

Tension escalates between dictatorship and ethnic ceasefire groups

Tension is rising in northern and eastern Burma as the regime builds up its military forces in the region. Many observers believe the regime is preparing to launch a military offensive against the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in southern Shan State, following a build up of troops in the area since the defeat of the Kokang in late August. The UWSA has also been reinforcing military defenses and is the largest ethnic armed group with an estimated 25,000 soldiers.

In late August, the 20-year ceasefire agreement between the Kokang ethnic group in northern Burma and the SPDC Army broke down after regime forces moved to occupy Kokang territory. Nearly 37,000 refugees fled across the border into China. Despite the regime's claims that peace has returned, more than 20,000 refugees from the Kokang region are still living in temporary camps set up by Chinese authorities.

The cause of the conflict is linked to the Burmese regime's new constitution, which is designed to entrench military rule and does not provide any democratic or ethnic rights. In preparations for its sham elections in 2010, the regime has been pressuring ethnic ceasefire groups to transform their armies into border guard forces under the control of the Burma Army. All of the major ceasefire groups have rejected these regime plans.



Prisoner release 'cynical ploy'

On 22nd September the Burmese military junta granted an amnesty to 7114 prisoners. However, only 128 were political prisoners and no leading members of the opposition were released. There have been six amnesties for prisoners since 2004. However, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), only 1.3% of the total were political prisoners and at least 32 (25%) of the political prisoners released were due for release in less than a year as their sentences were due to expire.

The regime uses prisoner amnesties to try and ease international pressure. This time the releases came shortly before the opening of this year's UN General Assembly session to be attended by General Thein Sein, the junta-appointed Prime Minister.

"We are happy for those political prisoners released, and for their loved ones. But from a political

perspective, this is just a cynical ploy designed to ease international pressure. There can be no real progress towards democracy in our country until all political prisoners are released," said Tate Naing, Secretary of AAPP.

Meanwhile, between July and September, the number of political prisoners has risen to more than 2200, including at least 124 activists who are in serious health conditions. Only in September, AAPP has documented the arrests of 36 activists in Burma, including three monks.

Those arrested include well-known individual activist and US citizen Kyaw Zaw Lwin, (aka) Nyi Nyi Aung, detained on 3 September on his arrival at Rangoon International Airport. He was taken to various different interrogation centres where he was kicked and beaten, deprived of food for several days, and questioned throughout the night. His request for medical treatment for his injuries has so far been denied.

Human Rights Watch released a new report, "Burma's Forgotten Prisoners," which highlights dozens of prominent political activists, Buddhist monks, labour activists, journalists, and artists arrested since the uprising in 2007.

Find the report at: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/08/08/burma-s-forgotten-prisoners>

Ban Ki-moon raises Burma at UN General Assembly

In his opening speech at the UN General Assembly, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon raised the issue of Burma. He said "The release of some political prisoners last week falls short of what is needed. We call on Myanmar's friends and neighbors to do more, much more, in the best interests of Myanmar and its people. If next year's elections are to be accepted as credible and inclusive, all political prisoners must be released - including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi."

Ban Ki-moon also reiterated his call for the regime to release all political prisoners and "to create the necessary conditions for credible and inclusive elections" in a bilateral meeting with Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein at the UN.

US concludes Burma policy review

In September the Obama administration concluded a 7-month review of its policy toward Burma. The policy maintains existing sanctions on Burma, as well as pursuing further sanctions if circumstances warrant. In addition to maintaining sanctions, the administration said it would engage in a dialogue with the military regime aimed at a transition to democracy.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said "Engagement versus sanctions is a false choice in our opinion, so going forward we will be employing both of those tools." The State Department said that unilaterally lifting sanctions would send the wrong signal to Burma's military regime, and that sanctions would only be lifted if the regime makes concrete changes.

Campaigners welcomed the results of the review but cautioned that there must be a timeframe and clear benchmarks for change as the regime is well practiced in engaging in never-ending diplomacy without any measurable results.

Burmese generals pocket \$5bn from Total oil deal in Singaporean banks

Two new reports by Earthrights International (ERI) reveal the vast sums earned by the Burmese regime from the controversial Yadana gas pipeline project.

The reports accuse oil giants Total and Chevron of insulating the country's military rulers from the impact of international sanctions imposed over its human rights abuses.

According to ERI, Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council has earned almost US \$5 billion from the Yadana project by using an outdated exchange rate of just 6 kyat to the dollar, when the de facto rate is closer to 1,000. ERI believes the undeclared amount of around \$4.8 billion to be lodged in Singapore banks.

According to a confidential International Monetary Fund (IMF) report obtained by ERI, revenue "contributed less than 1 percent of total budget revenue in 2007/08, but would have contributed about 57 percent if valued at the market exchange rate."



The pipeline in Eastern Burma carries gas from rich fields in the Andaman Sea through Burma into Thailand, where it generates electricity for the Bangkok area, and in total makes up 60 percent of Burma's gas exports to Thailand. Total has been a major investor in the Yadana project since 1992, holding a 31.24 percent stake, with Chevron on 28 percent.

