

BURMA ISSUES

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A village in Kachin State which was forcefully relocated by a military campaign earlier this year.

Many cases of torture, arbitrary killings, rapes and other inhuman treatment against women, and disappearances have been reported to me from various reliable sources. They seem to be taking place most frequently in the border areas by the Burmese army (Tatmadaw) in the course of military operations or relocation against ethnic national population, many of whom are peasants, daily workers and other peaceful civilians.

Professor Yozo Yokota, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma, November 24, 1993

REGIONAL POLITICS

Prasong Visits Burma

In the wake of Thai foreign minister, Prasong Soonsri's visit to Burma in September, Thailand will set up a closer elite relationship with the Burmese military regime. Prasong visited Burma from 16-18 September to attend the first meeting of the Thailand-Burma Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation.

The purpose of the meeting was to enhance relations between Thailand and Slorc in twelve different sectors:

- 1) all levels of exchange visits,
- 2) Cooperation on Tourism,
- 3) Technical and Economic Cooperation,
- 4) Transport and Communications,
- 5) Cultural Exchanges,
- 6) Energy,
- 7) Trade,
- 8) Investments,
- 9) Forestry,
- 10) Fisheries,
- 11) the Economic Quadrangle, and
- 12) other matters.

Concerning Exchange Visits, it was agreed that exchanges at all levels of government officials, members of the private sectors or state enterprise and academicians would be organized.

Prasong agreed that the promotion of tourism is an essential part of the national development of both coun-

tries. In the future active cooperation on tourism education and training will be set up. A Thai tourism project called "Friendship Rally Tour" starting in Chiang Rai and ending in Kuming China, will pass through Kyaington, Burma from 2nd to 10th December 1993.

In Technical and Economic Cooperation, Thailand agreed to provide 25-30 million baht assistance to Slorc over the next three years and another 15.47 million baht has been allocated for the purpose of agriculture cooperation for fiscal year 1994.

The three border check points at Mae Sai-Tachileik, Maesod-Myawaddy, and Ranong-Kawthoung will be set up to promote trade.

Concerning the energy sector, Slorc expressed the view that the Salween Dam Project is very capital intensive and a decision can not be made without making a proper feasibility study first. Prasong agreed with the Slorc on this during the meeting.

Regarding the forestry sector, Slorc reiterated that timber extraction to be in secure areas would be granted on mid-term and long-term contracts and local community development programs are to be included with every timber extraction plan. Thailand expressed its agreement that the logging concessions be in the secure areas for 5 to 10 years contracts but Thailand will take into consideration local community development programs as an integral



Poverty remains in Burma despite a more open economy.

part of the project. Additionally, Thailand requested Slorc to consider exportation of timber and related products across the Thai/Burma border rather than through seaports as Slorc is now demanding.

For Fishing Firms, Thailand requested Slorc to consider granting fishing rights to Thai companies and also requested that Slorc's penalty system be monetary fines rather than confiscation or jail punishment of crews and boats which violate contracts.

Concerning Banking, Thailand requested Slorc to issue Banking licenses, but this was denied by Slorc.

The next Thai-Burma Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation meeting will be held in Thailand in 1994 and the date will be arranged through diplomatic channels.



POLITICS AND PEACE

In October of 1989, the United Wa State Party (UWSP) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) signed a peace agreement with Slorc. This came after twenty-two years of war between the ethnic Wa, then members of the Communist Party of Burma, and the Burmese military.

The Wa area is one of the largest producers of opium in Southeast Asia. A desperately poor people, the Wa peasants plant, tend and harvest the opium which is then purchased from them for a very small amount, processed into heroin and finally sold on the world market at a tremendous profit.

In a recent statement called "The Agony of the Wa People", the Wa leaders reflected on the Slorc policy to suppress opium growing. Following the WA/Slorc peace agreement in 1989, the Burmese military was in a position in which they could easily begin the process of substituting new crops in the Wa opium fields. Yet, opium production has nearly doubled since 1989. According to the Wa statement, the Slorc's policy to suppress opium growing "...is a window dressing policy only to impress the West. In the past, the United States has even given the Burmese aid to carry out that policy. While, in fact, the Burmese officials encourage opium, growing and enable its marketing for their own benefit. They take their cut -- the major cut."

