Burma Issues

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INFORMATION FOR ACTION CAMPAIGNS FOR PEACE GRASSROOTS EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING

The UWSA: Guns, Drugs, and Power Politics

Few armed groups in Burma have captured the attention of the international community as has the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and few Burmese ethnic minorities have as high a profile world-wide as have the Wa. Located in eastern Shan State, the UWSA has earned a reputation as the world's largest source of heroin with its ever-increasing amphetamine trade. For a group that makes regular regional and international news, very little is written about the UWSA specifically or the Wa in general beyond their drug-producing proclivities. While they have often been singled out, an in-depth look at the UWSA reveals a story all too familiar in Shan State specifically and in Burma as a whole. A look at the context of the UWSA and Wa people reveals some of the future difficulties that face Burma.

Background

Prior to the middle of this century the Wa, also known as the Lawa, were largely divided into two groups. The "tame" Wa (as designated by the British) were Buddhists and participated in the Shan princedom or *Sao Hpa* system, while the "wild" Wa were known principally by their practice of head hunting (Smith, 220). As with most highland people in Southeast Asia, the Wa historically have struggled with food sustainability. The land high in the mountains, where Wa villages were located, provided poor rice growing soil and the Wa people were often required to barter with neighboring groups for the necessities of rice and salt. While the Wa hillsides made poor rice fields, the land was excellent for growing opium poppies and by the time the British arrived on the scene in the late 19th century, Chinese traders were making regular trips to the Wa areas bartering salt and other necessities for raw opium (Scott, 310). However, until the 1940s, the Wa remained an isolated and semi-feudal people who were just able to scrape out a basic existence with the sale of opium.

Kuo Min Tang

The isolation of the Wa was broken forever with the invasion of the Wa hills by the Chinese nationalist Kuo Min Tang (KMT) army in the 1950s. There was virtually no central control over the Wa and Kokang areas of Shan State by the government of Burma. Consequently, it made an ideal locale for the KMT to set up camp after being driven from China by the communist People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949 and 1950. The KMT immediately started fostering ties with sympathetic local leadership and businessmen and through these connections was able to recruit troops from ethnic groups, including the Wa along with their Lahu, Shan, and Palaung neighbors.

The KMT presence increased both drug trade and arms build-up in the Wa and Kokang hill areas dramatically. During the colonial period, the local opium farmers produced approximately 30 metric tons of the drug annually, a little more than what was necessary to support addicts within Burma. With the KMT's General Mi Li encouraging farmers to grow opium poppies and then levying heavy taxes on the crop as a profit-making activity, opium production grew quickly. By 1953 the KMT, with the help of the U.S.A.'s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was exporting a half a ton of opium through Chiang Mai, Thailand every week (Lintner, 142-143).

The rapid growth of the opium economy and the introduction of superior weapons by the KMT into the fairly unstable local political scene laid the groundwork for militarism and warlordism in Eastern Shan State. However, after a couple of years, the people were chafing under the burden of KMT occupation. Many local villagers resented the nationalist Chinese army's demands for support and the heavy taxation. By the 1950s, many of the Wa substates had formed "home guard units" and in 1952 nine northern Wa chiefs agreed to collectively drive out the KMT; an agreement that led this group to eventually join forces with the Chinese PLA. At the same time, the chief of Ving Ngun and his allies entered into an agreement with the KMT to assist in their war against the Chinese communists, in exchange for help in efforts to subdue another Wa chiefdom, plus weapons and the appointment as titular head of Wa State (Sai Kham Mong).

The KMT were eventually defeated in a two-step process. More than 5,000 soldiers were evacuated in 1954 following the passage of a UN General Assembly resolution calling for complete withdrawal of all foreign soldiers on Burmese soil (Sai Kham Mong). However, the thousands of "disowned" soldiers that stayed behind to fight on were not defeated until January 1961 when they clashed with 5,000 Burma Army troops and 20,000 troops fighting under the PLA standard (McCoy, 394). While the power of the KMT was largely broken at that time, the twelve years of KMT occupation had divided the Wa people, increased the importance of armed groups and generally set the stage for all that has come.

The KMT occupation and eventual defeat solidified and institutionalized four important patterns that remain pertinent today:

1. The cultivation, transportation, taxation, and sale of opium were bound up inexorably with arms and armed forces in Shan State.

2. China started playing a central role in the

power politics of the region.

