

THE FUTURE OF INDO-BURMA RELATIONS: A VIEW FROM DIVIDED PEOPLES

Lian H. Sakhong

This paper was presented at the 9th International Conference on Burma Studies, University de Provence, Marseilles, France, 6-10 July 2010. This is its first publication.

Introduction

Burma and India share a 1,643 km-long land border, which divides the homelands of three major ethnic groups in the region, namely, the Chin, Kachin and Naga. Modern international boundaries divide the Chin into Chin State, Sagaing Division and Magwe Division in Burma, Mizoram and Manipur States in India, and Bawm Area of Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh. The Kachin are divided into Kachin State, Shan State and Sagaing Division in Burma, Arunachal Pradesh State in India, and Yunnan Province in China. The Naga are divided into Nagaland and Manipur States in India, and Sagaing Division in Burma. Before the colonial period, these ethnic groups and their homelands were never annexed or conquered by either India or Burma/Myanmar.

During the colonial period, the British authorities promulgated two separate constitutions for these ethnic groups: the Kachin Hill Tribes Regulation of 1895, which was applied mainly to the Kachin; and the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896, which was applied not only to the Chin in what they then called the Chin Hills District, Chittagong Hills District, and Lushai Hills District, but also for the Naga in the then Naga Hills District and other areas. After the promulgation of the 1935 Burma Act and India Act in 1937, which officially separated British India and British Burma, the Chin Hills Regulation for the Lushai Hills District and Naga Hills District was renamed as the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation for the Lushai Hills and Naga Hills. For the Chin Hills District, the name Chin Hills Regulation remained until the Chin joined in Burma's independence in 1948. Unfortunately for those peoples, the British administrative boundaries that divided their homelands became the international boundaries when India and Burma gained their respective independence from British colonial power.

In this paper, I shall examine the future of Indo-Burma relations from the perspective of these three ethnic groups: the Chin, Kachin, and Naga. I will argue in this paper that the future of Indo-Burma relations, especially the Indian “Look East Policy”, depends very much on how the Burmese military junta and the Indian government approach these ethnic problems, including on-going territorial-based ethnic conflicts in North East India and a six decades long civil war in Burma. They all have armed groups and while the Chin and Kachin are fighting against the military junta in order to gain greater autonomy within a federal arrangement of the Union of Burma, the Naga, from both India and Burma, have been fighting for their freedom since the end of the colonial period.

Without solving these ethnic problems in North East India and Burma, India cannot effectively apply its “Look East Policy”. The Look East Policy, as Pudaite argues, is part of “India’s response to the process of globalization...initiatives India and its eastern partners take for expanding mutual cooperation spanning over and through the NE region” (Pudaite, 2010: 179). India cannot look east without “looking at the NE region” including the Chin, Kachin and Naga regions in Burma. Without ending sixty years of civil war and solving the root cause of the political crisis in Burma, which is mostly rooted in ethnic issues; the military junta in *Naypyidaw* cannot hope for the stability of the region and the long term developments that they dream of, even by establishing good relationships with its neighbours, especially with India.

For the past sixty or so years, those ethnic nationalities have been able to protect and promote their heritage and way of life through armed resistance. Consequently, they were able to prevent the degradation of their culture, religion and language from successive governments of the Union of Burma and India. However, due to the changing geopolitics after the end of the cold war, it has become very difficult to sustain armed-struggle as an ethnic nationalist movement. Moreover, it is not easy to resist the forces of globalization, represented not only by the governments of India and Burma but by multi-national companies, trans-national corporations, and international-financial institutions, etc. This paper will, therefore, argue that for those ethnic nationalities, even if they are not willing to abandon armed-struggle, it is time to look at other alternative means and ways to sustain their heritage, way of life, freedom, and the development of their homelands.

The future of Indo-Burma relations, in a nutshell, depends very much on how India and Burma approach ethnic issues in the region, and how those ethnic groups will respond to the forces of globalization, and whether they are able to find alternative solution to armed-struggle.

Historical Background: The Crown Colonial Scheme

In 1937, when the Burma Act of 1935 was officially implemented and Burma was separated from the Province of India, Sir Robert Reid, the Governor of Assam, strongly protested against the policy of the British India government, which had adopted the administrative boundaries of the homelands of Chin, Kachin and Naga as the boundary between Burma and India, and later between India and Bangladesh as well. He thus wrote to the London government that ‘. . . the separation of Burma from India on lines of the present frontiers will permanently divorce portions of tribes [Chin, Kachin and Naga], which naturally should comprise a single unit’ (R. Reid 1942: 6).

From the very beginning, Sir Robert Reid, like B. S. Carey who drafted the Chin Hills Regulation, was in favour of forming what later came to be known as a “Province of Commonwealth” for those peoples and were strongly opposed to the idea of dividing them into three administrative units and thereby three countries. Foreseeing the dangerous consequences of dividing those peoples, in 1935 he updated the provision of the “Inner Line Regulation” of 1873 in order to protect the Chin, Kachin, Naga and other ethnic groups in what is now called “Northeast India” from the exploitation of outsiders. As a matter of fact, the inner line regulation was adopted by the British colonial power not only to prohibit permanent residence in the area by persons not native to it, but designed as a recognition of the pre-colonial independent status of the Chin, Kachin, Naga and other peoples in the region.

In 1941, Sir Robert Reid made his strongest proposal, which became known as the “Crown Colonial Scheme of 1941”. He declared that ‘. . . they [the Chin, Kachin and Naga] are not Indian in any sense of the word, neither in origin nor in outlook, and it is a historical accident that they have been taken into an Indian province’ (R. Reid 1942: 6; cited also by Symleah 1981: 172–78). He thus proposed to form a separate colonial province, what he called the “Chin-Lushai Province”, for the peoples and regions covered by the Chin Hills Regulation, which would have had its own governorship and the same political and administrative status as the governments of Assam, Bengal and Burma. His proposal was accepted by the Conservative Party in London led by Sir Winston Churchill. Unfortunately, World War II prevented the implementation of Sir Robert Reid’s proposal of the Crown Colonial scheme in 1941.

Soon after the Second World War, the British returned to Burma with new colonial schemes, including the “Crown Colonial Scheme of 1941” which intended to create a separate British colonial province, the “Chin-Lushai Country”. The British officers who had had a friendly relationship with the Chin, Kachin and other ethnic groups during the war, particularly Sir Dorman-Smith, Governor of British Burma, and H.N.C. Stevenson, Director of the Frontier Areas Administration, reminded the London government of its commitment to implement Sir Robert Reid’s Crown Colonial Scheme (cf. Sakhong, 2003: 186-187).

