

B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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A young Mon boy stands beside his abandoned home in Thailand

Although the foreign currency reserves of Burma are increasing due to investments by foreign companies, malnutrition, HIV, forced relocation and a host of other problems are increasing in Burma (see UNICEF Report on page 3). The suffering of the people is increasing every day (see Arakan Atrocities Continue; Refugee Numbers Rise page 7-8). The international community must take notice.

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CIVIL WAR

Kachin State

A report filed by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and received here on April 12, indicates that the Burmese military is now beginning a major offensive against the Kachin. According to the KIO, the Burmese military has been preparing for this offensive for over a year, and has both military and economic motives behind it.

As is typical in all areas where the Burmese military is carrying out campaigns against the ethnic minorities, extensive use of human porters was made to carry food rations and military hardware from Burmese military bases into China at Nong Tau - Rwei. For two days, from March 29 to 30, the porters carried these supplies.

What is of major concern now is the role which the Chinese are playing in this campaign. Not only have they allowed the military to carry food and weapon stocks into China, but according to the KIO report then provided 20 local Chinese trucks and 3 Chinese military trucks to transport the supplies into a Burmese Army post in Loiye, of the Kachin State. It was also reported that on March 20, 5 Chinese military trucks, loaded with munitions, crossed the Burma border from Wandin to Pangsai (Kyugok), and then on to Muse.

On April 4, the military campaign against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) began. Heavy casualties have been reported, and the death toll on the porters used by the Burmese military is thought to be very high as they are often placed in the front line positions, or used to clear the way ahead.

The link between the Chinese and the Burmese military seems a bit surprising considering their past relationship. For many years the Chinese supported the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) in their struggle against Ne Win's forces. When the BCP fell apart in 1989, relations between the two militaries slowly began to improve.

China is now seeking permission to build a road from Bhamo-Sinlum in

Burma, up to China. They are also wanting to build a hydro power station in the Sang Gang area of Kachin State. Both of these projects are in areas presently controlled by the KIA. In the past the Chinese approached the KIO for permission to construct the road, but the KIO refused this permission. Now the Chinese are encouraging the Burmese military's offensive against the KIA in order to make it possible for them to achieve these two objectives. If the Burmese military can overrun the KIA's 3rd Brigade which controls this area, the Chinese could then begin their projects.

However, the campaign also has more strategic military goals for the Burmese military. If they can eliminate the KIA's 3rd Brigade, then they can also more easily attack the KIO headquarters in Pa Jau. In the past, the Burmese have never been able to defeat the 3rd Brigade.

It will be important to confirm whether the collaboration between the SLORC and the Chinese represents an official policy on behalf of Beijing towards the Burma regime, or is merely an unofficial initiative by the local Chinese along the border.

Mannerplaw

The military's offensive against Mannerplaw continues. Although the junta had set a goal of occupying Mannerplaw by March 27, (Armed Forces Day in Burma) they failed, and now the rapidly approaching rainy season threatens to frustrate them even more. Mannerplaw is the headquarters of the Karen National Union, and since 1988 has also served as headquarters for most of the other opposition groups such as the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), the National Democratic Front (NDF), the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), etc. Yet it is more of a symbol of resistance rather than a truly essential stronghold of the opposition. The KNU have already distributed most of their forces throughout the surrounding jungles and can rely on guerrilla warfare to keep the Burmese

military at bay. The remaining opposition groups can easily and quickly relocate their offices to other places and continue their work with little hindrance.

For the Burmese military, Mannerplaw has always represented a "thorn in the side". It symbolizes a resistance which the military has never been able to rid itself of, and since 1988 has helped focus international attention on the democratic struggle in Burma which was hidden from the world for so many years. Although taking Mannerplaw would not end the democratic movement, it would give the Burmese military a much needed morale boost as well as give them propaganda ammunition to use in their attempt to convince the international community that they, and not the democratic opposition, legally and practically rule the country. Both of these factors are becoming more and more crucial to the Burmese military as international criticism grows and as the threat of political and economic isolation from the world community gains momentum.

Yet the chance of the Burmese military actually taking Mannerplaw seems slim. Although they have vastly superior weaponry, and a greatly enlarged army, they are having to fight in terrain which they are not properly trained for. The Karen know the mountains and jungles surrounding Mannerplaw by heart, and thus they can out maneuver the Burmese military with some ease.

