

SLORC READY FOR U.N. TALKS

On 22 July, Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri told his counterparts in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) that the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in Rangoon is now ready to talk to the United Nations about improving Burma's human rights situation. He said he was informed by SLORC Foreign Minister U Ohn Gyaw that SLORC had decided to open a dialogue with UN Secretary General Dr Boutros Boutros Ghali on "democratization, national reconciliation and improvement of human rights in Burma". Prior to this, SLORC had always insisted that there are no human rights problems in Burma in spite of reports to the contrary by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly's resolutions calling for improvements and respect for the results of the 1990 elections. Analysts say the timing and manner in which the announcement was made suggest that SLORC was trying to brush up its public image prior to the ASEAN meeting in Bangkok. The UN confirmed that to date, the Secretary General has not as yet received any official communication on the matter from SLORC [AO940722, A940803]. ASEAN = Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand - Ed.

SLAVE LABOUR IN MANDALAY

According to the New York Times, residents of Mandalay are now required to provide at least 3 days of free labour a month. The slave labour is being used to beautify the city in anticipation of 1996 which SLORC has now proclaimed as "Visit Myanmar Year". The residents are expected to work from dawn until late in the evening. Military families are exempt as are those that are able to pay a Kyat 200 tax. This is the first time city folk are being conscripted. In the past, SLORC only demanded free labour in rural and ethnic areas where villagers were conscripted for an indefinite period of time and also made to serve as beasts of burden for the military. The US State Department reported that last year hundreds of porters died "from disease and overwork, though reports of mistreatment and rape were also common" and "when porters are wounded or unable to continue their work, some have been reportedly left unattended to die" [NYT940717, TS940713].

ASEAN, DIALOGUE PARTNERS - "SLORC NOT CHANGING ENOUGH"

Although SLORC gained political points by being invited to the ASEAN meeting in Bangkok, the consensus that emerged seems to have set it back. According to Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, ASEAN and its dialogue partners agreed that SLORC is not doing enough to democratize Burma. There was a feeling that if ASEAN is to embrace SLORC, it will have to meet certain criteria. While ASEAN did not make an official statement, Australia, Canada and the European Union declared a new approach to SLORC. The new 'Critical Dialogue' policy involves engaging in critical or serious dialogue with SLORC and setting a number of benchmarks against which to measure SLORC reforms. The U.S. remained firm in its position against improved relations. Commenting on the differences, Evans said, "It wasn't a matter of different benchmarks or standards being applied by different countries Everyone seemed to have a common purpose There was much more common ground between all the countries than I've seen before on this issue. And I think that message, if it is properly conveyed out of the meeting to the SLORC administration, will be a very helpful message in moving the game forward". The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) welcomed the greater interest shown by ASEAN and its dialogue partners on the political question in Burma and called for a specific time frame within which SLORC should be expected to reach the benchmarks. It also suggested that the international community spell out specific actions that SLORC can expect if it fails to reach the benchmarks or ignores them. The NCGUB attributed the recent changes in Burma to the strong stance taken by the US government [ABC940726, NCGUB940729].

THAI P.M. CHUAN LEEKPAI APPEALS FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S RELEASE

On July 25, during talks with SLORC Foreign Minister U Ohn Gyaw in Bangkok, Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai urged SLORC to release Aung San Suu Kyi. He is reported to have said that her release is the key to solving Burma's political and economic problems [F940804].

Burma News:**KHUN SA-ARMS SWAP**

According to news reports, SLORC has offered to defeat Shan resistance leader Khun Sa in exchange for the lifting of a US arms embargo. The offer is said to have been conveyed officially to the US State Department. Khun Sa was indicted in absentia by a federal grand jury in New York in March 1990 on 10 drug trafficking charges. In recent months, the fighting between SLORC and Khun Sa's Merng Tai Army has intensified. A Burmese officer is quoted as saying, "If the US really wants Khun Sa to be wiped out in this area, the first thing they will need to do is to help us with arms and ammunition. What we need are helicopters and smaller arms which we can use in the mountains." Political analysts had predicted since the beginning of the year that SLORC would move against Khun Sa and use the fighting as a pretext to get US aid. The US government has accused SLORC of "only minimal narcotics enforcement". Others have been more forceful and have accused the Burmese military of complicity in the illegal narcotics trade. In 1974, the US started a drug eradication program with the Burmese military providing helicopters and other assistance. By the time the program ended in 1988, the US had spent US\$81 million in aid but annual opium production in Burma had doubled from 600 metric tons in 1974 to 1,200 metric tons. Khun Sa, however, has made a counter offer. He said that he would voluntarily end opium production in the Shan State and surrender to the international community in exchange for the recognition of Shan independence. He said, "There is no need to support the universally hated Burmese military in order to catch me. I am, as I always have been, fighting for independence. If the right of self-determination of our people is recognized and guaranteed, and the Burmese withdraw from out homeland, I will sacrifice myself" [A940727, B940716,18, NYT940715].

