

BURMA ISSUES

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"Many people have experienced far greater suffering than us. We are the lucky ones, to be able to leave. I consider Burma my home and my land, but because of gross injustice and abuse, we are forced to run away. We grew rice until this year. I even planted a new crop, but we had to leave it all. If we harvested early to pay for the journey people would have suspected. So we lost everything." A refugee from Pegu Division upon reaching Thailand.



Burma Issues, the monthly newsletter of Burma Issues, highlights current information related to the struggle for peace and justice in Burma. It is distributed internationally on a free-subscription basis to individuals and groups concerned about the state of affairs in Burma.

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PRESS RELEASE

TRIBUNAL PUBLISHES FINDINGS ON HUNGER IN BURMA

HONG KONG - OCTOBER 20, 1999

The Asian Human Rights Commission has released *Voice of the Hungry Nation*, a 170 page report containing evidence, findings and conclusions of the **People's Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma**.

What is the People's Tribunal?

Concerned by reports of widespread hunger due to military rule in Burma (Myanmar), in 1997 AHRC began preparing for The People's Tribunal. Like non-governmental hearings around the world, this Tribunal was created to investigate and expose human rights violations in a nation where legal recourse does not exist. Burma's nationwide political repression is already a matter of public record; the Tribunal's purpose is to highlight militarization's devastating effects on Burma's silent, often forgotten rural population. Sitting on the Tribunal are three prominent members of Asia's human rights movement: Justice H. Suresh (India), Professor Mark Tamthai (Thailand) and Dr. Lao Mong Hay (Cambodia). Throughout 1999 this panel reviewed evidence, took depositions, and deliberated its findings and recommendations, as presented today.

Voice of the Hungry Nation

In *Voice of the Hungry Nation* the Tribunal details how Burma's ongoing civil war and militarized economy are gradually starving not only the nation's rice farmers, but even the urban middle class. Scores of witnesses relate how forty years of military rule have eroded agrarian life and played havoc with the economy, revealing that the 1990s have seen an unprecedented pervasion of military violence, exploitation and authoritarianism on all levels of society.

In the name of counter-insurgency, the Burmese government stands guilty of denying rights and freedoms, including the most basic human rights to food, work and human security in the conflict zones. The resulting picture is a grim portrayal of human suffering. Displaced peasants whose villages and crops have been burned flee into eastern Burma's rugged jungles, hiding from marauding soldiers in army-declared "free fire" zones. Without food or health care, children die from malnutrition and simple disease, while entire communities trek through the combat zones to take refuge in Thailand. Thousands of villages have been strategically relocated, leaving innumerable persons without land, work or a secure future.

Meanwhile, in central and lower Burma the government's army-first agricultural policies deny rice to the very farmers who grow it. The government enforces an exorbitant paddy quota, collecting rice for the army and civil service regardless of hunger in the rice-producing heartland. Burmese rice procured at gunpoint or under threat of land confiscation is then offered up for sale on the world market, feeding hard currency into a state which spends 40% of its budget on the army. Seeking to bolster its dominance, the military runs development programs which routinely appropriate farmland, use forced civilian labor and otherwise drain the rural economy's land, natural resources and workforce.

Recommendations

By focusing global attention on basic economic rights, the Tribunal hopes to promote the needs and interests of rural Burma in the international discourse on human rights and democratization. This means raising awareness about people's fundamental rights to benefit from their local natural resource base as a source of food, employment social security and cultural identity. It makes recommendations to all parties involved in this debate, including the Burmese government, opposition political and military groups, the UN and non-governmental organizations. These include protecting basic human rights in armed conflict, creating the peace needed for displaced people and refugees to resume agriculture, and rebuilding Burmese economy and politics to respect the rights and importance of farmers.

