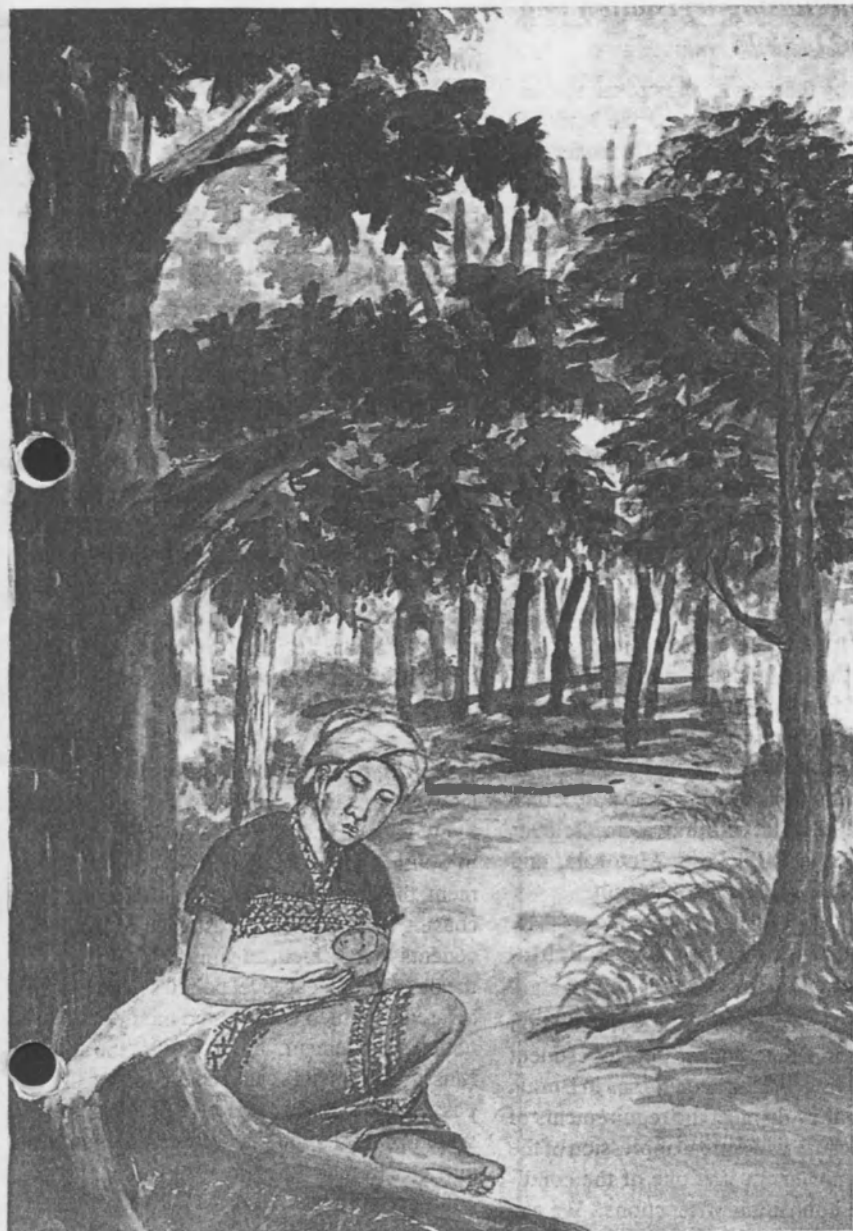


BURMA ISSUES

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Painting by Tin Aung Min

“This military government says that there is peace and tranquillity in the country, but in my view, if they continue to act as they have always done then even when I am dead and my children have reached sixty years of age there will still not be any peace and tranquillity in Karen State.”

– Loo Pleh Township villager

Burma Issues, the monthly newsletter of Burma Issues, highlights current information related to the struggle for peace and justice in Burma. It is distributed internationally on a free-subscription basis to individuals and groups concerned about the state of affairs in Burma.

