

B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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In the Karen State school children practice entering a bunker in preparation for a possible air attack by the Slorc military. Such drills are as common to these children as fire drills are to children in schools in the West.

For more than 45 years many people in Burma have lived under the constant threat of attacks by the military. Their lives are organized by these attacks rather than by the seasons which generally determine planting time, harvest time and rest time. Their struggle for a time of peace continues and the international community can help by boycotting companies investing with the Slorc, and by pressuring the UN Security Council to impose trade sanctions and an arms embargo against Slorc.

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CIVIL WAR

During the present summer season, 2,500 Slorc troops have been carrying out an active offensive against the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) area opposite the northern town of Mae Hong Son. Most all other active guerrilla areas are appear relatively quiet.

Due to the fighting, about 4,952 Karenni (Kayah) refugees have already fled the area from June to December. They are now housed in six refugees camps on Thai Soil.

The Slorc attack began following a KNPP surprise attack on Slorc's "Huay Pong Long camp" on September 1 last year. The KNPP guerrillas occupied the camp and also captured 10 Burmese troops alive. Since the camp is strategic for border trade, Slorc immediately launched a massive counter offensive and recaptured it on 26 September last year. However both sides accelerated the war in order to control the area and casualties were high.

Unlike previous dry seasons, no major fighting has been reported in guerrillas areas of the Karen, Kachin and Mon. Slorc withdrew its troops from secondary posts in these areas to the urban centers to tighten security for the national convention. However about 12,000 troops are still in primary positions.

In spite of halting the war for the moment, Slorc is still exercising his policy of forced relocation of villages from war zones to zones under tight Slorc control. Perhaps hundreds of thousands of villagers have lost their homes and livelihood through these operations.

At the same time Slorc is systematically carrying out a forced recruitment program to extend the size of their infantry forces. Officers from the recruitment centers are conscripting boys from villages in the Irrawaddy Delta Division. Their strategy is to get ten young men from each group of villages. Moreover the army officials take advantage of the parents by demanding a ransom of 5,000 kyats for a boy to be returned back home. If the villagers can not pay, the young men

will be sent into the war zones after only six months basic training. This Slorc policy obviously has its most dramatic affect on the poor families who can not afford to pay such a large sum of money.

The army's propaganda is diverting international criticism against Slorc's abuses of basic human rights with the fabrication that the country is in danger from a foreign invasion. The army's public relations officers are reportedly trying to shock the Burmese people by telling them that Burma needs a strong military to protect the country from foreign invasion. They are never clear what country is poised to invade Burma

Nevertheless, Karen guerrillas say Slorc continues road construction projects leading to the front line and supplying ammunition to these frontline posts. Because of such activities, Karen guerrillas expect Slorc may resume a massive offensive just before the rainy season in April and May. At that time, the present national convention would be completed and Slorc will transfer troops from serving for urban security to the front line secondary posts. The time will be ripe for war. Eventually, the life of the innocent village people will be destroyed again and the number of refugees will be increased drastically.

One of the ways to save the life of thousands of innocent people in Burma is for the issue to be taken to the United Nations Security Council

where a total arms embargo on Burma can ben initiated. This would bring about an international campaign against major arms importing countries such as China, Singapore, Yugoslavia and Poland. The members of ASEAN countries should forget their selfish economic profit-oriented "constructive engagement" policy and take a stronger stand against Slorc in order to build up regional peace and stability. All ASEAN countries would truly benefit if the war in Burma were ended and power turned over to the people.

At the same time, few people are naive enough to believe this will come about easily. For the UN Security Council to take action, and for ASEAN to change their constructive engagement policy, local campaigns which are both courageous and sustained must be organized and coordinated. As rocks on the seashore are slowly worn down by the constant and unending movement of the waves, so too can constructive engagement and arms sales to Rangoon be changed if local groups carry out their campaigns day after day, week after week, month after month. Persistence and tenacity are essential if lives are to be saved and peace restored to Burma.

• Sources:

*KNU

*BCG

*TN (18/10/92)

*BP (10/12/92)

ACTIONS

Pro-democracy groups struggling against the military junta in Burma have called for friends around the world to launch campaigns against companies investing in Burma, demanding that they totally withdraw their investments until all political prisoners have been released, and Slorc withdraws its troops from ethnic-controlled areas in order to facilitate the movement towards national reconciliation.

