

Burma Issues

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THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?



People from the Chin indigenous ethnic group who have taken refuge in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government does not recognize them as official refugees, so they survive as best they can with assistance from the Chin National Front.

See **Life is Not Normal** on page 5 of this issue for a report from the Chin State.

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

The Shape of Things to Come?

by Anna Mitchell

Burma's National Convention recently resumed briefly after another of the lengthy breaks which have characterized it since its opening in January 1993. It is believed that the delay this time was caused by dispute over the level of autonomy to be allowed the various ethnic groups. Indeed, before its abrupt and unexplained indefinite adjournment it was announced that six of the smaller groups (Wa, Kokang, Pa-O, Naga, Danu and Palaung) would be awarded small territories within the larger states, where they can enjoy some degree of self-government. The extent of this autonomy has, of course, yet to be determined.

The junta's idea of democratic debate is for *The New Light of Myanmar* to announce when the Convention is sitting, who speaks, the text of these prepared speeches and what time the meeting ended and/or will reconvene. Original members of the National Convention who have dropped out of the process, such as Daniel Aung, point out that all statements have to be approved by the chairmen of the various groups. Nowhere is any public discussion of the issues involved permitted. In fact the Chair of the Convention, Lt-Gen Myo Nyunt has specifically warned delegates to "be careful during the discussions not to attack the results of the SLORC's efforts, which have achieved a good basis for national unity."

The United Nations Special Rapporteur, Yozo Yokota, has made his disappointment with the process clear in his most recent report. However farcical as it may be, it now seems possible that within the foreseeable future the junta will present their new constitution to the world as the 'Burmese' solution to their current problems. Only then, it seems, will they feel safe enough to release Aung San Suu Kyi, as they know that this cannot be delayed indefinitely.

Two fundamental principles of the new constitution ensure the continuation of military rule. The first is that the military will occupy 25% of the seats in the legislature, both at national and state/regional level. The President - who will be the Head of State - must have been resident in Burma for at least 20 consecutive years, and be well-acquainted with political, administrative, economic and military af-

fairs. This, of course, rules out many of the elected NLD members currently in exile. In a further restriction clearly aimed at Aung San Suu Kyi, the head of state, and his or her spouse and children, cannot hold citizenship of any other country.

Many have pointed out that the constitution currently being drafted for Burma appears to be largely modeled on that of Indonesia. Curiously, some seem to find this reassuring. It's hard to see why, given Indonesia's record of systematic human rights violations in East Timor and its continued suppression of its own media. Perhaps it is felt that at least the government of Indonesia does not abuse its own people to the same horrifying extent as does the SLORC.

In a further restriction clearly aimed at Aung San Suu Kyi, the head of state, and his or her spouse and children, cannot hold citizenship of any other country.

There are similarities: First there is the role of the army - the Burmese Tatmadaw, the Indonesian Abri. The Abri is allocated one-fifth of the seats in the Indonesian parliament. The Tatmadaw is to be given one quarter of the seats both in the Burmese House of Representatives and House of Nationalities, as well as in the administration of the states and divisions. In Indonesia a large share of the top administrative, ministerial and ambassadorial posts go to the military. In Burma the President and his Vice-Presidents must be "well-acquainted with military matters": in other words, all top posts will be held by the military.

But there are important differences between Burma and Indonesia which suggest that what works in Indonesia will not prove workable in Burma.

But the Tatmadaw and the Abri have played very different roles in the history of their countries. While the Tatmadaw has always been a highly significant force

in Burmese politics, it has more often than not been seen as the oppressor of the people, not their defender. Its atrocities against civilians now fill volumes, and the mere sight of a Tatmadaw uniform strikes terror into the heart of villagers. Far from holding the country together, as the generals claim, the Tatmadaw is notorious for its brutality.

