

The Mon Forum

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Human Rights Foundation of Monland

Contents

News:

- (1) A Curfew by SPDC and Restriction against the civilians due to fear of 9-9-99 uprising,
- (2) Flood in Kawkareik and Pa-an Townships area of Karen State,

Report:

Land confiscation around Mon, Karen States and Tenasserim Division, and use of forced labour after SPDC set order for self-support in army.

Some Acronyms in This Issue

- SPDC- State Peace and Development Council,
- SLORC- State Law and Order Restoration Council (the previous name of the current military regime)
- BSPP- Burmese Socialist Programme Party
- MI- Military Intelligence (of SPDC),
- IB - infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
- LIB- Light Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
- NLD- National League for Democracy,
- NMSP- New Mon State Party.

News

A Curfew by SPDC in Mon State and Restriction against the Civilians Due to Fear of 9-9-99

(August, 1999)

Starting from the second week of August, 1999, Mon State PDC authorities in many township declared the curfew orders in the respective township area and have made restriction against the movement of civilians, careful watch on the high schools' students and restriction to the teachers to halt them from participating in an uprising. Due to this order and restriction, some innocent civilians were arrested while many town residents faced difficulties to make income and effected to survival of the poor families. As the government has cared for an uprising on September 9, 1999, so the orders those restricting the daily activities of the civilians were declared before hand.

In August, the township authorities also arrested some 1988 pro-democracy activists who were well known and detained them until the situation became normal. Some activists at the moment have not participated in any activities, but they were still detained for some months. Nearly all NLD active members in Mon State were arrested and kept in



A harbour in Mon State: The authorities also made a restriction against the civilians due to fear of 9-9-99 uprising _____

detention.

According to curfew orders, the authorities allow the civilians to be on the roads until 8:00 p.m. in evening and if they met someone later this time, he/she must be arrested. It made many difficulties for town residents who have the daily works as vendors, tri-cycle drivers, car drivers, shop keepers to seek the possible income. Following to this order, 3 young men, 1 day labourer and 2 tri-cycles drivers were also arrested because they returned their homes late. Similarly, two farmers who returned homes to Kalorttort village late at night were also arrested and detained.

In the normal situation, the town residents opened their shops until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. and selling the goods at evening time and it was a good habit for making income. Similarly, the tri-cycle drivers could make possible income at evening time by bringing the people from one place to another. Similarly, the farmers who have farms far from towns or villages also returned to homes at late evening time. After the curfew order, the civilians have to care about their activities and also lost some income from their works. According to order, the authorities also restricted the gathering of five peoples in streets or in coffee shops or other public places and so authorities also closed down the movie and other show theatres.

The authorities also instructed the civilians in the towns or villages that to inform about the guesses' names, civilian cards, and the backgrounds, if they received guesses who visited to them. If one house received a guess and failed to inform to the nearest section/ ward leaders, the house that received guess and other nearest four houses must be punished for this failure. By this way, the authorities have instructed the civilians to check each other.

Besides the movement restriction against the civilians, the authorities also called a meeting with high and middle level schools head masters, head mistresses and teachers and instructed them to keep their students to not join any uprising in coming 9-9-99. The authorities have put more attentions to the high schools in town. Pretending that the teachers were asked to attend training, the authorities also closed some schools. Or, Moulmein based MI No. 5 Intelligence Battalion also ordered their township MI unit to send one MI man in each school, except the primary schools, and report the situation development of every school to the battalion regularly. Thus, in August, the MI men with civilian clothes by holding walking-talkie radios, went to every school and stayed

at head master or head mistress rooms and reported the students situation to the township unit base regularly. When the schools closed about 3:00 p.m. in the evening, the teachers were not allowed to return homes and the intelligence men instructed them to search every rooms to find the illegal materials that could encourage the uprising.

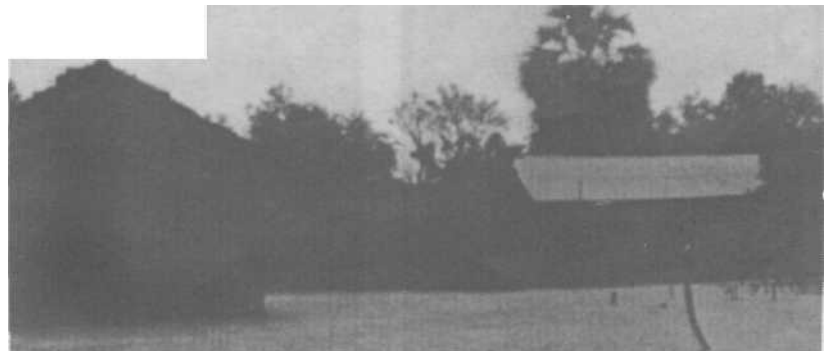
To organize the teachers to not support the uprising like 1988, the authorities also gave two months rice ration supplies to them, which the government never acted before. So the teachers received two months food rations for August and September. Then the teachers were also asked to sign in the papers that promising they would not encourage or participate in any uprising and to help the authorities to give information regularly concerning to any uprising.