At the same time, Slorc established the Border Development Program with the stated goal of bringing roads, schools, clinics and other development projects into border areas where ethnic nationalities agreed to cease fires. For the Wa, this was a very attractive draw into the cease fire negotiations. During the years of war, more than 12,000 Wa were

killed, leaving thousands of orphans and widows, and countless wounded and disabled. The Border Development Program offered some hope in this hopeless situation.

Now, almost four years later, little has changed for the Wa people. "At the present, there are no paved roads in the Wa area, not even any gavelled roads." The roads that have been built are designed only to get artillery of the Slorc to the top of the hills.

"Modern medical care is non-existent. There are no hospitals, not even any clinics."

"The vast majority of the Wa have no formal education. There are only a few informal primary schools taught by teachers who themselves have been only to primary school."

The Border Development Program has been much proclaimed by Slorc as a great development plan to bring the border regions into peaceful and prosperous union with the rest of Burma. As such, Slorc has managed to get financial support for the program from the United Nations Development Program. Yet for the Wa, who were one of the first recipients of the program, there has been little if any improvement. According to their report, "Roads and other improvements reported [by the Slorc] in the Burmese press were constructed only in the news media."

Not surprisingly, many of the ethnic nationalities look at Slorc's call for peace talks with suspicion. The experience of the Wa, and a history of being manipulated by the Burmese military, makes many of these groups leery of any cooperation at all with Slorc. Fresh in their memories is still an attempt at peace talks in Rangoon during October and No-

vember of 1963 when some of the ethnic leaders were attacked by the Burmese military on their way home after the talks failed to reach a positive conclusion.

During a November 17-18 visit to the Kayah State, Slorc Secretary-1, Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt called on all armed groups to "return to the legal fold". "The government welcomes any armed group which is willing to return to the legal fold and desirous of coordinating measures for perpetuation of the Union, consolidation of national unity and development of their regions, and economic and social uplift of Union nationals", he said in a speech to the local people of Kayah State. He further emphasized that most armed groups in the Kachin and Shan States had already "returned to the legal fold" and were now involved in regional development. The Wa, are one of the groups in the Shan State who have been "enjoying" the regional development programs of the Slorc.

Khin Nyunt stressed that the Border Development Project was implemented to ensure equality among the national people, and to narrow the economic and social gaps between the States [border regions of Burma occupied by the ethnic nationalities] and the mainland. As a stick and carrot approach to reel in the insurgents, it may be a good strategy in theory, but the realities of the past are keeping most of the ethnic groups from being tempted much by the carrot.

Several issues remain central in the opposition's hesitancy to cooperate with Slorc in peace talks. The first is Slorc's constant call for them to return to the "legal fold". This tends to infuriate some of the opposition groups who believe that Slorc is not the legitimate rulers of Burma since

they suffered a resounding defeat in the 1991 elections, and then refused to turn power over to the people's choice of government. The opposition sees Slorc as a military power rather than a political power with any legal status. Thus, it is not a process of the ethnic nationalities returning to the legal fold, but rather Slorc returning to the legal fold by surrendering power to the winners of the 1991 elections. "Returning to the legal fold" suggests surrender and acceptance of being "illegal" by the ethnic nationalities, and peace talks should not be built around such a misrepresentation of the history of Burma. Opposition groups feel that peace talks and a nationwide cease fire should take place between all the groups in Burma at one time, and should focus on ending hostilities. The political process of the country would then be able to progress under the guidance of people who truly represent the voice of all the groups in Burma.

A second issue which is of great concern to many of the opposition groups is that any talks must focus on the root issues of ethnic conflict which have existed in Burma for so long. It is felt by many that Slorc is trying to force the ethnic groups into negotiating at a disadvantage by economically and physically squeezing them into a corner in which they have little chance of survival. In such a situation, the ethnic groups might be forced to agree to terms which do not meet their basic and historic demands. Should this happen, peace would probably be short lived, and civil war would again break out, bringing perhaps even more destruction to the peasants who tend to bear the brunt of the hostilities.

And thirdly is the fact that Slorc has been unwilling to meet the conditions which the DAB has set for peace talks to take place. The conditions are: 1) the talks be carried out with all of the opposition groups, 2) the talks be held in a neutral country rather than in Burma, and 3) the talks be open to the foreign press, and attended by United Nations officials.

