

Letters to the editor

Contributing to ruin

Open Myanmar only after shutting down brutality and oppression

Editor, The Times:

The Myanmar The Times thinks should be engaged deserves to be a pariah nation ("Engagement, not isolation in SE Asia" editorial, April 4).

I'd love to see cross-cultural exchanges take place on a massive scale between the U.S. and Myanmar, but I can't imagine many of us willing to go into the majority of the countryside, where land mines litter the landscape and military units benefit from opium and methamphetamine production, while terrorizing, bullying, raping and enslaving the more than 30 percent of the population that isn't ethnic Burmese. A million ethnic minority villagers have been driven from their lands to become internally displaced people.

I'd love to visit a peaceful Myanmar, so close to Thailand, where I served in the Peace Corps, but not until the junta in power ceases its brutality, offers autonomy to ethnic minority groups and truly frees (opposition leader) Aung San Suu Kyi. Myanmar talks of open markets and democracy, but its actions mock its words.

I proudly sold my Unocal stock when it became clear that company contributed significantly to horrors faced by disenfranchised ethnic minorities. I am not proud of The Times' editorial!

- Mike MacLeod, Shoreline

Engage in enforcement

The Times faults a boycott Of Myanmar as being ineffective. I agree. To be effective, a boycott must be as total as possible. In the past 15 years, only (boycotts of) Libya and South Africa have been effective.

The South Africa boycott, despite your expressed misgivings, was effective because *all* outside parties participated. For the Myanmar boycott to be effective, the gold buyers and oil prospectors need to be blocked. That will not happen until either the current government kills Aung San Suu Kyi, or slaughters a large number of its own people and there is worldwide revulsion. In the case of South Africa, apartheid was sufficient to cause worldwide response.

Until the boycott is really enforced, it will not work. Allowing exceptions only creates the same conditions as occurred with Iraq.

- Bill Mallow, Seattle

Failing very well

The Times fails to note our congressional delegation unanimously supported the Burma Freedom and Democracy Act in June of 2003, which passed 418-2 in the House, and 97-1 in the Senate.

Now, some eight months after the sanctions were put into force, and despite the fact that the Burmese regime within weeks announced a new promise to democratize, the sanctions are said to be "failing"? Fortunately, virtually no one shares your view.

Democrats and Republicans, House, Senate and White House and most importantly, Burma's elected democrats themselves, all agree that the sanctions are working and that now is the worst time to dismantle them unilaterally.

In a shameful effort to disenfranchise the Burmese electorate, you write "Much has changed since the 1990 election. Myanmar has declared a market economy." Well, yes, the regime has made such a declaration, but this only serves to illustrate the chasm between the regime's promises and its actions. A quick review of various "indexes of economic freedom" put Burma/Myanmar dead last (according to the Cato Institute, as well as the Fraser Institute) or among the worst countries in the world (Hong Kong Centre for Economic Research, World Audit and others). That's a reason to "engage" the Burmese dictators and abandon democracy in Burma?

- *Larry Dohrs, Seattle*

Business, as usual

The Times completely ignores the reality of life inside Burma. The steady crushing hand of the military regime continues to oppress the ethnic peoples, the elected leadership of Burma, and anyone who opposes the rule of the regime.

This call for engagement is not a call that serves the interest of the people of Burma, but (is) a call for business interests in the United States to serve themselves.

Real freedom and democracy will only come to Burma when the military government loses its financial support from the outside world and surrenders to the will of the people.

- *Laurie Dawson, Seabeck*

Substitute China

I was glad to see The Times editorial on the ineffectiveness of sanctions. In Burma (Myanmar), we were told by a man who is a member of Aung San Suu Kyi's party that U.S. sanctions had the effect of making Burma entirely dependent on China. It was plain to see that the big, new hotels and businesses had Chinese characters on them.

An American presence in the country could only serve to shine a spotlight on some of the human-rights abuses, as well as giving the people of the country a

much-desired window on the outside world.

- Barbara Rieman, Seattle