

B. U. R. M. A.

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A US DEA official and a SLORC official look over a collection of drugs about to be burned in a ceremony meant to establish Slorc's credibility in trying to eradicate drug production and use in Burma. It may look good, but many people seriously question Slorc's sincerity since drug deals may be earning them the money they need to purchase weapons to continue their civil war against their own people.

(See DRUGS, page 6 and 7)

1992 is coming to a close. The war in Burma has not ended and the people have added one more year to their history of suffering. 1993 can bring either more despair or new hope for them. The United Nations Assembly will be issuing a strong statement against human rights abuses in Burma sometime during December. International concern needs to focus on this UN statement and call for even stronger action such as economic sanctions and/or the removal of Slorc from the UN seat. Join us for peace in Burma

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Interview with Mahn Nyunt Maung

Mahn Nyunt Maung was one of the leaders of a group of writers and artists during the nationwide, anti-government uprising in Burma in 1988. Following the crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in which several thousand people were killed by the army, he became the general secretary of the Union Karen League Party, and concurrently served as a central committee member of the League for Democracy and Peace, which was led by former Burmese prime minister U Nu. During the 1990 general elections he registered as a candidate from the Wakema constituency no.(1). He was later arrested by junta security forces in October of 1991, in a crackdown stemming from an armed conflict in the Delta region between the junta and Karen nationals. During that time, Mahn Nyunt Maung openly expressed his opinions by comparing the situation with that of communal ethnic conflicts which broke out in the same area during the early years of Japan's occupation of Burma in WW II, and by suggesting that the conflict should be settled through negotiations. The junta not only ignored the suggestions, but further decided to arrest him, together with the Joint Secretary of the Union Karen League, on October 9, 1991. Both were brought to a military intelligence interrogation center situated on the Baundry Road in Rangoon, Burma's capital city. They were ceaselessly interrogated there from evening until daybreak, and then sent on to the notorious Insein prison, some miles north of Rangoon.

Mahn Nyunt Maung was released on April 29 of this year (1992) in accordance with the SLORC's Declaration 11/92, which allowed a handful of political prisoners to go free, largely as a PR attempt to persuade international observers that the oppressive situation inside Burma was fundamentally changing. He left Rangoon at midnight on Sep. 6 and fled to the liberated area.

Mahn Nyunt Maung reports that the strength of the military intelligence has rapidly increased under the SLORC. Its manpower is now comparable to that of the regular army. Its agents are planted in every village and ward, on every part of all streets, in every factory and civil service department, in all schools, from secondary and middle schools to the universities. Some of these agents earn monthly salaries while others are hired for a daily wage. The village and ward level administration offices, called Village/Ward Law and Order Restoration Committees, are nests full of MI employees. They spend their time documenting, with the help of their many civilian informers, the activities of those persons on the anti-military lists, and watch closely every movement of these persons. All normal citizens are living within an atmosphere of constant fear, constantly worrying about being called upon by the MI agents and interrogated. For example, a prominent politician has said that he feels safe only when he is with his family, and feels surrounded and watched by enemies whenever he has to leave his house.

The MI is even arresting civilians who have never been members of a political party, under section 5(j) of the legal code, which had in the past been used by the British colonial police to apprehend pro-independence nationalist politicians.

A private teacher named U Htay Lwin, from South Okalapa Township in Rangoon, was apprehended by the MI, and locked up in the no.2 cell of the Insein Annex Prison, after making a remark that questioned why SLORC government officials were spending money and time staging a boat race while the majority of the population was struggling just to obtain their daily food, and many families had had their homes destroyed and been forcibly relocated into Army concentration camps and satellite towns.

A comedian named Chit Sayar, also from South Okalapa, was visiting a health clinic when he overheard several persons grumbling about the deteriorating conditions within the

country. In response, he made a quick joke, saying that it would not be too difficult to solve the nation's problems if the government was handed over to the winners of the 1990 elections. He was also arrested immediately, and put in the same cell as U Htay Lwin at Insein Prison.

In another incident, U Myint Swe, a retired principal of the State Institute of Arts and Music, and his friends U Soe Myint, a retired manager, Ahlone Ba Myint, an artist, and Tin Oo Lay, a cartoonist from North Okalapa, were discussing the BBC report related to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 1991 at a local tea shop when MI agents suddenly arrested all of them, and sent them off to the same no.2 cell of the Insein Annex.

