

BURMA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

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An Overview

The importance of the "China card" in western strategic thinking began to decline in the mid-eighties as the dynamic Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev launched his daring economic policies and, in their wake, completely overturned Moscow's traditional foreign policy. World-wide detente made the Soviet Union a dialogue partner, not an enemy, from the West's point of view. Meanwhile, China was becoming an increasingly embarrassing ally: the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 was a watershed in China-US relations. Human rights issues, and the fact that China's previous role as a counterweight to the Soviet Union had become irrelevant, undermined the argument that friendship with Beijing was important to the balance of power between the "Western Bloc" and the "Eastern Bloc." The final blow to this old perception came when communist rule was irrevocably overthrown in Moscow in August 1991. The subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, ushered in a completely new set of alliances on the international arena. China, realizing its diminishing international importance, became bus strengthening ties with smaller Asian countries in order to remain a regional power. China also began to stress bilateral relations with more important powers in the region and even announced that it was interested in promoting relations with non-communist political parties in the third world.¹ Within a few weeks of each other in August-September 1991, China played host to Prime Ministers Toshiki Kaifu of Japan, John Major of Britain and Giulio Andreotti of Italy; Heads of State King Azlan Shah of Malaysia and President Wee Kim Wee of Singapore; elder statesmen Henry Kissinger, Margaret Thatcher and former Polish Premier Mieszyslaw Rakowski; Foreign Minister Nguyen Ngoc Cam of Vietnam; and assorted legislators, press lords and senior diplomats from elsewhere. China's Prime Minister Li Peng's five-day visit to India in December should also be seen as an outcome of Beijing's new regional concerns.

However, two Asian countries seem to be of a more profound strategic importance than others to China as a new regional power: Pakistan and Burma. China for years has been a major arms supplier to Islamabad, and Pakistan was also a major conduit for Chinese military hardware destined for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. The Karakoram Highway, completed in 1982, provided China with a direct road link to the Indian Ocean.

Burma, on India's eastern flank, began to develop into an important Chinese ally on 6 August 1988 when the two countries signed an agreement establishing official trade across the common border. This agreement was the first of its kind that hitherto isolated Burma had entered into with a neighbour. The present Burmese junta which seized power on 18 September 1988 after crushing a nationwide uprising for democracy, clearly saw in China a potent ally, especially when the leaders in Beijing staged a very similar massacre of pro-democracy activists in June the following year. China was one of the few countries that resumed assistance of Burma after the bloodbath in Rangoon in August-September 1988. On 30 September 1989, the chief of Burma's dreaded secret police, the Directorate of the Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI), Brigadier-General (now Major-General) Khin Nyunt, said in an address to a group of Chinese engineers working on a project in Rangoon: "we sympathize with the People's Republic of China, as disturbances similar to those in Burma last year, [i.e. 1988] broke out in the People's Republic [in May-June 1989]."² The importance of relations between these two international condemned regimes increased following a twelve-day visit to China in October 1989 by a twenty-four member military team from Burma. The team which was led by Lieutenant-General (now General) Than Shwe, included Khin Nyunt, the director of procurement, David Abel, and the chiefs of air force and navy. The visit resulted in a massive arms deal:

China pledged to deliver US\$1.4 billion worth of military hardware to Burma, including a squadron of F-7 jet fighters (the Chinese version of the Soviet MiG-21), at least four Hainan-class naval patrol boats, about 100 light tanks and armoured personnel carriers, anti-aircraft guns, rockets, a substantial quantity of small arms and ammunition, and radio equipment for military use.³

Since the signing of the border-trade agreement almost four years ago, Burma has also become China's chief foreign market for cheap consumer goods, and China now is a major importer of Burmese timber, forestry products, minerals, seafood and agricultural produce. World Bank analysts estimate that nearly US\$1.5 billion worth of goods are exchanged along the Burma-China frontier, not including a flourishing trade in narcotics from the Burmese sector of the Golden Triangle.

But analysts emphasize that Burma's dependence on China goes far beyond arms supplies and trade. They believe that the Burmese also depend on the Chinese for advice on diplomacy and propaganda. Burma based diplomats say they have reports about regular meetings between members of the ruling junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), and Chinese embassy staff in Rangoon. Striking similarities in the propaganda campaigns of the Chinese and Burmese governments lend credence to this suggestion: both regimes have frequently referred to past colonial excesses by western powers to justify harsh repression of political activities and other human rights abuses in their respective Countries. Both have also sought to use the drug issue, and natural calamities such as floods, to attract sympathy and support from abroad.⁴

China is also showing increased interest in Burma's infrastructure, including the construction of roads from the Yunnan frontier to Rangoon as well as the work to upgrade Burma's ports. After decades of neutrality and a strictly non-aligned foreign policy, Burma has become China's principal ally in Asia, rivalling even Pakistan in strategic and economic importance to Beijing.

With countries closely allied with China on both its western and eastern borders, developments in Burma should be of utmost concern to India's security planners. However, having been too pre-occupied with its traditionally volatile western border, and related conflicts in the Punjab and Kashmir, India has so far paid little interest to developments on its eastern border. India has indeed on several occasions condemned the SLORC's human rights abuses, expressed its support for the movement for democracy in Burma- and even told the Chinese of their concerns over Chinese arms sales to Burma.⁵ But India has yet to formulate a comprehensive Burma policy. This paper discusses China's and India's diverging perceptions of Burma and the SLORC, Burma's own foreign policy since independence from Britain in 1948, and New Delhi's policy alternatives in regard to Burma as well as China's new role as a major regional power.

Sino-Burmese Relations

Relations between China and Burma may be divided into three periods. From the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 until 1962, Beijing maintained a cautiously cordial but basically friendly relationship with the non-aligned, democratic government of Prime Minister U Nu, which ruled Burma during most of its democratic period from independence from Britain on 4 January 1948 until the army, led by General Ne Win, seized power in a coup d'etat on 2 March 1962. Then, during the first sixteen years of Ne Win's rule, Beijing actively supported the armed struggle of the insurgent Communist Party of Burma (CPB): China poured in more arms and ammunition than to any other Communist movement in Asia outside Indochina. But following policy changes in China after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and, more importantly, the return to power of Deng Xiaoping, in 1978, Beijing began to seek a rapprochement with Rangoon. At the same time, however, support for the CPB continued albeit on a much reduced scale. But since the suppression of the pro-democracy movement in Burma in 1988, and the formation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) on 18 September that year, the relationship between Beijing and Rangoon has been characterized by genuine cooperation.

1949-1962

The relations between China and Burma in the late forties were troubled by a disputed and largely undemarcated border, illegal immigration into Burma by vast numbers of Chinese labourers, businessmen and even farmers in search of greener pastures, and smuggling. Relations became even more uncertain when large numbers of Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang troops retreated into Burma's northeastern hill areas following their defeat in the Chinese civil war. From clandestine bases in remote border mountains, which have never been fully controlled by any central Burmese government, these Kuomintang forces, supported by Taiwan, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Thailand, launched a secret war against the new Communist government in China. There was a definite possibility of a war between China and the unwilling host to these forces. But the Sino-Burmese relations that developed from this initial possibility of conflict provide a good

example of how a small, comparatively weak country worked to preserve its independence and neutrality in dealing with the largest and then most powerful nation in Asia. Burma's independent foreign policy vis-a-vis China was all the more remarkable considering that China, regardless of the political nature of the government in power has always considered Burma to be a vassal state and the Burmese kings of precolonial day soften had to send tribute missions to the Chinese Emperor.⁶

But a breakthrough came in early 1953 when Burma decided to take the matter of the Kuomintang presence on its soil to the United Nations. Even prior to that, the fledgling Burmese army had fought several decisive battles against the Kuomintang, which clearly demonstrated that these guests were unwanted and were not camping on Burmese territory with the consent of the government in Rangoon. On 22 April, the UN adopted a resolution demanding that the Kuomintang lay down their arms and leave Burma. This did not materialize, but that was due to the fact that although thousands of Nationalist Chinese soldiers were evacuated to Taiwan, reinforcements were flown into secret airstrips in north-eastern Burma in aircraft provided by the CIA, something that Rangoon was unable to stop.

But the U Nu government had made its point, and on 22 April 1954, China and Burma for the first time signed a bilateral trade agreement, On 28-29 June. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited Burma at the invitation of the Burmese government and held talks U Nu. A joint Sino-Burmese declaration was signed by the two leaders on 29 June, endorsing the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence": Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equal and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.⁷

Burma adopted a neutral stand in foreign policy, the ultimate aim of which very obviously was to prevent China from interfering in its internal affairs. The first years of Burmese independence were marked by widespread insurgencies, and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was one of the major rebel forces. Although the party had a strong Maoist tendency already in the fifties, Beijing refrained from supporting it.⁸

The next issue was to settle the disputed Sino-Burmese border and this question was discussed in detail in September 1956 when U Nu visited China. He returned with a tentative plan for a settlement which called for Chinese recognition of Burmese sovereignty over the so-called Namwan Assigned Tract (a border area between Bhamo in Burma's Kachin State and Namkham in Shan state, which the British had leased from China in 1897) in exchange for ceding to China three villages in Kachin State: Hpimaw, Gawlum and Kangfang. China also pledged to recognize Burmese claims on the remainder of the 1,357 mile frontier.⁹ U Nu's concessions provoked protests from Burmese politicians and, especially, ethnic groups such as the Kachins, who rose up in rebellion in 1961 as a direct result of the border talks with China. However, negotiations continued for nearly four years until an agreement was eventually signed on 28 January 1960. In 1958, U Nu had to hand over power to a military caretaker government, headed by army chief General Ne Win, and it was he who concluded the border agreement and also signed a treaty of friendship and mutual non-aggression. In addition to the three Kachin villages (59 square miles), Ne Win also ceded the Panhung- Panglao area of the northern Wa Hills (173 square miles). In return, the Namwan area (85 square miles), which for all practical purposes was part of Burma any way, formally became Burmese territory. More importantly, though, China did renounce all its claims to areas in northern Kachin state: until that time Chinese maps had shown the border just north of the Kachin state capital of Myitkyina. Taiwan maps still show the border at that point, since Taipei has never recognized any agreements signed between the communist government in Beijing and other nations.¹⁰

