

Burma Issues Newsletter

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[Civil War](#)

[Constructive Engagement](#)

[Economics](#)

[A Quarter of a Century of Struggle](#)

[Politics](#)

[Interview With Young Porters](#)

[Gang Rape of Karen Woman](#)

Civil War

The monsoon season has started in Burma since the middle of May and heavy rains together with the rough topography have become major obstacles for the transportation of the junta's infantry forces. Therefore, the military's heavy "dry season offensives" have ended, especially in the eastern regions of the Kachin,

Shan, Karen and Mon states. However, heavy exchanges of fire and guerrilla warfare still continues in the regions. Moreover, malaria and a shortage of food are also pushing down the moral of the junta's soldiers.

During the dry season offensive of the junta, the priority was to occupy Manerplaw, the headquarter of all political dissidents of the country, but heavy casualties caused the troops of the military to pull back.

Currently, the junta's objective seems to be to maintain their transportation routes throughout the monsoon season for use in their dry season offensive starting from about the middle of mid-October to November of this year. Subsequently, the recent surrender of some guerrillas in the Shan state is a big advantage for the military and most of its forces from the Shan state have been able to move to the Kachin and Karen state.

One of the great tragedies of the civil war in Burma is that most of the privates in the junta's army are about 17 years old and came from poor families. They are sacrificing their lives only to protect the power of Burma's top military leaders. Disabled war veterans are rapidly increasing in the nation and the small military pension they receive can not provide for their survival because of the unreliably high inflation rate in the country.

The numbers of Burmese refugees are increasing in the neighboring countries of Bangladesh, China and Thailand. Following the military's offensives, about 30,000 more ethnic refugees have fled to Thailand and China.

Kachin State (Northern Burma)

The KIA (Kachin Independence Army) is one of the most defiant forces among the minorities and they have more than 12,000 members. Currently, 46 of the junta's infantry regiments, about 23,000 soldiers, are carrying out "operation Yan Nai Min " (Conqueror) in the region.

According to the KIA, the Burmese military has been forcefully relocating the Kachin indigenous people to government controlled areas in order to keep Kachin civilians away from the KIA. Following the Burmese military operations in KIA areas, about eighty six villages, comprising 395 families, have been relocated. There are totally 27,538 Kachin refugees near the Sino-Burma border. Currently, 1,052 students are

living in the liberated area of the KIA which is providing for their daily welfare, food, 487 junta soldiers were reportedly killed, 487 wounded, 41 captured by the KIA, and another 41 surrender to the KIA while 39 were missing in Kachin State. At the same time, 87 members of the KIA were killed, 305 were wounded and 2 were captured by the junta's troops.

Shan State (Eastern and Northeastern Burma)

This area had been one of the strongest guerrilla warfare areas and has the most ethnic diversity of Burma since the CPB (Communist Party of Burma) had controlled in the area until 1989. The Wa and Kokang (ethnic Chinese) minority populated areas were the major military posts of the communist's war fare in the area. Following the Kokang and Wa mutiny in the CPB last year, the Kokang negotiated with the junta to live with their armies in the Kokang area of northern Shan State. Subsequently, clashes between the Kokang and the military have not appeared yet in the area. However, the junta also permits the Kokang to trade in drugs. According to an interview with the Kokang, they will grow opium commercially in the region for six more years. Even the drug loaded trucks which belong to Kokang are not searched by the security officials on the roads. Currently, it is certain that opium production in the region will be double earlier years.

At the same time, three ethnic dissident groups, the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), Pa O National Organization (PNO) and the Palaung State Liberation Party (PSLP) surrender to the junta this year. The military campaigns by the junta troops in the area have consequently become much less than before.

The Wa and rival drug lord Khun Sa signed a cease fire the middle of July after about one year of heavy clashes for control of the drug trade routes. However, military troops have not come into the Wa's areas and basically the military are providing food and financial support to Wa group which split from the CPB last year.

Karen State (Southern Burma)

One of the civilized guerrilla groups, the Karen National Liberation Front (KNLA) is becoming one of the main targets of the military which is transferring a lot of troops from other areas into the Karen State. Politically, almost all of the dissident groups under the umbrella organization of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) set up their headquarters in Manerplaw and this is obviously getting the attention of the military. The junta is determined to try to solve the political problems of the country by use of military campaigns rather than by peaceful ways.

The alliance guerrillas are striving to drive out the junta posts which are located in their areas. During month of July, there were eleven clashes, including one heavy counter-offensive, between the KNLA and the military over a strategic mountain . Following the was a Lance Corporal. Two Karen civilians were wounded by the shooting of the junta's troops. One of the Burmese soldiers and his wife defected to the KNLA and four KNLA members were wounded. Combined forces of the KNLA and students recaptured the very strategic Thawwa Bal Lu mountain from the junta troops on the 2nd of July.

Arakan State (Western Burma)

Four of the Rakhine minority groups have formed a leading group called NUFA (National United Front of Arakan) since about five years ago. It is based on the frontier of Bangladesh and Burma.

