

Burma Alert No.3

March 1990

Background:

The Burma Army has been widely criticized for its brutal suppression of political dissent. Aid donors have cut off funds to pressure the military into implementing reforms. However, General Saw Maung has instead embarked on a crash program to obtain foreign exchange.

The military has been selling off Burma's resources and trying to attract foreign investors. Funds obtained are being diverted to enrich the leadership and to buy more arms. In turn, the increased fire-power is being used to tighten the Army's grip on the country.

The "Alert" was initiated in January 1990 to persuade businesses to refrain from investing in Burma. Without a ready source of funds, the Army might be more willing to consider much needed reforms.

The February "Alert" focused on the logging concessions granted to Thai companies and their connection to the Thai power elite. With Thai support, Rangoon is ignoring demands for reforms. The danger that these deals will deplete Burma's forests in a few years is real.

Moral Basis for Action:

As the list of firms in the "Alert" grows, it is natural that some may become discouraged. However, we need to remember that:

1. When Burma gained independence in 1948, our leaders decided that a multi-party parliamentary democratic system would be adopted.
2. After only 14 years of democracy, one man - General Ne Win - decided that he knew better. Using the Army that was to protect the nation, he ignored the will of the people and seized power.
3. In 28 years of Ne Win's despotic rule and his one-party Burmese Socialist system, Burma has been transformed from one of Asia's richest nations into one of the world's poorest.
4. In 1988, the people of Burma decided that they had suffered enough and called for a return to democracy. The world witnessed an unprecedented nation-wide protest and the killing of thousands of unarmed students, civilians and even government employees.
5. Unable to any longer disguise the fact that he rules by the gun, Ne Win ordered Saw Maung to launch a 'coup'. Once again ignoring the people, Ne Win is trying to rule Burma as he pleases.

Can we in good conscience forget all those who have died? Can we ignore the suffering being inflicted on our fellow human beings? Can we allow Ne Win to continue destroying Burma? The answer is 'NO!'.

Ne Win has no right to impose his will on Burma. He has no legal standing. He came to power by betraying the trust of the people. General Ne Win is basically a liar, an armed robber and a murderer.

Money & Arms Cannot Enslave a People:

We must also remember that the flow of hard cash and arms into Burma does not necessarily make the military junta in Rangoon invincible.

- Marcos of the Philippines had billions of dollars and access to an unlimited arms supply but he was overthrown.
- All of General Noreiga's (Panama) drug money could not save him.
- After 24 years of repressive rule, Romanian dictator Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were executed.
- China has been shaken by its people's demand for democracy.
- The U.S.S.R., East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria are all undergoing change.
- Even South Africa can no longer ignore the rights of its people.

Change will also come to Burma. The people are no longer afraid of Ne Win and his minions. They are ready to fight and die for their freedom. We who live in relative comfort and safety can do no less.

The importance of keeping up the pressure on the Rangoon regime is summarized succinctly by this editorial in the *Singapore Straits Times* on Jan.8/90, entitled "GIVE BURMESE A BREAK":

"The international community, on its part, has effectively used economic pressure or diplomatic persuasion to advance the cause of peaceful reform. It was precisely international pressure that ensured Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's safety - house arrest rather than hurried burial in an unknown graveyard somewhere ... These are firm ways of telling the present leadership in Burma that brutal military rule is repugnant and unacceptable. It is now time to give the Burmese people a break."

Sources: [P] = Working People's Daily [F] = Far Eastern Econ. Review
 [D] = Dawn, A.B.S.D.F. [N] = The Nation, Bangkok
 [B] = The Bangkok Post

CHINA:

A 14-man trade delegation led by Governor He Zhiqiang of Yunnan Province visited Rangoon from Nov.29-Dec.7/89 and signed the Trade Agreement reported in the "Alert" No.1 [P891231].

A delegation led by Wang Wendong, Assistant Minister for Foreign Economic Relations & Trade, visited Burma Dec.23-27/89 [P891231].

The 24-man delegation to China led by Army Commander-in-Chief Lt.Gen. Than Shwe, Oct.18-27/89 ("Alert" No.1) visited the North Industries Corporation (NORINCO) in Beijing [P891130]. NORINCO has a joint-venture with Suco Engineering Co. in Thailand to assemble, repair and export Chinese armoured personnel carriers. Suco is a sugarmill equipment maker owned by Pricha Navawong (see Thailand) [F900222].

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Czechoslovakia is planning to sell to Burma, light aircraft for counter-insurgency operations [F900125 & D891231]. Write to: Mr. Jiri Dienstbier, the new Czech Foreign Minister in Prague.

CANADA:

Alberta Trade Delegation led by Assistant Provincial Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade Murray Rasmussoin (sic) and Assoc. Director Greg Jardine visited Burma in October 1989 [P891031].

Former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau called on General Saw Maung, Col. David Abel and Rear Adm. Maung Maung Khin, Minister for Mines & Energy, in July 1989 [P890731].

THAILAND:

Thai Teakwood: owned by Sia Choon, one of the linchpins of the timber industry. Connected with Thai Pong and Pathum Thani Sawmills. Enjoys high standing with timber merchants. Logging concession in Mong Yawn, Shan State, opposite Chiang Rai [G891201 & C891224].

