

BURMA ISSUES

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"Nations that colonized other nations and enslaved its people and also governments that are responsible for mass-murdering civilian populations, for example Hiroshima and Nagasaki...must also be looked into." Burma government spokesman Hla Min on the "blatant hypocrisy" of the extradition of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet to Spain to stand trial for crimes against humanity



Painting by Saw Ke Doh, age 15, Huay Kaloke Refugee Camp

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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LIFE IN THE JUNGLE: THE DILEMNA OF IDPS

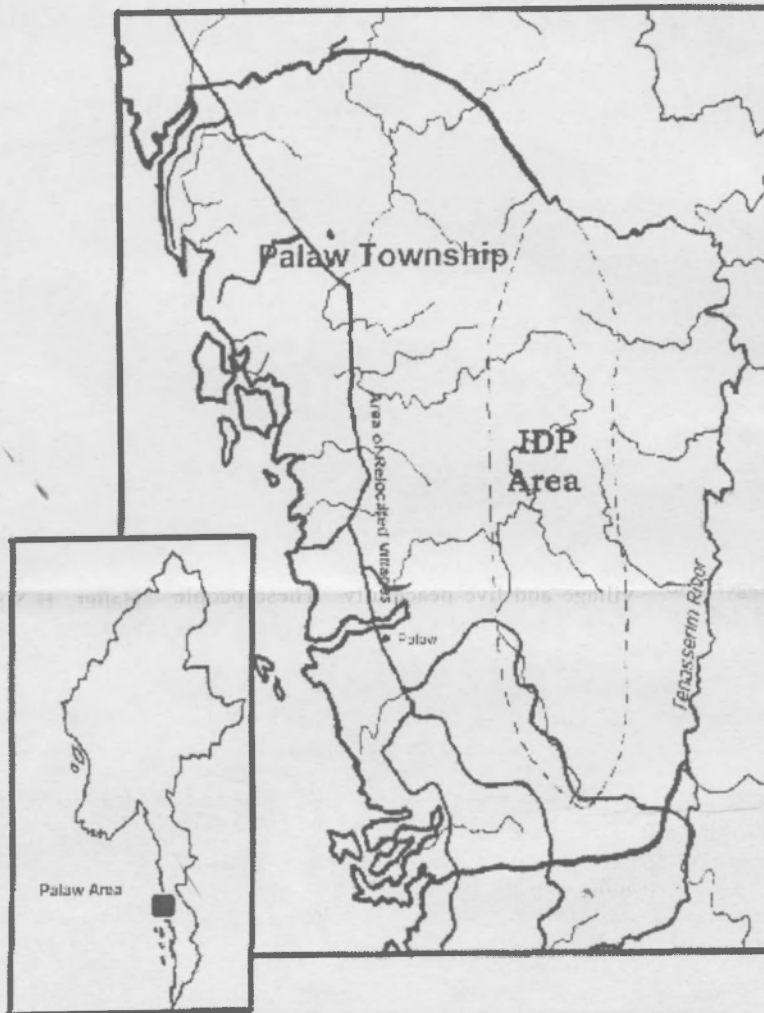
Village relocation or 'four-cuts' programs have frequently been utilized by the Burmese government both to cut links of support between local villages and insurgent groups, and to clear areas of civilians so that free-fire zones can be declared. Relocated people are moved into tightly controlled fenced communities inside Tatmadaw (Burma Army) held territory, effectively separated from their land and their livelihood. Unwilling to relocate, many of these villagers flee to the surrounding jungle to eke out a basic existence. Despite increasing hardships, they prefer to remain close to the land they know, and maintain some control over their lives and communities.

Palaw Township in west-central Tenasserim Division has recently experienced mass relocations that followed the 1997 Burma government offensive against the Karen National Union. This township, which is composed mostly of Burmans and Karens, has long been a "brown area" neither controlled entirely by the Tatmadaw nor the KNU military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Palaw, which has well-established KNU and SPDC village-level administrations, is divided by two roads running the length of the township. Upper Car Road (Kle Mu Ser Kō) runs along the foothills of the KNU-held mountains at the edge of the jungle in the east. Lower Car Road (Kle Mu Ser La) is located towards the western, coastal area of the township, an area primarily controlled by Tatmadaw troops.

The following has been extracted from a report about the situation in Palaw Township by a visitor to the area in April and May of this year.

The relocation program was started in October 1997 but some villages were moved as early as August 1997, during the rainy season. There had also been some relocation in the 1996 rainy season. The area that the SPDC did not control they recognized as

black area (meaning enemy controlled area) and they planned to turn this black area to white area (area controlled by the Burma Army). They started to relocate the Karen villages that the KNLA depended on, and established a free-fire zone. Upper Car Road region was completely established as a free-fire zone.