In Burma, the systemic denial of these rights has resulted in untold death and suffering, and in the Tribunal's eyes constitutes a crime against humanity. The Tribunal urges all State governments, the United Nations and international agencies to reject the militarization of Burmese society, support economic, social and cultural rights, and bring the full force of international law to bear upon the responsible state officials.

The Tribunal's Report: *Voice of the Hungry Nation* is available on-line at www.hrschool.org/tribunal



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BURMA'S RICE ECONOMY: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Any investigation into hunger must take into account agricultural production and distribution. Rice is the staple crop and staple food, and is the commodity which determines food security or scarcity. Burma's agricultural economy has seen four eras of rice production and distribution: feudal, colonial export, nationalized, and post-socialist. However, because the country is politically and geographically diverse, significant sectors of the agricultural economy remained unaffected by these historical changes. This is particularly true in the distinction between lowland rice production, by which farmers cultivate rice paddies flooded by monsoon rains, and highland swidden agriculture, in which non-irrigated fields are cultivated on hillsides. To generalize: lowland cultivation provides a surplus crop to be sold and traded; growing highland rice generally produces a subsistence crop for local consumption. The four eras of Burma's agricultural economy generally refer to changes in the production and distribution of lowland paddy.

Feudal agriculture provided a community's food and whatever tribute was due to the monarch or his local vassal. Generally, the subsistence economy depended on three factors: enough cultivable land, communal labor and a local natural resource base to provide the necessities of life. The "rice tax" due the royal court, its army and small civil service was more or less of a burden depending on proximity to the capital (or feudal lord), total output and the specific demands placed on a farming community.

With colonialism came the rice export economy. Under British administration, vast areas of lower Burma were cleared for export rice production, and by the 1920s Burma became the foremost supplier of rice to the world. In 1939 Burma was still the leader, putting 3 million tons of rice on the international market that year. Much of it was grown in the Irrawaddy Delta and exported from Rangoon.

Under the socialist regime, which took over in 1962, rice production was nationalized. The government attempted to redistribute productive lands under nationally administered, locally managed collective farming. The general ineffectiveness of the implementation of this program combined with the fertility of Burma's soil meant that the program posed little threat to food secu-

rity, despite population growth from 17 million just after World War II to 24 million in 1962. However, poor harvests in the late 1960s tested nationalized rice production's flexibility in a crisis:

Bad harvests in 1966-68 resulted in short supply of food. Starvation was experienced



(BI, 1997)

for the first time in the known history of Burma. Even during the four years (1942-45) of war, food had not been scarce. For the first time in the lives of the people of Burma, the word famine expressed itself in real life. Parents sold their children for some rice... Around 1960 1 kilogram of rice cost .5 kyat. In 1966-69 it cost 28 kyats, 56 times more.¹

In good times and in bad, the government was a major rice consumer. It purchased a percentage of all rice produced at a fixed rate, regardless of most fluctuations in the rice market. As in pre-colonial times, the government procured rice to provision the army and sell at a discount to civil servants. Throughout the shortages of the 1960s, the government maintained its purchase rate of 3 kyats per kilogram, or almost one-tenth of the going market rate.

Trouble in the rice market triggered the end of the socialist-styled agricultural economy. By 1987 another food crisis loomed, and the

government abandoned its strictest controls on the rice market. In August 1997 rice had risen to 15 kyats per kilogram, the highest price since the 1960s. Fearing possible famine, in September the government lifted the ban on harvest-time rice trading, in place since 1962. The market price of rice was cut in half.

The post-socialist era has retained central planning and control of food production. Farmers are still required to sell a percentage of their rice to the government at discount prices. This paddy procurement system is implemented by Myanmar Agricultural Produce Trading (MAPT), a state agency which, along with other arms of the bureaucracy, inherited the duty from its socialist predecessor, State Corporation No 1. MAPT's national structure reaches down to the village, where it designates paddy land and collects a fixed quota based on land area. This quota rose steadily from 1988 until 1995, when it was fixed at 12 baskets per acre in high rice-producing areas such as Irrawaddy Division (reports of quotas set at 15 or even 18 baskets are not unknown). Around this time the government paid one-third to one-fifth the going market price for rice purchased under the quota system.