Following a general election in February-March 1960, U Nu returned to power and with the border demarcated, a new offensive was launched against the Kuomintang forces in north-eastern Burma the following year. This time, thousands of regular Chinese troops also crossed the border into Burma near the town of Mong Yang north of Kengtung in eastern Shan state, where the Kuomintang maintained a major base. Mong Pa Liao, another Kuomintang base near Burma's border with Laos, was also attacked in a campaign which was clearly coordinated with the Burmese military. It is reasonable to assume that this was part of the new "friendship agreement" between China and Burma as well, although it has never been admitted officially.¹¹

1962-1978

It is generally assumed that Sino-Burmese relations took a turn for the worse only in 1967, when anti-Chinese riots broke out in Rangoon. The Chinese community in the Burmese capital had been

influenced by the Cultural Revolution in China and many young Sino-Burmese began wearing red Mao badges. This violated an official Burmese regulation, and the young “Red Guards” were ordered to take off their badges. When some of them resisted, anti-Chinese riots broke out in June and July that year. Chinese shops and homes were ransacked and looted, and many Sino-Burmese were killed. A mob even attacked the Chinese embassy in Rangoon before the situation was brought under control. However, the role of the authorities in this affair was a matter of dispute: the Chinatown riots in Rangoon came, hardly by coincidence, at a time when there were acute shortages of rice and basic foodstuff in Rangoon. According to eye-witnesses, the police did not interfere with the killings and the looting until the Chinese embassy was attacked. It is widely believed that Burma’s military government encouraged the riots in order to deflect attention from the country’s internal problems at that time.¹²

The incident was followed by the withdrawal of ambassadors from both capitals and the expulsion of the Xinhua (New China News Agency) correspondent in Rangoon. Beijing also suspended its aid programme to Burma, granted under the 1960 friendship treaty. Radio Beijing began broadcasting fierce attacks on the Ne Win government branding it “fascist,” and on January 1968, heavily armed CPB units crossed from China into north-eastern Burma. China had decided to lend all-out support to its Burmese sister party.

However, my own research into Sino-Burmese relations indicates that the 1967 incident was little more than a convenient excuse for the Chinese to intervene directly in Burma’s internal affairs. A new era in Sino-Burmese relations was, in fact, ushered in already in 1962 when General Ne Win seized power. The military takeover had upset the regional stability provided by Burma’s neutral democratic government. Furthermore, China had long been wary of the ambitious and sometimes unpredictable general in Rangoon. Six important events took place immediately after the coup in Rangoon:

1. In the early fifties, several groups of CPB cadres had trekked to China to request assistance for their armed insurrection in Burma. As long as U Nu was in power, these Burmese communists — in all 143 people — were housed in the province of Sichuan where they attended communist party schools. But they received no other support, and certainly not arms and military training. The leader of these CPB exiles in China was Thakin Ba Thein Tin, who later became the chairman of the CPB. He resided mostly in Beijing where he came close to Mao Zedong, and the two developed a long-lasting, personal relationship. Following Ne Win’s takeover in Rangoon, the CPB was for the first time allowed to print propaganda leaflets and other material in Beijing. Already on 1 August 1962, the Beijing-and Sichuan-based exiles published a document titled “Some Facts about Ne Win’s Military Government,” denouncing the new regime.

2. The most urgent task was to find a way to contact the CPB units in the old base area in central Burma, the Pegu Yoma mountains north of Rangoon where the old, once strong communist army was crumbling. There had been no links between them and the group in China since the latter had trekked to Yunnan in the early fifties. By a strange twist of historical events, it was the new military regime in Rangoon that unwittingly provided an opportunity for the CPB exiles in China to re-establish these links. Probably hoping that the insurgents could give up when faced with the massive force of the military government, it called for peace talks after about a year in power. From 14 July 1963, the CPB, Thakin Soe’s much smaller Red Flag communist party, the Karen, Mon, Shan, Kachin ethnic rebel armies, and some smaller groups attended the negotiations in Rangoon and guarantees of free and safe passage to and from the peace parley, regardless of the outcome.

The colourful Thakin Soe probably attracted the most attention when he arrived accompanied by a team of attractive young girls in khaki uniforms. He placed a portrait of Stalin in front of him on the negotiating table and then began attacking the “revisionism” of Soviet leader Khrushchev and the “opportunism” of Mao Zedong’s China. Thakin Soe was soon excluded from the talks. However, 29 veterans from the main CPB in China also arrived in Rangoon, purportedly to participate in the peace talks. Among the “Beijing Returnees,” as they came to be known, were yebaw (“Comrade”) Aung Gyi, Thakin Bo, Bo Zeya — and Thakin Ba Thein Tin who did

not actually participate in the talks but seized the opportunity to visit the CPB's headquarters in the Pegu Yoma, bringing with him radio transmitters and other aid from China.¹³

According to CPB documents, the Burmese government demanded that the communists should concentrate all their troops and party members inside an area stipulated by the authorities, inform the government if there were any remaining guerrillas or cadres elsewhere, stop all organisational activities of the party and cease fundraising. The intransigence of the military regime was a blessing in disguise for the CPB. The talks broke down in November and the various insurgents returned to their respective jungle camps. Thakin Ba Thein Tin and another CPB cadre returned to Beijing, while the other 27 returnees stayed in the Pegu Yoma where they assumed de facto leadership of the party at home.

3. Following the split in the international communist movement at about the same time, some CPB cadres who had been studying in the Soviet Union — Khin Maung Gyi, San Thu and Thein Aung — returned to Beijing in November 1963. A “leading group of five” to direct the work in China was set up in Beijing shortly after Thakin Ba Thein Tin's return from the peace talks in Rangoon. This group, which became the nucleus of the new leadership of the CPB that emerged during the sixties, consisted of Thakin Ba Thein Tin as “leader,” with Khin Maung Gyi as his personal secretary. Khin Maung Gyi was to become the CPB's main theoretician.

4. In late 1963, San Thu, one of the Moscow returnees, was put in charge of a team that began surveying possible infiltration routes from Yunnan into north-eastern Burma. During this period, China built a network of asphalted highways, leading from Kunming to various points along the borders with Burma and with Laos, where another communist movement was active.

5. Nearly all the CPB cadres in China were well-read Marxist intellectuals with little or no experience in military matters. But in 1950, an ethnic Kachin rebel leader, Naw Seng and 200 to 300 of his followers had retreated to China where they had been resettled in Guizhou province as ordinary citizens. Naw Seng was a decorated Second World War hero — he had fought brilliantly against the Japanese — and he was exactly the kind of military commander that the CPB intellectuals needed. In early 1963 — even before the peace talks in Rangoon — Naw Seng was brought to Sichuan. He was introduced to Thakin Ba Thein Tin and told that the time had come to go back to Burma and fight. Naw Seng, eager to leave his people's commune in Guizhou, readily agreed. He assembled his men and their military skills were rehearsed at a training camp in Yunnan in 1965-65. On 1 January 1968, Naw Seng's Kachin warriors at last entered north-eastern Burma from the Chinese side, accompanied by Khin Maung Gyi and other political commissars from the CPB.

6. Since the thirties, small cells of ethnic Chinese communists had been active in towns in central Burma, completely separate from the mainstream Burmese communist movement.¹⁴ In the early sixties these were for the first time put in touch with the CPB. They were few in number, but the Chinese embassy in Rangoon arranged for ethnic Chinese from the capital and some small towns in the Irrawaddy delta to visit the CPB's then base area along the Shweli river (and later to the new north-eastern base area that was set up after 1968). The number increased after anti-Chinese communal riots in Rangoon in 1967; these riots may have provided the catalyst for the already planned China-sponsored thrust into Shan State, but they were not the reason for China's support for the Burmese communists.

During the decade that followed, China poured in more aid into the CPB effort than any other communist movement outside Indochina. Assault rifles, machine-guns, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, radio equipment, jeeps, trucks, petrol, and even rice, other foodstuff, cooking oil, and kitchen utensils were sent across the frontier into the new revolutionary base area that the CPB was establishing along the Sino-Burmese frontier in north-eastern Burma. The Chinese also built

hydroelectric power stations inside this area, and a clandestine radio station, the People's Voice of Burma, began transmitting from the Yunnan side of the frontier in April 1971. Thousands of Chinese "volunteers" also streamed across the border to fight alongside their Burmese comrades. Within four years of the first thrust into north-eastern Burma on New Year Day 1968, the CPB had wrested control over a 9,000 square mile area along the Sino-Burmese frontier.¹⁵

During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese saw themselves as the leaders of the "World Proletarian Revolution" and the massive support they lent to the CPB was only one of the powerful expressions of this policy. During the same decade, from the mid-sixties to the late seventies, China initially had wanted to support the Maoist Naxalite movement that swept the northern part of West Bengal in 1967.¹⁶ But in the absence of an effective, coordinated leadership of the badly factionalized Indian Maoists, the Chinese instead ended up supporting ethnic insurgencies in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.¹⁷

Support to the CPB was the main element of China's Burma policy until the late seventies. The change towards a less militant foreign policy began when an internal power struggle broke out within the Chinese communists after Mao Zedong's death in 1976. In April that year, when China's radical Left reasserted itself and ousted Deng Xiaoping, the CPB — unlike other communist parties in the region — spoke out loudly in favour of the hardliners: "The revisionist clique with which Deng was linked headed by Liu Shaoqi has been defeated." in a congratulatory message to the fifty-fifth anniversary of the CPC in June 1976. It went on to say: "The movement to repulse the Right deviationist attempt at reversing correct verdicts, and the decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on measures taken against rightist chieftain Deng Xiaoping, are in full accord with Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong thought."¹⁸

In a second message mourning the death Mao in September 1976, the CPB stated: "Guided by Chairman Mao Zedong's proletarian revolutionary line, the Chinese people seized great victories in the socialist revolution and socialist construction in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in criticizing Liu Shaoqi's counter-revolutionary revisionist line, in criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius and in criticising

Deng Xiaoping and repulsing the Right deviationist attempt at reversing correct verdicts and consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, thus, consolidating the People's Republic of China — the reliable bulwark of the world proletarian revolution."¹⁹

The CPB had reason to re-evaluate the reliability of that bulwark the following year when Deng reassumed power in Beijing. The CPB, which once had branded its own "revisionists" Yebaw Htay and H.N. Goshal as "Burma's Deng Xiaoping" and "Burma's Liu Shaoqi" respectively, became silent. Htay and Goshal were two of the founders of the CPB and they had been executed during a series of bloody purges within the party in the late sixties. The *Beijing Review* and other official Chinese publications, which had previously published battle views and CPB documents, stopped printing anything about the "revolutionary struggle in Burma." The CPB was mentioned for the last time in November 1976 when Thakin Ba Thein Tin and his Vice Chairman Thakin Pe Tint, called on the new Chinese Chairman Hua Guofeng in Beijing, who was soon to fall into disgrace.²⁰

The Burmese military quickly and shrewdly exploited the rift by lending its good offices to China in Cambodia, by then the focus of Chinese interest as concern in Beijing increased over Vietnam's designs on its Indo-Chinese neighbour. In November 1977, Ne Win became the first foreign head of state to visit Phnom Penh after the Khmer Rouge takeover. The Chinese were no doubt behind the unusual visit, hoping to draw the Khmer Rouge out of its diplomatic isolation. Ne Win played along, for his part hoping that Beijing would further reduce its support for the CPB. He was not disappointed. In 1978, the CPB's entire China-based central office, including the broadcasting station, the Peoples Voice of Burma, was forced to return to Panghsang on the Yunnan frontier, the official headquarters since the Burmese army had captured Pegu Yoma in 1975. The Chinese "volunteers," who had fought alongside the CPB since 1968, were also recalled.

