

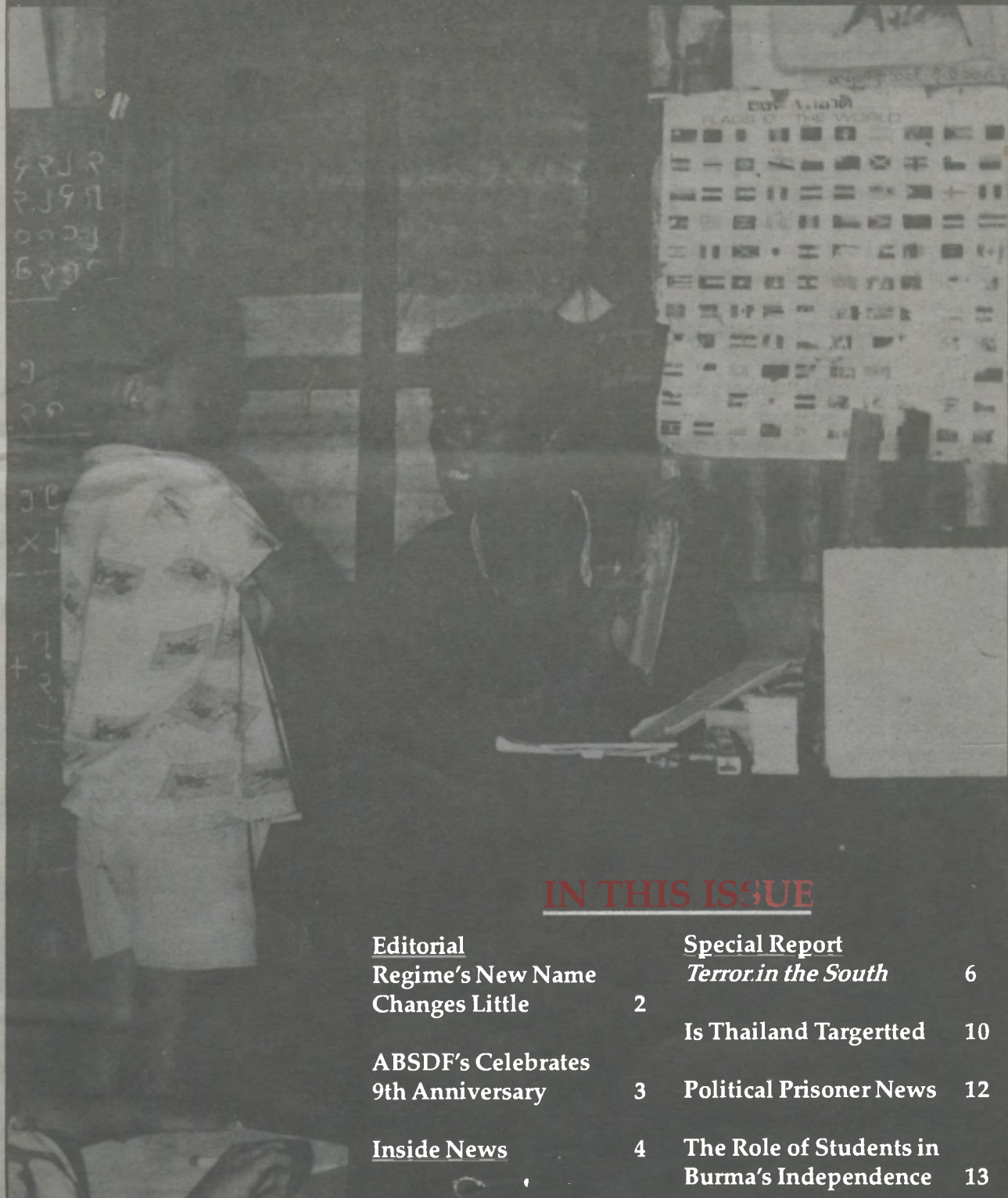
DAWN



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Regime's New Name Changes Little for the People

Reaction to the recent name change of Burma's brutal military regime from the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has been quite rightly, very guarded.

The change has removed some of the corrupt old guard, who have been placed in a 14-member Advisory Group, and has served to resolve some of the internal rivalries among the top brass. It has also paved the way for the military's younger echelon to share in the spoils of high office with the new 19-member council comprising the heads of the country's 12 regional military commanders. However, the fact is that the top four generals - Senior General Than Shwe, General Maung Aye, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt and Lieutenant General Tin Oo - have retained their positions of power in the new council. And of course Ne Win and "The Butcher" Sein Lwin are still believed to hold immense power and sway over policy.

The move certainly came as a surprise, but such changes by Burma's military are not entirely unexpected. Since the coup in 1962, the military has changed the name of the country three times, changed the flag once, and has adopted four different names for its ruling body - the latest being the SPDC. What is disturbing is that the military continue to be concerned only with resolving their internal struggles for power. There is a total neglect of the economic crisis confronting the country and the enormous hardships faced by the people.

"Disciplined Democracy"

Diplomats have said the move was an attempt to remove corrupt officials and improve the regime's image. A spokesman for the new SPDC was quoted as saying the SPDC's mission is to restore democracy to Burma and the change in name and composition at the top was a sign it was following that mission.

But there has been little change, especially at the very top where the four most senior generals retain their positions of power. The removal of the corrupt old guard and the name change from the Orwellian sounding SLORC to the State Peace and Development Council does show the regime is at least concerned about its image - if only for the purpose of attempting to appease the international community and encourage further investment. However, these changes are merely cosmetic.

The fact that the SPDC stated it will move towards the establishment of a so-called "disciplined democratic system" is of concern. Clearly the military is not envisaging true democracy, but rather a continuation of a military dominated state. The military must relinquish their political role and once again let the people decide who should run the country. As the NLD stated in regard to this matter: "Only a genuine democratic state that guarantees basic human rights can help us attain freedom, justice and equality".

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Statement on the 9th Anniversary of the Establishment of the ABSDF

On November 1, 1997, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) marks nine years of unrelenting struggle for democracy and human rights for the people of Burma following the nationwide pro-democracy uprising of 1988.

At this time, we honour our many colleagues who have over the past nine years sacrificed their lives in the jungle and in prisons throughout the country for the restoration of democracy in Burma. To uphold the honour of these colleagues, we will persist with our struggle until democracy in Burma is achieved.

