

DAWN

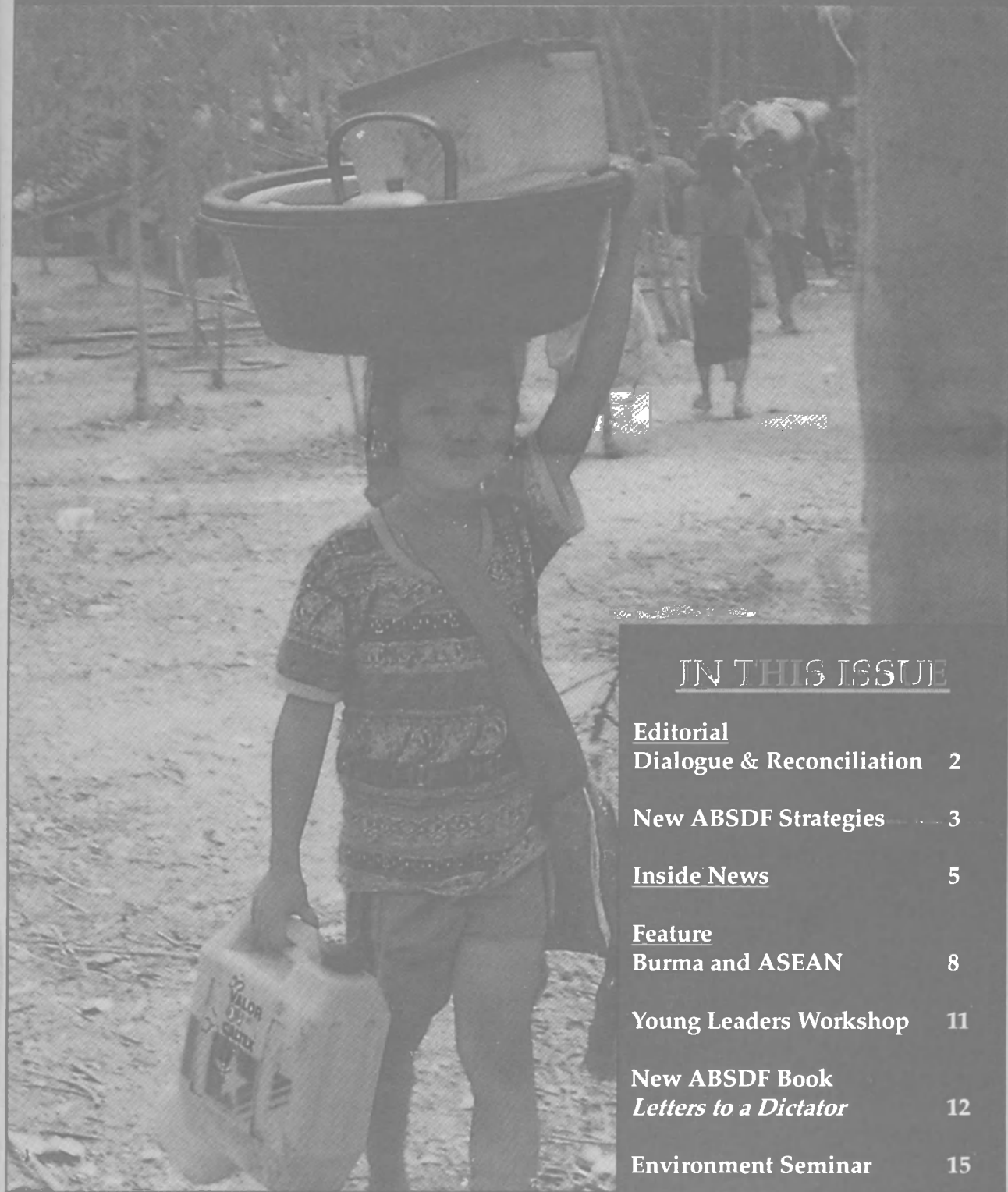


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Reconciliation Only Possible Through Dialogue

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After the refusal by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to honour the 1990 election result, the creation of a state constitution and a puppet civilian government has become SLORC's main goal, alongside economic reform.

However, the emergence of a constitution and civilian government has no possibility of becoming a reality. It is understandable why SLORC cannot fix a date for the completion of what is probably the world's longest drafting process for a state constitution. The drafting process lacks the support of the people, is totally under the control of SLORC, has been boycotted by the National League for Democracy (NLD) and has received international condemnation.

Meanwhile, SLORC's sponsored open market economy has failed to bring any prosperity to the people. Despite figures showing an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and foreign investment, inequalities in wealth continue to grow and the standard of living for the majority of Burmese declines even further. Millions of Burmese are leaving the country in an attempt to escape this poverty. At the same time, diplomats and analysts have stated that if there is another mass uprising it will probably be due to the severe economic hardships people are facing. SLORC's dream of a better standard of living for the people to ease tensions in Burma is far from a reality.

ASEAN Must Intervene

If SLORC's plans to solve the political crisis fail, their reasons for rejecting a dialogue are groundless. SLORC's Secretary-one Khin Nyunt restated after a recent meeting with the Japanese deputy foreign minister that SLORC will not talk with the NLD. But many are watching how long SLORC can stand pressure from nations like Japan to enter a dialogue. Japan and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have expressed their opposition to US investment sanctions, claiming that they themselves are able to convince SLORC to accept political reform. Japan has begun some initiatives in this regard, and it's time for ASEAN to do the same. As debates on ASEAN's policy intensify, it is now the best time in Burma for ASEAN to adopt 'constructive intervention'.