One such company is Pepsi which now operates a soft drink factory in Rangoon. Pro-democracy groups feel that an international boycott against Pepsi is not so difficult, and can be a good activity to involve more and more people in the Burma issue. They also feel that it should not be too difficult to dislodge Pepsi from Burma and this would be a warning to other companies who seem unaware of how their investments help prop up the military regime.

According to one Burmese activist, "Our friends around the world no longer drink Pepsi. They heed our call and understand that a small move like boycotting Pepsi can be the first step in bringing about major changes for peace."

THE BURMESE MILITARY

The Role of the Military in Burma Politics

Burma was an independent state for more than 45 years. During those 45 years, civilian governments ruled the country for a mere 12 years, 1948-1958 and then 1960-1962.

During the remaining 33 years, the country has been under military rule, first in the name of an interim government (1958-1960), and then a military dictatorship assuming various names, viz. the Revolutionary Council, the Government of Socialist Republic of Burma and State Law and Order Restoration Committee (1962-1993). It was under this military regime that Burma lost all of its development prospects created before the military coup in 1962. However, instead of trying to atone for their past mistakes the military still claims that they are the savior of the nation because they protected the nation from foreign aggression and prevented it from disintegration. They further claim that they have executed numerous plans that have been beneficial to the nation and that the army is the only organization which has remained united throughout its long standing history. Based on these misleading reasons they fallaciously conclude that the military deserves the right to maintain a leading role in future politics.

The desire to play a leading role by a specific strata of the people or by a particular institution itself is a deviation from the essence of democracy. On the other hand it would be appropriate to examine whether their claims are authentic.

With regard to the first claim that the army has protected the nation from foreign aggression, is not it the basic duty of the military to protect the nation from foreign intruders? If not for what purpose was the army originally established? Anyhow, in spite of our difference in views as to whether fighting against foreign aggression is a basic duty or an extracurricular duty of a military, let us first try to find out how many battles the Burmese military has indeed fought against foreign intruders.

In fact, since its establishment on Dec 26, 1941 in Bangkok, Thailand, the Burmese army has fought a mere two brief wars against foreign intruders. The first was against the Japanese during WW II. That war of resistance, where the entire people participated dealing decisive blows against the enemy, began on March 27, 1945 and lasted a few months only owing to the end of the war on August 14 that year. Actually the Japanese left Burma even earlier than that.

The second was against the Koumintang remnants in early 50. But the hero of that war, Brig Gen Kyaw Zaw was ousted by Ne Win in 1957. Many observers view this ouster to be Ne Win's earliest action in a series of conspiracies to finish off a rising star, who could become a rival in the army.

As for the prevention of national disintegration, though Burma has never been officially disintegrated, the internal conflict has been so fierce that it has lasted for more than 45 years. This is one of the longest such conflicts in history. There have been many attempts to settle the conflict through negotiations. Each of these attempts were categorically turned down or blocked by the military. Thus the military, according to historians, has been manipulated by some ambitious personality(s) for his(there) personal interests.

Regarding the second claim that the military has served the nation more than any other institution or organization in Burma, the following brief list of events could be helpful for us to consider whether a handful of military rulers have abused the military to advance their own positions or not.

*1962, March 2: The military led by Ne Win toppled the popularly elected government of U Nu.

*1962, July 8: Rangoon University Students Union Building, which was one of the most prominent historical monuments in Rangoon, was demolished by the army sappers killing all wounded students who were hiding in the building.

*1963, February 23: All private owned factories were confiscated

which (as proven by history) was the beginning of the decline of Burma's economy, (previously the strongest in SEA).

*1964, May 17: 100 kyat & 50 kyat notes demonetized.

*1965, December 6: All newspapers confiscated.

*1967, June-July: The regime incited communal riots between the Burmese and Chinese; more than 300 killed.

*1967, August 13: The military fired into thousands of Arakanese people demonstrating to demand sufficient rice rations; More than 100 killed.

*1974, January 3: A new constitution was approved which endorsed the totalitarian system of General Ne Win

*1974, May 13-June 6: Labor unrest broke out when workers demanded increase of wages; more than 300 workers killed in their respective factories.

*1978, April 1: 5000 prisoners were forced to work at the Rangoon-Mandalay highway construction project; exposed to the sun from dawn to dusk with meager rations and water, having no adequate measure to prevent malaria, typhoid and other tropical deceases, many died at the work site.

*1985, November 3: 100 kyat notes were demonetized

*1987, September 5: 75, 35 & 25 kyat notes were demonetized.

*1988, March 13-18: Student unrest was crushed by the military; more than 200 died; the most painful incident was the death of 42 students who suffocated to death while locked inside a van.