In September 1979, Burma even left the Non-Aligned Movement — which it had helped form in the fifties — at its Havana summit to protest against Cuba's assuming the chairmanship and its decision not to let the Khmer Rouge represent Cambodia. Burma's then Head of State San Yu, said in a report to parliament after the Havana meeting: "Every nation has the inalienable right to freely choose its political, economic, social and Cultural system without interference in any form by another state...Burma strictly stands for the solution of problems by peaceful means rather than resorting to threats or use of force."²¹

San Yu's remarks were made with a vague reference to Vietnam's 25 December 1978 invasion of Cambodia, but they were also interpreted as a signal to Beijing that Rangoon disapproved of its continued support for the CPB — however limited it had become.

1978-1988

This decade was a period of gradual rapprochement — and a virtual standstill in the previously extremely heavy fighting between government forces and the CPB. Following Ne Win's trip to China and Cambodia in 1977, Deng Xiaoping paid a politically important visit to Rangoon on 26-31 January 1978. Diplomatic relations on the ambassadorial level between China and Rangoon had been restored in 1970, but it was not until Deng's visit that the hitherto strained relationship between the two countries could be described as reasonably normal. Aid to the CPB was downgraded, but not completely cut off. The official Chinese policy during the decade 1979-88 was also characterised by the rather contradictory Chinese concept of differentiating between "party-to-party" relations and "government-to-government" ties — a meaningless distinction in the Chinese context since the party in any case formed the government in Beijing.²²

Relations between Rangoon and Beijing were nevertheless improving noticeably. Between 9-13 July 1979, Burmese Prime Minister Maung Maung Kha visited China and an agreement on economic and technical cooperation was signed on 12 July. Ne Win returned to China in October 1980 and again in May 1985. China's President Li Xiannian visited Rangoon in March 1985. Meanwhile, the CPB forces in Burma's north-east were becoming increasingly irrelevant and anachronistic. They neither advanced, nor were they defeated by the Burmese army. But in their base area, a lucrative, cross-border trade in contraband was beginning to become economically significant. When the Chinese in 1978-79 decided that the CPB had to become "self-sufficient," this was the main source of income it could muster. The orthodox Burmese Maoists suddenly became free-wheeling capitalists, and the cross-border trade flourished as a result. Chinese consumer goods — textiles, plastic products, cigarettes, beer, bicycles, petrol and household utensils — were exchanged for Burmese timber, minerals, precious stones and jade. The CPB survived by taxing this increasingly lucrative, but still illegal, cross-border trade. But the foundations for an entirely new kind of relationship between China and Burma had been laid.

A seemingly insignificant event in the midst of the political turmoil that engulfed Burma during the summer of 1988 turned out to be an extremely important watershed in Sino-Burmese relations; on 6 August 1988, when mass demonstrations shook Rangoon almost daily and only two days before a general strike crippled the entire country, most observers were probably amused to read in the official media in Rangoon that China and Burma had signed an agreement, allowing official cross-border trade to take place between the two countries. The timing could not have been more unfortunate; the rest of the world was watching what they thought were the last days of the old regime. Almost the entire, 1,357-mile Sino-Burmese frontier was in any case controlled by the CPB and other rebel forces. Following the border agreement in 1960, the frontier had been marked with border stones, which were erected by a joint Sino-Burmese team that literally covered the entire length of the common border. When these had crumbled more than two decades later, new stones were erected in 1985 in accordance with a new agreement. But this time, the Burmese border stones, the location of which the Chinese had decided, were conveniently located in open paddy fields and glades in the jungle — far away from major rebel bases along the frontier.

But the Chinese, who have always been renowned for their ability to plan far ahead of everybody else, had expressed their intentions, almost unnoticed, in an article in the official *Beijing Review* as early as on 2 September 1985. Titled "Opening to the Southwest: An Expert Opinion," the article, which was written by the former Vice Minister of Communications Pan Qi, outlined the possibilities of finding an outlet for trade from China, through Burma, to the Indian Ocean. He mentioned the Burmese railheads of Myitkyina and Lashio in north-eastern Burma as possible conduits for the export of Chinese goods — but he conveniently refrained from mentioning that all relevant border areas at that time, were not under central, Burmese government control.

That situation changed in early 1987, when the Burmese government managed to recapture a few CPB strongholds along the frontier, including the booming border town of Panghsai, where the fabled Burma Road crosses into China. The Chinese, whose policies had changed dramatically since the Cultural Revolution, began to penetrate the Burmese market through an extensive economic intelligence reporting system within Burma. This network monitored the availability of domestically manufactured Burmese products, as well as the nature and volume of illegal trade

from other neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and India. China could then respond to the market conditions by producing in its state sector factories. More than 2,000 carefully selected items were reported to be flooding the Burmese market. Chinese-made consumer goods were not only made deliberately cheaper than those from other neighbouring countries, but were also less expensive than local Burmese products.²³

Then, to the surprise of many, the hill tribe rank and file of the CPB's army mutinied in March-April 1989 and drove the party's Maoist leadership into exile in China. The mutiny came after years of simmering discontent between the hill tribe cannon fodder, which had been forcibly recruited into CPB's army, and the Burman ageing intellectuals who were still clinging to their old ideals. The government in Rangoon quickly and shrewdly exploited the mutiny: the leaders of the new forces who emerged from the ashes of the old CPB were promised that they could engage in any kind of business — if they agreed to a ceasefire with the government and refrained from sharing their vast quantity of weaponry (which the Chinese had given to them during the decade 1968-78) with other rebel groups in the wake of the August-September 1988 urban uprising against the authoritarian regime in Rangoon. The most potent military threat to Rangoon was neutralized, and the cross-border trade flourished as a result.

With the border trade booming, ties between Burma and China were strengthening gradually. By 1990, Burma had also become China's principal political and military ally in Southeast Asia: Chinese arms poured across the border into Burma to help the extremely unpopular military regime in Rangoon survive. In the wake of the Rangoon massacre of 1988, and the Tiananmen Square massacre the following year, it was hardly surprising that the two isolated, internationally condemned neighbours would move closer to each other. Burma's strategic importance to China was also not lost on outside observers. China soon became involved with upgrading Burma's badly maintained roads and railways. By late 1991, the Chinese experts were working on a series of infrastructural projects in Burma. Chinese military advisers arrived the same year, the first foreign military personnel to be stationed in Burma since the fifties. Burma is, in effect, becoming a Chinese client state; what the CPB failed to achieve for the Chinese on the battlefield has been accomplished by shrewd diplomacy and flourishing bilateral trade.

Indo-Burmese Relations

While China's interests in Burma have been guided by a master-client relationship, as a legacy of history, as well as more modern, political, economic and strategic concerns, India's Burma policy has followed a completely different course of development. Historically, ties between the two countries are close as Buddhism entered Burma from India more than a thousand years ago, but no Indian ruler ever demanded tribute from the Burmese kings. During the colonial period, Burma was a province of British India until 1937, when it became a separate colony. Indian political movements had a profound impact on Burmese political thinking, and Burma's nationalists borrowed heavily from their Indian counterparts. The education, civil services and administration were also strikingly similar.

A thornier issue was the question of Indian immigration to Burma. The British began importing Indian labour already in the 1830s, and more immigrants followed in the early twentieth century. Though many were labourers, the railways, post and telegraph, the police and the civil service were also staffed with people of Indian origin. Just before the Second World War, the Indians numbered over a million of a total population of about 16 million at that time. Forty-Five per cent of Rangoon's population was also of South Asian origin — Hindu, Muslim and Sikh — but their numbers were greatly reduced because of the Japanese invasion in the Second World War, and because of Burmese attitudes thereafter. Many Burmese associated the Indians with indirect, British colonial rule and anti-Indian sentiments sometimes erupted into riots in Rangoon, which for instance, was the case in 1938 when mobs attacked Indians in the capital's Theingyizay Market.

Generally speaking, people of South Asian origin were looked down upon and referred to as *kala*, a pejorative meaning "foreigner" or "Indian." Interestingly, Caucasians are called *kala pyu*, or "White Indians." Therefore, the nationalist movement that swept Burma in the thirties and forties often had undertones of communal tension. Most detested of all were the Chettiar money-lenders from Madras, to whom many Burmese peasants had lost their land during the depression of the early thirties. This racial prejudice has remained an important element in Burmese perceptions of India till recently. It has also, it should be added, been used by various politicians and rulers in Burma as a "divide-and-rule" tactic whenever it has been politically expedient.

But despite racial tensions within Burma, relations with India as a country were very cordial after Burma's independence in 1948 and, indeed, throughout the fifties. India served as a model for Burma's policies of neutralism and non-alignment. Burma's independence hero, Aung San, consulted Jawaharlal Nehru both before and after his meetings with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee in London, which preceded Burma's independence. Aung San was assassinated on 19 July 1947, six months before the British left Burma on 4 January 1948, but his successor, U Nu, maintained close links with India as well.

