

Burma Issues

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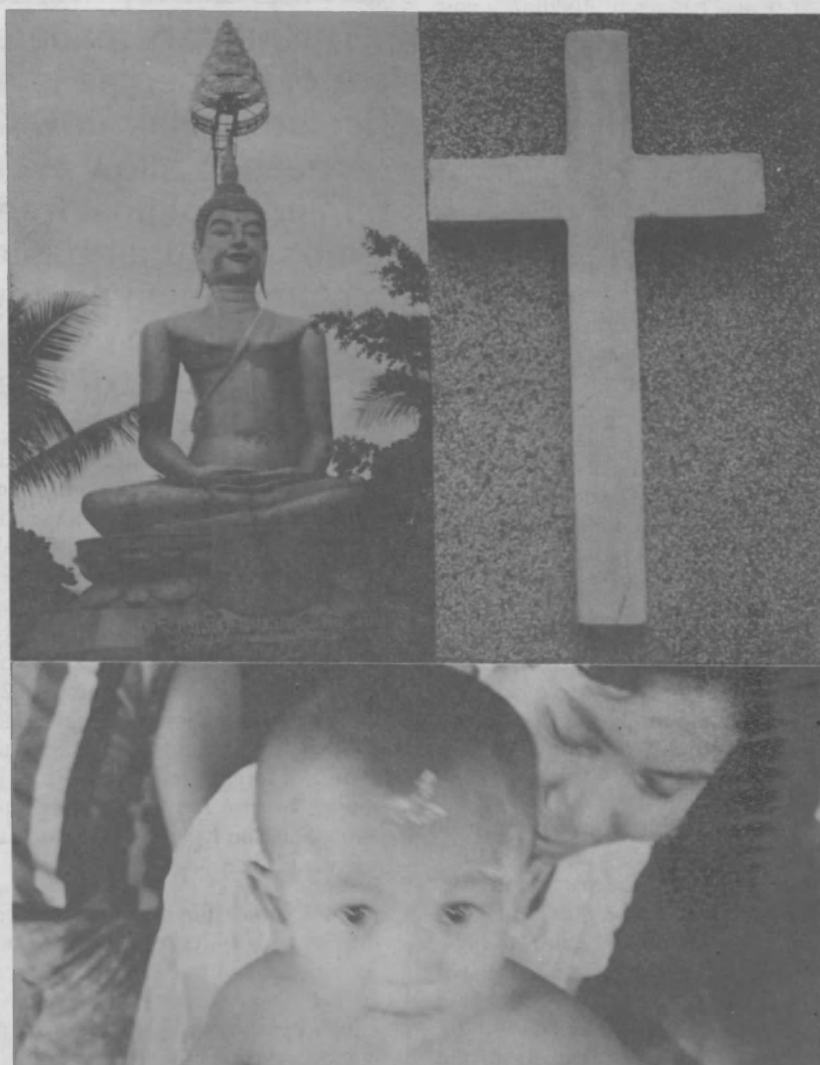
**AND WE ALWAYS
THOUGHT WE WERE BUR-
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FEAR, FAITH, FRIENDSHIP, ...PEACE?



It is scarcely worthwhile remembering how many times the sun has looked down on the slaughter of the innocents ... Give thanks that the men to whom you are giving a lesson in cruelty are not in a position to profit from it...

James Baldwin (1963), Seneca (4BC-65AD)

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POWERFUL FEAR

by N. Chan

"Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it..." Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom from Fear

Recent events throughout Burma continue to raise serious doubts about the sincerity of the military to allow democracy to take root and grow in the country. The military leaders' fear of the people is reflected in their unwillingness to allow even minimal political freedoms, and their haste to clamp down on anything which even slightly tastes of freedom of expression.

One of the most evident illustrations of this paranoia is the national convention which has been plodding along since 1990, attempting to cough up a new constitution for the country. Of the 702 members originally involved in the convention, more than 50% were hand picked by the military leaders. Now, only about 15 elected representatives of the people continue to sit in the convention - the rest having been safely removed by the military or themselves having pulled out in protest. Those withdrawing from the national convention in protest, especially Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), have complained that the rules of the convention do not allow for any debate on significant issues. The delegates serve only as a rubber stamp for motions put forward by the military.