Talks last June between Khin Nyunt and NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe are considered by NLD leaders to be the first step towards a comprehensive dialogue. NLD leaders, ethnic groups and exiled opposition leaders are confident there will be a dialogue sooner or later. What NLD leaders have made clear concerning a dialogue is that it must be satisfactory to all those involved and the end result must be reconciliation, rather than a winner-loser scenario. The democratic forces would not be 'winners' and SLORC would not be 'losers', but instead both sides would unite under the title of national reconciliation for the benefit of the country. However, this outcome can only be achieved through a comprehensive dialogue.

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ABSDF Adopts New Strategy Focussing on Political Activities

With nine years experience of struggle against SLORC, the ABSDF leadership gathered to discuss what would be the most effective policies in order to restore democracy in Burma. Delegates to the last Central Committee meeting reviewed whether or not past policies matched the present circumstances and they agreed to make changes to ABSDF strategies and tactics.

Central Committee members believe that democratic movements all over the contemporary world

"Burma now faces an even more critical situation than it did at the beginning of the civil war immediately after independence from Britain."

are being effected by rapid exchange and dissemination of information. SLORC knows that information is power. SLORC uses the media by controlling all radios, televisions and news papers in order to prolong their grip on power. Creating a network of news and information collection and dissemination is essential for those who are struggling for democracy and human rights. Therefore, the ABSDF Central Committee has given priority to working on news and information collection and dissemination.

SLORC leaders only have experience in military operations against democracy opposition groups and are afraid of non-violent

political defiance movements. SLORC has a weak point in responding to non-violent political defiance movements. The change made in the Central Committee meeting took into account this weak point, which can become a strength for the ABSDF. Therefore one of the new ABSDF strategies includes promoting political defiance movements among the people.

SLORC fears that their status as the ruling elite may be lost when the people, currently influenced by government propaganda, are empowered. The people must understand their role in a democratic society before such a society can come into existence. Consequently, the Central Committee decided to work on educational programs to empower the people.

SLORC has being criticised by the international community for its human rights abuses and its refusal to acknowledge the 1990 election results. Since the international community can play in an important role in pressuring repressive governments to undertake political change, an increase in international pressure on SLORC will help democratisation in Burma. The



First Central Committee meeting since the reunification conference in September 1996. ABSDF Chairman Dr Naing Aung addresses the meeting, held on the Thai-Burma border, which adopted new political strategies.

ABSDF Central Committee members agreed to give precedence in promoting international lobbying aimed at increasing international pressure on SLORC.

After SLORC is toppled, members of the ABSDF will be part of the generation who'll play an important role shaping the future of Burma. The ABSDF believes that it not only has the task of overthrowing the present repressive military regime, but it also has a part in the future reconstruction of Burma. Therefore, while the struggle for democracy and human rights continues, the simultaneous study of the future reconstruction of Burma is needed. The last Central Committee meeting spelt out some strategies to deal with this.

Opposition Groups

A delegation composed of ABSDF leaders and members will learn democratic systems of different countries and the obstacles they face. This delegation may visit some countries if the opportunity arises. The ABSDF will give special attention to how social justice and fair distribution of national wealth can be attained under an open market economy. Finding solutions to ethnic conflicts in Burma is also a priority. The Central Committee will greatly appreciate any individual or organization which is able to co-operate or consult with the ABSDF on these matters.

The ABSDF can do many things that opposition groups under the control of the SLORC cannot. As all opposition political parties are moving toward the same goal, the ABSDF will always try to work with other groups, especially those under SLORC's control. The ABSDF will also strengthen its work with other members of National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB).

T-Shirts

Quality T-Shirts with a picture of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on the front are currently available from the ABSDF.

The T-Shirts are white only and are selling for US \$8 each. Postage US \$2.

To order your T-Shirt contact us at
P.O. Box 151
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ABSDF Statement

ABSDF Central Committee Meeting Decides To Prioritize Political Work To Restore Democracy and Human Rights

A recently completed ABSDF Central Committee meeting has resolved to alter the organization's strategy to make non-violent political defiance tactics and international lobbying the main weapons in our struggle to end the brutal military dictatorship in Burma. The 40 student leaders from different regions, who attended the meeting spent 10 days analyzing the effectiveness of the tactics that have been used in the past, and discussing the most appropriate course to follow in the future.

The ABSDF believes that Burma now faces an even more critical situation than it did at the beginning of the civil war immediately after independence from Britain.

The SLORC's continued refusal to acknowledge the desires of the Burmese people, and its unwillingness to tackle political problems, in particular democratic, ethnic and human rights issues, in a just and dignified way by political means, is the primary cause of the economic crisis that the country now faces. Furthermore Burma's hopes of achieving development, and peace in the future have been almost shattered by the SLORC's complete failure to address the urgent need for investment in human resources, and by their rampant depletion of our natural resources for the purchase of arms.

The ABSDF believes that the only way out of the abyss lies in the hands of the Burmese themselves. All of us must actively participate in the struggle, and fight for the freedom and rights that we have been deprived of for over three decades.

With the ever-increasing repression of political dissent, the worsening economic situation in the country, and growing dissatisfaction among the rank and file of the Burmese army, the ABSDF believes that in the foreseeable future the people will be driven to a level at which they can tolerate no more, and at which they will once again rise up against the dictatorship as they did in 1988, and risk life and limb to demonstrate their desperation.

