“Development has been a weapon used time and again to eliminate opposition. It is a double edged knife. If you allow it, you and your people shall perish. If you don’t, then you’ll be accused of prohibiting progress and prosperity to the people. It’s an old story to the rest of the world, but in Burma, it has only just begun.”

A Thai activist commenting on development projects in Burma, particularly the damming of the Upper Salween Basin in the Shan State.
SILENT NIGHTS

It is now some twenty years later and nothing has improved for the IDPs. Their numbers have continued to increase; they still seek protection in distant jungle havens and require silent nights and silent days to avoid attracting soldiers to their hiding places. Fear remains etched on their weathered faces, but so does determination - the determination to survive and to remain free.

The new year gives little cause to hope that the ongoing IDP pilgrimage for a more secure life and a future of peace for their children will soon end. The Burmese military is reportedly building up its troop strength in many areas along the borders of the country and recruiting a growing number of porters - a sign that new military operations are to be launched soon. New refugee camps have been arriving at the Thai/Burma border, and in many cases have been denied entry into refugee camps on the Thai side. International campaigns have not yet been coordinated enough to convince the Burmese military to move back to their barracks, and the United Nations remains unforgivably weak in their meager efforts to protect the lives of these long-suffering peasants. Where, then, lies the symbol of hope that these silent nights, which have sadly been a normal part of IDP life for so many years, will finally turn into nights of calm and rejoicing?

Oddly enough, perhaps one of the strongest symbols of hope is the IDPs themselves. For several decades already, they have refused to give up. They hide in the jungles and maintain their silence so as to go undetected by roving military units, yet they survive amidst this oppressive system and cling to their right to live as they wish within the land which they call home. The suffering they have endured all these years goes far beyond what any words can describe, and still they persevere. What right then do we, who live in relative freedom and ease, have to feel tired and discouraged in the struggle for peace and justice in Burma? Can we not draw our energy and determination from these IDPs who symbolize not only the brutality of the civil war in Burma, but also the will to survive and live in peace and dignity?

We too easily see the fear and suffering etched in the faces of the oppressed. This raises our own feelings of sympathy and pity for them; but perhaps, does not give us the hope we need to energize our actions in more creative and effective ways. Let us be aware too that the faces of the IDPs also reflect determination and a will to survive. This is what we need to focus on more deliberately.

The world has not been silent about the deplorable situation in Burma, but has yet to be effective enough to help bring it to an end. The struggle for peace and justice remains the responsibility of the people of Burma themselves, but the international community must help by neutralizing the military’s ability to so thoroughly hold their oppressive force over the people. Given space, the people, including the IDPs, can and will move to bring the civil war to an end.

The silent nights, the faces of the IDPs - there are the symbols we must learn to respect. For hope and energy we must arouse the world to the need of campaigns and supportive activities for peace and justice in Burma.

M. Ediger
In early October 1998 a meeting was held in Chilton Park, England. Attended by UN officials and diplomats from Asia and the West, they gathered to look at a new approach to the problem of Burma - giving the U.N. the power to actively mediate the situation. There seems to be general consensus that both the "constructive engagement" approach used by Asian countries and sanctioning by the West have failed. As the international community reevaluates strategies for political change, proponents of democracy and human rights need to analyze their approaches towards Burma. The political situation in Burma is highly complex. A clear understanding of the role of the international community and a well laid out strategy towards effective political change are required.

Sanctions are concrete actions on the part of governments, human rights groups and individuals designed to pressure totalitarian and oppressive governments to change. According to Stuart Eizenstat, former U.S. Under Secretary of State for economic and business affairs:

"Sanctions are intended to highlight mis-conduct by rogue regimes, to alter the behavior that threatens our national interests and the stability of the international community. Sanctions address misconduct in human rights, terrorism, narcotics, weapons of mass destruction, and other areas where such conduct is considered unacceptable by world standards."

Therefore sanctions are geared towards motivating change, and they allow individuals to act ethically in the global economy.

Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy party have continually called for the international community to apply sanctions in Burma, but governments have been slow to respond. Immediately after the bloody 1988 anti-democracy crackdown, most countries withdrew non-humanitarian aid to Burma, but the push for sanctions quickly built steam. Recently, the U.S., Canada and the E.U. enacted arms embargoes, bans on military cooperation and retained bans on non-humanitarian aid. In May 1999, U.S. President Clinton stated that on all new investment in Burma, the strongest economic sanctions of any country against Burma. More recently, in October 1998, the E.U. voted to extend and strengthen its own sanctions, including the expulsion of Burma's military personnel from embassies and a ban on transit visas for Burma's military leaders.

Activist groups have been most successful in boycotting companies and affecting change at the local level. Twenty-eight municipalities in the U.S. and Australia and the state of Massachusetts have all passed laws restricting their governments from purchasing goods and services from companies doing business in Burma. activists have convinced Pepsi Inc., Ericsson Communications and others to withdraw their investments in Burma. While sanctions have been increasing in strength they have also come under fire for not affecting change within Burma.

On the other hand, proponents of change in Burma through normalized diplomatic relations and economic investment argue that exposure to western values and the free market economy will motivate the government to move towards a more open society. However, it is unclear what their plan is. The argument that as the government moves more towards a free market economy democracy will naturally follow is suspect. Singapore is a prime example of an open market economy with a totalitarian government. Ultimately, nations and companies involved in Burma must choose whether financial gain or moral factors are the priority in determining their continued engagement in the country. If there is no clear strategy for change, investment will reinforce the current behavior of the military government. Levi Strauss, whose investment was contingent on the standard that their products "are manufactured in a way that is fair and humane and compassionate" dropped contracts with suppliers in Burma. A spokesman for the company said the move was made, based on "a very serious review of the social and economic and political environment there as well as health and safety issues [and] the human rights environment."

If a clear priority is placed on human rights and a strategy for change is in effect, countries and companies will set aside ethical concerns and act as those are not met.

Proponents of sanctions need to analyze the role of sanctions in effecting change. Sanctions are not a one-size-fits-all solution to the problems of human rights abuse around the world. There are many factors that play into the validity and effectiveness of sanctions. What is the ethical response towards investment in Burma? Whose responsibility is it to initiate change? Is there a clear strategy towards change? How do we decide if sanctions are effective? Sanctions need to be evaluated in terms of these questions.

Sanctions and moral responsibility
Sanctions can address the morality of lending support directly, or indirectly, to Burma's military government; primarily via consumer responsibility campaigns. In an increasingly global economy, buying groceries in Tokyo, clothes in London, electronics in New York City or petrol in Sydney all have ramifications far beyond the immediate locality. As one U.S. Burma lobbyist stated, people "have to start confronting as we move into the global economy. We are going to have to assume some responsibility for the effects of the dollars we spend..." In this complex international picture, brand name products such as Iridium cellular phones and Suzuki motorcycles take on another dimension of value. On top of the normal consideration of price and product quality, conscious consumers have to consider how their purchase might support human rights abuses in Burma and other countries. Boycotts of products and municipal and state level selective purchasing laws addresses questions of consumer responsibility. Such measures allow individuals to become educated on the human rights abuses of the government of Burma and to act accordingly. This also adds an ethical dimension to the market system which doesn't inherently address questions of human rights. These sanctions are justified on moral grounds alone. However, if they are utilized as part of a larger plan, they can also be tools for change.

Sanctions to apply pressure
The withdrawal of humanitarian aid, visa bans on the military rulers, bans on new investment, trade restrictions and other government sanctions have often been initiated due to moral concern. However, government-level sanctions are inherently of a different nature than boycotts and selective purchasing laws which focus on withdrawing support from an oppressive regime. Government sanctions are primarily designed to directly change the behavior of the targeted government. Governments have the prerogative to attach clear conditions to sanctions, instead of merely withdrawing support. The effectiveness of government-
Development

**DAMMED IF THEY DO, DAMMED IF THEY DON'T**

Recent reports confirm that surveying for a dam is underway at a site in southern Shan State along the Salween River. According to an NGO coalition report, a series of teams including, Japanese, have been traveling with Thai staff from large infrastructure specialists MDX Plc Co, have been traveling from northern Chiang Mai province up to the dam site. Burma army soldiers have been providing security—this is a civil war area which is being subjected to military operations and systematized relocation programmes resulting in the displacement of thousands of people.