3. The Wa and other ethnic people, both collectively and as individuals, were used as pawns in the larger political struggles of the region.

4. Local ethnic leaders used the "greater powers" around them to consolidate their own political, military, and economic power.

Patron-Client Systems

In practical terms these four trends served to reinforce the existing patron-client socio-political system. This system is characterized by a hierarchy of reciprocal relationships in which the position of a "client" is derived from a tributary relationship to a stronger "patron" who in turn shares the benefits of his or her position with respective "clients." The introduction of arms and the development of an opium economy in eastern Shan State have served to push this indigenous social condition from a loose feudal system into full "warlordism." The events of the years that followed only solidified this trend.

Following the 1962 coup when Ne Win took power in Rangoon there was a backlash throughout the country which saw the rise of new ethnic armies in Shan State. In April 1964, the three largest insurgent groups (the Shan State Independence Army, the Shan National United Front, and the Kokang Resistance Force) agreed to join forces to form the Shan State Army with the goal of incorporating various smaller groups into a state-wide organization (Smith, 220). At the same time, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), supported by China, was organizing villagers in the northern part of Wa territory and recruiting Wa soldiers to form an armed force to take power in Burma. Additionally, numerous militias were being formed both for ethnic nationalist purposes and for support of the now burgeoning opium smuggling business in Shan State.

This sudden increase in armed groups in Shan state was a serious problem for Ne Win. In an attempt to get a handle on the situation he put forward a policy allowing armed groups economic and political control over their territory in exchange for allegiance to the government. The *Kwe Ka Ye* (KKY), or government defense militia, scheme was successful in reining in the armed groups but also served to sanction an increase in opium production and black-market arms trade as well as to entrench a drug-based patron-client system (Smith, 221).

The CPB

In 1973, when the CPB North East Command's People's Army (a force cobbled together from Kachin, Shan, Wa, Lahu and Red Guard troops) had taken control of most of the Kokang and Wa area, they made an attempt to break with the past. While they instantly became the largest "patron" in Shan State, they made efforts to wash their hands of the drug trade. Wheat was introduced as a substitute for opium poppies in the Wa areas and the production and sale of drugs was restricted. However, by the mid-1970s, due to drought, a rat infestation, and other economic setbacks, the restrictions on drug production were relaxed. Eventually, even local CPB leaders started collecting and selling 20 percent of the local opium crop and levied taxes on drug caravans passing through their territory (Smith, 254-255). In the end the indigenous drug economy proved stronger than the introduced agenda of the CPB.

While the patron-client system and some local warlords fared well under the CPB, the Wa people had a rougher time. Between 1973 and 1989, the Wa people served as soldiers in no less than five insurgent groups, and it is estimated that a greater percentage of Wa were under arms than any other ethnic group in Burma. The majority of these Wa soldiers were fighting with the CPB. With around 12,000 Wa fighting with the CPB at any time, they made up as much as 80 percent of the foot soldiers' ranks. The Wa suffered considerably due to the "human wave" style attacks of the communists and an estimated 30,000 Was ultimately died in the service of the CPB PA. Additionally, there were few Wa officers and those Wa leaders that were serving with the CPB advanced slowly. Then to add insult to injury, the CPB central committee restricted the production of opium in 1985. Consequently, in March 1989, when a group led by Kokang druglord Peng Jiasheng rebelled against the communist leadership, many of the Wa CPB troops followed their lead (Lintner, 363).

Within a month of the original uprising the Communist Party of Burma ceased to exist. To deal with the CPB remnants, Burma's military government called in drug lord Lo Hsing Han as their intermediary. Lo Hsing Han had accepted a 1980 amnesty deal and had set up a home guard army under the government's *Pyi Thu Sit* program, which was virtually identical to the *KKY* militia program of the 1960s. The SLORC was successful in enticing fragments of the CPB to follow Lo Hsing Han's lead and set up their own home guard units. Chao Ngi Lai, who led about 50 percent of the former CPB troops, soon signed a cease-fire agreement with the government. Shortly afterward the Wa CPB remnants joined with two anticommunist Wa groups to form the UWSA which, armed with their government-granted legal immunity, immediately sought to dominate the drug trade (Lintner, 365-367).

Present Situation

During the 1990s the UWSA grew to be the largest insurgent army in Burma. The veteran drug lord Wei Xuekang helped finance the UWSA in 1989, and his experience was put to use running the business as-

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Perpetrators: The other side of the Equation: 2

In the last issue we examined how the process involved in creating a person capable of killing or torture includes two broad elements –

· Dehumanising the victims by portraying them as less than human. (Discussed in the last issue)

· Conditioning.

