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Burma News:

LAUREATES SEEK RELEASE OF DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI

In an unprecedented solidarity with a fellow laureate, a group of Nobel Peace prize winners tried to visit Rangoon in Feb.93 to seek the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (1991 Nobel Peace Prize). This unique initiative was led by Dr Oscar Arias, former Costa Rican president (1987). Other fellow laureates who participated in this mission of mercy included Rigoberta Menchu, a Mayan human rights activist from Guatemala (1992), the Dalai Lama of Tibet (1989), Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa (1984), Adolfo Perez Esquivel, a human rights activist from Argentina (1980), Ross Daniels representing Amnesty International (1977), Mairead Maguire and Betty Williams, peace activists from Northern Ireland (1976), and Donna Anderton representing the American Friends Service Committee. Although Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union (1990) and Mother Theresa of Calcutta (1979) were unable to participate in the Mission, Gorbachev wrote that he was gravely concerned for Daw Suu's well-being and hoped that she would be released, "In my heart, I am with you". Mother Theresa wrote to the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) urging them in the name of God "to release Aung San Suu Kyi". SLORC, however, unequivocally and categorically denied entry to the Nobel Peace laureates. The SLORC Embassy in Ottawa claimed that the organizers of the trip, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, (ICHRDD) which was established by the Parliament of Canada, has 'links with terrorists'. The ICHRDD has, since 1991, provided funds for the legally elected National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) to lobby internationally against the military dictatorship in Rangoon. The laureates travelled to Bangkok on 15 Feb. In spite of a protest from China, the Dalai Lama was granted a Thai visa indicating a change in Thai policy. The Dalai Lama was denied entry to Thailand in 1987 and 1990. Earlier, the Thai Foreign Minister had warned the laureates not to use Thailand as a base to attack SLORC. The laureates visited Burmese refugees and continued on to Geneva to report to the United Nations Commission for Human Rights [ICHRDD].

JAPAN WANTS SLORC TO TRANSFER POWER

According to NHK News, prior to the convening of the 'National Convention' in Rangoon in January, Japan urged SLORC to transfer power to civilian rule as soon as possible and to try to respect its citizens' human rights. The message was conveyed to the SLORC Ambassador in Tokyo by a senior Foreign Ministry official [NHK920128]. Japan is also concerned about the statement made by SLORC that it will not release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi until the situation in Burma is stabilized [Kyodo920113].

UNDP REPORT WARNS OF POLITICAL UNREST IN BURMA

A recent UNDP report warns that Burma's economy is again slipping into recession and hyperinflation and that "if the current trend continues, it could lead to social and political instability". The report criticized SLORC's economic reforms as being only partial in nature. It said, "The first step in bringing the economy back into line is political stability. The military government must clarify, in a manner understandable and acceptable to the people, the temporary nature of its rule and also the process and schedule ... leading to a civilian government". The report is remarkable on two points. Of all the UN agencies operating in Burma, the UNDP has been the most supportive of SLORC policies. Second, the report was compiled by Minoru Kiryu, a prominent Japanese economist and Burma expert who is known for his sympathetic attitude towards successive military regimes in Rangoon. According to the UNDP, the prices of all daily necessities, including rice, vegetables, meat, and even salt have nearly tripled since SLORC assumed power in 1988 - "the common people ... especially urban workers and poor farmers, are seriously affected by the price increases". Money supply has soared at an average annual rate of 53% leading to a lack of confidence in the currency and an increasing demand for land, jewels, precious metals and other hedges against inflation. SLORC's fiscal policies have not encouraged savings and investment in productive capacity. Cross-border trade agreements, especially with China, have flooded the country with cheap consumer goods further undermining the domestic manufacturing industry. Excessive consumption, imports of military hardware and luxury goods from abroad have widened Burma's trade deficit to Kyat 2.2 billion (US\$385 million) from Kyat 550 million in 1990. In spite of attempts to earn more hard currency, SLORC's foreign exchange reserves fell to US\$137 million from a high of US\$313 million in 1991 [F930114].

Burma News:**THAILAND SIGNS TRADE PACT WITH SLORC**

Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri and his Burmese counterpart U Ohn Gyaw signed an agreement on 21 Jan to set up a joint commission to promote economic and trade cooperation. Prasong said that the pact is not intended to bolster SLORC and that it is Thai policy to treat all countries equally. The NCGUB, however, voiced concern that the pact will not benefit the Burmese people. Referring to Thailand's recent border problems with Burma, the NCGUB pointed out that the 'Constructive Engagement' policy is not working. Instead of appreciating Thai sincerity, SLORC is interpreting the Thai position as one of weakness and timidity in the face of a superior military power. The Overseas National Students Organization of Burma called the signing of the pact "an act of great political corruption". The Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma, the Coalition for Peace and Development, the Co-ordinating Group for Religion in Society, the Friends of Women Foundation, the Students Federation of Thailand, and the Union for Civil Liberties, also protested the pact. They fear that it will strengthen SLORC at the expense of the Burmese people and that development projects such as dam construction will damage the environment [GUB930122, B930122, N930124,27].

