

The Mon Forum

Issue No. 1/2000

The Publication of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (BURMA)

Contents

News:

- (1) The conscription of forced labour in Ye-Tavoy motor road and dike construction,
- (2) Mor tax collection in Kawkareik Township Karen State,
- (3) Helpless situation of Mon villagers after big flood,

Report:

- (1) The various mis-treatment against farmers during 1999-2000 paddy buying season (Part I)

Personal Account:

- (1) The plight of a Mon farmer

Some Acronyms in This Issue

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

News

The Constriction of Forced Labour in Ye-Tavoy Motor Road and Dike Construction

Since the beginning of December, 1999, the SPDC battalions from the BA's No. 8 Operation Control Command have forced the local villagers from Ye and Yebyu township areas, to contribute free labour in Ye-Tavoy Motor Road and dike constructions in Yebyu township area. Under this military command, there are totally 12 battalions and there are battalions from LIB No. 410 through 410, LIB No. 273 and LIB No. 282.

These battalions base in Yebyu township area and they have taken responsibility in widening the Ye-Tavoy motor road and constructing of four dikes in Yebyu township areas to keep water for the army's farms. The set order to reconstruct the Ye-Tavoy came since the beginning of 1999 and the army had forced the local villagers until May, 1999 to contribute in the road widening construction already. However, during the rainy season, because of flood, some parts of this road was destroyed and all water canals along the road were filled with dusts and earth.

Again, the army battalions have forced the local villagers to rebuild some parts of the road, where was ruin because of floodwater and forced



Conscription of forced labour: *The local villagers in Yebyu township are forced to rebuild the Ye-Tavoy motor road.*

the villagers to dig and take all dusts and earth from 2 feet depth water canals. The army commander gave orders to every village headmen from the villages that situate along the motor road and instruct them to rebuild the road. Each family was instructed to dig and take dusts from every half-kilometer long canal.

Continuously, a member or two members of that family were forced to clear the grass, bush and small trees for 50 feet outside of the road. The battalions required for the clearance of the road, because they worried for the ambush of rebel soldiers. When the SPDC soldiers along the road, they could see the outside of the road and no rebel soldier could approach to the road.

In conscription of forced labour in the widening of the road, the villagers who stay along the road and near the road including Kyaukadin, Kywethalin, Yapu, Mayan, Mintha, Legyi, Hamaw-gyi, Sin-swe, Sat-taw, Yengan-gyi, Sein-pon, Natkyisi and Paukpingwin villages were constantly forced until the end of January, 2000, to contribute unpaid labour in the construction.

The similar conscription of forced labour has been taken place in Kywe-tho-nyima water dike, which is situating in Kywe-tho-nyima village tract. Similarly to the road, the embankment of this dike was also destroyed by flood water during the last rainy season and all villagers from every family in Kywe-tho-nyima village tract were forced to build the embankment. Thus, since December, 1999, the villagers from Cha-bone, Mae-taw, Mae-than-taung, Ah-byu, Ah-byike and Kyauktauyan and Kywe-tho-nyima villages were forced to work in the construction of rebuilding the embankment of the dike.

The villagers were instructed to bring small woods, bamboo and tools to the construction site. The villagers were ordered to build parallel wooden poles in the streams and filled with earth to get embankment in every stream. The villagers had to sink in water for several hours in putting the poles. The soldiers required many hundreds pieces of wood and bamboo poles to build the water embankment. When the villagers went to the construction site, they also have to bring their own foods and cash to buy vegetables and other supplement foods. LIB No. 273 and LIB No. 410 which have taken responsibility to rebuild the embankment also ordered the headmen in this village tract that every household in the village must have to send one family member and that person must have to work in the construction site for one weeks or 10 days depending on work-duties. The army also instructed they would not use women and children to not delay the work-duties and required all able-bodied men to complete the construction as quick as possible.

During November and December, while the villagers were forced to work in the dike construction, they have less time to work their own works. Many villagers had to reap their paddy and other crops. Or, some villagers' embankment in the paddy fields was also similarly destroyed by floodwater. However, they had to go and rebuild the water embankment of the army, instead of their own. If

they could not go and work in the construction site, they must have to hire a substitute labourer and pay 500 Kyat per day.