Still the military carries on the convention, attempting to mould a constitution which will guarantee their continued leading political role, an indication that they truly fear the people and the possibility of losing their grip on power.

In late March, the convention adopted rules which would deny Burmese voters any direct participation in electing the country's president. According to the rules, Burma will have three vice presidents. Each of the two houses of parliament will elect one vice president. The third will be elected by military members of the

parliament who are guaranteed at least 25% of the seats by the proposed constitution. A joint-session of parliament will then elect a president from among the three vice-presidents. Because of the composition of the two houses, it is almost guaranteed that only a president totally supported by the military has a chance to become president.

Constitutional qualifications for president also effectively eliminate a huge portion of the country's population and further guarantee the mili-

The military leaders' fear of the people is reflected in their unwillingness to allow even minimal political freedoms and their haste to clamp down on anything which even slightly tastes of freedom of expression

tary's political role. The president must be expert in political as well as military affairs, which disqualifies all women (none of whom are highly placed in the military) as well as all but a small handful of men. The president must also be at least 45 years old and have lived in Burma for the past 20 years. He or she must not have parents, spouse or children who are citizens of a foreign power. This rule is seen to be directed primarily against Aung San Suu Kyi who is married to a British citizen.

The Cabinet ministers for defence, interior and border region affairs and their deputies must be military personnel. These persons will be nominated by the armed forces' commander-in-chief. While government

employees have to resign from the civil service after taking a cabinet post, military personnel serving as ministers or deputy ministers need not resign from military service.

The legitimacy of the national convention to draw up a constitution for the country continues to be a pressing question. With the absence of the NLD which won over 80% of the votes during the 1990 elections, the voice of the Burmese people is glaringly absent from the process. On the 4th of April of this year, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Alvaro de Soto, asked Siorc Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw why the military was unwilling to have dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi as a step towards solving the country's political problems and moving towards a more democratic process for drawing up the constitution. A United Nations report indicates that Ohn Gyaw replied, "...a dialogue with her [Aung San Suu Kyi] was not acceptable since it implied that she would be treated on an equal footing with the Government [sic]". The meeting between de Soto and Ohn Gyaw finally took place in New York after the Burmese military refused to meet him in Burma, perhaps fearing that he would request to meet Aung San Suu Kyi, see political prisoners, or raise sensitive questions which the military did not want discussed at the upcoming UN Human Rights Commission meeting.

Ohn Gyaw further argued the importance of the military's staying in power by informing de Soto that only a military government could encourage all armed groups to lay down their arms. "The Government's [sic] position regarding the national races and ethnic groups that had taken up arms was that they would lay down their arms when the Constitution was

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adopted and that they would do so **only with a disciplined Government and not a civilian Government at the helm.**" (emphasis added by the writer)

It is not only through manipulation of the constitution-writing process that the military expresses their fear and distrust of the people, but also through harassment and intimidation of any individual or group which has the courage to speak out on important issues. Twenty one prisoners in Burma had their prison sentences extended on March 28 to new terms of five to 12 years each. The apparent cause of these extensions is that the prisoners had attempted to send information about prison conditions to a representative of the United Nations. An Amnesty report says the trial took place in a closed session in Insein Prison and the prisoners were not allowed legal counsel. The men were sentenced under a 1950 emergency law which calls for punishment of anyone who "causes or intends to disrupt the morality or behaviour of a group of people or the general public, or to disrupt the security of the reconstruction of the stability of the Union." Many of the 21 prisoners are members of Burma's leading political party, the NLD. The representative of the United Nations was collecting evidence on the human rights situation in Burma in response to a UN mandate to seek information about prison conditions, force labor, etc. in Burma for presentation to the 1996 UN Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva.

On January 7, a group of 13 artists were arrested in Rangoon after a performance at the home of Aung San Suu Kyi. Nine of those arrested were released after a few weeks, but two, Par Par Lay and Lu Zaw, were given long prison sentences and sent to a hard labour camp in Kachin State. Par Par Lay and Lu Zaw are prominent Burmese comedians and apparently told a story poking fun at the "Visit Myanmar" year which is to begin this October. There are few countries in the world in which a simple joke

qualifies someone for years of hard labour.