Following the military takeover in 1962, many of the remaining Indians had their property confiscated and were forced to leave Burma, but this never clouded Indo-Burmese relations to any significant extent. Many people of South Asian origin also lost their Burmese citizenship during the Ne Win era and India's main concern was their continuing welfare. A strong stand against Burma's new government could have jeopardized the well-being of the still fairly large, but also very vulnerable, Indian community in Rangoon and other urban areas. Ne Win's new government, however, downgraded relations with India. Instead of being a neutral but friendly neighbour, India became more or less a non-entity in Burmese foreign policy. Ne Win's main concerns were directed towards China, and the Chinese-supported communist insurgency which gained momentum a few years after his coup d'état in Rangoon.

India's policy of benign neglect changed dramatically after the bloody events of 1988. Along with all other major democracies in the world, India came out strongly in support of the pro-democracy movement, while China and the ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries sided with the ruling military junta. Daring, anti-military broadcasts over All India Radio's Burmese language service became extremely popular, and many Burmese undoubtedly saw India as an ideal once again, as it had been in the fifties. India also watched spreading Chinese influence in Burma with increased concern; nowhere in Asia have Chinese and Indian policies and ideals clashed to the same extent as in Burma. For this reason, the absence of a comprehensive, clear-cut Indian policy on Burma may be one of the most severe shortcomings in New Delhi's relations with its eastern neighbour today.

1948-1962

Burma's immediate problem after independence in 1948 was widespread insurgency in practically every part of the country. The CPB resorted to armed struggle on 28 March, army units rose in mutiny, and Karen and Mon ethnic insurgents followed suit in 1949. Within a year, the Burmese government controlled little more than the capital, and was often jokingly referred to as "the Rangoon Government." U Nu's fledgling parliamentary government would most probably have fallen, had it not been for massive support from Nehru in India.²⁴ At the height of the civil war in 1950, both India and Britain provided Burma with 10,000 small weapons each and arranged with other Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Ceylon and Pakistan (Burma never joined the Commonwealth, though), to provide a loan of 6 million pounds sterling to tide the state's treasury until the insurgent forces could be suppressed.²⁵

A cordial relationship emerged as a result, and there were only two problems facing Indo-Burmese relations during the fifties: independent Burma had inherited a disputed and undemarcated border with India, and a debt incurred during the colonial period while Burma was an Indian province. There was no urgency to solve either problem and not until 1953 did U Nu and Nehru personally inspect a disputed area in the Naga Hills. Burma's debt to India was also solved smoothly. In 1954 India and Burma signed an agreement according to which Burma sold 900,000 tons of rice to India at a special low price and agreed to make payment toward the pension fund of civil servants of Indian origin that had been incurred when Burma was a part of India.²⁶

India's attitude towards the people of South Asian origin eliminated another minor irritant in Indo-Burmese relations. Nehru made it clear that all Indians living abroad must either take up citizenship of their adopted land, or return home. There was no question of Indians holding dual citizenship or becoming a problem in the relations between India and its neighbours. This worked fairly well in Burma; there was no outburst of anti-Indian sentiment in the fifties, and many Indians continued to work as civil servants, labourers, lawyers and doctors in Burma in very much the same way as they did in Malaya (which became Malaysia in 1963). Independent Burma, however, ended Indian immigration, a move that was welcomed by the Burmese public. It did not upset India either. Indo-Burmese relations throughout Burma's democratic period are perhaps best summed up by the Burmese prime minister of that era, U Nu "[I] was at one with Pandit Nehru in the observance of the principles of peaceful coexistence. [We] believed in the democratic way

of life and in the policy of strict neutrality...there was nothing to disturb the relations between the two countries that their leaders had worked hard to foster.”²⁷

1962-1988

The nature of Indo-Burmese relations changed after Ne Win's coup d'état in March 1962, albeit gradually in a process of attrition rather than because of any decision made by policy makers in New Delhi. After a few years in power Ne Win's new "Revolutionary Council" decided to nationalize privately owned businesses and factories, of which 60 per cent were owned by Indians. Thousands lost their livelihood, and since there was little prospect of employment in the new state-owned economy that emerged many were compelled to leave for India. More seriously, the nationalization of the internal wholesale and retail trade that followed meant that all petty traders and their employees, of whom the vast majority were Indian, were

thrown out of business. No compensation was given and all Indians leaving the country were allowed to take only Kyats 75 per adult, Kyats 15 for each child, and Kyats 250 worth of jewellery.²⁸ During the period 1964-68, some 150,000 Indo-Burmese left Burma, many of whom were Burmese, not Indian citizens. The Indian community in Burma appealed to the Indian government for help. New Delhi sent a representative to investigate, but he concluded that the policy was an internal Burmese affair. India did not protest.²⁹

But relations between India and Burma did deteriorate after the 1962 coup d'état in Rangoon. Trade and cultural exchanges were reduced to a minimum, mainly because of lack of interest from Burma's side. Until 1962, many young Burmese had gone to India to study, both at private schools in the hills (Darjeeling, Nainital, etc.) and in Indian universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi. But the number of Burmese students also declined considerably after 1962. Burma went into a state of self-imposed isolation; relations with India were no longer important.

The only bilateral issue that remained to be discussed was the common border, and, in the seventies, the fact that Naga and Mizo insurgents from India's north-east maintained sanctuaries in remote hill areas of western and north-western Burma, areas which were not controlled by the central government in Rangoon. From these cross-border sanctuaries, the insurgents launched occasional raids into India, just to retreat to Burma again, beyond the reach of India's security forces.

On 10 March 1967, Burma and India did agree on the common border and an agreement was signed. The only part of the border which remains undemarcated is opposite the northeastern - most corner of Arunachal Pradesh, since China claims that part of Arunachal, Burma is of the opinion that it cannot settle that stretch of the frontier as long as India and China have not solved their border dispute. If Burma demarcated the stretch with India, it would most certainly upset the Chinese. But that is a minor point and the border issue has never been, and is not likely to become, a major problem in Indo-Burmese relations.

The ethnic unrest in India's north-east, on the other hand, spilled across the border into Burma in the early sixties and since then India's main concern in Burma has been the insurgency. Indeed, until 1988 India cared little about anything else in Burma. Successive Indian army offensives against Naga rebels on the Indian side of the border had weakened the tribal resistance inside India. In 1963, General Kaito, a commander of the Naga rebel army, established a base in the Somra tract in Burma, opposite Manipur's Ukhrul district. At the same time, some Burmese Nagas — distant cousins of the Indian Nagas — were beginning to show an interest in the insurgency. S.S. Khaplang, a Naga from Burma's Sagaing division, set up the Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council (ENRC) in 1965, and cooperated closely with the Naga National Council (NNC) in India.

The Burmese army, preoccupied with fighting more important insurgencies elsewhere in the country, showed only scant interest in this alliance, and the fact that the Indian Nagas were establishing more permanent base areas inside Burma, well beyond reach of the army.

From India's point of view, the situation became even more alarming when groups of Nagas began trekking through northern Burma to China, where they received military training, arms and ammunition (see the Appendix for a complete list of such missions to China). Equipped with modern weapons, these Nagas returned to India, where fierce battles were fought with the Indian armed forces. Small groups of Mizos and Manipuris also went to China, where they received support. This was during the decade 1968-78, when China also gave all-out support to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and other insurgencies in Burma, notably the ethnic Kachin Independence Army (KIA), whose troops often escorted the Nagas on their way to China.

But despite an obvious convergence of security interests between India and Burma, Rangoon's

response was always cool when New Delhi suggested joint operations against the insurgents along the common border. Burmese and Indian military authorities held regular flag meetings on the border; there was a certain amount of exchange of intelligence information — but joint operations, which India repeatedly suggested, never materialized. In 1980, however, 200 Indian troops and 400 Burmese soldiers attacked a Naga base in the upper Sagaing division, and the following year, Indian troops crossed the border and bombarded the then Naga headquarters at Mongkhwe, also in northwestern Sagaing division.³⁰

An unofficial agreement apparently existed between the Indians and the Burmese according to which troops from either country could cross up to 10 miles inside each other's territory "in hot pursuit of insurgents." In a way this was a major concession to India, since only India was keen to destroy the Naga base in Burma and only Indian troops were inclined to take advantage of the agreement. An enthusiastic local press in Nagaland declared "India is at last getting effective help from the Burmese government in dealing with the Naga rebels, who have been enjoying sanctuary across the border."³¹

The euphoria was, however, shortlived. Burma paid no further attention to the Naga problem, and relations with India did not significantly improve. Then, in May 1984, India went a step further. During a visit to New Delhi by the then Burmese Foreign Minister Chit Hlaing, India's Defence Minister, R. Venkataraman, offered Burma help in its counter-insurgency operations on both sides of its borders with Nagaland and Manipur. India also offered Burma training of military personnel and the upgrading of Burma's outdated defence industries.³² The Burmese politely declined the offer, perhaps because they feared it would upset China, which was still giving, limited support to the CPB. A military agreement with China's arch-rival in the region, India, could have prompted Beijing to once again step up its support for the CPB, the Burmese reportedly argued. No breakthrough was achieved, and relations between India and Burma remained static. It was becoming increasingly obvious that Burma's main, and almost only, concern in the international arena was how to best appease the Chinese. Improving relations with India remained way down on the list of priorities in Rangoon.

Meanwhile, the condition of the Indians in Burma was deteriorating steadily. In 1982 the Burmese government promulgated a new citizenship act, according to which full citizenship would only be given to people who could prove that their ancestors had lived in Burma prior to the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824-26. "Non-indigenous races" such as the Indo-Burmese and the Sino-Burmese were immediately affected. Many lost their full Burmese citizenship, and were officially demoted to second class citizens.³³

1988-

The 1988 uprising for democracy became a turning point in Indo-Burmese relations, India was among the first countries to comment on the Burmese crisis. On 10 September 1988, when millions of people were marching for democracy in virtually every town and city in Burma, and more than a week before the army stepped in and suppressed the protests, New Delhi expressed its support for "the undaunted resolve of the Burmese people to achieve their democracy." Later, when thousands of Burmese dissidents fled the bloody crackdown that resulted from the military takeover on 18 September, India became the only neighbour that adopted a clear-cut refugee policy. On 25 October, India's then External Affairs Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, told a parliamentary panel that "strict instructions have been issued not to turn back any genuine Burmese refugees seeking shelter in India."³⁴

One refugee camp was built at Leikhul in the Chandel district of Manipur. Two more camps, mostly for the ethnic Chin minority, were built at Champhai and Saiha in Mizoram. India's sympathetic attitude was also reflected in the frankness of All India Radio's Burmese service. Until then, it had attracted only a few listeners, mainly from Burma's Indian community. But in 1989 and 1990, AIR became even more popular than the BBC's service among the Burmese public at large. Burma's military government responded by publishing vitriolic attacks on AIR, accusing it of "interference in Burma's internal affairs." The state-run *Working People's Daily* also began publishing outright racist articles and cartoons against AIR and Indians in general, attempting to revive the old anti-*kala* xenophobia of the thirties.