After extensive consideration of these circumstances, the ABSDF has decided to adapt our political strategy to give a greater focus to non-violent means of struggle.

Central Committee
All Burma Students' Democratic Front
12 August 1997

Farmers Arrested and Sent To Forced Labour Camps

Farmers who have recently escaped to Thailand have complained of being sent to forced labour camps by SLORC. Many farmers who have fled to the Thai-Burmese border have told of being arrested and sent to labour camps, while others explain they fled to escape arrest. Farmers say their paddy fields were subsequently occupied by SLORC.

Last year many farmers were arrested for not providing the rice quota of 12 tins per acre to SLORC, six tins to the Union Development and Solidarity Association (USDA), and rice to local SLORC officials. Since SLORC adopted a policy of increasing rice exports, farmers have been forced to sell rice to SLORC at a price lower than that in the market. The SLORC offered price is 70 Kyat per tin while the price in the market is over 250 Kyat per tin.

Farmers in Irrawady and Pegu Divisions have suffered most under SLORC's order. The rice production in these two divisions is traditionally among the highest in the country but paddy fields were destroyed in the area last year due to bad weather. Therefore farmers could not provide the rice quota as SLORC demanded.

SLORC also issued an order warning farmers that those owning more than five acres of paddy field would have their excess land confiscated by the state and redistributed under the SLORC administration. According to a farmer who recently escaped to Thai-Burmese border, many farmers have as a consequence been forced to sell their extra paddy fields at low prices before SLORC could enforce the order.

SLORC Creates New Corporation to Monopolise Economy

The Burmese Army has recently created the 'Myanmar Economic Corporation' in an attempt to monopolise the Burmese economy, but has yet to officially announce the move. The Myanmar Economic Corporation has its Head Office on Shwe Dagon Pagoda Road in Rangoon and is owned by Divisions and Regions of the Burmese Army.

Although the Corporation has not been officially announced it has extended its capital in the areas of

insurance, steel, cement, construction and mining. It is expected the Corporation will be officially announced after it has ensured control of many areas of the economy.

Another SLORC corporation Myanmar Economic Holding Limited controls most areas of the Burmese so-called open economy. The Myanmar Economic Holding Limited has the largest amount of capital among Burma's national companies, and holds shares in 18 foreign companies and is involved in textiles, mining and tourism. A branch of the company, Myawady Tour is allowed to take tourists to places where some 350 other tour companies are prohibited from operating. Last year, the Myawady Tour extended the transport of tourists along the Moe Goat-Mandalay-Musal route by using army helicopters.

There have also been accusations that Myawady Bank, operated by Myanmar Economic Holding Limited, has been involved in money laundering.

TOTAL Employees Reportedly Rape Local Girl

A 15-year-old girl from Tenasserim Division in southern Burma was raped in June by three foreign employees of the French company TOTAL, according to a source from the girl's village. The source claims that TOTAL has given 800,000 Kyat to the girl's parents in an effort to close the case.

The girl and her parents live in a village in Yebyu Township where TOTAL's gas pipeline project is under construction. Their village was relocated due to the pipeline. According to the local source who recently arrived on the Thai-Burma border, the incident occurred on 23 June when the three TOTAL employees went to buy vegetables from the girl. The employees allegedly grabbed the girl when she went to collect their money, took her away and raped her.

When her parents arrived back home they were seriously concerned because they could not find their daughter. The following day they found their daughter in the TOTAL hospital and discovered what had happened to her. The girl's parents informed the local SLORC officials and police, but no one apparently dared handle the case.

The local source says that local villagers were very upset by the fact that no legal action was taken against the three foreigners.

15 Killed in Karen State by Landmines

SLORC landmines killed a total of 15 civilians in August in Pa Pon Township and Shwe Kyin Township in Karen State. There have been numerous reports of civilians dying from landmine accidents in ethnic areas where SLORC has used thousands of the weapons to protect the so-called insurgent groups from approaching their camps. Another report said that SLORC landmines also recently killed two other civilians in Karenni areas.

Since land mines are very effective, both SLORC troops and members of ethnic armed groups use the devices. However, most of the landmines have been placed after cease-fire agreements have been reached between SLORC and armed ethnic groups because SLORC takes the opportunity to protect their positions. Therefore, those who have suffered the most from landmine accidents have been the ethnic people.

KNU Commander Dies

The Company Commander of Karen National Union (KNU) Battalion 16 died on 14 June after he was given a medial injection by a SLORC medic from Battalion 549. The Commander, Saw Al-Lwe, surrendered to SLORC during a military operation against the KNU last February. He was the son of Commander Saw Tha Mu Hel of KNU Battalion 16 who led the surrender group.

Refugees Sent Back to Burma

The Thai army sent 24 Burmese refugees including six children back across the border in mid-June from Nopo camp in Tak Province, Thailand. The refugees

are villagers from the area under the control of the Karen National Union's (KNU) Brigade No. 6.

They arrived at Nopo camp on 12 June and asked the Thai Army to let them into the camp. They were brought to Um-Phan the same day and were then sent back to Burma the following day. Nopo camp is controlled by Thai Army Division No. 3. Double barbed-wire fences surround Nopo and since June refugees have no longer been allowed to freely enter and leave the camp. Instead they must receive travel permission from the Thai authorities.

The camp emerged in the aftermath of the SLORC offensive against the KNU in January and February this year.

