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BLURRED VISION

The SPDC continues its campaign to “sell” its 7-point roadmap to the international community while working to consolidate military, economic and political viability at the expense of Burma’s people and their future.

The National Convention, scheduled to reconvene in May as part of the roadmap, will remain just as undemocratic and repressive as it was when it was suspended in 1996. The unchanged format and structure will ensure that the NC, devised as a strategy to avoid convening a pro-democratic parliament in 1990, remains incapable of delivering much-needed reforms.

The SPDC has been able to apply their domestic divide-and-rule tactics to the international context, and used their 7-step roadmap to buy time and ease post-Depayin pressure without actually delivering visible progress.

As Gen Khin Nyunt performed his role as product spokesperson overseas, the regime perpetrated fresh arrests and detentions. In January, 6 students were jailed for up to 17 years for criticizing the roadmap. In February, 7 students were given jail sentences ranging up to 15 years for starting a sports union. The regime has sought to use its limited concessions to some prisoners as a means to gloss over fresh and ongoing repressions. NLD leaders, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, remain in detention.

As the regime hypes up ceasefire talks with the Karen National Union, it continues to launch attacks on ethnic villagers, inflicting forced labour, forced relocation and sexual violence on civilians.

The regime has used the NC and ceasefire talks as excuses to avoid substantive engagement with the international community on the delivery of irreversible reforms. The international community should not accept this. The fact that the SPDC has been able to inflict repression while negotiating ceasefires is proof enough that it has the ability to “walk and chew gum at the same time”.

Natural gas reserves off the coast of Arakan state, and gold and gems in Shan and Kachin states have contributed to an outbreak of ethical amnesia amongst Asian investors, including state-owned enterprises.

Contracts and MOUs may provide a short-term respite for the SPDC, buffeted by the effects of capital flight, a serious banking crisis and international sanctions. They may also create a sense of optimism amongst resource-hungry foreign investors. This is likely to dissipate, as the harsh realities of dancing with dictators make themselves felt, just as they have done with previous investors.

DEMOCRACY & DIALOGUE

- **The National Convention (NC) will reconvene on 17 May.**
- **The SPDC re-establishes the “6 Objectives” and “104 Basic Principles” to dictate the course of the upcoming NC. The junta continues to guarantee a role for the military in a future “democratic” Burma.**
- **Six students are sentenced to 7 to 17 years imprisonment for criticizing the National Convention.**
- **The generals secure the support of ceasefire groups before announcing the date the National Convention will reconvene.**
- **Major ethnic political parties and non-ceasefire groups reject the junta’s roadmap, and demand tripartite dialogue first.**
- **The 3rd Ethnic Nationalities Seminar drafts its own 7-step roadmap to a federal Burma.**
- **On 14 February the junta transfers NLD Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo from prison to house arrest.**
- **FM Win Aung makes vague promises about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s release and NLD participation in the NC.**
- **Razali makes his 12th visit to Burma, fails to obtain any firm commitment from junta, but keeps faith in Gen Khin Nyunt.**

NATIONAL CONVENTION TO RECONVENE 17 MAY

After keeping the world in suspense since the unveiling of the roadmap in August 2003, the junta finally announced on 30 March 2004 that the National Convention would convene on 17 May. Invitations to those attending the “temporarily suspended national convention [...] will be sent very soon”, said the junta’s radio statement.¹ This announcement led diplomats to speculate on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s ‘imminent’ release.²

1 AFP (30 Mar 04) Myanmar to launch "democracy road map" with national convention in May

2 AP (31 Mar 04) Hopes for Suu Kyi release raised after junta takes first step in road map to democracy

“MYANMAR ROAD TO DEMOCRACY”: THE WAY BACKWARD

Months before the regime announced the National Convention’s resumption, the generals made clear the constitution drafting process would not pave the way for a democratic Burma. On 27 January, the SPDC quietly announced that the much criticized “6 Objectives” and “104 Basic Principles”, guaranteeing a leadership role for the military in a future “democratic” Burma, would dictate the course of the new National Convention session.

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Khin Maung Win declared this in a speech entitled Myanmar Road to Democracy: The Way Forward during “Understanding Myanmar”, a two-day seminar held in Rangoon on 27-28 January. The seminar, attended by diplomats and academics from 18 countries, aimed to “correct the misperception” of Western countries that the “Myanmar government [is] carrying out atrocities ranging from gross violations of human rights to employment of child soldiers”.³

THE “6 OBJECTIVES” AND “104 BASIC PRINCIPLES”: ENTRENCHING MILITARY RULE

The National Convention was initially convened on 9 January 1993 to “draft basic principles for the drafting of a firm and stable constitution”. Prior to its commencement the regime, then known as State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), imposed the “six Objectives” to “guide” the drafting of constitutional principles.⁴ Although the first 5 objectives primarily involve nation-building and goodwill intentions of peace, justice and democracy, the sixth principle guarantees a dominant role for the military, the Tatmadaw, in the future Burmese government.⁵ The generals seek what they call “disciplined democracy”, a euphemism for continued military rule.⁶

Nine months into the Convention SLORC imposed an additional “104 Basic Principles”. Among these principles is the inclusion of SPDC officials in legislative and executive branches of government, the authority of the Tatmadaw to take over State power, compulsory military service for all citizens and the Tatmadaw’s complete independence from civilian government.⁷

3 AFP (27 Jan 04) Myanmar says time for the West to be more positive about military state

4 Burma Press Summary (Vol. VI, No. 4, Apr 92) Constitutional Convention Called

5 NLM (18 May 04) Regulations are prescribed in the interest of the national races and the delegates

6 NCGUB (7 May 04) Statement: The National Convention

7 Understanding Myanmar (27-28 Jan 04) Myanmar Roadmap to Democracy: The Way Forward

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These objectives and principles were criticized by the NLD because they were drawn up without consultation with the National Convention delegates, and some are “not consonant with a truly Democratic State”.⁸

The international community, notably through the UN General Assembly’s annual resolution on the situation of human rights in Burma, has also consistently condemned the objective of the military to carve a leadership role for themselves in a future democratic Burma.⁹

For more detailed information and analysis of the National Convention, see Altsean-Burma’s briefing: “Burma’s National Convention: Illegitimate, Unrepresentative & Oppressive” (available online at www.altsean.org)

SEEKING SUPPORT FROM CEASEFIRE GROUPS

The regime’s two-pronged strategy regarding the roadmap emerged more clearly in the first few months of 2004. While on the one hand the generals sought to marginalize the NLD, they appeared very eager to secure the cooperation of ceasefire groups. Dep FM Khin Maung Win emphasized that a consensus with ceasefire groups was crucial because, “should there be major differences, the possibility exists for them to take up arms against the Government, thus re-igniting the circle of violence”.¹⁰

In early 2004 Gen Khin Nyunt met with most ceasefire groups, and obtained their support for the regime’s 7-step roadmap:

- 3 Jan Kayah State, Special Region-2 (Karenni State Nationalities People’s Liberation Front, or KNPLF, ceasefire since 9 May 1994)¹¹
- 7 Jan Shan State Nationalities People’s Liberation Organization (ceasefire since 9 October 1994)¹²
- 10 Jan Kayah State, Special Region-1 (Kayah National Guard – KNLP splinter group, ceasefire since 27 February 1992)¹³

8 Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (22 Nov 95) The Observations of the National League for Democracy on the National Convention

9 UNGA, 48th Session (20 Dec 93) Situation of human rights in Myanmar [A/RES/48/150]

10 Understanding Myanmar (27-28 Jan 04) Myanmar Roadmap to Democracy: The Way Forward

11 NLM (4 Jan 04) Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt receives national race leaders

12 NLM (8 Jan 04) Prime Minister receives Shan national race leaders

13 NLM (10 Jan 04) Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt receives Chairman of Kayah State Special Region-1 and party

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- 19 Jan Shan State (North) Special Region-1 (Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army – Kokang, ceasefire since 21 March 1989)¹⁴
- 22 Jan Shan State (North) Special Region-5 (Kachin Defence Army - KIO 4th Brigade, ceasefire since 13 January 1991)¹⁵
- 23 Jan Shan State (North) Special Region-7 (Palaung State Liberation Army, ceasefire since 21 April 1991)¹⁶
- 10 Feb National Unity Party (NUP - former BSPP)¹⁷
- 15 Feb Shan State (East) Special Region-4 (National Democratic Alliance Army, ceasefire since 30 June 1989)¹⁸
- 23 Feb New Mon State Party (ceasefire since 29 June 1995)¹⁹

On 25 February NMSP's General Secretary Naing Hantha told the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) that the junta's claim of the party's support of the roadmap wasn't true. A NMSP delegation did meet with Gen Khin Nyunt to discuss political issues but the party Gen Sec said the regime is "spinning" the facts for its own gain.²⁰

14 NLM (20 Jan 04) Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt receives national race leader of Shan State (North) Special Region-1

15 NLM (23 Jan 04) Prime Minister meets Chairman and party of Shan State (North) Special Region 5

16 NLM (24 Jan 04) Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt receives national race leaders of Shan State (North) Special Region-7

17 AFP (11 Feb 04) Pro-junta party throws support behind Myanmar democracy plan

18 NLM (16 Feb 04) Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt receives national race leaders of Shan State (East) Special Region-4

19 NLM (24 Feb 04) Prime Minister receives national race leaders of New Mon State Party; information in parenthesis from Irrawaddy (1 Jan 04) List of Cease-fire Agreements with the Junta

20 DVB (26 Feb 04) We did not say that we support the 'roadmap' plan says NMSP

MAKING & BELIEVING PROMISES

“The generals are past masters at creating a sense that there is movement when nothing is actually happening,” - Rangoon-based diplomat²¹

The regime’s “pragmatists”, FM Win Aung and PM Gen Khin Nyunt, continued to mesmerize the international community with promises to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and include the NLD in the NC.

On 9 February at a BIMST-EC Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Phuket Win Aung hinted at the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the NLD participation in the NC. Thai FM Surakiart Suthirathai immediately welcomed this announcement. “When the time comes, she should be released, and it won’t be long,” he said.²² “I believe that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released soon,” added Surakiart following the junta’s announcement that the NC would reconvene on 17 May.²³

The UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail expressed similar optimism following his visit to Rangoon in early March.²⁴ He said that 16 April had been fixed as an “informal deadline” for the Nobel Laureate’s release.²⁵

REACTIONS TO THE ROADMAP

NLD: Four Minimal Demands

On 2 March, the NLD - Liberated Area (NLD-LA)’s Foreign Affairs Department stated that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would consider attending the National Convention if the SPDC met four demands:

1. Release all political prisoners;
2. Re-open NLD offices nationwide;
3. Nullify the 104 basic principles of the National Convention;
4. Set up an independent commission to investigate the Depayin Massacre.

21 Mizzima (11 Feb 04) Signs of Breakthrough Pick up, Skepticism Lingers

22 AFX (10 Feb 04) Myanmar's Suu Kyi to be released from house arrest soon - Thai FM; AFP (9 Feb 04) Myanmar junta to lift crackdown on opposition, Suu Kyi could be freed

RFA (18 Mar 04) Aung San Suu Kyi Meets Junta Envoys, Could Be Freed by Mid-April

23 Nation (31 Mar 04) Burma forum should advance reconciliation

24 Irrawaddy (5 Mar 04) NLD, Ethnic, Leery of Razali's Optimism

25 Reuters (10 Mar 04) Powell suggests US to keep ban on Myanmar imports

Elected NLD MP in exile Daw San San confirmed the report and reiterated that the NLD could not guarantee its participation to the NC if the conditions were met, but would only “consider” it.²⁶

On 10 January, the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) rejected the regime’s roadmap as a “political maneuver” created to respond to the political crisis following Depayin Massacre.²⁷

In the same period the Women’s League of Burma (WLB) denounced the regime for perpetrating violence against women even as it engaged in ceasefire talks with the KNU and prepared for the NC. WLB said the regime’s roadmap was an attempt to perpetuate military rule and to deceive the international community by turning attention away from the Depayin Massacre.²⁸

Ethnic Nationalities: Tripartite Dialogue First

Most ethnic political parties and non-ceasefire armed opposition groups continued to reject the junta’s roadmap, labeling it a strategy to perpetuate military rule. They argued that tripartite dialogue was the first step in any genuine process of national reconciliation in Burma.

On 11 January the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) said tripartite dialogue between the junta, the NLD and ethnic nationalities must come before talks on the constitution could take place.²⁹

The KNU rejected the roadmap and the National Convention, despite having held two rounds of ceasefire talks with the junta. On 14 February Mahn Sha Lah Phan, KNU General Secretary, declared that the NC was not genuine, and that it will not solve political problems or grant self-determination to ethnic nationalities.³⁰

David Taw, the KNU’s Foreign Affairs Secretary, declared on the eve of the Moulmein talks (24-26 February) that his organization would not benefit from the NC and believed tripartite dialogue should precede constitution drafting.³¹ [see Ethnic Relations]

26 Network Media Group (5 Mar 04) Suu Kyi to consider attending NC if 4 demands met

27 DPNS (10 Jan 04) Statement of Emergency Central Committee Meeting

28 DVB (23 Feb 04) WLB views on SPDC’s ‘road map’

29 ABC (11 Jan 04) Burmese ethnic party calls for three way talks

30 Network Media Group (14 Jan 04) KNU: Cease-Fire talks do not mean to support ‘Road Map’ General Mya in Rangoon

31 BBC Monitor (25 Feb 04) Karen rebel group information chief views talks with Burmese government

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The Arakan National Council (ANC), formed on 7 March to provide a unified leadership for Arakan organizations, rejected the SPDC's roadmap. The ANC argued that the roadmap constituted a strategy for prolonged military rule.³² [see Ethnic Relations]

On Chin Revolution Day, 20 March, the Chin National Front (CNF) added its voice to the chorus of ethnic nationality organizations calling for tripartite dialogue.³³

Ethnic Groups Draft an Alternative Roadmap

The ethnic nationalities of Burma have elaborated viable alternatives to the regime's roadmap for national reconciliation and transition to democracy. In February 2004 the Third Ethnic Nationalities Seminar, comprising 61 delegates from 25 groups, categorically rejected the SPDC's roadmap, as it "would not lead to democratization and establishment of a federal union but only sustain a military dictatorship in the country."³⁴ Instead, the participants released their own seven-point roadmap to democracy, entitled "Rebuilding the Union of Burma", consisting of the following points:

1. To hold, at the earliest date, the tripartite dialogue, as called for by the UN resolutions annually since 1994;
2. To form an interim government comprising of representatives, proportionally, of the SPDC, the NLD and other political parties, victorious in the 1990 elections, and the ethnic nationalities, based on the agreement arrived at the tripartite dialogue;
3. The interim government is to convene a legitimate "National Convention";
4. To form various commissions, with approval of the National Convention, to draft constitutions of the Federal Union and the constituent States;
5. To hold national referendum for adoption of the Federal Constitution and to hold referendum in various constituent States for adoption of respective State Constitutions;
6. To hold elections at national level and state level for the formation of Federal government and State governments in various States in accordance with the newly adopted Federal and respective State Constitutions;

32 Mizzima (7 Mar 04) Arakans in Diaspora reject SPDC Road Map

33 DVB (21 Mar 04) CNF vows to fight on for democracy in Burma

34 SHAN (4 Feb 04) Third force presents revised roadmap

7. Subsequent to the elections, the Federal and State parliaments (legislatures) are to be convened and the respective election-winning parties are to form the Federal and various State governments;³⁵

The pro-democracy movement outside Burma warmly welcomed the ethnic nationalities' call for tripartite dialogue as the first step towards national reconciliation, democracy and federalism in Burma. The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) and US Campaign for Burma (USCB) stated that the ethnic nationalities' seven-point roadmap is perfectly in line with the position of Burma's pro-democracy movement.³⁶

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: LOOKING FOR A TIMEFRAME

Both the junta's regional allies and harshest critics have called on Rangoon to set a timeframe for its democracy roadmap. In early January Indonesian FM Hassan Wirayuda also asked Burma to involve all parties, including the NLD and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the process.³⁷

Wirayuda claimed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi declared ASEAN should not push the Burmese junta too hard, as this would "hamper the reconciliation and democratization processes". This allegation troubled the pro-democracy movement, especially because the Foreign Minister did not explain how he obtained this information. Wirayuda also alleged that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi called on the international community to be patient with Gen Khin Nyunt.³⁸

During the 17th ASEAN-US Dialogue Meeting held in Bangkok on 30 January the United States criticized the junta's lack of timeframe and a comprehensive approach to democratization.³⁹ Following the announcement of the NC's start date the US warned that it could not endorse the constitutional talks if the regime did not release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and allow her to participate fully.⁴⁰

35 SHAN (4 Feb 04) Third force presents revised roadmap

36 NCGUB (9 Feb 04) Ethnic Leaders Lauded for 'Common Approach' Toward Democracy, Federalism and US Campaign for Burma (7 Feb 04) US Campaign for Burma Recognizes Burma's Ethnic Nationalities' Rejection of Regime's Roadmap

37 AFP (6 Jan 04) Indonesia urges Myanmar junta to set time frame for democracy

38 Jakarta Post (6 Jan 04) Suu Kyi asks for world's patience: RI

39 Nation (1 Feb 04) ASEAN, US officials discuss Burma road map during dialogue

40 Irrawaddy (31 Mar 04) National Convention to Reconvene, Opposition Not Yet Invited

REPRESSION CONTINUES

The regime continued to respond to the constructive suggestions of the NLD, ethnic nationalities and international community with more repression against Burma's pro-democracy movement.

The SPDC's promise to include the NLD in the upcoming National Convention did not translate into a relaxation of the regime's efforts to crush the party. NLD Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo's transfer from prison to house arrest (see below) is an inadequate sign of goodwill. Three other top NLD leaders, Chairman Aung Shwe, General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi, and Secretary U Lwin, have remained under house arrest since the Depayin Massacre.

On 22 December 2003, the SPDC arrested eight NLD members from Mandalay Division, who were victims of the Depayin Massacre. AAPPB reported that other NLD victims of the Depayin Massacre who had just been released were sent back to prison under unspecified charges.⁴¹

In mid-December, five NLD members from Tenasserim Division, Nyi Soe, Aung Min, Than Soe, Nyi Nyi Lay, and Phoe Pe were arrested by the regime. The charges pressed against them remain unclear, although AAPPB stated that the arrests were linked to the NLD members' political activities.⁴²

U Tin Oo: From Prison to House Arrest

On 14 February NLD Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo was transferred from Kale [Kalay] Prison to house arrest in Rangoon. The junta did not publicize the reason behind this move.⁴³ U Tin Oo, arrested after the Depayin Massacre on 30 May 2003, is still not allowed contact with the outside world. His phone line was cut, and his house has remained under SPDC surveillance.⁴⁴ On 12 March over 50 NLD members gathered at a private home to pray for U Tin Oo on the occasion of his 77th birthday. "He is in good health and in high spirits," said his wife.⁴⁵

41 AAPPB (1 Jan 04) NLD members arrested in Mandalay and Tennasserim Division

42 AAPPB (1 Jan 04) NLD members arrested in Mandalay and Tennasserim Division

43 AP (15 Feb 04) Myanmar opposition figure Tin Oo moved from prison to house arrest

44 DVB (16 Feb 04) NLD deputy chairman U Tin Oo has no contact with members

45 AFP (12 Mar 04) NLD members in Myanmar pray for vice-chairman's release on his 77th birthday

Two-year Prison Term for NLD Trip Organizer

On 23 March DVB reported that U Salin, NLD member from Maymyo Township, Mandalay Division, was “recently” sentenced to a two-year prison term for allegedly insulting the US\$A. Relatives believe his arrest is linked to his participation in the organization of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s trip to southern Shan State last year.⁴⁶

Criticizing the Roadmap Gets Students 17 Years in Jail

On 21 February the junta sentenced six Dagon University students to between 7 and 17 years imprisonment at Insein Prison for organizing a Students’ Union and distributing leaflets critical of the junta’s roadmap.⁴⁷ The leaflets stated that the roadmap would not lead to democracy, and called on pro-democracy groups and ethnic nationalities to boycott the process. The six students were arrested in September 2003.⁴⁸

NLD ORGANIZES ACTIVITIES DESPITE REPRESSION

Despite repression and harassment the NLD was able to hold meetings.

On 4 January, over 400 NLD members celebrated Independence Day at the Nga Dat Kyit monastery in Rangoon. They prayed for the freedom of their party and its leadership.⁴⁹

On 15 January, NLD members from five townships of Myaungmya District in Irrawaddy Division held a meeting to discuss the National Convention.⁵⁰

On 1 February, NLD members from Meikhtila District in Mandalay Division held their monthly meeting despite earlier threats from the SPDC. Local NLD meetings have also been reported in Arakan State.⁵¹

On 12 February, Burma’s Union Day, the NLD adopted a resolution calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and for democracy and equal rights for ethnic nationalities. The resolution stated that no new election result would be accepted except those of the 1990 election. Nearly 400 NLD

46 DVB (23 Mar 04) My father is unfairly imprisoned

47 NCGUB East (22 Feb 04) One NLD Youth Member Lost Consciousness due to Barbaric Torture by Authorities

48 Irrawaddy (23 Feb 04) Students sentenced

49 AFP (4 Jan 04) Myanmar’s opposition NLD prays for freedom from 'bondage'

50 DVB (10 Feb 04) NLD members resume meetings throughout Burma

51 DVB (4 Feb 04) NLD held meeting despite SPDC’s harassments

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members and supporters gathered at the residence of NLD Central Executive Committee member U Than Tun for the event.⁵²

RAZALI LEADS THE CHOIR OF OPTIMISTS

UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan faced mounting pressure from the pro-democracy movement early in the year.

Burmese activists in exile wrote to Kofi Annan on 5 January to criticize his warm welcome given to the National Convention.⁵³ “By welcoming the regime's handpicked and pre-packaged roadmap scenario”, Kofi Annan is “undermining the spirit of the UNGA resolution” said the pro-democracy activists, under the banner of the International Campaign for Democracy in Burma (ICDB).

ICDB, grouping activists from the United States, Canada and Japan, also called for the replacement of the UN Special Envoy. By lending support to the junta's roadmap, Razali Ismail defused “any international pressure that once existed after May 30th, 2003” and has contributed “to the myth that Burma's regime is serious about change,” wrote the activists.⁵⁴

Farhan Haq, spokesman for Kofi Annan, defended the Secretary-General's position saying it was only an attempt to “push the process along” and to urge the junta to keep its word on its commitments.⁵⁵

Surprise Visit Bears No Fruit

On 1 March Razali arrived in Rangoon for his 12th official visit.⁵⁶ The visit, which had not been publicly announced, came a few weeks after Razali had failed to obtain an invitation to visit Burma from FM Win Aung on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' meeting.⁵⁷

52 BBC Monitor (14 February) [No title: original source: Democratic Voice of Burma, in Burmese (12 Feb 04)]

53 AFP (19 Dec 03) UN's Annan welcomes democracy commitment from Myanmar

54 International Campaign for Democracy in Burma (5 Jan 04) Letter to Kofi Annan - Call for UN Secretary General to Terminate Special Envoy to Burma

55 AFP (14 Jan 04) UN defends remarks on Myanmar junta

56 AFP (1 Mar 04) UN envoy Razali plans to see Aung San Suu Kyi during visit to Myanmar

57 AFP (8 Feb 04) UN envoy fails to win invitation to Myanmar, date for democracy "road map"

The Special Envoy met twice with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The Nobel Laureate reportedly declared to Razali that she wanted to “turn the page” and work “in a harmonized relationship” with the junta.⁵⁸

On 2 March the SPDC allowed Razali to meet with ethnic nationality representatives. The UN Envoy held a one-hour talk with members of the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA). Ethnic leaders said they would accept the regime’s seven-step roadmap if the junta agreed to change the objectives and procedural rules of the National Convention.⁵⁹

According to SNLD chairman Hkun Htun Oo, Razali was in Burma to promote UN involvement in the junta’s roadmap. During his talks with Gen Khin Nyunt and NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Razali was said to have suggested the creation of a “constitution-drafting council” ahead of the National Convention. The forum would allow a tripartite dialogue between the junta, the NLD, and the ethnic nationalities.⁶⁰

Razali denied having made the suggestion in an interview with the BBC after the conclusion of his visit on 4 March, and said the ethnic leaders had misunderstood. UNA members stated that they hadn’t made up the proposal, and that they would “have to be careful” in their relationship with the UN Envoy in the future.⁶¹

Having failed once again to secure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s release, or any breakthrough in the democratization process, the UN Special Envoy was nevertheless “encouraged by the expressions of commitment of the Prime Minister to implement, in an all-inclusive manner, the Government’s seven-step roadmap, starting with the reconvening of the National Convention”.⁶²

Optimism fell on the verge of naiveté as Razali expressed his belief that the new convention would be different from its 1993 version, nearly two months after the regime clearly stated that the objectives that dictated the course of the old convention would remain in place.⁶³ Both the SNLD and the NLD expressed skepticism about the UN Envoy’s optimism following his 4-day visit, and questioned his belief in Gen Khin Nyunt.⁶⁴

58 AFP (4 Mar 04) Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi wants to ‘turn the page’: UN envoy

59 Irrawaddy (2 mar 04) UN Envoy’s Roadmap Mission

60 AFP (2 Mar 04) UN envoy meets Myanmar premier, Suu Kyi to discuss new deal

61 Irrawaddy (5 Mar 04) NLD, Ethnic, Leery of Razali’s Optimism

62 UNSG (5 Mar 04) Press Release: Following Meetings in Myanmar, Secretary-General’s Special Envoy stresses need for all parties to turn over new page [SG/SM/9183]

63 RFA (18 Mar 04) Aung San Suu Kyi Meets Junta Envoys, Could Be Freed by Mid-April

64 Irrawaddy (5 Mar 04) NLD, Ethnic, Leery of Razali’s Optimism

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The UN Special Envoy's conviction that "the prime minister is committed to move the process all the way to democracy" also highlighted the split between regime's "pragmatists" and "hardliners". Although Gen Khin Nyunt is apparently willing to engage with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Razali hinted that the Prime Minister might lack the power to influence the more conservative faction of the regime, led by Sr Gen Than Shwe. Much negotiation still needs to take place between the two, said Razali, and Gen Khin Nyunt needs to be given "full powers" to implement the roadmap.⁶⁵

FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA CREATED

On 26 February a number of groups springing from the 8 August 1988 Burmese pro-democracy demonstrations formed the Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB). The FDB includes a number of groups, and was formed to respond to the current political situation.

Some of FDB's constituent members are:

- All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF)
- Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS),
- Network for Democracy and Development (NDD)
- All Burma Federation of Students Unions (ABFSU)
- People's Defence Front (PDF)
- Burma Women's Union (BWU)

Note: A 29 February news report by BBC Monitor erroneously stated that the name of the new group was the Burma Democratic Alliance (BDA).⁶⁶

65 FT (6 Mar 04) UN envoy hails Burmese changes

66 BBC Monitor (29 Feb 04) Burmese exile groups form Burma Democratic Alliance; Forum for Democracy in Burma (22 Apr 04) "Forum for Democracy in Burma" Begins Official Operations, Calls for National Convention Boycott

MILITARY THREAT

- **Sr Gen Than Shwe dreams aloud: “Only when a nation possesses a modern defense capability will it be possible to ensure the full protection of sovereignty.”⁶⁷**
- **As the Military Intelligence tries to engage the KNU in talks, field commanders continue to defy Gen Khin Nyunt at an operational level, illustrating ongoing command and control issues for the MI.**
- **The Generals upgrade their Air Force with assistance from Serbia and the Ukraine.**
- **Indo-Burman military ties are strengthening, with both joint training exercises along the India border and rumors that the Burma Army began an offensive against anti-Indian rebels in Burma.**
- **Despite pretty political promises of national reconciliation, the junta continues to order its forces into ceasefire areas, with abuses reported in Karen, Karenni, Shan and Mon States in early 2004.**

GOING NOWHERE

In a speech to 7,000 troops on Armed Forces Day on 27 March, Sr Gen Than Shwe highlighted the military’s determination to retain a central role in national politics. His address to the troops stressed the need to maintain a strong and well-equipped military to defend the nation and “guide it towards development.”⁶⁸

Of course, no Armed Forces Day celebration was complete without Than Shwe’s traditional exhortation to “crush ... the internal and external destructive elements hindering the stability and progress of the State.”⁶⁹

67 Asia Pulse (27 Mar 04) Junta leader tells troops to crush destructive elements as country carries out plan for democracy.