Villages at Upper Car Road

The villages that were situated along Upper Car Road were all Karen villages and all were relocated. Most of the villagers did not go to the SPDC designated relocation sites and, instead, went into hiding behind their villages, in the jungle and high in the mountains at the sources of streams, places they thought they could survive. Even before the relocation, some of the villagers had already moved into the jungle to avoid persecution by SPDC troops. These villagers were not trusted by the SPDC troops. The SPDC suspected them of helping and supporting the KNLA, so the majority of the villagers did not dare go to the relocation sites. After the relocation, almost all of the houses in the

villages that were deserted were burned down by the SPDC troops.

Villages at Lower Car Road

The villages at Lower Car Road were not relocated, but the houses on the outskirts were brought into the middle of the village and the villagers were fenced in. The villagers at Lower Car Road are not able to easily flee to the jungle like those at the Upper Car Road, because they live deeper in the area controlled by SPDC troops and far from the jungle. These villagers are also afraid that their villages will be damaged by the SPDC troops. Some have already fled from the Tenasserim region.

Conditions in Jungle

Many villagers who fled the relocation programs are hiding at small streams in the mountains a great distance from each other, unlike when they were living in village communities. At one stream two or three families are hiding and at another three or four families. They started growing their crops at the place where they were....They mostly hide in valleys of thick forest at the sources of streams high in the mountains where it is difficult to find them. They do not make any clear footpaths to their hiding places. They build many small huts for hiding their paddy, food supplies and other materials. They called this a security hut.

Many IDPs I met said, people like us, the Burmese army recognizes as their enemy....Many of the places found by the Tatmadaw troops, including paddy stores and shelters were destroyed. The displaced villagers are hiding quite far from the border. Some of them talked about going to the border where they thought they could get some food assistance, because they had heard that the IDPs at the border received food assistance. However, the majority did not want to go to the border and tried to survive as long as they could. Some tried to protect themselves by setting traps with spikes around their area. Their lack of security has also caused problems of food shortages, because they cannot farm safely. Based on

what we saw, at no place in Palaw this year, will the IDPs have sufficient food.

The lack of other food such as salt, fish paste and Ajinomoto (MSG), which people cannot produce themselves and which had been a main part of their diet, became another problem for the villagers who were hiding. They tried to sneak into the nearest village, which had been relocated, to buy these foods....an old man told us when they bought a little fish paste they would mix it with wild potato (Su Te) so that they could eat longer. Many of them were killed when they went to buy food.

The people frequently faced illnesses such as malaria and diarrhea as well as weakness, dizziness and pain in the joints and waist. There is no medicine available. Even before the villages were relocated, it was difficult to find good medicine and that medicine was expensive. Some displaced villagers would walk half a day to other villages to find medicine. They could buy a little western medicine and Burmese herbal medicines. A KNU sponsored mobile health team went to many hidden villages, and villagers came to be examined and receive medicine. At places where the health team did not reach, the villagers waited for their arrival. When we arrived at a new place they asked us if we had brought any medicine. I saw one villager who had been wounded by a trap and did not have any medicine. One child had been wounded by a bullet and there was no proper medication for his wound so they had used some tree bark. At one house an old man with a chronic cold had been drinking a tea made from medicinal leaves, but it didn't help. In Palaw Township the mobile health team reached only a small part of the areas where displaced villagers are living.

They cannot avoid the Burmese troops. After they flee their villages, they are constantly hunted by the troops and their life is threatened at all times. However, most of the people we met said, when Burma Army troops have found our place, we will move to another. But still a few said, we should revolt. Regardless, those who fled, even when they live separately, try to organize each other and try to still live as a community. Whenever they heard about Burma Army troops they passed the information on to each other.

According to one villager who was interviewed and who had fled relocation:

"I had left my village three years ago and moved farther out of my village to avoid the actions of Burmese soldiers even before the relocation began. We are always living in fear of them. The SLORC's troops had

searched out our hideouts four times during 1988 [between January and April]. When they come, if they find us, they shoot us or arrest us and take us to their battalion. One time when they came up they arrested one of my daughters. I have learned that she was imprisoned and she is alive. During the four invasions the SLORC's troops killed six villagers in my area. During 1998 we had to change our places four times and build four shelters."

