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ARAKANPOST

Monthly Journal



BO GREE KRA HLA AUNG

Issue - 4

May, 2004

The Arakanese Student And Youth Movement

Series-3

BO GREE KRA HLA AUNG

(1910-1995)

Shwe Lu Maung alias Shahnawaz Khan, Ph.D. (Wales, UK)

The Troubling Questions

The rough 50-year journey of the independent Union of Burma raises troubling questions again and again. Was it right for the Arakanese to have given full support to the Bama political movement? Was it right to have taken independence jointly with the Bama? Was it right to have followed the Bama leadership with faith and trust?

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Bo Gree Kra Hla Aung during 1988 Democracy Uprising at Saite Twey © Dr.Shwe Lu Maung

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The Arakanese Student and Youth Movements Series-3: Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung (1910-1995)

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The Troubling Questions. The rough 50-year journey of the independent Union of Burma raises troubling questions again and again. Was it right for the Arakanese to have given full support to the Bama political movement? Was it right to have taken independence jointly with the Bama? Was it right to have followed the Bama leadership with faith and trust?

Some Answers. We will find some answer to these questions when we analyze the Arakanese rural youth movement. Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung is a typical example of Arakanese rural youth movement; 'Bo Gri' is his popular name among his followers, whereas 'the lotus' is his code name in all confidential and intelligence communication. I was fortunate to have closely associated with him as a member of the central committee of his organization, Arakan National United Organization (ANUO), in 1966-67.

Bo Gri The Leader. Late in 1965 the Rakhaing Network for Federation and Democracy in Burma (RNFDB) decided that Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung was the right person to lead the Rakhaing revolution for freedom. As per definition of RNFDB 'freedom' means the freedom to practice sovereign authority as a common citizen. That means sovereignty must emanate from the citizens. As long as the sovereignty emanates from a person, a group of people, a class of people, or a particular national race/origin there is no freedom. I was one of the two persons who were empowered to go underground, join Bo Gri's party and prepare for the revolution. With such

power and privilege I became a member of his party, Arakan National United Organization (ANUO), at its Rachaung headquarter in 1966 and a Central Committee Member in 1967. The followings are the reasons we chose him as our leader.

1. He is a historical revolutionary figure, skilled in military science with WWII combat experience.
2. He called upon our generation, “Come and join me. I am a centrist and a liberal. I will groom a future generation of leadership”. We contrasted this from other revolutionary parties which carries such ideological colours as pink, red, or white etc. He was colourless.
3. He held our founding parents’ view to establish a Union of Burmese Republics (UBR). In Rakhaing language it is called and written *Thamada Prayhtaungsu Mranmar Naignan* (သမတပြည်ထောင်စု မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ), which is translated as the Union of Burmese Republics. The concept of a federation of the Burmese republics was adopted in Aung San Constitution that was approved by the AFPFL Convention in May 20, 1947. It is different from the *Prayhtaungsu Thamada Mranmar Naignan* (ပြည်ထောင်စု သမတမြန်မာနိုင်ငံ) or the Union of Burma that was adopted by U Nu’s Constituent Assembly in September 1947, after Bogyoke Aung San and his cabinet members were killed in July. The Union of Burma as it was called in U Nu’s Constitution was a unitary system where sovereignty emanates from the Bama peoples subordinating other federating nations such as the Rakhaings, the Chins, the Kachins, the Shans, the Karrennis, and the Kaothulai etc. (Note: Please compare this Union of Burmese Republics and Chairman Kyaw Zan Hwree’s vision of *Rakhaing Praythu Tamada Naingan*.)

Rakhaing Country Youths and Kra Hla Aung. Kra Hla Aung is *the* role model of our Rakhaing country youth movement that can be contrasted from the Rakhaing urban youth endeavour. The urbanites strive for modern education, better jobs and leadership role in politics and society under the British colonial system. The country youths learn traditional education and look for an intelligent educated person to lead them into a new era of freedom and prosperity. They are deprived of the modern educational, economical, cultural, and social institutions that are available to the urbanites. Kra Hla Aung became a country youth leader by his own right. His leadership role was indeed greatly facilitated by his father’s position in early age. As a distinguished award winning zonal village headman his father was a towering figure in the Arakan Division of British India. Even the Arakanese urbanites knew him as the ‘*double-barrel-winning headman*’ because the distinguished award was accompanied with a double barrel gun. The gun was the insignia of his special authority in those days.