There is speculation that the dam will not only produce electricity for Thailand and Burma—an estimated 3,700 megawatts—but may also entail a water diversion scheme which will bring the water through Mong Ping and across 300 km into Thailand. It would be delivered to the drought-crippled Bhumibol reservoir in northern Thailand. A feasibility study is being carried out by consultants from Thai and Japanese corporations. NGOs anticipate that finance for construction of the dam may come from the Japanese government's US$30-billion aid package for Asian crisis hit countries.

The project will be sponsored by the Burmese government's national programme, the Border Areas Development Programme (BADP). The programme's major tasks relate broadly to infrastructure and socio-economic development. Military regime sponsored development has serious immediate and long term human rights and natural resources consequences. If the dam project goes ahead, the foreign investors will reap benefits extracted through repressive practices and widespread social disruption.

### The Area

The site where the dam is being surveyed is in the region of the Shan Hsa La (Ta Sala) river area. There is currently a major bridge being built across the river at Shan Hsa La near Ta Hsiang village. The crossing links the town with Mong Pin and Mong Taw townships. Ta Hsiang is a civil war zone, currently categorised by the military as a "black" zone (insurgency-nominated area) due to heavy military offensives since 1996. The area is being transformed into a "brown" zone (government-assigned shared area). The civilian population continues to be subjected to military operations against the main active ethnic resistance group in the area (the Shan United Revolutionary Army [SURA] faction of the Shan States Army [SSA]). Systematized relocation, and "development" programmes under the auspices of the BADP are also widespread. Thousands of people have already been forcibly relocated from the surveying area. The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) estimates that 61 villages—2,031 households (an average household containing at least five people) were relocated in Mong Pan township, and 24 villages—285 households—from Mong Pin between 1997 and 1998.

### Who’s Involved?

Talk of damming the Salween's hydroelectric potential, and exporting the electricity to Thailand, has been around for nearly twenty years. Five potential dam sites on the Salween have specifically been proposed within the past 10 years. The proponents of the dams include the governments of Thailand and Burma (who have formed a Joint Working Commission and signed a memorandum of understanding [MoU] in July 1997 as to purchase of electricity), and, more recently, to the use of water from the Salween River, the Asian Development Bank, and China. Dam-building consultants from Norconsult in Norway, and Japan's Electric Power Development Company (EPDC) and Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), have been most active in securing bilateral aid contracts with their respective governments to carry out pre-feasibility studies for dams. JICA (a government agency), has been working in cooperation with Burma in the areas of irrigation and forestry for 10 years. Several Thai companies, including Ital-Thai, MDX Plc, and logging company Thai Sawat, are also involved.

The feasibility study in the Wan Hsa La area is being carried out by consultants from MDX (through its subsidiary GMS Power) along with experts from EPDC. The SSA has allowed the survey to go ahead but warns they want to consult with NGOs and their people before agreeing to its construction.

### Who’s financing?

Local sources familiar with the project quote the cost of the planned dam between 4 billion to 7 billion dollars. NGOs anticipate the project is being designed to get financing from the so-called Miyazawa plan, which aims to invest US$30 billion for Asian crisis hit countries. The plan, introduced by Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa last October, includes offering official development-aid loans, in yen, to Asian countries.

