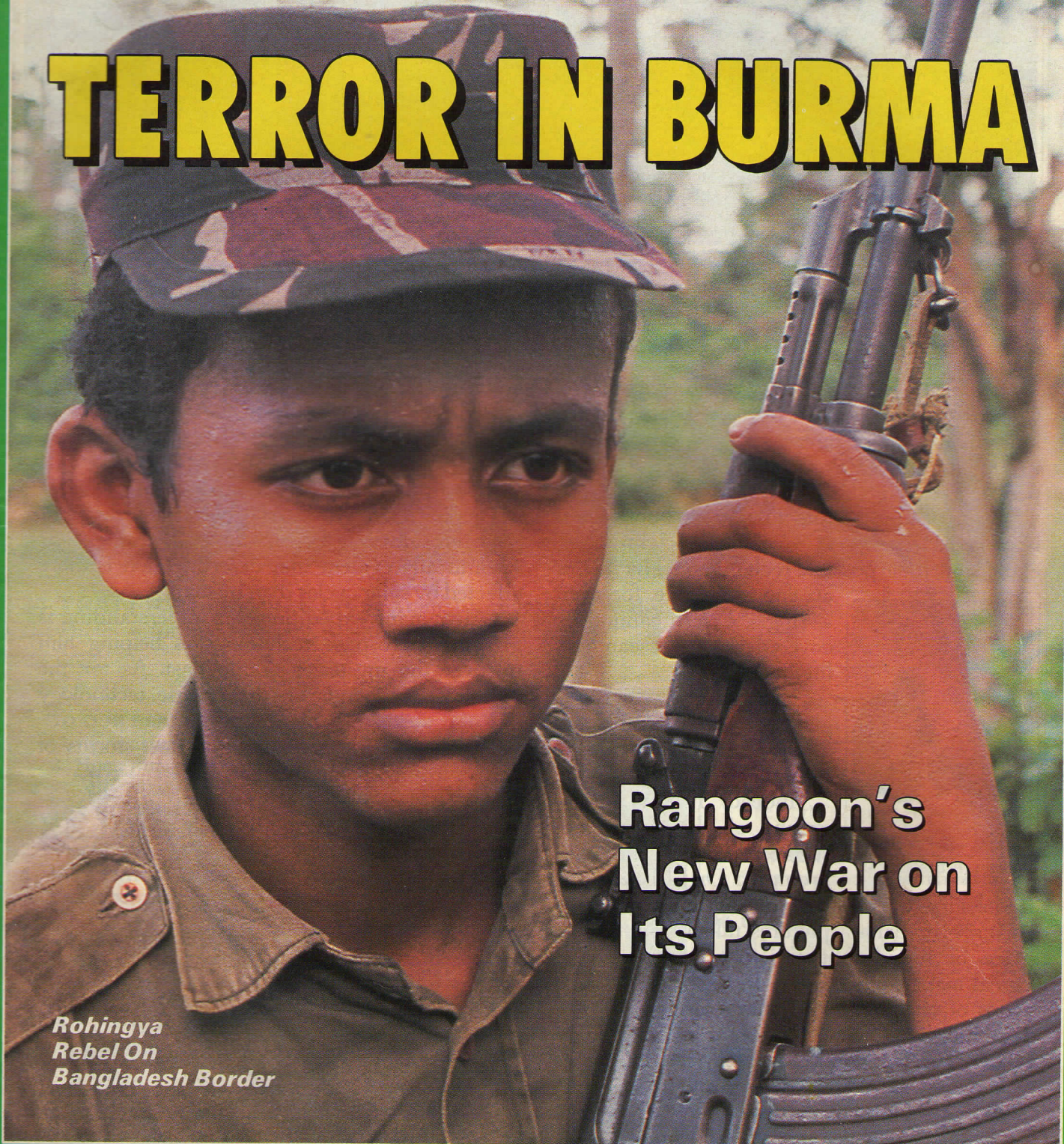


**MOVIE  
STARS VS.  
THE TRIADS**

# ASIAWEEK

FEBRUARY 21, 1992

## TERROR IN BURMA

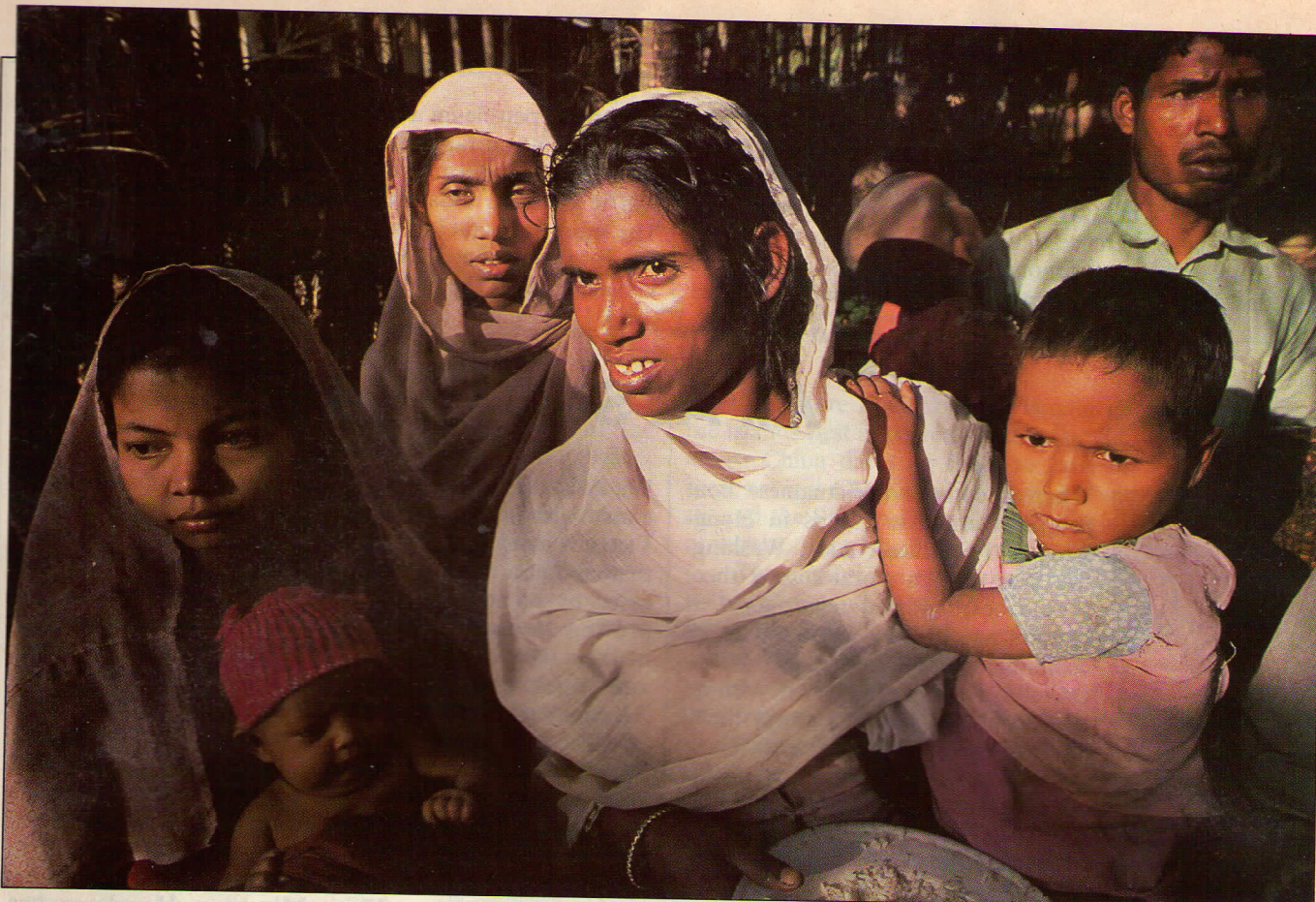


**Rangoon's  
New War on  
Its People**

*Rohingya  
Rebel On  
Bangladesh Border*

AUSTRALIA.....A\$5.00	CHINA.....FEC19.00	JAPAN.....¥700 (本体 ¥680)	NEPAL.....NcRs65	PHILIPPINES.....P45.00	TAIWAN.....N.T.\$100
BANGLADESH.....Taka60	HONGKONG.....HK\$28.00	KOREA.....Won2,500	NEW ZEALAND.....NZ\$6.50	SAUDI ARABIA.....SR15	THAILAND.....B80
BRUNEI.....B\$5.50	INDIA.....Rs42	MACAU.....HK\$28.00	PAKISTAN.....Rs40	SINGAPORE.....S\$5.50	U.S.A.....US\$5.00
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Rohingya refugees arriving in Bangladesh: Rangoon wages a relentless campaign to expel a Muslim minority