General Strike

During the August Central Committee meeting of the ABSDF, we unanimously decided to promote more political activities inside the country, which will culminate in a nationwide "general strike" against the military. The ABSDF firmly believes that a people's democratic movement has the strength to overthrow the military dictatorship.

Although ASEAN has admitted Burma as a member, it can be clearly seen that their "constructive engagement" policy does not work. At the same time, the SLORC military regime is under great pressure from the international community which has expressed serious concerns about political repression and human rights violations.

The military regime has still refused to enter a meaningful dialogue with the democratic forces, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic representatives.

The ABSDF fully supports the National League for Democracy (NLD) and its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for attempting to enter a meaningful dialogue with the SLORC in order to solve the country's problems peacefully.

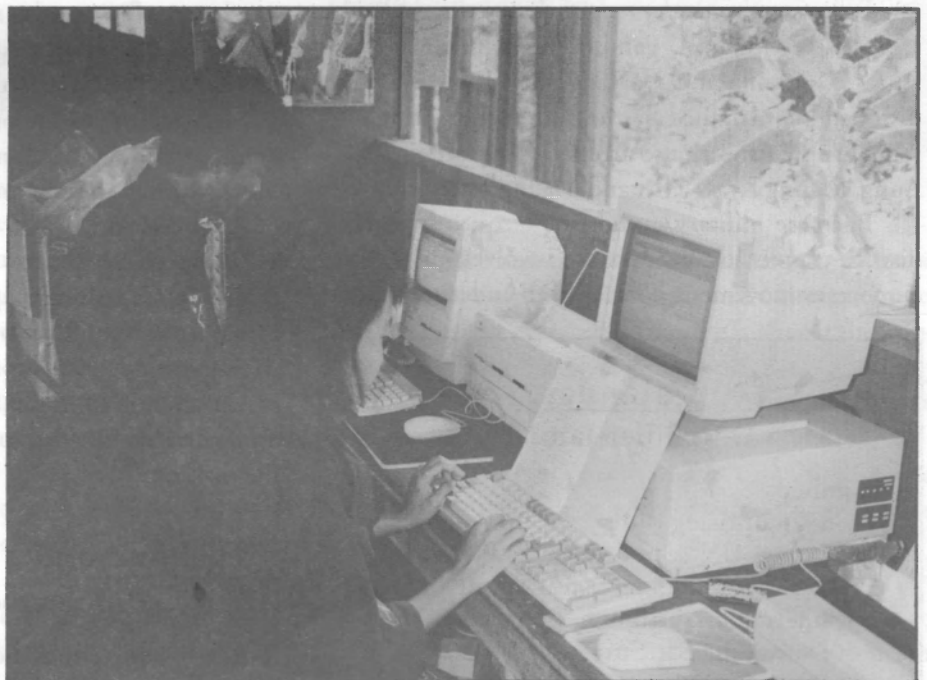
The ABSDF continues its struggle with the following objectives:

1. to liberate all nationalities under military rule,
2. to restore democracy and human rights,
3. to restore internal peace,
4. to establish a Federal Union of Burma.

Central Committee

ABSDF

Headquarters (Dawn Gwin)



ABSDF members working on the Thai-Burma border. By early 1989 some 10,000 students and supporters had fled to border areas to escape the brutal SLORC military regime. To organise this support in order to fight the military, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front was formed on 1 November 1988.

Buddhist Monks Forcibly Defrocked in Irrawaddy Division

Eight Buddhist monks were forcibly disrobed in November in Henzada town, south-west of Rangoon, and subsequently detained in prison following a scuffle with local authorities, according to a monk who witnessed the incident.

The monk, U Wayama, said the incident occurred following the temporary arrest and questioning of two Buddhist monks by the local police. The two monks were taken in by police sergeant San Nyunt for questioning at about 10 p.m. on November 14 and were released after being interrogated for about an hour.

U Wayama, who recently fled to the Thai-Burma border, said a group of monks, from the Boe Thein Tan Monastery, and students numbering about 20 approached the local Township Law and Order Restoration Council office demanding an explanation as to why the two monks had been interrogated.

When the authorities failed to provide a proper explanation, a scuffle broke out between the group and local authorities.

Following the incident, the eight monks - U Teikka, U Seitta, U Sandaw, U Pandita, U Nyanidawbatha, U Panya, U Zanila and U Nandamala - were forcibly disrobed and detained by the authorities. Three high school students were also arrested. They are Zaw Myo Aung, Maung Kyaw Thet and Maung Thet Naint Oo.

Burmese military authorities frequently forcibly disrobe monks it considers are involved in the pro-democracy movement. The ABSDF understands there

are about 152 monks who are still serving prison sentences in Burma's jails for various political offences. More than 500 monks have been arrested and jailed since 1988 and 16 of them have died in prison.

In another incident, a revered Buddhist monk from Haymawum Buddhist Monastery was killed on November 3 in a car accident involving an army truck. The 77 year-old monk, U Badanda Damika, was from Myaung Mya town in Irrawaddy Division and was awarded the prestigious title of Maha Kamahtana Saria, or the Great Meditation Instructor. According to U Wayama, the truck slammed into the car carrying the monk near Tike Gyi in Rangoon Division and the local people are extremely angry with the army.

Border Clash Leaves Nine Dead

A gun battle between security police and unidentified gun men in Tamu in October on the India-Burma border left a security guard, two villagers and six police dead.

The Nan Phalon market in Tamu was fired on by the unidentified gun men about 30 minutes before midnight on October 12, 1997. The fighting lasted 20 minutes and houses on both sides of the border were hit by bullets.

Later, a fire was also started in the market and was put out at six o'clock next morning. An estimated 150 million kyat was lost in the fire.

According to an order from SLORC's Trade Ministry, the Nan Phalon market and 450 shops at the nearby Moray check point No.2 opened in the middle of April this year.

An ABSDF source said SLORC township vice chairman Captain Kaung Zan Oo receives taxes and bribes from Nam Phalon market and that the shops in Moray are not very prosperous. The source said an earlier attempt to start a fire at Nan Phalon was made on September 20 when people found oil spread inside the market.

