BURMA ISSUES

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"They are basically losing a generation. Their infant mortality and life expectancy rates are as bad as you might find in the worst nations in Africa."

– A Burma-based diplomat describing living conditions outside Rangoon

Painting by: Tin Aung Win

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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ASEAN: NOW WE ARE NINE

"Burma's future and Asean's are now joined. And now, more than ever, Burma's problems need an Asean solution." – *US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright*

"It is inconceivable how Asean can remain to be a potent and credible international entity when one of its members is at the verge of civil war and the government of another member is abhorred by much of the international community." – *Darmp Sukontasap, lecturer in international relations at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University*

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) celebrated its 30th birthday by expanding its membership to include Burma and Laos, while Cambodia's admission was delayed following the political crisis in the country in early July. The birthday bash coincided with the 9th anniversary of the popular uprising in Burma on August 8, 1988. The hypocrisy of Asean's refusal to endorse Cambodia's Hun Sen, while accepting Burma whose ruling junta is an illegitimate regime, has not gone without criticism from Asean's Western dialogue partners, activists, and NGOs. The admission of Burma and Laos is another step toward the goal of a 10-member association which was envisaged by Asean's founders three decades ago. However, by linking itself so closely with Burma and Cambodia, Asean now has the responsibility of helping to resolve two very complex problems in the region. By accepting Burma, Asean in effect has accepted the responsibility to try to bring political change to that country, and has also been entrusted by the international community to return peace to Cambodia. Now the heat is being turned up; some high-profile 'Aseans' are publicly discussing changing its policy of "non-intervention" in internal affairs to a new policy of "intervention with approval" or "constructive intervention." At the fourth Asean Regional Forum (ARF), Asean's dialogue partners, most notably the US, Astralia, Canada, and the European Union (EU), called on Asean to use its expanding influence in bringing about political change in Burma. Judging by the consistent refusals of Burma's foreign minister, Ohn Gyaw, to acknowledge any urgent need for political reforms, Asean has a challenging task ahead of it.

"Human rights and regional security are inextricably linked....The security of the nation states begins with the security of the civil society of which they are composed." *– Rory Mungoven, AI*

Far Eastern Economic Review journalists Hibbert and Vatikiotis asked: "How does Asean justify admitting Burma while excluding Cambodia, when the leaders of both regimes seized power at the barrel of a gun?" Asean's response to such criticism is that it has styled itself primarily as an economic organization; the chief, really the only, requirement for which is a willingness to trade freely with others. Considering Burma is planning to seek financial aid from Asean to spur an economy depressed by depreciation of the kyat, it seems Asean's homework was rather slapdash. While Burma is facing an economic crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has demanded that the military regime improve its democracy and human rights record and open dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic minorities before aid will be granted. The European Union, the US and Canada cited Burma's human rights record as the reason they are not prepared to extend the funds for development cooperation to assist the new members, as Asean requested them to do at the recent meetings. Burma's generals may even need to buy their Asean membership on credit. A recent article in the *Bangkok Post* described the costs of being an Asean member: Asean members are liable for picking up the tab for delaying Cambodia's entry, a total of $50,000 to be shared evenly among the nine members, plus sharing the group's $6.325 million budget which had previously been divided into ten. Burma's share for this year is $585,648 because Asean is two months into its fiscal year. In addition, the new members must pay $1 million each to the Asean Fund and $50,000 to the Asean Science Fund as up-front membership dues. Considering recent speculation that Burma's government is almost bankrupt (*Bangkok Post*, Oct. 8 & 18, 1996), where is Burma going to find the money, and why did Asean believe Burma had it?

Geopolitical factors seem to have outweighed a host of other considerations. Burma shares its borders with both of the two big powers in the region: China and India. If there is any one country in the region that particularly worries Asean, it is China. Beijing is Burma's biggest arms supplier and recently signed an economic pact with Rangoon. At the beginning of 1994, Asean was so concerned by China's southward push into Burma, the grouping thought the only way to halt it was to immediately embrace Burma, regardless of the regional and international ramifications.

