

BURMA ISSUES

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"The government is doing so not because it is confronting difficulties in food sufficiency but because some Southeast Asian Nations are facing the problem of food shortages.... We are trying to boost agricultural production to extend help to them with a humanitarian spirit." – *SPDC Sec. 1 Khin Nyunt, urging farmers in southern Burma to increase their rice output, as quoted in the state-run New Light of Myanmar.*



Painting by Hsar Lah Wah, age 16, Huay Kaloke Refugee Camp.

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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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POLITICS OF STABILITY: CO-OPTING BURMA'S CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH THE USDA

In September, Burma marked three anniversaries: the 1988 crackdown on democracy demonstrators, the takeover of the government by the SLORC (now SPDC) and the formation of the National League for Democracy (NLD). In unprecedented political defiance over the last two months by the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition party announced its intention to convene parliament which has not been allowed to sit since the current government's sponsored election in 1990. Burma's junta has reacted by stepping up its offensive against Suu Kyi and the NLD ordering the arrest or detention of over 900 members of the party. Included were 200 people elected to parliament in the 1990 elections. Since the NLD's demand, a dozen rallies, each reportedly attended by over 20,000 people, have been held showing support for the military and denouncing the NLD. It is understood that the rallies are government sponsored, the attendees generally members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). Speakers at the rallies have condemned the NLD's call to the international community to impose economic sanctions against Burma, accusing Suu Kyi and the NLD of harming the stability and unity of the country and causing the current economic crisis. This public denouncing and scapegoating has been among the junta's most visible efforts to counter mounting pressure from the NLD. An interesting question is the composition of those who are attending these rallies – how real is Burma's civil society support for the SPDC? Has the USDA been an effective tool for the ruling junta in co-opting civil society?

A flourishing civil society is often viewed as a threat by regimes that don't wish to see their policies or programs undermined or questioned. Civil society is composed of institutions and groupings that are outside of, or autonomous to, government. The wary state will often sponsor mass organizations that are designed to provide a popular or mass base for state policies. Since 1962 the

military has effectively destroyed civil society in Burma, successfully controlling, co-opting or eliminating any organization that had potential beyond those at the most local level, such as village or ward Buddhist temples.¹ However, the regime has created its own 'civil society' in the form of the USDA. This Association was founded on

ters are members of the Central Executive Committee (CEC). The stated objectives of the USDA are exactly the same as the regime's. This was recognized officially and reported in the government mouthpiece *New Light of Myanmar (NLM)* in 1994, at a mass rally in Rangoon: "According to Secretary General U Than Aung, the rally was intended

to reflect the common desire of all Burmese for peace, tranquility and economic development. He said the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the government and the USDA share the same objective."²

The question of legitimacy is a troubling one for the regime. It realized early on, following the outcome of the 1990 election, that it needed a way to perpetuate its influence and attain support for its policies now and in the future when the constitution is finished and elections for a legislature are held. At each USDA Annual General Meeting (AGM), motions are tabled and unanimously approved by delegates firmly stating support for the code of conduct and duties and responsibilities of the Association, and the legitimacy of the *Tatmadaw's* role. For example, at the first AGM in 1994, secretaries of state and district USDA groups tabled motions supporting the SLORC for "upholding Our Three Main National Causes

– non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of sovereignty;" the participation of the *Tatmadaw* in "the national political leadership role of the future state," and the principle in the National Convention that "No part of the territory made up of regions, states, self-administration areas etc., shall ever secede from the Union."³

Perpetuity is a concern which the USDA addresses. The organization has significant community development and educational components to attract membership, with an emphasis on recruiting youth. The USDA organizes free courses such as computer trainings and English language classes for



September 15, 1993 shortly after the SLORC announced it would hold a national convention to write a new constitution.