In this issue I focus on the second of these elements.

Conditioning

The image of boot camp that we get from films and TV depicts a world of repetition, hardship and deprivation. The nature of any army dictates that its soldiers should be ready to kill. So a great deal of basic training is involved in preparing soldiers for that eventuality. They are drilled to follow orders without question. They are removed from any prior points of contact: family, religion, friends or 'normal life.' They are isolated. They are often subjected to extreme hardship, forced marches, beatings, or repetitious work. The commanders can make soldiers go without food, or inflict brutal punishment. A process of 'hazing' is often used, where extreme and sudden violence is used for no reason (torture).

As one Vietnam veteran described boot camp – "I yelled 'kill, kill' until I was hoarse. We yelled it as we engaged in bayonet and hand-to-hand combat drills. And then we sang about it as we marched. 'I want to be an airborne ranger. I want to kill the Viet Cong.' I had stopped hunting when I was sixteen. I had wounded a squirrel. It looked up at me with its big, soft brown eyes as I put it out of its misery. I cleaned my gun and have never taken it out since. In 1969 I was drafted and was very uncertain about the war. I had nothing against the Viet Cong. But by the end of Basic Training, I was ready to kill them" (Grossman, 251).

With all previous comforts, friendships and relationships removed, soldiers often form incredibly strong bonds with their comrades. This is a powerful process of peer pressure where the the individual cares so deeply about his comrades and what they think about him, that he would rather die than let them down (Grossman, 150). Looking bad or weak in front of his peers can become a strong influence. And strangely, in the creation of such strong bonds, a kind of group anonymity can be attained whereby an act committed by an individual can be deflected onto the group. Often the entire company may be punished for an individual's misdemeanour.

There are some factors that also play a special role in the case of Burma. The use of child soldiers in Burma is well documented (No Childhood at All). Many of these child soldiers are under the command of respected older men. They have no other frame of reference being so far removed from family, often for the first time in their lives, and are incapable of resisting the indoctrination process. "Their youth makes them particularly susceptible to a military ideology in which masculinity is defined by the ability to dominate and commit brutality against the 'enemy'" (Apple).

Similarly, there are reports that many soldiers are forcibly conscripted, or even that criminals are encouraged to join the army rather than face imprisonment. Even more worrying are the reports of widespread use of drugs. There are repeated testimonies of soldiers being given drugs before a battle.

Earthrights found all of these elements discussed in its examination of the Burma Army:

· The training focuses on building fear rather than skills. Soldiers are instructed in cruelty through example and practice.

· Punishment is inconsistent, inappropriate, unpredictable, and generally brutal. In addition, soldiers are called upon to punish their peers. This creates a culture of perpetual fear and victimhood where it is expected that force will be used to punish misbehavior.

· Daily treatment. Soldiers are virtually starved, given inadequate clothing and equipment, and forced to act as slaves for their officers. Their valuelessness is confirmed by the withholding of salaries and medical attention.

· Soldiers generally are prohibited from visiting their families and, in many cases, from sending and receiving mail. To the extent they develop camaraderie with one another, it is based on harmful rituals of brutality they are forced to execute. In addition, they are discouraged from developing trust within their units through self-punishment practices and enmity between officers and soldiers. Isolation and loneliness induce extreme behavior.

· Excessive use of alcohol and, in some cases, drugs. Many soldiers are frequently drunk, sometimes on the front lines. In addition, some reports indicate that soldiers use drugs including marijuana and heroin (Apple).

In the border areas in particular, the physical hardships placed upon these youthful soldiers can be extreme. The SPDC has a policy under which the army should 'live off the land' (Far Eastern Economic Review). They must extort food and supplies simply to survive. They are placed into areas where the local population is largely hostile and unfriendly, and often

cannot speak Burmese. Such hardships are obviously also present for villagers and resistance fighters. Once a conflict is begun, the nature of killing and abuse can generate a culture of violence. When a child's father is killed by soldiers, or a comrade is killed, revenge, hatred and aggression can often be the consequence. Having had over forty years of civil war in Burma, there is no shortage of victims, nor of the consequent product of entrenched hatred.

