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"When we are seen as victims, we get sympathy. When we are seen as people who are struggling for justice, we get cooperation. We appreciate sympathy from others, but it will not help us to end the injustice. We prefer to work together with the rest of the world for justice rather than to get sympathy."

– Padoh Kwe Htoo, KNU, Mergui/Tavoy District

Painting by Aung Thein, Mae La Camp #1 High School.

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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THE 1997 OFFENSIVES IN MERGUI/TAVOY DISTRICT

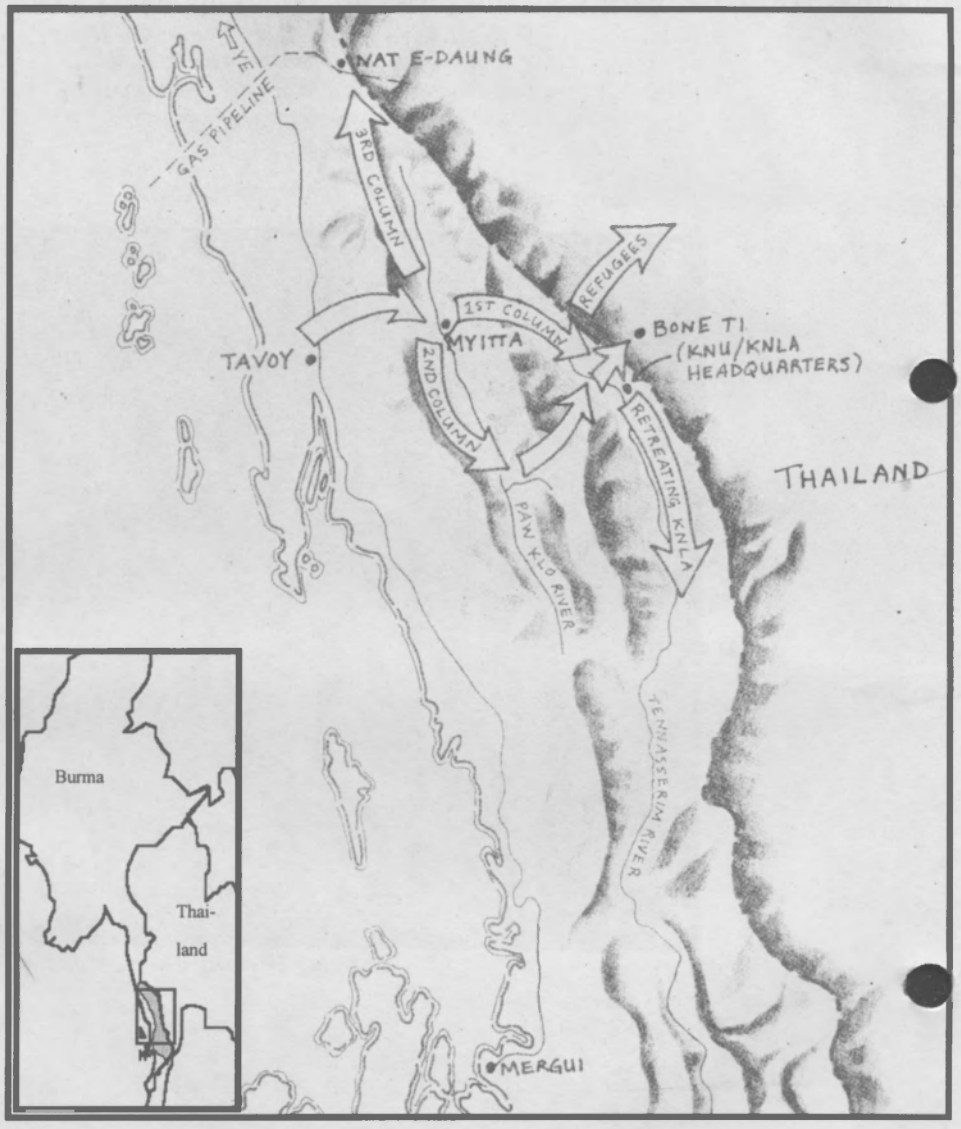
As everywhere in Burma, the Karen civil war is rooted in deep ethnic and political conflicts. However, the Burma Army offensives of 1997, unlike past military offensives, were economically motivated. The goal was to secure border trade with Thailand and to secure multinational projects in ethnic Karen-inhabited areas. The areas most affected by these offensives were the Mergui/Tavoy and Duplaya districts in southern Karen state. In Mergui/Tavoy District, the primary goal of the offensive was to secure areas adjacent to Burma's most significant foreign investment project, the Yadana gas pipeline.