68 AFP (27 Mar 04) Myanmar leader sheds no light on democracy plans in major speech.

69 Asia Pulse (27 Mar 04) Junta leader tells troops to crush destructive elements as country carries out plan for democracy.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

“Field Commanders are defiant of Gen Khin Nyunt at the operational level. They perceive the intelligence officials as opportunists who receive privileges without sacrifice.”- Senior SPDC Official⁷⁰

Sr Gen Than Shwe’s refusal to publicly discuss the roadmap is also indicative of continuing tensions within the ranks of the army. An SPDC official involved in the KNU ceasefire talks has suggested a continuing discord in military command and control, with field commanders, at times, defying orders that come from Intelligence officials. He said it would be ‘extremely difficult’ to implement a ceasefire initiative with the KNU because some elements of the Tatmadaw, especially field commanders, still believe the SPDC Army is capable of militarily wiping out the ethnic insurgency.⁷¹

SPDC representation at the KNU ceasefire talks also illustrated a division in the ranks. No senior officials from the War Office (i.e. the Ministry of Defense) attended the talks. Also absent were representatives from the four Bureaus of Special Operations, the bodies responsible for coordinating regional commands. Instead, Brig Gen Kyaw Thein, head of the Information and Intelligence Bureau chaired the talks during the Rangoon round in January. The junta’s delegation also had to report to the War Office each day for approval of negotiations.⁷² The SPDC delegation during the Moulmein (or 3rd) round of talks, was led by Maj Gen Kyaw Win, the Vice-Chief of Intelligence Services.⁷³

Reports have also surfaced alleging that a number of disgruntled soldiers have murdered their superiors. On 17 December 2003, SPDC soldiers occupying No.9 border point near Mae Hong Son allegedly killed their commander, Wei Kyan, by blasting his commanding post with mines. Four other soldiers and an officer were killed while the soldiers escaped the army. On 23 November, a soldier reportedly shot his commanding officer and deserted with 11 other soldiers at Naung Aw base on the Thai-Burma border.⁷⁴

70 Mizzima (28 Jan 04) Two-Level Game: SPDC divided on Peace

71 Mizzima (28 Jan 04) Two-Level Game: SPDC divided on Peace

72 Mizzima (28 Jan 04) Two-Level Game: SPDC divided on Peace

73 Mizzima (22 Feb 04) KNU delegation headed to Moulmein for 3rd round of talks with SPDC

74 DVB (7 Jan 04) More Burmese soldiers revolting against their officers

PROCUREMENT & RECRUITMENT

The Burmese Military continued to expand its weaponry, with high-level defense officials seeking hardware from India at a 21-country armament fair in early February. A representative from the Burmese delegation to the fair said: "We are looking at procurements from India, but the equipment will not be for the infantry which we manage on our own," suggesting a long-term relationship between the two.⁷⁵

Upgrading the Airforce

Approximately 30 Serbian engineers have reportedly been upgrading the SPDC Airforce's SOKO G-4 trainer/ground attack aircraft. The SOKO G-4 Super Galeb is a tandem seat trainer/ground attack aircraft designed for modern training and ground support. The Burma Airforce reportedly has 12 G-4s, which have been grounded since the mid to late 90s due to a shortage of spare parts.⁷⁶ The Serbia and Montenegro Embassy in Rangoon claimed it was unaware of the engineers' presence in Rangoon, but did not deny the reports.

This upgrade of the G-4 trainer aircraft came after reports that the Burma Airforce has approached the Indians for assistance in building its air capabilities.⁷⁷

According to a Rangoon port official, a Ukrainian flagship carrying weapons for the SPDC also arrived in Rangoon on 25 February. The official said Deputy Defence Minister Gen Aung Hlaing and the Director of Air Defence Forces, Colonel Aye Myint welcomed the ship. The presence of the two officers prompted suspicions the shipment was carrying anti-aircraft weapons manufactured in the Ukraine.⁷⁸

Ethnic Recruitment

The SPDC has reportedly ordered its officers in regional military units to pay particular attention to organizing and recruiting ethnic youths. According to the BBC Monitor, a directive from Military Headquarters in Rangoon said an officer would be rewarded 20,000 kyat (20 US\$) for recruiting an ethnic youth.⁷⁹ [see Women and Children]

75 AFP (6 Feb 04) Myanmar seeks military hardware from India

76 Irrawaddy (9 Mar 04) Serbian Engineers Refurbishing Burma Airforce Planes; Irrawaddy (1 Mar 04) Whispers from the War Office

77 AFP (5 Feb 04) Myanmar seeks military hardware from India

78 DVB (7 Mar 04) Ukrainian weapons arrive in Burma

79 BBC Monitor (6 Feb 04) Burmese government urges army to recruit more minority youths

Forced Portering

Karenni sources have reported that the Burma Army has used forced labor to build a new road from Mawchi southwest to Htee Lay Kee to serve the new wolfram mine there. The Burma Army has forced villagers from #2 and #3 townships of District 2 to relocate along the Mawchi-Toungoo road and porter for the Burma Army, and also to build a new army camp 1 mile west of Mawchi.⁸⁰[see Displacement]

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TIES

North Korea

In early 2004, scholar Andrew Selth released a monograph that investigated the close arms links between North Korea and Burma. Selth outlined a number of weapons transfers and negotiations between the two regimes, including plans for submarines, short-range ballistic missiles, surface-to-surface missiles and nuclear technology. The report also detailed the history of the SPDC's nuclear program, beginning with their overtures towards Moscow in 2000 requesting help in the development of a nuclear reactor. He concluded that while increasingly close ties were cause for concern and increased scrutiny, it reflected pragmatic concerns by both pariah countries. "Burma wants arms, while North Korea wants food and funds. The interests of both are served by working together more closely."⁸¹

Speculation over DPRK-SPDC ties continued as US policymakers were urged in early February to pay close attention to the "growing relationship" between the two. Speaking at a panel discussion for the Heritage Foundation in the United States, Keith Ruse, aide to Senator Richard Lugar said that the North Korea-Burma issue was a key area of concern. Highlighting potential nuclear exchanges and scud missile transfers as primary concerns, State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher said he could not confirm allegations of nuclear exchanges.⁸²

Senior US State Department official Matthew Daley said on 26 March the US administration had information suggesting North Korea offered surface-to-surface missiles to the Burmese junta. Daley, Deputy US Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, said the SPDC indicated they did not accept the offers.

80 Free Burma Rangers (7 Jan 04) New Karen and Karenni IDPs

81 Andrew Selth (Mar 04) Burma's North Korean Gambit. A Challenge to Regional Security?

82 Crosswalk (10 Feb 04) Alarm raised over possible Nuclear links between Burma, North Korea.

Daley further denied press reports suggesting Burma has provided heroin in exchange for military or nuclear technology, saying that available evidence does not support that conclusion.⁸³

India: Border Deployment

Ties between the junta and the Indian Army have reportedly strengthened after joint border trainings in expectation of cooperative activities against anti-Indian groups inside Burma.⁸⁴ These good relations saw the Indian government demand that the SPDC take steps to close down and demolish the camps of militants residing inside its borders. The junta responded by reportedly launching a military strike in mid-February to flush out anti-India insurgent groups based along its border.

Officials have not released information on the groups involved in the offensive, but earlier reports suggested that SPDC troops intended to target the Tenu Tekhap Joku valley in Western Burma, headquarters of the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland.⁸⁵

Indian border forces had been deployed along the border since early January to prevent 'fleeing rebels' from crossing into India. Indian officials say army units in Nagaland and Arunchal Pradesh have been reinforced.⁸⁶

This strategy of collaboration is designed to intimidate ethnic groups in both countries and pressure them into negotiations.

BREACHING THE CEASEFIRES

Karenni State

On 1 January, a joint SPDC-Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO) operation burnt down a church in Noo Tha Hta village, southern Karenni state.

Karenni sources have reported that 1,000 SPDC soldiers entered Karenni State from nearby Karen areas. Some Karennis have alleged the SPDC is taking advantage of the unofficial ceasefire with the KNU to concentrate their forces against the Karenni.⁸⁷

83 Irrawaddy (26 Mar 04) North Korea Offered Surface-to-Surface Missiles to Rangoon

84 AFP (2 Jan 04) India says joint operation possible with Myanmar against rebels

85 BBC (6 Jan 04) India reinforces Burma border

86 BBC (6 Jan 04) India reinforces Burma border

87 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (21 Jan 04) Thousands more civilians attacked in Burma as ceasefire talks start

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Between 11 January and 13 February, SPDC and KNSO troops conducted joint attacks against villagers living along the Karen-Karenni border. Some suggest the rationale behind this has been to destroy the villagers' food supplies and deny the Karen-Karenni resistance access to support. Reports say soldiers have also burned villages and planted landmines on approaching roads in some parts of Karenni State. The attacks involved battalions from division 55 MOC-LIB 553, 512 and IB 18 and were launched from Mo-Kee and Pa Saung in Karenni State, focusing on southern parts of Karenni State, into Muthraw and Toungoo Districts of Karen State.⁸⁸

Karen State

On 15 January, the SPDC established a new base in Northern Muthraw district in Karen State. Reports said that the 55th Division of Tactical Command 3, and its 3 battalions (LIB 18, 512 and IB 3) have set up a command center there.

The Free Burma Rangers further reported that on 20, 21 and 22 January, there were clashes between SPDC Battalions and KNLA troops in North East Muthraw district. These battalions were also reported to have increased patrolling the East-West road that divides Muthraw district in Karen State, with orders to shoot on sight. Burmese battalions also mined the road.⁸⁹

On 23 January, an SPDC battalion attempted to attack Sidy village in Northern Karen State but was forced to retreat when they encountered landmines.⁹⁰

In early March, the SPDC fired upon a key Karen stronghold on the Thai-Burma border despite the tentative ceasefire agreement made in January. Col Ner Dah Mya, commander of KNLA Battalion 201 said the SPDC fired on their base in Vallay Kee, south of Myawaddy. Ner Dah Mya said nobody had been injured and the base was not damaged. He also said Karen troops did not return fire. Ner Dah Mya also reported that the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) had been preparing to attack KNU positions in its Seventh Brigade Area, north of Myawaddy, however this was denied by a member of the DKBA operating in the area.⁹¹

88 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (21 Jan 04) Thousands more civilians attacked in Burma as ceasefire talks start

89 Free Burma Rangers (27 Jan 04) Ongoing Burma Army Offensive in the Northern Karen State and Southern Karenni State

90 Free Burma Rangers (27 Jan 04) Ongoing Burma Army Offensive in the Northern Karen State and Southern Karenni State

91 Irrawaddy (11 Mar 04) KNU Base attacked

Karen sources also say SPDC expansion has continued in Karen areas since the ceasefire agreements earlier this year. According to a KNU press release issued on 21 March, the Burma Army has been constructing a motor road linking Kya-in-seikkyi and the Three Pagoda Pass. The press release also reported a continued military buildup around the Karen forces.⁹²

Shan State

Fighting between the Shan State Army-South and Burma Army forces in Tachilek had quieted down since January, but flared up in townships east of Taunggyi. On 11 January, LIB 336 reportedly staged a surprise raid in Mongnai that killed 6 SSA officers.⁹³

In response, the SSA's 759th Brigade attacked the headquarters of the SPDC's Military Operations Command #7's Light Infantry Battalion 574 in Takun Village. Since then, fighting was reported in Mongkerng, Laikha, Namzarng, Kunhing, Mongnai, Langkher and Mongpan, though heavy casualties were not noted by either side. In the Mongton region, where SSA 727th Brigade and LIB 524 are active, one source had said that 'a day has rarely passed since (early January) without any reports of fighting between the two sides.'⁹⁴

Since 1 March, motor vehicles have been forbidden from moving between Nakawngmu and Mongton without an armed escort: "The Army told us an armed escort would be provided only if there were no less than 5 vehicles," said a truck driver.⁹⁵

Mon State

Since mid-December, the SPDC's Thunder Victory Operation No 3 continued in Southern Mon State. Kaowao reported that the offensive meant to wipe out the Hongsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP), an armed group led by two brothers who split from the New Mon State Party last year.⁹⁶

According to the same Kaowao report, the junta secretly ordered soldiers in the Eastern Command to kill ethnic villagers over the age of 18 years. The report said that the order was issued by the Burma Army's Rangoon headquarters on 30 January.⁹⁷

92 SHAN (22 Mar 04) Karens disconcerted by Rangoon road building

93 SHAN (4 Mar 04) Rangoon holding "war talks" with Shans

94 SHAN (4 Mar 04) Rangoon holding "war talks" with Shans

95 SHAN (4 Mar 04) Rangoon holding "war talks" with Shans

96 Kaowao (11 Mar 04) Thunder Victory Operation (no.3): The killing continues

97 Kaowao (11 Mar 04) Thunder Victory Operation (no.3): The killing continues

SECURITY TIGHTENED

Rangoon Police Headquarters have reportedly issued a directive ordering an increase of security measures at 'all important buildings' after recent disturbances in a number of universities.

According to the directive, local police in Arakan Division have been ordered to increase security around Waythali Hall in Akyab and the satellite relay station in Maungdaw. Riot squads from Mon State and Pegu Division have been sent to Thaton and Shwekyin under special arrangements, while the Sagaing Division squad was dispatched to Kyi Ywa in Tabayin Township and the Mandalay squad sent to Kyaukse.⁹⁸

ARMY IN SHORT SUPPLY?

Troops from the Western Command have reportedly been buying rice from Arakanese local farmers since 16 February. According to an unconfirmed report, 192,000 tinn (6,144,000kg) of rice was bought by the Army Supply Authority in Mrauk-O Township. Some have said the rice was purchased for export purposes, but the Authority has said the acquisition was purely for Army supplies.

It has also been suggested that much of the rice was bought below set prices. Rice prices are set at 1,300 kyat per tinn (32 kg) for army purchases, but one report indicated that Army units paid only 900 kyat.⁹⁹

98 BBC (18 Mar 04) Burmese police increase security measures following student protests

99 Narinjara (23 Mar 04) Arakanese Farmers forced to sell rice to the Burmese Army

DRUGS

- **Maj Gen Manas Paorik, Commander of the Thai Pha Muang Drug Suppression Task Force says strengthened security ties between Thailand and Burma is crucial to ending the drug trade.**
- **China is irked by continued drug flows into the PRC and says “the drug control situation in China is still very serious, multipoints of entry and all lines of infiltration of illegal drugs is imposing immense harm to China.”**
- **The US State Department releases its annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Board Report, saying “Burma has reduced poppy production modestly but remains far from demonstrating the counter-narcotics commitment that would...get itself out of the trafficking system”.**
- **SPDC soldiers clash with police in Kawthaung, Southern Burma, in January, when police attempt to inspect a poppy plantation allegedly sponsored by the Burma Army.**
- **Thai Police says a new drug route has emerged from Burma-Laos-Thailand as a result of stepped up pressure along the Thai-Burma border.**
- **Local SPDC officials force villagers in Shan State to pay exorbitant fines after the crop-substitution program “New Destiny” fails.**
- **Pao Yuchang, leader of the UWSA, dismisses his younger brother from commander of the UWSA Special Regiment to appease Thai officials.**

COUNTER NARCOTICS

Thailand Orders Friendly Ties

In early January Commander of the Thai Pha Muang Drug Suppression Task Force, Major-General Manas Paorik, told his men to rethink their attitudes towards Burmese border troops. The command comes as part of Thaksin's Prime Ministerial push to strengthen counter narcotics capabilities along the Thai-Burma border. Maj Gen Manas said strengthened security ties between Thailand and Burma are crucial to stopping the drug flow into Thailand. The

general said he has instructed his men to avoid any 'untoward incidents' with their Burmese counterparts.¹⁰⁰

China to Continue Anti-Drug Collaboration...But Fed-Up

A senior Chinese police official said China remained committed to continuing its international anti-drug cooperation efforts. At the February meeting of the National Narcotics Control Commission in Beijing, Chinese officials praised the 38 cooperative anti-drug campaigns launched with Burma and Laos in the last year, and said China would continue future cooperation. Deputy Director of the Commission, Luo Feng said China would further promote regional anti-drug mechanisms, such as the Memorandum of Understanding on anti-drug cooperation in the East Asia region, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the ASEAN anti-drug action plan. China also promised to promote information sharing and cooperative activities to prevent cross country drug trafficking in the coming year.¹⁰¹

However, two weeks later, Chinese ministers bemoaned the continued effects of Burmese narcotics on China, asserting "the infiltration of illegal drugs is causing immense harm to China." Deputy Director of the National Narcotics Control Commission Luo Feng said "the drug control situation in China is still very serious, multipoints of entry and all lines of infiltration of illegal drugs is imposing immense harm to China." According to the National Narcotics Control Commission, Laos and Burma produced 70 to 80 tonnes of heroin in 2003, 80 per cent of which entered China across the Burma border. "Myanmar heroin is feeding the habits of heroin users in China."¹⁰²

India and Burma to Intensify Cooperation

India has agreed to intensify drug suppression activities with the junta along the Burma border. Sources from the Indian customs department said the two countries reached an agreement to share intelligence to curb the growing problem. India has also provided 'sophisticated equipment' to the junta in a further effort to suppress smuggling.

The Indian government has recently intensified its border patrols, and has also increased its deployment of anti-smuggling units in Moreh.¹⁰³ This border cooperation comes at the same time as the Indian government is

100 Bangkok Post (5 Jan 04) Burma ties crucial for suppression

101 Xinhua (12 Feb 04) China active in int'l drug-control cooperation

102 AFP (1 Mar 04) China laments heroin influx from Burma

103 Mizzima (1 Mar 04) India assists Burma to Fight Drugs Smuggling

pushing for the SPDC to begin military offensives against “anti-Indian” groups inside Burma. [see Military Chapter]

US REPORT OFFERS SMALL CONCESSION

On 1 March, the United States released the annual International Narcotics Control Strategy report saying Burma remained the world’s second largest supplier of opium. “Burma has reduced poppy production modestly but remains far from demonstrating the counter-narcotics commitment that would...get itself out of the trafficking system,” said Robert Charles, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement.¹⁰⁴

The report said Burma continued to play a leading role in the regional trafficking of ATS (Amphetamine Type Stimulants, a.k.a methamphetamine). ATS seizures declined in the first ten months of 2003, from approximately 10 million tablets in previous years to a mere 4 million tablets. The junta has undertaken little substantive activity to stop ATS production and trafficking apart from the limited seizures. It also said that in 2003, there were “troubling signs that a nascent domestic market for ATS began to emerge in Burma.”

UNODC: Shift to Synthetic Drugs

INCS report included reference to the annual opium poppy survey jointly conducted by the UNODC, US government and SPDC in Shan State. The survey also suggested a shift towards synthetic drugs. The survey indicates poppy-free zones had been partially enforced, but alternative development projects were effective in replacing opium production as a source of income for growers.

Report Findings

- **Law Enforcement Measures underfunded.** The Rangoon-based Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) (comprising police, customs, military intelligence and the army) suffered from a lack of adequate resources.
- **Fewer refinery closures.** The government dismantled 7 heroin labs in the first ten months of 2003, compared to 17 from the previous year.
- **Fewer poppy fields destroyed.** Only 683 hectares were destroyed during the 2002/03 crop year, compared to the 10,466 hectares (25,862 acres) during the 2001/02 crop year. Poppy cultivation in the Wa Special

104 AFP (2 Mar 04) US takes new swipe at Myanmar over drugs

region increased by over 5,500 hectares, and accounted for 52% of Burma's total poppy crop.

- **Drug Flow/Transit.** The majority of ATS and heroin in Burma is produced in small, mobile labs along the Thai-Burma and Sino-Burma borders, in areas controlled by active, or former insurgent groups. The report highlighted the United Wa State Army, the Kokang Chinese and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) as controlling the market. Heroin and methamphetamine are then trafficked through China, Thailand, India, and, to a lesser extent, Laos, Bangladesh, and Burma.¹⁰⁵
- **Cultivation and Production.** Opium production declined for the seventh straight year. "The area under cultivation dropped by almost two-thirds, from 163,100 hectares in 1996 to approximately 47,130 hectares in 2003. However, the 2003 opium/hectare yield rate increased by about 18 per cent from the previous year, reflecting favorable weather and more intense cultivation in Wa areas." [see Opium Production: Rising or falling? for contradictory evidence]
- **Questioning motives.** Several of the narcotics trafficking armies, particularly the Wa, control amphetamine production labs and 'extensive trafficking operations,' leading to questions over whether the gradual departure from opium cultivation took place in order to concentrate on ATS operations. These ATS operations remained largely intact and are a major factor in amphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia and beyond.

OPIUM PRICES RISING IN SHAN STATE

Opium prices have risen across Shan State in response to increased demand. A businessman in Northern Shan State said prices in 2003 ranged between 280,000 and 300,000 kyat (approx US\$ 300 – 320) per viss (1.6kg). They have sold for 450,000 – 500,000 kyat (US\$ 483 – 537). The SHAN report has also suggested that opium prices in Southern Shan State rose from 200,000 to 250,000 kyat (US\$ 215 – 268), while prices in Eastern Shan State rose to 320,000 kyat (US\$ 344).¹⁰⁶

OPIUM PRODUCTION: RISING OR FALLING?

In response to the UNODC and the International Narcotics Control Board reports, which said opium production in Burma had reduced in recent years, local sources released disputing figures.

105 US State Department (1 Mar 04) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report

106 SHAN (4 Feb 04) Prices soaring at harvest season

A recent SHAN report stated that the total growing areas in the north had not diminished despite official UNODC figures. SHAN reported that the majority of farmers had instead moved to the Wa region east of the Salween, which had little effect on the actual rate of production¹⁰⁷

Other reports showed that the 2003-2004 harvest fell substantially due to bad weather. The Karenni Information Network Group said production in the eastern part of the Pawn valley fell from 5-8 viss/acre to 1-1.5 viss/acre. Refugees from the Salween and sources in Mongton agreed that more people were engaged in cultivation: "Only heaven and rain have not been kind to us."¹⁰⁸ Another Wa leader said 2004's harvest has diminished "but this is not due to the Wa leaders or the United Nations. It is simply because of the bad weather."¹⁰⁹

FRIENDS OF THE MILITARY ... TRADE WITHOUT BARRIERS

Local traders in Shan State reported that people close to the military continued to cultivate opium despite official attempts at restricting the practice. They say cultivation continued in force in Nan Kham Township, in villages like Pan Say and Kyan Kar where ethnic Chinese live.

Mizzima reported most buyers were Chinese nationals. One trader in Pan Say village said U Kyaw Myint, a Chinese national and village elder, was the largest cultivator of opium in the region. The trader said Kyaw Myint has a close relationship with Gen Khin Nyunt and "has not been subjected to restrictions on cultivating opium in the past."¹¹⁰

Crop Substitution Fails, Villagers Forced To Pay

Local SPDC soldiers have forced villagers in Shan State to pay the junta's outlay costs for crop-substitution projects after poor monsoon harvests meant the 'New Destiny' paddy failed. According to Lashio officials, poor harvests in Shan State resulted in a loss of 27 million kyat. Villagers were ordered to pay for SPDC losses, with fines ranging from 100,000 to 400,000 kyat per farm (US\$ 107 – 430). Those who could not afford to pay risk losing their fields.¹¹¹ [see Human Rights]

107 SHAN (4 Feb 04) Prices soaring at harvest season

108 SHAN (29 Mar 04) Opium output down, credit goes to bad weather

109 SHAN (29 Mar 04) Opium output down, credit goes to bad weather

110 Mizzima (17 Mar 04) Opium cultivation still continues

111 SHAN (5 Feb 04) New Destiny paddy project doomed

JUNTA & POLICE CLASH AT SPDC POPPY PLANTATION

In January, SPDC soldiers clashed with local police forces in Kawthaung, Southern Burma, after the police attempted to inspect a poppy plantation reportedly sponsored by the SPDC. Due to the presence of SPDC forces, police were unable to inspect the plantation or make any arrests. Local farmers have said the poppy plantation, located near the Thailand-Burma border on Maliwun Hill, supplied dried poppy leaves, which are used to provide alkaloid extracts.

This is the first reported case of a poppy plantation in the Kawthaung region of southern Burma. Locals have said there are also many similar poppy fields on the nearby islands in the Mergui archipelago.¹¹²

“ASEAN”: THE NEW NARCOTIC DRINK

A new narcotic reportedly drink named “Asean” has replaced amphetamine tablets in the stimulant market as Thai authorities crack down on amphetamine tablets. The main ingredient in the drink is dried poppy leaf powder, produced in poppy plantations similar to the one at Maliwun Hill.

The drink is reportedly available at big restaurants along the Thailand-Burma border where it costs only 500 kyat in Kawthung and 30 baht in Ranong (approx US\$ 0.75). Drink sales are increasing, as narcotics drugs become scarce.¹¹³

NEW TRADE ROUTE?

Thai police said recent arrests in Thailand have exposed a new drug smuggling network. They said the new route avoids travel along the Thai-Burma border, instead using routes through Laos. The arrest of four Thais on 22 February in Bangkok indicated the transfer of methamphetamine tablets from Laos, said national police chief Gen Sant Sarutanond. The suspected leader of the group, a 24 year old Laotian national, was detained in the northeastern Thai province of Nong Khai. “The suspects were totally new faces,” said Sant. “This is a new network set up to avoid police after the mounting crackdown along the Thai-Myanmar border.”¹¹⁴

112 BBC Monitor (25 Jan 04) New narcotic drink gains popularity in Burma’s Kawthaung, Ranong

113 BBC Monitor (25 Jan 04) New narcotic drink gains popularity in Burma’s Kawthaung, Ranong

114 AP (23 Feb 04) Police says drug arrests expose new smuggling route

WA

Wa Ecstasy?

SHAN reports have indicated drug operators in Mongton have branched out into Methylendioxyamphetamine (MDMA), also known as ecstasy. The pills have been available in Mongton, Shan State, and across the Thai for the past two months.

Original reports suggested the Wa were manufacturing four brands of ecstasy:¹¹⁵

Airplane (White), produced by Shao Yin in Mongjawd, in partnership with Infantry Battalion 277

Dragon (Green), produced by an ethnic Chinese from Kunlong, Northern Shan State, in Mongjawd, in partnership with Infantry Battalion 225

Playboy's Bunny (Pink), produced by Wei Hsuehying, Wei Hsuehkang's younger brother, in Mongjawd, in partnership with Infantry Battalion 65

Butterfly (Yellow) in Mongjawd, producer unidentified

Later reports from insider sources confirmed the availability of ecstasy in the border regions. "They only compress the finished product brought down from Panghsang into pills," said the SHAN source. "The same goes for yaba (methamphetamines). Only heroin is 'cooked' here."¹¹⁶

UWSA: Dancing to Thai tune...or Chinese beat?

Pao Yuchang, leader of the UWSA, dismissed his youngest brother from a key command position over alleged involvement in drug abuse and trafficking. Bao Yu-hwa was dismissed in late January from his position as commander of the UWSA Special Regiment near the Thailand border and placed in detention just north of Kengtung.

The move was reportedly an attempt to gain favor with the Thai government to quell suspicions of UWSA's involvement in the drug trade.¹¹⁷ But Mahasang, leader of the non-ceasefire Wa National Organization, said the

115 SHAN (19 Mar 04) Wa branching out to ecstasy?

116 SHAN (24 Mar 04) Insider confirms border ecstasy

117 Nation (3 Feb 04) Wa leader sacks brother from key post. NOTE: Pao Yuchang is also known as Bao Yu-Chiang.

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decision to oust Pao Yuchang's brother only came after Bao's three day visit to China.

Other sources insisted Pao Yu-hua had not been taken into custody and was still at large in Tachilek. "He is thinner, perhaps because of worry in addition to excessive drug taking," said a Tachilek-based businessman, who had seen him recently, "but he's still there."¹¹⁸

Wa Interrogation Center: Collaborative Bribery

At least 113 captured drug runners were held captive in a Wa-run detention center north of Tachilek. According to a recently released detainee, Wa strongmen and Burmese military intelligence officials were using the detention center to extort drug runners caught by MI or Thai authorities.

