



Dammed by Burma's Generals - Salween River Dams

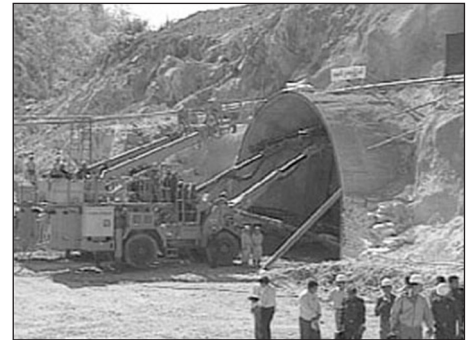
The Salween River, one of the great rivers of Southeast Asia, is under threat. The governments of the Salween countries; Burma, Thailand and China have been pushing forward with plans to dam this still free-flowing river. It is planned to both exploit the hydropower potential of the entire river basin, as well as to divert water to Thailand.

One of the world's most threatening developments, in both human and environmental terms, is taking place on the Salween River in Burma, China and Thailand. It involves the building of several major dams on the Salween which will drown enormous areas of forest lands, rich in bio-diversity, and force the eviction of Burma's ethnic peoples, including Karenni, Shan and Karen. In one case, an entire tribal population is likely to be forcibly relocated, with the likely result of eliminating them and their unique culture. In a recent March 2006 report from the Karenni Development Research Group, called *Dammed by Burma's Generals**, the Karenni people speak of upwards of 30,000 people being displaced from their hereditary lands and the loss of 28 towns and villages. Ironically, this project which is being driven forward by the Burmese military government, as well as the Thai government, will provide hydro-electric power which Burma itself does not need. The electricity generated will be sold by the Burmese junta to Thailand, providing a rich income for the regime.

On 14 March last, 359 people of different ethnic nationalities from seven Burmese social organisations, as well as Thai social organisations and local villagers attended an *International Day of Action Against Dams for Water and Life* event held in one of the five planned Dam sites, Wei Gyi, adjacent by Mae Hong Son Province, inside Karen State in Burma. The event was hosted by the **Karen Rivers Watch**. The coalition members/or signing organisations present,

called on the Thai government and the Burmese military regime known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to discontinue plans to build dams on the Salween River. Currently 25,000 people along the Thai-Burma border, IDPs and Karen people from different districts inside Karen State have signed a petition against the planned project. In a statement issued on 14 March, the collective gathered said: "We urge the SPDC regime to immediately stop waging wars against ethnic people along the border; stop the planned dam projects across Salween River; forced labour; extortion of money, torture and extrajudicial killings of the Karen people and burning of Karen villages". To access this report *Dammed by Burma's Generals*, log on to: www.salweenwatch.org

*The report's full title is as follows: *Dammed by Burma's Generals – The Karenni Experience with Hydropower Development from Lawpita to the Salween*.



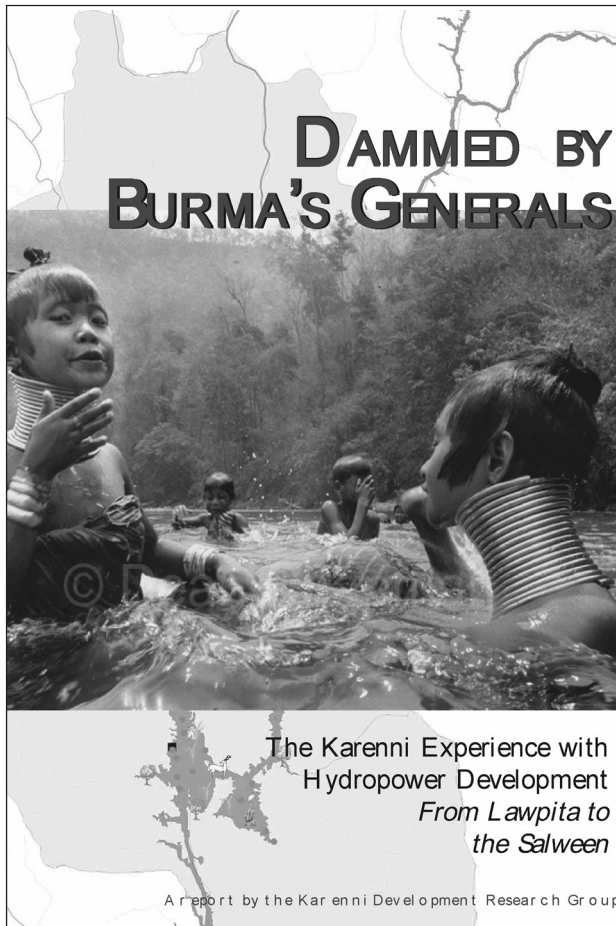
The Salween River Dam, typical site sample.