Opposition groups feel that peace talks and a nationwide cease fire should take place between all the groups in Burma at one time, and should focus on ending hostilities. The political process of the country would then be able to progress under the guidance of people who truly represent the voice of all the groups in Burma.

Slorc continues to demand that the talks be held in Burma, and that since the issue is an internal affair, the presence of foreign observers is not necessary.

Amidst all of this, the Kachin have been involved in talks with Slorc, and an agreement of some sort has been worked out. A cease fire in the Kachin States seems to be in place, although reports indicate that no formal agreement has yet been signed. Slorc officials are shown regularly on Burmese television visiting the Kachin State and talking with Kachin representatives. This has truly been a major political coup for Slorc.

The Kachin move has upset some opposition groups who feel the Kachin should have stuck with the DAB agreement that any talks with Slorc would be carried out as a unified coalition. These groups feel that Slorc is trying to divide the

DAB forces by unilateral talks which will weaken any negotiation advantages which the DAB might have.

However, the Kachin stress that their talks with Slorc have been only aimed at bringing about a nationwide cease fire after which the DAB and Slorc could sit down for talks. A nationwide cease fire, they argue,

is essential for the survival of the peasants in all the States who can not survive much longer under the onslaught of Slorc's military campaigns. Also, a nationwide cease fire would make it possible to start talking about some of the more essential issues which are preventing peace in Burma.

A Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) statement outlines some of the issues which could be addressed once a nationwide cease fire is in place.

"Among the important issues that could be discussed following the implementation of the cease fire are (for example in Kachin State) the relocation of villagers who have been moved to Burmese Army areas and the status of those who have been arbitrarily detained for many years on suspicion of supporting the KIO (while the international community is rightly condemning political prisoners detained since 1988, we hear nothing about the many Kachins and other ethnic nationalities who remain in prison for supporting their cause). It is also possible that a State-wide convention of political leaders, Kachin and non-Kachin alike, could be held to discuss the priorities for a future political agenda. Needless to say, a formal cessation of hostilities could also lead to an improvement in the human rights situation for the thousands of oppressed people forced to work as laborers, porters and sol-

diers. While one can argue that in the future it may be necessary to return to armed struggle, we should look positively at these developments, remembering that only until just now, Slorc was insisting on separate talks."

The future remains hidden in the mist of all of these hopes and fears. Is Slorc truly sincere or not in their call for talks? No one can say for certain at this time. However, it remains a fact that Slorc is gaining much political ground from the present situation. By publicly announcing their call for talks, and by having at least some success in discussions with the Kachin, they are raising their credibility in the eyes of the international community. During this year's UN General Assembly, such political success is very important for Slorc. During last year's Assembly, they were soundly criticized for their failure to bring

about needed changes in Burma. This year, they may escape such burning criticisms. At the same time, Slorc may be planning a more sinister strategy. By openly announcing their call for talks with all the insurgents, they may also be preparing the way for a decisive dry season offensive, especially against the Karen and the Mon. They have publicly said they are ready for peace talks. If the Karen, Mon or other ethnic groups hesitate, Slorc can simply say that these groups refuse to negotiate for peace and only wish to destroy the union. Then they can launch their offensive, rationalizing that they have no other choice. If this happens, will the international community be caught sleeping?

The coming weeks and months are crucial for Burma. The Burmese military has a long history of manipulation which leaves many people nervous about the present trends.

What ever the Slorc is up to, it is absolutely essential now that the opposition groups seek a unified voice and strategy. Only then can they be in a position to sue for peace from a position of advantage strong enough to insure that they will get the kind of peace which will be lasting, and which will bring about equality of all the ethnic groups in Burma.

• Sources:

- ❑ The Agony of the Wa People, 1993
- ❑ KIO Statement, 931102
- ❑ Background to Peace Talks in Burma, October, 1992



SUPPORT

In October, Thai NGOs, students and international groups who are concerned about environmental issues on the Thai/Burma border held a seminar at Chiang Mai Thailand. The theme of the seminar was "Environment Issues on the Thai/Burma Border" and addressed two main subjects:

- ❑ 1) logging concessions and their destruction of the forests
- ❑ 2) Energy development projects, including dams and a gas pipeline, being planned by Slorc and the Thai government.

