Contemporary Developments on Burma's Borders (Report on a seminar held at The Australian National University, 21 November 1992)

This issue of the Newsletter is largely devoted to the papers delivered at the seminar. The attendance included both academics with an interest in Burma and Southeast Asia and members of the public, particularly representing the Burmese community in Canberra and Sydney. We have reason to believe that the exchange of ideas was mutually profitable. Many of the Burmese who attended are members of the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma and there was open and healthy discussion between those who held that the only issue of substance was the defeat of SLORC and those who attempted to analyze contemporary developments (some of which are working to the benefit of SLORC) and consequences for the future.

There were a number of crucial issues discussed at the seminar, but here I would like to draw brief attention to three on which disagreement was expressed.

The first arose out of the distinction that Ananda Rajah drew between 'conflict resolution' and 'conflict management' strategies. The view was expressed that SLORC appears on occasion to be more conciliatory than the Karen National Union and the Democratic Alliance of Burma, and sometimes effective in establishing agreement with opponents, as they successfully did with many of the factions of the imploded Communist Party of Burma. This view was contested, mainly by representatives of the CRDB, who among other things pointed out that the Karen and the DAB have called for negotiations with SLORC - the only conditions being that they be held under UN supervision and outside Burma.

The second point relates to some scepticism expressed about the possibility of a federal solution for Burma's ethnic problems once the fighting ends. Again, the Burmese representatives at the seminar did not share this pessimism. In fact, Dr Raymond Tint Way had made two important points in the CRDB Australia News and Views (No. 9, Nov./Dec. 1992) made available at the seminar. He writes.

The discussions have usually been clouded by an assumption that regional autonomy is only a step on the road towards secession of the regions and disintegration of the nation. This notion was cleverly planted by General Ne Win in order to justify his ruthless dictatorial control Unfortunately, it was accepted uncritically by most Burmese so that even today
some otherwise thoughtful, progressive and committed people are prone to believe it and to state it as part of their own hesitancy about autonomy for the regions and the ethnic minorities. Leaders of all the main opposition groups have signed the 11-point agreement of 1988 in which they guarantee not to attempt to secede from the Union. They have also signed the Manerplaw Agreement of July 1992 on the establishment of a Federal Union of Burma in which all indigenous groups are guaranteed equal rights of self-determination and no group would receive special privileges.

The third issue has to do with UN aid to Burma under SLORC. Readers are referred to Doug Porter's paper in Number 18 which describes and discusses the UN Border Area Program. The arguments against UN aid are essentially those against any foreign dealing with or aid to SLORC. The UN argues that it only operates in areas in which fighting has ceased. But this still gives legitimacy to SLORC control. Even more dangerous for the future is that it reinforces the movement of Southeast Asian capital into these areas. In the future the Thai government could argue, as it now does in Cambodia, that trade is an individual matter and Thai citizens and their interests need to be protected. Even more dangerous is the probability that Singapore too would take this view, and, with Thailand, resist the overthrow of SLORC.

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Gehan Wijeyewardene

In 1960 Edmund Leach published a paper entitled 'The frontiers of "Burma"' which had a great influence on Southeast Asian anthropology at least, and perhaps on a much wider audience. It was provocative in many ways - not least in its definition of 'Burma' - which he deliberately placed in quotes. He wrote 'By the "Burma" of my title I wish to imply the whole of the wide imprecisely defined frontier region lying between India and China and having modern political Burma as its core.' The ambiguity I am sure was deliberate - Leach's own experience was in Burma, now the Union of Burma, and mostly in the highlands of Burma. Therefore it is of this region he writes. Nevertheless, there is the clear suggestion he is also talking of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. He writes that his basic distinction of 'hill people' and 'valley people' goes back at least to the 13th Century account of Angkhor by Chou Ta-Kuan. The paper argues that notions of frontiers and nation-states are the product of Western colonial expansion. 'The whole of "Burma"' he writes, 'is a frontier region continuously subject to influences from both India and China and so also the frontiers which separated the petty political units within "Burma" were not clearly defined lines but zones of mutual interest.' Real traditional frontiers in pre-colonial times were ecological boundaries which separated the hill people, who had Chinese notions of kinship, chiefship, religion, marriage and the importance of trade from the valley peoples who had Indian notions of these matters. In each case the ecological base being the type of agriculture - intensive wet-rice cultivation in the plains and swidden agriculture in the mountains - with the important exception that some parts of the hills developed intensive terrace agriculture.

In more recent years a widely influential book on related themes has been Benedict Anderson's account of nationalism - Imagined Communities, in which he argues that national consciousness is the product of the growth of 'print capitalism' and the efforts of politically active, educated elites to create the stage for their own achievements a process which he interestingly links to 'pilgrimage'. It is very significant that both Leach and Anderson attack the notion that language is inherently tied to nation. Leach attacks the historical linguistic view that genetic relations between languages give any historical evidence of migrations or connections between people. Anderson suggests that languages could be learned by anybody and it is only time that prevents all humans speaking all languages. In the latest edition of Anderson's book he has used the work of Thongchai Winichakul on 'mapping' to bolster his case. Thongchai, argues, as have many others that the 'nation-state' is an European product purveyed to the rest of the world though colonialism. To talk of the traditional frontiers of Thailand is an anachronism because until the modern technology of mapping such a notion was not in fact possible. Anderson sees the technology of mapping as a fitting handmaiden to 'print capitalism'.

There are a number of theoretical issues that arise out of the Leach and Anderson points of view, but for this seminar I wish to take up only a few, particularly insofar as they relate to contemporary Burma.
First of all I think one needs to have some idea about the confusions that inhere in the use of the terms 'nation' and 'ethnicity'. I will here follow a recent paper by Hobsbawm.  

Hobsbawm points out the very important difference between a 19th Century view of 'nation' and a current 20th Century one - the latter conflating notions of ethnicity with that of nation. In the 19th Century, particularly if we take the United States of America as paradigmatic, the nation was a superordinate entity within which minorities and ethnicities would merge their identities. It was this notion that was embraced by anti-colonial movements which created the nation-states of India, Ghana, Nigeria and Ceylon, among others. Burma too, was the product of this view of the nation-state. In the communist world nation and nationality were used in a different sense. In both the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China the words translated as 'nation' and 'nationality' referred to politically recognized ethnic groups. The political recognition was important, because this brought the proliferation of theoretically independent (autonomous) national republics, provinces, prefectures etc. It should be also mentioned that this echoed a rather different American use of the word 'nation' where it was used to refer to Indian political groups such as the Iroquois and Cherokee nations.

These last mentioned groups are in some ways prototypes of the politicized ethnicities which are emerging as one of the major political problems of the late 20th Century - particularly in central and eastern Europe.

The post-colonial states have been remarkably stable as far as boundaries are concerned, for a number of reasons. Most important, the post-colonial ideology insisted that borders were for them, the post-colonial states, to decide - thus the often arbitrary borders imposed by colonial powers were declared, if not sacrosanct, inviolable except by decision of the states concerned themselves. One major exception has been the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan - which overthrown what may have been the stupidest of the post-colonial arrangements. Post-colonial borders were also reinforced by the Cold War. These were part of the stand-off between the great powers. Another notable exception, to the extent that borders were redrawn, was the Ne Win-Chou Enlai agreement which settled disputes on the Burma-Chinese border. In a sense - it is not an exception, but an example of the principle that it was for the post-colonial states to re-negotiate their borders if necessary. The problem is complicated because there are such examples as Timor and Goa, but the general point that needs to be emphasized is that borders were the entire responsibility of the emergent states and this principle was generally re-inforced by the exigencies of the Cold War.

'Ethnic groups', in the Hobsbawm treatment, as opposed to 'nationalism' which is a 'political programme', is a readily definable way of expressing a real sense of group identity which links the members of "we" because it emphasizes their differences from "them". Very often what links the 'we' is language or religion - or both. The sociological reality of this cannot be questioned - Leach and others would contest the necessary historical reality which putatively binds the ancestors of the people claiming such unity. Arising out of the Andersonian thesis is the suggestion that it is elites, particularly political elites, that create such 'ethnicity' where consciousness of it had not existed before. This is a point of view criticized by Ranajit Guha in his review of the first edition of the book. Not only elites, but peasants could have a view of ethnicity or nationhood, and fight for it. Guha also points out that the central notion of 'imagined' in Anderson's work is so obvious that it loses any explanatory power.

A strain that runs through the Anderson-Thongchai view, and found in the writings of many others, for example Geoffrey Benjamin (The Unseen Presence: a theory of the nation state and its mystifications), is the suggestion that ethnic identity, politicized ethnic identity, is a confidence trick perpetrated on an innocent population by its leaders. The other side of this particular coin is revealed by Anderson who at the end of the book accepts post-colonial nationalism and ethnic identity as essentially benevolent, without the vilification and violence that characterizes colonial racism. This is to ignore the nauseating violence and hatred that accompanied the partition of British India, the Sri Lankan conflict, Malaysian race riots and a multitude of other recent historical events.

To return to Leach, one should keep clear that he was fighting battles on many fronts. He was objecting to the idea that there was some fixed, recoverable territorial frontier which defined traditional Burma. He was here recognizing, but then discarding, the validity of British efforts over a century to demarcate the boundaries of what they considered theirs. He was by implication questioning the rights of the government in Rangoon to the territories it claimed - ignoring the realities of the post-colonial world. Traditional Burma may have no frontiers of the kind drawn on maps.
and customs and immigration control - but modern Burma did. The only valid point, it seems to me, here is that there is a historical discontinuity in traditional views of political units and modern ones. I, among others, have argued that traditional notions of frontiers in mainland Southeast Asia had to do with the political recognition of river valleys as units and watersheds as boundaries. When colonial boundaries were drawn the occupying powers both recognized this fact and ignored it to suit their convenience - hence the distorted boundaries of the post-colonial states.

Another battle he was fighting was that against the historical linguists - whom he accused of confusing the use of language and the historical relation between languages with the movement of peoples and the ancestry of living populations. Here one need not jump to the defence of linguists who are quite able to defend themselves, but Leach was again distracting attention from one of the important phenomena which were beginning to shape modern Burmese history - what we may perhaps call 'linguistic nationalism'. It may be that Karenic nationalism whereby the Kayah and Pa-O have become associated as allies of the Karen National Union, is partly the creation of linguists identifying these languages as related, but it is also partly the recognition of similarity by the peoples themselves, and, most important, the political fact cannot now be disputed. Hobsbawm recognizes the phenomenon and writes that he speaks as 'part of my subject. For historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan [he could as well have said Burma] are to heroin-addicts; we supply the essential raw material for the market.'

The third battle is only implicit - and it could be quite unfair to raise it at all. Leach was concerned with history and the error of projecting the modern on to the historical. But as with Anderson and Thongchai there seems to be a clear suggestion that an understanding of the past will create a different program for the present and future. To recognize that the frontiers of historical Burma are illusory is perhaps to recognize that some other view should be taken of the frontiers of modern Burma. In Thongchai's case there are clear statements that indicate his argument about the 'geo-body of Siam' is an attack on Thai chauvinism. Though the implied criticisms I will now make may be unfair, perhaps some good may come of it.

When Leach's paper appeared in 1960 the Karen rebellion was already well over ten years old. In 1949 part of the Kachin forces who had served under the British went into rebellion led by Naw Seng, but he did not carry the bulk of his fellow Kachin and he went into exile in China. It was not till 1958-9, while Leach's paper was in press that the Kachin Independence Organization went into revolt. In the previous year the Shan had begun their revolution. At the time the paper went into print the people with whom Leach was most familiar, the Kachin or Jingpo, were expressing their ethnic identity as a political fact - they were no longer a cultural-ecological category.

