News

Mon Schools were Ordered to Close down
(October, 1999)

On October 16, 1999, when a Mon national school was operating and providing education to Mon children in a building in a Mon monastery compound of Kwan-tar village, Mudon Township of Mon State, the SPDC village authorities came and ordered it to close down. The order actually came from Military Intelligent No. 5 and the village PDC chairman, Nai Sein Aung, and Secretary, Nai Thar Aung, had to take responsibility to close the school down. On the next day, on October 17, the village headmen called a meeting with all students’ parents and explained that the higher authorities (but did not describe details about the order from MI No. 5 unit) have ordered them to close down the school because it was illegal institution and the teaching of Mon language was also illegal. After the school was close, about 100 children also lost access to education.

As the authorities including MI No. 5 believe, the operating of Mon national school is the creation of the competitive education against the government education and accuse that more students from the government have moved from government school to that Mon school. Dur-
ing MI No. 5 unit gave the order, there was less number of students in government school than in the Mon school.

In the meeting, the village PDC authorities also warned the students’ parents that they must not send their children to Mon school and if they did in the future, both parents and students must be taken action or arrested for their illegal activities. Then, they also forced the parents to sign a promising letter to give a promise that they would not send their children to Mon school again. On the similar day, the village militia troops waited and rounded the Mon school in halting the teachers and children to not operate the school. Until the end of October, militia forces rounded up the school and it was totally closed down by the authorities.

Later, on October 28, the Mudon Township PDC authorities also closed down another school. The Township Secretary, U Myint Soe, went to Set-thawe village, about 30 miles in southern part of Mudon town and ordered through village headmen to close down the Mon school immediately which was operating in the village. On the next day, the village chairman asked the school headmistress to meet him and asked to close down the school immediately. He also threatened the headmistress that if she refused to close down the school, she must be arrested and detained according to the laws as she was leading illegal activities.

In every previous year, SPDC always tried to close down many Mon national schools, which were operating in rural areas of Mon State. The Mon community has encouraged these schools and also sent their children to learn Mon language in the schools. The NMSP education committee or the community itself tried to get qualified Mon teachers and let them teach in these schools.

Since 1995, after NMSP-SLORC ceasefire, the Mon community believed they could operate the Mon school and provide Mon education independently and since then has established many Mon schools. NMSP also officially asked the military government to allow the teaching of Mon language in government schools and to establish the Mon national schools. However, after the local Mon communities actually establish the Mon schools and operate the Mon education system in there, the government has stopped the Mon education.

The establishment of Mon national schools and the initiative of Mon education system were resulted from the BSPP government’s assimilation policy that acted against the ethnic nationalities and protracted civil war in Burma. After Gen. Ne Win seized power in 1962, the Rangoon government that adopted “Burmanization policy” and also closed down many Mon schools established during the parliamentary era from 1948 until 1962. More restriction against the speaking and teaching of Mon language was introduced in the whole Mon area. This made the civil war to be intensified and NMSP also received more support from the Mon people. However, many Mon schools in the Mon areas are totally closed.

Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) occupied more areas and so NMSP also adopted administration in many parts of Mon areas. Accompanying with NMSP administration, its Education Department also re-established many Mon national schools in many rural Mon villages, with cooperation from the local community. Later the establishment of Mon national schools gained momentum and, more and more schools were established. Until 1995, there were about 250 Mon national schools were established in Mon areas and most Mon communities expected they would have more independent situation to run their schools after ceasefire. In 1999, there are about 300 Mon schools in the whole Mon areas.

However, the government did not allow the teaching of Mon language as a subject in government school in Mon areas in 1996. Then the Mon communities in government control areas also established many Mon schools due to the order came from Mon State LORC that they could establish their own schools if they have desires. After Mon schools were established, many students from government schools moved to Mon schools. Then, the government authorities made a new operation to close down the Mon schools in 1998. The schools were closed just for a while, but the community tried to re-open again. However, the operating of Mon national schools and Mon education system have been regularly disturbed by the government authorities including MI No. 5 in Mon State.