The Japanese foreign ministry released a statement in December saying that "Given the situation at home and abroad involving Myanmar, Japan does not see the nation as subject to the so-called Miyazawa plan." However, Brigadier General Kyaw Win, deputy president of the Office of Strategic Studies under the Burmese Defence Ministry (currently visiting Japan), is believed to be "sounding out Tokyo about the possiblity of resuming yen loans." The Thai cabinet recently approved a Science Ministry feasibility study on the Salween Water Division Project to solve drought problems in the future. The Science Minister plans to fund the survey through the Miyazawa Plan. Therefore, the Japanese initiative could possibly be used to fund the dam project in Burma either directly, depending on the outcome of Kyaw Win's visit, or indirectly through Thailand.

### Feasibility Studies

Although a feasibility study is being conducted at the site, proponents of building dams in the Salween River basin have not initiated environmental and social impact assessments to address the possible damage of proposed dams on the whole river basin, or the cumulative effects of the construction of such a large number of dams and river diversion schemes on the Salween River's ecology, biology and local people's means of livelihood. Such studies should be based on the knowledge of potentially affected local people, who understand the rivers, forests, and agroecosystems upon which they depend for their means of livelihood. These should identify the short and long term harm the dams might cause the environment before being built, and find ways to assess or solve the problems. As the people in this area have been targeted as a source of the SDPC, their participation or consultation in such a process is highly unlikely.

### Immediate Consequences

There are considerable strategic benefits to the SDPC in building the dam in this area. The benefits will be similar to those gained by the activities of the Thai and Chinese loggers and the builders of the Yadana gas pipeline in Tenasserim Division, an area occupied by Mon and Karen ethnic nationalities. The army can extend its efforts to transform...
the area into an insurgent-free zone, bring the ethnic populations under SPDC control, and cut off support from Thai authorities now wanting to secure their interests. Security fears by the SPDC were used as a justification for a build up of soldiers in the construction areas of the Yadana project.

Consortium partners US oil company Unocal and its French partner Total have recently been accused of financing soldiers to suppress ethnic groups along the pipeline route. Both Unocal and Total have denied any direct payment to the military for security services. Unocal is battling a lawsuit in the U.S. over this issue and responsibility for the effect the project has had on local communities. The presence of consortium partners legitimates military activity as the MoU allocates responsibility for ensuring security to the SPDC. This furthers both the regime's economic and military agendas in the region.

That authorities, who had previously allowed the Mon and Karen insurgent groups to move back and forth across the border, warned them against sabotaging the project. This led to a cease-fire agreement with the Mon and significantly weakened the Karen insurgency. A senior MDX advisor and former government minister, has already asked the SSA, through intermediaries, not to interfere with the project. Regardless of whether the SSA agrees to construction or not, as it is highly unlikely the local peoples will be consulted about the project or compensated for resulting loss of lands and livelihoods, they are "dammed if they do and dammed if they don't." Along with a natural corresponding increase in human rights violations due to increased military presence, there is extensive documentation that villagers who have been relocated in civil war areas become a readily available labor pool to consolidate military objectives. With increased infrastructure work in the region comes an increased demand on villagers to labor on these projects, but also press ethnic groups along the pipeline route. This led to a cease-fire agreement with the Mon and significantly weakened the Karen insurgency. A senior MDX advisor and former government minister, has already asked the SSA, through intermediaries, not to interfere with the project. Regardless of whether the SSA agrees to construction or not, as it is highly unlikely the local peoples will be consulted about the project or compensated for resulting loss of lands and livelihoods, they are "dammed if they do and dammed if they don't."

Myanmar by the authorities and the military for portering, the construction, maintenance and servicing of military camps, other work in support of the military, work on agriculture, logging and other production projects undertaken by the authorities or the military... the construction and maintenance of roads, railways and bridges, other infrastructure work and a range of other tasks." 11 The regime, in its submission to the ILO (Article 118), denied allegations of forced labor specifically referring to the Yadana gas pipeline project - despite extensive documentation by the ILO Commission to the contrary.