Another 500 Muslims are preparing for guerrilla warfare in the dense jungles of the Bangladesh-Burma border. The Muslims are fighting against the junta for the freedom of the Islam religion.

[Return to Top](#)

Constructive Engagement

On July 22 - 24 the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) met in Kuala Lumpur to discuss regional issues along with their major trading partners -- Australia, Canada, The European Community (EC), Japan, New Zealand, the United States and South Korea. The sad state of human rights in Burma and environmental destruction of the country were two major issues which occupied much of the meeting time. These discussions came at an extremely important time for the human rights struggle in Burma when many countries including the EC, Canada and the USA have begun putting strong pressure on the Burmese military to release political prisoners and turn power over to the elected government. This pressure has long been sought by opposition groups in Burma to help create a process for peacefully ending the long civil war in the country.

At the ASEAN meeting, Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Barbara McDougall, called for the military regime in Burma to release all political prisoners, to convene the national assembly at an early date, and to proceed promptly to end the systematic and forced oppression of the Burmese people.

US Undersecretary of State, Robert Zoellick, stated, "Without our efforts, the people of Burma will suffer longer. Undeveloped and undemocratic Burma will poison the region with narcotics. It will remain a cancer of instability." He further added, "Even the Buddhist clergy has suffered at the hands of the military. Thousands of political prisoners remain in cells or under house arrest."

The US statement, presented to the ASEAN meeting, came shortly after President George Bush signed into effect a trade sanctions bill which would prevent the renewing of a textile agreement with Burma among other sanctions. In 1990, textiles accounted for just over US\$9 million of the total Burmese exports to the US of US\$22 million. The US will also oppose loans to Burma by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions. The sanctions bill effectively blocks the sale of arms to Burma from the US, and also calls on other countries to follow the same example. The European Community recently imposed an arms embargo on Burma as well. (The sanctions bill was announced by Senator Moynihan on July 19, 1991)

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans joined his voice with others to seek ASEAN cooperation to push the Burmese military to honor human rights. He said that the SLORC has "manifestly repressed the clear wish of its people for democratic change," producing a new source of potential instability in the region.

The European Community said its future ties with ASEAN would have to address the issues of human rights and the environment.

These statements of support, although welcomed by opposition groups and environmental issues on others or try to make them conditions for trade and investment. Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, on behalf of ASEAN said, "Attempts to impose the standard of one side on the other or interpreting it in a selective or narrow manner would disrupt the traditional goodwill and cooperation and tread upon the sovereignty of nations."

ASEAN has suggested that they will pursue a course of "constructive engagement" with SLORC which includes working closely together with the military leaders of Burma and encouraging more investments. Through capitalist investments in Burma, ASEAN feels that they can encourage democratic reforms without having to raise the issues of political prisoners or the transfer of power to the democratically elected government of the country. The question of the right of a military elite to maintain complete control over the people also can thus be avoided. ASEAN made it clear to their trade partners that human rights and the environment could not be a condition for economic involvement.

To pursue this course of "constructive engagement" ASEAN will send Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus to visit Burma for direct talks with the military government. Apparently Raul Manglapus has a longstanding invitation from the military leaders of Burma to make such a visit. This invitation demonstrates how comfortable SLORC is in their relationship with ASEAN. Recently SLORC turned down a request by a United Nations representative to visit Burma and look at the human rights situation there. Burma is a member of the United Nations, but is not a member of ASEAN.

As ASEAN plays a strong defensive role for the Burmese military junta, arrests of opposition leaders, military attacks on defenseless villages, and forced labor as porters and mine sweepers by the military continues throughout the country. Opposition leaders have condemned the ASEAN position saying that as long as ASEAN protects the military leaders of Burma, there can be no end to the civil war, or to the intense suffering of the people.

As suggested by Robert Zoellick and Gareth Evans, the civil war in Burma contributes to instability throughout the region. Without an end to the civil war in Burma, the country can not begin a process of rebuilding or of economic development. This in turn affects the entire region.

If the ASEAN countries truly want to involve themselves in "constructive engagement" with Burma, and want to see more regional stability, they should make it their priority to pressure the military regime of Burma to turn power over to the elected government and to release all political prisoners. This would allow Burma to begin making a positive contribution to the economic and social development of the region. At the same time, ASEAN is relating only to SLORC, and thus have limited their effectiveness in helping move Burma towards democratic reforms. "Constructive action, ASEAN could gain international recognition for its role in mediation as well as gain the respect of the Burmese people.

At the present time, there are serious doubts about ASEAN's true intentions towards Burma and whether or not they are pursuing a policy which will not only help bring peace to Burma, but also stability within the whole Southeast Asian region.