The Mergui/Tavoy district did not seem to be a priority for the Burma Army until 1989 when SLORC (now called SPDC) and Thai private logging companies signed agreements to begin logging in the area. Substantial profits from the logging deals enticed SLORC to begin offensives in the district. Because the Burma Army was engaged in other areas at that time, a full-scale offensive in this district was impossible. However, SLORC carried out a few minor offensives to control trading routes to Thailand, to ensure logging concessions, and to occupy some strategic areas in order to impede Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) movements and to protect garrison towns.[1]

In 1995, the same year that Burma's state-owned monopoly MOGE (Myanmar Oil and Gas Exploration) and multinational companies finalized an agreement for a giant gas exploration and export project in the Mergui/Tavoy district, generally known as the Yadana gas pipeline, Rangoon mounted preparations for a full-scale offensive against the KNLA. The Yadana gas pipeline is the most well-known and potentially lucrative of Burma's international projects.

In 1992, the Paris-based energy company TOTAL signed a contract with SLORC for the appraisal and development of natural gas in the Yadana offshore field in the Martaban Gulf. In early 1993, the US-based oil company UNOCAL joined the project. In 1995 the Petroleum Authority of Thailand's Exploration and Production Co., Ltd. (PTTEP) joined the existing shareholders of the project, forming the Martaban Gas Transportation Company (MGTC) to build and operate a 254-mile transmission pipeline from the Yadana Gas Field to the Thai border. In the same year, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) signed a 30-year purchase agreement with the shareholders of the project to export the gas to a power plant at Ratchaburi, southwest of Bangkok. While the MGTC contracted to build the segment of the pipeline in Burma, PTT will construct the 162-mile segment in Thailand. In February 1997, the other shareholders made a payment to the SLORC/SPDC for a production-sharing contract of US $20 million.

Besides the gas project in the district, the Thai government is currently proposing an 80-kilometer road project from Kanchanaburi in Thailand to Tavoy, a coastal town of southern Burma. Thai business people foresee the road being used for trade and for expansion of tourism into Burma. Another project under consideration by the Italian-Thai company is seaport construction in Tavoy – a shortcut route to the Andaman Sea. Thailand is also considering building a manufacturing base in Tavoy.[2]



Operation Thu Ya

In 1995, following the finalization of the multinational gas export project, the Burma Army mounted its preparation for a full-scale military offensive. In that year, village relocations became more intensive than before. The Burma Army relocated villages from a large area to create a broad buffer zone, running north and south, between its well-controlled area and the KNLA-active area. In many cases, the Burma Army sent ultimatums to the villagers in the area to move to the north-south Ye-Tavoy road, which functions as a sort of informal line between the government-controlled area and the KNLA-active area. The Burma Army would often order people to move to relocation sites directly upon entering villages. Empty villages would then be declared as free-fire zones where anyone would be shot on sight. Some villagers moved to relocation sites, hoping to go back to their villages soon, and others sought KNLA protection by moving into the KNU-liberated areas.

In early 1996, Rangoon separated the Mergui-Tavoy from the previous South Eastern Military Command and formed a new commanding area called the Coastal Military Command (CMC). Then, the General Headquarters of War Office in Rangoon assigned Brig. Gen. Sit Maung as commander of the CMC. He was one of a few awarded the second highest military award, *Thi Ha Thu Ya* (a lion's bravery), and was by then allegedly already known for

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human rights abuses.[3]

In May 1996, the Burma Army began increasing the number of infantry regiment deployments in the district. According to the KNLA, the Burma Army patrols became more intense than before. At the same time, the KNU claims that the number of human rights abuses such as rapes, looting, village destructions and executions by the Burmese soldiers increased significantly.[4]

The Mergui/Tavoy District of the KNU, also known as the 4th Brigade area of the KNLA, is located in the southeastern coastal area of Burma, opposite Kanchanaburi of Thailand. Once the district was the KNU's largest liberated area with, according to KNU census statistics, 1,161,000 residents.

The rugged terrain, dense jungle, and abundance of streams and creeks were disadvantages for the Burma Army, but advantages for the KNLA. Many Karen say it is the worst malaria-ridden area, and death from malaria-related sickness is higher than in any other KNU district. The KNU district office and KNLA 4th Brigade headquarters were located at Htee Kee on the Thai-Burma border, about 35 miles west of the town of Kanchanaburi in Thailand.

On February 7, 1997, having spent several years in detailed preparation, the Burma Army began its offensive under the code name Operation *Thu Ya* (bravery). A total of 9,000 Burmese troops participated in the offensives in three military columns (see map). The CMC appeared to have two military objectives: to push the KNLA away from the gas pipeline to the south and to cut KNLA access to food, medicine, and ammunition from arms smugglers in Thailand.[5] It took 19 days to overrun the district headquarters of the KNU and KNLA at Htee Kee, and 23,000 new refugees from the Mergui/Tavoy district were driven into Thailand.[6] In addition, 2,274 families with a total number of 11,877 people were internally displaced.[7]

It is difficult to predict the future of the Karen struggle for autonomy. Unexpected factors, like the economic motivation for the 1997 Burma Army offensives, could be involved in the situation. In the future, it will continue to be crucial for the Burma Army to tightly control the locations of foreign investment projects in the Karen-inhabited areas.

