

Burmese Stay Neutral, Oust Foreign Merchants

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Reuters

RANGOON, Burma, March 2—Burmese strongman Gen. Ne Win today celebrated the completion of his first five years of power still firmly in control but facing serious economic problems.

The fifth anniversary of the dawn coup that brought the General and his Revolutionary Council to power was proclaimed a national holiday for Burma's 25 million people.

The first five years of Ne Win's military regime saw a steep decline in exports of rice, the staple of Burma's economy, but was also marked by two important achievements, according to observers here.

First, by skillfully treading the tightrope of international affairs, the 55-year-old President acquired for Burma a reputation of scrupulous neutrality.

Secondly, he rid Burma of foreign economic domination by Indian and Chinese merchants and British and other Western companies. This restoration of trade, business and agriculture to Burmese hands has worsened the country's current economic problems.

"Officers who run the new Burma are dedicated and devoted men facing a superhuman task," one European diplomat here said. "But the system simply doesn't seem to work."

The country's resources are so rich, however that while tightening their belts, the Burmese do not face the threat of starvation.

The government recently adopted a more pragmatic approach to the economy, allowing private trade again in over 50 commodities, with the exception of rice.

A relaxation of internal polit-

ical tension was also apparent with the release of former Premier U Nu—now a Buddhist monk—in October and of 200 other political prisoners last month. But it is unofficially estimated there are still more than 2000 political prisoners left.

There has been no abatement of the near civil war between the central government and tribal groups that aspire to autonomy in the last five years, however.

Malaysia Fines Six For Anti-U.S. Rally

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, March 2 (UPI)—Six persons including the chairman of a branch of the Peking-oriented Lisor Party were ordered to pay fines of \$33 or spend six months in jail for demonstrating against the visit of President Johnson last October.

They were found guilty of "taking part in an illegal assembly" at Ipoh, 100 miles north of here, Oct. 30 during the President's visit.