The “Crown Colonial Scheme”, however, was updated in accordance with the changing political situation during the war, which favoured the formation of a separate colonial country called the “Province of the Commonwealth” between India and Burma. While Robert Reid’s original “Crown Colonial Scheme” was aimed at the creation of the “Chin-Lushai Country” only for the Chin, the up-dated proposal included the Chin Hills District (the present Chin State in Burma), Lushai Hills District (the present Mizoram State in India), the Chittagong Hill Tracts (in present Bangladesh), Arakan Hill Tracts (Paletwa Township of present Chin State), Naga Hills District (present Nagaland State), Manipur, North Cachar and Mikir areas, parts of the Chindwin District (present Naga Hills in Burma), the west bank of the Chindwin (present Kale, Kabaw, Kankaw, and Tamu Valleys in Sagaing Division of Burma), Kachin Hills (present Kachin State in Burma, but excluded Myitkyina, Bamaw and Kata Townships), the hill areas of Sadiya and the hills of Tripura. Thus, in 1945, Mr R. Coupland, a Professor in the History Department at Oxford University and an expert on constitutional law, was sent again to study the possible implementation of the resolution to make a separate country for those peoples into what he called a “Province of the Commonwealth”. He gave his affirmative report to the British government under the Crown Colonial Scheme (Cf. Coupland 1946: 201–205).

However, before this project was implemented, the Conservative Party was defeated in the first post-war general election by Clement Attlee’s Labour Party. The Labour Party, which had long had the independence of India and Burma as part of its program, wanted to give away the entire subcontinent and the creation of a “Province of the Commonwealth” between India and Burma was out of the question for the new government. Eventually, Attlee annulled the Conservative Party’s “Crown Colonial Scheme” when he came into power in 1945 (cf. Sakhong, 2003: 186-187, and pp. 206-208).

The Status of Chin, Kachin and Naga in Newly Independent Burma and India:

After the end of World War II, the Chin, Kachin, Naga and other ethnic groups in Burma, such as the Karen and Shan expected better treatment from the British government in the way of social, cultural, economic and, most importantly, political development projects for their homelands. They had, after all, served with great loyalty on the British side during the war. They were not prepared for the rapidly changing political situation after the Second World War, nor for independence of their respective homelands. While Indian and Burman nationalists had been fighting hard to gain freedom and become sovereign nation-states, the Chin, the Kachin and the Karen were still willing to remain under British rule.

In the early stage of the post-war period, the colonial powers strongly highlighted the rights and interests of the Chin, Kachin, Karen and other non-Burman nationalities from the so-called Frontier Areas. But in 1945, soon after he came to power, Attlee decided to replace former governor Dorman-Smith with Major-General Hubert Rance, who had administered Burma during the temporary military administration in 1945. Rance arrived in Rangoon on August 30, 1946, and immediately informed London that “the White Paper is now out of date”. He also cabled directly to Attlee that “The AFPFL is the only horse to back” (M. Smith, 1991: 77). Thus, together with the replacement of Governor Dorman-Smith, who closely associated himself with the Conservative Party, the Labour Government in Britain “reversed its policy, and Burma’s political agenda became largely a matter of bilateral negotiation between the British and Aung San’s AFPFL” (Christie, 1998: 155).

In December 1946, the British only invited Aung San and his delegation from Burma Proper to London without a single representative from the Frontier Areas to discuss “the steps that would be necessary to constitute Burma as a sovereign independent nation” (Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991: 23). Since Attlee’s Labour Government had already prepared to grant Burma’s independence “either within or without the Commonwealth”, the London talks were largely a formality, at most putting into more concrete form the principles to which they already had agreed. The only stumbling blocks were the issues relating to what they then called the Frontier Areas (Cf. U Maung Maung, 1988: 253).

When the Chin, Kachin, Shan and other ethnic groups became a major issue in post-war Burma, Stevenson, Director of the Frontier Areas Administration, organized what came to be known as the First Panglong Conference in March 1946. Later, at the Second Panglong Conference, held in February 1947, the Chin, Kachin, Shan and the Interim Burmese Government led by General Aung San signed the historic Panglong Agreement, the purpose of which it declares in its preamble:

Believing that freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins, and the Chins by their immediate co-operation with the interim Burmese government.

For the Chin, Kachin and Shan, the essence of the Panglong Agreement was to speed up their own search for freedom together with the Burman and other nationalities in what became the Union of Burma, based on the principles of equality, mutual trust and recognition. As a condition for joining the Union of Burma, the Chin, Kachin and Shan demanded that the right of secession must be included in the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma, which was duly proclaimed in Chapter X, Article 201, and 202:

Chapter (X): The Right of Secession

201. Save as otherwise expressly provided in this Constitution or in any Act of Parliament made under section 199, *every state shall have the right to secede from the Union* in accordance with the condition hereinafter prescribed.

202. The *right of secession* shall not be exercised within ten years from the date on which this Constitution comes into operation.

Although Chapter 10 of the 1947 Constitution guaranteed the rights of secession for all member states of the Union, the clauses in the same constitution for the Chin Affairs (Chapter IX, Part V), and the Kachin Affairs (Chapter IX, Part. III) omitted the right of secession. Only the clauses for the Karenni and Shan States Affairs reaffirmed the right of secession.

Unfortunately, the Naga in Burma were more or less side-lined when the negotiations for the future status of the non-Burman/Myanmar ethnic nationalities were conducted. The same was true for the Chin in India in what they then called the Lushai Hills District when Indian nationalists negotiated with the British for independence. However, the Naga in India were capable of negotiating their own future status both with the British and Indian nationalists.

In 1947, the Naga National Council (NNC), under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, went to New Delhi and negotiated the Naga claim for independence with both the British and Indian nationalists, including Mahatma Gandhi. Phizo and his NNC submitted a Memorandum to the [British] Government of India, in which they asserted their “right of self-determination and amending the setting up of an Interim Government of the Naga people for a period of Ten Years” (NNC 1993: 17-18).

After submitting the Memorandum, Phizo was able to secure what came to be known as “The Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord”, which was signed by Sir Akbar, the Governor of Assam, and the Naga leaders in Kohima on 28 June 1947. The “Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord”, also known as the “Governor’s Nine-point Agreement”, recognized “the right of the Naga to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes” (Hazarika, 1994: 97). The accord also mentioned

that after ten years of the agreement's implementation, "the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period, or [if] a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people [should be] arrived at" (Ibid.)

Knowing the attitude of the Indian nationalists who intended to oppose the "Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord", Phizo and his NNC declared Naga independence on 14 August 1947, just one day ahead of India's independence. On 9 July 1948, Phizo was arrested and jailed in Calcutta. He was released after one year on humanitarian grounds, but "Phizo was undeterred" (Hazarika, 1994: 98). As soon as opportunity presented itself, Phizo and his NNC conducted "a referendum where the Naga were asked whether they wanted to live in India or resume their separateness. The vote was ninety-nine percent in favour of independence" (ibid). Thus, Phizo once again declared Naga independence in 1956, and a full fledged war broke out between the Naga and the Indian government.

Indo-Burma Relation as Joint Operations against Ethnic Insurgencies:

The war in Nagaland continues today. In this on-going war, as Hazarika observes,

Churches were burned, villages were razed, and aircrafts were used to bomb and harass the Nagas. Women were raped and continue to be molested even these days by troops, nearly forty years after the first shots of Naga uprising were fired (Hazarika, 1994: 101).

In late 1950s, while the civil war in Nagaland was in a full swing, another ethnic insurgency arose in North East India, this time in Mizoram State, or what they then called the "Lushai Hills District" led by the Mizo National Front (MNF).