Geoffrey Klaverkamp

## INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

### BURMA

# Terror on the Border



Nurul Islam's eyes brim with tears. "I decided to leave after they killed one of my brothers," he cries. "They kicked, tortured and tried to press-gang me." Just

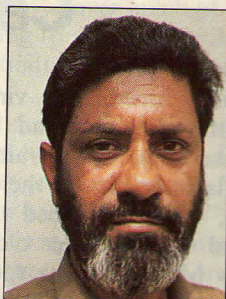
five days before, Nurul was a farmer in Burma's Arakan state. He owned 1.7 hectares of land, two houses and four cows. Today he is in southeast Bangladesh. His only possession is a ragged blanket. Strung across two twigs, it shelters his wife and seven children. "They robbed us," he says. "There's nothing to live for." Nearby is 22-year-old Tamang Khali. "I have been debased," she sobs. "Five of them raped me one by one."

Nurul and Tamang are among some 90,000 Rohingya Muslims who have fled mainly Buddhist Burma for Bangladesh since last year. Behind the exodus, say the refugees, is Burma's army junta, the State Law and Order Resto-

ration Council, commonly known by its sinister acronym, SLORC. Led by Senior Gen. Saw Maung, the regime took over in a bloody coup in 1988. Since then it has gained a reputation for ruthless repression. After allowing polls in 1990, SLORC refused to hand over power to the victorious National League for Democracy. Since then it has systematically detained or deregistered NLD leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize.

Recently the junta has taken ferocious aim at Burma's minorities. In addition to its assault on the Rohingyas, Rangoon has launched an all-out campaign on the Thai border to wipe out the ethnic Karen (see box, page 25). And in the north, Burmese troops last month clashed with Naga tribespeople, pushing more than a thousand into India. Burmese exiles in

Bangkok see the bloodletting as a divide-and-rule tactic aimed at diverting attention from political problems in the capital. Similarly the junta justified not handing over power to civilians elected in the 1990 elections by pointing to communist and other groups it said were fomenting unrest.



