B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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A Swiss-made Pilatus PC-7 sits on the apron of a Burma Air Force base near Rangoon. The PC-7 was sold to Burma by Pilatus as a trainer only, but is heavily loaded with rockets and bombs. Ethnic villagers living in the border areas of Burma have often claimed that airplanes such as this one bomb and rocket their villages destroying houses and killing civilians.

Many of the people of Burma have suffered under a civil war for more than 40 years. Their suffering has been tremendous. Now international attention is slowly focusing on this hidden country and its people. A recent visit to the border area by Nobel Peace Prize Laureates has also highlighted the need for international help in ending this suffering. All such efforts need to be directed at ending the civil war and bringing about a nation-wide cease fire. Only then can steps be taken to end the suffering and start the building of democracy for the people.

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

POLITICS

The Iron Triangle

The political waves generated by the visit of 7 Nobel Peace Prize laureates to Thailand this past month, exposed the cozy, triangular partnership that exists between the military strongmen of China, Burma, and Thailand (with the Khmer Rouge providing a subordinate, fourth leg to this eclectic regional alliance). While this mutually-beneficial political/economic confederation raises no constitutional conflicts for the military regimes in Rangoon and Peking, where the generals wear two "hats", and run the political/legislative side of the governmental game as well, its overt expression in Thailand tends to threaten the fragile "democracy" underconstruction in Bangkok. As the "Nobel 7" incident revealed, the Thai military elite continues to view itself as something of an autonomous national power unto itself, whose jurisdiction unquestionably extends to the domain of foreign policy formulation. By allowing the Nobel 7 peace mission to enter Thailand, against the expressed wishes of the military, Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpei struck a provocative blow in the name of the elected political establishment's primacy over that of the military in matters of policy. While it remains to be seen what long-term effects the Nobel visit will have on the situation in Burma, the peace pilgrimage made an immediate impact upon domestic Thai politics, one that hopefully will not fade away quickly.

The trigger issue sparking this internal Thai conflict revolved around the granting of a visa to the revered Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, as part of the Nobel laureates' crusade on behalf of their sister prize-winner, Aung San Su Kyi. The Chinese regime put heavy pressure on Thailand to deny the Dalai Lama entry into the country, accusing the exiled Tibetan of fostering insurrection designed to "split the motherland" in his former home region, now under occupation by the Chinese. Slorc point man, intelligence chief Khin Nyunt, also made it clear that Burma regarded the Nobel visit as an aggressive attack by interfering, imperialistic foreigners, which seriously undermined their sovereignty over "internal affairs". The Thai military quickly took up the cause on behalf of their authoritarian counterparts in China and Burma, with Army commander Vimol leading the charge, accusing the Thai Prime Minister of unnecessarily "inviting a war into our own house" by interfering in the politics of Thailand's neighbors. Other top military leaders, as well as prominent politicians within the right-wing opposition parties, chimed in with strong support for the Chinese and Burmese concerns. Overnight, a prominent political fault line surfaced between the military and elected officials, which sent quakes of concern rippling among Thailand's pro-democracy community.

Why the staunchly right-wing, fervently anti-communist Thai military establishment would be in bed with the descendants of Mao in China is a complex story of classic "balance-of-power" political intrigue. Ever since Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, to kick out of power the notorious Khmer Rouge revolutionaries, Thailand has discovered a good friend in the Chinese, as both have drawn closer to each other via a shared hatred/fear of Vietnamese "expansionism". Soon a "quid pro quo" arrangement was established wherein Thailand covertly facilitated the flow of Chinese arms to their infamous Cambodian clients, the Khmer Rouge, in exchange for China's complete cut off of aid and support to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), who's rural insurgency quickly died out in the late 1970's, after enjoying a burst of momentum only a few years earlier following a harsh military crackdown on student activists in Bangkok. After donating a limited supply of AK47 and RPGs in the early 1980's, Chinese arms dealings with Thailand escalated throughout the decade with the Thai military's purchase of 100 Chinese T69 tanks, 400 armored personnel carriers, numerous artillery pieces, and even 4 Chinese Navy frigates in 1992. In a few short years, a strong relationship has emerged between the Chinese and Thai generals which transcends ideological differences. The other corner of the "Triangle", the Slorc junta in Burma, also fosters close ties to both the Thai and Chinese military establishments. The extensive economic investments of top Thai military officials in lucrative Burmese logging and gem-mining operations is well-known, as is Thailand's desire to utilize Burma as a source for desperately needed hydro-electric power and natural gas deposits.

