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SLORC ISSUES ULTIMATUM

Germany's Development Minister Carl Dieter Spranger cancelled his trip to Burma following an ultimatum issued by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) that he could either meet with SLORC or Burmese democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Spranger, who was scheduled to visit in mid-Feb, said that the ultimatum would harm SLORC's attempt to improve ties with the west. SLORC had previously agreed that he could meet with Daw Suu [AEN960210]. German Deputy Foreign Minister Helmut Schaefer also cut short his visit to Burma in Mar.95 after meeting with SLORC Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw who showed no interest whatsoever in having a dialogue with the European Union [BA9503].

SLORC INSULTS UNDCP HEAD

On 22 Feb, the New Light of Myanmar, SLORC's mouthpiece, accused Giorgio Giacomelli, Executive Director of the UN International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), of belittling SLORC's anti-narcotics efforts by meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and that his conduct "was incompatible with the status of a gentleman." The article said, "While in Myanmar...Giacomelli was treated well. But... he stealthily met the wife of the man with the long nose at the UNDP office in the afternoon of 11 Feb.96. He did so in disregard of the hospitality extended to him, without paying attention to his dignity and not in concert with his job. He then had clandestine discussions not in favour of drug control measures taken in Myanmar." SLORC has told foreign leaders and diplomats they are not welcome to visit Burma if they want to meet the Burmese democracy leader. Giacomelli visited Burma 7-11 Feb [AP/N960213; AFP960223, WPD960222],

US STAFFERS DENIED VISA

Paul Berkowitz, a staffer for US Congressman Benjamin Gilman, and Grover Joseph Rees, the Staff Director of the Subcommittee on International Relations and Human Rights, were denied visas for a two-day trip to Burma. Both Berkowitz and Rees have been involved in drafting Burma sanctions legislation in the House of Representatives. Berkowitz met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon in 1995. Both had hoped to visit her again. According

to Berkowitz, the US Embassy in Bangkok was told that no one from the US Congress would be given a visa at this time [Net960117].

PARLIAMENTARIANS REFUSED VISA

A delegation led by former Norwegian Foreign Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik to visit Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was refused visas. A short letter from SLORC's London Embassy said that authorities were too busy to handle the visa requests. The delegation, which included former Swedish Foreign Minister Lennart Bodstrom and lawmakers from Japan and Sri Lanka, had planned to meet Burmese democracy leaders and members of the military regime in Rangoon. Instead, they went to Thailand and met with Burma's exiled government, the NCGUB and other leaders from Burma [DVB960117].

"TOTAL" ATTACKED AGAIN

It was reported that on 8 Feb, the Kanbauk field office of TOTAL, the French oil company building a natural gas pipeline to Thailand, was attacked by an unknown group using a 107mm rocket launcher. Four local staff were killed and five wounded. Unconfirmed reports claim a Frenchman was also killed [AB960304]. A TOTAL survey team was attacked in Mar.95, killing 5 and injuring 11 [BA9503].

RETALIATION AGAINST THE KARENS

On 12 Feb, SLORC Light Infantry Battalion No.273 entered the Karen village of Eindayaza, close to where the attack on TOTAL took place and battered to death 11 villagers including the headman. Two women were also stripped naked and tortured. One is said to be disfigured beyond recognition. Two other women, Naw Ser Ser and Mugar Theh Ner, and a man, Saw Gon Ray, were taken away. They are being held in a local SLORC detention centre [AB960304].

2ND KNU DELEGATION TO SLORC

A second Karen National Union (KNU) delegation led by Mahn Shar La Phan left for Burma to conduct cease-fire talks with SLORC. The KNU has the biggest armed force among the ethnic groups that have yet to sign a cease-fire. The first delegation went to Moulmein for talks from 13-18 Dec.95 [AB-DNA960214]

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Burma News:**SUU KYI APPEALS FOR SUPPORT**

On 11 Feb, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi appealed for moral and practical support from the international community to help Burma attain democracy. She directed her appeal to the sprinkling of foreigners present outside her house as she addressed the regular weekend crowd of supporters. She said that those who came to her weekly public meetings are fully aware that they run the risk of bringing down upon themselves the disfavour of the authorities. "But still they come because they believe democracy is something for which they should sacrifice their security. So seeing how the people of Burma are committed to democracy, we would like the international community to help in every way possible to bring about an early implementation of the terms of the [UN] General Assembly resolution," she said. The resolution called for an early restoration of democracy to Burma [AFP/N960212].

