

The Mon Forum

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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),
- NMSP-** New Mon State Party,

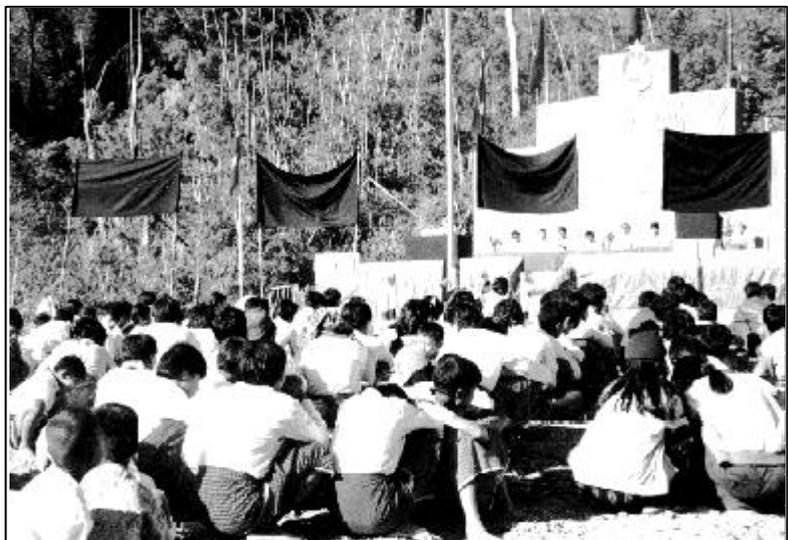
News

Mon National Day in Rangoon was Banned (February, 2000)

In this year, the military government also prohibited the celebration of 53rd Anniversary of Mon National Day in Rangoon, which was planned to be celebrated on February 20, 2000. Although the Mon people in Rangoon have prepared for nearly for one month to celebrate the Mon national day and at the end, before the national day was celebrated, Lt. Gen. Khin Maung Than, the Commander of Rangoon Division Military Command, ordered the Rangoon Mon National Day Celebrating Committee to not celebrate that important day.

Before this important day was celebrated, to assure for the celebration of Mon national day, the key members from celebrating committee and other Mon leaders including Dr. Mehm Thet San, who is still working as an advisor for economy to military government, and other three representatives who actively participated as negotiators during NMSP-SLORC ceasefire talks, met with a high rank Intelligence Officer, Col. San Pwint and asked for permission. In the meeting, intelligence officer gave permission to the committee to celebrate the Mon national day with many restrictions instructed by the authorities, to not hold national flag and Mon National Day banner, and to not give any speech. Although with many restrictions, the Mon leaders agreed to hold the national day with a small ceremony just to give alms to the Mon monks.

Anyhow, the Mon community in Rangoon have prepared to celebrate



A Mon National Day celebration in Mon State

Mon national day even with many restrictions and collected fund from community, invited the Mon people to attend the celebration, invited monks to give alms and etc.,.

However, on February 17, Lt. Gen. Khin Maung Than, asked the key leaders of the celebrating committee to meet him and he said in the meeting that the permission given by Intelligence Officer was illegal and he would not allow the celebration of Mon national day to be held in Rangoon which was under his control. At the end, all plans were suddenly banned and it was an evidence that the military government refused to recognize the identity of all ethnic nationalities in Burma and restricted the rights to non-Burman ethnic people.

Corruption and Tax Collection in Mon State

After the rainy season, to prevent the illegal military activities conducted by the ethnic armed opposition groups, so the SPDC check-points have checked who traveled on the roads. The travelers on the road have to show their identity cards to the authorities including police and military intelligents in every check-point. If those travelers could not show the identity card, they must have to pay fine to the authorities. Sometimes, those travelers were brought to the town detention centers for some hours and were questioned from which they came and they purposes they traveled. For the release, they have to pay fine.