In Indonesia, the Abri not only fought for and won independence for Indonesia in 1945-49, it also "saved the nation from communism" in 1965. Undoubtedly the nation has had to pay a high price for this in terms of reduced individual freedoms, but there have been compensations in terms of a steadily improving economy which translated into a higher standard of living for most people. The Indonesians have far less reason than the Burmese to regard their army as their enemy and the Abri has never suffered the humiliation of a resounding electoral defeat by its own people. The Abri has always had to share power with political parties and mass movements, and has had the good sense to allow technocrats to run the economy. As parliament gradually but inexorably grows in importance, so the military element has learned to adapt itself to wielding a different kind of power, one which depends more on persuasion and less on sheer force.

SLORC's formation of the USDA, a supposedly mass movement, is reminiscent of the Indonesian GOLKAR party which has so far succeeded in winning every election since Independence. Attendance at USDA rallies is compulsory and rallies feature largely in official media. In many fields it is impossible to hold a job without being a member of the USDA. Whether it actually enjoys genuine popular support is highly questionable.

Whatever one may feel about his politics, one has to grant that President Suharto has proved a skillful leader. He has managed to balance civilian and military forces within his government in such a way that neither feels secure enough to overthrow the other. Or him. Unquestionably a one-man dictator, Suharto's unwillingness to effect genuine democracy will very likely lead to serious upheavals when he dies or has to step down. But for the past 30 years Indonesia has moved from being an impoverished, exploited colony to an increasingly prosperous country which has earned its place at any diplomatic gathering.



There is little chance that constitutional changes being orchestrated by the military regime in Burma can offer the majority of the people any hope for a better life.

(The Shape of Things to Come? continued)

This is partly because when Suharto came to power, the West - self-serving as ever - was eager to support any regime in the region which was anti-Communist. Remember the domino theory? Fear of Chinese communism was rife, and was of course confirmed as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos all embraced the ideology. Bastions of anti-communism, like Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand were supported by Western power, and money. And additionally, Indonesia was oil-rich at a time when the West greatly feared its dependence on Middle Eastern oil.

While Burma certainly has natural resources which countries both East and West are keen to acquire, it does not have the strategic importance which keeps Indonesia's potential critics silent, or at least muted. The military regime therefore lacks both external interest (apart from China, which has its own agenda) and internal support.

Indonesia had two other useful preconditions for economic growth - low inflation and a convertible currency. Burma has neither. Inflation in Burma is running

at close to 40% p.a., and despite the introduction of Foreign Exchange Certificates to ease the situation, the wildly over-valued kyat is not the currency in which any business wants to be earning its profits. The rumor is that aging Ne Win would not tolerate a devaluation (even if SLORC-speak carefully designated it a revaluation). An even more potent deterrent is that a devaluation would further fuel inflation and lead to widespread disaffection amongst civil servants, whose current salaries are barely viable, and have to be supplemented by perks in the form of subsidized petrol, rice and building materials which they can re-sell on the black market. In theory undemocratic governments can impose unpopular decisions on an unwilling populace: but in today's global market, no country can enjoy affluence without the collusion of the world.

Repatriation of profits is another problem: sometimes permitted, sometimes not - it depends who your friends are. While these might seem to be economic rather than political considerations, the fact is that SLORC is counting on growing domestic affluence to anesthetize dissent. It is arguable that Indonesians are prepared to accept a high level of political and civil repression in exchange for a steadily rising

standard of living. The vast majority of Burmese are unlikely to enjoy this compensation so long as the economy is controlled by military leaders whose grasp of economics is superficial and simplistic.

For all these reasons, it seems that, in embracing the Indonesian model constitutionally, the military junta has, true to form, failed to take account of the significant differences between the two countries.

Sources:

TN 941104

FEER 941013

Burma Affairs, Vol. 4 No. 3, Aug-Oct 1994

Censorship Prevails: Political Deadlock and Economic Transition in Burma, a report by Article 19, London, March 1995

The Economist, 950128, reprinted in CRDB Newsletter



THE BLIND EYE OF INVESTMENTS

by N. Chan

Foreign investments under Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc) continue despite worldwide criticism of the regime's blatant disregard for even the most basic human rights of its people. Talking to reporters in Singapore last month, Slorc's minister for economic and national planning, David Abel, said Western criticism is "just meaningless when they talk about human rights and democracy and so forth." He further emphasized that the Western yardstick of human rights "is not to the requirement of the Asian perception" and differs from Burma's ethos, culture and history." (TN 950611)

The argument that Western norms of human rights differs from Asian norms has been expressed by many of Asia's military and quasi-military regimes for years. While Western and Asian culture, ethos, and history do differ, the nature of human dignity does not. Forced labor, rape of rural women, pillage and destruction of villages, forced relocations, and summary executions are unacceptable in both Asian and Western societies.

