B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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Despite Slorc's claim of ending military campaigns against the ethnic minorities, people continue to be killed as the fighting continues.

Shortly after Slorc's Ohn Kyaw announced at the UN General Assembly that military campaigns against ethnic minorities were being haulted, more attacks along the Thai/Burma border were reported. In mid-October 500 Karen refugees fled into Thailand as Slorc troops attacked a Karen camp at Mawpasu in Karen State. Other reports indicate that thousands more ethnic minority people are being displaced as Slorc troops move through the countryside. This issue of B.U.R.M.A. emphasizes the plight of these internally displaced people.

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CIVIL WAR

Despite Slorc's officially announced halt to its offensive in the minority Karen State, military activity continues, creating a serious "credibility gap" for the government among the allied ethnic resistance groups fighting in these jungle areas. Slorc's version of a cease fire involves shelling Karen defense outposts and boats travelling on the Salween river - the main transport route to and from Manerplaw, jungle headquarters for the allied resistance groups.

Military preparations for a renewed Slorc dry-season offensive against Karen rebels appears to be in high gear. Slorc has been building roads leading into the front-line jungle areas, especially those near Manerplaw. The Burmese military has also deployed large numbers of 120mm artillery and Swedish-made 84mm guns around Manerplaw, and seems prepared to launch a full-scale attack any day now. Moreover, Slorc reinforcements sent to the Karen and Karenni states have been generating increased tension between ethnic resistance and the military.

For example, Karen guerrillas managed to penetrate into a previously secure Slorc area on the 25th of July, as fighting was renewed after nearly four months of uneasy silence. More significantly, bomber planes and gunships from the Burmese Air Force attacked Karen outposts 10 kilometers north of Manerplaw in late September.

Fighting this summer has already left 107 Burmese soldiers dead, plus an unknown number of guerrilla causalities. On the 2nd of September, approximately 400 Karenni rebels reoccupied a former base, driving out 200 Burmese army personnel. This battle left 12 Burmese soldiers dead and 10 captured as POWs.

But, as usual, the people who are bearing the brunt of Slorc's military campaigns are the ethnic minority civilians in the area, most of whom are poor farmers struggling to eke out a simple existence for their families. The bulk of Slorc's notorious, strategic "four cut system" - to cut food, information, new recruits, and financial resource supplies away from the rebel armies - is inflicted directly upon the villagers who are simply "potential rebel sympathizers" in the eyes of the army.

For example, Slorc's forced relocation policy, which drives villagers from their natural homes, and concentrates them in army controlled camps removed from rebel territory, has been intensified since September. Often the minority villagers' original homes are looted and then torched, including their rice fields, which are the life-blood of the people. Civilians are being relocated particularly from out of farming areas into Slorc-secured areas west of the Sittang river. An estimated 7,000 ethnic Kayah (Karenni) have been herded into the Deemawso concentration camp near Loikaw city in the Karenni state. Another 8,500 ethnic Karens have also been relocated by the Army.

Living conditions in the camps are inhumane, with intentional malnutrition, no medicine for malaria, beatings, and rapes being everyday realities for these uprooted farmers.

Furthermore, inmates of the camps are often forced to be porters for the Burmese army. Even pregnant women have been rounded up to carry 50 lb. loads of food or ammunition day and night through the jungle, often with little food to eat and while sick with malaria. Women porters also face the added degradation of rape by soldiers on a regular basis.

Other slave laborers are used to build military roads, do the dirty work of cleaning up the army camps, or act as human mine-sweepers, or even shields for the army in combat with resistance fighters.

Perhaps an even more desperate problem than the relocation camps is the situation of the estimated 15,000 ethnic Karen who are internal refugees inside Burma.

When exposed to Slorc's terror tactics most villagers end up going to the relocation camps out of fear, but some manage to hide from the army in the dense jungle. Even the ethnic resistance groups, like the KNU, often have little idea where or how many of these refugees exist. They are completely isolated from international awareness or aid, unlike the Burmese refugees who make it across the border into Thailand, where, at least, they are documented and taken care of.