Appeal for International Action

Burmese refugees are still crossing the border into neighboring Thailand, as well as Bangladesh and India. Multinational companies are involved, through investments in projects in areas affected by conflict. Thailand has economic interests in the progress and outcome of the conflict in Burma. China became a major arm suppliers to SLORC/SPDC. All of these factors have internationalized the conflict. This is why, to bring peace to Burma, international action is necessary.

The international strategy should be bringing Rangoon into equal dialogue with collective ethnic groups, so that all parties can expect a fair outcome. International actions can help support this strategy:

- An official United Nations arms embargo would be an effective pressure on Rangoon. After the military government gunned down unarmed demonstrators in 1988, the United States and European countries imposed an (unofficial) arms embargo, but China has remained a major arms supplier to Burma, filling the gaps left by the embargo. An arms embargo imposed by the United Nations would affect China's arms shipments to Burma.

- International action against multinational companies is very important in order to halt investments until the political problem is settled in Burma. This action will have a double impact on the Burmese military. Financial deficit will affect Rangoon's arms procurement and military expansion. Moreover, halting multinational projects in the Karen area (and other ethnic areas) will make Rangoon less interested in carrying out military offensives for economic reasons. International pressure will help bring SLORC/SPDC to the negotiation table with ethnic organizations as well as the democratic opposition. Moreover, this pressure will help to balance the power of the conflicting parties.

- Besides these pragmatic actions, refugees and internally displaced people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Their suffering is great. Cross-border aid is desperately needed to allow humanitarian assistance to reach the displaced people. This kind of aid is best implemented by international nongovernmental organizations.

Conclusion

The ethnic struggle in Burma for cultural preservation and for political and economic self-determination started in 1949. The conflict has lasted nearly five decades. Thousands of human lives have been lost.

Since the ethnic struggle in Burma has already shifted from a domestic conflict to an international issue, international action is needed to support peaceful resolution of the conflict. The strategy should bring SLORC/SPDC to the negotiation table for equal dialogue with the collective ethnic groups.

Before dialogue, pragmatic international actions must help to balance the power between the conflicting parties by imposing an official arms embargo and by pressuring multinational companies to halt their projects until the political problem is settled. Since the number of displaced people is increasing, aid for refugees and for internally displaced people is crucial.

Overall, the achievement of peace in Burma depends on a collective strategy and the cooperation of ethnic groups. Past experience demonstrates that survival of one ethnic group depends on cooperation with other ethnic groups. International action can pave the way to settling the political problem. The combination of cooperation among the various ethnic groups and converging international actions is the hope for peace in Burma.

❖ Moe K. Tun

This article is excerpted from a recent report published by Burma Issues, "The 1997 Offensives," by Moe K. Tun, which discusses the background and the impact of these offensives on the local people in southern Karen State.

On page 7, a story from Mergui/Tavoy District, "Our situation haunted us every day."

Endnotes, 'The 1997 Offensives'

1 Personal observation on the Thai-Burma border in 1989-1994.
2 "New Burmese Port on Andaman Sea likely to boost Thai Trade," Bangkok Post, Business Post, 10 Jul 1996.
3 "Maj. Robert Zan, KNLA," Personal Interview in Thailand, 20 Aug 1996.
4 Saw Win Khaing, KNU, Personal Interview in Mergui/Tavoy District, 22 Oct 1996.
5 Saw Thaw Thi, KNU, Telephone interview, 1 Dec 1997.
6 Burma Issues, "Forced Repatriation of Karen Civilians Into Area of Ongoing Military Offensives," 27 Feb 1997.
7 Karen Information Center, "Situation Update," 21 Feb 1997.

THE CHIN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION: WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY

The situation facing refugees who fled from Burma and are continuing to flee into neighboring India receives comparatively little attention from the international community. There are an estimated 40- to 50,000 displaced people from Burma's Chin State in the northeast Indian state of Mizoram. Due to Burmese and Indian insurgent activity in Mizoram and across the border in Burma, tourists are denied access to the area, local travel is severely restricted, and few if any services are provided by nongovernmental organizations. The only established refugee camp along the border is a site known as Parva Camp, which shelters a group of Rakhaing (Arakanese) refugees. However, Parva residents receive little in the way of humanitarian aid, and information concerning their situation is scarce. Members of other ethnic groups fleeing Burma such as Chins and Nagas generally cross the border and stay illegally in existing communities. Mizoram's isolation is a primary reason for the lack of information concerning Indian policy toward both Burmese asylum seekers from and officially determined refugees. Around 500 Burmese people are living in New Delhi, India: mainly Chin and Rakhaing students who fled after the 1988 uprising, and received protection from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[1]