Comedian Chit Sayar, artist Ahlone Ba Myint, and cartoonist Tin Oo Lay were later officially sentenced by a Military Tribunal.

Other political prisoners include the poets Min Lu and Tin Moe, who were arrested for writing poetry criticizing the SLORC junta. Min Lu was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment, while Tin Moe remains in custody at present. A popular comedian named Zarganar was also imprisoned for his joking remarks against the junta. He was transferred to Thayet Prison in central Burma.

Sometimes police officers would visit the detainees in prison, and inform them that it would be better for them to confess to the crimes they were accused of, since by giving their confessions at the military tribunal trials they would gain leniency from the judges, and suffer less than if they defended their innocence. Some of the detainees, though they had committed no crime, gave their confessions as instructed by the police officers. As a result, they were slapped with severe punishment, instead of receiving lighter sentences as the deceptive officials had led them to believe.

POLITICS

What lies ahead for Burma in 1993?

One of the key issues to watch in 1993 is the National Convention to be around January 9. It will get a lot of international attention, and many countries, especially Asean, will use it to try to prove the success of their policy of "constructive engagement". However, the convention will be mainly attended by Slorc people, or people whom Slorc can manipulate. The voices of the opposition will not be allowed. Slorc stated this clearly in their preparation meetings for the convention held on July 27 of this year. *"It would be unnatural to invite persons who have no confidence in the Convention to attend it. If the armed terrorists are truly serious of attending the National Convention they ought to abandon the line of armed struggle. They will have to return to the legal fold after abandoning armed struggle. After their return to the legal fold, they, like other members of the public will be able to attend the National Convention by obtaining suitable number of delegates. It is quite clear that the armed terrorists in the jungle today have no other way to attend the National Convention except the one I have just explained."* (Maj-Gen Myo Nyunt, Chairman of the Steering Committee)

The purpose of the National Convention is to draw together ideas for a new constitution for the country. Following this convention, the elected members of the parliament (those not in prison or in exile) will write the constitution which must then be accepted by Slorc and finally pass a national referendum. Since September 1988, the country has been without a constitution, ruled only by military decree. *"The State Law and Order Restoration Council (military) is not an organization that observes any constitution; it is an organization that is governing the nation by Martial Law. It is common knowledge that the State Law and Order Restoration Council is governing the nation as a military government and that it is a government that has been accepted as such by the United Nations and the respective nations of the world."* (The State Law and

Order Restoration Council Declaration No 1/90, July 27, 1990)

Following the 1988 uprising and the

The national convention can never bring an end to the civil war because it can not deal with the root causes of that civil war in the absence of full participation of all opposition groups.

September military coup which followed, the political struggle in the urban centers became closely and actively linked to the armed struggle along the borders. This not only strengthened the struggle and brought it into the international spot light, but it also brought many thousands of ethnic Burmans into a working relationship with the ethnic minority armed groups who had been carrying out their armed struggle in isolation for almost 40 years. The National Convention is seen by many as simply an attempt by Slorc to once again separate these two aspects of the struggle. This could come about in the following ways:

1) The national convention will first of all focus international attention away from the borders and back into the urban centers and the political struggle taking place in the convention. Slorc will have more freedom then to carry out military campaigns along the border with less international criticism.

2) Secondly, the holding of a National Convention and the drawing up of a constitution will result in a new election. A civilian government will probably be elected, but one which the Slorc can hold control over. The political tensions in the urban areas will relax and Slorc will be able to concentrate more of its military forces in the border area. Since the ethnic Burmans are struggling for "democratic" reforms and not for ethnic rights, many of them will probably be satisfied with the changes and get back to the work of earning money in a more open economic climate.

3) Slorc will probably at this time offer amnesty to all those who fled to the border since 1988. Sick with malaria, and tired of the long struggle, some of these people may return to the "fold", thus further separating the urban political struggle from the border armed struggle.

4) Slorc will then tell the world that, since there is now a civilian government and democratic reforms are coming about, the ethnic forces along the border have no reason to continue their struggle. The border struggle will be further isolated.