[Return to Top](#)

Economics

Hope seems to be fading for Burma to pull itself out of its "least developed nation" status. The military's failing economic policies are driving inflation ever higher, pulling 80% of the 41.7 million people of Burma deeper into poverty. The sale of the country's natural resources to international companies has not improved the living standards in Burma, nor brought about a sense of economic development within the country. Profits earned from this trade have benefitted the few top military leaders of the country, and made it possible for them to purchase a vast array of new weapons to upgrade its military strength. Since Burma does not face any external threat from its neighbors, this increased military might is aimed only at further control over the restive population. This trend in the country must change if Burma is ever to shake off the embarrassing status of "least developed nation".

The present economic crisis can be attributed to several significant issues:

1. High level military leaders are dictating the nations business policies despite total lack of skill and training in economics. Corruption is also rampant among almost all top military officials and civil servants.
2. The majority of the national budget, as well as the natural resources of the country, is us by the military to continue its 43^ayear-old civil war against the ethnic minorities and opposition politicians.
3. Strong militarization and the present unstable political situation discourages the nation's economic development.

Lack of skill and training

Since 1962, when Burma began its trek down the road to total militarization, military leaders have been placed at the highest levels in all the civil departments, displacing those civilians who are trained and capable to better run these departments. The military leaders need some way of creating jobs for disabled war veterans and retired military officials, so they place them in these positions creating serious problems between military officials and civil servants as well as hardships for the general population.

For example, in the agriculture sector, farmers are forced to sell a certain quota of their crops to the military at a very low official price (see B.U.R.M.A. Vol.1 No. 5). At the same time, essential fertilizers are insufficient. The junta leaders tend to purchase cheap fertilizers from foreign countries. These fertilizers are cheap because they are dangerous to the health of the people and thus are often banned in the producing country. Agriculture is, therefore, steadily decreasing. To counter this, farmers find it more and more difficult to survive and are migrating to the urban centers to seek jobs. Whereas about 80% of the population lived and worked in the rural areas in 1970, the number has now dropped to 70%, indicating a serious urban growth for which no suitable plan has been worked out.

Corruption

The official exchange rate for the Burmese kyat is US\$1 to 6.844 kyats. However, foreign companies are selling their products in Burma based on the illegal exchange rate of US\$1 to about 80 kyats. The average farmers or worker can not afford to buy anything at this rate.

Most of the trading in the country, including the import and sale of necessities such as soap, toothpaste etc., is done through the illegal underground market. This illegal business accounts for 40% of the total economy in the country and is becoming the main business of high ranking civil servants and military officials. For example, one commander from the Northern Division, Lt. Gen. Kyaw Ba, owns a 70 million kyat (about US\$10 million) house in the central Burma town of Mandalay, as well as several jade mines in the Kachin State. High ranking military officials are allowed to purchase extra quotas of fuel as well as very cheap household goods and electronic supplies from State subsidized shops. They then sell these items back to the people at extremely high prices, since the general market is in such short supply.

The Expense of the Civil War

According to some observers, the junta is using up to 60% of the state budget to continue their civil war against the ethnic minorities and opposition politicians. In past year, the junta claimed that only 24% of the state budget was used for these wars.

Following the 1988 nation-wide unarmed uprising, thousands of people fled to areas controlled by the ethnic groups and joined in their armed struggle. The civil war has thus intensified as has the junta's expenditures to keep feeding it. To find the ever increasing funds needed to maintain and build up the military, the junta has been giving more and more investment contracts to foreign companies as well as the indigenous private sector. In 1990, the junta invested ¢10 billion kyats (about US\$130 million) to set up a private investment company through which they can control almost all domestic business.

The Unstable Political Situation

Military harassment towards civilians as well as all opposition groups is creating an atmosphere of fear in the country resulting in many skilled technical people and academics leaving for jobs in foreign countries. It is estimated that about 700 people are universities and colleges closed for almost three years, but a large number of the lecturers have either fled the country or been dismissed from their duties. They have been replaced by unqualified, and often untrained teachers.

People also do not have confidence in the local currency which the military has, in the past, tended to demonetize without warning and with compensation. Even the military does not want to keep kyat notes in their possession and have been forcing the owners of gold shops to sell gold to the junta.

Lack of security has also negatively affected the transport of goods from one part of the country to another. Oil prices on the illegal market have skyrocketed. Presently, one gallon of gas is about 130 kyats (about US\$18 at the legal exchange rate which is what the people have to pay). Most reserves of fuel are kept by the military to carry on their civil war, and this makes a scarcity for the people. However, military officials sell the reserves to the public at this exorbitant rate. Having no other choice, people have to purchase it at this price. The price of all necessary goods transported throughout the country are therefore becoming more and more expensive as well. This instability is not conducive to any positive economic growth in the country.

[Return to Top](#)

A Quarter of a Century of Struggle

Background

A few months after Burma attained independence from British colonial rule, civil war broke out in the country. As the civil war dragged on, it was the broad masses of the people who suffered most. However, despite the civil war, political evolution and economic development began to gain some initial momentum. As the people and politicians began to realize the evil consequences of civil war, the desire to end the civil war developed gradually. The movement for internal peace led by patriotic scholar Thakhin Ko Daw Hmine won the support of the broad masses.