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INSIDE

- ② **DIVESTMENT:** The Combined Power of Government-Imposed Sanctions and Grassroots Activism
- ④ **HUMAN RIGHTS:** Notes from the Barren Ground
- ⑤ **POLITICS:** Asean... A Sticky Situation
WOMEN: Flesh Trade Seminar
- ⑤ **Civil War:** Cycles of Futility
- ⑤ **The Last Word:** What Others Have to Say About Burma

THE COMBINED POWER OF GOVERNMENT IMPOSED SANCTIONS AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

"I think in some ways it's better to have the 'people' of the world on your side, rather than the governments of the world, even if the governments can be more effective in certain directions."

Aung San Suu Kyi commenting on selective purchasing legislation and consumer boycotts, November 21, 1996

On April 22, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced President Clinton's decision to ban new United States investments in Burma because of the regime's increasingly harsh treatment of the country's democratic opposition. The presidential action, however, will not affect an estimated \$240 million in existing US investments in Burma, (or more as Burmese officials claim that US investments swelled to \$582 million for the month of February as companies rushed to conclude deals before sanctions were introduced) nor is it certain to induce other governments to take similar punitive actions against the Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc). Secretary of State Albright, who once described the Slorc as "an ugly acronym for an ugly government", stated that "we have used the prospect of new investment sanctions as a tool to encourage change. Specifically, we have urged the military authorities in Burma to begin a serious political dialogue with the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and with representatives of Burma's many ethnic minorities."

The announcement is the latest censure of Slorc by international actions that includes removal of trade benefits by the European Union (the EU), suspension of development aid from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and a condemning resolution passed by the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Since the US announcement, the EU has extended their sanctions on Burma for a further six months. The EU also agreed last month to exclude Burma from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which accords preferential access to EU markets to goods from developing countries, to protest against the widespread use of forced labor to promote economic development in Burma. The ADB said any resumption of development assistance to Burma, which has been suspended since the mid-1980's, hinges on the country's political situation changing.

President Clinton, said in his press release that the decision was "in response to a constant and continuing pattern of severe repression by the SLORC in Burma. During the past seven months, the Slorc has arrested and detained large numbers of students and opposition supporters, sentenced dozens to long-term imprisonment, and prevented the expression of po-

litical views by the democratic opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD)." He mentioned the serious abuses in the recent military campaign against Burma's Karen ethnic minority group, "forcibly conscripting civilians and compelling thousands to flee into Thailand" and Slorc's toleration for "drug trafficking and traffickers in defiance the views of the international community" as additional reasons for imposing sanctions.

Clinton's decision to impose sanctions was in compliance with last September's Cohen-Feinstein amendment, a new law which required the president to issue a ban on new US investment in Burma if the administration determined that the Slorc has harmed Suu Kyi or engaged in "large-scale repression" of the NLD. The Cohen-Feinstein amendment and the state of Massachusetts' selective purchasing legislation have already figured prominently in several companies' decisions to end business transactions in Burma. Apple Computer announced its withdrawal in October 1996, and Hewlett-Packard, Motorola, and Eastman Kodak quietly followed suit.

Selective Purchasing Legislation Gains Momentum in the US

On February 3, Aung San Suu Kyi called on the US government to oppose new investment in Burma, saying that "the conditions in Burma are such that they do meet the requirements of sanctions because widespread repression of the democracy movement was one of the conditions for the imposition of sanctions. We can say very, very clearly that there is a large scale repression of the democracy movement going on." Amnesty International reported that 1996, with more than 2,000 political arrests, was "the most repressive (year) since 1988." Aung San Suu Kyi has been virtually under house arrest again since her entourage of cars was attacked in November last year, and was initially unavailable to comment on President Clinton's decision as her telephone line appeared to have been cut. She has since praised the US for standing by its convictions.

Unocal chairman and chief executive Roger Beach said he was 'disappointed' by the decision, insisting that the company's investment in Burma was providing new opportunities for

the people living in the pipeline area. "The best way for America to advance Myanmar's transition to democracy," he wrote, "is to remain involved in the nation's economic development." Unocal Corporation holds a 28% interest in a US\$1.2 billion pipeline joint venture project that will pump natural gas from an off-shore field through Burma to Thailand. Aung San Suu Kyi's response to the idea that developing the market oriented economy speeds the process of democratization was: "Developing a market oriented economy in the right way, would of course, help the process of democratization, but not the kind of market economy that grossly favors the elite and the kind of open market economy that is only open to some and not to others. What we have in Burma now is not an open market economy." According to financier George Soros, "The [Yadana] pipeline, when completed, will be Slorc's single largest source of foreign currency. Nothing would hurt the Slorc more than the oil companies' suspending operations on the pipeline under the pressure of public opinion from Europe and the United States. The oil companies bear a grave moral responsibility." Thus, the decision to impose sanctions, but to allow previous contracts to stand, does not go far enough.

