

Burma - Background - Welfare
Planning.

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Subcommittee on Welfare
for the Far East

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BACKGROUND FOR WELFARE PLANNING

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BURMA

Reports and Analysis Branch
Welfare Division
UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION
Washington, D. C.
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For Discussion by Committee on Welfare for Far East

Background for Welfare Planning

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I. WELFARE BACKGROUND BEFORE THE WAR

A. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Burma has an area of 600,000 square kilometers, which is about twice the area of the British Isles. It has three principal regions: (1) The central basin is very fertile, and includes both the flat and humid delta of the Irawaddy, where the rainfall is 100 inches a year, and a dry belt around Mandalay, where irrigation is necessary as the rainfall averages only 33 inches a year. (2) On the east is the Shan plateau, which is really an extension of the Yunnan plateau of China. (3) On the west, the Arakan Alps make Burma difficult of access from India.

B. ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The people of Burma are to a large extent agriculturalists, engaged principally in the growing of rice. This is coupled with the growing of ground nuts and millet in the irrigated region.

During the last 100 years the native peoples of Burma have increasingly sold their surplus rice and purchased such other necessities as clothing, earthenware, and metalware. The rice acreage has been extended, and rice has been grown for export as well as for home consumption. On the eve of the War, Burma handled nearly half of the net international export trade in rice. Internal and international trade expanded simultaneously. Railways and waterways were developed with British capital, and mineral resources were exploited, especially in the east of Burma. The ability of the Burman to raise his standard of living has depended on the continuance and expansion of Burma's foreign trade.

Of 18,000,000 acres under cultivation in Burma on the eve of the war, 12,000,000 were under rice, about half of the rice acreage being for export.

There are two cities with more than 100,000 people: Rangoon (400,000) and Mandalay (150,000). There are also ten cities of 10 - 100,000 people, most of them being ports along the seacoast.

C. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

(1) The Native Peoples. Of the 16,800,000 persons in Burma at the time of the last census (1941), about 15,000,000 were of various indigenous races, the most important group among them being the Burmans, who accounted altogether for about two-thirds of the total population. In religion they are Buddhists. Outside every village is a Buddhist monastery, which serves also as a school for boys, sometimes subsidized by the government, but more often in competition with the publicly-provided school. Very few boys stay long in school; but more than half the males of Burma are said to be able to write their names and spell out a notice. Every local community has two leaders - the village head-man and the senior monk.

(2) Immigrant Races. With the development of commercial economy, people of other races have come into Burma, settling especially in the ports, the delta region, along the transportation routes, and in the mining districts. About 1,500,000 persons were of Indian origin but were permanently domiciled in Burma and, in many cases, had been born there; they provided most of the unskilled labor and were also active as retailers, money-lenders, landlords, bankers, insurance agents, wholesale dealers and professional people. There was also a substantial Chinese community. The British community was very small but controlled utilities, transportation and mining. These immigrant groups have formed distinct "communities," adhering to their own religion and language, marrying within their own community, and providing for the welfare of their own members. It is from these groups that more than half the students of the University of Rangoon were drawn.

D. GOVERNMENT

(1) Central. In 1923 dyarchy was introduced. A legislative council was established, composed mainly of elected members. Certain governmental activities, including health education, public works and agriculture, were transferred to ministers selected from elected members of the legislature. In 1937 Burma ceased to be an Indian province and its governor was made directly responsible to the secretary of state at London. At the same time responsible self-government was extended, nearly all matters being transferred to ministers responsible to the legislature. The lower house of the legislature was elected on a communal basis in order to secure representation of the immigrant groups as well as of the Burman majority. Burmese nationalists have tended to be hostile to the British, Indian and Chinese immigrant communities. In accordance with the 1937 constitution, power reverted to the governor during the war emergency when responsible government ceased to function.

(2) Local Government. The rural part of the country is divided into: seven Divisions, each under a civil servant as commissioner; 28 Districts, each under a civil servant as deputy commissioner and an indirectly elected council; 275 Circles, each of which has an elected board; more than 2700 Village Groups; and approximately 10,000 Villages. For educational purposes there are ad hoc district school boards.

E. WELFARE CHARACTERISTICS

Burma resembles other British countries in Asia in the encouragement that its government has given to cooperatives, public dispensaries, primary schools, and school health. It resembles all countries of Southeast Asia in having no compulsory social insurance; and it resembles all except the Philippines in having no government-financed public assistance system. The infant mortality rate remained around 200 per 1000 live births throughout the inter-war years, showing little or no tendency to decline.