A lesson that may be sinking in, is that just as the the group cannot ignore international alliances, it must also respond to internal developments in the country which can destabilize regional security. As Rory Mungoven, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Program Director, commented in a recent statement: "Human rights and regional security are inextricably linked....The security of the nation states begins with the security of the civil society of which they are composed." The thousands of refugees that flooded Thailand this year, and increasing numbers now fleeing Cambodia, illustrate that human rights violations or political repression is not just an "internal affair", as human rights issues directly engage the international responsibilities and national interests of other states. Asean prides itself on its strict adherence to the principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs" of member countries.

Jusuf Wanadi, chairman of Asean-Isis, a current policy-study group based in Jakarta, comments that exceptions to Asean's highly valued rule of 'nonintervention' have taken place under the banner of 'constructive engagement'. The 'Asean' way of constructive engagement is facilitated through private consultations and deliberations, and only through public declarations if the situation worsens. Asean's response to the Cambodian crisis could point to a radical shift in Asean's approach, and Asean members have voiced their desire to take a bold interventionist role when member countries face internal strife. Malaysia's acting Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said in July that "(Asean) must now move from being a largely reactive organization to one that is proactive... Perhaps it is now appropriate for Asean to seriously consider the idea of 'constructive interventions'." Who knows whether Anwar has had his fingers rapped by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad for those comments, but Thailand's foreign minister, Prachuab Chaiyasan, has voiced support for the idea, saying that the policy needs rethinking as "growing interdependence in the region means events in one country can send shock waves throughout the region." There will no doubt be many discussions, according to the 'Asean way', before there is public declaration of a change in approach.

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REPATRIATION TO A POSITIVE FUTURE

Over 120,000 people from Burma are presently living in refugee camps scattered along the Thai-Burma border. Some have already been here for nearly fourteen years, while others have just recently arrived. Repatriation back to their fields and villages is a dream which has never faded from their minds. But fear of being repatriated before they feel confident that their lives will be safe and secure has left the refugees in a state of continual mental stress.

The issue for discussion, therefore, is not whether or not repatriation should take place, but rather when and under what conditions that repatriation will have long-lasting, positive results. This discussion is crucial, not just for the refugees themselves, but also for Burma's neighboring states and the international community – all of whom can face continued and perhaps even more serious problems if great care is not taken to insure that voluntary repatriation, not refoulement, is the final result.

Some Issues Meriting Discussion Prior to Repatriation

It needs to be stressed that the majority of refugees now in Thailand have not fled battlefields. Interviews carried out by a wide variety of human rights organizations indicate that physical abuses by the Burmese military, as well as military policies which have resulted in destruction of food supplies and people's livelihood, are the main reasons people flee. Life in the refugee camps has not been good for most refugees, but their fear of continued abuse by the Burmese military and the hardships of life created by military policy, have forced them to opt for exile in a strange land rather than the terror of life in their own homes.

Truly voluntary repatriation of the refugees must be preceded by an international guarantee that the abuses they fled in the first place will not be repeated. This international guarantee must be supported by a process for appropriate international and NGO bodies to monitor the return of the refugees and their rebuilding of lives and livelihoods.

A second issue will greatly impact the voluntary repatriation of refugees is the right of the refuges to return to their traditional homes and villages. Many of these areas were ostensibly cleared of local populations in order to "protect" military-encouraged development projects. For example, vast areas around and south of the gas pipeline being constructed by Total (France) and Unocal (USA) in Mergui-Tavoy District of Karen State are now almost totally devoid of the villagers who have occupied and farmed these lands for generations. Many of these villagers believe that the Burmese military's campaign through their area was specifically aimed at forcibly relocating them so that the pipeline, roads, and other related development projects could be carried out without interference from the indigenous populations.

People want to return to their traditional homes. This is where their ancestors are buried. This is where they have live since birth, working to grow their own food and raise their families. These are indigenous lands, and the indigenous people should have the right to return to them once again.