In the US, Burma activists have advocated selective purchasing policies which were effectively used in the 1980's to oppose apartheid in South Africa. In the anti-apartheid movement, the first localities to adopt selective purchasing legislation (SPL) established legal precedents that influenced similar localities, and the passage of local-level policies in turn raised awareness which contributed momentum to a national movement. In June 1996, the state of Massachusetts set a precedent in the US by passing a state-wide selective purchasing law which prohibits the state government and its agencies from contracting with companies that conduct business in Burma. Twelve American cities and states, including the city of San Francisco and the state of Vermont have passed similar legislation. Since the Clinton Administration's announcement, New York City has passed SPL, and Northwest Airlines has ended a controversial promotion which offered bonus miles to frequent flyers who stayed at the Traders Hotel in Rangoon. At least a dozen other cities and states are expected to adopt similar measures soon. The decision to impose economic sanctions on new investment has and will continue to speed up the decision making process for local governments throughout the country.

To date, no other countries have followed the US' lead. Australia's foreign affairs minister,

Alexander Downing, said the Australian government does not believe that the imposition of similar measures against new investment in Burma would make any significant impact on the current political situation. Analysts say that US investment is too limited for sanctions to put a serious economic squeeze on the junta, as it is the fourth largest investor behind France, Singapore and Thailand. However, US sanctions strike a blow to investor confidence and should embarrass companies from continuing to do business with Burma. It is a moral condemnation of an illegal regime with an appalling human rights record and it is disappointing that other democratic countries are not implementing similar measures.

Corporations Respond to Selective Purchasing Legislation and Consumer Boycotts

While it appears that other governments are slow to support the US decision, activists are using the opportunity to campaign to make multinational corporations accountable and responsible global citizens. In Canada, Australia and Denmark, activists have launched consumer boycotts which are having favorable results. SPL combined with the imposition of sanctions is a powerful tool, but SPL and consumer boycotts will now more than ever play an important role in targeting the investments which are not affected by the US imposition of economic sanctions. The message is that Burma is not a good place to do business.

Consumer boycotts, stockholder actions, the anti-Slorc campaign, and other measures in support of Burma's pro-democracy movement, have already forced a number of US businesses, including PepsiCo and clothing retailers Liz Claiborne, Levi Strauss and Eddie Bauer to sever their ties with Burma. In Australia, a coalition of Sydney-based student and Burmese activist groups called for a national consumer boycott of Foster's Brewing Group Ltd.'s beer until it withdrew from Burma. Foster's pulled out of Burma on April 17, a week after the campaign started, but the company denied that it was pressured by calls for a global business boycott of the junta, stating: "Foster's has taken all factors into account and made a business decision." Since the announcement, Anheuser-Busch International has suspended exports of its Budweiser brand beer to Burma, citing the US government's imposition of trade sanctions as the reason, and Burmese activists in Denmark have launched a consumer boycott targeting Scandinavian investment in Burma.

International sanctions, shareholder action in divesting stocks and consumer boycotts impact existing, and potential, investors sending a strong message to multinational corporations that the international community and consum-

ers will not tolerate disregard for human rights violations in the pursuit of profit and will withdraw their support from the corporation – an action that effectively makes investment a "risky" business decision. SPL has gained momentum in the US, raising national and international awareness of the situation in Burma and tax payers are influencing their governments to take action. Taken together, boycotts, SPL and economic sanctions will endorse consumers' wishes for multinational corporations

to be responsible global citizens. Thinking globally and acting locally has had international ramifications as the US, the ADB, the EU and the UN Human Rights Commission, along with the citizens of the US, Canada, Australia, France, the UK and the Netherlands, start to get tough on Burma's ruling junta.