BANGLADESH ALLOWS UNHCR TO SCREEN RETURNEES

Following the publicity surrounding the UNHCR's protest about the forced repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Burma, Bangladesh on 28 Jan agreed to allow the UNHCR free access to interview possible returnees. SLORC continues to ignore calls for the UNHCR to be allowed to participate in the resettlement program in Arakan State. Up to 17 Jan, 17,073 persons had been repatriated without any independent monitoring of either the repatriation or resettlement [BAG9301, RR930117].

SHANS SEEK RECOGNITION AND UNPO MEMBERSHIP

A joint delegation of the Shan State Organization and the Shan Human Rights Foundation to the 3rd Assembly of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) held at the Hague, 19-24 Jan, sought recognition for Shan independence and membership in the organization. Similar to the Karennis, the Shans claim that General Ne Win's 1962 coup broke their legal tie to Burma and that the Shan State is now an independent state. The SSO wants the United Nations to protect the sovereignty of the Shan State and wants the International Court of Justice to compel Burma to pay reparations to the Shan State for war damages since 1962. The Shans are ethnically from the same stock as the Thais and the Laotians. Shan kings dominated most of present day Burma in the 13th century. By the time the British arrived in the 19th century, their influence had diminished and the independent Shan states were ruled by a variety of hereditary rulers. Under the British, the Federated Shan States were formed in 1928, which in turn became the Shan State of Burma in 1948. The Shan State has a population of about 4 million, equivalent to Norway and a land area of 158,000 sq km or about half the size of Norway. The UNPO was founded in 1990 to represent nations and peoples not recognized by the United Nations. It now has 39 members representing 130 million people. Other delegates from Burma included the Karennis, the Kachins and U Peter Limbin, Foreign Minister of the NCGUB [SSO/SHRF930104, T930201].

THAI POLICE BREAK UP AND ARREST HUNGER STRIKERS

On 8 Jan, fifteen Burmese students-in-exile started a hunger strike in front of the SLORC Embassy in Bangkok to denounce the 'National Convention' in Rangoon. Thai police broke up the hunger strike on 10 Jan and arrested the protesters who are recognized by the UN High Commission for Refugees as 'persons of concern'. They were taken to the Immigration Detention Centre but it is not known what they will be charged with. The students had not registered with the Thai Interior Ministry when it began screening Burmese student refugees for its proposed controversial 'safe' camp [N930111].

NEWS SOURCES THIS ISSUE: A = Asiaweek, AB = Asian Business, AFP = Agence France Presse, AP = Associated Press, B = Bangkok Post, BA = Burma Alert, BAG = Burma Action Group, UK, BW = Bangkok Post Weekly, F = Far Eastern Economic Review, Focus = All Burma Students Democratic Front, Norway, GUB = National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, ICHRDD = International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, IHT = International Herald Tribune, JRS = Jesuit Refugee Service, Bangkok, Kyodo = Kyodo News Agency, N = The Nation, Bangkok, NHK = NHK News, Tokyo, P = Working People's Daily, RR = Radio Rangoon, Ren = Reuters, SHRF = Shan Human Rights Foundation, SSO = Shan State Organization, and T = Time Magazine.

Foreign Trade & Investments:**CHINA:**

China delivered two Shaanxi Y8-D transport aircraft in Sep.92 as part of its US\$1.5 billion arms deal. Four more are expected soon. The Y8-D is China's equivalent of the U.S. C-130 Hercules [Reu921202].

On 11 Jan, 130 heavily laden Chinese Army trucks from Ruili crossed the Shweli river to Muse, Shan State, to deliver arms and ammunition to SLORC. The delivery is believed to be part of the 1989 US\$1.4 billion arms deal. To date, only about half the purchase has been delivered. The trucks used the new concrete bridge built by China in Oct.92 to replace the old WW.II 'Bailey' bridge [F930204].

CANADA:

COLLINS AND LITTON CANADA is the supplier of the avionics used in the Shaanxi Y8-D transport aircrafts that China recently delivered to Burma.

INTERNATIONAL PETROLEUM CORP is involved in oil exploration in Burma. Details not yet available. Address: 1320, 885 West Georgia St, Vancouver, BC, V6C 3E8. Tel: 1 (604) 689-7842.

Note: Eighteen new concessions for oil and gas exploration have been offered to foreign oil companies by SLORC. Five are in Arakan State and 13 are in the Gulf of Martaban. Bids are due by April 1 [F930128].

INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES:

The ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK is organizing a conference to be held this spring for SLORC officials to meet with delegates from other Southeast Asian countries. It is understood that the ADB is studying loan proposals from SLORC [IHT930128]. In May.92, Panas Simasathien, Permanent Secretary of the Thai Finance Ministry urged the ADB to resume lending operations in Burma [BA9205]. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand is seeking international loans to build several dams on the rivers bordering Burma [BA9111] and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand is also planning a US\$2 billion natural gas pipeline from Burma's Gulf of Martaban [BA9104,05,9208].

KOREA:

POHANG IRON AND STEEL CO Managing Director Koo Jay-young signed an agreement with Myanmar Metal Industries to set up a 50-50 joint venture to produce 25,000 tonnes of steel bars, 10,000 tonnes of nails and 6,000 tonnes of corrugated and galvanized sheet steel [Reu921126/Focus].

MACAU:

MYANMAR MACAU INTERNATIONAL was set up in Dec.92 by Myanmar Economic Holdings as a joint venture to build a six-storey, 84 room, 3-star hotel in downtown Rangoon [F921224].

MALAYSIA:

SEAL INCORPORATED formed a joint venture, MYANMAR SEAL LTD, with SLORC to harvest timber from a 200,000-hectare forest concession in southwestern Burma. The venture will take over an existing plywood mill and 3 sawmills. SLORC and SEAL, through its Hong Kong subsidiary SEAL INVESTMENT LTD, each hold a 45% share and the remaining 10% is held by a Japanese firm. SEAL said its initial investment is US\$1.13 million [AP921010].

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

GENERAL ELECTRIC THAILAND is planning to develop new markets for GE's consumer and industrial goods and financial services in Laos, Burma and Cambodia. In Jun.92, GE appointed Sun Chanthol, a Cambodian-American as its national executive in Thailand [A921204].

The US\$3 million PEPSICO bottling plant on the outskirts of Rangoon is 35% owned by PEPSICO INTERNATIONAL and 60% owned by PEPSI-COLA PRODUCTS MYANMAR Chairman U Thein Tun, 56, who is also Chairman of two trading companies, MYANMAR GOLDEN STAR CO (1988) and JV3. Myanmar Economic Holding Co (SLORC's investment arm) has a 45% share in JV3. U Thein Tun is also a Director of the Myanmar Citizens Bank. He started in the construction business in 1960 and later became a representative of foreign firms including Berli-Jucker of Thailand. Production at the Pepsi plant is 100,000 bottles a day with plans to increase to 400,000 bottles a day in 1993 [AB920930].

Foreign Trade & Investments:

THAILAND:

Faced with higher licensing fees and fear of overcrowding, Thai fishing companies with concessions in Burma have formed a confederation to negotiate with SLORC [B921008, N920930]. They are:

Company:	Trawlers:	Purse-seiners:
THAI-MYANMAR	60	40
THAI BURMA	40	20
NARONG CANNING	70	20
PORNCHAI RANONG	20	20
J.V.O.	20	20
OCEAN FOOD	30	20
TALAY THONG PATANA	20	20
SIN PETCHRATNA	n.a.	n.a.
PAKNAM FISHERIES	nil	20

Note: Paknam Fisheries is not listed as a member of the fishing confederation but it has a concession in Burma. SLORC recently raised the licensing fee from US\$500 to US\$600 per gross tonne and fines for fishing outside their concession areas have been raised from US\$20,000 to US\$70,000.

YES GROUP CO LTD Managing Director Vikrom Aisiri signed a joint venture agreement with Myanmar Gem Enterprise [P920822].

CHIANG RAI Provincial Governor Kamron Booncherd travelled to Kunming in Dec.92 and went to Shan State in Jan.93 to discuss plans to build a road to link China and Chiang Rai via Burma [AFP930106].

In early Feb, RANONG Provincial Governor Chamnong Chalermchat and FOURTH ARMY Region Commander Lieut-Gen Kittti Rattanachaya organized a three-day seminar titled "Thai-Burmese border Problems following the Hill 491 Crisis", which dealt with illegal labour, fishing in the Andaman Sea, log trading and trade problems. Lieut-Gen Kittti said that the military has revamped its strategy to concentrate on the development of security and economic issues along the border and that Ranong will be developed as the gateway to Burma in order to boost bilateral relations and trade ties [BW930212].

On 10 Feb, SIAM CITY BANK President Som Jatusipitak announced that the Bank will be opening a branch in Burma to serve its customers in the gem and jewellery business [BW930219].

International Activities:

INDIA:

The **BURMESE STUDENTS MOVEMENT IN INDIA (BSMI)** organized a "SAVE BURMA FROM CIVIL WAR" week including a demonstration and a 4-day exhibition of 500 photographs, 20 paintings and posters at the Press Club of India in New Delhi. Inaugurating the exhibition, P N Haksar, a former diplomat, applauded the indomitable spirit behind the democracy movement in Burma and said that it will eventually conquer all the forces which are trying to suppress the people. The BSMI was formed in Dec.92, by the All Burma Students Union, the All Burma Young Monks Union (Arakan), the Burma Democratic Students Front and the Burma Students League.

THAILAND:

On 6 Dec, students from Australia, Bangladesh, Burma, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand demonstrated peacefully in front of the SLORC Embassy in Bangkok denouncing SLORC and expressing concern for human rights violations in Burma. The students were participating in the People's Plan for the 21st Century Youth Forum. Thai police manhandled some of the demonstrators and threatened them with arrest if they did not disperse. C W Hang, Secretary of the Asian Students Association, representing the students, later held a press conference to protest the police action and vowed to continue their struggle in support of Burmese students who were fighting for peace, justice and democracy.