In the first meeting, he reminded me of the Hollywood *supremo* John Wayne (1907-1979) in his movie the *Stagecoach* (1939). He was still straight and agile with a slim built in late fifties, about 5 feet 11 inches (177 cm) in height having a bodyweight of around 160 lb. (72.5 kg). He talked with an air of utmost courtesy and friendliness, always with a charismatic smile. Having a great sense of humor, he was always able to gather a crowd of audience in every village I went with him. In the middle of the night men, women and youth lined up the road and warmly welcomed him as he entered the village. In our political campaign tour that encompassed Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Munbra, Pauktaw, Mreybon, Ponnajyan townships we went through some 50 villages. Everywhere he was warmly welcome with great love, affection and enthusiasm. He was well educated in Rakhaing traditional education and Buddhist cannon. He spoke poor

English but fluent Japanese. Well versed in the British administration system he was also knowledgeable in a wide spectrum of political thoughts and ideologies.

Kra Hla Aung the Soldier. He joined the army in 1942. The following is his narration to me.

“During the Japanese rule I learned to speak Japanese. As soon as I spoke some Japanese I went to the Japanese Army camp on my horseback and told them I wanted to join the army. The Japanese commander knew me pretty well. He asked me to run, swim across a river and show my horsemanship. I was a skilled horseman, as my father owned horses and I used to follow his tours and travel on horseback since I was a child. He was very impressed with my spoken Japanese and horsemanship. Finally he asked me to climb a tree. With a surprise I asked him if it was part of the military science. He said yes. So I did climb a tree. That was it. He took me as a soldier and trained me and later my followers in the arts of war.”

It was the first time that I came to know the Japanese recruited the Rakhaing youths in their army. This is not mentioned in the Burmese historical records. Bo Gri told me that the Japanese’s plan was to use the local soldiers in their invasion to India as the interpreters, guides, scouts, and forefront fighters. The Rakhaing soldiers were under the direct command of the Japanese and totally independent from Maj. General Aung San’s Burma Independence Army (BIA). This was the reason why the Japanese did not cast any doubt on Aung San and his army, when the Rakhaing soldiers rebelled against the Japanese and aided the advancing Allied Forces in 1944. As a matter of fact Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung was made aware of the plan to strike the Japanese with the help of the Allied Forces by U Nyo Tun. I mentioned about U Nyo Tun in my previous communication. During this revolution against the Japanese he became the guerrilla commander-in-chief known as *Bo Gri*.

Kra Hla Aung and AFPFL. Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung became a regional leader of the Anti-Fascist and People’s Freedom League in Arakan Division in 1945. Neither he nor his guerrilla force was incorporated in the newly founded Burma Defence Force (BDF), but remained armed under the supervision of U Nyo Tun who was a trusted colleague of Aung San. Like all the Rakhaings in AFPFL both Kra Hla Aung and Nyo Tun had absolute faith in Aung San to establish a federation of Burma in which the Rakhaing would have their own legislature, government, and state. Please visit <http://www.shwelumaung.org/AungSanConstitution> to read Aung San Constitution. When Aung San and his cabinet members were killed Bo Gri went underground and planned for the Rakhaing revolution. “We all agreed that we had no other choice but waged another guerrilla war”, he told me during a regular narration of his life when I was with him at Ranchaung. I briefly mentioned about this event in my book *Burma: Nationalism and Ideology* (University Press Ltd., Dhaka, 1989), Chapter 3.6 and 3.8.

A Lesson For Us. The political life of a Rakhaing country youth leader who became our national hero Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung teaches us a lesson. It was wrong to have committed absolute faith and trust to the Bama people. They even killed their beloved leader Bogyoke Aung San to abort a federation of Burma. (Remember? Brutus killed Julius Caesar!). *We cannot trust the Bama nation.* The Bama destroyed our kingdom in 1403, and 1784, and again betrayed us in 1947-48 and 1962. How can we trust them and follow their leader General Khin Nyunt’s Roadmap to democracy? On the other hand, Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi Aris and her NLD’s

commitment to a federation of Burma did not go beyond the Bo Aung Kyaw Lan Declaration (1989). President Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was committed to the abolition of black slavery in the United States of America. He waged a civil war (1861-65), ready to pay the price with bloodshed. Such was his bold and firm commitment. In deed, there is no Abraham Lincoln in Burma. As long as the sovereignty emanates from the Bama national race we shall have to fight for our freedom, no matter what form of government may rule at Rangoon. Armed or unarmed, our struggle is legitimate. In short, *'Decolonization of Burma'* is a must.

To be continued.

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