

Burma Issues

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HUMAN RIGHTS LOSES OUT TO GAS



A sports stadium in Karenni State being built by forced labor and forced financial contributions of the people. (See *Slorc Abuses*, page 6)

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

IT'S IN THE PIPELINE?

The sound of guns from Manephor (sic) Camp, the Karens' largest base, had not yet subsided when a grand contract signing ceremony for natural gas trading was taking place in the Santi Maitri Building at Government House in Bangkok between the Thai and Myanmar governments. (Advertisement by The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand in the Bangkok Post, 950417)

by N. Chan

The abandonment of Mannerplaw, the long-time headquarters of the Karen National Union and other Burmese opposition groups, did indeed give Thailand cause for excitement. The huge natural gas fields discovered in Burma's Gulf of Martaban by the French company Total gave Thailand an answer to its rapidly growing energy needs. Protests against the construction of new dams within Thailand are making these needs increasingly difficult to meet. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) and other Thai government agencies quickly realized that the new Martaban gas fields could provide them with almost unlimited gas supplies at, presumably, a rather good price.

According to the agreement between Thai and Burmese authorities cited above, Thailand will purchase 10,000 million baht worth of natural gas from Burma each year for 30 years. The pipeline should become operational by 1998. It is expected that initially Thailand will receive 350 million cubic feet of gas per day. This will eventually increase to 550 million cubic feet per day. (BP950417)

The defeat of the Karen troops representing the strongest ethnic group in Myanmar, will bring many changes to Thailand's western border.

Under the State Law and Order Restoration Council or SLORC, Myanmar will now have more power both domestically and internationally.

The contract signing ceremony for natural gas trading was therefore also a signal for stronger bilateral relations between the Thai and My-

anmar governments from now. (EGAT advertisement)

But it was always likely that the 45 year-old civil war in Burma would create serious obstacles to the construction of the necessary gas pipeline from the Gulf of Martaban through Burma's Tenasserim Division into Thailand. Much of the Tenasserim Division has long been controlled by Karen and Mon opposition groups, and they have vowed that they will do what they can to prevent the pipeline from being built since it will result in the forced relocation of many of their people. The companies involved in constructing the pipeline, principally

Financial concerns take precedence over the rights of indigenous peoples whose lives have long been wed to the mountains and streams of the area, and who threaten to take action in order to protect this life.

Total and the US-based UNOCAL, have made no attempts to discuss the project with the traditional residents in the area, the Karen and the Mon.

The Myanmar government aims to complete its part of the gas pipeline system by 1996. The pipeline will pass through Karen villages in Laydoozoo District, Mergui-Tawai province and in Mon villages, Ye-Tawai province. Myanmar has recently cleared the way by relocating a total

of 11 Karen villages that would otherwise obstruct the passage of the gas resource development project. (EGAT advertisement)

For many years the Karen served as a buffer between the Thai military and the Burmese military, helping keep the long border between the two countries relatively secure. That friendship turned sour when the Thai military realized that comradeship with SLORC would better benefit the economic needs of Thailand, and began putting heavy pressure on both the Karen and the Mon to enter negotiations with SLORC. The fall of Mannerplaw thus represented a signal to the Thai authorities that SLORC was gaining broader control over the area and could guarantee more security for the pipeline.

Groups opposing the construction of the pipeline have raised the concern that Karen villagers living near the proposed route might be forcibly relocated. Both Total and Unocal claim these fears are unfounded. However Karen and Mon people regularly report forced relocations of villages in the area as well as other abuses. EGAT's advertisement states plainly that relocations have indeed occurred

If there are any deviations from the plan, we must ask ourselves what would happen to the investment in this 60 kilometer pipeline worth hundreds of thousands of million baht, not to mention the investment required for the power plant in Ratchaburi [Thailand], which because it is being specially designed to use different types of fuels so as to reduce the supply risks associated with relying solely on natural gas, will cost an additional 70,000 million baht. (EGAT advertisement)



Giant oil corporations continue to develop Burma's gas fields hand in hand with the military regime claiming that human rights abuses are not related to their project. Still, more and more refugees flee to the Thai/Burma border areas. Is there really no connection?

The high investments in the project make it imperative, from the point of view of the companies involved, that security be maintained, and that the project finish on schedule. Financial concerns take precedence over the rights of indigenous peoples whose lives have long been wed to the mountains and streams of the area, and who threaten to take action in order to protect this life.

