

BURMA SUPPORT GROUP(SOUTH AUSTRALIA)
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Thursday 8 October 1992

Tel:(08) 210 8172

TO:

RE: CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN BURMA(MYANMAR)

The Burma Support Group(SA) invites you to join in calling for the United Nations resolutions on Burma's political problems to be addressed. You and your group are invited to express a similar concern ¹ to the Australian delegate to the UN. Your statement may be forwarded directly to:

**H.E. Mr Richard W Butler AM,
Australian Mission to the United Nations,
885 Second Avenue,
New York NY10017,
United States of America,
Phone: 1 212 421 6910,
Fax: 1 212 371 5843.**

Outlined are our concerns regarding Burma with relevant details for your information. We recognize that the various committees e.g. CRDB ², CDB ³ and DAB ⁴, are looking to each other for solidarity and continued communication in working towards democracy and the restoration of Human Rights in Burma.

¹A.1 The letter to the Foreign Affairs from the Secretary of BSG(SA)

²Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Burma

³Committee for Democracy in Burma

⁴Democratic Alliances of Burma

The Burma Support Group(SA) ⁵ wishes to work with other like-minded groups and we would appreciate you contacting our secretary Ms Kribo Ackerman [(08)210 8172].

United Nation Resolution on Human Rights violations in Burma

Serious Human Rights violations occurring in Burma since the military took over the state power in September 1988 have been reported. Concerned with grave Human Rights abuses in Burma/Myanmar, the United Nations has appointed a rapporteur in October 1991. In the 46th session of United Nations General Assembly, the resolution on Human Rights abuses in Burma was adopted without a vote(meaning all votes are counted) and it has become a United Nations Recommendation.

SLORC's (the Military Government of Burma) response to the resolution was, not surprisingly, *non-adoption and not a party to it* ⁶. SLORC ignored the resolution (A/C.3/46/L.43) and showed no sign of transferring power to the elected National League for Democracy(NLD). Grave Human Rights abuses continue to occur throughout the country. Especially, at Thais-Burma border and Bangladesh-Burma border of killing, torture and rape by soldiers on unarmed- civilian population are being reported ⁷.

Burma-Rohingyas in Bangladesh

In the mid-December 1991, the Burma-Rohingyas cross the Naf river and began entering the Bangladesh territory ⁸. The SLORC response to the refugee problem was "*There are no refugees, only insurgents in disguise*"⁹. This response is blatantly unjust, especially for Rohingya who haven't been engaged in armed struggle ¹⁰.

There is no foundation for SLORC to persecute Burma-Rohingyas. There are assumptions that SLORC has made a political diversion; SLORC attempted to incite a religious conflict between Buddhist-Burmans and Muslim-

⁵ A.1 SA Catholics, July 1992.

⁶ A.2 The press-release from Embassy of the Union of Myanmar(Burma) and the resolution (A/C.3/46/L.43) attached with

⁷ National Refugee Weeks presentation 17-June-1992 by the Hon. Justice Marcus Einfeld : This comprehensive report is available from AUSTCARE, The Refugee Council of Australia, International Commission of Jurist Australian Section, \$ 20 a copy.

⁸ A.3 JRS report, August 1992.

⁹ Burma Resource and Action Kit from Australian Council of Churches: This informative publication is available from Australian Council of Churches, 379 Kent Street, Sydney, Box C199 Clarence Street PO, Sydney 2000.

¹⁰ though there have been some insurgency prior to 1970.

Rohingyas ¹¹. After the UN resolution in November 1991 and the strange behavior of the army chief General Saw Maung ¹² there is embarrassment within the army which may have led to a breaking point. Therefore, such a political diversion was created by SLORC . There have also been suggestions that the Rohingyas are traditionally known as illegal immigrants to Burma and persecutions of the Rohingyas may have helped to justify the army's role. However, the atrocities committed by the army to Rohingyas are so uncivilised that a political diversion as such for its motive is simply inadequate. There is no explanation to SLORC's madness and brutality.