Malaria is a severe problem among these internal refugees, especially for children and old people. According to one Karen source, about 10 children have died from malaria and dysentery in the jungle, out of a group of three hundred families which he is aware of, all of whom fled from a single Karen township.

While all this is going on in the jungle, out of the sight and mind of the international media, what makes the news about Burma is Slorc's glorified national convention to draft a new constitution. Slorc's strategy seems to be to focus domestic and international attention on this undertaking, and away from its intensified summer offensive, and the situation of refugees in the countryside.

The solution to Burma's many problems will not arrive with a new constitution, or even a transfer of power to civilian leadership, though this is what the world judges as progress. Slorc may indeed someday transfer limited power to a civilian government composed of selected representatives, who are under their control. However, while this may appear to be moving towards a democracy in Burma, the civil war will still be going on in the jungle, and thousands of innocent people will still be suffering and dying. The number one priority in Burma should not be cosmetic democratic changes, but rather a cease fire which brings an end to the human misery of war for minority villagers. Only after peace is established in the jungle will real democratic transformation be possible in Rangoon.

- Sources:

KNU

KNPP

TN: (3/9/92)

Personal sources.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Karen villagers in the Twee Pa Wih Kyo (Sleeping Dog Mountain) and Salween Rivers areas of the Karen State survive off of subsistence rice farming. Every year, around April, they begin clearing off fields which have lain fallow for several years. When the rains start in June they begin planting their rice, and with good weather they will harvest enough to feed their families for the coming twelve months.

This year, however, they will not have a rice harvest. Shortly after the Slorc announced to the world that they were halting their military campaign against the Karen, Slorc soldiers moved into this area, burned down all of the villagers' homes and rice barns, and forced the villagers to flee to other areas. Betel nut, coconut, mango and other fruit plantations which the people had developed over the generations were also totally destroyed. Now, at least 5,917 people from the area are living as internally displaced persons within the Karen State, and are desperately in need of food, clothing and medicine.

Some observers now suggest that as many as one and a half million people in Burma have been displaced from their homes. Living deep in the jungles, or in concentration camps inaccessible to humanitarian organizations, these are some of the undocumented victims of the war Slorc is waging against the people of Burma. They are the most unlucky victims of the war.

In Pa'an Province of the Karen State, Hlaing Bwe and Thoo Mwe townships have also been extremely hard hit by Slorc's "four-cut" policy which is meant to drive a wedge between the villagers and the ethnic minority forces fighting against the Slorc. As thousands of Slorc troops marched through this area toward the Karen headquarters at Manerplaw last dry season, they burned all villages in their way and looted everything they found of value. Thousand of villagers, including women and children, were forced to build roads so Slorc could move their equipment more efficiently and quickly into the frontline areas. Other villagers were forced to serve as porters for the advancing troops. If villagers refused to cooperate, their villages were bombarded with mortars.

In Taungoo Province of Karen State, Slorc also launched local operations, and villagers in Tantabin and Myothit townships were ordered to move from their homes to large concentration camps closer to Slorc-controlled towns and the railway line. They were told that after 15 to 20 days, anyone found in their home areas would be gunned down as "insurgents". At first they left their villages and belongings and went down to the camps as ordered. But at the camps, 5 families were forced to live in each single-family hut, and there were no arrangements to help them survive, not even enough water or firewood. The only food supply was that which the villagers brought along with them, and that was taken away by Slorc to be rationed back to them one meal at a time. After one month of unbearable living conditions, most of the villagers began running away into the forests. At least 1,550 of them are now displaced within the Karen area, unable to return home, and unable to plant and harvest crops for their own survival.

Some of the people manage to flee into Thailand. If they are able to reach an established refugee camp, they will likely receive some food and medicine from several international organizations. The United Nations, its hands tied by Thailand's refusal to accept the villagers as official refugees, has done virtually nothing to help.

Some of the people who arrive in Thailand are not so lucky. About three hundred Karen villagers who took refugee in Mae Hong Son Province of Thailand were forced to go back to Burma by the Thai military. Despite very heavy rains at the time, the Thai officials would not listen to pleas from the people to postpone the eviction until the rains ended. They finally had to return to the jungles of Burma with no shelter from the torrential monsoons, and no assurance of any food.