WEEKEND MEETINGS GROW

The weekend gatherings in front of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's residence have increased to about 6,000 people, and are growing. This increase is significant in that there were only about 100 people a few days after her release. It is also against SLORC laws for more than 5 people to assemble in public. The crowd reached the 6,000 mark on the weekend after the NLD boycotted SLORC's National Convention. NLD leaders U Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung also speak at the gatherings [BA].

DAB CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The Central Committee of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), the umbrella organization of Burmese democracy forces held its 3rd meeting from 9-12 Jan.96. The meeting re-affirmed General Bo Mya and Tin Maung Win as chairman and vice-chairman of the Alliance, and appointed Myint Zaw of Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), as Acting General Secretary. Dr Naing Aung, Chairman of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) was appointed DAB Joint-Secretary and Moe Thee Zun, who heads the breakaway faction of the ABSDF, was elected Assistant Secretary of the DAB's military committee. The meeting adopted a new strategic plan for the DAB, discussed the reunification of the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), and agreed to admit the

Pa-O National Organisation to the Alliance. The application of the Mergui Tavoy United Front is still under consideration. Other alliance members include:

- All Burma Students' Democratic Front
- All Burma Muslim Union (ABMU)
- All Burma Young Monks' Union (ABYMU)
- Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)
- Committee for Restoration of Democracy in B
- Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS)
- Karen National Union (KNU)
- Lahu Liberation Organisation (LLO)
- Muslim Liberation Organisation (MLO)
- National United Front of Arakan (NUFA)
- Palaung State Liberation Party (PSLP)
- People's Liberation Front (PLF)
- Wa National Organisation (WNO)

The DAB's Central Executive Committee, which met 7-8 Nov.95, agreed to support calls for SLORC to hold a tripartite dialogue for national reconciliation and to expel the New Mon State Party (NMSP) after it concluded a cease-fire agreement with SLORC [DAB, B960121].

US WILL NOT GET KHUN SA

On Feb.9, Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw said that Khun Sa will not be extradited to the US to face heroin trafficking charges because it has no extradition treaty with the US [WA960210].

KHUN SA HAS HEART ATTACK

Opium warlord Khun Sa suffered a heart attack in Feb.96. Others say he is suffering from hypertension, heart problems and diabetes. SLORC flew up a team of doctors and nurses from Rangoon by helicopter to care for him [AP/N960224, AFP/B960224].

HO MONG A SLORC DISTRICT

Ho Mong, has been declared by SLORC to be a district of Loikaw province under its control. SLORC also named 3 former aides of Khun Sa to the six-man ruling committee set up to administer Ho Mong [AFP/B960224].

SHAN GROUPS MERGE

The Shan State Army and the Shan State National Army, decided at a meeting in Hseng Kyau from 5-7 Jan.96 to merge into a single Shan State National Army with 8,000 men. Sao Sai Nong was named Chairman, Sao Pang Hpa Vice-Chairman, and Sao Kang Yod, Secretary General. The SSNA will continue to resist SLORC's invasion and reform the Shan State Progressive Party fSHAN9602111.

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Burma News:**POLITICALS LEADERS THREATENED**

The 23 prominent politicians who wrote to SLORC and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi urging a dialogue were summoned on 26 Nov.95 to meet with Lt. Colonel Tin Hlaing, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs, Colonel Kyaw Win, Deputy Director of Military Intelligence, Soe Win, Chief-Director of the People's Police Force, and Colonel Ba Hein, Head of Criminal Investigation Department. They were told, "Your demands are identical with those of the US, the Mr. Nousey. People from the US embassy visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house on a daily basis. Mrs Albright also treated us harshly. It looks like we'll have to work in accordance with the will of the Americans. We do not want to become a stooge of the Americans. We cannot do everything as they wish us to do... The US is setting out guidelines. We know that other embassies are interfering in our affairs. We want all of you who have political traditions to remain neutral... We believe that the NLD is using you. We want you to stay out (of it) if political movements become more violent... People from the US, Britain and Australian Embassies visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi every day and give her instructions. Her husband is also instigating the situation from abroad. We do not wish you to get involved in this" [AB-MTZ960120].