In March 1992, Australian government commissioned the Hon. Justice Marcus Einfeld to visit the trouble spots and refugee camps in Asia, including Thailand and Bangladesh. In his report ¹³, Justice Einfeld described the extent of problems for Rohingyas.

The year 1992-1993 has been described as *year of repatriations*. Despite apparent lack of resources, the Government of Bangladesh has shown grave concerns for Burma-Rohingyas and treated the situation very humanly. As yet, no Rohingyas so far has been forced to return to Burma against their will. Unsupervised repatriation is simply immoral, knowing the record of human rights abuses by SLORC. The UN body must observe and monitor the process of repatriation and resettlement.

Although SLORC has conducted the persecution over Rohingyas in the form of racial or religious grounds, it must point out that the entire population of Burma is also under oppression. The refugee problem is the symptom of Human Right violations of Military being the illness. One needs to make efforts to relieve the symptoms, while at the same time curing its illness. We must give attention to both Burma-Rohingyas repatriation/resettlement and the peaceful process in transfer of power to NLD.

IN CLOSING

With these objectives, Burma Support Group(SA) has been active in encouraging the Australian Government to take stronger stand against SLORC ¹⁴. Any Government with a conscience and concerns about Human Rights vio-

¹¹Burma Resource and Action Kit by Australian Council of Churches.

¹²A.4 Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 February 1992.

¹³A.5 In his report, Justice Einfeld describe "...refugees arrived with minimal possession...many people, especially the children and elderly, are in poor condition and malnourishedmost may not survive..."

¹⁴A.6 Adelaide University Students Weekly, 3-August-1992

lations ought to be working towards a resolution in the civil strife in Burma. While UN General Assembly is still in progress ¹⁵, we request the Australian Government to sponsor following issues:

(a) Concerning with Rohingyas refugees in Bangladesh: The Rohingyas safe and early return to Burma is recommended. The United Nations bodies should supervised repatriation for Rohingyas, guaranteeing their safety.

(b) Concerning with the establishment for a democratic state: The Burma (Myanmar) Military Government must give a firm date on the transfer of power to the elected National League for Democracy party. A fair and just constitution for the people of Burma must clearly be presented.

(c) To ensure the Burma(Myanmar) Military government to comply with the recommendation (A/C.3/46/L.43): The non-compliment of the resolution will incur an immediate international trade embargo.

¹⁵Usually held from 3rd September to Middle of December every year

ပြည်ထောင်စု မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်၊ သံရုံး
EMBASSY OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR

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AT THE 46TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, HIS EXCELLENCY U KYAW MIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR MADE A STATEMENT TO THE DRAFT RESOLUTION A/C.3/46/L.43 REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES, ON 25 NOVEMBER 1991, WHICH WAS ADOPTED WITHOUT A VOTE.

IN HIS STATEMENT, THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, AMONG OTHER POINTS, TAKES NOTE OF THE FACT THAT IN THE SPIRIT OF MYANMAR'S UNBROKEN TRADITION OF FAITHFULLY OBSERVING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHARTER AND CLOSELY COOPERATING WITH THE UNITED NATIONS EVER SINCE MYANMAR REGAINED INDEPENDENCE, IN DEFERENCE TO THE SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED BY A GREAT MANY DELEGATIONS REPRESENTING GOVERNMENTS WHICH BEAR GOODWILL AND UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS MYANMAR AND OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE STRONG APPEAL MADE BY THE CHAIRMAN AT THE OPENING MEETING OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE THAT DELEGATIONS SHOULD COOPERATE TO ENABLE DRAFT RESOLUTIONS TO BE ADOPTED WITHOUT A VOTE, THE MYANMAR DELEGATION HAD DECIDED NOT TO REQUEST A VOTE ON L.43. THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE MYANMAR DELEGATION IS NOT TAKING PART IN THE ADOPTION OF THIS DRAFT RESOLUTION AND WILL NOT BE A PARTY TO IT.