There has been quite a lot of international attention given to the plight of the Burmese students in Bangkok who are refusing to go to the safe camp (see article in this issue on Social Issues). Yet their situation is not nearly as desperate as that of these simple villagers who have been driven about for over forty years by a civil war they wish not to be engaged in. Without international intervention, they live without hope.

The UN, the ASEAN and many other countries continue to treat the situation in Burma as though it is only a political issue. As Slorc makes various concessions here and there, they step back, voicing hope that at last Slorc is becoming more democratic, and patting themselves on the back because their policy of "constructive engagement" is working.

The issue in Burma is not so much a political issue as it is a human rights issue. Slorc has no legal or legitimate right to be ruling the country. Their only claim to power in the country is their armed might, and that creates no political legitimacy in the eyes of anyone truly interested in democratic principles. While Slorc and the international community continue to play this political chess game, it is the ethnic minority peasants who suffer untold misery, and who will gain nothing as long as the world sits back and waits for Slorc to become more democratic. Perhaps the world is not responding to the terrible suffering of these villagers because pictures of their human misery is not projected on TV screens every day to shock people into action.

International human rights agencies such as the UNHCR, ICRC etc, should not have to wait for such a sensational show of suffering before they take action. People in Burma are suffering. There is enough evidence of that. It could be ended by international intervention.

Source:

KNU Report

POLITICS

The Military Role in Politics

Burma watchers worldwide seized upon a single sentence subtlety inserted within a larger government declaration issued earlier this month in Rangoon. The buried passage confirmed many observers worst fears about the role the Burmese military junta (known as Slorc) hopes to play in the country's political future.

Slorc (or the State Law and Order Restoration Council) involuntarily disclosed their true intentions in Burmese politics in its issuing of Order #13/92 on Oct. 2, 1992. This order outlines the formation of an important government committee - the Convening Commission for the National Convention - whose duties include the drafting of a new constitution for Burma. The committee is obligated to remain within the framework of certain Slorc-prescribed objectives. The key line, which drew international attention, was objective #(6), which insured, "participation of the Tatmadaw [the Burmese Army] in the leading role of national politics of the state in the future." (WPD, Oct.3, '92)

This unforeseen incident of bad publicity for the junta comes on the heels of a relatively successful international PR campaign launched this year by Slorc to clean up its brutal, dictatorial image.

Last year the world increasingly began to see through Slorc's unreasonable excuses for not turning over power to the legitimate NLD-led government, which resulted in stepped-up international pressure against Burma to change its policies. Consequently, the Slorc was criticized by increasing numbers of governments and organizations in 1991, climaxing in an official declaration of condemnation in the United Nations, and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Burmese democracy leader and political prisoner, Aung San Suu Kyi in December of 1991.

Alarmed by the extent of international condemnation, Slorc decided to play a different tune with the same old song in 1992. Saw Maung was removed as head of state, and Than Shwe installed. This cosmetic change of leadership was followed by a series of deceptively conciliatory political maneuvers.

These highly-publicized actions included a limited cease fire against ethnic insurgents groups, the freeing of a small fraction of political prisoners, revoking of the curfew, retraction of the official state of Martial Law, reopening of universities, and the issuing of the plan for a National Convention to write a new constitution.

But now some of these highly touted changes are starting to look suspiciously superficial. For example, from time to time Slorc has claimed it is not a political party, and will not run in any future elections. They are simply performing their national duty in restoring order to the country, they claim, and will step aside when the time comes to hand political power back to a civilian government. However, as this recent declaration highlights, the army may not officially compete in future elections as a political party, but it will always maintain its dominant, leading role in any future government. Slorc has never had any intention of turning over real power to civilian democrats.

Another crucial deception involves the issue of the Burmese Army's supposed cease fire with ethnic insurgents fighting for self-determination. During the same period in which the junta's Foreign Minister was telling the UN General Assembly that they had suspended their military operations against Burma's ethnic groups, the army was sending thousands of troops to attack the villages and defense outposts of ethnic organizations, like the Karen National Union(KNU). Fierce fighting has broken out in both the Karen and Karenni (Kayah) states, forcing hundreds of desperate villagers to flee into Thailand or deeper into the Burmese jungle.