Just five minutes walk inside Thailand, newly-arrived refugees stops in the forest for a rest, not knowing where to go next. [February 1997 KHRG]

A third issue is that of the right to self-determination. Ethnic groups have their own identities, languages, cultures and traditions. They deserve the right to practice these freely, and to have a voice in how their land will be administered and developed and how their children will be educated.

The Benefits

Cooperative discussions on these and other important issues prior to any repatriation of the refugees, will benefit almost all parties involved. For the external refugees, voluntary repatriation resulting from clear agreements on the above issues will mean the chance to finally begin rebuilding their lives. Many of them have lived in refugee camps most of their lives and have had to learn to cope with uncertainty, hopelessness, and despair. With proper guarantees, they will be able to return to their old homes and will not have to think about the possibility of needing to flee once again to Thailand for safety.

With guarantees for safety, internally displaced persons in Burma, probably numbering well over one and a half million, would finally be able to emerge from their hideouts deep in the jungles. Their days of terror and starvation would be over. Together with the external refugees, they could reestablish their fields and occupations, thus bringing benefits to the entire country of Burma. Their days of fleeing for their lives to Thailand or to isolated jungle hideouts would be over. Thailand also has much to gain by insuring the true voluntary repatriation of the refugees. Presently Thailand not only is host to 120,000 refugees in camps, but also hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants from Burma who have filtered across the border and are seeking work in virtually every province of the country. A repatriation of refugees from the camps before the proper conditions inside Burma are met could well result in thousands of these repatriated people finding their way back into Thailand's interior to seek employment for survival. So, even though the refugee camps would be closed, the number of illegal immigrants in the country would probably increase, creating more complex problems for the Thai government to deal with. It will benefit Thailand to make certain that refugees from Burma return to a country of stability, peace, and guaranteed protection of human rights and self-determination.

Benefits of true voluntary repatriation to the international community can also not be ignored. The international community, as represented by the United Nations and its various bodies, is presently dealing with tremendous human crises in countries like Rwanda and Bosnia. Even after so much expenditure of money and human energy, peace and tranquillity for the people remains uncertain.

If the international community were to take a more proactive approach in Burma, they would not only save themselves many serious future problems, but could also save countless lives of people in Burma. It is inexcusable for them to wait until the situation in Burma is in such desperate straits as has been seen in places like Rwanda or Bosnia. Prevention, in this case, is most certainly better than attempted cure.

Repatriation of the refugees is a goal, not only for Thailand, but also for the refugees themselves. However, care must be taken to insure that, once the refugees have gone home, they will not find the need to return to Thailand and start the cycle of frustration and suffering all over again.

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N. Chan

August 1997

BORDER AREA DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: AS YOU SOW...'

"The adage 'As you sow, so shall you reap' is also interpreted in the most practical sense when one speaks of people getting together in the thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, contributing to the accomplishment of a task that would benefit the general wellbeing of the State.... For huge undertakings as the building of railroads there is much manpower needed. We have that plenty, in the villages in the immediate area of the project. With little cudgeling, they get together to help."

– Perspectives, state-run New Light of Myanmar, March 2, 1995

For the insurget groups negotiating ceasefire agreements with the Slorc in recent years, development assistance via the Slorc's Border Area Development Program (BADP) has become familiar as the main reward on offer in exchange for putting down their guns. Indeed, Burma's generals make it very clear that any discussions with ceasefire groups will be limited to business and border development projects only; that 'political' issues are not up for discussion, now or ever. Sixteen of Burma's insurgent groups, many of whom have been at war for more than 30 years, with large displaced and poor populations, have accepted the deal only to find out that the reality of the BADP falls far short of the hype. The 'carrot' brought out to lure insurgents into ceasefires with the Slorc has turned out to be the same stick they have known all along, only the rhetoric has changed and now the stick is being wielded ostensibly for the good of the people.