FULL TEXT OF THE STATEMENT MADE BY HIS EXCELLENCY U KYAW MIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR, AND THE RESOLUTION ARE ATTACHED HEREWITH.

ANNEXURE

Forty-sixth session:
THIRD COMMITTEE
DRAFT RESOLUTION A/C.3/46/L.43
25 November 1991

HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS
OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES

Situation in Myanmar

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming that all Member States have an obligation to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms stated in the Charter of the United Nations and elaborated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1/ and the International Covenants on Human Rights 2/ and other applicable human rights instruments.

Aware that, in accordance with the Charter, the Organization promotes and encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government".

Recalling that the Government of Myanmar has assured the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies of its intention to take all necessary steps towards democracy in the light of the election held in 1990.

Noting with concern substantive available information indicating a grave human rights situation in Myanmar.

Welcoming the Secretary-General's statement on the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi and his repeated appeals for her early release from house arrest.

1. Takes note of the assurances of the Government of Myanmar to take firm steps towards the establishment of a democratic State and looks forward to the early implementation of this commitment;
2. Expresses its concern at the information on the grave human rights situation and stresses the need for an early improvement of this situation;
3. Urges the Government of Myanmar to allow all citizens to freely participate in the political process in accordance with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
4. Decides to continue its consideration of this question at its forty-seventh session.

* * * * *

1/ Resolution 217 A (III)

2/ See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

JRS REPORTS ON THE
Rohingyan Refugee Camps in Bangladesh
August 1992

Just under 300,000 Burmese refugees are spread through 15 refugee camps located along the southernmost regions of Bangladesh. This estimate of their numbers was given in mid-July 1992.

The Burmese, known as Rohingyas, began arriving in southeastern Bangladesh early last year, but the refugees really flooded across the border in December 1991, as they fled military persecution in northwestern Arakan, Burma's only Muslim-majority state.

The Governments in Dhaka and Rangoon signed an agreement on April 28 for repatriation of the refugees in six months from May 15. But unexplained "technical" problems have delayed the Rohingyas departure. Bangladesh can not force the Rohingyas out because the agreement provides for voluntary return.

The refugees insist they will not go back unless Burma allows the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to supervise the repatriation and resettlement. The Burmese fled anti-Muslim oppression, forced conscription, rape and confiscation of crops and properties and now monsoon rains have underlined their plight as they languish in Bangladesh as victims of two very poor and difficult governments. The April agreement pledged no improvements to their legal status nor gave any guarantee that they would be returned to their land and houses.

There are a large number of local Bangladeshi NGO's working among the Rohingyas, together with some international NGOs who are involved mainly in supplementary feeding and emergency medical programs. The refugees are banned from cutting firewood inside the camps, after critics pointed to the depletion of forest areas, and they can no longer trade rations like lentils for alternative sources of proteins as the camps are no longer open to outsiders coming in or insiders going out of the camps.

Rain has exacerbated the problems of sanitation, shelter, food and access. In mid-July additional efforts to start sanitation education began in a few of the camps and to take extra precautions including reinforcing latrines that had become flooded. It has been reported that during the rainy season at some camps, patients and medical teams wade through deep mud because even heavy-duty vehicles cannot get through. One confirmed case of cholera has been reported.

Workers worry about the deteriorating condition of the refugee children. The most needy children are provided with therapeutic or supplementary feedings in the NGO organized Feeding Centers in each camp.

The Outreach programs and medical work which reach a large number of the Rohingyas are very important. Prevention and early treatment are always most critical.

A special program teaches new community health workers and is seeking out Rohingya birth attendants to teach them, initially in the ante-natal clinic. There are two doctors, one from Canada and the other from the United Kingdom, working in the four camps along with nurses who provide basic health care and health and sanitation guidance.

The NGO workers have been asked by the refugees to guarantee that they will not be repatriated to Burma, and by the Bangladeshi Commander-in-Charge to try to motivate the people to cooperate. Of course, they cannot do either - as no one knows what will happen. All the NGOs involved in the Bangladeshi camps are and will remain neutral.