NEWS SOURCES THIS ISSUE: A = Asiaweek, ABC = Australian Broadcasting Corporation, AO = American Online, B = Bangkok Post, F = Far Eastern Economic Review, N = The Nation, Bangkok, NCGUB = National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, NYT = New York Times, WPD = Working People's Daily, now New Light of Myanmar.

CHINESE GENERAL VISITS

China's General Li Jiulong, Commander of Chengdu Military Region, is said to have visited SLORC's naval facilities recently although he is not a naval man. Chengdu is the main supply base for the Chinese Army in Tibet and has been the source of arms China is supplying to SLORC. China is reportedly seeking access to 3 Burmese islands: Ramree Island off Arakan near Bangladesh, Coco Island off India's Andaman Islands, and St. Matthew's Island off Tenasserim, close to the northern entrance of the Straits of Malacca. China is building a new naval base for SLORC on Hlainggyi Island in the Irrawaddy delta and upgrading SLORC naval facilities on Coco Island. A new 45-metre antenna for monitoring radio traffic has reportedly been installed on Coco Island [F940804].

SLORC TO INTRODUCE "BURMESE WAY TO DEMOCRACY" SOON

SLORC Secretary 1 Lieut-Gen Khin Nyunt speaking to university professors, was quoted on Radio Rangoon on 17 July as saying that plans are underway to introduce a 'Burmese Way to Democracy'. He said this was needed to bring about a suitable form of democracy to Burma. To achieve this, he said, "University lecturers should teach students about democracy but should not teach western-style democracy or encourage them to adopt western-styles in this country" [Reuter/N940719].

THAILAND THREATENS HUMAN RIGHTS SEMINAR IN BANGKOK

A human rights conference focussing on East Timor and Burma was held 20-25 July in spite of intimidation by the Thai government. Thailand banned East Timor activists from attending the conference and Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri said that foreign NGOs attending the conference without applying for permission 30 days in advance would be arrested according to Thai law. Plain clothes immigration officers turned up at the seminar and asked to check the passports of all 17 foreign participants from Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Pairote Pholphet of the Coordinating Committee of Human Rights Organizations in Thailand which had co-organized the conference to coincide with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, accused the government of bowing to pressure from neighbouring countries [B940721, N940719]

Burma News:**SLORC ATTACKS REFUGEE CAMP**

At about 8:00 am on 21 July, 100 well-equipped troops from SLORC's 62nd Battalion led by Deputy Battalion Commander Major Aung Myint, attacked an ethnic Mon refugee camp west of Halockhani on the Thai-Burmese border. The 500 unarmed civilian refugees in Kwan Saya camp were driven out, their belongings looted, and their shelter razed to the ground. Using 50 refugees as a human shield, the SLORC troops advanced on the main refugee camp at Halockhani at about 11:30 am. Mon resistance fighters who were camped on nearby hills intercepted the SLORC advance wounding a SLORC soldier. The SLORC column took 16 refugees hostage and retreated warning the others that they had 3 days to leave the area or be killed. The 6,000 refugees in Halockhani including about 1,000 women and 3,500 children fled further into the Thai province of Kanchanaburi. The Mon refugees were previously in camps in Thailand. Beginning in October 1993, in an attempt to pressure the Mon resistance army to negotiate a cease-fire with SLORC, Thai authorities forced the Mon refugees to 'voluntarily' move to Halockhani in spite of fears for their safety. Assurances were given that the Thai Army would protect them. Although the New Mon State Party has had 3 negotiation sessions with SLORC the two sides are still deadlocked. Some suspect that the attack on the refugee camp may be a ploy to pressure the NMSP into signing an agreement before the ASEAN meeting. Others, however, question whether SLORC would take such a risk considering the negative reaction the attack has provoked. The timing was especially curious since Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri was at that time defending Thailand's decision to invite SLORC to Bangkok for the ASEAN Meeting. The refugees are currently in temporary shelters in Thailand but Thai authorities want them to return to Halockhani as soon as possible, threats of further attacks notwithstanding [N940725,28, NCGUB].