The MNF began its movement as the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) in 1959, when the famine called "*Mautam*" struck Mizoram. The *Mautam*, is a periodical event, related with the bamboo plants that flower every fifty years and form a sort of seed resembling paddy seeds. Although the flowers heighten the rugged beauty of the landscape, they are also the harbingers of starvation and death. Not only the bamboo seeds, but also the flowers themselves, attract rats like "honey draws bees". Millions of rats swarm into the jungle and rice and vegetable fields of the *jhum* or *Lo*, devouring everything in their wake. This was the most important cause of the great famine that periodically visits

Mizoram (Cf. Hazarika, 1994: 111).

In October 1958, the Mizo District Council predicted the imminence of famine following the flowering of the bamboo and passed a resolution to take precautionary measures. It asked the governor of Assam to sanction the sending of Rs 150,000 in relief funds for the Mizo district, including the Pawi-Lakher region. However, the Assam government rejected the request, “possibly assuming that the prediction of famine was a primitive people’s tradition” (ibid.). But tradition proved right. The bamboo flowered in 1959, and the next year rats multiplied in millions and ate up grain, fruit and everything else that was edible. The catastrophe occurred suddenly and so comprehensively that the governor of Assam was taken by surprise.

Exasperated by the Assam government’s failure to bring in assistance in time, the Mizo Cultural Society and various denominations of Christian churches formed famine-fighting squads. The most prominent of these groups was the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), launched by a young bank clerk called Laldenga. In fact, most of the relief and aid came from foreign missionaries who had been working among the Mizo for many years, such as the American Baptist Mission and the Scottish Presbyterian Mission. During that period of suffering, the MNFF helped the villagers by making sure they received their share of missionary and government aid. In doing so, they became so popular that the villagers recognized them as their real leaders, especially Laldenga, who was seen as a national hero. Sanjoy Hazarika writes:

In order to help his people Laldenga developed a network of workers and supporters who distributed food and travelled to the remotest villages with relief and a message. The message was simple: the state and Central Government did not care for the Mizos and this was shown in its shoddy response to the famine; that the Mizo District Council, the main political forum, had failed to rally support at a time of crisis and was now unrepresentative of Mizo aspirations; that the area was integrated into Assam as late as 1898 under a political officer who acted as a representative of the Viceroy; and that the Mizos, like the Nagas, were a nation and deserved a place of their own, away from India. The response was electrifying (Hazarika, 1994: 111).

On October 28, 1961, after the famine was over, the MNFF eventually converted itself into a political party called the Mizo National Front (MNF), with independence—and hence the reunification of all the Chin people living in Burma, India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)—as its goal. Thus, from the very beginning the MNF had advocated for independence, or what some historians call the philosophy of “Greater Chinram”, which indeed became very popular among the Chin people in both India and Burma. The policy of the MNF was clearly described in the “Mizo Memorandum”, submitted to the Prime Minister of India on October 30, 1965.

The Mizos, from time immemorial, lived in complete independence without foreign interference . . . Their administration was like that of the Greek City State of the past . . . Their territory or any part thereof had never been conquered or subjugated by their neighbouring states . . . The Mizo are a distinct nation, created and moulded and nurtured by God and nature. The Mizo had never been under the government of India. Therefore, the Mizos demanded the nation of Mizoram, a free sovereign state to govern itself, to work her own destiny and formulate her own foreign policy (cited by Vumson, 1986: 279).

On February 28, 1966, the MNF began the Biblically code-named “Operation Jericho”. All the towns in Mizoram were encircled by the Mizo National Army, to strike at zero hour, one o’clock on March 1, 1966. Before the next day dawned, the MNF Army had occupied the entire region of Mizoram. The Government Treasury, radio station and police station at Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, fell into their hands. The MNF therefore solemnly declared the independence of Mizoram on March 1, 1966, and West Chinram, of Mizoram State in India, became a free nation, at least for a short period of time (cf. Vumson, 1986: 286).

As the ultimate goal of the MNF movement was independence for the entire Chin people they planned to capture and set free the whole of Chinram. That is, not only Mizoram in India but also Chin State in Burma and the Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh, where the Chin people are artificially divided. They, thus, widened their operations into Burma to capture all the important towns in East Chinram. In this operation, from April to June 1966, the MNF captured Tiddim, Tamu and Falam. Since Falam was the capital of what was then called the Chin Special Division, its liberation symbolized the freedom of the whole of East Chinram in Burma. Thus, by capturing Aizawl and Falam, at least for a short period, the MNF was symbolically able to liberate both East and West Chinram (Chin State and Mizoram State) in 1966.

Even before the Naga and Mizo (Chin) from the North East India started their armed-struggle against the New Delhi government, ethnic nationalities in Burma had already started their armed resistance against the central government in Rangoon. Although the right of secession was included to safeguard ethnic rights in the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma, none of the ethnic nationalities in the country were satisfied with the real constitutional arrangement. When they signed the Panglong Agreement, they had envisaged a federal system where they could enjoy a combination of “self-rule” for their respective ethnic states and “shared-rule” for the whole Union. But what happened with the 1947 Constitution was a mixture of both federal and unitary systems with strong centralization. With this, they felt, that they had lost their autonomous status in an independent Burma. Therefore, beginning with the Karen in 1949, one ethnic group after another revolted against the central government.

In addition to the constitutional crisis that they have faced since independence, Chin, Kachin and Karen Christians were also confronted by another problem when U Nu's government promulgated Buddhism as a state religion in 1961. The most serious armed rebellion as a direct result of the adoption of Buddhism as a state religion was that of the Kachin Independence Army (KIO), which emerged soon after the state religion of Buddhism act was promulgated in 1961. The "Christian Kachin", as Graver observes, "saw the proposal for Buddhism to be the state religion as further evidence of the Burmanization of the country" which they had to prevent by any means, including armed rebellion (Graver, 1993: 56). The Chin rebellion, led by Hrang Nawl, was also related to the promulgation of Buddhism as the state religion, but the uprising was delayed until 1964 owing to tactical problems.

After several months of training in East Pakistan, the Chin National Liberation Army, under the leadership of Hrang Nawl, was ready for action. But before they took any action against the Burmese government, they discussed all the matters with their blood brothers from the Mizo National Front (MNF) led by Laldenga. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss whether they would need to combine their forces into a single political organization and fight both India and Burma under the same command. The meeting was held at Tuisang on March 23, 1965. The MNF's delegation was led by Maj. Gen. Lalliana the commanding officer of the MNA (Mizo National Army) Special Forces, Senator Subloa, a member of the Central Committee of the MNF, and Brigadier Biakchhunga, a veteran of the Burma Army's Chin Rifles. At the meeting they agreed that, because of the geopolitical nature of India and Burma, they would not combine their forces but would fight separately for the same purpose, and they also agreed not only to cooperate with each other in military operations but also to exchange and share any information they would need for such operations.