Thai Authorities Detain Members of Pro-democracy Groups

Thai army units from the 9th Division, including two high-ranking officers, and local police arrested 17 members from various pro-democracy opposition groups on November 24, 1997.

The arrests took place when Thai army units with the help of local police raided offices belonging to

Calendar

December-January

December

- 5 1974 uprising during the funeral of the former UN Secretary-General U Thant
- 1996 student demonstrations in Rangoon
- 10 International Human Rights Day
- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 1991

January

- 4 Burma Independence Day
- 9 Karen New Year

Burmese opposition groups at about 11:30 am.

The detainees include four members of the Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS), two members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), two members of the Karen History Research Department, two adults and three boys from the Mergui-Davoy United Front (MDUF), and four members of the Peoples' Defense Force (PDF).

According to the same source, Sergeant Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese military intelligence officer from Military Intelligence Unit 5 based at Three Pagodas Pass, came to see the group in their police cells. One of the detainees, Ko Kyaw Htet from the PDF, was reportedly questioned by the Thai army for several hours.

Although the motive behind the arrests is unclear, local residents told the ABSDF that the Thai Army must have acted at the request of the SPDC (formerly the SLORC) after recent clashes near Mae Katha between opposition forces and Burmese troops stationed at Three Pagodas Pass. Twenty Burmese soldiers including a captain were killed in the fighting and many others were wounded.

Three Pagodas Pass is situated opposite Sangkhala Buri in Thailand and is a former stronghold of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), which signed a cease-fire with SLORC in 1995.

Counterfeit 500 Kyat Notes Circulated in Shan State

On September 16, 1997, many shop keepers in Kynhein, eastern Shan State, found they had received wads of counterfeit 500 kyat notes.

The notes had the Burmese letters ka-la and ka-najee and the shopkeepers surrendered the counterfeit money to the police, according to a trader from Kynhein.

In June 1997, there were reports that authorities confiscated 700,000 kyat worth of counterfeit 500 kyat notes in Taunggyi.

This followed the seizure of 15 million kyats worth of counterfeit money on October 19, 1997, in Muse on the Sino-Burma border, as well as many hundreds of thousands of counterfeit kyat in the golden triangle and along the Thai-Burma border. In Shan State there is widespread use of counterfeit 500 kyat notes by the local people.

The trader from Kynhein said that the quality of the counterfeit money is almost as good as the real thing and is much better quality than the counterfeit notes

SNIPPETS

All In The Family

The mother of the notorious head of the Coastal Region Military Command Major-General Thiha Thura Thura Sit Maung, is attempting to sell teak to Thailand from a wildlife reserve in Tenasserim Division.

Daw That That is said to be working in cooperation with the Maha Pyne Rice Company of Thailand to take the teak from the Myint Hmo Lakhat wildlife reserve. SLORC has been conducting an operation since early 1996 to clear the nearby area of opposition forces including the KNU and the ABSDF.

Enough To Make You Crazy

A high level of insanity and medical discharge have recently been reported in the army.

Soldiers are not receiving their proper salaries from the regime due to the economic crisis. Since October this year the regime has stopped supplying cooking oil to its forces as a result of spiralling inflation and a lack of foreign reserves. These include ground forces, navy and air forces, police, all other subordinate troops and cease-fired groups.

Many in the army have therefore reportedly resorted to pretending they are insane in order to receive a medical discharge from the force.

he had seen before.

Previous counterfeit money had slightly different colour separation, no water mark and no security line. But the current counterfeit money is almost the same as real notes and even has what looks like a security line which on proper notes is made from a very thin piece of film.

Because of the quality of the counterfeit notes, many people are finding it difficult to distinguish them from real notes.

It is not known how many counterfeit notes have been circulated in the central cities of Burma, but many have been found in Shan State, he added. In addition, many Burmese traders on the Thai-Burma border have been facing difficulties because Thai traders are now refusing to accept 500 kyat notes with the Burmese letters Ka-Htawoonbei and Ka-Dayinkauk because they fear the notes are counterfeit.

New Study Shows Economic Projects Curb Human Rights in Southern Burma

A new report published by the ABSDF shows how economic projects in southern Burma have directly led to an increased military presence in the region and a corresponding rise in human rights violations against the local people.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which recently changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has carried out widespread human rights violations in Tenasserim Division in an effort to subdue armed opposition groups and secure the development of large scale infrastructure projects in the region. These violations include extra-judicial killings, rape, torture, forced labour, forced portering for the army, forced relocation

of villages, forced evictions, and deprivation of livelihood.

Human rights abuses in the region have substantially increased since construction began four years ago on the infamous Ye-Tavoy railway project and the Yadana natural gas pipeline. These two major ventures and other infrastructure projects have led to an increased military presence as well as an increased use of forced labour.

The state owned petroleum companies of both Thailand and Burma, the US company Unocal, and the French company Total are all involved in the Yadana gas pipeline project, which crosses into Thailand. In addition to these two major projects, other joint-ventures with Thailand include the construction of the Yedagon natural gas pipeline between Yebyu and Thailand, the building of deep sea ports at Tavoy, Bokepyin and Palauk, building an inland road between Tavoy and Thailand's Kanchanaburi province, and eco-tourism ventures in the Mergui Archipelago.

Ever since foreign oil companies planned to build the Yadana gas pipeline to Thailand, the military has been steadily building up its presence in the region to protect its infrastructure projects. Before 1988, there were only five battalions in Tenasserim Division comprising approximately 2,000 armed soldiers. The currently number of armed forces in region is about 11,600 situated in 27 battalions and two artillery units.

The increased military presence became more obvious after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in September 1994 for the sale of natural gas from the Yadana project from Burma to Thailand. According to the MOU, if gas is not delivered for any reason the producers - Total, Unocal and the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise

Terror in the South

Militarisation, Economics and Human Rights in Southern Burma

Documentation and Research Centre
ALL BURMA STUDENTS' DEMOCRATIC FRONT

(MOGE) will have to pay compensation to Thailand. The regime is therefore required to ensure absolute control of the region through which the pipeline runs.

One of those forced to work on the Yadana gas pipeline project was Ko Kyaw Tun, a villager from Mintha, Yebyu township. According to him, local people were ordered to provide unpaid labour for the construction of military barracks and some were also ordered to work as security guards for the pipeline.