In the past few months the Thai policy has also become more positive towards the Karen and other Mannerplaw-based opposition groups. A large number of Thai troops have been placed just opposite Mannerplaw to immediately halt any attempts of the Burmese military to make use of Thai territory to attack Karen positions from the rear. During the past several years, the Thai military tended to turn a blind eye to these incursions by the Burmese military, and this resulted in the loss of several strategic opposition bases along the border. Being unable to move through Thai territory has left the Burmese military at a distinct disadvantage.



ECONOMICS

Foreign investments continue to prop up the Burmese military junta which has ruled the country since the coup in 1988. Despite a great influx of money from the outside, the lives of the majority of the Burmese continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate.

According to an article in the *International Herald Tribune* of March 31, 1992, U.S.-Burmese trade has doubled since 1988. Although the US Congress has authorized president Bush to impose trade and investment sanctions on Burma, he has refused to do so except for a trade embargo on textiles. Private investments by US companies in Burma go on unhindered. According to the deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs, Kenneth Quinn, the Bush administration's policy in East Asia is to oppose economic sanctions.

At the same time, large amounts of foreign currency are entering the country through logging concessions sold to companies from Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. These investments provide the military junta with about US\$112 million annually.

Japan not only has resumed its development aid worth about US\$134 million in 1991, but has also exported to Burma more than 15,000 Isuzu, Nissan and Toyota trucks. These trucks are reported to be used only by the Burmese military.

Theoretically, the economic situation in Burma should be improving. In 1988 foreign currency reserves were reported to be around US\$12 million. In 1991 these reserves jumped to US\$900 million.

In a country so rich in natural resources and capable of producing such vast amounts of food, Burma should therefore be facing a good future. A UNICEF report made on March 16 of this year, however, presents a very sad situation for the Burmese people, especially the children. The report gives the following statistics concerning children in Burma today:

- The infant mortality rate at 98 per 1000 live births is more than double what had been reported for two decades;

- About 175,000 children under five die each year, mostly from readily preventable or treatable diseases -- mainly due to lack of essential drugs and essential information;
- An appallingly high 10% of children under three suffer from severe malnutrition -- comparable to the situation in Sudan, Burundi, Pakistan and Mali. This is primarily the result of untreated infections and infestations, progressively eroded purchasing power and forced resettlements;
- Maternal deaths of 58 women per week is 40% attributable to illegal abortions, which in turn are caused by unwanted pregnancies and lack of affordable contraception;
- Less than 20% of primary-school age children complete all 5 years -- comparable with Bangladesh and Nepal; but unlike these two countries, there is no second chance for Burma drop-outs or adult illiterates, since non-formal education programs do not exist;
- Safe water supply in rural and urban areas (31% and 38% respectively) is half that for the developing world as a whole, and population increase outstrips current program expansion. Even urban water supplies remain untreated;
- Many children are orphaned, abandoned, trafficked, exploited in the labor force, institutionalized or jailed. Some are used in drug running, while others are targets of ethnic discrimination. In the civil war children have become victims or participants in armed conflicts, at times used as porters, human shields or human mine-sweepers.

The UNICEF report summarizes its findings in very stark words.

"These problems all have one thing in common, namely a chronic and malignant failure by the State to provide for the survival, protection and development needs of children. This failure is directly linked to the long drawn-out civil war. These problems also reflect the Government's persistent refusal, since 1962, to allocate any part of its foreign exchange earnings to the non-military social sector. In other words, the important component of social sector programs in health and nutrition, water and sanitation, education and social welfare for all these years was exclusively financed by donor contributions from governments and international organizations."

This UNICEF report highlights the fact that foreign investments under the present regime can never benefit the people. Despite relatively large amounts of foreign currency entering the country, malnutrition, early death, and a multitude of other problems will continue to plague the people and will, in fact, increase.

It has been no secret that since the military coup in 1988, the Burmese military has been busy upgrading its weaponry, and increasing its numbers. This is where money gained through foreign investments is going. Companies which are establishing department stores in Rangoon, building hotels, drilling for oil, or producing soft drinks like Pepsi are not able to improve the lives of the majority of the people. The Burmese people, especially the children, do not need Pepsi or modern consumer goods. They need medicines, good food, and better education.

One member of the opposition fighting against the military regime stated it this way, "They (foreign investors) are sleeping in bed with the dictators. Because of them, our people must suffer even worse than before. We will one day rid our country of the military dictatorship, and then it will be necessary to cancel all these foreign contracts and ask them to leave our country."