5) An elected "civilian" government will also lead to more international recognition for Burma as many countries are more interested in the act of an election than in the actual existence of human rights and democratic principles. Western countries tend to relate more easily to urban political struggles, and an election, even one organized by a dictator, will probably get more attention than an on-going rural struggle for land and cultural rights.

6) Slorc will continue its program to eliminate the ethnic minority groups, especially the Karen. There is little chance that they (Slorc) will do any political negotiations with them. "Since the State Law and Order Restoration Council is not a political government, it has no reason at all to negotiate by political means with any armed insurgent organization." (Slorc Declaration No 1/90) A civilian government, under the thumb of the military, will have little opportunity to change this policy.

In conclusion, any constitution which grows out of this convention will not guarantee democracy for the country or human rights for the people. This convention can never bring an end to the civil war because it can not deal with the root causes of that civil war in the absence of full participation of all opposition groups. And so the war will continue for the millions of ethnic minority people who live outside the vision of the world's eye, and who have already suffered for more than 40 years.



ECONOMICS

After three years of disappointing oil explorations in Burma, Petro-Canada has announced it is terminating its operations there at the end of this year. This major pull-out could initiate a trend towards further divestments among the 12 foreign oil firms investing in Burma presently. The Australian oil firm, BHP, had already abandoned its Burmese enterprises earlier this year.

Most of these firms signed 3-year oil and gas exploration contacts with the Slorc government in late 1989. These contracts are set to expire in December of this year, and many companies will be faced with the decision to either stay on and hope for improving profit and business conditions, or close up shop and move out.

High dock handling charges, archaic or absent communication and transportation infrastructure, often requiring companies to build their own roads and bridges in order to continue operating, governmental delays, and the instability and potential harassment stemming from the presence of ethnic minority insurgents in several areas of the country, have all become major headaches for the oil firms, leading to higher than expected costs. When these conditions are coupled with the fact that discoveries have so far been minimal, and confined to the gas sector rather than oil deposits, the prospect of continued explorations is becoming increasingly unattractive for many outside investors. Perhaps, even a growing corporate "PR" sensitivity to the negative international image repercussions tied to economic cooperation with one of the world's worst human rights violators, is now also being factored into any future investment equations, especially when the civil war itself begins to directly threaten some oil development sites.

Beyond the Petro-Canada and BHP pull-outs, Amoco has also become frustrated with its 80/20 profit-sharing arrangement with MOGE (the Myanmar (Burma) Oil and Gas Enterprise), and is pushing for renegotiation, as its profit returns have been negligible. Furthermore, the British Premier cor-

poration is looking to farm out 50% of its operations to Texaco.

MOGE is running scared, and has increasingly been sending out delegations to other countries in a bid to lure in new investors, as their old partners become restless. Commented one foreign oil exploration investor, "they keep asking - Do you have any money to spare for explorations in our country? They almost seem desperate". (Bangkok Post, 2/12/92) However, new investors are very cautious. The Slorc's unrealistic official exchange rate of 5 kyats to 1 dollar (as compared to the illegal market rate of 100 or more kyats per dollar), and the estimated inflation figure of, at least, 50%, both constitute major, ongoing inhibitors to new investment. One new initiative the Slorc is offering to counteract such negative variables is a 6 month grace period before corporations would need to begin drilling for oil, allowing time for feasibility studies. This deal was given to the American Trend and Apache firms, which signed new deals with MOGE in June of 1992.

Another recent 1992 deal, inked with the French oil giant Total, remains as the biggest foreign investment in Burmese history, however. This agreement to explore for gas deposits in the Mataban Gulf, in association with the PTT (Petroleum Authority of Thailand), is the centerpiece of Slorc's campaign for foreign investment. Total hopes to build a pipeline from the Gulf coast, possibly through the Three Pagoda Pass along the Thai border, over the next 2 or 3 years, at a cost of several hundred million dollars. 25% of discovered reserves would be allocated for domestic consumption within Burma, with the rest being sold to Thailand.

All told, there are now a total of 25 offshore blocks in the Mataban Gulf and Bay of Bengal under contract to joint venture foreign firms, and 11 onshore blocks in central Burma.