An inherent flaw in this system is the government's quota calculation based on arable land area rather than amount of rice actually planted or harvested. Farmers who work poor land or for other reasons produce an imperfect crop are not exempt from the quota. They fulfil their obligation by supplying paddy bought on the market. In these cases, the difference between the relatively high market price and the low government purchase rate results in a net loss for farmers.

Households which fail to fill the quota face a variety of consequences. While arrests and beatings have been reported, more common is the confiscation of paddy land, for redistribution to other farmers more likely to produce. Farmers have also been sent to labor camps to work off their debt. In Irrawaddy Division, local military authorities are said to have ordered no milling of harvested rice for consumption or trade until entire villages filled their quotas. Lastly, farmers have been threatened, scolded and publicly abused by government rice procurers dissatisfied with their quota.

Continued on page 7

TROUBLE IN THE RICE BOWL: PROBLEMS IN BILIN TOWNSHIP

Food insufficiency is a reality for people from all areas of Burma and all walks of life. In this excerpt from Voice of the Hungry Nation, a 25 year old father and subsistence laborer from Bilin Township of Mon State related his experiences to the Peoples Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma. He related the hardships of life as a wage laborer:

My parents are wage earners, as our family has no land of our own. Starting from when I was 16 until 24, I too worked on a farm. Now I have left. Working as a farm laborer I received 10 baskets of polished grain for a season's work- farmers hired me to help them plant and maintain crops. I had to feed seven people. Our daily consumption was 1 pyi of rice, small quantities of fish paste; chilies; Ajinomoto and vegetables foraged in the forest.

Living hand to mouth, his family was not able to provide even for these basic needs and sank even farther into poverty.

Sometimes we had absolutely no more rice left and then we had to go and seek some from other villagers, such as farmers whom I worked for. At these times, my father would also work. We would borrow enough rice to keep us going for one or two months. But sometimes after working to get rice, I had to give it back to people whom I had borrowed it from and so then we no longer had enough left to eat ourselves, and had to borrow it again. Generally, we had to beg for rice like this at least once a year, usually not long before the new harvest was in.

But because land holders have become totally discouraged they don't want to do the work anymore. In our area land is not yet organized by title- people simply clear land for use. What prevented me from doing that was the need for capital items, such as tools and cattle to plow the land, and a stock of seeds to sow. None of these do we poor people have available to us, nor is there any way for us to get such items without too much expense. It is easier to work on someone else's land.

Military demands for porters, exacerbated already difficult conditions.

In 1990, the Burma army arrived in our region. Other villagers fled, but I was not aware of the arrival, as I was off working. They captured me and forced me to work as a porter for more than 2 months, carting ammunitions up the one hill three or four times per day. They fed me only once per day.

Not long after he finished portering the mili-

tary demanded that local villages be relocated at sites under military control. Making a living at the relocated sites is difficult as the military monitors and controls all aspects of life.

To leave the relocation site, such as to go work in the fields, you have to get a pass from the village chairman, and return the same day- the hours of the pass are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Outside these times, the soldiers threaten to shoot anybody they see on sight. Most farmers' properties are at least two hours walk from the relocation site, and so they have a maximum of 6 hours work time available per day. There is no longer any benefit in doing work. So the land holders are no longer working their fields and this also created a big problem for me. Although I might have been able to find some other work, it is very difficult to earn a living now, and we live in constant fear of the military.

A further burden is placed on the villagers when soldiers sell goods they receive during the dry season to traders and then demand food contributions when supplies run low during the rainy season.