But, to go back to Leach's paper, I should make it clear that Leach had a pretty good understanding of the political-ecological situation. He understood very well the nature of the valley state and the valley princes. His main concern was the relation of these states, particularly when they comprised more than one valley, with the hill peoples that lived on the borders between valleys. He writes that the control princes could exercise over them 'was seldom more than marginal'. He also writes that language and ethnic identity were determined by place of residence and agricultural practice. Thus a Kachin who moved into the valley and cultivated irrigated rice became a Shan, became a Buddhist, and could marry a woman from among his neighbours. A Burmese (or Shan) Buddhist, he says, cannot marry a non-Buddhist. In contrast, Chinese traders very often established a network of connections throughout the hills by marrying local women. This is very neat, but it is not I think entirely accurate. Robert Taylor, for instance, writes of the Restored Toungoo and Konbaung states Further from the king's supervision lay the third zone, that of the tributaries. Here immediate authority was exercised by hereditary rulers from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These rulers, Shan Sawbwas, Kachin Duwas, Karenni Sawbwas, Karen and Chin chiefs etc., paid allegiance to the central court through tribute missions, marriage alliances, military forces and similar non-permanent, non-bureaucratic displays of obligation.

It seems, intuitively, a mistake to attribute such a view of marriage to Theravada Buddhists. In terms of agriculture it is quite clear that from pre-colonial times the Karen spanned a range of ecological niches, though one should also remember that the extensive rice-growing of the delta is a colonial phenomenon. As Ananda Rajah has shown us rice ecology and ethnic identity have complex relationships. The Karen with whom he worked cultivated irrigated rice on fields originally established by Hmong, a hill-tribe of non-local origin, but reserved their mystical connections with agriculture, for their swiddens. Leach, in his book on the Kachin, does give examples of individuals that changed their identity when they changed their agricultural way of life, but this does not prove that many others did not practice wet-
rice agriculture and remain Kachin. Though it is not a conclusive argument, in Thailand there are many Hmong and Yao who cultivate wet rice for part of the year and return to their hill villages at the end of the season. Leach has argued that traditional systems are no longer recoverable - and this may well be true (though Martin Smith, while agreeing with Leach, also says this is disputed by KIO leaders), but we need to approach these assertions with some scepticism.

Leach's experience was of the particular Kachin/Shan divide and he attempted to generalize it, not only to modern Burma, but to the greater region itself. When we try to see what lessons his theory has for the modern conflicts of Burma, the brief discussion above seems to suggest - very little. Ethnicity for Leach was an epiphenomenon of ecological boundaries. It would be foolish to deny its reality today. As Martin Smith eloquently points out, a full understanding of Burma's linguistic divisions is still beyond our grasp. The divisions and sectional loyalties are couched in memories of history that go back long before the colonial period. He writes that in Tavoy-Mergui districts in CPB controlled areas, Burmese speakers refer to fellow Burmans as 'Pagans', harking back 'to an age long ago'. The Karen, despite continuing political differences, have given to the outside world an illusion of unity, embracing such distinct, though Karenic-speaking, groups as the Kayah (Karenni) and Pa-O. In fact large groups of mostly Pwo-speaking hill Karen have almost nothing to do with the insurrection and in the delta many Karen are opposed to the insurrection and fight on the side of SLORC.

Clearly what is required is a framework for understanding the relations of these groups - among themselves, with each other and with Burmans - a theory, so to speak, which replaces the neat formulation of Leach and which recognizes the reality of ethnicity. Language and religion are important - though the importance can vary and convictions of ethnic identity may exist though both language and religion are lost. Chao Tsang Yawngwe - son of the first president of Burma and a leader of the Shan rebellion describes his frustration during the early days of the rebellion, sitting with Shan and not having the language to express his disagreement or expound his views.9

Such a theory is not merely an academic exercise. One of the major political activities of the Democratic Alliance of Burma is to revive the old call for a federal constitution to face the difficulties that must arise at the end of SLORC. A search for principles to describe the on-the-ground reality of ethnicity in modern Burma is essential if the DAB constitution is not to flounder in uncertainty and wishful thinking. As a start I will go very quickly through the major groups that occupy the borders of Burma and try to bring out some of the issues that are most prominent in the situation as it is in the final decade of the 20th Century.

Mon

Christian Bauer writes of the Mon that they themselves tend to equate ethnic identity with language and, 'In spite of reports over the past century that Mon is a dying language, there is no evidence to suggest that its use is declining in Burma'10. Bauer arrives at a tentative population of Mon in Burma as 1 million. As comparison Smith reports that 'leaders of the main ethnic minority communities estimate the Shan and Mon populations at approximately four million each. All figures, particularly the Mon, need treating with great circumspection, being projections based largely on ancestral records or regions of habitation' (1991: 30). On Bauer's discussion the ceiling on Mon-speakers in Thailand (as opposed to those who might claim Mon ethnicity) is about 50,000. These communities were probably established in the 18th Century after the fall of Pegu (1757). Though the Mon insurrection has been of some importance in lower Burma, particularly in the region of the Three Pagodas Pass, it has been relatively small. From a theoretical point of view, it seems unlikely that there is any ecological determination of Mon ethnicity - nor a religious one, the Mon being Theravada Buddhist as are Burman and Thai. Mon ethnicity is linguistic first and foremost, though, as noted by Smith, the phenomenon of ethnic identity connected only to a historical name is also a Mon characteristic.

Karen

Smith writes of modern population figures 'No reliable figures have been collected or released since independence and those that are published appear deliberately to play down ethnic minority numbers'. He provides the estimate of three to four million, with another 200,000 in Thailand. The KNU estimate their population, including Pa-O, Kayan and Kayah (Karenni) as 'some seven million'. It should be noted that whatever the true figure this includes a very diverse population - even in ethnic terms. It is of course in the interests of the KNU to accept a single ethnic identity. We may
briefly mention that there is a large Buddhist population, some Burmese-speaking, in the Delta, and older Buddhist chiefdoms such as the Pa-O, a Christian population from, which the KNU leadership is largely drawn, and many hill Karen who are probably only now being drawn into the insurrection and military conflict. Leach's ecological divisions may be informative at some points, but are certainly inadequate to deal with the general situation. Were a true Karen ethnicity to emerge it would be a created ethnicity, though this is not to deny the nationalist fervour which has maintained the insurrection for nearly half a century.

Shan

The Shan are among those who claim that they were betrayed by the British grant of independence. The Shan states were not, they claim, administered as part of lowland Burma and should not have been handed to Rangoon. Claims are made that even in 1942 Shan State, as the agglomeration of small chiefdoms had become, was not considered part of Burma. These views are criticized by Chao Tsang Yawnghwe who writes that the ‘tales sprang more from wishful thinking than facts’. Essentially the Shan, who are Tai-speakers, fit part of Leach's model very well - they were after all one factor in his model. The Shan rebellion did not begin till 1958-9 and was, it appears, directly a result of the Kuomintang invasion of Burmese territory. Apart from a short period in the 80s, they have been faction ridden, reft by alliance and opposition to the communists, by the opium trade and by their ethnic relations with Thailand. The heavy-handed occupation of Kengtung by the Siamese during the war, probably ruled out a major option of Shan insurrection - a demand for unification with Thailand.

The current position of the Shan insurrection is difficult to guage. Some groups have made their peace with Rangoon and others are part of the DAB. The major player, however, is still Khun Sa, who trades opium, is said to have an agreement with Rangoon, is at war with the Wa and has strong informal relations with Tai Jai i.e. Shan, in Thailand. Despite any agreement with Rangoon, earlier this year Rangoon seems to have been supporting, militarily, the Wa, and certainly until the events of May in Thailand this year, the Shan were also coming under attack from the Thai air force. When the Shan groups were last in a position to make a statement of policy, they clearly chose independence and rejected the Union of Burma.

Wa

Smith gives the insurrectionists estimate of Wa population at two million, but this figure probably includes much of the population in China. The Wa began to make an impact on the insurrection in their own right with the self-destruction of the Communist Party of Burma. The CPB was well-known as having a Burman leadership and minority, particularly Wa, fighters - at least in upper Burma. Smith reports that Wa themselves say that it was not the Shan, not the Burmese, not the Chinese who intruded into their tribal life - but the Communist Party of Burma.

The Wa have embraced the opium trade and certainly until recently have been in fierce dispute with the forces of Khun Sa. There is no clear indication of their political demands, though it seems they do aim for territorial independence.

As we have looked at the border groups against the Leach model, I may just say that the Wa, like the Naga and the Chin, do demonstrate an aspect of the model with which I have not dealt here, but may briefly mention - a dual chiefly/democratic social structure with movement between the two poles. The evidence, except for the Kachin, is not extensive.

Kachin

These people were of course the core of Leach's theoretical model. Smith's figures for the Kachin are one and a half million. There are a number of questions that need to be asked about the Kachin. Leach claimed that the term Kachin was not an ethnic, but a political term. The Jingpo-speakers made up the Kachin. Leach claimed that the term Kachin was not an ethnic, but a political term. The Jingpo-speakers made up the majority, but the Kachin chiefdoms and the egalitarian communities were made up of speakers of a number of different languages. In China the word Jingpo is used and the application of the word Kachin is unclear. Nevertheless these are related communities - the national border sometimes bisects villages. Movement is free across the border, and though, at least since the demise of the CPB, China supports SLORC, Jingpo are allowed to support their kinsmen across the border, though officially not allowed to provide arms. The KIO leader Bran Seng is a welcome visitor in Beijing, and I was told that KIO leaders
find it much easier to visit their headquarters via Beijing than through Burmese territory.

The Kachin are said by some to have more fighters in the field than the KNU. On the other hand Bran Seng has on occasion upset his DAB allies by negotiating with SLORC. Early this year it was said that there was now an agreement in place among the DAB leadership that such unilateral talks would not take place.

Chin

The Chin in fact comprise a large number of different groups (whose names for themselves usually has the word zo as part) who have on the whole been supportive of the Rangoon government. There are, however, groups representing the Chin in the DAB.

Baas Terwiel recently visited the Mizo on the Indian border and reports that they have established their headquarters on the Indian side and largely manage their own affairs, even though there was an Indian government representative stationed there.

Arakan

The majority of the population of Arakan are Buddhist Rakhine whose numbers are given as two and a half million. Smith gives a figure of 'one to two million' Muslim Arakanese or Rohingyas. He says 'many of whom are now living in exile'. The Arakan was a major centre of communist activity and the main area of operation of the 'Red Flag' communists. Smith writes, 'It is certainly no coincidence that since the fall of the CPB's Pegu Yoma base areas, the CPB's only remaining footholds in predominantly Burmese-speaking areas have been in the Rakhine State (where determined separatist movements remain active).

Conclusion

This presentation must be considered a preliminary reconsideration of Leach's theory and its application over all Burma's borders and into the contemporary situation. Burma's frontiers were never all like the Kachin-Shan boundaries, and many of the elaborations of theory may be questioned. Nevertheless, it still remains to be considered how much the ecological factors behind Leach's theories continue and influence contemporary developments.

Material for the distribution of ethnic groups is based on Frank M. Lebar et. al. 1964. A major point needs to be made. The maps of this book show no Burman populations on Burma's borders - except in Arakan. These groups are probably Rakhine. This term is not used in the book and Arakanese are subsumed under Burmese. The term Rohingya does not occur.

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contemporary developments in kawthoolei: the karen and conflict resolution in burma

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Introduction Recent developments in Burma and Kawthoolei, the Karen separatist state on the borders of Burma and Thailand, indicate that the Karen now have a greater role to play in internal political developments in Burma than they have had before. The current, larger role of the Karen in relation to political developments within Burma has come about, paradoxically, because of developments in Burma itself rather than through any direct initiatives on the part of the Karen, at least on a concerted basis (see also Wijeyewardene 1992). These developments are now well known and do not need extensive discussion; but it is worth recapitulating some of these developments in the course of this exploratory paper because of their relevance for an understanding of the role of the Karen in relation to conflict resolution and conflict management. In conflict studies, the difference between resolution and management is an
important one both conceptually and in policy or practical terms. Whereas resolution is seen as a process resulting in long term elimination of conflict, management implies shorter term goals in the reduction or containment of conflict (Ben-Dor and Dewitt 1987b). In situations of protracted social conflict, conflict management approaches are considered more feasible or realistic than conflict resolution approaches. The reason is that conflict resolution approaches tend to focus on issues of fundamental differences and sources of conflict which are generally intractable while conflict management approaches seek to address discrete instances of conflict, the containment of which may set the preconditions for longer term solutions. In this paper, I want to suggest that the Karen approach, for a long time, has been largely oriented towards conflict resolution while recent developments suggest the emergence of conflict management strategies in Burma. This orientation, I further suggest, has in some ways precluded the Karen from giving sufficient attention to these strategies, the consequences of which may be detrimental to their role in reducing the conflict in Burma.