So far, the two groups benefitting the most from Burma's foreign oil/gas investments would appear to be the Slorc junta and Thailand's PTT. On the Slorc side, the regime has already

raked in at least \$US400 million worth of precious foreign exchange for diversion into its rapidly expanding military-security apparatus. These funds are an essential component of its all-consuming efforts to clamp down on internal civilian opposition and various ethnic insurgent groups, as it clings to power through the sheer force of weapons and fear. Its extremely limited support within the country, consisting of a precariously narrow base of elite Army officers and their relatives, elevates its economic, cash-supplying alliances with foreign investors to a level of ultimate importance. Thailand's PTT also plans to gain from the disastrous situation, viewing Burma as a long-term solution to its increasingly serious need for outside energy supplies to fuel its economic growth.

Hopefully, during this crucial time of transition, these foreign firms will start to wake up to, 1) the on-going suffering they are helping to inflict upon the Burmese people, 2) the growing international movement for humanitarian-motivated economic sanctions against the illegitimate Slorc government, called for, in large part, by many of these corporations own government leaders, NGO organizations, citizens, and consumers, and 3) the unfavorable business climate within Burma, which seems to be indicating the doubtful probability of making a profit there in the near future (i.e. the proverbial "bottom line" even points to divestment, if no other influence can reach the hearts of corporate decision-makers). In short, this would be an ideal time for concerned citizens, consumers, organizations, and government leaders within these investing nations to put some pressure on their own corporations to abandon their unsuccessful projects of collusion with Slorc's Burma. Whether they do this for moral or practical reasons, or a combination of both, makes no difference to the millions of victims of Slorc's internal war.

• Sources

- BP 2/12/92,
- TN 25/11/92.

DRUGS

Drugs, Guns and Civil War

International traffic in illicit drugs ranks second, behind only arms-sales, as the world's most lucrative business endeavor. Drugs, like weapons, are a global plague that effect everybody to some degree in our increasingly interdependent world. Burma's Slorc junta is deeply intertwined in both of these dubious commodities, often selling one(drugs), to buy the other(weapons). It is solely via its production of drugs, however, that Burma clearly achieves "world-class" status.

Burma is the #1 producer of opium and heroin globally, supplying over 60% of the world's voracious demand. It forms the heart of the infamous "Golden Triangle" opium-producing region, a geographical zone formed at the convergence of northeastern Burma, northwestern Laos, and northern Thailand. Field-level heroin refineries proliferate along Burma's shared borders with Thailand and China, and process much of its 160,000 hectares worth of poppy cultivation into "China White" heroin. Burma's poppy-growing areas are concentrated predominantly inside the isolated, mountainous Shan State.

Opium production in Burma has more than doubled since the current Slorc regime seized power in 1988, rising from 2,250 metric tons of output in 1989-90, to 2,350 in 1990-91, to an estimated 2,750 last year. The reasons for this rapid escalation are several. #1 among them is the dissolution of the Communist Party of Burma(CPB) rebel front, which controlled much of the Shan State region until 1989. The CPB collapsed during March and April of that year when the Wa and Kokang Chinese minority groups which formed the bulk of its rebel army, mutinied against its majority Burman party leaders, in large part over the issue of opium cultivation and drug money. It didn't take long for Slorc leaders to exploit the situation. Within weeks, Slorc chief-of-intelligence and #2 man, Khin Nyunt, had made high-level contacts with the mutiny leaders. The Wa and Kokang

mutineers quickly signed cease-fire agreements with the Slorc, and in exchange for severing ties with other rebel groups inside Burma, and ceasing attacks on Slorc army units, these former insurgents were allowed a degree of local autonomy, and given governmental development assistance. Slorc recognized their armies as official militia units, turned over local security operations to them, and sat back and watched as they launched full-scale, and full-time, into expanding opium production.

meeting between a team of UN experts and "leaders of the local nationals, U Sai Lin and U Kyi Myint".(WPD,19/3/92) The UN officials were probably unaware that these two "local leaders" were also big-time drug barons. UNICEF, WHO, and other UN agencies, have also been involved in backing these Slorc-controlled projects, which appear primarily to serve the national security interests of the junta, and often benefit drug-producing organizations directly.



Khin Nyunt (on left) distributing rice to one of the leaders of a group following a ceasefire agreement.

