B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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CONTENTS

Page.....2
Civil War - Karen and Kachin States

Page.....3
Economics - The economic outlook for this year

Page.....4-5
The civil service in Burma

Page.....6
Politics - Slorc's strategy to win international support

Page.....7
International News - Asian Human Rights Commission, Canadian Friends of Burma, Burmese Relief Center- Japan, International Burma Campaign

Page.....8
News in Brief - Hong Kong Investment, Reopening Universities and Colleges, Stopping Logging Concessions, UN's Observation on Muslim Refugees.

Civil war has destroyed the lives of many ethnic minorities

In this issue, B.U.R.M.A. looks briefly at the recent "reforms" initiated by Slorc. The major issue facing Burma continues to be the on-going civil war. If sincere efforts by the Slorc are not taken to end this war, all reforms initiated can not bring peace to Burma. (See **Politics** page 6)

P.O. Box 1076, Silom Post Office, Bangkok 10504 Thailand

CIVIL WAR

On the 28th of April, the Slorc regime's spokesman, Brig-Gen Maung Hla, abruptly announced on the state run radio that the military's present major offensive against the Karen State had been halted in order to show national spirit and good will. This announcement came following Slorc's failure to capture Manerplaw, headquarters of the Karen National Union, by their deadline of May 27 (Burmese Armed Forces Day). However Slorc did not make any statement concerning their offensives against the ethnic Kachin Independent Army.

Even though the official statement was made public, Burmese troops continued efforts to build motor roads leading to Manerplaw, and also continued their efforts to resupply ammunition and food to troops in HtreeParWeeKyo (Sleeping Dog Mountain) near Mannerplaw. However, Slorc did withdraw some of their troops from other less strategic hill tops surrounding Mannerplaw.

About 7,000 prisoner from the various prisons inside Burma have been used as conscripted laborers for constructing roads and for carrying heavy supplies to the troops in the area during the military's dry season offensive. In this effort, only prisoners facing criminal sentences were used rather than political prisoners and dissident students. Moreover, civilians from the slums and even from the relocated (satellite) towns in suburban Rangoon were rounded up and forced to be conscripted laborers and human mine sweepers. Since the start of the dry season offensive, at least 300 prisoners have died after being caught in the exchange of fire between Slorc's troops and ethnic Karen guerrillas.

Until the first of April, hundreds of refugees were arriving at the Thai border every day from the various interior areas and even some of them came from the Slorc controlled areas. The reason most of the people gave for fleeing from the government areas is that Slorc's soldiers charge them at least 200 kyats per month up to 5,000 kyats to be exempted from serving as a porter. One family recently interviewed was a Burmese fishing family of seven who came from south of Ye town. They said the fines demanded were more than what they could earn. One farmer said he was supposed to pay a rice quota of 100 tins compared with 50 tins last year. He does not even grow as much as 100 tins.

One relief agency working closely with the refugees said that the border population must be at least 70,000 by now. As always it is difficult to predict what the numbers will be in the future. The rains are still four to eight weeks away so it is expected that refugee numbers will certainly increase before than but hopefully to not more than 80,00, a figure the relief programs could manage. We can not rule out a major influx of new refugees the relief agency said.

As international attention focused on the national convention in Rangoon and its promises of a new constitution, the Slorc could launch an even more vicious dry season campaign against the Karen bases in a final attempt to wipe out this constant threat to their total control over the country.

The 28 April announcement by Slorc raises questions as to whether or not an end to the offensive has really finally arrived. However, events during early April suggested that the Slorc regime was launching an even more intensive offensive against the ethnic Kachin civilians. Villages have been forcefully relocated or burnt down. On 5 April 1992, Slorc's army regiment No.38 and 109 infantry unit entered Prang Hu-Dung village in Bhamo District and brutally shot Bazooka rockets into the local catholic church while the villagers were attending Sunday service. One nun and 8 children were reported to have been killed in the attack and many more wounded.

On 13 April the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) stated that in the present offensives against the Kachin guerrillas, China has been assisting the Burmese army. Chinese trucks from Yunam province have been spotted carrying ammunition for the Burmese army to mop up Kachin resistance. A member of the KIO said that China has not denied the KIO statements about China's involvements.