World attention is needed now as it will be too late when the death statistics are finally released. Shall we once again have to say "We did not know, because no one told us"?

BURMA

SLORC chief's sickness could start a power struggle

General malaise

By Bertil Lintner and Rodney Tasker
in Bangkok

When the authorities in Rangoon announced on 29 January that the military-dominated Burmese Government had been expanded to include seven new ministers, of whom four were civilians, few observers were prepared to interpret the move as a step towards any real change of Burma's strictly centralised power structure.

Of far more significance were reports filtering out of Burma that the junta leader, Gen. Saw Maung, is becoming increasingly unable to serve as head of the country. This could herald the beginning of a power struggle within the ruling military.

When the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) assumed power on 18 September 1988, after suppressing a nationwide uprising for democracy, it set up a nine-member cabinet in which ministers held two or even more portfolios each. "The fact that only a few persons have been assigned a large number of portfolio responsibilities is clearly indicative that there is no desire whatsoever to cling on to power for a long period," Saw Maung said in a speech five days after the formation of the SLORC. The original idea, as expressed by the military in 1988, was to set up an interim administration pending general elections.

That election was held in May 1990, resulting in a landslide victory for the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). The SLORC, however, refused to convene the elected assembly. Instead, hundreds of NLD activists were rounded up. According to a report released at the 86th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Santiago, Chile, last October, 65 elected MPs have been arrested.

Others have fled to rebel-held areas along the Thai border, or to India. "If anything, the expansion of the cabinet shows that the outcome of the election has been declared null and void — and that a more permanent, still military-dominated administration has been put in place," an observer said.

No important policy changes are expected as a result of the new cabinet line-up but the deteriorating state of Saw Maung's health could have far-reaching consequences for the SLORC, as divisions within the ruling military are becoming increasingly evident, analysts say. Earlier reports that he had suffered a nervous

breakdown appear to be correct, according to reliable sources in Rangoon. They say Saw Maung collapsed and lost consciousness for 40 minutes on 17 December and had to spend two days at Rangoon's Military Hospital No. 2.

The news spread quickly. After it was carried by the international media, other SLORC members apparently felt the need to respond by organising stage-managed appearances for the ailing general. For almost a month after the incident, the state-run *Working People's Daily* published almost daily reports of Saw Maung attending various ceremonies and visiting Buddhist monasteries across the country. But even in the accompanying pictures, the general looked dazed and battered.

The deterioration of his health became obvious on 21 December, when Saw Maung was going to be the first tee-off at a tournament at the military golf course in Rangoon. In front of Burma's top brass and government officials, Saw Maung reportedly began screaming: "I am King Kyansittha! I am King Kyansittha!" Patting his holstered pistol, Saw Maung warned onlookers to be "careful" or "I will personally kill you."

His reference to one of the kings of the ancient Pagan empire was especially eccentric. Kyansittha, a powerful king whose name means "the remaining soldier" or "the one who was left behind," was the main character in a Moses-like story of a man who survived attempts to kill him to become king. Saw Maung may have seen himself as the only SLORC member who also served with the pre-1988 regime.

Astoundingly, Saw Maung's erratic performance was repeated in full view of the Burmese public exactly a month later when Burmese television showed him addressing a meeting of local SLORC officials. His rambling, incoherent speech also contained references to Kyansittha, the old regime and various Buddhist scriptures.

In the middle of the speech, Saw Maung exclaimed: "Today the country is being ruled by martial law. Martial law means no law at all." He concluded by

telling the bewildered audience that "I always work with caution, perseverance and wisdom. Wisdom does not mean black magic."

Saw Maung is said to be suffering from diabetes. This, combined with heavy drinking and the strain he has been under following repeated international condemnations of his government, including a resolution in the UN General Assembly on 29 November 1991, may have contributed to his strange behaviour.

