

Uncertainty Reigns in Shan State

Conflicting claims, suspicion and arrests create confusion

By Aung Lwin Oo

Although the Rangoon regime insists that Shan State is stable, one armed opposition group, the Shan State Army (South), continues to hold out against government pressure to disarm. Relations between Shan groups and the regime are also strained because of the arrest in February of several ethnic leaders, including 82-year-old activist Shwe Ohn.

Complicating the situation still further in Shan State is the status of the United Wa State Army, which maintains a de facto ceasefire with the regime while allegedly continuing to engage in a drugs trade protected by their own armed forces.

The first ceasefire agreements between Shan ethnic groups and the regime were signed in 1989. The original agreements granted the groups business concessions, particularly in logging, and tax collection autonomy. They also allowed the groups to remain armed—but from early this year the regime has been pressing them to disarm under a program dubbed “Exchange Arms for Peace.”

In April, 170 soldiers of the Shan State National Army turned in their arms and 843 rebels of the Palaung State Liberation Army surrendered to the Burmese Army. The following month, the leader of the SSNA, Col Sai Yi, and several of his troops abandoned their base in northern Shan State and merged with the SSA-S.

In September, an 800-strong brigade of the Shan State Army (North) also abandoned their base rather than disarm.

Despite these developments, the junta’s information minister, Kyaw Hsan, claimed at a recent press conference that “peace” had been secured with armed ethnic movements.

“If things are improving, why are people fleeing to Thailand every day?” responded SSA-S spokeswoman Nam Khur Hsen. The Burma Army presence in Shan State has also increased dramatically, from about 40 battalions in 1988 to a current strength of more than 200, according to Khuensai Jaiyen, of the *Shan Herald Agency for News*.

The UWSA, with an estimated membership of around 15,000, is the strongest of the Shan ethnic groups. Apart from the two arms of the Shan State Army, others include the

SSNA, the Shan State Nationalities Peoples’ Liberation Organization, the Myanmar [Burma] National Democracy Alliance Army (a Kokang group), Shan-Akha group National Democratic Alliance Army (Shan-Akha), the Pa-O National Organization, PSLA, and the Kachin Defence Army. Several smaller groups act as local armed militia, while Rangoon has given others border police duties.

Many of the groups are being allowed to produce and trade in drugs in exchange for co-operation with the regime, according to a report by the *Shan Herald*

Agency for News. The UWSA, long accused of running a lucrative drugs business, tried to polish its image by preparing an elaborate ceremony at which it would announce its territory to be “drugs free.” But the planned ceremony turned into a farce when the regime took exception to invitations signed in the name of a “Wa State.” Widespread skepticism had anyway greeted the “drugs free” announcement.

The Wa enjoyed close relations with former prime minister and military intelligence chief Gen Khin Nyunt, and the UWSA has acted as a buffer between the Burma Army and the SSA-S.

Apart from the enmity existing between the SSA-S and the regime, tensions have arisen between Rangoon and other Shan ethnic ceasefire groups following the arrest in February of Maj-Gen Sao Hso Ten, president of the Shan State Peace Council, an umbrella group comprising the SSA-N and the SSNA. He was taken into custody for participating in a meeting in Taunggyi, Shan State, along with other prominent Shan leaders, including Hkun Htun Oo and Sai Nyunt Lwin, chairman and general-secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, and the veteran politician Shwe Ohn.

The arrests put into question a regime proposal for ceasefire groups that participate in the National Convention to form themselves into political parties. The growing strength of the Burma Army in Shan State is also causing concern, as is a report by the Shan Human Rights Foundation, claiming that forced labor, sexual abuses, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings continue in Shan State. ■

“If things are improving, why are people fleeing to Thailand every day?”

Fighting colors



Shan State Army (North)



Shan State Army (South)



Shan State National Army



SSA-S troops on parade

PHOTO: PAT BROWN/THE IRRAWADDY

Learning with the Irrawaddy 8

To accompany November 2005 Issue of Irrawaddy Magazine

Activities to do Before Reading

Activity 1

Prediction: Analyse the title

- a) You are going to read an article about military presence in Shan State. Look quickly at the article, and look at everything *apart from* the text.

Brainstorm the meaning of *REIGNS*.

- b) Look quickly again at the article (again, at everything *apart from* the text), and then predict the meaning of the title 'Uncertainty Reigns in Shan State'.
- i. The future of Shan State is definite.
 - ii. Presently in Shan State, the situations of all the different armies are unclear.
 - iii. Many different armies will rule Shan State in the future.
 - iv. In Shan State, every family has a member in the army.

Activity 2

What do you know?

- i. How many armies do you know in Shan State?
- ii. For the armies that you don't know, can you guess the meaning of the acronyms? (Your teacher will give you some acronyms.)

Activities to do During Reading

Activity 3

Vocabulary: Replace with another word

- a) *strained* (paragraph 1)

The relationship between my mother and my husband is *strained* because my mother thinks my husband is lazy.

