

# Quiet, tough Sein Win Heads Cabinet in Exile

A. J. Singh writes from Dharmasala, India

Nearly a year after a multiparty election in Burma (now called Myanmar), the junta clings to power and ignores the people who won by a landslide. Frustrated MPs met secretly in a monastery and decided to set up a government in exile. Their plans were partly frustrated, but the government has been proclaimed and sits on the border.



SEIN WIN  
Returned on fake passport

QUIET, slightly built Sein Win is a tough figure. He is Prime Minister of the new provisional government-in-exile of Burma, which has made its headquarters close to the Burma-Thailand border. The military junta in Burma (which now calls the country Myanmar), tries to ignore Win, yet is finding itself in a tight spot.

Nearly a year ago, on May 27, the National League for Democracy led by Win's cousin, 46-year-old Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero Aung San, won a landslide victory in the first multi-party poll in 30 years. The junta refused to hand over power. In July Suu Kyi was put under house arrest.

On December 18 the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) was proclaimed under Win at the headquarters of the Karen rebels, Manerplaw, just inside Burma.

Win said they had no alternative: "The only option for the representatives elected by the vast majority of people is to escape into liberated areas and form a government for the people."

Formation of the NCGUB reflected increased frustration with the junta, known as the State Law and Order Council (SLORC).

Win was educated in Hamburg, Germany. When he was halfway through his doctoral work the military rulers ordered him home. He ignored them and the military refused

to renew his passport. After nine years abroad he earned his Ph.D in mathematics. He did a short stint as a dishwasher in a restaurant and then left Europe and taught maths at universities in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Nairobi, Kenya.

He yearned to return home and in 1984 he landed in Rangoon (renamed Yangon) with a fake passport. Soon his presence was detected. He was arrested and held for nine months in the notorious Insein jail on charges of illegal entry.

After release his application for a lecturer's job at Rangoon university was ignored. For a long time he led a secluded life teaching maths at Workers College in the capital.

Win's leadership of the NCGUB is no surprise. As a member of a political family his background appeals to the people. His father was the elder brother of Aung San. Both men were assassinated in 1947.

Win is an introvert by nature, but he was never reconciled to the rule of the junta. His passive opposition ceased at the time of the bloody pro-democracy turmoil of 1988. He saw soldiers killing hundreds of protesters or throwing them into Insein jail.

He said: "I couldn't sit back and do nothing." He joined his cousin's National League for Democracy (NLD) and on her suggestion headed the Party for National Democracy (PND) which was intended to replace the NLD if the junta dissolved it.

When, seven months after the election, the junta did not call the elected assembly and arrested 50 MPs, its intention to cling to power became plain. Twenty MPs fled, mostly to Thailand, and three reached Burma's western border with India.

A total of 120 others met secretly in a monastery in Mandalay on October 20 and decided to form the parallel government. Before the plan could be implemented the military got wind of it. Many were arrested, including Maung Ko, an NLD leader said to be the brains behind the movement.

On November 9 Maung Ko was found dead. The army said it was suicide. Eyewitnesses say he had been tortured. The body was bruised and one leg broken. Most MPs went underground and some took to the jungle in rebel-held areas. Win was one, leaving behind his wife of one year.

NCGUB aims to eliminate SLORC, call a national convention of elected representatives, including ethnic minorities and set up a democratic gov-

ernment. To win over the minorities—Karens, Kachins, Shans and others who have been fighting for autonomy form Rangoon since 1948—the provisional government has agreed to form the Democratic Front of Burma (DFB). This would include Win's cabinet and Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB)—an umbrella organisation of 21 minority, religious, student and expatriate factions.

NCGUB wants recognition from friendly nations, but this is expected to take some time. It will have to show that it enjoys wide support inside Burma—an uphill task.

Yet it will be difficult for SLORC or the world to ignore the provisional government. Its alliance with ethnic minorities—the first since 1948—is bound to erode the morale of soldiers in the military indoctrinated to believe they are fighting non-Burmese insurgents.