Many ethnic minority villagers continue to be recruited for forced labor inside Burma, most being used as army porters supporting the supposedly non-existent military campaigns. One of the worst examples of this trend can be found in the Karenni state, where villagers are forced to work in the railway construction project linking Loikaw, in Karenni state, and Aung Ban in southern Shan state. This project has been labeled the "death train" by some, due to the high incidence of disease, death, and suffering among its unfortunate slave laborers.

At the same time it is brutally oppressing its own citizens, the junta is also beginning to harass its neighbors. Rohingyas, a Burmese Muslim minority group from Arakan State, were harassed to the point that hundreds of thousands fled across the nearby border into Bangladesh, placing a tremendous social and economic burden on the already impoverished nation of Bangladesh.

More recently, the Burmese Army briefly imprisoned several Thai civilians and administrative officials working in the border region, causing an uproar in their normally supportive neighbor to the south, Thailand.

In conclusion, the Burmese junta's attempts to project a new and improved image to the world is increasingly wearing thin. Slorc repeatedly has shown its true colors, and proven itself to be untrustworthy and deceitful, especially in its promises to eventually turn power over to an elected, civilian government, and end its genocidal war against ethnic minorities like the Karen. The international community can no longer delay in stepping up its efforts to apply pressure on Slorc. It is time for the ASEAN neighbors of Burma, in particular, to terminate their immoral policy of "constructive engagement", and put human rights above quick economic profits. ASEAN, especially Thailand and Singapore, should begin to open communication with the opposition inside and outside of Burma, and work with them towards resolving Burma's deeply entrenched political, ethnic, and economic problems.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Safe Camp

Since 1988, several thousand Burmese exiles have found their way to Bangkok. Some of them get work in factories or on construction projects. In some cases these workers are paid wages much lower than the legal minimum wage, but they can make no protest as they are living illegally in Thailand

Others seek ways to continue their political protest against the military regime which continues to rule Burma. Their protests have often resulted in at least some of them being arrested and placed in detention.

Although the Thai government will not recognize these exiles as refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Bangkok began interviewing them in 1989 and granting many of them the status of "Persons of Concern". This status would entitle them to receive 2,500 baht (about US$100) per month. With this support, their survival in Bangkok became easier even though they still faced the possibility of arrest.

The Thai government finally decided on a plan to create a "safe area" for these political exiles after they faced increased international criticism every time they arrested or deported some of the exiles. All exiles in Bangkok were told they must apply for entry into this safe area.

Of the 1,425 who finally actually applied for admittance into the safe area, only 516 were accepted as legitimate refugees. Selection was apparently made on the basis of age, and proof of student status.

Asia Watch of New York has raised serious questions about this screening process and how it affects other Burmese seeking refuge in Thailand. They question why only people who can prove they are students are deemed refugees. Are villagers with no education, but who are fleeing for their very lives not also genuinely fit to be called refugees?

Asia Watch has also voiced concern over how the international community is looking at this whole procedure. The United States, for instance, has decided that any Burmese applying for resettlement in the US must do so from the safe area. Thus all people from Burma living in Thailand, no matter what their human rights situation within Burma might be, will not be eligible for resettlement in the US unless the Thai government's screening program recognizes them as true refugees. No one is yet clear exactly what criteria the Thai government is using to gauge the authenticity of an exile's claim to being a true refugee.

More troubling, however, is the fact that the Thai Ministry of the Interior has stated that all those not accepted for the safe camp, or who refuse to register for it, will be deemed "illegal immigrants" and subject to arrest and eventual deportation. This is a direct threat to the safety of the thousands of other people from Burma including professionals, villagers, monks etc. who, because they are not students, may not be accepted by the Thai government as true refugees.

Although the safe area is an issue of concern, the international community should set a higher priority at putting pressure on Slorc to totally end their war against the ethnic minorities of Burma. Once the war is ended, the safe area would no longer be necessary, political exiles could start going home, and most importantly the suffering of the ethnic minorities which has gone on for over 40 years, could at last come to an end.