As evidence, on November 19, 1999, the authorities in a Thanbyuzayat township also detained 20 rural villagers who came from the rural areas of Thanbyuzayat township. For these villagers, since their villages were far from the town and the continued civil war for several years, they were not recognized as citizens and they have not made the identity cards. Then the authorities suspected those were not citizens and so they took fine 500 Kyat from each person and then released them.

Similarly, on November 18, 1999, when the a couple came back from Thailand to deliver a child in their native village, they were also arrested by authorities and accused they were working in the villages under the rebel control. Actually, the couple left Thailand for many years and sought jobs in Thailand after they had no job in Burma. When the woman had pregnancy, she would like to deliver her baby in their parent houses and decided to return their native homes. While the authorities checked them, they could not show their identity cards and so they were detained for some hours. After they agreed to pay 20, 000 Kyat fine to authorities, they were released.

On the other hand, by showing some rural area development programs, the authorities also collected various types of tax and received huge amount of money from the local villagers. As evidence, in November, 1999, with a reason to build a water dike and related embankment, Thanbyuzayat township authorities also collected 200 Kyat tax per household from the whole township area. In Mon

State, with purpose to take security the roads, bridges and other constructions in the rural areas, the authorities have regularly forced two to three villagers to take security in each bridge and along the roads. When they met some suspicions of rebel activities, they must have to immediately inform the nearest army outpost. If someone failed to come and take security in the instructed place, they must give fine to the authorities or army with 500 Kyat per day. During the cultivation season, the local villagers are quite busy with their own works and so the authorities also received a lot of money from villagers as fines.

Another way of raising fund, the authorities also sold the calendars produced by Construction Ministry to the local villagers. In 2000 Year, the construction department in Mon State also produced a calendar with Ataran Bridge and sold it with 200 Kyat per sheet price to the local villagers by force. The township authorities took responsibility in forcible selling those calendar and raised fund for their own townships.

Similarly, the Mon State police station also produced a calendar and sold them to their local villagers and town citizens. They also sold with 200 Kyat per sheet. By this way, many SPDC departments have raised fund for their own departments after the government could not provide sufficient and enough fund to their departments.

On the other hand, after the authorities failed to celebrate Students' Sports celebration in 1999 in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, and they also showed the reason that the fund they had received was not enough to celebrate the celebration. Therefore, the government authorities have collected more fund from the civilians to support for Students' Sport celebration. During the beginning of Year 2000, the authorities produced many flags with symbol of Students' Sports and sold them to trishaw, taxi, ferry and truck drivers in the whole Mon State. The authorities produced different sizes of flags and sold them to car drivers with 150, 200 and 300 Kyat respectively.

While the local SPDC authorities collected various types of tax, the army in every area of Mon State also collected porter fees from the local villagers and town residents. Depending on the number of soldiers in a battalion and the number of battalion in one township, the amounts of porter fees are also different from one area to another. As example, in Zin Kyaik village of Paung Township, the government authorities have collected about 200 Kyat from each house for every month. In that village alone, there are about 1,500 households and the army could receive 30, 000 Kyat porter fee from that village alone. In the whole township, the army receives about one million Kyat fund. By this way, the army has attempted for their survival and created self-reliance instructed by the military government in Rangoon.

Due to various type of tax collection from the villagers, every household has to give to the concerned authorities with 500-3,000 Kyat tax every month. This continuous tax collection also made the villagers to remain poorer and poorer.



Report

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

Detaining of Farmers after Failure of Selling Paddy

During the government planned to buy some paddy from the local farmers during November and December, 1999, in Mon State, some local Mon farmers who failed to sell the set amount of paddy to the government's paddy-buying centers were also arrested and detained. In detention, they were forced to give promise that they would sell the set amount of paddy or the remaining family members were forced to sell the set amount of paddy.