The Shan national said he was released only after his family turned his land and paddy field deeds over to Pao Yu-hua. Of the 113 people in detention during his stay, 40 were unable to pay and taken to Mongyawn (Yongpang). According to the detainee, Pao Yuchang's deputy conducted harsh interrogation sessions on the defaulters. Nearby locals confirmed this, saying they had often heard cries of pain and loud oaths.¹¹⁹

Wa Refineries Move

Wei Hsueh-kang, a Wa strongman wanted in both Thailand and the United States, recently moved one of his refineries to Mongyi, a village in Mongyawng township, close to the Thai border. Chao Ching, one of Wei's close associates and the man who set up the refinery was reportedly placed in charge of the refinery on 4 February.¹²⁰

ATS Factories at Panghsang

Two ATS factories were found in Panghsang, Shan State. Maj Hsarmkiang, a Shan commander with the Wa Central Security regiment, reported two ATS factories just outside Panghsang. He said a walled compound overlooking Nalawd village housed a 'cavern' where four 'machines' manufactured pills with the WY logo. The factory reportedly had a capacity to manufacture 7 million pills per day. A second factory was located at Loi Parngpeng, where the Hwe Namngern reservoir was located. "It also had a cave factory

118 SHAN (2 Feb 04) Druglord still at large

119 SHAN (7 Jan 04) Wa druglord still in Tachilek

120 SHAN (25 Feb 04) Wei sets up shop in upper triangle

operated by Wei Hsueh-kang's people...but I never had a chance to visit there..." he said.¹²¹

Wa Take Ruby Hill

Troops from the UWSA's 171st Military Region seized the Loi Hpaleng range. Despite reports that the range was "crammed" with red ruby stones, some said the region is ideal for drug activities. Sources have said that Pao Yuchang and Wei Hsueh-kang think the place might be an ideal front for their drug activities. "The place is quite rugged...It takes two days from Nakawngmu (halfway between Mongton and the Thai border) even to get there."¹²²

SEIZURES

- 13 Jan SPDC intelligence officials and Hpa-an Special Anti-drug squad seized 1,292 stimulant tablets in Letpan Village, Hpa-an district, reportedly bearing WY letters, widely recognized as a UWSA logo.¹²³
- 14 Jan The SPDC seized 40,550 tablets of stimulant drugs in Tachilek, Shan State.¹²⁴
- 24 Jan The Mandalay Special Anti-drug Squad arrested Aung Myint at the Nansa Hotel in Chanayethazan Township, seizing 2 310 stimulant tablets bearing the WY logo. The Myanmar Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) reported that action was being taken against the culprit under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.¹²⁵
- 19 Jan 20.66 kg of raw opium was seized in Sittaung Village tract, Pinlaung Township, Southern Shan State.¹²⁶
- 21 Jan Local intelligence in Myitkyina and the Myitkyina special anti-drug squad seized 19.33 grams of heroin at the house of Maung Si Li and

121 SHAN (18 Mar 04) Defector: Labs in Wa laps

122 SHAN (4 Mar 04) Wa grab gem mountain

123 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of January 2004 Drugs Seizures

124 Xinhua (14 Jan 04) Myanmar seizes large amount of stimulant drugs

125 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of January 2004 Drugs Seizures

126 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of January 2004 Drugs Seizures

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Ma Ei Ei Wai of No 132, Aung San Road, Thida Ward, Myitkyina.¹²⁷

- 24 Jan Local Muse intelligence and the Muse Special Anti-drug squad seized six blocks of heroin weighing 2.1 kilograms in Muse Township. Two men were arrested in relation to the incident. The CCDAC reported that authorities seized 64 blocks of heroin weighing 24.19 kilos found in a ditch in Tawsaing Village, Pansaing.¹²⁸
- 18 Feb One Burmese man and three Thais were arrested for the possession of 16kg of heroin in Bangkok. Kyan Shown Pons, the Burmese national, was reportedly the courier and had come to Bangkok from Chiang Rai. Pons was reportedly meant to deliver the heroin to three people who had earlier been arrested by Thai police for possessing 8kg of heroin.¹²⁹
- 27 Feb Authorities in Northern Shan State seized 74 blocks of heroin weighing 25.9 kilos.¹³⁰
- 28 Feb Myitkyina intelligence and Anti-drug Squad seized 220g of heroin found in 11 soap cases in a house in Hsekhin Village, Phakant Township.¹³¹
- 19 Mar Yangon Special Anti-Drug Squad and Dagon Myothit (South) Police Station seized 30.77 kilos of marijuana at a house in Dagon Myothit South.¹³²

127 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of January 2004 Drugs Seizures

128 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of January 2004 Drugs Seizures

129 AFP (19 Feb 04) Thailand catches Myanmar 'courier,' three Thais with 16 kilos of heroin

130 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of February 2004 Drugs Seizures

131 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of February 2004 Drugs Seizures

132 Myanmar Central Committee for Abuse Control Report of March 2004 Drugs Seizures

ECONOMY

- **Resource diplomacy thrives in early 2004, with India and South Korea clamoring to access gas discoveries off Arakan State. The junta is set to rake in a cool US\$ 800 million per year from the A-1 mining zone.**
- **Amidst energy shortages throughout Burma, the generals persist in exporting oil and gas discoveries, where development projects co-exist alongside forced labor and human rights abuses.**
- **With the help of the ever-friendly Singaporeans, the SPDC has managed to change their international trading currency to Euros, thereby mitigating some effects of the US sanctions.**
- **Without warning, the SPDC imposes a rice export ban on 1 January, leaving rice traders open to legal liability with international traders.**
- **6 BIMSTEC members sign an agreement to form a Free Trade Area by 2012.**

NATURAL RESOURCES: REGIME'S REDEMPTION

Natural resources investments and explorations played a large part in keeping the junta afloat in early 2004. New discoveries boosted the SPDC's financial hopes as control over the country's largest export and investment earner increased their political leeway. The junta capitalized on the attractiveness of its natural resources, offering "investment incentives" to foreign companies eyeing the country.

Obnoxious Gases: Large Scale Discovery in A-1

On 15 January, Daewoo International reported a discovery of large-scale natural gas reserves in Arakan State's A-1 offshore block. The December 2003 drilling test struck deposits estimated at between 4 and 6 trillion cubic feet of gas.¹³³ Daewoo CEO Lee Tae-Yong sealed the deal by quickly flying to Rangoon on 16 January to negotiate the find with Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt and Energy Minister Brig-Gen Lun Thi.¹³⁴

¹³³ Business Standard (29 Jan 04) Myanmar in talks for gas pipeline, GAIL may invest Rs 4,000 crore to move the gas

¹³⁴ AFP (17 Jan 04) Daewoo CEO in Myanmar to discuss major gas find

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Expectations gathered steam when Brig Gen Lun-Thi met with Indian Petroleum Minister Ram Naik on 29 January to discuss the possibility of building a Burma-India gas pipeline for exporting the gas.¹³⁵ Lun Thi also reportedly offered a US\$116 million refinery revamp contract and promises of the A-3 gas field to state-sponsored Indian enterprise GAIL as part of his attempt to shore up the export market.¹³⁶

At the same time, Daewoo obtained the rights to explore M block on 12 February. On 18 February, Daewoo also won the right to explore the A-3 block, despite the tentative promises to GAIL. The exploration of A-3 block is to be conducted under an agreement signed in late March with the Ministry of Energy and is likely to begin in 2006.

A-1 Mining Zone – Who is Involved?

- Daewoo 60%
- Korea Gas Corporation 10%
- Indian Petroleum Corporation subsidiary ONGC Videsh /OVL 20%
- Indian Gas Corporation (GAIL) 10%

Under the production sharing contract (PSC), the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), a state-owned company under the Department of Energy, has a 65% share of the production, while the consortium reserves the right to market the remaining 35%.¹³⁷

GAIL signed a Memorandum of Understanding with OVL and Daewoo International to market the gas produced in India. It is expected that GAIL will have access to at least 2.1 trillion cubic feet for the Indian market.¹³⁸

How Much Gas is There?

The junta is poised to reap at least US\$800 million a year from the project (also termed the Shwe prospect) and could even receive up to US\$3 billion annually.¹³⁹

135 Business Standard (29 Jan 04) Myanmar in talks for gas pipeline, GAIL may invest Rs 4,000 crore to move the gas

136 Press Trust of India (29 Jan 04) India plans to export diesel to Myanmar

137 Business Standard (29 Jan 04) Myanmar in talks for gas pipeline, GAIL may invest Rs 4,000 crore to move the gas

138 Business Standard (29 Jan 04) Myanmar in talks for gas pipeline, GAIL may invest Rs 4,000 crore to move the gas

139 Asia Tribune (14 Feb 04) Cheers, jeers over giant gas find

At present, gas reserves in A-1 block are estimated at between 4 and 6 trillion cubic feet, equivalent to total deposits between 700 million and 1.1 billion barrels of petroleum, and 80-120 million tons of liquefied natural gas. Daewoo CEO Lee Tae Yong says other mines within the block are also expected to contain between 7 and 12 trillion cubic feet of gas in deposits.¹⁴⁰

GAIL is to spend the next 5-6 months conducting a feasibility study into potential transport routes. Possible plans thus far are an offshore pipeline with a landfall point somewhere in south Bengal, or through an onshore pipeline to a suitable point in Mizoram.¹⁴¹

Contradictions

The junta is exporting fuel while Burma is in short supply of energy. Complete lack of consultation at both local and national levels led to strong opposition to the Shwe Prospect. There was no public debate over whether the gas should be exported or used to generate electricity and industry in energy-starved Burma. In February, even Rangoon suffered from a chronic shortage of electricity. Power was distributed on rotation among the townships in the capital. Some townships only had electricity between 2am and 6am. Reports from Arakan State indicated that it too, was subject to harsh energy rationing. The export of energy reserves without first developing a cohesive policy that ensures domestic access to adequate energy creates legitimate skepticism over who will benefit from the gas explorations.¹⁴²

Proceeds from the exports do not benefit the people. The Anti Gas Export Committee, a local Arakanese organization, has said the benefits of the gas deals will go to the regime, not to the ordinary citizens. "The hard cash that will come from this deal will be used to buy more weapons that will be used to suppress the pro-democracy supporters," said Kyaw Han, a member of the Anti-Gas Export Committee. "This is the largest non-renewable natural resource of Burma but the junta has disregarded the rights of the local people...This is blatant violation of human rights by the military dictatorship," he said.¹⁴³

Development under the SPDC makes villagers more vulnerable. Sources from inside Burma have reported that the military has already started "forcibly relocating villages to create a pipeline corridor." They have also

140 Korea Herald (15 Jan 04) Daewoo Int'l Explores Gas Mine

141 Press Trust of India (29 Jan 04) India plans to export diesel to Myanmar

142 Asia Tribune (14 Feb 04) Cheers, jeers over giant gas find

143 Asia Tribune (14 Feb 04) Cheers, jeers over giant gas find

reported instances of forced labor in the construction of service roads and military facilities in areas near the survey work.¹⁴⁴

INDIA: A BLESSING AND A CURSE

While the gas discovery has offered an opportunity to industrialize India's energy-starved North East and develop its potential as a trade route for South East Asia, issues concerning access to the energy also gave rise to political sensitivities, to which the Indians hastily prepared to cover their backs.

Covering their backs. Indian companies have avoided commenting on alleged human rights violations in the project, but high level sources in GAIL have said "the conglomerate is taking steps very carefully".

"We have already told the Burmese government that we will not tolerate any forced labor and will also speak to the locals if they have any complaints," the top official in New Delhi said in an interview.¹⁴⁵

A GOLDEN LAND: DIAMOND AND GOLD MINING AT SET GA DONE

On 12 January the Burmese Department of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration (DGSE) signed a mining concession with Leeward Capital and Jet Gold Corp for the drilling of gold and diamonds in a 70,000 hectare plot in northern Shan State. The Set Ga Done Concession agreement was approved on 10 December last year.¹⁴⁶ Leeward Capital and Jet Gold Corp are Canadian companies.

The Set Ga Done Agreement

On 31 March, Leeward Capital signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Jet Gold governing their joint participation in the exploration of the Set Ga Done concession. Pursuant to the MOU, Jet Gold agreed to expend an initial US\$200,000 in acquisition and exploration costs. Subsequent expenditures will be shared equally with Leeward. Leeward agreed to a 75% interest in the property, with the further 25% interest falling to the SPDC. The Leeward/Jet Gold interest may be earned through the expenditure of US\$1,750,000 in exploration over a three year period and an additional US\$1,000,000 on a feasibility study.¹⁴⁷

144 Asia Tribune (14 Feb 04) Cheers, jeers over giant gas find

145 Asia Tribune (14 Feb 04) Cheers, jeers over giant gas find

146 Stockhouse (12 Jan 04) The Formal Signing of the Set Ga Done Gold Property in Myanmar

147 Mines and Communities (23 Mar 04) Drilling starts in Myanmar

The two companies have negotiated a 1,000 meter diamond drilling contract with 'Drillcore Indoasia' Ltd.¹⁴⁸

Drilling began in March.

NEW GEMSTONE MINING AREAS

According to the New Light of Myanmar, Burmese mining authorities approved new blocks for gem mining by local companies. The blocks will be distributed under a bidding system and mining agreements will operate via a production sharing agreement that gives the SPDC a certain per centage of profits. The three new blocks are set in the mine areas of Phakant, Lonkhin and Nantyahseik, Kachin State.¹⁴⁹

SANCTIONS

Contradictory reports on sanctions continued to arise, with claims that factories are both re-opening and closing. One report indicated that 31 factories in Hlaingtharyar Industrial Zone, which had closed last year, have now reopened. 10 of these are reportedly running under normal conditions, with orders from Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, South Korea, Malaysia, Europe, Hong Kong and Taiwan.¹⁵⁰ Another report said 20 factories in Yangon Industrial Zone closed down during January, with a general downturn in garment production.¹⁵¹

Washington has continued to push the sanctions issue, with Colin Powell promising that he "will be looking at the sanctions issue very, very carefully with the same attitude I looked at it last year."¹⁵²

'Made in Myanmar' Shirts Found in NBA Store

Several dozen shirts were pulled from the shelves of the National Basketball Association (NBA) Fifth Avenue store after Charles Kernaghan, Director of the National Labor Committee, an anti-sweatshop group, accused the NBA of selling shirts that were made in Myanmar. The manufacturing contractor produced records indicating that the shirts had been 'rushed in' last August, prior to the imposition of the US import ban on 1 September 2003.¹⁵³

148 JetGold Corp website: <http://www.jetgoldcorp.com/>

149 Xinhua (16 Mar 04) Myanmar designates new blocks for gem mining

150 Xinhua (19 Feb 04) Some factories resume operation in Myanmar since US sanctions

151 Xinhua (14 Jan 04) US sanctions affects Myanmar's garment production

152 Reuters (10 Mar 04) Powell suggests US to keep ban on Myanmar imports

153 NY Times (21 Jan 04) N.B.A. Pulls Sweatshirts Illegally Imported From Myanmar

CHANGE TO EURO CONFIRMED

On 18 January, British newspaper The Observer confirmed that the generals had changed their international trading currency to the euro, with the help of Belgian based conglomerate SWIFT.¹⁵⁴ A spokesperson from SWIFT said the group was working, through a Singapore regional office, to set up new banking systems for the four Burmese banks offered membership last November, and also said effective from March 2004, the country's central bank would be billed in euro.¹⁵⁵

INDIA: NEW OFFICIAL TRADE POINT

In another bid to enhance access to Southeast Asian markets, Indian officials opened a new trade point in Rih, Mizoram State. "With the opening of the [new] trade point, this region will become a major trade hub in South-east Asia."¹⁵⁶ The new access point received much praise from Indian traders. The Indo-Myanmar Traders Union said that the Rih border point marks a new beginning for trade in North Eastern India.¹⁵⁷ The Indian government earmarked US\$440,000 for the development of infrastructure at Rih, most of which is expected to be spent on improving roads. However, at present, only 22 items can legally be traded with Burma across the border point. Trade bodies have had little success in expanding the list of items that are legally allowed to cross the border.

The Indo Myanmar Traders Union has also said that traders in the region are eager for Longwa and Pangsay to also be opened as trade points, so they too can "take advantage of the growing economic relationship between Burma and India."¹⁵⁸

At the end of January, the Indian Petroleum Secretary reported that the Numaligarh Refinery in India would begin exporting surplus diesel to Burma by July 2004.¹⁵⁹ On 15 March, Business Standard reported that the Indian Finance ministry had rejected Burmese proposals for the sale of diesel fuel on the grounds that the trade between India and Burma was too low. The report said the Ministry had suggested reviewing the case if India started importing natural gas.¹⁶⁰ On 16 March, the managing director of the Numaliagrh refinery told Mizzima that this was not the case and that "...officials from

154 The Observer (18 Jan 04) Banks bust Burma trade ban

155 The Observer (18 Jan 04) Banks bust Burma trade ban

156 Mizzima (5 Feb 04) New Trading Point Opened on India-Burma Border

157 Mizzima (5 Feb 04) New Trading Point Opened on India-Burma Border

158 Mizzima (5 Feb 04) New Trading Point Opened on India-Burma Border

159 Press Trust of India (29 Jan 04) India plans to export diesel to Myanmar.

160 Business Standard (15 Mar 04) Myanmar not to get Indian diesel

Numaligarh refinery are now in Myanmar to accelerate the process of exporting diesel and to fix the price.”¹⁶¹

NO GO AREA: BANGLADESH SHIPPING ROUTE SUSPENDED

Direct shipping between Burma and Bangladesh was suspended due to limited trade and high operational costs. The lone vessel operator suspended the Chittagong-Rangoon route after suffering losses of nearly half a million dollars from only 18 voyages since introducing the line in 2003.¹⁶²

BIMSTEC FREE TRADE AREA

On 8 February, six of the seven BIMSTEC members signed the Framework Agreement on the Free Trade Area. All of the Bimstec members apart from Bangladesh have signed the agreement which commits the grouping’s more developed members (India, Sri Lanka, Thailand) to abolishing tariffs by 2012, while Burma, Bhutan and Nepal have a further five year grace period. Tariff reductions will begin in 2006, with a number of items designated as “fast track” items, to be traded at zero tariffs by mid 2009 and mid 2011.¹⁶³ This Agreement greatly enhances access to regional markets for Burmese raw materials.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

Sr Gen Than Shwe urges agricultural development

On 2 March, Sr Gen Than Shwe urged Burmese peasants to boost the development of the agricultural sector and “strive for full realization of the production target.” At Burma’s annual Peasants Day, Than Shwe called for nationwide agricultural development to boost rice production and export because “the agricultural sector is the nation’s main economic pillar.”¹⁶⁴

Unlikely. Cohesive efforts to boost agricultural development are increasingly difficult as prices of basic commodities have skyrocketed after last year’s salary rise for government servants. The price hike has meant non-government employees suffered further hardship and a dramatic fall in rice prices has made things even more difficult for farmers.¹⁶⁵

161 Mizzima (16 Mar 04) India to Discuss Export diesel to Burma

162 Xinhua (5 Feb 04) Bangladesh-Myanmar direct shipping route suspended

163 Asia Pulse (9 Feb 04) India, 5 BIMSTEC members to sign free trade deal

164 The New Light of Myanmar (20 Mar 04) Economic development must be building up the nation

165 Narinjara (9 Jan 04) Prices Rise in Arakan as the Salary of Government Servants Increase

MORE CONTRADICTIONS: RICE EXPORT BAN

Despite Than Shwe's Peasants Day claims, the junta has imposed a six-month ban on rice exports in a bid to keep rice prices down after canceling the rice subsidy to state employees last year. The export ban, effective 1 January, also applies to chilli, onions, sesame and maize. The ban was not publicized or publicly acknowledged. Traders themselves were unaware of the ban until their goods were blocked from leaving the country.¹⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, the plan backfired, causing rice prices to fall excessively low, sparking concern among the rice farmers. The Economist Intelligence Unit has suggested it may cause long term damage to the new export trade. Traders also face potential legal action from foreign companies who had already ordered large quantities of rice following last year's liberalization of the rice trade.¹⁶⁷

RAW GOODS LIBERALIZATION

Sugarcane, cotton and rubber production was also liberalized, according to the New Light of Myanmar. "With a view to ensuring greater economic development and better practice of the market-oriented economic system, the government has allowed free trade of such raw crops as sugarcane, cotton and rubber," said Sr Gen Than Shwe in March. Rubber, however, may only be exported once domestic needs have been met.¹⁶⁸

THREE BANKS REOPEN

On 29 January, three of the six Burmese banks closed during the 2003 banking crisis have reopened after the Crisis Committee cleared them for normal trading. The Myanmar Oriental Bank (MOB), Myanmar Universal Bank (MUB) and the Kanbawza Bank (KB) were cleared to begin normal banking business from 2 February 2004.¹⁶⁹

FOREIGN TRADE

Buy Less, Export More

In February, the junta sponsored publication, Business Tank released figures suggesting Burma's 2003 exports rose 2% from 2002 to US\$2.5 billion. It also said Burma's imports fell by 14.2 per cent to US\$1.8 billion. The results

166 EIU (Feb 04) Myanmar Country Report

167 EIU (Feb 04) Myanmar Country Report

168 The New Light of Myanmar (20 Mar 04) Economic development must be building up the nation

169 AFP (29 Jan 04) Three private Myanmar banks to reopen after last year's crisis

have been attributed to the junta's "buy less, export more" strategy which aims to encourage home-made goods, limit imports and substitute imported goods with domestic products as much as possible. According to the report, Thailand was the country's largest export partner during 2003, with US\$1.09 billion dollars, followed by India (US\$325 million), the United States (US\$201 million) and Singapore (US\$108 million). Singapore and China represented the largest import partners, with US\$612 million and US\$262 million respectively.¹⁷⁰

No More Prawns

Following US sanctions, Singaporean and Malaysian businesses stopped buying prawn from Burma. Prawn has since been smuggled into Bangladesh through black market border trade. Bangladesh prawn traders have complained, arguing that the influx of prawns caused a crash in prices, and also said that Burmese prawns are packed with chemicals, affecting their quality.¹⁷¹

China-Burma Trade: US\$1 billion in 2003

According to official statistics, Burma-China bilateral trade exceeded US\$1 billion in 2003. The figures from Burma's official statistics show that, including border trade, Burma's exports to China reached about US\$170 million, while its imports from China were US\$900 million. The figures also show China has invested over US\$64 million dollars in the country, over 10 projects, placing it as the 15th largest foreign investor.¹⁷²

Next Port of Call

The recently appointed Asean Ports Association (APA) chairman Datin Paduka O.C. Phang has set out to make Burma and Laos members of the association. She says that as ASEAN members, the two countries should not be left out of port and harbour cooperation. The Association provides members with a body dedicated to regional cooperation in port and harbour development operations and management.¹⁷³

170 Xinhua (23 Feb 04) Myanmar exports increase slightly, imports fall sharply in 2003.

171 Narinjara (5 Jan 04) Burmese prawn may harm Bangladesh's prawn export

172 Xinhua (22 Mar 04) Sino-Myanmar bilateral economic trade ties get new momentum

173 Bernama (7 Jan 04) New APA Chief Aims To Rope In Laos And Myanmar As Members

East-West Corridor

Representatives from Burma, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam participated in a Workshop in Laos on 18 – 19 February to discuss ways to utilize economic opportunities from the East-West Economic Corridor.¹⁷⁴

QUICK MONEY MAKERS: A GUIDE FOR DICTATORS

Japan Tax

The Burmese embassy in Tokyo was collecting an “income tax” from Burmese people living in Japan. Japan’s Foreign Ministry commenced investigating the “tax”, over suspicions that it violated customary international law. Burmese living in Japan were forced to pay the embassy between 200,000 and 300,000 yen for passport renewal, in addition to paying 10% of their income, or a fixed fee of 10,000 yen per month. According to officials at the Burma Office Japan, other Burmese embassies have collected similar taxes as part of attempts to acquire foreign currency. The embassy reportedly rejected passport renewal unless payments were made. The officials also said that the ‘taxation’ system dates back to the 1960s.¹⁷⁵

Foreign Investment for Tourism

The junta pledged to develop the Mergui archipelago into a major tourist destination and is seeking foreign investment in the region. The border point of Kawthaung is being used to encourage tourists to the area, alongside foreign investment.¹⁷⁶

Concessions in Exclusive Economic Zone

Burma has granted a Thai company rights to fish in its exclusive economic zone in a deal expected to rake in US\$260 million over the next five years. The five year deal includes over US\$250 million in payment for the fishing rights, as well as an expected US\$8.4 million that will be earned in import tax on the diesel used by the boats.¹⁷⁷[see Thai-Burma relations]

174 Xinhua (16 Feb 04) Mekong's road project to provide regional economic opportunities

175 Jiji Press Ticker Service (28 Mar 04) Myanmar Embassy Collecting Myanmarese in Japan

176 Xinhua (23 Feb 04) Myanmar to invite foreign investment for archipelago tourist development

177 AFP (14 Mar 04) Myanmar grants Thai firms exclusive fisheries deal: report

Sell Some Gems

The junta held its bi-annual Gems Emporium from 16 - 21 March. Foreign merchants from six countries, primarily Thailand and China, partook in the emporium which sold approximately euro 25 million. This year, the gems were sold in euro after the switch in trading currency. In addition to earnings gained from regime-linked gem traders, the regime earned 10% of all sales as part of the Sale Agreements signed when merchants hire lots.¹⁷⁸ US gem merchants were said to have attended the event despite the US import bans.¹⁷⁹

MEKONG POWER GRID: QUESTIONABLE POLICIES

The International Rivers Network published a report in response to plans for the Mekong Power Grid (MPG), arguing that the ADB project contravenes the ADB's "safeguard policies." The report argued that the project violates the ADB's own policies on water, energy and indigenous peoples, in addition to having uncertain fiscal rewards.¹⁸⁰

The report exposed a number of problems in the project:

Lack of participation and consultation

Despite explicit references to the importance of involving civil society in formulating ADB strategies, participation has been limited to high level officials in the majority of deliberations over the MPG. The limited civil society involvement in decision-making has undermined issues of transparency surrounding the project. The ADB has not convened discussions with the relevant stakeholders.

Lack of indigenous engagement in the development process

ADB reports on the project have only been produced in English and not translated into local languages of the affected communities. Ethnic representatives have been excluded from the planning process. Concerns of the indigenous people have further been marginalized with each step of programming, project processing and policy development. This contravenes the ADB indigenous peoples policy.

178 Union of Myanmar Ministry of Mines, Jade and Gem Special Sale will be held from 26th June to 3 July

179 AP (14 Mar 04) Myanmar expects euro 25 million in sales at annual gems emporium

180 International Rivers Network (5 Feb 04) Sizing up the grid

Failure to meet cost effectiveness and environmental standards

The paper argued that the grid development would have minimal impacts on consumer electricity tariffs, and that previous reports have also indicated uncertainties in financial benefits. Moreover, the master plan did not cohesively address environmental concerns, and in particular implications for fishery reserves.¹⁸¹

ICT DEVELOPMENTS

Burma will develop local language versions of the Microsoft Windows Operating System to boost the nation's computer literacy rate, said Thein Oo, chairman of the Myanmar Information and Communication Technology Standardization Steering Committee.¹⁸²

ICFTU UPDATES SHAME LIST

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) updated its "shame list" of companies with links to the Burma (and hence, the regime) in March to include:

- Senao International, a Taiwanese Telecommunications Firm, as a company that has 'business links' with Burma. As of 22 March, the company listed the Rangoon office of FISCA enterprises as an agent for their services.
- Wah Seong Corp, a company that specializes in pipe coating for the oil and gas sector has also been placed on its list for establishing a foreign investment office in Rangoon.
- The Singaporean based Hitchins group was added to the list on 3 February. The group specializes in Research and Development of chemicals used by the group in building and waterproofing.
- Korean based Samtik Corporation, a manufacturer of rubber products, was added to the list on 22 March.
- As of 23 March, Swedish Textile Company, Guston Molinel, also operates a factory from Rangoon.

181 International Rivers Network (5 Feb 04) Sizing up the grid

182 Japan Economic Newswire (29 Mar 04) Myanmar to create local language version of Windows

AID

- **Japan resumes aid to Burma citing the SPDC's "progress" on the roadmap; offers US\$1.55 million for 'human resource' development and US\$6.2 million for maternal and child health care services.**
- **EU offers 9.5 million euros (US\$12.7 million) for aid projects along the Thai-Burma border.**
- **UNDP, FAO and ADB set out to improve Burma's agricultural sector.**
- **WFP defend their supply of 10,000 tons of rice worth US\$3.7 million to Wa and Kokang ex-poppy farmers.**

JAPAN RESUMES AID

In late January, Japan quietly resumed aid to Burma. According to officials, the decision was based on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's "move" from prison to house arrest last September and the SPDC's "progress" in the roadmap.¹⁸³ The aid will focus on developing human resources and promoting economic cooperation amongst ASEAN states.¹⁸⁴

On 16 January, Japanese Ambassador to Burma, Mr Yuji Miyamoto, signed two notes at Rangoon's Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, promising 159 million yen (US\$1.55 million) for a human resources development scholarship project in Burma.¹⁸⁵

The Japanese government is also set to provide a grant of US\$6.2 million to the junta to improve maternal and child health care services in rural areas. The grant is to be used by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to purchase drugs, vaccines and test kits for various diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has also proposed a major project aimed at improving the water system in Rangoon.¹⁸⁶

183 IFI (30 Jan 04) Japan to resume some small-scale aid to Myanmar

184 IFI (30 Jan 04) Japan to resume some small-scale aid to Myanmar

185 NLM (17 Jan 04) Japan and Myanmar exchange notes

186 Xinhua (15 Mar 04) Over 4,700 Myanmar villages benefited from water supply project

Japan has increased its import of buckwheat from Burma as part of a JICA-sponsored opium crop substitution project in northern Shan State. Taiyo Pusan, a Tokyo based company, will receive the US\$230,000 shipment.¹⁸⁷

EU TO OFFER BORDER ASSISTANCE

The European Union has set aside euro 9.5 million (US\$12.4 million) for five aid projects along the Thai-Burma border. On 3 March, the EU released a statement that said international organizations and NGOs along the border would carry out the projects. It added that the EU's projects in Burma are "motivated by humanitarian concerns."