Often in cases of human rights abuses, the perpetrator will fall back to a position of "I had no choice." In an interview with a soldier who defected, Thant Zon Oo described shooting upon civilian protestors in the 1988 uprising: "I myself did not want to kill the innocent people . . . but I had to. I felt that we soldiers were unjustly forced to do things that we did not wish" (Dawn News Bulletin). While this should never be seen as a justification for any action, it must be taken into consideration. Often soldiers recount feeling that had they not participated, they too would have been killed.



Towards an Understanding

None of this discussion is to excuse the perpetrators of human rights abuses. It is merely to point out that as much as the leaders of the SPDC are responsible for many evils, so too are many ordinary people from Burma – from both sides of the conflict. Any reconciliation will have to address this fact. Some people have been led to commit great evils. It is far too easy to sit back and think there is something intrinsically wrong with this person, or this race, or that ethnic group that could commit such atrocities. That 'we' could never be capable of such acts.

Rather, all the evidence points to the fact that ordinary people are capable of atrocity when desensitized, indoctrinated, and placed in difficult conditions. A Vietnam veteran pointed out that even your average American was capable of killing. "You put those same kids in the jungle for a while, get them real scared, deprive them of sleep, and let a few incidents change some of their fears to hate. Give them a sergeant who has seen too many of his men killed by booby traps and by lack of distrust, and who feels that Vietnamese are dumb, dirty, and weak, because they are not like him. Add a little mob pressure, and those nice kids who accompany us today would rape like champions. Kill, rape and steal is the name of the game" (Grossman, 190).

Conclusion

When one group defines itself as being different and superior to another group, violence can occur. Chauvinism, which exists in what I would consider to be relatively low levels in the general Burmese population, is heightened and accented in the army. This, combined with 'boot camp' indoctrination, extreme brutality, drugs, the use of children as soldiers and hardship in the border areas, makes the situation ripe for a variety of atrocities to occur. And they do.

Ultimately these are issues of who is responsible. Is it a case of an evil regime ordering atrocities upon its own people? Certainly this article is not to diminish the responsibility and culpability of those in command. But it is also important to address the fact that ordinary citizens are completely capable of perpetrating atrocities – on both sides of the conflict. Certainly each person must be held accountable for his or her own actions (or inaction), but ultimately to view these people as rogue elements, the embodiment of evil, or as aberrations, is to deny the underlying structures that help cause these occurrences. Similarly, to place all the blame onto leaders is to deny individual choice and culpability.

The factors that create more efficient soldiers are closely related to those which can allow a person to commit human rights abuse, be it arbitrary execution, rape, torture, beating, forced labor, and so on.

Some people are capable of extreme brutality against others. Without understanding how people can reach this point, through personal experiences, socialization, indoctrination, government brutality, or whatever, we cannot hope to change it.

J. Shnookal

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KARENNI STATE: "LIVING IN THE TIGER'S MOUTH"

Karenni State in eastern Burma, like many of the border areas of Burma, has had a tumultuous recent past. Between 1994 and 1999, most of the insurgent groups in Karenni State signed cease-fire agreements with the military government, leaving the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) as the last major insurgent group still fighting the government. Then in 1996, in an effort to deal with the KNPP, the government military forcibly relocated more than 12 percent of the entire state population from the western and southern areas of Karenni State. These two events have been significant in shaping the reality of Karenni State today.

Karenni State is divided north to south by the Salween river and its tributary, the Pon River. The Htoo and Pai rivers run in east-west directions, splitting the state into unequal quadrants. The 1996 relocations effectively depopulated the area west of the Pon river and south of the Htoo river with the exception of areas immediately adjacent to Shadaw town and other large relocation sites. All of this area has been declared a free-fire zone, populated primarily by abandoned cows.

While a few people remain in this area as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and others reside at the relocation sites, many people have fled to territory on the eastern side of the Pon and into Shan State. The land adjacent to the northern border of Karenni State is controlled by the Shan National People's Liberation Organization. The SNPLO is an ethnically diverse insurgent army with a mixture of ethnic Pa'o, Kayah, and Shan soldiers. Pitted against larger drug-funded armies for many years, the SNPLO was forced into signing a cease-fire agreement long ago. However, due to previous good relations with the KNPP, the SNPLO have allowed many Karenni people to take refuge in their territory with the condition that these refugees are required to wear Pa'o dress to avoid raising the suspicions of the military government.