CAMBODIAN EM. TO RANGOON

Cambodian First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh paid an official visit to Rangoon from 27-29 Jan at the invitation of the SLORC Chairman and Prime Minister Senior General Than Shwe. The Prince was accompanied by Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Ung Huot and Cambodia's ambassador to Laos, Kek Larang, who will concurrently serve as ambassador to SLORC [B/AFP960106, OTT9502],

JOINT AIR-SEA-LAND EXERCISE

For the first time, SLORC's land, sea and air forces held a joint exercise off Burma's southwest coast, south of Arakan State from 20-23 Jan.96. Ships, jets, missiles and artillery provided by China were reportedly used. The exercise sparked rumours that the US was about to invade to snatch drug warlord Khun Sa. It is expected that a similar exercise will be held in the near future in the south close to the site of the natural gas pipeline [B960130].

EU INVESTIGATES FORCED LABOUR

On 16 Jan, the European Commission opened an official enquiry on 'forced labour practices' in Burma with a view to temporarily withdrawing Generalised System of Preferences from SLORC. It is the first time that the Commission has used this procedure. The investigation was launched based on information provided by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). They allege that forced labour practices in Burma contravene International Human Rights, the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and International Humanitarian Law. They include forced civilian portering, military labour, major development and infrastructure projects, tourist development projects and Army-owned commercial ventures. It is furthermore alleged that the economic benefits that accrue are not being reinvested into the country's economy but are being used by the leadership for purposes other than for the economic good of the country [BCN960127].

EUROPE GIVES US\$1 MILLION

The European Commission will grant emergency food and medicine worth Baht 26 million to 75,000 Karen refugees living along the Thai border. The aid will be administered by two non-government organizations, France's Aide Medicale Internationale and Germany's Malteser Hilfsdienst. The Commission is also considering a separate grant of rice and other food worth an estimated 22.08 million baht [B951223].

DKBO SETS UP RADIO STATION

The Democratic Buddhist Karen Organization (DKBO), the breakaway faction from the KNU, has set up a radio station with the help of SLORC. "Thapyay" Radio is operating under the direct supervision of SLORC's Psychological Warfare Department. It broadcasts 3 times daily at 07.00, at 12.00 and at 19.00 on 6,354 MHZ [AB-MTZ960122].

GENERAL SAN YU DEAD

Brigadier General San Yu, 78, a Ne Win loyalist, died in Rangoon on 28 Jan. He was a member of General Ne Win's Revolutionary Council that seized power from a democratically elected government on 2 March 1962. He was President of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma and had to step down during the pro-democracy upheavals in 1988 [A960209].

Investments:**BANKING JOINT VENTURES**

On 19 Dec, Finance Minister Brig-Gen Win Tin announced that SLORC will allow foreign banks with representative offices in Rangoon to set up joint ventures with private Burmese banks. This is the second important financial reform SLORC has put in place since an International Monetary Fund (IMF) team set up a technical monitoring programme. Under it, SLORC will have to implement a set of recommendations in order to be eligible to apply for funding.

Twenty-two foreign banks, including **Banque Indosuez**, **Bank of Commerce Malaysia**, **Banque Nationale de Paris**, **Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation**, and **Standard Chartered Bank**, already have representative offices in Rangoon. Nine more foreign banks have been issued licences to open offices. Since 1992, 15 private Burmese banks have been established: 13 in Rangoon and one each in Mandalay and Taunggyi, capital of the Shan state.

Earlier in Dec.95, SLORC allowed private companies and citizens to legally exchange the kyat at the market rate of about 125 to the US dollar as opposed to the official rate of 6 kyat to the US dollar but still maintains strict controls over capital outflows [FT951220].

MINING EXPLORATION

SLORC has invited foreign firms to conduct mineral prospecting and exploration operations. Six foreign companies are involved in gold and copper exploration - three are from Canada and one each from Australia, Singapore and the United States. Mineral resources to be developed include gold, copper, lead, zinc, silver and nickel. According to the latest official statistics, foreign investment in the mining sector amounted to US\$192 million in 25 related projects as of August 31,1995 [X951231].

