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THEIR OWN DEMOCRACY STYLE



While Slorc calls for cease-fire negotiations, human rights abuses increase. In the Taungoo area, free-fire zones are expanding, and thousands of people are being forced out of their homes. With food supplies being destroyed, they face starvation.

(see **Taungoo's Suffering**, on page 2)

Information for Action +++ International Campaigns for Peace +++ Grassroots Education and Organizing

HUMAN RIGHTS

TAUNGOO'S SUFFERING

During the past months, the free-fire zone near Taungoo of northern Karen State (see map in October Burma Issues, page 3) has been enlarged. More people have been driven from their homes and are now suffering from exposure to the cold and from starvation. This was recently confirmed by a friend of Burma Issues who spent time travelling throughout the region interviewing the people there.

A small road runs from Kawthade (southeast of Taungoo) to Boo Sa Khi village. The distance between these two towns is not more than 20 miles but the area is very mountainous so the narrow dirt road winds around, up and over the mountains. Many Karen villages dot the mountainsides and the people survive by farming the steep hill sides, and by raising animals. During the past rainy season, the villagers were ordered off of their farms by the military. They refused to go as they had no alternative place to establish their homes, and this area represents their traditional family farms. The Burmese military then stated that if they did not move off, the area would be declared a free-fire zone, and they could be shot on sight.

In October, the Burmese military began a campaign along the road. Lt. Col Myint Aung of Infantry #26 was in charge of the campaign. He led two columns of troops through the villages, looting, burning and killing along the way. Part of their rampage is documented by the following calendar of events.

- October 17 - The second column of troops arrived at Sa Wa Dha village. They killed two villagers and burned the gardens.
- October 19 - The troops moved on to Mo The Dha village. They immediately burned all of the paddy fields and killed one woman.
- October 21 - Troops of the second column arrived at Managyi village and burned seven houses. After destroying all of the rice fields, they killed two persons. One was a woman named Naw Hay Lay. She was 62 years old.

- October 25 - In Kha Tha Tho village, the soldiers killed a 63-year-old man.
- October 27 - At Ta Aye village, column #2 combined with column #1. They killed Mr. Hel Tha Ble. He was 30 years old.
- October 28 - The entire village of Aye Khi, including the Catholic church, was burned to the ground. All of the property of the villagers was confiscated. Then the soldiers walked through the rice fields and, using bamboo poles, beat all of the rice into the ground. Finally they killed 15 goats, 2 cows, and 3 buffaloes.
- October 30 - The troops arrived at Boo Khi village and stole nine boxes full of the villagers personal possessions.
- November 1 - When the troops arrived in Boo Sa Khi village, the two columns again split up. Column 1 continued south to Lae Khi village where they joined Slorc Infantry #440. Column 2 remained in Boo Sa Khi.

After a month, the troops were called back to Kawthade since they are out on campaign only one month at a time. Once back in Kawthade, other infantry groups were sent out on similar campaigns. They are all under the command of Major General Gyi Aung of the Southern Command.

During the above campaign, at least 2,316 villagers were affected. Most of them fled their villages to hide deep in the jungles. They report that seven of their people were executed by the Burmese military. An unknown number of porters also died. During the

fact finding mission, the bodies of several of the dead porters were spotted along the road or in the fields.

The future for these internally displaced people is now extremely bleak. They are hiding in the jungle without proper shelter. It is the cold season, and they have no protection from the elements. Food is scarce. Some of them have been able to sneak back into their old farms to collect some of the rice which escaped the fires, but this will provide them only with enough food for about one month. After that they will be without anything to eat. Even if they could find another source of food, they have no money to buy it.

This military campaign was directed solely against a defenceless civilian population. It is a part of the military's "four cut" strategy to deprive villagers food and shelter so they can not support any movements for self-determination.

While this campaign against the villagers around Kawthade was going on, the Burmese military was also initiating cease-fire talks with the KNU. On October 11 they secretly met with representatives of the KNU in Mae Sot, Thailand to start the truce dialogues. According to a KNU source, the Slorc negotiating team assured the KNU that Rangoon would not launch a military offensive against Karen strongholds.

Source:

Saw Michael

TN 951128



SOME RECENT ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN BURMA

The Kanchanaburi (Thailand) branch of the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) has proposed that the Thai and Burmese governments develop the Burmese city of Moulmein as a new regional deep-sea port.