- i. under pressure ii. easy iii. awful

- b) *de facto* (paragraph 2) /de 'facto/

It is still common for many Thai couples not to register their marriages with the authorities. *De facto* marriages are acceptable in Thailand.

- i. illegal ii. expensive iii. unofficial

c) *granted* (paragraph 3)

The travel documents granted people security whilst traveling between Mae Sot and Chiang Mai.

- i. gave ii. denied iii. wished

d) *dubbed* (paragraph 3)

He was very clever, so the other students dubbed him “Brains”.

- i. dreamt ii. named iii. painted

e) *dramatically* (paragraph 7) /dra'matic-ly/

She's very sick – her temperature has risen dramatically since yesterday.

- i. fast ii. very slowly iii. slowly

f) *lucrative* (paragraph 9) /'lucrative/

Modeling can be a very lucrative career, but being famous can make your life very difficult.

- i. good ii. well-paid iii. boring

g) *skepticism* (paragraph 9) /'skepticism/

I don't like our new accountant - my skepticism about his honesty makes it difficult for me to trust him.

- i. doubt ii. dreams iii. proof

h) *tensions* (paragraph 11)

There are tensions between my father and my sister at the moment – my sister keeps playing her music too loud, and my father gets very angry.

- i. feelings of happiness ii. fights iii. bad feelings

Activity 4

Vocabulary: Guess the meaning

a) *hold out* (paragraph 1)

She said that she doesn't love me, but I don't believe her - I'm going to hold out.

- i. accept the thing that the other person wants
ii. wait until you receive the thing that you want
iii. pressure the other person until they give you the thing that you want

b) *allegedly* (paragraph 2) /a'legedly/

Allegedly, China is going to stop its human rights abuses.

- i. Something that is proven
- ii. Something that will definitely happen in the future
- iii. Something that is said but not proven

c) *concessions* (paragraph 3) /con'cessions/

The government gave my father concessions to build on forestry land.

- i. rights
- ii. tools
- iii. money

d) *turned in* (paragraph 4)

I found 100B on the floor of a shop, so I turned it in to the shop owner.

- i. give it to the authorities
- ii. sell it to the authorities
- iii. lend it to the authorities

e) *elaborate* (paragraph 9) /e'laborate/ (adj.)

(note: /elabo'rat/ (v) – to give a more detailed explanation)

The bride's wedding dress is very elaborate, it must have taken a long time to make.

- i. long
- ii. wonderful
- iii. detailed, with many parts

f) *farce* (paragraph 9)

His graduation party was a farce – everyone knew that he had cheated on his exams.

- i. dangerous situation
- ii. foolish situation
- iii. unhappy situation

g) *polish (his) image* (paragraph 9)

My brother upset a lot of people last year, and many people don't like him now. He needs to polish his image.

- i. do things so that people like you
- ii. apologise to people you upset
- ii. clean your mirror

h) *buffer* (paragraph 10)

The cliffs are a buffer between the sea and the land.

- i. something that pushes one thing away from another

- ii. something that pulls one thing towards another
- iii. something that stops one thing from touching another

i) *enmity* (paragraph 11) /'enmity/

A strong *enmity* still exists between the two old men, who had fought on opposite sides during the war.

- i. a situation of being friends
- ii. a situation of being enemies
- iii. a situation of being brothers

j) *veteran* (paragraph 11) /'veteran/

His father is the oldest First World War *veteran* I know – many of the other *veterans* are dead now.

- i. someone who has very little experience
- ii. someone who has a lot of experience
- iii. someone who is alive

k) *arbitrary* (paragraph 12) /'arbit-ry/

There was no reason why the police stopped my motorbike – their decision was completely *arbitrary*.

- i. a decision that is made because someone orders you
- ii. a decision that is made for a reason
- iii. a decision that is made for no reason

l) *extrajudicial* (paragraph 12) /'extraju'disial/

A corrupt police force is not a fair police force. A corrupt police force does many things that are *extrajudicial*.

- i. unlawful – not within the law
- ii. has respect for human rights
- iii. lawful – within the law

Activity 5

Referencing

a) 'Complicating the situation still further...' (paragraph 2)

Complicating which situation still further?

- i. The situation between the Shan groups and several ethnic leaders.
- ii. The situation between the Rangoon regime and Shwe Ohn.
- iii. The situation between Shan groups and the regime.

b) 'They also allowed the groups to remain armed...' (paragraph 3)

Who allowed the groups to remain armed?

- i. The first ceasefire agreements.

- ii. The regime.
 - iii. The original agreements.
- c) ‘Despite these developments...’ (paragraph 6)

Which developments?