Additionally, the police, army, MI No. 5 unit and the respective Township authorities also opened check-points in every entrance of the towns. These check-points stopped every car and search the illegal materials from the passengers. They believe many illegal materials including the statements, newsletters, documents that encouraging the uprising of 9-9-99 may pass through Mon State. Because of this serious search from the civilians in many check-points, they also stopped traveling from one place to another in August.

Flood in Kawkareik, Pa-an Townships area of Karen State, and the Related Food Problems

(August, 1999)

In August, from the first week to the third week, there have been big flood and the accompanying storm in southern part of Burma, these natural disasters also destroyed many houses in Mon and Karen States and made thousands of civilians to be displaced. After many houses have been under flood, many thousands of Mon



Many houses in a Mon village of Kawkareik township are underflood



The flood and the higher level of water also destroyed the paddy plants in Kawkareik township area

villagers are in helpless situation. They were also displaced and have to move from their houses by carrying only few belongings and little amount of foods.

Since the first week of August, the rain has started falling for many days. The rain was heavy and the storm was also so strong. Estimated about 200 houses in Ye town were wholly or partly destroyed by storm and some town residents also moved to hilly places in the town. Some have stayed with their relatives and some in the monasteries. Similarly, many houses in Chaungzon township of Balu-kyun island, west of Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, were also destroyed and some of them have been sunk by water. Therefore, the villagers also had to flee from their homes. The villagers have been displaced for several days and some of their foods were thrown away by water and wet and destroyed by water. In some places, the water suddenly rose up quickly and the villagers could not get time for preparation to collect their belongings and foods with them.

The most effected villagers by the higher flood and storm are the villagers who are residing along Gaing river in Pa-an and Kawkareik townships of Karen State. Gaing river flows from Karen State to Mon State and then into Andaman sea and it is belonged to both Kawkareik township of Karen State and Moulmein township of Mon State. Because of the rain, the water level in the river became suddenly higher and water flew into the villages and rice-farms which are situating along the river. Because of this flood, about 13 Mon villages along this Gaing river have been effected and thousands of Mon villagers are displaced and facing food-shortage problem.

Due to flood and storm, about 13 Mon villages along Gaing river, such as, (1) Kanni, (2) Thayet-taw, (3) Karit, (4) Kawkataw, (5) Tamortkaren, (6) Kawgo, (7) Kawthar, (8) Ahtwin-kayar, (9) Ahpyin-Kayar, (10) Thanhlae, (11) Kawpauk and (12) Kawbein and (13)

Kawpalaing villages. From these 13 Mon villages, about 2112 households or families of 11,846 villagers are homeless. Because of the sudden rise of water level, the villagers could not have enough time to collect their foods together with them or could take only few amount of it. The paddy warehouse which are mostly built under the houses also wet and they also lost their paddy.

In these 13 villages, there are about 11,000

households or families of about 60,000 Mon population and so nearly 20% of the whole population have suffered from the flood. All of them moved to more higher place where the water level could not reach. Some villagers have moved to monasteries while some moved to hilly places. Depending on the hilly places, some villagers have to go about 2 miles far place where the hilly places are situating. Following with flood, some middle and primary schools are partly sunk under the water and so these schools were also closed for several weeks until the end of August. The children also have to go with their parents to escape the flood.

Before the rain started, under the instruction of Karen State PDC, the local authorities also take many baskets of paddy from farmers as yearly paddy tax. They bought the paddy from farmers at low price and forced the farmers to sell their paddy to the authorities' set paddy buying center without conditions. So the food supplies, especially paddy or rice, in this area is too limited and after a lot of foods were destroyed or thrown away by flood, some villagers in these 13 villages also face food shortage problems.

Because of the flood, the paddy plants in 3,000 acres of farmlands in Kawkareik and Pa-an Township were also destroyed due to high flood. Therefore, in coming harvest season, the crop production in this area must be reduced. If the government continuously takes yearly paddy tax like every year, the farmers and the local people could probably face food-shortage problems.

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Conscription of Forced Labour in the Repair of Ye-Tavoy Railway Road

(August, 1999)

Because of heavy rain and flood in Yebyu Township of Tenasserim Division during the period from the last week of July to second week of August, some

parts of railway and bridges in near Malawe-taung area were destroyed. To repair the railway and the bridges in this area, the villagers from Paukpingwin were conscripted as forced labourers to work in rebuilding the railway embankments and repairing the bridges.

From Paukpingwin village alone, there are about 60 households and the military from LIB No. 404 and No. 406 ordered the headmen to send one person from each house to the construction site. When all villagers arrived to the construction sites, the soldiers shared them with work-duties. They are instructed to go to the work-site from their village early morning by taking their own foods and tools. Until the end of August, the villagers have been forced to work in this construction and have no time to work their own works.

In the construction site, the villagers have to dig the earth, carry it to embankment and fill in the poles along the embankment. Due to flood, some pans of embankment were cut by water flood and the villagers are required to fill the earth in the long holes. Then, they have to find and collect the iron rails, which were thrown away by flood. Then, they have to carry the iron rails to the embankment and the railway engineers will fit them again.