While the MNF launched "Operation Jericho" and occupied the entire West Chinram of Mizoram and the Capital of East Chinram, Falam;, Hrang Nawl and his Chin Liberation Army attacked Haka, the present Capital of Chin State, Tiddim, Rih, Thlantlang, Matupi and other towns and areas. The 700 strong force of the Chin Liberation Army, under the command of General Tual Zen and Col. Son Kho Pau, a former Burma Army officer, were divided into two groups, Northern Command and Southern Command, and they virtually controlled most of East Chinram in March 1965.

Alarmed by the Chin rebellion on both sides of Chinram, Mizoram and Chin States, and also by the Naga liberation movement; the Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri visited Burma and discussed the situation with General Ne Win and with "rebel movements along the India-Burma borders. . . they agreed to cooperate with each other to prevent any sinister attempt at secession or disintegration" (Vumson, 1986: 235). As geopolitics played a major role in the

region, Burma too was alarmed by the Chin nationalist movement on both sides of its border with India. General Ne Win, thus, visited India in March 1968. There “he agreed with Mrs. Indira Gandhi, then Indian Prime Minister, to joint security measures against resistance groups on both sides of the boundary. They agreed to exchange information and to coordinate their patrols in the Naga-Mizo-Chin border areas”(ibid. P.237).

In 1969, the Burma and Indian Armies launched a joint operation against the Chin nationalist movement. In Shillong, Hrang Nawl, Son Kho Pau and TunKho Pau were all arrested by the Indian authorities and deported to Burma in accordance with the Indo-Burma Agreement. Hrang Nawl, Son Kho Pau and other Chin nationalist leaders were immediately handed over to the Burmese government but Tun Kho Pau, who was an Indian citizen, was not deported but brutally killed by the Assam Rifles of the India Army. Son Kho Pau passed away a few months after he was released from a Burmese jail after serving more than ten years imprisonment without trial. Hrang Nawl also served several years without trial and was released two years after General Ne Win promulgated a new constitution in 1974.

As the physical movement of the Chin National Liberation was virtually ended by the Indo-Burma joint operation in 1969, the Indian Army launched another military operation against the MNF. In 1971 when the Indian Army invaded East Pakistan and declared the independence of Bangladesh, the MNF headquarters in East Pakistan was forced to move into the Arakan Hills Tract in Burma. Laldenga was evacuated to Karachi in West Pakistan, where he was helped and protected by Z. A. Bhutto's government. Later, with the help of his missionary friend Michael Scott, Laldenga moved to London and lived there in exile.

In October 1984, Indira Gandhi invited Laldenga for talks. Mrs Gandhi died and her son Rajiv Gandhi signed the Mizo Peace Accord in 1985. As a result of this accord, Laldenga entered Aizawl as a victorious leader of the Mizo tribe of the Chin in India. He became the Chief Minister of the Interim Mizoram Government in 1986. Soon his MNF party was victorious and on Chin National Day (February 20) in 1987, Laldenga became the elected Chief Minister of Mizoram. On that very same day, Mizoram was declared a full autonomous State within the federal system of India (Cf. Chatterjee, 1990: 541–542).

The Changing Dynamic in Indo-Burma Relations

Since both countries emerged as sovereign nation-states, India and Burma adhered to the five principles of peaceful co-existence, formulated at Bandung Conference in 1954 as the core of

their foreign policies. These were: (1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) Mutual non-aggression; (3) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; (4) Equality and mutual benefit; and (5) Peaceful co-existence. Both countries were also active in the non-alliance movements as founding members in 1950s.

The foreign policy for every sovereign country is fundamentally intended to safeguard their national interests abroad, and, as such, it is more or less the extension of domestic policies, which can broadly be described as: (i) consolidation and preservation of national independence, (ii) safeguarding of national security, and (iii) national development (cf. Pudaite, 2010: 215). As part of their respective "national security" interests, bilateral relation between India and Burma has mainly focused on "cooperation in combating insurgencies" along the Indo-Burma border, especially the Chin, Kachin and Naga insurgent groups (cf. K. Yhome, 2008: 85).

The Chin, Kachin and Naga nationalist movements have always been a major concern for both countries. Although the physical movement of the Chin National Liberation was curtailed in 1969, and the Mizo National Front was converted into a normal political party when Mizoram became a full autonomous state in 1987; the Kachin and Naga armed-struggles continue to exist. However, in 1980, the Naga National Council split into two factions; Thuengaling Muivah, who was picked up by Phizo for his chief aide in 1966, split away from Phizo's NNC. Together with Isak Swu, Muivah founded the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) on the Burma side of Nagaland. The NSCN split into two factions again; one group is led by Muivah and Isak Swu, therefore known as NSCN (M-I), and another faction is led by Khaplang, therefore known as NSCN (K).

After the student-led democracy uprising in Burma in 1988, another insurgent group emerged from Chin State in Burma. The Chin National Front (CNF) was founded by Chin students from Rangoon and Mandalay universities, who were involved in the 1988 democracy movement but escaped to the India border after the military coup in 1989. The CNF's military wing the Chin National Army (CNA) received military training from the Kachin Independent Organization (KIO) in early 1990s and established a strong network with other ethnic insurgent groups from Burma and joined the National Democratic Front (NDF), founded in 1976, the largest alliance of ethnic armed groups in Burma,. They also become a member of the "Ethnic Nationalities Council", the largest ethnic political alliance which includes both armed groups and political parties of all of Burma's ethnic nationalities. The CNF has made it clear that their policy has been to establish a genuine democratic federal union of Burma. And, as such, they do not interfere nor disturb Indian sovereignty in its policies.

Although CNF policy is aimed at the establishment of a democratic federal union of Burma, the

Indo-Burma joint military operations did not spare them. In 1995, when the Indian and Burmese army launched a joint security operation code named “Operation Golden Bird” against the Naga armed groups, the CNF was accused of helping both the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) to transport arms through the border between the two countries. The Vice-Chairman of the CNF, Salai Sang Hlun, was captured by the Assam Rifles and killed on 23 April 1995. In the early to mid- 2000s, the CNF suffered two more joint military operations launched by Burmese and Indian forces. In 2005 they lost “Camp Victoria” one of their most important military camps in what was the most severe setback suffered by the CNF since its inception.

Indian and Burmese joint military operations against ethnic insurgent groups intensified after the formation of the “Indo-Burmese Revolutionary Front” which united various armed groups from both sides of the border; “the KIO, the NSCN-IM, the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom), the UNLF-M (United National Liberation Front – Meghen, of Manipur) and PLA (People’s Liberation Army, also of Manipur) The Revolutionary Front was able to launch a number of joint attacks against Indian authorities (Egreteau, 2003: 62-63). While the Indian army was engaged in military campaigns against the CNF and other groups on the Indian side of the border, the Burmese army attacked the general headquarters of the NSCN (K) in Eastern Nagaland of Sagaing Division in early 2007. The “NSCN (K) acknowledged that ten of its cadre were killed during raids and some others sustained injuries” (Yhome, 2008: 79).