HUMAN RIGHTS

Mon Refugees

According to the Mon National Relief Committee, Mon refugees living in Thailand were given until April of this year to return to Burma. This was of great concern to them because they feared not only falling into the hands of the Burmese military regime, but since they would be in a very remote area, they also feared they would face starvation.

Several international organizations working with the refugees helped intervene and recently the Governor of Kanchanaburi Province (where most of the Mon refugees living in Thailand are located) agreed to allow the refugees to all be consolidated in a much more accessible area within Thailand. This will, of course, make it much easier to provide the food, medicines and other materials the refugees need for survival until they can safely return to their villages inside Burma.

The moving of these refugees to their new site has, however, not taken place without some problems. In a recent interview, a 48 year old Mon farmer with ten children described his experience as totally depressing. U Nyein said that he and his family had been living in Pan Hmaing village since he fled Burma over fifteen years ago. Some of his neighbors had been in Pan Hmaing village for more than twenty years already. In his part of the village, the population was about 300. All are farmers.

On March 10 of this year, Thai troops under the command of the local governor came into the village and ordered the people out. The people refused to leave since they had lived in the village for a long time already and all of their livelihood was situated in the village.

U Nyein claimed that the soldiers then forced the people out and began smashing the houses and the people's possessions. Those villagers who resisted were physically threatened, and some arrested. U Nyein's two sons, aged 24 and 19, were ar-

rested and taken to an unknown place. At the time of the interview, U Nyein still did not know the whereabouts of his two sons.

"Their (the soldiers) conduct was worse than robbers," U Nyein said, referring to the fact that the soldiers took much of the people's valuable possessions and their savings.

From the village, the people had to walk approximately ten miles to a refugee camp. They could not carry any of their possessions with them, so arrived destitute. From self-sufficient farmers, the villagers have now become homeless and penniless refugees.

Forced Labor

Mr. Maung Win a 33 year old trader from the Mon ethnic group, claims that villagers from Kawkaik Township in Karen State of Burma are being forced by the Burmese military to construct a road from Moulmein to the site of one of the drilling rigs of a foreign oil company. The construction, according to Maung Win, began in February of this year and every family from the villages in the area is forced to dig a ditch 8' by 2' by 4' each

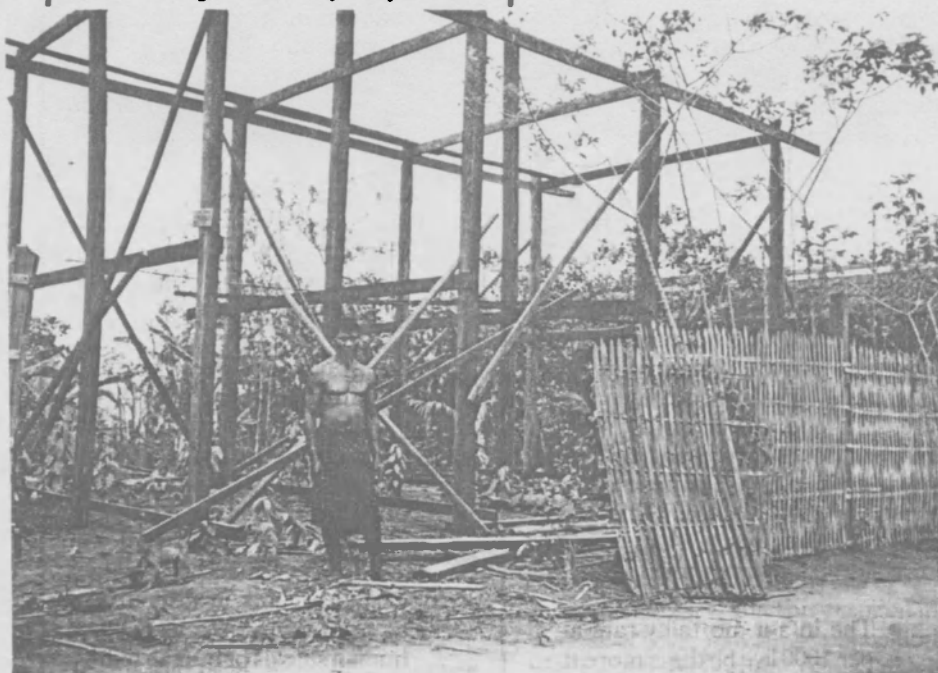
day. The earth from the ditch is spread on the road to raise it above flood level.