They also propose that a major road be constructed to connect the Tavoy region of Burma with the Thai border at Three Pagodas Pass. The road would parallel the pipeline which Total and Unocal are soon to build. FTI suggests that this port and road could become an alternative to Singapore for the transport of goods from Thailand, Burma and Southern China to the Middle East and Europe.

The construction of the road would further infringe on traditional indigenous lands of the Karen and Mon. TN 951101

Burmese Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw visited South Korea and Japan last week and called for stronger economic ties with more investment from the two "tigers" economies. He promised to help them build an industrial base in Burma. BP 951107

Singapore said yesterday that it was sending a 75-member business mission to Burma to explore new investment and trade opportunities.

Private business organizations involved in the hotel, entertainment, exhibition, construction, engineering and public works industries and trading and financial services will be included in the mission.

Singapore is the second largest foreign investor in Burma after Britain. At the end of August its investment commitments in Burma totalled US\$528 million in 31 projects. TN 951106

Visiting British businessmen met on Thursday with senior Burmese military junta members in Rangoon to discuss investment opportunities in Burma.

The delegation, headed by the chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce, called on the head of military intelligence, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, and Trade Minister Lieutenant General Tun Kyi. TN 951111

In yet another move reflective of soured Thai-Burmese ties, the Burmese Government yesterday rejected conditions attached to a 300-million-baht loan the Thai Government offered for upgrading the Tachilek-Kengtung road in northern Burma.

The Burmese Embassy in Bangkok has notified the Foreign Ministry that Rangoon wanted to use Burmese contractors for the project instead of Thai companies as conditioned by the loan package.

The loan to Burma carries standard strings set by the Finance Ministry -- that Thai companies participate and that materials and equipment be sourced in Thailand. BP 951115

Japan will provide \$50 million as relief to cover a loan to Burma earlier this month. The money is Japan's 13th such grant to Burma since Tokyo began cancelling debts of least-developed countries by providing aid to cover their repayments. It provided Burma with \$40 million in the 1992 fiscal year, \$62 million in 1993 and \$12 million last year. BP 951128

The Burmese junta's campaign to promote 1996 as Visit Myanmar (Burma) Year has met with little success as the country is still short of hotel accommodation while food remains very costly, said Thai traders doing business there.

Burma currently has only 4,000 hotel rooms, of which only 1,000 meet general tourist standards. Hotel room and service charges are also some of the highest in the world, said the traders who recently returned to Thailand. TN 951125

Construction of the Hanthawady Golf Club resort, a Burmese-Japanese joint venture, is under way in Bago.

The developers, Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd and Nikko Shoji Co, want the 80-room three-star hotel and golf resort ready for Visit Myanmar Year, 1996. BP 951205

"Money motivates men, big businessmen. Their motivation is to make money," Brigadier-General David Abel, minister for national planning and economic development told Reuters. "If they can make money, why not? They are not worried about what politicians say."

Abel dismissed calls by NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi for foreign investors and international organisations to be cautious about investing in Burma because of its dismal human rights record and un-democratic military-run government.

"That's a joke," Abel said, referring to Suu Kyi's remarks. "It doesn't worry me at all. The situation is good, they can make a sound investment. They can make money." BP 951202

Visitors to Burma will not find accommodations cheap. The famous Strand Hotel charges up to US\$300 a night, and the few three- and four-star hotels now completed charge \$100 to \$150. Simple guesthouses are said to be asking up to US\$50 for a very small room. BP 951205

The Thai Board of Investment has placed Burma second on its list of most favoured trading nations behind Laos. It proposes that Thai companies should make more investments in Burma because of Thailand's comparative advantages. TN 951101



POLITICS

PEACE THROUGH JUSTICE

"The new generations of Burma, made up of her myriad indigenous peoples and ethnic races, should not inherit from us, the older generation, the pain and suffering of war, arrogance, and chauvinism. Therefore, we ask you, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to seriously consider this critical reality facing Burma today and work with us to find the right process to bring about an appropriate, just, and long-lasting solution. (Open Letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi by Pu Khi Doh)"