Both of these issues will have a severe, long-term impact on the eco-systems in the area as well as on the culture and life styles of the ethnic nationalities who live there.

As an outcome of the seminar, the participants agreed to form a Thai/Burma Network, which will try to focus local and international attention on the issues mentioned above. They plan to carry out a persistent campaign of education which will ultimately lead to effective campaigns in Thailand, inside the Burma border area, as well as internationally to end environmental destruction related to deforestation and planned dam construction.

The first action of the group is to collect and analyze information related to Thai logging companies and the planned dams along the Salween and Moei Rivers. This information will be printed in English, Thai, Burmese and Karen. Seminars will also be held to educate the public on the importance of these issues.

The group realizes that without bringing an end to the civil war, the protection of the environment and the security of the people who live in these areas can never be successful. Therefore, a clear link between the environment issues and the root causes of the civil war will always be stressed.

ECONOMICS

The momentum of the Burmese opposition's call for international economic sanctions against Slorc is slower than the influx of foreign companies into Burma. The increase of foreign currency reserves in the hands of Slorc spotlights the weakness of opposition's strategy and also highlights the need for better international cooperation.

Following the massacre of civilians by the present military regime in 1988, the Burmese opposition began calling for foreign governments and the United Nations to impose total economic sanctions against Burma. The main aim of this strategy was to cut off Slorc's significant military expenses which are used to continue their long-running civil war against the people of Burma. Various opposition leaders have been trying to lobby for these sanctions, but have tended to limit their lobby work to mainly European and North American countries.

The Slorc well understands the Burmese opposition's strategy and has launched a counter offensive to woo foreign investors into Burma by initiating an open door economic policy. This open door economic policy does not, however, indicate any major changes in Burma as Slorc's political door still remains closed to any international pressure to push Burma towards significant democratic changes. However, lack of political changes has not affected Slorc too negatively as they have been able to gain closer international ties through economic cooperation, especially with China and Asean.

By 1990, Slorc had gained foreign currency reserves of about US\$468.9 million with two thirds of these reserves coming from nine foreign oil companies which were granted contracts to explore for oil

and gas. Five of these oil companies, i.e. Shell, Unocal, BHP, Croft Exploration, Idemitsu and Petro Canada, have pulled out of their concessions after failure to gain the profits they had hoped for. Nonetheless, all of them had already paid millions of US dollars to the Slorc in concession fees, and Shell Co. alone had invested US\$90 million. Obviously the main aim of the opposition's call for economic sanctions against Slorc to weaken Slorc militarily, has failed.

The other oil companies are Amoco (USA), Yukong (S.Korea), Premier Oil, Total (France) and PTTEP (Thailand) and they remain active in their exploration fields. Amoco and Yukong recently renewed their contracts. The PTTEP of Thailand is involved in a very expensive plan to build a gas pipeline from the Gulf of Martaban to Kanchanaburi Province of Thailand. At least US\$500 million will be required for infrastructure and an additional US\$250-300 million for the pipeline construction.

Another offshore contractor, Premier Oil, had a concession on the Tennasserin cost and has sold 50% of it's shares to Texaco and another 20% to Nippon Oil. The Total company of France has found an estimated 10 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves in its offshore concession. On March 4th, a drilling ship arrived at the Total site to begin drilling a test well.

In the future, Thailand plans to become involved in the "Economic Quadrangle" plan which is an economic cooperation project between Thailand, Laos, Burma and China. It specifically focuses on the six sectors of transport, energy, environment, human resource development, trade, investment and tourism.

China and Thailand will be the major recipients of the profits from this project. Both countries need closer ties with Burma in order to get the raw materials Burma has to sell, and to benefit from the potential market in Burma market and transportation routes through Burma.

The project will mainly use Burma as a transit for goods passing between China and Thailand. China's south west provinces of Sichuan & Yunan will ship their goods through Burmese ports which are closer than China's major seaports in the east. Recently the Thanlyin bridge near Rangoon was opened. It is the largest bridge in Burma and connects Rangoon with a newly proposed seaport through which Chinese goods can be exported. The bridge was built with Chinese technical assistance and loans.

About 200 million people in these two provinces of China are also potential consumers of Thai goods. Burma and Laos will gain little from this project in terms of economic development, although Slorc will once again pocket funds which it can use to strengthen its army even more.

