

# Burma Issues

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## CONTENTS

GAS PIPELINE.....2

**BLOOD PROMISE:  
UNOCAL IN BURMA**

ECONOMICS.....3

**THE ECONOMIC DE-  
VELOPMENT OF  
BURMA**

DETENTION.....5

**THE RELEASE OF SUU  
KYYI - HOPE POST-  
PONED**

DETENTION.....6

**FIRST STEP TO A  
LONG JOURNEY**

HUMAN RIGHTS.....7

**RAILWAYS, PIPELINES,  
AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

NEWS BRIEFS.....8

**ARMED CONFLICT**

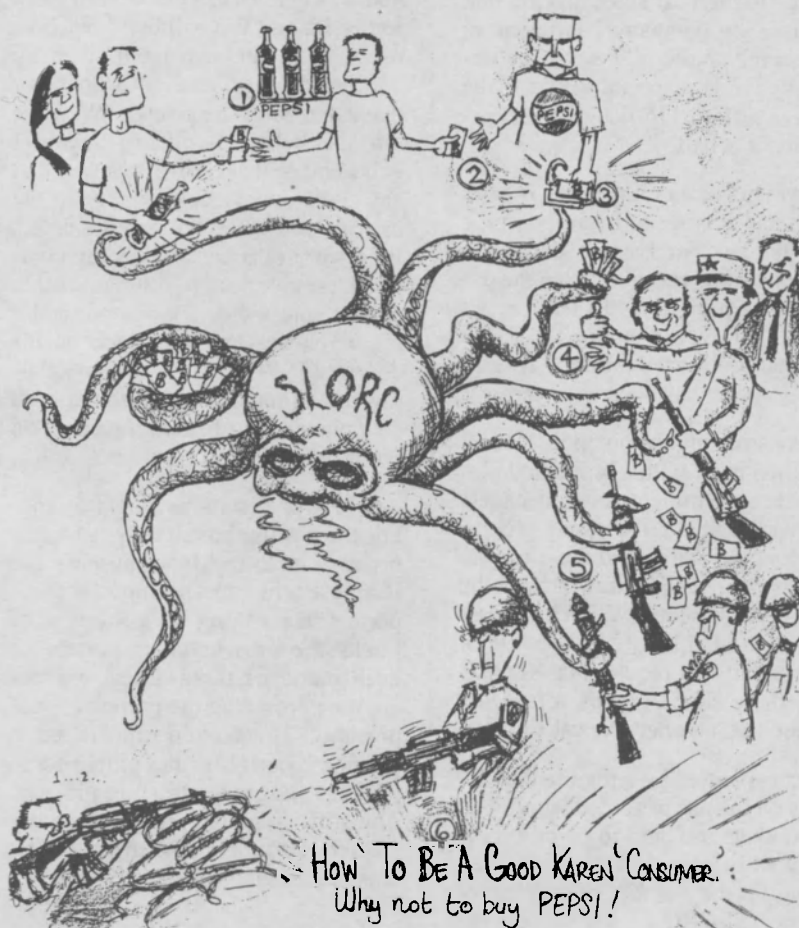
**BURMA-THAI RELA-  
TIONS**

**INTERNATIONAL RE-  
LATIONS**

**BUSINESS AND TRADE**

A boycott Pepsi poster circulating around the refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border.

## RAILWAYS, PIPELINES, AND HUMAN RIGHTS



- ① You give your money to the shopkeeper for a PEPSI.  
② The shopkeeper gives money to the PEPSI Company to get more PEPSI.  
③ PEPSI Company gives money to SLORC to make and sell PEPSI in Burma.  
④ SLORC buys guns from China, Yugoslavia, Poland and companies in other places.  
⑤ SLORC gives guns to the Burmese Army (and money!)  
⑥ The Burmese Army tries to kill Karen!

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

### Blood Promise: Unocal in Burma

In the rainforests of southern Burma, Unocal and its French partner, Total, are beginning construction of a billion dollar pipeline to carry natural gas from offshore fields in the Andaman Sea across southern Burma and over the border to Thailand. Promises Unocal of their project, "We would never allow our activities anywhere to be the cause of human suffering." Sadly, Unocal's definition of causation seems only to include suffering directly inflicted by their own employees. Meanwhile, the military regime of Burma is deeply involved in a host of abuses to ensure the pipeline's construction, including the use of slave labor on a massive scale, ethnic cleansing, extra-judicial murder and the degradation of the environment.