*1988, Aug-Sep: The two-month long 88 popular uprising: Thousands killed.

*1990, May 27: Majority of Burmese people rejected the military regime by voting for the opposition.

1991, Dec 10-11: Students demonstrated in the university campus to express their support for Nobel peace laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. More than 1000 imprisoned.



REFUGEES

The refugee population along the Thai-Burma border, which hovers at around 70,000 Karen, Karenni, and Mon persons, is stable at present, although fighting in October and November did generate a small-scale wave of new displacement. However, as refugee relief worker, Jack Dunford, reports in his year-end analysis of the border situation, the arrival of the dry-season, and corresponding reports of Slorc troop movements, has brought with it the annual flight of hundreds of ethnic villagers escaping forced conscription as army porters inside Burma.

This year the refugees arriving are both older (many over 65), and younger than normally, as Slorc troops increasingly resort to enslaving children and the elderly for service in their counter-insurgency campaigns. An uneasy, "wait-and-see" atmosphere pervades throughout the border region at the moment. All parties involved are on the look-out for any initial signs signaling the long-expected launching of the Slorc's dreaded dry-season offensive.

This year the timing of Slorc's "D-day" has been complicated by political maneuverings in Rangoon. The Slorc has invested a lot of political capital into promoting this January's "National Convention", and will probably hold off on any major strikes against ethnic insurgents until the Convention is over, or at least well under way. They are aware that a skeptical international community is watching closely, and will not be impressed by its words of reconciliation and reform in Rangoon, if it is simultaneously bombarding ethnic groups in the jungle with "scorched earth" military operations. However, as the constitution-writing process will be a long and drawn out one, and probably inconclusive, the military cannot wait forever to begin attacking.

Some feel that the Slorc's delayed onslaught has little to do with the Convention, however. They assert that the Army has gained a superior military advantage in the civil war over the last several years, as a result of repeated

rounds of debilitating attrition tactics against the guerrillas. These campaigns have cost the Slorc dearly, as well, but they can afford more losses than the insurgents. With the rebels considerably weakened, time is on the Slorc's side, this theory holds. They therefore have no need to rush, and can afford to methodically move all their forces into place before attacking when the time is ripe. Thus they hope to assure a swift, overpowering victory, at a minimum cost of life.

In any case, when the "blitz" comes down, it will be vicious, and generate a major new exodus of refugees into Thailand. There are already thousands of precariously balanced internal refugees inside Burma's border states, with more being created daily by the Slorc's heavy-handed forced relocation strategy. If the large civilian populations presently being protected by the rebels also become exposed to Slorc policy, as a result of the Army's coming drive to control the entire border area, a large-scale humanitarian crisis, quickly spilling on over into Thailand, will be the inevitable result.

Some fear that the Slorc, with the cooperation of Thailand, is attempting to seal off the border now, before making any major moves. Troop movements in the northern border region seem to confirm this ominous prospect. Perhaps Thailand would not be all that unhappy to see the refugee flow shut down in this manner. Several refugee camps on the Thai side of the border have complained recently of harassment by local officials, as the Thai Interior Ministry plans to move at least 4 camps to new, inaccessible and inhospitable locations.

Turning to Burma's other, prominent refugee quagmire, the Arakanese Rohingyas encamped along the western border with Bangladesh, we find yet another stalemated situation. The UNHCR, which agreed last September to participate in a repatriation process for the estimated 288,000 Moslem Rohingyas in Bangladesh, abruptly withdrew from the operation in November, accusing the Bangladeshis of forcibly

returning unwilling refugees. Only 17,000 "volunteers" had been repatriated when the Bangladeshis suspended the process in mid-January, due to their disagreement with the UNHCR.

"We have agreed in principle to take a breather until January 25. By that time we hope to bring the UNHCR back into the repatriation process ... Bangladesh is keen on a quick understanding with the UNHCR", commented the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, before heading off for talks with UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali. "How the refugees can be sent home in the shortest possible time is our main concern", he added, making clear Bangladesh's #1 priority with regards to the problem. (BP, 21/1/93)

In a related incident, some 5000 Rohingyas, who had slipped out of the refugee camps to avoid repatriation, were tracked down by local authorities and threatened with arrest. (BP, 25/11/93) It seems unlikely that the repatriation process will ever achieve stability as long as Slorc remains in power inside Burma, and the Rohingyas remain deeply suspicious of the junta's intentions towards them. In the meantime, impoverished Bangladesh will continue to bear the brunt of hosting Slorc's tattered orphans of war and persecution.