In the other direction, the 1.2 billion dollars worth of arms China sold to Burma in the early 1990's, as well as millions of dollars more worth of cross-border trade between the two nations (including probably a booming business in illicit opium and heroin) are more then enough reasons to maintain close ties in that geo-political sphere.

The visit of the Nobel delegation stirred up a hornets nest of irate generals from Peking to Rangoon to Bangkok and back. It crystallized the extent to which this Iron Triangle of military/economic alliances shapes regional politics, but also highlighted its vanishing ability to control events, at least in Thailand. The growing international movements for democracy and human rights is beginning to turn up the heat on Asia's warlords, as gradual inroads are being made into their primacy of power. More and more Asian citizens are coming to share the opinion of Costa Rican president and Nobel laureate, Oscar Arias, who asserted during his Thai visit that "the military is the same everywhere - repressive and corrupt". This consciousness-raising trend signals a time of hope in Asia, but also a time of danger. Democracy activists must be very careful in how they proceed in their attempts to diminish the military's control over their societies, for a cornered beast is more likely to lash out in anger, than calmly accept defeat.

Sources - Far Eastern Economic Review, 4/3/93. Bangkok Post, 21/2/93.

PEACE ISSUES

The Nobel Laureates Peace Mission

The controversial visit of 7 Nobel Peace Prize laureates to Thailand this past week, climaxed dynamically with their united call for - 1) the ejection of the illegitimate Slorc regime from its official seat representing Burma in the UN General Assembly, 2) a total arms embargo aimed at severing the insidious links between the human-rights abusing Slorc war machine and both national and private arms-traders, 3) rapid disengagement from the supportive economic and political alliances the ASEAN nations, and particularly Thailand, have formed with the repressive Burmese warlords ruling Slorc, and 4) hard-hitting, selective sanctions and a general economic boycott against Burma, designed to cripple the Slorc's capacity to sustain its war against the Burmese opposition groups and undermine its iron rule of terror over the civilian population.

Furthermore, the peace delegation highlighted two imperative political objectives: 1) the immediate release of their sister Nobel laureate, Aung San Su Kyi, and 2) Slorc's recognition of the 1990 Burmese election results. The Nobel laureates see these two actions as necessary first steps in the inevitable process of Slorc's handing over of political power to a democratically-elected government in Burma, and any future attempts to bring national reconciliation to the war-torn country.

"We're going to Geneva to the tell the UN to expel Burma", proclaimed Betty Williams, the activist from Northern Ireland, revealing the next item on the agenda for the Nobel laureates' peace mission. Ross Daniels of Amnesty International also confirmed the delegation's conviction not to allow the trip to end up being simply a 1-week "PR party", with little substantial follow-up to translate the current momentum they've helped generate into concrete actions. "I know what is going through the minds of Slorc. They are thinking that, if only these silly people would go to Geneva, and we last a few weeks, all this will die down ... Well, I have a message for the Slorc: this is just the beginning!", Daniels promised a group of Karen refugees who are living along the Thai border with Burma.

Expanding upon the issue of a total arms embargo against the Slorc, AI representative Daniels went on to declare that the world must recognize that "the sale of arms {to the Slorc} is the sale of death." He continued by pinpointing specifically the billions of dollars worth of military hardware China has poured into Burma in recent years, commenting that, "it is ironic that some of the countries that provide the most arms to autocratic regimes are members of the UN Security Council". South African archbishop, Desmond Tutu, joined in on the arms embargo chorus, noting that "Slorc is spending 50% of their budget on arms. For whom? They are using them against their own people! All that money could be translated into investments and worthwhile ventures in Burma. It seems so obvious, that what we are speaking about to them is in their own best interest." Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, who has led a push for peace and disarmament among his own war-racked Central American neighbors, universalized the issue, suggesting that "what we need to do in the Third World is demilitarize, because otherwise we won't find the critical funds needed for health and education." The revered Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dali Lama, reinforced these political, economic, and humanitarian considerations with the spiritual insight that the availability of arms inevitably leads to "some kind of human suffering", particularly when combined with "narrow-mindedness". He went on to quietly assert his belief that an arms embargo is "practically and morally speaking ... very right."