The majority of the laborers are women as the men have run into the jungle to escape being used as porters and mine sweepers by the Burmese military.

The families must provide their own food, and if they can not do the work demanded each day, they must hire other people to help them. Medicines are also not provided.

In February, Maung Win says that a foreigner visited the area to inspect the oil drilling site. He stayed for about one week, and Maung Win claims that at least 700 Burmese military soldiers provided protection for him during the visit.

The Kirkland oil company of England owns the oil concession in this area. Since there is little or no contact with villagers in areas where other foreign oil companies are working, research on possible forced labor in these areas is not presently possible.



U Nyein in front of the house he was forced to abandon

SAFE CAMP

On February 17, 1992, Thailand's Interior Ministry deputy permanent secretary for security affairs, Chaiwat Hutacharoen, officially opened a "Safe Camp" for Burmese student exiles living in Thailand. The camp is located in Ratchaburi Province near the Thai/Burma border. The official opening of this camp reflects the determination of the Thai government and military to place all Burmese student exiles into one confined area where they can be more easily watched and controlled.

The camp idea has been floating around Thai government and military circles for at least two years and is their response to international criticism about the way Burmese political exiles taking refuge in Thailand have been treated. Numerous reports from international human rights organizations have focused on the arrest, detention, occasional forced repatriation and alleged beatings of some of these political exiles. Thai officials then decided that placing the exiles in a "safe camp" where they would no longer face the threat of arrest and detention, but would be provided food, medication and perhaps educational possibilities, would not only stop international criticism, but would also be a way of dealing with a group of exiles who have often embarrassed the Thai government by staging anti-Burmese military actions in Bangkok. Thailand is one of the few countries which has never openly expressed criticism of the Burmese military's habitual violation of its people's human rights. Many Thai companies have also become deeply involved in economic profiteering in Burma through logging and fishing concessions.

Many international organizations as well as many embassies in Bangkok have expressed concern that the "safe camp" may not be all that safe, and have continually sought assurances from Thai officials that students held in the camp would be safe from harassment and sudden forced repatriation. On March 5, Thai officials of both the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Interior Ministry met with some of these organizations and embassies to pro-

vide details on the "safe camp". They assured those concerned that students would not be held in prison-like conditions, and that with special passes, they would be allowed to travel around Thailand for one week at a time. Although most international organizations would not be allowed to stay in the camp, the United Nations refugee office would be allowed to set up an office in the area to work with the students. Many of those who attended this meeting felt somewhat reassured about the safety of the students once they enter the camp.

However, most of the students still have serious questions. The Central Executive Committee of the Overseas Mon National Students Organization based in Bangkok, stated it this way, "We left our homeland with a single noble aim to sacrifice for our suffering people -- not to seek our self-refuge in a foreign country." In a recent interview they elaborated by stating that their purpose in coming to Thailand was not to continue their education, nor to seek some way of living safely and freely. They came with the purpose of continuing their struggle for democracy and justice in their homeland. They wish to return home as quickly as possible, and in order to do that, they must engage in political activities which can bring about democratic changes in Burma.

Such activities will be banned in the "safe camp". Mr. Chaiwat of the Interior Ministry made this clear when he stressed that the students will have some freedom of movement in the camp provided they do not engage in political activities which would affect Thai-Burmese relations. (Bangkok Post, February 18, 1992)

Student political exiles also fear that Thai policy on the operations of the camp might change once they enter the camp. They quote a proverb which says, "a child that has been burnt, fears the fire." Many of the students have already spent time in immigration jails, and their experiences in these jails has left them fearful. The relationship between the Thai military and the Burmese military is very cordial, and students fear that the Burmese military will influence how the

"safe camp" is run. This fear was heightened when some students who have already registered to enter the safe camp in order to acquire release from Thai immigration detention centers said that during the registration interview they were asked very detailed questions about their families and their political activities both inside Burma and after fleeing to the border. Some have claimed that their interview was also filmed on video by a man in a Thai military uniform. They also claim that the interviewer spoke excellent Burmese and was a Thai military captain who showed them photos of Rangoon and encouraged them to go back. With such a good relationship between the Thai and Burmese militaries, the students fear that this information will find its way into the files of the Burmese military intelligence, and thus endanger their families and friends back in Burma.