V.J.C.

ASEAN MEMBERS RESPOND TO US PRESSURE

THAILAND'S PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SAROJ CHAVANAVIRAJ, SAID THE US INVESTMENT BAN COULD AFFECT FUTURE ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ASEAN AND THE US ALTHOUGH HE SAW THE BAN AS ONLY A "WARNING SIGNAL" BECAUSE IT WAS NOT RETROACTIVE.

PHILIPPINE FOREIGN MINISTER MR. SIAZON SAID ASEAN MEMBERS RESPECTED THE US DECISION ON SANCTIONS AND WOULD CONSIDER THE US REQUEST BUT SAID THAT BURMA'S RELATIONS WITH ASEAN HAD "STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS" - RELATIONS CANNOT EXIST IN THE ONE DIMENSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

MALAYSIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER MR. ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI SAID THE ENTRY OF BURMA INTO ASEAN WAS VITAL FOR REGIONAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THAT ASEAN NATIONS POLICY OF CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH BURMA SERVED THE REGION WELL, AND THAT BURMA ALREADY ATTENDS THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (ARF) AND THE POST MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE (PMC). MR. ABDULLAH SAID THAT ALTHOUGH ASEAN MAINTAINS THE STRICT POLICY OF NON-INTERFERENCE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, "WE HOPE THROUGH OUR RELATIONS WITH BURMA, WE CAN BRING CHANGES TO BENEFIT ITS PEOPLE."

INDONESIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER ALI ALATAS SAID THAT HE HOPED ASEAN'S AND THE US'S "COMMON INTERESTS WILL BE PRESERVED." THAT ASEAN DOES NOT BELIEVE IN SANCTIONS, AND THAT ITS METHOD OF CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT IS BETTER THAN ISOLATION. "GETTING MYANMAR INTO ASEAN IS A BETTER WAY OF ENSURING GREATER PEACE, GREATER DEVELOPMENT AND STABILITY IN OUR PART OF THE WORLD."

A STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE VIETNAMESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SAID THE SANCTIONS AMOUNTED TO AN INTERFERENCE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF A NATION AND ARE CONTRARY TO BOTH THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY AND MUTUAL BENEFIT AND THE GLOBAL TREND IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

THE CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY CONDEMNED THE MOVE, WARNING THAT SUCH A CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH COULD ONLY SERVE TO INCREASE ANTAGONISM ON ALL SIDES: "CHINA IS ALWAYS AGAINST INTERFERENCE IN OTHER COUNTRIES' INTERNAL AFFAIRS BY MAKING USE OF ECONOMIC MEANS."

NOTES FROM THE BARREN GROUND

The following reports indicate typical rural conditions in Pa'an District, central Karen State, between January and March 1997. Most of the villagers in this area continue to experience the usual array of hardships served up by the long running civil war. See also associated article, "Cycles of Futility", in this edition.

FORCED RELOCATION: Loo Pleh Township (West Dawna Range)

In November 1996, the Commander of the Burma Army Infantry Battalion (IB) 28 accused villagers of Noh Law Bler, T'ku Kraw and Kwee Phat Htaw of supporting the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and demanded they relocate to the vicinity of Naw Deh village, in Kawt Thay Forest. The designated relocation site has no water supplies, so the villagers fled to other locations. After all of the villagers had left, the soldiers entered the village. They torched some houses but dismantled the best ones as well as the village school, taking the wood to reuse at their own camp. They also announced, "If we see anybody who has fled come back to the village, we will shoot them."

The villagers fled and constructed temporary shelters for themselves. But this year, the soldiers came in search of people who had fled, so most of them had to flee a second time. The villagers have all been forced to scatter to other villages and are now living in poverty. The children are ill with diarrhea and fevers but have no medicines to be cured with. These villagers, who have lost all of their farmland, cannot begin to think about how they will survive in the future. Nobody is attempting to return to their villages.



A family from T'Ku Kraw share a meal at their new residence.

