B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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The civil war continues to rage in Burma and is spreading to every border area. More and more village people are fleeing this never-ending war, and end up living lives of uncertainty as refugees in Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh.

International pressure is necessary to help bring about a peaceful solution to this sad situation. Several articles in this issue of B.U.R.M.A. explore how international pressure is making a difference.

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CIVIL WAR

Currently the junta's forces are estimated to be about 230,000. Recently some observers say the junta may have extended its forces to at least 250,000. It seems evident that the Slorc (The Burmese military junta) has no intention of seeking peaceful solutions to the country's sensitive political and ethnic problems. Newly equipped Chinese-made F-6 and F-7 bombers will most certainly carry out air raids against ethnic villages and strongholds during the coming dry season which will start in October.

According to an eye witness in Moulmein, a city near the ethnic Mon and Karen guerrilla controlled areas, the junta is extending the runway of the Moulmain civilian airport for the purpose of landing cargo planes and fighters of the junta's air force. It is sure that the civil war will intensify in the ethnic areas.

The various ethnic groups in the eastern boundary states of the country have been fighting for autonomy against the military government for many years already. The other ethnic groups, such as the Rakhine and Chin minority groups in the western areas, which neighbor with India and Bangladesh, also recently started fighting against Slorc. The civil war is obviously spreading to all the nation's borders.

The refugee problem which is directly related to the civil war is also growing in the neighboring countries. About 60,000 refugees, mostly from minority groups, are presently staying on the Thai/Burma border and others are living in China, Bangladesh and India. Another unknown number of refugees are struggling for survival in the thick jungles.

At the present time, the serious situation seems to have no peaceful solutions. The Burmese military is still demanding that the ethnic rebels first abandon their arms, and later discuss the problems in the national assembly. In fact, this creates suspicion and confusion among the ethnic rebels who consider the junta's demand to abandon arms tantamount to surrender. In previous years, the military junta stubbornly demanded that the ethnic rebels surrender unconditionally.

The results of the May 1990 election seem to offer no hope to the political dissidents and pro-democratic people in the country. Shortly after the election, the people felt there was at least a small light of hope that the country's issues could be solved peacefully. But since the time of the 1988 mass unarmed uprising to the present the only result has been the death of 6,000 to 8,000 demonstrators, about 12,000 political prisoners suffering torture in the prisons, 65 elected representatives arrested, eviction of about 30,000 urban poor people from their home land and the increasing number of refugees in the neighboring countries.

Day by day, more and more political dissidents are fleeing to the ethnic controlled areas for the purposes of political co-ordination with the armed ethnic groups and to avoid being harassed by the junta.

Shan State (Eastern and Northeastern Burma)

Although most of the PNO leaders and guerrillas (Pa-O National Organization) surrendered on the 23rd of March, recently about 100 Pa-O ethnic guerrillas reformed, led by Khun Oak Kar, to fight against the military government.

Karen State (Southern Burma)

During this month, there has been no heavy exchange of fire in the area except for some guerrilla warfare. Most of the areas are flooded by the rains and this is an obstacle to the junta's troop movements in the area. So, the junta's troops are taking defensive positions in their strongholds. At the same time, the junta is reinforcing its troops in the strategic cities for security and is preparing for the offensives in the coming dry season the end of this year.

On the 12th of August, the government troops sent an ultimatum to nine villages in Tha Yet Chaung township to move to the junta's controlled area. This is done to keep the civilians away from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Totally 820 villages were reportedly forced to move from their native lands and their possessions were looted by the troops. Most of the people are farmers and lost their farms. At the present time, the people are facing a shortage of food and some of them are suffering malnutrition. Even while the people were facing tremendous problems due to a lack of medicine and poor living conditions, four of them were killed by the troops simply for reasons of suspicion.

Arakan State (West Burma)

The civil war is gradually spreading into the Arakan State. The junta's current infantry forces are about 10,000 in the State. According to some observers, the military is reinforcing its troops in the region for security and this is causing many problems for the civilians. Basically, transportation is difficult from the main land to this area, and the military has never shown any interest in providing development assistance to the people here. However, the present harassment of local Arakan politicians by the military is pushing the local ethnic people to become more militant.

Currently, the National United Front of Arakan (NUFA) is taking up guerrilla warfare positions, and in the previous months, some of the junta's officers were killed in exchanges of gunfire between the NUFA forces and the junta's troops.

The another Muslims who originally came from Bangladesh have recently received arms and are threatening the military troops. It is estimated that about 600 Muslims, known as "Rohingya", are undergoing training on the Bangladesh/Burma border. Basically, Muslims are fighting for the freedom of religion but according to some observers the Rohingya are also demanding that the Burmese military government recognize the Rohingya as one of the ethnic groups in Burma. There are right now about 15,000 Muslim refugees on the Bangladesh side, and the number of Muslim refugees is increasing in Bangladesh.

POLITICS

The military junta of Burma has often indicated that they are not much interested in what the world thinks of them, nor are they much bothered by international criticism. Several recent events, however, indicate that international criticism does have a negative effect on the military leaders, even if sometimes in a rather round about way.

According to the Bangkok Post of August 15, 1991, the Thai government has axed plans for an official visit to Bangkok by Burma's military junta leader, General Saw Maung, following growing international protest against the Burmese regime. The Thai government's decision to refuse to officially sanction the trip comes after intense lobbying by Western nations at the recent ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur for ASEAN nations to withdraw support to the Burmese military junta in the light of its dismal human rights record.

Originally the trip was scheduled for June but has been repeatedly postponed.

Earlier the Thai Agriculture Minister, Anat Arhabhirama, called off a planned official visit to Rangoon. This cancellation was also due to increased international pressure on the Burmese junta because of the junta's failure to comply with the result of last years general election and its human rights abuses.

The Burmese people, who have witnessed a number of irritating attitudes by ASEAN governments towards the political crisis in Burma, were very much surprised and overjoyed when they learned that the Thai Agriculture Minister had canceled his visit to Burma and that the Thai government opposed Saw Maung's visit to Thailand. A Burmese source from Burma said, "These decisions could be very significant for the future relations between the two nations."

In an earlier report, the Thai Foreign Minister, Arsa Sarasin, warned SLORC to prepare for a tough time ahead as Western countries are poised to condemn Rangoon at the United Nations General Assembly which will be meeting later this year. Arsa conveyed this message to Ohn Gyaw, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Burmese military regime, who came to Bangkok to meet him on August 9.

Mr. Arsa also said that Thailand wants SLORC to know how it is perceived by foreign countries. He said that unless SLORC comes up with a time frame for democratization, strong repercussions can be expected.

Cooperation with the ruthless Burmese military regime might, for the time being, benefit the Thai government and some Thai companies. In the long run, however, if the SLORC can hold its power for some more years, the xenophobia of the Burmese military leaders will surely give trouble to the Thai government, business men and the people of Thailand.

One example is the case of Thai fishermen being arrested by the Burmese military regime for illegally fishing in Burmese waters. During their detention period in Rangoon, some died from bad treatment despite the good relations between the two countries. (see B.U.R.M.A, July, 1991. Page 2) The Burmese military leaders trust no one outside their own group, and for that reason, they also can not much be trusted.

Another example is the speech by SLORC Secretary No. 1, General Khin Nyunt, given at a meeting with the leaders of the motion picture organization of Burma.

In that speech Khin Nyunt said, "In South-East Asian nations there is a growing influence of alien cultures and that means loss of independence."

"... there occur quite a large number of law breaking incidents daily in the Western nations which are recognized to be developed nation."

He continued, "In our country at present, there is no such incident and there is no nation which is as peaceful as Burma. No one can deny that the people of Burma possess good cultural traits which are unmatched." (Working People's Daily, the junta's propaganda organ, July 15, 1991)

Khin Nyunt's reflections portray the SLORC's chauvinistic nature as well as its xenophobia. They have constantly tried to portray to the people of Burma the danger which other countries pose to the economy, culture and morals of Burma. By instilling the people with fear of all non-Burmese nations, they hope to justify, in the eyes of the people, the junta's strong control over the country. It is SLORC, they tell the people, that is trying to save Burma from this frightful "outside influence."

At the same time, they open their doors to foreign investments from Thailand, Japan, and other countries, allowing these countries and their companies to exploit the natural resources of Burma. There will come a time when they no longer want this foreign presence in Burma as well, and will once again nationalize everything as they have in the past.

In 1967 when the people's indignation against the military regime was at the brink of explosion, Ne Win diverted the people's anger towards the Chinese community and the Chinese government. When Chinese leadership decided to assist the Burmese communist party, and began doing so, Ne Win abruptly went to China and apologized to Mao Tse Tung saying Chinese and Burmese people were traditional friends. Today Ne Win sent Saw Maung and his team to China with the instructions to approach Chinese leaders in order to win favor.

Clearly the junta will not hesitate to change their course, even 180 degrees, if the situation calls for it.

Meanwhile, mounting international criticism is, indeed, making it more difficult for ASEAN nations and China to blindly continue their defense of the military regime in Burma. Perhaps they realize that they are not supporting or defending the legal government or people of that country, but rather a military junta that has no legitimacy either within the country or internationally.

ECONOMICS

The Population

In 1990, the total population of Burma was about 41.7 million. This puts the current population density at about 54/sq.km. In inaccessible areas of the country, the population density is only about 10/sq.km.

The average annual population growth is 2.1%. Due to the agri-crisis, the urban population is increasing rapidly, especially in Rangoon which is the capital city of the country. Presently about 30% of the total population is in urban areas. Statistics show that an average of 0.2% of the people are drifting annually into the urban areas. However, Burma's population is still lower than its neighbors Southeast Asia.

Economic Forecasts

The military junta is trying to forecast a better economic development for the 1990/91 financial year with a of 5.7% growth for the GDP (the present GDP is 5.1%). Agriculture is excepted to grow by 6.8%, livestock and fisheries 3.0%, forestry 8.8%, mining by 38.1% and manufacturing by 8.7%. In fact, this will only be an artificial economic growth with little or no benefits reaching the people. Burma absolutely can not reach this goal because of poor external demand, low investments, extremely high civil war expenses and the continuing unstable political situation.

Actual Currency System

The present currency exchange rate is relatively down on the official market from 6.7 kyats per US dollar in 1980 to 6.448 in 1991. However the official exchange rate is completely artificial, even in relation to legal trade with foreign countries. The foreign department stores are selling their goods at the black market rate for the kyat, making these goods extremely expensive for the people. In fact, the goal of all foreign investments is simply to get cheap labor for their manufacturing net work.

Despite the military's setting an official low foreign exchange rate, the black market exchange rate is sky rocketing. The black market exchange rate changed from about 65 kyats for one US dollar in July of this year to 160 Kyats in August.

The Burmese kyat is untrusted even by the Burmese people as the threat of demonetization always looms on the horizon. Currently, some of the special units of the military intelligence are forcing owners of the gold shops to sell their gold at cut prices to military officials.

Most commodities are much more expensive than before 1989. At the present time, black markets are becoming major distributors for goods to the urban people who suffer the most from a shortage of food and malnutrition.

Energy

Despite the military's control over the floor price of gas, an inadequate supply of petroleum is encouraging the black market buying and selling of fuel. Officially, one gallon of gas sells for 13.5 kyats (US$2.09) while the black market rates is at least six times higher. Since the official supply of fuel is so low, most fuel must be bought on the illegal market at this high price. The final effect is that the flow of commodities in the country costs so much more, forcing a higher price for every necessity of the people. Moreover, private and state owned factories have been forced to reduce their work because of the shortage of diesel oil.

The country's two major petroleum refineries are located at Syriam (across the river from Rangoon) and Mann. They have a total capacity of 26,300 barrels per day. The new refinery at Mann has probably not yet gone into full production since its completion with Japanese help, due to a shortage of crude.

The military's control over all state enterprises still remains. They are the largest investors in the manufacturing sector at kyat 842.3 million (US$130.62 million). At the same time, they spend about kyats 885 million (US$137 million) for administration and the military.

Agriculture

Agriculture still makes up the primary production for the country. In 1989/90, 492,870 tons of rice were exported while 13.0 million tons were consumed domestically. To inccrease the export potential of rice, the junta invested from kyat 572.3 million (US$88.76 million) in 1989/90 to kyat 658.1 million (US$102.06 million) in 1990/91. The government also extended the rice planting areas to about 4.8 million hectares in 1989/90 but poor support by the junta for fertilizer and the present flood disasters are major restrictions for the junta to reach its goals.

Livestock and Fishing

According to FAO data, in 1988 there were 10 million cattle, 2.2 million buffalo, 3 million pigs, 259,000 sheep, 1.1 millon goats and 139,000 horses in Burma. The people in rural areas are extending the size of their livestock themselves by using advanced breeding methods provided by the UNDP and other affiliated organizations, but at the same time, the expensive fuel prices are having a massive negative affect on the price of animal food which must be transported to the villages. Usually, animal feed production is located in the urban areas.

Burma's primary fishing areas are in the delta, the Southern costal regions and the Bengal Gulf where tremendous fish resources are available for the country. After 1988, the junta offered foreign fishing companies, mostly from Thailand, large concessions for fishing in Burmese waters instead of promoting the domestic private business. Burmese fishermen are still using the old traditional ways of fishing and new trawlers are essential for them to compete in the fishing industry. Presently, Thai companies are earning hugh profits from Burmese waters by dealing with the junta. Burma's state owned Fishing Corporation produced an estimated 13,438 tons of fish in 1989/90.

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ENVIRONMENT

Deforestation

The national resources of Burma, especially the forests, are doomed to unrepairable damage if something is not done soon to stop their wanton destruction by Thai, Malaysian and Japanese logging companies.

Burma has some of the best natural resources in the region. In a report by FAO made in 1983, 47% (318,660 sq. km.) of the entire country is covered by forest. The country is approximately 678,030 sq km in size. Most of the world's remaining high quality teak is found in Burma's forests. The report further states that the annual deforestation is 10% or 67.658 sq. km. "Myanmar (formally Burma) Timber Enterprise and Forest Department has been exceeding the quota of the "Annual Allowable cut" (AAC)" the FAO report concludes.

The removal of teak logs from 1988 to 1989 was approximately 700,000 cubic meters. In fact the actual "AAC" is only 400,000 cubic meters for the country. Mover over, the present political situation and the civil war are pressuring the military to sell logging concessions at a far greater rate than the actual AAC allows in order to cover the expenses of the civil war.

Following the 1988 unarmed uprising, US$112 million of the total net annual income of Burma was from the export of logs to Thailand. The selling of these logs to Thailand was a response of thanks to the Thai military who assisted the Burmese armies to attack the strongholds of the Karen and Mon guerrillas along the Thai/Burma border.

On the 5th of October 1990, Lt-Gen Chit Shwe, Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Breeding, Culture and Forestry, announced that Burma has the potential to annually produce 8 million cubic meters of teak logs. This means that the Burmese military regime is ready to sell off teak at a rate twenty times the recommended AAC.

In December 1988, after the trip to Burma by Thai General Chavalit, a group of Thai logging companies were abruptly given 46 logging contracts along the Thai-Burma border. It is believed that deforestation rates are much higher now than before the Thai logging companies began their logging. According to civilians in Maesod, a Thai/Burma border city, 80 to 100 Thai trucks daily are carrying logs out of Burma, and each truck carries an estimated 35 tons. That means Thai trucks are carrying out Burmese logs estimated at more than 20 million Cubic meters from their concessions covering 40 sq. km. in Burma.

At the beginning of these logging concessions, the Burmese military government wanted to show trust for the Thai logging companies as an encouragement for good ties with the Thai military. Therefore they did not carefully check out any Thai trucks coming and leaving Burma. But later, early in 1991, U Ba Thwin, Director General of the Forest Department claimed in an interview that about 10 to 20 Thai companies did not follow the rules of the Burmese Forestry Office because these companies were cutting every size of the trees, including even very small trees which were cut to make charcoal.

The Burmese Forestry Department has set the various sizes of trees which can be cut depending on the type of forest. In good teak forests the cutting girth is limited to trees not smaller than 2.3 meters at breast height, and in poor forests the minimum size is 2.0 meters with a felling cycle of 30 years. Nonetheless, Thai companies are still cutting all sizes of the trees by giving bribe money to the military officials and the staff of the Forest Department. Thirty two per cent of Burma's total earnings come from timber export, especially to Thai timber companies since 1988.

In the earliest years, the military regime claimed that the main reason for deforestation was the indigenous tribes' shifting agricultural system which included slash and burn farming. In fact, this is not the main cause of deforestation in Burma because the tribal groups are living in areas which are inaccessible and mountainous. Their population in these areas is less than 10 persons per sq. km. Even if all of these tribal people are involved in a shifting agricultural system, this number could not make a major negative affect on the forests. Moreover, the tribal groups traditionally live in the jungle and pay much attention to keeping the forest safe as their livelihood depends on the forests. In some cases, tribal tradition prohibits the cutting of large trees because of a spiritual belief.

The military also wants the forests cut to prevent the opposition from using the forest cover to carry out guerrilla warfare in the states of eastern Burma.

The shortage of logs for the logging industries is also one of the major reasons for deforestation. Since Thailand has banned logging within its borders, Thai logging companies must look elsewhere for trees to fill the hugh demands they have created for hard wood.

The World Bank is involved as a financial supporter in the "Logging Industries Project No.2". This project is designed to build up the furniture industry, plywood production and more extensive milling capacity. The project term ran from 1984/85 to 1988-89 in Burma. Not only the World Bank, but other affiliated countries, including Japan, are providing major loans for the forest industries in Burma.

Unless there is an investigation of the logging practices of Thai and other logging companies in Burma, and unless the civil war is brought to an end, there is no way to protect Burma's forests from being totally destroyed.

ECONOMY, continued from page 3

Conclusion

The junta is still announcing artificial economic growth rates to the international community. Unless a stable political situation is established which requires an end to the civil war and well-organized economic policies, there is no hope for development benefits for Burma's own people.

BURMA'S FIRST CASINO

For more than a year now, rumors have been building that a Thai company is planning to build a casino on Burmese soil opposite the Thai border town of Chiang Saen in the infamous Golden Triangle area. Although no one can yet confirm these rumors, many people involved in the project will not deny that a casino is, in fact, a part of the resort development in that area.

The Golden Triangle is the area where the borders of Thailand, Burma and Laos meet. It has gained fame over the past decades as a major source for the world's opium and heroin supply. Drug Lords, such as Khun Sa, operate freely here.

The borders of these three countries are delineated by the Mekong and Sob Ruak rivers. A small island is created by these two rivers, and it is on this island that the casino is rumored to be in the process of construction.

A Thai company called Withawat International Co, and owned by a Thai politician, is investing three billion Thai baht (approximately US$117 million) to build the Paradise Resort on more than 1300 acres of land on this Burmese soil. The resort will contain a first class hotel of about 400 rooms, an 18 hole golf course and other recreational facilities. A hospital, hovercraft docking area and a shopping center will also be built. The president of the project, Prasit Phothasuthon, would not deny that a casino was part of the project.

Gambling is illegal both in Thailand and in Burma. For many years, various influential persons in Thailand have tried to set up casinos in order to bring in foreign money, but each project has been successfully rejected by the Thai government. It is for this reason that some of these influential persons have begun looking to neighboring countries as a possible locale for such lucrative business. Even though gambling is illegal in Burma, it is possible the Burmese military regime would ignore what happens in this far corner of their country if it would provide them with some very much needed foreign currency.

The resort, even though it may temporarily benefit a few people in Burma, will probably bring vast fortunes to the Thai company. The contract itself is a 30 year concession, and gives the project owner exclusive right over the concessioned area. The Thai government will have no authority in the area, and the Burmese military seems to have granted almost national sovereignty to the Thai project owner. An interview with Prasit Phothasuthon by a local business magazine called Phoojatkarn, accentuated this political arrangement.

Phoojatkarn: Some people have said that the casino can not be opened, even though you really want to open it.

Prasit: Why not? Who has the most power in this area? I have. This area does not concern the Burmese government. Today whoever wants to enter this area has to seek permission from me.

Phoojatkarn: Are most employees Thai people?

Prasit: Yes. This is so that things will not be uncontrollable. But we also use Burmese people to do labor jobs while Thai people will do the work that requires some skill.

The Thai company must pay the Burmese military US$30 million in rental fees during the 30 year period. They will have a tax-free holiday for the first 8 years and then will have to pay a tax of 15% on all profits to the Burmese military. Normally the Burmese military charges 30% tax.

A recent *Far Eastern Economic Review* article raised some serious concerns about the casino plans. It quoted the New South Wales Australian police as say in August of 1990, "The casino at the Golden Triangle will be a dream money-cleansing place...The airport and the helicopter parking area will be used to transport narcotics out of the area." According to many police officials from around the world, casinos are mainly a place for cleansing and circulating the money earned from drug trafficking.

A further question plagues the minds of many people in Burma. How many young women from the villages in the area will be forced into prostitution to serve the wealthy tourists who will frequent the resort? Already many young women from ethnic minority villages are being bought and sold by gangs along the Thai Burma border. These poor women are forced into prostitution in brothels all over Thailand and perhaps other Asian countries.

For how much longer must the people of Burma be the victims of their own military rulers as well as the victims of their wealthier neighbors?

SLORC Statistics not important

During an exhibition on the destruction of heroin and other narcotic drugs, held on July 1 of this year, the ambassador of Germany noticed a discrepancy in the statistics presented by the SLORC. According to SLORC's newspaper published on June 27, 1990, the total value of drugs destroyed was US$100,402.38 million; "but it is here presented as US$4,330 million. Which is correct?" he asked.

Ohn Gyaw, the deputy Foreign Minister replied, "The statistics are not important, it is only secondary." (Working People's Daily, July 2, 1991).

This means that a difference of US$96,072,380,000 dollars is not important if it concerns SLORC.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

Since taking over power on September 18, 1988, the Burmese military regime has consistently asserted that they are not concerned about, nor affected by, international criticism and/or economic sanctions. They continue to declare to the world that Burma is self-sufficient, and can continue to exist without international assistance just as it has existed since the Ne Win coup of 1962. The fact that Burma has fallen from being one of the wealthiest and best developed countries in the region to now being listed as one of the ten poorest countries in the world, does not seem to shake their position.

Despite the junta's constant affirmation that "all is well", there are signs that international pressure does affect them.

Earlier this year the United Nations Human Rights Commission, meeting in Switzerland, condemned the human rights record of SLORC and called on them to release political prisoners. During the meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), held in July of this year, the major trading partners of ASEAN countries called for economic and political sanctions against SLORC and sought hard pressure from ASEAN nations to force SLORC to turn state power over to the legally elected representatives.

The General Secretary of the United Nations has, on several occasions, called on SLORC to immediately release Aung San Suu Kyi whose house arrest has been extended for another three years by the Burmese military.

It is also speculated that the Nobel Peace Prize may be awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi this year. Such a move would again put SLORC in a difficult position internationally as well as raise the courage and hope of the people of Burma.

All of these things are happening as the General Assembly meeting of the United Nations approaches. Several member countries of the UN have shown interest in debating the right of SLORC to occupy the Burma seat in the UN, and should such a debate prove successful, SLORC would lose the one thing which seems to give them international legitimacy.

Despite the nonchalant face which SLORC puts on, they are obviously concerned about all of these moves against them. To bolster their sagging international image, they have taken to using the Buddhist religion as a means to gain credibility.

After showing extreme disrespect for Buddhist monks, including beating and killing, the military regime of Burma decided to bestow high religious titles on several Buddhist monks throughout Asia. The event which was held in February of this year, almost totally misfired due to the failure of most of the invited monks to attend.

The Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, who was to receive the Adhidhaja Maha Ratha Guru (Burma's highest religious title for non-Burmese) did not go to Burma in February, citing ill health as the reason.

Unsullied by this, the Burmese Home Affairs and Religious Minister, Phone Myint, came to Bangkok late last month to present the award directly to the Supreme Patriarch. Local criticism immediately erupted. Religious and human rights organizations spoke out against the award stating that the award was a political move through which SLORC simply wished to gain international respect. The Buddhist faith, they averred, should not be used by military dictators to further their power goals.

Phone Myint was finally forced to return to Rangoon without making his presentation to the Supreme Patriarch. The award now rests with Thai Interior Minister Issarapong Noonpakdee who must decide whether or not to pass it on to the Supreme Patriarch.

The message to SLORC must now be clear. The meeting of the UN General Assembly to be held in September, may be an extremely difficult one for them. Perhaps soon the time will come when they have to admit that international pressure and trade sanctions, do hurt. At that time, perhaps they will finally be ready to sit down and negotiate with the opposition.

Remembering those monks who have been killed

HUMAN RIGHTS

Disaster in Kachin State

On the 22nd of June 1991, several unusually heavy rains started in the Kachin State, along the Sino-Kachin border area. The heavy down pours caused the Mung-lai, Je Yang, and Mo Ru streams to overflow into the Mung Seng Yang which then flowed over its banks and left 96 families homeless. Several villages of refugees and displaced people were located in the area, which is approximately 50 kilometers south east of Myitkyina, the major city of the Kachin State. Nine villages as well as the Kachin Independence Organization's public hospital were washed away.

At least 40 villagers, 15 KIO organizers, 8 members of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), and one medical doctor were reportedly killed in the floods.

Currently, relief efforts have been carried out by the Kachin Refugee Relief Committee (KRRC) and the Kachin Women's Association (KWA). Emergency relief is badly needed from the international organizations and private donors for the refugees. Any donations can be sent to:

Kachinland News & Information
P.O. Box 445
Bangkok 10400
Thailand

Safe Center to be Established

The Thai government is moving ahead with plans to set up a "safe center" for Burmese dissidents living in Thailand. The project has been in the planning stages for many months already, but now there is speculation that official permission to move ahead with the plan is forthcoming.

The "safe center" will be constructed at the site of a former Border Police camp near the Thai/Burma border and will hold over 1,500 Burmese dissidents. Burmese students living illegally in Thailand will be moved to the center where some education and skill training might be provided, but no political activities allowed.

Burmese dissidents oppose the idea as they say it will make it much easier for the Burmese military intelligence units to collect information on them which can be used to take action against their families. They also say that they did not leave Burma to simply while away there time sitting in a camp, but are committed to working for positive changes for their country. Fear also exists that once they are placed in the camp, forced repatriation would be easy and quick.

The Thai government, however, argues that they can not allow illegal aliens to roam freely about their country, especially when these Burmese dissidents often embarrass the Thai government by staging demonstration inside Thailand against the Burmese military regime. The Thai government and the Burmese military regime enjoy a very close political and economic relationship.

It is feared by many international observers that the "safe center" will simply be the start of a plan to push back all illegal Burmese aliens, including ethnic refugees, into Burma. With the dry season offensive by the Burmese military soon to begin, this would be tantamount to sending these people back to live in a battle zone.

AIR MAIL

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Information Bureau of the NLD (Liberated Area)