The history of war and conflict in the land area now known as Burma, stretches back several centuries already. It was a reality to the various indigenous and ethnic peoples living within these borders long before the State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc) was created. Thus the real problem facing the people of Burma is not Slorc. The problem in Burma is a system which allows any individual and/or group to have such total control over every aspect of life without being accountable to the people. Removing Slorc from power will, therefore, not guarantee an improvement in the situation, although it will be a very important first step. The system and mentality which makes such abuse of power possible, itself must be totally changed and replaced with new political, economic and social systems which will eliminate chauvinism of all kinds, and allow peace and justice to flourish.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as head of the National League for Democracy (NLD), and as the people's choice of leader for the democratic movement, is in a unique position to help bring about these changes. In his open letter to her written in October of this year, Pu Khi Doh of the Karen indigenous group expressed confidence in her commitment to doing just this. "Your release from six years of house arrest now will enable the drawing up of a real national constitution which will build a future based on the desires of all the peoples of Burma."

The following stories remind us again of the difficult, but extremely important task ahead.

Chinland

Zimpui School in Tiddim Township of Chinland is run by the local

villagers since there is no "government" school in the area. The villagers have requested financial assistance from the Slorc for the school, but these requests have been turned down. In order to find the necessary funds to operate the school, students have two periods each Friday when they work for villagers in the area who can pay them a small amount. This money is collected by the school and kept in a special fund to help purchase tables, chairs, blackboards, chalk, and other necessary school supplies.

On September 9 of this year, troops led by Capt. Soe Myint of Battalion 269, entered the village while the students were working. All of the school teachers, the chairman of the village, and other local committee members were summoned by Capt. Soe Myint. The following conversation took place:

Soe Myint: Why are the students working instead of studying their lessons.

Headmistress: We have set aside two periods each Friday as special work education times.

Soe Myint: You make the students work so you can pocket the money they earn!

Headmistress: No. We use all of the money for running the school since our request for assistance from the government was turned down. The fund is kept by the school committee and I can show you the list of income, purchases, as well as the balance. Also, as you surely know, the military has demanded a "contribution" of 22 kyats from each student for the township sports fund. Our students are extremely poor and they can not

pay this money, so the only way we can make this "contribution" is by working like this.

Soe Myint: Don't be proud just because you Chins have some education. Don't you know that you can do nothing without my authority? All economic, education, political, and religious matters are completely in my hands. Listen and obey me or I will report you to my seniors.

Headmistress: You can do that. It is up to you. I have to suffer for the sake of these poor children and for the school.

Soe Myint: I am a military commander. Do you know who has authority in Burma now? (pointing his finger threateningly at the headmistress) When I come back, if you don't follow my orders, you and all of the teachers will be fired. You are always giving money and assistance to the rebel Chin National Army. If you give more assistance to them, your village will be burned to the ground. You Chin people don't live in houses like other people and you don't eat food like other people. Why don't you listen to the orders of the Burmese. What will you eat without the Burmese to feed you? Be sure you listen carefully to me. You can do nothing without my authority.

Rohingyas

On 18th October, 1995, a section of military intelligence belonging to MI 18 of Buthidaung township some 80 miles north of Akyab, capital of Arakan State in western Burma, arrested 5 youths from different villages under Buthidaung township for allegedly having links



Karen villagers try to harvest a little of the rice not destroyed by the Burmese military. It will provide them with only about a month's supply of food. After that they starve.

with insurgents. While under interrogation they were subjected to severe torture and later all the five were executed behind a hill west of the MI office.

Extrajudicial killings and summary executions are carried out against the Rohingya by law enforcing agencies and security personnel without slightest fear of prosecution.

Imam Sharif, 45, son of Dabir of Sikdarpara village near Maungdaw township was inhumanly beaten to death by security personnel at night. Again on 10th September, border security forces of Khandauung under Buthidaung township killed Sha Alam, 35, by beating. In another incident on 21st September, a passenger boat bound for Buthidaung from Ponnyolake village stopped at U Hla Pe village. Some security forces waiting at the jetty ordered the Muslim passengers to load the soldiers belongings onto the boat. Mohammad Haroon could not obey as he was very sick. The security forces then bayonetted him to death in front of the shocked and terrified Muslim passengers.

Any process for peace in Burma must include steps to bring justice to those who have been most victimized by this war. Their suffering must be acknowledged, and they must be allowed participation in creating those new economic, political, and social systems needed to ensure peace and prosperity for future generations.