NEW KAWTHAUNG AIRPORT

Minister for Transport Lieut-Gen Thein Win announced that the new runway at Kawthaung airport is now operational. The 85-seat Fokker F-28 aircraft can now land where previously only the 44-seat Fokker F-27 could. Work to extend the small military airfield began in Dec.92 and cost Kyat 434 million (US\$72 million).

BANGKOK AIRWAYS and **AIR MANDALAY** will be landing at Kawthaung, a tourist destination in the southern tip of Burma [X951226].

CANADA:

INTERNATIONAL PANORAMA RESOURCE CORP President Kenneth MacLoed met with SLORC member and Deputy Prime Minister Lieut-Gen Tin Tun on 25 Jan.96 to discuss bilateral cooperation [OTT9602].

WESTCOAST ENERGY INC Director W H Hopper met with SLORC member and Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Admiral Maung Maung Khin at the Myanmar Investment Commission on 25 Jan.96 [OTT9602].

GERMANY:

SIEMENS AG Executive Vice President Dr Gunter Wilhelm, accompanied by Ambassador Dr Wolfgang Wiesner, called on SLORC Member and Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Admiral Maung Maung Khin on 16 Jan.96 to discuss economics and investments (see MYANMAR ELECTRONICS SYSTEM below in 'Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited'). Maung Maung Khin is also the Chairman of the Myanmar Investment Commission [OTT9602].

INDIA:

India and Burma have opened a second border crossing point at Champhai in the Indian state of Mizoram. The first crossing at Tamu and Moreh in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur was opened in Jun.95 and trade is estimated to have exceeded US\$1 million [B951219].

JAPAN:

The 1st Myanmar-Japan Health Expo 1996 was held on 23-26 Jan.96 at the Tatmadaw Hall on U Wisara Rd in Rangoon. It was jointly sponsored by the Dept of Health and **JAPAN MEDICAL PRODUCTS INTERNATIONAL TRADE ASSOCIATION** [OTT9602].

THAILAND:

Thailand and SLORC have agreed to allow more charter flights between Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phuket and Surat Thani in Thailand, and Rangoon, Mandalay, Heho, Tachilek, and Kengtung in Burma. **THAI AIRWAYS** and Myanmar Airways will be allowed to fly 2,500 passengers a week on the routes [BPWR960216].

Investments:

UNION OF MYANMAR ECONOMIC HOLDINGS LIMITED

Increasingly, the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (UMEH) is being promoted by SLORC as its major economic development vehicle. Foreign investors are being encouraged to help open up the Burmese economy by forming joint ventures with the UMEH, the flagship of SLORC's 'private' enterprise initiative. The following are facts about the UMEH that foreign investors should be aware of:

The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd was created by SLORC Order No.7/90 on 19 Feb.90. It was later registered on 27 Apr.90 under the Myanmar Companies Act (Registration No.28/90-91). The initial capital of the company was Kyat 10 billion (US\$1.4 billion). Forty percent (40%) of the shares were designated Class "A" shares and allocated to the Directorate of Procurement of the Ministry of Defence. Sixty percent (60%) of the shares were designated Class "B" shares and allocated to armed forces personnel, armed forces cooperatives, veterans and veteran associations.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors is Brigadier-General Than On and the Managing Director is Brigadier-General Win Hlaing.

The following are economic enterprises wholly-owned or affiliated to the UMEH:

ASIA PACIFIC BREWERIES (MYANMAR) LIMITED is a joint venture with **Asia Pacific Breweries Limited (Singapore)** to produce and sell beer. Capital: US\$ 29 million.

BAN HOCK HIN MYANMAR LIMITED - 50% owned. Joint venture with **Ban Hock Hin Company Ltd of Singapore**. Founded in Dec.91 to assemble cars, motorcycles, scooters and import small electric generators. Capital: Kyat 10 million (US\$1.7 million). 93-94 Dividend to UMEH: Kyat 1.72 million (US\$0.29 million).

10 COASTAL FISHING VESSELS - 100% owned. The ships are currently on lease to **JVC (6)**, a semi-state fishing enterprise. 93-94 Income for UMEH: Kyat 0.3 million (US\$50,000).

HANTHAWADDY GOLF COURSE - 50% owned. Joint venture with **Nikoshoji Company of Japan**. It operates a golf course and recreation centre. Capital: US\$8 million.