KNLP accuses SLORC of breaking cease-fire agreement

The Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) has accused SLORC of breaking their cease-fire agreement by forcing KNLP soldiers to lay down their arms. KNLP Commander-in-Chief Major General Than Palan made the accusation in a speech given on 4 June 1997 during celebrations for the 33rd anniversary of KNLP that took place in Phel Khon Township in Shan State.

Than Palan said SLORC Battalion No. 336 used force in ordering KNLP soldiers to lay down their arms. He added that when KNLP members travel from place to place they are searched by SLORC troops, including KNLP leaders. Than Palan said these kinds of acts by the SLORC army is a break of the cease-fire agreement.

The KNLP signed a cease-fire agreement with SLORC on 27 July 1994, which recognised that the KNLP did not have to lay down their weapons. The KNLP, formed on 4 June 1964, has urged SLORC to start a tripartite dialogue with ethnic forces and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Many observers point out that SLORC's increased pressure on the KNLP is due to the organisation's call for a tripartite dialogue.

SLORC Military Intelligence trafficking in women

A group of 20 women arrested last June by SLORC Military Intelligence Unit 19 (MI 19) were sold by the Unit to a brothel in Ranong in Thailand, according to local sources.

Officers from the unit, based in Kaw Thaung opposite Ranong, frequently search houses and arrest unregistered guests. During one search in June 20 women were arrested along with a number of men and

Calendar

October-November

October

16 Buddhist Light Festival

November

1 Founding Day of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)

19 Founding Day of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB)

24 National Day - commemorating the first student boycott in 1920 against the British.

the officers sold the women to a brothel in Ranong. One of those arrested was a 30-year-old school teacher from Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, who was visiting Kaw Thaug when search was conducted. She and the other trafficked girls wrote letters to immigrant Burmese working in Ranong explaining their situation and their suffering.

Finally Burmese social workers in Ranong were able to get them out of the brothel. However officers from MI 19 again arrested the school teacher from Moulmein while on her way home. Her whereabouts are unknown.

SLORC Increases Pressure on Cease-fire Groups

While SLORC constantly boasts that there have been 15 groups who have signed cease-fire agreements, the dissatisfaction among these groups is increasing with recent restrictions being placed on the Shan national groups.

When these groups negotiated with SLORC they were told they would be allowed to wear their military uniforms and keep their weapons, however SLORC has now stated that cease-fire group members are no longer allowed to wear their uniforms or retain their weapons.

Cease-fire groups are also unhappy with the implementation of SLORC's so-called local development projects. Due to corruption among local SLORC officials, money has been siphoned from the development projects. As a result, the groups have themselves had to pay for the construction of facilities such as schools, hospitals and infrastructure such as roads.

In this manner, the cease-fire groups have attempted to prove they are able to carry out their own development projects. While SLORC always uses forced labour whenever they implement such projects, cease-fire groups pay fair wages to the labourers.

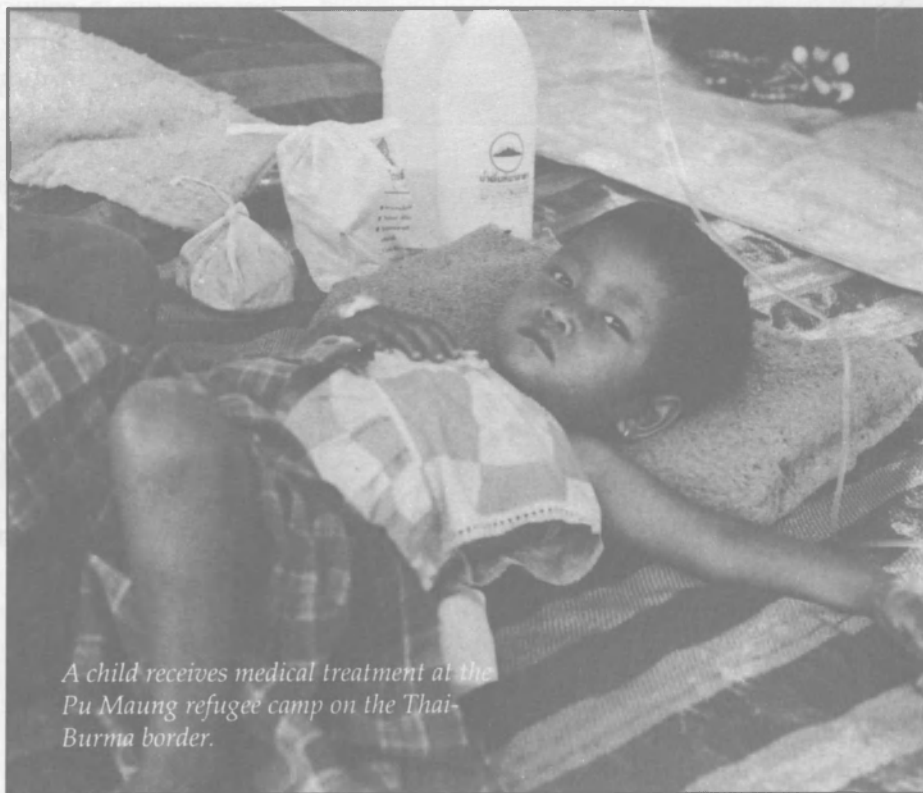
Land Reportedly Seized and Given to Khun Sa

Hundreds of acres of land in Shan State has been forcefully occupied by SLORC and transferred to opium lord Khun Sa who surrendered to SLORC in early 1996, according to a trader who recently arrived in Thailand.