Developments in Kawthoolei

The Karen have been engaged in a long, drawn-out struggle with the Burmese. The larger historical and political circumstances and conditions for this do not need rehearsing here. However, we may note that in the 1970s, a succession of political cum military fronts consisting of various ethnic separatist organisations including the Karen National Union (KNU), were formed. These fronts were a response to disillusionment with working with ethnic Burman opposition parties, the 1973 referendum in Burma and the 1974 Constitution in Burma which established a one-party state and Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) rule. One front, the Revolutionary Nationalities Alliance (RNA) was formed in 1973 at Kawmoorah a Karen stronghold. The aim of the RNA was the overthrow of the Ne Win regime and the establishment of 'a genuine federal union of independent national states based on the principle of equality and national self-determination' (Smith 1991:294). This is one of the earlier indications of the Karen position with regard to conflict resolution in Burma, namely the goal of establishing a federal system. However, that the Karen position on these matters has not always been consistent, at least as far as appearances go, as I discuss later. The RNA and other fronts were eventually replaced by the National Democratic Front (NDF) which was formed in 1976 at Manerplaw, the KNU's new general headquarters (Smith 1991:294). The principal purpose of this alliance was, again, to form a united front consisting of ethnic minority separatist organisations and to develop greater co-ordination, political and military, in their confrontation with the Burmese government and its armed forces. As Smith points out, the NDF came to have a significant impact on the conflict in Burma but was initially plagued by differences over numerous issues including federalism, the right of secession, and so forth. These differences took a long time to resolve. Here again, we see federalism as a goal in conflict resolution. An inherent problem in the past in these fronts and their concern with federalism as a goal and means of resolving the conflict in Burma is that they did not include any Burman party. This, of course, has since changed.

As a result of the 1988 democracy uprising and the SLORC crackdown, several Burman opposition groups sought refuge in Kawthoolei where the Karen now play host to the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the National League for Democracy-Liberated Area (NLD-LA), the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) and representatives of the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB) among others, all of which enjoy the protection and relative security of Kawthoolei. These groups established the Democratic Alliance of Burma in November 1988. It would seem that the DAB is not entirely as cohesive as it may appear. Smith (1991:408) reports that had General Bo Mya, President of the KNU and Commander-in-Chief of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), not been elected as Chairman of the DAB, he would not have co-operated with the DAB. Furthermore, some democracy activists who participated in the uprising in Rangoon were apparently unhappy over the appointment of two Burman representatives from the then Peoples Patriotic Party (PPP) and from the CRDB to the DAB Central Executive Committee. Be that as it may, the alliance of Burman opposition groups with the ethnically-based separatist movements on Burma's borders -- an outcome of the SLORC crackdown -- is none the less significant. It is significant not because Burman and non-Burman opponents to the military regime in Burma have finally recognised that they have something in common but because the Burman opposition groups have recognised this common interest and have finally sought out a working relationship with the ethnically-based insurgents, though admittedly by force of their own circumstances in Burma. Were it not for these circumstances, it is unlikely that these groups would have actively sought out a modus vivendi with the ethnic insurgents amongst whom the Karen (and Kachin) enjoy a certain pre-eminence. It may be noted that with these developments, the Karen have been concerned to consolidate their pre-eminence. Not only is General Bo Mya Chairman of the DAB; he is also President of the
National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) which was established on 4 August 1992 by the DAB, NLD, and NCGUB (News and Views, September/October 1992, p. 7). An important feature of this modus vivendi is the explicit recognition of the rights of the various ethnic groups and parity of their political status. I think it fair to say that the Burman opposition groups have, in principle, recognised these rights but their main concern, until the formation of the DAB, was opposition to the military regime. The in-principle recognition, in other words, has not hitherto had any practical political significance. The recognition of these rights in current circumstances does, however, have practical political consequences as the recently signed Manerplaw Agreement indicates.

There is another consequence of SLORC's crackdown on opposition groups in Burma which is of some significance, namely, the fragmentation or division of these groups. The designation National League for Democracy-Liberated Area, for instance, is a deliberate one intended to distinguish its members from the NLD in Burma which, under pressure from SLORC, expelled various members including Aung San Suu Kyi. These divisions in the Burman opposition groups and the association of some factions with the ethnic separatists have implications for conflict resolution in Burma.

These and other related developments have had yet another consequence. The alliance of Burman opposition groups with the ethnic separatists in the NDF in general and the KNU and KNLA in particular have made the destruction of Kawthoolei a high priority as far as SLORC is concerned. This has, in part, been made possible by the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and accommodations between the Burmese regime and splinter factions of the CPB amongst others (to be discussed later) which has allowed SLORC to devote greater military resources in its operations against the Karen in Kawthoolei.

The Manerplaw Agreement of 31 July 1992

In July 1992, an agreement to establish a Federal Union of Burma, known as the Manerplaw Agreement was signed by several opposition groups. The signatories to the agreement are: the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the National League for Democracy-Liberated Area (NLD-LA), the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), and the National Democratic Front (NDF).

Where the Karen are concerned, the Manerplaw Agreement, is a significant development in terms of Kawthoolei's political position in relation to the Burmese state and the other separatist movements. We have seen that as a member of the various fronts of ethnic minority organisations, the KNU has indicated that it would like to see some sort of federal system in place in Burma. At other times, however, the Karen have expressed other desires. More than twenty years ago, for instance, when Peter Hinton conducted his fieldwork in northern Thailand, the Karen separatists were reluctant to indicate that they were concerned with political restructuring in the form of a larger federal system (Hinton, personal communication). Ten years ago, I was told by a Karen missionary closely connected with the KNU that the Karen were not 'revolutionaries' but 'rebels', the vague implication being that the Karen were concerned with secession rather than overthrowing the Burmese regime under General Ne Win, or the political reconfiguration of Burma in which the Karen would have a part to play in one capacity or another. And, on 19 August 1984, Bo Mya announced the independence of the 'Republic of Kawthoolei' (Smith 1991:478, Chapter 19, note 3). Two months later, however, the NDF stated that it intended to 'establish a unified Federal Union with all the ethnic races including the Burmese' (Smith 1991:386). This entailed rescinding any demands on the part of NDF members, including the KNU, for the right to secede. Smith notes that the NDF decision to establish a Federal Union represented a considerable compromise on the part of the Karen. It would appear that the Karen position on conflict resolution has thus been somewhat inconsistent.

The inconsistency can be explained away (but only in part) if we consider more closely what kind of federal system the NDF and therefore the KNU have in mind. Recall that when the KNU was part of the RNA, their stated aim was to form 'a genuine federal union of independent national states based on the principle of equality and national self-determination'. The operative words are 'independent national states' and 'national self-determination'. Thus when the KNU (and other members of the NDF) talk of a Federal Union, they are none the less equally concerned to retain a high degree of sovereignty within their own states. This, of course, raises the question as to how viable such a federal system would be if it were to be put in place. Here, I share Wijeyewardene's pessimism (1992) over the viability of the Federal Union proposals contained in the Manerplaw Agreement which is the latest expression of federalist intentions.
The agreement is an important one none the less because Burman opposition groups are among the signatories unlike previous agreements, proposals, and declarations by the NDF and its predecessor fronts. For this reason, the agreement deserves close scrutiny in relation to the role of the Karen in conflict resolution in Burma, both at present and in the future.

The agreement states, among other things, that the signatories would 'draw up a true Federal Union constitution in accordance with the desires of indigenous nationalities and all peoples' and that they will 'follow the principles that no nationality shall have special privileges and no restrictions will be imposed on the basic rights of any nationality or minority in the Union'. Article Five of the agreement is perhaps the most interesting because it reveals something of the basic structure of the Federal Union as the signatories see it. The Union would incorporate the Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Chin, Mon, Burman, Arakan, and Shan peoples, each of which would have 'national states': these national states would 'assign certain powers to the Federal Union and the remaining powers will be exercised by the National States including legislative, administrative and judicial powers' (emphasis added); the Federal Union will consist of two Houses of Parliament: The National Assembly (Upper House) and the People's Assembly (Lower House). Furthermore, 'In accordance with the principle of civilian supremacy over the military the Federal Union and State armies will be put under the direct supervision of the elected Governments', 'The legislative, administrative and judicial branches of the Federal Union Government will be checked and balanced in power, and the judiciary will be independent', and 'The Constitution will be designed to prevent any re-emergence of chauvinism and fascist dictatorship in the future'.

There are four points in the agreement which are worth noting. The first point, a conceptual one, is that the agreement is unquestionably oriented towards conflict resolution as all previous proposals on federalism have been. The second point which is closely related to the first, is that the agreement is concerned with the removal of SLORC. In this sense, it is not unlike, for example, the RNA declaration referred to earlier. Third, it is concerned with the parity of the political status of the various ethnic groups where Burmans are not in any way privileged, a long-standing concern of the NDF. Fourth, it is evident that the signatories and the 'national states' that they represent are concerned to preserve their autonomy and sovereignty as much as possible. The federal government will only have powers assigned to it by the governments of the constituent national states. This, of course, raises the thorny question of what would constitute a Burman state in the Federal Union.

Conflict Resolution: Dilemmas and Realities

Recent work in the area of conflict studies in the Middle East, especially in terms of the concept of protracted social conflict (see, for example, Azar and Marlin 1987) suggest that conflict resolution approaches adopted by participants and analysts with inputs into policy formulation do not in fact lead to the resolution of conflict. The prima facie evidence for this is the indisputable fact that conflicts have not been resolved in the Middle East and that they are protracted. The theoretical reasons are that conflict resolution approaches tend to address issues of fundamental differences, which of course underlie the sources of conflict, and are therefore not amenable to compromise or bargaining. The conflict resolution approach embodied in the Manerplaw Agreement and in the KNU position provides a comparable example illustrating the kinds of problems encountered with such an approach.

Given the current situation in Burma, it is one thing for Burman opposition groups to agree to a federal system in which a large amount of sovereignty is conceded to ethnic 'national states'. It is quite another matter when these opposition groups and ethnic minority organisations seek to resolve the conflict where their principal adversary is the military regime, a regime which is unwilling to surrender power. Conflict resolution in these circumstances requires the removal of the existing regime. It is a demand that is non-negotiable on either side. From this and other related issues arise several obstacles, of a practical nature, to conflict resolution in Burma, of which I shall discuss only two.

Subordination of the Military to Civilian Government

One major issue is the subordination of the military -- or more precisely the various armies and militias -- to civilian government in the proposed Union and its constituent 'national states'. The various insurrectionist movements, which are all ethnically based, are run by organisations where political and military leadership are identical or coterminous. There is no indication of how the military will be brought under civilian control. It seems more realistic to assume that
if such a Federal Union were indeed to come into being, the ethnically-based 'national states' would see the separation of military leadership from civilian governments only in a nominal sense, if at all.

Where the Karen are concerned, it is highly unlikely that Bo Mya would want to relinquish his hold over the KNLA or, on the other hand, to retain control over an army responsible to a civilian government in which he had no part to play. There is no reason to suppose that this would not also be the case with the other insurrectionists in their 'national states' such as the Kachin, Karenni, Mon, and so forth.

As for Burma, one must surely raise the question as to how it would be possible or practicable for any coalition government to bring the Tatmadaw (the Burmese armed forces) under its control. The removal of SLORC, a necessary precondition for any civilian government to assume power in the Federal Union, would have to entail not merely the removal of the current incumbents of SLORC. It would have to require the removal of several layers in the upper echelons of the Tatmadaw down to at least divisional commander level. The reasons for this are obvious. Divisional commanders have been responsible for, if not formulating, then most certainly executing not simply SLORC policies but general Tatmadaw policies (which go a long way back) of involving civilians in their war with the various insurgent forces. This includes the internment of not only Karen and other ethnic civilian populations and using them as porters up to the front lines (Smith 1991:259-260), but Burman civilians as well (Testimony of porters escaped from the SLORC army 1992). In short, it is difficult to see how a large number of senior Tatmadaw officers could be removed let alone how the entire Tatmadaw could be brought under civilian control. The fact that there is no indication that there may be some senior serving Tatmadaw officers who disagree with SLORC policies or support the current opposition in Burma and who could therefore be relied upon to subordinate the Tatmadaw to a civilian government makes the prospect of civilian control of the army even more unlikely.