In this township area alone, there are more than ten battalions have been taking bases and through the instruction of No. 8 Operation Control Command, those battalions have been active in both military offensives against the rebel troops in the area and have conducted in development works.



More Tax in Kawkareik Township, Karen State

Since the beginning of dry season (November, 1999), the troops from Burmese Army (BA) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have requested various types of tax from the local Mon villagers in Kanni village tract of Kawkareik township, Karen State. Besides the burden and various types of tax collection from the villagers, the soldiers also have conscripted forced labour from them.

Since 1995, the DKBA troops have cooperated with Burmese Army in the military operations and offensives against KNU troops in Kawkareik township area and these troops also have taken base in Kanni village tract. Among the villages, the villagers from Kaw-kyaik village have been suffered more from various types of tax and use of forced labour. Whenever the DKBA went into the villages, the soldiers regularly asked for porter fee from the villagers. The DKBA requested the porter fee at least 1, 000 Kyat payment to them in every month. Besides the porter fee, whenever the troops arrived into villages they always requested rice and other food supplies. According to the villagers from that area, the troops came into their villages twice per week and they have to serve every thing for them. In this area, DKBA troops' commanders Lt. Col. Pha Kha led the troops and Lt. Ye Nyunt and Lt. Aung Yin have launched to various villages to collect various type of tax.

Due to the regular request made by the DKBA troops for food and cash, many villagers could not afford to pay more and some relatives in the villages moved and stayed at the same house to avoid paying more tax collection and food supplies. On the other hand, DKBA troops also take administration power in this area and they also put the villagers to trail and take fine from them for any kind of crime happened in the area illegally. Sometimes, the villagers were severely beaten by soldiers if they were accused committing guilty for one case and then they were put to trail. Normally, the DKBA have not put criminals in jail but took a lot amount of fine cash from the villagers.

Besides terrible treatments made by the DKBA troops, the villagers were also forced to be forced porters and forced labourers for the Burmese Army's battalions which base in Kawkareik township area. Normally, the troops from the Burmese Army forced the local villagers from this area to do farming in their own farms. In this area, the troops took some lands for their own battalions or

confiscated lands from the villagers and has grown rubber, cashew nut trees and paddy in these lands. So they forced the villagers to plough lands, clear grasses, reap crops and various types of work and the use of forced labour has taken place from the beginning of June, when the rain started, until the end of December. When the soldiers forced the villagers to contribute labour the workplaces they have to carry their own tools and foods. Sometimes, they have to work in these workplaces at least for three days continuously.

However, the local villagers have no choice except to stay on in the villages, to pay various types of tax and to contribute free labour in the soldiers' farms and plantations. Although the government has declared that it has tried to do for the development of the ethnic communities in the border area, actually, its local military battalions and authorities have enslaved the ethnic villagers to participate in their works only which could support for army and authorities' survival.

Helpless Situation of Mon Villagers after Big Flood

(November, 1999)

In the last week of October, 1999, because of big storm in the Andaman Sea and the unusual flood and rain, there was some landslide along the rivers in Mon State and Karen State. Some houses on the Salween river bank were also destroyed and many villagers were displaced in the helpless situation. Due to flood, it brought about 20 houses from Htone and Kaw-hlein villages and about 100 villagers had been displaced during the flood and those villagers had to find a new places to settle.

Due to this flood, a primary school in Kaw-seik village of Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, was totally destroyed and about 60 villagers from 10 households displaced and found a new places for the resettlement.



A flooded Mon village: During flood, many houses and paddy were destroyed by water.

At the same time, because of the flood along the sea-coast area of Andaman Sea, west of Mon State, some houses were also destroyed and some villagers disappeared and died. Among some villages, which were under water during the flood, the villagers in Paung Township of Mon State suffered more from the flood, because many villages are situated along the seacoast area. On October 26, when the flood suddenly came, a Mon village, Ah Like, in Paung Township, was under water and about 22 people including some women and children disappeared and the villagers believed they were brought by flood into the sea.