In a related incident, James Leander Nichols, an Anglo-Burmese close to Aung San Suu Kyi, was arrested, held without charges and sentenced to three years jail. Mr. Nichols who has served as honorary council for several European countries in Burma during the past few years, is reported to be ailing. One report suggests that he was detained for having an unregistered fax machine and telephones in his home. Many observers believe his arrest is a further attempt to harass Aung San Suu Kyi and pressure her to withdraw from the Burmese political scene.

In Burma, the most fearful group must certainly be the military itself - fearful that what they have created during the past forty years will finally collapse in on top of them. Hiding behind medals, military parades, and uniforms can not keep such fear from being reflected back to the world. Refusal to turn political power over to an elected civilian government, refusal to hold open and honest dialogue with opposition groups, snubbing high-level United Nations officials, and manipulating a national convention

which is writing a constitution to guarantee their rule and eliminate the possibility of future participation of people like Aung San Suu Kyi are signs of an elite group living in desperate fear. If the Burmese military were truly confident that they were serving in the best interests of the country and of the people's support for their rule, they would not fear to enter into dialogue with the people, or let the people fully participate in events which are building the future of the country.

Sources:

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/194

Intervention by U Aye, Ambassador/Permanent Representative and Leader of the Myanmar Observer Delegation to the Fifty-Second Session of the Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, 16 April 1996

TN 960419, 960331, 960422, 960405, 960501

BP 960404, 960331, 960405



Dialogue is not acceptable...

FAITH, TOLERANCE AND PEACE IN BURMA

by CAC

A big pagoda you may build, with ill-begotten gain. The sin involved will weigh a pound, the merit - just a grain...
Burmese proverb

Religion is a paradox like no other. It is both a matter of private choice and a subject of public scrutiny. The practice of religion is an act of individual conscience, as well as an act of communal solidarity. People both control their choice of faith and are limited by the options inherited from family and community. In theory, religion is often considered to be separate from politics, unfettered by worldly concerns, yet, at the same time, it can be one of the most powerful political forces humanity has at its disposal. Religious institutions can be the catalyst for a culture of mutual respect and tolerance in a sea of diversity, or wrathful agents of hatred and misunderstanding.

Religion is one of the categories by which most people instinctively define both their own identity and that of 'others'. When asked, people respond to an inquiry about faith with: 'I am a Buddhist/ Catholic/ Baptist/ Muslim etc.' Religion is one of the fundamental descriptors human beings employ to distinguish themselves from one another or to bind together.

Burma is a fascinating religious crossroad in Southeast Asia. The historically dominant religions - Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam - all have their place, as well as the diversity of Christian denominations, from Catholicism to Seventh Day Adventism. While Buddhism originally came from India, in Burma it evolved in unique syncretism with the traditional 'Nat' spirit religion in Burman communities and with these and other belief systems in non-Burman settings. As everywhere, religion is moulded and adapted to fit the life and culture of the people. At the same time, it remakes that life and culture. Religion is the key evolutionary factor in human society.

One of the most remarkable recent developments in the Karen state has been the explosion of religious intolerance. This intolerance manifests itself politically as a rivalry between the Karen National Union (KNU), often described as a predominantly Christian-led organisation, and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which is described as a militant Buddhist organisation. The formation of political and military entities along religious lines is nothing new in Burma. It is doubtful if Buddhism or Christianity would ever have reached Burma were it not for the politically active, at times ruthlessly militant, proponents of their faith.

The KNU/DKBA rivalry is not disturbing because it displays divergent politico-religious factions in Karen society, but because it has so rapidly become an agent of intolerance and communal violence. Where communal violence erupts, one must ask why whatever had restrained it finally failed? What went wrong with the ways the communities had been managing their religious diversity?

There seem to be two methods for dealing with religious diversity: active and passive. One of the most effective active forms has been evangelism: changing the 'other' to be more like oneself. This has generally been the way all religions perpetuate themselves, regardless of origin. Both Buddhism and Christianity were delivered to Burma by missionaries. Other active modes include war, genocide and apartheid-like separation.

In the passive mode, people deal with diversity with a spectrum of responses, which can be termed 'tolerance'. Tolerance can take many forms, from true understanding, respect and appreciation of a different faith (sympathetic tolerance), to isola-

tion and intentional ignorance (nominal tolerance). Neither mode is without its problems or potential for violence, yet both are ways to address diversity.