By R. Strider

In a brochure sent to their stockholders to defend their pipeline project in Burma, Unocal promised that "We would never allow our activities anywhere to be the cause of human suffering." In the year since making that promise, the company has taken an exceedingly narrow view of causation, denying responsibility for the massive suffering inflicted on the corporation's behalf.

Surveying work on the pipeline has begun and it is set to begin pumping in 1998. The Far Eastern Economic Review reports revenues from the gas may be as high as \$400 million per year. That would make the Unocal/Total project the military government's largest hard-currency earner.

In constructing the pipeline, Unocal has allied itself with a brutal and illegitimate government in its decades-long war against three ethnic groups, the Mon, the Karen and the Tavoyan peoples. To put a pipeline through the lands of these people which has never been controlled before by the central government will require that SLORC crush these ethnic groups, a fact that can not have escaped Unocal's notice.

Burma is ruled by a regime that depends on the use of forced labor. Exact numbers are hard to come by but one well-informed Burma watcher, adding up the number of "voluntary laborers" SLORC admits to, puts the figure at 500,000 on any given day.

This is drawn from a pool of people who are forced to labor on a rotating basis. The size of the entire pool subject to forced labor is estimated at 3 million people.

Unocal's Imle insists that the pipeline will neither use nor benefit from forced labor. "We will build our own roads, with our own labor, with no impressed labor, and with no labor that is not paid," he asserts. "We have said that before, I will say it again, I will stand on that. There is no way that any government can impose on us the use of slave labor. We will not do it." Imle will not acknowledge any company connection to human rights abuses unless they are committed by his employees or take place on his doorstep. "We will not," he says, "allow those [human rights] violations to take place to our benefit, meaning on our property."

Imle's protestations notwithstanding, the pipeline has already caused an increase in forced labor because the Burmese army doesn't move without porters. Hamstrung by a shortage of trucks, the army dragoons porters for even mundane tasks. Local villages are now providing the porters to support the 12,000 soldiers mobilized to provide security for the pipeline and its supporting infrastructure projects. The army uses two porters for every soldier, so "pipeline security" enlists tens of thousands of slave laborers.

Nei Pe Thein Zea, a Mon spokesperson, says, "Violence to destroy the pipeline would be our last option, but in the end we would have no choice." He warns that the SLORC "will force slave labor on the people without payment. This violates our fundamental human rights, so we will oppose the pipeline by any means."

Imle's response to charges that his pipeline is bringing slave labor in its wake is to blame the victims. "If you threaten the pipeline there's going to be more military," Imle says. "If forced labor goes hand and glove with the military, yes, there will be more forced labor. For every threat to the pipeline there will be a reaction." Unocal's arrogance regarding the project seems to know few bounds. Unocal has publicly promised to obey all the environmental laws of Burma, a country which has none. Total and Unocal officials refuse to meet with the indigenous peoples whose lands they are taking, and company officials dismiss allegations of forced labor or human rights abuses in the area on the grounds that the people making the allegations have never been there. It is for good reason that outside human rights groups have been unable to get to the pipeline. Unocal won't allow neutral observers to visit the area. The thousands of Burmese troops providing "pipeline security" will shoot them if they try.



#### STOP PRESS

On 29 March the public relations manager of Unocal released a statement deploring the violence being perpetrated against innocent people along the gas pipeline. He did not, however, indicate whether or not Unocal intended to take any action.

## The Economic Development of Burma

(adapted from an address to the International Development Conference, Washington DC on "Achieving Global Human Security", 16 January 1995)

by Harn Yawnghwe Program  
Director of ADDB Burma Alert

**1**995 will be a critical year for Burma, and I would like to spend some time looking at the question of foreign investment and aid to the military regime.

As background, I would like to inform you that although I am now involved in politics and I edit a newspaper, I am not a radical activist. I started my professional career as a mining engineer and have also worked as an investment analyst and management consultant in the Asia Pacific. That is why I am interested in the economic feasibility of SLORC's economic recovery.