The second military coup staged by Gen. Ne Win and his followers in 1962 to oust the popularly elected government of U Nu destroyed every step of progress that had been gained. The process of development in politics and economy decelerated at first and then came to an abrupt standstill. Finally it gradually degenerated until the country plunged to "least developed country status" in December 1987.

During these years the people of Burma ceaselessly tried to resist the military rule. The military leaders ruthlessly crushed every resistance movement, always by overacting in a very brutal way.

The first massacre (1962)

The first remarkable resistance took place in July 1962, a mere four months after the coup. On the 7th of July, just three days after the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) was formed, the students of Rangoon University, under the leadership of the Rangoon University Students' Union (RUSU) chaired by the late Ko Ba Swe Lay, performed a peaceful demonstration inside the Rangoon University Campus. Ne Win and his close associates sent troops equipped with newly imported G©3 automatic

rifles with orders to fire into the crowds of thousands of students who were peacefully demonstrating. Over one hundred students were killed and many hundreds injured. The next morning Ne Win ordered the destruction of the RUSU building which was an invaluable historical monument. The building was blasted to pieces by heavy explosives, and every trace of it removed.

The second massacre (1967)

The second mass killing took place in 1967 when the military junta incited a communal riot between the Chinese and Burmese. At that time shortages in rice and other basic food items forced the people of Rangoon to travel to surrounding areas in search of rice or other suitable substitutes. Nearly all the offices and industries were deserted as if a general strike had been called. Ne Win and his inner circle of trusted friends decided to divert the people's anger at being hungry by inciting the communal riots. They sent and other races. The communal riots began on June 22, 1967. Ne Win's every ready army stayed away as the riot developed into indiscriminate killings, looting and burnings. After several days, some vigilant people, including student members of the underground students' unions, distributed statements explaining to the people that the people were unknowingly dancing to the tune of Ne Win. The statement urged the people and the students to turn their direction of anger towards the military rulers. As soon as these statements appeared, a mass of about 10,000 people On June 27, gathered in Rangoon to protest against the military rulers. Within a few hours martial law had been declared and Ne Win ordered his troops to move in. They quickly rounded up 1,300 Chinese and more than 2,000 Burmese students and civilians.

The massacre in Arakan (1967)

A month later trouble broke out in Akyab, the largest city of the Arakan State. This trouble w, also due to the shortage of rice. In the afternoon of August 13, 1967, troops fired into a crowd of about 5,000 Arakanese people who were demonstrating near Sat Roe Kya Chaung, a creek to the north of Akyab. Over 100 men, women and children were killed and hundreds injured.

Students' uprising (1969)

The military junta held a students' festival in Rangoon during December, 1969. On December 1, a dispute occurred between the students and the authorities over the selling of sports tickets. In a short time the dispute was transformed into an anti©regime mass protest. Thousands of students participated in the demonstrations in Rangoon and Mandalay. When the authorities used force to quell the demonstrations, it turned into riots. Nearly 300 student leaders were arrested

and most of them were expelled from their respective universities. Universities and schools were closed.

Golden Jubilee (1970)

A celebration to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first anti-colonial strike that occurred in November 1920 was organized in November 1970. During the festival, student unrest broke out. Students from Rangoon, Mandalay, Moulmein and Magwe were involved. The universities were closed and hundreds of students were arrested and expelled from the universities.

Labor Strike (1974)

The Ne Win regime promulgated a new constitution on January 1, 1974. Elections in conformity to the new constitution were held in February. The first parliament since the coup in 1962 was convened in the first week of March and power was transferred from the military leaders to the "newly elected civilians". Thus General Ne Win, chairman of the revolutionary council, transferred his power transformed into U San Yu, Colonel Thaung Kyi to U Thaung Kyi, etc. Apart from these changes, there was no sign of change in the ever worsening living conditions of the people. Instead, commodity prices soared up beyond the reach of low level employees. This hopeless situation resulted in a worker's uprising just a few months after the new administration was installed.

Workers from the Chauk Oil Fields began their strike on the 13th of May, 1974, demanding higher wages. The strike quickly spread to other towns as far away as the city of Rangoon. On June 6 and 7, the authorities responded by firing automatic rifles into the crowds of demonstrators. All the factories were stormed. The authorities' announcement said 22 workers were killed and eighty wounded, but sources close to the workers gave the number of killed over 100. As the students tried to join the workers, all the universities and schools were closed. Thousands of workers were jailed.

U Thant's Funeral (1974)

U Thant, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, died in New York on November 25, 1974. His body was brought to Rangoon and after a disagreement between the students and the authorities over the burial site, the students took the body away to the University Campus. U Thant's body was put in a mausoleum built

by the students on the plot of ground where the famous Rangoon University Students' Union Building had proudly stood.