Borders and Frontiers, Contingent Sovereignty and Effective Control

I have argued elsewhere (1990), following Buzan (1983), that the political relations and the conflict between the Burmese state and the Karen imply that the Burmese state is a 'weak state', the criterion being that the institutions of the state are contested to the point of violence. The argument may, of course, be extended to include the relations between the Burmese state and the other ethnically-based insurgent movements. The fact that the Burmese state is engaged in a protracted conflict with numerous ethnic insurgent movements on its internationally recognised, historically demarcated borders (but see below) implies that the sovereignty of the Burmese state is limited by the existence of these movements. In other words, the sovereignty of the Burmese state does not in fact extend to the extremities of its borders. Accordingly, it seems more accurate to take the view that there are frontier zones separating those parts of Burma over which the Burmese state has contingent sovereignty and territories which insurgent groups such as the Karen, Kachin, Karenni, and so forth, have effective control.

These realities are at variance as much with official Burmese maps indicating the boundaries of the various states in the Union of Myanmar as they are with similar maps drawn up by the NDF. Needless to say, there are some differences between NDF maps and official Burmese maps. The demarcation of the boundaries of the 'national states' in NDF maps, to some extent, reflects the recognition of the effective control over areas which its constituent members exercise as well as their larger claims to territory. The only similarity which may be said to exist between Burmese and NDF maps (and therefore the 'formal' political positions of the Burmese regime and the NDF) is the principle that the constituent or national states should encompass what are thought to be the areas predominantly inhabited by specific ethnic groups. The application of this principle, however, would raise formidable problems of state boundary delimitation and demarcation in a Federal Union, which are inevitable entailments of the conflict resolution approach of the NDF and DAB, for two reasons. First, there would have to be agreement on the distribution of the various ethnic groups in relation to the 'national states'. Where, for example, would the sizeable Karen population in the delta area of Burma stand in relation to Kawthoolei given that they would then be in a Burman 'national state'? Second, the territories under the effective control of the insurgent movements in most cases do not match the extent of the areas inhabited by the ethnic groups which they claim to represent. The territory controlled by the KNU and KNLA, for instance, is much less than the area considered to be inhabited by Karen populations whether in the Karen State of official Burmese maps or the Kawthoolei of NDF maps. Would the delimitation and demarcation of the boundaries of the 'national states' in the proposed Federal Union reflect the geographical distribution of ethnic groups -- or territories under effective control of the various insurgent movements?
The problems of boundary delimitation and demarcation associated with the Federal Union proposals are not, however, confined to internal boundaries in Burma. Although Tenasserim was annexed by the British following the first Anglo-Burmese war and although the border between Burma and Siam was stabilised through negotiations between Thailand and Henry Burney, the ambassador of the East India Company in 1826 (Lamb 1968:161-163), ambiguities exist with regard to Three Pagodas Pass at Kanchanaburi Province (Smith 1991:396). Little is known of Burmese and Thai attempts to resolve the dispute but there can be no doubt that the presence of the Mon insurgents (the New Mon State Party) has complicated the situation. The Mon were in effective control of Three Pagodas Pass until early 1990 when Burmese troops overran their positions. Nevertheless, current NDF maps depict Three Pagodas Pass as part of Mon State. Recent tensions between Burma and Thailand (over the abduction of Thai villagers and officials by Burmese troops further north along the border) have resulted in a statement by a senior Thai military official which is, perhaps, revealing of Thai attitudes, at least in certain institutional contexts, and the ramifications of boundary disputes and the presence of ethnic insurgents on the borders of Thailand and Burma. In a surprisingly candid speech to the Association of Women Territorial Defence Volunteers in Thailand, Lieutenant-General Chetta Tanajaro, Commander of the First Army Region, was reported to have said that the existence of ethnic rebels on the border with Burma was of benefit to Thailand, whilst denying Thai support for the ethnic insurgents (The Nation, 23 October 1992). Citing the Three Pagodas Pass as an example, the general said that demarcation problems at the Thai-Burmese border could have escalated into major bilateral conflicts had it not been for the minority groups acting as 'buffers' and that 'if the [minority problem] is settled, the situation might turn dangerous'. Although it may be inferred that Thai foreign policy with regard to border issues has always come under the purview of the Thai military (whilst other foreign policies may well come under that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proper), it is not known to what extent Lieutenant-General Chetta's opinions reflect current Thai foreign policy, or at any rate the present military establishment's position with regard to this particular border issue. Nevertheless, these remarks are sufficient indication of the complex, bilateral (or multilateral?) implications of the delimitation and demarcation of boundaries related to the Federal Union proposals.

If a post-SLORC period were to eventuate and if such a Union were to come into being, would the determination of the boundary at Three Pagodas Pass be a matter for the Union (with its 'assigned' powers?) and Thailand to negotiate - or for the Mon and Thailand to negotiate? Answers to questions such as this can only be speculative. Whatever transpires, it seems reasonable to assume that in assessments of future internal developments in Burma, the possible role of Thailand cannot be discounted. Such assessments would also need to recognise the past record of Thailand, namely, the pursuit of Thailand's national interests (as defined by various groups, including the military, associated with various governments of the day) in response to the political realities in Burma and through the maintenance of official bilateral relations with Burma whilst simultaneously managing in situ accommodations with (as against providing support for) the various ethnically based movements along the Thai-Burmese border.

The Emergence of Conflict Management in Burma?

Although the Tatmadaw and the KNLA along with other insurrectionist armies or militias are engaged in an unceasing confrontation, there are indications that some form of conflict management has emerged in some areas, namely, Shan State. In Shan State, a complex series of events (see Smith 1991:355-373), including the revolt by Kokang and Wa elements within the CPB against the CPB's central administration, resulted in the collapse of the CPB in 1989. Only a week after the Kokang revolt, SLORC representatives went to the area to open negotiations. According to Porter, The terms of the agreement are not widely known. They are said to provide for SLORC's extension of national sovereignty, the eradication of poppy, and the disassociation of the various militias from dissident activities. In return, SLORC acknowledges the administrative pre-eminence of local commands, promises unrestricted commercial activities and government investment in infrastructure and services. On the ground, the accords are quite fluid and, even within areas controlled by the same militia, are applied in different ways (1992:3-4).

The agreement covers areas held by the Kokang and Mong Ko units of the CPB, the United Wa States Army (UWSA), the Burma (Eastern Shan State) National Democratic Army, and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). Porter notes that soon after the agreement, infrastructural projects commenced, the total estimated expenditure being in the region of 275 million kyats in a period of eighteen months.

Although not much is known about the terms of agreement, the little that Porter describes is sufficiently revealing. SLORC and the various ex-CPB factions have developed a form of conflict management which has resulted in a
cessation of hostilities, even if a somewhat uneasy one. As Porter goes on to say, this has allowed UN development activities to proceed resulting in the assurance of some measure of peace and a positive economic impact in these areas (1992:8). Despite the claim by Porter's informants that the agreement provides for SLORC's extension of sovereignty and the undertaking on the part of the local armies not to engage in dissident activities, the other aspects of the agreement indicate that SLORC's sovereignty is by no means absolute in these areas. The 'administrative pre-eminence of local commands' is a clear indication of this. The recognition of the claim to sovereignty which SLORC may have extracted from the ex-CPB elements hardly reflects the political and military realities on the ground. The point to note, however, is that these realities are actually recognised in the conflict management strategy.

The strategy also entails specific mechanisms intended to contain the outbreak of hostilities such as 'open channels of communication. Tatmadaw, Kokang and Wa units have, for example, established signals communications down to platoon level to ensure that hostilities do not break out during the passage of troops (Doug Porter, personal communication). It is possible that other mechanisms may also exist. What has emerged is, in effect, a local, limited security regime which is given some degree of stability because of the presence of UN agencies and their activities. The security regime is not the result of security-building measures on the part of the UN agencies since these agencies are not involved, in any direct sense, in implementing these measures. However, their presence contributes to emerging confidence-building measures. The activities of these agencies provide some measure of stability to the limited security regime because both SLORC, the Kokang and Wa have a vested interest in the economic benefits which may be derived from such activities. The benefits include profits from heroin production and trafficking on the part of the Kokangese and, allegedly, soldiers of the Tatmadaw's 99th Light Infantry Division (Smith 1991:379; 478, Chapter 18, note 18).

These and other ceasefires have been documented by Smith (see also Palaung Statements 1992). Smith notes that soon after the formation of the DAB,

In a fast moving game of political chess, SLORC immediately strove to break up the new political alliance by stepping up its offers of a ceasefire to selected NDF members, guaranteeing for the first time their right to hold weapons and control territory. SLORC's strategy met with immediate success when, running desperately short of ammunition since the CPB collapse, leaders of the KIO [Kachin Independence Organisation] 4th brigade in January 1991, the PNO [Pao National Organisation] in March and the PSLP in April, took unilateral advantage of the offer to give their troops a respite (Smith 1991:419, emphases added).

Smith goes on to discuss SLORC's proposed National Convention which the CPB defectors and ex-Burma Socialist Party Programme members would be allowed to attend, and rumours that these other erstwhile foes of the Tatmadaw would likewise be allowed to be present. This appears to be part of SLORC's larger strategy of eventually declaring a 'civilian administration' whilst real power would none the less remain with the Tatmadaw. These moves have been strongly denounced by the DAB (Central Executive Committee, Democratic Alliance of Burma 1992).

The central issue in these developments is the inability of the Tatmadaw and the armies of the NDF to resolve the conflicts decisively by military means. SLORC and the various parties which have accepted the ceasefire offer have thus been forced to a conflict management strategy, whatever SLORC's political cosmetics may be. The emergence of these endogenous conflict management strategies, though relatively small in scope, raise a paradoxical consideration in relation to the Federal Union proposals espoused by the NDF and DAB. The arrangements on the ground between SLORC, the ex-CPB factions, the PSLP and so forth reflect the relative autonomy of these various forces in the areas which they control. Although this does not approximate the kind of 'national state' envisaged in the Federal Union proposals, for all practical purposes it comes as close as can be expected in current circumstances. Admittedly, a true Federal Union of the kind that the NDF and DAB would like to see in place undoubtedly would not have Tatmadaw troops stationed in any of the constituent 'national states' -- and there are, of course, other complex political issues and differences as well. However, as I have suggested, the realisation of such a Federal Union seems unlikely. The arrangements which reflect the practical military and political realities in the conflict management approach, on the other hand, offer some scope for moving towards a solution which might in the end resemble the Federal Union proposals.

The Karen: Limited Options?
The Karen stand vis-a-vis the Burmese regime under General Ne Win and now under SLORC has largely been an intransigent one. It is an intransigence which, quite arguably, has been reinforced by the alliance of Burman opposition groups with the NDF and the establishment of these groups in Kawthoolei which has given the Karen something of a pivotal role in the DAB and NCUB. It could, of course, be argued that the SLORC position has also been equally intransigent but as we have seen above, SLORC appears to be willing to enter into localised conflict management arrangements. Given the entrenchment of SLORC, its unwillingness to surrender power, the 'balance of forces', as it were, in Burma and recent developments, a resolution to the conflict appears unlikely in the foreseeable future.

In early October 1992, it was reported that U Ohn Gyaw, foreign minister of the junta in Burma, announced the suspension of all offensive operations in 'Kayin' (Karen) State and other parts of the country 'to consolidate national solidarity and unity' (The Nation, 14 October 1992). The same report added that SLORC had called off its military offensive against the Karen in April 1992 though it had mounted an offensive against the Kachin at the same time. It is possible that this may have been part of the conflict management strategy on the part of SLORC, but it is also probably evidence that SLORC's military resources are inadequate for the simultaneous conduct of two major offensives, at least in the present. The Karen, however, have claimed that fighting did not abate in October. Indeed, there have since been reports of further fighting around Manerplaw, suggesting that the Tatmadaw are aiming to destroy the Karen general headquarters. It is possible that the conflict management strategy in Shan State and elsewhere has thus enabled the Tatmadaw to devote more military resources in an effort to eliminate the Karen and Burman opposition groups in Kawthoolei. In these circumstances, it would seem that the Karen have few options. Should Manerplaw fall, it has been suggested by some Karen that the KNLA would continue its confrontation with the Tatmadaw employing a full-fledged, guerrilla warfare strategy (Wijeyewardene, personal communication). While this would seem to be the only option open to the Karen, the fall of Manerplaw would also mean that the ability of the Karen leadership to coordinate various KNLA forces and the various opposition groups would be severely limited. On the other hand, if the Karen are able to hold Manerplaw, it would only be a matter of time before the Tatmadaw renews its offensive and thus the cycle of protracted conflict.