One important step in that process is acknowledgement of the causes of the present conflict. In his letter, Pu Khi Doh emphasizes that the Karen struggle is not simply an ethnic insurgency. It is a struggle for the right to land, language, script, and culture. General Aung San recognized this need of the indigenous people and promised them the right to rule their own people freely, and without disturbance. In a speech to the Karenni, General Aung San said, "We [the people of Burma] did not want to be slaves under the British, and in the same way, you [the indigenous races] do not want to be slaves under us."

True unity of all the peoples of Burma is essential for a long lasting and true peace. Urging Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to follow in the steps of

her father, Pu Khi Doh ends his open letter with this plea:

"To establish one country we need the full cooperation and participation of all the nationalities. General Aung San said, 'The Burmese can not work successfully without the support of the indigenous nationalities, and the indigenous groups can not work effectively without the support of the Burmese forces'. For national unity, we do not have to build a bigger and more modern military force. Unity created in such a way will never last long as our past history clearly shows. We must build the country with unity, love, and full justice. Then our country and our peace will last forever."

Source:

Open Letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi 951024

Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, Arakan 951129

Chin National Front 951127



EDITORIAL

THEIR OWN DEMOCRACY STYLE

by K. R.

In September this year, tough sanctions against Burma, in the form of an amendment to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Appropriation Bill, were withdrawn by the person responsible for introducing them - Republican senator Mitch McConnell. Pressure from other republicans and from oil giants UNOCAL and Texaco (whose interests in Burma would have been affected) was said to have played a part in the decision, though Mitch McConnell intends to fashion a new sanctions bill in the future. (BP 950929)

For many Burmese people and Americans involved in the campaign to free Burma from the grip of the SLORC, Mitch McConnell is an avenging angel, a fearless campaigner, a spokesperson in high places for the downtrodden of Burma. Few would argue that his work on the sanctions bill was anything but honourable and it caused a ripple of excitement from Washington to Rangoon as people awaited its outcome.

During a recent interview with Ralph Bachoe from the Bangkok Post, Mr. McConnell talked about his interest in foreign policy and his interest in "promoting democracy - American - style democracy". He told Bachoe that what "America ought to be doing is promoting western values" (BP 951105)

He makes no direct equation between western values and human rights but the context would lead readers to assume this frequently made connection.

McConnell's fine work in trying to bring the U.S. people to a commitment about Burma ought to be acknowledged. As he says - "No one should doubt my resolve to have the US Senate fully debate the deplorable situation in Burma and bring about the trade and investment sanctions I propose against the SLORC regime." However the tone of his remarks suggest that he has his own agenda for the

Burmese people which may or may not coincide with what they want for themselves.

The whole notion of human rights is one which trite comments about 'western values' simplifies to the point of meaninglessness. Those of the west/north must remember that while they have sought to dominate the discourse on human rights, debate has gone on nevertheless in the south.

Perceived and real relationships between economic growth and democracy have been a bone of contention for many Asian governments who maintain that their own economic progress has been, rather, the result of a firm hand in economic affairs and that concepts about human rights differ in Asia from the west because of religious and socio/cultural differences. This variety is all that must be acknowledged here. Whilst an individualistic, secular approach to rights and a strong relationship between economic growth and democratic government may be widely assumed, there may also be a place for accommodat-

ing ideas which grow from a sense of community and strong religious faith.

The north has imposed policies and forced its agendas on southern cultures to its own advantage. For the west, the secularisation of the notion of human rights has grown with the rise of market economies which give scope to individual pursuits and which glorify the place of the individual in the cosmos. McConnell was trained in this school of thought. But for many of the peoples of other cultures, western notions of human rights do not satisfy their social, religious or political outlook. It is not for the west to set the human rights agenda and to behave suspiciously over the definitions and beliefs of others. The 'southern' debate over human rights is every bit as legitimate, perhaps more so in some contexts.

It is worth noting that America, which credits itself with the moral authority to behave as the world's policeman, has forged a negative place in many less developed nations through its destructive environment



What kind of democracy will work for all the people of Burma?

TOURISM

policies, its perpetuation of negative attitudes to people of other cultures as well as by sheer force when their own interests have been threatened. An example of the latter is the Gulf war. There has been no rush into Rwanda/Burundi or Bosnia where threats to American oil interests or strategic interests are not great, but where human rights violations abound.

And has American style democracy resulted in fair and equal outcomes for all Americans - its black citizens for example? The words of Filipino Renato Constantino - "Why should it [America] be the enforcer of standards it does not observe?" reflect a growing resentment about America's dominance of the human rights debate. (DAGA info No 59. P.5 950728)

Burma's citizens need the opportunity to enter these debates on their own terms, and not out of a sense of duty to those who have supported them. There would be no community more qualified to speak about human rights and the desire for democracy.