FORCED LABOR: Nat Kyaung fields (West of Hlaing Bwe River)

A young woman related the following: We had to construct a road 6 yards wide through the fields. Each village tract (a group of 3 to 5 villages) was allocated 100 feet of road to construct. The villagers could work quickly or slowly, but they had to finish their part of the road. We had to excavate the earth with hoes, and it was stony, so we had to use hoes with metal handles (brought from their villages) because wooden handles would bend and break. The males excavated the earth and the females carted it to the road site. The people there included the elderly, who couldn't work the earth, so they had to boil water and cook rice.

"We had to get up at 2:30 a.m. If we didn't get up on time, another 10 feet of road was added to our work as punishment. We took a break at 8 a.m. and we ate rice. We worked all day in the heat, until 6 p.m., after which we bathed and ate again. We had to sleep in the wet fields, as the soldiers didn't like us to sleep under cover. Some people were sick, and village groups had to bring medics to take care of the ill. Not only did they not give us food, but furthermore the soldiers providing security (watching over the progress of the work) even came and ate our rice (that the villagers had to bring for themselves).

LAND DEGRADATION

Ta Kreh (a.k.a. Paing Kyone) Township (West Dawna Range)

An increasing amount of agricultural land is lying fallow because of deteriorating conditions for farmers, including lack of security, high taxation, forced labor, etc. The following are reliable estimates of dis-

used land in a number of village tracts throughout Ta Kreh township:

Village Tract	Est'd Paddy Grain	
	Disused Land	Yield Lost
Noh Kwee	250 acres	1000 na*
Taung Saun	200 acres	800 na
Pee T'khat	50 acres**	600 na

*1 na = 2 standard vegetable oil tins

**The differentiation in paddy yield per land area can be accounted for in terms of land quality.

If land is left lying fallow for a one to two year period it will remain vegetated (grasses, etc.), however, if left for a longer period it will steadily deteriorate and become totally degraded, essentially useless. Much of the above land is now entering this latter stage of deterioration.

COMMUNITIES COLLAPSING

As a result of the increasingly difficult social and economic conditions there is a continued breakdown of traditional inter- and intra-community relationships throughout these areas. There is a serious loss of trust among community members, with the result that people very rarely openly talk about the issues and competing forces that are having such a detrimental effect upon their lives. That people are clearly too afraid to openly reflect on such serious conditions in their own traditional social context is evidence of the significant, albeit invisible, damage suffered by communities throughout the civil war zones on a day to day basis. It is the inherent power of this very kind of psychological manipulation that allows a small military elite to control an entire national population.



N.P.T.

ASEAN.....A STICKY SITUATION

Asean foreign ministers will converge in Kuala Lumpur on May 31 to work out their "recommendation" for their leaders on the timing of the admission of Burma, Cambodia and Laos into the regional grouping. The Asean leaders will make their final "political decision" based on the recommendation submitted by their foreign ministers. The foreign ministers decided last year to simultaneously admit the three countries in 1997, and are currently evaluating the economic situation of each applicant. By admitting the three applicants, Asean would realize its goal of making Asean a truly regional body, bringing together all 10 countries of the Southeast Asian region. The admissions would also provide one more reason for Asean leaders to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the association which takes place this year.

Then the US announced President Clinton's decision to impose economic sanctions against Burma's authoritarian regime. The US administration is fully aware that the limited sanctions will have little effect on the policies of the Burmese military junta or on the Burmese economy. It is hoping that the decision will be a major factor in the consideration of Asean foreign ministers when they meet on May 31 to decide on the timing of Burma's membership. The sanctions are an astute diplomatic offensive to pressure Asean, a move which was further strengthened by the US State Department announcement on April 25 that the US is trying to persuade Asean member states to reject Burma's bid for full membership, on the grounds of Burma's "woeful" human rights record.

Asean members have insisted that the US measure would not affect its decision to welcome Burma into the grouping, as the grouping has a strong policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, and resist moves to link trade with politics. However, members will certainly find it more difficult to decide on the timing for Burma's entry. To go ahead with their agreement to embrace Burma by July (when Asean foreign ministers hold their annual ministerial meeting (AMM)) will put Asean relations with the US, which is the grouping's political and security ally, a major trading and investment partner to virtually all members, in a very awkward dilemma. If Asean welcomes Burma, the US could decide to reduce the privileges it offers to Asean members such as trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). It also raises concerns about the future

of Asean on the international front as it has been demonstrated in recent years that where the US goes, others, such as the Europeans, tend to follow. The prospect of continued smooth relations between Asean and two key trading partners cannot be guaranteed if the grouping includes Slorc.