Because of the flood and the higher level of water, thousands acres of rice-fields were under water and the paddy crops were dropped. Many farmers lost many thousands baskets of paddy when they harvested them. According to reliable source, there were about 10, 000 acres of paddy-fields in Paung Township alone under the water and many farmers lost their crops. Similarly, about 5, 000 acres of paddy fields in Chaungzun township were under water and the farmers lost their crops.

During the end of this month, the farmers also started reaping their crops and some of reaped crops were also thrown away by the flood in some very low farmlands. In the bitter high lands, the farmers put their crops in the fields and those reaped crops were also wet by water.

In Kya-Inn-Seikyi township area of Karen State, the authorities also issued an order to the all farmers in the township to dry out all their crops as quickly as possible. The government authorities have just set orders to the local farmers, but have not helped them to bring the crops to a drought places. Continuously, the authorities set another order to farmers to prepare to sell their paddy at low price to the government's set paddy-buying centers.

Because of flood and rain water, although the farmers lost a lot of paddy crops and these information have been widely known by the authorities, they have not reduced the set amount of paddy that instructed to farmers to sell to the paddy-buying centers. In November, the Karen State and Mon State PDC has called various rounds of meeting with local village headmen and instructed them to force the farmers to sell their paddy to the set paddy-buying centers.

Under the rule of military regime, the flood victims have not received any assistance from the government relief program and most of them have to find the new settlement places by themselves. On the other hand, the government authorities also forced those victims, to sell their remaining crops to the government paddy-buying centers. Their suffering is doubled under the rule of SPDC.

Report

The Various Mis-treatment against Farmers During 1999-2000 Paddy Buying Season (Part I)

The Government's Preparation to Buy Paddy

Since September, 1999, the government authorities including Township PDC (*Township Peace and Development Council*) and Agricultural Products Trade Department in Mon State has planned to buy the paddy at low price from the farmers or to take yearly paddy tax in Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim Division of the lower part of Burma. As a main plan during that time, whether a local farmer took or not, the authorities from Agricultural Products Trade Department lent an advance payment to him/her and forced the farmers to sign a contract that promising to sell the set amount of paddy to the government paddy-buying centers. By the help of Myanma Agriculture Bank, the authorities lent the money to farmers. Depending on the set amount of paddy required to buy, the authorities have lent money to farmers, 1, 000 to 2, 000 Kyat per acre.

During September and October, 1999, for the preparation of buying paddy from the local farmers, the Agricultural Products Trade Department and Township authorities formed a paddy-buying management committees and appointed managers for all paddy-buying centers. Those managers in the paddy-buying centers have taken responsibility to get the set amount of paddy decided by the committees. In Mudon township, there are 4 town sections and 42 villages totally in administrative area and the authorities set up 11 paddy-buying centers. The managing committee is led by the Second Manager of Mudon Township Agricultural Products Trade Department, U San Hlaing, and appointed 11 managers for 11 buying buying centers in town wards and village tracts. By coordinating the main managing committee, township authorities, local militia and army and the managers, the managing committee planned to buy about 1. 3 millions baskets of paddy from this township alone.

Similarly, in Thanbyuzayat Township, there are 4 Town sections and 38 villages totally in administrative area and the authorities decided to set up 6 paddy buying centers. The managing committee is led by Thanbyuzayat Township Agricultural Products Trade Department's Manager, U Shwe Yin, and appointed 6 managers for 6 paddy-buying centers. This managing committee plans to buy about 800, 000 baskets of paddy from this township alone.

As yearly paddy tax, the government authorities bought the paddy from the farmers at low price. The authorities



A Paddy-buying center in Mon State: *The local farmers are constantly forced to sell the paddy.*

instructed to the local farmers to buy paddy from 10-16 baskets of paddy per acre. This amount of paddy is nearly two third amount of the paddy produced by the farmers. If some farmers' crops are destroyed by flood, they were unable to sell this amount of paddy. However, the authorities used various methods in pressuring the local farmers to obtain the set amount of paddy from the local farmers.

Forced Shut Down of Paddy-husking Mills

During October until December, 1999, when the paddy-buying managing committee tried to obtain paddy from the local farmers, the Township authorities also ordered the local paddy-husking mill owners, to close down all their mills. If not, the authorities will take actions against them. The forcible closing down of the local paddy-husking mills was happened only in some townships in Mon State and Karen State.

