

# The Mon Forum

Issue No. 7/99

July 31, 1999

**The Publication of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (BURMA)**

## Contents

## News

### News:

- (1) Arbitrary execution, forced relocation, forced labour and refugee flux in Mergui district area,
- (2) Unusual tax collection in Mon State,
- (3) New military battalion deployment and land confiscation in Ye Township,

### Report:

- (1) The plights of rice cultivation farmers: The harassment against farmers in Karen State and Tenasserim Division in Taking 1998-1999 yearly paddy tax

## Some Acronyms in This Issue

- SPDC- State Peace and Development Council,  
SLORC- State Law and Order Restoration Council,  
IB- Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),  
LIB- Light Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),  
KNU- Karen National Union,  
DKBA- Democratic Karen Buddhist Army,  
MDUF- Mergui-Tavoy United Front,

### Arbitrary Execution, Forced Relocation, Forced Labour and Refugee Flux In Mergui District Area

(June, 1999)

Due to Burmese Army's systematic persecution against the local ethnic Mon, Karen and Tavoyan villagers in the last dry season, some hundreds of them from Bokeyyin Township rural area, Mergui District of Tenasserim Division, have gradually fled to Thailand border area since April until June 1999. In the dry season, the Burmese Army's local battalions, LIB No. 432, LIB No. 355 and LIB No.589 have been active in Bokeyyin Township area and had launched ceaseless offensives against KNU's 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

Following the offensives, some local villagers were also accused as rebel-supporters and arbitrarily executed by the Burmese (or SPDC) troops. Since 1998 dry season, LIB No. 432 tried to relocate the villagers from Pawa village, which was accused as KNU base, but the villagers refused to move and stay in new designated village. In dry season 1999, that battalion has tried again and ordered the villagers to move from the villages as quickly as possible and if they met some villagers in the village, those villagers must be killed. In the third week of March, when the troops from LIB No. 432 led by Lt. Col. Htein Win went into the village, the soldiers shot to over ten villagers and they died on the spot. They also looted the villagers' belongings and then burnt down



**The population displacement in Mergui District:** *The local villagers are often displaced whenever the offensives were launched by the Burmese Army*

the village into ashes. The soldiers also burnt down monastery and school in the village.

Before this mass execution, the troops also killed some villagers from the same village with accusation they were the rebel-supporters. In May 1998, LIB No. 432 soldiers killed a Karen villager, Saw Ba Tun (57 years old, male) with accusation he was a KNU supporter. Similarly, in December 1998, the soldiers from the same battalion killed another 3 men, Saw Ba, Saw Tee Toe and Saw Dat Seik with accusation of rebel-supporters. At the same month, when the troops went into village, the soldiers also shot and killed a woman, Ma Hla Aye (41 year old), because she fled soon he met the Burmese soldiers. Because of the often-arbitrary execution to the villagers, many villagers escaped their village and displaced in the forest.

Similar to Pawa village, other villagers from Kamawpyin were also ordered to move from their village and resettle in the Burmese Army designated village. After the villagers refused to move from their village, the Burmese Army has similarly punished the villagers for their refusal and alleged them as KNU supporters.

Besides the villagers who were ordered to vacate and move from their villages, other villagers in Bokepyin Township has been constantly used as unpaid labourers in road building and as civilian frontline porters to carry ammunition and other food supplies for army. The soldiers from LIB No. 355 always conscripted the villagers from the villages such as Manoryone, Kyauk-thaung, Saikun and others, to build Tanasserim (Taninthayi) - Manoryone and Tanasserim-Moetaung motor roads. Since 1997 dry season, many hundreds of local villagers were forced to build these roads.

Likewise, the villagers have been constantly conscripted to be civilian porters to carry soldiers' food supplies to the border bases such as Chaungchi and Moetaung, in the west border point of Prachuab Kirichan Province, Thailand. Sometimes, the porters were used for several months to carry ammunitions and foods along with military battalions.

In some case, the soldiers also confiscated foods from some villages and let the villagers depended on them for foods. They gave little amount of food for villagers on a daily basis and sometimes they also sold the confiscated foods to villagers. The villagers were not allowed to go outside of the villages. Or, the soldiers created minefields outside of the villages to prevent the rebels from taking base in villages. These conditions have made difficulties for villagers to do their own jobs in farms or plantations. Then, the villagers also faced food-shortage problems.

Because of armed conflict and accompanying cruel treatments by Burmese Army, many thousands of local villagers have internally displaced and very little number of them escaped to border areas. The border was far from their home villages and some battalions of the Burmese Army already took bases at border and the situation poses too dangerous for escapees to reach a safe place. On the other hand, Thailand also have not allowed the new refugees in border camps who escaped from human rights abuses.

## Unusual Tax Collection in Mon State for Student Sports and Army Fund

(June, 1999)

Following the instruction of Southeast Region Military Command (also known as "*Southeast Command*") to seek fund for the coming celebration of 1999 December Student Sports in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, the local military battalions in Mon State have collected unusual tax from the local Mon population. In June, 1999, the local SPDC military battalions, police and township authorities had staged concerts, traditional boxing and women football competitions, and forced the local villagers and town incidents to buy tickets for stages whether they wanted to watch or not. These stages were held in nearly all townships of Mon State such as Mudon, Kyaikmayaw, Thanbyuzayat and Ye. From staging and selling tickets, the battalions and authorities could make many million Kyats in raising funds for student sports and for their battalions' funds to feed the soldiers, while the civilians were facing various difficulties to get daily income.

According to government source, Southeast Command requires about 80 millions Kyat to celebrate this Student Sports in Moulmein city and the entire fund must be collected only in Mon State. The government in Rangoon would provide only 20-25% of the required fund and the Southeast Command must seek the remaining fund to spend in the celebration.