PROSPECT BURMA 1996 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

PROSPECT BURMA is again offering a scholarship to people of Burmese origin who meet the following conditions:

Category A - *Students who are currently studying for their first degree at a college or university.*

Category B - *Postgraduate students who have already started or have a confirmed offer of a place at the Master's level at a university for the 1996 academic year.*

Category C - *Postgraduate students who have already started or have a confirmed offer of a place at the Doctorate level at a university for the 1996 academic year.*

In 1996, priority will be given to candidates who:

- *Reside in SE Asia or the Indian sub-continent, and*
- *Whose subject of study is in the field of:*
 - * *Agricultural Development/Engineering*
 - * *Teacher Training/Education*
 - * *Urban/Rural Planning & Development*
 - * *Women's Studies*

Those who fulfil the above conditions may obtain application forms and further information by writing as follows:

Residents of S E Asia: *PB Projects, GPO 322, Bangkok 10501, Thailand.*

Residents of the Indian Sub-continent: *Education Resources Centre, D41, Sujana Singh Park, New Delhi 110 003, India.*

Others: *Prospect Burma, 143 Rivermead Court, London SW6 3SE, UK.*

The closing date for receipt of completed application forms is 31 May 1996. The closing date will be strictly adhered to.

Investments:

**UNION OF MYANMAR
ECONOMIC HOLDINGS LIMITED**

(Continued)

MYANMAR DAEWOO INTERNATIONAL - 45% owned. Joint venture with **Daewoo Corporation of Korea**. Founded 12 Dec.90 to operate garment factory for export. Also affected by US textile quota restrictions. Capital: Kyat 30 million (US\$ 5 million). 93-94 Dividend to UMEH: US\$83,376.

MYANMAR ELECTRONIC SYSTEM - 40% owned. Joint venture with **Siemens Aktien Gesellschaft of Germany**. Founded in Dec.91 to import electronic and electrical equipment and be a service centre for electronic goods. Capital: Kyat 15 million (US\$2.5 million). 92-93 Loss: Kyat 0.4 million (US\$70,000). 93-94 Loss: Kyat 0.7 million (US\$120,000). The Managing Director E Holtz was asked to leave the country and was declared *persona non grata*.

MYANMAR FULBRIM TRADE & INVESTMENT LIMITED - 40% owned. Joint venture with **Fulbrim (S) Pte Ltd of Singapore**. Founded 18 Mar.94 to import condensed milk, shoes and artificial flowers. Will also engage in construction activities at the Pyinmabin Housing project. Capital: Kyat 8 million (US\$1.3 million).

MYANMAR JADE INTERNATIONAL LIMITED is a joint venture with **Jade Enterprise of Hong Kong** to cut and polish jade stones. Capital: Kyat 18.9 million (US\$3.15 million).

MYANMAR LEADING LOGISTICS LIMITED - 51% owned. Joint venture with **SKS Marketing Pte Ltd of Singapore**. Founded 19 Sep.90 to service foreign oil companies operating in Burma. It now operates "Double-9" supermarkets in Rangoon (Sells in US\$ to foreigners). Capital: Kyat 1.09 million (US\$0.18 million). 93-94 Dividend to UMEH: Kyat 0.357 million (some paid in US\$).

MYANMAR MACAU INTERNATIONAL LIMITED - 65% owned. Originally owned 40% but the unidentified Macau partner was unable to raise the required funds. Founded in Dec.92 to build a 6-story 3-star 'Central Hotel' in downtown Rangoon. Capital: US\$4 million. UMEH

may have to take-over the whole project. The Macau partner is facing financial difficulties.

MYANMAR OKINAWA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION is a joint venture with Okinawa. MYANMAR OKINAWA is building a Kyat 1.5 million (US\$0.25 million) factory in the Pyinmabin Industrial site. Technicians (retired soldiers) will repair and re-condition used saw mills from Japan and export them.

MYANMAR SEGYE INTERNATIONAL LIMITED - 40% owned. Joint venture with **Segye Corporation of Korea**. Founded 28 Mar.90 to operate a garment factory producing shirts and trousers for export. It is now only producing raincoats and sports wear because of US textile quota restrictions. Capital: US\$1.25 million. 93-94 Dividend to UMEH: US\$120,000.