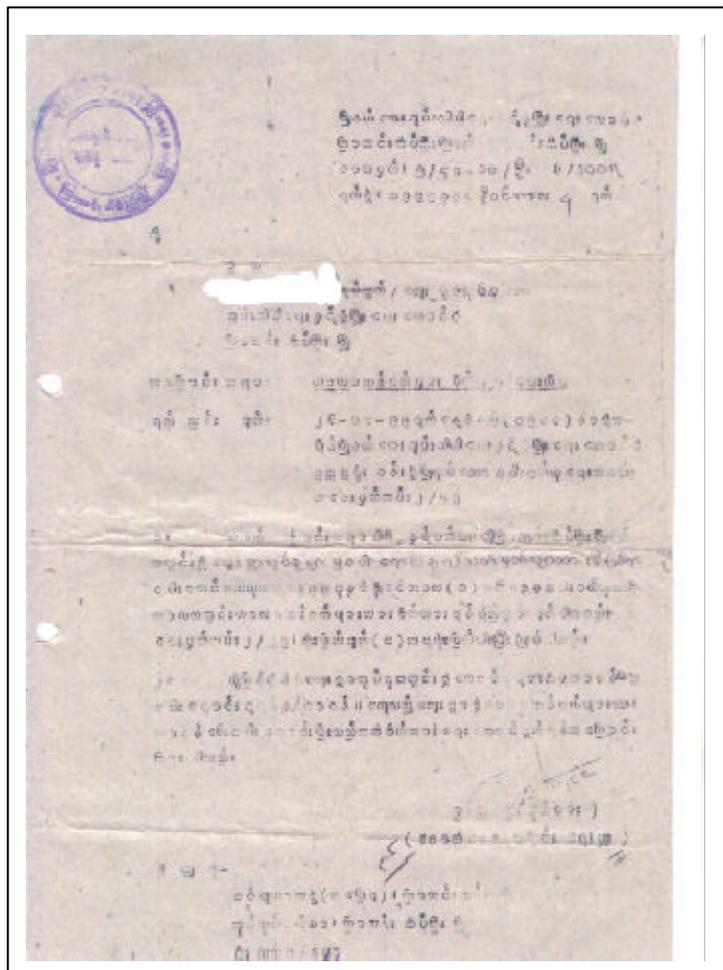
In some township areas, the authorities have allowed only some farmers, who completed selling the set amount of paddy tax, to husk their paddy to get polished rice. The authorities also stopped the farmers who failed to sell the set amount of paddy to the paddy-buying center, to not husk their paddy in mills, or to sell to traders.

Therefore, during this period, the authorities or the members of paddy managing committees went around from one village to another and checked the situation how many farmers had completed selling the complete amount of paddy and how many remained. In Mon State, when the authorities met that many farmers in a village failed to complete the duty, they closed the mill down in that village to not husk paddy for all farmers.

There are some evidence of government's restriction against the paddy-husking mill owners to stop their activities.

On November 29, 1999, when Paung Township authorities and deputy manager of paddy-buying managing committee went around the villages in the administrative areas of Paung Township, they also closed a paddy-husking mill in Kyone-hor village tract, which was owned by Nai Par. The forcible closing down of the mill happened after the authorities knew there were many farmers in the village tract area who have not completed selling the set amount of paddy to government paddy-buying center. The authorities also gave that order through village tract leader and the manager of paddy-buying, U Myint Kyaw, to carefully watch the activities of that paddy-husking mill and take actions if the mill owner did not follow accordingly to the order.

Due to this order, the villagers in this village tract has faced insufficient foods, and the farmers have to buy the polished rice with high price from the town traders. Then the village tract leaders informed to township authorities about the situation of the villagers, and so requested to re-allow the husking of paddy. And, the township re-allowed for operating of the mill, but allowed to farmers who completed selling the set amount of paddy, to husk the paddy by taking permission from village tract leaders. The village tract leaders took 10 Kyat per basket from those farmers when they asked permission to husk the paddy.



