INSIDE SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

The following information was supplied by a friend of Burma Issues on return from a recent trip inside Burma. Most of this information comes from IDP’s living in Southern Shan State and Northern Karenni State. The Shan State area discussed here comes under the cease-fire zone of the Shan National People Liberation Organisation (SNPLO). This week presents observations on education, health and the general living situation for the villagers. Next month Burma Issues will talk about the military activities in the area and the situation of the cease-fire agreement.

PEOPLE’S SITUATION

Many Karenni people moved to Shan State about 20 years ago. They moved there to escape the oppressive rule of the Burmese junta. The people were forced to provide labour, porters and also tax to the military. In Karenni State they found that the demands from the military did not allow them enough time to grow their own crops and they were unable to feed their families. They settled in Shan State because there they were able to work and farm more freely there due to the SNPLO’s cease-fire agreement.

In 1996, after the four-cuts policy which was implemented throughout the whole of Karenni State, more people from Karenni State fled into Southern Shan State’s SNPLO area. When they arrived in Shan State, both groups started to wear Pa-0 clothing rather than their own Kayah dress. They did this because they worried that if the SPDC troops saw them wearing Karenni clothes, they would be victimised.

The people there farm rice and opium. When we were there, the cost of the poorest quality rice rose to 4000 Kyat and the price of the highest quality rice rose to 6000 Kyat per sack. In fact, even though we say a sack, it doesn’t even fill three big tins. The price of opium is 17-1900 Kyat for the weight of a Kyat. In comparison, a civil servant’s salary is around 5000 Kyat per month. People of course choose the option with the better return.

Those who arrived after 1996 are waiting for the political situation to improve so that they can go back to Karenni State. In the summer of 2002, several villages went back to resettle in Karenni State. Even though they are back in their homeland, there is still no security, no health care and no education.

Before the last group went back to Karenni State earlier this year, they informed the SPDC authorities based in their old township. The SPDC authorities replied that they could return as long as there is no fighting around their village and they are also not allowed to contact the Karenni rebel group. They threatened that if any fighting took place, they would come back and burn down the village. As a consequence of this, on their return to Karenni State the villagers requested that the Karenni military forces not approach them for help nor fight near their villages.

The group also met with the Karenni forces who are active in the Loikaw area, before their return to Karenni State. I was there at that time, so I suggested to the villagers that if they could get permission from the SPDC, it might be good to go back to Karenni State. In case the situation should deteriorate again they could come back and re-settle in Shan State.

EDUCATION

In the IDP areas of Southern Shan State most of the young people do not go to school. Many villages do not even have schools, so many people cannot read or write. Some teachers volunteer from the Roman Catholic and Baptist Churches to teach in the villages. When the children finish primary school, they have to go and study in towns and these are usually quite far from the villages. Many children cannot go to school in town after primary school because they cannot afford the school fees. Some of the children’s parents also want them to work for their family. Some parents told me that if they let all their children go to school they wouldn’t have anyone to work for the family.

Some children have been working since they were young. I talked to the volunteer missionary teachers several times. Some of them told me that if the people do not convert to their religion, they will not teach them anymore.
When I heard these words, I felt very sorry for the people there because it seems the missionary teachers are only interested in proselytising and they don’t really think about the children’ education. I was also surprised that the school year was already finished when I arrived in the area in the third week of January 2002. Usually schools finish in the first or second weeks of March. Referring to this, I asked a missionary teacher whether the students were able to finish all their lessons? She said that they didn’t need to finish all their school lessons.

Most children still do not go to school though and this does not bode well for the future. The same pattern is likely to continue, with parents thinking that their children need to work for the family and the people will never become educated. That is why I think it is a challenge for us to break down this pattern of thought in this society. It is my personal opinion that the IDP education program in Karenni state should find some ways to assist in the area. In some of the villages, the people want to learn to read Karenni because they didn’t go to school when they were children. They cannot speak nor write and read in Burmese.

In the villages by Loikaw

In the Loikaw area, the villages which were very close to Loikaw had been assisted by the SPDC to build schools. UNICEF provided the SPDC funds to help the Villages Development Council in Burma about health and education. But the SPDC provides the villages with only half of the total expense. The villagers find it very hard to raise enough funds to cover the other half of the expenses for their school. Thus, some people from the villages want to set up sawmills in their villages to raise funds for their school.