The question facing the Karen community, one which is facing the rest of Burma and perhaps the world, is: how to deal with religious diversity when it becomes an issue of communal violence?

The origin of the recent communal intolerance between Christians and Buddhists is a subject of debate. Many contend that it is a device introduced by the DKBA to defeat the KNU, the implication being that, prior to the advent of the DKBA, peace reigned. This perspective does not explain how ostensibly peaceful communities found themselves embroiled in violence and how it was possible for a militant Buddhist group to find support. Others will explain the situation by referring to the growing dissatisfaction with the way some members of the KNU linked religion to favour and status in the organisation and the KNU's overall unwillingness to address such complaints.

Other explanations spring from the differences of the two faiths and their social and historical associations. The military junta in Burma actively promotes Buddhism as the state religion, using it to pacify minority groups. The forced ordination of novice monks and construction of pagodas in non-Buddhist areas are two examples. For many non-Buddhist ethnic minorities, Buddhism is the religion of the enemy and oppressor: it is dangerous to their survival. The line between who is 'them' and who is 'us' becomes blurred. Buddhist institutions are very visible: monks wear a unique costume, pagodas are impressive landmarks and Buddhist festivals can be

frequent, lengthy, loud and boisterous.

The physical institutions of protestant Christianity in Karen State are less prominent: churches may not be as easily distinguished from a distance and religious officials integrate more openly with the community. Tenets and less visible institutions of the Christian faith also have a strong impact on non-Christians. Mission schools offer basic education, direly needed in rural Burma, linked explicitly to the adoption of Christianity.

With its emphasis on literacy and connections to western institutions, Christianity can elevate the status of people who would otherwise have few opportunities for education and foreign contact, potentially creating an elite class. Christians are more likely than Buddhists to speak English.

The injunctions imposed by some evangelical protestant churches against contact with other religions suggests to some an attitude of intolerance. Many Christians are prohibited from entering a Buddhist monastery or talking to Buddhist monks and, most importantly, from performing the ritual prostrations before a Buddha image.

This last point is crucial, not as an epitome of intolerance, but because it demonstrates how misunderstanding the 'other' can lead to mutual intolerance. Christians can point out the scriptural prohibition against worshipping idols, a characteristic of early Judaism that distinguished it from other ancient religious faiths. It is a popular misconception, even among Buddhists, that Buddha statues are divine images or idols: the respect afforded to them reinforces this misperception. Technically, Buddha images represent a human being for whom Buddhists are taught to show ultimate respect. In Buddhism, the mere act of respecting a Buddha image has no bearing on one's salvation, yet for Christians worshipping a false idol might be detrimental to theirs.

It is understandable that a Christian would feel threatened by an act which a Buddhist regards as ordinary and

harmless. From a Buddhist point of view, because this act of respect is not an act of worship per se, a refusal to participate may be understood as a de facto show of disrespect. The original Biblical injunction was recorded thousands of years before the Buddha. Today, in rural Burma, it might be interpreted by both faiths as that which distinguishes and polarises them.

It can be seen that misunderstanding each other's beliefs can lead to offence and a conviction that different religions are diametrically opposed. This is a drawback of nominal tolerance, for it leaves many unanswered questions about the 'other', questions that can grow into disdain, suspicion and ultimately hatred. This misunderstanding is neither he fault or the sole property of one group or another: examples of Buddhist misunderstanding and intolerance abound. A misunderstanding of the Bible's scriptural proscription regarding the worship of statues could easily lead Buddhists to misperceive that Christianity looks down on other faiths.

A recent report from the Karen state shows not only intolerance, but the effect it has on the individual, and, by extrapolation communal, consciousness. An interview with a middle-aged Karen woman, recently arrived in Thailand from Pa-an, shows how religion is becoming a divisive issue in diverse communities. When asked if the DKBA had been intimidating people in the village, she responded:

Now they don't, but before, they were terrorising, saying they would kill all Christians. Although we were Christians, we had to stay and listen to this. We did not do anything. One evening, around 7 o'clock, a villager who followed the DKBA called out: 'Now we have beaten the Christians [meaning KNU], so you cannot stay here any more. The Abbot does not like it any longer.' Then, I suffered at the core of my heart, my emotions rose and I prayed that I would not give an unfortunate answer. I held my tongue and did not answer anything. My daughter answered, 'if we must bow down as Buddhists, then let us all die. We will pray to God.' He immediately

went away. I did not speak again until daylight.