Ne Win ordered his troops to storm the campus at midnight on December 11, resulting in heavy casualties among the protesters. All the people found in the campus were arrested without any investigation. Nearly 4,000 were jailed. Universities and schools were closed once again.

Students and workers join hands (1975)

On June 6, 1975, hundreds of students gathered in the Rangoon University Campus. Another group, who converged on the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, were arrested early in the morning. In the campus the demonstrations continued and, on June 11, students marched to Insein Prison where thousands of students and workers were being held. Several hundred workers joined the students. The demonstrators were rounded up by the army and hundreds of students and workers were imprisoned as universities and schools were closed.

Centenary of Thakhin Ko Daw Hmine (1976)

Students demonstrated again on March 23, 1976 to mark the centenary of the birth of the late patriotic leader and scholar Thakhin Ko Daw Hmine. Before the demonstrations gained momentum and spread, the authorities closed the universities. Rangoon, Bassein and before he bravely climbed the steps to be hanged by the military authorities on sedition charges.

The third demonetization

The Ne Win regime unscrupulously demonetized the existing currency three times. The first was in 1964 when 50, and 100 kyat notes were canceled; the second was in 1985 when newly distributed 100 kyat notes were involved. In both of those cancellations, the value of the demonetized notes was compensated although with a certain amount of reduction. The third demonetization was declared on September 5, 1987, and was carried out without compensation. The third attempt shocked everybody young and old because a mere two months ago the authorities issued a statement warning the people not to believe the rumors that some of the currencies would be demonetized soon. The announcement even promised that the administration would not cancel any currency notes.

The students of the Rangoon Institute of Technology led the protests and the general public supported them. The authorities hurriedly closed the schools and universities.

Apart from these uprisings, there have been many other forms of resistance against military rule.

In 1976 a certain number of young patriotic army officers led by Captain Ohn Kyaw Myint planned a plot against their military commanders. But the news was prematurely leaked and the young patriots were put on trial. Ohn Kyaw Myint was hanged and others were given jail terms.

Another coup attempt occurred at the end of 1977. It was also discovered prematurely and three of the coup leaders, Manh Ngwe Aung, Manh Dah Weit and Ko Kyaw Htoo, and their followers were put on trial and given death sentence, for the leaders, and lesser sentences for the followers. One of the coup leaders, U Kyaw Hla, escaped to the KNU held area.

Split among the military leaders

There have been a lot of differences among the military leaders. Out of 17 Revolutionary Council members formed in 1962, only two, Ne Win himself and San Yu, were still in power when Ne Win declared his retirement in 1988. Some had been sacked, some forced to resign or retire, and some became freedom fighters.

From 1962 to this day, Ne Win remains the only most powerful dictator in the country while others play as part time performers who appear and disappear in a cycle of 'come and go'.

The National Democratic Front (NDF) grouped together and formed the National Democratic Front (NDF). The NDF has been the main opposition front which can confront the military rulers since the coup in 1962.

8-8-88

March

With the accumulation of every kind of discontent among all the people, the situation was rife for an explosion. Any spark, from wherever, would be enough to ignite the explosion.

On March 12, 1988, a quarrel between a group of students of the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) and a group of local youths was mishandled by the authorities. The anti-riot armed police, called Lon Htein, specially trained under the direct instruction of notorious Sein Lwin, intervened and fired with automatic rifles at the students. Maung Phone Maw and Maung Soe Naing, both RIT students, were killed. As the news circulate to the other universities, anger among the students deepened. The Lon Htein raided the RIT on the 14th of March. Several hundreds of students were beaten. Some were sent off to Insein prison. On the 15th of March, the Lon Htein attacked 3,000 students gathering on Prome Road. Many students were beaten to death, some drowned in Inya Lake, many female students were robbed and molested. The small white bridge at the site of the riot turned red with the blood of the fallen youth.

The students demonstrated again on March 18 along Sule Pagoda Road in the center of Rangoon. The Lon Htein again overreacted. An eleven year old student, on his way home from school, came across the demonstrations and so he joined in. When the Lon Htein attacked, the young boy was repeatedly beaten even after he had fallen to the ground. Onlookers yelled and attacked the Lon Hteins. A riot followed which spread to all parts of Rangoon. More than 100 people, mostly young students, were killed. In a single police van, 41 young students, including some girls, died from suffocation. At first the authorities denied this news but confessed to it later.

June

Another massacre occurred on June 21 when teenagers were run down by a military truck. The local people again attacked the Lon Htein in retaliation. In the afternoon, the troops intervened and fired at everybody who happened to be on the road.

August

Ne Win, San Yu and some top BSPP leaders resigned on June 23 and the notorious Sein Lwin, who was better known as a butcher, took over both jobs of the two outgoing men. Meanwhile, the students called for a general strike on 8.8.88. participate in the demonstrations. About 200,000 took part on that day. Most of the demonstrators had their faces masked so that the military count not identify them. No remarkable incident occurred that day.

That night, tens of thousands of people gathered in front of the City Hall. One after another they delivered speeches criticizing the regime and demanding the release of prisoners, the setting up of multi-party elections, etc.