"In my village, Mintha, there are 40 households.

"Human rights abuses in the region have substantially increased since construction began four years ago on the infamous Ye-Tavoy railway project and the Yadana natural gas pipeline."

But every two weeks, one person from each household is ordered to work building barracks. The troops are in charge of security for the pipeline and they forcibly ordered us to build the barracks and other facilities for them. We are not paid, though we heard that Total paid some money to the soldiers."

Ma Sein Aye, a 14-year-old Mon girl was among one of the children forced to work on the Ye-Tavoy railway. She explained that forced child labour was common on the railway.

"I was 13 years old when I went to work at the 42-mile labour camp....The village LORC knew my age but they did not say anything. Among the 15 labourers from my village, five were my friends and were as young as me. I noticed that among the people from Yaphu village some were 12 or 13-year-old girls."

Ma Win Win Than, mother of three children from Tavoy escaped from the Ye-Tavoy railway project where she worked as a forced labourer.

"I worked two times at the Zin Bar labour camp, in October and December 1994..... At that time I was also six months pregnant. I pleaded with the local authorities but they said they would arrest me if I did not go. So I left my husband and children at home. When I arrived at the camp I saw many other pregnant women.....I also found out that many pregnant women had miscarriages during their time in the labour camp.....In December 1994.....I had to work again when I was eight months pregnant."

The forced recruitment of new troops from villages and townships in the region was stepped up as

a result of a strict new quota system enforced at random. The increased military presence also led to further deprivation of livelihood for people in the region. Taxation has not only increased, but people have been forced to provide various taxes to the local battalions as well as their free labour.

Soon after the establishment of the notorious Coastal Region Military Command, it issued orders for the massive relocation of people under its infamous "Four Cuts" campaign. The primary objectives of the relocation orders were to eliminate the possibility of civilian support for the ethnic armed opposition, to bring all the civilians in the region under SLORC control and to gain a captive population of forced labour for building infrastructure projects in the region.

In order to secure the region and make it more "attractive" to foreign investors, SLORC launched a major offensive against KNU and ABSDF positions

ABSDF Publications

Terror in the South: Militarisation, Economics and Human Rights in Southern Burma
(November 1997, English, pp52)

Letters to a Dictator
(July 1997, English, pp186)

Forced Relocation and Human Rights Abuses in Karen State
(May 1997, English, pp34)

Burma and the Role of Women
(March 1997, English & Burmese, pp160)

Pleading Not Guilty in Insein
(February 1997, English & Burmese, pp82)

The Situation of Elected MPs From the National League for Democracy
(September 1996, English, pp63)

Cries From Insein
(February 1996, English, pp83)

For copies of *Terror in the South*, or *Letters to a Dictator* please contact us at P.O. Box 151,
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Bangkok 10240 THAILAND

Forced Labour Used by Military At Marine Park Development in Southern Burma

Burma's military regime is using forced labour to construct large scale tourism facilities at the Lampi Marine National Park off the coast of southern Burma.

A villager who recently spent a week as a forced labourer on Lampi Island told the ABSDF that 150 villagers are required to work there for a week at a time without food or pay. He said there are about 400 prisoners also working on Lampi Island along with local villagers.

Depending on their size, some 17 villages near Lampi are required to supply between five and 14 people to the Army for the development work. Those who do not want to be recruited as forced labourers have to pay up to 20,000 kyat for a week's work.

Work on Lampi Island began in May this year, was temporarily stopped in July during the rainy season, and resumed in early October. The marine park on Lampi Island is one of two environmental projects that SLORC has planned to develop in the Mergui Archipelago, which has more than 800 islands. The other is the Myinmolekat Nature Reserve.

A total of 30,000 people from over 80 villages situated on various islands and on the mainland coast are estimated to have been driven from their homes or forced to relocate as a result of the massive tourism developments associated with the marine park and nature reserve. Many others have either been killed or detained to make way for the projects.

Both the Lampi Island Marine National Park and the Myinmolekat Nature Reserve are being jointly run by the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WSC) and the Washington-based Smithsonian Institute.

About 150 soldiers from Light Infantry Regiment 358 are stationed on the island for security and to oversee the work. At the beginning of this year about 40 people were killed by SLORC troops and 200 others were placed under detention.

Local sources say a jetty and three helicopter pads have already been built, and a number of buildings are under construction. Fourteen elephants were also recently transported to the island and the forest is being cleared for the development of a zoo.

on February 10, 1997. About 4,000 SLORC soldiers attacked the headquarters of the KNU's 4th Brigade (Mergui-Tavoy Region) in what was dubbed "Operation Thura". Battalion positions of the ABSDF near Kanchanaburi, Thailand, were also attacked. As part of this operation, more than 1,000 civilians from Tenasserim Division and from Mon State were forcibly conscripted for use as porters. This was in addition to prisoners taken from Tavoy and Mergui prisons. Another similar mass offensive was also launched against the KNU's 6th Brigade in the Duplaya area.

These offensives by SLORC troops have resulted

"These offensives by SLORC troops have resulted in human rights abuses including extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests, forced labour, forced portering, rape, forced evictions and looting."

in human rights abuses including extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests, forced labour, forced portering, rape, forced evictions and looting. These violations continue despite the fact that most of the Tenasserim region has already been taken over by the military.

People were taken by soldiers during the offensive and used as porters, and female porters were subjected to rape and sexual harassment. After a clash between SLORC troops and the KNU near Pya Tha Chaung village, SLORC troops rounded up 25 Karen women and five Karen men who, according to an escaped porter, were forced to become porters.

"I saw women porters in the column. The women were ordered to carry the equipment of the soldiers as well as cook and wash the uniforms of the officers in the column. During the day they were used as porters and, besides having to bear the heavy loads, six of the younger ones were forced to sleep with the officers at night."

The offensives against the KNU caused an estimated 20,000 new refugees to flee into Thailand, most of whom came from areas which had been controlled by the KNU for decades. There are, literally, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons still inside Burma today. Some live along the border with little food, inadequate water supplies, poor shelter, and no access to medicine. Today, the Burmese military

control most of the Thai-Burma border and have blocked the evacuation routes of the thousands who wish to flee into Thailand.