After they made their demands, something terrible happened. People said, 'Christians are coming and spraying poison in the wells.' They looked me directly in the eyes and said: 'if Buddhist and Christians are staying among one another, the Christian soldiers are going to kill all of them.'

These descriptions are familiar in scenes of communal unrest: hateful threats, rumours, scapegoating. Commonplace though they may be, they are no easier to decipher. The first task should perhaps be to separate those genuine emotions which arise from the target of discrimination from the thorny labyrinth of propaganda.

This is a mere sketch on the issues of diversity, tolerance and intolerance in rural Burma. Further research on the issue can potentially illuminate the character of Buddhist-Christian conflict in Karen state, as well as other ethnic, religious and political conflicts in other parts of Burma.

Peace in Burma will be the direct result of a dynamic, widespread culture of tolerance among people of all faiths, ethnicities and social classes. This tolerance must be actively sought, built and rebuilt by the people who are willing to try to understand their neighbours, rather than nominally tolerate their existence.

Both Christianity and Buddhism have remarkable records as catalysts for communal harmony in the midst of violence. Burma may perhaps have yet to realise this potential in many of its religious institutions, yet the need is strikingly apparent. Anyone concerned about peace in Burma might wish to consider how initiatives in communal tolerance can be built at grassroots level and join Burma's ongoing struggle for peace and justice.

Source:

Interviews Regarding Conditions in Pa-an Township, 960422



AND WE ALWAYS THOUGHT WE WERE BURMESE TOO!

by KR

Around 87% of Burma's people are Buddhists. Christians (4.5%) and Muslims (4%) make up small but solid minorities, represented mostly in rural areas among Burma's many ethnic groups. An even smaller minority is Hindu (1.5%) and the Jewish congregation numbers 40 - just 8 families in Rangoon.

The western state of Rakhine which shares a border with Bangladesh, is home to a large Muslim population. The Rohingya Muslims fled to Bangladesh in their hundreds of thousands in 1978 and 1991 to escape the appalling abuses being levelled against them. Forced relocations, suppression of their culture and thousands of disappearances resulted in the exoduses. Their repatriation, now under the supervision of UNHCR, fills many Muslims with fear and trepidation as the abuses continue.

Muslim shopkeepers in Rangoon have occupied the same commercial areas for generations, but in a clean-up operation for 'Visit Myanmar Year', they are being forced to sell up shop and their land (prime real estate) is being confiscated by the SLORC. Two thousand Muslim shopkeepers are being offered the choice of buying land out of town for grossly inflated prices or simply moving on. This is the third time in four years that such a land grab has occurred.

In Burma, if you cannot trace your Burmese ancestry back to a time prior to British rule then you cannot claim status as an indigenous group and you are denied the rights of citizenship, such as they are. Most Muslims in Burma arrived during British rule, when the British rulers were looking for an educated middle class to be the foundation of the public service. The exoduses to Bangladesh and the confiscation of lands in Rangoon must be seen in this light. To the SLORC, these people do not belong in Burma anyway and even the flight of the Ro-

hing was originally described as an expulsion of illegal immigrants.

This abuse of Muslim peoples has extended to their places of worship. At three Pagodas Pass in the east, the SLORC took over a mosque with a congregation of a thousand worshippers and is now using it as a base. In the west in Arakan, a holy site, the Jamme Mosque, was demolished by the SLORC and a much more lucrative venture - a hotel and restaurant - was built in its place.

One group of Muslims - the Panthay Chinese Muslims in northern Shan state - has recently acquired indigenous status and the rights of citizenship. The SLORC has even built a new mosque in Tachilek. Why would they pull down a mosque in Arakan and build one in Tachilek? A realistic reply is that China supplies much foreign investment and most of Burma's arms. A concession to a Muslim group may also be seen as a gesture when Burma is seeking full membership of ASEAN, many of whose member states have substantial Muslim populations.