Life is not easy for the Karenni refugees in SNPLO territory. As the KNPP, the Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), and government soldiers, as well as SNPLO troops, all operate in the area along the border between Shan and Karenni states, the people living in this area have to constantly appease all these armed groups. One headman complained:

"It is very hard staying between these military groups, but now it seems to be the everyday culture for us because we have been suffering from war for so many years. Now we don't have anything more to lose but only to suffer more. We just have to find new ways of living in the tiger's mouth."

Residents of the SNPLO area have to pay an "inhabitance tax" of 4 baskets of rice and 8000 kyats per year and also have to work on building roads, bridges, and pagodas with SNPLO's 'development program.' This is especially difficult because there are only hillside slash and burn fields for them to cultivate and they have experienced drought for two out of the last three years. In the words of one local villager, "Because this is not our land we have to pay so much to be able to live here. But it is better than staying in our home land because we have to pay with our lives if we stay there."

Health issues are causing difficulties for these refugees. As there is no formal healthcare in this area, some enterprising people are bringing their own brand of high priced healthcare to the people. Medical teams comprised of persons with very basic health/first aid training have been making the rounds in this area, charging exorbitant prices for medical care. However, due to their lack of medical expertise, sometimes the treatment only causes further problems. As the cost is so high, most people thus depend on traditional remedies and herbal medicines to deal with illness.

Virtually all of the villages to the west of the Pon river have been relocated, but some of those villages close to the east bank of the Pon and along the Shan State border have been relocated as well, as this is where much of the fighting is currently happening. Villages in Northern Western Loikaw township were relocated to the area surrounding Loikaw town several years ago. However, as this land was fertile and the area villages were prosperous, and as there was little means of support at the relocation sites, local people have recently started moving back to their homes.

At first these returnees lived like IDPs, fleeing whenever SPDC military units entered the area. Later, local leaders approached the military and made a deal that they would not support KNPP troops. One of the special conditions that local villages live under is that they have to give the SPDC military units "special information" regarding the KNPP once a month, with occasional demands for reports on a weekly basis. This situation puts village headmen in an awkward position. Information must be forthcoming whether the villagers actually know anything or not. However, even if villagers do have information, they do not want anger the KNPP and they would rather lie than have fighting occur close to their village, endangering their families and property.

People in this area are subject to forced labor, and whenever the "special information" reports are made, the village headman must give food as well. These

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pects of the drug empire. When Khun Sa--perhaps the most notorious drug lord in Burma's history--gave up the business in1996, the UWSA took advantage of the sudden decrease in competition. From 1989 to 1997 the poppy harvest increased more than two fold from 1,100 to 2,500 tons of raw opium (Lintner, 416). However, not satisfied with their heroin profits alone the UWSA also entered the increasingly profitable business of methamphetamine production and started participating in legitimate business ventures.

It must be acknowledged that with success in the drug industry has come a level of material progress as well. In recent years as profits have poured in, infrastructure projects have abounded. Roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, and electricity generating projects have proliferated rapidly in this formerly isolated area. The benefits of connection with the UWSA do trickle down to the people to a certain extent. However, it would be inaccurate to represent the UWSA as the champion of the people. The life for villagers high in the mountains of Wa state, while seeing a marginal improvement, is still difficult. The age-old issues relating to disease and drought continue to cause problems for the mountain villagers. Local people have faced relocation by the UWSA to make way for Chinese immigrants. Confiscation of property, unfair taxation and other types of human rights abuse happen at the hands of the UWSA in Wa territory in a manner not dissimilar to that of the SPDC troops.

While ethnic politics played into the formation of the UWSA, people are often mistaken in the impression that it is purely an ethnic Wa group. However, much of the UWSA leadership remains Chinese or Kokang. Additionally, as business has increased so have relationships with China. Chinese has become the dominant language in parts of UWSA territory, which cuts uneducated ethnic Wa people out of the power structures. However, all local ethnic peoples, including Shan, Lahu and Lisu participate as soldiers in the UWSA. Those that have connections (or the money to foster such connections) with the UWSA regardless of nationality receive the benefits and all others are left out of the loop. Those who have the guns or money have power and a voice, those that don't, do not. More than an ethnic or nationalistic issues, it is money and power that are the primary concerns of the UWSA.