**BURMA
WOULD
STRENGTHEN
THE
AUTHORITARIAN
POLE IN THE
BALANCE OF
POWER
WITHIN
ASEAN,
CREATING A
SOLID FRONT
AGAINST
EXTERNAL
CRITICISM
OF THE
REPRESSIVE
PRACTICES
IN THE
MAJORITY OF
THE ASEAN
STATES.**

Asean reiterates that its concern is the economic readiness of the applicants, and that it regards Burma as better prepared than the other candidates to meet the obligations of membership. Burma's economy is in many ways more developed, and it is already a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Burma also attends the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) and the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC). The newly accepted countries must sign two agreements at the annual meeting of Asean in July. One agreement is to accept the principle of most favored nation and to support national treatment and transparency in trade. The second agreement acknowledges the acceptance of other regional economic pacts: the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) Agreement, Framework Agreement on Cooperation in Services, and the Framework Agreement on Cooperation in Intellectual property. Afta's aim is to bring down tariffs among the Asean countries to

zero by the year 2003 in order to create a market of some 400 million people that could serve as the basis of a coordinated regional industrialization. Burma has already provided some details on its proposed participation in Afta but its membership would distract Asean's attention from the Afta project and weaken the ARF as Burma's role will become the focal issue instead of pressing peace and security concerns.

The economies of Vietnam and the three applicants are all at a much lower stage of development, and three out of the four are marked by a much greater role of the state in their economies than the original Asean members. Indonesia's President Suharto has been the main pusher in bringing Burma into the grouping, his major consideration being the realpolitik of authoritarianism. Suharto is concerned about the effect of pressures for greater democracy throughout the region on Indonesia, dominated for more than 30 years by Suharto's single military party. Burma would strengthen the authoritarian pole in the balance of power within Asean, serving to neutralize the formal democratic regimes of the Philippines and Thailand and create a solid front against external criticism of the repressive practices in the majority of the Asean states.

The debate as to the timing of Burma's membership into Asean has taken on the dynamics of a "West vs. South" confrontation. This is unfortunate, but not a new tactic employed by Asean members sensitive to external criticism. The foreign ministers in making their recommendations, and the Asean leaders announcing the final "political decision" face a difficult situation, as they consider whether to harm Asean's good relationship with Washington and possibly the European Union, or whether to harm relations with a neighbor and not achieve the goal of having 10 members by the 30th anniversary of the regional body. The best way to save face would be to delay Burma's entry on the basis of a regional administrative decision, as Burma does not appear ready to fulfill its obligations. This is the recommendation of Thailand's former foreign minister Thanat Khoman, one of the signatures to the first Asean charter. Let's hope the Asean foreign ministers and leaders heed his advice.



V.J.C.

WOMEN

FLESH TRADE SEMINAR

During a recent seminar held in Bangkok, entitled "Children and Women in Crisis: The Responsibilities that Lie Ahead", experts from government and NGOs claimed that the rising number of women and children lured from neighbouring countries into prostitution in Thailand confirms the ineffectiveness of legal enforcement following the much vaunted introduction of harsh legal penalties for flesh trade racketeers and customers of young prostitutes. The experts also claimed that some foreigners are harassed and sexually abused by law enforcers. The experts urged the authorities to seriously tackle the problem by focusing efforts on prostitution rackets and corrupt law enforcement officers, while ensuring fair treatment for the foreign prostitutes. Participants of the seminar strongly agreed that women and children who are lured into the country should not be put in jail or treated as illegal immigrants as they had no intention of entering illegally.

It is accepted that victims of the flesh trade are easily deceived because they face poverty, unemployment, broken families or wish to support their family, and unstable governments in their own countries and that the business has major implications for the increase of HIV/AIDS infection and drug problems.

The seminar was organised by the US Information Service, the child rights group Asianet, the National Youth Bureau and NGOs.