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cross-border trade between Yunnan and Burma, and the emerging Mekong corridor

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The speed of economic change in eastern and southern China since the mid-1980s has helped to transform cross-border trade with Burma and Laos, in both volume and diversity. Published references to this trade focus particularly on illegal movements of heroin from border areas of Burma to Kunming and beyond, and on China's imports of logs, notably from Laos, but these are merely two components in a two-way flow which has grown quickly from a trickle to a torrent, extending well beyond the near-border areas. And as Yunnan's trans-border trading area expands, it is increasingly enmeshed with Thailand's trans-border trade reaching northwards from Mae Sai through Kengtung to the Yunnan border at Daluo, and from Chiang Khong-Ban Houei Sai on the Mekong to Mengla County (Map).

Our concern in this paper is to view cross-border trade between Burma and China mainly from the Yunnan side of the border and in the context of what we see as the fast-emerging 'Mekong Corridor' between southern Yunnan, northern and perhaps northeastern Thailand. Much of our information and awareness of recent developments was acquired during a long field reconnaissance in Mekong river counties of Yunnan in January-February 1992, as a first step in an on-going 'Upper and Middle Mekong Research Project' (Hinton, n.d.); this was supplemented by subsequent work on Dehong Prefecture (Tan) and previous experience in northern Thailand (Chapman and Hinton).

Historical perspective After 1949 and in the 1950s, with the US embargo on trade with China, the Yunnan border was virtually closed for three decades. It is well to remember however, that for centuries in the past this far southern corner of China was a cross-roads for trade, commerce and cultural exchange. It was at once the south-western gateway to China and the route to India. Direct access to mainland Southeast Asia, particularly Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, was gained along its valleys and its ridges. It is, as a consequence, a region of great historical significance and is crisscrossed with 'roads': caravan routes for silk, cotton and tea, the Burma Road of World War 11 (from Lashio in upper Burma through what is now Dehong Prefecture to Kunming) and the Mekong River itself, 'the River Road to China' in Osborne's phrase (Osborne, 1975).
It was the French of the colonial era who hoped to pioneer a route to Yunnan along the Mekong River. They envisaged the opening up of trade between Vietnam and China using the 'back-door' of Yunnan, as the British had established a lien on coastal ports like Canton and Shanghai. In the 1860s the French expedition led by Commander Doudart de Lagree travelled up the Mekong from its delta in Vietnam, through Laos and Burma and then into Yunnan as far as the ancient city of Dali (ibid.). Their arduous journey failed in its primary object - to find a navigable route to China along the Mekong - owing to the frequency of rapids along the river's course. The Frenchmen did, however, establish beyond doubt that southern China was rich in the resources they coveted, and was the site of considerable commercial activity. But the area was chronically unstable - among other conflicts there was a long-standing revolt by the Muslim minority in western Yunnan - and the rugged terrain made travel and transport extremely difficult. The valley of the Red River, in contrast, offered an easier route for French trade through Hanoi to Kunming. As British control in Burma extended in the 1880s and early 1890s, with the Salween as the effective border between Upper Burma and China, but the frontier not well defined (Hall, 1968), the borderland between the Salween and the Mekong lapsed into a state of anarchy with Shan, Kachin and Chinese warloads in competition, for much of the time leading up to World War II.

The emerging Mekong Corridor

In the past 30 years China has built a well-articulated road system in the southwest quarter of Yunnan, where formerly there were mostly tracks and caravan trails. The road network is centred, of course, on Kunming. It was certainly not built with cross-border trade as a main consideration, but nonetheless the road network now links the few border towns, many near-border towns and designated border market-places to the province as a whole. At much the same time as main roads were being built in Yunnan, Thailand acquired its highway system, in the 1960s and 1970s, as an integral part of the spectacular economic growth then beginning in the northern provinces. As a consequence, for about a decade now it has been possible to travel 800 km from Kunming to Daluo on a bitumen-sealed, two-lane highway; and from the Thai border town of Mae Sai, 800 km on a bitumen-sealed highway to Bangkok. Thailand and Yunnan are both experiencing rapid economic growth, but the physical gap which separates them (between Daluo and Mae Sai) is approximately 250 km of bad roads. In 1990 travel between Mae Sai and Kengtung was said to require 8 1/2 hours non-stop on a motor-cycle, but improvements are now under way, as part of SLORC's Border Area Development Program (Porter, 1992). The prospect of an 'Asian Highway' through the Mekong Corridor, linking Kunming with Bangkok and peninsular Southeast Asia is clearly coming closer to reality.

But before considering likely future effects of the Mekong Corridor, we might well ask why Yunnan's border trade and expansion of its trans-border trading area increased dramatically only after 1985. A useful indicator is the growth of 'semi-official trade' through Dehong Prefecture, the most important administrative area for Yunnan's trade with Burma: between 1985 and 1991 the gross value of semi-official trade through Dehong Prefecture increased from 11 million yuan to 132 million yuan (1100 per cent!), with exports of consumer goods such as textiles, clothing, 'daily necessities', chemicals, bicycles, petrol and building materials comprising 66 per cent of exports in 1991 (Tan, 1992).

In answering the question about the recency of change, we can identify a number of factors which have radically affected cross-border trade and the expansion of Yunnan's trading area, including its expansion through Laos and Eastern Shan State towards northern Thailand.

Development in the Yunnan periphery. Following establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 there was a continuing southwards migration of Han Chinese, into farming areas previously dominated by Tai (Dai) and other minorities, and into towns and cities for employment. Road construction was closely linked with this growth in population and production which clearly served both economic and political objectives, notably in helping to secure the provincial periphery. State-owned industries played an important part in some areas: rubber, for example, was successfully established on State farms in the 1970s, particularly in Xishuangbanna (Chapman, 1991).

Liberalization of the Chinese economy. Beginning in 1978 when China introduced the 'household responsibility system' in rural areas, a succession of reforms affected first the rural economy, and then industrial and administrative activities. These decisive moves allowed a great deal of scope for development of local enterprise. Greater autonomy was granted to provincial, prefectural and county governments and after 1984 there was greater autonomy for state-controlled enterprises (Blecher, 1991). At the same time township and village enterprises were encouraged and, following further fiscal reforms in 1988 there was a marked strengthening of financial incentives for township and
county governments to sponsor local industries (Hong Xiaoyuan, 1992) and - in border localities - to foster cross-border trade as a source of taxation revenue.

Relaxation of controls on border trade From the early 1950s until the Cultural Revolution began in 1965-66, most border trade in China was subject to the control of state-run commercial agencies; and then for more than a decade (1965-78) most trade was cut off. Even local trade, for example in markets in border areas, was closely restricted before 1984. Controls on local trade were progressively relaxed and 'semi-official trade' was allowed to operate under fewer controls. This had special benefit for township and county enterprises seeking to expand production and so to increase their income from taxes and fees.

Events in Burma and Laos

While rapid economic changes were occurring in southwest Yunnan in the later 1980s, the economy of Laos made little progress and Burma continued to suffer turmoil and strife until 1989, when the Communist Party of Burma collapsed. Shortly thereafter SLORC announced its Border Area Development Program and in the next three years welcomed an expansion of cross-border trade, for the provision of consumer goods and normal customs revenue, and to improve its tarnished international image (Porter, 1992). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Laos has lost its once-powerful ally, and so both Laos and Eastern Shan State are now more vulnerable to the economic expansion of China and Thailand in and through the emerging Mekong Corridor.

Observations in three border localities, 1992

In February 1992 two of the authors (Hinton and Tan) visited the main locations for cross-border trade in Xishuangbanna, at Daluo in Menghai County, on the Burmese frontier, and at Maw Haw on the border with Laos, about 75 km southwest of Mengla (Map). Jingrong Tan also obtained information on Dehong Prefecture which controls about four-fifths of Yunnan's cross-border trade, in gross value. There are then marked differences in the importance of the three locations, but officials at each were equally keen to retain and if possible increase the trade they handled, because of its immediate importance for local revenues.

Dehong Prefecture had a population of 920,280 at the 1990 Census and, with Xishuangbanna, was the fastest-growing prefecture in Yunnan Province between 1982 and 1990 (Population Census Office of Yunnan Province, 1990). In 1992 there were 10 roads connecting the four counties to Burma, but most of the border trade was handled by Riuli (about half) and Wanding city; 65 per cent of exports came from beyond Yunnan; about 70 per cent of exports were then shipped to destinations in northeast Burma and another 20 per cent to Lower Burma and Rangoon. Most of the exports at Dehong were consumer goods, as stated before, and imports were overwhelmingly agricultural products, teak and other timber, hides, rubber and precious stones (diamonds, jade). In 1990 more than 3 million individuals crossed the border (Tan, 1992). But perhaps the most exciting feature of all was the rapid growth at Dehong of manufacturing and service industry, including commercial agencies acting for other prefectures anxious to develop their cross-border trade.

Daluo, on the other hand, had a total revenue from border trade amounting to only a small fraction of that at Dehong, but again there was evidence of rapid growth and high expectations. In Daluo town itself there were crowded markets along the main street, with goods for sale that were not easily obtained elsewhere in China: they included cigarettes, cosmetics, agricultural chemicals and clothes with fake designer labels, available at bargain prices. Many of these had originated in Thailand. Side streets were lined with new and elaborate apartment blocks, privately owned and bought with profits from cross-border trade dealings.

Local officials at Daluo decried the occupation by the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) of the adjacent area of Burma, as the BCP army levied an additional tax on goods passing through its territory (4 per cent paid to the Burma Government; 4 per cent paid to the BCP). Officials feared that trade would consequently be diverted to border towns which were not affected in this way. Without exception, they saw border trade as being a key to the future prosperity of their county, and regarded other counties to the north as being in direct competition.

At the border itself, 3-4 km from Daluo town, there was a festive atmosphere. Stalls sold food to Chinese tourists from Kunming and even further afield, who photographed one another on either side of the border post which was inscribed
in Chinese on one side, Burmese on the other. The barracks of a BCP contingent overlooked the border post and khaki-clad BCP soldiers mingled with the crowd, along with watchful soldiers from the Chinese PLA.

Shang Yong, the third location, is a border post near Maw Haw, about 75 km southwest of Mengla, the county bordering Laos. It was a contrast to Daluo in one main respect: whereas the cross-border trade at Daluo was established and flourishing, at Shang Hong it was still being promoted and built up by officials, for the now familiar reason that increased customs revenue would benefit the county. Already a considerable volume of raw materials flowed into Menghai County from Laos, including logs, minerals and scrap metal (debris from the Indochina War). But these items were not enough: Shang Yong was to be the site of a trade fair (late February, 1992), a promotion conducted by county officials in collaboration with local private interests.

From Shang Yong, or from Maw Haw, it is about 325 km through Laos to the border town of Ban Houei Sai, on the Mekong opposite the Thai town of Chiang Khong. This is currently the most direct and favoured route from Xishuangbanna to Thailand, but the road through Laos was said to be so poor that less direct routes were often used. These entailed the use of both land and river transport: one route reached the Mekong above Ban Houei Sai and led to the Thai town of Chiang Saen; another involved water transport down a tributary of the Mekong to Ban Houei Sai/Chiang Khong.