As joint military operations were conducted more often it has become clear that, “military-to-military ties between the two countries have been growing over the years. High-level visits of military officials have been part of the process of strengthening ties between the two militaries” (Yhome, 2008: 78-79). In April 2007, the Burmese (Myanmar’s) Naval Chief, Vice Admiral SoeThein, visited India. That visit was followed by the visit of Lieutenant General Tin Aung MyintOo, the Quartermaster of SPDC Armed Forces, who replaced Gen SoeThein as Secretary-1 of the SPDC in October 2007, when he met “his Indian counterpart Lt. Gen Sudhir Sharma and the then Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Deepak Kapoor”. At that meeting the SPDC General asked “India to sell infantry weapons and ammunition in return for Myanmar’s help in flushing out insurgent groups based along the border region” (ibid.).

India has reportedly sold two British made Islander aircraft, light artillery, T-55 tanks and small arms, including assault rifles, light machine guns, and handguns to the regime. Indian military officers have also “promised aid and training for Myanmar’s troops”. Security imperatives of both countries in their border areas, as Yhome observes, “strengthen the military supply relationship between the two countries” (ibid. P. 79). In addition to “military-to-military relations”, the improvement of Indo-Burma relations could, in early 1990s, be viewed within a broader perspective of the changing dynamic of Indian foreign policy, from “idealism” to “realism”, or from a moral-value-based approach to a more pragmatic one.

The Indian Look East Policy

India was the only Asian country that officially condemned “through its official channel” the SLORC’s bloody crackdown on the student-led democracy demonstrators in 1988 and openly supported the pro-democracy movement in receiving “Burmese student refugees with open arms.” (Yhome, 2008: 76). All this was done in accordance with the so called the “idealism” approach of the Indian foreign policy establishment, through which India, as the largest democratic country in the world, supported democracy movements not only in Burma but around the world. However, this approach was soon ended by the Narasimha Rao’s government which adopted the more pragmatic approach of realism in its foreign policy towards Burma (cf. Egreteau, 2003: 132-133).

India had obviously changed its foreign policy towards Burma for several reasons, including: (1) the perceived need to contain the Chinese influence in South East Asia, especially in Burma, (2) an urgent need to obtain energy supplies, especially natural gas, from Burma, and (3) the long term need to secure cooperation with the Burmese military regime in combating insurgencies in North East India (cf. Yhome, 2008: 85). With this changing new policy, India “officially put to an end ... radical isolation of Myanmar”, and decided to “follow the diplomatic model of ‘Constructive Engagement Policy’ conducted by ASEAN countries” (Egreteau, 2003: 133). To open a new diplomatic door, Mr. J. N. Dixit, Deputy Foreign Minister, visited Rangoon in March 1993. The Rao’s government reaffirmed the Indian fundamental principle of “non-interference in the internal affairs of any country” to the military junta in Burma, when Foreign Minister Mr. Pranab Mukherjee visited Rangoon in March 1996. Mukherjee also confirmed to the generals in Rangoon that “India considered the Burmese democracy movement Myanmar’s internal affairs” (ibid.). In this way, India demonstrated that “it has become aware of [the] importance of establishing a dialogue” with Burma and ASEAN countries (ibid.).

In line with this new foreign policy, India adopted its “Look East Policy” which eventually transformed not only in to an “idealism-oriented” Indian foreign policy, but also changed its approach to the North East region. Since independence, the North East region is not only “poorly connected” with mainstream India but neglected by successive governments of India in New Delhi. Until the late 1970s, political issues of the region, including insurgent problems, were dealt with by the External Affairs Ministry of the Government of India, not by the Home Ministry (cf. Hazarika, 1994: 91). India seemed to have adopted, and continuously applied, British colonial policy in its dealing with the Chin (Mizo), Naga and other ethnic groups in the North East region and thereby recognized the pre-colonial independent status of those ethnic groups. However, “compared to the pre-Independence land and waterways connectivity

available for the North East, the existing channels of trade and transport routes are far from adequate to have any opening impact on the overall insularity of the region” (Pudaite, 2010: 182).

The immediate reason for changing Indian foreign policy from “idealism” to “realism” seemed to be related also to the end of cold war and the collapsed of the Soviet Union. During the cold war, India depended heavily on the Soviet Union for trade, economic and financial assistance to military, technological and diplomatic matters. When the Soviet Union collapsed, India lost its last remaining Western-*Sahib*. It was a huge mental shift for Indian elites, who still wanted to worship the Western-*Sahib*. And now that the *Sahibs* were gone, Indian elites tried to readjust to the new reality and looked towards the East, instead of the West; there they discovered that Asia’s Tiger economies were booming. When Delhi looked eastward, India found the reality of the North East and realized that without opening its door to the East, there was no way to develop the landlocked regions of North East India. And without any form of development that could facilitate finding a political solution, there was no way to end the on-going ethnic conflicts in the region. India was thus forced to include the “Look East Policy” as both foreign and domestic policies in the North East region.

When India started serious engagement with South East Asia, especially with Burma, Mr. Lal Thanzaua Pudaite, who belonged to a Hmar dialect group from the Mizo tribe of Chin, was appointed as the Indian Ambassador to Burma in 1995-1996, and Indian Trade Representative in Taiwan in 1997-2000. Pudaite described in his posthumously published book that India had taken several initiatives during his tenure as Ambassador in Rangoon, including:

Joint venture for hydro-power project on Chindwin River; Reintroduction Indian Airlines flight from Kolkata to Rangoon; Joint exploration of Myanmar’s gas deposits in Arakan; Multi-model project for development of Highway; Inland Waterway on Kalodyne River; Sittwe Port and Hydro-power generation from a dam on Kalodyne; Railways to link Myanmar via Jiribam-Imphal valley through to Kalewa (Tahan) in Myanmar; Highway to be constructed by India from Champhai to Falam in Myanmar; Reconstruction of the Stillwell Road or old Burma Road from Assam via North Myanmar to Yunnan in China, etc. (Pudaite, 2010: 178).

India has also taken a proactive role in the following projects:

1. In 1992, UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific region (ESCAP) based in Bangkok endorsed the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID).

Thereafter, it revived the Asian Highway (AH) and the Trans-Asian railway (TAR) projects, which had been held in abeyance since 1959 and 1960 respectively. Inter-governmental agreements were concluded: for AH on 18 Nov 2003, and for TAR on 4 July 2004.

2. Agreement on Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Singapore-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established in 1997. Its principal aims are eventual free trade, investments, tourism and technical cooperation.

3. Kunming Initiative (1999): a meeting of non-official think tank group as well as businessmen was convened at Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, China, to explore ways for sub-regional economic and cultural cooperation. Representatives from Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) participated and the group now called “BCIM Economic Cooperation Forum” has been meeting at various locations in one of the 4 countries every year. The main objective of this group is to generate ideas and device mechanisms for sub-regional cooperation extending over Southwest China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Northeast India.

4. Free Trade Agreements with Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei by 2011 and with Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam by 2016.

5. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, etc.

6. There are a number of cooperation agreements at bilateral level too. For instance, an Indo-Myanmar bilateral agreement for far-reaching significance to Northeast is the Multi-modal Inland Waterway-cum-Highway project on the Kaladyne River, estimated to cost \$104 Million. Under this project, Sittwe Harbour in Rakhyne, Myanmar and navigation on Kaladyne as also Highway from south Mizoram will be developed so that Northeast is directly linked to seaport. All the attendant protocols to the agreement have been signed and the project is ready to take off (Pudaite, 2010: 178-179).