Unocal's President, John Imle, in a January 4, 1995 interview, stressed that Unocal will not allow forced labor to be used on its part of the project, nor would he believe that any villagers were being harmed in any way by the proposed gas pipeline. However, he would not even consider suspending the project until an independent survey of the human rights situation along the pipeline route could be made. There is probably safety in the knowledge that Slorc would never allow such a survey in the first place. However, if Unocal were genuinely interested in determining the truth of the matter, it would be entirely possible for the company to send a survey team to the Thai/Burma border where they could interview refugees who have fled the area. Perhaps Unocal

shareholders should push for such a survey at their next meeting.

Perhaps Unocal can still keep itself at arms length from human rights abuses directly related to their work on the project, but there is an additional issue which may not so be so easy to brush aside. The US Macy's Department store recently withdrew from Burma because, "corruption makes normal operations impossible". A Macy's executive was quoted as saying that "widespread official bribery is routine in Burma", and Macy's "was unwilling to make payments that could violate the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which bars US companies from making unofficial payments to foreign officials". The official explained that foreign companies would have great difficulty operating efficiently and profitably if they did not make such payments. (TN950413) How then, one wonders, do companies such as Unocal manage to operate in Burma?

While EGAT, Unocal and Total seem to have everything under control, the gas may not yet be in the pipeline. EGAT's paid advertisement in the *Bangkok Post* ended with a hint

that perhaps even they are not so certain about the acceptability of the project. The half-page advertisement ended with a common disclaimer. *"Opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect any opinion of The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT)."*



OPPOSITION GROUPS IN BURMA

A Guide for the Perplexed

Do you suffer from AO*? When the conversation turns to the IMF, UNHCR, NCGUB, RSI and the ECU does your head begin to spin? Amongst its many troubles, Burma suffers from a dizzying and ever-changing list of organisations and armies, all characterised by letters only. We can't change the world, but the following is offered as an aid to wending your way through the minefield of Burma's opposition groups' acronyms.

(* Acronym Overload)

Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB)

The DAB was formed in November 1988 as an umbrella group composed of 22 other dissident groups. Until recently it was based in Manerplaw, with Gen Bo Mya as its Chairman.

It has helped to build a bridge of understanding between the Burmese and other nationalities, as well as amongst other nationalities themselves. It has also laid down fundamental principles and laws to form the basis of a federal union of Burma.

SLORC's policy of negotiating with individual groups has been damaging to the DAB, though it still has a membership of 20 groups committed to overthrowing the military regime, establishing peace and democracy and setting up a genuine federation in Burma.

National League for Democracy (NLD)

A pro-democracy movement formed in September 1988 in the wake of widespread unrest, violently suppressed by the Burmese army, and the abolition of the 1974 constitution. In the 1990 general election this party won 392 out of the 485 parliamentary seats. Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest since 1990, was general secretary of the NLD. After the elec-

tion many of its members were executed, arrested or forced to flee the country.

National Coalition Government of Burma (NCGUB)

A 'parallel government' set up in December 1990, composed of MPs elected in May but later prevented from assuming government in Rangoon. Their leader, Sein Win, is based in Washington, US, from where he makes representations to the United Nations, national governments and other democracy and human rights groups on behalf of the opposition in Burma.

Democratic Front of Burma (DFB)

Set up at Manerplaw in December 1990, and composed of members of the DAB and the NLD who had fled to the Thai border after the May election.

National Democratic Front (NDF)

Set up in May 1976 at the Karen rebel headquarters of Manerplaw, this alliance was formed by a number of ethnic political parties. Its membership was drawn from the Pa-O, the Mon, the Kachin, the Wa, the Lahu, the Chin and later the Arakanese and the Karen. Their chairman is General Bo Mya.

All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)

The ABSDF was formed in November 1988 in the Karen revolutionary area. It is composed of students and professionals who took part in the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. It has its own constitution and its members are organised into separate military and political wings.

The aims of the ABSDF are the same as those of the DAB. It publishes a regular bulletin in Burmese called 'Down-O-We' (The Cry of the Peacock) and one in English called "Dawn Bulletin."

New Mon State Party (NMSP)

The NMSP was set up by Nai Shwe Kyin in July 1958, upon the demise of the Mon People's Front. At first Nai Shwe Kyin continued the struggle almost alone but, after abortive peace talks with the Burmese government in 1963, more Mon, mainly students, went underground. The NMSP split into 2 factions in April 1981, but were reunited under Nai Shwe Kyin in December 1987. The NMSP is a member of the NDF as well as the DAB. Its armed wing is the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA). They are now in the process of holding ceasefire talks with the SLORC, but so far no agreement has been reached.

The Karen National Union (KNU)

The KNU was instigated in July 1947 by Ba U Gyi to safeguard Karen interests upon Burma's independence. In November 1953 the party was reorganised into a front organisation (the KNU), a vanguard political party (KNUP) and an army (KAF, later KPLA). In 1968 the eastern units broke away to become the Karen National United Front (KNUF) under Mahn Ba Zahn (Chairman) and Gen Bo Mya (Vice-Chairman) and both factions of the army in 1975 became known as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) under the reunited KNU.

Although ceasefire negotiations with the SLORC were discussed throughout 1994, no such negotiations have yet taken place. Early in 1995 two leading KNU strongholds, Manerplaw and Kawmoora, were overrun by the SLORC army and a break-away Buddhist Karen group, the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA). The KNU and KNLA are currently undergoing reorganization.

Mong Tai Army (MTA)

This army grew out of the Shan State Restoration Council (SSRC) which, in turn grew out of the Tai-land Revolutionary Council/Army (TRC/TRA)

and the Shan United Army (SUA). Under Khun Sa's leadership, the MTA has recruited thousands of men and is now the strongest and best-equipped army opposing the SLORC. It seeks independence for Shan State, but might not be opposed to some form of federation provided Shan State were granted a degree of autonomy.

Additionally, there are many other opposition groups, both armed and unarmed. The following have signed ceasefire agreements with the SLORC (date of agreement in brackets).

Myanmar National Democracy Alliance (31/3/89)

Myanmar National Solidarity Party (9/5/89)

National Democracy Alliance Army (30.6.89)

Shan State Army (24/9/89)

New Democratic Army (Kachin State) (15/12/89)

Kachin Defence Army (11/1/91)

Pa-O National Organization (Shan State) (18/2/91)

Palaung State Liberation Party (21/4/91)

Kayan National Guards (Karenni) (27/2/92)

Kachin Independence Organization (1/10/93)

Karenni National People's Liberation Front (9/5/94)

Kayan Pyithit Party (926/7/94)

Shan State Nationalities Peoples Liberation Organization (9/10/94)

The following groups have not signed agreements.

Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP)

Chin National Army (CNA)

Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO)

Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)

Arakan Liberation Army (ALA)

Arakan Army (AA)

People's Liberation Front (PLF)

Tavoyan Army (TA)

Wa National Organization (WNO)

Various smaller groups

The following groups are members of the DAB.

All Burma Muslim Union (ABMA)

All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)

All Burma Young Monks' Union (ABYMU)

Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)

Chin National Front (CNF)

Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB)

Democratci Party for a New Society (DPNS)

German Burma Association (GBA)

Karen National Union (KNU)

Lahu National Organization (LNU)

Muslim Liberation Organization (MLO)

New Mon State arty (NMSP)

National United Front of Arkan (NUFA)

Overseas Burma Liberation Front (OBLF)

Overseas Karen Organisation (OKO)

Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF)

People's Patriotic Front (PPF)

Palaung State Liberation Front (PLSF)

Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation (SNPLO)

Wa National Organisation (WNO)

And the latest pair of acronyms on the scene?

PDF - Peace and Democratic Front : 8 ethnic groups which have signed ceasefire agreements, but are disappointed with slow progress towards development in their areas.

DKBO/DKBA - Democratics Kayin Buddhist Organization/Army - A group of Buddhist Karen who broke away from the KNU in December 1994 and appear to have now joined forces with the SLORC.

Sources:

BURMA IN REVOLT by Bertil Lintner

DAB Newsletter, No 1, January 1995

Burma Alert, No. 12, Vol 5, December 1994



HUMAN RIGHTS

SLORC Abuses

Chin State

Chin State is in northwestern Burma, adjacent to southern Bangladesh and India's Mizoram and Manipur states. It is mostly semi-mountainous remote hill country, and is home to the Zo people, also known as Chin, who also inhabit much of the adjacent part of India. The small but active Chin National Front is involved in armed struggle against SLORC, but there is very little fighting there compared to many other parts of Burma. In spite of this, the SLORC behaves much the same in Chin State as it does in the country's war zones, as is shown by the following incident.

On 30 May 1994 letters from the Tan Ta Lan Township LORC were distributed in both Burmese and Chin languages throughout Tan Ta Lan town and to all villages in Tan Ta Lin Township. The letter said that, with the purpose of giving higher education to the children of the development of areas in the state, those below the age of 14 were to be provided with food, clothing, education, and trained to be refined individuals without any racial or religious discrimination. Nationals were to send their children either to Rangoon or to Tan Ta Lan town in order to receive education. The State would provide lodging, board, clothes and all other necessities for the children who enrolled. The children should be sent before the end of July 1994 and must bring with them all their particulars: date of birth, names of parents, National Registration Card number, name of village, and religion. They would be allowed to practice their own religion.

Some of the Christian Chin in the township believed the announcement, and at least 9 children were entrusted to the care of SLORC. They were taken first to Tan Ta Lan town, then to Rangoon. Since the end of July 1994 there has been no communication whatsoever from or about them. They have been completely cut off from

their parents. When the parents investigated, they learned that all the children were living at K'Ba Aye Buddhist monastery in Rangoon. This was communicated to the Chin Christian community in Rangoon. In the first week of December 1994, they went to the abbot of the monastery and asked permission to see these children, but this was refused.

In the third week of December, Dr. XXX and another individual went down to Rangoon to attend the SLORC's national convention and learned about the Chin children. They went to the authorities and asked permission to see them, and two of them were granted permission. When they met the children at K'Ba Aye monastery, they found that the boys had had their heads shaved in order to become novice Buddhist monks, while the girls had been pressured repeatedly to have their heads shaved to become Buddhist nuns. So far the girls had refused. All of the children cried and begged to be taken home. However, the children are still being held at the monastery.

(Note: Not only is the SLORC using the promise of education to steal Chin children, Burmanize them and coerce or force them to become Buddhists, but there is also a further danger that as soon as the boys reach age 14 or 15 they are very likely to be conscripted into the Burma Army. SLORC has used similar tricks in the past in areas such as the Irrawaddy Delta, where it invited young Karen boys to sporting tournaments only to kidnap them and force them into the Army. The Tatmadaw has a history of grabbing orphans and other small boys, housing them at Army camps, indoctrinating them and using them as errand boys until they are big enough to be soldiers. As Cambodian civilians learned from the Khmer Rouge, such kidnaped and brainwashed children can make the most terrifying of teenage soldiers.)

Report from the Karen Human Rights Group, 15 March 1995

Karenni State

In preparation for the All Burma Students' Sports Festival organized by the Burmese military regime in Loi Kaw, capital of the Karenni State, Slorc ordered the modernization of housing along the capital's main street. General Maung Kyi, the man responsible for development projects in Karenni State, ordered residents living along this street to tear down their decades-old wooden houses and erect "modern" two story houses. The owners had to pay for the construction, and residents who did not have the funds to build a new house were ordered to turn their lot over to people with enough money to cover all construction costs.

In February of this year, the front yards of all these houses, including the courtyard of a famous Buddhist monastery were also moved back in order to widen the footpath along the main street.

The festival itself also became a burden to the people as all were forced to make contributions for the event. Students had to contribute 100 kyats each, correspondence students paid 300 kyats each, all government officials had 100 kyats deducted from their salaries, and each family in the Karenni State was forced to contribute from 50 to 300 kyats. Wood, transportation and labor were also provided, under duress, by the people of Karenni State.

Report from the Karenni Information Department



Reports Recently Received

The following reports have recently been received in the Burma Issues' office.

1) BURMESE BORDER SITUATION REPORT

by Mediciens Sans Frontieres

30 January 1995

Report of survey taken on Jan 28-29 on state of refugees in Metola area.

2) THE DEVELOPMENT OF BURMA

by Harn Yawngwe

Paper given at Washington conference on "Achieving Global Security" on how Burma's apparent economic achievements are illusory and cannot succeed without a change in the political situation.

3) DEVELOPMENT AND THE CRY OF PEOPLE - DEC. 94

by KNU - Mergui/Tavoy District

December 1994

Report mainly focusing on forced labour for Ye-Tavoy railway. Excellent details of rates of pay for soldiers, cost of living in area etc.

4) SHAN STATE CONFERENCE REPORT

by Shan State Association (USA)

3 February 1995

Report of conference held in New York Jan 21-22 by SSA to enable NGOs to examine current situation in Shan State and develop a common strategy for the future. 'New York Declaration' attached, of which main points are that Rangoon must not dictate to Shans, acceptance of rights of other ethnic groups, intention to work together with them, explore federation option, eradicate opium cultivation.

5) UNOCAL IN MYANMAR : REPORT TO STOCKHOLDERS

by Roger C. Beach, CEO

July 1994

A refutation of human rights abuse allegations connected with Unocal's pipeline. Insists that project will benefit people, as in other countries, that Unocal representatives have visited area (in helicopters!) and discovered no human rights abuse, and that environmental damage will be minimal.

6) UNOCAL'S "MODEST PROPOSAL" IN MYANMAR

by Rainforest Action Network

July 1994

A total rebuttal of Unocal's justification for investing in Burma.

7) SUMMARY REPORT ON VISIT TO KACHIN STATE - November-December 1994

Report of investigative team looking at conditions in Kachin & Northern Shan State since February 1994 cease fire. Found cease fire meant less harassment for villagers (tho' still plenty) but development minimal and refugees/displaced people afraid to return. There could be a role for NGOs, but this needs approaching cautiously.

8) PARTIAL LIST OF THAI LOGGING COMPANIES IN BURMA

from TERRA

Gives company names, areas, amount of tons per annum and exact locations where known.

9) THE IMPACTS OF DAMS IN THE SALWEEN RIVER BASIN

from TERRA

27 February 1995

Survey of likely effects of building proposed dams on the Salween. Recommends that full Environmental and

Social Impact Assessments should be completed before any further progress.

10) SUBMISSIONS TO AUSTRALIAN JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE & TRADE, Vol. 3

from Australian Parliament, Canberra

16 February 1995

Papers as above, from Dr Marta, International Human Rights Law Group, Asia Development Bank, Alan Smith, Dept. of Foreign Affairs, AIDA, U Ne Oo, Family Farms Foundation, OBLF and Hugh Wood.

11) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN MYANMAR...

to the UNEconomic & Social Council

21 February 1995

Statement from Secretary-General on his representative's 'good offices' mission to Myanmar 6-8 February. Results were: repeat of suggestions from previous meetings, no permission to meet Suu Kyi, an alternative MoU be submitted to ICRC, and another meeting planned for spring.

12) VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION FROM BANGLADESH TO MYANMAR

from UNHCR

January 1995

Official update on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees - about 130,000 returned, leaving 120,000 scheduled to return in 1995. Said to be going well, and absolutely voluntary. UNHCR has staff of 17, with 11 in Rakhine state, shortly to be increased

INFORMATION

by 5. Limited used of local and international NGOs now authorized.

13) THE RETURN OF THE ROHINGYA REFUGEES TO BURMA:

by Curt Lambrecht, US Committee for Refugees

March 1995

Details concerns about the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. Concludes that UNHCR is unable to do its job in Bangladesh, and is even less likely to succeed in Burma, that safeguards for returning refugees are inadequate, and voluntary nature of repatriation far from established.

14) REPORT ON SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN Myanmar

by Yozo Yokota to the UN Economic & Social Council

12 January 1995

Outlines mandate, historical background, full report on 1994 visit to Burma and to camps on the Thai-Burma border. Human rights abuses cover virtually entire gamut. Main recommendations are that the government should assume obligations under Articles 55 & 56 of the UN Charter, accede to international human rights covenants and other instruments, and brings its law into line with international standards.

15) SITUATION UPDATE - MERGUI TAVOY DISTRICT

Padoh Hser Nei, Refugee Coordinator

6 March 1995

Build-up of military strength in district, considered to be linked to the Ye-Tavoy railway, construction of gas pipeline, planning for concession to be granted to Malaysian and Singaporean companies for palm oil plantations and extraction, and road

construction. Estimated 4000 porters conscripted from Tavoy area and around 5000 porters from Mergui area. SLORC target said to be 7000 from Mergui area. Continuing forced labour on Ye-Tavoy railway, with exemptions only granted on payment of fines ranging from K1000 to K4000. Forced portering and looting and burning of villages continues.



BURMA ISSUES

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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