This manipulation of religious groups and the issues close to them is a trademark of the SLORC, and it is becoming a feature of many of their dealings with ethnic groups. They take with one hand and give (if it is advantageous to them) with the other. They use concessions as carrots in their negotiations and as rewards for cooperation, then they paint that cooperation with the colours of unity, patriotism and loyalty to the notion of a united Myanmar. What is sad is that many groups of Christians and Muslims are allowing this to happen. They accept the rewards - air time on television at Easter, money for projects in areas where ceasefires have been signed, attendance at official events by members of the SLORC - as moves towards reasonableness and a vital source of funds, rather than seeing it all as a cynical manipulation of the whole faith issue in Burma.

Christianity came to Burma with the British. Western missionaries also helped in some areas to create a script for the notation of local languages, a useful tool in progress towards literacy. In Chin state, the local script has now been outlawed even though some names cannot be written in Burmese script. The local language can no longer be taught in schools and Chin people are lured away from their homeland to relationships and to institutions which do not allow them to practise their Christian faith.

Christianity is especially vulnerable to being associated with 'otherness' and with outside influences which threaten the stability and unity of Myanmar. It is promoted as a product of outsiders who might use their evil influence to do harm. The government paper *New Light of Myanmar* is dotted with warnings, such as *beware of unscrupulous persons who will use Christianity and...denounce such persons who harbour ill-will.* (951231) At the same time, the SLORC has used the Christian faith of many ethnic groups to encourage them to cooperate.

Whilst life is not all roses for the people of Kachin state, the KIA's ceasefire agreement with the SLORC is bringing rewards. The actual funds for promised projects may be slow in coming but the Christian people of Kachin state are being given many opportunities to express their gratitude whether they want to or not. At a recent meeting of the Kachin Baptists Association, Khin Nyunt, first secretary of the SLORC, cited Christian doctrine which stresses 'loving kindness, endurance and forgiving' and exhorted Kachin nationals 'to constantly consolidate national unity, based on gentle-mindedness of Christianity, and to strive for prevalence of perpetual peace in Kachin state.' His loud praise of religious freedom at such events must have a very hollow ring for the Christians of Karen State.

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FRIENDSHIP TESTED

by N. Chan

The much heralded 'Friendship Bridge', being constructed across the Moei River, stands as a cement monument to the fact that two countries may be too far apart for any bridge of friendship to span.

Conflicts between the two countries over a tiny island in the middle of the Moei river, have brought a halt to bridge construction. This is indicative of the tense situation which exists along much of the Thai-Burmese border. It is more than a year since the Burmese military launched their heavy military offensive and gained control of much of the border, the traditional home of many indigenous peoples.

While control of the border area changed hands, the incidence of border conflicts increased. The Burmese military continues to claim that the regular violent incidents along part of the border are caused by a lawless group over which they have no control. They maintain that the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA), often cited as the instigators of the incidents, operates alone, without support from the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

Reports of atrocities, from victims who escape to Thailand, present a different picture. In Myanmar Kayin (Karen) State: the Killings Continue, Amnesty International (AI) reports that: *the tatmadaw [Burmese*

Army] reportedly has stolen supplies from local villagers, including valuable livestock, rice stocks and even farmers' clothes and cooking utensils. The DKBA often accompanies the tatmadaw, acting as guides and interpreters for ethnic Burman troops.

Most Burma watchers believe the DKBA is supported by SLORC. This is supported by an independent human rights monitor who recently wrote: *this DKBA group are out of control [they] want to catch and kill people... They do this because SLORC is behind and supporting them.* It is also supported by Thai Fourth Regiment Commander, who reported that there have been numerous attacks on border villages in his area in the past six months, most of them involving the DKBA.