Individual soldiers sell their personal supplies to supplement their incomes. The other thing that happens is that the battalion commanding officer sells bulk provisions for personal profit, especially the stocks of rice. Most rice is sold by the commander, not the soldiers themselves. The effect of this however is that in the rainy season when the roads are no longer open, the soldiers don't have sufficient provisions left for themselves, and they demand rice from villagers. They demand rice weekly for the duration of the rainy season and quantities vary from one can to one pyi per house, depending upon the needs of the soldiers and the size

of the household. Come the next dry season, and it starts all over again.

A schoolteacher, also from Bilin Township, remarked about the effects of militarization on the people.

Due to soldiers' activities or difficulties in getting to their farms, people are no longer working their lands. So there is no longer enough food left to eat. Villagers are facing starvation and disease. They can't contemplate their futures. Some who have no money and no more rice go to those with rice and do domestic work at their houses to get food to eat, meal by meal. The house owners are very embarrassed and sympathetic, but the people who come to do the work are no longer thinking of anything except how to get a small amount of food to fill their stomachs, which will satisfy their immediate needs.

As I see it, the village is in serious decline. The villagers are totally discouraged, and some want to leave their lands for good and find other work, but as they have never left their area or done any other kind of work, they can't think of where they would go or what they would do. The food that they grow, they don't get to eat. They have to give taxes and meet demands from three sides. Even if they have only rice porridge to eat, they still aren't too discouraged, but now some can't even eat rice porridge any more- sometimes they just eat roots and leaves. Some villagers told me, "If we could go to Thailand easily then we would all desire to go, but we don't want to give up our homelands here to other people."

"VOICE OF THE HUNGRY NATION"

The People's Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma released it's findings in a report entitled Voice of the Hungry Nation on 15 October 1999. The report can be found in full, along with other information about the Tribunal can be found at:

www.hrschool.org/tribunal

Those who would like a hard copy of the report or more information about the Tribunal can contact ARHC at:

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FOOD SCARCITY AND MILITARIZATION: THE NEXUS

This Tribunal convened to investigate two straight forward questions about human rights in Burma: Is there food scarcity, and if so, is militarization the cause?

In the course of inquiry we reviewed evidence from a variety of first and second hand sources representing all walks of life. The geographic distribution of evidence covered ten states and divisions, from the northeastern-most Shan State to the western border with Bangladesh. This swath of territory includes a range of topographic conditions: fertile river valleys, arid plains and plateaus, tropical forests, remote mountains and coasts. Hunger appeared consistently throughout these diverse regions. The prevalence of food scarcity was also clear in the demographic distribution of evidence. The Tribunal admitted evidence from members of at least eight different ethnic groups. Among the rural population, we heard from subsistence farmers, landless peasants, hired workers, and landowners. Townspeople and suburbanites, including educated civil servants and teachers, also testified to hunger and its proximate causes. Muslims, Christians and Buddhists alike struggle daily just to eat. The Tribunal is confident that food scarcity is indeed a nationwide phenomenon.

The causes are also national, linking hunger wherever it occurs to a common source. By all accounts, the source is social rather than natural, rooted in the structure and actions of the state rather than vagaries of land and climate. Our findings show that among state institutions, the people of Burma overwhelmingly accuse the military of denying their right to food. The displaced hilltop farmer hiding in the jungle, the impoverished lowland rice farmer surrendering his crop, and the harried civil servant trying to feed and clothe his family all identify the army as the source of their privation.

The abuse of power, rampant though it may be, would not in itself be sufficient to qualify for militarization. The excessive use of force could be explained as isolated incidents, minor flaws or corruption in a well-meaning and essentially noble institution. Poor judgment, weak discipline and loss of self-control are dangers inherent to army field operations everywhere. However, the army attacks on all fronts: strategic, political, economic and ideological. Influence over all political, economic, legal, social and cultural affairs of the

nation is prescribed by the needs and priorities of the state, enforced by the military's potential for violence against citizens, and reinforced by the people's lack of legal recourse. This trend has contributed to state repression of fundamental rights and freedoms, insurgency, communal violence, and particularly to the evolution of a powerful and successful military government. Paddy procurement, agriculture development and rice export are all nationwide policies designed at the highest levels to fulfil military needs first without regard to civilian well-



Headman stands on the site of his burned house (BI, 1997)

being. The military's role in managing the national economy demonstrates that militarization is centralized, not isolated; systematic, not random; intentional, not accidental.