Geoffrey Klaverkamp

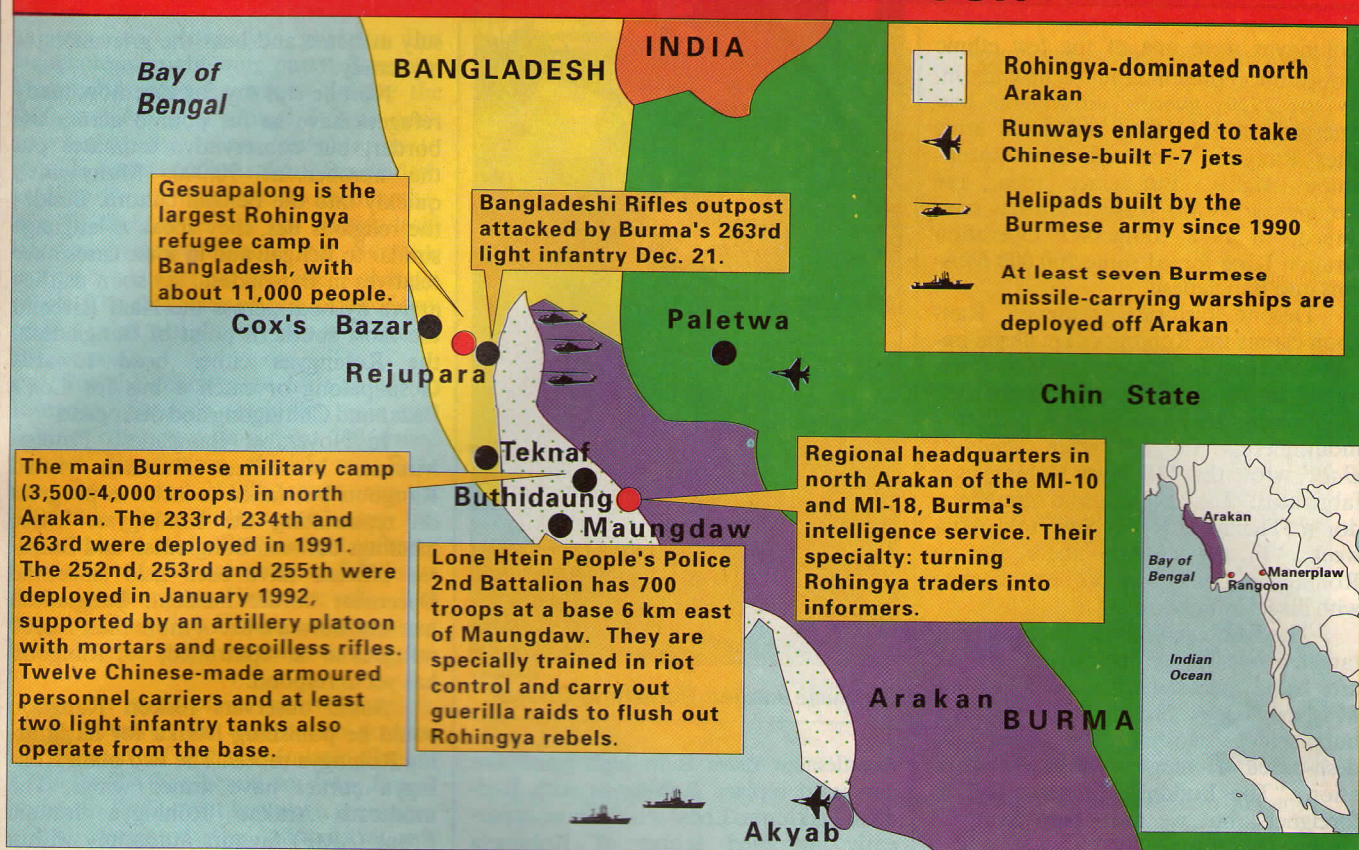
Nurul: Outcast

Rangoon's campaign of terror against the Rohingyas has raised tensions with Muslim neighbour Bangladesh. In December Burmese troops killed a Bangladeshi border guard while supposedly chasing Rohingya rebels. After the incident both nations began pouring troops into the border area. But analysts say Dhaka fears a war with Burma and has chosen to play down the refugee issue. As a result, the plight of the Rohingyas has been kept out of the international spotlight.

The tide of human misery has been



# RANGOON'S BRUTAL PUSH



Asiaweek Map

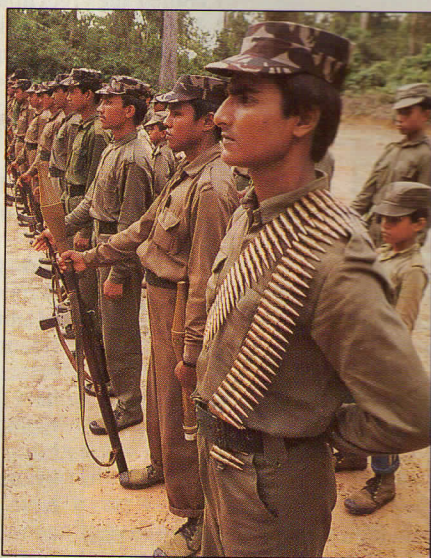
overwhelming. Every day some 150 refugees pour into Gesupalong camp where Nurul and Tamang languish. By some estimates ten people die each day, many of them children. Families are camped in straw huts fit only for livestock. On the sun-cracked earth women pick at edible scraps. Amid swarming flies, malnourished children forage for firewood to trade for rice and vegetables to add to watery curries.

A few kilometres away at the private Rabita Hospital in Cox's Bazar, the 30-bed ward is filled to overflowing. Mangnama Mohamed Hasein, 35, balances on a bed. Machine-gunned by Burmese troops, he has had both legs amputated below the hip. "We are operating at full capacity," says Dr. Abu Hanif, 26, "treating people for bullet injuries, malaria, gastroenteritis and malnutrition." The medical care is funded by private Rohingya groups. But apart from that and help from a few local and international relief agencies, no aid is reaching the Rohingyas. Most aid groups are unaware of the problem.

The Rohingyas are fleeing to one of the world's poorest nations. To make things worse, the area where they have sought refuge is still recovering from a cyclone last year that killed more than 139,000 people. Not only does Bangladesh have little to offer the refugees, it has almost no clout to persuade Ran-

goon to take them back. Says one Special Branch police officer in Cox's Bazar: "We can only work to push back the Rohingyas in a peaceful agreement with the Burmese. We know more than any country of [their] arrogance and uncooperativeness. But we cannot even feed our people. What do you expect us to do? Fight the Burmese army?"