The Farmers are Forced to Grow Two Seasons Paddy Crop
(November, 1999)

According to the government’s policy on agriculture project, it has adopted that every paddy peasant farmers must have to grow paddy twice within one year. The farmers who stayed in Mon State also effected from this policy and are forced to grow two seasons paddy crops whether it is possible or not during the dry season. In most parts of Mon State, the farms do not get water during dry season and the growing of paddy crop in that season is impossible, however, the farmers are forced to grow paddy in dry season. Normally, the farmers in the firm control area of government such as in Kyaikmayaw Township, Moulmein Township and Paung Township have suffered more from this forcible instruction to farmers to grow dry season crop.

The project was started since last year after the.
Mon State PDC was instructed from Rangoon to have more acres to grow paddy crops during the dry season. According to traditional farming, Mon farmers in some parts only could grow crops only rainy season, but could not grow any crops after harvest in December. In some area, the farmers also grow pea-nut and sesame for three months after harvest. Those types of crops do not require a lot of water like in the rainy season and could grow easily with small amount of snow. Different from these short-term crops, the paddy requires a lot of water to be grown well and the plants could not survive if they get insufficient water. Before they could grow paddy, the farmers have to keep water in their farms and then plough the lands and grow the plants.

In November 1998, after harvesting of paddy crops, while the farmers in Kyaikmayaw, Moulmein and Paung Townships were growing peanut and sesame crops in their farms, the authorities ordered the farmers that they must have to grow paddy crop. The authorities went every farm and forced the farmers to remove all small plants of peanut and sesame and replace with paddy plants. Then many farmers had to remove all their peanut and sesame plants and then grow paddy.

Because of less water in the farms, the paddy plants could not grow and at the end nearly all farmers could not get crops. Thus, the farmers lost both other sesame and peanut crops and paddy crops due to wrong instruction of the government authorities. Although the local authorities even knew, there is no profit for growing paddy in the dry season, they could not oppose or disagree with the orders came from the higher authorities.

Now, in November 1999, after harvesting of paddy crops, the local farmers from the above townships are ordered again from the Township authorities to grow dry season paddy crop. Therefore, the local Mon farmers faced difficult situation to grow this crop. The government has not helped to bring enough water to their farms, but just give order to grow dry season paddy crop. The local authorities even knew, there is no profit for growing paddy in the dry season, they could not oppose or disagree with the orders came from the higher authorities.

The returned immigrants were checked by government immigration officers, army and police to show their identity cards and if they could not show the cards, they were not allowed to enter Burma. Many migrants who went into Thailand did not hold any citizenship ID card and so the Burmese authorities drove them out. Sometimes, the Burmese Army also shot to the returned immigrants and has not accepted them to cross the border. Such evidence was happened in both border point areas of Myawaddy-Mae Sot ami Ranong-Kawthaung. Then, the Thai authorities also had to deport back those immigrants to border point where there was no checkpoint of Burmese Army. Generally, many thousands immigrants were deported via Halockhani, the border point under the control of NMSP and other areas under control of KNU.

Additionally, the Burmese authorities also set up some checkpoints deep inside Burmese territory and arrested some immigrants and fined them to pay. Some
The deportation of Burmese immigrants: these immigrants are every week deported via Halockhani, a Mon refugee resettlement area, near Kanchanaburi Province of Thailand.

were also arrested and imprisoned according to the laws that described the punishment for illegally leaving the country. As an instant, on October 30, 1999, 7 Mon immigrants who initially deported back to Burma via near Myawaddy town of the border were arrested on the half way in Attaran bridge, the border bridge between Karen State and Mon State, and were taken by the Burmese authorities. The 7 Mon immigrants were: (1) Aung Tun - 30 years, (2) Kyaw Htun - 25 years, (3) Soe Win - 25 years, (4) Min Win -18 years, (5) Min Oo Lay - 16 years, (6) Halae - 18 years, and (7) Ma Hla Yee - 28 years.

These civilians brought the authorities to Moulmein and the police also put them to the trails for their illegal leaving the country. According to the court and existed laws, they were detained for 6 months. Then, all of them are imprisoned in Moulmein jail for 6 months.

These civilians were the first group and later many hundreds of immigrants went back and the authorities could not afford to arrest and imprisoned them all. However, the authorities had taken fine for every person who returned from Thailand. For the whole month of November, under the order of Karen Peace and Development Council Chairman, Saw Khin Soe, a group of authorities including immigrants officers, police, army and DKBA troops opened a check-point on Myawaddy-Paan motor road, near Paan town, the capital of Karen State, and stopped every passenger truck and checked and took out all returned immigrants. And the authorities asked for a fine for those returned immigrants to give 5,000 Kyat per head as a fine. If someone could not give payment for fine, they were kept in the check-point or in Paan police station and let them informed to their families to come and pay the fine. After they received a payment for fine, the immigrants were released. If someone could not contact their families, they were also used as unpaid labourers in military outposts and in the farms, which owned by army or police.

Not only the immigrants from Thailand, some illegal immigrants from Malaysia and Singapore were also arrested and imprisoned by the government. On October 8, 1998, about 103 civilians came back from Singapore by a boat stopped near Kyaik-kha-mi, a village near seacoast area in Thanbyuzayat township, all civilians took a rest in the village. The police and army suddenly went into village and arrested about 53 civilians. They were brought to Moulmein and put a trial for illegal leaving the country. Then, they were imprisoned for one-year term in jail with hard labour, according families who met their sons.

Since SLORC came into power, the economics situation in Burma has deteriorated and most able-bodied men and women are unemployed. They have remained with low income working in their farms and could not manage to provide enough income for family survival. Since over 10 years, many civilians from Mon State, Karen State, Tenasserim Division, Rangoon Division and Pegu Division went into Thailand to seek jobs for better income. After they were employed in Thailand, these immigrants also send money to the remaining family members in Burma. By this way, many families in Mon State have survived with income of their family members in Thailand. However, the treatments to the immigrants who returned from the neighbouring countries are inhumane by the Burmese authorities and always face unwelcome situation.
Report

More Military Deployment in Mon State
and Related Land Confiscation

I. The Analysis on Land Confiscation

In the recent years, hundreds acres of civilians’ lands in Mon State were confiscated by the government authorities, army and police with many purposes. The main purposes of land confiscation are as below:

a. Land confiscation for rice farms and fruit plantation

After the Burmese military government ordered its local military battalion to support themselves for food supplies and other fund, the government has allowed its battalions to confiscate lands from the local villagers. The army and police also have confiscated many hundreds acres of lands in Mon State for this reason. Some lands owned by Mon villagers in Karen State and Tenasserim Division also confiscated by the government troops. Sometimes, due to heavy tax, when the farmers could not afford to work on in their lands, those lands were also confiscated by army, police and authorities.

b. Land confiscation for new settlement or new town section:

In the previous years, the Burmese Army also made some forced relocations and drove some villagers from the rebel control into its control areas to cut off the communication between rebels and civilians. Due to this forced relocation, some lands near a village or a town, which were under the control of Burmese Army, were also confiscated with purpose to resettle those villagers. On the other hand, some lands near a town always confiscated whenever the government planned to extend a town section or create a new satellite town. Such confiscation of land happened in most of the town in Mon State. Sometimes, when the government creates and build a new building such as prison, factory for foreign companies and to settle the surrender groups, the lands owned by the civilians near the towns were also confiscated by government authorities.

c. Land confiscation for development projects:

Generally, during SLORC/SPDC era, the government has built many roads and bridges to pretend itself as a legitimate ruling government. Whenever one development project was implemented by government, some lands owned by civilians were confiscated. When the government built Ye-Tavoy motor road, many housing lands, plantation lands and farmlands owned by Mon villagers in Ye and Yehyu township area were confiscated. When the route passed into a village, the villagers have to immediatly move from the houses and gardens. Similarly, other road construction, bridge construction and other projects done by government also took lands from civilians.

d. Land confiscation for troops deployment:

The other reason for land confiscation is to deploy many troops from Burmese Army in a specific place. The number of troops in the Burmese Army has been grown since SLORC seized power in 1988, and the government has required more and more bases to deploy them. Normally, the government chose the most suitable and strategic places to deploy these troops to prevent the military activities of the rebel groups and to keep closer control area with ceasefire groups. If the government met a suitable place, it confiscated the civilians’ lands in there and deployed the troops. When the battalions are building the military encampments, the local village or town communities are forced to contribute unpaid labour for those new military camps.

One similar thing in all land confiscation is, the civilians who owned the lands have never received the compensated costs. If they did received, they would receive very little amount of payment, which could not support to create a new life or to buy another space of lands. The government believes that all lands are owned by State according to “land nationalization law”, and it could confiscate anytime when it needed.

Note: In this report, it describes only about the land confiscation for troops deployment in Mon State.

II. Land Confiscation and Troop Deployments in 1999 in Mon State

In 1999, to keep control more Mon territory and to get closer control base with NMSP, a Mon political armed group which agrees for ceasefire for 4 years ago, the Burmese Army also confiscated some lands in the
The Mon Forum (Issue No. 11/99, November 30, 1999)

so-called "Black Area (free fire zone)" and deployed its troops. According to NMSP-SLORC ceasefire agreement, the government also defined the troop location for the Mon army, Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), for 12 zones and so the troops from outside of these zones were instructed to withdraw. Following to this agreement, some Mon troops in Ye township area (in both northern and southern parts of the area) moved to east side of Ye town or east side of motor road which runs along the coastal area from the north to south. This troop withdrawal was made during 1995 and 1996, and after there was no more Mon troop, the local civilians also lost protection from Mon army. As a result, the Burmese Army has more opportunity to conscript forced labour, arresting villagers for porter service and demand for various types of tax or looting villagers' belongings.

The local civilians in Ye Township have been constantly conscripted to contribute unpaid labour in government development projects mainly in Ye-Tavoy railway construction. Since the rural areas in Ye Township has been recognized as "Black Area", the arrest of porters for the military operations is quite often. Additionally, as the Burmese Army has more control in the area, it also looked a good chance to deploy new military battalions.

In March 1999, a local SPDC battalion IB No. 61 confiscated about 300 acres of lands from the local villagers in southern parts of Ye Town and has planned to deploy a new battalion, LIB No. 299. IB No. 61 made a land survey before it deployed the troops and took all lands about 300 acres in each side of Ye-Tavoy motor road. Those 300 acres of lands were grown with rubber, betel-nut, cashew-nut and other fruits. The over 80 spaces of rubber and fruit plantations were owned by Mon villagers from Hangan and Koe-mile villages and plantations were created about 30 years ago.

IB No. 61 battalion also gave some small amount of compensation costs to the villagers with 7 Kyat per tree. The 7 Kyat compensation cost is only for one betel-nut fruit in the market price and the plantation owner received only 2,000 to 3,000 Kyat for each space of plantation. Actually, one plantation has a cost at least about 200, 000 to 500, 000 Kyat depending on the types of fruits and age of trees. When the battalion gave payment, the local villagers had to sign on a paper and that was an evidence that they have received compensation costs.

After the villagers received compensated costs, they were not allowed to harvest their fruits again. The battalion took all fruits and let the soldiers collect them and sold in the markets. Thus, the soldiers could make a lot of income from selling betel-nut, cashew nuts in the markets.

In June, by the help of IB No. 61, LIB No. 299 also came and deployed its troops and started cutting trees and clearing the grounds. After clearing the grounds, the battalion commander conscripted the nearest villagers to build the military barracks. (see below: about the conscription of forced labour in the construction of military camps). On the other hand, the villages in the whole Ye Township area had to provide fund for all the buildings of military battalion, (see below: about the requesting fund for the military camp). The construction of the military camps for LIB No. 299 started from July and has taken place until October, 1999.

Another confiscation of land happened in northern part of Ye Town. In September, 1999, the Burmese Army, with the command of Southeast Region Military Command, confiscated about 800 acres of lands in the northern part of Ye Town. With a plan to deploy a new battalion, an artillery regiment and an air base, these lands which were owned by Mon villagers and used to be rubber, durian and betel-nut plantations were confiscated by the government troops. The place of the confiscated lands is situated on both...
sides and along Thanbyuzayat-Ye motor road, and is far about 15 miles in the north of Ye Town.

In land confiscation, the army took 51 spaces of plantations owned by Aru-taung villagers, which costs about 65 millions Kyat, according to the current price. Similarly, 19 spaces of lands, which owned by Kundune villagers, are also confiscated and these lands with big fruit and rubber trees cost about 24 million Kyat according to the calculation made from the local villagers.