Although the withdrawal of some Burmese troops from the Mannerplaw area, the release of a small number of political prisoners inside Burma, and the promise to call a national convention in the near future seems to indicate a softening stance by Slorc, most Burma watchers are far from optimistic. According to one person very close to the Karen struggle, the moves could simply be another ploy of Slorc to divert international attention away from the border war. It will take another six months before the national convention Slorc has promised to call could be convened. That would be at the start of the next dry season. As international attention focused on the national convention in Rangoon and its promises of a new constitution, the Slorc could launch an even more vicious dry season campaign against the Karen bases in a final attempt to wipe out this constant threat to their total control over the country. If that happens, will the international community be ready to mobilize the pressure needed to help force Slorc to back off? The answer to that depends on just how effectively Slorc can not manipulate the international perspective of the issues facing Burma today.

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ECONOMICS

On the first of April 1992, Slorc announced that for fiscal year 1992-93, the state has targeted the GDP at 53,866m kyats (about US$8977.6 million at the official exchange rate). The overall growth rate is aimed at 5.8% but at the same time the economic deficit is about US$1 billion. Total exports are targeted at about 4,236 million kyats (about US$706 million) while imports are expected to be about 5,748 million kyats (US$958 million). It is generally accepted that there is a large discrepancy between the figures stated by Slorc and the economic realities of the country.

Reports indicate that about 16.7 million of the total national population of 41.7 million are living well below the poverty line. This figure will continue to increase as the internal security defense budget is mopping up 20.8 billion kyats (US$3.4 billion) per year. This is an increase of 17% from the 1991-92 budget of 17.8 billion, 32% from the 1990-91 budget and 27% of the 1989-90 budget. This is the first time these figures have been made public since the military took over total state power more than thirty years ago.

While the military junta has claimed that they will attain a 11.0% growth in the industrial sector this year, the country is facing many shortages. Even in the capital city of Rangoon, civilians face shortages of electricity almost daily. Family-owned portable electric generators are becoming essential for the people of Rangoon in order to insure that they have regular and reliable electricity. These shortages of electric power also will have an on-going effect on state industrial developments. The plans of the state to increase electrical supplies so that Burma is self sufficient in power never seem to materialize. The old Law Pi Ta hydro power station located in the Kayah State remains the only major distributor of electricity for the state. Despite the serious problems, the Slorc's 1991-92 economic report did not indicate the actual needs of the nation for electric power nor development plans in this area. It only stated that present power production is 2478 million kilowatt-hours.

Meanwhile, nine foreign oil companies are working in Burma under joint economic ventures with the junta. They are carrying out extensive oil exploration operations both on shore and off shore, but have not yet discovered any major oil wells. Even though they have discovered some gas, the process of developing these wells to meet the needs of Burma will take at least three more years.

The nine oil companies have each made deposits of at least US5$ million for their contracts with the Slorc regime which means benefits for the Burmese military even though no major oil discoveries have yet been made. These deposits seem not to have any benefit on the lives of the local population who must now pay almost US$13 (at the official exchange rate) for one gallon of gas on the illegal market as there are severe shortages of fuel on the legal market. It is this illegal market which supports the transportation services throughout the country.

The regime has set an impossible target of 5.9% growth in the agriculture sector. Last year the worst flood in 50 years hit Burma's major rice producing area, badly affecting the country's rice supplies. The flood left 3,500,000 people homeless and destroyed 315,000 acres of farmland along with 1,481 villages.

The agriculture sector has further been hurt by the on-going civil war. Clashes between armed Karen guerrillas and Slorc forces in the delta region of Burma broke out in October of last year and have continued through February of 1992. Slorc military forces have responded by relocating an unknown number of Karen villages suspected of having contact with the guerrillas and cutting off all transportation routes into and out of these areas. This seriously hampers rice production in this area which is one of the more productive agriculture areas in the country. Serious starvation is expected in the camps set up to hold the relocated villagers as they can no longer plant and harvest their crops. The problem will become most serious as the rainy season comes the middle of May.

International relief agencies working along the Thai/Burma border also note that an increasing number of refugees are farmers from deeper inside Burma. They say they are coming to the border as they can not produce enough to pay the taxes demanded by local Slorc officials. Their numbers suggest that the rural economy is rapidly collapsing.