An Uncertain Future

Some of the villagers talked about going to the refugee camp because there is no security for them in the jungle. Some have already found ways to flee to the border and the refugee camps. Those in the jungle complained that the Burma Army always tried to find and kill them; it never ended. The difficulty for them in going to the refugee camp is that the journey is quite far and unsafe, because almost all of the ways are blocked by the Tatmadaw troops. It is also not easy to cross the Tenasserim River because Burma Army troops are deployed in many places along the riverside. If they travel only with men it would be easier, but with old people, women and children it is difficult and dangerous. Some villagers decide to hide as long as they can survive, because they think one day they will be able to go back to their village and live peacefully. These people did not want to abandon their village. Most of the people I met talked about their village, how their mother and father brought them up. They were longing for their native homeland. Some even said; if I die, I will die at my place.

Some people tried to avoid the persecution and move deeper into areas that are not controlled by the Burmese troops. We learned that traditionally when the relocation started the Karen people always fled to the jungle. Still many of these people face the persecution as long as they can. These people described their problem: they have faced bad things but cannot do anything because the army has guns. However, these villagers have always tried to organize each other to work together and suffer together, to stay together in unity and maintain their village stability. Their main hope is that their homeland will not be destroyed and their communities will not collapse.



This article was extracted from a larger internal BI report on the conditions in Palaw Township.

BOOK LIST: HISTORY & ETHNICITY

HISTORY

Aung Chin Win Aung; *Burma and the last days of General Ne Win*; Yoma Publishing; 1995

Study of Burmese history from ancient times to the contemporary period by a democracy activist.

Maung Htin Aung; *A History of Burma*; Columbia Uni Press; 1967

History up to 1948 (independence).

O'Connor, V.C. Scott; *Mandalay and Other Cities of the Past In Burma*; White Lotus

Abbot, Gerry; *Inroads into Burma: A travellers anthology*; Oxford Uni Press; K.L.; 1998

"(C)ontains sequences of fascinating information covering almost four centuries of Burmese history and drawn from travellers' accounts..." - The Asian Experts catalogue

Hallet, H.S.; *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant in the Shan States*; White Lotus (historical text reprint)

ETHNICITY

Gilhodes, C; *Kachin Religion and Customs*; White Lotus (reprint of historical text)

Leach, E.R.; *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*; Fletcher and Son, London; 1964

In-depth anthropological text on Kachin society.

Marshall, Harry Ignatius; *The Karen People of Burma*; White Lotus, 1997 (reprint of 1922 anthropological text)

Milne, Leslie; *Shans at Home*; Hazell Watson and Viney; 1910
Colonial-era anthropological text.

Seagrave, Gordon; *Burma Surgeon*; Consolidated Book Publishers; 1944

An autobiographical account of an upbringing in Burma and work as a doctor among the Shan.

ANOTHER TALE OF DIVIDE & RULE: THE SURA & GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGNS IN THE SHAN STATE

This story from Shan State is similar to many other sagas in the ongoing civil war in Burma. It is reminiscent of how the SPDC split the Karen opposition groups, forcing them to focus on disputes between the KNU and the DKBA, instead of on the struggle with the government of Burma itself. Likewise, they have also created disharmony on the stage of Shan State. Their tactic of "Divide and Rule" made the episode of Khun Sa's surrender and the international supply of heroin from the Golden Triangle possible.

A simple pattern emerges within the actions of the SPDC. Their need for money and their need to control the state makes them a principal actor in the region. And yet the audience cannot forget that, as in all good stories, neither side in this drama is blameless or wholly at fault.

The Cast:

SSNO: The Shan State National Organization began in 1997 as a consortium of the SSA, the SSNA and SURA. These three groups originally sought to be united under cease-fires held between the SSA and the SSNA with SLORC. When the SLORC refused to acknowledge the role of SURA in the organization, the SSNO chose to invalidate its cease-fire agreement. They created their own army which fought under the name of the Shan State Army.

SURA: The Shan United Revolutionary Army, based in southern Shan State, joined the Mong Tai Army (MTA) in April 1985 when commander Gon Jerng, hoping to unite Shan forces, joined his army with that of Khun Sa. After the MTA dissolved, SURA under Maj. Gen Yawd Serk attempted a cease-fire with the SLORC. When the SLORC refused, they joined the SSNO.

SSA: The Shan State Army founded in 1958, signed a cease-fire agreement with SLORC shortly after the coup d'état in 1988. Following the formation of the SSNO, the SSA stated, "If SLORC is sincere in achieving peace in Burma through negotiations...it could seriously consider and give due respect to the SSA's endeavor in searching for "peaceful conflict resolution" in Shan State." With these words, they abandoned their cease-fire.