Local people own the land, consisting of about 1000 acres in Phelkhon Township and 2000 acres in Pin Laung Township. Some 90 houses are to be built in Phelkhon for Khun Sa's followers, of which about half have already been completed.

The construction of the houses, known as the Ka-Thel-Kwin project, involved taking wood from local saw mills free of charge under SLORC's instructions. Consequently, many of the Phelkhon saw mills have been forced to close and, according to the trader, only one saw mill is operating. Over the last five years there have been increasing numbers of SLORC troops in Phelkhon and one SLORC Army Command has even been set up there.

The trader says SLORC army officials in the region are also involved in gambling, drug trafficking and prostitution. Although SLORC is sponsoring an anti-drug program, he says that drug production in the Phelkhon area is rising as drug producers bribe SLORC officials.



A child receives medical treatment at the Pu Maung refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border.

From 'Engagement' to 'Intervention': The Way Ahead for ASEAN

With ASEAN's policy on Burma under the spotlight, *Khin Maung Win* looks at the current situation in Burma and where this policy should be headed.

There are two major factors underlying Burma's present political plight which the international community needs to keep in mind when they are assessing their policy towards the ruling military regime in Burma.

The first is that the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has the right, mandated by the people at the 1990 election, to form a government in Burma. That landslide victory at the democratic ballot box has been denied to the NLD by the refusal of the military junta to cede power or in any way to recognise the verdict of the people. The second is that the repression and abuse of power against the people of Burma by the SLORC military regime exposes to the international community a human rights record which is among the worst in the world.

The slaughter, torture and repression of the people of Burma and its ethnic minorities rank among the

Advocating dialogue rather than sanctions, ASEAN's approach has had the effect also of providing encouragement to the SLORC to continue their human rights abuses against the Burmese people and the ethnic minorities. ASEAN's 'constructive engagement' policy seems to be based on more than simple or even complex economic considerations, important as these self-interest economic forces are. The following discussion will attempt to explore other ASEAN motivations for support for 'constructive engagement'.

'Asian Values'

It is not surprising that ASEAN leaders adopt the role of promoters of an 'Asian Values' approach to civil and individual rights, which contrasts with that of Western democracies. 'Asian Values', promoting as it does seniority in politics and continuity of rule, is generally to be understood through the concept that the economic good of the nation has greater priority than the rights of individuals in society. Since economic development in ASEAN countries has been achieved at rapid rates under authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, that success has given some credibility to this idea that ASEAN leaders are promoting — that their political system, differing from that of the West, is responsible for their economic success.

Some ASEAN leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir seem intent on raising their status as ASEAN leaders to become world leaders. Rejecting western approaches, Dr Mahathir has argued that the concept of 'Asian Values' is eminently suitable for Asian society. His position has been encouraged publicly by the SLORC Foreign Minister, U Ohn Gyaw. As long as no philosophy emerges in the region to challenge the assumptions underlying the 'Asian Values' doctrine, the ASEAN leaders can continue with impunity to thus differentiate themselves from the West and individual rights.

"The foolish belief that uncontrolled economic development coupled with uncontrolled military spending and oppression of its citizens can bring political liberalisation to Burma, is misguided and a delusion."

worst excesses of an illicit regime in modern times. Western democracies are moving to support the restoration of democracy and human rights in Burma by means of sanctions - a move which Burmese people and the ethnic minorities endorse. Under the slogan of 'constructive engagement', however, ASEAN members are encouraging SLORC to remain in power.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has never attacked any ASEAN leader personally, but Lee Kuan Yew last year sought to discredit her personally, stating that she was not fit to govern a country that needs a strong government. Such an attack demonstrates how ASEAN leaders have adopted a personal agenda which operates when they have to address Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's ideas. That agenda has now been translated into the 'constructive engagement' tactic. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi does not oppose Burma's ultimate membership of ASEAN, but only proposes that the right time is when Burma becomes a democratic state. In this she is not alone. However, ASEAN leaders have found it difficult to do anything that would allow the emergence of a rival philosophy that might undermine their own positions of authority.

Extending Thailand's Interests

It has become increasingly obvious that the Thai government will not voice any significant criticisms against the SLORC, even when Thailand's sovereignty has been under threat. There have been at least ten recent attacks by the SLORC which intruded into Thai territory or which affected Thai sovereignty. SLORC also received full support and co-operation from Division 9 of the Thai Army during attacks against KNU bases in the Tenasserim region opposite Kanchanaburi.

The Tenasserim region is important for the Thai economy. It is planned as a corridor for the development of a transportation route that will connect Thailand's major industrial zones with the Andaman Sea. The proposed route will cross areas previously controlled by the KNU and in an attempt to realise its economic importance, repression in the region has increased. Refugees in the region suffer much more than ever before as the Thai army implements its government's policies of co-operating with the SLORC to "clean up" the area.

For Thailand, 'constructive engagement' policy appears to be synonymous with expansion of its economic interests. The call by the Thai Foreign Minister to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to "tone down" her stance in order to facilitate a compromise with the SLORC is calculated to undermine further the mandate of her election-winning party. This remarkable call has been made in the absence of any willingness by the SLORC to enter into dialogue with her.