V.J.C.

CYCLES OF FUTILITY

Hypothesis: Cycles of violence are made up of series of interconnected events.

If we recognize that the various manifestations of violence in Burma do not occur at random, then it follows that those 'watching' these events should not conduct their observations randomly. In particular, it is critical to the pursuit of human rights abuse documentation to understand the context in which specific events take place. Simply reporting the superficial details amounts to mere journalism. Genuine compassionate understanding evolves through adequate appreciation of the multi-dimensionality of all human interactions, good, bad or otherwise.

I want to share the following with you. I feel it is a vivid example of how tragic outcomes may be understood not as hiccups in some kind of social vacuum but rather as the products of self-replicating cycles of violence.

Loo Pleh Township is a part of Pa'an District, Karen State, an area that stretches from the Hlaing Bwe River in the west to the Dawna Range in the east, north of Kawkaeik. It is largely flat agricultural land occupied by traditional farming communities. It has also long been shared militarily by units on both sides of a prolonged civil war, the rebel Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops using the Dawna Range from which to launch their activities. The majority of the villagers throughout this region have had contact of one form or another with KNLA units over the years, and this adds a dimension of difficulty to their relationship with the *Tatmadaw* (Burma Army) columns who are increasingly coming to take a position of authority over their lives.



Naw Ter Kee villagers carry their few valuable possessions into the mountains.

In light of this unstable relationship Col. Nyunt Hsaung, Commander of Infantry Battalion (IB) 28, gave an order on February 1, 1997 to three villages under his jurisdiction, Pee T'khat, Naw Ter Kee and Kawt P'nweh Koh. The village leaders were required to give the precise locations of the KNLA units operating in their vicinity, or all would have to relocate their villages to new sites, beginning from February 16, to be completed by March 6. Pee T'khat, in particular, is a significant and well-established village, although its numbers have dwindled in the last year particularly due to activities of the Democratic Kayin (Karen) Buddhist Army (DKBA), which has sought to drive a wedge into the village's religiously mixed population.

Needless to say, the villagers were less than enthusiastic about either alternative presented to them by the IB 28 Commander, and prior to the specified date, all of the villagers contributed what money they could, and purchased food for the *Tatmadaw* officer: oil, beans, pork, chicken,

condensed milk, cake and Sprite. They forwarded this gift to the commander, requesting permission to stay in their own villages. Regrettably, Nyunt Hsaung had his cake and ate it too, accepting the sorrowful bribe but refusing to repeal his order. As the appointed date approached, the people began to leave their villages, although at least one old woman was heard filling the silence with traditional epic poems long after most of the others had left.

Since the so-called "relocation sites", devoid of water supplies and tenable land, presented an unappealing choice, the majority of villagers who left their homes did not stick to the letter of the commander's instructions and scattered to an array of locations. They fled to other villages, the jungled hillsides, and the tenuous refugee camps in Thailand where per-

haps for the youth there exists the future prospect of a marginal income from a Bangkok sweatshop. Subsequently, about a week after the March 6 deadline, there was a mobilization of IB 28 troops to regional villages, in an effort to resecure the cooperation of those who had not yet fled very far.

Among these troops was a unit of about 30 soldiers led by Company Commander Capt. Win Myint. During daylight hours on February 14, this *Tatmadaw* unit had halted in Hteh But village, to the southeast of Pee T'khat. A KNLA unit launched a surprise attack on the *Tatmadaw* soldiers while they were inside the village, immediately killing six soldiers, and a seventh died later in the day from severe injuries that had prevented him from fleeing with his comrades. Among the corpses was one that would have been no more than 12 years of age. Whatever cycle of violence (that is, oppression) that had led him to become a combatant in this futile misadventure had acquired the highest price from him, and this child became yet another statistic on an "enemies killed" list somewhere. He and his almost equally young associate, who managed to survive, were well known to villagers in the region; because they were young and their bodies still small, they were regularly called upon by their superiors to crawl under houses and shoot poultry with slingshots.