SSNA: The Shan State National Army made peace through a cease-fire with the SLORC after they left the MTA in 1994. As the SSNO called for the international community to act against the SLORC, SSNA and SSA cease-

fires with Rangoon were inevitably ignored.

Khun Sa (Shan/Chinese drug lord) & the MTA: The Mong Tai Army was established when Gon Jerng's army joined Khun Sa's in 1985. It was primarily controlled by Khun Sa, who also controlled 2/3 of the Shan State opium crop.² Even as Khun Sa recruited inter-ethnic (Wa, PaO, Akha) factions to join the MTA, building up the size of the army, it was the SSA which continued to fight the SLORC, and the MTA which protected Khun Sa's drug interests.

When Khun Sa chose a peaceful surrender to the SLORC in 1996, it should not have surprised many. Some of the MTA desired to follow him into his retirement from the drug

unite the Shans to fight for the national cause, and at the same time seek to reform Khun Sa himself.³ However, the MTA's primary responsibilities remained transporting and protecting Khun Sa's drug production and distribution machinery. When the MTA was dissolved following the surrender of Khun Sa in early 1996, Yawd Serk led a 4000 man contingent re-forming the SURA. Their purpose was to resist the oppression of the Shan people by standing "firmly against dictatorship and drugs," and "wholly for democracy and human rights."⁴

However, by late 1996, discouraged by the ravages of continued war with the SLORC, Yawd Serk appealed to the SLORC's Sr. Gen. Than Shwe for cease-fire negotiations.

SLORC offered no reply except to war. SSA and the SSNA not to assist the SURA. Regardless, a tripartite agreement signed in September of 1997 bound the

the Burma Army can commit various human rights abuses as part of their campaign against SURA

trade, seeking a similar amnesty from extradition and prison. But the SLORC forced them to labor instead.⁵ This created dissension between Khun Sa and his former soldiers, who now threatened to assassinate him.

Upon the dissolution of the MTA, some soldiers followed Yawd Serk as he established the SURA and others continued their work in the drug trade under its new leadership, the UWSA.

UWSA: The United Wa State Army (& others) now control the drug trade and refineries formerly operated by Khun Sa. They signed a cease-fire with the SLORC in 1989, and today appear to be protected by the SPDC Army as the drug trade continues.

SLORC/SPDC: The State Law and Order Restoration Council, now the State Peace and Development Council, has been in power in Burma under different guises, though always in the form of a military junta since 1962. Their relationship with groups in the Shan State has only been predictable in that they have continued to promote division with the aim of increasing their control over the state.

Act I: The Battlefield

Maj. Gen. Yawd Serk had joined the MTA under Gon Jerng who chose to ally his army with that of the drug lord Khun Sa. The alliance was made in the hopes that Gon Jerng could use "Khun Sa's power and money to

SSA, the SSNA and SURA together as the SSA (Shan State Army) with its political wing called SSNO (Shan State National Organization). The junta, however, refused to recognize the SURA faction.

In the early days of November 1998, Yawd Serk, now of the SSA, is beginning drug interdiction operations against drug gangs along the Thai border, capturing drug smugglers before they enter Thailand.

The opinion of the SSA is that the drug trade is protected by the Burmese Army. Commander Yawd Serk's spokesman, Orntern, states, "The Burmese get the money and we get the blame."⁶ This view correlates with the SPDC's previous contact with Khun Sa, and its protection of the UWSA.

As November unfolded 5 drug smugglers were captured. They were handed over to the Tai Police. Yawd Serk's troops were ambushed by the SPDC in Mongpan, 60 miles north of the Thai border. The SSA proved victorious in this round, but continuing to survive guerilla warfare in a 7000 sq. mile free-fire zone created by the enemy is as difficult as it sounds.

Act II: Rangoon

The SPDC has set an agenda: they need to increase their financial gain; they need to keep the nation, with all of its insurgent groups, firmly under their control; and they need to convince the international commu-

nity that their efforts are in line with human rights standards.

Their need for money is manifested in their encouragement of the drug trade; something they have long cultivated. It is widely believed that Khun Sa operated as a lackey of Ne Win and the SLORC in both serving to splinter the support of the Shan people and in providing the government with much needed income. Maha San, leader of the Wa National Organization (another ethnic group seeking resolution with the SLORC) said, "[Khun Sa] was not a revolutionary, but a reactionary sent by Ne Win to disrupt our revolution. He also came to deal in opium internationally and to make it very profitable for the Ne Win government."⁶

On the other hand, their longing to please the international community manifests itself in a superficial discouragement of the drug trade. Through the burning of some poppy fields and the "surrender" of Khun Sa the government of Burma hopes to convince its critics of the sincerity of its attempts to curb the illegal drug trade.