The USDA is registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs as a social organization, however, it is explicitly mandated to support the role of the *Tatmadaw* (the armed forces of Burma, see box opposite page) and cannot be viewed as operating independently of the current regime. Chairman of the SPDC Gen. Than Shwe is the Patron of the USDA. The SPDC Secretary-3 is the Vice-Chairman, the Minister of Cooperative is the Secretary General, and the Ministers of Energy, Rail Transportation, and the Mayor of Rangoon are all secretaries. Another 11 government minis-

youth which are open to members and non-members who are then encouraged to join the USDA on course completion.⁴ Student members who perform well are also awarded prizes. The *NLM* reports frequently on these ceremonies, as in the recent article: "Cash, TVs for outstanding students, USDA associations....' a ceremony to donate cash for outstanding students and under-developed States and Divisions was held at USDA Executives Management Training School of Central Public Relations Unit in Hmawby [Mhawbi] Township, at 11 pm today."⁵ As one teacher from Karen state observed: "As for USDA, students and others join to get good opportunities. For example; on TV quiz shows, and contests, the prize winners are only USDA members. On the Burmese Jubilee quiz shows on TV Myanmar (Myawaddy) a girl gave a lot of wrong answers, but she won the prize because she was a USDA member."⁶

As a state-patronized organization, the USDA receives various economic concessions. At both the national and local level, it has an extensive range of business interests and activities which benefit members as well as providing support for the regime's market-oriented approach to the economy. The USDA owns bus and train transportation monopolies, plantations, rice milling, housing and real estate and can even tax local business.⁷ Participation in such enterprises is obviously attractive to a population that is suffering a severe economic recession.

However, aside from these perks (awards for outstanding performance of duties, prizes for academic performance, and economic concessions), it is believed that membership is not completely voluntary as townships have to fulfill quotas as demanded by the USDA Central Executive Committee. Members are expected to attend the opening ceremonies and rallies regularly reported in the *NLM*, or face fines. In particular, there is an implied understanding among civil servants that one needs to be a member to increase promotion prospects. Another benefit of membership is the reduced chance of being treated as a suspicious person. Members are accepted

as being "imbued with love for the nation and patriotism and like the Association's aims, are capable of living up to its Code of Conduct and are desirous of taking up its duties."⁸

The USDA is clearly used as a political tool by the junta to support its power base. At the third Annual General Meeting in 1996, U Than Aung indicated that membership was close to 5 million. It is believed to have in-

The UNION SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION was founded and registered as a social organization with the Home Affairs Ministry with effect from September 15, 1993.

The aims of the Association are: -

1. Non-disintegration of the Union
2. Non-disintegration of national unity.
3. Perpetuation of sovereignty.
4. Promotion and vitalization of national pride.
5. Emergence of a prosperous, peaceful and modern Union.

There are Four Oaths to be pledged by each Member of the Association which affirm the aims, and 11 parts to the code of conduct that a Member shall abide by. Included are: defend and protect the sovereignty and perpetuity of the Union; dutifully perform the tasks assigned by the Association; protect the rule of law and order and peace and tranquility.

Some of the duties and responsibilities of the Association are: -

1. to defend the independence and sovereignty of the Union,
2. to vitalize a keen sense of patriotism with a view to promoting national pride,
13. to render the *Tatmadaw* all-round assistance.

Other duties and responsibilities include: preserving and protecting national culture, assist in achieving rule of law and order and peace and tranquility, protecting State and public property, taking active part in rescue and relief work in case of disasters such as fire, flood, earthquake, storm and epidemics, assisting social development schemes for farmers and workers, and to strive for the affection and unity of the national races.

As reported by the *New Light of Myanmar*, 16 Sep 1993.

creased considerably in the last two years due to its expanding organization work, which is "carried out to have common beliefs and convictions to secure united and collective participation of Members ... In giving guidance to realize the objective, he said there should be ideology, policy and working programmes."⁹ Explicit support for the state was reiterated with the three main national causes which have been declared as state policy and to which the USDA is officially committed. Than Shwe further "observed that the way to national development will not be without obstructions and obstacles. That is why the four-point People's Desire has been laid down so as to *annihilate all destructive elements obstructing*

and hindering progress." He highlighted this as the ideology to be followed by USDA executives in discharging their organizational duties.