A military showdown with Rangoon is the last thing Bangladesh wants. That is why Dhaka has been reluctant to



Rohingya rebels: A long history

ask international aid organisations for help, or to raise the issue at the United Nations. Says a foreign aid official in Bangladesh: "The Rohingya issue is hardly known because its political nature is extremely sensitive." But until Dhaka asks for help, he says, the "Rohingya will be a phantom problem. Thousands of these refugees will continue to land in Bangladesh without relief. Out of respect for Bangladesh, we have no choice but to keep a low profile over the matter."

**F**or centuries the Rohingyas have made up a majority in Arakan, especially in areas north of the port capital of Akyab. Their ancestors were Arab, Moorish, Mughal and Bengali merchants and sailors who set up trading ports along the Arakanese coast beginning in the 7th century. They shared the area with the Buddhist Rakhine of Tibeto-Burman stock. Isolated from the Burmese heartland by a long mountain chain, the Rohingyas quickly developed a strong streak of independence, which through the centuries led to periodic clashes with their Rakhine neighbours.

The Rohingyas felt Rangoon's lash at its worst in the late 1930s, when the Burmese independence movement was in full swing. The so-called Burmanisation campaigns led to the massacre of more than 100,000 Muslims. When Burma won independence in 1948, the

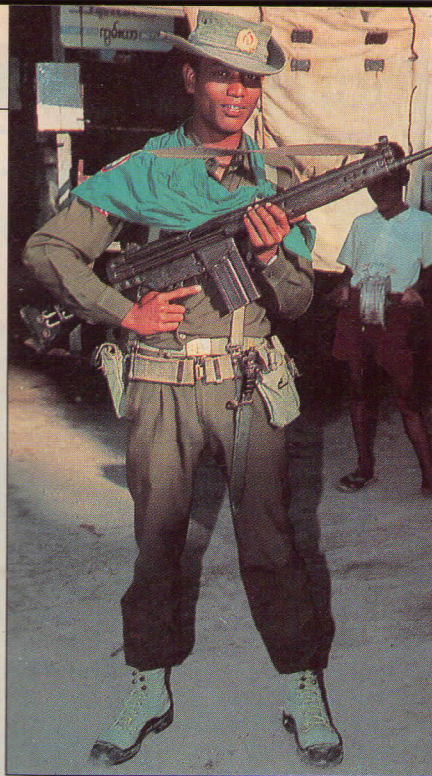


Rohingyas were one of the few ethnic groups not represented in the new union. By the 1950s guerilla movements had emerged. In 1961 they laid down arms after Rangoon promised them autonomous rights. But since then, the Rohingyas say the persecution has continued. In 1978 Rangoon's Operation Dragon King forced some 200,000 Muslims into Bangladesh.

Despite historical evidence, Rangoon claims the Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, and it is determined to drive them across the border. In a recent series of articles, SLORC's mouthpiece, *The Working People's Daily*, wrote that "the term Rohingyas is fabricated." Last week Burma's ambassador to Thailand, Nyunt Swe, told Asia-week: "In my country there are no Rohingyas. This is a problem dealing with illegal immigrants."

The Rohingyas claim they are being targeted because of their religion. "We are being persecuted because we are Muslims," says Sirajul Alam Chowdhury, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh-based Rohingya Muslim Association. "The Buddhist Burmese call us foreigners, but we have been living in Arakan for centuries."

The government's latest campaign against the Rohingyas began in earnest in mid-1991, when the Burmese army launched Operation *Peezaya* (Prosperous Country). The scope of the operation has been vast. In the two most populous Rohingya townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung, a massive



Ira Chaplain

### Burmese soldier: Punishing Dhaka?

resettlement drive is in high gear. The aim is to replace Rohingyas with Buddhist Rakhines. Local militia have apparently uprooted scores of Rohingya villages. Arakan Muslims need passes to travel between towns. They are taxed to cross bridges and transport goods. Says one 21-year-old Rohingya now in Bangladesh: "We have no rights. I cannot attend university. I can never go to the cinema for fear of being threatened by [Rakhine] thugs. All I can do at night is

stay at home and hear the grievances of my family."

No one can say for sure how many refugees have so far poured across the border, but conservative estimates put the number at 90,000. Many melt quickly into the Bengali culture. Besides the religious ties, they speak a language similar to Bengali and in some cases have relatives in Bangladesh. As soon as they arrive by boat across the Naaf River in the most southern point of Bangladesh, the Rohingyas either head towards Gesuapalong or catch a bus for Cox's Bazar and Chittagong and disappear.