Unfortunately, however, there is some truth in what Mr. Abel says. Western criticism of Slorc's human rights record does have an aura of meaninglessness when it is the most outspoken of these countries which have the biggest investments in Burma. Britain comes in first place with US\$634 million (mostly Hong Kong-based companies), while the United States comes in fourth. "The present investors, they are not scared [because of human rights allegations], they are prepared to invest more," Abel told the news conference. (TN 950611)

Slorc has reason to feel smug. For almost eight years they have used friend and foe alike to strengthen their military grip over the forty three million citizens of Burma. ASEAN has long defended Slorc to the world, carrying out a "constructive engagement" policy which has brought large investments from several ASEAN countries, especially Thailand and Singapore, to the pockets of Slorc officials. Constructive engagement, these ASEAN countries claim, will help them influence Slorc to steer a more democratic course for the country. In response, Slorc has invaded Thai territory numerous times during 1995, has abducted several Thai soldiers and civilians, and killed several others, and has now called for a boycott of Thai goods. The United Nations, which legitimizes Slorc by allowing them to

sit in the General Assembly, has tried to reform Slorc by severely challenging their human rights record. Slorc has shrugged these criticisms off as "simply a ritual thing" the UN does every year.

To be slapped in the face by Burma's military regime is one thing, but to be slapped and still provide them, through foreign investments, the funds they need to keep their dictatorial junta afloat, is indeed pathetic. What will it take for the world to realize that, after all these years of "constructive engagement", "critical dialogue", "bench mark diplomacy", and "wait and see", the life of the people has not improved in the least. Perhaps serious dialogue with the people themselves, and placing their welfare above company profits, would be one of the first big steps towards democratization in Burma.

Foreign companies, such as UNOCAL of the USA, argue eloquently that their investments help open the country up, and bring benefits to the common people. UNOCAL, along with TOTAL of France, is involved in developing some of Burma's biggest gas fields, and will construct the Yadana pipeline through territory traditionally occupied by Karen and Mon ethnic people so that Slorc can sell gas to Thailand. The pipeline creates serious problems for the Karen and Mon people. At least eleven Karen villages have already been forcibly relocated, and reports from the area suggest that people are being forced to help clear the area of brush, trees, gardens and orchards.

UNOCAL denies that their project is bringing any hardship to the people. In a May 12, 1995 letter to the Chairman of Mergui/Tavoy District (KNU), Mr. David M. Garcia, Senior Public Relations Representative of UNOCAL, stressed that, "UNOCAL will not tolerate any human rights abuses in any of our projects in the world."

According to Mr. Garcia, UNOCAL and TOTAL sent several fact-finding missions to Burma in order to determine whether in fact any human rights violations are happening along the route of the gas pipeline. He said they "found no evidence of human rights abuses related to the Yadana pipeline project." Oddly enough, they apparently have never made a trip to the Thai/Burma border to talk with refugees fleeing the areas around the pipeline route, feeling perhaps that these refugees are not a reliable source of information. Such one-sided "fact-finding missions" help them avoid talking directly with those who claim to be victims of the project, and, at the same time, play into the hands of the Slorc regime which likes

nothing better than to be the sole source of information on what is happening inside Burma.

UNOCAL, TOTAL, and a host of other foreign companies working in Burma, can easily convince their shareholders that their investments are bringing "long-term benefits to the people of Myanmar [sic]" if they do not have to deal with the realities of the horror which hundreds of thousands of people in Burma experience daily under Slorc. Like the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand, there is nothing to fear if you close your eyes to it. However, the suffering of the people of Burma will not go away simply because companies want to believe all is well, nor because they are turning a healthy profit. The truth is, human rights abuses in Burma are on the increase, and no fact-finding mission carried out under the watchful eye of Slorc is going to change that.