Normal governance and administration have been subsumed by military authoritarianism. All functions of state which came under our purview—tax-collecting, infrastructure development, economic policy—conform to military priorities and bear the signs of military implementation. Civilians are polarized from the state through continual and excessive demands for food, land and labor. Moreover, the army's obsession with internal security has become so central that it tolerates no form of political dissent. Just as the army treats the people as an Enemy, so too have the people become inimical towards the state.

Nowhere is this polarization more evident than in Burma's continuing armed conflict, in which the state repeatedly destroys and expropriates food, farmland and crops, displaces entire populations and systematically denies people the right to work. Civilians are presumed to be unpatriotic, hostile and seditious and thus in the army's eyes lose all their rights. In non-combat zones, where one might not expect to see similar excesses, again the state levies enormous demands on malnourished farmers, upbraiding them as

selfish, lazy and dishonest when they can't comply.

Moreover, the Tribunal has found evidence that the militarization of Burmese society extends beyond the government and its relationship to the people. Insurgent or revolutionary armed groups follow the same pattern of absolute military authority, although with a notable reduction in violence against civilians. Nevertheless, arbitrary taxation and compulsory labor are standard wherever an army takes over. This suggests a transcendent pattern of militarization in which whoever holds a gun rules supreme and may dictate to the people under his control.

While other factors such as natural disaster or mere incompetence may contribute to or exacerbate scarcity, none is as pervasive or consistent, none can explain why food is not available to those who produce it, and none can override the state's role in denying the right to food. The nexus stands established.

The People's Tribunal is aware that Burma is in the throes of a long and difficult democracy struggle, and wishes to emphasize once again the importance of the right to food. Civil rights, political participation, freedom of expression and civilian rule are all important in democratization. So too are the most basic economic and social rights which allow people the physical strength and security to realize and enjoy their political freedoms. Without food, land rights, and a secure natural resource base, the comings and goings of assorted governments and political parties are to the rural poor mere scenes played out on a distant stage.

True democratization means breaking down barriers between political actors and their captive audience. A democracy struggle brings little change if those who lecture, exploit and despise the rural poor simply change from military to civilian costume. Democratization must be a complete change of character. Ultimately, Burma's democratization will depend on widening the stage to accommodate all society, burying the old habit of monologue and building a new culture of dialogue based on mutual interest and respect.

This article is an excerpt from Voice of the Hungry Nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ON FOOD SCARCITY AND MILITARIZATION IN BURMA

Based on its findings, the Tribunal makes the following recommendations:

1. On the Urgency of Food Scarcity:

All parties must recognize the urgency of Burma's food scarcity before it reaches a crisis. Steps should be taken immediately, in accordance with the recommendations below.

2. To the Government of the Union of Myanmar:

Under international law, all States share a fundamental obligation to safeguard the well-being of their people; this obligation includes ensuring the availability of food. The Government of the Union of Myanmar must address widespread food scarcity throughout the country by giving highest priority to food security as a basic human right, and by:

- a) guaranteeing the rights of farmers to possess and use arable farmland and agricultural products to achieve food security;
- b) guaranteeing that the State will not interfere where people who have been internally displaced attempt to return to their original lands and resume agriculture conducive to food security;
- c) guaranteeing that refugees displaced by conflict can return to their original lands and resume agriculture conducive to food security.

3. To other parties engaged in Burma's armed conflict:

All parties whose participation in armed conflict affects civilians' access to food must recognize that food security is a fundamental right which can never be denied, regardless of political and military circumstances. Where their military action affects the food supply, all armed parties must make protecting and promoting food security among civilians a higher priority than provisioning combatants.