According to a villager from Paukpingwin village, he said, since the government built Ye-Tavoy railway in 1993, the villagers had gradually fled from the village to escape from the conscription of forced labour. In 1993, his village had about 300 households and now it has only 60 households. These families would not

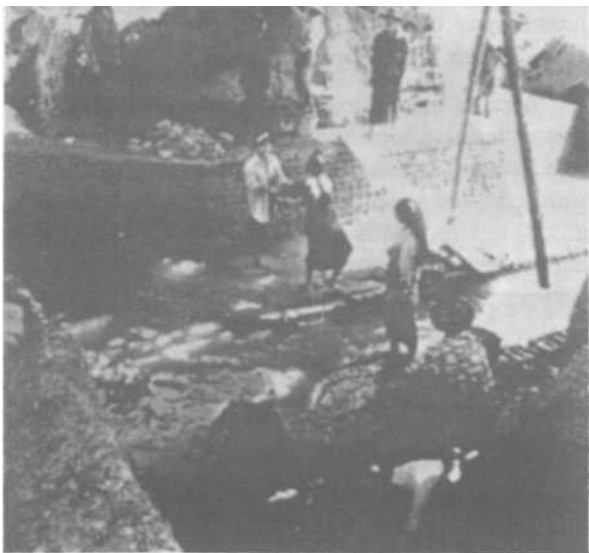
like to abandon their lands and belongings and so have remained in the village. Since the village has less households and less population, the local military battalions has used all villagers at the same time to work in the construction.

Since 1993, when the government built this Ye-Tavoy railway, not only the villagers from Paukpingwin, hundreds of thousands of local inhabitants Mon, Karen and Tavoyan ethnic peoples from many townships of Tenasserim Division and Mon State had been constantly forced until the whole building process was completed in 1998. On March 26, 1998, to honour the "Armed Forced Day", the government also celebrated the opening ceremony of this railway. In the opening ceremony speech, SPDC'S General Secretary No. 2 Lt. General Tin Oo also praised his soldiers for their labour contribution in the railway construction. Actually, nearly 90% of the construction was done by forced labour and about 200 peoples died in the construction due to land collapse and sickness. The villagers were also mistreated such as kicking, beating by soldiers in the construction. The villagers were absolutely not paid for their labour and they also have to pay to the military battalions, which took responsibility for construction, whenever they could not go to the construction site.

About one and half months after the opening ceremony, because of the flood, some parts of embankment in Malawe-taung and Gagaw-taung areas were destroyed and about 2,000-4,000 villagers were forced for nearly six months to repair the collapsed bridges and re-build the embankments. (*The detail report on "the Conscription of Forced Labour on the Repair of Ye-Tavoy Railway Road" was described in "The Mon Forum", Issue No. 1/99, January 31, 1999.*)

In March, 1999, the trains could use this road again. Since the government railway authorities and soldiers had not used the possible machines, to press on the embankment, it is not strong enough to protect natural disasters such as flood and rain. They just had used the villagers and whenever the embankment and the bridges are destroyed like now, the villagers are blamed. And they also used the villagers again to re-build the road.

According our information we had received and research, the Paukpingwin villagers have been suffered more than other villagers, in building this railway construction if we compared with other villages. Because this village is close to railway, whenever something happens in the railway, the villagers from this village are firstly conscripted to contribute unpaid labour and continuously. As a result of constant conscription of forced labour from this village, about 80% of the total villagers had already fled from the village since 1993 to escape from the conscription of forced labour and many of them went to the refugee resettlement camps established in NMSP control area and displaced.



Forced labourers in building a bridge in Ye-Tavoy railway road

Report

Land Confiscation around Mon, Karen States and Tenasserim Division, and Use of Forced Labour after the SPDC Set Order for Self-support in Army

I. the Reason of Land Confiscation

Since the beginning of 1997, after SPDC ordered their most military command around the country to support themselves for food supplies, the land confiscation by the local military battalions, especially paddy growing lands have been occurred in many parts of Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim Division. The SPDC township authorities or the local military battalions have directly participated in confiscating these lands and they planned to grow paddy, but has conscripted the local villagers to do farming for the whole years.

According to government's "the 1954 Agricultural Land Nationalization Act", all lands in the whole country are possessed by the State (or the government) and the current farmers are granted with "the right of exemption" to cultivate crops according to the laws. The profit of this act was many rice growing farmers received the pieces of lands from foreign and national landlords during U Nu led parliamentary democratic government in 1954. If a farmer had continuously cultivated in a piece of land and he was qualified according to Article 6 of this act, he had complete rights to work on in that land. Without opposed or broke the points in Article 6 of the act, the government could not reposses the lands from the farmers. (*Look some articles in "the 1954 Agricultural Land Nationalization Act"*).

Even during BSPP era, the government has not repossessed the lands from farmers who did not oppose the laws and but it has registered the lands and issued legal access on agricultural land to farmers. During the rule of SLORC and SPDC, actually, the local authorities or the army have more power and have not cared about the laws. They have confiscated the lands from the local farmers unconditionally and without referencing the previous act and laws. There has been no guarantee for farmers to cultivate in the pieces of the lands and these lands could be confiscated by soldiers or authorities anytime, even they has continuously cultivated in the lands since since 4 January, 1948. The farmers have no right to complain for such confiscation or to apply to regain the lands again by referencing to the act and laws.

In 1997, due to difficulties to get full amount of yearly paddy tax from the farmers and the decreased production of paddy in the whole country, the government received less and less crops tax from the local farmers. On the other hand, they also believe that the local paddy traders have tricked in paddy trading and created the price of paddy to be higher. Then, because of less food supplies in their stores, the government could not give the food rations to their local military battalions in some military command including Southeast Region Military Command (also known as Southeast Command) bases in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State. Southeast Command commands and administrates many battalions in the whole Mon State and Karen



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The local villagers are always forced to contribute unpaid labour in development projects under the name of border area development program

State.

After the government or the local military commands could not manage to provide full amount of supplies to the local military battalions, they also ordered them to support themselves with food rations. The government will give them only monthly salary. Following this order, the local military battalions have a good chance to confiscate lands from the farmers without compensation costs. As the authorities or soldiers have no experience to do farming, they also conscripted the local farmers from the nearest communities to contribute free labour in their farms. Therefore, the local farmers in Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim have suffered from land loss, jobless and conscription of forced labour.

Besides paddy-growing farmlands, some battalions and township authorities also confiscated fruit and rubber plantations, salt farms and pasture lands. The confiscation of land was not only for growing paddy and also for other purposes, such as extending new section of a town, building some infrastructure projects, new troops deployment, and establishments under the name of border development program.

II. Land Confiscation in Mon State and Conscription of Forced Labour

A. Land Confiscation in Kyaikmayaw Township

In October, 1998, Kyaikmayaw Township PDC authorities confiscated about 100 acres of paddy growing farmlands near Khayonegu village and about 7 Mon farmers from that village lost their lands, and the lands were shared among the township PDC departments, police and army. In October, the crops were not ripe to be reaped and so the authorities took the lands with crops. These 100 acres of lands are close to the river and the authorities could grow two times crops (both rainy season and dry season) within one year. Due to this confiscation, the 7 farmer families lost their lands and jobless, and so some villagers also fled into Thailand to seek jobs.

Similarly, some individual military officers, by showing the reason that taking the lands for their battalions, they confiscated lands for their own, without compensation to farmers. The soldiers in the column or the battalion under those commanders never received any foods from that confiscated land but no one could complain about the corrupt of the commanders.

For examples,

At the beginning of 1997, Lt. Col. Moe Myint Aye, an officer from Mon State border area development program department, confiscated about 50 acres of farmlands from 7 Mon famers from Letpan village in Kyaikmayaw township. His reason was that under the policy of border development program, his department required some paddy growing lands and will display to the local farmers how to grow 2 seasons crops in the lands. This corrupt officer also used the government fund and grows the paddy. He almost used the Letpan villagers to contribute unpaid labour in farming.

Similarly, an Intelligence officer, Lt. Col. Mya Kyin Sein, from No. 5 Intelligence Battalion, based in Moulmein, also confiscated about 100 acres of land from 7 Mon farmers of Kawswe village of Kyaikmayaw township in June, 1998. The 7 Mon farmers who lost the lands were, Nai Hawar, Nai Kwat, Nai Hadoe, Nai Paw, Nai Zot, Nai Klaik and Nai Taing. These farmers have not received any compensated costs from the officers and they also asked him to give back their lands.

This officer also confiscated the land for his profit only, not for his troops. When the farmers asked to give back their farmlands, he refused but hired the lands to them to continue farming by paying him or give him 4 baskets of paddy per acre as land hiring costs. So those farmers also have to give 12 baskets per acre as yearly paddy tax. The intelligence officers did not help them with facilities or others but they just have to give him every year and the lands are also totally owned by him.

Under the name of giving alms or donation to the government formed State Buddhist Monks Association, the local authorities also confiscated lands from farmers. To give alms to 7 senior monks in Mon State, who are the leaders of Mon State Buddhist Monks Association, the government authorities also confiscated about 365 acres of farmlands in Kyaikmayaw township. Although they said they would give these lands for monks, actually they owned the lands and have not given the monks but provided them with some food supplies regularly. The authorities and army took most of crops produced from the lands.

B. Land Confiscation in Ye Township

The land confiscation of paddy-growing farmlands or other lands such as salt produced lands, rubber plantation are also happened in other township areas. With plan to extend the area of Ye town, some lands were also confiscated.

In June, 1998, after each battalion received the order that each battalion must support themselves or to find their own farmlands, Ye township based military battalions, IB No. 61, LIB No. 343 and IB No. 106, also confiscated about 150 acres of farmlands and the army did not pay any compensated costs to the land owners. These confiscated lands are situating about 20 kilometers in the northern part of Ye town between the two Mon villages, Tamortkanin and Taungbon. After land confiscation, the soldiers have constantly forced the farmers from Tamortkanin, Taungbon and Aru-taung villages, to do plowing the lands, clearing the grasses, preparing the embankment to store water and growing plants, etc., in these farms. In both 1998 and 1999 years rainy season, the soldiers have conscripted the local farmers to do farming. The forcible conscription of farmers had taken on a rotation basis and about 30 farmers from the nearest villages worked in every day works. The soldiers forced not only the farmers, but when the farmers went to battalions' farms, they also

Some Articles in the 1954 Agricultural Land Nationalization Act

Article 4

It is not allowed to transfer, mortgage, sell or by any other means exchange one's agricultural land.

Article 5

Repossession; All agricultural land, except that which is granted the right of exemption as described in Article 6, can be repossessed by the State.

Article 6

Granting the Right of Exemption: The State shall grant the Right of Exemption to those peasant households that meet the following qualifications:

It must be a rice peasant household.

One of the household members has continuously owned the land since 4 January 1948 (day on which Burma regained independence from Britain),

Chief of the household had already attained the peasanthood by 4 January 1948.

All the household members must be citizens of the Union of Burma.

The meaning of a peasant:

One who has continuously cultivated the agricultural land with his own hands and as his main livelihood.

Article 11

Any peasants - with the exception of those who have been granted the Right of Exemption - are not allowed to sell, mortgage or otherwise exchange their agricultural land.

The peasants who are granted the Rights of Exemption must follow the following rules and regulations:

- He must cultivate the agricultural land with his own hands and continuously.
- He must pay the taxes related to the agricultural land, imposed by the State.
- He must not cease being the peasant household.
- Without sufficient reason, he must not leave the agricultural land cultivated,
- He must not lend his agricultural land to others for cultivation.

Article 38

Where and when one's agricultural land is to be changed to cultivation of another crop, if it is assumed that such change in crop for cultivation will benefit the peasant, *(the authorities concerned)* shall let the peasant to make a formal application for the change of crops for cultivation. For example, the change from cultivation of paddy to cultivation of garden fruits, from cultivation of garden fruits to cultivation of rubber, from cultivation of nipa palm to cultivation of paddy, etc.

Article 39

Utilization of one's agricultural land in accordance with the officially-set means:

Without permission, a peasant must not utilize his agricultural land by otherwise means.

The articles in the 1954 Agricultural Land Nationalization Act, that describes the rights of a paddy-growing farmers to continuously work on his land

had to bring their *own* oxen in plowing the lands and did other works.

In August, 1998, with a plan to extend a new section outside of Ye town, the Township PDC authorities, No. 5 Intelligence Unit, IB No. 61 and LIB No. 343 confiscated about 100 acres of lands which included the palm plantations and rice-fields. About 15 farmers from Ye town lost their lands. These farmers also made a survival from the income by selling palm leaves for roofing and grow rice. Those confiscated lands were divided into many spaces for house surroundings. After the lands were equally measured and divided into 268 spaces for house surroundings, those were shared among the government servants, military and intelligence officers. The servants also made profit from selling these house surroundings to civilians.

In September, 1998, IB No. 61 and LIB No. 343, also confiscated about 40 acres of salt produced farms in the west of Ye town and put the battalion signboard and declared these lands were owned by the battalions. The land owners were not informed before hand by any authority or soldier and after land confiscation, the soldiers went to the land owners and ordered to keep working in the salt farms but all salt produced from the farms was owned by battalions. The land owners did not receive any compensated or labour costs by soldiers. In 1999, the battalions hired some villagers to work in these farms.

C. Land Confiscation in other Townships in Mon State

In May, 1998, about 100 acres of rubber plantations outside of Thanbyuzayat town, in southwest side were also confiscated with purposes to build a new railway station. These lands were owned by Nai Aung Ba and Nai Ain Wet, and they have not received compensated costs by Thanbyuzayat Township PDC authorities. At the same time, about 300 acres rubber plantations in east side of the town were also confiscated by the authorities to resettle about 150 families of town residents, who were forced to move from a town section, where the authorities to build a telephone exchange office.

Similarly, LIB No. 209 that bases near Kamawet village of Mudon Township also confiscated about 50 acres of farmlands in the west side of that village. Kamawet village is the biggest village in the township and far about 15 kilometers from Mudon town. The confiscation land was recently used as pasture land for the villagers to raise their cattle. Although the soldiers did not force the farmers to work in the farms, they have asked paddy plants to grow in their farms from the farmers nearby without payment.

The similar land confiscation was also taken place in other places in Mon State, such as in Thaton, Chaungzon, Beelin and Paung township areas. SPDC Light Infantry Division No. 44 that bases in Thaton township also confiscated about 4,000 acres of wild lands, fruit plantations and rice farmlands in township areas.

D. New Military Battalion Deployment and Land Confiscation

Since April, 1999, the Burmese Army has planned to deploy a new military battalion, LIB No. 299, in southern part of Ye township area. Because of the military activities conducted by a Mon armed group in this area, the SPDC deployed that new battalion. On the other hand, after the withdrawal of Mon troops of NMSP from this area according to ceasefire agreement, SPDC has good chance to take base in this area and extend their control.

Due to this land confiscation, about 80 betel-nuts, cashew nut and rubber plantations owned by the local villagers from Koemile and Kalort villages were also confiscated by army. About 100 families for these two villages lost their plantation. IB No. 61 has taken responsibility in taking the lands and it also paid some small amount of compensated costs to avoid condemnation. The battalion paid 7 Kyat per any tree and every owner of the plantation received not more than 3,000 Kyat compensation. According to the villagers who lost the lands said that they have created these plantations about 10-15 years and invested a lot of money in growing and to gain fruits. Now, even a small plantation with 100 betel-nuts trees, which could produce fruits, the owners could sell it with price .300, 000 Kyat worth. Two or three relatives' families owned one plantation and so the total estimated 100 families lost the lands and they became jobless and helpless situation as a result. These all plantations are situating east of Ye-Tavoy motor road.

III. Land Confiscation and Forced Labour in Farming in Karen State

Due to the similar instruction to many battalions in Mon State, the SPDC military battalions in Karen State were also instructed to confiscate the farmlands and grow paddy to support themselves. Thus, the local military battalions in many townships of Karen State, such as Pa-an, Kya Inn Seikyi, Kawkareik and Myawaddy, also confiscated farmlands and forced the villagers to cultivate paddy in the confiscated lands.

In June, 1998, before the rain started, Pa-an township PDC authorities, Karen State, confiscated about 200 acres of land from the about 20 farmers of Than-hlae and Krone-sot villages. After confiscation, the army

planned to grow two seasons crops of paddy (*both dry season and rainy season crops*) and the local villagers especially from the above two villages have been used as day-labourers, but have not received any payment from the authorities. Light Infantry Division No. 22 bases in Pa-an town and troops from this military division by coordinating with township PDC authorities also confiscated the lands and conscripted the villagers to be labourers. The villagers from the above two villages have to work in their farms about three days each round and the work-duties are shared on a rotation basis.

Similarly, in June, 1998, the local battalions mainly base in Kawkareik township, LIB No. 547, 548 and LIB No. 549 also confiscated about 500 acres of farmlands from about 40 farmers near Nabu village. And the land owners or the farmers who have worked in that lands have been also hired by soldiers to do farming in these lands for soldiers. The battalions told to those farmers that they would pay costs for farming and so will give the hiring costs at the end of cultivation season. After cultivation in January, each farmer received about 100 baskets of paddy from the battalions as an ordinary labourer. In this area, an ordinary labourer could receive about 75-100 baskets of paddy if he was hired for the whole cultivation season, but he did not have to invest anything in the farms. For the former land owners since the beginning of the cultivation, they have to hire oxen to plow the lands, day labourers to grow paddy plants, buy fertilizers for plants and others. In this case although the above farmers invested every thing in the farms, they receive back only 100 baskets of paddy. But they have no responsibility to give yearly paddy tax to government paddy-buying centers. Because of this forced conscription to do their own farms for army and cuts of possible hiring costs, some farmers also abandoned their lands and fled to other areas to escape from the permanent forced labour by the soldiers. So, in 1999 cultivation years, the soldiers have forced the nearest villagers to do farming in these lands.

Similarly, these three battalions also confiscated about 200 acres of villagers' farmlands and another 250 acres of wild lands on Kawkareik-Myawaddy motor road in area from Kyonedoe to Thingan-nyinaung village tracts. In 200 acres of farmlands, the battalions are continuously growing paddy with forced labour while they decided to grow rubber plants in another 250 acres of hilly lands. In both paddy cultivation and rubber planting, the local villagers from Kyonedoe, Kanni, and Thingan-nyinaung village tracts have been forced to work without payments.

Not only the military battalions, the local polices also confiscated some small spaces of land and forced the farmers to grow rice in the confiscated lands. During the first and second weeks of July, 1998, under the arrangement of Township police authorities in Kawkareik town, the local polices who were taking bases around many Mon villages in the township area, had confiscated some lands. Then they again forced the farmers to grow rice in their confiscated farms. The police officers, 2nd Class Warrant Officer Than Hteik Shein confiscated 5 acres of lands from Kawbein village, Pol. Segeant Ba Thein confiscated 5 acres of lands from Kawgo village and another 2nd Class Warrant Officer Min Thu confiscated 5 acres of lands from Kharitkyauktan village respectively. The police ordered the headmen to gather all farmers and grow plants in their farms within one day or two days. The concerned villagers have been forced in 1998 and 1999 years, for planting the paddy and reaping the crops.

In Kya Inn Seikyi township, a military battalion, LIB No. 284, that bases in the township area, also confiscated about 100 acres of land in each side of the town, on the Zami river bank and also forced the villagers nearby to contribute unpaid labour every day. The battalion's farmlands is situating near Warbogone village and the villagers from Wabogone, Kyotan, Thaketchaung, Natchaung and Kasat villages are forced to work in these farms. About 5-10 villagers every day for each village were instructed to send and over 20 villagers were always in the battalion farms. Those villagers were ordered to stay in the farms at least for three days and when the village headmen other villagers and replaced, those villagers could go back to their homes. Thus, the headmen had to manage to send the villagers on a rotation basis.