At about midnight the troops fired into the masses killing hundreds of people on the spot.

The next day the people resumed the demonstration. There were more killings, more demonstrations.....

On the 10th of August the people blocked all roads by cutting down trees or placing whatever they could find in the roads to prevent the military from moving around the city. The troops stationed in different parts of the city were isolated; some without sufficient rations or even water.

Some troops surrendered to the people while some sneaked out under the cover of darkness. The military leaders were terrified. The seriousness of the situation forced the leadership to persuade Sein Lwin to resign. They did not even have time to decide who should succeed Sein Lwin. Sein Lwin resigned on 12 August. Appointment of Dr Maung Maung was declared only on the 19th of August.

The situation became more and more confused. More than one hundred organizations among the people emerged. A General Strike Committee was formed but was not too strong. Some leading figures also emerged during the uprising viz. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo, U Nu, U Aung Gyi, Min Ko Naing, Daw Myint Myint Khin, Moe Thee Zun, etc.

September

On September 17, all the individuals and organizations reach an agreement that an interim government should be formed and declared not later than September 20. On the 18th, one day after a compromise was reached, Ne Win ordered Saw Maung to declared a so-called coup. Troops opened fire indiscriminately, killing hundreds.

Thousands of students and civilians fled to the NDF held areas. ABSDF was born in late 1988, and the DAB formed shortly thereafter. A new era of struggle began.

Meanwhile, Saw Maung formed the SLORC; political parties registered; elections were held, but transfer of power to the newly elected government was canceled. whole world. It brought to light how the military dictators have ruled the people with terror for two and a half decades, how human rights have been violated and how the people have suffered and struggled for so long.

International involvement

More and more politicians and governments of the world are beginning to clearly see the plight of the Burmese people. The United Nations Human Rights Commission has condemned the junta for its human rights violations, the European Community has decided to take action against the junta and the U.S. government has decided to place economic sanctions against them as well. These are actions which give hope and encouragement to the democratic movement in Burma.

However, more needs to be done. The legal right of the SLORC to sit in the United Nations needs to be debated. They have no mandate by the people of Burma to sit there as that mandate was given to the NLD through the May 1990 elections. Pressure by international friends must also be brought against China, Thailand, Singapore, and other countries which are trading in arms with the military, or making other significant investments in Burma. Their continued support of the SLORC is an obstacle to peace, both internally and regionally.

But along with progress made, there have also been obstacles. The ASEAN nations have refused to use the pressure that they have to help push for a quicker end to the civil war and they have criticized the positive actions taken by the US, EC, Australia etc. The ASEAN nations say that the process of democratization and the guarantee of human rights must move very slowly, especially in Asia. This is obviously said by those who do not have to suffer the daily indignities of being illegally and brutally ruled by a military junta.

The people of Burma have sacrificed much during the past 43 years. During the past four years, there have been hopes that the war would be brought to an end through peaceful means, but each hope was shattered when SLORC guaranteed its own survival and power base through political, economic and military agreements with its neighbors.

The burden of seeking peaceful solutions to the civil war in Burma does not lie only with the people of Burma. Friends in every country must take responsibility for the roots of oppression which originate in their own country. This is especially true for friends in the ASEAN countries.

A quarter century of struggle for human rights and peace in Burma will end when all those who care truly work together on the issues for which they have responsibility. Regional peace and regional stability depend on this.

[Return to Top](#)

Politics

Aung San Suu Kyi is still being held in her house incommunicado. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, personally appealed last December for her release. The SLORC of Burma showed no response. When UN Human Rights Commission investigator Sadako Ogata visited Burma in February last year, she requested the Burmese authorities for permission to see Aung San Suu Kyi. But the SLORC rejected the request.

In the first week of July the European Parliament formally awarded Aung San Suu Kyi the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Since she was not allowed to leave her house, Maung Htein Lin, her younger son, attended the ceremony to receive the prize.

Opposition

While the question of political oppression in Burma is discussed in ASEAN and other international governmental or non-governmental gatherings, the Burmese regime's ambassador to Bangkok seems to think there is no problem. In a recent interview he said, in totally seriousness, "There is not a single political prisoner in Burma."

In fact, there are over 10,000 political prisoners in Burma's prisons and most of these prisoners are being tortured everyday and night.

According to Slorc (State Law and order Restoration Council), currently 9 registered political parties have already been dissolved. Out of the 9 parties, one was automatically defunct after the election, 4 voluntarily dissolved themselves and the 4 others were unilaterally banned by the Slorc, accused of having relationships with revolutionary organizations. At the present time, there are 83 registered political parties in Burma of which 26 have at least one elected representative and the remaining parties have no one elected. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won 396 seats out of 485 and NLD's ethnic alliance parties won over 60 seats. However Slorc is still refusing to hand over power to the NLD. Instead they have arrested nearly all efficient leaders of the opposition parties and sentenced many of them to long prison sentences. Presently 65 of the legally elected representatives have been arrested and sentenced to at least 10^ayear prison sentences.