Under the aid package:

- Thai-based NGO, Burmese Border Consortium (BBC) will receive euro 4 million to provide food and boost security at two Karen refugee camps in Mai Hong Son province, and to provide building materials for the nine Karen camps inside Thailand.
- Euro 1.2 million was earmarked for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR's) Karen refugee education project in Thailand. Euro 1.78 million will be given to the UNHCR in Thailand to assist Thai and Bangladeshi reintegration programs.
- Euro 510,000 will go to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for its programs working with displaced Shan.
- The World Food Programme will also be given euro 2 million for returnees in northern Arakan State.¹⁸⁸

US SUPPORTS AIDS PROJECTS

The new Thailand office of USAID will provide support for HIV/AIDS projects in Burma. The US has earmarked US\$55.9 million for aid to Southeast Asia and China this year, to focus on "halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, protecting the environment, protecting vulnerable populations and promoting economic growth and democracy."¹⁸⁹

187 Xinhua (3 Mar 04) More Myanmar's opium-substitute product exported to Japan

188 AFP (3 Mar 04) EU pledges 9.5 mln euros in aid for Myanmar refugees, ethnic groups

189 AFX (18 Feb 04) USAID earmarks 55.9 mln US\$ for southeast Asia, China projects

FAO

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has said it will offer advanced technology to Burma in an attempt to upgrade its dairy products. An agreement between the FAO and the Myanmar Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department has set out the two-year program, which involves small-scale technology transfers and training for Burmese producers.¹⁹⁰

A combined United Nations Development Program (UNDP), FAO, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) project is also underway to review the development of Burma's agricultural sector. The review aims at identifying investment requirements, setting strategic goals, collecting statistics for seeking international aid and foreign investment, and maintaining sustainable development in the sector.¹⁹¹

UN Gives Rice to Ex-Poppy Farmers

The World Food Program is set to supply 10,000 metric tons of rice worth US\$3.7 million to Wa and Kokang ex-poppy farmers. According to an emergency report released on 12 March, the 180,000 beneficiaries began receiving rice on 15 March from the WFP's Emergency Operations (EMOP). EMOP sub-offices are being set up in Kokang, Panghsang and Lashio and negotiations for the provision of 3,000 tons of rice are underway.¹⁹²

After widespread criticisms of the WFP Program, Regional Deputy Director Kenro Oshidari said the program was a break, not a cure: "Food aid doesn't solve the problem."¹⁹³

190 Xinhua (9 Mar 04) FAO to upgrade Myanmar's dairy products

191 Xinhua (4 Feb 04) Myanmar strengthens agricultural research activities

192 SHAN (24 Mar 04) UN provides food for poppy farmers

193 SHAN (24 Mar 04) UN Agency Defends Program

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- **Gen Khin Nyunt adopts a threat based approach to international diplomacy, warning that democracy would become a “distant reality” if the regime continued to meet with interference from Western nations.**
- **Regional ties continue to strengthen, particularly with India.**
- **The generals are gleeful as Burma is swept along with regional development projects and funding efforts aimed at enhancing regional cooperation.**
- **Fears that the junta will revert to an isolationist policy that ignores the benefits of economic, security and narcotics cooperation subdue the quiet regional protests of 2003.**
- **Worried that free-flowing drugs are affecting their relationship with China, Sr Gen Than Shwe reaffirms his commitment to the one-China policy.**
- **The EU voices complaints over the SPDC’s stilted reconciliation process, but nonetheless offers up its currency for junta transactions.**

UNITED NATIONS: NO ONE HAPPY

Relations between the UN and exiled Burmese democracy activists have soured, with leaders telling Secretary-General Kofi Annan they are “disappointed” and “frustrated” with his policy and demanding a replacement of special envoy Razali Ismail.¹⁹⁴ US, Canada and Japan-based exiles are angry over a December comment from Annan praising the national convention. In a letter addressed to the Secretary General, the Burmese told Annan that they were “deeply disappointed in you and your envoy Razali Ismail for lending your words of support to Myanmar’s military junta.”¹⁹⁵ [see Democracy and Dialogue]

The UN responded to the criticisms with caution, saying that Annan was simply trying to hold the generals to their commitments.¹⁹⁶ On 19 December 2004, an official statement from Annan’s office said he was “...encouraged by the commitment made by Foreign Minister Win Aung of Myanmar that

194 AFP (6 Jan 04) Myanmar exiles criticise UN chief over democracy comments

195 AFP (6 Jan 04) Myanmar exiles criticise UN chief over democracy comments

196 AFP (14 Jan 04) UN defends remarks on Myanmar junta

the Myanmar authorities would implement their seven-step roadmap for the country's democratic transition in an 'all-inclusive' manner." Annan further welcomed "the Government's intention to reconvene the National Convention and draft a new Constitution in 2004."¹⁹⁷

On 21 January, the Burmese junta rejected a report by Kofi Annan accusing the SPDC of using child soldiers. The generals responded to the criticism by saying that the report was based on second hand information provided by politically motivated NGOs.¹⁹⁸ [see Women & Children]

Razali to Rangoon, Japan

In early March, UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail headed to Rangoon and met with Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt, ethnic leaders and Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁹⁹ At the end of the four-day visit, Razali emerged confident that SPDC-NLD relations were improving. Razali said Gen Khin Nyunt appeared committed to allowing democracy, but needed 'more power to push it through.' "I am convinced that the Prime Minister wants to move the process forward all the way to democracy," Razali said.²⁰⁰ [see Democracy and Dialogue]

In mid-March Razali headed to Japan, reportedly in an attempt to persuade the Japanese government to provide aid to Burma.²⁰¹

INDIA: LOOKING EAST? BURMA GATHERING STRENGTH

While India focuses on 'looking east' as a foreign policy focus, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has not let Burma's political troubles stand in the way of friendly relations. With a strategic policy dominated by economic and security concerns in the Northeast, the BJP-SPDC relationship solidified into one of mutual gain. As one of the few states that has refused to call for any positive development in Burma (even the release of Aung San Suu Kyi), strengthened bilateral ties are premised upon a far broader policy of non-interference than any of Burma's ASEAN buddies.

197 UNSG Press Release (19 Dec 04) SG/SM/9089: Secretary-General Encouraged by Commitment to Implement Plan for Democratic Transition in Myanmar

198 AFP (21 Jan 04) Myanmar rejects UN claims on child soldiers in the army

199 VOA (4 Mar 04) UN Envoy ends trip to Burma

200 AP (5 Mar 04) UN Envoy: Myanmar committed to reform

201 Irrawaddy (16 Mar 04) UN Envoy to Lobby Japan for Aid to Burma, says leading dissident

Joint Border Offensives

In early January, reports indicated that the Indian Army was training SPDC officers with the expectation that they would undertake joint military offensives against anti-India forces along the border. The reports come after similar cooperation with Bhutanese soldiers in late December last year. Indian Chief of Staff General Nirmal Chander Vij said: "Army-to-army relations between India and Myanmar have been very good and we have been helping them."²⁰² [see Military Threat]

Holding Hands in the Fight against Drugs

On 1 March, the two countries agreed to intensify cooperation against drug smuggling along the border. The agreement included promises to share intelligence on narcotics transactions. Indian customs officials have also reported that India has provided "sophisticated equipment" to the regime in order to contain the problem inside Burma. Indian and Burmese customs departments agreed to fight the problem jointly and to hold "frequent meetings" to "adopt strategies to reduce the problem."²⁰³

The Indian government has also intensified its patrols of the international border in a further attempt to counter smuggling routes. [see Drugs]

Border Trade

On 17 January, SPDC officials attended a three-day "International Conference on Regional Cooperation," in Assam State. Indian government representative, P. Gogoi said the meeting focused on attempts to re-open the famous Stilwell road, which links India, through Burma, to China.²⁰⁴ Burma has been recognized as an important strategic gateway for Indian influence and market access in Southeast Asia.²⁰⁵

Energy Diplomacy

Burma's burgeoning energy supplies remain a persuasive element in Indo-Burmese relations. On 29 January, Burmese Energy Minister Lun Thi met with Indian Petroleum Minister Ram Niak to discuss the possibility of exporting natural gas to India through a transnational gas pipeline.²⁰⁶ Two

202 BBC (2 Jan 04) Screws tighten on Indian rebels

203 Mizzima (1 Mar 04) India assists Burma to fight Drugs Smuggling

204 Mizzima (25 Jan 04) Assam Set to Promote Relationship with Burma

205 Mizzima (5 Feb 04) New Trading Point opened on Indo-Myanmar border

206 Business Standard (29 Jan 04) Myanmar in talks for gas pipeline

days later, Lun Thi offered Indian oil companies a US\$116 million contract for Burma's A3 gas field and new diesel purchase orders.²⁰⁷

On 8 February, Indian officials also offered to fund and conduct a feasibility study into developing a deep sea port in Dawei. [see Economy Chapter]

Defence Ties

On 5 February, a high level military delegation reportedly sought defense hardware from India at a 4-day armament fair in New Delhi.²⁰⁸ Officials from both countries met on the sidelines of the fair, and will meet again to discuss possible procurement and assistance.²⁰⁹

Who pays?

India-based Burmese dissidents have complained about deteriorating conditions as Indian leaders develop closer ties with the junta. The dissidents have suggested that during negotiations to buy natural gas, the junta demanded political concessions in the form of the expulsion of refugees and crackdowns on opposition groups.²¹⁰

CHINA

Despite strong Sino-Burmese ties, Chinese officials have been frustrated by the continuing drug flows across the border. Luo Feng, Vice Minister of China's Public Security Bureau said Burma's heroin supply feeds the habits of China's 643,000 active users.²¹¹ "The infiltration of illegal drugs is causing immense harm to China," she said.²¹² [see Drugs]

Sensing the growing discontent, Sr Gen Than Shwe continued attempts to regain Chinese favor. In late February, he reiterated the junta's adherence to the "one China" policy, pledging to continuously develop the traditional "paukphaw" (fraternal) friendship with China. The comments were made during a 5-day "goodwill visit" by high level Chinese officials.²¹³

207 Business Standard (29 Jan 04) Myanmar in talks for gas pipeline

208 AFP (5 Feb 04) Myanmar seeks military hardware from India

209 AFP (5 Feb 04) Myanmar seeks military hardware from India

210 Asia Tribune (14 Feb 04) Cheers, jeers over giant gas find

211 Xinhua (1 Mar 04) China laments heroin influx from Myanmar, warns of growing problem

212 Irrawaddy (2 Mar 04) China Alarmed at Heroin Influx from Burma

213 Xinhua (23 Feb 04) Myanmar top leader reiterates adherence to "one China" policy

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh-Burma ties remain friendly, as negotiations on the Bangladesh-Burma Friendship Road. Bangladeshi Communications Minister Namzul Huda has said that the Bangladesh government attaches “great importance” to the construction of the road, as a means to establish a direct link with Southeast Asia.²¹⁴

On 5 March, the Burmese Ambassador to Bangladesh promised that Burma would accept Burmese citizens from Bangladeshi jails. The Ambassador made the comment as part of a speech at a Buddhist celebration in Bangladesh. The speech came after 72 Burmese citizens were returned to Burma on 28 February after finishing their sentences in Bangladesh jails. Another 800 Burmese citizens remain in Bangladesh jails and would be forced to remain there after their sentences are finished unless SPDC officials follow through on promises.²¹⁵ [see Human Rights]

ASEAN: EASILY INTIMIDATED?

The junta’s threats have had some effect on ASEAN member states. Indonesian FM Hassan Wirayuda announced on 6 January that the regional grouping had decided to stop using harsh tactics against the generals as they had threatened to revert to a policy of isolation. “If Myanmar isolates itself, it will be a backfire [sic] for ASEAN,” said a senior diplomat on condition of anonymity. Hassan also said ASEAN would not pursue sanctions as a means to push Burma toward reconciliation.²¹⁶

At the same time, Ali Alatas, the Indonesian envoy to Burma, has said that ASEAN must “reinvent itself” and be more flexible to remain relevant. Alatas said that despite media portrayals of ASEAN as rigid on the issue of non-interference, discussions within ASEAN about the Burmese generals have shown the group is relaxing the policy.²¹⁷

On 24 February, Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai dismissed Indonesian proposals for an ASEAN peacekeeping force for ASEAN as unnecessary, saying there were no international conflicts in the region.²¹⁸

214 Narinjara (5 Feb 04) Joint Survey on Burma-Bangladesh friendship road soon

215 Narinjara (11 Mar 04) Burma will accept its citizens jailed in Bangladesh

216 Jakarta Post (6 Jan 04) Suu Kyi asks for world's patience: RI

217 AFP (7 Jan 04) ASEAN must reinvent itself, loosen non-interference policy, diplomat

218 Japan Economic Newswire (24 Feb 04) Thailand sees no need for ASEAN peacekeeping unit

INDONESIA

On 6 January Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hassan Wirayuda, praised the military junta for showing “more flexibility and openness in facing its opposition.” At the same time, Wirayuda also urged the regime to set a time frame for the reconciliation process.²¹⁹

MALAYSIA

Malaysian officials will set up a joint commission to promote and strengthen ties between Malaysia and Burma. Although headed by Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar, the commission is simply a mechanism to further forge business links between the two countries. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the commission would act as a “catalyst to bring about higher participation in Myanmar’s development” but “it is [still] the role of the Malaysian business community here to ensure its success.”²²⁰

ASEM

With little obvious intention of fully implementing a robust sanctions regime, EU threats to block Burma’s admission to ASEM have emerged as their strongest political tool. While the block itself would be a fairly significant move, the threats are part of a European trend that has, in the past, witnessed numerous threats have been toothless.

The Italian Deputy Foreign Minister said on 19 February that “the answer for the moment is ‘no’ for Burma inside Asem.”²²¹

ASEAN countries remained united and supportive of the junta despite the EU’s push to exclude the generals from the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM). On 4 March, Southeast Asian foreign ministers insisted that Burma be admitted to October’s meeting, despite European objections. At an ASEAN foreign ministers retreat in Vietnam in early March, Singapore’s Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said the Asian position was very clear: “The Asian position is that on the ASEAN side there are three new members...and the leaders of ASEAN have decided we should take a unified position on that.”²²²

219 Jakarta Post (6 Jan 04) Suu Kyi asks for world’s patience: RI

220 BBC Monitor (14 Feb 04) Malaysia, Burma to set up joint commission to strengthen ties

221 Bangkok Post (19 Jan 04) Italy urges push for constructive talks

222 AFP (4 Mar 04) ASEAN insists Myanmar must take part in ASEM despite EU objections

BANGKOK PROCESS

As the SPDC distanced itself from Thailand's efforts at a regional roadmap, Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Margherita Boniver visited Thailand in late January and told Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai that the Bangkok Process should move forward. Ms Boniver suggested that Thailand take the lead in forming a mission of EU and ASEAN countries to visit Burma as part of the Process to forge a constructive dialogue with Rangoon.²²³

Norway and Switzerland agreed to participate in the next round of the Bangkok Process. Switzerland said that they have a "strong humanitarian interest in Burma" and want to take part in "trying to find a solution there."²²⁴ [see Thai-Burma Relations]

EUROPEAN UNION: A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION, A LITTLE MORE ACTION

The EU's attempts to portray themselves as one of the harshest critics of the regime suffered a substantial blow in early 2004 when the Burma Campaign UK reported that EU sanctions were not being implemented by member countries. Despite an EU asset freeze on the regime, the report said that a dismal £57 (US\$ 109) had been frozen among EU members since 2000.

When questioned in the House of Commons, UK Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien admitted that the UK had not frozen any of the regime's assets. Only Germany had frozen any assets.²²⁵

On 26 February, the House of Commons expressed tri-party support for tougher sanctions on the regime. Liberal Democrat MP Alistair Carmichael reportedly pushed Mike O'Brien to introduce legislation banning new investment in Burma.²²⁶

IRELAND AND BURMA ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Burma and Ireland have established diplomatic relations at an ambassadorial level. On 10 February, the two countries signed an agreement in Kuala Lumpur that said the two countries were "desirous of establishing friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation on the basis of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and norms of International Law..."²²⁷

223 Bangkok Post (19 Jan 04) Italy urges push for constructive talks

224 AP (17 Mar 04) Thailand discuss free trade agreement

225 BCUK (25 Feb 04) UK ignores EU Burma sanctions

226 BCUK (26 Feb 04) Tories welcome BAT withdrawal from Burma: Support grows for Burma investment ban

227 BBC Monitor (12 Feb 04) Burma establishes diplomatic relations with Ireland

UNITED STATES

Junta Confused: Maybe We Should Be Friends?

The junta remained defensive over sanctions, and continued to criticize both the effects of and justifications for sanctions. At the same time, junta representatives have attempted to lure US officials on side by making offers of cooperation and friendship.

On 28 January, the regime released a statement accusing the United States of attempting to destabilize the region by funding “expatriate groups”, and urging them to join together and help shift the country towards democracy.²²⁸

At the same time, Khin Nyunt told a group of teachers in Rangoon that “some countries” promote their national interest “by manipulating and interfering in the affairs of other countries without any regard for principles of equality and mutual respect which are the norms of international relations.”²²⁹

On 1 February, Director General of the Burmese Foreign Ministry’s Political Affairs Department, Than Tun, said the “progression of dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi warranted a fresh look” from the US on its relations with Rangoon. He said that while Burma had been cooperating with the US on narcotics prevention, the US was “not very forthcoming.”²³⁰

There’s little chance the junta’s inconsistent behavior will result in any shift in US policy. On 2 February, Colin Powell told the Washington Post the US “was intending to press Burma [it] at every opportunity...It’s sad that this country continues to live in this despotic past, and we’ll continue to press.”²³¹

Human Rights Report Critical

This was followed by the 25 February release of the US State Department’s annual human rights report, which condemned the junta’s worsening human rights record, saying the junta continued to commit serious abuses in the midst of poor health care, declining education levels, poor infrastructure and continuously deteriorating economic conditions.²³² [see Human Rights]

228 AFP (28 Jan 04) Myanmar accuses United States of working to destabilize Asia

229 BBC Monitor (1 Feb 04) Burmese PM says local, global support vital for success of roadmap

230 Nation (1 Feb 04) ASEAN, US officials discuss roadmap during dialogue

231 WP (2 Feb 04) Excerpts from an interview with Colin Powell

232 US Dept of State (2004) Annual Human Rights Report. Available online: www.state.gov

Business Lobby Unhappy with Human Rights Report

On 2 March, Ernest Bower, president of the business lobby group US-ASEAN Business Council, said that US reports on human rights, narcotics, religious freedoms and trade barriers were too critical and should be more constructive to avoid hurting regional allies. Bower said the group would lobby for changes in the way US embassies and the State Department approach their reports. The group, which represents US companies operating in Southeast Asia, says the nature of the reports were always heavily weighted towards identifying criticisms.²³³ [see Human Rights]

AUSTRALIA

On 11 February, Australia's opposition party, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) announced its Burma policy. Labor criticized the Australian government's stance on Burma, particularly concerning reports that it will renew its human rights training course for Burmese officials.

The ALP called upon the SPDC to open genuine political dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic nationalities, release all political prisoners and cease its repressive attempts to suppress political freedom.

An ALP government would:

- "Close the Australian Office in Rangoon
- Discourage Australian trade with Burma
- Discourage Australian citizens from visiting Burma for business and tourism
- Review the issue of visas to Burmese officials and other persons associated with the regime
- Offer sympathetic consideration for Burmese refugee applicants"²³⁴

Crime Prevention and Counter-terrorism

Australian fraud experts have also made their way to Rangoon to train 120 Burmese officials on how to detect fake travel documents so as to prevent cross-border crime and terrorism.²³⁵

233 AFP (2 Mar 04) Business calls for US constructive reports on Southeast Asia

234 US Campaign for Burma (11 Feb 04) Australia Federal Labor Party has announced their policy on Burma at their annual conference in Sydney

235 AP (24 Feb 04) Australia to train Myanmar officials to detect fake travel documents

THAI-BURMA RELATIONS

- **Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra continues to show enduring faith in the regime in early 2004, despite continued rebuffs from the generals.**
- **“I expect Suu Kyi to be released before October. With close relations with Burma, I would guess that they are doing that.”
PM Thaksin Shinawatra²³⁶**
- **This loyalty has come as a blessing for the junta, with continued displays of economic and political leeway during the early months of 2004.**
- **Economic concessions have sprung forth in line with friendly political assurances and sustained pressure on Burmese in Thailand**
- **Thai officials have been unusually thick skinned in their attempts at the ‘prediction game’ regarding Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; and perpetual contradictions have done little to undermine overt shows of support.**
- **Efforts at the Bangkok Process continue in full force, with FM Surakiart shoring up attendance from Bangladesh, Norway, Malaysia and Switzerland. Unfortunately, Burmese FM Win Aung’s role is less certain.**

ENDURING FAITH....

Thai Foreign Minister Surakiat Sathirathai, 10 February: “When the time comes, she (Aung San Suu Kyi) should be released, and it won’t be long. We have told them that when they are ready they should quickly free her.”²³⁷

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, 21 February: “Burma is on the right track...If they follow our recommendations, they will be okay and get everything done.”²³⁸

236 Nation (22 Feb 04) PM says Suu Kyi to be freed by October

237 AFX (10 Feb 04) Myanmar’s Suu Kyi to be released from house arrest soon - Thai FM

238 Nation (22 Feb 04) PM says Suu Kyi to be freed by October

Thai Foreign Minister Surakiat Sathirathai, 30 March: “Releasing Aung San Suu Kyi would be considered a positive development but that is a matter for Myanmar to decide. I hope it will happen soon.”²³⁹

Thai Foreign Minister Surakiat Sathirathai, 30 March: “I believe that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released soon.”²⁴⁰

UNDERSTANDING IS THE KEY: THAKSIN ON THE JUNTA

Thaksin has made “understanding” a key concern for Thai officials and security forces, said Major General Manas Paorik, commander of the counter narcotics Pha Muang Task Force. The general said that one of Thaksin’s principal priorities in recent months has been to promote understanding between Thai security forces and the Rangoon junta as the key to securing Thailand’s borders.²⁴¹ [see Drugs]

BANGKOK PROCESS: YES, NO, NO.....YES

In early 2004, Thailand has appeared confused over the role and purpose of the Bangkok Process. Originally pegging the second round of talks to developments in the national reconciliation process, Foreign Minister Surakiat Sathirathai scheduled talks for April 29-30 before the junta announced a date for the National Convention.²⁴²

Intense international efforts aimed at building support for the talks were not matched with substantive bilateral efforts between the neighbors. Internationally, the talks were packaged as a means to push for reforms; but after meeting Burmese Foreign Minister Win Aung, Sathirathai held only vague hopes that it would “yield more information on the junta’s roadmap.” In early March, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sihasak Phuanketkeow said the meeting was simply meant to give Burma the chance to update the international community on the drafting of a constitution and its talks with ethnic groups and the NLD. This was later supplemented with possibilities of renewed international aid: “if Burma shows the international community that tangible progress is being made, this could be a precondition for other countries to resume humanitarian assistance to Burma,” he said.²⁴³

239 AFP (30 Mar 04) Thailand to host international meeting on Myanmar reforms next month

240 Nation (31 Mar 04) Burma forum should advance reconciliation

241 Bangkok Post (5 Jan 04) Burma ties crucial for suppression

242 AFP (30 Mar 04) Thailand to host international meeting on Myanmar reforms next month

243 The Nation (31 Mar 04) Burma should advance reconciliation

Even later, Surakiat Sathirathai told AFP the generals must show “a few positive signals” at the second round of talks. “There has to be some novelty, some interesting announcement. You cannot ask people to return to the table after a few months if you have nothing new to tell them.”²⁴⁴

With little consensus and even less understanding over the role of the meeting, there is little chance that substantive progress is likely to be made.

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Norway and Switzerland will join the 12 nations who met in December last year for first meeting.²⁴⁵

United Nations envoy Razali Ismail is also set to attend the meeting.

ECONOMICS

Be My Guest: Industrial Zones

Plans are underway to develop three special industrial zones along the Thai-Burma border as part of bilateral cooperation under the Economic Cooperation Strategy (ECS).²⁴⁶ According to a report from Business Tank, the industrial zones will be set up at Myawaddy, Pa-an in Karen State and Moulmein in Mon State. General Khin Nyunt has said he anticipates Thai factories will be established in Burma under the project. Khin Nyunt said on 2 February that factories and mills set up in Burma would “not only create jobs in Myanmar, but also benefit both nations economically and socially. Thailand would provide aid for development of transport, industrial and infrastructure sectors and also assume responsibility for building the factories and marketing the products.”²⁴⁷

Something Fishy

Ten days later Burma agreed to issue a five-year fishing concession to Bangkok-based Siam Jonathan Company, allowing 500 Thai vessels to fish in its exclusive economic zone.²⁴⁸

Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai said Thailand and Burma would consider joint investment in fisheries. Rangoon also invited Thailand to

244 AFP (30 Mar 04) Thailand to host international meeting on Myanmar reforms next month

245 The Nation (31 Mar 04) Burma should advance reconciliation

246 Xinhua (11 Jan 04) Special industrial zones to be established in Myanmar

247 Xinhua (4 Feb 04) Build Thai factories in Myanmar for mutual benefit

248 AFP (14 Mar 04) Myanmar grants Thai firm exclusive fisheries deal: report.

invest in its fish processing industry. The proposal hinged on the condition that no Thai fishermen would be arrested during a one-year trial period.²⁴⁹

Siam Jonathan was the sole company suggested to the Burmese cabinet in the Thai government-sponsored proposal that established the agreement.²⁵⁰

Access to information on Siam Jonathan's owners and beneficiaries beyond the name of its managing director, Mr. Jirawat Supaseta Anun, are as yet unavailable.

Border Trade Opened in Mae Hong Son: Junta License Required

On 25 January, public and private sector representatives from Mae Hong Son agreed to begin formal trading with Burma via Ban Fong Haeng pass in Muang district. Mae Hong Son governor Supoj Laowansiri had reportedly approved shipments of motor vehicles and spare parts to Burma.²⁵¹

Mae Hong Son District Chief Decha Sathaphol gave his full support to the plans and also promised state-sponsored assistance for villagers living along the border. Hua Maung district chief has said his district is 'fully prepared' to open up border trade with Mae Hong Son; however, he has called for strict inspections on goods crossing the border to protect against the trafficking of illegal goods.²⁵²

Thai and Burmese traders engaging in cross border operations would be subjected to strict background checks to ensure they were not associated with ethnic groups or drug traders. Burmese traders are reportedly required to hold licenses issued by the junta.

All items exported from Mae Hong Son must also undergo customs inspections and payments can only be made through bank accounts.²⁵³

Pineapple Plantations & Sweet, Sweet Corn: Tax Free

A food processing company based in Kanchanaburi province has signed a preliminary agreement with a state-controlled firm in Burma to run contract farming for pineapple plantations and sweet corn. Kan Agro will receive the food tax free under the guidelines of the special economic zone, which will be laid out under tax privilege guidelines by the Thai Board of Investment.

249 Nation (4 Mar 04) Thailand to receive Burma fishing rights

250 Irrawaddy (Mar 04) Fishy peace dividends

251 Bangkok Post (27 Jan 04) Formal Trading with Burma to start soon

252 FT (26 Jan 04) Mae Hong Son joins hands with Myanmar to boost border trade

253 Bangkok Post (27 Jan 04) Formal Trading with Burma to start soon

TAVOY PORT

Burma and Thailand will begin joint construction of a deep-sea port at Tavoy (Dawei), Tenasserim division, as part of the ECS bid to cement regional cooperation. The construction of the seaport is to take place in conjunction with a the development of the Dawei-Kanchanaburi road link and will join up to the trilateral road project linking India, Burma and Thailand.²⁵⁴

THAKSIN DEFENSIVE OVER MCCONNELL ACCUSATIONS

Leading US Congressman Senator Mitch McConnell accused Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of linking Thailand's support for the military junta to his family's investment in the country.

"Some suspect that the raison d'être can be summed up in a single word: iPSTAR."

"What investments, including projects and activities related to iPSTAR, do Shin Satellite and Shin Corporation have in Burma, and/or have planned for Burma?" asked McConnell.²⁵⁵

Shin Corp's chief executive, Boonkee Plangsiri denied the allegation, saying: "Our business dealings have nothing to do with politics...We are merely leasing transponders to the Burmese. We are not operating anything there."