- i. The Shan State Army (North) abandoning their base. (paragraph 5)
- ii. The Shan State National Army turning in their arms and the Palaung State Liberation Army surrendering. (paragraph 4)
- iii. The merge of some of the SSNA with the SSA-S. (paragraph 4)
- iv. The regime expecting the groups to disarm after the groups had been assured they could keep their arms. (paragraph 3)
- v. All of the above. (paragraphs 3-5)

Activity 6

Comprehension

- a) Members of two armies abandoned their bases. Which armies were the soldiers from?
- i. SSNA and SSA-S.
 - ii. SSA-S and SSA-N.
 - iii. SSA-N and SSNA.
- b) Who merged with the SSA-S?
- i. The SSNA.
 - ii. Several members of the SSNA.
 - iii. Colonel Sai Yi.
 - iv. The PSLA.
- c) In which month did the merge happen?
- i. April
 - ii. May
 - iii. June
 - iv. September

Activity 7

Linking words

Although and despite (paragraphs 1 and 6)

e.g.1 Although it rained a lot, we enjoyed our holiday.

e.g.2 Although I had all the necessary qualifications, I didn’t get the job.

e.g.3 Although Saw Nay Blute says that his friendship with Saw Po Kler is good, Saw Po Kler says that they are not talking to each other.

- a) We use *although* when:
- i. The second sentence is an expected continuation of the first.
 - ii. The second sentence is not an expected continuation of the first.

b) We use *despite* in a similar way:

e.g.4 Despite it raining a lot, we enjoyed our holiday.

e.g.5 Despite having all the necessary qualifications, I didn't get the job.

e.g.6 Despite Saw Nay Blute saying that his friendship with Saw Po Kler is good, Saw Po Kler says that they are not talking to each other.

Change this '*although*' sentence into a '*despite*' sentence:

Although the Rangoon regime insists that Shan State is stable, one armed opposition group continues to hold out against government pressure to disarm.

c) The clauses can change order:

e.g.7 Despite it raining a lot, we enjoyed our holiday.
We enjoyed our holiday, despite it raining a lot.

Although it rained a lot, we enjoyed our holiday.
We enjoyed our holiday, although it rained a lot.

Change the order of these clauses:

i. Despite having all the necessary qualifications, I didn't get the job.

ii. Although I had all the necessary qualifications, I didn't get the job.

d) Look at the sentence you wrote in b. Change the order of the clauses, writing it once with *although* and once with *despite*.

i. (*although*) _____

ii. (*despite*) _____

e) We re-phrased paragraph 6 like this:

Despite many Shan groups refusing to disarm, Kyaw Hsan claimed that "peace" had been secured with armed ethnic movements.

Change this *'despite'* sentence into a *'although'* sentence, and change the order of the clauses (write only one sentence).

Activity 8

Contradictions

A *statement* is something that is said by someone.

e.g. “Peace has been secured with armed ethnic movements”, said Kyaw Hsan.

Kyaw Hsan made a *statement* claiming that “peace” had been secured with armed ethnic movements.

A *contradiction* is a statement that is the opposite of a previous statement or action.

e.g. Many Shan groups refused to disarm. Kyaw Hsan’s statement that “peace” had been secured was a *contradiction*.

In groups of 2-3, do the exercises below.

a) The article begins with a contradiction in paragraph 1. What is it?

b) There is one more contradiction in paragraphs 11 and 12. We have started it for you, please finish it.

Although the regime proposed that ceasefire groups who participated in the National Convention could form into political parties, _____

Activities to do After Reading

Activity 9

Summaries

Below are some summaries of the article. Some are contradictions, some are not. Decide which are contradictions.

- a) “The situation is improving in Shan State, less people are fleeing into Thailand.”
- b) “Ceasefire groups that participate in the National Convention will not be arrested if they form political parties.”
- c) “In the “Exchange Arms for Peace” programme, we are not asking the ceasefire groups to give up their arms.”

- d) “Colonel Sai Yi joined with the SSA-S because neither of them want to disarm.”
- e) “Colonel Sai Yi joined with the SSA-S because he wants to persuade them to disarm.”
- f) “The de facto ceasefire between the UWSA and the regime does not mean that they are no longer involved with the drugs trade.”
- g) “Disarmament will bring peace to Shan State.”
- h) “The Burma Army and the SSA-S were not direct neighbours.”
- i) “The SSA-S is the only opposition group that refuses to disarm.”
- j) “The Burma Army does not have a strong presence in Shan State.”

Activity 10

Research and role play

The regime has continually made contradictions relating to the situation of Aung San Suu Kyi. Do some research – recent publications such as Bangkok Post, Irrawaddy; radio; interviews; and find out what these contradictions are. In small groups, role play your results.

- e.g.
- Person 1: Regime spokesperson, relates the information.
 - Person 2: Aung San Suu Kyi, relates the truth of what really happened.
 - Person 3: Democratic newsreporter, gives a one-sentence summary, using ‘*although*’ or ‘*despite*’.

Activity 11

Discussion

In small groups discuss the reasons why some groups think ceasefire agreements with the junta are a good idea, and why some groups think they are not.

Consider:

- the positive and negative effects of agreeing to ceasefire.
- the positive and negative effects of not agreeing to ceasefire.