Doubts have been raised as to how much longer Saw Maung can remain head of the SLORC without causing embarrassment to the government. This, in turn, has exposed the main weakness of the present administration in Burma — the lack of competent leaders who could replace him.

Burma's real strongman since 1962 has been the 81-year-old Gen. Ne Win, who has survived in power by eliminating everyone around him with ability or leadership qualities. The old guard, who helped Ne Win seize power in 1962, was purged after only a few years. In the wake of an abortive coup attempt in 1976, another major purge was carried out; the officers who survived did so not because they were competent but because of their proven loyalty to Ne Win.

The outcome, analysts say, is the situation Burma faces today: the country is ruled by corporals and

sergeants who have become generals. According to US Burma scholar David Steinberg, of the SLORC's 18 members, 10 have only high school education or less, four have had some college education, and only four have university degrees or their equivalent.

On grounds of seniority, SLORC vice chairman and commander-in-chief of the army, Gen. Than Shwe, will be the natural successor to Saw Maung, if he is indeed replaced. Like Saw Maung, Than Shwe joined the army at a young age after receiving very basic, primary education. He is known to be reticent and lacking basic leadership qualities. If Than Shwe succeeds to the top post real power is likely to remain in the hands of intelligence chief Maj-Gen. Khin Nyunt, Ne Win's protege. The able but unpopular Khin Nyunt, however, is resented even by many leading army officers.

"Once Saw Maung has resigned or been retired, things could begin to happen. Ne Win is old and Khin Nyunt's future without him is extremely uncertain," a Rangoon-based diplomat said. ■



Saw Maung: doubts.

VINIC INCORPORATED

155 pit latrines were provided but some were in high positions so that if they become flooded by rain, the overflow will almost certainly cause widespread disease. 71 wells provide drinking water but again the survivability of this supply in a monsoon is problematic. 4 health teams were in operation and a program was under way to vaccinate all children between 6 months and 2 years of age for measles. Children's classes in the particular dialect of the Rohingyas are provided daily. I witnessed one such class in progress.

For the remainder of the camps, the type of 'shelter' in most instances consists of flimsy grass huts, all of which are shockingly overcrowded. There was little water on site and minimal toilet facilities. Plans were in place to use plastic sheeting for new shelters, and the Refugee Commissioner informed me that sheeting for 65,000 people was on order. Tens of thousands of very recent arrivals had no shelter at all and merely squatted under large trees. There was a massive need for potable drinking water.

Health services were being provided by GK, Medecins Sans Frontieres and UNHCR. The refugees suffer, and some die, from a variety of health problems including malnutrition, diarrhoea, measles, tetanus, gastro-intestinal disorders, malaria and dysentery, among others. There is a special diarrhoea clinic to try to reduce the deaths. The children were particularly vulnerable. Most of the refugees had apparently never seen a doctor or been medically treated in Burma. They certainly had not had any professional dental treatment in their lives. The provision of truly effective

health services under such conditions is, of course, impossible except on a very basic level.

I also saw the distribution and some preparation of food. Until 1 April 1992, food was provided by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, under a program financed by the EEC and the Red Cross. It was replaced on 1 April by supplies from the World Food Program. Food is distributed via stores in each camp, supplied from a central repository in Cox's Bazar. Family packs of food are used (a concept developed by GK), based on the number of people in each family. The calorific value of the parcels is 2,200 calories per person per day, and packages are issued weekly. The diet does not change from week to week (mainly rice, soya bean oil and salt), and the ration is extremely meagre. It requires supplementing by hunting, fishing or searching for locally grown fruit and vegetables.

Most of the refugees arrive with minimal possessions - a few cooking pots and very basic clothing. Some report having travelled many hundreds of miles through difficult terrain, often on foot, prior to getting into the boats to cross the river to Bangladesh. Consequently many people, especially the children and the elderly, are in poor condition and often very malnourished. Some are quite ill or diseased and may not survive.

Some 45% of the refugees are under 12 years of age. Families tend to be large with children close together in age. Birth control or family planning is virtually unknown in Rohingya

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