On the broader, provocative issue of punitive sanctions, or a general economic boycott against Burma, one of the laureates was able to speak directly from personal experience on the question. Desmond Tutu testified to the historical effectiveness of humanitarian-based economic penalties against the racist "apartheid" system in his own country, South Africa, contending that it was sanctions that forced progressive reforms on behalf of his down-trodden black brothers and sisters, not a willing change of heart on the part of the country's authoritarian rulers. Tutu asserted that "we kept at it relentlessly, calling on the world to make a moral decision - are you on the side of democracy, are you on the side of freedom, or are you on the side of repression? ... Power ultimately belongs to the people! I ask you to use a non-violent method of applied sanctions. Anyone that tells you that sanctions don't work, or that they only hurt the common people, just say to them, "baloney"!".

This call for sanctions is directly tied to the Nobel laureates' correlated demand that ASEAN, and especially Thailand, step up the level of economic and political pressure they are presently exerting on Slorc for change (or not exerting, as most human rights observers would contend). "The challenge lies in particular with the ASEAN governments to get Slorc out of the region, in the interest of preserving rights for the Burmese people", AI's Ross Daniels maintained at a joint news conference staged by the laureates. Playing upon the ASEAN terminology of "constructive engagement" - the 6-nation power bloc's current, collective policy of political collusion and economic cooperation with Slorc - Oscar Arias proposed that the SE Asian region shift its gears and explore the more progressive approach of "constructive rapid disengagement" from bilateral relations with the Slorc power-mongers.

This confrontational proposal stepped on the toes of the Thai government, to whom "constructive engagement" represents a deeply-entrenched, sacred cow of the Thai military and business elite. Facing a barrage of criticism over its accommodating Burmese policy, Thai PM Chuan Leekpei resolutely maintained that "it is the common stand of ASEAN to take an approach of con-

structive engagement rather than being aggressive or trying to isolate Slorc... Thailand has their own way of dealing with Burma." He further responded with the charge that "outsiders from other regions" were causing many of the problems in SE Asia, and suggested that Thailand "knows more about the cultures of this region", and therefore should be allowed to pursue its own foreign policy of quiet diplomacy, characterized by the Asian tendency to place economic connections above human rights. "Unlike the Nobel laureates, who came here as private individuals, we, as a country, have to think about relations with other countries", he concluded, implying that individual moral conscience has little relevance in the sphere of "real politik", where the strategic need of nations to maintain cozy, mutually-beneficial political associations, outweighs any other human considerations.

At the heart of the whole "constructive engagement" debate lies differing perceptions on the role and definition of human rights as a priority in international or internal relations. Oscar Arias articulated the Nobel laureates' outlook on this aspect of political philosophy, with his pronouncement that "we are concerned about the lives of courageous people who are in jail for simply defending ideals. That is much more important than having normal relations with a foreign country. It's a matter of priority. I don't see any more important priority now than to fight for freedom and democracy and respect for the human rights of people all over the world." Many of Asia's political strongmen, however, would attack this idea of human rights as an alien, Western concept, which is imperialistically being shoved down their throats, and unjustly disrupts the traditional Asian way of relating and resolving conflict in the process. It's a bit more difficult to make this self-serving charge stick, however, when the same humanitarian beliefs are spiritually expressed by the Dali Lama - a renowned Asian leader, and a revered Buddhist teacher - whose words of wisdom could carry some weight in the overwhelmingly Buddhist societies of both Thailand and Burma. "All human beings are brother and sister. They are members of one human family. The entire future depends {on developing} this sense of human responsibility since ... right motivation and compassion are the most essential virtues in human life", counseled the influential Asian personality, suggesting that the "stronger" Western approach of confrontation must be utilized once "the gentler Asian way" has failed to alleviate human suffering and misery.

The world, and especially those action groups who wish to support the Burmese people's struggle, must never lose sight of the most important issue which must be faced and be the focus of every activity. That is the call for a total Slorc cease fire so that the suffering of the village peasants can be ended and steps taken to find a final solution to the civil war.

By allowing the laureates to undertake their peace mission in Thailand, however, the Thai government seems to be taking a small step towards the international vision expressed recently by the Asian-Pacific Peoples Tribunal, in which "it is realized that the violation of human rights in the modern world can no longer remain a national concern. It has deep and profound impact over other countries as well. Its international ripples can impair and jeopardize peace in the entire region. Moreover, humanity is indivisible, and whenever there is suffering and injustice to a section of the people, whenever there is a denial of basic human rights, the entire humanity must feel concerned, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or national boundaries."