Along with all the foreign investments and regional trade plans, the regime will develop closer political ties with countries in the region. The opposition's call for economic sanctions to help bring about democratic changes and human rights guarantees for the people will soon be lost in the dust of "economic progress".

• **Source;**

- AI (00/11/93)
- Mgr(00/04/93)
- TN (04/11/93)



PEACE TALKS



Talks which lead to a true peace are the only hope.

DAB Letters to the KIO

The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), a jungle-based allied opposition group in Burma, recently sent two letters to one of its members, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) which has been involved in cease fire discussions with Slorc.

The first letter was dated October 15, and called on the KIO to stop its ongoing independent talks with Slorc for a cease fire. The letter added that if the KIO continued these activities in violation of the constitution and regulations of the DAB, the KIO would be asked to resign as a member of the DAB within a month.

The second letter was dated October 16 and indicated that the final decision of DAB was for temporary suspension of the KIO as a member of the DAB.

The DAB is made up of the 20 alliance dissident groups of both the

ethnic minority revolutionary groups and the political dissidents who joined following the 1988 massacres in the urban areas of Burma.

• Source

- DAB 151093.
- DAB 161093.

Bo Mya Stresses Slorc's Tactics

Saw Bo Mya, chairman of the DAB as well as president of the KNU, said that the Slorc's new strategy is to infiltrate the armed alliance and to sign individual peace treaties with DAB members in order to make the revolutionary groups bow to its wishes. He accused the Slorc of lacking sincerity in solving the ethnic minority problems. Their so-called peace offers and treaties are aimed at disintegrating the alliance and ensuring continued military domination in Burma.

He added that what the DAB desires, if the military regime really

wants to establish peace and unity in the country, is for the Slorc to initiate a nationwide ceased fire and to announce to the people of Burma and world of their intentions to hold talks with the DAB.

• Source

- BP071193.

Slorc Meets with Kachin Mediators

A representative group of Slorc led by Slorc Military Intelligence Chief, Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, met with a Kachin mediation group for discussions concerning a cease fire between the two groups. The meeting was held at a military guest house in Rangoon on 27 October.

The Kachin mediation group was comprised of retired ambassador U La Wang, General Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Church Rev U Sabwe Juam and businessman U Khin Myat.

The Kachin mediation group recounted their experiences at a news conference at the United Nation headquarters in New York, and discussed further plans for their peace efforts and for the development of the Kachin State.

• Source

- NLM281193.



BRIEF NEWS NOTES

Slorc Gives New Grants for Thai Fishing Companies

Slorc will permit 281 fishing boats belonging to eight Thai firms to fish in Burmese waters from the beginning of 1994. This comes as a result of the discussions on bilateral agreements on fishing held in Burma during September 13-18.

According to the new regulations, Thai fishing firms do not have the right to directly make contact with the Burmese military regime. The Fisheries Department of Thailand will select Thai firms to make contracts with Slorc. This establishes a governmental relationship between Slorc and Thailand. Under the new Burmese law, illegal foreign boats fishing in Burmese waters will be sentenced to 47 years imprisonment if caught.

• Source;

□ BP110593

Thai and Singapore Logging Firms

Thai logging companies have asked the foreign ministry to negotiate with Slorc to eliminate Rangoon's agent system in awarding concessions for managing natural resources.

During mid-October, the Burmese government granted a contract to a Singaporean firm to help organize the allotment of natural resource, fishery, and forestry concessions starting mid 1994.

Thai Co.s will now have to deal through the Singapore company. They are expected to pay fees at double the amount to both the Singapore and Rangoon firms.

The 47 Thai logging firms working in Burma are scheduled to suspend operations by this year's end. Concession are now expected to be awarded to other foreign firms.

Thai-Burma Bridge

On 5th October, Thai officials discussed funding options for the construction of a proposed Thai-Burma bridge from Maesod district of Tak province Thailand to Myawaddy of Burma. The estimated cost is 80 million baht for the 350 meter-long bridge.

The bridge is part of an ESCAP-supported plan to develop an Asian high way network. The forthcoming Escap meeting is expected to discuss the question of funding as the UN has not broached the subject so far.

• Source;

□ BP071193



BURMA ISSUES

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