One of the arguments we hear often is that the State Law and Order Restoration Council is different from the Revolutionary Council that took over in 1962. SLORC's policy of allowing private enterprise and foreigners to invest in Burma is seen as very positive. We are told that Burma's economy is about to boom. Many foreign governments, businesses and even NGOs are anxious that if they do not enter Burma now, they will be left behind when the Burmese economy takes off. Unocal and Texaco, for example, are forging ahead with plans to exploit natural gas from Burma. This is despite reports from the area that SLORC is using slave labour in building infrastructure to support the oil companies' operations, and forcibly relocating ethnic communities to secure the pipeline. Atlantic Richfield and Caltex are also joining the rush. How valid are these assumptions about an impending economic boom?

The question is very relevant to this Conference, because we are told that the increased economic activity will bring about development in Burma. The scenario is that, as people become more prosperous, Burma's social and

political ills will be resolved. We are told that, like Indonesia, democracy will come to Burma when the country develops economically. I do not agree that economic development is the cure for all our problems in Burma and fully endorse the position of Aung San Suu Kyi who has argued very eloquently that sustained development is dependent on the empowerment of people and respect for human rights. However, for the sake of argument, I would like to look at the so-called economic development that is taking place in Burma. Is it really taking place? If so, maybe Unocal and Texaco can argue that their investment with SLORC will bring about a better Burma. But if there is no prospect for economic development, they will have no argument at all for being in Burma.

I would like to quote a prominent Burmese economist as a reminder of how wrong predictions can be if crucial factors are ignored. Dr Khin Maung Kyi from the University of Singapore wrote recently:

*"When Burma attained its independence in 1948, international agencies identified it as one of the most promising regional candidates for economic take-off. Its modern technical and university education system, high rate of literacy, well-trained civil service and a cadre of educated middle class, basic infrastructure, and a well-run legal system were considered as good ingredients for Burma's expected take-off."*

What everybody underestimated was the seriousness of Burma's political situation. The multinational oil companies may be making the same mistake now. Let us look at how the Burmese economy stands today.

The main argument used in favour of SLORC is that it is implementing economic reforms. After almost 3

decades of state control, private enterprise is now allowed and state monopolies are being relaxed. To encourage foreign investment a new Foreign Investment Law has been enacted. State economic enterprises that have long dominated the economy are now being privatised. How valid are these claims?

While these are real steps, which look impressive on paper, we need to look at underlying factors. While foreign investment is welcome, there are some hidden disincentives.

First, it is not widely known that foreign companies are expected to pay all their expenses in foreign currency. This is usually calculated at the official exchange rate of approx. 6 Kyat to the US\$, while the black market rate is closer to 120 Kyats. The introduction of Foreign Exchange Certificates has eased the situation slightly, but the basic premise is the same.

Second, neither the interest on capital brought into Burma nor profits earned there can be automatically repatriated. The Foreign Investment Commission reviews repatriation on a case-by-case basis.

Third, foreign investments are given a three-year tax holiday, but after that they will have to pay income tax, a profit tax and a commercial tax. The tax rate is 30% for each category. It is not clear how the tax will be calculated or enforced. Red tape is very restrictive.

Fourth, it is common knowledge that nothing in Burma is done by the rulebook. Everything depends on which army general, government minister or official you know.

Fifth, there is no free flow of information.

Sixth, civil servants routinely expect to be paid under the table for the most

## ECONOMICS

routine tasks. Corruption is widespread and rampant.

Seventh, exporters are expected to ship via the state-run Burma Five Star Lines, which charges exorbitant rates.

The list could go on.

More serious than all these difficulties is that fact the SLORC does not have an overall economic strategy. Everything is done on an ad-hoc basis, with political expediency or short-term gain as the main motivating factor. For instance, SLORC has embarked on a number of infrastructure projects and has an ambitious program to expand the army to half-a-million men to contain domestic discontent. In absolute terms, its budget deficit between 1988 and 1993 was Kyat 54 billion (about US\$9 billion). To cover this, SLORC has simply printed more money. Since 1988, the currency in circulation has been increasing, on average, 45% annually. Of course this has caused inflationary pressure, which in turn causes even more domestic discontent.

This brings us to the problem of official statistics in Burma. The official Consumer Price Index has increased on an average of 21% annually for the last 5 years, which is bad enough. But the Index includes the price of rice and gasoline at the subsidized price applicable to civil servants. In the case of rice, a basic indicator, the price of unsubsidized rice in October 1993 was 17.5% higher than in 1987, but this is not reflected in the CPI. In the case of gasoline, civil servants pay Kyat 16 per gallon, while ordinary people have to pay Kyat 220 per gallon, or about 14 times more. This illustrates how official statistics, on which international agencies rely, are not reliable.