Finally, several pitfalls may be looming up in the near future in relation to the Nobel laureate's visit, which will need to be addressed. #1 among these is, what will be the next step? Will the situation be allowed to return to a status quo obscurity once the publicity fanfare and glamour of the moment fades away, or will strong efforts for change on all levels be sustained over the long haul? As Nobel winner Adolpho Perez Esquival emphasized about his own involvement in movements for justice, it was a combination of international solidarity and dynamic local support from grass-roots organizations that eventually ousted the brutal dictators in his native land of Argentina. It is essential that the movement's renewed energy be funneled into the primary priority of developing grass roots participation, organization, dialogue, and solutions to the long-term problems of Burma.

Some of the more publicized and visible problems facing people of Burma should not distract international attention away from the truly desperate situation of the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons among the ethnic-minority village communities inside Burma's isolated civil war zones. It is these people who suffer the most severely as a consequence of the Slorc's notorious "scorched earth" counter-insurgency and forced relocation campaigns. Their pain is largely hidden away from international aid or awareness, just as is the non-Burman ethnic groups' 45-year struggle for equality and self-determination

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In conclusion, the most pressing humanitarian consideration in Burma today must be bringing a halt to the debilitating, decades-old civil war. Even the release of Aung San Su Kyi must be aligned to this most rudimentary objective. The power needed to give hope to any such solution can come only from a sustained and courageous grassroots movement in countries around the world which draw inspiration and energy from actions such as the Nobel laureates visit. Without such grassroots movements, the potential for change generated by the Nobel laureate's visit may remain only a potential for change.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Women Porters

Many stories about mistreatment of porters by Slorc troops stream out of the jungle areas almost every day. All of them are pitiful stories, but perhaps none are as bad as those told by the young women who are not only forced to serve as porters and "jungle concubines", but are also often forced to leave behind their small children whom they may never see again.

One of these young women is 25 year-old Naw Kyi Po from the Karen State. In April of 1992, a column of Slorc troops came into her village and rounded up many of the people to be used as porters. About 100 women were included in this group of forced porters. One of them was Naw Kyi Po. She was forced to leave her one-year old son behind in the care of her elderly mother.

The women were taken to the front line at the base of "Sleeping Dog Mountain" where they were divided into groups of 5 women each. Each group was assigned to a unit of 10 Slorc soldiers. Every day the women were forced to carry heavy loads of ammunition to the front line through intense fighting. The work was physically exhausting, and knowing that they were carrying ammunition which the Slorc soldiers were using to fight against their own ethnic brothers and sisters was emotionally intolerable.

At night they could not rest. All night soldiers came to take them out and rape them. The women, hungry and sick, could find no way to resist.

Food was scarce for them. Rice was insufficient and often they even did not have enough water to drink. After two weeks they were sick and weak. One of the women was wounded, and the others were not allowed to help her. She died along the path without any comfort from her friends.

When Naw Kyi Po was too weak to carry ammunition, she became the "jungle concubine" of the camp commander, Kyaw Hla. He used her as he wanted, and she had no recourse but to submit.

After about one month, she felt she could no longer tolerate her situation. She decided to flee knowing that she could either be caught and killed by the Slorc soldiers, or she could be killed by mines or artillery. Anyway, she felt that death would be better than what she was now living in. For three days she struggled through the jungle with only leaves and some jungle berries to keep her alive. When she finally arrived at home, she was so malnourished and sick that her mother could not recognize her.

She rested for some days, and then took her son to the border where she could finally take refuge in one of the refugee camps inside Thailand. Now she feels some security, but knows that one day Thai authorities may send her back, and then she again faces an unknown future.

Forced Relocation

Noh Law Plaw is a village of around 100 houses and is situated about 4 kilometers from Talaing Kayin village where a Slorc military unit is stationed.

It is normal for each family to be asked by Slorc to supply one porter twice a month. Each porter must work at least five days. If a family can not provide a porter, they must pay at least 500 kyats for a substitute.

In December of 1992 a new Slorc unit moved into the area, and not long afterwards issued an ultimatum for several villages in the area to be relocated. The ultimatum stated that if the villages were not totally relocated by the end of December, all remaining villagers would be considered rebels and their property confiscated or destroyed.