From October 1995-April 1996, more than 44 raids from 'renegade Karen' [DKBA] and 'unidentified intruders' have occurred on Thai soil, leaving 14 people dead, 20 wounded and more than 1 million baht (US\$40,000) in property damage. Details of a few of the incidents are:

November 11 1995: 8 men blocked the highway with a fallen tree and fired M16 and AK47 assault rifles at a truck, driven by a police officer from Mae Moei, killing a 9 year old girl and wounding 4 others;

November 26: 5 men threw an M26 grenade at a tourist van at Ban Mae Lameng. The driver was killed in-

stantly, 10 tourists seriously wounded and the van destroyed;

December 2: 50 DKBA soldiers entered the Sho Klo refugee camp with assault rifles and grenades, killing a Karen clergyman and seizing 3 former Karen soldiers;

December 10: A Thai villager was held hostage by 14 soldiers who demanded a 30,000 baht ransom, before coming under fire from Thai troops. A Thai Border Patrol Policeman, an infantryman and one Karen were killed;

Other major incidents occurred on December 27 and January 9 and 31, leaving 5 confirmed dead (including an 8 year old boy and a paralysed 71 year old man), more injured and a 16 year old girl abducted and not yet released.

For years, the indigenous peoples have acted as a buffer between the Thai and Burmese militaries. The buffer is gradually eroding.

Sources:

KHRG 960401

AI, April 1996

BP 960507, 960426



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The KNU has not yet succumbed to the efforts of the agreement and the Karen people suffer daily cruelties. They are taken as porters and forced labourers on construction projects and driven from their villages. They have their food and belongings stolen from them, suffer violent atrocities like rape and beatings and many have been killed as a result. The DKBA, break-away Karen Buddhist group and armed SLORC columns, commit

many of the atrocities for and on behalf of the SLORC.

Recently, Aung San Suu Kyi was prevented from attending a new year celebration and merit-making ceremony, on the grounds that this would be using religion for a political purpose. Yet SLORC generals make much of their own merit-making. A camera is always handy it seems when SLORC generals give alms and receive blessings. Promoting themselves as good Buddhists goes hand in hand with denigrating other religions,

unless of course, there is something to be gained from taking a more patronising stance - maintenance of a ceasefire agreement or another weapons shipment.

Sources:

Bangkok Post 960305, 950418

The Nation 950915, 951115



IN THE NEWS

NEWS BRIEFS FOR MAY

Burmese Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw has reiterated the SLORC stand that it will not have dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, or any other NLD member and that the National Convention was the forum for that. He said that Burma will require a 'disciplined government'[sic], not a civilian one, once the constitution is adopted. (TN 960419)

Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD were barred from attending new year celebrations and a merit-making ceremony because the SLORC 'doesn't approve of political actions which take advantage of religion'. (BP 960417) General Tin Oo's own presiding over the ordination of 10 soldiers in Ho Mong (Khun Sa's former stronghold) was described as a cynical PR exercise by the MTA (Mong Tai Army). (BP 960510)

Pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi appears to be mounting. Her friend and godfather, James Leander Nichols, has been jailed for 3 years for having unregistered fax machines and telephones. (BP960519)

His health is of grave concern to international envoys who called for his release (BP 960423). He has since been sentenced to 3 years jail. The NLD members who were arrested for their part in a performance at Aung San Suu Kyi's home, and sentenced to 7 years jail, have been sent to hard labour building roads in Kachin state - proof that the SLORC uses political prisoners as forced labour. (TN 960501) Since then, 44 of her key supporters have been arrested in what is seen as an attempt to prevent the 3 day NLD conference, scheduled for 26/5/96, proceeding. Aung San Suu Kyi said that the conference will be held. One diplomat in Rangoon said that it appeared the NLD and military were now on a collision course. (TN960522)

Speculation continues about Khun Sa's whereabouts. The SLORC now say he is in a military compound and not free at all as previously reported. The US says that the coming months will be a test of Burma's commitment to the eradication of the drug trade since it was the SLORC who predicted a dramatic decrease in poppy

production after the surrender of Khun Sa. (TN 960509)

Security remains a priority in refugee camps where several deaths have been reported in the last month from DKBA attacks. Stockpiling of rice before the rainy season is proving difficult in some areas, especially where local officials make special requests. (TN960425)

Pepsi has decided to sell its 40% stake in its joint bottling venture in Burma to the Tun family, which is close to the SLORC. This is only a partial victory for activists (Pepsi citing economic considerations and public concern as reasons for the withdrawal), as Pepsi maintains its interest in its franchises by supplying syrup and allowing use of its logo. A resolution to withdraw all interests from Burma was overwhelmingly defeated. (BP960412, TN 960424)



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