4. To all civilian individuals, organizations and political parties planning for political change:

All such parties working towards political change within Burma, as well as those working for change from outside the country, must first recognize the contribution and the importance of farmers to Burma's past, present and future. Burma is an agrarian society with an economy dependent on subsistence agriculture. All economic policy must address the well-being of farmers—particularly small and subsistence farmers—and protect and promote their fundamental role in feeding the nation by reinforcing their basic rights to land, labor and economic self-determination.

Consequently, all parties working towards political change must emphasize food security as a national issue affecting all people regardless of race, religion, location or political belief. Any program for conflict resolution, political change, democratization or the transition to civilian rule must include economic policies which respect small farmers as the backbone of Burma's agricultural economy and promote their interests.

5. To the international community:

a) To State Governments:

The international community must, to fulfil the obligations specified by Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, promote food security, and therefore must:

- i) accept the importance of food security as a fundamental human rights issue in Burma;
- ii) study the nature and all causes of the food scarcity situation, with due recognition of the military's role in creating food scarcity;
- iii) exert influence on the Government of Myanmar to recognize that denial of food is a human rights violation of the most serious and fundamental type, and to guarantee and safeguard food security for all people.

b) To the United Nations:

As global promoter of human rights, and as the forum for State governments, the United Nations must in its relationship to Burma strive to realize the principle declared in Article 1 (2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources with out prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based on the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

c) To International NGOs:

International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to support peace, conflict resolution, democratization, human rights or development in Burma should recognize the fundamental role economic, social and cultural rights play in promoting popular participation and political and social empowerment. Awareness and attainment of the right to food, land, housing, health care and education are critical to building a free and open society.

6. On the Criminal Implications of Creating Food Scarcity:

Through the systematic militarization of Burmese society, the Government of Myanmar is largely responsible for food scarcity. The government may be considered guilty of a crime against humanity, punishable under international law. If the government and other concerned parties fail to reverse this consistent denial of the right to food, it falls within the scope and obligation of international law to investigate and prosecute those responsible.

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Continued from page 3

Quota rice is not only used to provision the army and the civil service, but sold on the international market. Since 1988 there has been a renewed emphasis on agricultural production for export. The main strategies are to increase the land area under cultivation, increase productive capacity through a variety of irrigation and agricultural development projects, and license commercial ventures to grow rice for export.

In 1994 the government announced a major new drive to increase rice exports fourfold, but in the first years of its plan was forced to buy rice at market value to make up for the shortfall of MAPT-procured quota rice. The World Bank estimates that in 1994-95 rice farmers lost about one quarter of their gross income because of MAPT procurement. This mass purchase of an additional 3% of the nation's rice over and above the quota raised its domestic market value. Following this experience, the government became slightly more cautious in purchasing rice for export. In 1997 government purchase rates rose to almost one half the market price for top-quality rice. A temporary relaxation of the strictest aspects of the quota rule and a reduction in land confiscation also saw the total amount of rice procured fall by 21% in 1996-97.

The government may have accepted that its export plans will only be realized when the total amount of paddy produced in Burma increases to satisfy the both the domestic market and the MAPT quota, and leaves a surplus bound for foreign shores. In a speech to mark World Food Day 1997, Minister for

Agriculture and Irrigation, Lt-Gen Myint Aung, explained:

Food policy adopted for the country is aim[ed] at supplying [a] sufficient amount of food for the entire nation and at the same time to guarantee better health and social well being of the populace. throughout the country, but especially in the Irrawaddy Delta. The centerpiece is the summer paddy program, in which the traditional single rice crop per year, sown in the rainy season and reaped in the cool season of October-December, is followed by another crop raised and reaped in the hot season. The summer paddy scheme has several elements: development of irrigation systems such as dams and canals, introduction of high yielding hot-season rice strains, and use of new fertilizers, pesticides and machinery to cope with the technical complications of the new crop.²