Foreign investments in Burma are not nearly as benign as companies would have their shareholders believe. Money generated through industry and trade does not bring democracy to a country and its people. Respect for the dignity of all people, even the poorest and most marginal, however, does. Foreign investors must recognize this.

The District Chairman of Mergui-Tavoy District Karen State, responded to Mr. David Garcia's letter on June 13 by challenging UNOCAL to go much further than simply meeting with Slorc to determine the truth. "We would like to broaden this discussion in a different forum, allowing us the opportunity to present our arguments in a free and fair hearing. If such a direct meeting would jeopardize your company with Slorc authorities, we invite you to come to interview refugees who have fled from the pipeline area and are now living at the Thai border. Such an interview should be carried out in conjunction with an impartial Refugee/Human Rights lawyer together with representation from your embassy here in Bangkok. We implore you to consider this offer and reply to us again."

Sources:

UNOCAL letter to Mergui/Tavoy District 950512

Mergui/Tavoy District letter to UNOCAL 950613

TN 950609, 950611, BP 950604



LIFE IS NOT NORMAL

by A.P.

Little has been heard of the situation of the indigenous people of Burma living in areas bordering Bangladesh, India, and China. Silence does not mean life is normal in these regions. The following brief report was filed by a member of the Chin National Front. It offers a brief glimpse into the suffering of people in Chin Land.

The Chin State in Northwestern Burma lies adjacent to Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the Mizoram and Manipur States of India. It is home to the Chin people who, for the most part, live in the hill areas of the state. Little international publicity has been given to these people despite the fact that they have suffered terribly under the militarization of the country.

Following the 1988 mass uprising in Burma, hundreds of the Chin people fled for their lives, seeking refuge in the neighboring countries of Bangladesh and India. At the same time, the Chin National Front (CNF) was formed inside the Chin State to struggle for an end to military rule and the establishment of true democracy for the entire country.

Several military operations by the CNF have been carried out in the Chin Hills since 1989. In response, SLORC has behaved much the same as they do in front line war zones in other parts of the country. Much suffering has been brought on the Chin people, and they must suffer it without assistance from any international organizations. Isolation, a lack of finances, poor English skills and poor communications lines, have all contributed to this problem.

Starting in 1990, SLORC carried out military operations in Chin State in which they have forced the Chin villagers to serve as porters. The Chin State has few roads, so most of SLORC's weapons and supplies must be carried by people over the hills. These loads are extremely heavy, and the villagers have little chance to rest, or even to resist serving as forced laborers. Women do not escape this hard labor. They are also forced to carry these heavy loads, and at night are raped and tortured by the SLORC troops. Few personal accounts of these rapes are available since the soldiers threaten them with even worse treatment if they talk. Thus their suffering goes on in silence. No one, anywhere in the world, can hear their screams and pleas.

SLORC's border development program has also reached Chin State. Through this program, SLORC is constructing roads, bridges, electric generators, schools and hospitals. Local villagers are forced to contribute funds, materials and labor for these construction projects. Those who can not afford to pay are arrested and badly tortured. Those who can not provide "voluntary" labor are charged 150 to 200 kyats per day, a heavy price for people who live hand to mouth. Villagers fear this "development" almost as much as they fear military campaigns against them.

The majority of the Chin people are Christian, but have long lived together with Buddhists in peace. One of the policies of SLORC is to create religious strife as a way of weakening opposition against them. In Chin State, this policy is being actively carried out. One example is that of three pre-teenage children who were taken from Hriphi Village of Thantlang Township to Rangoon by a Mr. Chan Kio, head of the Buddhist Mission Group in the region. The children, two girls and one boy, were taught Buddhist law against their will.

In Falam town, a Roman Catholic graveyard was destroyed when SLORC built an army camp on top of it without providing any compensation or alternative place to move the graves to. Christian publications brought in from Mizoram, India, are confiscated and burned. In January of this year, Mr. Siam Lian, a Chin man who transports such literature, was arrested and detained. Also, Buddhists are not forced to do volunteer work and can purchase necessities such as rice, sugar and kerosene at special prices while Christians must pay unsubsidized rates.