Before the deadline, the soldiers killed several villagers, and arrested and tortured several others. Feeling powerless to protest, the villagers obeyed the Slorc order and moved to the new area which was near a Slorc military camp. However, many of the villagers waited for an opportunity and fled to the border refugee camps. Others may follow soon.

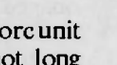
Source: Field Reports

Action

For more than 40 years villagers inside Burma have been living in this inhuman situation. Their suffering has been unnoticed by the world until only recently. Now these stories are slowly becoming common knowledge to people in countries all around the world who care sincerely about human rights and justice. Yet their suffering has not abated.

The suffering of the people in Burma can be brought to an end only if proper international actions can be organized. In order to use this international energy effectively, the causes of the suffering need to be clearly identified and actions which deal with those causes carried out. Without a careful analysis, much time, energy and resources can be wasted.

The main issue in Burma which must be addressed by all people is the decades long civil war. Only when the civil war is brought to an end can the refugees begin returning home, villages rebuilt, farms reopened, families reunited, political prisoners released and the democratization process truly started. Until then, refugees will remain refugees, more villages will be displaced, more arrests will be made, and the dream of democracy and human rights will remain but a dream.



BURMESE LOOKING GLASS, by Edith T. Mirante, Grove Press, 841 Broadway, New Yor, NY 10003-4793.

This is a new book recently off the press. It is part of the story of the liberation struggles going on in Burma as told through the experiences of Edith T. Mirante. Edith first began her visits to Burma in 1983, and since that time has made numerous visits to Burma, crossing the border through China and through Thailand.

Her writing style is personal and engaging. The book gives readers a look insde Burma and its struggles through a looking glass which can help identify why ending the civil war is such a priority to all people who truly care about justice.

CIVIL WAR

Pilatus Aircraft Ltd.

Pilatus Aircraft Ltd is a Stans, Switzerland based aircraft production company which was established in 1939. They specialize in smaller aircraft which, although not able to carry very heavy loads, are quite economical to operate. Their Pilatus PC-6 Turbo Porters saw much action in Vietnam and Cambodia where they were equipped with GE-machine guns and were flown under the flags of Wien-Alaska Airlines and the CIA.

Many smaller countries such as Burma, Chili, Iraq and Angola, have made extensive use of the Pilatus-produced PC-7 trainer aircraft which was put into use in 1978. Since that time is has been highly appreciated by foreign military operators, both as a low-cost trainer aircraft, but also as a very suitable and low-priced COIN (combat) aircraft. In 1976 the Burmese air force ordered its first 8 PC-7 aircraft. Later, in 1979, it ordered another 8 aircraft of the PC-7 type.

In 1984 the Burmese air force ordered 4 of the new Pilatus PC-9 aircraft. This aircraft has a more powerful engine than the PC-7 as well as other improvements.

Pilatus has always claimed that its aircraft are designed only for training pilots, and it is for this reason that the Swiss government allows Pilatus to export their planes to military junta's such as Slorc in Burma. However, several of the ethnic groups in Burma have long claimed that the PC-7 and PC-9 airplanes are often used for air attacks against ethnic strongholds and villages. Pilatus says that it may be possible that the Burmese air force contracts other countries to install weapons systems on their planes, but that can not be the responsibility of Pilatus Ltd. Now a Swiss NGO called Arbeitsgemeinschaft fur Rustungskontrolle und ien Waffenausfuhrverbot ARW (NGO for Control of Arms Export from Switzerland) has uncovered evidence which contradicts the Pilatus claim.

According to the ARW report, "From the early beginning, the policy of Pilatus Aircraft Ltd. was to install weapon systems on its aircraft." In 1976, Pilatus worked with a French weapon manufacturer called Matra to design an ideal configuration for the installation of underwing weapon systems. Apparently Pilatus also made a promotion film showing the useability of the armed PC-7 and PC-9 which was shown to potential customers.

Also, from 1978 to 1979, Pilatus worked closely with the French armament companies Matra and Giat, and with the Belgian companies Fabrique Nationale (FN) and Forges de Zeebrugges (FZ). It appears that at all times Pilatus was fully informed and even actively involved in the armament of its aircraft.

The ARW report also claims that immediately after the Burma air force signed its first contract for 8 PC-7 aircraft, French Matra and Belgium FZ began carrying out weapon systems trials. "During the installations of the armament and the trials, Pilatus technicians and pilots were directly involved."