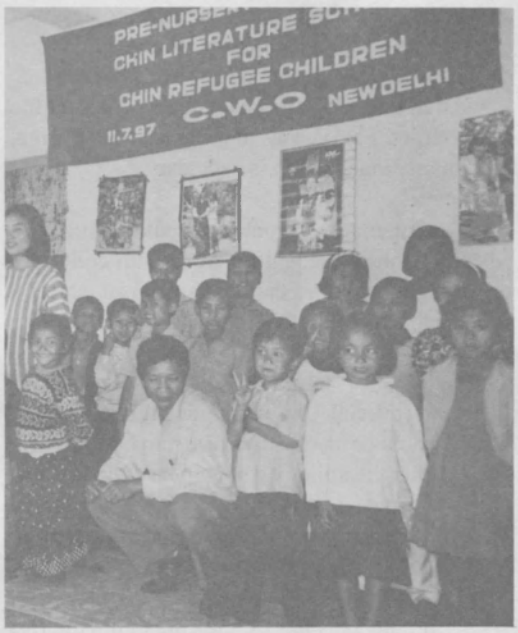
Most of the Chin community in New Delhi is living solely off the small monthly allowance[2] which the UNHCR provides to those whom it has officially recognized as refugees. There is a strong community commitment among the Chin to prepare for the future, when they can return to their homes in Burma – a prospect refugees sincerely desire. Securing appropriate education for their children is an important aspect of their vision in preparing to rebuild Chin State.

The UNHCR provides education assistance to refugee children. Until April this year, the UNHCR quite generously covered the costs for the children attending English medium schools. Parents preferred to send their children to these schools, because at the Hindi schools, all subjects but English are taught in Hindi. Learning English is seen as essential if Chin children are going to progress. Some view English as an important step toward further study and resettlement options; the Canadian Embassy has just started a resettlement scheme and 20 families will be leaving soon. For the majority of refugees, however, English is important preparation for returning to Chin State in the future with skills to support the rebuilding process.

In July last year, the Chin Women's Organization (CWO) opened a primary school. The main aim of the school is to maintain Chin literature and culture, as both are banned from schools inside Chin State. The teachers feel that since they have the freedom to teach in New Delhi, they must do so. Since Chin language and culture are not being taught at the Indian schools, the children attend the local or medium school from 7 a.m. to midday, and in the afternoon they go to the Chin Center to learn Chin, Burmese, English and mathematics. Currently, around 35 to 40 students attend.

The costs of running the center are borne by the ten executive members of the CWO, who contribute half of their monthly allowance given by the UNHCR. The center currently has no textbooks – the teachers themselves make handwritten books for the students. Contributions are collected from the community to help buy stationery. Exercise books have been bought on credit.

In November last year, the UNHCR announced that in April 1998 the education assistance would be lowered to cover only the costs of the local Hindi schools. The community is worried. Children's education is seen as essential for the future progress of the community, Chin State and Burma as a whole, and the local Hindi school curriculum does not adequately prepare the children for a future in Burma.



Students at the Chin community school in New Delhi.

The CWO has decided to organize an alternative for the Chin families in their community. They will set up a regular school at the center, and ask everyone in the Chin refugee community to contribute the UNHCR assistance money received for education. Van Suichin Vice President of the CWO, said, "The community has decided to open a primary school with the assistance money UNHCR will still give, instead of sending our children to the local school. We will teach Chin, English, mathematics, science and Burmese. In Burma, we will not speak Hindi, and we need to prepare our children for the future." Their plans are ambitious, considering they are currently struggling just to meet the running costs of the center. Preparing for the future is foremost in the community's thoughts, and the CWO is very committed to the project.

The CWO has made more long-term plans to open another center in Mizoram State, and its vision is to eventually establish branches throughout Mizoram State "wherever Chin people are living," according to Van Suichin. "If we are strong in Delhi we can expand." She believes that in order to build their nation, "We need to start in the family, extend to the community, the village and then the nation... in this way we will be successful in progressing which has been impossible under the current military government."

This community project illustrates a practical commitment to education for the future. Inside Burma, many young people do not have the opportunity to attend school; the opportunity to receive an education is extremely valued. As Burmese government schools provide instruction almost exclusively in Burmese, these young students have a unique opportunity to study in their native language. As one recent arrival said, "When I was in Chin State, all I was concerned at was how to survive, day by day. Now that I am here in New Delhi, I can see that the problems of my state are political, and I want to learn about this and be involved. Education is essential, and now I have time to pursue it, I must for the good of my community here in Delhi, and for the future back in Chin State."[4]

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V. Coakley

Endnotes, 'Where there's a will...'