• Sources

*Jack Dunford - "Year-end Report on the Thai-Burma Border"

*Bangkok Post



POLITICS

Thai-Burmese Relations

Several significant developments in Thai-Burmese relations in the past month have once again highlighted the harmful effect Thailand's "constructive engagement" policy is having on the prospects for any emergence of authentic peace, justice, or democracy in totalitarian Burma. Outstanding among these developments was a bilateral agreement on economic and trade cooperation, signed by Burmese Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw and his Thai counterpart FM Prasong on January 21st.

The agreement, which was made official at a ceremony inside Bangkok's royal Saranom Palace, will establish a joint commission between SLoRC and the Thai government, with a mandate to promote increased economic and trade ties between the two nations. The Burmese opposition government-in-exile, the NCGUB, lambasted Thailand's complicity in the deal, asserting that its increased economic involvement in Burma "will never produce any benefit for the people of Burma".

The NCGUB spokesperson went on to slam the proposed joint trade commission on ecological grounds, predicting the agreement would lead to "inestimable damage to the environment of Burma". (TN, 24/1/93) Thailand's past record in Burma lends a persuasive credence to both of these charges. Thai logging operations since 1988 have ravaged the remaining forest lands along the Burmese border, for example, while its fishing trawlers are rapidly depleting and disrupting Burmese waters in the Andaman Sea and elsewhere. Furthermore, increased Thai investment in Burma in recent years has not correlated into any improvement in human rights, democratic participation, quality of life, or freedom from fear for the masses of average Burmese citizens, debunking the central myth of Thailand's constructive engagement policy.

If anything, human rights conditions for the common people have worsened as a result of Thai business ar-

rangements along the border, especially for the ethnic nationalities, while the flow of Thai trade revenues into SLoRC's military coffers have only provided the Army with more resources to wage its near-genocidal attacks in the countryside. The fact that the Thai government would proceed with such a major political agreement as the joint trade commission within days of the highly-publicized collapse of the SLoRC's farcical National Convention, reveals its unswerving determination to cling to a self-interested agenda of economic exploitation in Burma, regardless of international criticism, or the widespread, well-documented acts of SLoRC repression against its own people.

After lecturing the 700 Burmese delegates attending the highly touted National Convention for several hours, emphasizing the utmost importance of maintaining the military's leadership in any future governments, the SLoRC abruptly halted the fledgling meetings on only the second day, claiming the participants needed several weeks for "appropriate study" of the SLoRC's rigid guidelines before the constitutional process could begin again. (BP, 12/1/93) Few observers of the conference were left with any remaining doubts as to whether the SLoRC convention was a sincere effort towards reform, or just another half-baked PR ploy to buy elusive international legitimacy.

While the above-mentioned events occupied the highest levels of Thai-Burmese diplomatic relations, other critical developments were taking place concurrently at the provincial level. In northern Thailand a delegation of local Thai officials led by the governor of Chiang Rai, met with the Burmese governor of Kentung Province, and tentatively agreed to begin construction on a proposed road link to connect the countries of China, Burma, and Thailand. The road link is the centerpiece of Thailand's strategic plan to open up the "Golden Triangle" region to joint trade and tourism development. China's Yunnan Province originally proposed the idea several years ago,

and the Thai private sector now hopes to carry it forward by building hotels, expanding local airport capacity, and facilitating foreign tourists who want to travel to Burma or China from Thailand.

"This dusty, unpaved road will certainly be developed as a major tourism and trade route", proclaimed the Thai governor of Chiang Rai, with no apparent concern for the moral questions implicit in increasing economic ties with the notorious SLoRC regime, or the sustaining flow of foreign exchange revenue that would result from enhanced Burmese tourism. (BP, 21/1/93)

The same week witnessed another important development in the financial sector, with the Thai Military Bank opening a branch office in Rangoon. This important Thai institution is the first major foreign bank to set up operations in Burma in the last 30 years.

All of these recent events in the Burmese sector reflect Thailand's broader foreign policy to "turn the battlefields of SE Asia into marketplaces", in the words of former Thai PM and present trade crusader/politician, Chatichai Choonhavan. In the next few years Thailand will push forward several transportation projects to link Laos, Vietnam, Burma, and China to Thailand in the hopes of establishing itself as the regional king of tourism and trade. Furthermore, Thailand desperately hopes to exploit its neighbor's energy and water reserves through hydroelectric dam projects, and oil and gas explorations.