MYANMAR UNIMEX INTERNATIONAL LIMITED - 40% owned. Joint venture with **Unimex Limited of Hong Kong**. Founded July 1992 to operate garment factory for export. Also affected by US textile quota restrictions. Capital: Kyat 15.62 million (US\$2.6 million). 93-94 Loss: Kyat 6.79 million (US\$1.13 million). Company is currently under investigation by SLORC.

MYAWADDI BANK - 100% owned. Founded 4 Jan.93. Capital: Kyat 60 million (US\$10 million). 93-94 profit: Kyat 4.54 million (US\$0.76 million).

NTUC FAIRPRICE (MYANMAR) SUPERMARKET is a joint venture with **NTUC Fairprice International Pte Limited of Singapore** to operate a supermarket in Rangoon. It sell goods in US\$ to foreigners.

ROTHMANS OF PALL MALL MYANMAR PTE LIMITED is a joint venture with **Rothmans of Pall Mall (Singapore) Pte Ltd** to manufacture cigarettes. UMEH contributed land and the factory building to the venture.

The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEH) is the sole agent for **SEA CONTAINERS MYANMAR LIMITED**, which is wholly owned by **Sea Container Asia Limited (Singapore)**. SEA CONTAINERS MYANMAR operates a 100-room Floating Hotel in Rangoon and a cruise ship on the Irrawaddy River. UMEH's commission is 20% of profits before tax.

Tourism:**VISIT MYANMAR YEAR 1996****CYCLISTS NIGHTMARE**

A group of 12 British and American cyclists were officially invited by the Myanmar Cycle Federation to bike from Rangoon to Mandalay and then on to Pagan. The following is an edited account of their experience as reported in the Bangkok Post 28 Jan.96:

As they cycled north from Rangoon, they were greeted warmly in all the towns and villages along the way. But three days later, when they reached Magwe District, the police intercepted them and told them that they had to return to Rangoon. They were taken to the government rest house, and the next day they were kept locked inside all day.

The licensed guide who accompanied them spent the day on the phone trying to negotiate their release. The general in charge in Prome told him that the problem was that they did not have a travel permit. The fact that their trip had been okayed in Rangoon was meaningless. Finally it was agreed that the matter could be settled if they went to Prome to meet the general and fill out the travel permit.

The next day, 11 of the 12 travelled to Prome only to find that the general was not there. They waited and waited and eventually were told that they would have to spend the night at the Prome Hotel. At 11 p.m. they were surprised to see a truck pulling up with all their bikes, baggage, and the other cyclist. They were then awakened by loud knocking at midnight. A local bus filled with passengers had come to pick them up and take them down to Rangoon. When the group realised that the general was not there, they refused to get on the bus and went back to bed.

In the morning, they phoned the Ministry of Tourism and Myanmar Travel and Tours, the Myanmar tourist organisation. SLORC officials agreed to meet them at the sports stadium in Rangoon to work out the problems. They arrived later that day only to find that they had been stood up yet again. At this point, six of the 12 cyclists flew out to Bangkok to cycle in Thailand instead. The other six scheduled a meeting at the MTT for 9.30 a.m. on Monday morning.

However, the MTT and Ministry of Tourism officials did not show up on Monday until 11.30 a.m. Then they were told that a law had been put out in April 1995 curtailing independent travel. It turned out that this law was so secret that no one in the American or British embassies, the Myanmar Cycle Federation, or even the MTT knew about it.

The law seems to have been promulgated so that SLORC could justify the detention or expulsion of any tourists for whatever reason.

The group could not figure out why the authorities were after them. No one would give them an answer. Their guide accused them of bringing along "agricultural spies", because they had stopped at an experimental rice station and asked some questions.

A day later, they were allowed to take the train up to Mandalay. But they were then held in the Mandalay train station for an hour before being escorted to their hotel. That afternoon, they were told they could not go beyond the city limits. As they cycled around town, they were followed continually by officials on motorcycles who stopped to phone in the group's location from time to time. When one pair of cyclists approached the city limits, they were threatened by police officers waving handcuffs. The cyclists were not allowed to bike or even to hire a car to Maymyo, a hill station 40 kilometres outside Mandalay. Maymyo has been open to foreign tourists for years and is not a sensitive area.