These are only three localities, among the small legion of official and unofficial crossing-points between Yunnan, Burma and Laos, but for us they helped to highlight some aspects of China's current practices in handling border trade. Essentially, the legal trade is conducted on China's terms: business transactions negotiated in Burma or Yunnan still require government approval in Yunnan ('semi-official trade') before goods can cross the border. Burmese businessmen and traders are often delayed at border points while formalities are completed. Furthermore, after more than 30 years when Yunnan's borders were virtually closed to foreign trade, border counties and even border towns within the same county are now in active competition to attract cross-border trade. In some instances county towns send envoys to centres in the hinterland of Yunnan to promote their towns as good market-places; at the same time many enterprises located well away from the border maintain commercial offices in border towns (Ruili and Wanding are the outstanding examples), or use commercial agencies located there. Remarkable as these practices might seem to be, they are wholly consistent with the 'managerial responsibility system' introduced in 1984 (Blecher, 1991; Hong Xiaoyuan, 1992). Managers of township or county enterprises (and the actual on-the-spot administration of border trade is effectively a county and prefectural responsibility) are likely to hold their positions only if they are successful in maintaining and increasing revenue for the local governments concerned. Their success in turn provides increased revenue for further county or prefectoral investment, perhaps in new industries which may be located at or near the border towns where tax advantages can be offered, as the situation in Dehong now illustrates.

Prospects:
Whether the Burmese or the Laotian route between China and Thailand becomes of greater significance in the next 10 years or so remains uncertain, for although the Burmese route is more direct, the potential for political instability and disruption of trade in upper Burma is arguably greater than in Laos, which seems destined to be a minor player in regional politics. At the same time the power of Chinese businessmen and warlords, residents in upper Burma for generations, cannot be discounted. Their connections and interests, which are embedded deeply in the Thai and Chinese systems, would undoubtedly be best served by an on-going peace.

Last, but not least, there will be an increasing interpenetration of the national cultures of the Thai, and of the Chinese, whether or not it is possible to travel by a bitumen-sealed highway from Bangkok to Kunming by the Year 2000, or a decade later. Han Chinese culture has expanded rapidly in the southwest quarter of Yunnan and beyond in the the past 50 years, both as a consequence of official policy and following spontaneous transmission. Thai culture - primarily now Bangkok Thai culture, mediated by the Thai version of consumerism - is transmitted, on the other hand, by ever more sophisticated electronic media, as well as by personal contacts. The increasing presence of Thai tourists in Xishuangbanna (Sip Song Panna), widely regarded by Thais as the cradle of their civilization, is one significant manifestation of the regionalization of culture. The result of the meeting of these two very assertive 'cultures' will be fascinating to watch.

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the burmese refugees in bangladesh: causes and prospects for repatriation

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Nature of the current emergency and UNHCR role.

On the hierarchy of human needs, survival is paramount and for the 250-300,000 Burmese Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, survival is certainly the only issue. UNHCR was invited by the Bangladeshi government to assist with the emergency about mid-February 1992, though the situation was clearly developing since June of 1991. I was asked, as a lawyer working for the UNHCR office in Canberra, to go to Bangladesh on the Monday, having been up to Mt
Kosciosko on the Sunday, and on the Thursday I was in Bangladesh ...

It was very much a piece of field research. We were there to find out exactly what was causing these people to flee. The problem being that reports in the press that these people were being killed and raped in large numbers were not being believed, largely because we were talking about a group of Islamic people and it is not regarded as usual for Islamic societies to report the incidence of rape. They asked us to go in to apply, you may well say culturally inappropriate, forensic techniques - but forensic techniques nevertheless - to try and establish to some degree of certainty whether or not this incidence of rape was taking place.

The situation I found there has potential to continue to develop into a major humanitarian emergency through the stasis and inability of the governments of Bangladesh and Burma and the inability of the UNHCR to effect a reasonable compromise. We now have something like 300,000 Burmese refugees, people from Arakan, who are Rohingyas a group to be defined in terms of race, religion and language. Official figures say 250,000, but my information suggests that another 50,000 are not in a camp situation and are therefore not being counted. They speak a dialect of Bengali, strictly speaking a sub-dialect of the Chittagonian version of Bengali. They are distinctively Indian in racial type apart from the results of some incidence of inter-marriage. They are quite distinct in religion and culture and live in a well defined area of the northern end of Arakan state, most refugees coming from the township areas of Buthidaung and Maungdaw.

The normal means of escape for these people is to travel westwards across the Naaf River or north to parts of Bangladesh adjoining Arakan province. Over the past six months something like 2000 refugees have died, primary causes have been diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria and cholera. The root aetiology for this mortality includes poor sanitation, poor water supply, lack of shelter, insufficient medical attention and the ignorance of the refugees themselves. In short, a desperate situation has been forced on one of the poorest countries of the world in order to allow these people to survive.

Those familiar with the UN system would know that we, UNHCR, have to basically mount an appeal for funds before any long term program can be underway. The final appeal was for 27 million dollars of which 20 million has been raised. The shortfall has the effect of diminishing the quality of care in the long term and, of course, the equivalent amount of 27 million dollars is needed starting in about March next year when the cycle of annual funding has to repeat itself. For all that a lot has been done - almost all the refugees are under some form of plastic or shelter. We have a comprehensive food assistance program done in conjunction with WFP and a variety of NGOs, there are lots of refugees with UNHCR plastic above their heads. You can see the blue water-trucks and the blue godowns everywhere - indications that, in conjunction with others, we are working.

These people face a most despicable situation which must, in my view, be far worse than a lot of the failure of economic initiatives in other parts of Burma which have been discussed today. We are talking about people who are really at the lowest rank of development, people who in leaving Burma have effectively been deprived of their land and if they go back, will be forced to work in a sort of subsistence existence without security at all. It is my view that if we are to look at long term security there has to be a way to get the SLORC to agree to make land available. Land which was taken away from these people to give to Rakhine and also Burman people living in Arakan state. Restoring the land to the Rohingyas of course is going to be a particularly difficult process.

Causes

Much of what our survey found has been released in one form or another, internationally. I was there from the 5th of March to the 7th of April. Our survey shows the population is almost entirely Muslim with a small minority of Hindus. Almost all of the people are of Bengali ethnicity - perhaps 1% may be Burmans or Rakhine people who have converted to Islam through marriage or for some other reason. Almost all are poor, rural, illiterate and if they are educated at all they are normally only educated in Madrashas, i.e. Islamic schools. Even then they have no more than an average of one or two years of schooling which means they may understand the mechanics of writing but they certainly cannot write themselves, whether in Urdu or English or Arabic or whatever.

The folklore of the people that I interviewed, and I interviewed, personally, over three hundred, once again on a
forensic basis, suggests the cause of the problem is the 1990 elections. It appears that in this area of Arakan the elections were carried out with meticulous orthodoxy. No one was denied the opportunity to register and every vote was duly recorded. It seems a relatively simple process to access the voting records for each booth and then create a little map of where pockets of resistance and opposition are. It seems to me that the solution being proposed for Cambodia where the election is to take place on a regional basis, rather than on a local, is a much safer solution when it comes to protecting people. These people told us that almost universally they voted for what they called the 'Kari Party'. In other words they voted for the party with the symbol of the car. The car was the symbol of the party supporting Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy.

After 1990, particularly from the middle of 1991 to early 1992 there was an increase in forced labour, which they talk about incidentally, reflecting the British tradition, as 'coolie' labour. This basically involved building military camps in these two northern areas, building roads and cutting bamboo. In one case where they talked to us about building a road that was a hundred feet wide, I suspect they were actually building some sort of airstrip which they did not recognize. The people are so culturally isolated that when they got to Bangladesh, some of them seeing vehicles on the road, asked, in all honesty, what sort of rice went into those things and where it was put in. The bottom line here is that the roads were being built from south to north, linking up towards the border areas.

We recorded a lower incidence of forced labour among the women than has been recorded for the Karen and other similar studies elsewhere. We discovered that after this initial onslaught of forced labour there was an intensification, starting I think in about December to about February 1992, involving attacks on the women. Most would agree that it is very hard to get people, women of any race or religion, to talk about these things with complete strangers. Nevertheless 46% of the women we talked to said they had been raped. This represents something like over 50% of women of child-bearing age. The rapes took place among women as young as 12, women as old as 50. The rapes were not isolated incidents undertaken by individual soldiers on their own. There were many pack rapes. Often the military would go to a village, go to a house, looking for forced labour. If the men had run away they would rape the women. You also had a pattern of women being taken back to the military camps and pack raped there, working virtually in a field brothel. There were of course many deaths reported through the rape of these women. It is my view that these rapes were really the mechanism, the catalyst for the exodus. While any amount of forced labour could be undertaken, while any amount of taxation, deprivation of property could be endured, when the attacks on the women started, people moved to Bangladesh. Looking back through my material it seems that it was generally no more than a lag of one or two weeks between the rape and the departure to Bangladesh.

Operation Naga Min

It is going to be hard for these people to get back. Even if all other conditions are favourable, many of them will have no papers and many of them will have no land. UNHCR wants them to go back, but we also need to think about what sort of development activities we can undertake. In a situation where it is unclear whether the Burmese government, the SLORC, will allow a major UN presence in this area I am really at a loss to say how we can promote this process of repatriation. This has all happened once before. In 1978 under operation Naga Min which is referred to in some of the literature, but not in great detail, 200,000 refugees were forced to flee Arakan to Bangladesh. I was able to do some research and I found some articles from the newspapers dating from that era. What I find interesting is that these articles could just as easily have been written about what is happening today. To an extent I guess there is hope because it suggests we can adopt the same methods in getting these people back into Burma. But there is also despair because, obviously, unless we work much harder at finding a way to get these people back in conditions of safety and dignity the same patterns, the same cycle, will recur once again.

Prospects for repatriation

When I suggest there is no hope for repatriation that is not entirely true. As early as April there were talks about repatriation and Burmese and Bangladeshi governments reached an agreement, a set of conditions for voluntary return. The only thing that stalled the immediate repatriation of those people was that the refugees did not want to go and that there was no agreement that the international community should be involved, meaning either UNHCR or NGOs.

On 24 October 1992 Reuter reported the following
Bangladesh reported a policy change by Burma on Saturday, quoting Burmese officials as saying Rangoon would consider allowing the United Nations to oversee repatriation of Moslem refugees.

A Bangladeshi official said that the Burmese side gave this assurance during talks between Burmese and Bangladeshi delegations in [Chittagong].

'Burmese officials told us they would actively allow United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to oversee the return of refugees to their homes in Burma', Omar Farouk the leader of the Bangladeshi team, said. 'There is clearly a welcome change of heart in Burma', Farouk said of Saturday's meeting. Farouk said that he was convinced the Rohingyas who had returned to Burma were well treated by the authorities in Arakan. Most had got back their homes and other property.

He said the Burmese officials agreed to let Bangladeshi journalists visit the resettlement area in Maungdaw township in Arakan.

Now against that I have a situation report put out by my organization on 17 November, this week, which makes no mention of any repatriation movement voluntary or otherwise. It is not clear to me what is happening and I don't want to give you the impression that there is no hope. On the other hand I don't think I can give you the impression that the Burmese government has relaxed its stand entirely.

For their part, the Burmese officials must be aware of the increasing politicization of the refugees. Given that there has been a significant involvement of various Islamic organizations, Iranian, Iraqi, with the refugees. There has been some talk of a Medecins sans Frontieres hospital being boycotted by the refugees under the influence of Islamic relief organizations, because MSF people are European Christians. There is a lot of potential tension for both governments - the Bangladeshi, because there is the potential for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism - but also for the Burmese, because ostensibly the activities against these people have been carried out because the two organizations the RF and the RSO were allegedly waging border campaigns against the Burmese military. It has never been established that there were ever any more than 500 or so fighters in both organizations combined. What is happening, it seems to me, is that the Burmese government has in fact created a situation where there are many more guerilla fighters ready to fight, many more people who have been politicized by this operation than would otherwise have been. So perhaps, with an eye to that, the Burmese government realizes that it has to slow down the process of politicization.

Certainly the Bangladeshi government is quite willing to get rid of them. They, the refugees, have received assistance - sometimes I guess, in advance of what the local people may expect to receive. There has been a lot of bitterness about the use of firewood, the use of water. There has been a lot of bitterness about the way the international workers have influenced the local economy. But the mechanics of getting them home is going to be very difficult - and obviously only those who are in camps, who are registered in camps, have any hope of being returned. Those who have gone into the general Bangladeshi community will find it impossible to go back. For so many of them who have had their papers taken away from them, it is quite clear that the Bangladeshi government is going to have a very difficult negotiation process to establish their bona fides. The Burmese nationality law is drafted in such a way that no Rohingya can ever become a citizen of Burma. That too is going to have to be negotiated if these people are going to return.