Normally, when the authorities arrested the farmers, they also used armed forces, *army or village militia* to help them in arresting the farmers. Before the arrests happened, the authorities, mainly paddy-buying officials and village leaders always called meetings with villagers and set the deadline to sell the complete amount of paddy to the designated paddy-buying centers. When the deadline arrived, the authorities came to meet with local village headmen again and inquired whose still remained to sell the paddy. Then, they went to those farmers house and sometimes looted the paddy from their houses, *or* if they did not meet any paddy from those houses, they also warned the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy as quick as possible. Or, sometimes, they also arrested the farmers, if they suspected the farmers hid their paddy in another places. Whenever the authorities made arrests to the farmers, they also brought armed forces along with them and treated the farmers as criminals.

There are many evidences of arrest happened in Mon State during the period from December until the end of February. As an instance,

On February 18, 2000, when Mudon Township authorities and paddy-buying officials went into Kamawet village, the biggest village in Mudon township, they also met some farmers failed to sell the set amount of paddy although they gave promise the set amount of paddy. And, the deadline for those farmers also ended. Then the authorities, the headmen, the paddy-buying officials and village militia troops went farmers' houses and forced them to sell the paddy. Among farmers who failed the set amount of paddy, the authorities also tried to arrest a farmer. When they arrived to his house, they did not meet him and his wife could not give any agreement whether he/she could sell the set amount of paddy. Thus, on behalf of the man, the authorities also arrested his wife, Mi Phaw Tin (51 years old) and his son, Mehm Raing Chai (21 years old) along with them and brought them to Mudon township police station. The mother and the son were detained in the police station for 7 days and the authorities also gave pressure to Nai Nyein Han to sell the set amount of paddy for the release of his wife and son. Although he said to authorities to detain him instead, they refused and just took his wife and son and used them as pawns to pressure the men to sell the paddy. At the end, he



The government's a
paddy-buying
center in Mon State

sold some of his belongings, bought paddy and gave the authorities for the release of his wife and son.

The similar arrest also happened in various Mon villages in another township areas of Mon State. The farmers who failed to sell the set amount of paddy to the designated paddy-buying centers normally own the low quality land and they may lose their crops because of flood or other related bad weather conditions. Among the farmers, those who own the deeper low lands always lose their crops when too much rain falls and dips in their lands for many days.

In the last rainy season, the farmers faced a lot of paddy plants were sunk under water and died because of flood. In some areas, the floor covered many thousands acres of rice-fields and the related disasters were that floor made death to a lot of paddy plants and the farmers also lost crops.

According to reliable source, there were about 10, 000 acres of paddy fields in Paung Township alone under water and many farmers lost their crops. Similarly, about 5, 000 acres of paddy fields in Chaungzone township were sunk under water and the farmers also lost their crops.