After his retirement, Pudaite co-founded the “Center for North-East Studies and Policy Research”, and established his own NGO called “Tribal Welfare Agency”. He proposed “Vision NER – 2020”, in which he outlined, among others, the following points:

a. Upgrade, and integrate Mizoram’s transport network into existing proposal for Trans-Asian Railways (TAR) and Asian Highway systems; e.g. additional AK linkage from Bangladesh via Agartala – Aizawl – Champhai – Tiddim/Falam – Mandalay (The original proposals for TAR and AH systems do not cover Tripura, Mizoram and Chin State of Myanmar).

b. Connect NH-54 from south Mizoram to Haka, [the capital of Chin State].

c. Enhance quality of maintenance of all existing roads to at least all weather level and upgrade load bearing capacity of bridges in all major roads to national standard.

- d. Early execution of the Multi-Modal Highway-cum-IWT project on Kolodyne.
- e. Railways (broad-gauge) expansion from Chaparmukh (Assam valley) to Hailakandi (Cachar), by passing 39 tunnels and 179 bridges in the Lumding to Badarpur sectors, then extend railways to Bairabi (Mizoram) up to Lawngtlai/Myanmar border in south Mizoram.
- f. To bypass Sonupur area, where the highway frequently blocked by land/mudslides throughout rainy seasons, another highway link from Assam valley to Surma valley is essential.
- g. Open up Inland Water-cum-Rail/Road transit routes from Mizoram to West Bengal via Bangladesh, and also to access Chittagong port.
- h. Direct air links en route some Northeast cities to Southeast Asian cities like Kunming, Yangon, Mandalay, Bangkok, etc.

Pudaite suggested that in pursuit of India's Look East Policy; "Vision for NER – 2020" will transform the "Northeast India Region" into a major gateway between South Asia and Southeast Asia, and will eliminate the "isolation and remoteness" of the region. Since he saw the "Look East Policy" as an Indian response to globalization, Pudaite insisted that "we cannot avoid or escape from this inexorable process of globalization, for the NE is too insignificant a region to influence this massive international game. India has decided to be an active participant in this game and all we need to do, therefore, is to prepare for the challenges we must face" (ibid, p. 180). The challenges are already there, and how the peoples from the region will respond is a critical issue that requires careful analysis.

Paradigm Shift in Indo-Burma Relations: Searching for a Solution

The challenges posted by the forces of globalization are huge and real. The indigenous peoples from the region, especially the Chin, Kachin and Naga, must respond to these challenges whether they like it or not. In such a situation, a paradigm shift in Indo-Burma relations is

needed, but, how to find a political solution for the ethnic nationalities in the region is much more important.

Under current political circumstances and existing laws from both sides of India and Burma, the indigenous peoples from the region will not be able to reap the benefits of globalization. Unless both countries can find political solutions to end the on-going civil war and ethnic conflict and repeal repressive laws that are imposed on the people due to these circumstances there is no way to empower the peoples in the region. Without empowering the peoples, railways and highways may pass through the region but the common people will just be by passed and they will not have the capacity to make use of the new opportunities brought about by globalization and its connectivity.

There are two legal issues that require serious political consideration, especially in North East India, which also concerns the peoples from Burma. The first one is: "Restricted Areas Permit" (RAP) and the second is: "Inner Line Regulation" (ILR). The "Restricted Areas Permit for Foreigners" is a regulation imposed by the New Delhi government to prevent foreigners, especially Christian missionaries from abroad, entering the region. The "Inner Line Regulation" was promulgated by the British authority in 1873, in order to prevent the influx of outsiders, especially Indians, to the region. Both laws are now in need of review within the context of current political demands from those indigenous ethnic groups in the region, especially the Chin, Kachin and Naga.

(1) *Restricted Areas Permit for Foreigners*

The reason for imposing the "Restricted Areas Permit for Foreigners" in North East India was directly or indirectly linked with the prohibition of "Foreign Christian Missionaries" activities in the region.

During the colonial period, the Chin (especially among the Mizo tribe), Kachin, and Naga were converted to Christianity en masse by foreign missionaries, mainly from the United Kingdom and United States of America. For many years, the Christian missionaries were in the region not only as spiritual leaders but also as educators and social workers. They knew the needs of local peoples, spoke the local languages, and identified themselves with the local peoples as brothers and sisters in Christ. When the nationalist movements emerged after World War II, those missionaries could not avoid providing to the needs of the people, and some of those missionaries became unofficial advisors to the leaders of ethnic nationality movements,

especially among the Chin, Kachin and Naga.

Although this was not intentional on the part of the Christian missions, Christianity or at least Christians have played a prominent role in the ethnic struggle for political liberation among the Chin, Kachin, and Naga. For better or for worse, Christianity has become the “established” religion among those ethnic groups, in both India and Burma (cf. Dawns, 1992). A unique feature of political developments among the Chin therefore is “the prominent role played by Christians”: such as, Phizo (Naga National Council), Laldenga (Mizo National Front), Hrang Nawl (Chin Liberation Army), and Zau Tu and Zau Dang, the two brothers who founded the Kachin Independence Organization. There were many Christian leaders who led the Karen National Union (KNU) in Burma as well.

Among the Foreign Missionaries, Michael Scott, Presbyterian Missionaries from Britain, was a prominent figure who was personally involved both as a peace maker and helper. When the Naga nationalist movement was at the peak, Michael Scott founded a “Peace Mission” together with Jayaprakash Narayan, a leading follower of Gandhi, and Prasad Chaliha, the Chief Minister of Assam, and tried hard to negotiate between the Phizo’s Naga National Council and the Indian government. However, the “Peace Mission” failed because Michael Scott was accused of acting “too openly toward the Naga cause” (Hazarika, 1994: 102). As mentioned, Michael Scott also helped Laldenga in his exile to London. He also arranged meetings for Hrang Nawl with the British and US Consulates in Calcutta in 1965, and later provided shelter when Hrang Nawl was hiding in Shilong.

The involvement of Christians in the nationalist movements among the Mizo (Chin) and Naga, especially when these movements erupted into violent rebellions, “has reinforced the suspicion of the Indian public,” as Downs observed, that “Christians, at least in that region, are anti-national in the larger sense of Indian nationalism” (Dawns, 1992: 29). The same is also true in Burma, since the Chin, Kachin and Karen, who are predominantly Christians, have fought against the central government of Burma in Rangoon.

Alarmed by the Chin (both MNF and CLA), Kachin and Naga nationalist movements, the governments of India and Burma agreed, during the visit of the Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to Rangoon in 1965, to cooperate to deal with the rebel movements along their mutual border. They also discussed the role of Christianity in these separatist movements, especially among the Chin and the Naga. Making no effort to understand the roots of the Chin, Kachin and Naga nationalist movements and the real cause of the rebellions, the two governments simply made Christian missionaries the scapegoat for all these nationalist movements, saying: “in fact Christian missionaries are there not for advocating a faith but for

keeping imperialism alive” (S. P. Sinha in K. S. Singh (ed.), 1972: 62; Downs, 1992: 30).