(1) Among the Burmans. Much social assistance is effected spontaneously within a local community, and takes the form of unorganized mutual aid, but much is also institutionalized and is supported by regular alms-giving or by

endowment, in accordance with the teaching of the Buddhist religion.

This has been supplemented by government action, working especially through the District Councils and the Circle Boards. These spend considerable sums on schools and on various health services, such as vaccination, hospitals, both public and private, a midwifery service and "mosquito brigades". They also contribute to the maintenance of pauper lunatics, pauper lepers, leper asylums and the school for the blind. They have provident funds and pension funds for their own employees. They grant house-building loans. They are responsible for such public works as water-supply, markets, cattle pounds and ferries.

(2) Among the Immigrant Communities. Local government engages in much the same activities in the urban centres as in the Burman countryside, but with more ample financial resources at its disposal. Spontaneous mutual aid in the cities occurs within the framework of the religious and racial "community" rather than of the local community. Some voluntary agencies and endowments have also been sponsored by members of immigrant groups. These groups proved a fertile field for the government's attempt to encourage the formation of savings and loan cooperatives.

II. WELFARE SERVICES

A. REGISTRATION

In the villages this is the responsibility of the Head Man. It is generally unreliable.

B. INFORMATION, ADVICE AND COUNSELLING

No information.

C. CASH ASSISTANCE

Credit cooperatives have been encouraged by the government.

D. ASSISTANCE OTHER THAN IN CASH

Government hospitals numbered 300 and had 9000 patients in 1935. They also operated out-patient departments and had a total of 4,000,000 patients in 1935. There was considerably less than one bed per thousand of the population. Doctors in 1937 numbered 1500, or one to every 11,000 of the population; of these, 500 were government-employed. Most of the doctors were in the cities; but some were employed by the government in mobile dispensaries. Doctors were helped by a small number of "compounders". Nurses and midwives were trained in three centers (Rangoon, Moulmein and Mawhkan) but were very few in number. There were also very few trained dentists and no facilities for training them.

There was a tuberculosis dispensary at Rangoon.

The Burnese Red Cross Society had chapters in the principal cities.

E. EMERGENCY SHELTER

No information.

F. MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

There were maternal and infant welfare agencies in some of the cities.

G. MIGRANTS

No information.

H. SHELTERED CARE

(1) Mental Hospitals. There were two (Rangoon one, Minku one).

(2) Leprosy. There were four asylums (Rangoon one, Moulmein one, and Mandalay two) and also 16 agricultural colonies. Supplementary projects for lepers were provided by the Burnese branch of the British Empire Leper Relief Association.

(3) Tuberculosis. There was one sanatorium for curable cases at Tawnggyi (Shan states). There was a Burma Tuberculosis and Leprosy Relief Association.

I. OCCUPATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

No information.

NON-INDIGENOUS WELFARE AGENCIES

Numerous missionary agencies have been active in Burma. These include:

The American Baptist Mission which operates hospitals and a number of dispensaries and cares for some lepers.

Methodist Episcopal Church, which operates one of the leper asylums at Mandalay.

Roman Catholic Church which trains most of the nurses for work in government hospitals.

Seventh Day Adventist Church which operates two hospitals and one clinic.

III WARTIME CHANGES AND POSTWAR NEEDS

A. DISRUPTION OF THE ECONOMY

(1) Collapse of International Trade. Exports have practically ceased. The cultivated area has fallen to 12,000,000 acres. Immigrant groups have been economically ruined. The standard of living of the Burman agriculturalists, low before, has been further reduced. There has been no importation of cotton piece-goods or yarn for weaving, or of earthenware or hardware, or of medical supplies, since 1941.

(2) War Damage. Extensive damage was done to trade and private stocks during the British evacuation in 1942 by the destruction of warehouses, bazaars, stores and workshops, mills and refineries. Since then, Burma has suffered continued and widespread air attacks.

(3) Importance of Burma's Economic Collapse to Other Countries. About half of Burma's prewar trade was with India. The cessation of Burma's rice exports was the principal cause of the famine in Bengal in 1943. The rapid rehabilitation of Burma's agriculture is therefore of vital importance to other countries, and especially to India.

B. DISPLACED PERSONS AND THEIR WELFARE

(1) Number and Condition of Evacuees. Nearly one-third of the Indian community in Burma fled to India by sea or through the mountains in 1942. At a special evacuees' census at the end of 1943, some 394,000 evacuees from Burma were enumerated in India. This census was incomplete, and the total number of displaced Burmese Indians and other evacuees in India may amount to nearly 500,000. Of these, about three-quarters are males and one-quarter females. About 5,000 children have become orphans, either during or since the evacuation, and it may be assumed that their families in Burma, if still living, will be too impoverished to care for them. Between the evacuation and the end of 1943, 14,000 children had been born. Unattached women are said to constitute a special problem among the evacuee population. Assistance in various forms - monthly allowances, special allowances, and capital advances - was being given to 40,000 evacuees by Indian provincial and state governments in April 1944.