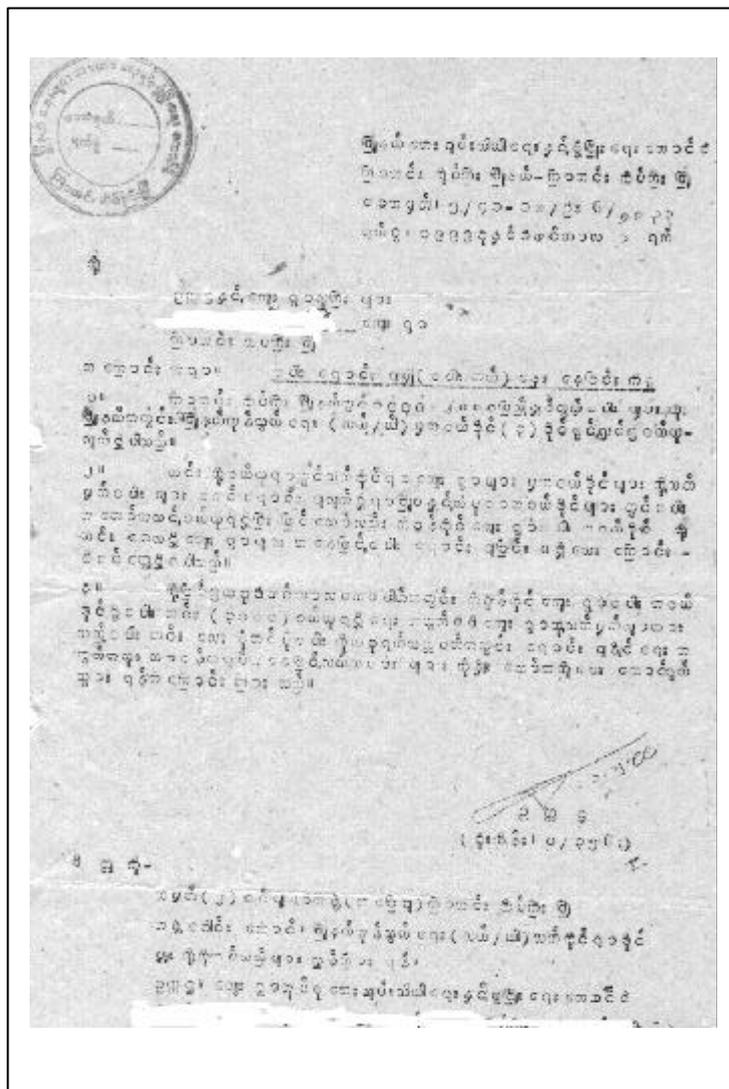
In some areas, the farmers earlier reaped their crops and put in the fields. When the rain came in October, their crops were wet and the grains were dropped. In Kya Inn Seikyi township of Karen State, the authorities also officially issued a reminding order to farmers that to keep their crops out of water and to be drought. This order also warned the farmers that whether their crops were destroyed or not, the authorities would take the set amount of paddy from them.

Because of floor 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 considered to reduce the set amount of paddy that required to buy from farmers. According a village from Mudun village village in Chaungzon township of Mon State, in his village area alone, the farmers lost crops from about 200 acres of paddy fields and the farmers also proposed about that problems to township authorities and paddy-buying officials. But the authorities constantly refused to reduce the set amount of paddy. When those farmers who lost crops could not sell the set amount of paddy to the centers, they were also arrested and detained.

Similarly, many farmers from Paung, Kyaikmayaw, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Ye townships were arrested by the authorities for their failure to sell the set amount of paddy to the respective paddy-buying centers. According to reliable source, there are over 50 farmers detained in Mudon township SPDC office and police station during February for their failure to sell the set amount of paddy. They must be detained in detention until they give promise that they would sell the set amount of paddy. During they are in detention, their remaining family members must have to sell their belongings including lands and give the remaining paddy to the paddy-buying centers for the release of detainees.

There were many evidences that the authorities have arrested and detained the farmers without inquiring the conditions or recognizing their problems. As an example,

On November 20, 1999, Ye Township authorities also arrested 7 farmers from An-din village tract after those farmers failed to sell the set amount of paddy to An-din paddy-buying center. Those farmers were Nai Hla Aung, Nai Kyaw



The order by authorities to village headmen in forcing the local farmers to sell the set amount of paddy

Min, Nai Yout, Nai Balai, Nai Myaw, Nai Seik Cho and Mi Phone. They were arrested in their houses by the local paddy-buying officials, township authorities and police came from Ye town. Then, they were detained in An-din village chairman's houses. Those farmers were unable to sell the set amount of paddy to paddy-buying center because their paddy crops were destroyed by flood. During the rainy season, one water embankment in An-din paddy fields was destroyed because of strong water flow and the flood went into those farmers' paddy fields. Thus, the paddy plants and crops were sunk under water and at the end, the farmers lost all crops and left nothing even for their own foods.

When the paddy-buying season started in November, when the local paddy-buying officials asked them to sell the set amount of paddy, they explained their problems and the village headmen also supported them. However, the officials set the deadline to them and at the end of the deadline, the authorities also arrested those farmers.