- Sources:

Asia Watch September 21, 1992 Report

Health Care in Kachin State

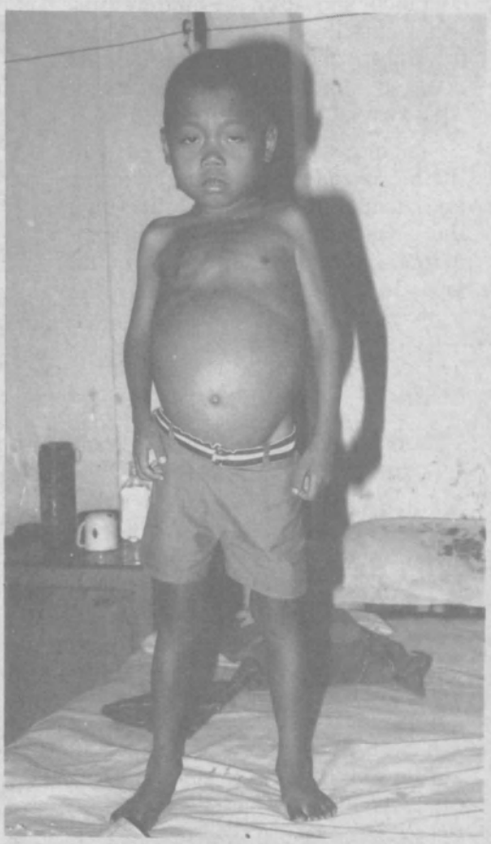
In Myitkyina, capital of the Kachin State, the main hospital was rebuilt in 1989. Jade merchants and traders were forced to contribute money to the construction costs so that the military regime was able to construct the hospital without spending any of their own money.

Most of the patients come from the Kachin, Lisu, Gurkha and Shan ethnic groups. They suffer from malnutrition, parasites, malaria, dysentery and dengue fever. Blindness, caused from severe malnutrition is a common occurrence.

People from the area report that the hospital rarely has any medicines to give them. After the doctor prescribes the medication, family members of the patients must go to the illegal market to buy the medicine. Usually this is medicine which the military is suppose to give the hospital, but sells on the illegal market instead in order to earn extra cash. Some people have also reported that medicines provided by UNICEF are also being sold in the illegal market.

Source:

Personal Report from Kachin State



A malnurished child in the hospital

ACTION

ECONOMIC CAMPAIGNS DO WORK.

JOIN THE CALL FOR ALL FOREIGN INVESTMENTS IN BURMA TO BE WITHDRAWN UNTIL THE CIVIL WAR IS ENDED AND PEACE RESTORED FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF BURMA TO ENJOY

Under the present military dictatorship in Burma, foreign investments not only fail to provide sufficient food to end malnutrition in the country, but also may result in poor rural people being used by the military as forced labor to build roads, rail lines and other infrastructure necessary for the foreign investments to function effectively.

ATTENTION

On October 23, the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York, sent a letter to Amoco Corporation. Portions of the letter follow:

H. Laurance Fuller, Chairman, President
Amoco Corporation
200 East Randolph Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Dear Mr. Fuller:

The Center for Constitutional Rights, a nonprofit public interest law office, has been contacted by several groups concerned about human rights violations in Burma. They have raised questions about the relationship between your company's investments in Burma and the gross human rights abuses perpetrated by the illegal Burmese military dictatorship. Our review leads us to conclude that Amoco could be held legally liable for deaths, injuries, property damage or other harm arising out of your company's operations in Burma.

The recent history of that troubled country, along with human rights reports prepared by international human rights groups, indicate that Amoco's investments provide support to the military dictatorship and contribute significantly to human rights abuses.

Of most concern to us, it appears that the Burmese military has instituted a campaign of terror in order to provide protection and other logistical support to your operations. Villages have been destroyed and local people have been kidnapped and forced to work as porters and manual laborers. Many have been killed. Others have suffered torture, including rape and other sexual abuses with lasting physical injury. Investigators familiar with conditions in the region in which your company operates state that these human rights abuses are a direct and foreseeable result of your commercial activities in Burma.