One Shin Corp spokesperson, defensive over the accusations, said the deal was a joint investment project with Burma's Bagan Cybertech, a company owned by Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt's son. The deal granted Shin Corp a concession to install 5,000 satellite receiving stations in Burma. However, iPSTAR also sells ground satellite equipment to Burma.²⁵⁶ Moreover, iPSTAR received a \$350 million loan from the US's Exim bank at the end of 2002.²⁵⁷

A Damming Report

Thailand and Burma agreed to undertake a joint one-year feasibility study for two hydro-electric dams in rivers shared by the two countries. The planned dams would create reservoirs in Burma where the Kok and Sai rivers cross the border. On signing a Memorandum of Understanding the Burmese agriculture minister played down environmental concerns, saying the project

254 Xinhua (12 Jan 04) Myanmar, Thailand to build deep seaport

255 The Nation (4 Mar 04) US Senator slams PM

256 Dow Jones (23 Feb 04) Thai Shin Satellite Expects Modest Rev From iPSTAR In '04

257 The Nation (4 Mar 04) US Senator slams PM

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would benefit thousands of square kilometers of farmland in both countries. Environmental groups are unconvinced, saying the project would destroy forest areas and affect Shans living near the Kok river in Burma.²⁵⁸ [see Environment]

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, ANOTHER DAMNING REPORT

Thailand's cozy relationship with the junta was harshly criticized in a Human Rights Watch Report released in February, which accused Thailand of violating international law by forcibly repatriating Burmese refugees. The report called the systematic harassment of Burmese exiles an attempt to curry favor with the regime. "Thailand should not allow commercial or diplomatic interests to interfere with the ability of Burmese to seek safety in Thailand."²⁵⁹ [see Displacement]

BO MYA THANKS THAIS FOR KAREN TALKS SUPPORT

Thailand welcomed ceasefire talks between the KNU and SPDC. Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai said he hoped the tentative ceasefire accord would lead to discussions on other sensitive issues. Gen Bo Mya thanked Thailand for supporting ethnic groups in the reconciliation process.²⁶⁰

THAI COURT ACQUITS KAREN

On 31 March, the Ratchaburi provincial court acquitted an ethnic Karen man of charges of murder and attempted murder on grounds of "insufficient and conflicting" evidence. However, he was convicted of illegal entry and sentenced to 12 months' jail. He was arrested in 2002 for participating in an attack against a school bus. The incident, which took place in South Western Ratchaburi province resulted in the deaths of three Thai students.²⁶¹

258 Bangkok Post (25 Feb 04) Thai-Burmese plan to dam two rivers – Activists raise alarm over environment, impact on minorities

259 The Age (25 Feb 04) Thai regime bullies asylum seekers, Rights report says

260 VOA (25 Jan 04) Thailand Welcomes Cease-Fire agreement between Burma, Rebel Group

261 AFP (31 Mar 04) Thai court acquits Karen suspect in 2002 school bus shooting.

ETHNIC RELATIONS

- **The SPDC fails to commit to a formal ceasefire with the KNU, despite three rounds of talks.**
- **The KIO averts an internal coup. The suspected mastermind, Chief of Intelligence Col Lasang Aung, is evicted from the organization.**
- **The KNPP decides to engage in fresh ceasefire talks with the SPDC, after having rejected the 1995 agreement. The new round of negotiation is set for April.**
- **The Shan State Army-South declares it is still open to dialogue with the SPDC.**
- **The SPDC forces members of the Salone ethnic group, also known as sea-gypsies, to live on land in designated villages as a tourist attraction.**
- **Arakan organizations form the Arakan National Council (ANC) to provide a unified leadership. The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation expresses concern, as the ANC doesn't include Rohingya or other non-Rakhaing organizations.**

KNU CEASEFIRE: NO FORMAL AGREEMENT

Gen Bo Mya Visits Rangoon For A Second Round Of Ceasefire Talks

On 16 January the Karen National Union (KNU) began a second round of ceasefire talks with the Burmese regime in Rangoon, hoping for a formal written agreement.²⁶² The first round of ceasefire talks, held in mid-December 2003, had led to an informal truce between the military wing of the Karen resistance – the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) - and the SPDC. [see October-December 2003 Report Card]

Issues such as KNU participation in the National Convention, boundary demarcation and development plans in Karen State were also on the table for discussion, although Gen Bo Mya, KNU Deputy Chairman and head of the

²⁶² AP (14 Jan 04) Myanmar's largest ethnic rebel group to send delegation to Yangon; AP (15 Jan 04) Myanmar's Karen rebels arrive in Yangon for historic peace talks

delegation, affirmed they were contingent on a formal truce.²⁶³ The 76-year-old General, also Commander-in-Chief of the KNLA, was visiting Rangoon for the first time since he started fighting the Burmese military 55 years ago.²⁶⁴

Despite an extension of the initial four-day visit up to 22 January, the regime failed to commit to a written ceasefire agreement with the KNU.²⁶⁵ The Karen delegation flew back to the Thai-Burma border with a provisional verbal agreement, a disappointing conclusion in light of several instances of ceasefire breaches by SPDC troops following the previous verbal truce obtained in December.²⁶⁶ [see Military, Human Rights, Displacement]

Although the KNU's demand to hold ceasefire talks in Bangkok was rejected, the SPDC agreed this time not to set pre-conditions, such as the surrender of weapons by Karen troops, as it did in negotiations with other groups. Such SPDC pre-conditions were seen as the reason behind the failure of previous rounds of talk, the last attempt dating back to 1996.²⁶⁷

Agence France-Presse caused controversy during the closed-door talks when it released a report claiming that the Karen delegates met with Sr Gen Than Shwe on 20 January. Although several news sources have concurred that the KNU delegation met with Gen Khin Nyunt on 16 January, KNU members based in Mae Sot denied their representatives met with the Senior General.²⁶⁸

Rivalries between SPDC Factions Hamper Ceasefire Talks

The rivalry between the Military Intelligence and the Burma Army's Regional Commands – hostile to any negotiations with ethnic armies – has continued to undermine ceasefire negotiations with the KNU. The Directorate of the Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI), in favor of ceasefires, negotiated alone with the KNU. DDSI nevertheless had to obtain daily approval of its negotiations from the War Office, the body coordinating Regional Commands. The tension between the War Office and the DDSI is at least partly responsible for the regime's failure to sign a formal written ceasefire.²⁶⁹ [see Military Threat]

263 Nation (16 Jan 04) Reconciliation: Karen leader in Rangoon for talks

264 Irrawaddy (13 Jan 04) KNU Plan Second Trip to Rangoon

265 AFP (22 Jan 04) Karen rebels win provisional ceasefire, talks with Myanmar junta continue

266 KNU (5 Jan) Immediate release to media

267 AFP (22 Jan 04) Karen rebels win provisional ceasefire, talks with Myanmar junta continue

268 Irrawaddy (21 Jan 04) KNU to Conclude Historic Trip

269 Mizzima (28 Jan 04) Two-Level Game: SPDC Divided on Peace

Thailand welcomed the informal ceasefire accord reached between the KNU and the SPDC. Thai FM Surakiart Sathirathai made positive comments on 23 January after a debriefing session with Gen Bo Mya.²⁷⁰ The General speculated that the peace process might well take between six months and a year before reaching conclusion.²⁷¹

KNLA Ceasefire Breach Opens 3rd Round of Ceasefire Talks

After some delay on the part of the KNU, a third round of ceasefire talks finally took place from 24 to 26 February in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State.²⁷² Both the location and the composition of delegations indicated a less politically significant meeting than the January talks. The KNU delegation comprised only 12 members, and was headed by Joint General Secretary Saw Htoo Htoo Lay. The SPDC sent Maj Gen Kyaw Win, Vice Chief of Intelligence Services, as the head of their delegation.²⁷³

A ceasefire breach by KNLA soldiers threatened to undermine the peace process on the eve of talks. On 23 February Karen troops had reportedly attacked a SPDC position near Duyinseik village, 60 km northwest of Moulmein, killing three SPDC soldiers and injuring seven.²⁷⁴ Later reports located the incident near Donzayit village in Pegu Division, about 137 km from Rangoon. According to the KNU, three SPDC soldiers were killed in the attack, during which Karen troops also seized around 40 weapons and radio communication equipment.²⁷⁵ As a gesture of goodwill and commitment to the ceasefire the KNU demoted the officers in charge of the KNLA 3rd Brigade who carried out the attack, and promised to return the seized equipment.²⁷⁶

Despite the 23 February attack the talks proceeded and were described as “successful” by the KNU.²⁷⁷ The negotiations focused on military positions, territorial demarcation and on the resettlement of Internally Displaced

270 VOA (25 Jan 04) Thailand Welcomes Cease-Fire Agreement Between Burma, Rebel Group

271 Reuters (31 Jan 04) Myanmar rebels see long road to peace deal

272 AFP (10 Feb 04) KNU rebels delay peace talks with Myanmar junta until late February; AP (25 Feb 04) Karen rebels wrap up peace talks with junta, describe it as 'successful'

273 Mizzima (22 Feb 04) KNU delegation headed to Moulmein for third round of talks with SPDC

274 AP (23 Feb 04) Dissident guerrillas attack army post before cease-fire talks, says leader

275 Irrawaddy (8 Mar 04) Karen Officials Likely to be Demoted Over Attack

276 Irrawaddy (23 Mar 04) Two Karen Military Officers Demoted

277 AP (25 Feb 04) Karen rebels wrap up peace talks with junta, describe it as 'successful'

Persons (IDPs) in Karen State.²⁷⁸ Little headway has, however, been reported in the press. A fourth round of talks was announced for the first week of April.²⁷⁹

Ongoing Skirmishes

The order given by the SPDC to its Regional Commander in Karen State to cease all military activities at the frontline was clearly not respected.²⁸⁰ In the week following the conclusion of the second round of peace talks the KNU reported SPDC troops advances in Karen State. Over 100 skirmishes between SPDC and KNLA troops were reported since the first verbal truce was agreed early in December.²⁸¹ The number and intensity of clashes between the KNU and the SPDC-allied Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have also increased since 14 March.²⁸² [see Military]

NEW HOPES FOR A KNPP CEASEFIRE

While carrying out an offensive at the Karen-Karenni State border in January, the SPDC continued to claim that the 1995 ceasefire agreement with the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) was valid.

On 2 January the Kayah (Karenni) State Peace Organization (KSPO), a ceasefire group and ally of the regime, conveyed the SPDC's view of its relations with the KNPP during a meeting with the group. The regime said via the KSPO that it was up to the KNPP to rejuvenate the 1995 ceasefire agreement. The SPDC also suggested that the KNPP should attend the upcoming National Convention.²⁸³

The KNPP quickly responded to the SPDC, stating it had rejected the 1995 ceasefire because of numerous SPDC violations in the past. In the first week of January alone over 1,000 Karenni villagers fled to Karen State following a SPDC offensive. The KNPP also reported one of its commanders was killed during an attack by the Burmese army.²⁸⁴ [see Military, Displacement]

278 Irrawaddy (18 Feb 04) KNU-Junta Talks to Continue

279 Irrawaddy (29 Mar 04) KNU Returns Weapons to Burma Army

280 AFP (22 Jan 04) Karen rebels win provisional ceasefire, talks with Myanmar junta continue

281 Irrawaddy (8 Mar 04) Karen Officials Likely to be Demoted Over Attack

282 Network Media Group (22 Mar 04) Fighting between KNU and DKBA

283 DVB (4 Jan 04) Karenni Armed Group "Skeptical" about Government ceasefire "overture"

284 Mizzima (5 Jan 04) KNPP leader Beheaded by SPDC

On 15 February the KNPP urged the SPDC to declare a nationwide ceasefire, to engage in tripartite dialogue with Burman and ethnic representative, and convene a national convention that will ultimately lead to a federal state.²⁸⁵

The prospect of future ceasefire talks seemed threatened after the KNPP took responsibility for the 8 March attack on a SPDC vehicle, killing one and injuring four others. The KNPP however denied that the attacked vehicle was a civilian passenger bus, as the Burmese junta claimed via its state-owned media.²⁸⁶ Several other skirmishes between the KNPP and SPDC were reported during this period.

KNPP officials met several times between January and March to discuss the possibility of engaging in new talks with the Burmese junta. On 12 March the KNPP Executive Committee notified the SPDC of their intention to participate in ceasefire talks.²⁸⁷ The talks are set to take place in Rangoon sometime in April. Discussions will also include the issue of the 21,000 Karenni refugees living in camps at the Thai-Burma border.²⁸⁸ The nine-member KNPP delegation will be led by Foreign Minister Abel Tweed.²⁸⁹

KIO: FAILED COUP & LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE

On 7 January the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) arrested a number of its officers suspected of plotting a coup against the KIO's headquarters. Col Lasang Aung, the alleged leader of the attempted mutiny, apparently fled the headquarters at Liaison Bum in Kachin State and hid close to the China border.

The coup attempt came at a time when the KIO's Chief of Staff Gen N'ban La was undergoing medical treatment in southern China. Supporters of Col Lasang Aung, the KIO's chief of intelligence, claimed rival factions within the KIO engineered the coup themselves in an attempt to discredit him.²⁹⁰

On 13 January the KIO formed a commission of inquiry to shed light of the events of the preceding week.²⁹¹ After two days, the body found the suspected plot leaders guilty. Col Lasang Aung, his deputy Lt Col Padip Gam Aung and KIO Vice President Brig Gen Hpauyam Tsam Yan were expelled

285 DVB (15 Feb 04) KNPP views on current situation in Burma

286 Irrawaddy (12 March 04) Karenni Insurgent Attack Kills One

287 Irrawaddy (16 Feb 04) Karenni to Hold Ceasefire Talks; DVB (23 Mar 04) KNPP prepares for a ceasefire talk

288 Irrawaddy (23 Feb 04) KNPP Ceasefire Talks Set for March

289 DVB (14 Mar 04) Burma: Karen[ni] party delegation to hold cease-fire talks soon

290 Irrawaddy (10 Jan 04) Coup Plot at Kachin Headquarters

291 Irrawaddy (13 Jan 04) Kachin Form Investigative Body

from the group's leadership.²⁹² The KIO later claimed that the exiled Kachin National Organization (KNO) had instigated the coup. The organization utilized this event to reshuffle its leadership.²⁹³

On 26 February Col Lazing Bawk, the KIO officer who averted the 7 January coup, was killed in his house by a bomb blast. No one claimed responsibility for the assassination, and no one was immediately suspected.²⁹⁴ Col Lazing Bawk had been elected to the position of Deputy Chief of Staff in the leadership reshuffle that followed the ousting of Col Lasang Aung and his associates.

SHAN STATE ARMY-SOUTH: COMMITTED TO PEACE

Progress in the ceasefire talks involving the KNPP and the KNU prompted the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), led by Col Yawdserk, to declare its openness to dialogue with the junta.²⁹⁵ The SSA-S imposed two pre-conditions: the declaration of a national ceasefire and freedom for ethnic nationality groups to openly engage in political dialogue.

The SSA-S also echoed the KNU's sentiment by asserting that the latter's peace talks with the junta would not compromise their Military Alliance. Little faith is put in the ceasefire agreements, because mistrust towards the SPDC runs deep in the Shan group.²⁹⁶ Steady fighting has been reported since January, notably in the townships east of Taunggyi.²⁹⁷ [see Military Threat]

On 12 March it was reported that SPDC Company Commander Capt Aung Myint Htwe and an unnamed Corporal were shot dead by suspected members of the SSA-S. The double murder occurred in Mongton township.²⁹⁸

Towards the end of March the SSA-S was accused of having kidnapped Thai human rights lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit, who has represented individuals suspected of terrorism in Southern Thailand. The SSA vehemently denied having anything to do with the disappearance of the lawyer.²⁹⁹

292 Irrawaddy (15 Jan 04) KIO Purges Top Leaders

293 BBC Monitor (2 Feb 04) Burmese ethnic rebels reshuffle following internal coup attempt

294 Irrawaddy (26 Feb 04) Senior KIA Officer Assassinated

295 DVB (16 Feb 04) SSA always opens door for dialogue with Burmese junta

296 Irrawaddy (19 Feb 04) Suspicions in Shan State - An Interview with Col Yord Serk

297 SHAN (4 Mar 04) Rangoon holding "war talks" with Shans

298 SHAN (16 Mar 04) Junta captain shot in Mongton

299 SHAN (30 Mar 04) Shans deny detaining missing Thai lawyer. Note: Somchai Neelapaijit, a prominent human rights lawyer known for his defense of Muslims in southern Thailand, disappeared on 12 March 2004. Human Rights Watch echoed widely-voiced suspicions that the Thai authorities were involved. In reaction, sources

SALONE/MOKEN FORCED ON LAND FOR TOURISM

The SPDC forced members of the Salone ethnic group to remain on land in designated villages and become a living tourist attraction. The Salone, also known as Moken or “sea-gypsy”, traditionally lived on boats along the Andaman Coast. On 12 January Gen Khin Nyunt inspected a “sea-gypsy” tourist village to increase the profile of the attraction. Salones have a hard time adapting to a land-based lifestyle.³⁰⁰

In a bid to attract international tourists to the Mergui Archipelago, off the Andaman Coast in Tenasserim Division, the junta’s Hotels and Tourism Ministry and local travel agencies also organized a “Sea-Gypsy” Festival from 14 to 17 February. Some Salone people were reportedly arrested by the SPDC and relocated in the tourist villages for the festival held on Bocho Island.³⁰¹

Some 12 Salones who fled to Thailand on 9 February to avoid being rounded-up by the SPDC were unfortunately deported a day later by Thai Authorities.³⁰²

The festival was overshadowed by the death of 37 people, who drowned when their boat, en route to the festival, sank off Lampi Island on 16 February. Only nine out of the 46 passengers were rescued.³⁰³

ARAKAN NATIONAL COUNCIL: A SOURCE OF CONCERN FOR ROHINGYAS

On 7 March Arakan organizations formed the Arakan National Council (ANC) to provide a unified leadership for the Arakan people. The ANC was formed following the Conference of Arakans in Diaspora, or the Arakan National Preconvention, from 1 to 6 March, and comprises members of the 4 main Arakan organizations: Arakan League for Democracy (ALD-Exile), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Democratic Party of Arakan (DPA) and National United Party of Arakan (NUPA). The ANC called for tripartite dialogue for national reconciliation and the emergence of a decentralized

aligned to the Thai government generated several rumors to distance themselves from the disappearance, including hints that armed groups such as the SSA-S were responsible. Govt sources even hinted that the lawyer had run off with another woman. Somchai Neelapaijit, chairman of Thailand’s Muslim Lawyers Association and vice-chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Law Society of Thailand, is still missing, presumed dead by his family and colleagues. See: Human Rights Watch (18 Mar 04) Thailand: Lawyer’s Disappearance Darkens Rights Climate

300 DVB (14 Jan 04) Burmese sea-gypsies forced to live on land for tourists

301 Irrawaddy (17 Feb 04) Thirty-Seven Killed At Sea

302 DVB (10 Feb 04) Burmese authorities rounding up sea gypsies for show

303 Irrawaddy (17 Feb 04) Thirty-Seven Killed At Sea

federal state. The ANC also rejected the use of the term “Rohingya”, and advocated in favor of the term “Arakan Bengali”.³⁰⁴

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) expressed concern over the newly-formed ANC, as it doesn’t include Rohingya or other non-Rakhaing organizations. On 15 March ARNO called for an “Arakan Conference” where Rakhaing, Rohingya and all communities of Arakan State could participate.³⁰⁵

CHIN NATIONAL FRONT: READY FOR CEASEFIRE TALKS

The Chin National Front (CNF) expressed its willingness to engage in ceasefire talks with the SPDC during a meeting with “Chin peace volunteers” at the Indian-Burma border. CNF nevertheless firmly rejected the National Convention until tripartite dialogue with elected representatives and ethnic nationalities could take place.³⁰⁶ [see Democracy & Dialogue]

ETHNIC NATIONALITIES COUNCIL FORMED

The Third Ethnic Nationalities Seminar held in KNU-controlled territory from 28-January to 2 February formed the Ethnic Nationalities Council, a new 10-member policy-making body from different organizations. Here is a breakdown of membership, with the number of members in parenthesis.

- National United Front (3)
- United Nationalities League for Democracy (2)
- Karenni National Progress Party (1)
- Restoration Council of Shan State (1)
- Shan Democratic Union (1)
- National Unity Party of Arakan (1)
- Kachin National Organization (1)

This body does not replace the Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (ENSCC) formed in 2001. The participants of the Third Ethnic Nationalities Seminar also drafted their own alternative seven-step roadmap to a federal and democratic Burma.³⁰⁷ [see Democracy & Dialogue]

304 Mizzima (7 Mar 04) Arakans in Diaspora reject SPDC Road Map

305 Kaladan (16 Mar 04) Rohingyas’ concern over “ANC”

306 DVB (17 Feb 04) CNF ready to talk to Burma junta too

307 SHAN (4 Feb 04) Third force presents revised roadmap

HUMAN RIGHTS

- **The regime claims to have released 151 people arrested in connection to the Depayin Massacre. The junta fails to mention how many people remain in detention, and how many were killed or disappeared following the 30 May 2003 events.**
- **The SPDC sentences seven university students to prison terms ranging between 7 and 15 years. The students founded a students' sports union without approval of the junta.**
- **Under international pressure, the junta agrees to review the case of the individuals condemned to death in November 2003 for having contacted the ILO.**
- **The regime agrees to allow an independent mediator to receive complaints from victims of forced labor, following the visit of ILO special envoy Francis Maupin.**
- **The junta refuses to invite UN Special Rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro to visit Burma. He was due to update his report ahead of the UN Commission on Human Rights.**
- **"The events in Depayin of 30 May 2003 have resulted in a setback for human rights in Myanmar", says Pinheiro.**
- **Burma is one of five countries with the highest risk of genocide, according to a researcher of the US Center for International Development and Conflict Management.**

POLITICAL PRISONERS

New Arrests

On 31 January Burmese Military Intelligence (MI) arrested Myint Aye, chairman of the NLD's Kemmendine township (Rangoon Division) office, and U Tin Maung Kyi, a senior NLD member.³⁰⁸ They were sent to Insein Jail, under unspecified charges.³⁰⁹

308 Irrawaddy (2 Feb 04) More NLD Members Arrested

309 AFP (9 Feb 04) Burmese opposition radio: Two senior democracy party members arrested

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On 11 February the MI detained seven NLD organizers from Bogale Township (Irrawaddy Division) including local Chairman U Aung Khin Bo. These arrests followed an impressive turnout at the NLD township office for preparations of the party's Union Day celebrations, held on 12 February. The junta has always feared such NLD celebrations, as they usually draw huge crowds.³¹⁰ [For other arrests see Democracy & Dialogue]

Political Prisoner Dies One Month Before Completing Sentence

On 28 January political prisoner Shein Tin died of lung cancer at Taungoo prison in Pegu Division, one month before he was due to complete his ten-year jail sentence. The 65-year old man, an executive member of the People's Progressive Party, was accused of being connected to the banned Community Party of Burma, defunct at the time of his arrest in March 1994.³¹¹

NLD Member Tortured in Insein Jail

Political prisoner Khin Maung Oo was reportedly tortured inside Insein Prison on 21 February and lost consciousness in the process. The NLD youth member was arrested in 1998 for delivering anti-regime pamphlets in Rangoon and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment.³¹²

Deteriorating Health Condition of Political Prisoners

Nine of the 33 journalists, writers and poets who remained behind bars during the period covered in this report were in urgent need of medical treatment, according to Reporters Without Borders and the Burma Media Association.³¹³ Furthermore, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) reported that two NLD MPs, Dr. Than Nyein and Daw May Win Myint, who are held at Insein Jail, had "seriously deteriorating" health condition.³¹⁴

310 BBC Monitor (14 Feb 04) Seven members of Burmese opposition group arrested

311 Irrawaddy (2 Feb 04) More NLD Members Arrested

312 NCGUB East (22 Feb 04) One NLD Youth Member Lost Consciousness due to Barbaric Torture by Authorities

313 Mizzima (8 Mar 04) Politics Becomes Zero-sum Game without Freedom of Expression

314 NCGUB East (22 Feb 04) One NLD Youth Member Lost Consciousness due to Barbaric Torture by Authorities

Releases

On 16 January the SPDC announced the release of 26 NLD members from prison, although it did not identify the released political prisoners.³¹⁵

On 17 January the regime released three more NLD members, all of them elected Members of Parliament imprisoned at Kale Prison, Sagaing Division. Their names are U Paw Khin (Myingyan Township Constituency), U Tin Aung Aung (Mandalay Northwest Constituency and Dr Win Aung (Kin-U Constituency).³¹⁶

On 25 January the SPDC claimed it had already released 151 persons arrested in relation to the Depayin Massacre, but failed to mention how many are still imprisoned. The regime still has not released a complete list of the dead and missing.³¹⁷

Journalists Released to Please UN Special Envoy

In a rather unsurprising attempt to flatter their UN guest Razali Ismail, the SPDC released on 1 March five political prisoners, including journalists Aung Zin Min and Cho Seint. The two reporters were arrested in December 1996 for alleged links with underground publications that criticized the junta and supported the 1996 student strike. Aung Zin Min was further accused of having links with the Communist Party of Burma, which he denied. Their sentence finished in December 2003, but for unknown reasons they were kept in jail three extra months.³¹⁸

Reporters without Border condemned the regime's lack of compassion for Win Tin, a journalist and NLD member who spent his 74th birthday in jail, after 14 years of detention.³¹⁹

Political Prisoners Not on Agenda of Karen Ceasefire Talks

The fate of over 100 imprisoned KNU members was not on the agenda of ceasefire talks between the regime and the KNU in January and February. The junta has imprisoned not only KNU members but also Karen civilians who were suspected of helping the insurgency. The KNU said the issue of

315 AFP (16 Jan 04) Myanmar releases 26 members of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party

316 BBC Monitor (19 Jan 04) Three more democracy party representatives released

317 BBC Monitor (25 Jan 04) Burmese government claims 151 democracy party detainees freed

318 RSF/BMA (10 Mar 04) Two journalists released at the end of their sentences. Journalist Win Tin will spend his 74th birthday at Insein prison

319 RSF/BMA (10 Mar 04) Two journalists released at the end of their sentences. Journalist Win Tin will spend his 74th birthday at Insein prison

political prisoners would be discussed only after obtaining a written ceasefire agreement, which has yet to be achieved.³²⁰ [see Ethnic Relations]

15 Years In Jail For Sports

On 7 January seven university students were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 7 to 15 years for founding a students' sports union without approval of the authorities. The students, arrested in June 2003, were reportedly tortured, and questioned over their possible links to political organizations. The students denied any involvement in political activities.³²¹

TOTAL IN BURMA: FRENCH HUMANITARIAN ACTIVIST DENIES WRONGDOING

Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders) founder Bernard Kouchner came under fire early in the year, after his report on Total's involvement in Burma was used by the French oil giant in the trial opposing it to victims of forced labor.

Total paid Kouchner 25,000 euro to investigate the company's actions in Burma, where it is a major partner in the Yadana pipeline. His report released in September 2003 absolved the company of all human rights abuses and praised its socio-economic program.³²²

Human rights activists, including the former director of Amnesty International USA Jack Healey severely criticized Kouchner's report. Kouchner's praise of the company conveniently omitted the substantial economic and political benefits accrued to the junta from Total's investments.³²³

Kouchner, a former minister in the French government, responded to his detractors in the press by reaffirming that the military junta, not Total, was responsible for human rights abuses in Burma. He criticized the company for its lack of support of the pro-democracy movement, but he reiterated his faith in the beneficial impact of economic and humanitarian investment in countries under totalitarian rule.³²⁴

Bernard Kouchner's report, entitled Report on a trip to Myanmar and the discovery of a silent industry, is available online: www.burma.total.com

320 Irrawaddy (16 Jan 04) Karen Prisoners Hope Ceasefire Leads to Freedom

321 Irrawaddy (9 Jan 04) Students Sentenced to 15 Years

322 Le Monde (5 Jan 04) Kouchner, Total et la Birmanie

323 Les Echos (7 Jan 04) Bernard Kouchner, médecin avec frontières

324 Les Echos (8 Jan 04) Total en Birmanie: Kouchner répond

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Burmese Rock Bands Denied Overseas Tours

Burmese authorities cancelled the tours abroad planned by two Burmese rock bands, Emperor and Iron Cross. Some musicians in Rangoon reportedly believed that the regime cancelled the bands' trips for fear that they would entertain opponents of the regime. Emperor was scheduled to tour in Australia, and Iron Cross in England.³²⁵

FORCED LABOR

ILO Envoy to Burma: The Junta Agrees to an Independent Mediator

In an attempt to improve its relationship with the International Labor Organization (ILO), the junta welcomed on 3 March Francis Maupin, special advisor to the ILO director general, for a four-day visit.³²⁶ The junta agreed to allow an independent mediator to receive complaints from victims of forced labor, following a meeting between the ILO special envoy and Gen Khin Nyunt. The mediator will attempt to resolve cases within the confines of Burma's legal system, which officially bans forced labor.³²⁷

Junta Will Review Death Sentences of "ILO 3"

Following the visit of the ILO Envoy, the junta also agreed to review death sentences handed down last November to three men charged with high treason for alleged contact with the ILO. The SPDC's Labor Minister Tin Win said on 17 March that contacts with the ILO were not illegal, and therefore the accused could be convicted for a maximum of six months' imprisonment on the charge of providing false information. The ILO continues to call for the immediate release of the accused.³²⁸

Forced Labor, Extortion, Confiscation of Villager Property Continues Unabated

Forced labor remains widely practiced especially in border areas, confirmed the ILO Burma representative Richard Horsey. During the early months of

325 Mizzima (18 Feb 04) Another rock band had tour abroad cancelled

326 AP (4 Mar 04) Special U.N. envoy departs Myanmar, labor envoy arrives

327 AFP (9 Mar 04) Myanmar agrees to allow independent mediator on forced labor: ILO

328 AFP (30 Mar 04) Myanmar agrees to review death sentences against ILO-linked three

78 Report Card: BLURRED VISION

2004 several incidents of forced labor, extortion, confiscation and destruction of villager property were reported in Chin State, Karen State, Karenni State, Mon State, and Tenasserim Division.³²⁹ The military uses forced labor to build infrastructure, to farm tea-plantations, and transport army supplies.