As the economy of the population declines, Slorc has been working hard to increase their foreign exchange reserves. In 1990, for example, foreign reserves increased from US$150 million to US$550 million. This increase can be attributed, for the most part, to the Foreign Investment Law which was issued in 1989. Many foreign companies took advantage of this law to invest in lucrative deals which simply placed more cash in the pockets of the Burmese military. The law allows for two types of investments. The first is an investment in which the foreign company holds one hundred percent of the capital invested. The second type is a joint venture made between a foreign investor and a citizen of Burma with the share of the foreign investment being at least 35% of total capital. This law brought about a quick increase of foreign exchange starting with US$159 million in 1989 and increasing to US$310 in 1990. As of September 1991, the Slorc regime had given permission to 1,089 limited companies, 121 foreign companies and branch offices and 658 partnerships.

Despite this increase in the flow of cash into the country, there has been no positive development in the lives of the people. This is mainly due to the extremely high expenses the Slorc must pay for internal security and for their defence budget which is needed to suppress the democratic movement and the struggle of the ethnic groups for autonomy.

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THE CIVIL SERVICE

When the British colonial power annexed Burma in 1885, the economic structures of Burma were far behind the modern world. So were the administrative and educational systems. Hence the British government had to rely on British and Indian citizens to fill various positions in the civil service.

At that time, "The immediate need was to create a class of people who could help the British rule." (Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma and India, Some Aspects of Intellectual Life Under Colonialism, Page 24) The educational system introduced by the British government was adjusted to supply the judges, magistrates, police and revenue officials required for the basic needs of the new general administration. For the auxiliary services such as engineers, doctors and so on, where special training was required, the British government found that importing foreigners was much easier and cheaper than training the indigenous people.

Thus the colonial government successfully established an effective and stable bureaucratic machinery which proved instrumental and effective in their attempts to subjugate the people of Burma.

Under that machinery each official derived his authority through his immediate superior and so on through a chain of officials up to the heads of departments called directors. Every official was subjected to the prescribed rules in all his activities. Officials were transferred frequently.

Young Burmans were encouraged to recognize that those who wished to get on in the ranks of the British Empire had to learn English and acquire the rudiments of a Western-styled education.

This process of colonization began in 1825, soon after the first Anglo-Burmese war when parts of Burma, namely Arakan (Rakhine) and Tennensarim (Taninthayi), were yielded to the British. The process was so successful that Arthur Phayre, the Chief Commissioner of British Burma, in his report to the Home Affairs Department of the Government of India in 1884, wrote "The people of Burma as yet know very little of the British government except as a police, a revenue, and a judicial power."

Contemplating the vast market in China, British India adopted a policy to develop the material resources of Burma through trade and economic enterprises. Before colonial powers came in, Burma was a closed society totally cut off from the outside world with the scope of its economy very limited for self-sufficiency only.

As the process of modern establishment began, the consequences of this seclusion cropped up encouraging an influx of foreigners who controlled almost all the trade and economic enterprises. Thus the economic power went into the hands of foreigners; namely Europeans, Indians and Chinese. For the younger generations of Burma who were educated in modern schools, the best way, and the only way for a better life, was to join the general civil services. This created a favorable situation for the British authorities to select the most brilliant, humble and industrious young persons for appointment into the appropriate positions according to the choice of the authorities. Hence the civil services became one of the most reliable machines of the British government.

By the turn of the century, as patriotism grew in Burma, numerous young Burmans were involved in political movements which were influenced by Western political philosophy. But the civil services kept far away from politics because the British government proved to be too sensitive concerning cases where its civil service employees were involved in politics. Any civil service personnel who were found to be related to any political movement were sure to be fired. Not only the personnel themselves, but if anyone from their families were found to be involved in politics, they would certainly be fired. Limited numbers of positions in the civil service and the soaring numbers of educated unemployed pushed the civil servants into ever more vulnerable conditions. Thus the civil servant in Burma became one of the most loyal sections of the people. But loyalty was to the "existing government." Whenever there was a change of government, the civil servants promptly shifted their loyalty to the new government.