Apparently out of fear of the Chin, Kachin and Naga movements along the Indo-Burmese border and other separatist political activities in both countries, Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and the Burmese military government leader General Ne Win agreed “to remove all the foreign missionaries from the black region”, or what were referred to in India as the “restricted areas” (Downs, 1992: 29). As a result, the Indian government expelled all foreign missionaries from West Chinram (Mizoram), Manipur, and Nagaland. While the Indian authorities classified these parts of the country as “restricted areas” and removed foreign missionaries from these areas alone, General Ne Win expelled all foreign missionaries, not only from Eastern Chinram (Chin State) but from the whole of Burma. Thus, on March 23, 1966, a deportation order was issued for all missionaries, bringing to an end the 150-year history of the American Baptist Mission in Burma.

Although foreign missionaries were expelled from North East India and Burma, the churches of the Chin, Kachin and Naga demonstrated their spiritual vitality in the face of revolutionary change and manifested their own true character of indigenous churches in the midst of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural environments of Burma and India. In present day, almost one hundred percent of the peoples of the Chin (especially among the Mizo), Kachin and Naga have declared their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour (Cf. Sakhong, 2000).

The vibrancy of the Christian Churches in Mizoram State and Nagaland State, without foreign missionaries, demonstrate that the “Restricted Areas Permit for Foreigners”, which was put in place for forbidding the activities of foreign missionaries in the region, no longer serves its original purpose. However, so long as the regulation remains in force, “no foreigner, even if he or she has a valid visa for entry to India, can visit much of the areas of the NER hills, without first obtaining an RAP from the Home Ministry of India or Home department of state concerned. No Indian missions abroad are authorized to issue this permit to visit the specified areas in NER without the clearance of the Home Ministry” (Pudaite, 2010: 186). Under such restriction of this regulation, “promotion of tourism for the region, for example, seems meaningless”, and as Pudaite suggests, this “Restricted Areas Permit regulation for foreigners should be withdrawn” (ibid. P. 187).

(2) Inner Line Regulation

The “Inner Line Regulation” is politically more sensitive than the Restricted Areas Permit. The

INR requires a “Inner Line Pass” (ILP) for outsiders of the region, including Indian citizens, as a kind of entry visa to Arunachal, Mizoram, and Nagaland States. As mentioned, the “Inner Line Regulation” was promulgated by the British colonial power as the recognition of the pre-colonial independent status of the Chin (Mizoram), Kachin (Arunachal), and Naga (Nagaland).

Since the “Inner Line Regulation” was passed on political grounds, it should not be viewed only in terms of the “the protection the native peoples in the regions from the exploitation of outsiders” and the “prohibition of the permanent residence in the areas for non-native persons”. The political essence of the “Inner Line Regulation” can be compared with the “Panglong Agreement”, signed by the Chin, Kachin and Shan with the Interim Burmese Government led by Gen Aung San, on 12 Feb 1947. The essence of the “Panglong Agreement”, like the “Inner Line Regulation”, is the recognition of the pre-colonial independent status of the Chin, Kachin and Shan, who could thus regain their sovereignty and independence without any attachment to Burma Proper, but agreed that they would join in the independence of Burma for the sake of speeding up their own search for freedom (cf. Preamble of Panglong Agreement).

The recognition of pre-colonial independent status, from both political and legal points of views, was meant “to guarantee the rights of internal self-determination” for those indigenous ethnic nationalities: which includes the right of “self-rule” for their respective homelands; the right of full autonomous status endowed with legislative, judiciary, and administrative powers for their respective states; the right to promulgate the state constitutions for their own respective states within a legal-framework of the federal union; and the rights to protect, preserve, and promote their culture, language, religion, heritages, ways of life and national identity. The core of “internal self-determination” in a federal system is the right to promulgate the “state constitution” through which the indigenous ethnic nationalities from member states of the federal union can protect and promote all other rights.

In today’s context, if the “Inner Line Regulation” is approached only from the perspective of “prohibition of the permanent residence in the areas for non-native persons”; the main concern will be “the problem of illegal immigration” and the “danger of being swamped by the outsiders” (Pudaite, 2010: 187). The problem of “illegal immigration” is sensitive but not unsolvable. The danger here is not merely “illegal immigration” but the power game: if the power game is shifted from the hands of indigenous ethnic nationalities in Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland to New Delhi, the Chin (Mizo), Kachin, and Naga peoples will forever lose their “rights of self-determination” which are protected by the “Inner Line Regulation” on the Indian side of the border. As the government of the Union of Burma has no right to abolish the “Panglong Agreement”, which was signed before independence; the government in New Delhi cannot repeal or abolish the “Inner Line Regulation” without the consent of the peoples, namely, the Chin (especially the Mizo and other Chin tribes who are in Mizoram State), the Kachin (and other ethnic groups in Arunachal Pradesh State), and the Naga.

In the light of India's "Look East Policy" and the unstoppable forces of globalization, the "Inner Line Regulation", which was promulgated more than a century ago, may be in need of review but it should be done without losing its original purpose. Under the current political circumstances, the best means to do this seems to be by granting the rights to promulgate separate state constitutions for the states which are now under the protection of the "Inner Line Regulation", *albeit* within the legal-framework of the Indian Constitution. In this way, the State Constitutions, which would be drafted and promulgated by the peoples themselves through their respective State Assemblies, will be able to protect and promote the rights that are meant to be protected by the "Inner Line Regulation". The "Inner Line Regulation" was meant to be the protection of the "rights of self-determination" for the indigenous ethnic nationalities in the region, but it was never fully implemented after independence. By replacing this regulation with the "State Constitution", the peoples from these three states will be able to enjoy full "rights of internal self-determination" within the federal arrangement of the Indian Constitution.

In order to grant the right to adopt separate constitutions for the three states that are protected by the "Inner Line Regulation", India must also upgrade its constitution, from a quasi-federal system to genuine federalism. The India Constitution, of course, has granted its member states the legislative, judiciary and administrative powers. The main flaw, however, is that the Indian states do not enjoy the right to promulgate their own separate constitutions. Instead, all the affairs of the states are incorporated into the Union Constitution, exactly like the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma. Such constitutional arrangements indicate that "whatever powers the government of states enjoy and exercise are given to them by the central government", which indeed is one of the main characteristics of a unitary, not a federal, system. In a unitary system, power lies in the hands of the central government; and state powers are derived from the center (cf. Sakhong, 2005: 17-18).

In addition to the absence of state constitutions, the India Constitution adopted a peculiar system of "unelected State Governor", appointed by the President. Constitutionally, the state executive power is vested in the Governor, and the Governor not only has the right to dissolve the State Legislative Assembly but appoint the Chief Minister of the State in a situation where no single party or leader commands majority support (cf. Kashyap, 2009: 197-200). Such powerful head of a provincial State, but unelected, is not only undemocratic but a political system usually practiced only in Imperialism and monarchy, not in a republic or a federal system.