One of the central components of Slorc's strategy of co-optation among ethnic minority rebels like the Wa and Kokang, was the implementation of a "Border Areas Development Program", which frequently involved direct cooperation with known drug warlords. These dubious projects, which have also faced charges of substantial exploitation of slave labor, have received significant support from the UNDP. Over \$1.3 million has been poured into former CPB rebel areas by the UN as of 1992, according to the Working Peoples Daily (12 July 1991). Another WPD report highlighted a

The Burman-majority Slorc regime's grand strategy to "divide and rule" the plethora of often resistant ethnic minority groups inside Burma, can be most clearly seen in its political manipulations in the Shan State. By buying off ethnic insurgents in the Shan State via its facilitation of the opium trade, the Slorc can free up military resources and personnel for deployment against resistance groups in other regions, such as the Karen and Kachin rebel armies, as well as focus more intently on clamping down on civilian dissent in the cities.

Beyond the boost given to its counter-insurgency campaigns in other parts of the country, its deal-making with the Wa and Kokang drug barons also provides a major source of indirect revenue for the cash-starved Slorc governmental coffers. As a recent US State department report on Burma reveals, "narcotics-related corruption remains a serious problem among local and field-level officials. Multiple, reliable reports confirm that lower-level civilian, police, customs, and military personnel frequently acquiesce or participate in drug trafficking in exchange for monetary compensation". (US State Department report, 3/3/92) As one might expect, the web of corruption doesn't stop at just the lowest levels. Bertil Linter, a well-known Burma expert, reports in the Far Eastern Economic Review that, while Slorc's official foreign-exchange revenues stand at no more than US\$300-350 million, "actual holdings may be as high as US\$850-900 million, most of which is deposited in overseas banks". (FEER, 20/2/92) The difference between official and actual revenue figures, measures the extent to which illicit drug profits are flowing into the Slorc central government bank accounts from outlying regions. Linter goes on to add that "intelligence sources, diplomats, and other observers suspect laundered drug money paid for a substantial part of Burma's recent purchase of more than US\$1 billion worth of military hardware from China". (FEER, 20/2/92)

Another disastrous offshoot of the narcotics trade has been the escalation of domestic heroin use among

Burmese youth. Estimates put Burma's escalating addict population at 150,000. Amazingly, the Slorc regime is encouraging the addictive habits of Rangoon college students and city-dwellers, as an easy method of sedating a potentially disruptive civil dissident force. College students led the nationwide pro-democracy movement that nearly toppled the Ne Win junta in 1988, so Slorc internal security forces focus their most intense scrutiny on the youth population. "The canteens on the grounds of Rangoon University are selling heroin freely, with the officials being fully aware of the situation", admitted one student, in a report by the Thai press. (TN, 13/3/92) Mahn Nyunt Maung, a well-known Burmese author and political prisoner, who fled to Thailand following his recent release from prison, collaborated these reports, declaring, "the availability of heroin in Rangoon is so great that one can easily buy it at any street kiosk for a bargain price". (TN, 18/11/92) He contends that Slorc officials are encouraging increased sales as a way of diverting students from politics, and placating a restless population trapped in a deteriorating economic situation.

In conclusion, the Slorc-facilitated trade in heroin detrimentally effects not only its own population, but also the communities of many other nations. Especially hard hit have been next-door China, who is suffering a heroin plague and related AIDS epidemic along its shared border with Burma, and the Western countries who's insatiable demand fuels the

whole process. Drug trafficking also represents yet another example of the Slorc's inevitable drive to pervert every sector of Burmese life to the its own military-security needs and iron ambition to remain in power. Hopefully, China, ASEAN, and the West will soon realize that the Burmese civil war cannot be treated as simply an internal domestic matter unrelated to international affairs, as the far-flung devastating consequences of Burma's drug trade highlights. The interdependent dynamics of our "new world order" require engagement in the human rights struggles of other peoples and nations. Otherwise, sooner or later, we will all have to pay a price.