J.S. Furnivall, a respected British scholar, wrote in his book An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma, "...after the British government left Burma the officials were screened and found loyal to the Japanese; after the war they were again screened and found loyal to their former British masters, and on the attainment of independence they, in general, loyally accepted service under the Burmese government." (Furnivall, J.S., Preface to the third addition of An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma, 1957)

Before WWII the loyalty of civil servants to the British government was almost 100%. But after the war some powerful organizations of civil servants emerged. The Ministerial Services' Organization, All Burma Teachers' Organization, All Burma Medical Practitioners' Organization, and the All Burma Fire Brigade were active in their struggle for their rights as well as for the independence of the nation. All of them were affiliated with the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL), the political front led by national leader General Aung San.

In August 1946 all these organizations took part in the general strike which was personally led by Aung San. After independence some went underground while some disintegrated voluntarily or did as instructed by the AFPFL government. During the late fifties the civil services organizations were reorganized according to their lines of employment. The Civil Services Union was the broadest, but it was not as strong as the labor organization. Though there were some small scale token strikes, mostly demanding an increase in salaries, fairness in appointments, promotions and transfer of employees etc., nationwide strikes did not occur during the period from 1948-62. Even so, during the reign of the caretaker government led by general Ne win (1958-60), a number of leaders of the civil service

organizations were arrested (together with leftist politicians and student leaders) and tortured. They were then sent to the prison on Cocos Island about 400 kilometers from the nearest coast to be kept there for one year.

During that period (1948-62), civil servants were not overtly involved in party politics. All the civil service organizations enjoyed independence from party politics. That admirable precedence was totally destroyed by Ne Win and his generals after their infamous coup in 1962. On March 28, 1964, the Revolutionary Council, which was the council of generals formed by Ne Win, issued a declaration on national unity prohibiting all organizations and political parties. Later they founded the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) and invited all the civil servants to join the BSPP. Although BSPP membership was not compulsory, it became the most reliable immunity certificate for the civil servants which could save them even from disciplinary actions for their misconduct. Party membership was also a reliable prop for their promotion. There were numerous cases where non-party officials, however qualified and zealous in carrying out their duties, were overtaken by their juniors. Thus BSPP party membership became an all purpose license.

In 1966 the Workers' Council, later to be called the Workers' Asiayone (Organization) was founded and most of the civil servants and manual laborers became members. Nearly all of the leaders came from the military and the policy and programs of the Workers' Asiayone were prescribed by the BSPP. Hence the organization was simply an instrument of the BSPP to control the civil servants and workers.

On June 6, 1974, workers and administrative staff members of almost all factories in Burma (all factories were State owned because the military regime confiscated all private businesses in 1963-64) launched a nationwide strike demanding an increase in salary and improvement of work sites. After a few days Ne Win sent armed soldiers to crush the boycott and they massacred more than 100 workers, several hundred others were wounded and thousands were arrested and imprisoned. From that time on workers and civil servants never attempted again to organize another boycott. They decided that the best way to solve the problems created by the rising prices of consumer goods was to steal what ever they could. Everyday workers as well as civil servants would sneak a few sheets of paper or a number of pencils or whatever else they could out of their offices. On the other hand, they had to make some small money from their clients so that tips became a must for everyone who had an occasion to deal with any government office. Without tips even a simple case could take months, if not years. Eventually money became as powerful as BSPP membership in determining status in the society. Corruption broadened to every corner of Burmese society. Office work was left unattended. The maxim, "No work. No Problem. No danger." became ever more popular among the civil servants.

Military officers were sent to various civil departments with the assignment to tackle corruption. However, within a few years they became champions of corruption. The civilian officials lost their life long ambitions to become the heads of respective departments, managing directors, director generals, or directors because these posts were reserved for military personnel only.

When the Political Pension Law was introduced on October 18, 1980, the entire administrative system turned from bad to worse. A person in civil service had to work for more than twenty years to become entitled to a full pension. But a person who became a council member of any level - township or divisional or central - became qualified for a full pension after a mere four years as a council member. This new law further damaged the already spoiled mentality of the services personnel.