I expressed my own interpretation of this development in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of 23 February 1989:

“Analysts suggest that India’s stand has been prompted not only by the way it usually views itself as a ‘guardian of democracy’ in the region, but also by considerations related to security and nationality. India shares an 857-mile frontier with Burma and ethnic insurgents, mainly Nagas, use unadministered Burmese territory as sanctuaries for cross-border raids into India’s sensitive northeast. So far, Burma’s only reaction to this situation has been to mount essentially futile, half-hearted military operations against insurgents from India. In any case, the Burmese military has been stretched to the limit fighting several ethnic insurgencies within Burma. It is widely believed that India hopes that a new, democratic government in Rangoon might try a more tactful political approach. A stable border could also result in increased trade between the two countries, analysts say. Another consideration might be New Delhi’s concern for the Indian community in Burma, which under a 1982 citizenship act has become stateless, or has been given a second-class citizenship by the Rangoon regime. Traditionally, the Burmese have looked down on the *kalas* — a derogatory word used to describe the Indo-Burmese. India might be assuming that its strong stand for democracy could help make life easier for this community in the future, according to some observers.”

In my opinion, this assessment is basically still valid, although India’s policy has seen a few twists and turns since early 1989. Eager to encourage the pro-democracy movement in Burma, India sometimes reacted emotionally and ended up supporting people of doubtful integrity. Burma’s military rulers were overjoyed when they arrested a prominent dissident in Rangoon, Ye Htoon, and in his computer discovered a reference to economic assistance from the Indian embassy in Rangoon.³⁵ It is still a mystery why he kept this information in his personal computer, and the disclosure caused considerable embarrassment in New Delhi.

India had reason to react negatively again in late 1990. General elections, which the military had promised when it assumed power in September 1988, were at last held in May 1990. Although almost every political figure of any stature, including the charismatic leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi, was in prison or under house arrest, the anti-military National League for Democracy (NLD) scored a landslide victory, securing 392 out of 485 contested seats in the National Assembly. The military, however, chose to ignore the outcome of the election; instead, it began to place under arrest the NLD candidates who had been elected. But about a dozen of them managed to escape to rebel-held areas near the Thai border, where on 18 December they set up a parallel government, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).

Shortly afterwards, however, two of the “ministers” in this jungle-based “government” defected to Rangoon, where a gleeful military arranged a press conference for them. One of them, “Minister for Trade and Cooperatives,” Than Kywe, claimed during the press conference that the NCGUB had received 300,000 Thai Baht from the Indian embassy in Bangkok.³⁶ The Indian authorities denied the charge, but whatever the case, it was obvious that many of Burma’s pro-democracy activists were untrustworthy and it was becoming increasingly difficult to decide whom to support.

India’s sympathetic attitude was also misused by other Burmese dissidents. On 10 November 1990, two Burmese students in Bangkok hijacked a Rangoon-bound Thai International airline to Calcutta. The hijacking was resolved peacefully and the two students gave themselves up to the Indian authorities. They were later released on bail, which infuriated the Burmese authorities. This may have been the motive behind a letter, classified top secret, which was circulated among the Burmese military in early 1991. Dated 22 February and signed by General Than Shwe, army Commander-in-Chief and Vice-Chairman of the ruling junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the letter cited India as a country which “encourages and supports internal insurgents” and “interferes in [Burma’s] internal affairs, acts which are not compatible with the expected behaviour of a friendly neighbour.”³⁷ Military analysts also noticed a significant buildup of Burmese forces along the Indian border and the creation in 1990 of a new regional command area encompassing Sagaing division and Chin state in north-western Burma, facing India.

In view of India’s tough stand against the SLORC, many observers were puzzled and even dismayed when the Indian government in May 1991 ordered AIR to discontinue its critical broadcasts. An outraged Indian media interpreted this as a concession to the SLORC: “This supine submission to the whims and fancies of the Burmese generals has appalled the leaders of the Indian Friends of Democracy in Burma headed by the former Union Energy Minister Mr K. R. Narayanan,

who are writing a strong protest letter to the Indian Government asking it to reconsider its 'shocking, shameful and timid decision'...To the millions of Burmese listeners the AIR's Burmese service has been the most popular among all the foreign broadcasts."³⁸

Special attention was paid to the fact that AIR's most prominent broadcaster was Than Than Nu, the daughter of the former Burmese Prime Minister U Nu. After failing to organise a resistance against the Ne Win government during the 1969-73 period, U Nu left for India where he went into exile in Bhopal until he returned to Burma in 1980. His daughter, however, remained behind in New Delhi where she was employed by AIR. The U Nu family has maintained close links with India; U Nu's own friendship with Nehru is well documented, and this continued under Indira Gandhi who gave him refuge in Bhopal, and by Rajiv Gandhi, whose government initiated the support for democracy in Burma in 1988. But Indian officials, less affected by these personal ties, reportedly felt that AIR had paid too much attention to U Nu and his group in Burma, which, after all, had failed to win a single seat in the 1990 election. The NLD, headed by the detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, were the victors of the election, which AIR sometimes seemed to ignore.

A statement issued by the Indian government on 11 November 1991 clearly indicates that New Delhi's policy has not undergone any fundamental change. The statement called for the unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and it was hand-delivered by India's Ambassador, P.M.S. Malik, to Burma's Foreign Minister, Ohn Gyaw, in Rangoon on 14 November.

It is my impression that India is re-evaluating its Burma policy, following a series of disappointments and embarrassments, rather than being prepared to appease the SLORC. This process may result in a new comprehensive Burma policy on New Delhi's part. Such a policy is no doubt needed; India's relations with Burma cannot be seen as a strictly bilateral affair. Chinese influence in Burma is increasing steadily — but, unlike in Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, there is these days no fear of "Indian domination" in Burma. Over the past few years India has earned itself a tremendous amount of goodwill in Burma, and it is up to the government in New Delhi how to handle this potentially favourable situation. In view of the total lack of any popular support for the people in power in Rangoon, Burma is also the weakest link in the string of pro-Chinese regimes that surrounds India.

Burma's Foreign Policy

James Barrington, an Anglo-Burmese who served as independent Burma's first Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office in Rangoon and Burma's Ambassador to the US and the UN, described democratic Burma's foreign policy in 1958: "Burma's foreign policy has been much misunderstood and subjected to severe criticism in the past. We have been accused of 'sitting on the fence.' The implication is that we are waiting to jump on the winning side when it becomes clear which side is going to win. This is completely untrue. It is ruled out because it is immoral, and also for the very simple reason that we do not believe there can be any winner if the present conflict [the Cold War] sharpens. Nor do we try to play off one bloc against the other, since this again would not only be immoral but would also be directly opposed to our objective of reducing tensions. The main objective of our foreign policy is simply to preserve our independence. For this we need peace, and we need cooperation among all nations."³⁹

Barrington was referring to Burma's attempts to maintain good relations with the western as well as the eastern bloc - an important cornerstone in Burmese foreign policy at that time, specialty in view of the fact that the government in Rangoon was troubled with widespread communist insurgency in the countryside. But it could also be interpreted as a description of Burma's balancing act in a regional context. Squeezed between the two giants of Asia — India and China — neutrality has always been of utmost importance for Burma. US Burma scholar Josef Silverstein concludes: "The policy of neutralism was based on certain realities that imposed themselves on either a civilian [before 1962] or a military [after 1962] Burmese government. Among them were Burma's small size and population its location between China and India; its economic underdevelopment; its memories of World War Two and the suffering and destruction inflicted upon its people and the land; its internal political instability; and its ethnic and political disunity."⁴⁰

The difference between democratic Burma and military ruled Burma, though, was that prior to 1962, Rangoon conducted an active foreign policy aimed at preserving independence. Burma participated in the 1955 Bandung Conference and it was one of the founders of the NonAligned Movement in 1961. U Nu travelled extensively abroad and became one of the best known leaders of the third world, along with Nehru, Nasser, Tito and Sukarno. Burma gained respect internationally. India served as a model for Burmese neutralism, non-alignment and democracy, but

Burma never allied itself too closely with India, which could have upset its relations with China. Burma managed to live alongside large and powerful neighbours without compromising its independent policy and relations.

At first glance, it may seem that Ne Win's military regime in almost every other way continued the foreign policy of the democratic government it displaced in 1962. However, Maung Maung Gyi, a former professor at the University of Mandalay who went into exile in the sixties, argues that although Burma remained neutral after the 1962 coup d'état, the main objective of that policy became what he termed "negative neutralism for group survival."⁴¹ Neutralism under the military, he says, became isolation and non-involvement, or negative neutralism.

The objective of Burma's neutrality and non-alignment had shifted from a policy aimed at preserving independence to isolation from the rest of the world by which General Ne Win and his group of army officers hoped to remain in power. Most foreign observers have failed to understand this basic maxim, and instead tried to analyse the trends and shifts in Burma's foreign policy since 1962 to find out whether Burma, for some unspecified ideological reasons, is leaning more towards the West, the East, China or India. This approach failed to take into consideration that since 1962 the Burmese government has been leaning in only one direction — towards itself and its own survival.

Burma under the military rule also invented an entirely new dogma in foreign relations — "bilateralism." This meant that Burma refused to deal with blocs of any kind; it even resigned from the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979.⁴² Burma dealt only with one country at a time, and preferably only with neighbours.⁴³ Cynics argued that Burma's new "neutral foreign policy" basically meant no foreign policy at all apart from the concept of group survival; its embassies and consulates abroad did very little to improve relations with the host countries. Their main duties were to look after visiting Burmese military officers and their families on shopping sprees or on trips abroad for medical treatment, and to keep a watch on the exiled Burmese community in the country in which the embassy was located.