On June 5 until 6, IB No. 210 battalion led by Lt. Col. Tin Hla staged a traditional boxing in Mudon town sport stadium. Before the stage, the commander had called a meeting with local village headmen and town ward leaders and instructed them to sell 100 tickets in each village and town ward. For some big villages, he gave about 300-500 tickets to sell at price 500 Kyat per pieces. He gave about 10,000 pieces of tickets and ordered the headmen to not return these tickets and sell them all. Besides selling the tickets, the commanders also instructed the headmen to collect tax 100 Kyat or 200 Kyat or 300 Kyat from the villagers who did not receive the tickets. From the staging of this traditional boxing, IB No. 210 could make about 5 million Kyat fund and just paid some small amount to boxers. Most villagers who bought the tickets did not come and watch the boxing because their villages were too far from town and they are quiet busy to do their jobs.

Again in Mudon township, another military battalion, No. 2 of Mechanical Engineering Battalion, led by Lt. Col. Ye Din also staged a dancing concerts that was hired from Rangoon and sold the tickets by forcing the village headmen and town ward leaders. The battalion gave 10,000 tickets to villages and town ward in the township and let village or town ward leaders sell them at price 300 Kyat per piece. From this staging of dancing concerts, the battalion could make estimated 3 million Kyat.

Similarly, IB No. 208 that bases in Kyaikmayaw Township also staged a traditional boxing in township sport stadium and sold about 10,000 tickets for two nights long boxing on June 13 and 14. From this stage, IB No. 208 battalion could make about 4 million Kyat fund to support Stu-

dent Sports.

Likewise, Ye Township based SPDC military battalion, IB No. 61 also staged a singing concert with well-known singers from Rangoon in Township Hall in first week of May and sold the tickets to town and village civilians at price 1,000 Kyat per piece. Although the villagers who stayed far from the town could not come and watch the concert, the headmen have to pay for the costs of the tickets given by battalion. From this staging of the concert, the battalion received about 3 millions Kyat fund. Similarly, in second week of June, EB No. 61 held a women football competition and sold the tickets to every house in Ye town and the villages near the town. They sold to every house and the price of one ticket was 100 Kyat. They sold about 10,000 tickets and received about 1 million Kyat.

The battalions in Thanbyuzayat Township, IB No. 62 and IB No. 31 also staged a traditional boxing for three nights and sought fund on June 19 until June 21. Even the boxing was not so nice, the battalion could make some good fund from this stage.

Besides necessary supporting fund for Student Sports in Moulmein, each battalions also required some fund for their own battalions. Because the Southeast Command instructed the local battalions to support themselves since the government have faced economic crisis in July 1998 and less budget to feed many thousands of soldiers in the whole command. Each battalion required to spend about 200,000 Kyat to 500,000 Kyat per month to feed its soldiers and do other purposes. This was another reason why the battalions always collect unusual tax from civilians in Mon State. After paying various types of tax to army, the local Mon villagers have become more poorer and poorer.

## **New Military Battalion Deployment and Land Confiscation in Ye Township**

(June, 1999)

In June, 1999, when the Burmese Army planned to deploy a new military battalion, LIB No. 299, in southern part of Ye township area, east side of Ye-Tavoy motor road, many hundreds acres of fruit and rubber plantation lands were confiscated without compensation. Because of this land confiscation, some villagers from Hangan and Koe-mile village lost their lands and regular income from these plantations.

The deployment of new battalion was planned since the beginning of March and the military engineers surveyed the land and selected the possible land to create battalion compound area and chose the places to build the barracks. Besides the compound area, the army also required some large land outside of compound to put outside camp security facilities to prevent from the attack of the rebels.

After land confiscation, the local villagers from Hangan and Koe-mile villages were also conscripted to be forced labourers in building the military camps for LIB No. 299 in

April. Later in May and June, the other villagers from the whole Ye southern area were conscripted to clear the ground, build fences, dig trenches and bunkers, and build the barracks.

According to Kalort villager who was conscripted to work in the building the military camps explained:

*When we arrived to the new battalion site, the soldiers told us to cut down the trees and clear the ground. We had to cut many young betel-nut trees and brought them to one place. The soldiers also sold the trees' woods. Then we were instructed to clear the ground. We had to dig the roots of the betel-nut trees and filled some holes with earth and balance the ground level to get a same level compound. Then, one sergeant showed us to dig the trenches. While we are digging trenches, the army officers still collecting planks and woods to build the military barracks. I was conscripted for five days in the construction,"*

Besides the conscription of forced labour, the former battalions in Ye Township, IB No. 61 and LIB No. 343 also requested cash from the villagers to buy planks and woods for new battalion. To support the new battalion with necessary fund to complete the deployment, IB No. 61 also took responsibility in collecting cash from every village in southern part of Ye town and villages on Ye river bank. IB No. 61 instructed the headmen to provide fund for new battalion, with rates 3,000 Kyat, 4,000 Kyat, 5,000 Kyat, 10,000 Kyat, 15,000 Kyat and 20,000 Kyat respectively. The difference of collecting fund depended on the size of the villages and population number in villages.

On the other hand, to support for the deployment of this new battalion, IB No. 61 troops also created various types of tax collection from the local civilians. Whenever the troops launched the military operations, they arrested more numbers of civilian porters than required and asked a ransom for the release of these porters. Additionally, the troops also put checkpoints on the main motor road and river and collected tax from civilians, traders and farmers for their traveling and goods brought together with them. For example, IB No. 61 also put a checkpoint on the Ye river bank in Kyaung-ywa village and stopped every boat that travels in river and collected tax from their goods. The checkpoint officer Warrant Officer Aung Khin has collected tax 2,000 Kyat for one ton of logs, 200 Kyat for one sack of paddy and 50 Kyat for one sack of betel nut and 500 Kyat for a big bamboo raft.