In the high schools, 75 percent of the students hire tutors for extra help with their classes but those from poor families cannot afford tuition fees. The students also need to buy their own books. Those who finish 10th-grade need to spend even more money to join university. Thus, it is very hard for the poor family students to continue their education.

Health

When people do not have health workers in their villages they approach the Karenni mobile medic to attend to the sick. There is only one Karenni mobile medic in the area and there is not enough medicine to take care of all the people. It is very hard to bring medicine from the refugee camps into Karenni State.

There is not enough medical care and nobody educates the people about health matters, many children are consequently malnourished. Most of the people just want to keep their chickens, pigs, and cattle for traditional festivals and rituals. They do not want to eat them for nutrition. There are a few health workers from the Burmese military, but they ask payment for treatment from the people. Some of volunteer teachers in the schools try to give medicine to the people who are sick but they don’t have medical training so it can be quite dangerous. I was told stories that some people became paraplegic because they were given the wrong injection.

I came across a story about a woman who had died while giving birth. I tried to find out why the woman died. Her old mother told me that she used to work very hard when she was pregnant and carried heavy things often. She also fell down from her home to the ground once during her pregnancy. Mostly people use traditional cures whenever they get sick. Sometimes they ask the chicken bones to predict the future, sometimes they look at eggs and some-

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It is easy to become caught up in the excitement of the moment, however, it is the history that puts everything into context. Last week we printed the timeline from 1988 through to 1993. In this second part of the timeline we chronicle the major events in Burma from 1994 through to 1999. The next edition will cover the period from 2000-2001. This time-line is drawn from Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948 by Bertil Lintner (Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai 1999).

February 27  The Karenni National People's Liberation Front announces it has reached a peace agreement with the government.

May-June  Fighting between the government and Mong Tai Army (MTA) increases.

July 26  The Kayan New Land Party makes peace with the government.

August 8  Kachin Independence Organisation leader Brang Seng dies in Yunnan, China.

September 20  Khin Nyunt holds a televised meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon.

October 9  The Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization (SNPLO) signs a cease-fire with the government of Burma.

November  Lt-Gen Tin Oo concludes a US$400 million arms deal with China.

January 26  Mannerplaw, home to the KNU, NCGUB, NDF and DAB, falls as the KNU burns the town and flees the area.

January 30  A Buddhist Karen faction which cooperated with the government during the attack on Mannerplaw announces the formation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organisation/Army.

February 14  U Nu, first PM of Burma, dies in Rangoon.

March 7  The Karenni National Progressive Party signs an agreement with Rangoon.

June 29  The New Mon State Party signs a cease-fire with the government.

July 10  Aung San Suu Kyi is released from house arrest.

January -February  The Burma Army captures Khun Sa’s headquarters without firing a shot. The MTA is disbanded and Khun Sa moves to Rangoon. Several thousand ex-MTA join to reform the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA).

April 28  The KNU hold unsuccessful talks with the government in Moulmein, Mon State.

May  The government arrests 262 NLD members (including elected MPs) who attempt to attend a party congress in Rangoon.

June 7  The government threatens anyone attending the weekly meetings outside Aung San Suu Kyi’s house with a 20 year prison sentence.

June 20  Burma is formally granted observer status in ASEAN.

November 9  A 200 person mob, organised by the USDA, attacks Aung San Suu Kyi’s car in Rangoon.

December 2-3  Between 1,000 and 1,500 students protest in Rangoon and approximately 600 students are arrested. Universities and schools are closed.

January 7-14  Ethnic nationalities call for an end to the civil war and for the restoration of democracy at a Nationalities Seminar in Karen State.

January 28-29  A joint force of DKBA and Burma Army troops attack three Karen refugee camps in Thailand.

April-May  Following fighting between SURA and Burma Army troops, tens of thousands of villagers in Shan State are relocated.

April 22  US President Bill Clinton signs a ban on all new US investment in Burma which comes into effect May 20.

July 17  Khin Nyunt meets with NLD chairman Aung Shwe.

July 24  Burma gains membership in ASEAN.

November  Police prevent an NLD meeting in Rangoon and Aung San Suu Kyi is essentially under house arrest again.

November 15  The SLORC is dissolved, “corrupt” members are purged and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) is formed.

April 7  Padoh Aung San, KNU forestry minister and central committee member, leaves the
Karen insurgents with more than US$100,000 and signs a cease-fire with the SPDC, weakening the KNU.

Late June The NLD demands parliament be convened by August 21.