Win has drawn up plans to make his government's presence known and to win legiti-

macy with the people. It will organise civil disobedience movements, co-ordinate guerrilla attacks against the army, seek financial and moral support from expatriates and foreign governments.

Recognition by Thailand would be helpful, though unlikely with a new military government there. Until 1988 it supported the anti-Rangoon ethnic rebels but reversed its policy to reward excessive logging concessions granted to Thai firms by the junta. China fully backs the junta with money and arms.

This bleak outlook does not deter Win. He told the press in his jungle stronghold: "We came here with our programme and agenda in hand and we are going to see that they are put into motion."

Meantime, the junta is re-acting predictably. With new weapons from China it has launched its fiercest dry-season offensive to wipe out the ethnic rebel armies. No one believes it can gain control over areas held by the rebels since 1948.

And as long as these free areas remain and as the NCGUB gains legitimacy, the junta's grip could begin to loosen. — GEMINI NEWS

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## Monitoring Shrimp Farming

The frozen food sector, one of Bangladesh's main sources of hard currency, is in trouble. The Gulf war badly hit exports to the Middle East in the first two months of this year. But that's only part of the story. The malaise goes much deeper.

Currently, only 40 freezing units out of 93 are in operation. The rate of utilisation of existing freezing facilities now stands at a mere 14 per cent. The level of efficiency at shrimp production ponds along the coast tells an even sadder tale: Bangladesh produces 200 kilogrammes of shrimp per hectare of land used, compared to 2000 kilogrammes in South East Asian countries such as Thailand.

As a result, Bangladeshi shrimp has lost its initial competitive edge, though it still accounts for 80 per cent of the country's frozen food exports. Major markets in Japan, the US and the European Community are now saturated with shrimps from highly-efficient South East Asian producers.

Although shrimp is now the fourth largest export item of the country, the volume of export has increased at an average of less than 14 per cent annually since 1981. Hardly a dynamic picture.

The industry has suggested a number of actions to rectify the situation. However, most of these deal with financial assistance in the form of bank credits at reduced rate of interest, easy repayment facilities, lowering of tariff on fuel, power etc. Unfortunately, the list sounds more like a plea for a bail-out than an action-plan for recovery.

Furthermore, the issue of allotting khas lands for shrimp culture has to be considered carefully. The full impact of shrimp farming on the environment is yet to be ascertained. But the omens are not good. Shrimp culture along the coast has allowed the sea to make inroads into cultivable land; salt water has seeped into fields around shrimp ponds, eroding soil fertility.

The dangers are clear. Expanding the physical size of shrimp farming without considering the cost to the environment would be the height of irresponsibility. It's a little rich to talk about increasing acreage when we cannot even make existing farms efficient.

While financial assistance to the industry, in terms of loans to acquire more up-to-date technology, adequate and reliable supply of feed, shipment facilities etc. should be recommended, it should also be acknowledged that the onus to revive the industry and realise its full potential lies principally with the producers and exporters. Government subsidies should not be allowed to become a convenient way out.

For starters, one simple fact has to be acknowledged: current rate of supply far outstrips world demand. Consequently, instead of expanding acreage, it is essential to raise the level of efficiency of our existing shrimp farms in order to offer a competitive price. The massive gap with South East Asian farmers has to be bridged if we are to stand a chance in the international market. Neither the government nor the banks can eliminate this productivity chasm.

Time has now come for a joint state-industry initiative to develop a national policy to promote export of food products in a planned and regulated manner, with preservation of the correct ecological balance receiving high priority. The policy should not only deal with shrimps and fish; it should also explore opportunities in other areas such as frozen winter vegetables, preserved seasonal fruits etc. The government should help to set up a research and monitoring body to formulate and help implement such a policy. The need for research is vital because we must balance our need for hard currency today with the state of the environment tomorrow.

## Passing of a Great Activist

One leading light of the great Language Movement is not any more with us. Professor Abul Kashem, founder of the Tamaddun Majlish and organiser of the first State Language Action Committee soon after the establishment of Pakistan, passed away Monday morning in a Dhaka hospital.