One of the environmental consequences will be deforestation. Forests will be cleared during construction of access roads to the dam. More areas of forest for the planting of food crops will be cleared out of necessity, as local people are evicted from their land, forcibly resettled, or flee from areas under SPDC control. Reduction in forest cover destroys or reduces habitat for forest animals and increases danger of rainy-season floods in downstream areas. This will undermine food security as sustainable agriculture and gathering of forest foods are the primary means of subsistence for ethnic groups living in this area. Local people who suffer physical and environmental damage as a result of the project have no legal avenue for relief in Burma. This also allows the foreign consortium parties to act without accountability.

Foreign Investment fueling militarization

Foreign investment should not be used to finance SPDC sponsored infrastructure development projects. The links between foreign investment and military spending are concrete. Much of the money goes into military spending and the build-up of arms and equipment. Burma's need for military forces appears to be growing smaller due to the numerous cease-fires in place with rebellious groups, the pacification of areas following successful offensives, and the lack of external threats. However, the size of the army, continues to expand. Defense spending is estimated to be at least half of the total government's revenue at $10 percent of recorded GDP, while real expenditure on health and education has been cut.

The consequences of militarization in areas where the BADP is a significant link between the military's efforts to pacify ethnic and indigenous minority populations and resulting human rights violations. Foreign companies should delay investment until a democratic government has been formed, and the local peoples concerned have been consulted and can participate in decisions concerning this project and other development initiatives.

V. Coakley

Endnotes 'Dammed if they do'

2 Refer to Burma News International, November 1998 for explanation of the various Shan groups and their relationship with the SPDC
4 "Salween water diversion study gets green light," The Nation, 21 Jan 1999
5 "Japan to implement two technical programs for Myanmar," Xinhua, 31 Jan 1999
7 James Fahn, "The Salween under attack again," The Nation, 26 Jan 1999
8 S. H. A. N., "The Salween Dam - an upcoming reality?" 11 Dec 1998 in ibid
10 "Japan Donates Myanmar Included In Nippon Plan" Kyodo, 10 Dec 1998
11 "Japan's latest joint efforts with Suu Kyi," The Nation, 2 Jan 1999
12 "A new era of diplomatic relations was opened," The Nation, 1 Jan 1997
13 "Salween: Groundwater station to be built," The Asia Times Online, 6 Apr 1999
14 "Unocal Implicated in Burma" Los Angeles Weekly, 15 Jan 1999
16 "Salween Dam - an upcoming reality?" 11 Dec 1998 in ibid
January 1999
6

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN IRRAWADDY DIVISION

The following story is composed of edited extracts of information recently provided by a Burma Issues information collector from central Irrawaddy Division, western Burma. The deteriorating economy and increased hardships at the subsistence level are notable, given that the Irrawaddy Delta is famous as "the rice bowl" of Burma.

Economic Conditions

In my opinion, the main issue in the last year has been the price of food: it has doubled, but wages are unchanged. So too have the costs of almost all basic goods. For example, the lowest quality polished rice, which is in fact the roughest discards from the highest quality stuff, has gone from 50 Kyat to 100 Kyat per psi (4.6 lb.). One viss (3.5 lb.) of salt has jumped from 10 to 22 Kyat, and vegetable oil from 300 to more than 700 Kyat per gallon. Ajinomo (MSG) seasonings packets that used to be sold for 5 Kyat were enough to last for a few meals, but now 5 Kyat packets are being made out of a bit of plastic and paper by shopkeepers, and are only enough for one meal.

All kinds of people are facing problems. In July 1998, I met a schoolteacher on the road-side in a central delta township. The teacher was pushing a bicycle loaded with dried goods and basic household items. He explained to me that he and his sister both teach primary school and must take the main responsibility to support their family of six. They each receive is not enough, but they are not given permission to resign their positions and find other work. Therefore, to survive he goes to buy small goods in town and resells them in the village where he teaches a couple of times per week. It takes about one and a half hours travelling time on the bicycle each trip. Most teachers must find extra sources of income like this to survive. Teachers, like other civil servants, continue to receive 6 pyi per month, still receiving rice rations of 6 pyi.