The potential of this rhetoric to materialize in destructive mobilization is real. Suu Kyi is constantly denounced for having married a foreigner, and even for having "alien" blood due to the fact that her mother, Daw Kyi Kyi, former ambassador to India, is Karen. A thousand people, believed to be connected with the USDA, attacked Suu Kyi's car in November 1996 with sticks and stones following a meeting denouncing her and the NLD. Members of the security forces stood by and did not do anything to prevent the attacks. "Neither did they make any attempt to arrest the perpetrators of the violence. On the contrary, after our cars had driven away, the mob settled down across the road and remained there for several hours...."¹⁰

The fourth Annual General Meeting

was held last month - the rhetoric members have been hearing leading up to the rallies blames Suu Kyi and the NLD for harming the stability and unity of the country and causing the current economic deterioration: "At a time when the State Peace and Development Council is striving for the development of the State day and night, external destructive forces who could not bear to see the economic development of the State, and internal axe-handles in collusion are re-

sorting to various means to impede the progress of the nation and to get the people poverty-stricken." (EC Member, Kachin State). There was a call "to crush internal axe-handles trying to disrupt the peace and tranquility and development of the nation and external destructive elements aiding and abetting them." (EC, Irrawaddy Division).¹¹

A major trigger of the 1988 uprising was a steep decline in the living standards of ordinary people.¹² Now, due to economic mismanagement, lower than expected rice yields contributing to steeply rising prices of food and other basic necessities, and the Asian economic crisis, the people's economic situ-

Continued on page 4

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ation has deteriorated. It is important for the regime that the current situation is not seen as linked to them – a reason for laying the blame elsewhere.

A point of speculation is how real is the support for the USDA in the hearts and minds of its members. The USDA has grown exponentially in numbers since its inception in 1993. The SPDC has successfully created a mass organization to support its power base at least on the surface. The difficulty in assessing whether the ideology as such is substantively supported by members is difficult to assess or analyze due to the pervasive climate of fear and distrust in Burma.¹³ A

few observations can be made. If the SPDC's power base declines or collapses, and the USDA also collapses, then it can be assumed that its members did not internalize the rhetoric. If the USDA partially collapses, continued involvement could be attributed to the benefits of membership. If the USDA continues unabated it can be assumed there is substantive support for the basis of the SPDC's control of Burma. Has the regime successfully co-opted civil society through the USDA, which will support, defend and perpetuate its policies?

V. Coakley

Endnotes, "USDA"

- 1 David Steinberg, "The Union Solidarity & Development Association: Mobilization and Orthodoxy," *Burma Debate* Jan/Feb 1997, p. 8.
- 2 Yindee Lertcharoenchoke, "SLORC believed behind huge Burmese rallies," *The Nation*, 17 Jan 1994.
- 3 "Motions tabled and unanimously approved by delegates to USDA Annual General Meeting (1994)," *New Light of Myanmar (NLM)*, 19 Sep 1994.
- 4 D. Steinberg, p. 9.
- 5 *NLM*, 15 Sep 1998.
- 6 BI internal report, 1996.
- 7 D. Steinberg, p. 9.
- 8 *NLM*, 16 Sep 1993.
- 9 *NLM*, 13 Nov 1996.
- 10 "Letters from Burma: Aung San Suu Kyi, Mob attack had tacit approval of Slorc," *The Nation*, 19 Nov 1996.
- 11 *NLM*, 15 Sep 1998.
- 12 Aung Naing Oo, foreign affairs secretary of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front, "Burma's Time to Choose: A worsening economy creates an explosive situation," *Asiaweek*, 2 Oct 1998.
- 13 Bertil Lintner, "Surface Calm: Student protesters lie low and regroup," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 Jan 1997.