This was not the end of the story. During those farmers were in detention, the authorities also forced them to sell their belongings at homes to buy the paddy and give them the set amount of paddy. Or, the authorities said they would confiscate the lands if the farmers could not give the set amount of paddy. So, their families sold their belongings including oxen, lands and houses and bought the required the set amount of paddy and give them to authorities in paddy-buying center. Then they were released. Depending on how quick the farmers could give the set amount of paddy to authorities, some of farmers were detained for one week while some were for over two weeks in detention.

Besides the farmers were arrested by the authorities, sometimes the authorities also arrested the local village headmen for their failure to encourage their own villagers to sell the set amount of paddy to centers. Before the arrests to the village headmen were committed, the authorities always forced the village headmen to encourage or force their own villagers to sell the set amount of paddy on time.

The following description is the translation of SPDC's order from Burmese version, which they forced the local village headmen to organize the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy.

Township Peace and Development Council
Kya Inn Seiky Township, Kya Inn Seiky Town
Letter No. 5/41 – 11/ U 6
Date: December 1, 1999.

To

Chairmen and other village headmen
----- Village
Kya Inn Seiky Township

Subject: Informing about the matter of delay selling paddy to the government paddy-buying centers.

1. As the subject mentioned above, the Township Trade (Agricultural Products) Department has planned to buy the paddy from farmers for 1999-2000 paddy-buying year in the whole township areas and we also created three paddy-buying centers.
2. As some the respective villages' farmers had sold the set amount of paddy to Myo-ma and Thanbaya paddy-buying centers, we already received the possible amount of paddy from farmers. However, as we were informed by our paddy-buying officials, the respective villages which have responsibility to sell the paddy to Tagun-taing paddy-buying center still have not sold any amount of paddy to this center.
3. Thus, during the first week of December, we planned to buy about 3, 000 baskets of paddy in Tagun-taing paddy-buying center and we require from your village's farmers to sell one fourth of the total amount of the paddy to the center. During this week, we would like to give you a special task to encourage your village farmers to sell the set amount of paddy to Tagun-daing paddy-buying center.

Signed/-

(Chairman)

Soe Thein, P/3563

Copies to:

1. Operational Strategic Command No. 2 (base), Kya Inn Seiky town,
2. In-charge, Township Trade (Agricultural Products) Department,
3. Chairmen, Village Tract Peace and Development Council





Some paddy plants are destroyed after long period flood

After the authorities issued this order, they actually took actions against farmers who refused their orders or who could not organize the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy to center. Some village headmen were also arrested by authorities after they failed to encourage the farmers in village to sell the paddy.

As an instance,

During the second week of December, 1999, after some headmen failed to organize their own villages' farmers to sell the set amount of paddy, the Township authorities also arrested and detained them. On December 10, the authorities informed three village headmen, the headmen of (1)

Thanbaya village, (2) Htee-phar-phaw village and (3) Weithalee village to come and meet them. When those headmen arrived, they asked the reason why the village farmers failed to sell the set amount of paddy to the center. Then, they detained the headmen for one week and the army and authorities forced the farmers to sell the paddy to the government as quick as possible for the release of those headmen.

In the rural areas, there are two different types of village headmen. The first type of the village headmen are the supporters to the government authorities and they are close with the authorities and most farmers do not like their behaviour. Those headmen would have closely cooperated with the local authorities, army and participated in deep corruption in making profit for themselves. Normally, such village headmen are directly selected the nearest military commanders or township authorities. The local township authorities always give pressure to farmers through these headmen and they also took responsibility acting as bad guys in the villages. In forcing the villages' farmers to sell the set amount of paddy to the paddy-buying centers and arresting farmers, those village headmen actively participated. In this condition, there is a split between village headmen and the majority villagers.