Various reasons are given by SLORC for these arrests and imprisonments. On July 11, Maj©Gen Myo Nyunt, who is commander of the Yangon Command Headquarters, said at a meeting, "The State Law and Order Restoration Council is striving its best to ensure smooth and swift flow of goods and to bring down prices. Commodity prices are high today because the supply cannot cope with the demand and because of certain politicians' attempt to destabilize the economy. The State is taking necessary action against those who are making attempts to destabilise the economy and the cooperation of the people is called for to help increase production".

Since arrests of the people's representatives are almost always based on groundless charges such as this, it can be expected that SLORC will continue to arrest and imprison any elected member of Burma's parliament which dares to speak out openly, or to express any views contrary to what SLORC subscribes to.

Third Congress of the NDF

The NDF (National Democratic Front) is the coordinating body of the ethnic minorities which are fighting against the military government for a federal state structure in Burma. After the 1988 nationwide unarmed uprising, the political opposition groups, including the student activists, joined with NDF and formed the DAB (Democratic Alliance of Burma).

The Third Congress of the NDF was held at its headquarters from June 24 to July 9, 1991. The delegates from the following member organizations attended the congress:

1. Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)
2. Chin National Front (CNF)
3. Kachin Independent Organization (KIO)
4. Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)
5. Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)
6. Karen National Union (KNU)
7. Lahu National Organization (LNO)
8. New Mon State Party (NMSP)
9. Wa National Organization (WNO)

and the representatives of the Pa-O Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palaung National Organization Committee (PNOC) also attended the Congress.

In their final statement the NDF made it clear that they firmly support the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), formed by the elected representatives of the people.

The Congress elected new leaders with Nai Shwe Kyin (NMSP) as chairman, Zaw Seng (KIO) as vice-chairman, Khine Soe Naing Aung (ALP) as general secretary and Sai Maung Mine (KNPP) as joint secretary.

Statement of the DAB concerning peace talks with SLORC

Following is a brief summary of the DAB statement regarding the DAB's stance on peace talks with the SLORC.

"Restoration of peace in Burma is the wish of all the people and DAB. The present situation is heading towards another uprising which will be greater than that in 1988. The basic political problem of present instability is created by the Ne

Win©Saw Maung military regime. The most fundamental tasks we need to perform are:

1. To eliminate the militarization of the country 2. To achieve democratic rights and human rights 3. To establish a genuine federal union where the rights of the nationalities and the rights to self©determination are fully guaranteed.

To achieve these goals, a national convention should be called comprised of the representatives of all democratic forces and all armed forces.

necessity:

1. to call for peace talks, not with single opposition groups, but with all opposition groups at the national level.

2. the peace talks must not be secret, but known to all the world

3. the two opposing forces should have equal status

4. they should be held in one of the democratic countries acceptable to both parties.

5. they should be observed by the local and world media, the United Nations and internal peace organizations, and appropriate persons from the host country.

All efforts contrary to these are dishonest and therefore cannot restore peace and national reconciliation in the country.

[Return to Top](#)

Interview with young porters

"My name is Maung Gyi and I am 19 years old. I live at Matabin, Ali Paung township in the Mon state. I worked as a manual laborer in the railway station carrying

luggage for the passengers. I am very poor as my earnings were just sufficient for my survival.

One day while I was carrying loads in the railway station, a policeman named Thein Lwin arrested me for not having a platform ticket but I understood it was unnecessary for the laborers in the railway station to have such a ticket. The policeman kept me for two hours and I met the other labors who were also kept by the police. Subsequently, the police handed us over to the headquarters of the Burmese Light Infantry Regiment No. 102. After that, the soldiers sent us to Belin, one of the cities of the Mon State, where we spent two nights. Later, they sent us to Myaing Ga Lay, one of the cities of the Karen State (Southeast Burma) where there is a Burmese military headquarters of the South Eastern Military Headquarters. But the soldiers kept us in the Buddhist monastery, called " Ohn Hnal Pin" monastery.

The next morning, we were carried by trucks to Myawaddy, a Burmese border town and frontier on the Thai-Burma border. We arrived there at midnight. We slept in one of the school buildings one night. The next morning the army forced each person to carry two rice bags (the size is half of the normal rice bag) to Pa-Lu, the junta's stronghold (Pa-Lu was a Karen guerrilla's defence post in 1989). We were very tired in the jungle because of the rough terrain and heavy load. We usually did not sleep well, and got only a little rice for our meals although we were carrying rice for the soldiers on the front line. Later, we got to the regiment headquarters which was on one of the mountains. Usually, after we delivered the rice bags to the soldiers on the front line, we got the chance to sleep in the regimental headquarters.

One day, one of the company commanders, Capt. Tin Oo from No.8 Burmese Infantry Regiment, ordered two of the boys my age to carry the rice back to one of the front lines. These two boys complained of fatigue, and were not able to walk. Subsequently, they were severely beaten with bamboo rods, hammered with gun butts and kicked with combat boot by the soldiers.

Along the way, the army did not give proper medical treatment and dress for us. Sometimes we only got one meal for one day. We were really tired and some of us suffered skin disease.

One night, we broke the fence around the military camp and ran away from the regiment headquarters. Immediately the soldiers chased us. Although we could not

run so fast because of malnutrition, we ran as fast as we could in order only to survive. Finally, we arrived at the revolutionary area."

in the Mon State. I earned my living by selling local made rice cake at the Mataban railway station. One day, a policeman named Thein Lwin arrested me without any reason and sent me to the No.102 Burmese Army Light Infantry Regiment. Then I and some other prisoners were carried by trucks to Myaing Ga Lay in the Karen State. On the truck I met some young boys who also live in our village area.

In the morning, we were forced to carry condensed milk tin boxes to Pa©Lu strong hold of the army which is on the frontier of the Thai-Burma border. The next morning, after breakfast, we moved with heavy loads to the front lines where there were soldiers from Company No.3 and from Regiment No. 102. In the jungle, we were really exhausted by carrying the heavy loads over the high mountains. We had difficulty walking because we had no rest in the jungle. I especially could not walk, so I hid behind one of the rice bags but they found me and beat me badly. The next morning, as a punishment, they sent me to collect bamboo shoots for their meals in the jungle. That was a chance for my survival, and I took advantage of it. Subsequently, I ran away from the soldiers, and met one Thai who showed me the way to get to the Karen guerilla area."

"My name is Kyaw Oo and I am 15 years old. I live in Ah Paung Township. On the 26th of June of this year, I had sentry duty in my village. At midnight, one of the police patrol groups arrested me, and kept one night at the police station. The next day, they sent me to the No.8 Burmese Infantry Regiment in Beling township in Mon State. Subsequently, the army carried me and some other arrested people to Myawaddy opposite Maesod which is a Thai border town.

The next day, we had to carry heavy rice bags and artillery shells to the front line headquarters of No.9 Infantry regiment. We often had to carry rice bags and artillery shells from the front line headquarters to the soldiers on the other lines. I was really young and very tired to carry heavy loads in the jungle. When I could not walk fast like the other people, they beat me badly. One of my friends, named Maung Gyi, one day slipped down the mountainside with the heavy artillery shells on his shoulder. He was beaten by the soldiers for slipping. As a punishment, he was forced to carry heavy loads in the jungle for two consecutive days.

Finally, we came back to the frontline headquarters where I broke through the fence, and ran away from the soldiers. I escaped, and got to the Karen guerrilla area."

[Return to Top](#)

Gang Rape of Karen Woman in Mae Sot

An ethnic Karen woman from Burma named Ma Khin Win Kying, about 23 years old, works as a maid in Banon Ward (North house) in Maesod, on the Thai-Burma border. She was gang raped by five Thai men, two of them holding pistols.

The Thai government has been repatriating Burmese citizens living in Thailand to the Burma side since the first week of May. To avoid being repatriated, Ma Khin Win Kying was hiding in a tiny hut about 200 yards behind Dr. Cynthia's clinic which is a very well know clinic in Maesot town. She was living with Ma Nan who is her house mate.

On the 13 of June 1991, about 10 pm, five Thai men came to her hut and two of them were holding pistols. The Thai gang first slapped, kicked and beat Ma Nan who was reportedly left unconscious in the hut. Then the Thai gang aimed their pistols at Ma Khin Win Kying, and drag her out through the rice fields.

After a short while, Ma Nan regained consciousness again and informed the people in Dr. Cynthia's clinic about the event. About 15 people from the clinic tried to follow the Thai gang. At that time, Ma Khin Win Kying and the Thai gang were under one of the trees in the rice field. Although she heard the people calling her name in the dark, she could not shout for help as the Thai gang were pointing their guns at her head.

Finally, about 12pm the people from the Dr. Cynthia's clinic came back, and called the Thai police on the phone. Although the Thai police said they would look for her,

none of them came to the place. Meanwhile, the Thai gang took her into one of the huts nearby. They forcefully took off her dress and raped her there in the hut the whole night. Following the rape, they threatened to shoot her, but she pleaded with them to spare her life. Finally, the Thai men freed her and shouted to her to go away from them.

Early in the morning she arrived back at her home and informed the people from Dr. Cynthia's clinic.

The woman who was gang-raped is:

Name: Ma Khin Win Kying

Nationality: Ethnic Karen

Address: Dai Pya village, Hlaing-Bwe Township

Karen State

Status: Single

We asked friends to take whatever action is possible to pressure for legal action against the Thai gang. This woman is not the first Karen woman in Thai territory to be harassed like this. Other women in Maesod are being given sexual harassment by Thai men but we can not give proof because, traditionally the women of Burma are very ashamed of such humiliation, and will not talk about it.

[Return to Top](#)