That evening they bought boat tickets to Pagan since they were not permitted to cycle there. They were to leave the next morning, but at 9.30 p.m. an immigration officer came to their hotel and told them they could not take the boat.

When two of the cyclists went to the Immigration Office the next morning, the office staff saw them coming and hid. Frustrated, they went to the chief immigration officer's office but the person on duty outside his office told them, "He's too busy to see you."

At this point, the tour organizer began faxing Lieutenant-General Kyaw Ba, the Hotel and Tourism Minister, and U Htay Aung, the Manager of MTT, in Rangoon. The Rangoon authorities faxed back saying the group could take the boat, but the Mandalay authorities were not personally informed, so they continued to refuse permission. According to the organizer, "many of the local authorities were friendly. They said they were just following orders."

Tourism:**VISIT MYANMAR YEAR 1996****CYCLISTS NIGHTMARE**

(Continued)

For the next three days, the cyclists were under constant surveillance as they biked around the old capital. Although they were told that this was "for their security", one of them was robbed right under the noses of military intelligence. He had parked his bike just outside the Mandalay palace walls and gone inside to take some pictures. After realising that he had left his handlebar pack on the bike, he went back to get it, but it was already gone. His wallet, passport, travellers cheques and \$500 worth of gems had been taken. The group strongly suspected their security guards were the culprits. When the police arrived, they said there was no reason to be upset, because the thieves "would probably mail it back". Although the police promised to meet them at the hotel later that day to file a formal report, they never showed up.

Three days later, the group finally made the boat trip to Pagan only to find themselves again limited to travelling within the city boundaries. As in Mandalay, they were not even allowed to hire a car and an official guide to take them to Mt Popa, a popular tourist destination not far from Pagan.

Finally they were forced to fly back to Rangoon, even though they had planned to take the train, which is far cheaper. Back in Rangoon, one of the organizers went to see Lieut-Gen Kyaw Ba again and demanded to know why they had been prevented from travelling more freely. Kyaw Ba denied having anything to do with their travel restrictions, saying they could have gone to any of those places outside Mandalay and Pagan. According to the organizers, "Nobody had the guts to face us." They also visited officials in the British and American embassies, all of whom were stunned but sympathetic. No one could tell them why they had been treated so harshly.

After reaching Bangkok, the organizer said she felt exhausted, "I'm so tired of being angry every day." When asked if she would be travelling to Burma again soon, she answered, "A Cycle Federation member told me to come next year and to bring a satellite dish receiver to bribe a general, but I said 'No way'!"

Other tourists have also had problems. Earlier in January, a group of Indian veterans from World War II were expelled from the country half way through their memorial walk. No explanation was given. Likewise, an American couple who had official permission to fly to Myitkyina in Kachin State was detained at the Myitkyina airport. They were forced to spend the night on tables in the departure lounge before being sent back to Rangoon on the next day's flight. Moreover, a Stanford University alumni tour group was denied landing rights in Rangoon, because the group's director had written to Aung San Suu Kyi inviting her to meet with their group.

An official at the American Embassy in Rangoon has warned American travellers that the United States does not have a consular protection treaty with SLORC. This means that embassy staff are not guaranteed access to Americans who are jailed by the Burmese regime.

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ITALIANS EXPELLED

The Bangkok Post of 20 Feb.96 carried this story:

In a letter to the Italian embassy in Rangoon, twelve Italian tourists told of how they were awakened at 1 a.m. on January 3 in a Kachin village named Nam Khan by soldiers who said they did not have permission to be there. The travellers believed permission had been obtained by their tour operator.

They were loaded on to an old, open-backed military truck in temperatures of 0 C (32F) and driven to the city of Putao. During the journey, the truck nearly fell off a bridge, they said. In Putao, they were forced on to a plane for Rangoon, the capital.

An Italian Embassy spokesman said "They were very angry about it." He thought the problem was a lack of communication between the central Burmese authorities and those in Kachin state, which opened up for tourism only in late 1995. Burma, he said, is not prepared for the wave of tourists it wants to attract. He said he sent a protest letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, but has yet to receive a reply.

If these incidents are any indication, SLORC's control over the country is slipping. The military has expanded too quickly - Ed.