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environmental degradation and conservation the two sides of the coin

Thomas Enters

Regarding the environment and particularly the forest resource two quite different developments are of interest in the border area of Thailand and Burma. They are different in that one deals with resource exploitation and resulting environmental degradation - this is happening in Burma and I have to rely on newspaper articles as a source of information - whereas the other one deals with resource conservation as a measure to prevent environmental degradation - here I am relying on my own research conducted in 1990/91 in Northern Mae Hong Son Province. Both
developments originate from the concern for the environment in Thailand and particularly for deforestation which has been and still is 'a never-ending problem of the nation' which 'has reached alarming dimensions' to quote two descriptions of the problem on the Thai side of the border.

In 1913 the percentage of total area under forest was estimated to be about 75% but is now down to perhaps 25%. The causes of deforestation are manifold but the common perception about the main actors involved is not. Officially it is the forest encroachment by rural people and in the northern border areas particularly hilltribe shifting cultivators who are blamed for the destruction of the forests.

Thailand's forest laws have been constantly amended during the past 50 years mainly in reaction to perceived and real problems. The most dramatic amendment to the Forest Act was introduced in reaction to catastrophic flash floods in two southern provinces in November 1988. For the first time logging was officially blamed for causing a catastrophe which resulted in the death of 350 people. As a result logging was banned.

The pledge to halt logging by the then Prime Minister Chatichai serves as an entry point to my presentation. The declaration of the logging ban was celebrated as a significant victory by environmentalists but caused consternation to the timber industry. But not for long. Already in mid-December, Thai army commander General Chaovalit flew to Rangoon to secure exploitation rights to Burma's resources amongst them timber. As a result, Thailand got access to the much needed teak and other hardwoods and Burma's empty state coffers were filled with the much needed hard currencies.

Just two months later, 20 concession areas of which 16 were in rebel-held territory, had been contracted along the Thai-Burma border and the Burmese government's Timber Corporation estimated revenues of US$112 million/year from logging alone.

There had always been logging by Thai companies on the Burmese side of the border in close cooperation with ethnic minorities. Karen rebels rewarded in April 1989 more 'official' concessions to five Thai companies. The Karens had depended on the forests to pay for their war and therefore carefully stuck to the British devised 'Burma Selection System' for logging which ensured that the supply of trees did not run out.

By July 1989 already 40 concessions had been granted mostly to Thai companies and the granting of new licences was halted by the Burmese. Though faced with numerous problems, Thai companies were able to import large quantities of teak which dwarfed Thailand's own production before the logging ban. Up to 40 checkpoints were opened to facilitate the transport. Imports rose dramatically and Thai companies considered re-export of logs. Logging also took place in Laos and Cambodia and Thai businessmen toasted 'the last tree in Laos, Cambodia or Burma'.

Though the Burmese authorities stressed that no depletion and environmental adverse effects would occur, it appears that the opposite happened and criticism by Thai and international environmentalists grew.

But even careless and destructive techniques did not automatically result in large profit margins. The logging companies were faced with numerous problems. During the dry season, Burmese government forces stepped up the war against the ethnic minorities with severely disrupted logging. During the wet season transport was difficult. Protection fees had to be paid to the ethnic minorities and commanders of Burmese army divisions. Safety for workers could not be ensured and trucks were in short supply. Loggers were frequently arrested by Burmese troops and because of the continual fighting, logging operations had to be suspended for several months.

In March 1990, most firms claimed to operate at a loss because of the disruptions and the lack of coordination among Burmese authorities. These difficulties led to even more indiscriminate and illegal cutting on the Thai side. Foreign relief agency officials said that the Thai companies were logging the timber wealth as fast as they could. Consequently environmental activists called for a complete halt of logging in Burma. International pressure on Thailand, mainly from the US grew and a New York Democrat claimed 'Every teak log from Burma is being extracted by the Thais at the cost of a human life' and 'the Thai military is profiting from the desperation of the Burmese regime'.

The ultimate losers of what could be termed 'logging rampage' were the ethnic minorities and the environment. In June 1990, experts claimed that the long-term damage to Burma's economic and ecological future could be severe, and the
destruction was being ranked as among the world's great environmental tragedies by the United Nations. Karen villagers watching the rape of their ancient homeland said their tolerance was running out. Thai loggers were accused of leaving felled trees to rot and in October 1990 logging was banned in two of the six districts under Karen control, even though the Karens profited from the logging in the same way as the Burmese authorities.

Laos banned logging at the end of 1991 and in early 1992 the then Thai Prime Minister Anand said his government had decided to discourage the private sector from logging in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Burma. Vietnam banned log exports in May 1992.

Not much information is available about what has happened since then. The Thai timber industry still needs logs and it appears that the Thais have changed their strategy when the Forest Industry Organization proposed in Burma and Laos.

In summary, it can be noted that Thai companies were on a rampage in Burmese forests for at least two years. Virtually all of the firms involved in the logging had financial links with senior members of the military and the Thai Government. This indicates that the Thais have no hesitation in exporting environmental degradation - not to talk about financially supporting the war in the border areas - whereas on their own soil they are intensifying efforts to preserve forests especially in environmentally critical areas such as the watersheds in Northern Thailand.

This takes me to the second part of my presentation or 'the other side of the coin'. Until the early 1950s there was little government concern for the highlands and its inhabitants. While the concern for border security was the basis for early government interventions some 40 years ago, the main concerns today are the low economic level of most tribal people, opium production and narcotic trafficking, soil erosion and forest destruction in the northern watersheds.

Attempts to link sustainable development with drug control are more than 30 years old but the earlier approach of opium crop replacement was broadened during the 1980s to agricultural and social development. Originally, the principal agencies involved in highland development were the Office of Narcotics Control Board and the Department of Public Welfare. The growing concern for the deterioration of the watersheds increased the power of the Royal Forest Department which is now the executing agency of the two UN-funded projects, initiated in 1987.

Today, numerous development projects located in Northern Thailand combine opium suppression with socio-economic development and conservation. Independent of the main agency involved the project strategies are very similar and all projects include some form of watershed management, soil and water conservation and alternative cash crop component.

The financial resources contributing to nine projects in Northern Thailand initiated between 1981 and 1987 are in the order of US$75 million. This indicates how serious the government and the funding agencies are in solving real and perceived problems.

Attempts to reduce forest encroachment and opium production basically focus on the introduction of so-called 'sustainable farming technologies', designed to replace shifting cultivation, and new cash crops designed to replace opium as an income generating crop.

The introduction of alternative cash crops faces numerous problems and many crops appear to go through boom and bust periods. Coffee, for example, once viewed as very promising suffers from very intensive management requirements and falling prices. Other perennial crops such as fruits have been locally successful even without any outside assistance. Cabbage on the other hand has been so successful in some areas that it lead to more deforestation, not less.

The objective of the recommended soil and water conservation technologies is to maintain soil fertility and productivity by reducing soil erosion. The basic concept of this technology consists of alternating grass or perennial strips with crops planted parallel to the contour line. Crop choice is left to villagers and in Northern Mae Hong Son villagers planted rice and corn in the wet season and red kidney bean in the dry season.

While countless research projects have shown that the recommended technologies reduce soil erosion and run-off drastically, the technologies do very little in alleviating the need for shifting crop production (especially rice) after one
to three years. About 95% of the villagers I interviewed said that shifting cultivation was necessary because of massive weed infestations. The soil and water conservation technologies rather increase weed pressure than reduce it. This automatically requires increased labor inputs during the wet season when labor is traditionally in short supply. Most project participants reported that production on their conservation fields declined in the same way as it did on the traditional fields. While most were maintaining one or even two conservation fields, they did so only because of the incentives they received and because they felt they had to since their village was included in a development project. Many villagers including the so-called 'non-adopters' rejected the technology as a good idea. One villager described best the general feeling of most people when he said: Now there are too many people and the government does not allow us to cut any more trees to make new fields. Life was much easier for the older generation. But grass - referring to the recommended grass strips - is certainly not the solution to the problems we are facing at present.

The analysis of these two recent developments indicates that the growing concern for Thailand's natural resources and particularly forests led to two distinct strategies which were both not in the interest of the people who live in the border areas in Northern Thailand and Burma; and it is also doubtful whether they have done anything towards 'solving the never-ending problem of the nation'.

The export of deforestation to Burma has not only resulted in environmental degradation but also increased human suffering because the price for the exploitation rights provided the Burmese authorities with the much needed capital to step up their war against the ethnic minorities. The introduction of inappropriate agricultural technologies on the Thai side of the border on the other hand has done nothing to reduce the pressure on the forests in the long-term. If anything at all, at least in my study area, many people are worse off now then they were before the development project started. It should not be surprising, therefore, that many respondents claimed that in the near future they would have to step up opium production again and clear more forests.

These negative developments call for a concerted effort by all parties involved and the first step in the right direction would be realistic land-use plans which consider that some areas which are gazetted 'Reserve Forest' are in actual fact inhabited and suitable for farming. Local people should be allowed to participate in forest management and initial steps have been taken to introduce community forestry. The whole logging industry needs to be overhauled and sustainable forest management techniques developed. And the introduction of agricultural innovations need to be accompanied by a close communication and cooperation between farmers and concerned agencies. While these recommendations are not sufficient to guarantee a more equitable distribution of costs and benefits and to prevent further encroachment on the still forested areas they are necessary first steps in the right direction.

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trade, drugs and HIV/AIDS in the shan state border areas

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A previous article (Newsletter Number 18, September 1992) outlined the events leading to the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma, the subsequent accords between SLORC and remnants of the CPB, and the involvement of various United Nations agencies in the Border Area Development Program. The accords, alongside economic liberalisation in China and increasing dependence on imported commodities in Burma, have led to a boom in cross border trade linking the Shan border areas with Yunnan and northern Thailand. This article looks at aspects of narcotics production and trade and, closely related, the potential spread and impacts of HIV/AIDS.

Narcotics Production and Trafficking

Local leaders, reported to be heavily involved in poppy and heroin refining (some since 1968 as CPB leaders) routinely disavow this and claim they are ready and willing to participate in UN drug control activities. Clearly, by signing regional agreements with China, Thailand and Lao, the government of Myanmar has agreed to the three aims of the UN Drug Control Program, namely:

- to eliminate trafficking in narcotic drugs and chemicals used in refining of narcotic drugs across the border;
- to eliminate poppy cultivation in the areas adjacent to the border through economic and social development programmes; and
- to eliminate the demand for and local consumption of narcotic drugs in border areas.12

The obstacles to achieving these aims are well documented and few UN officials expect poppy production to be eliminated within the SLORC-announced period of six years in the Kokang and ten years in the Wa areas. Under incomparably more positive conditions, almost thirty years effort and around US$25,000 per capita was expended toward this effort in northern Thailand. This required a massive effort in infrastructure development, and not least important the emergence of urban centres (such as Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai) based on tourism and industry, to provide markets, and hence improved prices, for agricultural products introduced to compete with poppy.

Comparisons with the north Thailand experience however, fail to take into account questions regarding SLORC and local command involvement in opium and heroin production and trafficking, about which there are numerous reports. Indeed, observers have pointed to the 1989 accords as the principal explanation for reported three-fold increases in opium production in the 1989 to 1991 period - in the order of 2,000 tonnes is reputed to have been produced in the bumper year 1991-92.

Yet whilst the accords may have eased surveillance on the trafficking of poppy and provided more secure havens for investment of ill-gotten gains, they do not account for the already steady increases in production prior to the CPB collapse. It is known that China's economic liberalisation fostered trading ventures on the Burma side of the border, thus creating markets for local products such as rice, pulses and other staples, well prior to the legalisation of black market trading. Moreover, between 1989 and 1991, the value of the kyat depreciated by more than 100 per cent, thus contributing to high levels of local inflation in prices at times of food scarcity.