Back home in Burma, the official newspapers always published endless "messages of felicitations" to various foreign governments on the national days in their respective Countries, or similar messages which had been received from abroad by the Burmese government. Since messages are sent as a matter of routine and diplomatic courtesy, few countries in the world even bother mentioning them. But in Burma, the regime placed these messages on the front pages of the newspapers to show the public that it enjoyed friendly relations with all nations and was a member of the world community.

In reality, the relations Ne Win really enjoyed with the outside world were personal contacts with a few foreigners, mostly private businessmen who won the old strongman's confidence and trust. Contacts with foreign governments were kept to an absolute minimum. One Rangoon-based foreign envoy commented in 1988 on this diplomatic vacuum: "We had no meaningful contact with any element of the Burmese government. They had a designated group of foreign ministry types who would come to our dinners and talk about golf and tennis, the weather and what fruits were in season...during my first three months in Burma, my backhand improved immensely, and I even took up the game of golf, which I had thought was just a waste of time. But I had time to waste."⁴⁴

Burma was a sleepy backwater where nothing was expected to happen. The regime seemed well-entrenched, the people docile and control mechanisms absolute. The 1988 uprising for democracy completely overturned this conventional wisdom: Burma exploded with a vehemence, which took even the Burmese themselves by surprise. But in order to survive and remain in power at a time when the Burmese regime, for the first time ever, became an internationally condemned pariah, Burma had to compromise its traditional neutrality. The very definite swing into the Chinese camp after 1988 has given the ruling junta some breathing space by making it survive in the short term. In the long term, however, Burma's close relations with China could prove potentially disastrous for the ruling military.

Whither Burma?

The Sino-Burmese border trade agreement of 6 August 1988 slipped into oblivion when a nationwide uprising for democracy shook Burma two days later. Throughout the country, millions of people marched against Ne Win's military dominated regime, demanding the restoration of the democracy that had existed before the 1962 coup d'état. The military responded fiercely from the outset: heavily armed troops and armoured fighting vehicles attacked the demonstrators; at least

1,000, possibly as many as 3,000 people were gunned down in Rangoon and other cities between 8-10 August. This did not stop the demonstrations, however, and the marches continued for more than a month.

Then, on 18 September, the military stepped in again, not to seize power from a failing government, but to shore up a regime overwhelmed by popular protest. Another thousand people were massacred as the military used brute force to suppress demonstrations. A new junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), was formed. But the real power remained with the wily, ageing dictator Ne Win who continued to pull strings from behind the scenes,

All major democracies in the world, including India, condemned the carnage in Burma. Former donor countries suspended their aid programmes, and the SLORC became an international outcaste. But survival was the most important consideration for the SLORC, as it had been for other Ne Win directed regimes that had preceded it. At the time of the assumption of power by the SLORC, Burma's foreign exchange reserves stood at a mere US \$10-15 million. The way out of this problem was to scrap the almost thirty years old "Burmese Way to Socialism" — a "free market economy" was introduced and a new foreign investment law promulgated. Thai, Singaporean, Malaysian, South Korean and Hong Kong companies took advantage of this new situation and began buying timber, minerals and precious stones from Burma. In return they flooded the Burmese market with electronics and other consumer goods. Slowly, Burma began to rebuild its foreign reserves — and nearly all of it was spent on expanding the size of the army and procuring arms and ammunition from abroad. Burma's armed forces were about the only segment of Burmese society that had remained loyal to the old regime in 1988.

But it was China that was able to take the maximum advantage of the new situation in Burma, and the SLORC's desperate struggle for survival. Border trade across the Burma-Yunnan frontier was booming, and, as already seen, China became the SLORC's main foreign ally and supporter. With China gaining influence inside the hitherto hermetically sealed Burma, Pakistan also followed — a new tripartite bloc was beginning to emerge. The first confirmed report of Pakistani arms sales to Burma's new military regime came in March 1989 when intelligence sources detected that a high-powered Burmese delegation had paid an unpublicised visit to Islamabad.

The team reportedly included the chief of the Burmese Air Force, Major-General Tin Yun, his deputy, Colonel Thien Win, Director of Ordnance Colonel Thein Tun, and Director of Defence Industries Colonel Htay Tint. The first deal, signed in March, included an initial delivery of 150 machine-guns with 50,000 rounds of ammunition and 5,000 120mm mortar bombs. The delegates also visited Pakistan's aviation industry complex, leading to speculations whether Islamabad would sell aircraft to Rangoon or train Burmese pilots.⁴⁵

However, neither the Chinese nor the Pakistanis may have anticipated the reaction from "their" respective communities in Rangoon. Shortly after the September 1988 massacre in Rangoon, the new trade minister under the SLORC, David Abel, called in Zhan Dee, the commercial Counsellor of the Chinese embassy in Rangoon to discuss the trade agreement that had been signed in August but not yet implemented. The then fledgling regime was anxious to publicize any evidence of foreign contacts, and a Picture of Zhan Dee's meeting with Abel appeared on the front page of the state-run *Working People's Daily* on 4 October.

A strong reaction came immediately from Rangoon's Chinese community. They approached the Chinese embassy and expressed deep concern: if a Chinese official was seen as being close to the new regime, the local Chinese feared that they would be victimised by angry crowds if there was a fresh outburst of anti-government sentiments. Most Chinese in Rangoon vividly remembered the bloody Chinatown riots of 1967 and were fearful of anything similar happening again.

Rangoon's Muslims of South Asian origin (who tend to look upon Pakistan rather than India as their original homeland although most of them actually hailed from the former United Province, now Uttar Pradesh) reacted in a similar way when news about the Pakistani connection leaked out. The Pakistani ambassador was barred from entering mosques in the Burmese capital; he was compelled to say his Id prayers in May 1989 at a private function at the Indonesian embassy in Rangoon.

But that did not stop China and Pakistan from pursuing their policy of courting the SLORC. Chinese influence continued to grow. Apart from border trade, arms supplies and diplomatic advice to the SLORC, China soon became involved with upgrading Burma's infrastructure as well. In 1991 the Chinese began to construct a new bridge across the Shweli River between Ruili in China and Muse in Burma. The Burmese had requested a 20-ton bridge; the Chinese insisted on

50 tons, and SLORC had to give in. Next, China offered to completely rebuild the 110-mile road from the frontier to the railhead of Lashio. At present, the road is a rough dirt-track which sometimes takes several days to negotiate. The Chinese have also proposed an asphalted highway, and negotiations are still underway. The problem, however, is that the Chinese insist that thousands of Chinese labourers be employed on the road construction work while some local Burmese commanders want to employ Burmese labour. The SLORC is expected to give in on this point as well. In addition, the Chinese have promised to finance the upgrading of the roads linking Mandalay with Rangoon, and to extend the railway from Lashio to the Yunnan border.⁴⁶

While these projects could be seen as purely commercial enterprises — to improve the roads along which Chinese consumer goods flow into Burma and Burmese timber and minerals into China — some other Chinese supported projects in Burma seem to go much further than that. The Chinese have reportedly promised to arm and equip an entire division of the Burmese army, and to sell arms for raising 74 new battalions. Before the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, Burma's armed forces totalled between 185,000-190,000 men. In late 1990 the figure had risen to 230,000. By mid-1991 it was believed to be closer to 280,000 and the army, according to well-informed Sources in Rangoon, is to reach 300,000 by 1992. The final goal may be a 500,000 strong, well-equipped military machine.⁴⁷

The expansion of the previously insignificant Burmese navy may be of special concern for India. With new patrol boats of Chinese origin, new naval bases have also become a necessity. The main new facility is under construction on Hainggyi Island near the mouth of the Bassein River on the Bay of Bengal. China is reportedly supplying equipment, including radio equipment and also radar and access to satellite communication, for the Hainggyi base. Unconfirmed reports indicate that in return the Chinese may get at least visiting rights at Hainggyi, which would give the Chinese access to the Indian Ocean.⁴⁸

For years, India's security planners have focused their attention on the ethnic insurgents in the north-east, and tried to establish the extent of Chinese support for these groups. But clearly, the Chinese threat to India in Burma is not posed by a number of small tribal groups in Nagaland and Manipur; the massive build-up of Burma's armed forces, including new units along the Indian border, pose a far more serious challenge to India than the largely inconsequential rebel forces in the north-east.⁴⁹ And if the Chinese gain access to the Hainggyi naval base, India would have to face an entirely new situation in the Indian Ocean.

It should also be emphasized that Burma, despite its official emphasis on "good neighbourly relations" has shown scant respect for the territorial integrity of its neighbours. In a highly publicised incident on 21 December 1991, Burmese government troops stormed across the border into Bangladesh, killed one soldier, wounded three, and made away with a large quantity of weapons. Adding insult to injury, Rangoon afterwards denied that any such incident had taken place.⁵⁰

Prior to the attack on the Bangladesh border post, Burmese troops had on numerous occasions crossed into Thailand and used Thai territory to attack ethnic rebel bases from the rear. The most blatant example of this lack of respect for its neighbours' territory occurred on 20 May 1989 when Burmese troops entered Thailand opposite the ethnic Karen rebel base of Wangkha and burned down an entire Thai border village comprising 200 houses.⁵¹ India also became a victim of Burma's aggressive policies in January 1992, when 1,500 refugees from northern Sagaing division fled to Nagaland, apparently escaping a major military offensive in which several villages on the Burmese side of the border had been burned down by Rangoon's forces. With Burma's armed forces being built up to outrageous proportions, there seems to be little doubt that its neighbours will be increasingly affected by Rangoon's belligerent postures as well.

China's long-term intentions in Burma are a matter of conjecture, but it seems unlikely that Beijing would be so short-sighted as to seriously believe that the highly unpopular SLORC regime will survive. But at the same time it is also obvious that Beijing has placed its bets on some kind of authoritarian, military dominated regime in Rangoon. Like the trade policy, which was first announced officially in 1985, the close ties that China is forging with elements within the Burmese armed forces may have a long-term dimension as well. Some observers have even suggested that China may be biding its time in Burma and waiting for its own men within the Burmese armed forces to rise to power. If these Chinese trained soldiers would stage a coup in Rangoon to overthrow the increasingly anachronistic SLORC, Beijing would, according to this school of thought, not try to prevent that from happening — in which case Chinese domination of Burma would be even more absolute than it is today.