FURTHER DEGENERATION, FURTHER DECLINE

Pinheiro report on Burma to UN Commission on Human Rights

In February, near the end of his six-year mandate, the Special Rapporteur on Burma for the UN Commission on Human Rights, **Mr Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro**, laid before the Commission his 28-page report. In the report summary he states that throughout his term, "he has received substantiated reports of grave human rights violations on a regular basis", but that "the vast majority of his communications to the (Burmese) authorities "have not received a response". He says the intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of civilians for peacefully exercising their civil and political rights and freedoms continue. Members of registered political parties, human rights defenders and pro democracy advocates are "particular targets". The Special Rapporteur also draws attention in the report to the marked decline in socio-economic conditions, which has resulted in increased poverty countrywide. "Urgent reform is required", he says, "to prevent any further degeneration of an already severely damaged economy". Mr Pinheiro also remarks that the humanitarian situation has "shown marked signs of deterioration over the past year".

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**DAMMED BY
BURMA'S GENERALS**

The Karenni Experience with
Hydropower Development
From Lawpita to
the Salween

A report by the Karenni Development Research Group



ILO criticises Burma over forced labour

The International Labour Organisation has urged (31 March) the Asian nation's rulers to halt forced labour in Burma. An end-of-March meeting of the ILO's governing body, "expressed its profound concern at the continued lack of any meaningful progress towards abolishing forced labour," in Burma. The governing body has decided that the International Labour Conference, (the ILO's ruling forum) which will meet shortly in May and June, should "review further action to be taken to effectively secure the compliance by Myanmar (Burma)."

Last year's conference had called on Burma to resume a "real dialogue" with the Geneva-based organisation by March 2006. The ILO has been trying for several years to get the military government of Burma to stop the use of forced labour. In 1998, an ILO inquiry found that forced labour was systematic throughout the country, particularly with the military. In 2000, the ILO's governing body

recommended trade and other sanctions against Burma because of its lack of cooperation in tackling the practice. The sanctions recommendation was frozen in 2001 amid promises from Burma's military leaders to stop forced labour and accept limited ILO surveillance. The ILO and the Burmese military did agree on a plan of action to reduce forced labour in May 2003, but it fell apart two days later when the regime detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Last October (2005), another ILO report on forced labour noted the unwillingness of the military regime to cooperate with the international community and detailed measures taken in Burma to intimidate the ILO's representatives in the country. On Friday 31 March, the ILO said that Burma's military should "enact legislation guaranteeing freedom of association to all workers and employers and to explicitly protect workers' and employers' organisations from any



Forced labour continues in Burma.

interference by the authorities, including the army."

Visit to Portlaoise Presentation Girls' Secondary School By Mary Montaut

Viewers to Channel Four may have seen the *Despatches* programme on Monday 3 April last, which featured a secondary school in Portlaoise where **Sister Barbara Raftery** and her class have been exposing the international arms trade by brokering weapons over the Internet. Working with Amnesty International and Mark Thomas of Channel Four, they demonstrated in the programme, how easy arms brokering is under current Irish laws, and elicited a positive response from the Irish government to the effect that laws will shortly be enacted to control this.

This group of young women and their teacher, Sister Barbara, invited Burma Action Ireland to come and present the facts about Burma to them, as part of their work on prisoners. The visit took place on Tuesday 29 March. As BAI's Co-Ordinator, I addressed a packed audience of fourth and fifth-year students, taking as the theme, the way in which the military governments of Burma since Ne Win's coup of 1963 have effectively made Burma itself into a prison for the civilian population. The students

had little background knowledge about Burma, so it was important to fill them in a little on the history as well as to explain the appalling human rights situation in Burma today. They were extremely attentive and, although they had already read/heard about the Association of Political Prisoners recent report, *The Darkness We See*, they were shocked to hear about the forced labour, portering, the impunity of the army and its systematic use of rape especially against ethnic women and the ever-increasing poverty, as well as the denial of any form of democracy.