But both of these needs fall further down the list, as the idea of simply controlling the land takes priority. The method is called "Divide and Rule" because the SPDC uses whatever tactics necessary to create division in an effort to dissolve strong ethnic leadership and solidarity.

This was demonstrated by their refusal to enter into talks with SURA in 1996, preferring instead to demonize the group. The lack of a cease-fire also allows Burma Army troops to continue military campaigns in Shan State to cement their control of the region. Collaboration between the Shan opposition groups could spell the dissolution of the SPDC's power over the Shan State, if the opposition were to find a way to work together. Without a cease-fire agreement, in the words of SURA, "[We have] had no choice but to continue...armed struggle..."⁷

Act III: The Bombs

Having forced a continuation of the war in Shan State, the SPDC can use it as a validation for the actions of the military. As they move through Shan State, the Burma Army can commit various human rights abuses as part of their campaign against SURA:

In January 1997 "...anyone found in the fields and farms would be accused of being SURA soldiers and shot on sight without being asked any question(s),"⁸ a warning displayed often and most recently in July of 1998 as SPDC troops killed six villagers in

Mawk Zali village, Murng-Ton township after accusing them of being members of SURA. Following the deaths in Mawk Zali, SPDC Commander Myint Swe of IB 65 ordered the relocation of their village to Wan Mai village, Me-Ken tract stating that the villagers were all "supporters of SURA."⁹

Later, SURA members passing through Kho Lam Relocation Site, Nam Zarng township fired at the local police station, harming no one before leaving the area. In response, SLORC troops fired mortar shells into the site killing two Shan families before harassing and accusing the residents of harboring SURA insurgents.¹⁰

The Shan State National Organization has described this phenomenon by stating, "SLORC's main aim in Shan State is a gradual genocide not just to annihilate SURA. SLORC could not implement its genocidal plans using military force against the people of Shan State if they accepted SURA merging with the SSA. SURA would become a

cease-fire group under SSA and SLORC would have no reason to use its military force to implement its plans."¹¹

The Moral:

As we watch this drama unfold, we realize that both sides will persist in violating the human rights of the other. As long as the SPDC seeks to achieve its goals of "Divide and Rule," this conflict will continue on the battlefield, it will be answered with bombs. And as tragedy continues daily, the SSA does not have time to look at options outside of their present 'eye for an eye' mentality.

Watching this "drama unfold," we remember that we are the audience. Should we leave at intermission stating our disdain with a rude exit? Should we wait to read the newspaper tomorrow hoping that the critics, and international NGOs will voice their disap-

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proval? Should we attempt to halt the pro-

KAREN FLEE FIGHTING & RELOCATION

The following is a translation of three articles that recently appeared in Kwe K'lu Sgaw Karen language newspaper, 15 Oct 1998

More than 1,200 Karen flee into Thailand

In the first week of September, more than 1,200 Karens fled to safety in Thailand's Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province, as a result of the attacks by Burma Army troops.

On September 6, 150 Burma Army Division 44 troops entered Wameh Khala village, facing the Tha Song Yang District, and burnt down all of the houses.

300 households fled across the Moei River and into refuge in Thailand. Three villagers, including one pregnant woman died in the attack. The soldiers also captured some people to serve as porters of weapons and food supplies during their offensives against KNU troops in the area.

Eight hundred fifty-nine people are taking refuge at Ban Hti Noekho refugee camp and the other 415 are at Ban Noebo camp. The Tak Province head went to look at the new refugees and said that they would all be repatriated after the situation in Burma had improved.

Forced Relocation of Villagers in Pa-an District

Near the end of August, the Burma Army began "Operation Aung Moe Le" in Pa-an District. The aim of this operation is to forcibly relocate villages in the Dawna Mountains. This operation is being coordinated

by Burma Army Div. 44, under the command of Htoe Aung. Nine hundred troops of LIBs 3, 9, 118 and IB 81 have moved into Phe Choe Township, and other battalions under Div. 44 have been located between Phe Choe and Myawaddy.

In September, eleven villages in Pa-an District were destroyed by Burma army troops. Before they burned the villages they ransacked villagers' possessions and shot animals. One school and one clinic were also burned down.

About 2,000 villagers have fled into Thailand from this area and another 4,000 people are now displaced in the jungle.

No One Wants to Make a Blood Compact with the Burma Army

On September 22, 1998 IB 231 Commander Aung Khaing called a meeting of villagers from thirteen villages in the Thayetchaung District.

After Aung Khaing called the meeting, he made all the villagers enter a blood compact with the soldiers. His soldiers and the villagers all cut their fingers and mixed all of the blood together with water. They then drank it together to commit each person to the compact. The soldiers placed a curse on the villagers, that if the villagers ever oppose the soldiers then they would suffer death as a result (through supernatural means).

A DEADLY HARVEST: LANDMINES IN INSURGENT AREAS

Landmines have played a significant role in the strategies of both ethnic armed groups and the Burmese Army, in the ongoing fighting in Burma. Cheaply and easily produced, landmines are effective in demoralizing enemy troops, and there is no sign of either the government troops or the ethnic armies slowing the laying of mines. However, in insurgent areas where there is little differentiation between battle areas and civilian villages, the rice field is also the battle field. Due to their indiscriminate nature, landmines are causing suffering and death for civilian and soldier; friend and foe alike. They promise to be a continuing problem for the people of Burma long into the future.

Landmines along the Borders

The Bangladeshi, Indian and Thai borders have all been subject to heavy mining with the expressed aim of restricting troop movements. Since much of the conflict in Burma has taken place along the borders, crossing the borders has allowed ethnic armies a backdoor to escape fighting and reduced the effectiveness of Burma Army campaigns. Landmines, consequently, play an important role in attempts by the government to seal the borders. However, due to the fact that much of these borders are contested and that villagers living in the area may cross "official" borders frequently in the course of their daily lives, the laying of mines along the border affects civilians as well as insurgents. Since the government forces started laying mines on the Arakan state-Bangladeshi border in 1996, 28 civilians have died from triggering mines¹. Chin farming and herding peoples on the Indian and Bangladeshi borders have also experienced the results of Chinese-made landmines planted by the Burmese army since June of 1997.² On Thailand's borders with the Shan and Karen states mining has extended into Thai territory. In late July of this year Thai villagers from Bann Mailan village in Mae Hong Son province were surveying a potential water source. As they were walking on a path that led towards a Burmese outpost approximately 300 meters from the border one of them stepped on a land mine and they were both killed instantly.³

The landmines differ greatly. Ones found in Arakan and Southern Chin state have been reported to be of Chinese origin which is consistent with the large amount of arms

trade between Burma and its northern neighbor. However, mines recently retrieved from Thailand, while of Chinese design were MM1 and MM2 devices bearing Burmese inscriptions. These mines would support reports that Rangoon had recently purchased production plants from China to produce landmines for themselves.⁴ Factory produced mines laid by both ethnic armies and the Burma military blanket the ground in insurgent areas along with the handmade but effective, bamboo and battery mines used by the insurgent groups.

The Situation in Pa-an District

The Pa-an District of Karen State has particularly been plagued by landmines. Since the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) split from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), both groups, as well as the Burmese Army, have been active in laying mines. The easternmost strip of Pa-an district is separated from the rest of the area by the Dawna mountains. Fighting has gradually been increasing between the KNLA who remain active in the east and in the mountains themselves, and the Burmese

Army and DKBA troops who control the central planes of the district. Recently the Burmese army has launched an operation to relocate villages within the Dawnas. Local insurgents, on the defensive, are at an advantage using landmines due to a greater knowledge of the land. The fact that the Burma Army is on the offensive into insurgent held territory also means, placed at the edge of insurgent held territory, landmines can slow the advance of the government troops. Consequently, KNLA troops continue to lay mines to protect their positions. The pro-government forces, on the other hand, are utilizing mines to restrict movements of both the KNLA and the approximately 4,000 displaced people fleeing relocation and living in the jungle at the border and in areas that are not firmly in their control.

According to one person who escaped after serving as porter, each battalion [of SPDC troops] was carrying 100-200 landmines. These mines are "Ka Ka 1" and "Ka Ka 2" varieties, made in Burma. They reportedly plan to bury these along the border, and even some places in Thailand.⁵

While the KNLA has been known to notify

villagers which routes are mined, the SPDC and DKBA troops have not done so. There are also some questions as to how well the KNLA is able to inform all local people of landmine locations. The danger of the landmines is increased by the fact that most of the area that is mined has inadequate access to medical care, resulting in a greater number of people maimed or killed by injuries that might have otherwise been attended to. According to one man in the area who lost a leg from triggering a landmine:

I had decided to collect some forest vegetables, but I didn't know that Karen soldiers had placed land mines on the path. Because I didn't know, I went along that path and I was wounded there. If they had let me know I would not have been injured. I didn't know that they had mined the route and were using a new route for travelling. It's not very far from the Moei river.