Towards the end of 1994, SLORC Battalion #376, Company 1, entered Longadoo Village of Paletwa Township, which is near the CNF General Headquarters. They arrested, without charge, Mr. Ramdo, the village headman who was taken by the soldiers to the nearby jungle and executed. No one in the area dared to complain about this action, so no punishment has been carried out against those

guilty of this murder. Following this execution, about 200 villagers fled to Bangladesh for fear of their lives.

All over Burma the people continue to suffer under military rule. The stories of the vast majority of these people will never be heard by the world. We urge the international community to think about this seriously. Silence does not mean life is normal for us. Sometimes people have no way of expressing their pain. Other times they are too afraid to say anything. The pain continues, and it will go on as long as the military rules the country. Peace requires that the military step down, and this can only happen with the help of the international community. The international community must understand that giving the military any political recognition at all provides the legitimacy it requires to survive.



Sources in this issues include:

TN = The Nation

FEER = Far Eastern Economic Review

BB = Bangkok Post

NLM = New Light of Myanmar

CIVIL WAR

CONTINUING MILITARY OPPRESSION IN KAREN STATE

by CAC

The changing complexion of politics and warfare along the Thai-Burmese border has recently been complicated by the emergence of a controversial and influential power group. The Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organisation (DKBO), and its armed faction, the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA) have rapidly added a new dimension to long standing problems in the troubled border region.

While armed opposition groups abound in Burma, DKBO is not significant for its military might, but for the destabilizing influence it has had on traditional politics of rebellion in contested Karen areas. Furthermore, widespread speculation and evidence regarding DKBO's origins, leadership and political allegiances have cast a potent and unpredictable variable into the volatile equation of militarism and human rights abuse in the Karen State.

DKBO entered the limelight in December 1994, when disputes over representation and discrimination within the KNU led to armed confrontation between some dissatisfied KNLA soldiers and the KNU administration, headquartered at Manerplaw. The chief grievance was that the Buddhist majority of Karen soldiers faced discrimination and a lack of representation in the KNU, many of whose leaders are evangelical Christians. (Though sometimes portrayed as a "religious conflict," in fact freedom or practice of religion never seems to have been a divisive issue in the way that it has, for example, between Hindus and Muslims clashing over holy sites in India. Rather, it seems to be more purely a political conflict between members of different religious groups.) Subsequent efforts at negotiation failed. Throughout these tense weeks, Burma Army operations near Manerplaw intensified, opening critical access routes along the Salween River. Under threat of a devastating assault on its headquarters led by former KNLA soldiers now scouting for DKBA and the Burma Army, the KNU (along with a host of political and military opposition groups) abandoned Manerplaw. The DKBA achieved immediate attention, and a new chapter of the Burma border saga began.

Since its debut, a single critical question has framed all discussion about DKBO. To what extent is DKBO an independent organization built on and representing a Karen constituency, and to what extent is it a Burma Army /Military Intelligence device for subverting the Karen National Union? It seems to be neither purely one nor the other. That the capture of Manerplaw was a Burma Army initiative, and that whatever DKBA participation existed was heavily supported by Rangoon is certain. Indeed, the *New Light of Myanmar*, as well as reliable news sources, quote Slorc spokesmen affirming that the Burma Army provided "logistical" support to DKBA. More directly, witnesses and post-capture reconnaissance confirm that

Thus both DKBA and Slorc reason that by depriving KNU "sympathizers" of succour in Thailand they can force KNU into submission.

the troops and equipment holding Manerplaw belong to the Burma Army.,

Regardless of who deserves credit for taking Manerplaw, since its birth the DKBO has advertised an agenda for recalling all Karen refugees back to Burma. Acting on this objective, DKBA has openly assumed responsibility for a campaign of terror along the border. Threats, abductions, execution, burning of refugee camps, and small scale forced-march repatriations have been rampant since the fall of Manerplaw. Once again, the fundamental question is to what degree DKBO is inspired or directed by the Slorc, which also wishes to eradicate "the refugee problem."