Another gross example is the reported GDP growth rate of 10.9% for 1992/93. Coming after a negative growth rate of 1.5% over the previous 4 years, this caused much excitement. But - the figure was a provisional figure, used for government reports which are publicized at the end of the fiscal year. These figures are almost always discretely revised downwards

later. It was important for a high growth rate to be recorded, because SLORC had designated 1992/93 the Year of Economic Development. The figures reflected increases in government revenues, which in turn reflected increases in prices and prices are controlled by the regime. In other words, a 10% growth rate was a totally misleading statistic, which has since been revised downwards. The growth figure for 1993/94 was 4.8%, and the target for 1994/95 is 6.4%. Even if these statistics are reliable, they do not appear to indicate a country on the verge of an economic boom.

What about the prosperous atmosphere in Rangoon and Mandalay, with new construction everywhere visible? SLORC claims that it has attracted US\$1.3 billion in foreign investment. One could generously add another US\$1 billion for the gas pipeline planned by Unocal and another US\$500,000 plus for new hotel commitments and round the figure up to US\$3 billion. This looks like a large sum until we remember that these figures are insignificant compared to, say the US\$4 billion Vietnam received in 1993 alone. Furthermore, much of the foreign investment is merely promised, it has not yet been received.

It must be remembered that these figures reflect the total cost of various projects, not the amount of actual funds flowing into the Burmese economy. Normally a large part, maybe most of the budget for resource extraction and hotel construction - Burma's two main sources of foreign investment - are spent outside the country. Perhaps 20% of the US\$3 billion, or US\$600 million might go to SLORC. Even this might look like a substantial sum, until we compare it to SLORC's arms purchases. To date it has bought from China alone US\$1.8 billion worth of arms. The outflow doesn't match the inflow.

As for tourism and hotels, the current approach does not make sense. For example, Burma receives about 70,000 tourists a year. SLORC hopes for 500,000 in 1996. How will it handle a 7-fold increase in tourists in one year? More hotels are being built, but that will add only 4,000 rooms to the

current approximately 3,000. Where will the extra tourists be housed? To make matters worse, many of the new hotels are of 3-star and 4-star standard. How many tourists stay in such luxurious accommodation? In addition, where will the electricity be obtained to supply these luxury hotels? Rangoon is already experiencing black and brown-outs and power to local businesses is rationed. What about the water supply for the hotels?

Finally, it is well-known that a serious obstacle to Burma's economic development is the discrepancy between the official and unofficial foreign exchange rates. Acknowledging this problem, Brig-Gen Win Tin, Minister of Finance, said that the regime needs a fund of US\$2-3 billion to cushion the impact of allowing the rate to float. Without the fund, he fears mass unemployment, runaway inflation and social unrest.

Therefore it is clear that it is premature to claim that Burma is about to take off economically. There are still too many problems for anyone to talk of economic recovery. To remedy these will be a difficult task, requiring the full cooperation of the people; and they are not willing to cooperate with SLORC. The only person who could rally the people to work together for the good of the country is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Without her, SLORC's economic dream is not about to become a reality, and those who are rushing in to invest now will lose their investments. SLORC is just not capable of delivering on its promise of economic development.

Dr Khin Maung Kyi also warned that Burma tends to go through cycles of calm and violence. He said that one should not mistake the periods of calm, imposed by fear and by force, for peace. Unless SLORC comes to terms with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi soon, we may see another round of violence in the near future.



## The Release of Suu Kyi - Hope Postponed

by Anna Mitchell

"How many times can a man turn his head,

And pretend that he just doesn't see?"

Bob Dylan, 1962

Scant attention has been paid to an article appearing in *The Nation* of 21 December last year, which outlines SLORC's justification for the continued detention without trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, in reply to an enquiry of the UN's Special Rapporteur on Burma.

The request was: *"Please specify the reasons, including reference to specific legal authority, for keeping Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest after 20 July 1994, and please indicate when the Government intends to release her."*

Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw replied that she was being detained "for her own good and for the good of the country". Aung San Suu Kyi apparently "had to be restrained in order to prevent her from promoting the cause of these unsavoury political elements (opportunistic politicians and insurgent groups) who had got themselves into positions of influence around her to create disunity among the Tatmadaw."

The law Ohn Gyaw invoked were sections 10(b) and 14 of the 1975 Law to Safeguard the State against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts.