International Action:**OTTAWA CANDLELIGHT VIGIL**

On 19 July, Canadian Friends of Burma, Burmese students and friends marched from the Human Rights Monument to Parliament Hill to remember the fifth anniversary of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's detention. The march ended with a candlelight vigil around the eternal flame.

VIGIL IN TORONTO

On 20 July, the Burmese community held a 2-hr vigil at City Hall to mark the fifth anniversary of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's detention. Murray Thomson, CFOB, Daisy Francis, Canada-Asia Working Group, Berne Grush, human rights activist, David Aung, community leader and Bush Gulati addressed the gathering.

TORONTO RADIO DEBATE

On 20 July, Radio station CIUT of the University of Toronto featured a debate between Pepsico Canada President Mr McEachron and Professor Bush Gulati of the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma (Canada).

CANADIAN MEMORIAL SERVICE

On 7 Aug. a Buddhist memorial service was held by the Burmese community at the Burmese Mahadhamika Temple in Toronto. The service was dedicated to the thousands of students, men, women and children who gave their lives for democracy in Burma during the 8.8.88 uprising.

"STOP THE BLOODSHED"

New Jersey-based Project Maje launched a "SLORC - STOP THE BLOODSHED" campaign to mark the anniversary of the 8.8.88 uprising. People were asked to draw blood from their fingers (or red ink, or paint or tomato sauce) to create a blood stain on a piece of paper and send it to SLORC with a message to to end its human rights abuse and to hand over power to the elected government. Ambassador U Thaung, Embassy of Myanmar, 2300 'S' St.NW, Washington DC.20008, USA.

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The "Burma Alert", published monthly by the Associates to Develop Democratic Burma, monitors foreign investments and trade with Burma in order to provide data for the Burmese democracy movement. Individual subscription to the "BURMA ALERT" is US\$25.00 (or C\$25.00) per annum payable to the Associates to Develop Democratic Burma, c/o Harn Yawngwe, RR.4, Shawville, Quebec J0X 2Y0, Canada. Fax: 1 (819) 647-5403, Tel. 647-5405. Institutional subscription is US\$100.00 (or C\$100.00) per annum. Readers are also invited to become 'Associates' by contributing US\$100.00 (or C\$100.00) per annum. In 1993, the ADDDB received grants from the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Canada; the Evangelisches Missionswerk, Germany; and the National Endowment for Democracy, U.S.A.

Foreign Investments:**CANADA:**

NORTECH CO OF CANADA is carrying out a survey for a natural gas pipeline from the Gulf of Martaban to Thailand. The survey is being carried out near Kanbauk, Kaleinang and Nateintaung villages in Yebyu township, Tenasserim Division [SLORC].

SINGAPORE:

GLOBE MYANMAR RESOURCES LTD will be constructing a 10-storey mixed commercial complex at the corner of Maha Bandoola and Lanmadaw Road in Rangoon. It will get a 30-year land lease [SLORC].

TURNKEY CONTRACTS AND CONSULTANCY handed over the INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CENTRE to SLORC on 20 January. The 42,000 square feet building houses 33 offices of various sizes for short-term rental and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 200-300 people. There are 150 IDD telephone lines and will be followed by fax and telex facilities. Short-term secretarial facilities will also be available. The Centre is located at 88 Prome Road in Rangoon. The Ministry of Forestry commissioned the IBC.

U.S.A.:

HERTZ is eyeing new markets in Asia. The rent-a-car giant will through its Singapore-based HERTZ ASIA PACIFIC expand into China, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Taiwan. It plans to 'establish a presence' in Burma and Cambodia within 18 months. Last year, Hertz's Asian rental revenue accounted for 5-10% of its global revenue of US\$4.5 billion. Investing in a fleet of rental cars involves a major capital investment. Opening a 100-car fleet branch could cost between US\$10-15 million. Hertz normally operates through franchises. Concerned individuals are urged to contact the company informing them of the human rights situation and the potential negative public relations impact an investment in Burma could have [Business Times/Project Maje]. Contact: Craig Koch, President & CEO, The Hertz Corporation, 225 Brae Blvd, Park Ridge, NJ. 07656-1870, USA. Tel: 1 (201) 307-1870.

US-based UNITED PARCEL SERVICE has launched a new service to Vietnam and Burma (13 June). Its partner in Rangoon is Wah Wah Pte Ltd [South China Morning Post].