ARW concludes their report with the following statement: "The first presentation of the Pilatus PC-7 Tactical in 1976 indicates that from the early beginning Pilatus intended to manufacture and sell a 'military' aircraft. The intervention of the press obliged the Swiss authorities to interfere and forced Pilatus to export 'civilian' aircraft. It is, however, a proven fact that from the delivery of the first PC-7 up to the last PC-7 and PC-9, Pilatus exported these aircraft knowing pertinently well that most of them systematically would be armed and intensively used in war-like operations in countries such as Angola, Burma, Chile, Guatemala, Iraq, Iran and Mexico."

A November 23, 1987 document further reveals that the Brennan Company of Singapore was requested by the Burmese air force to organize the FN and FZ world leading air weapon companies from Belgium to participate in weapons trials on PC-9 aircraft. The tests were carried out at the Thabyewa Range and the Taungnyo/Maenyo Range in Burma and were attended by representatives of the Burma air force, the Manager of Aircraft Assembly of Pilatus and members of Giat, FN and FZ companies. The tests included the use of aircraft guns, rocket firing and bombing runs.

In 1975, Pilatus Aircraft Ltd., produced a paper outlining the armament systems which could be used on the PC-7. These systems include machine gun pods, multiple-rocket pods, general purpose bombs and fragmentation bombs, and flares and grenades. Aircraft produced for the purpose of training civilian pilots would hardly need these systems.

In April of 1991, the Burmese military seized a key hilltop overlooking the Karen headquarters of Manerplaw. A Karen stronghold at Paw-tar also had to be abandoned. Karen reports stated that Paw-tar camp was bombed by four PC-7 planes. These aircraft carried cannon and rockets as well as bombs. The report further stated that the Burmese aircraft, which flew four missions daily, had bombed 11 villages in the battle for Paw-tar, killing three villagers. (The Nation, April 6, 1991)

Reports from other ethnic groups also suggests that the PC-7 and PC-9 have been used extensively in air attacks against ethnic strongholds as well as against civilian targets. Knowing the past conduct of the Burmese military, companies such as Pilatus, Giat, Brennan etal., must be held responsible for the results of any deals they have with the military which result in further suffering of the people in Burma.

- Sources:

*Arbeitsgemeinschaft fur Rustungskontrolle und ien Waffenausfuhrverbotm Switzerland

*The Nation, 4/6/91

ECONOMICS

Economic Sanctions

One strategy utilized by numerous liberation movements around the world to pressure the ruling military junta to agree to peace talks is economic sanctions in one form or another. The theory behind this activity is that military dictatorships will only be willing to sit down at the negotiation table when they feel that talks are their only hope of survival. This means that opposition to military dictatorships must identify the weak spot in the military and focus action there. Since the only source of power a dictatorship generally has is its military strength, it stands to reason that limiting their armed might through arms embargoes, or through economic sanctions which will limit their ability to earn the foreign exchange needed to purchase more armaments is one potentially effective way of bringing about change.

The internal economic strength of the country decides, to a large extent, how quickly or how slowly economic sanctions become effective, but testimonies from South Africa and Central America give credence to the belief that economic sanctions can bring about democratic change.

Opposition groups in Burma have been calling for economic sanctions against the ruling military junta ever since the democratic movement was put down in 1988. They have called for individuals and organizations to boycott companies investing in Burma such as Pepsi, Amoco (US), Total (France), and Thai logging companies to name only a few. Boycotts can cause such companies to remove their investments if they feel that their profits are seriously being threatened globally. Opposition groups have also been calling on the United Nations Security Council to place an arms embargo on Burma, and to also call for economic sanctions until the military calls a national cease fire and seriously begins a process of turning power over to an elected civilian government. Such an action by the security council would make it very difficult for companies from any country to continue their investments in Burma, and would also put pressure on China and ASEAN nations to withdraw their tacit as well as their openly expressed support for the military junta.

Skeptics feel that China would probably use their Security Council veto right to prevent any such sanctions or embargoes being placed against their neighbor. Their argument is that China's economic link with Burma is crucial to the development of their southern Yunnan province and therefore they will oppose any Security Council actions against Burma.