Similarly, IB No. 61 also put a checkpoint in the mouth of Ye river and collected tax or took fishes from the fishermen. It put a checkpoint in Zeetaw village and all fishing boats cross close to this point and so the checkpoint could easily stop the boats that went into the sea for fishing and ask for tax. Depending on the size of the boats, the fishermen had to pay tax, 500 Kyat, 1,000 Kyat and 2,000 Kyat respectively to the soldiers. If the boats could not pay tax, they also took gasoline from those boats or took fishes when the boat returned from the sea. By these ways, IB No. 61 has collected fund to support for the establishment of the new battalion and keep for their own battalion funds.

## Report Part II: The Plights of Rice Cultivation Farmers

### The Harassment against Mon Farmers in Karen State and Tenasserim Division in Taking 1998-1999 Yearly Paddy Tax

#### I. The Mon People in Karen State and Tenasserim Division

In Burma, the Mon people are not only staying in Mon State, but they are separating in Pegu Division, Karen State and Tenasserim, and these people are also under the oppression of the government like other ethnic peoples such as Karen, Tavoyan, Merguian, Pa-oh and Burman. In Pegu division, where the old Mon kingdom were established, because of the century-long assimilation policy adopted by the Burman-dominated successive governments, only little number of Mon people could speak Mon. However, the Mon people in Karen State and Tenasserim Division could speak Mon and the community itself has also maintained their literature and culture roles for several years.

There are many Mon people in Kya-Inn-Seiky, Kawkareik and Pa-an township of Karen State. Although the estimation of the population is not available, the Mon people living in Karen State are the native villagers. Similarly, there are many thousands of Mon people inhabiting in Tenasserim Division. The majority is in Yebyu township area, which is directly connecting with southern pan of Mon State.

In this report, as a second part of the plight of Mon farmer, we would like to focus only the situation of Mon farmers in Karen State and Tenasserim Division and how their suffering under the government instructed gathering yearly paddy tax. From inquiry how the Mon farmers are suffering, we can conclude that the other ethnic farmers suffer like the Mons.

#### II. Forced Taking of Yearly Paddy Tax in Karen State

##### a. The Situation of Farmers in Kawkarein Township

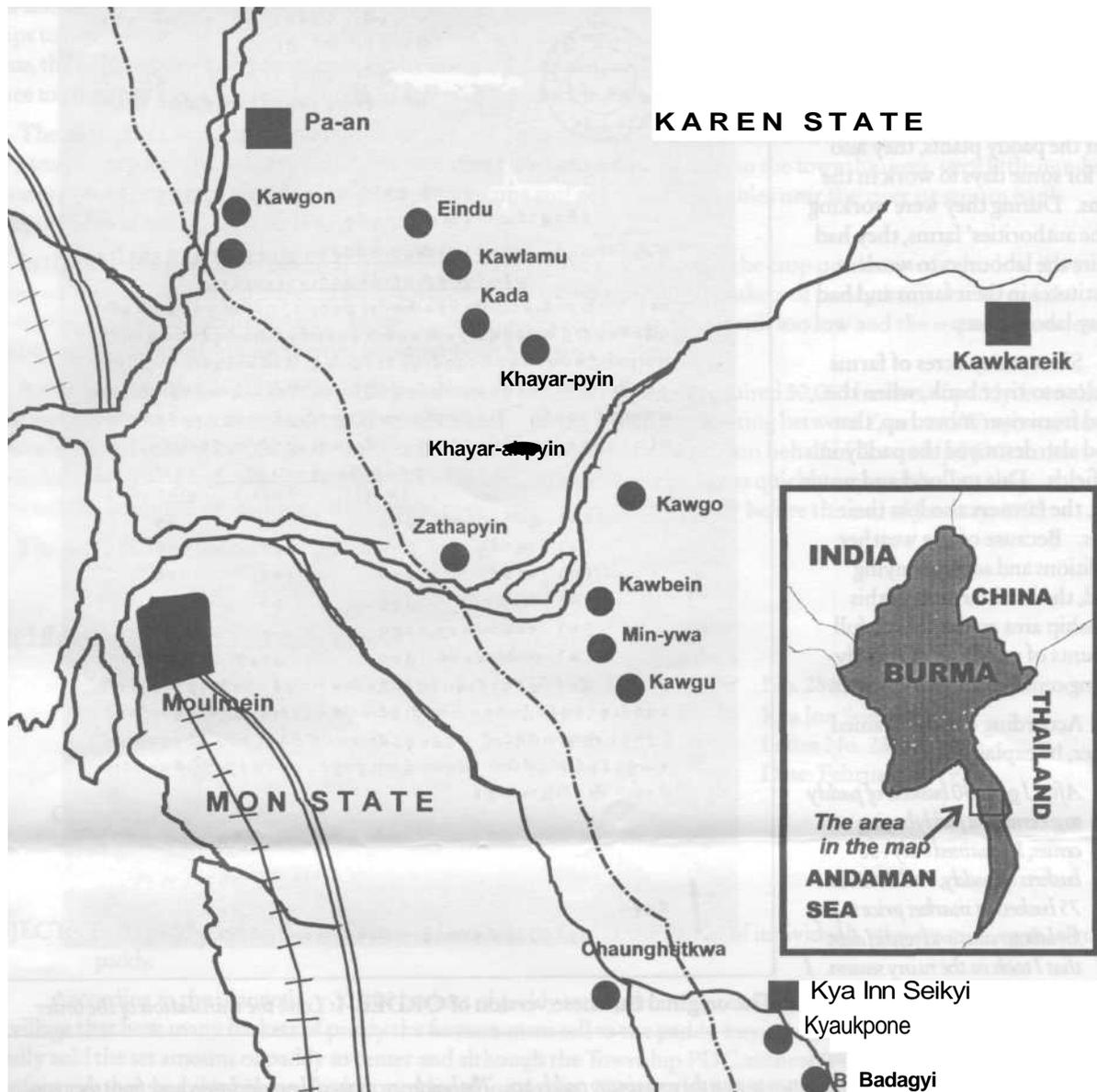
In Karen State and Tenasserim Division, the Mon farmers were also constantly forced to sell their paddy to the government paddy buying centers at low price set by government authorities. In every township, Township PDC appointed their close men to be officials for centers and let those officials and the local military battalions and militia force the farmers to sell their paddy. During the forcible buying of the paddy, some farmers were arrested and detained for some days until they gave promise to sell their paddy. Such incidents have been happened in various parts of Karen State and Tenasserim Division.