- Sources - US State Department report(3/3/92), FEER(20/2/92), AW(30/9/92), TN(13/3/92), (18/11/92)



SOURCES USED IN THIS ISSUE

- FEER - Far Eastern Economic Review
- AW - Asiaweek
- TN - The Nation (Thailand)
- BP - Bangkok Post (Thailand)
- WPD - Working Peoples' Daily (Burma)

China, Burma and Drugs

China is paying a heavy price for its close alliance with the Slorc regime. As an Asia Week expose on the opium trade reveals "the famous Burma Road, hacked out of the jungle nearly 50 years ago by Allied troops, has become a major artery for smuggling heroin out of Burma. As bundles of the drug traverse China on the way to the US and Europe, more and more is spilling out... A heroin plague - and an incipient epidemic of AIDS - is spreading across China". Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan Province, which borders Burma's Shan State, has an estimated 60,000 addicts alone, and over 2/3rds of China's recognized HIV cases are concentrated in a single county, Ruili, located directly on the Burmese border. AIDS spreads at the intersection of heroin use (through sharing of dirty hypodermic needles), prostitution, and trade, the

precise conditions existing along the Burma-China border.

But the incredible profits accompanying the trade frustrate even brutal measures designed to crack down on the drug plague. For example, a kilo of 90-95% pure heroin fetches 10,000-12,000 rmb (around \$2000) at the Burmese opium centers of Kokang and Mongko. Just across the Chinese frontier at Baoshan, the price jumps to 50,000 rmb, and by the time it hits Kunming the going price has risen to 100,000 rmb. And the product has yet to reach its prime exit port at Hong Kong, let alone the eventual destination in the US or Europe. Other prime drug supply routes are through Bangkok, Thailand, Manipur State, India, Chittagong, Bangladesh, and, after being shipped via Army truck convoys through Mandalay to Rangoon, out to sea, heading towards Singapore and Malaysia.

FEDERALISM

Ethnic Conflict and the Future of Burma

Soon after Burma attained independence from British rule in 1948, conflicts erupted between the rightists and the leftists, as well as between different ethnic groups and the central government. Before long, the newly born union plunged into internal turmoil which still goes on today as the root causes of these conflicts remain unsolved.

At the beginning of 1962, when the popularly elected government led by Prime Minister U Nu had expressed its willingness to solve the existing problems by negotiating with the opposition, indigenous leaders who had not yet joined the armed struggle assembled at Taunggyi in Shan State and consulted among themselves to formulate a better system which would be able to solve the ethnic conflict in Burma. As the ethnic leaders were meeting at Taunggyi, rumors spread all over the country that the ethnic nationalities were secretly planning a rebellion and were going to secede from the union. The truth was that ethnic leaders were working openly, not for rebellion, but for the betterment of the existing union and were planning to present their recommendations to the parliament. In their recommendations they used a new term "**Federal Principle**" to emphasize the amendments they wished to have added to the existing constitution. They did not intend to break away from the union because Chapter 10 of the 1947 Constitution had already conferred upon the Shan and Kayah States the right of secession. U Nu clearly expressed this in his book *Saturday's Son*, when he wrote, "**If the state leaders were intent upon rebellion they would be unlikely to spend time and effort on their Federal Principle. This was an uncertain bird in the bush; they had in Chapter 10 of the Constitution their bird in the hand.**" (U Nu, *Saturday's Son*, page 341)

Meanwhile Prime Minister U Nu, felt that it was time for the Union to find ways to amend the Constitution of the Union for the benefit of all

citizens. He called for a two day conference on constitutional reform to begin on March 1, 1962. Leaders from all legal political parties, including ethnic peoples' parties, attended the conference held at the Broadcasting Service, Prome Road, Rangoon. The first day session began with U Nu's opening speech followed by the presentation of the "Federal Principle" by the ethnic leaders and ended after a number of delegates had presented their views. The remaining delegates would present their positions the following day and then the necessary resolutions would be acted on.

Two prominent ethnic leaders, head of Shan State Sao Hkun Hkio and head of Kayah State Sao Wunna, accompanied U Nu on his way back to his official residence in Windermere. On the way Sao Hkun Hkio reflected on the rumors that were spreading around the country and assured U Nu that the ethnic groups would not take advantage of any one and that if they wanted to play rough they could have done it in 1948 and 1949 when the government was confined to Rangoon with a mere one and a half battalions under its command. U Nu replied that he did not believe the rumors and that he trusted the ethnic leaders.

Who was spreading these rumors? Prime Minister U Nu as well as the ethnic leaders had no idea at that time, but the puzzle was to be solved just a few hours later.