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Department of Labor Report

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's recent report, evidence points to the use of forced labor by U.S.-owned Unocal and French Total on the Yadana natural gas pipeline joint venture with the Burmese government. The report followed a probe into reports of human rights abuses associated with the pipeline project but also drew from worker accounts and Total documents. It was concluded that the two oil giants had used manual labor recruited by the Burma Army and that villagers were forcibly relocated and coerced into serving as porters for soldiers protecting the project. The report stopped short of directly accusing the two companies of using forced labor, noting that Labor Department officials were unable to confirm allegations because they could not get to the project sites. Unocal has categorically denied the report's conclusion saying that the report "is nothing more than the same old stuff that we have heard from activist groups before."

Bangkok Post, 10 Oct 1998

Bongti-Tavoy Road

Following lobbying by Thai businessmen, Rangoon has agreed to open a temporary border pass at Bongti village. The border opening combined with a 110 km planned road project between the small Thai village and the sea port at Tavoy will allow Thai businesses access to the Burmese seaboard. This would cut down on shipping costs from Europe, allow Thai fishermen quicker access to Thai markets and allow Burmese timber to pass more easily into Thailand. The Bongti-Tavoy road is a historic trade route and invasion point, will now serve to hook Burma into the highway network with Cambodia and Vietnam. Bongti is currently a village of 500

people primarily made up of Karen farmers. *Bangkok Post*, 5 Oct 1998.

USDA rallies

In response to the NLD's 10-member Committee representing Parliament, the SPDC has held government-sponsored rallies and demonstrations throughout Burma. Beginning in late September, these rallies continue to draw support 18,000-30,000 persons strong. The initial rally in Rangoon, sponsored by two state-run organizations, the Myanmar Industrialists Association and the Myanmar Fishery Enterprise, called on the junta to "maintain the conditions of peace and tranquility... of economic and living progress of the people already achieved," while criticizing the recent activities of the NLD. Further rallies in Mandalay, Moneywa, Kachin State, Shan State, and Karen State were comprised of mostly civil servants / USDA members organized by the ruling military, and "expressing genuine desires." Imposing fines and restrictions on those who refused to attend the rallies, the junta created impressive presentations, forcing spectators and speakers alike to cheer and scream on cue.

NCGUB statement, 17 Oct 1998.

New Light of Myanmar, Oct 1998.

Human Rights Watch Report

The Human Rights Watch report on Burmese refugees in Thailand was highly critical of both the Thai government and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for failing to protect these displaced persons. It noted that the Thai government had refused to ratify the U.N. Convention concerning refugees and that Thailand lacks a proper refugee determination process. The report accuses Thailand of returning refugees to Burma against their wishes and refusing en-

try to ethnic refugees who were not fleeing fighting between the military and insurgent groups. The report also cited the dangerous locations of refugee camps as contributing to the ability of troops from Burma to attack and raze several of these camps. The Thai government denied having *refouled* refugees and said that illegal immigrants had been repatriated through safe channels and never returned directly to Rangoon.

The UNHCR was accused of not taking a strong enough role in opposing Thai policies that exposed the refugees to risk of *refoulement*. The UNHCR had not had a presence in camps along the Burma-Thai border until July 1998, when the Thai government allowed them to hire a Thai consultant to serve as a roving protection officer. UNHCR said that it was regrettable that the Human Rights Watch hadn't taken recent developments into consideration before the report was released, referring to the recent invitation from the Thai government for the United Nations agency to have an expanded role with refugees along the border.

Bangkok Post, 9 Oct 1998.

Human Rights Watch, *Unwanted and Unprotected: Burmese Refugees in Thailand*, Sep 1998.

NOWHERE TO GO, NOTHING TO EAT

The worst situation ever for many Karenni ethnic people began in June 1995, with the breakdown of the cease-fire agreement. The cease-fire between the SPDC and Karenni resistance forces put a brief halt to the war which had raged since Burma's independence in 1948. The government's systematic "ethnic cleansing" policy has been resumed in full force since they broke the cease-fire, just three months after the agreement was made. The Burma Army has forcibly relocated 98 villages between the Salween and Pon rivers. While their official reasoning is to cut the support lines between Karenni villages and the Karenni Army, in reality what they are accomplishing is the destruction of Karenni village life. Hundreds of villagers are now in hiding from the Burma Army in "hidden villages" in the Karenni hills.