The exact plan is that, the Burmese Army will repair an old Japanese air base in this area and use it for a new air base for its air forces. To secure the new air base, the army requires deploying more ground troops and artillery forces in the surrounding areas. Thus, not only the plantations owned by the villagers were confiscated; the mountains and the forests near the area were also taken by Army. After the confiscation, the villagers were not informed for compensation, but all villagers were not allowed to go to their plantations and even into the forests.

According to the source from Burmese Army, they extend a new air base in southern of Burma and will create it as an important air base like air bases in Mingaladon, Hmaw-bi, Mattila and Myintkyina. The air bases are situating in Rangoon Division, central and northern part of Burma. Before the army started building the air base, they will have to deploy more infantry forces near the planned area and equipped the artillery guns on the top of the mountains and hills nearby. Some commanders from the Burmese Army said, the main aim of deployment of air base, ground base and artillery forces in the area is to protect the area from the activities conducted by KNU/KNLA. However, another reason of land confiscation and troop deployment is to keep the NMSP and Mon army, to not revolt against the Burmese Army again. Due to military strategy, the Mon army is mostly blocked at the border areas and if the NMSP resume fighting against the government, it could lose communication and support for the Mon people.

III. The Conscription of Forced Labour and Collection Fund in Construction of the Military Camps

The conscription of forced labour had been constantly used in building the military camps for LIB No. 299. Since July, the villagers from mainly four villages, Hangan, Kalort, Koe-mile and Mun-aung villages have been constantly forced to contribute unpaid labour in building the military camps. First, the villagers were forced to cut down all big trees and clear grounds where the army needed to build the military barracks. The villagers had to cut down many betel-nuts and rubber trees and collected them in one place. They also had to dig the roots of the trees and it was a hard work for the villagers. Then they were also instructed to balance the ground level.

After the needed spaces of grounds were balanced, the soldiers forced the villagers to dig long trenches. In some places, they were instructed to dig holes for bunkers and they also had to make fences. Similar to men, two elephants from Mun-aung village were asked to work in the construction. The elephants had to draw the trees and collected them in one place or had to bring trees to saw pits to make wooden lumbers.

Both chain saw and hand saw owners from these four villages were also conscripted in the construction site. The hand saw owners had to build saw pits and sawing logs to get the required lumbers. The chain saw owners had to cut trees and divided the logs. In July and August, about 50 villagers including elephant drivers and saw owners are forced to work in the construction every day.

Then, in September and October, about 50-100 villagers have been forced to build the military barracks, which were 50 feet in length and 20 feet in width. Some skill carpenters from the villages were also forced to work in designing the building and leading the other villagers. At the end of October, there were totally 5 buildings already built. The construction has been still continued by the use of forced labour.

Although the use of forced labour in the southern part is widespread, the army has less used in northern part in building the military camps. The building process of the military camp is not started yet in northern part. The army just kept the confiscated land and the soldiers are taking fruit and rubber from the plantations. However, at the moment, IB No. 61 also ordered the villagers to collect and send building materials to the places they set. Normally, the army will build temporary camps first to have enough space for supervisors and conscripted labourers.

IB No. 61 ordered to the village headmen to send many bamboo and hardwoods to the construction site near old Japanese air base. Every village with 200 households and over, near the planned base had to give 1,000 bamboo, 10,000 roofing thatches and 500 pieces of wooden poles to construction site and the headmen are instructed those materials must be gathered before the end of October.

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.

Information on HURFOM

AMb

Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1994, by a group of young Mon people. The main objectives of HURFOM are:
- To monitor human rights situations in Mon territory and other areas southern part of Burma,
- To protect and promote internationally recognized human rights in Burma,

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM has produced "The Mon Forum" newsletters monthly and sometimes it has been delayed because we wait to confirm some information. We apologize for the delay.

However, we also invite your feedbacks on the information we described in each newsletter and if you know anyone who would like to receive the newsletter, please send name and address to our address or fax number or e-mail as below:

HURFOM
P. O. Box 11, Ratchburana P. O.
Bangkok 10140, THAILAND
Fax: (66 34) 595 217
E-mail: mforum@np.anet.net.th

With regards,
Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

---

HURFOM
P. O. Box 11
Ratchburana P. O.
Bangkok 10140, THAILAND