The session lasted for an hour and a half, yet the students' attention did not flag. They showed real concern with issues which are, after all, far outside their own, everyday experience. At the end of the session, it was agreed that BAI and Sister Barbara should keep in touch, and another visit should be arranged next year.

If you would like someone from BAI to come to your school, please contact Mary Montaut on 087 1261857.

EBN meeting, Brussels, 2006

At the Euro-Burma Network meeting in Brussels in March, delegates welcomed the recent discussion of Burma at the UN Security Council. This groundbreaking discussion follows the success of the recent Havel-Tutu report which brought Burma forward as an issue appropriate for the agenda of the UNSC. However, European countries must continue to work for a binding resolution on Burma. Support was also urged for the NLD proposal calling for the convening of a people's parliament comprising successful MPs from the 1990 elections, which would recognise the current military regime as a *de jure* government. Major concerns about the humanitarian and environmental impacts of work on projects such as the Salween Dams and the SHWE gas pipeline were discussed at length.

BAI Coordinator **Mary Montaut** and Chairperson **Eileen Seymour** attended the EBN meeting along with, amongst others, representatives from the UK, Netherlands, Norway, Germany, France and Poland.



Update on Burma

CONCERN OVER NEW GAS PIPELINE PROJECT

Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council, together with a consortium of Indian and Korean corporations are currently exploring gas fields off the coast of Arakan State in Western Burma. The **SHWE Gas Movement** is concerned with this natural gas project which is presently unfolding in this area of Burma. Discovered in December 2003, these fields--labelled A-I, or "Shwe" (the Burmese word for gold) - are expected to hold one of the largest gas yields in Southeast Asia. These Shwe fields could well become the Burmese military government's largest single source of foreign income. However, for the people of Burma, this project will likely bring more suffering than benefits. It is the opinion of the SHWE Gas Movement that human rights issues are very likely outcomes if the pipeline project goes ahead unchecked. In order to transport the gas to India, for example, a pipeline corridor is already being cleared in the minority Burmese states of Arakan and Chin. Moreover, the area is becoming increasingly militarised and forced labour is occurring in the context of infrastructure development. As experienced with two previous international Burmese gas pipeline projects - the Yadana and the Yetagun - suggest, forced relocation of villagers, forced labour, torture, rape and extrajudicial killings will result from the Shwe project. If you would like to learn more about this project see www.shwe.org. There is also an online petition to stop the further development of these gas fields in Burma.

www.petitiononline.com/SHWE/petition.html

RUSSIAN ARMS FOR OIL

Burma has agreed to allow Russia to share in exploiting Burma's oil fields in exchange for weapons, the *Kommersant* daily Russian newspaper reported on Tuesday 4 April.

Commenting on the deal signed on Monday 3 April between General Maung Aye, Burma military regime's second most senior figure, and the Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, the financial newspaper said that the two sides were discussing delivery of Russian arms. *Kommersant* said Burma was seeking Russian help in developing an anti-aircraft system. "The rapprochement between Moscow and Myanmar (Burma), a pariah on the international scene as a result of its serious restriction of freedoms, is not only explained by economic reasons," the newspaper said. It was also intended as a contribution to regional security following President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to China.

LACK OF RULE OF LAW IN BURMA

Student leader **Min Ko Naing** has condemned a recent random act of violence committed on ex-political prisoner **Thet Naing Oo** by members of police and fire fighters in Rangoon. He said it "shows the lack of the rule of law in Burma". Thet

Naing Oo was beaten to death on the 17 March. The Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and the foreign affairs committee of All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABSFU), have called for an investigation into the lawless killing of this former political prisoner. Thet Naing Oo was a student at Rangoon University when the nationwide pro democracy uprising occurred in 1988. He was sentenced for his role in the demonstrations and released at the end of 2003. Reports on the day of his death (17 March) say that he was accused of being a pick pocket and beaten to death by military police and by members of the fire brigade. Min Ko Naing said: "In the international community, fire brigades are organisations formed to rescue human beings out of natural disasters. Therefore they are fire brigades formed with the intention of protecting the lives of the public and citizens. This kind of organisation should never carry weapons for whatever reason and endanger or threaten the lives of the public".