They have lived and died over these issues for many years.

Democracies can be as diverse as Britain, India, New Zealand or South Africa. Within democracies, notions about economic systems and the protection of human rights will vary. But when Aung San Suu Kyi rejected the notion of different types of democracy, she was referring to a bottom line, a fundamental concept which democracies share - governance according to the will of the people.

"American democracy is different from British democracy. British democracy is different from French democracy and so on. In the same way, Burmese democracy will be different from every other democracy." (TN 950716)

What's wrong with Burmese style democracy? There's nothing peculiarly American about voting for representatives to act on your behalf. Indeed the Burmese people did that very well back in 1990 and on other occasions in their history between 1947

and 1962. In Aung San Suu Kyi's words "After all we're not raw at it." (TN 950716) Burmese style democracy might suit the Burmese people very well, given half a chance to practise it.

Those in the west must be much more critical of the violations of the rights of others which occur in their own societies and much more accommodating of the very different, but just as valid, views held in other parts of the world. To impose a way of seeing and doing on others, and to make cooperation conditional upon towing a western line, is surely a gross violation of the rights of other nations to seek their own destinies.

What a future Mitch McConnell sanctions bill might do very well, is help to pave the way for the Burmese people to practise their own democratic style.



TOURISM NEWS

A survey of news reports since October gives a depressing picture of an extraordinary rise in foreign investment in Burma, mainly in the area of tourism in preparation for Visit Myanmar Year 1996. The following is a brief overview of the latest foreign investment contracts.

- Air Mandalay is expanding its schedule to include flights from Chiang Mai to Rangoon. Flights will initiate from Phuket as well in the near future.

- A 24 hour medical clinic has opened in Rangoon.

- The \$US35 million Baiyoke Kandwagi Hotel has opened.

- Deithelm Travel has opened an office in Rangoon and have expanded their tour services to include much of the country.

- Myanmar Diving Services is planning to offer diving holidays in the Mergui Archipelago.

- The new Andaman Club Casino Resort has opened at Victoria Point. Bangkok Air has joined with them to offer package tours from Ranong.

- The Oriental Hotel has purchased land near the Irrawady River to build a 100 room hotel at a cost of

\$US22.75 million as a joint venture with the Burmese government.

- The Krong Sombat co has signed a joint venture contract with the Burmese government to provide another domestic air service.

- The Burma/Japan Hanthawady Golf Club Resort joint venture in Bago will use money from Nikko Shoji Co and U.M. Economic Holdings and should be open and ready for Visit Myanmar Year 1996.

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The Nation - 951019, 951027, 951103, 951108, 951125,



NEWS BRIEFS

NEWS ITEMS THIS MONTH

ASEAN Summit in Bangkok. Burma is helping to cement its position in the ASEAN community of nations by agreeing to sign a treaty which would ban the use of nuclear weapons in the region.

In preparation for the ASEAN meeting, Burmese students and prominent Burmese citizens, including the editor of New Burma Journal, Y Gaung, have been arrested in Bangkok amidst fears that there could be demonstrations during the summit.

The National Convention. Eighty six delegates attended day 1 of the constitutional convention in Rangoon, then walked out. The boycott effectively bans them from further contributions to the convention which Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD describe as undemocratic.

Investments. David Abel, Burma's economic minister, has said that overseas investors are not interested in politics and human rights, only money. They're proving him right with over 160 new foreign investment contracts in Burma this year.

Stock Exchange. Burma's Maung Maung Khin has had lessons at the Thai stock Exchange in preparation for setting up a stock exchange in Burma.

Mon Repatriation. As yet there are no official plans in place for repatriation of Mon refugees from Thailand. Talks between UNHCR and the Slorc have yielded no commitments from either side as to the care of refugees who repatriate and the monitoring of the process. However, a spontaneous repatriation appears to have

begun and there are concerns for the safety of these people who could return to a situation even worse than the one they left.

Border Disputes. A missionary was shot dead by DKBA troops at Sho Klo Camp. A tourist van with 10 passengers was ambushed in Mae Hong Son. The driver of the van was killed. A border clash near Mae Sot has left a Thai policeman dead.



BURMA ISSUES

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