Another question concerns what will happen to those political exiles in Thailand who do not qualify as students. Of 102 exiles recently released from a detention center in Bangkok, only 96 were allowed by Thai officials to register as students. The other 6 were refused registration since they were either too old (over 30), or had very low education. Thai officials have said that all of those who do not register for the "safe camp" will be treated as illegal immigrants and subject to repatriation to Burma. Apparently Thai officials have stated that "those not accepted into safe areas to leave Thailand within 15 days". In March the UNHCR reported they have already accepted 1998 Burmese as 'persons of special concern' and are considering another 455. The UNHCR has refused recognition to 1,549. It is not clear how many of these 4,002 Burmese the Thai officials will accept as students to be placed in the "safe camp". What will happen to those who are not acceptable to the Thai authorities as students?

May 16 is the deadline for all Burmese political exiles to register with the Thai government. For these political exiles, many questions still remain to be answered.



SOCIAL ISSUES

Burmese Women in Thailand

The numbers of young women from Burma being lured into prostitution in Thailand is growing at an alarming rate. According to UNICEF (Possibilities for a United Nations Peace and Development Initiative for Myanmar, March 16, 1992), at least 40,000 young women and children have now been sold into Thailand's sex industry. They also claim that Burma, along with India and Thailand, now has the highest HIV incidence in Asia.

With little, or no treatment available for this disease, it can spread unhindered throughout the country, spurred on by more and more of these young women and children being infected in the brothels and tea houses of Thailand. Unconfirmed reports claim that women who escape the brothels and return to Burma are often killed if found to be HIV positive.

A recent letter, smuggled out of a brothel called the Grand Victoria Hotel in southern Thailand details some of the suffering these young women and children must endure. The letter was signed by 73 women, all claiming to be held in the hotel against their will.

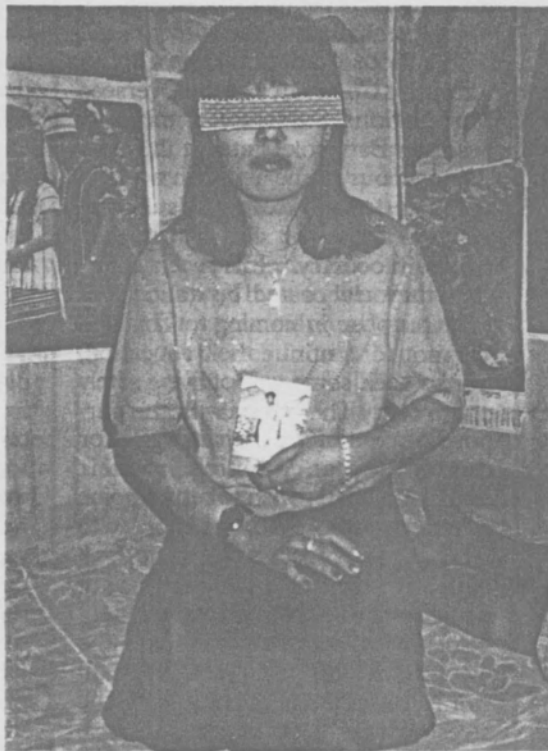
According to their letter, most of the women have already been working in the brothel for more than three years. Their letter states:

"They (brothel owners) forced and treated us like their slaves. We have to work all the day and night without rest. After we'd heard the news of death or illness of our relatives, we would like to go back, but they always rejected our leave and continued to force us back into slavery....Moreover, they fed us only a little amount of rice with tasteless boiled soup full of water. We haven't got enough sleep because they make us work till 2 a.m. and then awake us at 6 a.m. It's been more than 3 years that we had suffered such sleepless nights."

The psychological torture which these young women must face is enormous. Many of them come from eth-

nic villages deep in the interior of Burma. They can not speak Thai or English, and have no concept of the world outside their village. Suddenly being thrust into the life of sex trade, not only their physical, but also their psychological well-being is seriously threatened.

"There are 56 rooms and 100 Burmese girls working in Victoria Hotel. Only three of them had already escaped away from it up till now. We could not be patient on such a house arrest as beaten slaves. Some girls were being



threatened and tortured psychologically, so they became seriously depressed. It was the worst time when they got letters from their parents to come back home at once. Absolutely they can't. Their appeals were faced with harsh response. In order to relax their present tension, they drank a lot and even used narcotic drugs. Such drunken girls were not only beaten mercilessly with 2 1/2 inch-wide wooden sticks, but cut out of food and drink for a few days. Because of having been beaten with those big sticks, some girls got swollen bruises and injury all over the body and even vomited blood."