To Burmese who are struggling for the restoration

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maintenance of their political model in the region. Indonesia's Golka and SLORC's Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) are both government-sponsored organisations that are also the political bases for government domination of power. Both are attempting shamelessly to eliminate opposition political movements as rivals and alternate governments. It is because of the need for continued solidarity that Burma is so warmly welcomed by Indonesia. The exercise of 'constructive engagement' may thus be, in the

of democratic government, that call seems to be a partisan interference in the politics of Burma. It backs up the repressive regime while maintaining silence about the SLORC's stubborn refusal to transfer power to the elected people's representatives. The Thai government's support for 'constructive engagement' was reaffirmed during Prime Minister Chavalit Yawncchiyud's recent visit to Burma, when many economic contracts were signed.

SLORC is the architect of the most oppressive rule on earth. However, it has before it a number of examples of how to eliminate political opposition in order to hold power for life. SLORC has found in Indonesia a political model that maximises the role of army while minimising the impact of democratic principles on government. The Indonesian constitutional model is

Indonesian Model of Repression

being mirrored by the SLORC. The political theory that the governmental head should be elected by plebiscite is rejected in Indonesia where president-appointees elect the president.

The SLORC proposes a similar system in Burma if and when its undemocratic constitution comes into effect. Indonesia is also notorious for eliminating political opposition. Violence against parties opposed to those who hold power is exercised both in Indonesia and in Burma. The SLORC both admires and adheres to the Indonesian political system where the elite of society wields the political power and dominates the economy. The maintenance of solidarity amongst ASEAN members is deemed to be essential to the

case of Indonesia, an imperative to extend, or at least to defend, its own oppressive political system.

ASEAN leaders also define the method of implementation of their policy of 'constructive engagement' as one of convincing the SLORC "behind closed doors", and not through confrontation such as with sanctions as proposed by Western democracies. 'Constructive engagement' is, in fact, merely diplomatic language. We observe that diplomacy works only between those nations who care about their reputations in the wider international community.

The SLORC is composed totally of army chiefs who lack any skills of international diplomacy, or have any understanding of how to react when they are pressured by the international community. SLORC members have been isolated for three decades and are unskilled in international relations. SLORC generals don't appear to care what the international community is urging, and show scant respect for resolutions of the United Nations.

ASEAN leaders repeat that the policy of 'constructive engagement' is the most appropriate method to deal with the SLORC. But since ASEAN's adoption of a 'constructive engagement' policy towards SLORC, no political progress has been achieved. Instead there has been an increase in repression. In contrast, parallel to the advocacy of such a policy, the economic interests and investment by individual ASEAN members in Burma have intensified. Both ASEAN and SLORC have advanced their economic partnerships but the people of Burma continue to suffer.

So long as ASEAN's policy does not deal with the

Continued on page 14.

ABSDF Chairman Attends Democratic Leaders Forum, Declaration Passed

A declaration passed in Seoul in August at a Young Leader's Workshop during the 1997 Forum of Democratic Leaders in the Asia-Pacific (FDL-AP) called on the Burmese military regime to enter into a meaningful dialogue with representatives of democratic and ethnic groups.

ABSDF chairman Dr. Naing Aung participated in the Workshop held in Seoul, South Korea from 18-23 August, along with 43 other youth leaders from the Asia-Pacific region. Co-chair Mr. Kim Dae-jung stated in his opening speech to the Workshop that the FDL-AP was giving priority to democratization in Burma.

Democracy

The declaration stated that despite the progress being made in some Asian countries in the transition towards democracy, "we note with concern the serious reversal of democratic practices in Burma and Cambodia". The declaration went on to remind all ASEAN members of "their moral commitment to help restore democracy in Burma", and urge all Asian countries to work towards the establishment, improvement and consolidation of democratic institutions and practices.

Dr. Naing Aung made a presentation entitled *Burmese Democratisation: Its Significance in the Democratisation of Asia*. "In order to democratise Burma, our movement simply believes that a non-violent internal political movement is essential," Dr. Naing Aung said. "We demand the international community pressure SLORC to convince them to enter a substantial dialogue to solve the

political problems in Burma," he added. "While we are receiving support from democratic countries of the west and democratic organizations in the east, we as yet don't have any support from the ASEAN leadership, and our peoples' desire for democracy is being hindered by ASEAN's cosmetic 'engagement' approach."

The Forum of Democratic Leaders in Asia-Pacific is a non-profit organization established in December 1994 to promote democracy within the Asia-Pacific region, including all its necessary prerequisite conditions and institutions. The FDL-AP is co-chaired by Ms. Corazon Aquino, Mr. Oscar Arias Sanchez, Mr. Kim Dae-jung and Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

Dr. Naing Aung was met by Rev. Kim Dong-Wan, General Secretary of National Council of Churches in Korea, and Rev. Park Chong Yul, General Secretary of Korea Student Christian Federation, and exchanged views on democratization in Burma and in the region. He also met with Civil Society Magazine, which is sponsored by the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, and explained SLORC's economic mismanagement and its monopoly of Burma's so-called open market oriented economy.



New Book of Historical Letters Reveal SLORC's Brutal Tactics

The ABSDF has recently published a collection of 33 official letters from the NLD to the SLORC, which reveal the range of brutal tactics used to suppress NLD members and elected representatives.