The Irrawaddy Delta, 1998

Currently, to get extra money, soldiers in the delta go out on "conscription" drives. They visit Village/ Ward Council officers and inform them they want to conscript one or two people, and tell them how much it will cost to opt out. They don't make the cash amount too high. Right now nobody really wants to become a soldier, as their conditions aren't as good as before, so the soldiers know that people will pay the money. The money is split between the soldier collecting it and his superiors.

Agriculture

Farmers are facing higher rates of compulsory paddy procurement by the government. Previously, the standard rate was 12 baskets per acre, but after the attempted reforms earlier this year reverted to the old system (see Burma Issues, July 1998), the rate has become inconsistent, and in some areas 16 to 18 baskets are demanded per acre. The government agencies pay 300 Kyat per basket, and the current market rate is around 600.

Between December 1997 and February 1998 the state-run media made much of a new "market-oriented" paddy purchasing system, introduced in an effort to do away with the inefficiencies and corruption inherent in the old system, and put "growing diversification among farmers. The new system supposedly offered farmers their native avenues for the sale of their produce to the government. Brokers and agents were licensed to purchase paddy at prices more or less the rice market value, and then resell it to the government on condition that it was of good quality. After a short period of time, the much-touted reforms were quietly scrapped and the former compulsory-purchase system re-introduced.

At the time of the attempted reforms in Dec 1997/ Jan 1998, merchants paid 450 Kyat per basket for resale to the government. Some farmers sold most or all of their surplus at that time. Then the government reintroduced the quota system and demanded that farmers give as previously, so some had to re-purchase paddy at a higher rate than 450, to resell to the government at 300. In my opinion, the government tried to change the system initially because it is afraid that the farmers will revolt if things get too difficult for them.

Health

In June-July 1998 many children died from dengue fever due to heavy rains. Adults also suffered the disease, but didn't die. Every day children were brought into our town hospital from surrounding areas and two to three per day were taken in a period of some weeks. In one case in July, a father took only 900 Kyat for a boat to bring his child to the hospital, and then the doctor refused treatment and told him it was too late for his child. The father told him, "Worcher too late or not, give the medicine!" and was ready to pay for it. But the doctor refused and shortly after the child died. The father in a fury swore and abused the doctor and hospital staff. For those children who

Continued on the next page
survived, it took two to three weeks in the hospital to recover. This cost parents more than 20,000 kyat per child. At the hospital absolutely everything must be paid for.

**Education**

A large number of children are forced to drop out of school after Standard 2 or 3 (7-10 years of age). A member of my family works at a school where most of the children attending are particularly poor. At that school, the children who attend often come with no better economic circumstances. More people are daring to listen to the overseas news. However, every house in our township had electricity. During the summer, people claim officials and government servants are only working for themselves and not the broader communities. Most people are hoping that this government will fall, although this has not yet extended to action. As a result of economic hardship there are more political ideas among people than before.

**Politics**

Due to all these difficulties, people are getting stronger political concepts. More and more people consciously recognize that they are poor due to the bad government. There is more cautious resistance than before, both out of the need to survive and out of resentment of the administration. For example, 5-6 years ago, farmers had to give the compulsory paddy quota, whatever the amount, and the government is more cautious in its treatment of them. Traders recognize that taxes are high, and there are a lot of problems for them under the regime. They think that if there was "democracy" there will be representative and stable government is unlikely. One of the primary roles of sanctions must be to provide space and support for the people to create the structures necessary for transition to an open and civil society. Only the people, and their chosen leadership, have the legitimate right to set an agenda for change. Without this kind of agenda, sanctions serve merely to isolate Burma. Human Rights Watch Asia recently criticized both the uncritical engagement of ASEAN and the uncritical isolationism of western sanctions. The regional human rights group suggested that the junta should be offered a "road map" by which verifiable, concrete human rights improvements would be rewarded with normalized economic and diplomatic relations.