(2) Repatriation. In planning for repatriation, several principal problems have emerged. These include:

- (a) The right of all persons normally domiciled in Burma to return to the country of their domicile;
- (b) The possibility of organizing return on a quota basis with priority for those who would play the most active part in rehabilitating Burmese commerce;
- (c) The possibility of filtering repatriated persons through dispersal centers, and of housing some of them for several months in semi-permanent camps where welfare services would

probably be useful. It has been estimated that dispersal centers for a peak-load of 50,000 repatriates may be needed,

- (d) Cash assistance to set some of them up in business again;
- (e) Special measures to reintegrate those who are too young, too old, or too infirm to support themselves;
- (f) Special assistance to orphans.

C. OTHER HOMELESS PERSONS

Estimates have been made of the proportion of persons likely to be rendered homeless, both under circumstances of light and under circumstances of heavy damage, and of the proportion of these that would need only temporary accommodation in dispersal centres. Under circumstances of heavy damage, perhaps 10 per cent of the population of medium sized towns, and 5 per cent of that of the two biggest towns would be rendered homeless; under circumstances of light damage, half as many.

ADDENDA

To page 1, line 4 up (I C (1), THE NATIVE PEOPLES) add:

There was a substantial number of Burmese Christians, and, amongst them, the Karens, who had been Christians for about sixty years, mostly belonging to the Baptist Church; the Karen women made excellent nurses and schoolteachers.

To page 2, line 9 (I C (2), IMMIGRANT RACES) add:

A substantial number of Americans were employed as engineers and technical personnel in the various oil fields in Burma. It is believed that practically all of them were evacuated upon the invasion of Burma. Besides, there were a certain number of American missionaries throughout Burma, and in the Judson College in Rangoon the staff had a number of American professors and lecturers.

To page 4, line 5 (II B, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND COUNSELLING) add:

(1) Prisoner's Aid Society: This functioned in Rangoon under the guidance and with the help of one of the Honorable Judges of the High Court; it concerned itself with the welfare and rehabilitation of prisoners after their release, especially those who belonged to the educated classes; it also helped in probation work.

(2) Probation: There was a Juvenile Court in the city of Rangoon, with a special magistrate in charge; specially trained probation officers, both men and women, were attached to this Court.

(3) Vigilance Society: This voluntary agency was "non-communal" in character, but had the assistance of the Lord Bishop of Rangoon, leading officials, and High Court Judges; its voluntary workers rescued unfortunate women and girls and helped them to rehabilitate themselves.

To page 4, line 11 (II D, ASSISTANCE OTHER THAN IN CASH) add:

In Rangoon, the Ramkrishna Mission Hospital also rendered useful service; this was a purely voluntary organization and had both an in-patient and out-patient department; it had about 500 beds and on an average about 2000 out-patients were treated each day. There was another dispensary called the Muslim Free Dispensary, but it too was "non-communal" and gave assistance to almost 500 persons daily.

To page 4, line 11 up (II E, EMERGENCY SHELTER) add:

The monasteries in villages and towns throughout Burma have always been used as places where people could find accommodation and food in times of emergency, in fact this was availed of during the invasion of Burma.

Addenda continuation

To page 4, line 9 up (II F, MOTHERS AND CHILDREN) add:

The orphanages belonging to various "communities" living in Burma were run on voluntary lines and to a certain extent received Government support. The majority of these orphanages were located in the big cities and towns. In villages, monasteries also accommodated many orphans.

Furthermore, orphans and the children of poor parents were given free food and clothing in monastic schools and these were scattered throughout the country.

To page 5, line 5 (II I, OCCUPATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES) add:

Scout organizations were popular and a large number of boys and girls joined them.

Some form of occupational work and activity was carried on in monasteries throughout Burma, where recreational facilities were provided.

To page 5, line 3 up (NON-INDIGENOUS WELFARE AGENCIES) substitute:

The Roman Catholic Church had an institute in Rangoon called the Father De La Salle's Institute, which gave vocational training to orphan boys and children of indigent parents, and also trained priests who were attached to Roman Catholic Churches in the country.

To page 5, at end, add:

The Ramkrishna Mission and some other agencies received much support in India as well as in Burma.