Section 10(b) permits the Central Body of the Cabinet (in this case, SLORC) to take "preemptive measures" to "protect the state from dangers". This does not require the declaration of a State of Emergency. It permits the government to detain the accused for up to six months or restrict the right of the accused for up to a year (this includes restricting of movement).

Section 14 was amended in August 1991 to allow one-year extensions of

detention or restriction for up to five years. The latest six-month extension expired on January 20 this year. Under yet another section of this law, the Central Body, consisting of the Minister for Home Affairs, the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Foreign Affairs may obtain prior sanction by the Council of Ministers if it is necessary to continue the restraint of the person against whom action is taken for a period longer than contained in section 10(b). The regime has now indicated that Aung San Suu Kyi will be held until at least July 20, 1995 and nothing prevents them from imposing a new order at any time.

The Anti-Subversion Law contains limited review, reporting and appeal provisions that may or may not have been adhered to in this case. The law permits Cabinet to review the detention or ban every two months and revise it as necessary. An appeal can be filed with the Cabinet and it is not known whether Aung San Suu Kyi has at any point appealed her detention. However, the absence of an independent judiciary in Burma renders this scant review process meaningless. In reality the Anti-Subversion Law provides SLORC with unfettered powers to hold individuals for indefinite periods. Since 1989 SLORC has interpreted and amended the law to suit its needs, rather than the requirements of justice and the rule of law.

The anti-Subversion Law is an administrative detention law. Administrative detention is defined as any form of detention by the state that is conducted without judicial supervision, either by virtue of laws that permit detention without trial, or as a result of the systematic, illegal practice by an agency of the executive. In Asia, various form of administrative

detention were promulgated under British colonial rule and still survive.

It is commonly used today in such countries as Malaysia and India, as well as Burma, against political prisoners and others the state wishes to detain, but not bring before the courts. Administrative detention violates international human rights standards against arbitrary arrest and detention, and in practice often results in the violation of other human rights as well. UN Special Rapporteur Louis Joinet noted in 1990 that in some countries administrative detention had "become an instrument for the long-term suppression of all dissidence, for putting an end to criticism and protest and for eliminating political opposition."

As a member of the United Nations, Burma has an obligation to recognise and observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Article 9 declares: "No-one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile." The prohibition on arbitrary detention is essential to the right to "life, liberty and security" set out in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration.

A detention can still be "arbitrary" even if it is governed by national laws, such as Burma's Anti-Subversion Law. As a US international law expert stated in 1958, "Arbitrary arrest or detention implied an arrest or detention which was incompatible with the principles of justice or with the dignity of the human person irrespective of whether it had been carried out in conformity with the law." The drafters of the Universal Declaration were well aware of Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws, which sought to give legal cover to heinous state actions. As these laws demonstrated,

## DETENTION

laws themselves may be arbitrary or may empower the state to act arbitrarily. Under various international human rights treaties, criminal suspects must either be tried for violation of a pre-existing law by an independent judiciary under procedures which guarantee a fair trial, or they must be released. Administrative detention, which bypasses these protections and permits executive discretion to limit basic liberties, directly contradicts these basic assumptions of international law.

The specifics of Aung San Suu Kyi's detention are a clear violation of minimum international human rights laws and standards. She has had no meaningful opportunity to appoint le-

gal counsel, no right to challenge her detention and no review by an independent judiciary.

State and Foreign Affairs Departments in Western countries, particularly the US, seem to be waiting for yet another date to pass on which, theoretically, she might be released, according to Winston Lord's latest statement. 6 months ago they were waiting for January 20 1995. Before that they were waiting for July 20 1994. It seems that Western faith in SLORC's good intentions is unshakeable, despite repeated and massive evidence to the contrary. One wonders when, if ever, high-minded statements of support for human rights and

democracy will be accompanied by action.

Source:

TN 941221

*'The Detention of Aung San Suu Kyi under International Law' by James D. Ross, The Irrawaddy, Vol. 3, No. 10, February 15 1995*



## First Step to a Long Journey

Naw Eh, a Karen girl in her mid-twenties, recently attended a one-month course in Diplomacy Training, run by the University of New South Wales (Australia). The training was held at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. The course, attended by people from 12 countries working in various NGOs in their respective countries, was conducted in English. The following article describes some of her impressions of the course.