Other type of village headmen is the sympathizers to villagers and taking responsibility for the villagers' cases. Whenever they met township authorities or army commanders, they always say about the real conditions of the farmers, the flood situation, weather conditions that effect to the crop production. They always stand on behalf of the local farmers and proposed for the reduction of the amount of paddy that required by the authorities or army. In such situation, those village headmen are always threatened by authorities or army commander. Sometimes, the village headmen always warned to the headmen to encourage the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy. If they failed to encourage the farmers or if the authorities did not receive the set amount of paddy, they must be punished. The arrests happened as above example is always case to the village headmen who actually represent the real situation of the local farmers.

Active Participation of the Army in Forcing Farmers

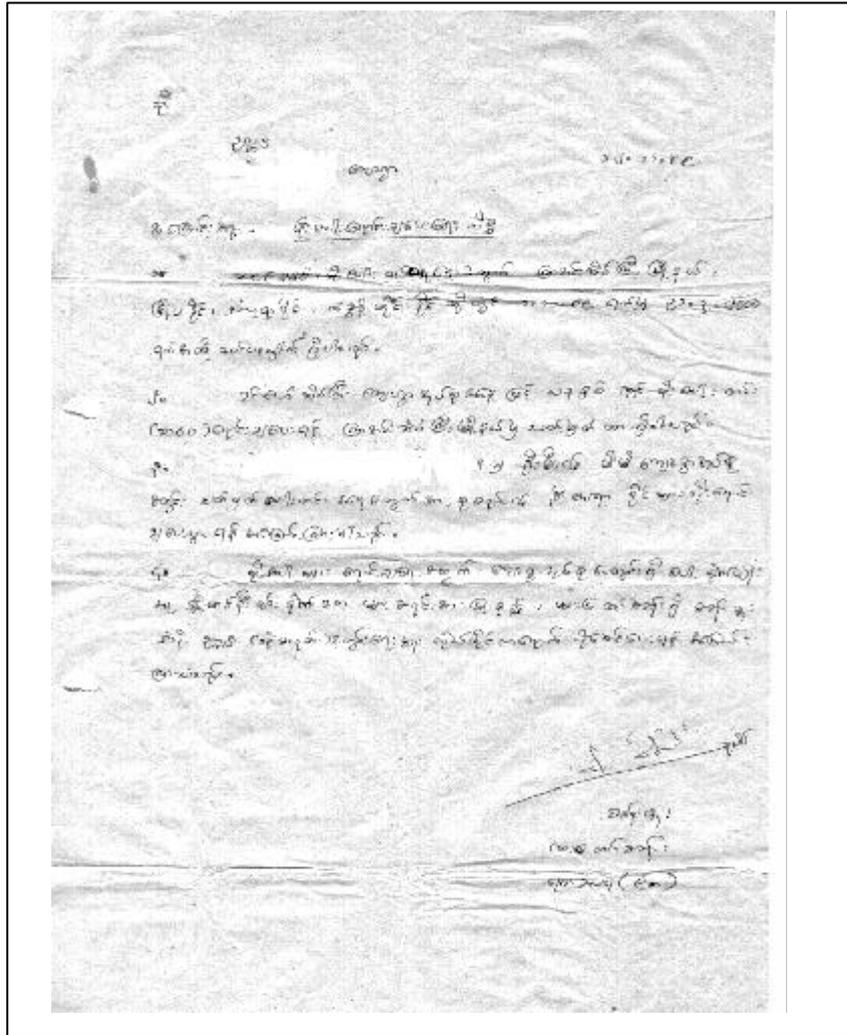
In this 1999-2000 paddy-buying season, the authorities increased 2-4 baskets of paddy per acre to be sold in the government designated paddy-buying centers when compared with 1998-1999 paddy-buying season. During 1998-1999 paddy-buying season, the authorities asked farmers in Mudon township to sell their paddy from 12 baskets per acre, and 1999-2000 season, they asked to sell up to 15-16 baskets of paddy. Why? According to reliable source, the extra amount requested by the authorities is the main food supply to provide the army that bases in the area or in Mon and Karen States. Since 1997, after the headquarters of *Burmese Army (BA)* could not provide a sufficient food supply to its military divisions, the HQs also instructed the military divisions to stand on the basis of self-sufficient and then, the concerned military division also instructed their own military battalions to find food supplies by themselves. Thus, in this 1999-2000 paddy-buying season, the authorities and army have coordinated each other in forcing the farmers to sell the set amount of paddy including the paddy for army.