With the imposition of the relocation orders, the Burma Army targeted the hill tribe villagers themselves. The relocation order gave villagers three days to move, or they would be shot on sight. Much of the villagers' possessions and livestock were left behind out of necessity. Once the food they had managed to carry with them had been used up, the Burma Army refused to supply either food or medical attention. As many of the relocation sites are on infertile land and are malaria-ridden, villagers have been fighting an uphill battle against starvation and health problems.

People in the relocation sites are denied any support or opportunities by the military government. In many cases, people flee the relocation sites and return to the jungle to live in hidden villages in the hills. These people gather in groups of two or three families and take the risk to cultivate *taungya** fields. Their day-to-day existence is precarious and they live in constant fear for their lives. They are especially terrified of the prospect of soldiers suddenly discovering them, as they know they would be shot, no questions asked. They are unable to sleep well at night, vulnerable in their makeshift shelters, or even in the open beneath the trees.

Day or night, they avoid cutting bamboo or trees for fear of soldiers hearing. Special precautions are taken to prevent noise from domestic animals. Small bamboo baskets are made and placed on the snouts of pigs and dogs and nose-rings are used to prevent fowl

from crowing. The people dare not stay in any location too long and regularly move every three or four days. Their paddy and food are hidden in a separate location, and food is retrieved every two or three days. Their daily lives have of necessity become an inventive and distorted version of the security and community they had once known.

There are currently many people living in fear in hidden villages throughout Karenni State. There is an obvious lack of house-



An uncertain future: Karenni children living in a hidden village.

hold materials, no access to medicine or medical treatment and no access to education for the school age children. Their diets are nutritionally inadequate with a constant shortage of salt used for food preservation. Basics such as blankets and mosquito nets are often nonexistent, making people susceptible to malnutrition and disease. Army troops systematically go through old villages and cut down all food-providing trees. Any domestic animals are often killed and eaten by the soldiers on the spot.

During May and June of 1998, Burma Army IB 250 and 251 reportedly launched an operation that included three columns of troops, to clear internally displaced villagers from the area. These were villagers who had fled from relocation orders and were hiding in forests. Of those villagers fleeing this operation, some made it to the Thai refugee camps. They confirmed that troops had caught six families from a hidden village and had brought them to Shadaw after taking all of their belongings and killing their animals.

A total of 87 new refugees (21 families) from 15 hidden villages arrived at Karenni refugee camp #2 on Thai soil, on May 26, 1998. Several from the group were interviewed not

long after their arrival. A 40-year-old villager from Daw Ta Soe hidden village told of how his wife had died:

Three days before I had escaped to here, I had gone to our taungya field while my wife left our three children and went to the hidden barn to fetch the rice. During that period, my wife had not been well. As she returned with the rice, she saw SPDC soldiers on the top of the opposite mountain. She ran back to alert the others carrying the heavy rice packet on her shoulder. She collapsed and died with blood pouring from her mouth only a short distance from her children. On my return, the body was gone as she had already been buried. I could no longer stay there, so I took my three children and came here.

An elderly man from the same hidden village gave his account of conditions at the Shadaw relocation site where he had stayed:

The soldiers said to the villagers who had run out of rice to eat, "If you need rice, go back to your hidden barns in your old villages and take what rice you have there."

When the villagers returned with their rice, the soldiers took it from them and turned around and sold it for 700 kyat a tin.

A young man, 24, who had come to Karenni camp #2 from a hidden village, expressed a common sentiment: "When I came here I had nothing left of my belongings, but I'm happy. I feel free here. I can sleep well at night instead of wondering where, or on what day, I would die."

One young woman, 20, showed her 10-day-old baby and explained, "I gave birth to him under a tree in the jungle after fleeing from SPDC soldiers."