For example, households in Myo Thit Township, Bamo District (Kachin State) were ordered on 8 March to contribute one person without salary to dig a pool for a hydroelectricity project. Locals who did not want to contribute were fined 1,000 kyat (US\$1).³³⁰

In another incident Shan State villagers who took part in the New Destiny crop substitution project were threatened with land confiscation, following the failure of the project.³³¹ [see Drugs]

TORTURE

Several incidents of torture were reported in Ye Township, Mon State, where the junta has fought a Mon armed group, the Hongsawatoi Restoration Party. In one instance villagers were forced to sit still in the sun for a whole day, after Radio Free Asia broadcasted that human rights violations were committed by the Burmese Army in the area. Soldiers threatened to kill villagers if they were found to be supporters of armed opposition groups.³³²

BURMA: HIGH RISK OF GENOCIDE

Burma is one of five countries with the highest risk of genocide, according to Barbara Harff of the US Center for International Development and Conflict Management. The five countries, which include Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), met all 5 of 6 risk factors outlined in Harff's theoretical model. The criteria were:

- Prior genocides or politicides;
- Upheaval since 1988;
- Existence of a minority elite;
- Exclusionary ideology;
- Type of regime;
- Trade openness.

329 Rhododendron (Vol. VII. No. II Mar/Apr 04) Forced Labor in Thantlang Town; Free Burma Rangers (12 Jan 04) Karen and Karenni Update with photographs; KNU Mergui-Tavoy District Information Department (Jan, Feb and Mar 04) Monthly Human Rights Situation Report – Tenasserim Division; Kao Wao (3 Mar 04) Slash and burn tactics: the regime's old habits die hard

330 Mizzima (16 Mar 04) Force labor still continues in Kachin State

331 SHAN (5 Feb 04) New Destiny paddy doomed

332 Kao Wao (3 Mar 04) Slash and burn tactics: the regime's old habits die hard

The researcher presented her findings during the Stockholm International Forum entitled Preventing Genocide; Threats and Responsibilities, held on 26-28 January 2004.³³³

BURMESE IN BANGLADESH PRISON DESPITE END OF SENTENCE

Some 74 Burmese citizens are confined in Bandarband Jail, in southern Chittagong Hill Tracts, despite their prison terms having expired 5 to 12 years ago. Two of them are Burmans from Rangoon who were caught fishing illegally, and the others are Rohingyas who illegally crossed the Bangladesh border. Four of the Rohingyas are children under 12 years old, and are reportedly suffering from malnutrition. The Burmese regime generally does not recognize Rohingyas as their citizens, thus blocking their repatriation by the Bangladesh Government. On 28 February, 72 Burmese prisoners were sent home following a bilateral agreement.³³⁴ On 5 March the Burmese Ambassador to Bangladesh promised a change of attitude by the junta, who would accept the repatriation of Burmese citizens jailed in Bangladesh. There are still around 800 Burmese prisoners in Bangladesh prisons.³³⁵

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

More Press Freedom in China than in Burma

On 10 March the International Press Institute released its World Press Freedom Review 2003, saying that even Chinese citizens appear to enjoy more freedom of press than the Burmese.³³⁶

Reader's Digest Breaks Through

The regime's censors surprisingly allowed the uncensored distribution of the March 2004 edition of Reader's Digest, which featured a six-page profile of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The article, entitled "The Soul of a Nation", denounced the junta's attack on the Nobel Laureate and her party on 30 May 2003, where "maybe more than 100, were killed or injured". Bookstores reported that all copies of the magazine were sold in a single day.³³⁷

333 AFP (27 Jan 04) Iraq, Afghanistan, 11 other states at risk of genocide: expert

334 Kaladan (31 Jan 04) Forgotten People: Burmese Rohingyas' Uncertain Destiny In Bangladesh Prison

335 Narinjara (11 Mar 04) Burma will accept its citizens jailed in Bangladesh

336 IPI (Mar 04) 2003 World Press Freedom Review Burma (Myanmar) available online: www.freemedia.at

337 Irrawaddy (18 Mar 04) Suu Kyi Story Passes Censor; AFP (17 Mar 04) Reader's Digest profile of Aung San Suu Kyi

THE US ON BURMA: WORSENING HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

"Four decades of military rule, economic mismanagement, and endemic corruption have resulted in widespread poverty, poor health care, declining education levels, poor infrastructure, and continuously deteriorating economic conditions" ~ United States Department of State.³³⁸

On 25 February the United States released its annual report on human rights practices in Burma, slamming the junta for its worsening record. The report focused on the Depayin Massacre of 30 May 2003, denouncing the lack of proper investigation into the event, the subsequent closure of NLD offices countrywide and arrest of more than 270 pro-democracy activists. The United States criticized ongoing extrajudicial killings, rapes, forced relocation, forced labor, use of child soldiers, forced conscription, torture of political prisoners, and arbitrary arrests committed by the military.³³⁹

The regime quickly counterattacked, claiming the US "has lost in credibility on human rights issues". The SPDC questioned the credibility of sources for the US report, the lack of investigation into the impact of US sanctions on the situation of human rights, and the US's own human rights record. Perhaps comically, the junta concluded their statement by urging the United States to abide by the "International Convention on Human Rights", a non-existent instrument of international law.³⁴⁰

The US-ASEAN Business Council also criticized the US government for its annual human rights reports, which the lobby group says are too critical of their allies and could hurt business interests.³⁴¹ [see International Relations]

PINHEIRO'S REPORT: CAUTION AND DESPAIR

"The events in Depayin of 30 May 2003 have resulted in a setback for human rights in Myanmar", said the UN Special Rapporteur in his statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights on 26 March.³⁴² Paulo Sergio Pinheiro called for the immediate release of all those imprisoned in relation to the Depayin Massacre, compensation for the victims and their families, and the reopening of NLD offices.

338 US DOS (25 Feb 04) Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2003, Burma

339 AFP (26 Feb 04) Myanmar lashed in US rights report after year of killings, detentions

340 BBC Monitor (1 Mar 04) Burma counterclaims on US rights record

341 AFP (2 Mar 04) Business calls for US constructive reports on Southeast Asia

342 UNCHR, 60th Session (5 Jan 04) Situation of human rights in Myanmar, Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro

But the Special Rapporteur also expressed fatigue and frustration at the little impact of his recommendations on Burmese regime. "I cannot continue requesting indefinitely the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners" he said, calling on the Commission "to strengthen the credibility of its special procedures".³⁴³

Pinheiro was more cautious than his UN colleagues regarding the SPDC's roadmap. He noted with concern that the bodies overseeing the National Convention were comprised only of SPDC officials, and excluded members of political parties and ethnic nationalities. [see Democracy & Dialogue]

The regime refused to invite Pinheiro to Burma. The Special Rapporteur wanted to visit the country to obtain first-hand information prior to the start of UNCHR's 60th session.³⁴⁴ Traveling was denied on the grounds that it would have overlapped with the visit of other international envoys, such as UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail and ILO special envoy.³⁴⁵ However in his statement to the Commission Pinheiro said that the authorities had agreed in principle to a future visit.

MIN KO NAING: ARRESTED 15 YEARS AGO

On 23 March 1989 Min Ko Naing, chairman of the All Burma Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU) was arrested for his involvement in the 1988 pro-democracy movement. On the 15th anniversary of his arrest his ABFSU colleagues and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPPB) called for his release.

Min Ko Naing is being held in solitary confinement in Akyab (Sittwe) Prison, Arakan State. His initial 10-year prison sentence finished in 1999, but he is now detained under Article 10(a) of the State Protection Act. This article allows Burmese authorities to detain individuals deemed a threat to the State without trial for up to five years.³⁴⁶

343 UNCHR, 60th Session (26 Mar 04) Statement by Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

344 Irrawaddy (17 Mar 04) Pinheiro Refused Entry to Rangoon

345 Dawn (28 Mar 04) Myanmar lacks basic freedom, says UN

346 ABFSU (Foreign Affairs Committee) and AAPPB (23 March 04) Statement on the 15th Anniversary of the arrest of Min Ko Naing, the Chairperson of the ABFSU

WOMEN & CHILDREN

- **The Karen Women's Organization denounces the SPDC, which continues to perpetrate violence against women even while engaging in ceasefire talks with the Karen National Union.**
- **The Burmese Army uses rape as a weapon of war in its latest offensive in Ye Township, Mon State.**
- **The lack of attention for women's rights is fueling the AIDS epidemic in Asia, report UN agencies.**
- **UN Secretary-General calls for diplomatic and economic sanctions on parties to armed conflict using child soldiers, including the SPDC.**
- **Junta criticized for not implementing its 1993 Child Law.**

JUNTA CONTINUES TO RAPE WOMEN DESPITE CEASEFIRE TALKS

State violence against women continued unabated during the period, with rape cases being reported, notably in Karen and Mon States. The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) denounced the Burma Army, which perpetrates violence against women even as it is engaged in ceasefire talks with the KNU. Burmese authorities continue to deny any wrongdoing, claiming it uses Karen women only as guides during offensives. It is reported that Burmese soldiers even forced the women's husbands to sign statement saying they only used their wives as guides.

The KWO called on the SPDC and the KNU to form a joint observer group to monitor human rights violations inside Karen State, with the cooperation of international organizations such as the ICRC.³⁴⁷

Rape continues to be used as a weapon of war by the Burmese Army in Mon State, reports the Mon Women Organization and the Women and Child Rights Project on 2 March, Mon Women's Day. Several rape and sexual harassment cases have been reported since mid-December 2003, in relation to the latest Burma Army offensive in Ye Township.

In one incident young women from six villages were forced to participate in a beauty pageant and karaoke contest held at a military camp. Some women

347 Mizzima (27 Feb 04) Karen Women Still Being Harassed

were then kept on the base after the party and forced to drink alcohol before being raped. In another case SPDC soldiers raped one woman while they were staying at her home. Villagers are forced to give hospitality to Burmese troops, who use the local population as human shields against armed opposition groups.³⁴⁸

LACK OF ATTENTION TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS FUELS HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC

Lack of attention to women's rights is fueling the AIDS epidemic in Asia, where rates of infection amongst women are increasing, particularly in the Mekong region. These findings were discussed during the Mekong Leaders' Consultative Meeting on Women and AIDS on the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2004. This meeting was a joint initiative of UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNAIDS, and the first initiative of the Mekong Coalition on Women and AIDS.³⁴⁹

In Asia 30% of adults infected with HIV are women (compared to Africa with 58%), but the numbers are rising. Reliable information on women's health is difficult to gather in the region. Lack of collaboration with men to practice safe sex, lack of access to prevention services and to prevention methods women can use on their own increase women's vulnerability.³⁵⁰

BURMESE WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AT THE THAI-BURMA BORDER

"Burmese women in Thailand are pressured from many sources to be productive but not reproductive". This is one of the conclusions of Suzanne Belton and Cynthia Maung, who published part of their findings in the January 2004 issue of the "Forced Migration Review". Using data collected through interviews of Burmese women and reviews of medical records, the research explains why unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions are particularly important health care problems for undocumented migrant women in Thailand.

Lack of access to modern methods of family planning and the pressure to be employed create problems of unwanted pregnancies for Burmese migrant women. Because of legal restrictions on elective abortion, unqualified abortionists and self-induced abortions are the only resources available to end

348 Kao Wao (8 Mar 04) Violence mounts against Mon women in rural areas

349 Aids Weekly (29 Mar 04) HIV/AIDS incidence rising faster among women in Mekong region than men

350 Star Online (9 Mar 04) HIV infecting women faster than men in some parts of Asia

an unwanted pregnancy. Cost, language, cultural barriers and the fear of deportation are additional obstacles for women to access to health care.³⁵¹

NLD WOMEN DEMAND RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

“Free all political prisoners” said over 800 women NLD members of Pegu Division, in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt. The women demanded the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, members of the NLD’s Central Executive Committee, and all those detained following the Depayin Massacre. Their letter, a copy of which was also sent to Sr Gen Than Shwe, also demanded the reopening of all NLD offices.³⁵²

FORCED RECRUITMENT FOR THE JUNTA’S ORGANIZATION

Women from Northern Chin State are forced to join the SPDC’s National Working Committee for Women’s Affairs (NWCWA). The body’s chairman Dr. Khin Win Shwe, wife of Gen Khin Nyunt, ordered all women aged between 10 and 60 years to pay the 300 kyat fee and join the organization.³⁵³

CHILD SOLDIERS

United Nations: The “Era of Application” Falls Short of Expectations

Burma, with over 70,000 children used as soldiers by the Army and armed opposition groups, is one of 15 countries identified by the UN Secretary-General as plagued by the problem. Despite the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and four resolutions of the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General’s list of parties to armed conflict using child labor grew from 23 to over 40 in 2003. UN Security Council Resolution 1460 passed in 2003 on Children and Armed Conflict fell short of activists’ expectations because it did not contain enforcement mechanisms.³⁵⁴

In his report released on 10 November 2003, Kofi Annan reiterated his earlier call to embark on the “era of application”. Specifically, the Secretary-General

351 Forced Migration Review (Issue 19, Jan 04) Fertility and Abortion: Burmese women’s health on the Thai-Burma border

352 DVB (9 Mar 04) NLD Women demand SPDC to release political prisoners

353 Rhododendron (Vol. VII. No. II Mar/Apr 04) Chin Women forced to Join Myanmar Women Organization Chaired By Gen. Khin Ngunt’s Wife

354 Asia Times (30 Jan 04) Losing Battle to Rescue Child Soldiers

called for a comprehensive monitoring mechanism, along with sanctions for parties found guilty of violation.³⁵⁵

On 20 January Olara A. Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, opened the Council's annual debate on the issue by restating Kofi Annan's proposal:

“As proposed by the Secretary-General, such measures should include the imposition of travel restrictions on non-compliant leaders and their exclusion from any governance structures and amnesty provisions, a ban on the export or supply of arms, and a restriction on the flow of financial resources to the parties concerned.”³⁵⁶

This recommendation was welcomed by the Burmese pro-democracy movement abroad. Burma is a case in point where the UN Security Council sanctions could be implemented because of the regime's use of child soldiers.³⁵⁷

The generals in Rangoon continued to deny the use of child soldiers by their army. In a statement to the UN Security Council dated 20 January the SPDC rejected the inclusion of Burma on the UN Secretary-General's list of countries where child soldiers are used.³⁵⁸

Meanwhile the SPDC reportedly ordered in January regional military units to recruit ethnic youth for the army. Officers would be rewarded 20,000 kyat (about US\$22) for each ethnic youth recruited.³⁵⁹

Talks on the draft Security Council resolution were disappointingly stalled on 21 January when Britain objected to the inclusion of Northern Ireland and its paramilitary groups in the list of parties using child soldiers, arguing the problem in that region did not constitute an “armed conflict”.³⁶⁰

Girl Soldiers

The Canadian NGO Rights & Democracy released on 3 March a study highlighting the widespread use of girl child soldiers in armed conflicts

355 UNGA-UNSC (10 Nov 03) Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General [A/58/546-S/2003/1053]

356 Olara A. Otunnu (20 Jan 04) Making the 'era of application' a reality for war-affected children

357 USCB (22 Jan 04) UN Security Council Weighs Action on Burmese Child Soldiers

358 AFP (21 Jan 04) Myanmar rejects UN claims on child soldiers in army

359 BBC Monitor (6 Feb 04) Burmese government urges army to recruit more minority youths

360 Reuters (1 Feb 04) Britain Puts UN Child Soldier Plan on Hold

around the world. The study revealed girls under 18 have taken part in armed conflict in 38 countries since 1990, including Burma.³⁶¹

CHILD PRISONERS: JUDGES IGNORANT OF THE COUNTRY'S LAWS

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) based in Hong Kong denounced the lack of application of Burma's Child Law passed in 1993 (amended in 2001), in a letter to the SPDC sent late February. The AHRC demanded the release of Maung Char Thar Kyaw, who was sentenced at age 15 to a juvenile training camp by Monywa Township Court, in violation of many provisions of the country's Child Law. Burma's enacted this Law following its accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.³⁶²

361 AP (4 Mar 04) Study: Use of Girl Soldiers on the Rise

362 DVB (26 Feb 04) Asian Rights Commission demands release of Burmese boy

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

- **Junta arrests and disrobes over 100 monks for breaking nationwide curfew.**
- **25 novices and one monk condemned to 18 years' imprisonment for refusing SPDC donations.**
- **The regime's religious authorities order the destruction of six non SPDC-sponsored monasteries in Myawaddy.**
- **New reports highlight the religious persecution of Chin Christians by the SPDC.**

JUNTA TIGHTENS ITS GRIP ON BUDDHIST CLERGY

Monks Tortured and Disrobed in Mon State

On 12 December 2003 the Burmese army tortured and disrobed two monks in Mon State, accusing them of supporting armed opposition groups. One of them, Rev. Nai Pok from Mi Taw Hlar Doat, was put in the ground up to the waist. A gun was fired close to his ears to intimidate him. In another incident Burmese soldiers reportedly burned three monks all over their body.³⁶³

Monks Arrested, Disrobed and Imprisoned for Curfew Violation

On 20 January it was reported that the Military Intelligence arrested and disrobed over 100 monks in Rangoon for breaking the nationwide curfew in place since 20 November 2003. This control measure has required monks to remain in their monasteries between 7 pm and 4 am. The SPDC imposed the curfew following religious riots in Kyaukse and Mandalay.³⁶⁴ Some of the disrobed monks were also beaten and imprisoned at the infamous Insein Jail outside the capital.³⁶⁵

It was also reported that other monks, disrobed and sent to Tenasserim Division labor camps, would be prohibited from meeting with Rangoon-based International Committee of the Red Cross teams visiting the region.³⁶⁶

363 Kao Wao (3 Mar 04) Slash and burn tactics: the regime's old habits die hard

364 DVB (20 Jan 04) Buddhist monks arrested and forcibly disrobed

365 Irrawaddy (20 Jan 04) Monks Arrested for Curfew Violations

366 DVB (21 Feb 04) ICRC won't be allowed to see disrobed Buddhist monks in prisons

Refusing SPDC Donations Gets 26 Monks 18-Year Jail Sentences

On 19 January the junta sentenced 26 Buddhist monks to 18-year jail terms because they “overturned the bowl” - i.e. refused alms - from SPDC officials. One monk and 25 novices were arrested on 4 November 2003 after they refused to participate in a merit-making ceremony sponsored by Military Intelligence in a Rangoon monastery. The dissenting monks were tried and sentenced by a court at the infamous Insein Jail.³⁶⁷

Following this incident, the Police Director General’s Office ordered abbots to provide the Religious Affairs Department with information regarding their personal views on the political situation inside Burma and their relationship with the pro-democracy movement.³⁶⁸

Temples Destroyed in Myawaddy

In January Burma’s SPDC-controlled religious authorities ordered the destruction of six monasteries in Myawaddy, Karen State.³⁶⁹ It appears the monasteries were demolished because SPDC-sponsored monasteries resented the respect conferred on their rivals by the local population. Monks residing at the destroyed monasteries were also suspected of having contact with armed ethnic organizations. Burma’s religious authority, the Sangha Maha Nayaka, claimed the temples targeted had not received permission for construction, and that escaped prisoners impersonating monks had taken refuge there.³⁷⁰

BUDDHIST- MUSLIM CLASHES IN ARAKAN STATE

DVB reported that Akyab (Sittwe) University was closed on 18 February following clashes between Buddhist and Muslim students. Despite the reopening of the university on 19 February, clashes apparently continued.³⁷¹

CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN CHIN STATE

A visit to the India-Burma border by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) highlighted several cases of religious persecution carried by the SPDC against the predominantly Christian Chin people. It was reported that villagers in parts of Chin State were forced to porter for the Burma Army

367 BBC Monitor (31 Mar 04) Burmese opposition radio reports 26 monks jailed for refusing generals' alms

368 BBC Monitor (31 Mar 04) Burmese opposition radio reports 26 monks jailed for refusing generals' alms

369 Irrawaddy (28 Jan 04) Illegal Temples Destroyed in Myawaddy

370 DVB (28 Jan 04) Buddhist monasteries demolished in Karen State

371 DVB (19 Feb 04) Buddhist-Muslim clashes continue in Arakan State

from 20 December to 19 January, prohibiting them to celebrate Christmas. CSW also documented the SPDC's introduction of cheap crude alcohol in Chin state, traditionally forbidden by the local culture, and instances of forced conversion to Buddhism.³⁷²

CHRO Releases Report on the Persecution of Chin Christians

In February the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) released its first comprehensive report on the abuses committed by the SPDC against Chin Christians, who form 90% of the Chin population. CHRO documented several human rights abuses and violations of religious freedom by the military regime over the past eight years, including:

- Destruction of churches and crosses built on mountain tops
- Forced conversion to Buddhism
- Prohibition against the celebration of Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter
- Forced labor for the construction of Buddhist pagodas
- Torture and killing of Christian pastors
- Introduction of cheap alcohol, although Chin people traditionally prohibited alcohol

According to CHRO, these abuses are part of a policy of Burmanization of the Chin population by the SPDC, policy also known as "Amyo, Batha, Thathana", or 'One race, One Language, One Religion', referring to Burman, Burmese, Buddhism. The CHRO linked the increase in human rights abuses to the militarization of Chin State, where the number of SPDC Infantry Battalions increased from 1 to 10 since 1988.

The report, entitled "Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christians in Burma, is available online at: www.chro.org.

ACTIVIST MONK PASSES AWAY

The reverend U Nandawuntha, a political leader of Buddhist monks in Mandalay and upper Burma during the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations, died in exile on 24 March. U Nandawuntha was the founder and General Secretary of Red Galon Association, which coordinated political activities for

³⁷² Christian Solidarity Worldwide (31 Mar 04) Christian children forced to become Buddhist monks by Burmese regime

the clergy. He fled to India in 1988 following the arrest and detention of the Red Galon Chairman U Kawiya, and remained there until his death.³⁷³

INTER-FAITH PRAYER AMIDST REPRESSION AT THAI-BURMA BORDER

Despite an ongoing crackdown on undocumented migrants by the Thai police, Burmese exiles of Christian, Muslim and Buddhist faith jointly organized a prayer for freedom in Burma on 15 March in Chiang Mai, Mae Sot and Mae Hong Son.³⁷⁴

373 DVB (24 Mar 04) Respected Burmese activist monk passes away

374 Network Media Group (16 Mar 04) Multi-religious Prayer Meetings held for Peace in Burma

DISPLACEMENT

- **Burma, with over 1 million internally displaced persons, (IDPs) rates as one of the world's worst countries for IPDs, says Global IDP Project report.**
- **The Burma Army carries a new offensive in Karen-Karenni States in January: 3,500 people displaced**
- **UNHCR temporarily suspends Refugee Status Determination for asylum-seekers from Burma in January. New registration process is limited to referral to refugee camps.**
- **Over 6,000 Burmese migrants living in Mae Sot return to Burma in mid-March to avoid an anticipated crackdown by Thai authorities.**
- **Japan grants special residency permits to asylum-seeker Khin Maung Latt and his family.**
- **SPDC grants permission to UNHCR to visit eastern Burma in preparation for refugee repatriation.**
- **The Thai government suspends UNHCR's power to grant "persons of concern" (POC) status to asylum-seekers.**

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

A Global IDP Project report released in February affirmed that Burma remains one of the worst countries with regards to IDPs. With over 1 million IDPs, Burma constituted one of the world's ten worst displacement situations in 2003. National security forces and government-backed militias were the main source of displacement in Burma, according to the report.³⁷⁵

Army Displaces 3,500 in Karenni & Karen States

The SPDC Army began a campaign to clear villages on both sides of the Karen-Karenni State border in December 2003. On 26 December the 55th Division of the Burma Army ordered all Karennis from 50 villagers north and south of the Mawchi road in Southern Karenni State to relocate to Mahntahlayn near Pasaung, on the west bank of the Salween river, threatening "if any fail to come in ten days, they will be considered rebels

³⁷⁵ Global IDP Project (Feb 2004) Internal Displacement: A Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2003

and will be shot on sight".³⁷⁶ Even before the ten days passed the Army, with the help of the Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO), burnt villages, which forced around 1,000 Karennis to flee to Muthraw (Papun) District in northern Karen State.³⁷⁷

On the Karen side of the border it was reported that the offensive, which started 30 December, had forced around 2,500 Karens into hiding, also within Muthraw District, by 16 January.³⁷⁸

According to Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) leader Aung Mya, Burmese troops burned down six Karenni villages in early January, forcing around 2,000 Karenni villagers to flee to the Thai-Burma border. This attack directly contradicted the regime's claim that the 1995 ceasefire agreement with the KNPP was still effective.³⁷⁹ [see Ethnic Relations]

Asian Highway Forces Relocation in Sagaing Division

Burmese authorities ordered thousands of households to relocate to make way for the upgrade of the Indo-Burma road in Tamu township, Sagaing Division. The project is part of the US\$700 million Asian highway, which will link Thailand to India. Villagers were given a month to resettle before their houses and farms would be destroyed, although no resettlement area was allocated.³⁸⁰

REFUGEES

JAPAN

On 14 January the Tokyo High Court overturned an earlier decision of the Tokyo District court to have Japan pay compensation to a Burmese migrant whose application for refugee status had been refused. The man, who fled political persecution in Burma and arrived in Japan in 1998, claimed he suffered emotional trauma due to his one-year detention by immigration authorities. News reports did not mention the name of the Burmese refugee nor did it clarify his current status in Japan.³⁸¹

376 FBR (7 Jan 04) January 7, 2004 New Karen and Karenni IDPs

377 FBR (28 Jan 04) Burma Army Attacks in Northern Karen State and Karenni State; January 28 2004; FBR (29 Mar 04) Internally Displaced People (IDP) in Muthraw District, Karen State, Burma, March 8-29, 2004

378 FBR (16 Jan 04) 3,500 new Karen and Karenni IDPs and Burma Army attacks; Burma Army launching new offensive in Northern Karen State

379 AFP (14 Jan 04) Thousands of ethnic Karenni in Myanmar driven from their homes

380 Network Media Group (22 Mar 04) Forced relocation for Asia highway in Tamu

381 Japan Economic Newswire (14 Jan 04) High court nixes Myanmar refugee's demand for damages from state

In another case the Tokyo District Court overturned a decision of the Tokyo Regional Immigration Bureau and granted refugee status to a 39-year-old Burmese man. The Judge accepted the refugee's claim of persecution and affirmed it was "unacceptable" to forcibly repatriate him to Burma.³⁸²

On 5 March Justice Minister Daizo Nozawa granted a special residency permit to Khin Maung Latt and his family. The 46-year old Burmese refugee was facing deportation and separation from his family following the previous rejection of his refugee application. Khin Maung Latt's case caught international attention in October 2003 when he was imprisoned for 50 days following the rejection of his appeal to the Tokyo High Court.³⁸³

The successful resolution of this case prompted at least two other asylum-seekers in Japan to file lawsuits to overturn their deportation orders. They demanded that Japan's immigration authorities initiate a transparent process for granting special residency to undocumented migrants.³⁸⁴

BANGLADESH

In early January Kaladan reported that officials of Kutupalong refugee camp were forcing families of absentees during ration distribution to pay bribes or sign up for voluntary repatriation. Family members reportedly faced a cut of half of their food rations if they failed to comply with either of those measures.³⁸⁵

It was also reported that the UNHCR submitted a proposal to the Bangladeshi government for the local integration of the remaining 20,000 Rohingya refugees living in refugee camps. As of 24 February the authorities were still studying the proposal.³⁸⁶

MALAYSIA

On 25 February immigration authorities from Kelantan State deported 52 Burmese migrants held in the Tanah Merah detention camp. The Burmese nationals had been held for illegal entry since last year, and were deported via Bukit Kayu Hitam, in Kedah State.³⁸⁷

382 Japan Economic Newswire (19 Feb 04) Tokyo court grants refugee status to Myanmar man

383 Asahi Shimbun (6 Mar 04) Burmese man, family get OK to stay

384 IHT (13 Mar 04) Case stirs other asylum seekers

385 Kaladan (6 Jan 04) A New Method set up for forced repatriation of Refugee in Bangladesh Camp

386 Narinjara (24 Feb 04) UNHCR seeks local integration of 20,000 Rohingya refugees

387 NS Times (25 Feb 04) 52 Myanmar illegals to be deported tomorrow

UNHCR PLANS REPATRIATION WHILE DISPLACEMENT CONTINUES

On 11 March the UNHCR announced Rangoon granted it permission to visit eastern Burma and prepare repatriation plans for refugees living in Thailand. This announcement came as internal displacement and warfare against ethnic nationalities continued in the region. This is the first time the Burmese regime allowed UNHCR access to the area. The informal ceasefire agreements reached between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the junta in January prompted this initiative.³⁸⁸ [see Ethnic Relations]

The agreement will allow the UNHCR to conduct workshops and seminars on health, education and community assistance services in Mon State, Karen State, and Tenasserim Division.³⁸⁹ UNHCR will not establish field offices but will work with local NGOs to upgrade infrastructure – schools, clinics, and roads – to ease repatriation.³⁹⁰ UNHCR made clear that any repatriation plan was contingent on the formal resolution of the conflict between the KNU and the Burmese military.³⁹¹

The UNHCR's move was criticized by Burmese exiles, who insisted that genuine political dialogue and significant improvement in the regime's human rights record should be a prerequisite for the UN agency's presence in Eastern Burma.³⁹²

THAILAND: THAKSIN TIGHTENS HIS FIST ON BURMESE REFUGEES

On 3 January Thai immigration police announced they had arrested 168,414 Burmese nationals in 2003 for illegal entry or stay in the country.³⁹³ This crackdown was part of a new set of Thai policies to contain refugees in camps at the border and restrict the flow migrant workers from Burma.