Caption: "Senior General Than Shwe presenting gifts to Tatmadawmen taking part in building Taunggyi-Shwenyaung Railroad - MNA", from the New Light of Nyanmar, June 3, 1997. The more than 20,000 civilians who, according to human rights organizations, have labored on the same railway were not in attendance.

Enlisting the Army

Recognized by the UN in 1987 as one of the least developed nations in the world, Burma's government has plenty of reasons to be talking about development. Some of the few statistics available on Burma, as cited by the International Monetary Fund in its 1996 report, suggest that 10 years later, Burma's level of development remains below that of Vietnam, Indonesia, and even Bangladesh, some of the poorest countries in the region. Faced with such fundamental problems, development is for Burma a matter of survival. For the Slorc, also, development is a matter of survival. The Slorc recognizes that it can gain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community if it can show that under its rule, the level of development in Burma is actually improving. In addition, if the Burmese people can be convinced that the Slorc's rule may actually improve their standard of living, Burma's generals know that they are in less danger of seeing another popular uprising like the one that nearly toppled them in 1988, and less likely to see a large-scale renewal of the brutal ethnic conflicts that they have so recently managed to suppress. However, in the border areas now under ceasefire the Slorc must face the daunting task of making good on its development promises with no money to back them up. The lack of funds has not deterred them. Apparently reasoning that most things can be got as easily with fear as money, the Slorc has applied its primary resource, the Burmese army, to the problem of development.

For one thing, the Burmese army, or *Tatmadaw* is one institution in Burma that is already semi-developed, well-funded, and growing, in spite of the fact that widespread ceasefires indicate Burma's military needs are shrinking. The US Embassy in Rangoon's July 1996 report on economic trends in Burma stated, "Neither the absence of any evident external military threat nor the signing of cease-fires-in-place with sixteen armed ethnic insurgent groups appears to presage any slowing of the Slorc's military buildup." Indeed, one in every 32 work-eligible people in Burma is in the military, a body which this year has grown to 475,000 troops, larger than the US army and one of the largest standing armies in the world. Based on the Slorc's reported spending for FY 95/96, for every kyat the government spent on 'border development', more than 26 Kyat went to the Tatmadaw. The US Embassy estimates SLORC defense spending at much higher levels, as Slorc reports do not include large hidden expenditures ranging from fuel and energy, health care and rice subsidies, to land confiscation, and use of forced unpaid labor as porters, servants, and manual laborers.

Doing the Work

Extensive evidence from central, urban, and border ceasefire areas alike shows that civilians are forced to do the bulk of the labor on regional development projects. In response to mounting international criticism, the Slorc issued a directive in June 1995, prohibiting unpaid labor in national development projects. In June 1996, the Slorc announced a new initiative to put the Tatmadaw to work on infrastructure projects. These moves have generated only cosmetic changes to an established system. While it seems apparent that Burma's military is on the payroll for many development projects, there remains little evidence that Tatmadawmen are actually doing much labor.

The Ye-Tavoy railway under construction since 1993 has excited strong international criticism due to the massive documented use of local forced labor. During the 1995-96 dry season, a Mon human rights group estimated that, based on copies of actual work orders submitted to local leaders, the project used no less than 45,000 civilian laborers each day. In October 1996, in one of the township along the line, Tatmadaw battalions reportedly stopped using unpaid civilian labor and provided their own soldiers to work on the railway. By July 1996, the soldiers seem to have run out of resources or lost their resolve, and many villages in the township were again

called on to provide labor on the line. At another location on the Ye-Tavoy line, the local military apparently made an agreement with the government to do the construction themselves, accepting a large advance payment for the labor (reportedly 1 or 2 million kyat per batallion). Soon daunted by the amount of labor they had agreed to do, the soldiers again began forcing the locals to contribute work to the project. It proves difficult to convince someone to pick up a shovel who has been used to using a gun to get things done. Apparently recognizing this, commanders reportedly disarmed soldiers assigned to the Eindayaza-Hsinku section of the railway before sending them to work there. According to local sources, dozens of soldiers consequently ran away from the worksite.[1]

