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PROFILES

MYANMAR

Burma

HISTORY

From 1942–1945, when British rule was restored, the Japanese occupied Myanmar, also known as Burma. In 1948, the British granted Myanmar independence, allowing the country to establish a policy of neutrality and isolation in international affairs. This policy was strained by Chinese pressure in the northeast. A 1960 boundary treaty between the two countries has eased tensions. A U. N. elected prime minister ruled from 1960 to 1962, until Ne Win staged a coup. Win disbanded the parliament, abandoned the constitution and began nationalizing industry. In 1974, Myanmar became a one-party socialist republic. Win stepped down in 1981, but remained chairman of the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP).

LANDMINES/UXO OVERVIEW

Myanmar, a known producer of AP mines, is currently ruled by a military government known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The 30 ethnic groups fighting against the SPDC are believed to possess the knowledge and supplies to construct landmines and improvised explosive devices, though only 10 groups are



known to be mine users. Two stockpiles, numbering in the thousands, are in the hands of ethnic militias. Of Myanmar's 14 states and divisions, 10 are mine-infested, with concentrations in eastern Myanmar, Karen, Karenni states and the Tenasserim Division, yet no reliable estimate of the number of mines contaminating the country exists. It is believed that the SPDC actively maintains mine fields along the border with Bangladesh, replacing exploded mines with new ones as necessary.

CASUALTIES

Estimates of landmine casualties in 1999 place the number at 1,500. In 1994, the U.S. Department of State estimated that landmines produced 1,500 victims per year, which suggests that the number of landmine victims per year has remained at a high level for the past five years. Statistics from

Karen State, from 1998, report that it produces nearly one civilian landmine amputee per day. Reports also state that 30 percent of landmine victims die prior to any medical care.

DEMINEING

There are no humanitarian demining operations in Myanmar, though some of the ethnic groups have cleared mines. The Myanmar Red Cross is considering developing a landmine awareness program.

REALITY CHECK

In attempts to overthrow the SPDC, armed ethnic parties have waged violent struggles. With no end in sight, the consequences of these conflicts are mounting. Tatmadaw units, active near Myanmar's border with Thailand, have been charged with making local civilians walk through suspected mine fields to trigger the bombs. This gruesome tactic, known as "human mine sweeping," is not limited to the Tatmadaw militia. Reports in late 1999 and early 2000 indicate that human mine sweeping is occurring in Karen State during military assaults on Shan State army locations and during operations against army bases in the Tenasserim Division.

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