Without a State Constitution, compounded by an all-powerful State Governor, no State in India can claim that they have the right of "self-determination", albeit "internal self-determination". Unless the right of internal self-determination is granted, which is guaranteed in a federal

system by the State Constitution; there is no other means to substitute the “Inner Line Regulation”. Thus, if the Delhi government wanted to find a political solution in Northeast India, and genuinely wanted to promote development through its “Look East Policy”, India must take a huge step or paradigm shift in constitutional change.

The same is true for Burma but the problem is bigger. In addition to the constitutional crisis created by the 1947 Constitution and the 1974 Constitution, the peoples of Burma, especially ethnic nationalities, have faced sixty years of on-going civil war and military dictatorship. Recently in 2008, the military junta promulgated a new constitution, which creates another level of constitutional crisis. As the military regime is posing several levels of threat to the peoples of Burma, there have emerged strong opposition groups who want to solve the country’s political crisis through peaceful means. Since the 1988 pro-democracy movement, all ethnic nationalities and democratic forces, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, are struggling together for democracy and genuine federalism. Such unity in purpose has never occurred in Burmese history since independence, and ethnic nationalities are no longer alone in their struggle for democracy, equality, and internal self-determination through a federal arrangement. The best hope for Burma, therefore, is that there are reliable and united political forces from both ethnic nationalities and democratic groups, who want to solve the political crisis in Burma through the constitutional means of establishing a genuine Federal Union of Burma.

Conclusion

Because of historical accidents that occurred at the end of the colonial period, many ethnic nationalities and their homelands are divided into different countries. In this paper, I have analyzed the cases of the Chin, Kachin and Nagain the light of the future of Indo-Burma relations, and also from the possible long term effects of globalization, currently represented by India’s “Look East Policy” and the Burmese military junta’s response to it.

For the past six decades, ethnic nationalities in Burma and Northeast India have been fighting against the governments of Burma and India, respectively. Both Indian and Burmese governments, therefore, must consider how to solve these ethnic conflicts and on-going civil wars seriously. Sixty years of negative experiences indicate that these problems cannot be solved through military means alone, and a political solution is needed.

To find a political solution, what the Indian and Burmese governments should do first is to recognize the pre-colonial independent status of the Chin (Mizo in India), the Kachin and the

Naga peoples and their homelands. No matter what kind of political systems they had practiced then, there were independent peoples and their homelands were never part of either Burma or India. Secondly, they should be granted “internal self-determination” for their homeland, so that they may be able to practice “self-rule” for their respective states while they will also be a part of “shared-rule” in larger federal unions, either in India or Burma depending on which side they live. Thirdly, in order to grant “internal self-determination” for those ethnic peoples through a federal arrangement, both India and Burma should practice a genuine federal system, so that all member states of the federal union of India and Burma would be able to enjoy political rights of legislative, administrative, and judiciary powers which they should apply through State Legislative Assembly, State Government, and State Supreme Court. Fourthly, in order to secure “internal self-determination”, all member states of both countries shall be granted the right to promulgate their own separate State Constitutions within the constitutional framework of the Federal Union of either India or Burma.

For the past sixty years, ethnic armed-resistant movements in Burma and Northeast India have been seen as the means to regain the rights of self-determination for their homelands, to protect the dignity and identity of the peoples, and to preserve and promote the culture, language, religion and way of life of all these unrecognized peoples. What most of all these ethnic nationalities are fighting for is not necessarily an independent sovereign state for their respective homelands but for the dignity of the people; for their long held traditions, heritage, and way of life; and for their national identity. Even if some groups are fighting for a sovereign nation-state, it should be re-evaluated in the light of contemporary international political trends and the forces of globalization.

Contemporary international political trends indicate that a sovereign nation-state is not the only means to serve the people best, and the power of absolute sovereignty is diminishing slowly, at least in Europe where the modern form nation-state first emerged. The sovereign nation-states in Europe are “coming together” as members of the “European Union” in order to serve their own peoples more effectively, and create peace and harmony in the region and in the larger world. By doing this, members of the European Union are consciously giving up a certain level of the absolute power of the sovereign nation-state. This is a lesson that can be learned both by governments and ethnic armed-groups in Northeast India and Burma.

In this paper, I have argued that the best means to solve political crisis in Burma and ethnic conflicts in Northeast India is to grant those ethnic nationalities, who were independent peoples before the colonial period, an “internal self-determination” through a federal arrangement. For those ethnic nationalities, especially, the Chin, Kachin and Naga, I suggest that armed-resistance is not the only means to serve the people best, and if “internal self-determination is granted”, they therefore must find some alternative means and ways to preserve, protect and promote the long term interests of their peoples.

If both governments and ethnic insurgent groups could find a political solution, and create peace and harmony in the region then Northeast India, Chin State, Eastern Nagaland, Kachin State and all the western valley of Upper Chindwin could become not only the gateway between Northeast and Southeast Asia, but the region can also become the place where the value of unity in diversity is practiced and the beauty of pluralism can flourish.

References:

- Aung San Suu Kyi (1991), *Freedom from Fear* (London: Penguin Books)
- Chatter, Shuns (1990), *Mizoram Encyclopedia* (New Delhi & Bombay: Jaycee Publishing House).
- Christie, Clive (1998), *Modern History of South East Asia* (London: Tauris Academic Studies)
- Coupland, Robert (1945), *The Future of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Downs, Frederick, S (1992), *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Vol. V, Part 5)
(Bangalore: The Church History Association of India)
- Egreteau, Renaud (2003), *Wooing the Generals: India's New Burma Policy* (New Delhi: Authors Press)
- Hazarika, Sanjoy (1994), *Strangers of the Midst: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast* (New Delhi: Viking-Penguin India)
- Kashyap, Subhash, C. (2009), *Concise Encyclopaedia of Indian Constitution* (New Delhi: Vision Books)
- Maung Maung, U (1989), *Burmese Nationalist Movements, 1940–1948* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press)
- Pudiate, L. T (2010), *Mizoram and Look East Policy* (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House)
- Reid, Robert (1942), *A Note on the Future of the Present and Partially Excluded Areas of Assam* (I.O.L: 1942, reprinted, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1976)
- Sakhong, Lian H. (2000), *Religion and Politics among the Chin People in Burma, 1896-1949*, (Uppsala: Doctoral Dissertation at Uppsala University)
- Sakhong, Lian H. (2003), *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies)
- Sakhong, Lian H. & David Williams, ed., (2005), *Designing Federalism in Burma* (Chiang

THE FUTURE OF INDO-BURMA RELATIONS: A VIEW FROM DIVIDED PEOPLES

By Lian H. Sakhong

Mai: UNLD Press)

- Smith, Martin (1991), *Burma: Insurgency and Politics of Ethnicity* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd)
- Symleah, D. R (1942), *Crown Colonial Scheme*, reprinted as “*Proceeding of North East India Association*,” (New Delhi: *History Association*, Second Session, 1981)
- .
- Vumson,(1986), *Zo History* (Aizawl: Published by the author)
- Yhome, K (2008), *Myanmar: Can the Generals Resist Change?* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co.)

[Back to Top](#)