Slorc government reports estimate that "public donations in cash, kind and services" averaged 40% of the total cost of development projects since 1989. Based on extensive reports of forced labor to support development projects, it is easy to see that the actual value of the "people's contributions" must be much higher. On most development projects, labor is conscripted from local villages via written commands submitted to local government leaders. Villages in the area of the project must provide a set number of workers each day, who usually go to work on a rotation basis, in 'shifts' of between one and fifteen days. Villagers who cannot attend their set rotation must pay fines to 'hire' labor in their place, though no one on the worksite is paid more than a token amount. For example, 30 villages along the 100 km-long Three Pagoda Pass-Thanbyuzayat Motor Road in Mon state must send workers daily to work on the road. People who could not attend had to pay 250 kyat a day and provide rice for the hired laborer (the minimum daily wage for public-sector employees is 60 kyat). For prison laborers in Burma, the shift is continuous. In Saigang Division of Chin State, widespread reports of forced prison labor on the "New Kabaw Valley Project", a development project funded by the UN and administered under the Slorc's BADP. An escapee from the New Kabaw Valley estimated that in the past 4 years, half of the prisoners on the project had either died or escaped.[2] Labor on roads, railroads, prisons, army camps, schools, police stations, bridges, dams, and weirs throughout Burma is performed in this way. Lengthy projects continue at an often devastating cost, when laborers must neglect their farms and families to perform required labor, and when abuse, accidents, and disease take their toll.

Paying the Price

Not only must Burmese civilians do the work on development projects, but they get to foot

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BURMA DEVELOPMENT INDEX[1]

Ranking of Burma in the world Human Development Index, 1996: 133/174[2]
Slorc development spending since 1989, millions of kyat: 3,759.91[3]
Breakdown of Slorc development spending since 1989 –
- 'Other': 42.49%[4]
- Roads and Bridges: 29%
- Education: 7%
- Agriculture and Livestock: 7%
- Health: 5%
- Public Relations: 4%
- Energy: 3%
- Telecommunications: 3%
- Forestry: 0.01%

INFRASTRUCTURE

Slorc estimate of "People's contributions" to roads built in FY 94-95: 33%[5]
Roads repaired since 1989: 4229 km[6]
People forced to labor on the Pakokku-Monywa section of the Chaung oo-Pakokku Railroad: 921,753[7]
Est. number of households assigned work duties on the Thanbyuzayat Motor Road in Mon State: 2,600[8]
People forced to build a 100-mile extension to the Ye-Tavoy railway: 200,000[9]
People forced to work on Bassein Airport extension: 30,000[10]
Number prisoners in all the camps working on the New Kabaw Valley Project in Chin State: 4,000[11]

EDUCATION

Slorc estimate of "people's contributions" to education in FY 94-95: 40%[12]
Number of students attending new schools built since 1989: 34,322[13]
Number of school children whose schools were closed for 5 months by government order: 7,000,000[14]
Number of universities which remain closed as of August, 1997: 30[15]
Total of forced contributions to one new high school built in Thayet Taung township: $11,079 or 1,396,000 kyat[16]

AGRICULTURE

Slorc estimate of "People's contributions" to agricultural projects FY 94-95: 33%[17]
Number of "agricultural supervisors" stationed throughout the countryside in Burma, who's job it is to ensure that farmers comply with agricultural quotas: 7,000[18]
Burma's rice exports in 1995, 1996: 1 million[19]
Rice export target set by Burma for 1996, tons: 1.5 million[20]
Actual rice exports for 1996, tons: 112,000 tons[21]

COMMUNICATIONS

Televisions per 1000 people: 1.9[22]
TV Broadcast Stations: 1[23]
Prison sentence for operation of an unlicensed satellite television receiver in Burma: up to 3 years[24]

FORESTS

Slorcspending on forestry projects since 1989: 190,000 kyat[25]
19,000 kyat at the 1996 exchange rate: $1,508[26]
Saw mills built by Burma's Forestry Department since 1989: 12[27]
Amount villagers paid in 1996 for cutting 1 ton of logs in Shan State: $2 (250 kyat)[28]
Traders selling price in 1996 of 1 ton of logs in Shan State: $95 or (12,000 kyat)[29]
Value of the contracts Slorc made with 40 Thai companies in 1989: $112 million[30]
Value of Burma's teak exports in 1995/1996: $175.2 million[31]

Slorc government defense spending in 1995/1996: $155 million[32]

❖ See page 7 for footnotes.