In my view, India needs a comprehensive Burma policy to counter China's increasingly aggressive designs in Asia, which Beijing seems to think are in tune with its new regional role. Unlike China, India enjoys goodwill among the public at large in Burma and several of the leaders of the pro-democracy movement have close personal and emotional ties with India. U Nu is not the only example; the popular winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, detained opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, first arrived in India in 1960 at the age of 15 when her mother, Daw Khin Gyi (the widow of Burma's independence hero Aung San), was appointed Burma's ambassador to New Delhi. Suu completed her schooling in New Delhi. She left for Oxford in 1964, but it was during her time in India that she acquired her lasting admiration for the principles of non-violence embodied in the life and political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1986, she returned to India to do research at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla.⁵²

The party that she built up in 1988, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won a landslide victory in the May 1990 election. Although the election result was ignored by the SLORC, and Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest in Rangoon, she still symbolizes the Burmese people's hope for change and a free society.

Her popularity remains unshaken, and that, in turn, makes the future of the SLORC, or any Chinese design for Burma, extremely uncertain. India, on the other hand, has both goodwill and leverage in Burma — the weakest link in the chain of pro-Chinese regimes surrounding it — and is in a position to influence events in its eastern neighbour.

Internally, Burma has been a hot-bed of intrigue, unrest and political turmoil since 1988. This, however, is no longer an internal Burmese matter: Burma is rapidly becoming a source of instability for the entire region. As China has done already, India needs to formulate a long-term strategy for dealing with this potentially dangerous situation in order to counter-balance the rapidly spreading Chinese influence, and to secure peace and stability in Asia.

Endnotes

- 1 For an overview of this change in China's foreign policy, see Lincoln Kaye, "Not in the Party Spirit," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 September 1991, and Lincoln Kaye, "After the Party's Over," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 October 1991.
- 2 *Working People's Daily* (Rangoon), 1 October 1989.
- 3 For a list of Chinese weaponry delivered and yet to be delivered to Bu see Bertil Lintner, "Lock and Load," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 September 1990, Bertil Lintner, "Oiling the Iron Fist," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 December 1990; and Bertil Lintner, "Hidden Reserves," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 June 1991.
- 4 Bertil Lintner, "SLORC Salvation," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 October 1991.
- 5 *The Hindustan Times*, 15 December 1991.
- 6 For a discussion about Burma's China policy during these years, see Joseph Silverstein, "Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation" (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 170-80. For the Burmese governments version of the Kuomintang invasion of north-eastern Burma, see "The Kuomintang Aggression against Burma" (Rangoon: Ministry of Information, 1953).
- 7 For a chronology of Sino-Burmese relations, see "China's Foreign Relations — A Chronology of Events 1949-1988" (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), pp. 207-15.
- 8 Sino-Burmese relations are described in detail in Chi-shad Liang, "Burma's Relations with the People's Republic of China — From Delicate Friendship to Genuine Cooperation" (unpublished paper, presented at a Burma conference in Oxford, England. 13-15 December 1991). His interpretation of events, however, differs somewhat from the one I have presented in this paper.
- 9 Silverstein, n. 6, pp. 172-75.
- 10 For an overview of the border dispute and its solution, see Bertil Lintner, "Cross-Border Drug Trade in the Golden Triangle" (England: Durham University, International Boundaries Research Unit, 1991), pp. 5-14.
- 11 The Burmese authorities have always denied that regular Chinese troops took part in this operation. However, this was admitted by a senior former Burmese commander, Brigadier General Kyaw Zaw, in an interview with the author in Kunming, China, January 1991. When I trekked through the Mong Yang area in April 1987, I interviewed numerous villagers who vividly remembered the Chinese forces. These villagers also pointed out the places along the

frontier where they had seen the Chinese troops cross over into Burma.

- 12 Silverstein. n. 6, pp. 161-621. From interviews with residents in Rangoon, held less than a year after the affair, the author learned that the shortages in the spring of 1967 were so severe that people were near revolt; the Red Badge affair, however, deflected their rage from their own leaders to the Chinese. When tempers finally cooled toward the end of the year, the new harvest was beginning to enter the market, and shortages began to disappear, the government quietly repaired Chinese restaurants, and communal tensions diminished.
- 13 Interview with Thakin Ba Thein Tin, Panghsang, 24 December 1986.
- 14 See "Communism in India — Unpublished Documents 1925-1934" (Calcutta: National Book Agency. 1980), p. 170.
- 15 For a discussion of these events. see Bertil Lintner, "The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma" (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Programme, 1990).
- 16 On 28 June 1967. Radio Beijing described the Naxalbari incident earlier that year as the "front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao Zedong." "Spring Thunder over India" was another catch-phrase often repeated by Beijing. See Sumanta Banerjee, "In the Wake of Naxalbari" (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980). pp. 114-15.
- 17 For a list of missions to China by ethnic rebels from India's northeast, see Appendix.
- 18 *Beijing Review*, 30 July 1976.
- 19 *Beijing Review*, 30 September 1976.
- 20 *Beijing Review*, 26 November 1976.
- 21 Bertil Lintner. "The Rise and Fall of the Communists", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 June 1987.
- 22 The Chinese gave generous support to the CPB during a major government offensive against party headquarters in Panghsang in 1979, and, as late as November 1986, when I witnessed a battle between the CPB and Burmese government forces at the mountain of Hsi-Hsinwan, large quantities of Chinese ammunition were sent across the border to support the Burmese communists. Wounded CPB soldiers were also treated in hospitals in China.
- 23 Bertil Lintner, "The Busy Border," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 June 1989.
- 24 This was acknowledged by U Nu himself in his autobiography, "Saturday's Son" (New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1975), p. 227: "[In the hour of my need] I found in Premier Nehru a friend and a saviour. Without the prompt support in arms and ammunition from India, Burma might have suffered the worst fate imaginable.
- 25 Robert Taylor, "The State of Burma" (London: Hurst & Company, 1987), p. 262.
- 26 Silverstein, n. 6. p. 181.
- 27 U Nu, n. 24, p. 231.
- 28 F.S.V. Donnison, "Burma" (London: Ernst Benn, 1970), p. 240.
- 29 Silverstein, n. 6, p. 182.
- 30 Interview with S.S. Khaplang, north-western Burma. 18 November 1985.
- 31 *The Warrior* (Nagaland). Vol. 11, No. 22, November 1981.
- 32 Mohan Ram, "India Offers Burma Aid against Rebels," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 June 1984.
- 33 Paisal Sricharatchanya, "Some Are More Equal," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 October 1982.
- 34 Bertil Lintner, "Different Strokes," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 February 1989.
- 35 See "The Conspiracy of Treasonous Minions within the Myanmar Naing-Ngan (i.e. Burma/BL) and Traitorous Cohorts Abroad" (Rangoon: Ministry of Information. October 1989). pp. 107, 219, 225-27. The foreign embassy mentioned in the government propaganda publication was identified in the *Working People's Daily*, as the Indian embassy.
- 36 Supapohn Kanewerayotin, "Defectors Side with Burmese Junta in Public," *Bangkok Post*, 1 February 1991.
- 37 "Asia Yearbook 1997" (Hong Kong: Review Publishing Co., 1992). p. 92.
- 38 *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 9 October 1991.
- 39 James Barrington, "The Concept of Neutralism, Perspective on Burma," *Atlantic Monthly Supplement*, February 1958.
- 40 Silverstein. n. 6. p. 169.
- 41 Maung Maung Gyi, "Foreign Policy of Burma Since 1962," in F.K. Lehman, ed., (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1981).

- 42 For a discussion of Burma and the Non-Aligned Movement see Jan Becka, "Burma and the Non-Aligned: A Retrospect" in *The Non-Aligned World Quarterly* (New Delhi: Central News Agency, 1983).
- 43 Even when hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees from Burma streamed into Bangladesh in 1978, Burma refused to discuss the matter with any country other than Bangladesh: "[the Burmese government said] that problems of mutual concern could be solved on the basis of friendliness and good neighbourliness." The emphasis on bilateralism, and the exclusion of any possible third party, is said to be significant. M.C. Tun, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 July 1978. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has constantly failed to understand Burma, Burmese sentiments and the complexities of Burmese politics, in late 1991 made the mistake of appointing Philippine Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus their special envoy to Burma. Hardly surprisingly, Rangoon responded by saying that Manglapus was welcome to Burma — but only in his capacity of Foreign Minister of the Philippines, not as an envoy of a bloc such as ASEAN.
- 44 Quoted in Bertil Lintner, "Outrage — Burma's Struggle for Democracy" (London: White Lotus), pp. 60-61.
- 45 Bertil Lintner, "New Camouflage," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 May 1989; and Bertil Lintner, "The Islamabad Link," *India Today*, 30 September 1989.
- 46 Interview with an Asia-based diplomat who has requested anonymity. Bangkok, 23 January 1992.
- 47 Bertil Lintner, "Army of Occupation," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 May 1991.
- 48 Interview with an Asia-based diplomat who has requested anonymity, Bangkok, 23 January 1992.
- 49 The only armed resistance group in the north-cast that can be taken seriously is the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). If the Chinese decided that it is worthwhile to encourage its activities, it would most probably do so indirectly via the Burmese military. However, this is pure speculation and should be treated as such.
- 50 See, for instance, a press release issued by the Burmese embassy in Bangkok, 16 January 1992, which branded press reports and international broadcasts as "unsubstantiated" and "grossly exaggerated." The statement went on to claim that Burma had only carried out "routine immigration checks" in the border areas.
- 51 *The Nation* (Bangkok), 25 May 1989
- 52 Bertil Lintner, "Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Unfinished Renaissance" (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1991), pp. 12, 14.

APPENDIX

MISSIONS TO CHINA BY INSURGENTS FROM INDIA'S NORTH-EAST

China's support for India's ethnic insurgencies has been a hotly debated subject since a group of Nagas first trekked to Yunnan in 1967. Later, Chinese-made weapons were recovered by Indian security forces in battles against Naga and Mizo insurgents in the north-east. Defectors also provided India with detailed information about the training facilities in China, mainly in the Tengchong area of north-west Yunnan. I have added this list of missions to China by insurgents from India's northeast in order to put the extent of Chinese support for these groups into perspective. It is my conclusion that the Chinese ceased supporting India's ethnic insurgencies with arms and ammunition more than a decade ago. However, personal links between representatives of some of these groups and Chinese interests do exist, and some north-eastern rebels may still be used by the Chinese for intelligence purposes.