Another of the corpses revealed the following (edited) order:

Currently... be on alert... (The relocated villagers) must not relocate to their relatives' villages, no exceptions. If anyone fails to relocate (to the specified sites) within the specified time frame, there will be shooting and the village will be burnt down. Therefore all village leaders must agree to this by signature to show that they will obey and respond.

The villagers of Hteh But had fled the moment fighting erupted; however, they began to return during the nighttime, and on subsequent days, in order to collect personal possessions, cooking utensils, food, etc., and then flee back into the hillsides.

On February 18, a large contingent (200-300) of *Tatmadaw* soldiers cautiously reentered the village for the first time since the ambush. Having examined and buried the now bloated corpses of their former companions they proceeded to plunder the village of its remaining contents, mostly clothing and basic household items, taking away nine bullock-cart loads of possessions.

From both need and habit, people continued

...CONT.,

to secretly return to Htah But village, and it was during the daytime of February 20 that Naw Paw Kler Moo, seven years old, was in the village with her parents when the IB 28 soldiers arrived. As they fled, she became separated from her parents. No exact details of what happened are available, as only the soldiers themselves were witnesses, but the second bullet-pierced corpse of a child was left lying in Hteh But village that week.

In what way were the lives and deaths of these two children different? Do the few years between the ages of the two children make a difference? That one was male, the other female? That we know the name of one, have a photograph of the other? For me, all these superficial differences fail to distinguish the utterly futile and irreversible outcome of both short lives. The application of even the dimmest contextual light does appear to blur the distinctions between combatant and civilian, perpetrator and victim, right and wrong. In this atmosphere, rhetoric and diatribe evaporate. We are left with only these continually revolving cycles of futility, where violence and injustice accomplish nothing, only adding momentum to a continuing cycle of violence and injustice.

There is a sadly ironic postscript. Subsequent to these events, IB 28 was re-deployed to another region. The new *Tatmadaw* commander in the region has now announced that people are free to return to their villages, as the relocation order was not of his doing. Apparently, this is far from the first time that replacement military officers have immediately countermanded their predecessors instructions. It is understood that to date most villagers have been reluctant to return, although at least a few of the community leaders have done so, and perhaps one old woman never left. At the time of writing, nothing more is known of the conditions of Hteh But village and the lives of Hteh But village people.



N.P.T.

*Chicken killers strike a pose:
the young boy on the right
was killed on February 14.*



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THE COMBINED POWER OF GOVERNMENT IMPOSED SANCTIONS AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

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The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"The Burmese have also made it clear that the Burmese who return must be Burmese." – **Tak province governor Pongpoyom Wasaputi** after a security meeting to discuss the Thai-Burmese border, explaining that the Slorc does not want any non-Burman ethnic minorities repatriated.

"Sorry, but all deals go to firms from countries with coherent foreign policies." – Slorc reply to US sanctions as reported in the article "The Burma Boycotts Start to Pay Off" by **Patrice Piquard**.

"Some telephone lines in Burma don't work for technical reasons, some for political reasons" – **Aung San Suu Kyi**, explaining to a reporter why he had difficulty contracting her by phone.

"Burmese leaders are on notice that, unless the clouds of repression are lifted, they will face investment sanctions under US law." – **Madeleine Albright**, US Secretary of State, a week before President Clinton approved the imposition of economic sanctions against Burma.

"[Sanctions] cut off American companies from places in the world where we should be involved." – **Unocal chairman Roger Beach** on the decision to impose economic sanctions.

"We're going to work very hard to get Myanmar into Asean." – **Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad** commenting on international pressure on Asean not to admit Burma.

"It is a powerful message to US and other [foreign] companies that this is not a good place to do business if you do so in the US." – **Kent Wiedemann**, US charge d'affaires to Burma.

"As in the case of South Africa and apartheid, a coordinated international effort which includes sanctions, is the most effective way of achieving democracy in Burma." – **Australian Democrats**, April 23 media release statement.

"Drug traffickers and their families are among the leading backers of high-profile infrastructure projects in Burma. They launder their money with impunity in banks controlled by military." – **Robert Gelbard**, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

"We can and we will use our legislative capabilities to help restore democracy in Burma." – **Peter Vallone**, New York City Council Speaker, on the city's selective purchasing legislation, passed on May 14.

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