In the last week of January, 1999, because of their failure to sell or give the full amount of paddy tax to government set paddy buying center, six Mon farmers from Kawkareik township of Karen State were arrested and detained. On January 28, 1999, the police chief of the township went to Kawkyaik village of the township and arrested them. They were brought to Kawkareik town and detained in police station for five days as a punishment for their failure to give paddy tax.

In Kawkareik township area, the farmers were instructed to give the paddy tax to the government with 8 baskets per acre. Under the unsafe situation in the area due to the on-going armed conflict between the Burmese Army and KNU, the farmers



were ordered to send their paddy A rice-growing farm in Kawkareik township area, Karen State; *Some farmers to reach the defined paddy-also abandoned their farms after they were unable to give to government*



The location map of Mon villages in Karen State

buying center. The paddy-buying officials also set the deadline for farmers.

The arrested five farmers were too poor and they have very low quality lands among many farmers in the village. Thus, they could not send their paddy on the set time. They just sent some amounts of paddy, but all. They were in the list that describes the names of the farmers who were uncompleted doing paddy-selling duties. The six farmers were: (1) Nai Ha Nee, (2) Nai Khare, (3) Nai Paroe, (4) Nai Win, (5) Nai Yin, and (6) Nai Kyaw. During they were in detention, the township authorities forced them to tell their families to complete selling the set amount of paddy. Through the village headmen, the authorities also forced their families to give the paddy as quickly as possible. Hence, the soldiers likely kidnapped the farmers to get the paddy tax.

In Kawkareik township area, the local farmers were forced to work in government officials owned farmlands at the beginning of rainy and the whole rainy season and they had less time to work in their own farms. In June 1998, when the rain started falling, many local farmers in Kawkareik township who stayed along Gaing river were forced to work in police or military owned rice growing farms. They were instructed to work plowing the fields, bringing the water in the fields, planting the paddy plants, clearing the grasses and etc. On the other hand, when the crops riped in November and December, 1998, the local farmers were again forced to reap the crops.

While the farmers were forced to work for government authorities and army's farms, they were quite busy to complete their own paddy growing processes. While they were plowing the lands, they were instructed on a rotation

basis to plow the authorities' lands. So the farmers and their oxen were forced to work in those farms at least for three days. Later, when the authorities forced them to plant the paddy plants, they also lost for some days to work in the farms. During they were working in the authorities' farms, they had to hire the labourers to work as substitutes in their farms and had to pay labour costs.

Since many acres of farms are close to river bank, when the flood from river moved up, that flood also destroyed the paddy in the fields. Due to flood and water level, the farmers also lost their crops. Because of the weather conditions and accompanying flood, the local farmers in this township area could not sell full amounts of paddy to the paddy-buying centers set by authorities.

According to one detained farmer, he explained,

*After I gave 30 baskets of paddy to government paddy buying center, I remained only 100 baskets of paddy, I sold it about 75 baskets at market price to pay for labour costs and repaid debt that I took in the rainy season. I left only 25 baskets of paddy for my own family. When I was detained in the town police station, my wife was forced by village headmen to give the remaining paddy tax. The headmen showed the order letter came from the town. Thus, my wife sold one cow and bought 30 baskets paddy and gave it to paddy buying center. The traders who bought our cow would sell it to Thailand for meat. After my wife gave the full amount of paddy tax, the police released me.*

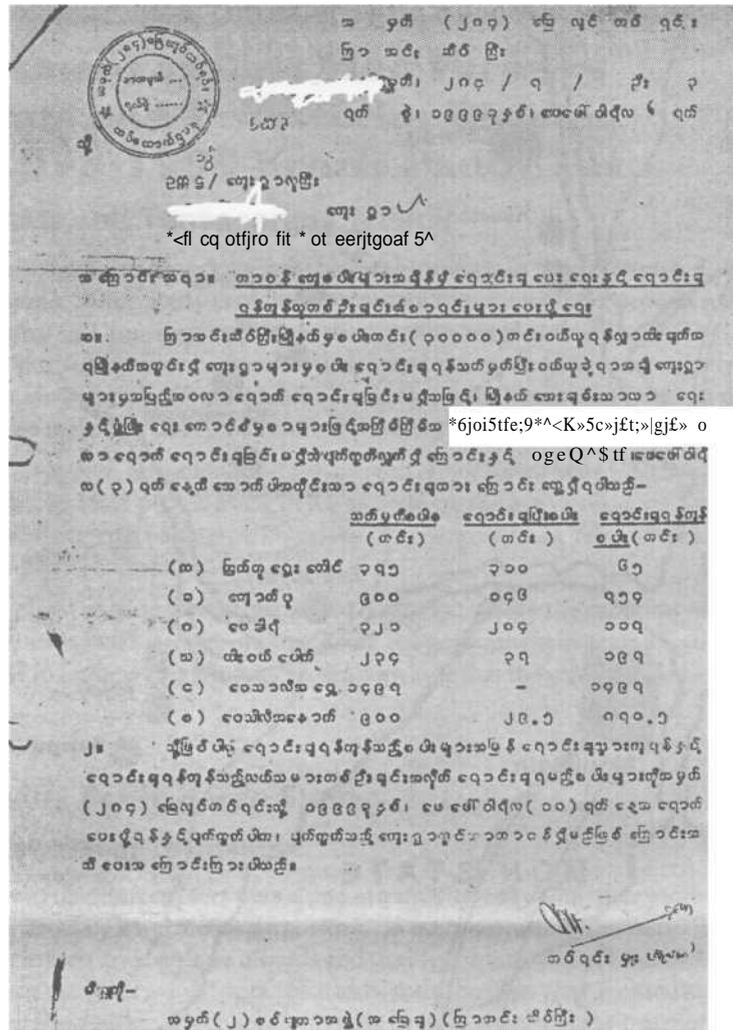
*During we were in detention, we were always forced by police to write the letters to our remaining families in the village to tell them to give the paddy tax. Since I had only 25 baskets of paddy to feed my family, I disagreed to give them all. So they forced our wives again. The women were afraid of longer detention and gave the tax. Like me, other farmers had to sell their own belongings and gave full amount of paddy.*

