

Foreward

"I always think the opposite of what the regime says in its propaganda, because I know there is no truth in it," says artist and illustrator Harn Lay.

The multi-talented artist says that his cartoons are intended not only to amuse people but to provoke awareness about what is happening around them. Harn Lay admits that politics drove him to become a cartoonist. "If there is something wrong, or if someone is cheating or oppressing someone, I want to stand beside the victim and illustrate the story."

So began his career as a cartoonist, and his readers in the region and beyond have been grateful ever since, despite the seemingly hopeless situation in military-ruled Burma, which forms the substance of most of his work.

Harn Lay's illustrations present the absurdity and humor of contemporary Burmese life, while also shedding light on the many ironies of the Burmese junta. His sense of humor, keen political insight and natural talent have benefited readers of *The Irrawaddy* for years, and we hope they will do for many years to come. We are proud to bring this special collection of his cartoons to our readers and to a wider audience.

Born and raised in Burma's Shan State, Harn Lay developed a keen interest in student politics and political events in Burma at an early age. His ancestors were in-

involved in the long struggle for independence from British colonial rule. Harn Lay attended the School of Fine Arts Academy in Rangoon for three years, during which he became well-versed in politics in the former capital.

The young artist fled to the jungle in the early days of Burma's pro-democracy uprising in 1988 and joined Shan resistance forces along the Thai-Burmese border. Assigned to the Mong Tai Army's public relations department, he soon grew disenchanted with his work and settled in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand, where thousands of other Shan have sought refuge and a new life over the years.

Harn Lay was recruited by the *Shan Herald Agency for News*, based in Chiang Mai, and later joined the staff of *The Irrawaddy*. According to the artist, his interactions with editors and staff reporters during brain-storming sessions—often punctuated by unrestrained laughter—have taught him a great deal about his craft.

When the laughter subsides, Harn Lay and the editorial team are left with striking cartoons worth a thousand words or more. Having created more than 1,000 cartoons over the years, Harn Lay has managed to tell many stories. We feel privileged to work with him.

The Irrawaddy

DICTATORIAL DIPLOMACY

Snr-Gen Than Shwe and North Korea's Kim Jong-Il have effectively used their powers as autocrats to frustrate international attempts to influence reform.