NLD CONCERNED FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI

On 7 April, Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD) party announced that it is concerned for the security and health of its leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** because she has been illegally detained for almost three years (continuously) and her family physician has not been allowed to see her for over a month. NLD spokesperson Myint Thein said: "The elders in the party and all the NLD members are very concerned about the health of our general secretary because we have been given to understand that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's personal physician, Dr Tin Myo Win has not been allowed to visit her."

MEDICAL CHARITY PULLS FRENCH STAFF

The international medical charity, **Doctors without Borders** (MSF) has announced that it is to close its French office in Burma after four years because government restrictions had made it impossible to work there. The aid agency said the head of its French mission had left Myanmar (Burma) on 26 March, because of the unacceptable conditions imposed by the authorities. MSF said its Swiss and Dutch sections would continue to operate in the country. But it said they were also "questioning the future" of their overall projects in the country. The Paris-based charity has been working in the Thai border regions of Mon and Karen since 2001. These areas are caught in an armed conflict between Burma's military regime and armed rebel groups. "The Myanmar (Burma) regime wants to get rid of all humanitarian workers in these politically sensitive regions," said Mr Herve Isambert, Head of MSF's French programme in Burma. "The restrictions imposed on us reduced us to the role of

specialist contractors subjected to the political will of the military junta. In reality, the Myanmar authorities do not want anyone to witness the acts of violence they are committing against their own people," he added.

NLD PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT

Burma's opposition party, the National League for Democracy, is calling on the regime to allow the formation of a "people's parliament" of those elected in the 1990 general election, in return for recognition of the junta as a *de jure*, or lawful, **transitional government**. (The 1990 general election in Burma was won by the NLD with a big majority, but results were ignored by the regime). Reaction from Burmese opponents of the regime living outside the country has so far been mixed. The NLD proposal was announced on 12 February. The NLD has called on the regime to respond to its proposal by 17 April, which is the start of the Burmese New Year.

FURTHER DEGENERATION, FURTHER DECLINE

Cont. from page one

The human rights concerns he emphasises are largely the same as those which he highlighted six years ago, and, "despite early indications from government that it was willing to address these problems", he regrets that "all such willingness appears to have disappeared". In the body of Pinheiro's report, he details at length, denials of civil and political rights, including abuses of security legislation, recent arrests and convictions, conditions of detention and restrictions on freedom of religion / expression and of social and economic rights (including forced labour and violence against women). On the humanitarian side, he stresses grave problems of health, (especially HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria), food shortages, problems of refugees and displaced communities. Emphasising these and other concerns he concludes: "In a region that has experienced significant development in recent years, it is unacceptable that the people of Burma are denied their inherent rights".

To access a copy of this report by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, log on to:

www.uscampaignforburma.org/contact-resources/reports.html

AGM NOTICE 29 May 2006

The AGM of Burma Action Ireland will take place on Monday 29 May at 7.30pm in Loreto Hall, 77 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. All are very welcome to attend on the evening. Agenda items will include: the Chairperson's Report, the report of the BAI Coordinator and the Treasurer's Report. The election of the officers will also take place, including the roles of: Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. Refreshments will be served. Meter car-parking is available on the Green.



Three new awards for Aung San Suu Kyi Olaf Palme Prize • Freedom of Sheffield • Freedom from Fear medal

Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi, recently received further international recognition. On the 28 February, the Olaf Palme Prize, awarded annually in memory of the assassinated former Prime Minister of Sweden, was received on her behalf at a ceremony in Stockholm. Commenting in the Dáil, Mr Dermot Ahern, T.D. said he was "delighted she had received the award for her unyielding fight for a democratic Burma". On 8 March, Sheffield became the latest of many municipalities world-wide including Dublin and Galway, to confer on her in absentia, the Freedom of the City which was in recognition of her personal courage and relentless pursuit of democratic justice in Burma and her commitment to secure democracy and human rights by peaceful means. The presentation event in the UK city included a poetry reading, a play performance and dancing by members of Sheffield's Karen community. On 13 May, at a ceremony in the Abbey of

Middelburg, the Netherlands, Aung San Suu Kyi, who will be 61 years of age in June, will be honoured with the 2006 Freedom from Fear medal, one of 'four freedom awards' presented annually by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute to national and world citizens of extraordinary achievement whose words and deeds best exemplify the qualities proclaimed by President Roosevelt in 1941 as necessary for flourishing democracies everywhere in the world: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. In a statement announcing the forthcoming May award, the Institute's co-Chairpersons said of Daw Suu Kyi that: "Her continuing imprisonment by the military junta that rules her country demands that the world take notice and bring before the tribunals of the world her cause for freedom. Aung San Suu Kyi is fearless and in her example, all peoples and all nations find inspiration to resist tyranny".