1 If you would like to receive more information concerning conditions facing people in Mizoram State, contact the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, email: ravi@sadc.unv.ernet.in, or write to C-16/2, DDA Flats (SFS), Saket, New Delhi - 110 017, India.
2 The UNHCR provides an allowance of 1200 rupees a month, plus 500 each for dependents (including wife), which covers basic needs.
3 Interview, March 10, 1998.
4 Interview, March 9, 1998.

AN ENHANCED ROLE FOR THE UNHCR ON THE THAI-BURMA BORDER

Following attacks on several camps along the border in March 1998, Thailand's Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai announced that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would be allowed to play a role in managing aid for refugees, and administering the camps.[1] A recent seminar, attended by representatives from the Thai government and military and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), was held in Bangkok to discuss the future of the refugee camps, as well as the UNHCR's potential role on the border.[2] Though plans have not yet been finalized, the seminar made clear that significant changes are imminent in the administration of the border camps.

It is clear that significant changes are imminent in the administration of the border camps.

To date, Thailand has allowed the UNHCR only limited access to the Burmese refugee camps and has been asked to help on a case-by-case basis. Thailand has been concerned that the presence of the UNHCR would attract more asylum seekers across the border, and the refugee camps would become more permanent. However, the Royal Thai Army has faced increasing criticism for its inability to protect the 116,000 refugees in camps from cross-border attacks. This year has already seen repeated attacks on Huay Kaloke (aka Wangka), Bae Klaw (aka Mae La) and Mawker camps, and other camps are currently on alert fearing further attacks. The Thai government now hopes a UNHCR presence will provide more protection for the refugees, and help deflect criticism for inadequate security when the camps are threatened or attacked.

At the seminar, possibilities were discussed for the relocation of the refugee camps to more secure sites within Thailand. Lt. Gen. Sanan Kajornklam, Special Adviser for the Thai Office of the Supreme Command, suggested consolidating all the existing camps into a single camp, as occurred in the Cambodian situation. The camp would be located as much as fifty kilometers inside Thailand, in order to ensure better protection. This necessarily depends on border security – how easy it is to move inside Thailand from the border.

UNHCR's assistance in establishing a single Burmese refugee camp would entail a different administration structure than is currently used. The existing camps are small replicas of villages and are mainly located close to the area of Burma where the refugees originally fled from. They are administered by a camp committee composed of local members. It is a cost-effective administration structure in this context, and arguably better than administration from managed completely from the outside as it allows for local involvement in running the camps. In addition, there could be an increase in social problems and tensions if people from different locations, and with different affiliations are all grouped together. A new camp run by the UNHCR will make refugees more aid-dependent than they already are, as the administration of the camps could become outside of their control, and the increased dependency may foster a reluctance to return to Burma.

Gen. Sanan welcomed the role the UNHCR could play in financing such a camp and mediating to draw financial support from other countries. This comment brought a response from the Burmese Border Consortium (BBC) representative, as the BBC has been coordinating humanitarian assistance to the camps for the last decade. Around eleven countries provide aid assistance to the existing camps through the BBC, and the programs permitted have been determined by Thai policy. Careful thought should be given to replacing the existing structure with something bigger until the parameters of Thai policy are known. Finance is not the real issue. The NGOs working along the border have only been able to provide the assistance permitted under a very restrictive Thai policy.

Until there is a political resolution in ethnic minority areas, refugees will continue crossing the border.

The UNHCR would be responsible for a refugee registration process, which would entail identifying ethnic group, political or other memberships or affiliations, and needs prior to repatriation. Screening is a contentious issue in this context. A number of the refugees are family members of people belonging to various political and insurgent organizations, and there exist significant hostilities and rivalries between groups. This suggests potential security problems in the camp due to these tensions, but NGOs will protest if people are refused protection.

After the camps burned in March, army chief Gen. Chettha Thanajaro announced that "only women, children and old people would remain at the refugee camps, while adult males would be removed and repatriated."[3] Last year in March at Bong Ti, male children as young as 14 were classified as "able-bodied men" and repatriated to Burma on a similar rationale. Such a policy of selective protection is a clear violation of humanitarian principles. Gen. Chettha's statement has not been repeated, and it seems clear that such an simplistic solution is unlikely to become policy. However, such statements emphasize the need for the UNHCR's screening process to be managed both impartially and independently.

The Thai government is concerned that allowing the UNHCR an enhanced role along the border may upset Rangoon. Although the UNHCR's work is considered humanitarian and nonpolitical, the Burmese government views the agency as representatives of the western community which it repeatedly criticizes. Thailand is no doubt concerned that by upsetting its volatile neighbor, existing and potential economic agreements could be threatened. However, Thailand also wants to solve the expensive and often embarrassing refugee problem, and realizes that it will only be safe and acceptable to send refugees back when the civil war ends.