Under this forcible buying of paddy, the majority villagers become poorer and poorer. Besides giving paddy tax, the villagers in this area also have to pay various kind of tax to government officials and army.

**b. The Situation of Farmers in Kya Inn Seikyi Township**

During the last dry season (from December, 1998 to June, 1999), the local farmers in Kya Inn Seikyi township area were requested twice to give the paddy tax. The SPDC township authorities by cooperating with local military battalions have set two paddy-buying periods and forced the farmers to give the full amount of paddy. When the farmers started growing paddy in June, 1998, the township authorities instructed the local farmers to cultivate two crops as both rainy season crop and dry season crop.

In Kya Inn Seikyi township area, even many acres of rice growing farmlands are residing along small streams and the river, the poor farmers could not make dry season cultivation because they have no own facilities or assistance from government. Under the command of Southeast Region Military Command, the two main regular SPDC'S battalions in Kya Inn Seikyi township, LIB No. 284 and IB No. 32 had made dry season crop cultivation. These battalions received a



The original Burmese version of ORDER-1: Look the translation of the order

lot of assistance from the government in cultivating dry season crop. They received high-powered engines with water pumps to bring water from streams and rivers to the rice-fields, and the township also provided fertilizers for their lands. Hence, the battalions received crops from both seasons. Normally, when the battalions do farming, they also have chance to conscript forced labour from the villagers in the township area.

Therefore, the township authorities have the same opinions to the local farmers and force them to do cultivation of dry season crop like the military battalions have done. Among many farmers in the township area, very little number of farmers could grow other kinds of crops, such as sesame and peanut or vegetables near the river or stream bank during dry season and all are unable to grow rice.

In this township area, the land soil is not so good enough to grow rice and the crop production is also low if we compared with farms in Mon State. The farmers could gain crop only 20-50 baskets of paddy from one acre of the land depending on the quality of land. However, this rate of crop production is still too low and the requested amount of paddy tax by the township authorities has never been lessened.

According to orders issued by Township and battalions, the authorities required 30,000 baskets of paddy from the whole township area, while they instructed about 30 Mon villages, which are situating between Zami and Winyaw rivers, in township to give about 20,000 baskets of paddy as tax. On February 6 to 10, on behalf of Township PDC authorities, the local military battalions also warned the local farmers to sell their paddy as quickly as possible after they instructed the headmen to encourage the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy before the end of January, 1999.

The detail facts of the order was as below:

Order-1 (Look the origin of the order in Burmese version)

No. 284 Light Infantry Battalion  
Kya Inn Seiki Town  
Letter No. 284/7/U3  
Date: February 6, 1999

To: Chairman/ Village Headmen  
\_\_\_\_\_ Village  
Natchaungkanna Village Tract

SUBJECT: To do paddy-selling duty on time and sending the lists of the names of individuals who are missing to sell the paddy.

1. According to the plan to buy 30,000 baskets of paddy totally from Kya Inn Seiki Township, we had adopted to each village that how many baskets of paddy the farmers must sell to the paddy buying center. But some villages had not fully sold the set amount of paddy to center and although the Township PDC authorities repeatedly wrote letters and informed, they had absented to do their paddy-selling duties. We met the below villages had sold only according to the following list until on February 3, 1999.

	<u>The set amount of paddy</u> (baskets)	<u>The amount of sold paddy</u> (basket)	<u>Remaining paddy to be sold</u> (basket)
a. Kyethu-ywe-taung	375	310	65
b. Kyaukpone	900	146	754
c. Badagi	310	204	117
d. Dawae-bauk	234	37	197
e. Waethalee (east)	1,497		1,497
f. Waethalee (west)	900	29.5	870.5

2. Therefore, the farmers who failed to sell the paddy must do selling as quickly as possible and we also requested to give the list of each individual farmer names who missed selling paddy and sent that list to LIB No. 284's Headquarters without failing. We would like to warn you that if you failed, it is only your responsibility.

Signed/-  
(on behalf of) Battalion Commander

Copies to:

- (1) No. 2 Military Strategic Command (Kya Inn Seiki Town)
- (2) Township Peace and Development Council (Kya Inn Seiki Town)
- (2) Office copy

Although the majority farmers had not grown the dry season crop like the military battalions in Kya Inn Seiki township area, they are additionally requested to give the paddy tax for dry season crop. On May 5, 1999, Township PDC authorities also ordered the local 30 Mon villages between Zami and Winyaw Rivers to give 5,000 baskets of paddy tax. Depending on the numbers of the farmers in each village, the requested amount of paddy tax also varied. For example, the authorities requested about 75 baskets of paddy tax from a Mon village, Waekalun, which has about 50 households and about 40 families were farmers. Thus, in calculation, every rice-growing farmer family had to give about 2 baskets of paddy tax again.