However, even the luck of the refugees who successfully arrived in Thailand appears to be running out. When the refugees began their mass influx into Thailand, Thai authorities stepped up their efforts to prevent further entry by turning many back. Some of them were subsequently attacked by SLORC troops. Thailand has attempted to seal its border with Burma especially in the Tenasserim region, and has instituted a de facto policy of allowing no new asylum.

As Thailand and Burma increase their economic, political and security links, Thailand's support for refugees has correspondingly decreased. The increasingly negative attitude the Thai's are demonstrating towards refugees from Tenasserim Division is in direct proportion to the increased economic co-operation between the Burmese regime and the Royal Thai Government. The primary motivation of Thailand is its desire to promote Thai business interests in Burma.

Thailand fails to recognise that human rights violations in the region are the main reason for the refugee influx. It also fails to recognise the connection between the human rights violations and its economic projects in the region.

Instead, Thailand is trying to smooth the way for the development of those economic interests and improve its relations with the regime while turning a blind eye to the long lasting conflicts in the country. Thousands of refugees have therefore become the victims of the economic interests of Thailand and Burma's brutal military dictatorship.

T-Shirts

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

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Typhoon Linda Reportedly Damages Yadana Gas Pipeline

Typhoon Linda which flattened homes and killed a number of people in its wake in southern Thailand, has substantially damaged an underwater section of the Yadana gas pipeline and damaged two ships that were laying the pipeline for the French oil giant Total.

According to local people who recently crossed the border into Thailand, the typhoon which passed through Burmese waters in early November cut loose some underwater sections of the pipeline. Some 22 people on board the two ships sustained injuries, some serious, including four foreign engineers. According to the sources, the four engineers were sent to a hospital in Rangoon.

The typhoon destroyed most of the deck on both ships, and a helipad on one ship was rendered useless. Some of the 36-inch pipeline piled up on the ships' decks was also blown away by the typhoon.

The damage to the pipeline and the ships has not been revealed by either Total or the Burmese military regime. It is understood that if the typhoon had hit while gas was flowing through the pipeline the damage would have been enormous.

The two damaged ships are owned by an Italian company known as SAIPEM which won the contract to lay the pipeline for the project. A 63 kilometre onshore stretch of the pipeline laid by Total, from the shoreline to the Thai-Burma border, has already been completed.

Total has denied Typhoon Linda caused damage to the pipeline.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between SLORC (SPDC), Total and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTTEP), the gas is supposed to be transported to Thailand from July 1, 1998.

The company Total estimated that the laying of the 346 kilometre offshore pipeline would be finished by the end of this month. However, it is understood that because of Typhoon Linda, the laying of the pipeline is unlikely to be completed on time.

There have been delays to the project on the Thai side of the border because of repeated protests by the local community and environmental groups who are concerned about the negative impact of the pipeline.

The Military Regime's Contingency Plan: Is Thailand Targetted?

A number of Thai academics have warned that Burma poses a threat to Thailand's security. It is interesting to note that since 1962, successive Burmese military regimes have adopted the same tactic of attempting to evade an unfavorable political situation by creating internal unrest.

This is intended to deflect the people's anti-government sentiment towards other targets, including racial and religious targets, to create unrest. It now appears however, that the military strategists have embarked on another plan of fomenting external unrest with the current political, economic and social dead lock in Burma.

While it might be hard to sustain an assertion that the regime might seek directly and deliberately to create external problems, there is little doubt that the military leadership readily exploit an external problem, often of their own making, to their advantage.

There is thus increasing support for the assessment by some notable Thai academics that Burma, or specifically the top generals, pose a threat to Thailand's security. The generals may have already developed a contingency plan to help resolve the disputes between the two countries, thereby consolidating their hold on power. There are at least three discreet groups of Burmese citizens who have justifiable reasons to feel aggrieved at the attitudes of the Thai Government. These are democracy supporters, the ethnic nationalities and migrant workers.

Burmese Democrats

Burmese democrats have repeatedly urged the Thai government to act in a constructive manner towards not only the military regime, but also towards the democracy supporters. This would enable some of the cross-border problems to be resolved peacefully and would not lead to feelings of hostility against the Thais to foment and grow.

Although it must be acknowledged in this context that the Thai Government has given shelter to some Burmese democracy supporters on its soil, the action appears to lack conviction in that both the status and the tenure of many refugees is left uncertain.

Burma's ethnic nationalities who signed cease-fire

agreements with the SLORC, are not happy with Thai policy. They know that the hardening of Thai policy against them forced them to enter into their cease-fire agreements with the SLORC. Many members of cease-fire groups have said that when the day comes when the Burmese ethnic nationalities and other groups are united in a democratic Burma, Thailand will have to answer for its actions.

These feelings of ill-will towards the Thai Government have been intensified even further because the cease-fire agreements are not delivering the benefits that the SLORC promised. The widely held view among ethnic nationalities that the Thai Government's policy was the catalyst for entering the agreements will not be easily forgotten.

Burmese migrant workers are another category of Burmese who suffer from the Thai authorities' oppression. The most extreme examples are detention, sometimes arrests, and accusations of illegal entry into Thailand. Many accounts of robbery, rape or other sorts of abuses by Thai authorities against migrant workers has been reported and authenticated.

Even some who possess work permit documents issued officially by Thai authorities have been detained and abused. Although the official Thai government policy of allowing many Burmese labourers to work and live in Thailand is welcomed, those who benefit obviously do not appreciate the abuse they encounter nor their precarious status. This treatment will also not be easily forgotten.

An important point to factor into the evaluation of whether the military leadership in Burma has the capacity to create a threat to Thailand, is the strengthening of the military's capability. The expansion of the army from 150,000 to 400,000 is surely not necessary to deal with internal law and order alone. It should be noted that many of these troops have been posted along the 2500 km-long Thai-Burmese border.

It should be remembered that the Burmese have conquered Thailand many times in the past and the current rulers continue to invade Thai territory up until the present day. These recent incursions also have the advantage of reinforcing in the minds of the Burmese generals just how easy it is to deal with Thailand. It is almost as if the Thai Government is showing the

generals that the more hostile and aggressive they are to the Thais, the more generous the Thais become.