At about two o'clock on the morning of March 2, U Nu, his cabinet members, and some of the ethnic leaders were apprehended by the military. A group of military leaders led by Gen. Ne Win seized state power. The reason given was "**the anion is on the verge of disintegration because of the ethnic groups who have made secret plans to start a rebellion after which they plan to break away from the union.**"

To strengthen their reasoning the generals equated the term "federal" with "disintegration". They went on to say that the ethnic conflict had been created by "Western Colonialists", and they labelled every body who dared ad-

vocate "self-determination" as secessionist.

Being a plural society, ethnic conflict had been, and still is, the center of politics in Burma. Without knowing the true facts of history, and without recognizing the actual depth of the ethnic conflict, we will never be able to find a way to settle these long standing conflicts.

Political leaders and political scientists who are aware of the seriousness of ethnic conflicts have been striving to work out better methods for settling such conflicts. Of many different approaches to settle ethnic conflict, the most distinguished approaches are assimilationist, partitionist and consociational. The assimilation approach aims at establishing a centralized system. In Burma the assimilation approach practiced by successive governments has failed. The partitionist approach refers to the alteration of international borders so as to reduce ethnic conflict, which has also proved to be impracticable. The consociation approach, considered by most of the political scientists to be a more realistic option for plural societies, seems to be the most suitable for solving the ethnic conflict in Burma and establishing a stable democratic system.

The indigenous peoples of Burma presented their aspirations to the government in 1948, and the government failed to respond, thus igniting civil war. When Prime Minister U Nu began to listen to the people and was beginning to work together with indigenous leaders in 1962, the military intervened extinguishing the optimism of the people. Now Slorc is once again trying to ignore realities. But history can not be stranded forever by a few people however deceptive they may be.

The international community is now slowly beginning to recognize the importance of solving ethnic conflicts in their endeavor to construct a peaceful world.

The problems in Burma can only be solved by recognizing the right of indigenous peoples which includes the right of self-determination.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Chinese Naval Bases

Burma, with aid from China, is building a new naval base in the Irrawaddy Delta, and upgrading several other coastal facilities, much to the displeasure of a worried India, who fears China will be given access to these bases in exchange for continuing to supply the Sloc with arms, and provide it protection in the UN. (A new base is being built on Hanggyi island, at the mouth of the Bassein river, while sites at Mergui, Sittwe, and the Coco Islands are being upgraded.) One Asian diplomat commented that "India is worried, and ASEAN should be worried too ... no one is really sure what they are doing." While the Sloc's U Aye claims the build-up is solely to defend the country from Thai fishing poachers, some suspect the regime also hopes to prevent a possible sea-based hook-up between Karen rebels in the Delta, and Arkanese Muslim rebels to the west. (3/12/92, TN)

Ericsson Pty LTD

The Australian company Ericsson Pty. LTD has signed a contract to

supply Burma with an initial 1000 mobile phones. (TN, 29/11/92)

Thai Press

Burmese military officials at a Regional Border Committee meeting in late November asked their Thai counterparts to help reign in the Thai free press, which they feel is too critical of the Sloc regime. (TN, 28/11/92)

Thai Ambassador to Rangoon

The Thai ambassador to Rangoon defended Thailand's constructive engagement stance towards the Sloc regime, pointing out that "Burma is not being protested against by all the world community. It has recently re-entered the Non-Aligned Movement which groups many countries." He also pointed out that despite Western calls for pressure against Sloc, "Western countries separate economic interests from political issues... the US tops foreign investment in Burma, followed closely by Japan, the Netherlands, France, and other European countries." He submits that

Western sanctions against Burma are not as stringent as those placed on Cambodia, because the EC and US benefit much more from Burmese investments than Cambodian ones. "If the EC wants to force Thailand to impose economic sanctions, it should first consider its own position ... we don't intervene in the internal matters of other countries", he concluded. (BP, 22/11/92)

Sanctions

Australia has held private talks with several countries about the prospect of sanctions against Burma. "The big problem is these countries that are doing the most business with Burma at the moment are not the slightest bit interested in imposing sanctions - I'm talking about the ASEAN countries and China.", said Australian Foreign Minister Garth Evans. The sanctions would focus on "embargoes on aid and defense-related goods", he said. (BP 4/12/92)

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