The letters demonstrate how the SLORC's campaign of repression against the NLD has been carried out with a total disregard for the junta's own laws, and expose the hypocrisy of the SLORC's claim to be maintaining law and order and bringing peace and development to the country. The book is entitled 'Letters to a Dictator', and the original document containing the 33 letters was smuggled across the border into Thailand at great risk to the carrier. The letters are a rare and important record of recent political events in Burma, and were distributed as an internal NLD document with a preamble to NLD members by the party's General Secretary Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

The 33 letters were written between 1 December 1995 and 4 March 1997, and were sent by NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe to the SLORC's Senior General Than Shwe. In many of the letters U Aung

Shwe makes the simple point that by suppressing the activities of the NLD which is a legal political party, the SLORC is violating its own laws and its objective of 'the prevalence of law and order' in Burma. There was no formal response by the SLORC to any of the correspondence, nor was any action taken against those responsible for the many criminal acts of repression.

The letters cover a number of important issues such as a face to face dialogue, the violent attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in November 1996, the convening of the Pyithu Hluttaw or Parliament, the National Convention and the Constitution.

Repression and Human Rights Abuses

The examples of repression and human rights violations contained in the letters include acts such as closing offices and dismantling party signs; public death threats against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and physical attacks on party leaders; forcing members to resign from the party; illegally detaining and interrogating members and officials; fabricating charges and interfering in the

due process of law; restricting the movement of party members; blackmailing the families of NLD members; forcibly conscripting NLD officials as porters for the military; and forcibly evicting members from their homes.

One of the letters dated December 1996 called for urgent action to be taken against U Win Sein, the Minister for Rail Transportation and Secretary of the USDA, who gave a series of speeches which the NLD described as "narrow-minded, insidious and evil". The letter goes on to state that "U Win Sein



*A woman and children from
the village of...
on the Thai-Burma border.*

tried to win the trust of the people by encouraging them to turn against Aung San Suu Kyi, telling them lies about her personal life...U Win Sein then shouted to the villagers three times, "That's why we must get rid of her! We must exterminate her!" He asked the audience if they knew the meaning of the phrase "exterminate her", and he said it meant to kill her."

Many letters detailed abuses of human rights against NLD members including this extract regarding

"The authorities not only forced NLD members to leave the party, but also made and distributed fake NLD resignation forms."

forced portage:

"Members have been taken to be used as porters for military operations...[and NLD member] U Saw Htun Nwe, a Karen national, died of fatigue as a result of his age...the NLD has not received any information regarding the rest of the officials [and] does not know if its members are wounded or healthy, dead or alive. The NLD considers this act of forced conscription as absolutely barbaric."

Other letters explain some of the SLORC's methods of forcing NLD members to resign from the party. From one letter:

"The authorities in Maubin told NLD members that the party was going to collapse because they were facing many hardships, and that they should quit the NLD now because people listed as party members were likely to be arrested once it was disbanded. The authorities not only forced NLD members to leave the party, but also made and distributed fake NLD resignation forms."

And another: "The Commander of Infantry 56, Lieutenant Colonel Ko Ko, met each of the NLD members individually and forced them to resign from the party. He used various threats to intimidate the members into resigning. In one of the threats he said, "You must resign from the NLD, otherwise your life may be in danger"...He told them, "You are our prey...All we've got to do is shoot."

Two of the letters concern the attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in November 1996 and complain about the lack of interest shown by the police in investigating the matter. Regarding the attack, U Aung Shwe states that "It is obvious that the attacks

were premeditated and that the aim was to assassinate leaders of the NLD. The authorities encouraged this act of anarchism by deliberately ignoring the attacks which were carried out on unarmed NLD leaders who had no ulterior motives."

Some of the violations cited in the letters also show the lengths the SLORC will go to incriminate NLD members, such as the following incident cited in the final letter:

"The Pantanaw Township LORC summoned officials from all departments of the town and asked them if Dr. Tin Min Htut had violated any law. When [they] could not find fault with him the town's police chief ordered...his men to find anything that could incriminate the NLD representative...When the police searched Dr. Tin Min Htut's house they found two Singaporean coins in a small toy cup [his] son was playing with. Dr Tin Min Htut was then arrested for illegal possession of a foreign currency."

ABSDF Publications

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democratisation of Burma, the SLORC will hope to survive and prosper. So long as ASEAN is receiving special advantages by dealing with SLORC, ASEAN will not speak out in support of the democratisation process. But 'constructive engagement' will turn out to be a counter-productive policy, for to be a bootlicker of a dictatorship like the SLORC has a limited future.

ASEAN leaders are proud of their success in economic development. They prefer to develop their economies rather than to pursue political reform. However, almost all SLORC generals are the same generation who have governed the nation since 1962, and lack the capacity, the skills and the experience to lead Burma's economic reform.

Investment

Although it is true that foreign investment in Burma is high, such investment has not improved the living standards of the people. Instead people's poverty has grown steadily worse. A million illegal Burmese immigrants are living in Thailand while thousands are also fleeing to Japan, Malaysia, Korea and Western countries to escape poverty. Foreign investment in Burma is not able to alleviate the entrenched poverty nor provide employment for the vast mass of the people who cannot sustain themselves. Even the billion-dollar gas pipeline project, a capital-intensive investment, can employ only a few hundred local people. An undeveloped country like Burma needs labour-intensive investment projects that can employ more people.

However, Burma can't attract these investment projects because its infrastructure and education system is incapable of matching the needs of economic reform. Rather than invest in a skilled workforce and appropriate infrastructure, SLORC expends at least 40% of the national budget for military purposes, while only 4% of the budget is spent on education. As long as political oppression continues to exist, decreases in military expenditure and increases in other sectors such as education, health and in the provision of infrastructure is impossible.

