Hey, brother, can you break a 45-kyat note? Not in Burma, you can't.

Our money is like our math. The lion's share of world coins are in the same denominations: 1, 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100. Banknotes run to larger numbers, but almost always in multiples of 5 and 100. Money of other denominations looks odd to our eye; there's a reason $2 dollar bills never caught on in the United States.

That's what makes the denominations on these banknotes, all of them issued by the Union of Burma Bank in 1985-87, so unusual: 15, 35, 45, 75, and, strangest of all, 90 kyats. Odd though the numbers may appear, these were all actual legal tender issued in Burma.

Why did the Burmese government eschew 20s and 50s for these bizarre issues? In 1985, when the first of these banknotes, the 75 kyat, was introduced, Burma was ruled by a megalomaniacal dictator, Ne Win, who put more faith in astrology and numerology than he did in economics and finance. The 75-kyat note was intended to honor his 75th birthday. In 1986, the 15- and 35-kyat notes were issued.

Extremely unpopular, all three were demonetized in 1988, along with larger issues, rendering 75% of the nation's currency worthless, crippling an already crippled economy, wiping out the life savings of thousands of people, and triggering at least one insurgency. Instead, of solving the problem, Win made it worse: 45- and 90-kyat notes were issued—these were multiples of 9, which Win's numerologist assured him was a lucky number. At the age of “lucky number” 90, Ne Win was arrested. He died in prison in 2002.

Data: Myanmar (Burma Banknotes)

- **P-62, 15 kyats**

- **P-63, 35 kyats**
  Front: Aung San in military hat; back: coat of arms.

- **P-64, 45 kyats**
  Front: workers' movement leader Po Hla Gyi; back: two workers at an oil field.

- **P-65, 75 kyats**
  Front: General Aung San in traditional headdress; back: dancer.

- **P-66, 90 kyats**
  Front: Saya San; back: farmer with oxen.

Album open measures: 11” x 7.5”
Album folded measures: 5.5” x 7.5”