As the battalion cultivates two crops for the whole year, the villagers are also forced for the whole to work in these farms. In dry season, when the battalion planned to carry water from the Zami River, the villagers have to prepare a strong embankment in the farms to keep water. Besides growing paddy, the soldiers also forced the villagers to clear some forest and grow rubber. The battalion planned to create about 200 acres rubber plantations and those paddy farms and rubber plantations are the main lands that the battalion own to raise fund.

IV. The Dike Construction and Exploration of Farmlands in Yebyu Township area, Tenasserim Division

Although there are many thousands acres of farmlands in Mon State and the majority Mon people in Mon State are farmers, less than 50% of the local inhabitants in Yebyu township are rice cultivated farmers

and the remaining are fruit plantation gardeners and fishermen. Thus, the area of rice growing farmlands in this area is lesser than other areas. So the local military battalions are instructed to explore the new lands to grow rice.

However, the local military battalions conducted the land confiscation before they planned to explore the new lands. There are about 10 SPDC military battalions in Yebyu township area and some battalions confiscated lands from farmers while the others planned to explore new lands. LIB No. 410 also confiscated about 50 acres of farmlands that owned by Singu villagers. After confiscation, Singu villagers were forced to do farming in these lands without payment. Similarly, LIB No. 406 confiscated about 60 acres of land near Yapu village and the villagers from Yapu were forced to work in the farms.

Thus, since August, 1998, the local battalions adopted plan to build water dikes first and then explore the lands. In Yebyu township area alone, the local military battalions which base in the township have built four water dikes by conscripting forced labour from the local villagers since August, 1998. The four water dikes are (1) Singu, (2) Hmaw-gyi, (3) Kywethonyima and (4) Mintha.

In constructing the dikes, first the villagers were forced to clear the grasses, bushes and small trees along the route where the battalion required to construct the embankment. The army required to build the embankment to keep water and explore the lands on the other sides of the embankment and distribute water from the dike. The dike constructions have been built for several months until the end of April, 1999, and the local villagers from over 20 villages, mostly from Mintha, Eindayaza, Kywethonyima and Natkyisin village tracts were forced to work building the embankment without payments. (*The reports on the conscription of forced labour in dike constructions were also described in detail in The Mon Forum, Issue No. 2/99, February, 1999*).

After building of these embankments, the villagers were allowed to work their own works, such as fishing or cultivating rice or gardening for three months from May to July. But the villagers in Natkyisin village tracts were forced to build widening the Ye-Tavoy motor road construction. Started from August, 1999, the villagers from these villages have been again conscripted to work in clearing the lands which will be used for battalions to grow paddy. The villagers are instructed to complete exploring the new farmlands during this rainy season. Each family is shared with work-duties to complete in clearing the lands for new farms.

The following information are about the collection of payment and conscription of forced labour from the local villagers by a the military battalion, LIB No. 273, which takes responsibility in exploring farmlands around Kywethonyima dike.



The confiscated land by Moulmein township authorities to extend the town section

LIB No. 273 has taken responsibility in conscripting forced labourers to complete the building of dike embankment and exploring the new lands for growing paddy around Kywethonyima dike. In building the embankment, exploring new lands and for a plan to grow paddy in the next year rainy season, the battalion was provided with 6 millions Kyat fund from the Border Area Development program. But the battalions said the fund provided from the government would not be enough and they also collected more tax from the villagers again. Totally, they have collected another 3.5 millions Kyat from the villagers. The village headmen had taken responsibility collecting that fund and asked the villagers to complete tax at four rounds. The village headmen in the villages have to take responsibility to collect these tax and so the family who are considerably rich by the battalions had to pay about 10,000 Kyat while a very poor family had to pay about 500 Kyat respectively.

In the dike construction, the battalions had used the local villagers to construct over 7, 700 feet long embankment and from this embankment and water in the dike they could distribute water to 400 acres large farms. Hence, at the moment, each family in Kywethonyima village tract are given work-duty to complete clearing the lands with 85 feet in length and 55 feet width. That family had to complete clearing all



Although the farmers could not grow crops in dry reason in Kya Inn Seiki township area, Karen State, they are still requested to give paddy tax for dry season crops

trees, bushes and grasses in the set piece of land and then balance the level of lands. Even for a man, he may have to complete this work-duty for nearly two weeks and more. During the rainy season, the villagers could not burn these waste matters under the rain and the soldiers also ordered to throw them in the river. It takes a lot of time for villagers to throw the waste matters.

The battalion plans to clear all the required lands around 370-400 acres of land before the end of rainy season and it must grow the paddy in next year rainy season. As the battalion has no possible labourers to work in these farms for farming, they may used the local villagers against to cultivate these lands. According to some village headmen, who attended the meetings with battalion commanders, they were already explained from the battalion that it would share the lands to the villagers who have no land and let them work in the farms. They would give labour costs to those villagers, at the end of every year cultivation. The battalion commanders said to the village headmen that they would give half of the crops to those who work in the farms. So the villagers who have no lands and inhabited with fishing and gardening works also worry about the handing over of the battalion's lands. They knew they would not get full amount of labour costs from farmers. They would be difficult to do farming in those lands, because, the ones, who received the lands, would have to cultivate by themselves and would not get any assistance from the battalion. They might have to hire the oxen, labourers, buy fertilizers by themselves and the army would not pay them every thing. The battalion would not take any responsibility in cultivation and when the crops are produced, they would give a half of total produced crops. According to village headmen and escaped villagers, it is too hard for them to do farming in the places where the battalion instructed the villagers because these farmlands are too low and the water level is too high during rainy season. So they could not grow rice. However, since the villagers have no chance to propose about the problems to the battalion commanders, they have no choice.

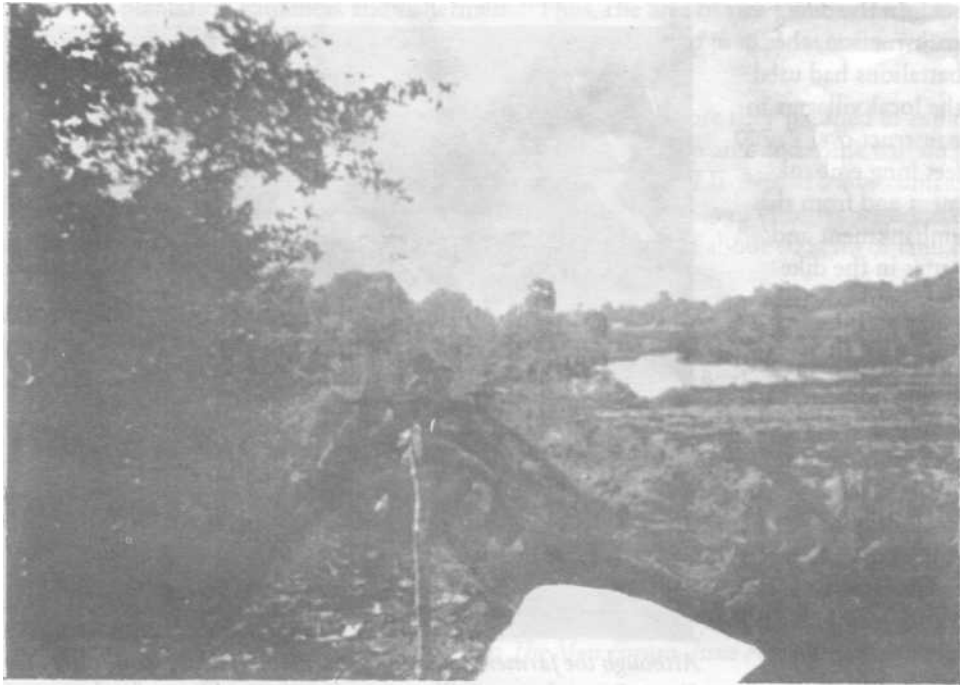
V. Conclusion

Since for many years after it came to power, the military government adopted a policy that each local military command must involve in the business deals to raise fund. So, Southeast Command also ordered its local regular battalions (IB Battalions) to raise fund for their battalion fund under the management of battalion commanders. But the battalion commander himself must not hold the business, but he must find the possible business deals to join them as shareholders.

Due to this order, many battalions in Mon State collected various types of tax from the civilians and kept for their own battalion fund. And the battalions also invested or participated as shareholders in those business deals in Mon State. In Mon State, main businesses are logging concessions, transportation, fishing concessions, trading with neighbouring countries and others. Some battalions, military officers, and the local car owners also set up passenger transporting company to raise the battalion funds. Some battalions also directly connect to forestry officials and do logging and lumber business. Due the army involvement in many

business deals, the battalions also exploit the local business groups.

On the other hand, the battalions, especially light infantry, which are taking bases in rural area and have to launch regular military activities, also complain about their less chance to do business. So in 1998, after the Southeast Command could not provide the possible food supplies for these battalions, it also gave authority that each battalion must have their own



Forced Labourers: *The villagers are forced to work in building the embankment for Kywetbonyima dike*

lands to create paddy growing farms or fruit plantations or rubber plantations.

If a battalion have no enough funds to deal in a business, that battalion would collect fund from the civilians. Sometimes, although some businesses would not like to take a battalion to be a shareholder in the group, they must take anyhow, because they are afraid of being disturbed by soldiers. And in some business, although a business did not have much profit as they expected, but they have to pay the battalion according to request from the battalion. Sometimes, the battalion also abuses the power and stops other similar businesses that are considered competing against the businesses that owned by the battalions. Normally, the town residents and other civilians who are dealing in businesses suffer from this discrimination.

Additionally, when the army confiscated farmlands or other lands, the rural villagers suffer from the collection of payment and conscription of forced labour as evidences mentioned above. In conclusion, under the rule of the military regime, whether the military battalions have involves in dealing in business or in creating farms or plantations, they always exploit from the civilians.