Complicating matters is the highly sensitive nature of the refugee camp populations. It is true that a large number of the Karen refugees whom both DKBO and Slorc have implored to return to Burma -- who are civilians -- have family connections to the KNU and KNLA, often referred to collectively as "Kawthoolei."

Many are Christians, and are thus the professed enemies of some radical elements in DKBA. Both DKBA and Slorc reason that by depriving KNU "sympathizers" of succour in Thailand they can force KNU into submission.

More gravely, by winning physical jurisdiction over Karens who, whether through KNU association or not, have resisted military rule in Burma to pursue freedom and security elsewhere, both DKBA and Slorc could exterminate dissenting voices. Why offer such a terrible prognosis for the refugees' future? DKBA officers have openly discussed with villagers their plans to kill refugees. In May, DKBA spokesmen gave a series of political speeches to Karen villages in Kawkaik Township. On May 14 at Bee T'kat village tract, a DKBA officer named Bo Kyaw, who is said to command a detachment called "999", discussed his organization's future plans. According to a witness, "He said that their plan was very good, that they intended to close up all of the border areas and open big resettlement camps for the refugees to return to. Bo Kyaw said that they would arrest all KNLA officers and he demanded that their houses and property be identified." Later, one Pa Th'da, a local DKBA spokesman, told assembled villagers that "KNU families are the same as KNU members, therefore if they are arrested they must all be killed." Finally, a 45 year old woman summarized a major theme of these speeches, "The Kho Per Baw ("Yellow Headbands" in Karen, meaning DKBA) had called a meeting and in it said they wanted to find all the Kawthoolei members and their families, and if they found them they would kill them all."

Whether or not these threats are realized under a refugee repatriation scenario, evidence already exists to suggest that DKBA is already persecuting suspected KNU family members, especially in the areas of Kawkaik and Myawadee Townships under control of the Burma Army's Battalion 230, which routinely uses violence to force local villagers into submission. In fact, threats against refugee populations are only one part of a DKBO "hearts and minds" campaign which is currently spanning Karen areas trying to drum up grassroots support. The following account describes the relationship between some DKBA officers and Karen civilians in Kawkaik Township.



This sign "SLORC Tactical Command 661" was photographed on the road leading into Mannerplaw after it was occupied. A short time later, the SLORC sign was erased and replaced with "DKBO"

"I can tell you about a situation involving a villager who was not a Kawthoolei wife. The Kho Per Baw went to the house of Saw Mo who is Saw Htaw's mother (not the real names), and told her that her son was Kawthoolei, so she must go and find him and bring him back. Then they took all her rice stocks and ripped the gold necklace off her daughter. Then they tied up her oldest daughter, who has a baby, and took her to the monastery, but her baby was left at home. They kept her at the monastery for one night, and then the mother and another woman went to talk to the Kho Per Baw. They asked, 'She is just a villager, why keep her?' and the Kho Per Baw replied, 'You must find your son, otherwise if you don't find him we must kill another member of your family instead.' After that I heard that the abbot of the monastery talked with them, and the daughter and the rice were returned, but I'm not sure about this because I moved to a completely different village."

While much remains unclear about where the DKBO finds its support and motivation, preliminary information filtering out of eastern Burma makes one thing clear. Whatever the DKBO is, it has cast its role as a military organization and its relationships to civilian communities in the familiar mold of military tyranny in Burma.

In addition to the yellow headband-sporting Kho Per Baw, there is the Kho Per Kit, distinguished by their striped headbands. Apparently, Kho Per Kit was a type of civic nationalist and Karen cultural organization which recently seems to have been absorbed into the DKBO structure. Wearing traditional Karen clothes, they carry drums and swords. It is not known when and to what extent Kho Per Kit became a paramilitary organization. It may also be a mechanism for village-level organizing and recruiting of anti-KNU Karens. The aforementioned Pa Th'da, for example, "...was only a civilian in our village, but after the Kho Per Baw came he became Kho Per Baw, with one star. A few days later some Na Wa Ta (Burma Army) officers visited him and after this he immediately became Kho Per Baw, with three stars."

Unfortunately, familiar relationships between civilians and soldiers persist in the Karen State, as they do all over Burma. The people with guns, regardless of ethnic group or political allegiance, consider their power absolute and their freedoms boundless. They take advantage of civilian populations with impunity, and with utter disregard or ignorance of concepts such as due process of law or human rights. While DKBO appears to be aligned with Rangoon, the bulwark of this

ignorance, it would be naïve to assume that other armed factions have not also indulged in similarly despotic behaviour towards civilians. Thus, while the faces and accents behind the trigger fingers may occasionally change, the people facing the barrels of those guns continue to suffer from violent repression of their fundamental freedoms.

Nevertheless, from this quagmire of oppression, powerful success stories emerge. This most recent account, gathered from witnesses at a DKBO lecture at Bee T'kat village, should be considered carefully by anyone who doubts the common people's ability to seek peace and resolve conflict.

"Generally, he said that everything about the Kho Per Baw is good, and nothing is bad, therefore we should join or they would burn down our houses, school and church...Later, very few people joined with Kho Per Baw, maybe only 40 villagers. Therefore, they were angered, and they planned to burn down the church. Pa Th'da went to the monastery and asked for petroleum in order to be able to do this. The abbot said, 'I will give it to you, and you can burn the church down, and also burn my monastery down. If you will not, then I will burn the monastery down myself. Christians and Buddhists have lived together since long ago and we live together peacefully. When they have a festival we help them and we have a festival they help us. We understand each other and drink water from the same river.' Then Pa Th'da lowered his head in disappointment and went away."

The courage, insight and compassion of this man set an example of commitment to peace in the midst of violence. In this case, the abbot's commitment seems to have won out over the forces of hatred and division. Until his example can be successfully replicated throughout Burma, people will live under the boot of armed and angry men.

Sources:

"Interviews regarding current conditions and DKBO/A activities in Myawadee and Kawkaeik Townships." May-June 1995, Mae Sot area border sources.

"New attacks on Karen refugee camps." Karen Human Rights Group report #95-16, May 1995.

NLM 950204, 950208



NEWS BRIEFS

INVESTMENTS AND CEASE-FIRES

Banking - French bank Societe Generale has opened a representative office in Rangoon after receiving its licence on May 9.

Societe Generale is the 26th foreign bank given permission to operate in the Burmese capital.

Other foreign banks licensed to operate in Burma include six from Thailand, five from Singapore, three from France, three from Malaysia and one each from Indonesia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Japan, Britain, the Netherlands and Canada.

BP 950530

Investments - According to Thailand's Office of Commercial Affairs in Rangoon, as of March 31, there were 107 foreign projects in Burma with a total investment of US\$ 2.23 billion. Britain (9 projects totaling US\$ 630 million), France (1 project at US\$ 499.92 million), Singapore (23 projects at US\$ 295.69 million), the United States (10 projects at US\$

269.11 million) and Thailand (19 projects at US\$ 257.16 million) are the top five investors in Burma. The sector receiving the largest investments is oil and gas at US\$ 1,360.22 million, followed by hotel and tourism at US\$488.04 million.

BP 950523

Sanctions - On June 1, 1995, 61 US Congress persons sent a letter to President Clinton, calling for the US to take stiffer actions in support of human rights in Burma. In part the letter stated:

"We agree with your Administration that U.S. policy towards Burma must include both incentives and disincentives and we believe that the terms must be defined very concretely with time limits attached. Without tangible progress towards substantially improving human rights and restoring civilian, democratic rule, we urge you to intensify the current economic sanctions by discouraging new, private U.S. investments in Burma. We firmly believe that these policy initiatives

must be coordinated with our allies in order to ensure their effectiveness."

Karenni - Slorc launched a military offensive against the Karenni National Progressive Party on June 28. This is a blatant breach of the cease-fire agreement that was signed on March 21, 1995 between Slorc and the Karenni.

Mon - At the end of June, the Mon signed a cease-fire agreement with Slorc, bringing to 15 the number of groups which have agreed to end fighting. It is reported that the Mon will be allowed to administer 19 small areas in the State.

TN 950627



BURMA ISSUES

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