**B**urma has been a member of the United Nations since 1948. Yet the Burmese people are not much aware of the UN mechanisms, what agendas the UN deals with, nor how a resolution is proposed, discussed and adopted. They have lived under the boot of the military since the 1962 coup led by General Ne Win, who then isolated Burma from the rest of the world and applied tight restrictions on all democratic movements in the country. Human rights, under the military, was simply a political tool for their own use. Those of us born after this coup know little about human rights and democracy.

The junta deceitfully drew up a constitution in 1974 and use it to create a legitimate government. Due to mismanagement, the country sank into a debt which reached about US\$4,000 million by 1987. In 1988 they declared the country bankrupt and accepted the status as a Least Developed Country (LDC) in order to avoid repaying these heavy debts.

In the mean time, the people suffered a lot because of skyrocketing inflation, demonetization, and a shortage of food and medicine. Fearing for their livelihood, the people rose up in 1988 in a nationwide demonstration against the military rule. Most of them did not understand what human rights truly is, but they knew that the regime was unjust and the treatment of their own people unfair.

During the uprising, the junta created many problems among the people such as poisoning the water, beheading some demonstrators, etc. A state of anarchy ruled the

country. This gave the military a reason to stage a new coup. On September 18, the military killed several thousand people who were peacefully taking part in the demonstrations. They then formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The military regime refused to transfer power to the National League for Democracy party which won a landslide victory in the May 1990 elections. During the military's rule, nobody knows how many people have been killed and taken away.

Having the opportunity to attend the Diplomacy Training Program at Thammasat University brought back the memory of the university students in our country. The university students in Thailand have a chance to study peacefully, whereas those in our country do not. However, after learning about international human rights, UN human rights procedures, women, environment and refugees, we begin to believe that we can help the true desires of our people become reality in the future if we learn how to raise our realities before the international community.

It is the duty of our younger generation to be free from fear and to free all the people from the fears which they are facing in the present situation. I believe that this training is pointing us towards the first step to a long journey which will restore human rights and democracy in Burma.



## Railways, Pipelines, and Human Rights

**S**ince my father could not take his turn working on the railway, I had to go instead. People unable to go for their turn at work have to pay 1,500 kyats (US\$250) to the local officials.

Also, every family in the village has to pay monthly porter fees of 100 kyats. Those called for porter duty but cannot go, have to pay an extra 6,000 kyats (US\$100) in order to be excused.

Last monsoon season there was heavy rain which destroyed much of the rice crop, yet the farmers got no sympathy from the military. Every farmer must sell 12 baskets per acre of paddy to the military camp nearby. Anyone failing to do this faces serious punishment. Sometimes, to avoid punishment, farmers buy paddy from the free market at 300 kyats per basket, and then sell it to the military at only 30 kyats per basket. (Ma Than Htay, from Son Zin Village of Tavoy District)

As the Ye/Tavoy railway project pushes ahead, reports of human rights abuses in the area continue to emerge. The Burmese military, making use of "voluntary" labor, has conscripted thousands of villagers to carry out the work on this project. Unable to bear the burden this is causing to their families, many are fleeing towards the Thai/Burma border to seek protection under the opposition groups based there.

But it is not just labor which the Slorc soldiers force the villagers to "volunteer" for the project. Recent arrivals at the border talk of also being forced to make "volunteer" financial contributions to the railway project as well. In Thayetchaung Township, a contribution scale apparently has been set up which establishes the amount of money each villager must contribute. The scale calls for contributions in the following kyat amounts per month:

|                         |         |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Widows-----             | 570     |
| Families-----           | 700-800 |
| Plantation owners-----  | 1,000   |
| Paddy field owners----- | 1,000   |

Those who are unable to make the contribution in full, are then forced to contribute their labor to the work of clearing bush, building dirt embankments, and laying rails.

In recent months, preparatory work on the gas pipeline which will carry gas from the big gas fields in the Gulf of Martaban to Thailand has also begun. The gas pipeline is being built by Unocal (USA) and Total (France), and will cross the Ye/Tavoy railway near the town of Zinba. While Total and Unocal claim that no forced labor will be used to benefit their project, villagers living in the area fear that this will not be the case.