Gen. Sanan acknowledged that the root of the problem is the Burmese government's aim to abolish the ethnic minorities who do not support the government. Until there is a political resolution in ethnic minority areas, refugees will continue crossing the border. Thailand must do what it can to encourage a political resolution to this crisis. Within ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), constructive engagement with the military government may be the best option. However, it was noted that up to this point, the Burmese have been very self-contained and difficult to budge; they listen but do not respond to suggestions.

Gen. Sanan emphasized that a time frame must be established for the UNHCR's involvement, and proposed that their involvement be structured to last between three and five years, with the shortest time frame preferred. However, he acknowledged that much depends on the internal situation in Burma. He pointed out within the next five years Burma's new constitution, currently being drafted under management of the SPDC, is due to be finished and promised elections held. It is too early to predict exactly when the ill-famed constitution will be finished and preparations for an election would begin, or whether such elections would be UN-supervised. It will nevertheless be important that the refugees are able to participate in such a process.

The UNHCR's role on the Thai-Burma border

Continued on page 7

COMMENTARY: SCHOOL OF RAPE, THE BURMESE MILITARY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

In July 1997, Burma signed and ratified the 1979 international Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Under CEDAW, state parties are obligated to protect women against violence. Within a year of signing, state parties must submit a report to the U.N. Secretary General on the measures adopted -- legislative, judicial, administrative or other – to protect women against discrimination, and on the country's progress toward the goals outlined in the convention. Compliance with the convention necessarily means that governments take responsibility for the practices of their armed forces, punishing perpetrators of rape to illustrate that it is not acceptable behavior. Burma's report to the CEDAW committee is due later this year.

EarthRights International's (ERI) latest report entitled, *School of Rape: The Burmese Military and Sexual Violence*,[1] analyzes the connection between perpetrators and acts of rape in Burma. Rape by the Burmese military, particularly against ethnic minority women, is endemic throughout areas of conflict in Burma. The report argues that the Burmese government is not providing the ethnic women of Burma adequate protection against violence by the armed forces; that in fact, the military system itself fosters extreme abuses.

The report 'School of Rape' argues that the Burmese government is not providing the ethnic women of Burma adequate protection against violence by the armed forces; that in fact, the military system itself fosters extreme abuses.

Rape is not an easy topic for discussion, much less investigation, as most rape victims understandably will not discuss their experience directly. Yet the systematic raping of women seems an integral part of war, specifically as a weapon in psychological warfare. Knowledge that the armed forces will use rape as a weapon spreads terror. Rape also serves as a means of revenge against ethnic insurgent fighters. It is a direct way of waging war on women as it deprives women of their dignity, and it often results in lasting trauma. In a culture which places a high value on virginity, the social stigma may burden the victim long after the worst of the trauma is past. The stigma is even greater for a woman who becomes pregnant through rape and carries the baby through to full term. In this way rape can be perceived as part of an ethnic cleansing strategy, as well as a psychological weapon of war. The forcible impregnation of ethnic minority women decreases the number of ethnic minorities by creating more "Burman births," and more deaths resulting from sexually transmitted diseases, botched abortions, suicides, and actual injuries or deaths resulting from rape.[2]

Rape is an act of violence which cannot be viewed out of the context in which it is perpetrated. It is an integral component of the civil war in Burma. Its prevalence in Burma is enabled by a number of larger cultural factors, which ERI has summarized as follows:

- *The exalted status of the military in Burma, which enables soldiers to commit criminal acts with impunity;*
- *The militarization of Burmese society, in which notions of masculinity and femininity are played out on the battlefields and in the villages, with soldiers' bodies as weapons and women's bodies as targets; and*
- *The subordinate status of women in Burma.*

The report in seeking to analyze the underlying causes of rape by Burmese soldiers, examines characteristics of the *Tatmadaw* [Burma Army] that are problematic and give rise to rape. In particular, it concludes that the following aspects of the Burma Army make military rape predictable:

- ***The age of Tatmadaw soldiers.*** *Many soldiers are under 17 years old. They lack the maturity, the moral development, or the emotional strength to resist indoctrination of the Tatmadaw. Their youth makes them particularly susceptible to a military ideology in which masculinity is defined by the ability to dominate and commit brutality against the "enemy."*
- ***The soldiers' education level.*** *Most soldiers lack even basic education, and many are illiterate. They are without skills or grounding in the rules of war. Many have no alternative employment opportunities. This creates a corps of armed men and boys ruled by ignorance.*
- ***The recruitment methods.*** *Many soldiers are kidnapped or otherwise forcibly conscripted. In addition, other soldiers join the Tatmadaw to escape arrest for crimes, sometimes violent, that they commit. Indiscriminate recruitment means inappropriate candidates are inducted.*
- ***The training methods.*** *The training focuses on building fear rather than skills. Soldiers are instructed, through example and practice, in cruelty. By the end of their training, they have become both pupils and teachers in the art of violent degradation.*
- ***Disciplinary techniques.*** *Punishment is inconsistent, inappropriate, unpredictable, and generally brutal. In addition, soldiers are called upon to punish their peers. This creates a culture of perpetual fear and victimhood where it is expected that force will be used to punish misbehavior.*
- ***Daily treatment.*** *Soldiers are virtually starved, given inadequate clothing and equipment, and forced to act as slaves for their officers. Their valuelessness is confirmed by the withholding of salaries and medical attention. A rigid hierarchy is created in which rank-and-file ("ordinary") soldiers have very low morale, and officers commit atrocious acts unpunished.*
- ***Isolation from support networks.*** *Soldiers generally are prohibited from visiting their families and, in many cases, from sending and receiving mail. To the extent they develop camaraderie with one another, it is based on harmful rituals of brutality they are forced to execute. In addition, they are discouraged from developing trust within their units through self-punishment practices and enmity between officers and soldiers. Isolation and loneliness induce extreme behavior.*
- ***Excessive use of alcohol and, in some cases, drugs.*** *Many soldiers are frequently drunk, sometimes on the front lines. In addition, some reports indicate that soldiers use drugs including marijuana and heroin. Drunkenness is accepted without question and drug abuse is often overlooked if not actually encouraged. Substance abuse and uncontrolled aggression are invariably linked.*
- ***Bigotry and sexism in the Tatmadaw.*** *Soldiers are often indoctrinated to view ethnic minority groups in Burma as inferior to ethnic Burmans. In addition, an attitude of strong disrespect for women, especially toward minority women, is reinforced through behavior by officers.*

The Tatmadaw, like all militaries, is a hierarchical institution. Ordinary soldiers are at the

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bottom of the pyramid and suffer the most, because as the least powerful members, they are subject to more potential abusers. However, because there is a pecking order of brutality in the Tatmadaw, even officers are subject to abuse by their superiors. Through its hierarchical structure, policies, and practices, the Tatmadaw transmits an ethos of violent masculinity to everyone who serves. Soldiers are taught that victory over the enemy depends on their masculinity; that, in turn gets defined as their ability to fight, to dominate, to commit violence.

At the same time, the Tatmadaw creates a paradoxical situation in which all but the highest officers are situated as both vulnerable victims of abuse and masculine warriors. Such a paradox breeds confusion, which is often resolved through violence. When Tatmadaw soldiers and officers – anyone subject to this para- have the opportunity to demonstrate their masculinity, they take it. This means they seek to dominate and violate those in more vulnerable circumstances: women. Brutality breeds brutality, and the prevalence of rape by brutalized Tatmadaw soldiers and officers is the predictable result of the cycle of violence played out between the military and the ethnic insurgents.[3]

Ultimately, it is the state which must take responsibility for the actions of its armed forces. As ERI points out, the ethos within Burma's Tatmadaw has direct bearing in turn on their treatment of civilians. The ethnic minority women of Burma are extremely vulnerable in this civil war. As a state party to the CEDAW, the Burmese government has an obligation to ensure that the discriminatory actions of the armed forces against ethnic minority women, rape being one manifestation, are not sanctioned. The international community must be aware of the reality the ethnic women of Burma face under the Burmese government's tacit knowledge and acceptance, and voice its disapproval when the government's report comes under scrutiny.

❖ V. Coakley

Endnotes, 'School of Rape'

1 Betsy Apple, School of Rape: The Burmese Military and Sexual Violence, EarthRights International, 1998, pp. 41-45 and 91-94. The report can be ordered from ERI: PO Box 12, Lard Phrao Bangkok 10901, Thailand; Tel/Fax: 66 2 512 2051; email: earth@ksc8.th.com.
2 B. Apple, 1998, ibid., p. 41-45.
3 B. Apple, 1998, ibid., p. 13-16.

Cont'd from 'UNHCR,' page 5

will be clarified over the next few months. The main question is what is the appropriate role for the UNHCR, and how will Thai policy change regarding programs and activities permitted inside the camps. The proposed time frame for the UNHCR's involvement starts with protection and necessarily ends with a successful repatriation program. Such a plan can not be cast in stone by the UNHCR and the Thai government. The attitude of the Burmese junta towards the ethnic minorities will ultimately determine the time frame for repatriation and the nature of the UNHCR's participation. Thailand's refugee situation will not end without a political resolution agreed upon and adhered to by all concerned. The international community needs to carefully monitor the progress on this issue, and demand accountability and transparency from the actors.