I am writing today to call to your attention several basic principles of U.S. law which apply to your activities. As you may know, understandard U.S. tort law, each of us, whether a natural person or a corporation, is responsible for the reasonably foreseeable consequences of our actions, even if those consequences involve the actions of a third party. Thus, if a -corporation enters into a contractual relationship with disreputable parties, and it is reasonably foreseeable that those parties will hurt someone, the corporation may be held liable for the harm resulting from the business transaction.

The analogy to your company's business activities in Burma is clear. If you specifically paid for or otherwise ordered the abuses, you would, of course, be liable. However, you would also be liable even if you had not requested assistance from the Burmese military and had not requested that they kidnap, torture or kill people. If your contract with the Burmese military government contributes in a substantial way to ongoing human rights abuses and those abuses are reasonably foreseeable, then you are liable to the victims and their families.

The fact that the abuses took place abroad or were actually committed by the Burmese army would not diminish your liability, if the above conditions are met.

The fact that your company has been the target of an international campaign designed to inform you of the dire consequences of your investment in Burma, is compelling evidence that you know or should know about the human rights abuses connected with your activities in that country, and that you should reasonably foresee abuses in the future.

The Center for Constitutional Rights thus urges you to cease your tortious business relationship with the Burmese military regime.

Sincerely,

Beth Stephens, Esq.

Campaigns against foreign investments in Burma are an extremely important way of supporting the democratic movement there. We urge everyone to support these campaigns by writing letters to companies who are doing business with the Burmese military regime, and by boycotting all of the products which those companies produce. Actions such as this one taken by the Center for Constitutional Rights in support of human rights and peace in Burma are invaluable in the struggle to save lives of the people of Burma.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION (B.U.R.M.A.)

ECONOMICS REPORT

Thai-SLORC Trade Talks Signal Closer Economic Cooperation

Slorc's foreign minister, Ohn Gyaw, and the foreign minister of Thailand, Arsa Sarasin, met on September 7th of this year, to launch the newly-formed "Joint Trade Committee" between the two nations.

This prominent public symbol of increasing official economic cooperation between Thailand and Burma is a cause for great concern among the peoples of Burma, and international friends working with them for democracy, human rights, and self-determination.

Strategically, Slorc hopes more closely coordinated economic ties with Thailand will lure Thai trade away from the Burmese border areas controlled by ethnic resistance groups, like the Karen, and into government-controlled trade routes. This tactic aims to choke off the ethnic insurgent's financial resources, which are drawn largely from unofficial tax revenue and cross-border trade with Thai merchants.

Thai minister Sarasin agreed with the Slorc trade proposal in principle, and submitted documents concerning the Thai-Indonesia joint trade committee, as a model framework for Ohn Gyaw to study.

- Source:

TN:(8/9/92)

Personal Sources

"Death Train" Railway Proposed to Thailand

Yawmal Chuthathonng, Chief of Thailand's State Railway system, revealed August 17th that Thailand has received a Slorc proposal to construct a rail link between Thailand and Burma. The proposed railroad is to be built along the same route as the notorious "Death Railway" which the Japanese army attempted to install during World War II to supply its forces in Burma.

During the World War II construction period, 88,000 POWs from the allied forces, and over 300,000 Asian slave laborers were used by the Japanese army. Approximately 16,000 POWs and 100,000 Asian workers died from malaria, malnutrition, and ill treatment at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army. This horrible experience was commemorated in the famous war novel "Bridge Over the River Kwai".

The current railroad proposal would pass through areas of two of Burma's largest minorities, the Mon and the Karen. The route would start in Kanchanaburi province of Thailand, and end at Pa-an, a Burmese town in the Karen State. Local residents of these minority regions are deeply fearful that the Burmese Army will round up ethnic villagers from along the proposed route to use as modern-day slave laborers in the dense jungle, continuing the brutal tradition of the Japanese. The Burmese Army has made repeated and widespread use of forced ethnic minority labor in its military campaigns against minority insurgents in the area.

Thai officials estimate the railway survey will take 6 months to 1 year to complete, and say that no high-level officials need to be involved at this point.