Still small money obtained from tips or stealing various materials could not solve the financial problems of the broad masses of civil servants. Having no legal organizations to represent them and having no other means to present their grievances, dissatisfaction accumulated year after year.

When students protested the BSPP regime's demonetization order in September of 1987, the civil servants silently supported them since the students' demand to retract the demonetization decree was identical to their aspirations. When the 1988 uprising broke out in August, the government employees refrained themselves from taking part because they feared retaliation by the regime. But when Dr. Maung Maung became president on August 19 and declared that a plebiscite would be conducted, they were delighted. Their delight did not last long because the BSPP party officials distributed hundreds of placards and banners to every factory and administrative office and department to be posted. The banners and placards said, "We support the one party system!" However those placards and banners backfired and were the last and final thrust which emboldened the civil servants to support openly and to take part in the nationwide uprising for democracy. Employees from each and every office, even the employees of the state council office, BSPP headquarters office and war office took to the streets. The entire government machinery came to a stand still.

It is note worthy that some offices continued to function throughout the struggle, not for the government, but for the welfare of the public. The Post and Telegraph Office functioned without any trouble, apparently more smoothly than before. The Electric Power Corporation was functioning so smoothly that there was not a single blackout during the period of one and a half months during the uprising (in Rangoon, blackouts were common with two or three or even more blackouts every week). The civil servants have proven that they are real servants of the people. They have proven that the corruption that occurred everywhere in Burma during the last three decades is due to the system of government and the political system, and that the mentality of the civil servants depends on the general situation of the country.

They are now being relentlessly punished by the Slorc for showing their genuine competence and for demonstrating their aspirations during the uprising. Tens of thousands have lost their jobs. Thousands have been imprisoned. Many more are now kept under constant surveillance.

POLITICS

On April 24, 1992, Slorc issued Declaration No 10/92 which stated that General Saw Maung had been replaced by General Than Shwe as Prime Minister of Burma. The announcement was signed by Major-General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the State Law and Order Restoration Council. General Than Shwe was also appointed Chairman of Slorc and Defence Services Commander-in-Chief. At almost the same time, Slorc also announced that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's family had been given permission to visit her after more than two years total isolation, and that the military campaign against Mannerplaw would be ended (see Civil War article in this issue).

Declaration number 11/92 also stated that Slorc would carry out the following measures: -

a) Of the persons arrested and detained politically, those for whom there are no reasons to endanger the security of the State, will be released promptly;

b) In accordance with the State Law and Order Restoration Council Declaration No 1/90, dated the 27th July, 1990, the State Law and Order Restoration Council will, in respect of the convening of the national Convention, meet and co-ordinate within two months, with the leaders of the Hluttaw (Parliament) Representatives of political parties existing lawfully and individual Hluttaw Representatives;

c) The State Law and Order Restoration Council will convene the National Convention within six months in order to lay down the basic principles for the drafting of a firm and stable Constitution, after meeting and coordinating as mentioned in subclause (b) above.

These sudden "reconciliatory" moves by Slorc caught many people by surprise and raised the question as to whether or not Slorc might, indeed, be changing its policy, softening its stand and opening the way for a peaceful solution to the long civil conflict in Burma. Yet there are very few, if any, Burmese who seem to take these moves seriously. One older Burmese man who has watched changes taking place in Burma for many decades now explained this skepticism as follows:

"There are rumors that we ethnic people are going to secede from the Union. If we wanted to do so we would have done it in 1948-49 when the government was in a helpless situation. We are going to submit our resolution to the parliament. That resolution would be our proposal to be discussed in the parliament."

These were the words of Sao Hkun Hkio, a famous and influential Shan State leader, when he explained the situation to Prime Minister U Nu. He and another ethnic leader, Sao Wunna of Kayah State, together accompanied U Nu on his way back home. They had just left the Burma Broadcasting Service building in Rangoon after attending the first day session of a two-day conference of ethnic leaders and prominent politicians. The day was March 1, 1962.

The conference had been called by U Nu with the intention of learning the real aspirations and demands of the ethnic peoples which could provide his government with valuable data for amending the constitution.