July 7, 20 & 24 In three separate incidents, the military blocks Aung San Suu Kyi as she travels by car to visit NLD officials in Min Hla town and Pantanaw Township in Rangoon Division and Bassein in Irrawaddy Division.

July 25-30 Aung San Suu Kyi and police involved in 6 day standoff as the NLD leader makes a second attempt to travel to Bassein.

July 31 Riot police surround Aung San Suu Kyi's residence and NLD headquarters to prevent protests commemorating the 1988 riots.

August 9 Eighteen international activists are arrested for distributing anti-government pamphlets during the 10th anniversary of the 1988 uprising.

August 12-24 Aung San Suu Kyi and military in 4th standoff on the road to Bassein. About 150 people protest in Rangoon. At the same time Khin Nyunt holds "confidence building" talks with NLD Chairman Aung Shwe.

September 17 The NLD announces the formation of the 10-member Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) to act as parliament. Dr. Saw Mra Aung of the Arakan League for Democracy is declared speaker. They declare all SPDC laws "illegal", in their first act. To date, 843 NLD members, including 195 elected MPs have been detained since May.

Late September-Early October Several protests of between 10,000 and 20,000 people are organised by the USDA around the country protesting NLD actions and demanding the deportation of Aung San Suu Kyi.

October-December The SPDC forces the resignation of NLD members and closes party offices in Myetkyina, Waingma, Sittwe, Billin, Ponnagyun, Mrauk-U, Pantanaw, Kyaukt, Sainbaungwe and other locations.

October-December The International Committee of the Red Cross is given permission to visit Burma's prisons for the first time since leaving the country in 1995 over the issue of prison access.

November Starting November 3 Thailand forcibly repatriates migrant workers despite Burma's refusal to accept them. Rapes, beatings and threats at gunpoint are reported.
Replacing the Structures

In the early part of June, cadets at the Military Technical College, one of the colleges under the Defense Services Academy (the SPDC’s version of West Point) held protests. The issues that the cadets were protesting over were not huge ones. A recent policy change left cadets without the guaranteed rank of 2nd Lieutenant upon graduation, and there were complaints about the quality of the food at the school. The response from the higher ranks of the military government was anything but forgiving or laid back. According to reports from Radio Free Asia and The Irrawaddy magazine the leaders of this revolt were sentenced to death, another 17 were given 20 years in prison, more than 70 are still in detention and 2000 of the 5000 students were expelled.

This is purely and simply a brutal response to what should be a fairly minor crime. However, the SPDC knows well that their grip on power is dependent on absolute obedience and unity on the part of the military. They have a very clear idea of how they want the military, and by extension the country, to run and strictly enforce those ideas on every level. The ideals of Burma’s many opposition groups run in direct opposition to almost all of what the military government stands for. However, many of these groups could take a lesson from the junta on one of the main principles of leadership – that the methods of organisational management be consistent with the desired goals.

Throughout the last four years I have met a large number of people from a large number of organisations. Without exception all the organisations that I have encountered are, at least on the surface level, pro-democracy, pro-civil society, anti-ethnic chauvinism, pro-protection of human rights and obviously anti-SPDC. At the same time I have met young people frustrated at their inability to participate in the decision making of their organisations. I hear stories of political in-fighting in Burma groups that are comparable to rumors of conflicts between the top men in the junta. Decision-making that favours a particular clique within the organisation; power handed down from family member to family member; behaviours which don’t at all promote democracy and civil society.

It is argued, and rightly so, that the management of an organisation and that of a country are different. It isn’t always practical to elect the leadership of an organisation. However, democracy, civil society and the promotion of human rights are all processes not states of being, not political nirvanas achieved in moments of enlightenment. Beyond just reacting to the problems under military rule, Burma organisations can begin building a more desirable society through the way that they work.

This process of moving towards social and political change begins first with the establishment of clear, honest and realistic goals. Achieving democracy is an admirable goal, but holding democracy forth as a goal is of little benefit unless the ramifications of that goal are understood. There have been many ethnic people from Burma who had to rethink their position on democracy, once they understood that if implemented in Burma the majority Burman populations would have a greater say in politics than the minority groups. Likewise, the goal of addressing the issues of the ethnic groups is an easy goal to adopt if it is seen as a fairly minor problem. Additionally, conflicts occur when the idea of federalism is held out as the organisational goal, while in reality achieving an autonomous, independent state is the primary objective.