UNION OF MYANMAR ECONOMIC HOLDINGS

The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH) is fast becoming the preferred 'economic development' vehicle for SLORC. It is also SLORC's showpiece for the success of its new 'open economy'. Increasingly, foreign investors are seeking to form joint ventures with the UMEH.

How open is SLORC's economy? How 'private' is the new private enterprise that is driving Burma's economy?

The UMEH was established by SLORC in February 1990. Using state funds, it was created to operate businesses at home and abroad. The Directorate of Procurement of the Ministry of Defence holds 40% of the shares. The rest are Defence Service personnel, regimental institutes and ex-servicemen. The Chairman of UMEH's Board of Directors is Lieutenant-Gen Myo Nyunt, Commander of Rangoon Command and SLORC member. Its Managing Director is Brigadier-General David Abel, SLORC's Minister for National Planning and Economic Development.

The third general meeting of UMEH for 1992-93 was held on 29 December 1993 at the headquarters of the Burma Army's Rangoon Command. The shareholders who attended were the who's who of SLORC and included Military Appointments Secretary and SLORC member Lieut-Gen Maung Hla, Minister for Home Affairs and SLORC member Lieut-Gen Mya Thin, Minister for Labour and SLORC member Lieut-Gen Aye Thoun, Minister for Mines and SLORC member Lieut-Gen Kyaw Min, Quartermaster-General Major-Gen Min Thein, Minister for Finance & Revenue Brig-Gen Win Tin, Chief of Staff (Navy) Vice Admiral Than Nyunt, and Chief of Staff (Air Force) Lieut-Gen Thein Win.

UMEH Chairman Lieut-Gen Myo Nyunt reported to shareholders that the company is operating 3 garment factories and is planning to set up 2 more; exploring the setting up of a cigarette factory; constructing a three-star six-storey hotel which will be opened in 1994; operating two joint ventures that import goods and sell them in foreign currency and in kyats; is planning to open branches of the MYAWADDY BANK, which it owns, in more developed townships; and is trying to establish an industrial zone in the Pyinmabin area [SLORC].

From interviews with the
AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION
 and
PRESS CONFERENCES
 in Bangkok, 24-26 July 1994

"CRITICAL DIALOGUE"

According to
SENATOR GARETH EVANS

ON AUSTRALIA'S POLICY REVIEW TOWARDS BURMA: "We ... were strenuously advocating both military and economic sanctions and ... a policy of maximum overt pressure and minimum dialogue. Over the last two or three years, we've taken the view that that was proving rather unproductive and it would be better to focus on trying to encourage the ASEAN countries ... (to create a better environment in that country, one that is more conducive to regional stability and one that does better in honouring basic human rights standards) ... We are still considering what the appropriate course of action should be and I certainly won't be rushing to judgement ... I want to ponder the results of my consultations and just see what kind of reaction, perhaps, comes out of the Myanmar administration in light of these (ASEAN) conference proceedings."

ON CHANGING AUSTRALIA'S TRADE POLICY: "Our policy at the moment is neither to encourage or discourage trade and investment in Burma. It is a matter of judgement ... as to whether the process of advancement there is further assisted by opening up the economy with significant new investment and foreign presence, or whether that would rather be encouragement for maintenance of the status quo That is under consideration as indeed are all present aspects of our policy but I wouldn't anticipate any rapid change in this respect."

ON AUSTRALIA'S MINIMUM POSITION: "The continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is absolutely indefensible. (It is) utterly unhelpful in terms of Myanmar's own membership of the larger international community and in terms of its way forward politically, economically and in terms of its regional role. It's not only of course the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi that's an issue here. It's the failure of the constitutional convention process to make any significant change in the direction of democratic accountability systems. It's the continued detention of many political prisoners. It is

the continued existence on the statute books of many laws of political censorship of one kind or another that are repressive and inhibit any kind of free dialogue or free political process. It's ... the situation in the border areas."

ON THE BENCHMARKS AUSTRALIA IS PROPOSING: "Greater access to political prisoners and detainees Reduction of sentences and hopefully the release of other political prisoners; the announcement of a clear timetable for the constitutional process and some much greater evidence that delegates are able to participate fully and freely in that process; some transitional arrangements under the new constitution that provide scope for further evolution towards democracy in the future; legal guarantees for the rights of minorities; cessation of the practice of forced labour, at least to the extent that this goes beyond a traditional custom Repeal of political censorship legislation and all other constraints that make life impossible for people with a democratic point of view..."

ON SLORC'S MEETING WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI: "I certainly want to see a dialogue process commenced ... not just one meeting to talk about the weather".