Silom Complex Co.: owned by Prateep Jeerakitti, a well-known logger turned property developer [N891215] reportedly connected with high-ranking Army officers. A shareholder is the son of a Thai general said to be respected by the Burma Army. Logging concession in Lower Mong Hsat, Shan State, opposite Chiang Rai [G891201 & C891224].

* B & F owned by Boonsawat Duangjai-ekkarat, a former Chiang Rai M.P. Has connections with the Social Action Party. Logging concession in Pungpahkyem I, Shan State, opposite Chiang Mai [G891201 & C891224].

* Thai Sawad: Logging concession in Pungpahkyem II, Shan State, opposite Chiang Mai [G891201 & C891224].

Pathum Thani Sawmills: Owned by Surasuk Iamdeenamlert and connected to Thai Teakwood and Thai Pong. Enjoys high standing with timber merchants. 2 logging concessions - in Wan Pa-Yok, Shan State, and in Upper Pasawng, Karenni, opposite Mae Hong Son [G891201 & C891224].

* Thai Pong: One of the linchpins of the timber industry. Connected with Thai Teakwood and Pathum Thani Sawmills. Enjoys high standing with timber merchants. Logging concession in Mong Mau, Shan State, opposite Mae Hong Son [G891201 & C891224].

Union Par Co.: owned by Seri Tanchookiat, a principal price setter for the timber industry. Has good connections with the Karen in Burma and with timber merchants. One of the shareholders is Pricha Nawawong, son-in-law of Army Commander-in-Chief, General Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth. 2 logging concessions - in Middle Pasawng and Upper Mese, Karenni State, opposite Mae Hong Son [G891201 & C891224].

* Sirin Technology: owned by Boonchoo Treethong, a former arms merchant new to the timber trade. Has close ties with high-ranking Thai military officers. 3 logging concessions - in Pasawng, Karenni State, opposite Mae Hong Son, and 2 in Mepale and Lower Myawaddy, Kawthoolei State, opposite Tak [G891201 & C891224]. Two of its Thai logging crew working in Burma near Myawaddy were killed in a night attack by a group of unidentified gunmen. Fifty other workers fled across the border. The attackers fired M16 rifles and M79 grenade launchers [B891219].

* Santi Forestry: owned by Santi Wayakornwijit, an experienced buyer of Burmese wood who operates an integrated wood business and is reportedly connected with a former Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Army. 2 logging concessions - in Lower Mese, Karenni and in Dagwin, Kawthoolei State, both opposite Mae Hong Son [G891201 & C891224].

Mae Sod Forestry: logging concession in Upper Yinbaing, Kawthoolei State opposite Mae Hong Son [G891201 & C891224].

Mae Moei Forestry: connected with Sa-ard Piyawan, a Chart Thai Party M.P. from Lampoon. Chart Thai is Prime Minister Chatichai's party. Sa-ard is an astute politician with good military connections. Logging concession in Yinbaing, Kawthoolei State, opposite Mae Hong Son [G891201 & C891224] (see Patumthani Tangkakarn below).

Silar International: owned by Pichet Tancharoen from Chachoengsao. The family has extensive business dealings all over Thailand. A younger brother, Suchart is a Chart Thai Party M.P. Another brother, Banyong worked in Buriram in N.E. Thailand and is connected to a Deputy Minister of the Interior. Silar International seems to dominate many other Thai companies in the area including Mae Sod Forestry, Muang Pana and Winiwait. However, the company has trouble getting along with timber merchants in Tak province who have good relations with the Karen in Burma. Logging concession in Gawli, Kawthoolei State, opposite Mae Hong Son and Tak [G891201 & C891224].

Muang Pana: logging concession in Kyeikdon, Kawthoolei State, opposite Tak [G891201 & C891224].

Patumthani Tangkakarn Co. owned by Boonkiat Tangkakarn, one of the linchpins of the timber industry. A shareholder is Sa-ard Piyawan (see Mae Moei Forestry above). Boonkiat controls a sawmill group and is said to be connected to a former Permanent Secretary of the Interior. Logging concession in Payathonzu (Three Pagodas), Kawthoolei State, opposite Kanchanaburi [G891201 & C891224].

* Chao Phya & Irrawady: owned by Sombat Panitchiwa, is part of the Thai Asahi Group and is said to be connected to Army Commander-in-Chief, General Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth and General Sunthorn Kongsompong. Logging concession in Lumphaw Yei, Tenasserim Division, opposite Ranong [G891201 & C891224].

* Thip Tharn Thong was blacklisted as of May 31, 1989 for failing to open a letter of credit as per contract [P890630].

P.P. Group: Prasit Bodhisuthon and Prapat Bodhisuthon, a former Deputy Finance Minister met with Col. David Abel in Tachilek in May 1989 to negotiate a deal to build a hotel and a golf course on an island in the Ruak River bordering Burma and Thailand. They were accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Prapas Limpabandhu and Chiang Rai Governor Banasith Salabsaeng. Solidarity Party M.P. Mongkol Jongsuthanamanee claims that a casino and 100 bungalows are included in the deal. Myanmar Ambassador U Nyunt Swe and Deputy Foreign Minister Prapas deny the casino deal but Interior Minister Pramarn Adireksan earlier confirmed it [B891218 & B891219].

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