These tactics have created two new burdens for farmers. The first is the labor needed to build roads, small dams and irrigation ditches. State-directed, uncompensated labor is common practice in Burma. Farmers who work on these development projects have less time to tend their crops or other subsistence activities. Secondly, the chemical ingredients of the summer rice program are not distributed free to poor farmers, but are sold to them. Farmers who don't buy the necessary materials can not participate in the program; their unproductive land, officially designated for double-cropping, is reassigned to a more able household.

Recent US Department of Agriculture statis-

tics affirm statements by the Burma government that in 1998-99 rice export once again drove national farming policy. There was a substantial export increase in 1998; by November, 86,233 metric tons of paddy had been exported, compared to only 15,328 for the whole of 1997. These reports coincide with rising national production targets, to be achieved in part by contracting big parcels of land to entrepreneurs.

Despite efforts to increase rice production, independent reports indicate that in the early 1990s, over 30% of Burma's children were suffering from malnutrition. Furthermore, anecdotal reports from throughout the country confirm that many people simply don't have enough to eat. AHRC has provided some of these reports to the Tribunal; most are publicly available. Perhaps one million Burmese refugees and migrant workers reside in neighboring Thailand, many reporting food scarcity as their primary reason for flight.

This article is an extract from Voice of the Hungry Nation the report of the People's Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma.

Endnotes: "Burma's Rice..."

1 "More Food Being Grown to Eradicate Hunger and Malnutrition," *New Light of Myanmar*, 17 October 1997.

2 Shwe Lu Maung, *Burma: Nationalism and Ideology*, Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1989. pp. 56-7.

The Last Word

What Others Have to Say About Burma

"This is one of those reports where those who put it together wish they could be proven wrong," *People's Tribunal panelist Professor Mark Tamthai of Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University on Voice of the Hungry Nation at a press conference in Hongkong, 20 October 1999.*

...

"This amounts to a crime against humanity. If the United Nations could intervene in East Timor, why can't it intervene here?" *Retired Bombay High Court justice and People's Tribunal panelist H. Suresh calling for international action against increasing militarization and food scarcity in Burma at the 20 October 1999 press conference in Hongkong.*

...

"Cultivable lands are to be extended, and endeavors are to be made to prevent failure of crops. Paddy production was no longer carried out with conventional methods. In addition to monsoon paddy, summer paddy is cultivated; cultivation work is upgraded from single crops to triple crops; nature is not left as it is, innovative measures have been taken; therefore, Myanmar agricultural golden lands have made a come-back." *From the New Light of Myanmar article entitled "From 'Onward march' to 'Onward in unity'—6," 12 October 1999.*

...

"Reliable Sources said that MAPT, an agency under the Ministry of Commerce has about 300,000 metric tons of rice stocks in hand for export. Nevertheless, with the decline in world rice trade with soft world rice prices MAPT will have to lower its rice prices lower than other Asian rice exporting countries in order to attract buyers. This is because of Burma's low quality rice compared to other Asian rice exporting countries." *From Burma Monthly Rice Trade the September 1999 Global Agriculture Information Network Report of the US Department of Agriculture.*

...

"...people are facing acute shortage and sky-rocketing prices of rice... The price of a bag of rice (53 Kg.) has gone up from Kyats 3,000 to 5,000 in a single month. While the price for a small basket of rice is almost equivalent to a day-income of a common person in Burma, the people face increasing difficulties for day-to-day meal.

"In the cities, many people are seen with their young children begging for rice while many farmers in the villages have to kill their livestock for exchange with rice. Poor farmers, who do not have cattle to kill, look for the vegetables and fruits in the jungle to exchange for rice." *From a Mizzima News Group report 7 September 1999 entitled "Alarming rice shortage in Arakan State of Burma."*

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