In February Human Rights Watch released a report, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai policy toward Burmese refugees", which severely criticized the Thaksin administration for these new policies, such as the detention and forced repatriation of asylum-seekers.³⁹⁴ [see Thai-Burma Relations]

388 AP (11 Mar 04) UNHCR gets permission to visit eastern Myanmar

389 Irrawaddy (18 Mar 04) Refugees' Return Won't be Easy or Quick

390 David Arnett (11 Mar 04) SPDC authorises UNHCR presence in Eastern Burma

391 Scoop (15 Mar 04) UN & Myanmar Strike Deal Possible Refugee Returns

392 Irrawaddy (18 Mar 04) Refugees' Return Won't be Easy or Quick

393 AFP (3 Jan 04) Thailand arrested 280,000 illegals, mostly from Myanmar, in 2003

394 HRW (Feb 04) Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants

UNHCR Suspends Refugee Status Determination For Burmese Asylum-Seekers

On 6 January the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced that the organization had stopped receiving applications from asylum-seekers from Burma at its Mae Sot and Bangkok offices effective 1 January.³⁹⁵

The suspension of the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process followed intense pressure from the Thai government who, in a bid to warm its relations with the Burmese junta, has sought to contain Burmese exiles in refugee camps and curb pro-democracy activities.³⁹⁶

Although the moratorium was lifted on 1 February, UNHCR announced the registration process would be limited to the referral of new applicants for admission to refugee camps near the Thai-Burma border.³⁹⁷ This restriction was a consequence of the Thai plans to relocate all Burmese refugees living in urban areas to three existing camps near the Thai-Burma border.³⁹⁸ The Thai government enacted this policy in June 2003 following protests of Burmese exiles in front of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok, something that angered Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.³⁹⁹

Burmese exiles have become more reluctant to approach UNHCR as it means they will be confined to refugee camps, and personal information shared with Thai authorities and Burmese intelligence.⁴⁰⁰

No More Persons of Concern (POC) Status for Refugees

On 22 March the Thai government announced UNHCR would no longer be allowed to grant "persons of concern" (POC) status to Burmese asylum-seekers. Instead, Thai authorities revived the Provincial Admission Board (PAB) to carry the screening process, with UNHCR acting only as an observer. Governors of Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai, Tak and Kanchanaburi provinces will head the PAB.⁴⁰¹

395 Irrawaddy (6 Jan 04) Mae Sot UNHCR Office Refusing Applications

396 Nation (27 Jan 04) Thailand: Harsh Policy Towards Burmese Refugees

397 UNHCR (31 Jan 04) New UNHCR registration process for applications from Myanmar asylum-seekers as of 1 February 2004

398 Irrawaddy (11 Feb 04) Thailand to Relocate Burmese Refugees From Cities

399 HRW (Feb 04) Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants

400 USCB (18 Feb 04) New UNHCR registration process for applications from Myanmar asylum-seekers as of 1 February 2004

401 Nation (23 Mar 04) UNHCR barred from giving status

US Resettlement Program Eases Thai Problem

In January the United States announced it was committed to resettle 4,000 urban-based Burmese refugees. These included the 2,000 people already registered as refugees (POCs), as well as 2,000 asylum-seekers whose cases were pending with the UNHCR as of 31 December 2003. Many details are yet to be worked out, including resettlement possibilities for Burmese asylum-seekers who filed applications after 31 December 2003.⁴⁰²

23 Burmese Activists Stage Hunger Strike in Bangkok Prison

Twenty-three Burmese activists detained at the Bangkok Special Detention Center went on a 3-day hunger strike beginning 4 January, Burma's Independence Day, to protest a plan by Thai authorities to deport them.⁴⁰³

The activists ended the strike following an agreement with the UNHCR for resettlement to a third country. Thai authorities agreed not to send them to Tham Hin refugee camp pending resettlement. Most of the strikers were already recognized as POCs. Some had been arrested at a demonstration in front of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok on 18 September 2003, the 15th anniversary of the SLORC coup.⁴⁰⁴

MIGRANT WORKERS

Thousands of Burmese Migrants Flee Ahead Of Thai Crackdown

In mid-March over 6,000 Burmese living in Mae Sot fled across the Moei River to avoid a new Thai crackdown on undocumented migrant workers.⁴⁰⁵ Most of them were held in a detention center in Myawaddy for identification before being sent back home.⁴⁰⁶

On 11 March Thai authorities put up posters across Mae Sot district warning undocumented migrant workers they would be jailed if they did not return to Burma by 15 March. Mae Sot reportedly resembled a ghost town during the week of the anticipated crackdown, although no arrests by Thai authorities were reported. Local business owners complained of a drop in cheap labor availability and clientele.⁴⁰⁷

402 HRW (Feb 04) Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants

403 DVB (5 Jan 04) Burmese activists stage hunger strikes in Thai prison

404 Irrawaddy (7 Jan 04) Activists Stop Hunger Strike

405 Nation (16 Mar 04) Burmese illegals flee across border ahead of crackdown

406 Irrawaddy (18 Mar 04) Work Permits for Migrants Postponed

407 Irrawaddy (16 Mar 04) Mae Sot Very Quiet as Crackdown Starts

Registration of Migrant Workers Postponed

In February Thai authorities announced that work permits for undocumented Burmese migrants would become widely available in April. As of March 2004 only 35,000 permits had been distributed in Tak province, despite the estimated 100,000 Burmese workers living in Mae Sot district alone. Burmese migrants complained that the cost of the work permit, equivalent to US\$110, was prohibitive.⁴⁰⁸

On 17 March a Thai official announced that the work permit plan had to be postponed due to a disagreement with Burmese authorities. The Burmese junta preferred to have the migrants repatriated rather than send a delegation to confirm the identity of applicants for work permits.⁴⁰⁹

Repression of Labor Activists

Two members of the Yaung Chi Oo Burmese Workers' Association have been in hiding since December to avoid possible arrest by Thai authorities. Moe Swe and Ko Phyo suspected that their defense of 260 Burmese workers in a case against the Nasawat Apparel factory angered Thai factory owners, who pressured Thai police to arrest them.⁴¹⁰

Deportation Despite Accident

On 20 February a truck carrying over 100 Burmese migrants to be deported at the Thai-Burma border overturned and crashed, killing six and injuring most other passengers. The deportation order was executed despite the accident.⁴¹¹

HUMAN SMUGGLING

Shan people leaving central Shan State to find work in Chiang Mai in Thailand pay on average 14,000 baht (US\$330) to smugglers, reported the SHAN. It costs 4,000 baht (US\$95) more to reach Bangkok. Most migrant workers have to sell their possessions and incur debt in order to pay for the trip. This information was provided by a businessman involved in human smuggling between Shan State and Thailand, who was interviewed by SHAN.⁴¹²

408 Irrawaddy (12 Mar 04) Migrants Flee Arrest, Go Home

409 Irrawaddy (18 Mar 04) Work Permits for Migrants Postponed

410 Irrawaddy (7 Jan 04) Workers' Advocates In Hiding

411 DVB (20 Feb 04) Burmese workers killed in Thailand again

412 SHAN (17 Mar 04) Human trafficking a big industry

HEALTH

- **The junta denies the presence of bird flu in Burma, and bans poultry imports from China and Thailand.**
- **Hunger persists in Burma because of the policies and practices of the Burmese regime, according to the Asian Legal Resource Center.**

BIRD FLU STORIES

The Burmese junta continued to deny the presence of bird flu on its territory, while the disease spread across Asia in the first months of 2004. In an attempt to prove its seriousness at preventing the disease the junta claimed to have formed a chicken inspection committee in early January, which apparently checked 8.5 million of the country's 63 million chicken.⁴¹³ At the end of January Burmese authorities also banned imports of poultry from China and Thailand, where cases have been officially reported.⁴¹⁴

Perhaps doubting the junta's claims, India's Ministry of Agriculture declared its intention at the end of January to screen passengers coming from Burma at air and seaports. India was considered a total ban on poultry imports.⁴¹⁵

Residents of Karen State reported that chickens bred at SPDC army bases in Karen State were dying in massive numbers in late January from "a mysterious disease", although there has been no confirmation from any sources that this disease might have been bird flu.⁴¹⁶

The Burmese authorities were pleased to announce a recovery of the price of poultry early in March, after a severe drop in January following speculations that the country had been affected.⁴¹⁷

FOOD SECURITY

Hunger persists in Burma because of the policies and practices of the military regime, which denies its people the right to food. The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) made this declaration during its annual statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights on 30 March.

413 Xinhua (9 Mar 04) Myanmar continues to remain free of bird flu

414 AFP (26 Jan 04) Myanmar bans Thai, Chinese poultry imports over bird flu fears

415 Hindu (29 Jan 04) Travelers may be screened

416 BBC Monitor (7 Feb 04) No bird flu in Burma, official says; deaths from "mysterious disease" reported

417 Xinhua (9 Mar 04) Myanmar continues to remain free of bird flu

The statement said the Permanent People's Tribunal on the Right to Food and the Rule of Law in Asia, created by ALRC in 2003, received reports throughout the past year on food-related crimes committed by the regime. Compulsory paddy procurement is still widely employed despite official denial. Land confiscation, forced relocation, rapes, and malnutrition continue to occur.⁴¹⁸

BURMESE MIGRANT WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

A study published in January detailed how unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions are particularly important health care problems for undocumented migrant women in Thailand.⁴¹⁹ [see Women & Children]

HIV/AIDS JOINT PROPOSAL

On 12 January Burma hosted the South-East Asia Constituency Meeting on the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Burma's Minister of Health Dr. Kyaw Myint announced that Burma and Thailand's health ministries were preparing a joint proposal to the Fund for projects along the border areas.

The meeting discussed fund management and participating countries' experiences in implementing projects. Delegates from Burma, Indonesia, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, India, the Maldives and East Timor and representatives of UN agencies attended the meeting.⁴²⁰

The Global Fund's Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) in Burma was formed in 2002 and comprises 29 members, including the Ministry of Health, NGOs, patients groups, the UN, and religious groups.

FAKE ANTIBIOTICS SEIZED

It was reported that Burmese authorities seized fake antibiotics in raids last December, some of which had been imported from China and India. According to the World Health Organization 57% of tested drugs in Burma do not have legal approval to be sold.⁴²¹

418 Asian Legal Resource Centre (30 Mar 04) ALRC Statement on 'Food scarcity in Myanmar' received by Commission on Human Rights

419 Forced Migration Review (Issue 19, Jan 04) Fertility and Abortion: Burmese women's health on the Thai-Burma border

420 NLM (13 Jan 04) South-East Asia Constituency Meeting on Global Fund open

421 Drug Week (3 Feb 04) Myanmar officials seize millions of fake drugs

ENVIRONMENT

- **UNESCO confirms that 9 of 13 dams to be constructed by China on the Nu River fall within the World Heritage listed Three Parallel Rivers area. Activists say communities located along the river, known as the Salween in Burma and Thailand, will be severely impacted by the project.**
- **Thailand and Burma sign a MOU on international water management, paving way for dams on the Koh and Sai rivers.**
- **The Burmese Forest Ministry triples the size of the Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Kachin State, creating the world's largest tiger reserve.**

CHINESE DAMS ON THE NU/SALWEEN RIVER

On 17 February UNESCO confirmed that 9 of China's proposed 13 dams to be constructed on the Nu River fall within the World Heritage listed Three Parallel Rivers area.⁴²² The Nu River, Southeast Asia's second longest river, flows from the Tibetan plateau through Burma and the Thai-Burma border, where it is known as the Salween River. China's plan to build 13 hydroelectric dams on the Nu River is causing uproar in Thai and Burmese civil society.

China has made no guarantees that it will study the environmental impact of its project on neighboring countries, where activists say communities along the river will be "drastically impacted".⁴²³

On 11 March it was reported that the Liuku dam, the first of China's 13 planned projects along the Nu/Salween River, was to be built in the first half of 2004. Workers have already started building access roads to the site. The Governor of Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, where the dam will be located, defended the project saying the rate of forest cover in the core part of the Three Parallel Rivers is actually increasing.⁴²⁴

THAI-BURMA PROJECTS FOR THE SALWEEN RIVER

Thailand and Burma are set to conduct a feasibility study to dam the Koh and Sai rivers, which they share, for the purpose of irrigation. On 24 February the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on international water

422 SHAN (1 Mar 04) UNESCO says China's Salween part of World Heritage Site

423 BBC (19 Jan 04) Thai groups battle new China dam

424 SHAN (11 Mar 04) Dam on China's Salween goes for it

management. The dams would create a reservoir in Burma and water would be channeled through one canal going to each country. Authorities claimed the project would not cause environmental degradation in Shan State, something with which activists from the Southeast Asia Rivers Network of Thailand disagree.⁴²⁵

There is still no sign of progress on the construction of the planned dam in Burma's Palao region. The dam is to be built by Thailand's MDX Group, following an agreement with Burmese authorities in December 2002. Burmese refugees who rafted down the Salween River in early February from Shan State to Chiang Mai's Fang District reported the news.⁴²⁶

MANGROVE REFORESTATION

A second project to regenerate mangrove forests in Irrawaddy Division was launched in late February. Burma's Forest Resource Environment Development Association (FREDA) and a Japanese NGO named Action for Mangrove Reforestation will implement the project. According to Burmese authorities the first project carried from 1999 to 2003 succeeded in cultivating 10 species of mangrove over a 607 hectares surface in the same region. 82 per cent of mangroves in the Irrawaddy Division have been depleted in order to obtain firewood and arable land.⁴²⁷

A TIGER RESERVE FOR THE SPDC

The Burmese Forest Ministry announced mid-March that it would triple the size of the 6,475 square-kilometer Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Kachin State, to create the world's largest tiger reserve. The main driving force behind this project is the American NGO Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which has been active in northern Burma for the past decade. According to WCS fewer than 100 tigers are living at the site.

WCS had only words of praise for the Burmese junta following the announcement of the expansion of the reserve: "Myanmar's government has done more to protect their tiger population than any other Asian government".⁴²⁸ The junta and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which controls the Hukaung Valley have apparently been supportive of the project.

425 Bangkok Post (25 Feb 04) Thai-Burmese plan to dam two rivers – Activists raise alarm over environment, impact on minorities

426 SHAN (25 Feb 04) No sign of dam on the Salween

427 Xinhua (18 Feb 04) Myanmar to launch second mangrove forest regeneration project

428 AP (1 Apr 04) Myanmar creates world's largest tiger reserve in effort hailed by conservationists

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This announcement fulfilled the junta's objective to expand the country's protected reserves to a minimum of 5% of its territory by 2010.

Effective commitment to the protection of this territory will however remain only a dream for the conservation community. The Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division of the regime's Forest Ministry has a dismal annual budget equivalent to US\$70,000, or US\$2 per protected square kilometer.⁴²⁹ According to Alan Rabinowitz of WCS, still much work needed to be done to work out funding and management of the reserve, as well as the partnership between Burmese authorities and WCS.⁴³⁰

WILDLIFE TRADE THRIVING DESPITE OFFICIAL BAN

Wildlife trade at the Burma-China border areas continues to thrive despite an official ban in 1994, according to a survey by the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Each year smugglers export 2,500 tonnes of snakes from Burma to Ruili at the Chinese border. The main market remains China, where people consume snakes, lizards, tortoises and monkeys as food, medicine, or keep them as pets.⁴³¹

429 Irrawaddy (30 Mar 04) Protecting Burma's Biodiversity in the Long-term

430 National Public Radio (15 Mar 04) Biggest-Ever Tiger Reserve in Myanmar

431 Mizzima (25 Mar 04) Wildlife Trade

CHRONOLOGY: JAN ~ MAR 2004

- 2 Jan The Indian army announces that it sent troops to train the SPDC Army in preparation for a possible joint operation against Indian insurgent groups operating inside Burma. *AFP, 2 Jan*
- 3 Jan Thai immigration police says they arrested 168,414 Burmese nationals who entered or stayed illegally in the country in 2003. *AFP, 3 Jan*
- 4 Jan Senior NLD members celebrate Independence Day with a religious merit-making ceremony and prayers for national reconciliation at the Nga Dat Kyit monastery in Rangoon. *AFP, 4 Jan 04; and VOA, 4 Jan*
- 4 Jan Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) leaders meet to discuss the SPDC overture for a ceasefire. The KNPP agrees in principle to hold talks, but wants to consult with other ceasefire groups first. *DVB, 4 Jan*
- 4 Jan Gen Khin Nyunt says the junta is determined to implement its roadmap to democracy, but warns that outside pressure will threaten the process. *VOA, 4 Jan*
- 4-6 Jan 23 detained Burmese activists stage a hunger strike at the Special Detention Center in Bangkok to protest a plan by Thai authorities to send them back to Burma. After 3 days UNHCR agrees to accept their application for resettlement in a third country. *DVB, 5 Jan, and Irrawaddy, 7 Jan*
- 5 Jan Maj Gen Manas Paorik, Commander of the Pha Muang Task Force, announces his intention to strengthen ties with Burmese border troops to fight the drug trade. *Bangkok Post, 5 Jan*
- 5 Jan It is reported that the SPDC attacked camps of a faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), a group that operates in Northeast India, and also from inside Burma. *BBC, 5 Jan*
- 5 Jan The UNHCR Mae Sot (Thailand) office temporarily stops receiving application from Burmese asylum seekers until the conclusion of talks between the UN agency and the Thai government. *Irrawaddy, 6 Jan*
- 5 Jan Leading Burmese activists in exile criticize UN Sec Gen Kofi Annan for his support of the SPDC's democracy roadmap, and ask for the replacement of Razali Ismail as UN Special Envoy. *AFP, 6 Jan*
- 6 Jan Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda claims Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has asked the international community to be patient with Gen Khin Nyunt's roadmap. He also urges the SPDC to set a

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- timeframe for the democracy roadmap. *Jakarta Post*, 6 Jan; and *AFP*, 6 Jan
- 7 Jan Indonesian President Megawati's envoy to Burma Ali Alatas calls for more action on the part of ASEAN in resolving domestic issues that impact the region. *AFP*, 7 Jan
- 7 Jan SPDC sentences seven university students from 7 to 15 years in prison after founding a students' sports union without SPDC permission. *Irrawaddy*, 9 Jan
- 8 Jan The Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN condemns the attacks of the SPDC on their rival, the Khaplang group (NSCN-K), in the first demonstration of solidarity since they split in 1988. *The Telegraph*, 8 Jan
- 10 Jan It is reported that an attempted coup against the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), allegedly led by Col Lasang Aung, intelligence chief of the KIO's armed wing, was averted early in January. *Irrawaddy*, 10 Jan
- 10 Jan The Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) denounces the SPDC's democracy roadmap as a "political maneuver" to respond to the pressures following the 30 May 2003 attacks. *DPNS*, 10 Jan
- 11 Jan The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) urges the junta to engage in a tripartite dialogue as a prerequisite for the National Convention. *DVB*, 11 Jan
- 11 Jan The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) adds 50 companies to its list of businesses operating in Burma, bringing the total to 375. *The Independent*, 11 Jan
- 12 Jan An Indian Army official reports that the SPDC army failed to attack Indian insurgent groups based on its territory. *PTI*, 12 Jan
- 12 Jan It is reported that Thailand and Burma will start building in January a deep seaport at Tavoy, Tenasserim Division, as part of the Economic Cooperation Strategy. *Xinhua*, 12 Jan
- 12 Jan The second Burmese international carrier, United Myanmar Airlines, postpones the launch of its international flights due to financial difficulties. *Xinhua*, 12 Jan
- 12 Jan It is reported that Canadian companies Leeward and Jet Gold Corp. have won the Set Ga Done Concession for gold mining in northern Shan State. *Stockhouse*, 12 Jan
- 12 Jan Burma hosts the South-East Asia Constituency Meeting on the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. *NLM*, 13 Jan
- 13 Jan The KIO forms a commission to cast light on the alleged coup attempt by one of its high-ranking members. *Irrawaddy*, 13 Jan

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- 13 Jan It is reported that the Burmese junta imposed a six-month ban on rice export effective 1 January. *AFP, 13 Jan*
- 14 Jan A KNU spokesperson affirms that ceasefire talks with the SPDC doesn't signify KNU support for the National Convention. *Network Media Group, 14 Jan*
- 14 Jan It is reported that SPDC attacks forced around 2000 Karennis to flee their villages in January and run to the Thai border. *AFP, 14 Jan*
- 14 Jan The Tokyo High Court overturns a decision by a lower court to have the state pay compensation to a Burmese asylum seeker for damages ensuing from the rejection of his application for refugee status. *Japan Economic Newswire, 14 Jan*
- 14 Jan UN Sec Gen Kofi Annan defends his cautious support the SPDC's roadmap, saying his office is simply trying to "push the process along". *AFP, 14 Jan*
- 15 Jan A 21-member KNU delegation led by Gen Bo Mya arrives in Rangoon for ceasefire talks with the SPDC. *AP, 15 Jan*
- 15 Jan KIO leaders responsible for the preceding week's attempted coup are forced to resign by the investigative commission who found them guilty. *Irrawaddy, 15 Jan*
- 15 Jan Daewoo International claims to have found a large natural gas reserve in the Myanmar A-1 mining zone in Arakan Sea, Western Burma. *Korea Herald, 15 Jan*
- 16 Jan Japan offers 159 million Yen (1.43 million US\$) for human resources development scholarship project to Burma. *NLM, 17 Jan*
- 16 Jan 26 NLD members are released from detention by the SPDC. *AFP, 16 Jan*
- 16 Jan Daewoo International President and CEO Lee Tae-Yong meets Gen Khin Nyunt and SPDC officials to discuss the natural gas find off the coast of Arakan State. *AFP, 17 Jan; and Asia Tribune, 14 Feb*
- 17 Jan The Assam Government (India) hosts an international conference on regional cooperation, attended by China, Burma and Bangladesh. Assam seeks to reopen the Stilwell Road crossing Burma from India to China. *Mizzima, 15 Jan*
- 18 Jan U Paw Khin, U Tin Aung Aung, and Dr Win Aung, 3 elected NLD MPs, are released from prison. *BBC Monitor, 19 Jan*
- 18 Jan It is reported that SWIFT, a company jointly owned by the world's biggest banks, is helping the SPDC to set up a new international banking system based on the euro, following US economic sanctions. *The Observer, 18 Jan*

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- 19 Jan Singer Bono and US Senator Mitch McConnell call for economic and political sanctions on the Burmese junta in an open letter published in the International Herald Tribune. *AFP, 19 Jan*
- 20 Jan It is reported that Sr Gen Than Shwe met for 2 hours with leaders of the KNU for ceasefire talks. *AFP, 20 Jan*
- 20 Jan It is reported that since the end of October 2003 about 100 monks have been detained at Insein Prison for breaking an SPDC imposed curfew. *Irrawaddy, 20 Jan*
- 20 Jan UN Secretary General Secretary Kofi Annan recommends that the UN Security Council impose sanctions on parties that use child soldiers, including Burma's military regime. *USCB, 22 Jan*
- 21 Jan The KNU denies its delegation in Rangoon met with Sr Gen Than Shwe, saying it only met with Gen Khin Nyunt on the 16 Jan. *AP, 21 Jan*
- 21 Jan The SPDC rejects the findings of a UN Sec Gen report on the use of child soldiers by its army. *AFP, 21 Jan*
- 21 Jan The National Basketball Association (NBA) removes sweatshirts illegally imported from Burma from its New York store following pressure from an anti-sweatshop group. *NY Times, 21 Jan*
- 21 Jan It is reported that 3500 Karen and Karenni people were displaced by the SPDC while the KNU was in Rangoon negotiating a ceasefire. *CSW, 21 Jan*
- 22 Jan The KNU delegation leaves Rangoon three days later than planned. *Irrawaddy, 21 Jan*
- It comes back with a provisional ceasefire but no written agreement. *AFP, 22 Jan*
- 23 Jan Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Victoria Gerrard Chaney rules that UNOCAL cannot be held legally responsible for the actions of its subsidiaries. *LA Times, 24 Jan*
- 25 Jan The SPDC claims it released 151 prisoner linked to the Depayin Massacre, although it did not provide information on the dead, the missing, and the people still imprisoned. *BBC Monitor, 25 Jan*
- 25 Jan Local police clashes with SPDC soldiers after trying to inspect an illegal poppy plantation near Kawthaung, Tenasserim Division. *BBC Monitor, 25 Jan*
- 25-26 Jan Thailand proposes to use its currency for trade with Burma, Cambodia and Laos instead of the US dollar at the Thai-Burma Joint Trade Commission held in Rangoon. *Irrawaddy, 26 Jan*
- 26 Jan The SPDC bans poultry imports from Thailand and China to prevent the spreading of bird flu. *AFP, 26 Jan*

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- 27-28 Jan Gen Khin Nyunt opens a seminar entitled "Understanding Myanmar" in Rangoon, saying democracy cannot be imposed from outside. *AFP, 27 Jan*
- 27 Jan It is reported that the Communist Party of Burma recently launched its new website, after the collapse of the party in 1989. *Irrawaddy, 27 Jan*
- 27 Jan It is reported that the First Summit meeting of Bimstec, grouping Bangladesh, India, Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, was cancelled because of elections in India. *South China Morning Post, 27 Jan*
- 27 Jan Burma is one of 13 countries facing a high risk of genocide, says a US expert at the Preventing Genocide Conference. *AFP, 27 Jan*
- 27 Jan It is reported that Buddhist temples built in Myawaddy without approval of local authorities and Sangha Council are being destroyed. *Irrawaddy, 28 Jan*
- 28 Jan People's Progressive Party executive member Shein Tin dies of lung cancer in prison just one month short of being released, after 10 years of detention by the SPDC. *Irrawaddy, 2 Feb*
- 29 Jan Myanmar Oriental Bank (MOB), Myanmar Universal Bank (MUB) and the Kanbawza Bank (KB), three of six private banks closed since the preceding year's banking crisis, are permitted to resume business. *AFP, 29 Jan*
- 29 Jan Announced that India will begin exporting diesel to Burma by road. *Press Trust of India, 29 Jan*
- 29 Jan SPDC Sec-1 Lt Gen Soe Win receives Deputy Prime Minister of Lao Dr. Thongloun Sisolith in Arakan State. *NLM, 29 Jan*
- 29 Jan UNOCAL Corp's General Manager David C Peters visits Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt. *NLM, 29 Jan*
- 30 Jan Burmese Energy Minister Lun Thi meets India's Petroleum Minister Ram Naik to discuss the export of gas from the newly discovered offshore gas field off Arakan state in western Burma. *Business Standard, 29 Jan*
- 30 Jan Japan announces it resumed small-scale aid to Burma in response to signs of democratization. *Reuters, 30 Jan*
- 31 Jan SPDC announces that a new round of ceasefire talk with the KNU will take place next week. *AFP, 31 Jan*
- 31 Jan The KNU celebrates the 55th anniversary of their struggle, and says peace talks with the SPDC could take from 6 months to a year. *Reuters, 31 Jan*
- 31 Jan Gen Khin Nyunt warns Western countries that any interference in the country's affairs will make the emergence of democracy "a distant reality". *AP, 31 Jan*