When I was wounded [the Karen soldiers] came running to me. They stopped not far away and I asked them to take me, but they weren't willing to come right to me because there were other landmines between us. When I looked at my leg I was furious – it was bleeding profusely and badly mangled. I told them, "Come and take me!", but they dared not come. "If you dare not come, then I will go myself." I pulled up my sarong and ran back on one leg."⁶

The use of landmines affects local villagers both directly and indirectly. The increased number of landmines in the area has also led to a greater number of villagers being recruited as human minesweepers. Burmese Army troops go into villages often specifically rounding up women, and demanding they walk out in front of the column of troops so that if there are mines on the pathway they will set them off and be killed or maimed, sparing the soldiers. Villagers from Taw Oak village report that at least 6 people have died in the past year from detonating landmines, some of whom were killed doing forced labor as mine detectors.⁷

A few months ago an SPDC patrol demanded that a group of women from the village go with one of their patrols to detonate mines, but the village headman would not allow it so he went in their place. He was killed by stepping on a landmine.⁸

The Burma Army continues to aggressively lay landmines in their campaigns to seal off the borders and forcibly relocate villages out of opposition held areas. Ethnic armies also seem intent on continuing to use landmines

Due to their indiscriminate nature, landmines are causing suffering and death for civilian and soldier; friend and foe alike.

to their own advantage despite the immediate and long term consequences for their own people. As fighting in Burma's border areas is far from being finished, both the Burma Army and insurgent forces need to be held responsible for the deadly fruits of the harvest of landmines sown in the border areas.



E. Miller

- 1 "Land mines in Arakan's Killing Zone," *The News Letter Monthly*, Jun 1998
- 2 "Chins Face threat of Landmines," *Rhododendron News Bulletin*, Aug 1998
- 3 Supradit Kanwanic, "Caught in the Crossfire," *Bangkok Post*, 30 Aug 1998
- 4 *ibid*
- 5 Kwe K'lu, Karen Language Newspaper, 15 Oct 1998 trans. BI staff
- 6 "Life After Landmines" Borderline Video 1998
- 7 "Displacement of Villagers in Southern Pa'an District", *Karen Human Rights Group*, 14 Sep 1998
- 8 *ibid*

BURMA ISSUES WEEKLY SUMMARY

Burma Issues also produces an e-mail summary of news, reports, newsletters and periodicals relevant to Burma. Summaries are taken from each document entered for a given week into the Burma Issues extensive documentation center. The summary averages about ten pages of information organized by subject. Those interested in receiving the weekly summary can e-mail their request to durham@mozart.inet.co.th and include "weeksum" in the subject line

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duction with our rotten tomatoes and boycotts? And can we ignore the lines drawn between actor and audience, communicating with members of the cast to discuss alternatives to this ceaseless cycle of war?



M. Davis

Endnotes for "SURA"

- 1 Statement of the Shan State Organization, 13 Oct 1996.
- 2 Martin Smith, "Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity," Zed Books, London 1991. p. 343.
- 3 *Bangkok Post*, 31 Jan 1996.
- 4 Yawderk, "Clearing up any myths or misunderstandings," *The Nation*, 29 Mar 1997.
- 5 S.H.A.N. 28 Nov 1998.
- 6 "Interview with Maha San of Wa State", *Burma Debate*, Mar/Apr 1996.
- 7 A letter from SURA to SLORC on 1 Jan 1997.
- 8 Shan Human Rights Foundation Monthly Report, Jan 1997.
- 9 SHRF Monthly Report, Aug 1998.
- 10 SHRF Monthly Report, May 1997.
- 11 SSO 13 Oct 1996.

NEWS BRIEFS

Massachusetts Burma Law

In early November the Massachusetts Burma Law, a U.S. state selective purchasing law or sanction, was ruled unconstitutional by a federal court. The law which adds a 10% penalty to contracting bids from companies conducting business with Myanmar, was enacted in the state in 1996. Similiar laws have also been passed by city governments throughout the U.S. The U.S. National Foreign Trade Council, which filed the suit on behalf of its 580 members, stated that this "should significantly deter states and cities from imposing their own foreign policy sanc-

While Massachusetts waits for their appeal to be heard by the Supreme Court, they continue to avoid business with those supporting the human rights abuses in Burma.

Bangkok Post, 12 Nov 1998.
Journal of Commerce, 6 Nov 1998.