❖ V. Coakley

Endnotes, 'UNHCR'

1 The UNHCR can only assist in refugee situations upon invitation from the refugee host country. To be involved in a repatriation program, the UNHCR must be invited to assist by the country of origin and the host country.
2 The seminar, entitled "Burmese Refugees: Status and Solution," was held on April 1, 1998, hosted by Forum-Asia and the Asian Research Centre for Migration, at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.
3 "Karen men in refuge sites to be repatriated," Bangkok Post, 26 Mar 1998.

"OUR SITUATION HAUNTED US EVERY DAY"

In February 1997, when we heard that troops had entered the neighboring village, all 30 to 40 families in our village fled into the jungle in fear. We walked from place to place, staying wherever we thought we might be safe. [redacted] of the men who would go back to check [redacted]me situation heard that SLORC troops had passed through our village regularly.

After wandering in the forest for a month and a half, we felt that no place was really safe for us. By that time, some people had come and told us that the SLORC troops would do nothing to us if we went back, but it would a different story if they if they caught us in hiding. So we all decided to go back to our village.

One day when there were no troops around, we returned to our deserted homes. Our things were strewn all over the place. There were none of the usual sounds of roosters crowing or dogs barking, no cattle wandering through. Everything was quiet.

The next day, SLORC troops came and dug foxholes beside our houses and took position for two days. They did nothing to us, only waited. Finally they told us that we could not leave the village without a permission form. Those who wanted to go to their fields had to pay 15 kyat per day for a paper from the SLORC office, and be back in the village before dark.

The soldiers ordered us to bring all our paddy rice from our hiding places or they would destroy it whenever they found it. Some people, afraid that the soldiers would see their cache, went to get their stored rice. The soldiers confiscated all of it. At the same time, some of them went from house to house to sell the rice that had been issued to them from their base camp. They charged 50 kyat per *pyi* (about market price). We couldn't afford to buy it because we had no income all season, ever since the military activities started in our area.

We had to pay to work in our fields, we had to serve in the camp without pay, they took our rice and we had to buy their rice in order to survive. They destroyed and looted our crops, killed or took all our animals. Then we heard we'd be forced to do hard labor on a new military road soon, without any pay. But we were unable to escape their control. They said their troops were all over the forests and mountains, and that their superiors had ordered them to destroy or kill anything they see outside of human habited areas. Our situation haunted us every day.

One day the SLORC commander summoned me, and told me to go and find my son (who was actually in the village defence) and bring him back to him. That day, when the SLORC troops had gone away for the day, my family fled from our village, together with seven other families. We joined about 60 other displaced people who had been staying in the forest. Together we worked our way to the east. On the way, three people died of diarrhea. We crossed into Thailand but the authorities there wouldn't let us stay, so we came back into Karen territory. Now we are waiting here, knowing nothing about our future.

I never wanted to leave my village, my home, my garden. But our fate was forced on us. If there were any chance to live peacefully in my home, I would go back at once without wasting a minute.

❖ *Anonymous sources*

The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"Some soldiers when they arrive at villages, they terrorize and rape the pretty women. Some soldiers enter villages and demand money that they have not been ordered to collect. I don't want all of the fish in the boat to go rotten, just because of one rotten fish. If our soldiers continue to behave so badly, our whole army will lose its reputation." – *From a speech given by SPDC Secretary-1 Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt at a meeting of Burma Army battalion and division commanders.*

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"There's a lot of discussion that it's an initiative of the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army], but I think the general view is that the DKBA doesn't really do anything without at least the tacit understanding of the Burmese." – *U.S. Ambassador to Thailand William Itoh commenting on recent cross-border attacks by the DKBA on refugee camps.*

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"The motive of these raids is a long-term strategy of the Burmese army to terrorize the refugees into returning to Burma and to force the armed KNU to enter into a cease-fire agreement." – *an NGO worker in Mae Sot commenting on the attacks on refugee camps.*

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"I want to go back [to Burma]. I want revenge." – *A 12-year-old boy whose leg was hit by bullets during a DKBA raid on the refugee camp where he lived.*

"We don't know who to trust and depend on. It seems no one is siding with us." – *A Karen refugee.*

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"I accept that it should have been stronger, particularly in our intelligence gathering." – *Thai National Security Council chief Gen. Boonsak Kamheangridirong on the security at Huay Kaloke camp during the attacks.*

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"It is terrible, almost unbearable for me. I am more sad than angry. I tried to laugh even when the tears were streaming down my face so I wouldn't go crazy. This was how to maintain our sanity." – *Interviewee answering documentalist from Amnesty International, on how he felt about knowing so many friends and relatives who had been killed recently in Kunhing Township (aka Konhein), central Shan State.*

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"They're building for the future, entrenching themselves and making investments. They feel they have the generals in their pockets." – *An intelligence officer commenting on Burmese drug lords.*

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"For every 20 people sent out, 50 new ones would come in." – *A Thai foreign labor official commenting on the idea of repatriating illegal workers from Burma.*

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