In March of this year, application forms for manual labor on the project were made available to persons wanting a job on the pipeline. According to villagers from the Michauing Aing area, applicants must fill in a form and attach a medical certificate of fitness. Two hundred persons are to be hired. For one's application to be successful, three conditions must be met:

- 1) They should be a member of the United Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), which is a military "NGO" used for control of the population,
- 2) The applicant must pay a bribe to the medical examiner,
- 3) The applicant must also pay a bribe to the officials on the selection board.

The foreign companies are said to have set the pay at US\$30 per day. In local currency, the workers will receive only 200 kyats per day based on the official exchange rate. However, the actual value of 200 kyats is less than US\$2.

While the foreign companies involved have made few statements on the progress of their work on the pipeline, reports have filtered in indicating that they are often very frustrated with the inefficiency of Slorc officials. Diesel, a necessity for their work, comes from the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), and is often late, delaying all of the work. Company officials are also strictly controlled, having to request permission from the Strategy Commander in the area before visiting villages or travelling.

In early March, members of one of the opposition groups attacked a helicopter carrying members of the Total company. Five persons were killed and an unknown number wounded. Total and Unocal released a statement saying the five killed were all of Burmese nationality, but rumors circulating around the area say that at least one of those killed was French. No confirmation of this has been made, and no group has yet taken responsibility for the attack. However, the attack indicates the anger this project has created among people in the area. The gas pipeline passes through an area never before controlled by Slorc, and the dangers of carrying out such a big project in a war zone must certainly be known to the companies involved.

While Total and Unocal continue to deny that any human rights abuses are directly connected to their work in the area, it can not be denied that if Slorc is to provide security for the pipeline, they must drive out the opposition groups which have lived here for generations already. For that to happen, villages must be forcibly relocated and opposition groups crushed. Thus, human rights abuses must go hand in hand with progress on the project.

*Source: Mergui-Tavoy Information Department, February, 1995*



## NEWS BRIEFS

### Armed Conflict

**Karen** - During the month Karen refugee camps were attacked almost daily by soldiers from Burma (SLORC or DKBO). Some Karen leaders were abducted, some refugees were killed and some were forced back to Burma at gunpoint. A few Thai citizens have also been killed. (BP/TN 950225-950325)

The Karen established a temporary camp in order to meet and review their leadership and strategy - they made some leadership changes, with General Bo Mya stepping down as head of the military (TN950320)

**Shan** - The predicted offensive against the Mong Tai Army (MTA) has commenced, with the MTA seizing the initiative, staging raids on Burmese army barracks, blowing up a bridge near Tachilek and carrying out an early dawn raid on that town. (BP 950321-950328). A number of villagers sought asylum in Thailand, and there is currently at 9 pm curfew operating in Tachilek (BP 95328).

**Karenni** - SLORC announced that the KNPP had surrendered, but the KNPP immediately denied this, saying they had only agreed to a ceasefire. (TN 950324)

### Burma-Thai relations

Thailand's Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai, offered to mediate between SLORC and the ethnic groups, as Thailand is affected by the conflict in Burma (BP950301). His initiative was welcomed by opposition groups, but rejected by Burma's ambassador to Thailand (BP950226)

Thailand's Foreign Minister cancelled an official visit to Burma (950301) and protested to the Burmese Ambassador about Burmese forces intruding onto Thai soil (BP/TN 950324). Burma criticised Thailand for offering humanitarian assistance to wounded rebel troops who fled across the border. (BP/TN 950325)

### International Relations

Japan resumed aid to Burma, with an unconfirmed US\$11 million grant for food production. It issued a statement saying that there would be no policy change towards Burma until the country made moves towards democratization. (BP 950309)

General Than Shwe paid a goodwill visit to Vietnam (NLM 95315)

Australia's Foreign Minister said SLORC's attack on the Karen might lead to a lowering of its status at the ASEAN meeting in July (BP/TN 950225).

### Business and Trade

The largest-ever trade mission from Thailand visited Burma to sign an agreement to increase trade co-operation and discuss investment in wood-related industries. (TN 950227). According to the Siam City Bank, Thailand had invested in 18 projects in Burma worth a total of US\$2.1 million and was the country's biggest investor up to January 1994 (BP 950328).

### Released

The Chairman of the NLD, retired Lt-Gen Tin Oo, and party spokesperson Col Kyi Maung were released, together with 30 others, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Armed Forces Day (TN/BP 950316). Also to commemorate this event, more than 23,000 prisoners had their sentences reduced by a third. (BP/TN 950327)



### BURMA ISSUES

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# AIR MAIL

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED