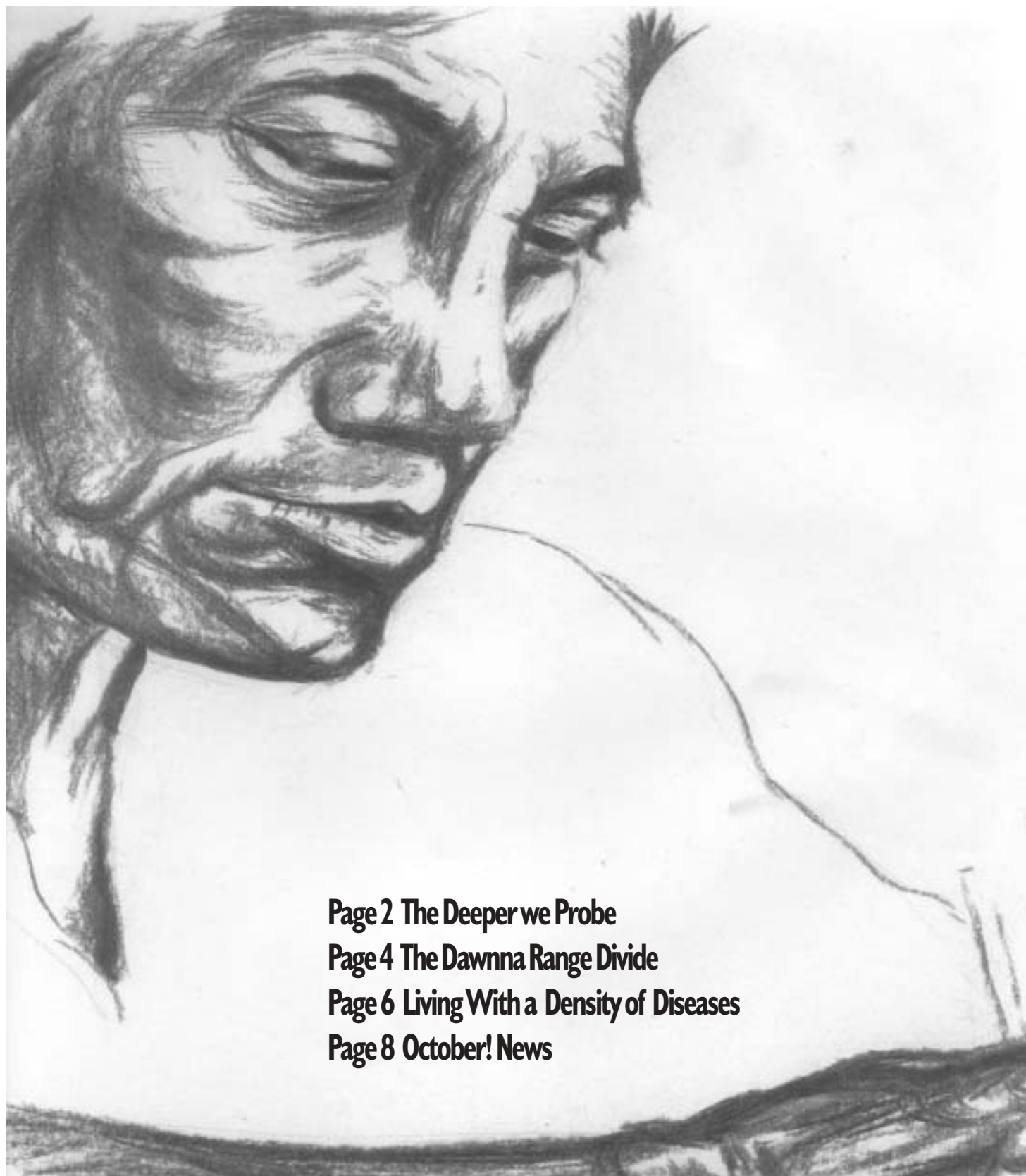




Burma Issues

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THE DEEPER WE PROBE

Ethnic genocide has become one of those catch words, like democracy and post modernism, a term that will determine a context so big and multi-faceted that we don't know entirely how to deal with it unless we can label it. In simple terms ethnic genocide describes one group or individuals deliberate attempt to wipe out an entire race, usually a minority group/s. That belittles the complexity of this issue though which is commonly involving a far more complicated set of processes that include things like economics, power, sexual domination and idealism. In this article I attempted to focus on sexual domination and its use in ethnic genocide but in doing so I find another area opening up to me that doesn't necessarily confine it to sexual domination aimed directly at ethnic women but the mental indoctrination that contributes to this issue on a national level, not just race-based.

History is littered with examples of labeled acts of genocide constituting a diverse group of circumstances. In the early days of colonial Australia white Europeans reveled in the game of wiping the ethnicity out of the aboriginals...how many generations of interbreeding, forced marriage or just forced sex would it take to wipe the black out of the aborigine. In Bosnia, in Rwanda and Burundi, in West Papua, the cases of ethnic rape are well documented, the magnitude of numbers sickening, the mentality of one races arrogance that they have the right to wipe out another a sad fact attributable to the human race.

The Burma that emerged after independence has a strong case for evidence of ethnic cleansing. It was a deeply divided nation, the ethnic races and their issues of autonomy and identity of paramount importance if Burma was to remain a unified country. Instead Ne Win's military undertook a policy of cleansing Burma of any opposition group to the military's power, predominantly the unhappy ethnic groups. They in effect undertook a process of ethnic cleansing that has been occurring ever since, the danger lies though in over simplifying it to just ethnic cleansing and ignoring the many factors that contribute to this.

A military policy that has been picked up by both the Shan and Karen independence movement stipulates an order by which Burmese soldiers are told to marry ethnic women. The order runs something like this, soldiers that marry an ethnic girl would be rewarded as these ethnic people would only destroy Burma. They are not Burma nationals and therefore were to be oppressed until they all disappeared from Burma. If Burmese soldiers complied with this then their family could live in peace. The obvious intention being that if killing and guns can't get rid of them then breeding them out will. Not only would it physically dilute the ethnic races into oblivion but it would also succeed in eradicating the culture and identity of the ethnic groups. The ethnic woman and any offspring would be forced to talk Burmese, any traditional ceremonies, customs and clothing would be lost, the population would be "Burmanised". Added incentive was the monetary stipend offered, documented extensively in the case of the Shan people. To marry an ethnic Shan woman you were paid an extra 3000 kyat on your salary, if she was from a wealthy Shan family or was educated then that amount rose even further, produce offspring and add a little more.

Of course, as with all cases of mass ethnic genocide one is always pressured to find the answer to the question...why? The military's idea of one superior race stems from Burma's first newly-independent government and its Aung San policy; one race would ensure a unified country and its people. It seems history has often mistaken the need for a single race to maintain a country that is stable and unified. The current regime has taken this to the extreme. Their idea of a unified country is to wipe out any forms of resistance to their position of power.

Whether this can be attributed to fear of those who are different, that offer alternative views, or whether the military simply needs to enforce their own power over the entire population, you can safely say that sexual violence has been used by the military as a means of eradicating those forces that oppose the military's goals. This isn't



We are now dealing with a mental state of mind that has been deeply ingrained into the behaviours of Burmese soldiers for a very long time.

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confined just to the ethnic groups but has evidence of being enacted throughout Burmese society.

The answer to the question why isn't just a simple eradication of ethnic races in Burma, or of power, although these have partial responsibility. An answer that is often neglected perhaps because of the sheer magnitude of the consequences of first admitting it and then finding an answer to it, is a little daunting. The good proportion of this answer comes from the military and troop mentality that has allowed these acts to occur.

What may have started out as a well thought out intention of the Burmese military to wipe out those groups that were opposing their power, namely the ethnic groups, has now evolved into something else. The recent License to Rape report researched by Shan Womens Action Network (SWAN) and Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) shows convincing evidence that rape is being used by the Burmese military as a weapon of war, the subsequent reports of rape that have flooded out from other ethnic areas seem to confirm such a statement. A fact that should not be lost in all this though is that rape is rampant all over Burma, not just in the ethnic areas, in fact the urban cities of Rangoon and Mandalay are just as rife with reports of rape carried out by Burmese soliders, and here the victims are Burmans. This would seemingly point to not a narrow target group of ethnic women but that every female is a victim and the real issue lies in the mentality of those that carry out such acts.

This poses are far more perplexing question as there is no immediate nor easy solution to it. If rape and Burman-ethnic marriages have the the sole purpose of eradicating an ethnic race we can give it a name...ethnic cleansing, if rape and Burman-ethnic marriages have the sole purpose of satisfying the power lust of emotionally deprived Burmese soliders then we don't have such a convenient name to label it. We are now dealing with a mental state of mind that has been deeply ingrained into the behaviours of Burmese soliders for a very long time. If the Burmese military called a halt to this type of behaviour tomorrow one would certainly have to doubt their ability to enforce that on to a group of men who have been educated in this



type of warfare for far too long.

The long term repercussions for a peaceful Burma are also tied up in this issue. The hatred that exists between Burmans and the ethnic groups is something that needs to be resolved, some sort of reconciliation is important if a future Burma is to see trust and understanding between these two groups. The ethnic groups must rally against the destruction of their cultures and identities, they must be the masters of preserving their own identity and not succumbing to the oppression and tactics employed by the Burmese military. The Burmese military must not only put a stop to this practice of sexual violence but must enforce punishment on those who carry out such heinous crimes.

There are two issues here: if it's ethnic genocide then why don't the international community step in to put a stop to it, they've done it many times before and if the United Nations wants to maintain the idealistic mantra they've set themselves then they need to stop the obvious picking and choosing technique based on the economic concerns of its more predominant members that they currently employ when dealing with such issues. And if its now not just a case of ethnic genocide but of a deep rooted mentality that is enacted across all races in Burma then how are we, the international community, and the people of Burma themselves, going to deal with this. How are the Burmese military, and that's if they even want to, going to deal with this problem. There's no easy solution to wiping clean decades of ingrained acts of such behaviour, it's hardly a quick problem to fix and that's probably the main reason no-one is willing to admit to the extent of it or deal with the consequences. The solution must always lie in finding the deep rooted causes to the problem and attacking them at that root otherwise, rape, sexual domination and ethnic cleansing, whatever label it is given, will continue to occur.

The East and West areas of the Dawna range in Karen's Pa-an District show an interesting example of the divide between Burmese military controlled areas and Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas. A mountain range physically separates them but the difference between living conditions is an even greater gulf of division. This week Burma Issues looks at the KNU controlled East Dawna area, next week will focus on the Burmese controlled West Dawna area.

In the past the villages in Mae Plah Toh Area of Karen State have not faced the severe oppression experienced by other areas of Karen State but in recent years human rights abuses and forced relocation have finally found their way here. During the years 1983-1984, when the Burmese regime carried out Four Cuts operations in this area, most villages suffered to some degree. Many innocent villagers have been killed, villages forcibly relocated, properties looted, and animals killed to provide food for the military troops. Most of the people could not live in the villages, especially the men, because they were killed without any questions being asked.

In 1994-1995, when the DKBA broke from the KNU, they collaborated with the Burmese regime and have been carrying out activities of human rights abuses in this area also. At present in this area, the three main groups, KNU, DKBA, and SPDC are all active ensuring the people are faced with many difficulties because they have to pay taxes to all three groups. The benefits that villages gain from these taxes seem to be non-existent, the abuses the villagers get from

Most of the villagers in this area are Sqaw Karen and the majority of the people believe in Buddhism. There were many Christian households in this area but when DKBA broke from the KNU, many Christian villagers were forced to flee to other places because they were accused of collaborating with the KNU. At present Christians make up about 10% of those who live in this area. There is also evidence of both the families of KNU and DKBA living together in the same villages, including two head villagers in each village, one chosen by the KNU and the other one chosen by the DKBA. The presence of both military groups in the villages with their

separately elected village heads as placed added pressure on the villagers. They are constantly caught between the warring factions in almost every aspect of their life whether it be taxes, providing food, answering to orders, the difference here being that everything has to be done or provided two or three times.

According to BI Information Collectors the DKBA have also been demanding free labourers and soliders for recruitment in these areas. Villagers are reluctant to go for free labour so they have to hire people

from other places and every month they have to pay free labour fees. This problem has existed since DKBA troops first entered the area. Free labourers have to go and stay with DKBA troops in their front line camps and they have to work on rebuilding fences for the camps, transporting food and carrying ammunition when the DKBA undertake offensives.

YOUTH SITUATION

The majority of youth in this area are illiterate because they do not have the opportunity to attend school. Many of the youth are willing to study but have no time due to responsibilities of working on their farms, looking after siblings



and caring for their animals. They are forced to give priority to providing a food source not their education. This is a huge problem for the future, ensuring youth have access to education is only part of the problem, they must also have sufficient living standards that they can devote time to their education and then have the job security that once education has been completed they will be able to find a job and earn enough money to support themselves and their family.

Each village in this area had developed a youth team and the purpose of the team is to organise the youth for the development of the community especially for the development of their religion. There is also evidence of youth helping each other on their farms. The oppression of the ethnic communities has seen the eradication of their cultures, these youth groups and any future work done in Burma is important in preserving these ethnic cultures.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Most of the villagers in this area are farmers and they rear animals like cows, goats, pigs and hens. They can often not produce enough rice because of the lack of fertile soil and are forced to buy from other villages. The main income of the villagers comes from their animals. The more they can sell, the more they can earn the money to buy others. In the rainy season, they can produce betel nut leaves, and dog fruits. Merchants from East Dawna area buy these products to resell it to other places especially in the towns. These merchants also sell some other products that come from the rural areas.

These villages are located at the center of the trade between the east and west of Dawna Mountain. Most of the merchants have to come across these villages to sell their products to Thailand. The villagers there build small tents for the merchants to sleep in and they have to pay 100 Kyat per night. For animals like cows, the merchants have to pay 200 Kyat per cow. This is also another way of gaining income for the villagers.

In this area the price of food is not stable, the prices increase each day. In this area the villages are divided into two groups. The first group are those villages which are close to the Burma Army bases and DKBA bases. These villages have sufficient rice and villagers do not need to worry about food at all. The second group are those villages which are situated far from the military bases. In these villages people do not have sufficient rice and they need to come to buy rice from villages which are close to the military bases.

During the month of June the cost of the products had increased due to the closure of the border. In one week, the price of the

products increased twice. For instance when BI Information Collectors first arrived at Day Lay Pya village in June, the price of pork for one kilo was 500 kyat. After one week, the price of pork per kilo increased to 1000 kyat. Due to the depreciation of the Kyat and the cost of products

East Dawna Region of PaAn District in Karen State

1.	Rice	1/2basket	2700
2.	Chille	1 viss	1200
3.	Shrimp paste	1 viss	750
4.	Salt	1 viss	150
5.	Pork	1 viss	1000
6.	Chicken	1 viss	1500
7.	Localmade alcohol	1 bottle	250
8.	Milk	1 can	400
9.	Dry cell/battary	1 pair	250
10.	MAMA noodles	1 pack	150
11.	Sardine	1 can	250

Average Monthly Salary

Primary School teacher	4500-5000 kyat
High School Teacher	5500-6000 kyat
Private in Burmese army	3000 kyat
Sergeant	5300-5800 kyat

(Information supplied by Burma Issues and NCGUB)

increasing the people there could not afford to purchase basic commodities.

EDUCATION SYSTEM

In this area, most of the schools apply the education system of the KNU. There are only primary schools in existence and the numbers of the students are about 50-60 in each school with 2-3 teachers per school. Most of the teachers have only finished primary school education and become teachers because they do not have the opportunity to continue their studies. All of the schools are supported by the education department of the KNU. Teachers are supported with a salary of 25,000 Kyat per year and the rest of their needs such as food are supported by the parents of the students. The morale of both teachers and students is quite low as most parents are unwilling to send their children to school and the teachers have to deal with getting paid 25,000 kyat per year but paying tax to the DKBA of 30,000 kyat per year. One of the teachers told Burma Issues that "next year I am not going to teach anymore". Awareness of the importance in education is slowly gaining force though and there is a remarkable improvement in the village people starting to build cooperation and unity in their community.



LIVING WITH A DENSITY OF DISEASES

T*his article is written by Poe Dah, a friend of Burma Issues, on her experiences within Tham Hin Refugee Camp and the conditions in the camp that are cause for major health concerns. This refugee camp houses a population of nearly 9,000 refugees, encompassing the population of a small town in a small, restricted area, with little of the infrastructure to deal with the myriad of health problems.*

Since February 1997 the Karen people, including my family and I from Mergui / Tavoy district, fled to Thai soil as their area was invaded by the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) troops. When we first arrived in Thailand we had to sleep on the ground at the border, often sleeping in fear because we could not build a higher floor to sleep on. After a month of living like this we were moved to Tham Hin camp. When I lived in Tham Hin camp four years ago I felt very upset because the camp situation is very horrible. I have watched many of my neighbours and friends die due to the diseases in the camp, most of the children and adults are contracting the dangerous disease called meningitis which is killing the people very quickly.

The Thai military authorities had classified the entire Tham Hin camp population as living in temporary shelter and did not allow the people to even call the place a "Refugee Camp". It was grouped into three zones, Zone (1), Zone (2) and Zone (3) and in June 1997 they gave it the name, Tham Hin camp. "Maybe this is why they called it a temporary shelter area. But this is no shelter, you can't call this is a shelter area."¹ They set-up the population of 8,250 people (about 1,850 houses) into houses, located within 5 by 5 meter sq. plots for a family with only 6-8 meters of plastic sheet as roofing. This has resulted in an unhealthy living situation. The heat from the plastic sheet roofing creates high temperatures and the size of the housing has caused over-crowding. Dry toilets, poor drinking water, dirty bath water and not enough soap has all contributed to the current health problems. The flow-off from the rain has become their source of drinking water, meaning there is very little fresh water available to drink, baths are also taken in dirty water. All of this produces poor living conditions and many people get sick very easily. "Htam Hin is very crowded. That's the biggest problem".²

I have seen many of my neighbours and friends die from many diseases when they arrived at the camp. Health care is pro-

vided by MSF (Medicines Sans Frontiers). "Malaria and diarrhea were among the most common diseases afflicting the refugees but these are controllable. Even HIV/ AIDS cases are rare and not a big problem," according to the MSF Director. Many diseases have increased over a short period of time; usually the people get many diseases like high blood pressure, Malaria, Diarrhea, Dengue Hemorrhages Fever, and they die. In 2001 this disease later known as Meningitis which infects the brain, affected many children in Tham Hin camp. As this disease can easily spread people have to avoid visiting these patients. The following is a common situation experienced by many families: When the children get this disease the family has to take the sick person to the hospital immediately. When the people get this disease it is very sad for them because they cannot walk and their whole body is not like it was before they got this disease; it appears like measles, mumps, whooping cough and ear infections. If they get this disease we cannot visit them because the disease can infect anyone who stays close to them, families will visit but cannot stay close, only the doctors will touch them. They can suffer this disease for a few days then they die.

Because of the high density of the population it is easy for the diseases to travel, especially in the drinking water; this is exacerbated in the rainy season when many things are not good for your health. When we arrived in the camp we had to use one toilet for 2 or 3 families. The toilets are located very far from our houses and are very dirty and smelly, these conditions have improved somewhat now the MSF supplies quality toilet water but the condition of the drinking



Tham Hin Refugee Camp
BI 2002

water is still not good. Most people also use the same stream for bathing and drinking. The food is not so fresh to eat as fly eggs and rats destroy the food before the people can eat it.

The previous United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Miss Sadako Ogata, had visited Tham Hin Camp in early 2000 and said that the location of Tham Hin camp is very poor. She had compared it with other refugee camps in Thailand and remarked that the Thai military authorities did not do the best they could in the camp. When she saw refugees from Cambodia in Thailand the situation was far better than Tham Hin. She also expressed deep concern over the camp's sanitation, but as yet there are still epidemic out-breaks. She recommended that the location especially spacing and shelter must be reconsidered.³

People in the camp want to go back to their own villages, before we lived in established and self-supporting villages, but they want to do this with peace and a feeling of security for their lives. When we lived in our own villages we did not spend lots of money on food and other supplies. We want freedom, we want to have control of our lives and then we can find money for ourselves. We also had good health and fresh air, fresh drinking water and fresh food in our villages. We did not need help from anyone and this lack of control over our own lives creates an unhappiness at having to stay in Tham Hin camp. The Thai military authorities have encouraged people to return quickly to their villages but if we do go back we do so without peace and safety from SPDC control.

In this article I have tried to show the very difficult conditions in Tham Hin camp and how these conditions have made so many neighbours and friends of mine get sick or even die. It doesn't have to be like this. I believe the Thai authorities need to consider the following recommendations, or else the problems and suffering will only continue.

The Thai authorities must consider allowing the refugees to manage their own land and there must be wider space and better shelter that will bring better health. Other essential items are the need for more land to build their houses on and to change the roofing to thatch. I encourage the UNHCR and other groups to seek protection for the refugees and to encourage the Thai government to allow more assistance for health. Many refugees complain that they only

receive paracetamol and low milligrams of medicines and that it's not enough to combat the health problems in the camp. So we need MSF to consider this situation when implementing their working systems in the camp. In regards to the poor drinking water, if we cannot change the water source we must make the existing source as clean as possible. The people have to participate in taking care of themselves and preparing health structures to get more sanitation in their community.



(Footnotes)

- 1 The Nation 18 October 2000, UNHCR Sadako Ogata.
- 2 Bangkok Post 12 December 2000, Mr. Kapranis.
- 3 The Nation 18 October 2000, Sadako Ogata.



For fifty years no Peace

The red ant walks on leaves
Under...the earth runs covered with the blood
Of many thousands of bodies
Bodies that remain in the memory of those who shed
their tears

Every corner of the world is full of conflict and blood
Children and elderly fleeing from its grasp
Its intensity burning like the core of the fire
No signs that it will ever end

Your heart trembles as leaves disturbed by the wind
Your life one of constant fear
The voice of the rifle shooting pellets like rain
A rain that takes your life

I dream of the bird flying free in the sky
Backdrops of bright coloured skies
The dream lasts but briefly
It flutters from your mind....you cannot prolong
such dreams

Fifty years have passed without meaning
The tears of the ethnic people still fall
From behind their facades of endurance and strength
Even dreams are not free from the fear

Under the worldly stars
Man kills but every day
While peace cannot fall from the sky
It will not be smothered, it will not be denied

.....oh peace

Sam Niang

news briefs

merit-makers bombed in shan state.

Sources coming across into Chiang Mai this month said two Burmese shells had killed 70 people observing Buddhist Lent in the southern town of Mongnai, 92 miles southeast of Taunggyi in Shan state. The shells, believed by the sources to be fired from the Light Infantry Battalion #518 destroyed part of the Sala Kao-hawng (9 room-pavilion) at Pawmong Quarter, Mongnai's northernmost suburb. The dead included 6 men and 64 women in addition to 2 men and 19 women who were injured. So far, S.H.A.N. could only obtain three names: Zarng Mawng, 62, headman; Heng Yong, 56 and Awng Pay, 36. Sources believe the attack was in retaliation to the recent "License to Rape" report which documented many cases from this area.

"70 Merit-makers blown to death in southern shan state, S.H.A.N, 27 October 2002

ethnic Karen, Mon told to hand in ID

cards. A thousand ethnic Karen and Mon here have been told to hand in their identity cards and household registration documents, less than a year after they recieved them. The villagers in Suan Phung district have asked the Law Society of

Thailand and the Human Rights Commission to help. At a meeting this month they demanded to know why the district had started taking back the documents with no explanation. Almost 140 people have returned their cards and documents, and another 850 have been told to follow suit. The villagers say that surrendering their papers could put the fate of their school-aged children in jeopardy who could be asked to pull out of classes once the school principals found they held no documents. The Law Society would ask the Education Ministry for an assurance that the children could stay at school.

"Ethnic Karen, Mon told to hand in ID cards, no reason given", Bangkok Post, October 6, 2002

militant groups on Indo-Burma border get together.

In a significant development, 12 underground organisations in North East India have constituted a platform to carry forward their armed struggle together. The move assumes significance at a time when the Indian Home ministry is taking steps to root out militancy from the region. In a joint statement issued recently, the 12 underground organisations

claimed that the platform has been constituted in order to bring the organisations under one umbrella. The 12 militant organisations have consolidated their bases in a common area of Burma, which they call "Liberated Burma".

Militant groups of Indo-Burma border get together, Mizzima , October 6 2002

burma puts gems on sale. The 11th Mid-Year Burma Gems Emporium is will see a total of 25.41 million US dollars' worth of locally-produced quality gems, jade, pearl and jewelry to be put on sale through competitive bidding, tender and at fixed prices. About 190 merchants of 80 companies from 12 countries and regions, mostly from China, China's Hong Kong and Thailand, are expected to attend the eight-day state-sponsored emporium. Mid-year gem emporiums were introduced in October in addition to the annual ones since 1992 to boost the country's foreign exchange earning. Since April 2000, the government has started mining of gems and jade in joint venture with 10 private companies under profit sharing basis.

"Burma to put 25.41 million dollar gems on sale", Xinhuanet, Oct. 25

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