But U Nu's intentions were never to be realized. Barely three hours after Sao Hkun Hkio and Sao Wunna left U Nu, a detachment of troops arrived at U Nu's house and took him away. That day, a group of army officers, led by General Ne Win, launched a coup claiming that they were doing so in order to save the Union from disintegration. From that moment the civil war, which was already slowly growing in the country, began spreading rapidly to all parts of the Union resulting in an enormous loss of life and property of the ethnic minority villagers living on the edges of Burma.

The collapse of the country's economic base led to the 1988 uprising in which thousands of urban people were killed. The struggle of the people for democracy continued with a vast majority of the people electing the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, despite the military's constant attempts to manipulate the elections and destroy the opposition.

Despite the landslide victory of the people, Slorc has continued to refuse to hand over power, pushing the people's struggle more and more underground.

In such a situation, what is the possibility that Slorc will now follow a path of reconciliation with its own people, let alone the various ethnic organizations?

If Slorc is truly interested in national reconciliation, they must show their genuine concern by executing a number of positive moves such as immediately declaring a total cease fire with all ethnic groups, opening honest peace talks with these groups, releasing all political prisoners, retracting the curfew and other oppressive decrees, to mention a few. This should be followed by dialogue with the opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on how to transfer power to the winners of the 1990 elections. Only at this point can talk of holding a national convention to draw up a new constitution be seriously considered.

The people of Burma, as well as much of the international community, have seen many unsubstantial "peace" overtures from the BSPP such as the peace negotiations in 1963 which collapsed after six months, the formation of an Interim Unity Advisory Board in November 1968 whose advice was totally ignored by the BSPP, the transfer of power from the military to civilian rule in 1974 in which the military leaders, including Ne Win, simply took off their uniforms, the multi-party general elections in 1990 after which the leaders of the victorious NLD party were imprisoned and parliament was never convened. All of these actions proved to simply be strategies by the military to confuse and further manipulate the people. With these experiences behind them, the people of Burma will be very reluctant to place much hope on the present promises of Slorc.

Other Burma watchers point out the following issues:

1) By replacing Saw Maung and immediately suggesting that reforms are taking place, Slorc is trying to convince the people of Burma and the

(continued as POLITICS on page 7)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Asian Human Rights Commission

The Asian Human Rights Commission based in Hong Kong has produced a campaign kit to help groups and organizations who wish to support the movement for peace and human rights in Burma. The professionally produced kit contains a chronology of political and economic events in Burma from 1962 to 1989, a sheet giving facts and figures on Burma's economy and another sheet giving some suggestions for a Burma campaign. Two post cards and a large poster are also a part of the kit. This is an excellent resource for anyone who wants to know more about Burma and who wants to get creatively and effectively involved in supporting the peace movement for Burma. It can be ordered from: Burma Campaign, c/o Asian Human Rights Commission, 4th Floor, 57 Peking Road, Kowloon Hong Kong.

Canadian Friends of Burma

The Canadian Friends of Burma, based in Ottawa, have been active in trying to bring about changes in the Canadian governments' position regarding Petro-Canada's investments in oil exploration in Burma. They are also encouraging the Canadian government to recognize the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). These actions are carried out together with leaders of other national associations in Canada including labor, teachers, churches and international development agencies. They have also raised funds to help with medical work along the Thai/Burma border.

Burmese Relief Center -- Japan

The BRC Japan recently carried out two demonstrations calling for Thai government officials to have mercy towards refugees from Burma, and calling for an international boycott of Thai Airways as a means of pressuring the Thai government to withdraw its support of the Burmese military regime. They are also planning to hold a Festival for Burmese Democracy during which they will try to raise more Japanese awareness of the suffering of the people in Burma and the role which Japanese investments plays in keeping Slorc alive.

International Burma Campaign (IBC)

The International Burma Campaign has been established in Washington DC by human rights and peace groups from many countries around the world. The IBC will try to help coordinate international campaigns. They are actively promoting the Pepsi boycott, supporting the campaign to free Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, distributing information and encouraging many other activities.

POLITICS

(continued from page 6)

international community that the person responsible for the past three and a half years of failure was Saw Maung himself. In fact, Saw Maung was a powerless man controlled by Ne Win and Khin Nyunt (Ne Win's hand-picked associate), both of whom are still in power and still controlling what happens in Burma. Few people expect anything new under Than Shwe who may also be a powerless frontman for those who really control the power in Burma.