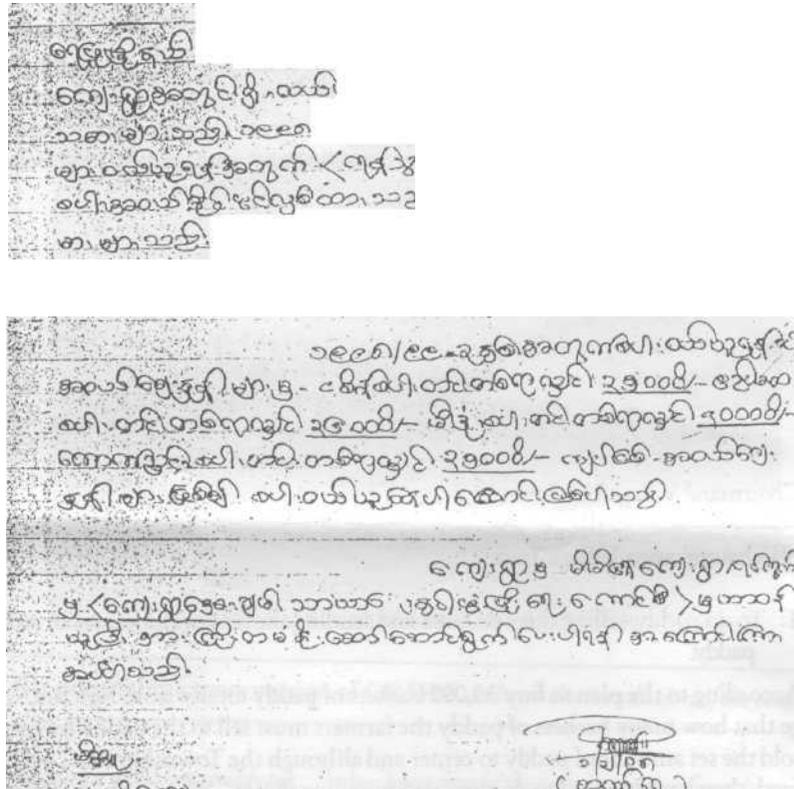
According to reliable source, before the rainy season started in May, the Township run out of rice to provide the military battalions that regularly launched offensives against KNU and so the authorities required more

foods. The Township PDC has to feed the government servants, police and military and these government servants have received every month food rations from Township supply warehouse. The paddy tax that received from January to March could provide only for government servants like education workers, health workers for the whole year and so the township required more foods to provide for soldiers. Thus, before the order was issued, the Township authorities also called a meeting with all village headmen and instructed them to give that dry season paddy tax. Although some village headmen complained that they have no paddy to give because of low crop production and no one grow dry season crop. But the authorities instructed that if they had no paddy to give, they must pay with cash instead of paddy.

The headmen who returned from the meeting tried to get the set amount of paddy, but they could not. As the time was too close to the rainy season while the farmers were preparing for a new cultivation, they had sold nearly the entire extra paddy besides the foods for their families and no farmers had paddy to give tax. And the farmers had to pay cash 1,500 Kyat per household that price was equal to 2 baskets of paddy tax at market price. When the authorities bought paddy from farmers they paid only 350 Kyat per basket. But when they actually requested the cash from farmers for paddy tax, they had asked at market price, 750 Kyat per basket.

**C. The Situation of the Farmers in Pa-an Township Area**

The Mon and Karen farmers in Pa-an township area, have been suffered the same from the forcible buying of paddy like farmers in Kawkareik and Kya Inn Seiki township areas. In Pa-an township area alone, there are about 20



The original Burmese version of ORDER-2: Look the translation of the order

small and big Mon villages and the villages such as Zathapyin, Thanhlae, Kyone-sauk, Khayar-atwin, Khayar-ahpyin, Kawlamu, Kawyetkha, Khayae, Phaekada, Kawgon and Htone-ai are big villages. Every village has about 300 to 1000 households. Many of them are rice-growing farmers. Besides Mon villages, there are over 30 Karen villages in the hilly area.

In this township, the government has requested about 80,000 baskets of paddy tax during the 1998/1999 paddy-buying period and the Mon villages were instructed that to give about 50,000 baskets. Although the majority villagers are farmers, their land soil was not so good like the lands in Mon State. But the farmers were also asked to give 10 baskets of paddy per acre as tax.

Since the government has firm control in the area and good communication in the area, the soldiers could move from one village to another easily and could directly force the farmers to do and complete their paddy-selling duty. During January and February, the township authorities had called serial meetings with village headmen and instructed them to give to farmers to quickly sell the paddy tax.

Like farmers in other township areas, the Mon farmers in this area were also conscripted as forced labourers to work in military owned rice farms. In May 1998, before the rainy season started, the military, police and government departments in Pa-an township confiscated about 200 acres of civilians' rice farmlands near Thanhlae and Kyonesauk village without compensation from Mon farmers. They took these lands for their own and forced the nearest farmers to do farming in their farms. The farmers had to work three days on a rotation basis in the farms and had to work about two rounds in every month in June, July and August of last year. Due to this conscription of forced labour, the local farmers also had less time to work in their own farms.

On the other hand, besides the regular paddy tax selling to the center, the farmers in the area also have to give rice and other food supplies to government troops and surrendered DKBA troops that are active in the area. DKBA's Battalion No. 3 and No.4 have been active in the area and they go into every Mon village and ask for food every month. Each month, one Mon family had to give 5 kilograms polished rice and 200 Kyat to those DKBA troops as a tax, which is equal to about 1 basket of paddy. The tax is illegal and but allowed by the local Burmese Army battalions to keep DKBA troops as their backers in fighting the KNU troops. Therefore, the local Mon farmers and non-farmers in Pa-an Township area have to pay tax both SPDC and DKBA.

### **III. The Similar Harassment against Mon Farmers in Tenasserim Division**

#### **a. The Situation of Farmers in Yebyu township**

Yebyu Township is situating along the seacoast of Tenasserim Division and most of its rural areas, except the small town, are recognized as "Black Area" or "Free Fire Zone" by the government and the Burmese Army. Since from many years, the local battalions of Burmese Army have been generally treated the local inhabitants, Mon, Karen and Tavoyan ethnic people, as rebel-supporters and so they have been constantly suffered from the oppression of the Burmese Army.

In taking the paddy tax from this area, the local battalions completely have taken responsibility and forced the farmers through village headmen to get the tax. The authorities or the army created paddy-buying center only in some area where they have control and could order the farmers to give the paddy. Normally, since the area is recognized as "Black Area", the local troops have chance to loot paddy in every village in the township area.

In official way of buying paddy from farmers, the paddy-buying centers always set the prices for every different type of paddy at low price and actually paid to farmers after they received the paddy sent by farmers. For example, the set price for different types of paddy in Yebyu township in this paddy-buying season were: 350 Kyat per basket for Ngasein paddy; 360 Kyat per basket for Ae-mahta paddy; 400 Kyat per basket for Mee-done paddy; and 350 Kyat for Kauknyin (*sticky rice*) paddy. However, the farmers had been under pressure to give that paddy tax as quickly as possible. The buying of paddy began in the first week of December, 1998, and the local paddy buying officials ordered to every village tract to sell their paddy to centers with the set days or within one month.

The official order issued by the local paddy-buying center in Kwethonyima village tract is as below:

Order-2 (*Look the origin copy of the order*)

To

Chairman/ Secretary  
Village Peace and Development Council

\_\_\_\_\_Village

Date: December 1, 1998

SUBJECT: To sell paddy for 1998/1999 year.

As the subject mentioned above, the (government's) Trading and Agriculture Department already set the paddy-buying center in Kwethonyima village to buy the paddy from the rice growing farmers of \_\_\_\_\_ village, Kwethonyima village tract, Kanbawk area of Yebyu township. Thus, the \_\_\_\_\_village's farmers must do their paddy-selling duty to the center.

In the paddy-buying period for 1998/1999 year, we set the prices for different types of paddy are: 35,000 Kyat for 100 baskets of Ngasein paddy; 36,000 Kyat for 100 baskets of Ae-mahta paddy; 40,000 Kyat for 100 baskets of Mee-done paddy; and 35,000 Kyat for 100 baskets of Sticky paddy and buy paddy in the set paddy-buying centers.

Therefore, we inform the headmen of \_\_\_\_\_village/ward PDC must take responsibility to encourage the farmers to sell their paddy as quickly as possible.

Signed/- Nyan Shwe  
Chief of the Center  
Kwethonyima Paddy-buying Center,  
Myanmar Agricultural Products Trade,  
Yebyu Township

Besides the official buying of the paddy or taking as tax from the farmers during the paddy-buying period, the local troops also looted the paddy in villages after this short period. As the government and the army could not control the whole area, Township PDC has no detail registration concerning the large of the paddy growing lands. And so when the battalion commanders instructed the village headmen to give the paddy tax, they normally calculated on the population number in the villages including non-farmers and estimated the paddy tax. Sometime, although the village headmen complained about the less number of farmers in village and villagers were unable to give the set amount of paddy tax, they were always shouted by commanders.

Whenever the farmers in the area could not give the paddy, the battalions went into villages and looted the paddy as they like. Some evidences were:

*On January 3, 1999, a military column from LIB No. 401 led by Maj. Thaw Min, went into Chabone village and looted about 250 baskets of paddy from many farmers. They went into every house and instructed the farmers to give 10 or 15 or 20 baskets of paddy respectively and to send the set amount of paddy to the middle of the village. After the farmers gave the paddy, they also ordered the village headmen to send all these paddy to Kwethonyima village. Thus, the headmen arranged oxen-carts and boats to send the paddy. Although the commander said he would buy paddy at price 300 Kyat per basket, he did not give any payment to the farmers.*

*According to instruction from the battalion, the commander needed totally 550 baskets of paddy from the village and ordered the village headmen to send another 300 baskets of paddy. The village has only about 100 households and about 60% of the villagers are fishermen. Thus, it was too hard for village headmen to gain another 300 baskets of paddy from the only 40% of the villagers in village. Therefore, he reported to the commander about the actual situation of his village. After the commander received his report, he replies to collect cash from both farmers and non-farmer households in the village to buy paddy. The commander instructed to collect 1, 500 Kyat per house from the whole village and send that cash to him instead of paddy.*

Although one SPDC battalion already took the paddy tax from one village, when another battalion came, the soldiers ask that tax again. The suffering of the farmers doubled in some Mon villages. Although Chabone villagers already gave the complete paddy tax to LIB No. 401 and brought them to Kwethonyima village, another battalion LIB No. 273 also came and asked for the tax again.

*On February 6, 1999, two military columns of LIB No. 273 led by Lt Col. Kyaw Soe went into Chabone village and forced the local villagers to give another 120 baskets of paddy. The soldiers went all farmers houses and took the paddy from their stores and kept them in the middle of the village. Then, the oxen-carts were forced to carry all paddy to the LIB No. 273 headquarters. Although the commander promised he would pay 400 Kyat per basket, the farmers did not receive any cash from that commander.*

The looting of paddy in Yebyu township area have been happened from the beginning of January until March. Whenever the commander dissatisfied on the management of the local village headmen, the soldiers also punished or mis-treated the village leaders.

As an instance,

*On January 21, 1999, when LIB No 401 led by Maj. Thaw Min went into Kwethonyima village to gather paddy tax from the farmers, the village headmen could not organize the farmers very well. Although the commander had informed the headmen he would*

*come on that day and ordered to gather all remaining paddy tax in one place, the headmen failed to manage. Only little amount of paddy reached to the set place. So the commander ordered to arrest the village secretary, "Nai Tin Shwe". The soldiers also beat him for his failure of management and asked him from whose they could get paddy. After severe torturing, he said where they could get paddy. And so the battalion looted about 270 baskets of paddy from the village and then went to another village.*

Like other areas in Karen State and Mon State, the soldiers from all battalions in Tenasserim were instructed by higher authorities to grow rice at the beginning of rainy season. So the soldiers also did farming in some farmlands and forced the local villagers to work in their farms. However, since the soldiers have not known how to grow rice, they receive very low production of crops. Thus, they could not support themselves and have asked paddy tax from local farmers by cooperating with Township PDC. Whenever Township authorities could not manage to give the requested paddy to battalions, the soldiers themselves went into village and looted the paddy.

The similar problem for those battalions was they were requested to report to the higher authorities about their crop production. No battalion dared to report the higher authorities about the true. They reported to higher officers, especially Commander or Second-commander of Coastal Region Military Command, with better information that they receive the possible crops from their battalions' farms. As they knew, the higher officers could check the crop production anytime, thus every battalion needed to collect the possible amount of paddy in their battalion headquarters. Therefore, the battalions have urgently looted the farmers' paddy from every village, as they knew the villagers have no opportunity to complain about their looting to higher authorities.

## **b. Movement Restriction against Farmers in Yebyu Township Area**

After reaching NMSP-SLORC ceasefire agreement in 1995, NMSP's Mon troops withdrew from Yebyu township area and another one Mon armed group, which was acted as militia group, has fought against the Burmese Army. And the regular activities of KNU and MDUF have occurred in the area and also pose danger to the Burmese Army and government's important infrastructure projects, such as railway, motor road, bridges and foreign investment. In order to halt the activities of rebels and prevent supports from the civilians to the rebels, the Burmese Army's local battalions have launched "four cuts campaigns". This campaign has made more pains to the civilians than the rebels.

Due to instruction from this campaign, the local battalions did not allow the rice-growing farmers to work in their farms freely and their movement has been restricted. Normally, the villagers are working in their main works especially in fruit-plantation, rice farms and fishing as their tradition. The battalions have restricted all activities of the villagers, whenever they heard the activities of the rebel troops. Or, if they met a farmer in rice fields or a worker in a fruit plantation, they tortured him and accused him as rebel-supporter. Some villagers were also killed because of this accusation.

Later on, when the farmers went to farms, they had to inform the village headmen or the local military commander if the troops were in village, to ask permission to go their work places. The headmen or the commanders must sign and issue permission letters for those farmers and guaranteed that he was an ordinary village. If soldiers from other battalion arrested that farmer, he could show the signed permission. But the headmen or commanders have not allowed any farmer to sleep at night in their farm huts. Because they worried the rebel soldiers could get contact from farmers. Depending on the safety of an area, some farmers were also allowed to sleep one night or more.

Whenever the farmers asked for permission paper from headmen or commanders, they have to pay at least 20-50 Kyat per day to stay and work in their farms. When they were allowed to sleep more than one night, they have to pay at least 100-300 Kyat. The headmen who signed the permission paper normally complained that they took that document tax from farmers was to pay the bills for foods and other supplies taken by soldiers whenever troops arrived into villages. Some corrupt headmen also took a lot of tax not only for payment for the service to soldiers, but made their own profit. Some sympathized village headmen did not take for themselves and just took as less as possible to cover for the payment for soldiers' bills.

Due to this conditions happened since ceasefire, the farmers in Yebyu Township area has less time to work in the work places in rice-farms or fruit plantation. Besides the movement restriction, the local villagers have been constantly conscripted to contribute unpaid labour in many government or military's infrastructure projects. This was another reason why the local farmers had less time to work in their work places. As a result of less time working in farms, the rice-growing farmers could receive less crop because the farmers could not manage to grow paddy in all spaces of their farms. Or, sometimes, the farmers had no enough time to clear all grasses among the paddy plants and so the plants were so weak and could not produce good quality crops.

Whether the farmers received more or less crops during the harvest season, the government authorities or the military battalions have requested full amount of paddy set by Township. Besides the request for the yearly paddy tax, the soldiers also looted the paddy from the farmers when they went into villages for their own foods to feed the soldiers in the battalions. Thus, among many Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) who fled from their homes, some abandoned

their villages with reason that they have no more foods at homes to eat.

#### IV. Conclusion

In comparing with townships in Mon State, the Mon farmers in Karen State and Tenasserim Division have been suffered more because of the unsafe situation in these areas. Since these areas are in rural and the civilians have no knowledge for a defiance to reduce their suffering, the battalions in the area have good chance to treat them as they liked.

After the army battalions confiscated many acres of land in the rural area, they generally have forced the local farmers to do farming in their farms. But in Mon State, the soldiers from most battalions have not dared to use the local villagers to do farming such as plowing the fields, growing the plants and reaping the crop. If they used the farmers, many farmers would complain about their abuses to Township authorities. Since most parts of Mon State are under "White Area", the military has no influence like in Karen State and Tenasserim Division. Township PDC authorities have more power than the army in Mon State and so the authorities themselves abuses the power in Mon State.

In Karen State and Tenasserim Division, since most parts of the area are recognized as "Black Area", the army has full authorities to conscript forced labour, loot villagers' belongings or crops, kidnap the civilians for a ransom. The soldiers have more power than Township PDC authorities in these areas. Besides giving the yearly paddy tax, the farmers in Karen State and Tenasserim Division also suffered from the constant conscription of forced labour and porters, asking various types of tax, restricting the villagers' movements and other violations. Following these abuses, the farmers have less time to work in their own works and some abandoned their farms and changed their jobs. Some moved into Thailand and sought jobs illegally. However, many of them still tolerate and continue working in their farms with reasons to not lose the lands and if they really have rice, they may not become food-shortage victims.



**The poster:** The announcement to farmers by the paddy-buying center to do paddy-selling duties

**HURFOM**  
**P.O. Box 11,**  
**Ratchburana,**  
**Bangkok 10140**  
**THAILAND**  
**E-mail: mforum@np.a-net.net.th**

Printed Matter

**Air Mail**