Some international agencies point out there has been an increase of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) under SLORC's governance. While vigorous attempts are made by the military regime to demonstrate that Burma's economy is developing by using GDP figures in isolation, the reality is that all of Burma's national income does not even cover government expenditure. The truth is that up to 50% of the money for

infrastructure and other domestic spending must be printed. That prescription for economic disaster has resulted in an inflation rate of 30%. One former large export earner, rice, is no longer the money-earner it was. Rangoon-based foreign diplomats have advised that foreign reserves are at their lowest for many years.

Even though SLORC may claim they are not worried about US sanctions, they are extremely hurt by the denial of World Bank, IMF, and recently ADB loans. Without these loans the SLORC will not be able to develop the infrastructure necessary to support manufacturing industries. As a result, there has been no development of Burma's manufacturing capacity since 1993. In addition, small investment in clothing manufacture has deserted Burma following pressure from Burma support groups.

Such a huge sluing of the economy by massive expenditure on military and civilian coercion agencies in a country of least-developed status has had a dramatic negative impact on the people, and their capacity to cope. The foolish belief that uncontrolled economic development coupled with uncontrolled military spending and oppression of its citizens can bring political liberalisation to Burma, is misguided and a delusion.

ASEAN Blocks Democracy

The democracy that Burmese people are struggling for is not a guided democracy, but one that guarantees political liberties, individual liberties and social justice. I suspect this type of democracy is what the majority of citizens in ASEAN countries also long for. Only those in power and who live off the ruling system want otherwise. Success of the Burmese struggle for democracy may lead to struggles in other ASEAN countries against repressive governments. If ASEAN is sincere, why do they close their ears to what the legitimate people's representatives and the oppressed peoples of Burma are saying? For Burmese, the only conclusion possible is that ASEAN leaders are deliberately blocking the Burmese democracy movement led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

'Constructive engagement' encourages the repressive regime of the SLORC. It takes no heed of, nor pay any respect to, election results, and turns a blind eye to human rights violations. The people of Burma are suffering from ASEAN's 'constructive engagement' policy. The time has surely come for ASEAN to abandon that approach.

Call for Action Against Environmental Devastation

An international seminar held in Bangkok in July on the Constitutional Protection of the Environment in Burma acknowledged that urgent measures need to be taken to address the country's deteriorating environmental situation.

The seminar was convened due to the result of growing concerns at the serious environmental devastation in Burma by the SLORC military regime and other parties. This devastation has occurred through unsustainable development and exploitation of Burma's oil and gas reserves, forest and marine resources, minerals, river systems, and agricultural lands.

The Constitution

Soe Aung and Myat Thu of the ABSDF Foreign Affairs department participated in the three-day-long seminar, along with 50 other delegates from various ethnic nationality organisations from Burma, as well as legal and non-legal environmental experts from Thailand, Japan, the United States, Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand.

Organised by Forum Asia, Images Asia, the Union for Civil Liberty, and the Burma Lawyers Council (BLC), the seminar concluded that there was a need for the long term protection of the environment by formulating avenues for its protection, conservation and restoration. It was declared that such avenues should include protection through the Constitution, and through defining the responsibilities of the government of the environment.

The seminar expressed concern at the current environmental degradation in Burma, which is intertwined with the worsening political,

economic and human rights situation in the country. There was also acknowledgement that these concerns can only be properly addressed when a political solution is reached in Burma along with the restoration of democracy.

The Second International Youth Festival On Human Rights was held in the Philippines in July, with the theme "Youth and the 21st Century: Building a Human Rights Culture".

Soe Aung, from the Foreign Affairs department was among nearly 200 delegates who attended the festival. He was one of the speakers in the discussion "Conspiracy of Hope: The Youth Response to the Human Rights Challenge", and gave a brief introduction of the ABSDF. Participants showed great interest regarding the situation of youth and students in Burma and in the jungle. Soe Aung also held a photo exhibition on the political, social, cultural and economic situation of Burma. The festival aims to establish networks among youth and serve as a venue where youth can respond to human rights challenges. Participants expressed their solidarity with the people of Burma by holding a tree planting ceremony in which a mango tree was planted at the venue.



Seminar on the Constitutional Protection of the Environment in Burma. Jenelle Saffin, BLC Honourable Secretary and member of the New South Wales Parliament, Australia.

USDA Forms New Group, Attack on NLD Expected

The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) has recently formed a new youth group. According to reliable sources, the Central Executive Committee of the USDA, an organization formed under SLORC's sponsorship, recently issued an order to its regional members asking them to collect at least 20 USDA youth members from each township.

These members are to be trained in a special manner and will be members of the "Pyu-Thut-Swan-Ahr-Shin-Mya-Athin", meaning people's power group.

Party Congress

The ABSDF has learned that this USDA youth group is expected to attack NLD members who are planning to attend an NLD party congress scheduled for 27-28 September.

SLORC has been training USDA youth members with the aim to eliminate opposition movements,

especially the NLD. Last November about 200 USDA youth members attacked an NLD motorcade in Rangoon which was carrying senior leaders including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Kyi Maung and U Tin Oo.

NLD leaders are expected to discuss the party's future plans during the September party congress. The NLD Central Executive Committee has invited regional leaders to come to Rangoon by 25 September. USDA youth members are under the SLORC's instructions to attack these NLD regional leaders on their way to Rangoon.

The Union Solidarity and Development Association is an organisation sponsored by the SLORC and was formed by the military in 1993. It currently has a significant involvement in Burma's economy. People are coerced into joining the organisation which is used both to suppress the democratic movement and to carry out SLORC's policies.

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