2) Slorc has "ended" their military campaign against Mannerplaw because they were unable to take the base in March as they declared they would, because they have suffered extremely heavy loses and the morale of their troops is very low, and because the rains are starting which will mean more difficulties for them to keep supplies rolling in to their forward positions. Karen forces around Mannerplaw also report that Slorc troops have only been withdrawn from positions which are not so important strategically. It is not clear if the total number of Slorc troops in the area has actually decreased or if they have just been relocated to nearby positions.

It seems quite clear that Slorc will probably continue their Mannerplaw campaign as soon as the next dry season begins in about six months. This will coincide with the opening of the national convention in Rangoon. If Slorc can focus international attention on Rangoon and this national convention, they might be able to carry out their offensive against Mannerplaw with less pressure against them from the international community.

3) The release of political prisoners by Slorc can only be taken seriously if they release all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Presently they seem to be releasing only those who are much older and in weak health, or those already dismissed from their parties. Without the release of the major opposition leaders, a national convention can not draw up a constitution which meets the requirements of the opposition, and more importantly, the needs of the indigenous minorities.

4) A national convention and the writing of a new constitution must be superseded by talks with the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) in which the grievances of the ethnic minorities can be aired and efforts be made to deal with the root causes of the four-decade-old civil war. This can only be done when Slorc calls a total cease fire with all the ethnic minorities and withdraws their troops from these ethnic areas.

Shortly after the 1990 elections, the winning NLD party suggested that the 1947 constitution, drawn up while Britain still had a presence in Burma, be used to govern the country until stability allowed the writing of a new document to meet the present realities of the country. Slorc leaders scuffed at the idea saying, "how can a constitution for an independent state written under a colonial government, be reliable?" Political activists in Burma today are asking, "How can a constitution written under a dictatorship be a reliable and democratic one?"

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hong Kong Investment

The Hong Kong based "Winner Co. Ltd" formed a joint venture with Slorc on 7 April 1992. Total investments for the JV is Burmese Currency Kyat 10,400,000 (about US$1,733,333). Address of the " Winner Co." is:

Mr. Yue Kwok Hung,Director,
2nd Floor, East Ocean Center,
98, Granville Rd.,
Kowloon, Hong Kong.

- Note: Please send protest letters to the above address.

Source: (WPD-9/4/92.)

Reopening of Universities and Colleges

Burma's military intelligence chief, Maj-Gen Khin Nyunt, announced on 7 April, that the universities and colleges would open again. The announcement was made at the meeting of the "Education Committee" which was formed on September 2. All the universities and colleges were shut down for the second time since December last year because of the students' anti-Slorc demonstrations. Khin Nyunt also announced the new education laws set up to insure that the students' anti-Slorc movements would not start up again. He added that Slorc had already approved the opening of a sperate university for the University Correspondent Course.

Source: (WPD-8/4/92.)

Stopping Logging Concessions

Slorc's minister of Forestry, Lt-Gen Chit Shwe stated that "as soon as the contracts date expire, timber extraction work at extraction camps (of Thai logging concessions) in the border area should be stopped". He did not elaborate, but perhaps this is due to tensions in Thai-Burma border relationships stemming from Slorc's accusations that local Thai military commanders are helping the ethnic Karen resistance.

Source: (WPD-8/4/92.)

UN's Observation on Muslim Refugees

On 2nd April, an UN delegation led By Mr. Jan Eliasson, UN Under Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, arrived in Rangoon to observe the Muslim refugee crisis along the Burma-bangladesh border.

On 3rd April, the delegation left for a one-day visit to the border to find the actual facts of the current Muslim refugee problems.

On 4th April, the delegation visited the relocated town of Dagon Myo Thit in the suburbs of Rangoon.

On 6th April, the delegation held a meeting with Maj-Gen Khin Nyunt in the morning. UNDP resident representative Gerd Merrem also attended the meeting. The delegation left from Burma on the same day.

On 7th April, the press in Thailand reported that Mr. Jan Eliasson felt he had made progress in negotiating the return of at least some of the Muslim refugees.

Source: (WPD-3-5-7/4/92)

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

AIR MAIL