Meanwhile, these same generals try to ignore the role of Thai politicians, by creating direct communications with the Thai army. The former SLORC Secretary-One Khin Nyunt is on record as saying that the border problems were due to mishandling by Thai politicians and the growth of the problems was only avoided because of understanding and co-operation between the two armies. The SLORC developed contacts with the Thai army since General Chavalit was the Thai Army Chief a few decades ago.

Thai Army

In this way, the SLORC successfully influenced Thai policy. This is another tactic used by the regime to humiliate Thai politicians. By ignoring the legitimate democratically elected rulers, their credibility as the Thailand's leaders is undermined. While the Thai government was advocating Burma's membership in ASEAN, SLORC officially sponsored a 'boycott Thai goods' campaign. The Thai government would have rightly expected all such acts of political sabotage against them to be terminated when Burma was honoured with membership in ASEAN, but this has not happened.

One of the SLORC's goals in seeking membership in ASEAN was to be able to claim they are not international pariahs, a clever ruse to legitimise their hold on power. It would seem that their strategy is designed to strengthen them, with the assistance of ASEAN, in their resistance of western pressure to allow those legally elected to govern from taking power.

Furthermore, the Burmese generals could readily assume that a dispute between two ASEAN members may not lead to expulsion from ASEAN membership. This assumption is reasonable, given that ASEAN prizes unity above all else. SLORC was able to cleverly use the Thai's constructive-engagement policy as their ticket to ASEAN membership, before opening up a counter-fire. Moreover, instability inside Burma, which will not abate in the foreseeable future, has led to and will continue to create regional instability.

The above scenario supports the view of those who claim that the Thai Government's attempts to live in peaceful co-existence with Burma's military regime will not succeed. The time has surely come for the Thai Government to review its policy towards Burma and ensure that the Thai national interest is safeguarded.

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Arrests, Sentences and Transfers from Insein

Dr. Min Soe Lin, an elected member of parliament and general secretary of the banned Mon National League for Democracy (MNLD), has been arrested for criticizing the military junta.

He was detained on November 6 by the then State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) under Article 5 (j) of the Emergency Provision Act. The ABSDF has learnt that Dr. Min Soe Lin, 40, was arrested for his role in organising celebrations for this year's 50th Mon National Day on February 23, which the SLORC had refused to allow go ahead.

Dr. Min Soe Lin was arrested in Mudon, Mon State, but it is not known where he has been taken or under what conditions he is being held.

Dr. Min Soe Lin was elected by various Mon organizations as general secretary of the Mon State Commission for the Golden Jubilee Celebration of Mon National Day. In this role, he repeatedly sought permission to hold the celebration in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State. However, the Military Intelligence Service (5) based in Moulmein, refused to give its consent for the celebration, although permission had been granted in previous years.

The celebration was finally held near Kanni at the source of the Ye River in an area under the control of the New Mon State Party (NMSP). However, the military considered this an act of defiance and it was widely known that Dr. Min Soe Lin was placed on the military's most wanted list.

UKyi Lwin, the chairman of the Moulmein Township Organizing Committee for the National League for Democracy (NLD) was sentenced to six years imprisonment with hard labour on October 17 for allegedly violating the Publishing and Printing Act.

An NLD member from Moulmein, U Myo Aung, who recently arrived on the border told the ABSDF that U Kyi Lwin, 52, had been detained since July this year without being charged.

"Military Intelligence officers came to his printing shop located on Main Lower Road in Moulmein in July and took him away", said U Myo Aung who witnessed the arrest.

The township court in Moulmein sentenced U Kyi Lwin to six years imprisonment with hard labour after

five court appearances. U Myo Aung said Military Intelligence have been constantly monitoring the movements of NLD members in Mon State, and arresting them whenever they can find fault with them.

In another case, U Win Shwe, an NLD member of the Bilin Township Organizing Committee, was recently detained and put under house arrest. SLORC was reportedly preparing to charge him under Section 5 (j) of the Emergency Provision Act.

A total of 120 political prisoners were transferred on November 14, 1997, from Insein Attached Jail (Special Jail) in Rangoon to Thayawaddy, Thayet and Mandalay Prisons.

Among the political prisoners were U Tin Tun and U Myo Myint Nyein, who were both sent to Thayawaddy Prison in central Burma.

The Special Jail at Insein previously housed about 120 political prisoners and about 70 former government officials including ex-army officers sentenced for various offenses. The former government officials were not included in the transfer.

Those political prisoners transferred included U Tin Tun, U Han Sein, U Lwin Oo, U Kyaw San (NLD), Ma Thida and two of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's former bodyguards - Bo Lay (aka) Aung Naing Oo and Thet Oo. These prisoners were all detained under the Publishing and Printing Act in July 1993 for possessing a copy of the *Khit Pyaing* (New Era) Journal.

Moe Aye, a former political prisoner recently released from this Special Jail, believes that the SPDC (SLORC) is likely to use the empty cells for Thai prisoners. Thai prisoners were formerly housed along with Burmese prisoners in the same building but were moved after a clash in 1996 with Burmese prisoners.

Elected NLD representative U Tin Aung, who has been in jail for a year, received emergency medical treatment in September due to a neck tumor, according to an informed source in Irrawaddy Division.

U Tin Aung, who is 53 and a lawyer, was detained on December 13, 1996 under the Emergency Provision Act. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment and has been held in Myaung Mya Prison, Irrawaddy Division.

The Past Is The Prologue...

The Historic Role Of Students In The Independence Movement Of Burma

In commemoration of Burma Independence Day - January 4 - and of fallen students
in their struggle against imperialism and militarism

By U Aung

Historical facts should be recorded properly and also presented accurately. The distorted presentation of facts will only produce gnarled stories. Contorted history will only confuse the new generation. If a statement is made such as: "Burma's independence was gained through the sweat and blood of the *Tatmadaw* [armed forces]", then it has to be corrected to thus: "Burma gained independence through the sweat, blood and lives of the rness movement, organized and mobilised by the student leaders".

The importance of the student movement in Burma is unparalleled. At the outbreak of the Second World War, political parties in Burma naturally strived for independence from the British. Burma then was under the Ministry headed by U Pu serving the British Governor. The Ministry made a statement of loyalty to the British Government and had passed a similar resolution in the legislature. On the other hand, the Executive Committee of the *Dobama Asiayone* (DA), a nationalist political party, issued a statement condemning fascism, imperialism and aggression, and called on the people and the parties to be united. On September 2, 1939 the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU) and the Rangoon University Students' Union issued a statement in support of the DA.