Helping the women escape the brothels is no easy task. One Thai nongovernment organization has attempted to help some Burmese women caught in the sex trade in Burma, and although they have had limited success, they face many threats and harassments. Since local police and officials may be economically linked to the local sex trade, it is often extremely difficult to get them to take legal action, or to press charges once the women may be freed. The Vice Squad based in Bangkok has provided assistance in helping many of these unfortunate women, but even their help has its limitations.

"During last June, the brothel men hid some of us in order to avoid the arrest of the Crime Suppression Police from Bangkok. The police raided the Victoria Hotel and arrested 16 Burmese girls from it. After a chain of interrogation, those police expatriated us to Kawthaung (on the Burmese side) by boat. But we were not lucky as in the middle of the river, Victoria Hotel boss Taw We, Wida Tauk and boss Phinai, who came along with us in our boat in disguise, bribed the boat driver to turn back to Ranong. By this way we had to return as their slaves. Whenever we ask for our freedom or release, we are beaten with big sticks till unconscious. By this situation, we no longer dare to open our lips again."

Young women in a situation of despair. Members of the human family, bought and sold in a human market. Their pleas for help are the cries of at least 40,000 other young women and children from Burma who have been snatched from their village world and thrust into the world of sexual slavery.

"Unless you take some initiatives to save us, we will be diminishing in the darkness of death. We can't stay any longer in this place because it has no hope for release - even worse than the prison or jail, which has at least a chance for release. We can endure no longer. We have great desire to see our parents as soon as possible."



REFUGEES

News about the suffering of Rohingya refugees fleeing the Arakan State of Burma and entering Bangladesh is terribly disturbing. Slowly the world is awakening to the realities of Burma today, and it is sad that so many people must suffer before international action slowly starts to unwind. The plight of the Rohingyas is a repetition of what is also happening to the Karen, Kachin and many other ethnic minorities inside Burma. It must be brought to an end! The following report was written by a friend of B.U.R.M.A. who recently visited the Burma-Bangladesh border. The report is shocking and demands international action. Names have been changed to protect the villagers.

Arakan Atrocities Continue; Refugee Numbers Rise

Rape, murder, public torture and kidnapping continue to be reported as over 205,000 Burmese refugees have officially arrived and registered for relief in Bangladesh. The numbers continue to grow as Burmese Muslims, known as Rohingyas, cluster in twelve camps along the 92 kilometer road from Cox's Bazar to Teknaf. Tens of thousands of others have declined to register.

With accounts of constant pressure by Rangoon troops to leave their villages for Bangladesh, refugees arrived in numbers sometimes as high as 10,000 per day a month ago. The rate slackened to an average of 5,000 and then 3,000 per day, coming to a complete halt during the visit to Arakan of UN Under Secretary General Jan Eliasson the first week of April. His trip, to investigate claims of human rights abuses against Rohingyas, is widely believed to have prompted the Burmese junta to stop forced evacuations briefly. But a flow of 3,000 per day had resumed within a week of Eliasson's departure, and reports of renewed mass killings during prayer and gunfire assaults on departing boats were being filed with Bangladesh authorities.

Patterns of slorc violence against Burmese Muslims have become standardized across western Arakan State, including the abduction of

males for forced labor without food, water or rest, and the routine rape of women and girls in villages. Public torture for trying to avoid labor, murder for defending family members, forced destruction of mosques and confiscation of some or all farm products are commonly alleged in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships, from which most of the fleeing Rohingyas arrive.

In recent interviews with Asia Watch, a New York-based human rights group, women described their homes as accessed by groups or single military rapists "every day, every night." They are frequently abused in their houses, then often tied together in groups and forced to make long hikes to camps. There they are raped by officers and soldiers, sometimes for days without rest or food.

Many don't survive. "I found my neighbor girl's body myself," said Den Kratua, 45, a widow from Buthidaung. "She had been dumped just outside our village, naked, and she had bled to death from rape. Her face was bitten through on both cheeks." The girl was only 13.