Aung San Suu Kyi, still under detention in Rangoon.

How you can help

BECOME A MEMBER OF BAI

BAI is always pleased to welcome new members. Members are encouraged to become active in one of BAI's voluntary sub-committees: **political, awareness and campaigns** and **fundraising and assistance**. The AGM on 29 May is an opportunity for you to hear about our work. Please contact Mary Montaut at BAI (number given below) if you would like to speak to someone in advance of the AGM. Otherwise, please feel free to come along on the night (See AGM notice on page 3). In addition, there are other ways you can help the people of Burma from your own home or office:

WRITE TO AUNG SAN SUU KYI

BAI wish to thank any members who may have responded to the notice on our website in February about sending a St. Patrick's Day card to Aung San Suu Kyi. On **Monday 19 June**, Aung San Suu Kyi will be 61 years old. For many years now, BAI has marked that day with a petition or an awareness event and will do so again. (See our website closer to the day). However we would encourage you to also send a **birthday card** to Daw Suu Kyi to let her know that you are thinking about her and about the plight of the Burmese people. Aung San Suu Kyi's high profile is one of the things that has kept her alive, but there is growing concern for her wellbeing. Daw Suu Kyi may not receive your card (as all mail is monitored), but nonetheless, a multitude of cards addressed to

her will undoubtedly remind the military regime that she is not forgotten and the world is watching. In the longer term, this will help to keep her safe. The address is as follows:

Aung San Suu Kyi
54 University Avenue
Bahan 11201
Yangon, Myanmar (Burma)

PETITION

Sign the petition which opposes the SHWE gas pipe line project (see update on Burma section).

POLITICIANS

Write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, **Mr Dermot Ahern, T.D.** (Bishop's Square, Redmond's Hill, Dublin 2), your local TD and MEP to let them know of your concern for human rights in Burma. Urge them to raise the Burma issue at every level of the political process and:

- Take all necessary measures toward a speedy restoration of democracy in Burma,
- Demand the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi,
- Express your opposition to the Salween Dams project (see front page).

THE OPPRESSION OF THE BURMESE PEOPLE AND THE DETENTION OF DAW SUU KYI

Write appeals to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) the Burmese military regime, calling for the safe release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese political prisoners. Daw Suu Kyi has been

in and out of detention in Burma since 1989. She was held under house arrest from 1989 -1995, and again under virtual house arrest from 2000 - 2002. She was then arrested in May 2003 after the Depayin massacre (in Burma), during which up to 100 of her supporters were beaten to death by the regime's militia. She is currently under house arrest in Rangoon. This detention has to stop. In addition to asking for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, please ask the SPDC to take action on the following:

- To end the continuing violations of the human rights of women, in particular forced labour; forced relocations, abuse, torture, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse in detention and summary executions, often committed by military personnel,
- To end the systematic forced displacements of persons and the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and create adequate conditions for their safe and voluntary return and complete reintegration, and to allow humanitarian personnel safe access to assist their return and reintegration.
- Voice your objection to the Salween Dams project and to the SHWE gas pipe line project.

Please address your action letters to the following:

Lieutenant General Soe Win
Prime Minister, State Peace and Development Council
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office, Yangon
Myanmar (Burma)

BAI would appreciate it very much if you could send us a copy of your letter(s).

Burma Action Ireland

PO Box 6786, Dublin 1, Ireland.

Tel: + 353 87 1261857

Fax: + 353 1 855 9753

Email: info@burmaactionireland.org

Web: www.burmaactionireland.org

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of Burma Action Ireland and can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of Irish Aid.

Thank you to Senator Brendan Ryan and Senator Paschal Mooney for the posting of this newsletter. Their support is appreciated.

Burma Action Ireland is a voluntary group established since May 1996 to raise awareness in Ireland of the current situation in Burma and the nature of the ruling regime.

Hon. President:
John Boorman

Chairperson:
Eileen Seymour