These Karenni villagers have no arms with which to fight, and want above all things a quiet and peaceful country in which to pursue their livelihoods. The current military regime has made it clear that it sees the Karenni as being less than human, and has left masses of ethnic people with 'Nowhere to go, nothing to eat.'



T.K.

* A traditional style shifting hillside cultivation where small plots of jungle are cleared for 1-2 years for farming and then allowed to go fallow for 12-15 years.

SUMMER RICE & THE DIFFICULTIES OF KARENNI FARMERS

In Burma, sweeping national development programs have been initiated with a speed and a scope only possible in a dictatorship. In the implementation of agricultural programs, the government has substituted force for the education and incentive programs that constitute a large part of typical agricultural development efforts. National agricultural reforms have aimed both to clear and cultivate additional fields, and to increase yields from established farms. To boost productivity, farmers throughout the country have been ordered to increase the number of crops planted a year, from one to two, and in some areas even three crops. National multi-cropping was first implemented throughout the country in 1992. The U.S. Embassy in Rangoon in its 1997 report on economic conditions in Burma described the government's top-down approach:

In some regions, multiple-cropping increased farm incomes with little risk and farmers complied willingly and successfully with the government's new production directives. In some other areas... salinity problems, high flood risks, and seasonal pest problems made multiple cropping inappropriate; it was nevertheless imposed on villages, with sometimes disastrous results, by regional and local military authorities who had production targets to meet.

The following report describes conditions resulting from the nationwide multi-cropping plan as they impacted farmers in Loikaw area, Karenni (Kayah) State. Farmers in the area have been required to grow two crops a year since the reforms began in 1992.

The government's summer rice program

Karenni state is mostly mountainous with few lowlands, so there isn't much area for wet rice cultivation. You can only grow good rice in Loikaw and De-Mawsoe areas; through the rest of the region people cultivate dry varieties of hill or mountain rice. The growing area at De-Mawsoe is roughly 80,000 acres and in Loikaw there are only about 40,000 acres where you can cultivate irrigated rice well. The rest of the wet rice growing areas are scattered throughout the state: 100 acres here, 200 acres there.

In 1992, the government ordered Karenni farmers to grow summer rice. The farmers were troubled by this order – though it was meant to increase their yields, instead it made them poorer and poorer. Growing summer rice caused the following problems:

Not enough water

At the beginning of the rainy season, the rain is scant and gradually increases towards the middle and the end of the rainy season. You often can't plant rice at the very beginning of the rainy season, because there's not enough water. At De-Mawsoe a lot of the rice fields use the Ngwe Taung Dam; in Loikaw area they irrigate from the Mo Pyeh Dam. So during 1996, under orders to grow summer rice, farmers had to use a lot of water from the dams. Because they had used a lot of the stored water during the summer, there was not enough water during the rainy season to supplement irrigation for the wet rice crop. If you don't have enough water, it reduces the yield.

Ploughing

Because you need to irrigate the fields all year round in order to grow the two crops, the level of mud in the fields becomes very deep. In Karenni State, farmers plow using draft animals and some Chinese-manufactured tilling machines. Only the government

agricultural department has larger tractors which for use on government plantations only; ordinary people have no access to larger machines. Due to the deep mud, draft animals and the small Chinese tilling machines can no longer be used, creating serious problems.

Fertilizers

Originally farmers grew only one crop a year, and used manure and other natural fertilizer to produce enough rice. There is not enough manure or natural fertilizer for two crops, so the government now provides farmers with chemical fertilizers. Much of the government-provided fertilizer is bought not by the farmers, but by local businessmen and brokers. The businessmen then sell the fertilizer to the farmers for elevated prices, which many farmers can't afford, and so they do not have enough fertilizer for their fields. The government also does not provide training to the farmers on how to use the chemical fertilizers properly – so some farmers overuse fertilizers, which degrades soil fertility. As a result, the summer rice crop is generally not good – production is sometimes less than half of any of the rainy season crops.