Continued from 'Asean', page 2

While Asean debates the new role it might play, it faced a concerted call at the fourth ARF from its Western dialogue partners: the US, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, Canada; to take direct responsibility for fostering democracy in Burma. US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said there is general agreement among Asean members that the organization will be a positive influence in encouraging Burma to open a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer said Australia hopes that Asean will use its influence with Burma to improve human rights and encourage a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. However, not long after, Downer met with Slorc representative Ohn Gyaw to discuss the democratization process and human rights situation in Burma, and left the meeting saying that he was "disappointed". Canada's foreign minister Lloyd Axeworthy was so "disappointed" with his similar discussion with Ohn Gyaw that he announced additional economic sanctions on Burma. In a statement, Axeworthy said: "Burma's military leaders have made no effort to improve the current situation and have repeatedly failed to respond to the international community's attempts to open channels of communication." European Union (EU) President Jaques Poos said that the EU has no plan for direct dialogue with Burma on assistance under the Asean framework, and that for now, "it is out of the question that we will extend [the EU-Asean cooperation] agreement to Burma." The other Western dialogue partners have also indicated that they will not extend development cooperation with Asean to Burma, showing how seriously they view the situation of suppression of human rights and democracy in Burma, and the role Asean has adopted in accepting Burma into the grouping. Considering that the grouping's stated aims, as expressed in the Bangkok Declaration founding the Association in 1967, are "To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law," the ARF is merely trying to hold Asean to its word.

The challenge, as voiced by a network of more than 40 organizations in Asean member states, is for Asean and its dialogue partners "to implement a coordinated and comprehensive strategy to endure the prompt cessation of human rights violations and the restoration of democracy in Burma." Asean's response to its widened responsibilities has been to make four specific proposals: the junta should carry out democratic reforms; ongoing work on Burma's new constitution must be completed as soon as possible so that national elections for the legislature can be held; a dialogue should be launched with Suu Kyi; and measures must be taken to ensure that Muslims and other minorities are treated fairly. Asean realizes that without changes, Burma will remain friendless, which now has implications for Asean due to the relationship between Asean and its dialogue partners. Prachuab said Asean policy on Burma must produce concrete results: "It can no longer just be constructive. It has to be comprehensive engagement and a policy that produces results." However, in spite of new talk about Asean making use of its increased influence in the region the Western dialogue partners were given a stinging farewell as Asean voiced collective support for Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's proposal to review the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other related UN documents. Was that *Asian* values or *Asean* leader values?

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V.J.C.

Asian/Asean values will be discussed in next month's edition.

Continued from 'Border Area Development', page 5

the bill as well. The Slorc's own numbers on development spending are revealing. A June 16 article in the *New Light of Myanmar* boasted that the Slorc had spent more than 4.8 billion kyat on border development projects since 1989. Over the same period, it claimed, local ministries 'donated' almost 1.2 billion kyat to their own local development projects, an acknowledgment that nearly 20% of cash spent on development in Burma since 1989 came not from the government but from the people.