- Sources:

BP:(21/8/92)

TN:(18/8/92)

"The Thailand to Burma Railway", by Goffery Pharaoh Adams

Personal Sources

Thai Military Bank Opens Branch in Rangoon

Burma's Slorc rulers have permitted the Thai Military Bank to open a branch in Rangoon, the state-run radio announced August 29th. This ground-breaking move highlights renewed financial cooperation between the two nations. It also follows a policy recommendation made by the UNDP to Slorc last year, to upgrade Burma's monetary system in order to establish urgently needed economic stability, and an effective market-oriented system.

- Sources:

BR: (29/8/92)

BP: (-/1/92)

Personal Sources

Thai Technical Assistance Delegation Sent to Rangoon

An eight-member Thai delegation arrived in Rangoon on the 14th of September to discuss increased Thai technical assistance in the agricultural sector of Burma under their joint technical cooperation program. The Thai delegation, the second of its kind, was led by Director General Mr. Narong Minanandana of the Education Dept., and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The assistance program is part of the Thai foreign policy of the interim Anand government which sought to provide increased aid to neighboring countries in Indochina. Thai technical assistance to Slorc is concentrated in the seeding, fishing, and livestock industries.

- Sources:

WPD: (15/5/92)

TN : (22/8/92)

Thai Navigation Area Expands Towards Burma

Thailand's Harbor Department is currently planning to expand its limits on navigational areas for local trade vessels. Total expansion area is to cover Cambodia and Vietnam to the east, and Burma and Bangladesh in the west. Presently, the agency is preparing a proposal to be submitted to the Transport and Communications Ministry of Thailand, but, so far, Thailand has not yet talked with Slorc about the expansion.

- Source;

TN: (17/9/92)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Levi Strauss & Company

In the past two years, more and more American companies have started doing business with the military regime in Burma. Many of these companies make their investments in Burma through subcontracts rather than through direct involvement in the country.

The American-based Levi Strauss & Company was one such company. According to BurmaCare, a San Francisco based action group, Levi Strauss & Company had subcontracts with two Korean companies, Dae Woo Ltd, and Segye Ltd., and one Hong Kong company, Kalomex Ltd. to distribute its products in Burma.

However, in March of this year, Levi Strauss & Company informed their contractors in Burma that they no longer wanted to do business there. The reason for their refusal to renew their contracts was their newly-adopted sourcing guidelines which prohibit relationships in countries where there are pervasive violations of basic homan rights.

Sabrina Johnson, Manager of Corporate Communications for Levi Strauss & Company said in a statement, "Through our investigation of contractors in Myanmar (Burma), we discovered that the military government owns a substantial piece of these firms. By doing business with these contractors, we were providing a direct investment or benefit to a government that is one of the leading violators of human rights in the world. Under current conditions, it is not possible to do business in Myanmar without directly supporting the military government and its pervasive violations of human rights."

Members of opposition groups situated along the Thai/Burma border expressed surprise and appreciation for this move by Levi Strauss & Company. They said Levi Strauss & Company's withdrawal of its investments in Burma showed much sensitivity to the plight of the people of Burma, and they hoped that other companies would have the same kind of courage to place the human rights of people above potential profits.

BurmaCare, which initiated the dialogue with Levi Strauss also expressed hope that other U.S. corporations would follow the same example.

Although a victory such as this one seems small in comparison to the vast amounts of foreign investments now entering Burma, it does give hope to the movement for peace in Burma that information sharing and campaigning can make a positive difference.

Institute for Asian Democracy

The Institute for Asian Democracy, 1518 K Street, N.W. Suite 410, Washington, DC 20005, has published a report which urges strong US action against the military junta of Burma. The 66 page report is an excellent resource for people who want to understand the issues in Burma more clearly. It contains many maps and charts to help those not so acquainted with this isolated country to developed a clearer understanding of the civil war raging there.

Along with much solid background information, the report also focuses on the role the US is playing in Burma politically and economically, and explains why Americans should care about what is going on in Burma and to the people of Burma.