Actually, in many townships, the authorities initially started forcing the local farmers to sell the paddy to government at low price. But when the authorities had no ability to get the defined amount of paddy from the

farmers, the army always intervened in the situation and forced the farmers to sell the paddy instead of the authorities. Sometimes, the army troops themselves went into villages and forced the local farmers through village headmen to sell the set amount of paddy.

Sometimes, in rural areas in where the Burmese Army has firm control areas, the army always send official orders to village headmen to organize their villages' farmers and order them to sell the paddy. After official orders, if the village failed to encourage the farmers or delay to organize, they must be punished.

During November, when the authorities could not manage to get the set amount of paddy some part of Kya Inn Seikyi township, Karen State, after several official order given by the township authorities, the nearer the army commander also send order to the local village headmen. The following description is the translation of the order given by army to local village headmen.



The order given by army to village headmen in forcing the farmers to sell the paddy

To
Chairman
----- Village

Date: November 12, 1999.

Subject: To sell the rainy season paddy crops to government.

1. As the subject mentioned above, the Kya Inn Seikyi Township authorities have planned to buy the rainy season paddy crops from the farmers in the whole township and created Myo-ma, Thanbaya and Tagun-taing paddy-buying centers. The period of buying paddy is from November 1, 1999 to March 31, 2000.
2. According to our record, your village tract has responsibility to sell about 1, 000 baskets of paddy to the government designated paddy-buying center.
3. Thus, we would like to ask you that you must organize the farmers in your own village tract to gather the set amount of paddy and sell them to the nearest paddy-buying centers.
4. Additionally, to do selling the set amount of paddy, we inform you to make a list that encloses the names of all paddy growing farmers and the numbers of acres each farmer owns. And, the chairman (or) secretary of each village must send these lists to outpost commander in Pha-pya village.

Signed/-
Outpost Commander
Pha-pya Outpost
LIB No. 98

Normally the village headmen are more afraid of the army commanders than the township authorities. Because, if the village headmen failed to follow the commanders' instructions, they must be taken action by the commander or they must be severely mis-treated by verbal shouting or beating. Thus, the village headmen are quickly follow the instruction ordered by the commanders.

As an instance,

On April 30, 1999, the village chairman and secretary of Tarana village, Kyaikmayaw township of Mon State were severely tortured by a SPDC back-line strategic commander, Col. Tin Win and his soldiers from LID No. 22 for their failure to manage a meeting between village's farmers and commander. Before that day, one April 29, 1999, that commander and his troops came into Tarana village and told the headmen to manage a meeting with village's farmers. However, the commander did not tell to headmen when he would come back again. On the next day on April 30, when the commander suddenly arrived into village, the chairman and secretary had no time to manage a meeting. Thus, the commander angered to village chairman and secretary. The commander slapped six times to chairman and ordered his soldiers to beat him with sticks. He, himself, took a stick and beat the secretary. Because of such cruel and ashamed treatment, both village headmen decided to resign from their posts.

Sometimes, the local commanders also forced the farmers to give money instead of paddy in area they could buy the rice supplies easily. As evidence, on November 10, 1999, the commanders from Southeast Military Command, bases in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, went into Tarana village again and called a meeting with all village headmen in Kyaikmayaw township area. In the meeting, the two commanders, Lt. Col. Aung Maw Maw and Lt. Col. Than Win explained to the village headmen that they must collect 1, 100 Kyat from each farmers which was the costs of two baskets of paddy. The army required only money and the fund for the military command. Besides the money paid to army, the farmers in Kyaikmayaw township have to sell 12 baskets of paddy per acre to the designated 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:

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