Known universally to thousands in the intellectual and academic circles variously in the endearing and respectful terms of address as Odhyapak Kashem, Kashem Shaheb or mere Kashem Bhai — he was one of the few that never spare themselves in their life's mission. Professor Kashem's mission had much to do with the one thing that this nation holds closest to heart — the cause of the Bangla language. His achievements in this was wide ranging. Not only he acted in a pivotal role in the shaping of the March '48 language demonstrations — the stepping stone of the great movement in '52, he had, even before that, published a pamphlet 'Pakistaner Rashtrabhasha — Urdu na Bangla?' which was the beginning of a particularly fruitful writer of books — all of them in Bangla.

He was one of the first who embraced the cause of Bangla as an activist. Unlike all other activists, 'bhasha-sainiks' to borrow a newfangled term, he took his activism to writing technical books in Bangla which was a very important job going abegging. He published forty text-books on physics alone. The nation remains ever grateful for this eminent student of physics not pursuing a career in that science — and devoting himself to things more important to the moulding and the blossoming of the society he was born in.

In the early years of Pakistan — a time heavy with disillusionment with Pakistan and growing disenchantment towards that — his Tamaddun Majlish and its organ 'Sainik' set a model for standing up to challenges. Many of today's intellectual luminaries including Badruddin Omar and Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury owe their nurture to the Majlish and to Professor Kashem.

Service to the cause of the Bangla language would be the best way to offer respects to the intellectual-activist's memory. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

It was November, 1987,

when Raminder Singh planned to escort his wife to her company's Christmas party at a local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. His wife was anxious for him to meet some of her co-workers whom he had not yet had the opportunity of meeting. But Raminder Singh was in for a surprise and hurt which led to a complicated series of hearings and public outcry that lasted until January.

Raminder Singh planned to attend the function that November night in 1987, but he had a quick change of heart after learning that he would not be allowed into the building because he wore a turban. And that was the start of his troubles.

He was informed that the dress code of the Legion prohibits men from wearing head apparel. Singh had the option of entering the building, removing his turban and joining in the gala. He decided the Legion was asking too much of him.

Singh stayed at home with his wife, angry and depressed and wondering why in a country such as Canada, which prides itself and boasts about its tolerance of racial minorities, he should be treated in this manner.

It was the start of three years of trouble for Singh... a period of time that saw him catapulted into the limelight, something he had avoided all his life and definitely not accustomed to all the attention he was about to endure.

Singh kept silent in his anger for some time then he finally had had enough. He decided to make an issue of his case and proceeded to launch an official complaint with the Human Rights Commission in the Canadian province of Alberta where he lives.

When the commission began its hearings, both sides of the issue presented their case. Several officials from the Legion pointed out that the Legion allows headgear to be worn only during special events or occasions authorized by Legion managements. Others argued that non-Sikhs must cover their heads when they enter Sikh temples, so

## Turban Takes on Trouble

Fuad A. Chowdhury and Trevor A. Bindoo write from Toronto, Canada.

Special to the Star

Sikhs should remove their turbans when entering Legion premises.

After many months of hearings and a series of studies, the Alberta Human Rights Commission came down with a ruling.

In a 20-page report, Ken Chapman, Chairman of the inquiry board, ordered the Jasper place branch of the Royal Canadian Legion on January, 24th, 1990, to amend its dress code in cases where its services are available to the public. Mr Chapman further ordered the Legion to apologize to Mr. Singh for any humiliation caused by the rule which prevented him from wearing his turban.

The ruling says the Legion violated the religious rights of Mr. Singh under Alberta's human rights law. Mr. Chapman criticized Legion management for failing to exercise discretion in applying the no-headgear rule. Because of its actions, Chapman said, the Legion brought "much embarrassment, time and expense" on its own head as well as violating Singh's rights.

Although he doesn't order apologies as a matter of form, Chapman said an apology was definitely in order "considering the circumstances" in the case.

"All of this could have been avoided by the proper exercise of judgement and discretion by the management..." Chapman wrote. "As a result, I further order the executive and management of the branch to apologize to Mr. Singh for any embarrassment, humiliation or distress their actions and lack of judgement may have caused him in these circumstances."