A young Burman on his way to do a shift of forced labor on a road in Tenasserim Division. The worksite is 6 hours walk from his village. He is carrying his own food for the five-day shift. [KHRG, Feb 1997]

Though the government may claim that these revenues consisted of 'donations' given in a fervor of enthusiasm for these benevolent projects, the propaganda is contraverted by endless reports from all regions of Burma of systematic forced taxation to support development projects. A villager in Chin State reported having to work on the Zee Chaung hydro project, "Now the villagers have to pay 100,000 kyats for a meter box to connect to the power supply from this hydro project.... We have to construct a road by ourselves from my village to another village. This is a new road under a government scheme, but they never supplied anything toward it and we had to collect money amongst the villagers."[3] A villager reported from Mong Hsat in Shan state reported, "At the present time all the villages around Mong Hsat, each village has to give 5 viss [8 kg] of meat every week. Now they are building a new bridge, the Nam Hkok bridge. The villagers have to pay to build that bridge. It costs 100,000 kyat.... For now, most of the people are patient and stay there. But some who cannot pay the money for fees to the Burmese run away."[4] A refugee from Mon state reported, "My village Kyauk Aing, composed of 70 households, is normally required to pay several charges/taxes each month, including portering charges, charges for the hire of labor on railway construction, and compulsory contributions to a variety of local funds. The household has to pay a total of at least 1,000 kyats every month. Just before I left the village, I had to sell off the pair of my gold earrings worn on my ears to be able to pay the said charges/taxes. On the other hand, rice costs 60 kyats for a Pyi [1/16 of a unit basket, or about 8 condensed-milk tins]. As a result, the people in many households in my village cannot even afford two meals a day regularly."[5] Reports are widespread of land confiscation to build or widen roads, airports, hotels. Even cemeteries have been confiscated to make way for development projects, and the families have had to arrange for the relocation of their relatives remains. It is hard to imagine how forcing Burma's poorest people to pay for roads, dams and bridges, and taking their land for these projects, is expected to improve the people's living. But such is the 'development model' being implemented in Burma.

Burma's generals seem to have concluded that by focusing the attention of an uneasy population on the lure of economic gain, they can distract attention away from political demands, and buy Burma a kind of peace. Visitors to Rangoon report that many urban Burmese, captive listeners to the reports of the state-run media, have little idea of the scale of the brutality that lies behind the Border Area Development Program. The hundreds of thousands of Burmese, supposedly the beneficiaries of this program, who are forced work on, and pay for these projects know a different side of the BADP. In spite of the volumes of earth being moved in Burma's border areas, Burma development programs are only an elaborate staging being built at the cost of real stability. If this kind of development is the means by which the Slorc intends to sow the seeds for the future of Burma, it may be worth reflecting what kind of crop might be grown from the seeds of misinformation, corruption, and brutality.

❖ *E.M.*

1 Mon State, Forced labor on the Ye-Tavoy railway construction during the year 1996, Mon Information Service, December 1996.
2 New Kabaw Valley (or) Death Messenger Project, ABSL, May 1 1997.
3 Slorc Abuses in Chin State, KHRC #97-03, March 1997.
[illegible] nterviews about Shan State, KHRG #96-27, Karen Human Rights Group, July 27, 1996.
[illegible] lon Information Service, 1996.

Burma Development Index footnotes (see page 5)

1 Format inspired by *Harper's Index*, *Harper's* magazine.
2 Human Development Index, UNDP, 1996.
3 "Senior General Than Shwe calls for expediting infrastructural development, eradication of narcotics in border areas," *New Light of Myanmar*, June 13, 1997.
4 'Other' is described as money spent: "on these projects and other services such as trade, social welfare and cooperatives, mineral exploration, housing, religion, home affairs, general projects undertaken jointly with international organizations, cash assistance and expenditures of the Work Committee office and its branch offices." *NLM*, June 13 1997.
5 Source: GOB Annual Review, 1995, quoted by the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, *Country Commercial Guide to Burma*, July 1996.
6 *NLM*, June 13, 1997.
7 Burma Action Group, London, 1995/96, quoted in *New Internationalist* 1996.
8 *Conscription of Forced Labor in Three Pagoda Pass – Thanbyuzayat Motor Road Construction*, Human Rights Foundation of Monland, February 1997.
9-10 Burma Action Group, London, 1995/96, quoted in *New Internationalist*, 1996.
11 *New Kabaw Valley (or) Death Messenger Project*, ABSL, May 1 1997.
12 U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, July 1996.
13-15 *The Nation*, August 13, 1997.
16 *Life in the country*, Mon Information Service, July 1997.
17-18 US Embassy in Rangoon, July 1996.
19 *Bangkok Post*, October 8, 1996.
20-21 *Bangkok Post*, May 28, 1997.
22-23 *CIA World Factbook*, 1996.
24 US Department of State report on Burma, 1996.
25-27 *NLM*, June 13, 1997.
28-29 Interviews About Shan State, KHRG #96-27, July 27, 1996.
30 Burma Action Group, quoted in *New Internationalist*, 1996.
31-32 IMF, April 1997.
* Calculated at the 1996 unofficial exchange rate of 126 kyat/dollar.