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- 31 Jan - 1 Feb SPDC military intelligence arrests 2 NLD members in Kyee Myin Daing Township and sends them to Insein Prison. *Irrawaddy* 2 Feb; *AFP* 9 Feb
- 1 Feb During a meeting with Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra at the 17th ASEAN-US dialogue, US assistant secretary of state James Kelly criticizes the SPDC's lack of timeline for its roadmap. *Nation*, 1 Feb
- 1 Feb NLD members in Meikhtila District, Mandalay Division hold a meeting despite harassment from the SPDC. *DVB*, 4 Feb
- 1 Feb UNHCR recommences registration process of refugee status of new applications from asylum seekers from Burma, but says it will refer them only to Thai-Burma border camps. *UNHCR*, 31 Jan
- 2 Feb KIO reshuffles its top leadership following the attempted coup in January, which it claimed was instigated by the Kachin National Organization, a group in exile. *BBC Monitor*, 2 Feb
- 3 Feb Indian States of Manipur and Mizoram ban poultry imports from Burma to prevent the spread of bird flu, despite the Burmese regime's claim that the virus is absent from the country. *AP*, 3 Feb
- 3 Feb It is reported that in mid-January the United Wa State Army (UWSA) leader Bao Yuxiang dismissed his youngest brother from his commander position due to alleged methamphetamine abuse and trafficking. *The Nation*, 3 Feb
- 4 Feb It is reported that the US\$36 million upgrade of Rangoon's International Airport will be completed at the end of 2005, with the help of private Japanese and Singaporean firms. *AP*, 4 Feb
- 28 Jan – 2 Feb During the 3rd Ethnic Nationalities Seminar in Karen State 25 ethnic nationality groups reject Gen Khin Nyunt's democracy roadmap, calling first for a tripartite dialogue and for the establishment of a federal union. The Seminar participants form the "Ethnic Nationalities Council" as a policy making body. *Shan*, 4 Feb; and *Irrawaddy*, 5 Feb
- 4 Feb It is reported that increased demand for heroin is pushing the price of opium higher in Shan State. *SHAN*, 4 Feb
- 5 Feb It is reported that the SPDC is threatening local farmers with confiscation of their assets following the collapse of the New Destiny crop substitution project in Shan State. *SHAN*, 5 Feb
- 5 Feb The Indian Commerce Ministry opens the second official trade point with Burma in Rih, Mizoram State. *Mizzima*, 5 Feb
- 5 Feb It is reported that direct shipping services between Burma and Bangladesh has been suspended since January due to the losses incurred by the operator. *Xinhua*, 5 Feb
- 5 Feb It is reported that the SPDC plans to obtain military hardware and assistance from India to build an airforce base. *AFP*, 5 Feb

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- 5 Feb A Japanese court overturns a decision of immigration authorities to refuse refugee status to a Burmese applicant, who is now free to re-apply. *AFP, 5 Feb*
- 5 Feb It is reported that Burma is unlikely to meet even one of the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015. *AFX, 5 Feb*
- 6 Feb It is reported that the SPDC last month ordered regional officers to specifically recruit ethnic youths, and gave larger rewards for doing so. *BBC Monitor, 6 Feb*
- 8 Feb Thailand hosts a Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Commission (BIMSTEC) meeting in Phuket. The 5 countries, plus Bhutan and Nepal, sign the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement for a Free Trade Area. *Asia Pulse, 9 Feb*
- 8 Feb India offers to conduct a feasibility study for the development of a deep sea port in Dawei area in Burma. *BBC Monitor, 8 Feb*
- 8 Feb UN Envoy Razali Ismail meets with Foreign Minister Win Aung at the BIMSTEC meeting, but fails to obtain an invitation to visit to Burma. *AFP, 8 Feb*
- 8 Feb On the margins of the BIMSTEC meeting Thailand declares that it may host a second Bangkok Process depending on the state of the National Convention in Burma. *BBC Monitor, 8 Feb*
- 9 Feb NCGUB and US Campaign for Burma welcome the demands for tripartite dialogue and a federal union in Burma made by representatives at the Third Ethnic Nationalities Seminar. *NCGUB, 9 Feb; and USCB, 7 Feb*
- 9 Feb Foreign Minister Win Aung affirms Daw Aung San Suu Kyi could be released and the NLD allowed to operate normally before the start of the National Convention. *AFP, 9 Feb*
- 9 Feb Panelists hosted the Heritage Foundation urge the US Administration to look closely at the nuclear links between Burma and North Korea. *Crosswalk, 10 Feb*
- 10 Feb The KNU postpones a new round of ceasefire talks with the SPDC to late February due to a lack of preparation. *AFP, 10 Feb*
- 10 Feb Burma has a primary school drop out rate of 47%, says a UNESCO report. *AFP, 10 Feb*
- 10 Feb The National Unity Party (NUP), formally known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), becomes the first political party to support the SPDC's National Convention. *AFP, 11 Feb*
- 10 Feb It is reported that NLD members across Burma have resumed monthly townships meetings, which were cancelled since the Depayin Massacre. *DVB, 10 Feb*

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- 10 Feb Burma and Ireland establish diplomatic relationship at the ambassadorial level. *BBC Monitor, 12 Feb*
- 10 Feb It is reported that the SPDC is arresting members of the Salone (Moken) ethnic nationality, and forcing them to perform in an upcoming sea gypsy festival. *DVB, 10 Feb*
- 11 Feb SPDC denies any intention of acquiring weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, from North Korea. *AFP, 11 Feb*
- 11 Feb It is reported that the Thai Government ordered Burmese refugees living in Thailand to relocate to the three camps at the Thai-Burma border by the end of February. The decision was taken in October 2003. *Irrawaddy, 11 Feb*
- 11 Feb The SPDC's military intelligence arrests the Chairman and six executive members of the NLD in Bogale Township, the just before Union Day celebrations. *BBC Monitor, 14 Feb*
- 11 Feb The Australian Labor Party calls for genuine dialogue between SPDC, the NLD, and ethnic nationalities, and denounces the Australian government's engagement policy with the military regime. *USCB, 11 Feb*
- 12 Feb The NLD commemorates the 57th anniversary of Union Day by demanding the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and declaring that no other election will be recognized except that of 1990. *BBC Monitor, 14 Feb*
- 12 Feb Burma is among the six worst countries in terms of the number of internally displaced persons, says the Global IDP Project. *New Zealand Herald, 12 Feb*
- 13-14 Feb During a 2-day meeting in Mae Hong Son Province (Thailand), the KNPP decides to start ceasefire talks soon with the SPDC. *Irrawaddy, 16 Feb*
- 14 Feb The regime transfers NLD Vice-chairman U Tin Oo from Kale prison to house arrest. *AP, 15 Feb*
- 14 Feb Malaysian Prime Minister announces the upcoming creation of a joint commission with Burma to strengthen their bilateral relations. *BBC Monitor, 14 Feb*
- 16 Feb A boat traveling to a sea-gypsy festival sinks near the Mergui Archipelago in Southern Burma, killing 37 passengers. *Irrawaddy, 17 Feb*
- 16 Feb The Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) claims it has always been ready to engage in dialogue with the SPDC. *DVB, 16 Feb*
- 17 Feb South Africa offers to get involved in the resolution of the political crisis in Burma. *Bua News, 17 Feb*

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- 18-19 Feb Burma, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam meet in Laos to discuss the East-West Economic Corridor, which seeks to link Moulmein port in Burma to Da Nang port in Vietnam with an all weather road. *Xinhua, 16 Feb*
- 18 Feb The KNU announces that a new meeting with the SPDC will take place during the last week of February, possibly in Paan or Myawaddy in Karen State, to discuss the withdrawal of military positions and resettlement of displaced Karen people. *Irrawaddy, 18 Feb*
- 18 Feb The US will give out 55.9 million US\$ in aid this year in South-East Asia and China, including Burma, through its new regional USAID office. The aid will focus on infectious diseases prevention, environmental protection, economic growth, and democracy. *AFX News Ltd., 18 Feb*
- 18 Feb Despite assurance given on 21 January that 'Made in Burma' sweatshirts would be removed from the NBA's New York store, the US National Labor Committee says such items are still found on its shelves. *AP, 19 Feb*
- 18 Feb Akyab University in Arakan State closes temporarily due to violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims. *DVB, 19 Feb*
- 19-22 Feb A 'Made-in-India' trade show takes place in Burma. The show seeks to increase business ties between India and Burma. *Asia Pulse, 18 Feb*
- 19 Feb It is reported by SDPC that 31 factories closed down following US economic sanctions are being reopened and seeking new markets. *Xinhua, 19 Feb*
- 19 Feb A Burmese national and three Thais are arrested in possession of 16kg of heroin in Bangkok, and face the death penalty. *AFP, 19 Feb*
- 19 Feb Daewoo International announces it has obtained permission from Burma's Energy Ministry to search for gas in the A-3 Block in the Bay of Bengal. *Korea Herald, 19 Feb*
- 19 Feb The Tokyo District Court grants refugee status to a 39-year-old Burmese man whose application had been rejected by the immigration authorities. *Japan Economic Newswire, 19 Feb*
- 19 Feb Burma grants Thailand's Siam Jonathan company fishing rights in a potential 5-year US\$260 million deal. *AFP, 14 Mar*
- 20 Feb SPDC condemns six Burmese students to jail sentences ranging from 7 to 17 years for having distributed leaflets criticizing the National Convention in Rangoon last September. *Irrawaddy, 23 Feb*

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- 20 Feb It is reported that Burmese forced to travel the Mergui Archipelago to attend the Salone festival were attacked and robbed by a group of Burmese soldiers. *DVB, 20 Feb*
- 20 Feb At least 6 Burmese migrants were killed and almost 100 were injured in Thailand when the truck transporting them to the Three Pagodas checkpoint to be deported crashed. Thai authorities remain committed to proceed with the deportation order despite the accident. *DVB, 20 Feb*
- 20 Feb The UNODC reports a two thirds reduction in opium production in Burma since 1996, and claims the SPDC has taken further measures in 2003 to fight the drug trade. *AFP, 20 Feb*
- 21 Feb Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra predicts Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will be freed by October 2004, and that the SPDC will send representatives to a second "Bangkok Process". *Nation, 22 Feb*
- 21 Feb SPDC's prison authorities bars disrobed Buddhist monks who are imprisoned in Tenasserim Division from meeting with an ICRC delegation visiting the region. *DVB 21 Feb*
- 21-26 Feb Sr Gen Than Shwe reiterates the SPDC's support for the "one-China" policy, and pledges to develop the friendship with its closest ally during a goodwill visit by a Chinese delegation led by the Vice President of the Chinese Association for International Understanding (CAIU) Luo Haocai. *Xinhua, 23 Feb*
- 23 Feb The KNPP announces that ceasefire talks with the SPDC will take place early in March. *Irrawaddy, 23 Feb*
- 23 Feb A 12-member KNU delegation leaves for Moulmein, capital of Mon State, for a new round of ceasefire negotiations with the SPDC. *Mizzima, 22 Feb*
- 23 Feb Around 70 KNU soldiers disobey orders, killing three Tatmadaw soldiers in an attack near Duyinseik village, Pegu Division. KNU leader Gen Bo Mya condemns the unauthorized ceasefire breach. *AP, 23 Feb; Irrawaddy, 8 Mar*
- 23 Feb Thai authorities discover a new drug smuggling network passing through Laos, bypassing the war on drugs at the Thai-Burma border. Thailand arrests the suspected leader of the network. *AP, 23 Feb*
- 23 Feb Women's League of Burma (WLB) releases a statement condemning the SPDC's democracy roadmap as a strategy to hold on to power. WLB denounce the ongoing rape of women while ceasefire talks are being held between KNU and SPDC. *DVB, 23 Feb*
- 24 Feb It is reported that the Bangladesh government is studying a UNHCR proposal to integrate the remaining 20,000 Rohingya refugees living in camps. *Narinjara, 24 Feb*

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- 24-26 Feb SPDC and the KNU discuss demarcation of territory, troop positions and resettlement of IDP during a three-day ceasefire talk. *AP, 25 Feb*
- 24 Feb Norway announces its participation in the second Bangkok Process in mid-2004, following talks between Norwegian FM Jan Petersen and his Thai counterpart. *BKK Post, 25 Feb*
- 24 Feb Thailand and Burma sign an agreement to conduct a feasibility study for a dam project on shared Koh and Sai rivers for irrigation purposes. Southeast Asia Rivers Network Thailand expresses its concern over the environmental impact on the local forests and the Shan population. *Bangkok Post, 25 Feb*
- 25-26 Feb Australia conducts training in Rangoon for 120 Burmese officials on fake travel document identification, as part of a counter-terrorist and anti-drug trafficking strategy. *AP, 24 Feb*
- 25 Feb It is reported that India's National Hydroelectric Power Corporation wants to invest in Burma's 800MW Tamanthi hydroelectric power project. *World Markets Research, 25 Feb*
- 25 Feb Human Rights Watch condemns the Thai government for its repression of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrant workers from Burma. *HRW, 25 Feb*
- 25 Feb UK Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien admits his country has not frozen any of the Burmese regime's financial assets, and thus failed to implement measures included in the EU's "common position" on Burma. *BCUK, 25 Feb*
- 25 Feb New Mon State Party (NMSPP) denies claims made by the SPDC that it expressed its support for the regime's democracy roadmap during a meeting between the party and Gen Khin Nyunt on 23 February. *DVB, 26 Feb*
- 25 Feb The US State Department releases its 2003 Human Rights Report, which condemns the Burmese military regime for its worsening human rights record. *AFP, 26 Feb*
- 25 Feb The UK's three major political parties express support for further sanctions on Burma during a debate in the House of Commons. *BCUK, 26 Feb*
- 25 Feb An air defense weapons shipment from Ukraine arrives in Rangoon. *DVB, 7 Mar*
- 26 Feb A bomb kills Col Lazing Bawk, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), in his house. The perpetrators are unknown. *Irrawaddy, 26 Feb*
- 26 Feb Malaysia deports 52 Burmese migrants who illegally entered its territory in 2003. *NS Times, 25 Feb*

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- 26 Feb The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) sends a letter to the SPDC demanding the release of a minor, Maung Chan Thar Kyaw, from a juvenile training camp, as the detention violates the country's Child Law. *DVB, 26 Feb*
- 28 Feb The SPDC rejects the latest US State Department report on human rights in Burma. The SPDC condemns the US for its own human rights abuses, and urges it to abide by the International Convention on Human Rights (sic), an unknown instrument of international law. *BBC Monitor, 1 Mar*
- 28 Feb 72 Burmese nationals kept in Bangladeshi jails past the end of their sentence are repatriated to Burma following an agreement between the 2 countries. *Narinjara, 11 Mar*
- 29 Feb Pro-democracy groups from Burma at the Thai border form the Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB). *BBC Monitor, 29 Feb*
- 1 Mar UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail arrives in Burma unpublicized for his 12th visit, due to end 4 March. He plans to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic political parties. *AFP, 1 Mar*
- 1 Mar China's Vice Minister of the Public Security Bureau expresses concern over the increasing quantity of heroin smuggled inside his country from Burma, and the problems it causes in terms of crime, prostitution, and AIDS transmission. *AFP, 1 Mar*
- 1 Mar The Japanese government grants US\$6.2 million to UNICEF for maternal and child health care inside Burma. *Xinhua, 1 Mar*
- 1 Mar It is reported that Rangoon faced severe electricity shortages for the last two weeks of February, each township receiving power in rotation for a few hours per day. *Irrawaddy, 1 Mar*
- 1 Mar It is reported that Customs departments of Burma and India recently agreed to increase cooperation in their fight against drug trafficking. *Mizzima, 1 Mar*
- 1 Mar UNESCO confirms that 9 of 13 dams that are to be built on China's segment of the Nu/Salween River will be located in the Parallel Rivers World Heritage Site. *SHAN, 1 Mar*
- 1 Mar The SPDC releases five political prisoners, including journalists Aung Zin Min and Cho Seint. *Mizzima, 8 Mar*
- 1-6 Mar The Conference of Arakans in Diaspora is held in New Delhi. The Arakan National Council (ANC) is created to represent as a single body the Arakan people. The ANC rejects the SPDCs' seven-point roadmap, as well as the term "Rohingya", replacing it with the term "Arakan Bengali". *Mizzima, 7 Mar*
- 2 Mar UN Envoy Razali Ismail meets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leaders of ethnic political parties and PM Gen Khin Nyunt in a bid to obtain a

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- greater role for the UN in the SPDC's democracy roadmap. *AFP*, 2 Mar
- 2 Mar Sr Gen Than Shwe urges Burma's peasants to take an active part in the upcoming National Convention, and to work to develop the agricultural sector. *Xinhua*, 2 Mar
- 2 Mar US State Department releases its annual "International Narcotics Control Strategy" report, condemning the SPDC for its weak anti-drug measures, and complicity with drug producers. *AFP*, 2 Mar
- 3 Mar It is reported that the KNPP reached an internal agreement to organize peace talks with the SPDC in March, although the regime claims that the 1995 ceasefire is still valid. *Network Media Group*, 3 Mar
- 3 Mar Opium cultivation areas were reduced by 24% in 2003, according to a new UNODC report. *Xinhua*, 3 Mar
- 3 Mar It is reported that United Myanmar Airways (UMA), a joint venture between state-owned Myanmar Airways Ltd and a Hong Kong investor, is to be terminated due to financial difficulties. *Irrawaddy*, 3 Mar
- 3 Mar The EU announces a humanitarian aid program of 9.5 million euro (US\$11.6 million) for five projects at the Thai-Burma border and inside Burma. *AFP*, 3 Mar
- 3 Mar Francis Maupin, advisor to the ILO Director General, arrives in Rangoon to investigate labor conditions in the country. *AP*, 4 Mar
- 4 Mar UN Envoy Razali Ismail completes his 12th visit to Burma, after having met twice with NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. *AFP*, 4 Mar
- 4 Mar ASEAN Foreign Ministers express their support for Burma's participation in the upcoming ASEM meeting. *AFP*, 4 Mar
- 4 Mar US Senator Mitch McConnell criticizes Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra's Burma policy, linking his apologist stance towards the junta to his business interests, notably his iPSTAR satellite project. *The Nation*, 4 Mar
- 4 Mar Rights & Democracy, a Canadian NGO, publishes a study revealing girl soldiers have taken part in armed conflict in 38 countries since 1990, including Burma. *AP*, 4 Mar
- 4 Mar The Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industries (UMFCCI) sign an agreement to create a taskforce to increase trade between India and Burma. *Mizzima*, 6 Mar
- 4 Mar It is reported that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) seized the Loi Hpaleng mountain range, opposite Chiang Mai, apparently to profit

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- from the presence of rubies, or as a strategic area for the drug trade. *SHAN, 4 Mar*
- 5 Mar Over 800 NLD women members from Pegu Division send a letter to Gen Khin Nyunt and Sr Gen Than Shwe demanding the release of all political prisoners and the reopening of NLD offices. *DVB, 9 Mar*
- 5 Mar The Burmese Ambassador to Bangladesh promises that Burmese nationals languishing in Bangladeshi jails after the completion of their sentence will be repatriated. *Narinjara, 11 Mar*
- 5 Mar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi demands the release of all political prisoners, the reopening of all NLD offices, the rejection of the NC 104 basic principles and an investigation on the Depayin Massacre before considering attending the NC. NLD-Liberated Areas reported these demands following Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's meeting with UN envoy Razali Ismail. *Network Media Group, 5 Mar*
- 6 Mar The European Burma Network releases the "Dublin Recommendations", demanding increased sanctions on the SPDC, a timeframe for dialogue, and the release of political prisoners, ahead of the EU government's review of the Common Policy on Burma. *Burma Centrum Nederland, 8 Mar*
- 8 Mar ILO DG special advisor Francis Maupin concludes his visit to Burma, with the SPDC agreeing to allow an independent mediator to handle complaints of forced labor. *AFP, 9 Mar*
- 8 Mar Two KNU army officers face demotion for being responsible for the attack on the SPDC during the last round of ceasefire talk on 23 February. *Irrawaddy, 8 Mar*
- 9 Mar It is reported that 30 Serbian engineers are repairing the SPDC's Yugoslavian G-4 military aircraft in Burma. *Irrawaddy, 9 Mar*
- 9 Mar It is reported that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will conduct a 2-year US\$356,000 technology transfer project to Burma's dairy industry. *Xinhua, 9 Mar*
- 9 Mar Burma Campaign UK releases a report criticizing the EU's economic support for the Burmese junta. The group argues in favor of effective and targeted EU sanctions on Burma. *BCUK, 9 Mar*
- 12 Mar NLD members honor fellow Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo, who turns 77 while still under house arrest. *AFP, 12 Mar*
- 12 Mar It is reported that local headmen distributed posters threatening Burmese migrant workers with jail sentences if they don't return to Burma before 15 March across Mae Sot. *Irrawaddy, 12 Mar*
- 14-18 Mar Organizations in Mon State meet to discuss preparations for the National Convention. *KaoWao, 19 Mar*
- 15 Mar India's finance ministry rejects a deal discussed in January to export 125,000 tons of diesel to Burma, due to the low amount of

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- bilateral trade between the two countries. *Business Standard*, 15 Mar
- 15 Mar UNHCR and the SPDC agree to create conditions allowing for the large-scale return of refugees from the Thai-Burma border. UNHCR will begin providing health, education and infrastructure assistance from inside Burma. *Scoop*, 15 Mar
- 15 Mar The Nation reports that over 6,000 refugees fled Thailand after media reports that there would be a crackdown on illegal workers. *The Nation*, 16 Mar
- 16 Mar UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail arrives in Japan, reportedly to persuade the Japanese government to provide aid to Burma. *Irrawaddy*, 16 Mar
- 16 Mar Senior leaders of the NLD and the United Nationalities Alliance meet and express their disappointment in UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail, saying he is acting like an agent of the SPDC and not in accordance with his UN mandate. *DVB*, 16 Mar
- 17 Mar The SPDC refuses the UN Special Rapporteur Sergio Pinheiro a visa to visit Burma in the lead up to his address to the UNCHR in Geneva. *Irrawaddy*, 17 Mar
- 17 Mar Swiss President spokesperson Christophe Hans says Switzerland will join the next round of talks in the Bangkok Process, saying that Switzerland has a "strong humanitarian interest" in Burma and wants to take part in "trying to find a solution" there. *AFP*, 17 Mar
- 18 Mar Thai plans to register migrant workers have been postponed after Burmese officials refused to endorse their citizens, saying they would prefer that the Burmese were returned to Burma. *Irrawaddy*, 18 Mar
- 18 Mar Radio Free Asia reports that Aung San Suu Kyi is holding monthly meetings with envoys sent by Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. *RFA*, 18 Mar
- 21 Mar It is reported that several DKBA soldiers have died in fighting between DKBA and KNU forces near No. 7 Brigade Area in Karen State. *Network Media Group*, 21 Mar
- 22 Mar US President George Bush and Vice President Richard Cheney vow to sell only US-made products as part of their re-election campaign after Burmese and Mexican garments were discovered in an NBA store. *Newsday*, 22 Mar
- 22 Mar In a conference on Burmese refugees at Chulalongkorn University, the Deputy Secretary-General of Thailand's National Security Council says that UNHCR in Thailand would no longer have the authority to grant refugee status. *The Nation*, 23 Mar

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- 23 Mar KNU General Bo Mya says two of the soldiers responsible for the 23 February attack against Burma Army outposts were demoted. *Irrawaddy, 23 Mar*
- 23 Mar The ABFSU and the AAPP call for the release of Min Ko Naing on the 15th anniversary of his arrest. *Irrawaddy, 23 Mar*
- 23 Mar Thai FM Surakiart Sathirathai announces that Thailand will hold a second round of international talks on Burma, however no date is set. *The Daily Times, 25 Mar*
- 24 Mar Reverend U Nandawuntha, a famous leader of Buddhist monks during the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations, passes away in exile in India. *DVB, 24 Mar*
- 26 Mar UN Special Rapporteur Sergio Pinheiro says the National Convention will fail unless political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, are released. *AFP, 27 Mar*
- 27 Mar In a speech to 7,000 troops celebrating Armed Forces Day, Sr Gen Than Shwe reiterates the importance of a strong and well equipped military. He says a nation can only ensure the full protection of sovereignty when the nation possesses a modern defense capability. *AFP, 27 Mar*
- 29 Mar The KNU returns the weapons it seized during the 23 February attack against the Burma Army. *Irrawaddy, 29 Mar*
- 29 Mar The junta refutes US criticisms labeling the National Convention a "sham". The junta calls on the US to join with them in "developing a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Myanmar in a realistic and responsible way." *Xinhua, 29 Mar*
- 30 Mar Lt Gen Thein Sein announces that the National Convention will reconvene on May 17. *AFP, 30 Mar*
- 30 Mar The junta agrees to review the death sentences handed down to three men accused of having illegal links with the ILO. *AFP, 30 Mar*
- 30 Mar Thai FM Surakiart Sathirathai says the second round of the 'Bangkok Process' will be held on 29, 30 of April. *AFP, 30 Mar*
- 30 Mar Burma's FM Win Aung says that Burma will attend the April meetings of the Bangkok Process. *Xinhua, 30 Mar*
- 31 Mar DVB reports that the 26 monks arrested in December 2003 for refusing alms from SPDC generals were sentenced to lengthy prison sentences. *BBC Monitor, 31 Mar*

GLOSSARY OF MEDIA ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AFX	AFX News Ltd. London
Age	The Age (Melbourne)
AP	Associated Press
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCUK	Burma Campaign UK
CCSDPT	Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand
CSM	Christian Science Monitor
Daily Times	The Daily Times (Pakistan)
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
FBC	Free Burma Coalition
FBR	Free Burma Rangers
FEER	Far Eastern Economic Review
FT	Financial Times
FTUB	Federation of Trade Unions of Burma
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IHT	International Herald Tribune
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KNU	Karen National Union
MNA	Myanmar News Agency
Nation	The Nation (Bangkok)
NLM	New Light of Myanmar
NST	New Straits Times
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service (US)
RSF/BMA	Reporter Without Borders and Burma Media Association
SCMP	South China Morning Post
SHAN	Shan Herald Agency for News
SHRF	Shan Human Rights Foundation
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
SWAN	Shan Women's Action Network
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
USCB	United States Campaign for Burma
VOA	Voice of America
WP	Washington Post
WSJ	Wall Street Journal

ABOUT ALTSEAN - BURMA

The Alternative Asean Network on Burma (Altsean-Burma) is a network of diverse organisations and individuals based in Asean member states working to support the movement for human rights and democracy in Burma.

Our activities are focused on supporting the movement for human rights and democracy in Burma within the context of Asean. In doing so, we also work to strengthen the human rights and democratization agenda in Asean. While our focus has been on Burma, we have worked with our partners to support human rights causes within the region.

We regard the political participation of women as an essential element of democracy and therefore incorporate this approach into our work.

RECENT RESOURCES FROM ALTSEAN-BURMA

- 2003 Nov Special Report: Ready Aim Sanction
- 2004 Jan Report Card: Under Pressure (1 July – 30 September 2003)
- 2004 Jan Altsean Activist poster and pocket calendar
- 2004 Mar Special Report: On the Road to Democracy? (prepared for the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights)
- 2004 Apr Postcards: Set of 10 postcards featuring Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Rallies in Burma
- 2004 Apr Video/VCD: Depayin Report *plus* Raw Footage of Aung San Suu Kyi's Travels in Kachin & Shan States, Mandalay & Sagaing Division
- 2004 Apr Web Feature: Slideshow of 87 photos of Daw Aung Suu Kyi's Rallies in Burma
- 2004 May Video: Raw Footage of Aung San Suu Kyi's Travels in Kachin & Shan States, Mandalay & Sagaing Division
- 2004 May Web Feature: On the Road to Depayin – Speeches by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
- 2004 Jun Briefing Note: It is Time to Act in Burma
- 2004 Nov Burma Briefing: Issues and Concerns Vol. 1 & 2
- 2004 Nov Special Report: A Failing Grade – Burma's Drug Eradication Efforts.
- 2005 Jan Briefing Notes – Tsunami Impact on Burma, Updates on Jan 4 and Jan 28, 2005
- 2005 Feb Briefing – Burma's National Convention: Illegitimate, Unrepresentative and Oppressive.
- 2005 Mar Report Card: Blurred Vision (1 Jan – 31 Mar 2004)

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