With strong backing from the students unions, the DA issued another statement demanding total independence in exchange for co-operation in the British war efforts. The DA also demanded a constituent assembly, the transfer of the Governor's special and reserved powers to the Council of Minister's elected by the Legislature, enfranchisement of the peoples of the Scheduled Areas (ie. minority races), and raising forces adequate for the defense of Burma. This political thinking had become the main stream political thought of the day. Dr. Ba Maw, head of the *Sinyetha Wunthanu Aphwegyi*, simply known as the Dama-Party (DP), was the only leading political leader

who expressed similar thinking to the DA. Seizing an opportunity, student leaders arranged a 'political marriage' between the DA and the DP and thus on October 10, 1939 the Burma Freedom Bloc (BFB) came into existence with Dr. Ba Maw as its leader and student leader turned politician from the DA, Thakin Aung San, as the BFB's Secretary-General.

At the Third Conference in March 1938, the DA was split into two factions, the majority joined Thakin Kodaw Hmaing's faction, while Thakins along the Prome-Rangoon railway line area and Moulmein District joined the Ba Sein-Tun Ok faction. Both Ba Sein and Tun Ok favored the totalitarian type of organization. Ba Sein also favored restoring the monarchy. Thakin Shu Maung, who later assumed the name Ne Win, belonged to the Ba Sein-Tun-Ok faction!

"the Burma Independence Army was initially formed under the patronage of the Japanese Army with the student leaders at its command..."

The Hmaing faction's All Burma Working Committee was taken over by Thakin Nu, All Burma Students' Union President, and Thakin Aung San, Rangoon University Students' Union President, while their friends Thakins Hla Pe, Than Tun, and Soe took over important portfolios. Thakin Aung San was appointed General Secretary of the *Dobama Asiayone*. By the time the BFB was formed these young Thakins were already national figures.

The British had a preconceived view of Burma that was strongly expressed in a letter of the Marquis of Zetland, the Secretary of State to the Governor Cochrane of Burma dated October 25, 1939: "the Burmans had made a loose or wishful interpretation of the pledge of 1931 that whatever constitutional

advance is achieved by or is promised to India, must be equally promised to Burma, or Burma equally helped to achieve it but what is ultimately achieved by India as a whole has no necessary connection with what may be achieved by separated Burma." Independent Burma was not on the agenda of the War Cabinet of Britain, far short of Burmese aspirations. The British view was quite clear: "the progressive realisation of responsible government in Burma is the attainment of Dominion status."

Burma Freedom Bloc Strengthens

Though student leaders avoided being accused of taking to party politics, they were the core members of the BFB along with the DA and other minor parties, viz some factions from the then defunct General Council of Buddhist Association (GCBA) and Karen and Arakanese. BFB's prominent leaders, Dr. Ria Maw, Thakin Nu, Thakin Aung San, Thakin Idya, Thakin Hla Pe and Thakin Than Tun, toured the length and breadth of the country espousing their views and opinions. By early 1940 the BFB became the only uncompromising political unit against the might of the British. Mass support and acceptance of the idea of unity among the opposing political forces for the cause was gaining strength, so much so that on June 9,

1940 at the Jubilee Hall in Rangoon the BFB openly challenged the British Government by forbidding the Burmese to support the war effort with either manpower or material. Another meeting was held in Mandalay. Public support was colossal and at that meeting, in front of the Sanghas and the public, Dr. Ba Maw was overwhelmingly acclaimed as "Arnarshin" the Dictator. Due to these accounts, on July 4 Thakin Nu was arrested and on July 10 Dr. Ba Maw was arrested by the British. A warrant was issued to arrest Thakin Aung San on July 12 but he went underground.

Since the general strikes of 1938-39 were called off, young Thakins and student leaders were seriously considering the effectiveness of the non-violence civil disobedience methods which they feared were not suitable for the Burmese temperament. They formed more underground cells and were searching for an effective way to challenge the British authority. They mulled for the armed struggle! But they felt that acquiring arms and training was beyond their reach. Most of the Thakins accepted non-violence especially Thakin Nu "the original modern student union leader, anti-clerical but remained devoutly pious, practicing Buddhist, and espoused a form of revolutionary political action that would involve no bloodshed or violence."

"Unity first under all circumstances" was the strictly adhered to policy of the student leaders who had not only established an 'inner circle' among their 'friends' but who also maintained close control over the student unions through the circle. Student leaders leaned toward western democracy but had no clear ideological orientation. Almost all the student leaders loathed fascism, nazism and Japanese militarism. They admired the Chinese resistance against the Japanese invaders and if they were to seek assistance for armed struggle, Japan would be the last country they would approach. By the time WWII broke out student



Students demonstrating against the military regime in December 1996. The students were at the forefront of the struggle for independence and continue to be a major opposition force to the military junta.

leaders had already sought arms from China. Even though their attempts were futile they never attempted to contact Japan.

Japan maintained a spy network through Japanese traders until the completion of the Burma Road, linking Rangoon and Yunan. Later, the Japanese navy used Shozo Kokubu, a reserve officer and a long-time resident of Rangoon. The Japanese Consulate used the normal route through traders and the Army assigned Colonel Keiji Suzuki to gather information mainly to blow up the Burma Road.

Dr. Ba Maw contacted the Japanese Consulate through his private physician Dr. Tsukasa Suzuki. Thakin Ba Sein had been well connected with Kokubu since early 1940. By the middle of 1940 at the invitation

“young Thakins and student leaders were seriously considering the effectiveness of the non-violence civil disobedience methods which they feared were not suitable for the Burmese temperament.”

of the Japanese Naval Headquarters, Ba Sein secretly crossed into Thailand but was arrested. After some months his deputy Thakin Aung Than (Bo Set Kyar of the Thirty Comrade) arrived in Bangkok.