An Order in Burmese to close down all paddy-husking mills in Kya Inn Seikyi township

Similarly, in Kya Inn Seikyi township, before the government received the set amount of paddy from the local farmers, the township authorities officially issued the orders the respective village tract to stop all paddy-husking activities in all mills in the township area. To close down these mills, the authorities officially sat a meeting and made

decisions from the meeting. The full translation of the order is as below:

Township Peace and Development Council
Kya Inn Seiky Township, Kya Inn Seiky
Letter No. 5/41 – 10/U, 6/100
Date: November 4, 1999.

To

Chairman
..... Ward/ Village Tract
State Peace and Development Council
Kya Inn Seiky Town

Subject: To close down all paddy-husking mills

Reference: The decision from the meeting of paddy-buying management committee 2/99, which was held in the Township Chairman house on October29, 1999.

Personal Account

The Plight of a Mon Farmer

Name: Nai Pyo

Sex/Age: Male/ 72 years

Nationality/ Religion: Mon/ Buddhist

Occupation: Farmer

Interview Date: January 12, 2000.

Where is your native place and what is the major occupation of your villagers?

My native village is Kaw-mi village, Kaw-bein village tract of Kawkareik township. In my village, there are about 350 households and all villagers are Mons. Most of them are paddy growing farmers like me and only a little number of families, who have no land, had to work for fishing. I own about 10 acres of land and worked as paddy growing farmers.

How is your crop situation this year?

I lost nearly half of the total crops, because of flood this year. Around my farm, there are about 250 acres of farmlands that growing paddy, owned by our villagers. When the flood water (*in October*) was high, estimated about 200 acres of the lands were under water and the flood took about two weeks period. Most paddy plants sunk under for two weeks and at the end, they died.

In the normal situation, if there is no flood, how many baskets of paddy you could get from your farms?

In the normal situation, if we could give enough of fertilizer in our farms, one acre of land could produce about 50 baskets of paddy. However, as my farm is close to river (Gyaing river), I always has faced flood every year. If the flood took for many days, we lost more paddy. If not, we are lucky.

Did the government help you to provide fertilizer and how did you give fertilizer to your farm?

The government does not give fertilizer, we could not get the required amount of paddy and so, we have to buy factory made fertilizer every year. In my farm, I have to give four sack of fertilizer for one acre of land and we have to put three types of fertilizer. Those fertilizers are quite expensive. The three types of fertilizer are at prices about 2, 600 Kyat, 4000 Kyat and 2000 Kyat respectively.

We always heard from the radio that the government would provide fertilizers at low costs. We also knew that the officials in Kawkareik town also brought many thousands sacks of fertilizer from Moulmein. Those fertilizers were for farmers. However, when we asked the price of fertilizer, the price were similar to price at the market. When we asked the officials why the government fertilizer price was quite high, they complained that the government did not provide for the transportation cost for those fertilizer sacks and they have to calculate for transportation costs and combined with actual fertilizer prices. However, the government could not provide sufficient amount of fertilizer. The official could provide only a half sack of fertilizer for one acre of land. So all farmers are depending on the fertilizers from the shops. We can get fertilizer anytime when we need it in the shop. Normally, the government officials sold those fertilizers to private shops and the farmers

1. According to the subject mentioned above, we have planned to buy paddy from all farmers in villages in the Township area. During the period of buying the paddy, all paddy-husking mills must be closed down temporarily, accordingly to our meeting 2/99's decision no. E.
2. Therefore, village PDC members must take responsibility to encourage the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy to government's paddy-buying center. And, for the villages where the farmers in there have not completed selling the paddy, the paddy-husking mills from those villages must be closed definitely.

Authorized by –

Signature

On behalf of the Chairman

Saw E Naw

Secretary

Copies to:

1. Military Operation Command (Base), Kya Inn Seikyi Town
 2. Agricultural Products Trade Department, Kya Inn Seikyi Town
-

have to buy from those shops.

Did the government authorities asked to sell the set amount of paddy to the government?

Yes, they asked. In our township, they asked 8 baskets of paddy per acre to sell to the government paddy-buying center. For our village, we have to sell the paddy in Kaw-bein paddy-buying center. Before the authorities set order to farmers to sell paddy, they also lent money to the farmers.