The recently failed charade of a National Convention staged in Rangoon should serve as a clear indicator to the international community, and Thailand, of the SLoRC's future intentions to retain full political power in Burma. It is time for the rest of the world to put pressure on Thailand to align its foreign policy with this reality, and the principles of humanitarian-based diplomacy. Thai economic collusion with one of the world's worst human rights abusers is no longer justified.



HUMAN RIGHTS

UNHCR Policy on the Detention Center

On January 28, UNHCR Deputy Representative Mr. Guy Gullet, repeating a previous UNHCR announcement, confirmed that UNHCR will continue monthly welfare assistance to all 2,191 Burmese accepted by UNHCR as "Persons of Concern" in Thailand, but admitted that the Thai Minister of Interior's plan to place these persons in safe camps, or holding centers, is better for the Burmese students.

The first announcement was made on December 4, 1992 by the head of the regional office, Mr. Daniel Conway. The statement said that the 516 Burmese students who signed an agreement to go to the holding center should go there and UNHCR will make assistance payments directly to the camp. At the same time, the Minister of Interior said that there are now two alternatives for the Burmese students; either go to the camp or be repatriate back to Burma.

Following the UNHCR announcement, US based Asia Watch stated on January 27 that Thai authorities refuse to grant UNHCR and other international organizations unlimited access to the camp and consequently UNHCR should stop pressuring the Burmese students to go to the camp.

At the present, there are only 17 people in the holding center while the remaining 499 still refuse to go. Those who have refused to go to the camp have had their monthly welfare assistance by the UNHCR cut, and their living situation in Bangkok has become critical. Some of them are looking for low paying jobs at construction sites around Thailand, but their lives will be obviously exploited by construction site owners and/or the Thai police. Others are trying to cross into Malaysia illegally where there is much easier access to jobs.

• Sources:

*ONSOB (27/01/93)

*BP (29/01/93)

*CCSDPT (04/12/92)

Students in Immigration Jail

About 20 Burmese students were beaten during their detention by the Thai Immigration Officials in Bangkok's Immigration Detention Center. The students are from the exiled All Burma Basic Education Students' Union (ABBESU) in Bangkok.

The students were punched and beaten by the officials who claimed that the students had broken their agreement with the Thai Ministry of Interior to go to the holding center.

Thai police arrested the students on January 10 during their protest in front of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok which they were holding to protest the constitutional convention being held by the SLORC in Burma. Following the arrest, Thai police handed the students over to the immigration officials.

Along with human rights violations by Thai officials against Burmese exiles, Ex-General Chavalit identified activities by these Burmese dissident groups and students as one of the issues creating Thai-Burmese (SLORC) tensions.

• Sources:

*ABBESU (8/01/93)

*BP (20/01/93)

Aung San Su Kyi's House Arrest

Lt Col. Kyaw Win, Deputy Director of Military Intelligence and SLORC's Information Officer, stressed at a news conference on January 12 that Aung San Su Kyi will remain under house arrest indefinitely and the next government will have to consider her release after a transfer of power.

• Source:

*BP (13/01/93)

Students arrested in Rangoon

Some 30 students were taken into preventive custody when a security net was thrown over a sensitive section of Rangoon. The students were arrested for a variety of reasons including charges that they were planning to disrupt the national convention, or because they were believed to have been involved in past anti-SLORC activities.

• Source:

*BP (20/01/93)

Woman Raped

Students in Mae Sot report that a 23 year-old Burmese shop keeper crossed the Muoi River into Myawaddy Burma to visit friends. On January 30 of this year, she was planning to return to Mae Sot to continue her work. At the river border crossing, she was taken by two Burmese soldiers and two Burmese police into a small building behind the immigration hut and raped. The rapes happened at about noon on that day.

She was allowed to then cross the river into Thailand, but was threatened with death if she should talk.

• Source

*Mae Sot student report



ECONOMICS

Foreign Investment

Thai's Chiang Rai Chamber of Commerce

Thai Chiang Rai officials have been discussing with Slorc and China the past two years to construct a new road linking Thailand, Burma and China. The new road is suppose to promote border trade and Thai tourism with neighboring countries. The Chiang Rai Chamber of Commerce said they predict the road would be constructed at the earliest in December, 1993.

- Source:

BP (05/01/93)

MGR (00/12/92)

Thai Military Bank

The first foreign bank, a branch of the Thai Military Bank, was opened in Rangoon on 22 January, 1993.