Once clear goals are established, these goals need to be promoted within the daily life of the organisation. As democracy is often given as one of the primary goals of many of the differ-
ent organisations, what does it mean to be a democratic organisation? Here are several short suggestions:

Within a democratic organisation ideas are weighed on their merit, not on the person who gives the suggestion. Within the patron-client systems that dominate Burma’s political sphere, ideas are judged in terms of your pecking order within the group or organisation. How important a position you have achieved is the most important factor in determining the weight of the ideas that you present. To truly be a democratic organisation requires the openness to accept ideas based on how the ideas will benefit the organisation as a whole regardless of the source of those ideas.

In democratic organisations criticism plays a crucial role. There is no way that every decision can be run past every person in an organisation. This makes it especially important that leadership be open to accepting and respecting criticism and questions. This involves a model of working, where constructive criticism is not viewed as an attack on leadership either by the leaders or by those criticising. This is an especially difficult one in the fractured world of Burma’s politics where people are often judged on a “for us or against us” basis.

Good democracies require good educational institutions. A good democratic organisation requires the constant education and development of its staff. A democratic organisation that draws its strength and decision-making from all of its members, develops as its staff develops. This requires both staff acquiring the skills to do their work better and acquiring a fuller knowledge of the organisation and how it runs. People coming in to a democratic organisation should constantly be trained to take on more responsibility and more leadership.

Within a democratic organisation, knowledge is not a precious commodity to be hoarded. Good communication, like education, is necessary for a democratic organisation to run successfully. If many people are going to participate in the life of the organisation, a full understanding of the daily workings of the organisation is necessary. Good communication channels necessarily encourage fuller participation by more people as well.

With rights come responsibilities. Democratic organisations should give greater rights to participate in the life of the organisation to its members at all levels. However, with this greater level rights comes additional responsibilities. The work no longer is that of the leaders alone, but of all the members of the organisation. As people feel more and more involved in the organisation that they work for, they feel more and more involved in the larger work of the organisation. They actively seek ways to improve the work. They take responsibility when things don’t go as expected.

The SPDC has been very active and fairly successful in their attempts to shape Burma’s society. The current social structures remain firmly entrenched as there are few structures to replace them if they should fall. Burma organisations around the world play an important role in attempts to replace the current structures with more democratic ones.

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owners to send timber to them. If the people cannot send the timber to them, the commanders ask the SPDC troops to come into the villages and take away the people’s sawmill.

Some of the people want to build a school or a clinic in their villages and they would like to set up a sawmill to raise funds for this. But other people are interested in logging only as a means of increasing their personal income. Regional Development factions that the SPDC encouraged to split away from the KNPP, log in this area. The SPDC troops in Loikaw Region Central Command let them to do this logging, even allowing them to cut down the saplings. There is so much logging underway that the forest in Karenni State will be completely gone in several years.
**news briefs**

**Unocal case will go to court.** A lawsuit claiming US energy giant Unocal was complicit in human rights abuses committed by Burma’s military regime will go ahead in California in September, lawyers said. The action was brought by villagers who lived near a disputed pipeline built with “slave labour” to carry natural gas from Burma to neighbouring Thailand. “We hope that this will serve as a message to Unocal and other firms that deal with regimes engaged in human rights violations that if you do business with the devil you can be held responsible for the devil’s work.”

The lawsuit, originally filed in 1996, claims Unocal was partly responsible for human rights violations committed by Burma’s military junta during the construction of the Yadana pipeline commissioned by the company and its joint venture partner, the Burma government. They have long alleged Unocal, and its partners including France’s Total Oil, were aware forced labour was used in Burma before they agreed to build the pipeline, but went ahead with the project anyway.

“**License to rape**”. A report released by the Shan Human Rights Foundation and the Shan Women’s Action Network details incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, involving 625 girls and women, committed by Burmese army troops in Shan State, mostly between 1996 and 2000. The report reveals that the Burmese military regime is allowing its troops to systematically and on a widespread scale commit rape with impunity in order to terrorize and subjugate the ethnic peoples of Shan State. The report illustrates there is a strong case that war crimes and crimes against humanity, in the form of sexual violence, have occurred and continue to occur in Shan State. According to the report there is clear evidence that rape is officially condoned as a ‘weapon of war’ against the civilian populations in Shan State. Out of the total 173 documented incidents, in only one case was a perpetrator punished by his commanding officer. More commonly, the complainants were fined, detained, tortured or even killed by the military.

**Burma issues**

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