"We were separated by beauty, in a group of 120 women from my village," explained another victim, Sin Dar, aged 25, from Ludengpara village. "We were made to walk about eight hours to the camp, our hands tied in back, so we couldn't carry our children. The soldiers grew tired of their crying, and began discarding them along the way, in the jungle." Her 18 month-old baby tossed by soldiers onto the roadside, Sin Dar was held at Taraing camp and raped for seven days, only allowed to receive food once from villagers, on the fourth day. After a week her father was able to raise the ransom asked by the military: one month's average salary. They never found her daughter, and Sin Dar doesn't know how many of the 120 women survived that ordeal.

Abductions of men and boys have been for labor on mosque demolition, new housing construction for non-Muslims on Muslim farms, canal building, leveling of hills and hauling of military supplies as forced porters. But much of the forced labor in Maungdaw and Buthidaung

townships has centered around a major four-lane highway begun by SLORC a year and a half ago. Originating at Akyab City, it now extends nearly to the Bangladesh border at Tombro, and has been the scene of innumerable deaths of Muslim laborers from starvation, exhaustion, exposure, beatings and complications from resulting injuries and illness. No one interviewed had ever seen medical treatment offered to sick or injured laborers. Dozens of men during Asia Watch interviews spoke of witnessing coworker deaths: even after 18 hours of work in the heat, "we would be beaten with bamboo clubs if we were spotted trying to drink water from roadside marshes," one man remembered. "I once saw a soldier urinate into a cup and offer it to a worker who asked for water."

Shelter for forced labor crews varies from area to area. In some regions, workers are made to sleep on the spot where they stop work, be it a gravel pit or cow field, without cover. Abdul Trahin of Maungdaw said only 2 1/2 hours of sleep were allowed under the labor crew guards at Kilarbil camp, and he knew of no man in his village of 600 families who had not been forced to serve. Din Ahmed, 40, of Boulibazar in Maungdaw, served for two years, with only short breaks and "without even a cigarette as pay," before escaping to Bangladesh, he says. The only food they were allowed was what they could carry from home when they were taken, and thereafter only food offered by villagers near their work sites. At night he was confined in a camp, to a windowless room with no light, and over 100 laborers inside. They were forced to sit up all night. "Sometimes men were so sick, they died in the night and were tossed out in the morning. I saw men die at night from beatings they received during the day," he said.

By far the greatest number of mass deaths witnessed was during forced portering, the hauling by men and boys of impossibly large loads over great distances for the military. Twenty year-old Abolha of Singdaung village in Buthidaung was among 500 classmates who were surrounded at

their Islamic school and forced to haul loads into steep country for eight days without food, water, or sleep. "They were falling from the cliffs in exhaustion and hunger," he remembers. "Slow ones were beaten and kicked over the edge. In the end we were grabbing leaves from the side of the trail and eating them." Only 150 of his 500 friends survived the week.

The Burma regime claims Arakan Muslims are "foreigners," and issues identification as such. Claimed 50 year-old Abdol Thokun, of Kandaung village in Buthidaung, "For half a century I have worked and farmed my land, yet I've been a 'tourist' in my own homeland, according to my Burmese I.D." The Rohingyas say they have been told by authorities to go "home" to Bangladesh for at least the past ten years, but treatment has been steadily more brutal since Arakan province voters widely supported the election

of Aung San Suu Kyi in 1990. Since then, abuses have intensified, their chickens, cows, rice and other crops taken on demand by the ever-increasing number of soldiers in their villages and townships. "There isn't enough left for us, even when we are allowed time off from forced labor to harvest or plant," stated Seden, 45, of Maungdaw. "They just keep telling us this is not our land, and if we don't like it, go to Bangladesh."

Solutions for the plight of the Burmese Muslims are in short supply: meanwhile, the numbers of new arrivals continue to rise. One great source of tension on the Bangladesh/Burma border is the upcoming rainy season. With makeshift shelters of rags, branches and sticks for the majority of refugees, others under plastic tarps and corrugated plastic roofing, all fear the mudslides inherent to this type of soil when rains

begin. As one Bangladeshi official put it, "The ones on the flat land will be under water, and the ones on the slopes will be in landslides. There are bound to be more deaths."

With only a month to wait before the rains, the Rohingyas live in relief and gratitude to the Bangladesh government for their immediate safety, but uncertainty for their future.



On April 16, the AFP reported that Saudi Prince Khaled Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz had condemned Burma's treatment of its Muslim population and said the United Nations should take action similar to that which led to the liberation of Kuwait. (The Nation, Thursday April 16, 1992)

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

AIR MAIL