These events had important implications for upland farming communities in the border areas. Recent research indicates that around 90 per cent of households are not achieving self-sufficiency in grain and having, on average, only some 6.3 months of grain supplies per year. In these circumstances and given the inflationary effects of cross border trading on staple prices, especially during the food deficit months, it is evident why poppy production has escalated and how the upland farmers have become increasingly dependent on this product. Poppy has great advantages (low bulk, high value, easy transport) over other crops in the present circumstances. Important also, for households short of labour and distant from markets, the added benefit of poppy is that the market, the trader, comes to the village, whereas other crops must be carted to the market centres. In short, recent changes in the regional economy, contributing to inflation in the price of staples, goes some way to explaining rapid increases in production - it is open to speculation how much of this increase may also be attributed to the favourable political conditions created by the SLORC-militia accords and improved links with Thailand.

In light of Thai experience, the levels of resources available to poppy replacement activities in the BADP are clearly inadequate. And regardless of whether one accepts SLORC and militia assurances of their good intentions on poppy, the involvement of the diplomatic community in opium and heroin production and trafficking, about which there are numerous reports, clearly diverts attention from other important issues.13 Moreover, for agencies sponsoring alternate, humanitarian activities, the association of the UN and diplomatic community with ritual publicity events gives quite confusing signals to local people outside the militia-SLORC circles. Indeed, given the significance of poppy to the survival of a surprisingly large number of upland people, as well as the other competing worthwhile activities on which development assistance could be expended, a vigorous eradication program should be opposed on humanitarian grounds.

Prostitution and HIV/AIDS

The links between narcotics and the HIV/AIDS pandemic are well known. It is reported that of 10,000 drug addicts HIV tested in Yangon by the government health department, 85% of them were seropositive. It is estimated there are now 160,000 heroin users in Myanmar.

There is a growing demand for Myanmar and Chinese girls in Thailand, reflecting the fact that they cost less than Thais. Border area minorities are disproportionately affected by this escalating trade. Of some 40,000 prostitutes from Myanmar's ethnic minorities in Thailand overall, there are reported to be 10,000 Shan prostitutes in Chiang Mai alone.
Around 20 per cent of local Shan prostitutes returning from northern Thailand are reported to be HIV infected. At the regional level, there is great potential for rapid escalation of the HIV-AIDS problem from Thailand into Yunnan and Myanmar, both currently considered low HIV risk areas.

Particular trends in the prostitution industry may be accentuated by the economic development of the Shan border areas. There is little evidence that knowledge of HIV/AIDS amongst clients, brothel owners and traffickers reduces the demand for services. However, the pattern of demand is said to change, where informed clients begin to insist on very young girls, which in turn fosters a higher turnover of girls. It is reported that brothel owners now recruit a new batch of girls every six months in order to reduce the likelihood of their being infected. Consequently, traffickers now travel further afield in search of novices, always homing in on the poorest, most isolated and uneducated communities. A trafficking route now extends from southern Yunnan, through to Keng Tung, on to northern Thailand, and the brothels of Bangkok or Malaysia.

The policies of all three governments are unusually conducive to the rapid and unfettered penetration of trucking operations. Myanmar-Thai trade is reported to have nearly doubled between 1989 and 1990, and Myanmar-China trade is exceeds US$1.5 billion per year. Both Chinese and Thai authorities are keenly facilitating the construction of all-weather, 10-wheel truck roads through Myanmar territory; the former to take advantage of Thai port facilities for Yunnanese agricultural exports, just as Thai traders are enthusiastic to connect with Yunnan's burgeoning consumer market. The links between Thailand and Yunnan will be the Thai truckers. Already Thai Toyota Hiluxes, always the advance guard, are found trading as far north as the Kokang. The trucking industry is associated with the highest concentration of AIDS in Thailand, and the lowest concentration of treatment facilities. Approximately 3-5 per cent of Thai truckers are HIV infected, this is expected to climb to 10-29 per cent by the year 2000.

Also important is the fact that the Thai trucking industry is growing faster than the general economy, there is already a shortage of truck drivers, and one might expect great increase in employment opportunities for young Shan, Kokang and Wa males - who in turn will doubtless accelerate the spread of HIV infection beyond prostitution and service circles. Furthermore the rapidly growing transport sector in Myanmar will itself require a parallel service industry. According to Thai research, more than 70 per cent of the cheaper prostitutes, those found in local truck service points, were found to be infected with HIV, compared with less than 20 per cent infection rates in those working the top end of the market.

The potential impact of the HIV/AIDS virus on the border areas could prove disastrous. It now seems a truism that 'poverty, discrimination, political disempowerment, economic marginalisation, and hopelessness' are all linked with increased speed and diffusion of the virus. The following points provide a glimpse of how this may work in the upland areas.

The poorest amongst these households, roughly 50 percent of the upland population, suffer appalling conditions. Families tend to be small (4 as an average) and very frequently female headed, as a result of the twin ravages of war (upland households provided much cannon fodder for the previous conflict) and chronic ill-health. There is a shortage of active labour (2.2 for landless, 1.7 for semi-landless and 1.6 for female headed households), a high dependency ratio (51%), no draught power, very few or no small stock and the already noted chronic food deficit. Wage labour, sales of non-timber forest products and growing of opium poppy are survival strategies.

Morbidity and death rates are difficult to determine, but infant mortality rates in some upland villages of northern Wa and the Mekong district are between 300/1000 and 470/1000. In the order of 25-40 per cent of household labour time is lost through partially or wholly debilitating illnesses - including the usual preventable malarial, gastro-diarrhoeal and respiratory tract ailments, exacerbated by protein/vitamin A deficiencies.

One side effect of these conditions (as well as the insecurities caused by the prolonged conflict) is that the environmental resources available to the bulk of the population are often in poor repair. Adult labour is required to prepare and maintain water control and soil conservation structures (and sometimes this is culturally required to be male labour) as well as to clear land in the shifting system that predominates. Existing gardens are often overused, fallow periods are frequently too short, and yields steadily decline - all reflecting the shortage of healthy adult labour for land clearance and weeding.
To overlay the potential impacts of HIV/AIDS on this situation is perverse and inevitably speculative. There is an urgent need to develop responses for the agricultural sector which are in advance of the worst impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. These responses would include labour saving devices in agricultural production (such as improved draught animal power, improved small scale irrigation) and associated works, such as household water supply which substitute domestic labour time, so releasing it for agricultural activities. One would expect that the worst effects will be felt by the smaller families, especially those on poorer soils, with smaller areas of land available, and who lack viable cash crops or access to off-farm employment opportunities.

Amongst the plethora of reports and recommended actions for UN activity in the border areas, it is alarming how little attention has been given to this potential crisis. A rapid escalation in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, combined with the inordinantly difficult task of mounting effective treatment, prevention and education programmes in such remote localities, could dramatically effect all aspects of the society, economy and environment. Yet pre-emptive programmes could reasonably become the most cost effective and prominent feature of UN agency activities.

* * *

Letters etc.

Kevin Heppner points out that the Burmese defence budget for 1993 is $1.26 billion and not $20 billion as we printed in the last Newsletter. Also the UN Human Right Commission Special Rapporteur on Burma is Dr Yozo Yokota. We regret the errors.

We have had two responses to the Porter article 'A note on United Nations involvement in the border area development program' (Number 18) from Kevin Heppner and Chao Tzang Yawnghwe. These will be published in Number 20. Part 2 of the 1964 UN report on opium in Burma has also been held over to the next issue.

* * *

The editor of this issue has received a card of greetings from Dr Tu Ja Manam, General Secretary of the Democratic Alliance of Burma and Deputy to Bran Seng, leader of the Kachin Independence Organization, dated 16 December 1992. Dr Tu Ja writes:

I joined the NCGUB/DAB [National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma/ Democratic Alliance of Burma] UN lobby team. We stayed in the USA about one and a half months. I feel that our trip was quite successful. More nations including some ASEAN nations showed their support. Our resolution sponsored by the Swedish mission was passed by the 3rd Committee of UN. It would be passed by the UNGA too.

Mr Yozo Yokota is visiting Burma. NCG/DAB leaders met him in Bangkok on his way to Rangoon. Now he is visiting Bangladesh. From there he will come back to Thailand and visit the Thai-Burma border to see refugee camps

Books and publications

Tai Minorities in China edited by Guan Jian

Vol. 1: A select bibliography
Vol. 2: The indigenous religion and Theravada Buddhism in Ban Da Tiu - a Dai Lue village in Yunnan.

US$20 plus $4 postage surface mail. Please send cheque with order. Available from Soma Prakasan c/o The Southeast Asian Review, Dhanesh Bhawan Compound, Shamir Taliya, Gaya 823001, Bihar, India.

*
Vladimir LO(i,)sO(c,)k 'Ethnic situation in China with a special respect to South China' Archv Orientln 60 (3) 1992: 251-268.

An update on the information in an article by Josef KolmO(a,)s in the same journal ['China's minority nationalities (some statistical observations' 48 no. 1 1980: 1-21)]. Contains much useful statistical data. Some of the Yunnan information is reproduced below.

Population of minority nationalities in Yunnan (1982 census)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic name</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhuang</td>
<td>894,408</td>
<td>6.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>3,352,732</td>
<td>61.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong (Miao)</td>
<td>752,122</td>
<td>14.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao</td>
<td>147,147</td>
<td>10.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>1,121,299</td>
<td>99.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>1,058,386</td>
<td>99.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan</td>
<td>95,925</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai</td>
<td>835,761</td>
<td>99.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisu</td>
<td>467,869</td>
<td>97.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>437,933</td>
<td>6.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lahu</td>
<td>304,131</td>
<td>99.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa</td>
<td>298,516</td>
<td>99.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sui (Shui)</td>
<td>6,126</td>
<td>2.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naxi</td>
<td>236,326</td>
<td>93.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jingpo</td>
<td>92,876</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gelao</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nu</td>
<td>22,837</td>
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<td>Mongol</td>
<td>6,211</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achang</td>
<td>20,404</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monguor (Tu)</td>
<td>2,888</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-ang</td>
<td>12,274</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jino</td>
<td>11,954</td>
<td>99.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derung</td>
<td>4,5999</td>
<td>99.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The National Thai Studies Centre has made a grant to the Newsletter for its continued publication. With funding from the Department of Anthropology this assures the publication of the Newsletter in 1993 and 1994. We are extremely grateful for these sources of support.

Scott Bamber is currently on fieldwork in Thailand and this issue of the Newsletter is edited by Gehan Wijeyewardene. Dr Bamber returns at the end of January. Correspondence may be sent either to him at CHRTU, University of Western Australia or to Gehan Wijeyewardene, Department of Anthropology, RSPacS, ANU, Canberra ACT 0200. Please note new ANU address.

The e-mail address for correspondence is gew400@coombs.anu.edu.au.

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1 The Newsletter writes the name of the country in this fashion, but there has been no editorial interference with authors who prefer to use 'Myanmar'.

2 Comparative studies in society and history 3 (1) 1960: 49-68

4 Siam Mapped: a history of the geo-body of Siam PhD, University of Sydney. 1988.

5 E.J. Hobsbawm 'Ethnicity and nationalism in Europe today' Anthropology today 8(1) 1992: 3-8.

6 Nationalism reduced to 'official nationalism' ASAA Review 9(1) 1985: 103-08.


10 Language and ethnicity: the Mon in Burma and Thailand Ethnic Groups across national boundaries in mainland Southeast Asia Singapore: ISEAS 1990: 14-47


12. Statement by Police Major General San Thein, Director General of People's Force and Secretary of the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, at the ceremony for the signing of the Project Documents on Subregional Cooperation between Myanmar, China, Thailand and the UNDCP, Yangon, 12 June 1992.

13. Which include not just movement on national political issues and recognition that the current SLORC-local militia accords do not provide a viable model for resolution of narcotics issues. Required also is a less expedient focus away from impoverished upland farmers toward the increasingly sophisticated Chinese syndicates and international cartels, and not least the culpability of officials in neighbouring countries.


18. This contrasts with upper stratum households (around 15%) of the population who live mostly in lowland areas (about 10% of the total population) with more labour (between 6.3 and 4.1), a lower dependency ratio (around 35%), access to irrigated land and producing a slight food surplus.

19. It should be noted that recently this has been rectified in UNDP interest in the border areas. The UNDP Program on HIV/AIDS and Development has expressed a particular interest in this area. The HIV/AIDS issue has been explicitly mentioned in the NCGUB-DAB Position Paper to the UN. (National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma and the Democratic Alliance of Burma, Position Paper of Delegation to the UN General Assembly, 1992).

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