Ten tactical guidelines for US action are given to help those who want to do a campaign but are not sure where their energy can best be used. Some of these suggestions are:

1. Denormalize relations with the Slorc regime and take steps leading to total derecognition.

2. Send a "Special U.S. Envoy" to Burma. Assign the ambassador to the provisional government.

3. Investigate and, if indicated, indict Slorc leaders for heroin trading to the United States.

4. Convene a Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly and convince the U.N. Security Council to declare the Slorc regime "a threat to international peace."

5. Enforce a U.N.-mandated international arms embargo.

6. Lead a total economic boycott including comprehensive U.N.-backed global trade and investment sanctions.

All North American groups interested in learning more about Burma, or who are wanting to develop a support campaign would benefit very much from this report. It can be ordered from the Institute for Asian Democracy.

This is the third report by international support groups of this type which has been produced. A similar report was produced by the Asian Human Rights Commission in Hong Kong and focuses on actions which action groups in ASEAN countries can take. Another report was produced in Australia for use by Australian action groups. Opposition groups in Burma see these reports as an excellent way of raising awareness of the issues facing the people of Burma today and also as an effective way of focusing groups in different countries on the kinds of actions they can take to make a difference. It is hoped that other countries will make similar reports in cooperation with Burma's opposition movement.

- Sources used in this issue:

TN - The Nation (Thailand)

BR - Burma Radio

KNPP - Karreni National Progressive Party

KNU - Karen National Union

WPD - Working Peoples' Daily (Burma)

NEWS BRIEFS

Slorc Signs on to ICRC Geneva Convention

In a surprising move this August, Burma's military junta (Slorc) suddenly signed on to the International Committee of the Red Cross's 1949 Geneva Convention. This internationally recognized human rights document establishes legal parameters of operation for internal conflicts, especially with regards to proper treatment of civilians in a war zone, and the handling of POWs.

This move surprised many onlookers, since Slorc has a terrible record of atrocities against its own civilian population, and refuses to even recognize the civil war it is waging against ethnic minorities and student dissidents inside Burma. It also denies there are any POWs in Burma on either side of the conflict.

The ICRC had been on the verge of pulling its resources out of Burma, since Slorc had remained unresponsive to repeated calls to sign the Geneva accords. The fact that the ICRC appeared willing to back up its threat to leave, probably spurred the Slorc to move on the issue, to maintain its international image, and the material aid of the ICRC.

Article 3 of the Geneva convention should prove to be a touchy subject for Slorc. This section deals with proper procedure during an internal war, including the treatment of POWs.

One of the problems involved stems from the fact that the Burmese Army instructs its soldiers to never surrender to capture by the enemy, but rather to commit suicide as your patriotic duty. The army will not recognize soldiers who become POWs, but considers them the enemy, equal to traitors. Even the families of these Burmese POWs can be in danger as a result.

The ICRC, therefore, intends to make use of Article 3 as a test of Slorc's sincerity in abiding by the treaty. It plans to try and get cooperation from Slorc over several specific concerns over the next two months, especially the issue of prisoners of the Karen National Union. Hopefully, this international instrument, which Slorc has now signed for its own security purposes, can be used against the junta to demand human rights for the common people of Burma, instead.

- Source

Kachin Land Info.

Slorc Lifts Martial Law

The Slorc dictatorship announced on state radio recently that the state of official martial law the country has been under for several years would be lifted on September 26, to coincide with the opening of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York. Ohn Gyaw, the Slorc minister of Foreign Affairs, and an accompanying delegation attended the UN assembly, proclaiming the removal of martial law to be a sign of true democratic change in Burma. Slorc, in a series of highly publicized gestures like this one, hopes to ease international condemnation of its human rights abuse record and military dictatorship through the forum of the UN.

The first martial law declaration, Order No. 1/89, was issued on the 17th of July, 1989, resulting in many demonstrators being shot and killed in the streets and many politicians, monks and students being imprisoned.

The second order, No. 2/89, was issued the following day, the 18th, and implemented the use of Military Tribunals instead of civilian courts, in trying cases. Hundreds of political prisoners were sentenced as criminals under this judicial structure. Some were even given the death penalty, without any public hearing.

- Source:

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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