- Source:

TN: (23/01/93)

Thai-Slorc economics Ties

On 21 February, Thailand and Slorc agreed to set up a joint committee to promote economics, commerce, social and cultural exchanges. The joint committee was approved by the Thai cabinet on 12 January, 1993.

Kyodo-Myanmar Joint Venture

A joint venture Co. between Japan and Slorc, Kyodo- Myanmar, is exploring for natural gas in the Gulf of Martaban in Burmese territorial waters.

Slorc's tourism

Slorc issued an order that foreign tourists entering Burma must change US\$200 into certificates that can not

be cashed in at the end of their stay. At the moment, foreigners are changing money on the illegal market where the rate is US\$1 equal to from 100 to 150 kyats. The present official exchange rate is US\$1 to about 7 Kyats.

- Source:

BBS: (28/01/93)

Personal source

Sale contracts

On 5 January, sale contracts were signed by four companies. Under the contracts, India and the Sanmas Trading Co., will purchase US\$0.325 million worth of agricultural products, Singapore and Eastbournne Chemical Industry pte. Ltd., Myanmar and the Huang Yui Co., China will buy agricultural produce, timber products and sculptures worth Kyats 208.4 million (about US\$ 29.71 million).

- Source:

WPD: (7/1/93)

International Support

Thai NGOs

On 21 February, four representatives of Thai NGOs submitted a letter to the foreign minister of Thailand, Prasong, asking him to postpone the signing of the joint committee for economic, social and cultural cooperation with Slorc.

US & European Community

Diplomats from the United States and the European Community lodged a protest against Slorc's poor human rights record, and boycotted the national convention's opening ceremony on 9 January.



A CocaCola adverdisement in downtown Rangoon. The Pan American Myanmar Ltd. company distributes Coke despite international calls for their withdrawl.

NEWS BRIEFS

Dry Season Offensive

The commander of Thailand's Third Army, Gen. Yingyos, confirmed reports that Burmese forces across the border appear poised to launch a major offensive against ethnic insurgents along the border areas opposite Mae Hong Son and Tak provinces. Judging from the scale of Slorc reinforcements, this year's dry season could produce the largest attack to date in the 40 year old civil war, he predicted. He added that the Thai Army is prepared to handle the influx of Burmese refugees that would follow a full-scale attack. A joint Thai-Slorc task force has been established to deal with such cases. The Thai policy will be to disarm any refugees seeking shelter across the border, and then to push them back into Burma once fighting has died down. (BP, 5/1/93)

Hill 491

The territory nearby the disputed Hill 491 will continue to be an issue of national importance for both Thailand and Burma, due to a potential 2 to 3 trillion cubic feet of gas that the French oil company, Total, hopes to extract from the area. Total plans to set up 4 drilling platforms and lay a pipeline to Tavoy, Burma, before connecting it on into Thailand, who would

receive the bulk of the discovered reserves. The pipeline would run through territory controlled by Karen rebels, which could lead to conflict. Estimates for the total cost of the project range from US\$ 800 million to 1 billion. Thailand's PTT has a 20% share in the joint venture. (BP, 10/1/93)

Burmese Labor

Thailand's Labor Department announced that it will allow illegal Burmese immigrants to work in ten Thai provinces where there are labor shortages, mostly along Thailand's western and northern borders. The Thai govt. claims there are some 160,000 illegal Burmese in the country, of whom 50,000 are thought to be political refugees who fled violence in Burma between 1988-92. Several key industries in many of these 10 Thai provinces would probably collapse if the flow of cheap Burmese labor was cut off. (TN, 14/1/93)

Nobel Peace Prize Visit

A group of Nobel Peace Prize winners hopes to travel to Thailand next month to pressure the Slorc junta in Burma to release 1991 recipient Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been held in isolation for over 3 years. The

humanitarian group, which includes South African Desmond Tutu and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, expects its bid to go to Rangoon and meet Suu Kyi will be rejected. The Slorc recently stated that Suu Kyi still poses a national security threat, and that they will leave it to an, as yet undetermined and theoretical, future civilian government to decide her fate. (TN, BP)

National Convention

Two student protestors slipped through the tight security net thrown around Rangoon for the National Convention, in an apparent bid to commit suicide in front of the US and Japanese embassies. The two were quickly drug away by security police, but not before calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and condemning the National Convention as a sham. Numerous reports theorized that the Convention was hastily called off after only several hours, because the Slorc feared the delegates might stage a surprise protest by calling for a release of political prisoners, negotiations with ethnic insurgents, and a referendum on the military's hardline demand for control of any future government. (BP 6/1/93)



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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