ON AUSTRALIA'S DILEMMA: "We ... face the question of whether we move forward, and if so, how and to what extent? And whether or not we should do so without some more of these benchmarks that I've indicated being satisfied."

Commenting on the new Australian-led approach, Joan Spero, US Under Secretary of State for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs said, "I don't think our goals are any different. We do hope that the policy of engagement being pursued by a number of our colleagues will be successful ... and believe that the kinds of benchmarks that Senator Evans has laid out make a lot of sense. Canadian Foreign Minister Andre Ouellet said that it is "important that benchmarks on progress be set out" as "serious dialogues" are pursued. Canada will not engage in the dialogues directly but will support and cooperate with the others in their attempts. Prior to the ASEAN meeting, Canada had said that "While Burma's opening to its neighbours ... is encouraging ... We need to see evidence of real commitment to political reform".

Inside Burma:**VOICES OF THE PEOPLE**

Human rights organizations have documented SLORC's use of forced labour in rural Burma for development projects and for the natural gas pipeline from the Gulf of Martaban to Thailand. The foreign oil companies involved deny that slave labour is being used in their project area. SLORC, however, justifies the use of forced labour. In Oct.93, Lieut-Col Than Han of SLORC's Border Areas Development Committee said that people had to contribute their labour because the development projects will benefit them. Recently, SLORC Secretary 1 Lieut-Gen Khin Nyunt claimed that it is Burmese culture to contribute one's labour for community projects. In July, two foreign journalists visiting Mandalay recorded the people's opinion of being forced to contribute their labour. The following are extracts from Philip Shennon's "BURMESE USING FORCED LABOR ON TOURIST PROJECTS" in the New York Times, 17 July 1994 and Richard Ehrlich's "BURMESE FORCED INTO 'SLAVE LABOUR'" in the Toronto Star, 13 July 1994:

"We are angry that we are being ordered to do this terrible work. It is dangerous for me to say these things to a foreigner, but I am so upset that I do not care. We must use our hands to take this filthy, smelly dirt from the bottom of the moat. I have seen women collapse from the heat. And for this, the government pays nothing".

Female, 50-year old shop owner

"The government is creating trouble for itself by making the people in Mandalay so angry".

Male, 30-year old tea shop owner

"I have worked here seven times already. Even my wife had to work. We have to stand up to our knees in the mud and keep digging. We are like prisoners - prisoners without chains. We start at 6 am and work in groups of 15 people. If our group works fast, we can go home maybe at 4 pm. If we work slow, we have to stay later. Everyone in Mandalay has a depression because of this. But we cannot refuse because then we must go to jail. Please tell the BBC, tell the Voice of America. No one knows about us".

Male, artist

"The trucks and machines use gas, but we are free".

Young female

"If you do not want to work, you can pay somebody 150 to 200 Kyats (US\$25-35 at the official rate or US\$1.25-1.75 at the black market rate. Burma's per capita GNP is 1,200 Kyats - Ed). I have paid three times already. He also paid (pointing to another man). She also paid. We pay somebody who has come from the villages to do hard work. We get a list of their names from our neighbourhood headman".

Male, hotel receptionist

"I have paid 5 times already. It is half my monthly salary. It is terrible. It is our oppression. But we can't do the hard work. We are white collar workers. Intellectuals can't work like that in the hot sun".

Male, teacher

"This is the arrogance of the government, that they will force poor people to interrupt their lives to do this sort of work. This is silly work, stupid work. It is reminding people of why we rose up against the military before. People could rise up again".

Male, 28-year old teacher & former student leader

According to the news reports, the men, women and children are involved in dredging the moat around the Mandalay palace. A human chain is used to get rid of the mud, dirt and debris. Others use small hammers to break up rocks for the new moat wall. Troops who do not display weapons but stand guard over the people. The beautification project is expected to last 6 months and will become a major SLORC tourist attraction.

A senior western diplomat based in Rangoon commenting on the use of forced labour in Burma said, "Mandalay is the most obvious example of the problem. The worst atrocities happen in other places where you can't go. The majority of Burmese living in areas under government control will have to contribute labour, unpaid, for the government at some time. It might be once every five to six years to improve a road. Around Mandalay or Rangoon where there are many big projects, it is more often. They are also extending the railway from Ye to Tavoy, hacking through virgin forest and malaria-infested swamps. No one can see those camps. People there can't bribe themselves out of working there. And there is no medical care. People have been dying... The Burmese government doesn't even care".