READER QUESTIONNAIRE

Occupation: _____ **Nationality:** _____

Organization Name: _____

How long have you received Burma Issues? _____

Organization Type
Choose as many categories as apply.

- ☐ Individual (no org.)
- ☐ Academic
- ☐ Embassy/Diplomatic
- ☐ Human Rights
- ☐ Media (Newspaper, Radio, TV, etc.)
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Refugee/Aid
- ☐ Burmese organization
- ☐ Pro-Democracy
- ☐ Peace and Justice
- ☐ *Other:* _____

[illegible] are you interested in Burma?

Types of information
Please number the following categories of information on Burma, in the order of your level of interest, or importance to you in your work.

- ___ Civil War
- ___ Refugees
- ___ Politics
- ___ Economics
- ___ Human Rights Reporting
- ___ Environment
- ___ Other: _____

In your opinion, how effective is Burma Issues in the following areas?

	(❶) *Poor*				*Excellent* (❺)
Provides accurate and timely information on...					
Refugees	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Economics	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Human Rights	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Politics	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Civil War	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Environment	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Identifies major trends...	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Encourages international action with focus on economics and human rights...	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺
Helps focus attention on the root causes of the civil war...	❶	❷	❸	❹	❺

What suggestions do you have for improving Burma Issues?

Other comments:

Thank you for helping us improve our newsletter!

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The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"It has been, and serves as a national unifier of our cultural minorities, races and other groups." – Burmese Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw explaining one of the roles of the Myanmar Armed Forces during an interview with CNN

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"This is the government's step-by-step approach according to its own schedule ... We decided the time had come to meet with them, but it's not due to external pressure. It's premature at this stage to expect future meetings. It would depend on the deeds or actions the NLD will pursue in the future." – A senior Slorc official commenting on Khin Nyunt's 45 minute meeting with Aung Shwe, president of the NLD, Burma's leading opposition group

• • •

"Asean decided to ignore all the negatives and let them [the Burmese] in anyway. This is obviously the Slorc's way of saying 'thank you'." – A Rangoon-based diplomat commenting on Khin Nyunt's meeting Aung Shwe

• • •

"Reform has moved at a snail's pace and we look forward to such commitments given being actually fulfilled, not in a decade or half decade, but in a sensible time frame." – Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer

"With or without her [Aung San Suu Kyi] there will be democracy. With or without dialogue there will be democracy." – Slorc Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw

• • •

"I don't feel that Burma's presentation was credible at all." – EU President Jacques Poos after the Burmese Foreign Minister failed to give a time frame for the constitution

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"What I cannot understand is why Myanmar could be a member and Cambodia cannot." – Cambodia's Hun Sen talking about Asean membership

• • •

"We feel that there is some other agenda apart from making money. As you may have noticed Asean countries are targets ... We ask ourselves is it just speculation to make money or is it something else? We feel that there is some other agenda, especially by this particular person who is the patron of a foundation." – Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad insinuating that the financier George Soros, who established the Open Society Institute which funds some Burmese pro-democracy groups and organizations, was attacking Asean currencies to punish the group for welcoming Burma

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