In November Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman visited Rangoon but failed to achieve progress on repatriating the Rohingyas. Three meetings between Bangladesh and Burmese officials have been held since the December border incident. Bangladesh has sent Burma a list of more than 12,000 refugees to be repatriated, but Rangoon has yet to respond.

Some observers reckon Rangoon could be punishing Dhaka for harbouring Rohingya rebels. The two main Rohingya parties have armed wings. The moderate Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) favours autonomy within a Burmese union; the radical Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) is calling for an outright  *jihad*  or holy war against Rangoon. Both say the Burmese army carried out the December raid to warn Dhaka of future reprisals if it provides rebels with material or logistic backing.

Dhaka has not given any formal

## INDIA

### Neighbourly Pressure



Than Than Nu has a voice familiar to millions of her countrymen. The daughter of former Burmese premier U Nu, she works for All-India Radio (AIR) in New Delhi. From 1988 until the middle of last year AIR's Burmese-language unit's broadcasts, especially its current affairs program, were immensely influential in Burma. The government of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi was openly supportive of Burma's democracy movement and its charismatic leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. As the Rangoon junta strengthened its hold, however, state-controlled AIR was asked to tone down its broadcasts. Than Than Nu, 44, was taken off the air, and the current affairs program scrapped.

The government of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, says Than Than Nu, is less

"vocal" in its support for Burma's dissidents. But New Delhi continues to put discreet but steady pressure on the Rangoon regime. On Feb. 3, President Ramaswamy Venkataraman accepted the credentials of Burma's new ambassador to India, U Wynn Lwin. India was concerned over the "delay and uncertainty in enabling elected representatives of the people to form a popular government" in Burma, Venkataraman told the envoy. He added that New Delhi "is looking forward to the day when the distinguished leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is released."

To Tint Swe, 43, exiled MP of Burma's National League for Democracy, "Indian policy is difficult to make out." He says India shows "moral sympathy" for the pro-democracy movement. But in its states of Manipur and Mizoram bordering Burma, dissidents have had trouble with local authorities. Tint Swe claims hundreds of Burmese have been pushed back from camps in India. Complicating the issue, he says, is the possibility "that the Burmese army is supporting insurgents in India." Still, Burmese dissidents have it better in India than in other Asian countries. Says Than Than Nu: "At least here they are allowed to demonstrate." ■



Sanjoo

### Than Than Nu: Unheard



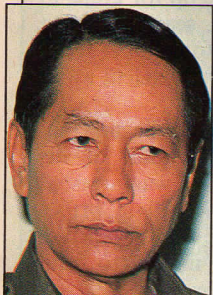
support to Rohingya groups. But Bangladesh's right-wing party, Jamaat-i-Islami, has been known to finance the RSO, as have other groups. It is an open secret that the rebels funnel arms to guerilla bases inside Arakan. Bangladesh soldiers turn a blind eye to their activities. In fact, some say the Bangladeshi border guards mistook the Burmese troops who opened fire for Rohingya rebels. The raid came after a series of successful rebel attacks on minor Burmese border posts.

But the rebels pose little threat to Rangoon. Between them the main two factions can count on a mere 700 armed fighters. Bangladesh officials say Rangoon has poured 25,000 troops into the 270-km border area. Rangoon's army has the toughest, most effective light infantry jungle force now operating in Southeast Asia, say observers. Given the odds, it is not surprising that Dhaka is leery about being dragged into a shooting war.

As a result of its relative inaction, however, the Bangladesh government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has begun to draw fire at home. In Parliament last week the opposition castigated the administration's "subservient foreign policy." Said opposition leader Sheikh Hasina Wazed: "Whatever explanation the government advanced, the fact remained that [its] defence and foreign policies suffered defeat." Opposition members demanded that the government seek international help and raise the issue at the U.N. Obviously stung by the assault, Foreign Minister Rahman said that "Bangladesh remains ready to face any eventuality."