When the authorities came to our village, they forced the farmers to take their money and ask to sign a promise letter that we must sell the paddy to paddy-buying center. The deadline for all farmers to complete selling the paddy was before the end of October, 1999. The price of the paddy that government bought from us is 350 Kyat per basket, which was three times less than the market price.

How you can manage to sell the paddy to the government to be completed your duty?

I have to give totally about 80 baskets of paddy. From my farms I received only 260 baskets of paddy.

Did you have to hire the labourers to work with you or did you work alone?

No. I have to hire one labourer for the whole year, because I am too old to work alone at my farm. Thus, I have to give about 100 baskets of paddy to that labourer alone. Additionally, during the periods when I grew the small paddy plants and reaped the crops, I also have to hire some day labourers by paying 300 Kyat per day. Thus, I have to spend another 40, 000 Kyat for that labour cost. Additionally, I also have to buy fertilizers for 100, 000 Kyat every year to provide in 10 acres of my lands. At the end I left nothing after giving paddy to government.

And how you can survive?

Soon after I gave paddy tax to government, I have to sell two acres of lands and received 150, 000 Kyat from that. But this was not the end of the story. I had to sell another a half acre of my land.

Why?

On January 9, 2000, the army officers from Kawkareik town came and called a meeting with all farmers from our village. In the meeting, one army officer explained besides the paddy selling to the government, the army also required additional 2 baskets of paddy from each acre. The meeting was held in the house of village chairman.

Then, what happened to the farmers?

Among many farmers, I was the oldest one and I told to the army commander that we already sold the paddy to government paddy-buying center with 8 baskets per acre and explained him about the flood conditions in the last rainy season. And the commander angered to me and asked my name. He shout to me and said that all lands are owned by government and not owned by farmers. Then, the commander and the two soldiers brought all farmers including women to Kaw-bein police station and forced them to give additional 2 baskets of paddy per acre. Then they released the farmers who gave promise them to sell the paddy. And, they detained me for one night because I did not give them promise. On the next day, my wife another a half acre of land and then bought 20 baskets of paddy from other rich farmers and gave to the paddy-buying center for the army. Then they released me.

This type of order also forced the local villagers to face food-shortage or starvation problems in their own villages. In Kya Inn Seikyi Township, during the month of November, the authorities have not allowed any activities of husking paddy and so, the villagers have a lot difficulties, to husk their paddy to get the polished rice. Normally, although they have used the traditional methods of paddy-husking, by wooden equipment, because of large number of population in Mon villages, the amount of paddy is insufficient to all villagers. In Kya Inn Seikyi township, this order also effected to village tracts such as Takun-taing, Kha-lae, Taung-dee, Winyaw-seikyi, Kyone-kha-wan and Pha-pya. There are about 40 villages under these village tracts.

For the farmers to get the polished rice for their own foods, they must have to buy rice from traders from Kya Inn Seikyi town. However, these farmers must have to sell their paddy to buy the rice instead. But the Township authorities also warned the traders from town to not buy paddy from the farmers who have not completed selling the set amount of paddy to the paddy-buying centers.

On the other hand, when the villagers from these villages bought rice and brought to their villages, they also worried for the accusation from the Burmese Army, that they provided foods for KNU troops. Normally, some rural part of Kya Inn Seikyi township under the control of KNU. Because of this accusation and careful transportation of food supplies from towns to villages, some villagers including paddy growing farmers, otherwise also have faced food shortage or starvation during the period the SPDC authorities forced the farmers to sell their paddy to government's paddy buying centers.

Unlike to the whole township of Kya Inn Seikyi, such restriction also has taken place only in some villages in Mon State. The government authorities believed there were more amount of paddy in Mon State than Karen State and that was why the Mon State PDC authorities only stopped the paddy-husking activities only in some specific villages, where the majority of farmers failed to sell their paddy completely to the paddy-buying centers.

**Information on HURFOM
and
Invitation for Feedbacks
from Readers**

Dear Readers,

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995, 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.a-net.net.th

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

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

Printed Matter



Address Correction Required