Nagas

1. The first Naga mission to China left Nagaland on 24 October 1966 and, after trekking through Sagaing division and Kachin State in northern Burma, they reached the Chinese frontier on 27 January 1967. The political leader of the 132-man strong group was Thuingaleng Muivah, and the military commander General Thinoselie M. Keyho. Thinoselie left China in November 1967 and reached Nagaland two months later. Muivah remained in Beijing as the unofficial representative of the Naga National Council (NNC) and its "Federal Government of Nagaland" until November

1970. He returned to Nagaland in December 1971 after spending a year in Kachin State. The Naga soldiers received military and political training Tengchong, and returned with modern. Chinese-made assault rifles, machine-guns and rocket launchers.

2. Isak Chishi Swu of the NNC's political leadership and General Mowu Gwizan from the Naga army led the second Naga mission to China. They left along with 330 men in December 1967 and reached China in March 1968. They also trained and equipped at Tengchong.

3. Ngasating Shimray and Lieut-Col. Taka with 100 men left Nagaland in January 1968 and reached the headquarters of the 6 th Battalion of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in western Kachin State in February. The KIA refused to let them proceed; the Nagas were disarmed by the Kachins and sent back to Nagaland.

4. Major Vesai and Jonathan led a 275-man contingent (which also included Lieutenant-General Dusoi, a prominent Naga rebel leader) that left for China in February 1968. On their way through northern Sagaing division in Burma, they were ambushed by the Burmese army. Many Naga rebels from India were also killed by hostile Burmese Nagas (eastern Konyaks). The survivors, 76 men including Dusoi, were captured by Burmese government troops on 18 June 1968.

5. S. Angam and Brigadier Koshang left in March 1968 with 150 men. They were ambushed by the Burmese army while attempting to cross the Chindwin River in northern Sagaing division. Angam and three of his men were captured alive; the rest retreated to Nagaland.

6. General Thungti and 200 of his men left later in 1968. They reached Chindwin, but had to return since the Kachins beyond the river were unwilling to escort them any further.

7. Lieutenant General Thinoselie M. Keyho, who had returned to Nagaland in January 1968, went to China by air from then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1969. He was accompanied by Brigadier Neidelie. In Beijing they met Muivah before returning to Dhaka in November 1970. East Pakistan remained a major foreign base for the Nagas until the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

8. Major Vedayi Moire left with 58 men in December 1971 to receive Muivah, who was on his way from China. They missed him, however, and Moire and his men continued to China. They returned to Nagaland in 1973.

9. Muivah left for a second mission to China in September 1974, escorted by 130 men. Isak Chishi Swu and 146 Naga rebels followed on 15 December. Only 11 men from Isak's group made it to China. They reached Tengehong in Yunnan on 14 August 1975, and stayed there until November 1975. They were back in Nagaland in February 1976. This was the last contingent of Nagas that received arms and ammunition from the Chinese.

10. "The Lhasa 27" became the nickname for a group of young Nagas who reached Lhasa via Nepal in September 1976. They remained in Tibet until March-April 1977, when they started to trickle back into India again. Several of them were apprehended by the Indian police on their way back. Although they did attend some political seminars in Lhasa, they were given no support or military training.

11. Muivah and 200 of his men left for China a third time in October 1976. They reached China in March 1977. Colonel Ashiho with 100 men caught up with them at the general headquarters of the KIA near the Yunnan frontier. This was Muivah's last mission to China, and although he was allowed to stay in China for almost a year, he was told that no more aid would be forthcoming from the Chinese. He left China in November and reached Nagaland in February 1978. The Naga rebel movement split shortly afterwards.

12. Colonel Abam Shimray and S. Angam left in September 1977 as leaders of a 140- man strong contingent (mostly Tangkhul Nagas from Manipur), but they were turned back at the 2nd Brigade headquarters of the KIA. Abam Shimray died in Kachin State. Ten stragglers, including Angam, remained at the 2nd Brigade headquarters until Muivah arrived there from China in December

1977. Angam, Muivah and all the other Nagas returned to Nagaland in January 1978.

13. Shortly after the formation of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) on 31 January 1980, Muivah decided to send a new delegation to China. They left in June 1980 and the delegation was led by Isak Chisi Swu and included Angam and Khui Khip, a Naga from the Burmese side. The entire delegation was refused entry to China; they returned to Nagaland in December 1981.

14. Captain Haw, one of Muivah's closest associates, left with 10-15 troops in September 1982 and reached KIA GHQ in March 1983. They were not allowed to proceed to China although the Kachins introduced them to a Chinese liaison officer on the border; the Nagas had blamed the Kachins for preventing them from proceeding to China and the Kachins, in turn, wanted the Chinese officer to explain to the Nagas that it was Chinese policy not to accept any more Nagas in China. However, Major Haw delivered a letter to the Chinese requesting Support; the letter was signed by the NSCN, the ULFA (Assam) and the UNLF (Manipur). The Chinese returned the envelope unopened.

15. Small groups of NNC members also reached Kachin GHQ during 1983, including one delegation led by Tubu. He stayed at Kachin headquarters from July to November 1983, but was unable to make contact with the Chinese.

16. Muivah made his last attempt to reach China in 1986-87. He reached Kachin headquarters, but had to retreat when it was attacked by Burmese government troops in May 1987. He returned to Nagaland without accomplishing anything.

Mizos

Inspired by the Nagas, the Mizo National Front (MNF) also began to send groups of soldiers and political cadres to China in the early seventies. Damkhosiaka and 38 of his men left Mizoram in 1972 and reached China early the following year. They received military training in China at Kotong post opposite Panwa Pass, on the Yunnan frontier with Burma's Kachin State. A second delegation left its hideout in Burma's Arakan State (opposite Mizoram) in November 1974, returned to Mizoram to collect more recruits, and then set off for China on 20 January 1975. They trekked through northern Burma for seven months, reaching China in August. The leader of the group was a Mizo commander called Biakvela, and his 108 soldiers received military training in Meng Hai, Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna), in southern Yunnan. They left China on 4 January 1976 and returned via Kachin state to Mizoram. The MNF overlord, Laldenga, his foreign secretary, Lalhi-ningthanga, and a few others also visited China, including Beijing, but they went by air from Bangladesh and did not trek through the jungle.

Manipuris

In April 1976, 16-18 Manipuri militants went to Tibet via Nepal. They received political training, and some military instruction, in Lhasa. They returned to Manipur in 1979, where they became known as *ohjas* (master or teacher in the Meitei language). The People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur was formed, and later the "army" also set up a political wing, the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF). On their return, they launched a number of attacks in the Imphal valley, but the Indian authorities managed to capture several of the *ohjas* including their overall leader, Bisheswar Singh. The acting chairman of the RPF, Soibam Temba Singh, left for Kachin State in 1983. The Kachins promised him training and equipment so he returned to Manipur to collect his followers.

Subsequently, 87 PLA activists received training by the KIA in Kachin State. The KIA agreed to arm them as well, but when they were about to leave for Manipur, a split occurred. Temba was ousted and remained at Kachin headquarters at Pa Jau, near the Yunnan frontier. In the end, only 51 PLA soldiers, led by Dina, returned to Manipur. Another 50 RPF/PLA cadres arrived in the Kachin area in July 1986, led by Manikanta (aka Laiba). About a dozen of them defected to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in late 1986. They are now staying at Panwa Pass with Ting Ying's group of CPB mutineers. All Manipuri insurgents were told to leave the KIA area in 1991; the majority went back to Manipur while some remain behind in Ting Ying's former CPB area in Kachin State.

The United National Liberation Front (UNLF), another Manipuri rebel group, sent their chairman, Sanayaima Manipuri, to Kachin State in 1985, to unite with the RPF/PLA. That failed, however, and he returned to Manipur in early 1986. Both the RPF/PLA and the UNLF tried to contact the Chinese authorities in Yunnan, but were unsuccessful. However, sources have suggested that RPF/PLA cadres have been used for intelligence purposes by the Chinese, through the KIA until 1991, and, perhaps more importantly, through the former CPB.

Assamese

The United Liberation Front of Asom [Assam] (ULFA) sent delegations to Kachin State in 1986 and 1987. Their chairman, Arabindra Rajkhowa, remained at Pa Jau for more than a year, and his men received training from the KIA. China's attitude is uncertain; some reports suggest that they were discreetly debriefed by Chinese intermediaries about the situation in India's north-east. But there is little evidence to support the suggestion that the Chinese gave them any assistance. However, the ULFA (like the UNLF, the NSCN and the RPF before them) tried to buy arms on the black market in Yunnan. It is uncertain whether this was successful; most ULFA weapons seem to have been obtained from Pakistan (the Afghan border) and, possibly, through contacts in Bangladesh. All ULFA activists were ordered out of the KIA held areas in Kachin State in 1991.

Naxalites

China's interest in India's Maoist movement was potentially even more dangerous for India's security than support for the ethnic insurgents in the north-east. On 9 April 1970, Radio Beijing announced, "at present, the flames of the peasants' armed struggle have spread to West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal, Orissa, Assam and Tripura, and particularly Andhra Pradesh." Later that year, the

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) sent Sourin Bose to Beijing where he held talks with Zhou Enlai and China's powerful intelligence chief Kang Sheng on 29 October. Kang Sheng reportedly told Bose that the CPC could not understand the real meaning of the Naxalite concept of "annihilation" which he likened to the methods used in China by "left adventurists" after the communist defeat in Shanghai in 1927. The Indian Maoists were, however, praised in an issue of the *Beijing Review*, (No. 1, 1970) which stated that Charu Mazumdar held "correct views" and added, "guerrilla warfare is the only way to mobilise and apply the whole strength of the people against the enemy." The Chinese also suggested that the CPI/ML should form a regular armed force. But little of that materialised, and the Chinese appear to have lost interest in the Naxalites when factionalism tore their tiny groups apart, and it became obvious that they were not a viable force in Indian politics. Chinese interest in the CPI/ML vanished altogether with Deng Xiaoping's return to power in the late seventies.