This argument is based on the fact that the China-Burma connection has been steadily strengthening since 1988. India believes that China is also making use of Burma to establish naval bases which will give them very easy access to the Andaman Sea. Burma's Cocos Islands, once used as a notorious prison for political detainees, is now reported to be used as a base for a Chinese-supplied radar system which can easily monitor Indian navy movements in the Indian Ocean. But why would Burma give China, a gigantic neighbor which is more to be feared by Burma than respected, permission to establish naval bases on their territory? The answer most probably is that Burma is now receiving the majority of their military equipment from China (more than US$1 billion worth since 1990), and they have little other than land area to give back to the Chinese.

Trade between Burma and China has also been rapidly increasing. In 1991 as much as 23% of all official imports to Burma came from China. This does not include a hugh cross-border trade in the Kachin State which brings in perhaps the majority of consumer goods now being used throughout the country. Reports from the Kachin State say that Chinese merchants control most of the economy of the area, and that many Chinese have simply moved into the Kachin State, purchased identity cards, and are now buying land and setting up their businesses.

The debate thus continues as to whether or not China would allow the UN Security Council to pass economic sanctions and an arms embargo against Burma. The answer to that debate probably depends on whether it is China that needs Burma, or the other way around. China can most certainly survive without Burma, and even though naval bases on Burmese territory would give China better access to the Indian Ocean, they also may not be too keen on provoking India and other Asian countries by appearing to becoming more aggressive.

Burma, however, may not find it too easy to survive without China. Few other countries are willing to provide them the amount of armaments they need to keep the people of Burma under control. Should an arms embargo, or even economic sanctions be imposed against Burma, Slorc would most certainly find it difficult if not impossible to survive.

Concerning China, one veteran diplomat in Rangoon said, "They (the Chinese) come bringing presents -- weapons, tanks, planes, bridges -- but it is Burma that needs China, not the other way around. If Peking felt it was in the greater Chinese interest to drop Burma, it would."

Thus the Burmese opposition calls for economic boycotts and sanctions seems to have much legitimacy. Should international support groups really begin making these economic campaigns a central and serious part of their efforts, Slorc just might be encouraged to quickly agree to a nation-wide cease fire, and this would start the process of national reconciliation and democratization. Thousands of lives in Burma could thus be saved.

Sources:

*BP 22/1/93

*FEER 1992 Yearbook

NEWS BRIEFS

Tourism

Recently the Slorc issued a new ruling that all foreigners visiting Burma must exchange US$200 at the border into foreign currency certificates. These certificates can be used to purchase tickets for rail or air transportation, and for hotel accommodations. They can not be reconverted into US dollars upon departure from the country. This is an attempt to stop foreigners from smuggling foreign currency into the country and then exchanging it on the illegal market. Foreign visitors can get as much as 100 kyats per dollar on the illegal market while the official rate only gives them approximately 6 kyats per dollar. Although Slorc has been urged by many international monetary agencies to devalue their kyat, they continue to refuse to do so. (TN 29/1/93)

Thai Singer to Burma

Thongchai McIntyre, a Thai singing superstar, is to give a concert in Rangoon sponsored by the Thai Foreign Ministry. The concert is an attempt to mend fences with Burma, upset over the visit of Nobel Peace Prize winners to Thailand last month. The Thai embassy in Rangoon has set a side about 100,000 baht (US$4,000) for the event. (BP 2/3/93)

Thai Village Attacked

On February 26, fifteen Burmese troops crossed into Koh Manow area of Tak's Mae Sot district and attacked a Thai village. Villagers were shot at and huts were burned. When Thai Border Patrol Police went to the area, they exchanged gun fire with the invading Burmese soldiers. At least 10 mortars were fired from the Burmese jungle into Thailand to support the intruders. The Burmese troops then retreated back across the border. (TN 27/2/93)

30th Gems Emporium

The Burmese Government netted nearly US$15 million from the sale of gems, jade, pearls and jewellery at the 30th Gems Emporium on February 3. A total of 654 gems merchants from 17 nations attended the emporium. The sales lasted for nine days. (BP 2/3/93)

Opium Survey

An American team led by Lloyd Armstead of the Drug Enforcement Agency conducted a joint mission with Burmese colleagues to survey the opium crop in the infamous "Golden Triangle" according to the Working People's Daily. The purpose of the survey was not clear but the team conducted an aerial survey and took soil samples and documentary photographs. The survey was conducted from February 13 to 19 in northeast Shan State. (TN 21/2/93)

P.O. BOX 1076
SILOM POST OFFICE
BANGKOK 10504, THAILAND

AIR MAIL

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED