

BURMA ISSUES

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Displaced peasants inside Burma have almost nothing. Even education for the children can not be guaranteed. Villagers who can read and write often attempt to teach the children so that they can have at least the ability to write their names. With even no paper or pens at their disposal, these peasant teachers use a piece of bamboo and a sharp stick to scratch the letters and numbers.

SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Actions on Pepsi

The Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG-Carleton) is a student funded and directed organization which attempts to address social justice and environmental issues. As part of their human rights campaigns, they have thrown their support behind a call for an international boycott of PepsiCo. Pepsi has opened a bottling plant in Rangoon and is expecting to expand to central Burma as well. They are also planning to introduce their Pizza Hut and Kentucky Fried Chicken chains into the country as well. All of this activity must be done with the help and support of the military regime.

OPIRG has prepared an "Urgent Message to Shareholders" which they are circulating to PepsiCo shareholders. In part the message says, "Burma's 43 million people live in constant fear of becoming pawns in slorc's criminal ventures:

Border peoples are under threat of extermination unless they surrender and join the opium trade (FEER, 28, Mar 91)

Thousands of women and children are trafficked to Thailand and forced into prostitution (TN, 5 Dec 92)

Hundreds of thousands of civilians are kidnapped and brutalized as slave porters and laborers (No Law

at All, Amnesty International Oct 92)"

The message urges PepsiCo to end all business with Burma's illegal regime.

For more information write to: OPIRG-Carleton, 1125 Colonel By Drive, 326 UniCentre, Carleton Univ., Ottawa ON Canada K1S 5B6

ICFTU

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) is currently looking into the possibilities of organizing either an international boycott or another type of economic sanctions campaign to pressure the Slorc for the restoration of democracy in Burma. This effort will be conducted in cooperation with the International Trade Secretariats (ITS) who group profession-based trade unions in various sectors worldwide.

For more information write to: ICFTU Rue Montagne Aux Herbes, Potageres 37-41, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgique

Actions on Behalf of Imprisoned Monks

The Network of Engaged Buddhists in Germany have been carrying out a letter campaign to call for the release of Burmese Buddhist

monks who have been imprisoned by the Slorc. An unknown number of monks have been arrested, disrobed and incarcerated, many without trial. The German group has sent over 1000 letters to high Slorc officials requesting that the monks be released.

Their campaigning has brought about a positive response from within Germany as more committees and boards have been set up within the German government to do research and action on behalf of human rights in Burma. This growing pressure can result in positive policy changes from the Germany government which can help opposition forces in Burma bring about peaceful and democratic changes.

Support for Slorc

Retired US congressman Lester Wolff is putting his years of experience behind Slorc's attempts to rebuild their international image while keeping their internal house as corrupt and brutal as ever. A veteran democratic politician from New York, Wolff arranges visits for congresspeople to Burma where they are wine and dined and convinced that all is well for the people of Burma. For this PR work, Wolff receives US\$10,000 a month plus expenses from the Burmese military. (FEER930826)

NOTICE

Please note the name change of our publication from *B.U.R.M.A.* to *BURMA ISSUES*. Starting in October 1993, we have made this name change and all of our publications, campaigns and correspondence will now come under the name *BURMA ISSUES*. We regret any confusion which this may cause.

Civil War

An indication that the launching of a limited military offensive by Slorc in the Karen state this coming dry season has appeared on the surface of a deceptively calm year. The dry season will start at the beginning of November.

Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), which is controlled by Slorc, discovered natural gas resources around Kyonekani Village which is east of Tavoy in the Tennassarin coastal area. The area is situated in a zone in which Karen guerrilla forces remain quite active. Indicating a serious concern that they maintain control over this region and its natural gas reserves, the Burmese army deployed infantry units throughout. The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) has been preparing for the defense of their bases.

particularly in Ratchaburi Province. Thai and Burmese authorities are expected to cut a deal by the end of 1993 for the sale of 300 million cubic feet of Burmese natural gas per day to Thailand. (TN930908) The Slorc and PTTEP are very concerned that security for this pipeline can be guaranteed. A Burmese military offensive in the area to eliminate any Karen or Mon forces is expected to take place in the next few months.

Some observers feel that there will not be a military offensive now as the Slorc is promoting their National Convention and promising the world that a new constitution will be soon written to bring Burma into the democratic age. These observers believe that Slorc does not want international attention to be diverted away from this convention and to a

much aware of such military action, and thus would not react against it.

Local village people are, however, very worried about Slorc's military deployments in the areas. Both areas are relatively populated and serve as local mini trade zones. Last year's military offensive created a large number of internally displaced persons as well as a big increase in the number of refugees who fled to Thailand. Currently, the number of Burmese refugees on the Thai/Border has reached at least 71,700. Thai authorities have already ordered Karenni refugees to be repatriated by the end of this year, and this creates serious worries for all other Burmese refugees in Thailand.

The current situation hints that there will not be a peaceful process to end the 45-year-long civil war in Burma. Saw Bo Mya, the president of the KNU, as well as the DAB, has sent an official open letter to Gen. Than Shwe, chairman of Slorc, but no official response has yet been received.

• **Source:**

KNU Information Organization, Mergui/Tavoy

The current situation hints that there will not be a peaceful process to end the 45-year-long civil war in Burma.

In the early part of July, the Burmese army trucked pipes needed for a gas pipeline into the area and prepared cement foundations for gas wells. Motor roads are also being constructed around the area. The MOGE has targeted completion of the entire project for late 1993.

Another project by a PTTEP Thailand and MOGE Slorc joint venture to transport gas from Burma to Thailand's Kanchanaburi Province is now also in the works. The plan is to lay a gas pipeline across ethnic Karen and Mon guerrilla active areas so that Burmese gas can be used to run huge electric generating plants on Thailand's western border,

military offensive. Once the national convention is completed and a new constitution written (which must guarantee a prominent military role in political affairs), an intensive military campaign in the ethnic minority areas would take place.

However, some KNLA officials predict that there will be a rapid military offensive in the areas where the two gas projects are, but the attack will be fast and short. In this way, the military could try to drive out the Karen and Mon without much exposure of their military moves to the international community. People inside Burma who are isolated from the war zones would also not be

THAI MILITARY OFFICIALS VISIT BURMA

On the 9th of August, Thai Gen. Wimol led a delegation visit for one day to Burma. A week later, the Thai Defence Minister, General Vjrit, also paid a short visit to Burma. Both Thai generals affirmed their commitment to the "constructive engagement policy". Furthermore, Gen. Vjrit confirmed that Thailand has established a clear policy to cut off all arms supplies to the ethnic guerrillas operating along the Thai/Burma border.

ECONOMICS

At what point does economics become a part of human rights? That is a question many Burmese are asking these days, and the answer they are probably expecting is that economics and human rights, like oil and water, simply do not mix.

Economic development in the region is high on the agenda of the ASEAN nations, and with the encouragement of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) serious efforts are being made to construct roads linking Thailand, Burma, China, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Other large projects are being planned to exploit Burma's gas reserves and waterways. Although this may seem as a positive step to much of the outside world, it becomes a serious issue of political, economic and ethnic rights for the people of Burma.

In 1991 the people of Burma participated in an election organized by the ruling military junta in which they clearly indicated their desire to be free from military rule, with a civilian government led by the winning National League for Democracy (NLD) taking over leadership. Within weeks the military had staged a military coup which was both bloodless and met with silence from the world. In this coup, they simply declared that power was not to be turned over to the winners of the election as earlier promised, that the election was held only to select people who would write a new constitution for the country, and that the military would not only remain in power until another new election could be held, but would also insure that under the new constitution they would always continue to play a major political role in the country. So much for a move towards democracy.

Despite this violation of all democratic principles, many nations began dealing with the military junta as though they were the legitimate rulers of Burma. For ASEAN nations, this became known as the "constructive engagement" policy. Through this policy, ASEAN nations said they would slowly nudge the Burmese military regime towards democratic reforms by encouraging them to open up their economy to foreign participation. Little heed was given to the cries of the vast majority of the people who called for the international community to isolate Slorc and help bring the people's elected representatives to power. This is the only process which the people of Burma feel can

agement" policy focuses, to a large part, on economic cooperation between Slorc and Thailand. One project to emerge from this unholy alliance is a gas pipeline to be laid from inside Burma to Kanchanaburi province of Thailand. Another pipeline system, scheduled for completion in 1999, at Ranong and Prachuab Khiri Khan, would channel natural gas from Burma's Texaco-operated field to Thailand. (TN930910) Thailand needs the gas to run new electric generators to be built along the Thai/Burma border. Although progress on the project has been quite rapid, the fact that the Mon and Karen still control much of the territory through which the pipeline must run, remains a serious obstacle.

There is a name for this: neo-colonialism. We don't call it that, of course, we call it "constructive engagement". But colonialism by any other name is just as odious."

finally bring a lasting peace to the country.

A statement in The Nation newspaper, a Thai English-language publication, put into a clear perspective just what the ASEAN "constructive engagement" policy truly represents. "There is a name for this: neo-colonialism. We don't call it that, of course, we call it "constructive engagement". But colonialism by any other name is just as odious." (TN930916)

This is most clearly seen by the results of Thailand's "construction engagement" policy on the Ethnic Mon and Karen, both of whom occupy areas in Burma which border Thailand. The "construction en-

Thailand, ignoring a long and positive relationship with the Karen and Mon, is now pressuring them to begin peace negotiations with the Burmese military. The Kanchanaburi-based 9th Division recently warned that it would force out some 10,000 Mon refugees staying at the Loh Loe camp on the Thai side by the end of September. The refugees would have to move back into Burma, near to Burmese military forces. The refugees are, not surprisingly, very fearful of such a repatriation, and talks are going on with Thai officials to seek some kind of compromise. Perhaps it is more than irony that the pipeline is expected to follow the route of the Death Railway built by the Japanese during World War II in

which tens of thousands of prisoners of war and slaves died. How many Mon and Karen villagers might now die along the same route so that the Burmese military can insure the safety of a gas pipeline to feed electricity to Thai consumers?

However, on September 9, the leader of the Mon, Nai Shwe Kyin, said he had rejected a Thai offer to make peace with Rangoon and clear the way for a gas pipeline between the two countries. (BP930910) He went on to say that Thai authorities encouraged a peace agreement with Slorc because then, "the refugees would be repatriated and could have good jobs working on the ongoing gas field project."

For the Mon and Karen, the issue which has held them in conflict with the Burmese military for almost 45 years now, is not an economic conflict, nor a lack of good jobs. It is an issue of ethnic cultural and land rights, and of autonomy over their

own affairs. This they can not sell for a few jobs so that the Burmese military can earn money through economic projects with their ASEAN neighbors.

Plans to build hydro-power dams along the Salween River which divides Thailand and Burma, follow the same pattern. Thailand desperately needs more electric power to fuel its rapidly growing industrialization. U Khin Maung Thein, Burma's energy minister said in a recent interview, "We plan to build dams which will generate 6,000 megawatts and expect to sell at least 5,000 megawatts to Thailand." This represents about half of Thailand's annual electricity consumption. (TN930910)

The Salween River runs through territory which has, for generations, been the home to Karen and other ethnic nationalities. In order for the dams to be built and kept secure, these ethnic people would have to be

moved out of the area and neutralized. There is little chance that these people would gain any of the benefits which the dams are intended to bring. The dams would also destroy the life, culture, and long history of the Karen people in this disputed area.

Economics and human rights can not be separated. Economic projects which benefit some, may seriously exploit others, and this is a clear violation of rights. The civil war in Burma will never end because economic improvements in the country can be brought about through exploitation of the country's natural resources or its people. The ethnic concerns which lie at the root of the on-going conflict must first be identified and honestly dealt with. Only then can economic development in Burma be carried out in such a way that it enhances and protects the human rights of all the people there.



"Constructive Engagement" and "economic development" bring no benefits to the peasants of Burma who continue to be deprived of home and dignity by Slorc's "silent war" against them.

Sources used in this issue: TN = The Nation, Thailand, FEER = Far Eastern Economic Review, KNU = Karen National Union, BP = Bangkok Post, Thailand, KNLA = Karen National Liberation Army, NLM = New Light of Myanmar,

HUMAN RIGHTS

Operation Yan Nyein Aye

The Burmese army's clandestine military operating known as "Operation Yan Nyein Aye" (Restoration of Tranquility) has been carried out since the 1st of January 1993 in Kyauk Kyi Township of Nyaung Le Bin District. The objective of the operation is apparently to set up free fire zones throughout the area. A free fire zone is an area from which all people have been forcibly relocated. Anyone caught in the free fire zone is considered an enemy by the military, and is subject to execution without question.

People living the area have been affected by forced relocations since 1975 under the military's "Four Cuts" strategy. Currently about 600 soldiers are in the area and are responsible for carrying out the task of massive forced relocations of all people living in the suspected Karen guerrilla areas. The Burmese army's tactical command No(3) is responsible for the campaign, and is under commander Lt. Col. Zaw Win Tun who personally is instructing the entire operation. A large number of the villages have already been ordered to move to areas near the army's primary posts. Here they provide a buffer zone around the military camps as well as readily available free labor for military projects such as the building of bunkers, roads etc. The villagers are reluctant to move from their villages as their gardens are a great distance from the new proposed settlement areas.

The Burmese army first threatened the villagers by burning down a village called Kan Ni on the 27 of July. The villagers are obviously frightened of the persecution which would be carried out against them as a further step by the Burmese army. Some decided to abandon their

homes and move to the guerrillas as they are afraid to stay near the Burmese army primary posts. The rest of the villagers moved to the new relocation sites.

The people who fled to the Karen guerrilla-controlled areas are in desperate need of food. The KNLA can not carry this burden alone since they themselves are struggling under a tough food situation.

Unfortunately, the villagers living near the army posts are also forced to work for the construction of new defence posts. A large number of the villagers are also conscripted to carry loads for the army columns which are carrying out military operations throughout the area.

During these clandestine military operations, the heads of the villages are taken to the army command headquarter. The army intelligence officers warn them that they are responsible to provide all information concerning guerrillas movement and operations. Moreover, they are threatened by the intelligence officers that if they fail to pass this information to the officials in time, they would be executed. They make it clear that the heads of the villages

must go to the army post voluntarily and report the daily general situation in the area.

Unfortunately, a number of village people are often detained and interrogated by the army intelligences officers as well. The guerrillas's relatives are especially subjected to this detention and interrogation.

Consequently, the people in the area are extremely worried about the possibility of a Burmese army summer offensive into the guerrilla-controlled area. Such an operation would create serious starvation in the area as well as an increase in the number of human rights abuse cases.

This year is quite different from the previous year. The Burmese army has not carried out any massive military operations. The present Burmese army's military operation seems intended to tighten their grip on the guerrillas rather than secure any military strategic area.

• *Source:*
Saw Nyi Nyi, KNLA(9)



The remains of a village in a Free Fire Zone.

POLITICS

Slorc's Way to Democracy

On September 16, Slorc's national convention held a plenary session to begin summarizing the discussion papers prepared by various convention work committees. A total of 22 discussion papers had been prepared consisting of over 900 pages. These papers outlined various principles which the working committees wanted to have included in a new national constitution which must be written before new elections can be held (NLM930917)

An editorial in the military's newspaper, "New Light of Myanmar" suggested that "all eyes are watching the on-going national convention, and the people are pinning their hopes on its fruitful outcome." However, a recent visitor from Rangoon said few people have shown much interest in the convention or the long reports which Slorc puts over their television and radio stations. He indicated that the people of Rangoon have little hope that the convention or the constitution it is suppose to give birth to, will change life for them very much.

The work of the national convention has not proceeded very smoothly despite that fact that Slorc carefully selected most of the 698 delegates. Some members balked at the demand of Slorc that the military be given a leading political role in the future. Wa delegates demanded that the Wa nationalities be given a separate State. Others disagreed with a Slorc proposal that Burma develop a presidential system rather than a parliamentary one. These disagreements usually resulted in a "break to read more materials and think over the issues more carefully." Some of these "breaks" last for up to four months. When delegates finally returned to the conven-

tion site, they appeared more willing to agree with their Slorc hosts.

During the September 16 session, National Convention Convening Work Committee Chairman, U Aung Toe, read out "clarifications" concerning the principles agreed on during the convention.

Among the principles which he outlined, and which are now to become part of the new constitution, several have created much concern among people throughout Burma, as well as Burma watchers around the world. The most important is one stating that the State is consistently determined "for the Tatmadaw [army] to be able to participate in the national political leadership role of the State."

fied with the fact that Burma will now have a "democratic" constitution and elections. If this is the case, the military will be able to continue their dictatorship under a guise of democracy, with international acceptance.

Although international criticism for Slorc continues, there are signs that Slorc's aggressive campaigns to improve their international image just might be producing some results. Thailand's Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri has said Thailand will officially propose that Burma be given observer status to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting next year. "There have been encouraging signs that Myanmar has embarked on the right path towards democratic and economic reforms," he said.

...the people of Rangoon have little hope that the convention or the constitution it is suppose to give birth to, will change life for them very much.

A further principle states that "the Head of State is the President of the State and the President of the State shall be elected by presidential electoral college." Discussions during the national convention indicated that the president would be chosen by an electoral college which would have a large military membership. This will insure that a president sympathetic to the military, will always be in power, and thus the military will be able to continue their control over every aspect of Burmese life despite the outward appearance of democracy. Many people in the Burmese opposition fear that the international community will be satis-

(BP930916) It is thought that ASEAN dialogue partners will not protest this move in 1994 since their criticism of Burma was much softer than usual at this years meeting in Singapore.

One possible obstacle in Slorc's drive for international acceptance could come from the United States. President Clinton has urged a review of US policy on Burma, and this could result in further US sanctions against Rangoon. (TN930905)

NEWS BRIEFS

Money Changers

Slorc still needs hard currency income. In an attempt to encourage an inflow of more foreign currency, they are now authorizing an unlimited number of licenses to private citizens with foreign exchange bank accounts to become money changers.

With an initial outlay of US\$1,000 and an annual license fee of 3,000 kyat, anyone wishing to become a money changer may do so in any part of Burma. Dollars changed at the official rate in government banks earns only 6 kyat, while the free market pays over 100 kyat per dollar. (TN930904)

Roads

The Burmese government has formally approved the 163 km Tak-hilek-Chaingtung Highway project, one of four roads connecting Thailand, Burma, China and Laos. (BP930908) Although it is claimed that the road will bring business into Burma, it is mainly being built to facilitate trade between Thailand and China.

Oil

Texaco of the US and Total of France are negotiating with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), Burma's national oil company, for the right to secure additional petroleum exploration fields in the country.

Apparently Burma is offering 20 offshore and 12 onshore fields to foreign oil companies.

Presently Burma has entered into production sharing contracts with 14 foreign oil companies, seven of which are currently operating in the country. Among these are Nippon Oil, Premier Oil, Unocal, Texaco and Total. (TN930909)

Burmese Seamen

Singapore has protested to Burma after an Burmese embassy official arranged to detain 11 Burmese seamen at privately-operated Singapore airport without telling Singapore authorities. The seamen were then forced to return to Burma.

The seamen had been involved in a protest against a policy which allows a certain percent of their pay earned while abroad to be paid by their employers directly to the Burmese military regime.

"The actions of the first secretary [of the Burmese embassy] were irregular and if against the will of the 11 seamen, illegal," Singapore Home Minister Shanmugam Jayakumar told parliament. (TN930902)

Health Team Visit

A six-member Thai delegation led by Health Minister Boonphan Khawattana arrived yesterday for a goodwill visit to Burma.

The delegation, invited by Burmese Health Minister Vice Adm Than Nyunt, is to confer with Burmese counterparts on cooperation in health work, especially Aids prevention

This visit was the third official Thai mission to Burma in the past four weeks. (TN930903)

BURMA ISSUES

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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