If such a "road map" were indeed charted by the Burmese opposition it would allow sanctions proponents to benefit from the gradualist approach to an end to the regime. For example, 5-6 years ago, farmers had to give the compulsory paddy quota, whatever the amount, and the government is more cautious in its treatment of them. Traders recognize that taxes are high, and there are a lot of problems for them under the regime. They think that if there was "democracy" there will be representative and stable government is unlikely. One of the primary roles of sanctions must be to provide space and support for the people to create the structures necessary for transition to an open and civil society. Only the people, and their chosen leadership, have the legitimate right to set an agenda for change. Without this kind of agenda, sanctions serve merely to isolate Burma. Human Rights Watch Asia recently criticized both the uncritical engagement of ASEAN and the uncritical isolationism of western sanctions. The regional human rights group suggested that the junta should be offered a "road map" by which verifiable, concrete human rights improvements would be rewarded with normalized economic and diplomatic relations.

**Sanctioning a strategy**

In looking at who is responsible for change, an aide to U.N. Secretary General notes on the primary point: "The solution to the problems of the country must be attained essentially amongst the people of that country." As the problems are the people's, so, ultimately, must be the responsibility for initiating change and monitoring effectiveness. Sanctions from the outside cannot initiate lasting change by themselves. Even if the State Peace and Development Council loses their grip on the country, without alternate power structures in place the emergence of a representative and stable government is unlikely. One of the primary roles of sanctions must be to provide space and support for the people to create the structures necessary for transition to an open and civil society. Only the people, and their chosen leadership, have the legitimate right to set an agenda for change. Without this kind of agenda, sanctions serve merely to isolate Burma. Human Rights Watch Asia recently criticized both the uncritical engagement of ASEAN and the uncritical isolationism of western sanctions. The regional human rights group suggested that the junta should be offered a "road map" by which verifiable, concrete human rights improvements would be rewarded with normalized economic and diplomatic relations.

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The Last Word
What Others Have to Say About Burma

“Now that sanctions against Myanmar have proven to be ineffective the idea of offering carrots in the form of a UN-World Bank assistance is being floated. According to the plan US$ 1 billion would be forthcoming if the government agreed to a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. It is obvious that those making the proposal are aware of neither the role of the international organizations in promoting sustainable development nor the principles on which the Myanmar government stands. Myanmar will neither succumb to the lure of carrots nor be cowered by the threat of sticks.” Press statement by the embassy of Myanmar [Burma], Washington, DC

“You don’t say what you believe is true, or what you know will be good for the country. Instead, you try to ensure that your presentation and analysis don’t deviate too much from the official line. Under these circumstances, self-censored and self-serving economic reports that have been produced in considerable abundance contain a wealth of information on the objectives of the government. But they don’t shed much light on what is happening to the people of Myanmar — ordinary citizens, such as farmers, laborers, students and office clerks.” A local economist and retired United Nations official on the reasons that the Burma’s military government has an unrealistic view of conditions in their country.

At this time, the people are facing ever greater restrictions imposed on trade by the SFDC. Furthermore, this year has brought drought and people have been unable to grow paddy as in previous years. The paddy which has been planted has wilted for lack of water, and so has not borne seeds and has shriveled up. Karen information Centre news report from Taungoo region, Pegu Division, November 1998.

“They can’t bear it, yet they must bear it. Most people just work harder, such as by finding more land to clear and crop. They spare no energy in their efforts to survive. They can’t leave and go anywhere else — there is no work in the cities, and the hills and jungles are free-fire zones. They have to try to survive there.” BI information collector on the conditions described above, and corresponding high taxation by the military in the area, December 1998.

“They [the Shan people] need permanent plots of land to grow rice and other crops, and they don’t have them. People in the Shan state have turned to growing poppy because it takes a short time, or a few months to harvest, and they can shift the location of opium fields in the jungles.” Colonel Yod Suk, commander of the Shan State Army, speaking about the drugs problem in Shan State saying that the Shan people and other ethnic minorities have been forced into opium cultivation by the actions of the Burma Army.