UNHCR on the Thai-Burma Border

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is officially setting up offices along the Thai-Burma border in three locations: Mae Sot, Mae Hong Son, and Sanklaburi. Their role will mainly provide security for the existing refugee camps, relocation of some camps at greater distances from the border and providing legal status for refugees in Thailand. UNHCR will also provide basic food and medical aid and educational assistance while trying to assist in preserving culture. UNHCR began registering the names, places of origin and family background of refugees

in the camps in late October.

The Nation, 22 Oct 1998.
BI internal sources

SPDC Reshuffle

On Nov. 14 the SPDC, by the authority of Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, announced a "reshuffle" of its cabinet, to the surprise of those being shuffled. The announcement that Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw had been "permitted to resign" came even as he attended meetings with a delegation from Bangladesh. The restructuring gave his post to the current ambassador to the UK, Win Aung, and transferred his deputy foreign minister U Nyunt Swe elsewhere. These changes, which come almost exactly one year after the restructuring which turned the SLORC into the SPDC, include the formation of a new Supreme Court, the loss of the chairman of the National Convention Convening Committee, and the additional post of "deputy prime minister" to the duties of Minister of Military Affairs Lt-Gen Tin Hla.

Burma Courier, Open Society Inst. 14 Nov 1998.
Reuters, 14 Nov 1998.

Printing Banknotes

Beginning on November 25 the SPDC will issue 1,000 kyat banknotes beginning 25 November. This announcement comes as no surprise as the country's annual inflation rate estimates fall between 20-50%, depending on whom you ask. Presently the 500 kyat note is the highest denomination and ridiculously small as the blackmarket exchange rate

fluctuates around 340 kyat to the U.S. dollar. Meanwhile the official exchange rate stays at 6.35 kyat to the dollar, creating a facade of calm amidst an economic crisis exacerbated by sanctions and Asia's own financial instability.

Agence France Presse, 20 Nov 1998.
Reuters, 18 Nov 1998.

U.N. and World Bank Offer

According to diplomatic sources in Rangoon, a report from the International Herald Tribune that the U.N. and World Bank offered the Burma government U.S.\$ 1 billion in aid in return for opening dialogue with the National League for Democracy was essentially correct but "ahead of the game." The idea was floated by U.N. special envoy Alvaro de Soto and a proposal was drawn up between five Rangoon-based ambassadors at an informal meeting in England but the discussions were not as detailed as reported. Under the plan the Burma government would be rewarded with assistance for progress in government-opposition dialogue.

Reuters 28 Nov 1998



The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"Here in Boston there's a certain tradition of not letting European bureaucrats impinge on our decisions regarding taxes and spending." *Simon Billeness, Massachusetts Burma activist comparing the Massachusetts Selective Purchasing Law to the Boston Tea Party in reference to the recent challenge of the law brought by the EU to the World Trade Organization*

....

"Financial assistance should go beyond emergency relief and should focus on reintegration and monitoring returnees to ensure the continuity of repatriation and to prevent the recurrence of outflow." *Boonsak Kamheangridhirong, Thai National Security Council head at the UNHCR's 49th session in Geneva*

....

"Obviously they are trying to shut down all NLD offices but I don't think this will paralyze the work of the party. We have been making it clear time and time again that even if they de-register the NLD, we shall continue our work." *Aung San Suu Kyi in response to the government announcements that 10 NLD offices had closed "voluntarily"*

....

"Too many bad feelings have come out from the NLD's unilateral decision to call a parliament. Wounds have to be healed first, the retraction has to be done before the dialogue process has to begin again." *SPDC spokesman Hla Min accusing the NLD of blocking dialogue*

"We shall never forget the important role played by Japan in our struggle for independence. In the same vein we will remember that our Tatmadaw was born in Japan." *SPDC Sec-1 Khin Nyunt to the Burma-Japan Bilateral Conference on Information Technology Co-operation in Rangoon*

....

"I am not confused about why the junta tries to hide the history of Japanese occupation. It is now holding the same attitude to it's ethnic minority people at the borderline. Mind you, just after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi criticized the junta as fascist, the generals were so angry that they finally put her under house arrest for six years" *Elderly Burmese man who lived under both British and Japanese occupiers on the governments lack of attention to the Japanese occupation of Burma.*

....

"No country is immune [to problems with HIV] but Cambodia and Myanmar are going to require particular attention. If we do not act and act firmly and decisively and in an ambitious manner, I fear in a few years time we may have the problem of HIV/AIDS taking on Africa-like proportions....I think that in Thailand, the government has acknowledged and has confronted the problem, but I think in Burma and Cambodia there is not sufficient acknowledgement or sufficient action." *Kul Guatam, Unicef's director for East Asia and the Pacific, on a potential AIDS epidemic in Burma and Cambodia*

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