At the hearings, legion officials said Singh wasn't barred because of his religious beliefs, but because he wouldn't adhere to house rules. They argued that as a private club, the legion was exempt from

the Alberta Human Rights Act. But Chapman said the legion had gone "outside the private sphere" at some 160 non-legion sponsored special events over a 33-month period. One such event was Singh's wife's staff Christmas party.

Alberta Human Rights Commission chairman Fil Fraser said the decision is important in clarifying that private clubs who offer services to the public cannot discriminate on grounds protected under the province's Individual's Rights Protection Act.

The ruling applies only to the Jasper Place legion, but a spokesman for the Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Command in the Canadian capital, Ottawa, said he expects other Alberta branches will review their dress code.

Greg Hogan said that 1,800 legion branches in Canada have rules governing the wearing of hats on premises, although many allow Sikhs to wear turbans. The Jasper Place branch was "over-zealous" in interpreting its dress code, he said.

Some members of the Jasper Place branch say they don't think an apology is called for. "Why should we have to apologize?" Club member Harvey Long said. "This is a veterans' club. Why should we apologize for a rule that's been there since day one."

The sentiment was echoed by about a dozen other club members interviewed outside the branch. Only one agreed the branch should apologize, and then grudgingly.

"If an apology would keep them out of the Legion I would go along it," said Walter Sikorski, a branch member for 14 years.

Singh said he is pleased by the board's ruling, but saddened by the hostile reaction

of some members. "What it tells is they don't understand who Sikhs are and what Sikh's religion requires them to do."

Singh said he is surprised the Legion's national office won't amend a bylaw that allows headgear only on special occasions. "I had hoped they would be more reasonable and interpret this as a need to take

corrective action." He said the resistance shown by the Legion indicates a need for governments to take a stronger stand on human rights issues. "Now they know the mindset of people, who when told their stance isn't reasonable — become defiant."

But Jasbeer Singh, a spokesman for the World Sikh

Federation in Alberta, said the decision, "improves our faith in existing human rights legislation".

The managers of some legion branches in Calgary, the second largest city in the province of Alberta, said they won't alter their dress code unless directed to do so by the national headquarters in Ottawa.

A national spokesman said the rule won't be changed, although individual branches are entitled to make an exception for Sikhs. He said hats are not allowed outside branches out of respect for Canada's war dead and the Queen.

## Landless Farmers Get Credit where it's Due

LAHORE: 'Bikers on Bikes' have made their way into the villages of Gujranwala.

Gujranwala is a district of Punjab province, the site of an innovative program which provides loans to the landless and women for the first time.

The rural landless have been the major beneficiaries, followed by small farmers owning less than 2 hectares of land.

### The rural landless have been the major beneficiaries

The Gujranwala Agricultural Development project is the first externally financed project in the country that includes a credit component directly addressing landless families.

Landless families make up 55 per cent of Gujranwala district, the highest percentage in Pakistan. Farm yields are low and incomes well below the national rural per capita average of US\$200.

The main objective is to increase rural incomes and food-crop production in Gujranwala. The district's population density of 285 people per square kilometre is much higher than the Punjab average of 213 and the national average of 114.

Since the project started, most of the credit has gone to dairy development loans,

popular with borrowers because it gives better and quicker returns. The next largest beneficiaries are cottage industries as Gujranwala is famous for its handicrafts, especially carpet-weaving.

Some 56.4 per cent of total loans have been given to the landless poor. This is a breakthrough for them since they were unable to get credit from

commercial banks before. Still, collateral has to be provided by a loan guarantor.

This requirement has contributed to good loan repayment. But it has restricted the number of loans granted. It has been recommended that efforts should be made to determine if improved appraisal could reduce the requirement for loan surety.

The participation of women is considered vital as improvements in the quality of life depend on their ability to earn additional income. Lending to women for cottage industries or small-scale dairy and poultry development got to a slow start. But the percentage of loans granted to women has improved since.

The project hopes to improve rural conditions by im-

proving rice and wheat yields and increase crop intensities. Employment and income would be widened through credit for small-scale rural enterprises and livestock.

Credit is available for livestock development and cottage industry. The program will provide 5,300 loans primarily for dairy production but also for sheep and goat breeding. The average loan size for dairy

production is 12,600 rupees (US\$740). Loans are also given for group activities.

Loan recovery suffered a setback in 1988-89 because of the floods in mid-1988. It improved in 1989, with 73.2 per cent of the allocated target for loan recovery.

The project was initiated by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Asian Development Bank. Also involved is the Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan.

Expected to benefit from the project are about 8,450 landless farmers (with about 1 ha. of farmland or less) and marginal farmers cultivating less than 2 ha.

— DEPTHNEWS ASIA

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Ifter allowance

Sir, Lunch allowance is generally suspended during the Holy month of Ramadan for the Muslim employees for instance in our bank, since they abstain from any kind of food from dawn to dusk. On the contrary, they are to take Ifter, supper/dinner and Sehari during the night by turn. It is known to all and sundry that the month of Ramadan is a period of untamable price hike causing severe financial stress on the Muslims in particular.

In the backdrop of the above situation the authorities of public concerns, including ours, may introduce Ifter allowance in lieu of

Lunch allowance only for the month of Ramadan, to ease the financial constraint of the big portion of fasting employees.

Muhammad Ataulah  
Pubali Bank Limited  
Reazuddin Bazar Branch  
Chittagong.

### Service bills and bank

Sir, It is not known, why certain commercial banks, such as Janata, Agrani, Krishi banks suddenly stopped receiving telephone bills. Now only Rupali bank receives telephone bill. The new arrangement is causing trouble to the subscribers because a single bank counter is not sufficient for the huge number of

telephone subscribers in a locality.

Not only in depositing telephone bill but other service bills as well, including gas, electricity, water etc., the subscribers are facing problems. One has to wait in a long queue to deposit bills which kills a lot of time of the office-goers and bearers.

We would, therefore, urge upon the respective authorities to ease the bill depositing system for their bonafide subscribers.

M.Zahidul Haque,  
Assistant Professor,  
Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka-1207.

### Electronics complex

Sir, The news item saying that the construction of an Electronics Complex in Mirpur is about to be completed, is very encouraging for all of us.

For a poor country like ours, which is trying to

survive in these hard times, it is indeed a good news.

For a country like ours to become self-sufficient in anything is not a matter of joke. With fund constraints and so many invisible obstacles to overcome, if at all we do achieve something, it speaks of our own sheer hard work and endeavour which needs to be lauded.

In these days of Electronic wave, if we are able to become self-sufficient in this field, it will solve a lot of our problems and save much of our valuable foreign exchange, which is lost in the way of buying so many things.

We wish such bold steps and interests are taken in other matters too.

Enam Rahman  
Savar

### BCS examination

Sir, It is indeed very sad that the BCS exams scheduled for the 9th of March had to be cancelled due to

some disturbances in the exam halls.

It is very disheartening, because generally people who do appear at these exams, hope to get a job if they can get through. Particularly in these days of hardship and unemployment.

They are mainly from the middle class and often have a family to look after. So the sooner they get over the student portion of their life, it is better for them.

Therefore even though the exams have been postponed at the moment, we hope that the authorities will realise the urgency of holding it and thus completing the entire exam at the earliest.

Shamim Ahmed  
Rayer Bazar, Dhaka.

### AIDS on rise

Sir, A report of WHO says that the dreaded disease AIDS (Acquired Im-

mune Deficiency Syndrome) is on the rise worldwide. However, USA the country with the highest number of no cure of this disease has been discovered up-to-date.

Experts at WHO believe that, many countries do not provide them with the right data, and tend to under-report.

If they get authentic report, the death rate caused by this disease will be much higher than actually recorded.

Many under-developed countries may also be having a large number of people afflicted with it, but due to lack of detection facilities they may be unaware of it.

It is our ardent appeal to countries who have the resources to utilise, to find a remedy to AIDS now killing millions.  
Renu Talukdar  
Comilla.