Late planting of the rainy season crop

The government sold the farmers special seeds for the summer rice crop, as the local varieties of seeds are for rainy-season rice only. The new summer crop is planted around March; however the variety of rice provided by the government takes a long time to grow – it has been ready to harvest as late as July. This creates problems both for the summer crop, because if the summer rice ripens late, the rains come and destroy or degrade the crops before they can be harvested. Also, if the summer rice finishes late, it means that there is not enough time for the farmers to prepare the fields for the rainy season crop. If the rainy season rice is planted late, the yield is again reduced.

The government's summer rice program has created many problems and frustrations for the farmers, primarily because it increases the cultivation costs of the farmers, who often have little money to spare. One Karenni farmer, originally from Loikaw, said:

Because of having to grow summer rice, my annual production is half of what I ever produced. We're busy all year round now, which is exhausting. Also, my cattle are getting thin [worn out]. Two of my cattle have swollen shoulders and can't be used at all, and I had to sell them for a low price. Some farmers, because they don't have enough water, have to use diesel engine pumps to bring water to their fields, which costs a lot of money. Some farmers because they can't pay the cultivation costs [for seeds, fertilizers, pumps, etc.], have had to sell their farms. One of my sisters had to sell her farm and now makes a living selling things from a small shop.

The result of these government programs is that traditional ways of farming are disrupted and farmers must work harder, and spend more money on cultivation costs, even though their yields have not necessarily increased.²



Thu Ray

Burma Issues, internal report on multi-cropping in Loikaw area, Karenni State.

GETTING ENOUGH TO EAT AT KARENNI RELOCATION SITES

People living at the relocation sites in Karenni areas are facing many problems. They are eating only thin rice soup every day, because the Burma Army gives them no support. Last year, the people could still sell some of their property, such as jewelry or cattle in order to buy food, but now they've run out of things to sell and are facing serious trouble.

The Burma Army does not allow people to work outside relocation site doing day labor. There are those who, despite this, sneak out to work outside the camp to support their family because they have nothing to eat. If workers are caught returning to the relocation site, the soldiers fine them all the money they earned as a punishment for leaving the camp without permission.

At the relocation site, people are permitted to grow small fields or gardens – but there's no rain and the land there is not fertile at all so they cannot produce enough food to eat. The people at the relocation site sometimes go in small groups to larger towns or cities in the area to beg for food. Wealthier people are often able to donate a tin or even a basket of rice. But the poorer people, they can only give with a small spoon. Many people in the relocation sites rely on donations like this in order to survive.

At the shops in the small village near the relocation site, they're allowed to sell rice by the viss [about 3.5 lbs.] or half viss, and they're forbidden to sell larger amounts of rice. For example, one person is permitted to buy rice equivalent to about the volume of four flashlight batteries. If you want to buy more than that, you must get permission. For other daily uses the shopkeepers just sell a small packet, about 10 or 20 kyats worth. People are forbidden to buy more than the amount of rice needed to feed themselves or their families. This is because the army is afraid the people will provide the rice to resistance groups.

Reported by friends of Burma Issues. This Oct 1998 report comes from the Shadaw relocation site.

BOOK LIST: POLITICS & INSURGENCY IN BURMA

For those readers who would like to learn more background information on the political aspects of the conflict in Burma, here is a short list of books on the topics of politics and insurgency movements.

Clements, Alan. Burma's Revolution of the Spirit: The Struggle for Democratic Freedom and Dignity. White Orchid Press; Bangkok; 1995.
A pictorial of the democratic movement and insurgency in Burma.

Boucaud, Andre and Louis. Burma's Golden Triangle: On the Trail of the Opium Warlords. Asia Books Ltd.; 1992.

Lintner, Bertil. Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948. White Lotus; 1994.

Lintner, Bertil. Outrage: Burma's Struggle for Democracy. White Lotus; 1990 (2nd Ed.).
A detailed account of the 1988 urban uprisings against the military regime.

Lintner, Bertil. Land of Jade. White Lotus.
An account of a secret trip the author took from the eastern states of India to China via the north of Burma, across territory at that time controlled by a panoply of insurgent forces, most notably the Kachin Independence Organization and the Communist Party of Burma.

Smith, Martin. Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity. Zed Books; London; 1991.
A comprehensive look at the development and decline of the insurgent movements in Burma, from independence up to the time of publication.

U Thaung. A Journalist, a General and an Army in Burma. White Lotus.
An autobiographical account of life as a journalist prior to and throughout the years of military control in Burma.

JAPAN INVESTS IN BURMA

Japan's public and private sectors continue to lead the world in investments in Burma, despite international criticism of the regime. Japanese dealings with Burma include investments by Mitsubishi Corp. and Fujitsu Ltd., and more recently the extension of credit for a new airport, and new investment by Suzuki Motor Corp.

Motorcycles

October 13, Suzuki Motor Corp. signed a US\$10 million contract of joint investment with Burma Automobile and Diesel Engine Industries at a 70%-30% split respectively. Plans for January 1999 include the production of motorcycles and small cars assembled from parts imported from Japan and Southeast Asia. Suzuki states that its interest is in the private sector where it can advance the livelihood of the individual by helping the economic activity of the country. However, this new investment in Burma is keeping with Suzuki's habit of aggressive investing in "emerging markets."

Air travel

Though the Japanese government supports development of the airport, it may not be a necessary facility. The state-owned Myanmar Airways International (MAI) may not be flying as their joint-venture partner, Highsonic Enterprise Pte Ltd. of Singapore withdrew its investment in early October. Highsonic and Burma began their partnership in 1993 so that the latter could offer international routes to Bangkok, Singapore, and Hong Kong. In 1993 MAI was using a single plane hired from Royal Brunei Airlines, and alternating its daily flight schedule to allow for transport to these three destinations. Most visitors to Burma pass through Bangkok, and as the air transport agreement between Thailand and Burma restricts travel to 14,000 passengers per year, it is not surprising that Highsonic chose to divest from this poor economic undertaking.

Burmanet, 13 Oct 1998. *Manager* magazine, Sep 1994.

The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"We are much distressed that there are those who would like to use the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within our domestic jurisdiction. We, in Myanmar, have chosen the path of democracy." – SPDC representative U. Ohn Gyaw addressing the 53rd General Assembly of the United Nations.

....

"In the age of globalization, the international community is setting the standard on various issues such as the environment and human rights and using these in their negotiations in trade and investment. Based on moral and ethical principles, we are trying to improve the standards and by doing so will help increase our negotiating power in the international arena." – Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan on the need for Thailand to pro-actively deal with the smuggling of women and children from bordering countries for prostitution.

....

"The U.S. Department of Labor applied the 'preponderance of the evidence test' which is the test that will be applied by juries in the two lawsuits pending in the U.S. Federal Court against Unocal brought by Burmese refugees and trade unionists. The finding clearly supports the lawsuits. It is also more than sufficient to trigger a legal duty by Attorney Dan Lungren of California to initiate judicial proceedings to revoke Unocal's corporate charter and

put it out of existence." – Law Prof. Robert Benson of Loyola Law School on the recent U.S. Department of Labor report on the use of forced labor in the Yadana joint pipeline project between Unocal, Total and the Burmese government.

....

"Tragically, political change and social unrest in some new democracies in recent months have resulted in rioting, looting, death and even civil war.... The government of Myanmar, therefore, takes the issue of 'political crisis' very seriously as we move towards our goal of a stable, multiparty democracy." – Junta spokesman Lt.-Col. Hla Min speaking about Burma's concerns about social breakdown as the effects of the Asian economic crisis are felt.

....

"Only when internal destructionists are removed, external hegemonists will not be able to interfere in Myanmar's internal affairs. Removing them would be like freeing a moon from an eclipse." – Fishery Enterprise general secretary Kyee Ngwe criticizing the National League for Democracy at a pro-government rally in September.

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"People would like to hear a clearer message from [Suu Kyi].... She has been setting up target dates but nothing has happened as the junta has been able to block her." – A former student activist in Rangoon.

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