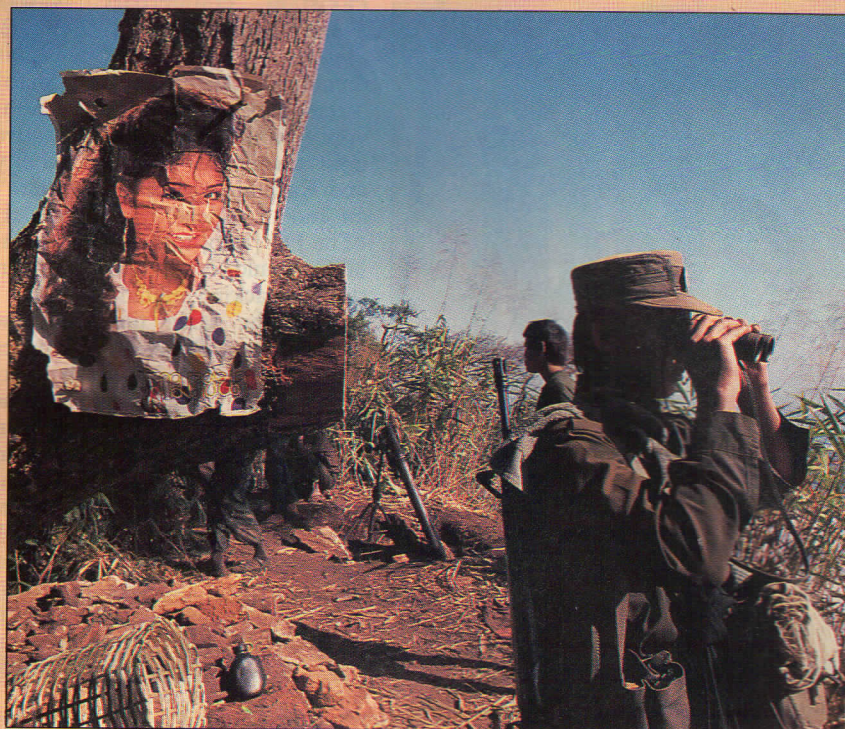
That is small comfort to the Rohingyas. "We are asking for fundamental rights," says Rohingya Muslim Association President Al Haj Manir Ahmed. "But most of the world knows nothing about what is happening to us."

Nor can the Rohingyas expect help from other junta foes. A spokesman for Burma's rebel government says Rohingya demands would "generate problems. Besides, everybody knows the Rakhine lived in Arakan before the Rohingyas." Given the attitudes prevailing in Burma and Bangladesh, the Rohingyas appear to be in for a tough time. Says Ahmed: "If we go back we will be killed."



Dominic Faulder—Bureau Bangkok

#### Saw Maung



Karen position in the mountains: Facing the biggest offensive in 30 years

#### REBELLIONS

### Gunning for Manerplaw



Major-General Khin Nyunt wants Manerplaw by March 27. Rangoon's military intelligence chief told his officers he intends to raise the Burmese flag over the Karen guerilla headquarters in time for Burma's Armed Forces Day celebrations that day. The Karens, who have been fighting Rangoon for self-rule for decades, aren't worried. "It's not the first time they have tried," said Karen guerilla fighter Major Ganemy as he watched celebrations for the 43rd anniversary of Karen Revolution Day. "And it won't be the first time they fail."

This year's dry season offensive on Manerplaw is expected to be the most intensive in 30 years. In early February, Karen intelligence intercepted reports that Burma's army was mobilising another 10,000 ground troops. These would bolster the 5,000 soldiers now trying to wrest control of the Tee Phar Wee Kjo mountain range from Karen and allied guerilla groups. Were

the Burmese to capture it, they could shell Manerplaw and cut off Karen supply routes along the Salween river. Karen sources claim Burmese forces have also rounded up 20,000 civilian porters to carry food and ammunition.

Three guerilla bases have already fallen. Ye Gyaw, a major Karen stronghold 15 km north of Kawmoora, fell Feb. 6. But the advance on Kawmoora hit an obstacle when Rangoon's troops were forced to stop building a bridge across the Moei River. The Thais had warned that any attempt to cross into their territory would be repulsed. The Burmese had planned to outflank the defenders of heavily-fortified Kawmoora, which stands on a spit of land surrounded by the Moei.

Meanwhile, recent weeks have seen more than 3,000 rural Karens fleeing into Thailand. They live in makeshift camps on the Thai bank of the Salween. But here too safety eludes them. Several shells have landed on the Thai side but Thai authorities have forbidden the Karens from moving farther away to safety. Famine is another worry. This is traditionally the time for rice planting, before the monsoon breaks in May. Villagers fear that if they return to their homes they will have nothing to eat for the rest of the year.