Conclusion

The UWSA is a very natural product of its economic and political environment and particular history. One part nationalist movement, one part development agency, one part legitimate business interest and many parts a self-interested network of warlords, the UWSA is not at all an oddity in Burma. Indeed many groups around Burma have signed similar cease-fire deals and are supporting themselves through both licit and illicit trade in gems, teak, drugs and other commodities to similar ends. What sets the UWSA apart is its size, the highly sensitive nature of its heroin and amphetamine trade, and its success at this trade. However one looks at it, the UWSA and all smaller cease-fire groups remaining under arms pose a huge conundrum to those seeking a peaceful future for Burma. Patron organizations, like the UWSA, look out for the interests of themselves and their clients. Those without connections to the patron organization are left stranded and unprotected. How can such organizations be assimilated into a democratic system and taught to respect the rights of all and to think towards the benefit of a nation and not just themselves? These issues, even more than the drug problem, need to be addressed to bring satisfactory closure to the story of the UWSA.

E. Miller

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villages often have to send timber or bamboo for the construction of military buildings as well. However, one positive aspect of living in the area is that, unlike other civil war zones in Burma, in this area there are no landmines. One KNPP leader said that they realized that for every one landmine that they laid the SPDC troops could afford to lay many times that number and that in the end this would hurt civilians as much as soliders. Consequently, it was judged better not even to start using landmines.

The residents of Karenni State, like all the people of Burma, are survivers of the highest order. The situation that they find themselves in is not good, but they often find creative means of survival. The hopelessness bred by years of living hand to mouth is unfortunately common, but there are also many stories of perseverance. It is in this perseverance of the people that the hope for peace in Burma lies.

april news

Construction on int'l airport. Plans for Burma's third international airport took a step forward April 5 with a cornerstone laying ceremony for the terminal at a site close to Bago about 80 kilometres north-east of the capital. Planning of the new airport got underway as long ago as 1990, and earth removal operations for the runway were begun in 1994. According to the official media, work on the 12,000 feet long, 200 feet wide runway is about a quarter complete and it will be finished in four years. The official press said the new terminal will be able to service 1,000 incoming passengers and 1,000 outgoing passengers at the same time.

"Hanthawaddy airport inches toward completion," Apr 6. New Light of Myanmar

Rangoon water supply low. Drinking water supplied by the Department of Water and Sanitation of the Greater Rangoon Development Committee (YCDC) is currently able to meet the needs of only about 72% of the population of five million who live in the national capital area, a seminar to mark World Water Day was told. About 95 million gallons of water are being extracted daily from the Hlawga, Gyobyu and Phugyi reservoirs but it is far short of the needs of capital residents, according to Daw Li Li Tin, an official in the department. She told attendees at the seminar that YCDC currently has plans to meet the shortfall by diverting water from the Ngamoyiek reservoir in the capital area's north-eastern sector. It was constructed several years ago by the Ministry of Agriculture to assist with flood control, irrigation and water storage. The department is facing a major problem in trying to finance the expansion, Daw Li Li Tin said. "As we have to generate the funds from within the department's own income, it will be difficult to develop the projects overnight." She said an equally pressing issue was that of unaccounted water. Problems were caused by unlawful usage and the disintegration of pipelines, many of which are dilapidated after a half-century of use. Many people are using private wells and storage facilities, but the unofficial storage mechanisms have health-related problems and the wells can become breeding grounds for insect vectors and water-borne diseases.

"Drinking water snafus increase threat of disease," Apr 2. Myanmar Times

Japan promises dam repair. Japan's Foreign Minister Yohei Kono told visiting Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win April 9 that Japan will provide Burma with a grant to repair a hydroelectric power station, an official at Japan's foreign ministry said. Although Kono did not specify the amount of the grant, the official estimated it at between 3-3.5 billion yen (US$ 24-28 million). Japan will send a mission in the near future to examine the Baluchaung No. 2 station, on the border between Kayah and Shan states in central Burma. The 168 MW capacity plant, built in the 1960s as part of Japan's reparations to Burma for damages inflicted on the country's infrastructure during the Second World War, is Burma's largest. Official Japanese aid in the eighties provided a loan to cover repairs to the generating system. Production at the two Baluchaung hydroelectric plants, seriously lowered during 1998-99 as a result of reduced rainfall and the over-cutting of forest cover in the dam watershed area, began to recover last year. According to Japanese officials, the Baluchaung repairs would be classified as "humanitarian aid" because the constant interruptions in power supply are affecting the work of institutions such as hospitals, schools, and other public centres.

"Japan promises to repair Baluchaung Power Station," Apr 10. Dow Jones

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