Colonel Suzuki, after discussions with various people including Thakins Hmaing and Mya and his main contact Dr. Thein Maung, came to a conclusion that the core anti-British groups were Hmaing's Thakins and the students. Upon his return to Japan he was asked to look for Thakin Aung San and his companion in Amoy, who were apparently stranded. Colonel Suzuki succeeded and the two hapless Thakins got to Japan. Suzuki submitted the Burma plan to the General Staff headquarters, and it was turned down. But the Navy was ready to commence their clandestine operations based on Thakin Ba Sein's plan and the Japanese Army agreed to set up a joint operation service unit, viz. the “Minami Kikan”. Suzuki's ‘Plan for Burma's Independence’ was adopted as Imperial General Headquarters policy on February 3, 1941.

On January 21, 1942 Prime Minister Tojo announced in the Imperial Diet that “if the Burmese offer to co-operate with Japan in establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan would gladly grant independence to the Burmese”. These

commitments lured young Burmese revolutionaries Underground (UG) to cooperate with the Japanese. In February 1941 Thakin Aung San slipped back into Burma to present the Minami Kikan's plans to the UG. The plans called for thirty volunteers to take up military training. Upon his return Thakin Aung San took the first batch with him. Thakin Tun Ok and his comrades got to Japan after Thakin Aung Than from their party arrived in Japan first. Tun Ok and his group patriotically joined Thakin Aung San's group. The unit among them was formed although the mother parties were still divided. After the completion of the on-again-off-again semi-military training, the Thirty Comrades were brought to Thailand. Minami Kikan's operation was placed under the 15th Army Group (Hayashi Butai) commanded by General Iida for the invasion of Burma.

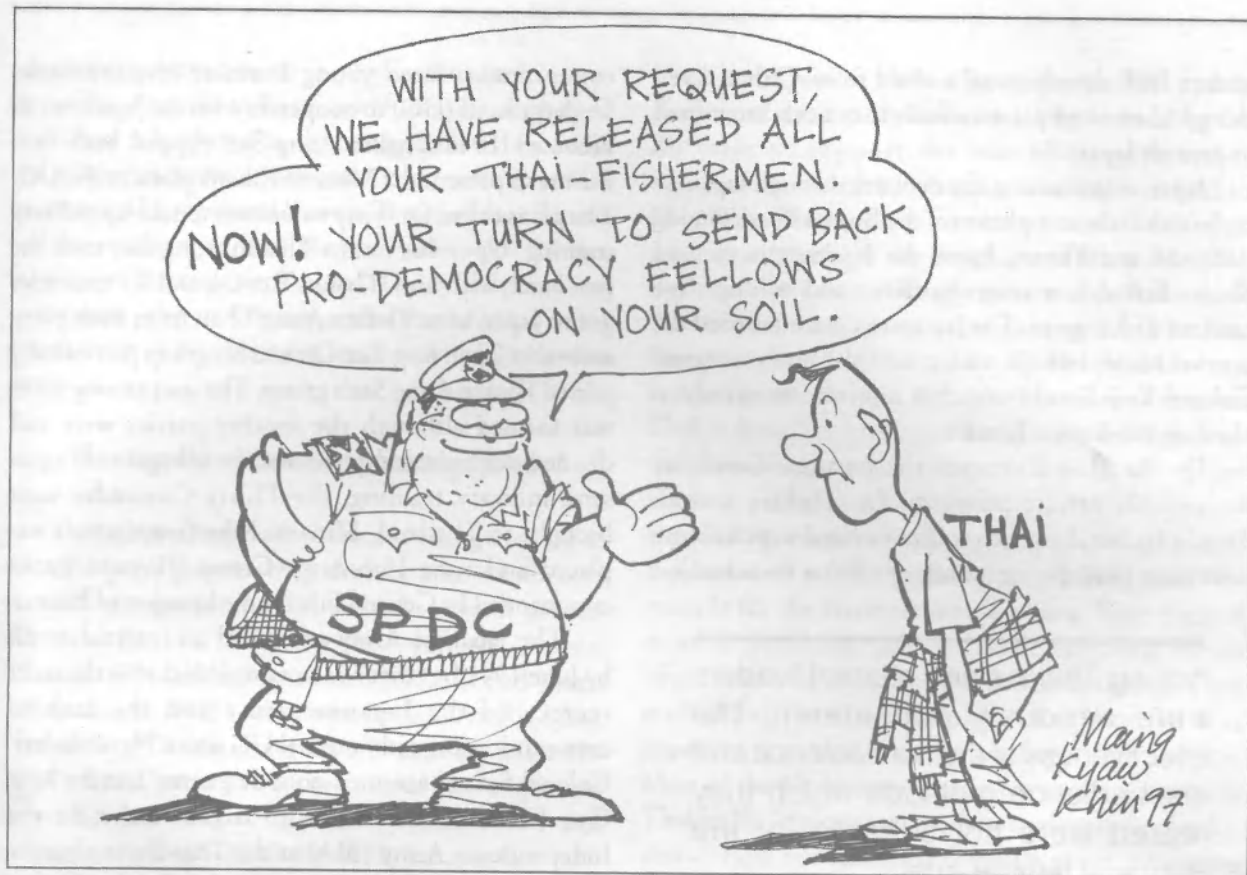
The Japanese Army scheduled an internal revolt by June 1941 but that was not possible due to the strict secrecy of the Japanese army and the lack of communication with internal UG units. Nevertheless, Colonel Suzuki assumed *nom de guerre*, and Bo Moe Gyo (Thunder) was able to organise the Burma Independence Army (BIA) at the Thai-Burma border assisted by the Thirty Comrades headed by Thakin Aung San.

The first recruits were descendants of Burmese living in Thailand. Thus, the Burma Independence Army was initially formed under the patronage of the Japanese Army with the student leaders at its command after they decided to free their beloved country from the yoke of British colonialism through armed struggle.

The Army not only has an historic past but the students also have a distinct historic past. After the army staged a coup d'état on March 2, 1962 the first ever clash between the army and students took place on July 7, 1962. Thousands of students were demonstrating in front of the historic RASU building against the military's repressive rule. They were brutally mown by the army and hundreds were killed. General Ne Win gave order to dynamite the historic RASU building in the early hours of July 8, 1962. This particular landmark was once the turf of the ‘inner circle’ in which he, General Ne Win, had never played a part.

Apology

The last issue was for October-November 1997 and not as otherwise stated on some pages.



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