The ERI reports can be found at: <http://www.earthrights.org/content/view/693/114/>

Food crisis in Chin State continues

A new report by the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), "On the Edge of Survival: The Continuing Rat Infestation and Food Crisis in Chin State" finds that food shortages have spread to seven townships in Chin State, Western Burma, as well as parts of Sagaing Division. In the last month 54 people have died because of food shortages in Chin State. Up to 82 percent of the farmland has been destroyed by rats and more than 100,000 people are struggling with severe malnutrition and diseases. Several thousand Chin have fled to Thailand and India.

The disaster is rooted in the cyclical flowering and dying of bamboo, creating a plague of rats which destroyed farmers' crops. "People have nothing to eat," said Salai Bawi Lian Mang, Executive Director of CHRO. "They are hungry, malnourished, and in a state of desperation. Meanwhile, the military regime has turned this natural disaster into a manmade disaster by ignoring and exacerbating the situation in western Burma."

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has denied repeated requests for food aid. Moreover, local authorities have issued a ban on foreign aid, threatening reprisals against anyone who accepts foreign aid. Forced labour, extortion and land confiscation continue within the affected areas, effectively undermining people's livelihoods and food security.

Danish Pension Fund bans Daewoo

Danish Pension Fund, Danica Pension, has put the South Korean corporation Daewoo International on its blacklist, for ethical concerns about their operations in Burma. Danica Pension said that "Daewoo International has been excluded because of its breach of international guidelines in connection with its activities in Burma."

Daewoo International is the operator of the controversial Shwe gas project in western Burma. The Shwe consortium also includes South Korean corporation KOGAS as well as GAIL and ONGC Videsh from India. The Shwe project has already led to rights abuses and revenue from the project will provide US\$ 29 billion over 30 years to Burma's military regime.

Burmese Monks and Students release statement on 2nd anniversary of 'Saffron Revolution'

Burmese Monks and Students Call on the Regime to Stop Use of Violence against Ethnic Minorities and Forcibly Enacting of its 2008 Constitution through Showcase Elections in 2010

21 Sep 2009

We Oppose the Military Regime's Use of Violence against Ethnic Nationalities, and Demand That the Regime Stops Forcibly Enacting of the 2008 Constitution, Which Is Not accepted by the People of Burma through the 2010 Election

(1) The battles that occurred in Kokang Region of Shan State in late August clearly highlighted the insincere attitude of the regime over the ceasefire

agreement between it and ethnic revolutionary groups, which lasted over 20 years. Furthermore, by attacking and defeating Kokang troops and occupying the Kokang Region, the regime has threatened other ceasefire groups to choose one of the two options, "subordinate to the regime, or being defeated".

(2) Building peace requires mutual respect and trust, as well as basic sincerity, understanding, discussion and compromise with patience among the parties concerned. All parties concerned must take responsibility to keep the existing peace. The eruption of violence in the Kokang Region abundantly demonstrated that the Burmese military regime has unilaterally abolished the ceasefire agreements, and that it has willingness to use force in solving political problems and ethnic national affairs, instead of working through a peaceful dialogue.

(3) The regime has been pressuring all ethnic ceasefire groups to abandon their troops and prepare to participate in the 2010 election. However, most of the ceasefire groups have refused to abandon their armed forces and are reluctant to participate in the election.

(4) The ethnic ceasefire groups refuse to abandon their troops and join in the election because the regime's 2008 Constitution fails to grant the fundamental rights of ethnic nationalities and equality among all. Therefore, the National League for Democracy, United Nationalities Alliance, and ethnic revolutionary forces have demanded that the regime reviews and revises the Constitution to really grant the fundamental rights of ethnic nationalities, equality among all, democracy and human rights.

(5) While the whole people of Burma have refused to accept the 2008 Constitution, written unilaterally by the regime and approved by force, the regime uses violence, threats, bullying tactic and arbitrary arrest to put the Constitution into effect through its 2010 elections. We demand that the regime stops these abuses immediately.

(6) We also demand that the regime releases all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally, announces a nationwide ceasefire and stops preparation for war. We also call on the regime to start a meaningful and time-bound dialogue with the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic representatives. This is the best way to solve Burma's problems, including politic, economic, social and ethnic nationality affairs, peacefully.

(7) The use of violence by the regime destroyed the peace and broke stability and security in the region. The continued pressure and attacks by the regime against ethnic ceasefire groups will increase the loss of lives, lands, and personal belongings of ethnic nationals, and create more instability and insecurity in the region. The regime's current policy towards the ceasefire groups will lead to more human rights violations and more refugees.

(8) Hence, we will continue to work together with all the people of Burma for emergence of democracy and human rights, as well as equality among all ethnic nationalities, and self-determination.

At the same time, we seriously appeal to the international Community, including countries in the region, and especially the United Nations Security Council, to effectively intervene in our country in time to stop the violence and unilateral acts pursued by the Burmese military regime, and to realize peaceful negotiation among all parties concerned.

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