

The Mon Forum

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Some Acronyms in This Issue

SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council,
APTD-	Agricultural Products Trade Department,
ILO-	International Labour Organization
IB -	Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
LIB-	Light Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
MOMC-	Military Operational Management Command
PDC-	Peace and Development Council,
PVA-	People Vigorous Association
USDA-	Union Solidarity and Development Association

News

Printing of books in Mon Language are barred

October 2003, Rangoon

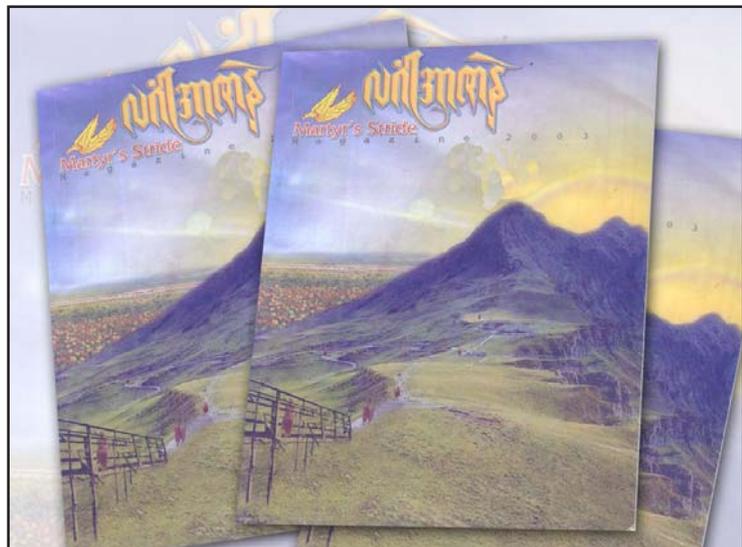
SPDC, the military government's Censorship Board has created more restriction against the ethnic publications even the printed books are directly and completely translated the already printed Burmese books.

The Mon monk communities in Rangoon, the capital of Thailand have not gotten permission of printing Mon books and then they changed. They just found the worthy reading Burmese books and translated them into Mon language in order the Mon people readers could read Mon books. However, they needed to apply the military government's 'Censorship Board' in Rangoon for permission of printing these books.

In early October, one Mon magazine which contents were the articles and stories that translated from Burmese language was rejected by the government's Censorship Board.

Accordingly to a monk,

"The articles are not related to the politics, we tried to put the contents with which the Burmese language articles that already published in magazines and journals, but the Censorship Board still prohibits".



A Mon magazine, " Martyr's Stride" which was barred by the Censorship Board of SPDC in Rangoon, Burma

SPDC's Political Plan and Denial of People Participation

Currently, the newly self-appointed Prime Minister of Burma, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, also declared for 7 points 'Road Map' and has planned to hold a 'National Convention' that aims to draw a Constitution that guarantee the role of army leaders to hold in power safely and fairly.

The main armed group in Burma, the Burmese Army, invited many other ceasefire and non-ceasefire armed groups to attend this National Convention. Then, the Prime Minister and the SPDC top leader will hand-pick some of their supporters as 'representatives' to attend the National Convention. Therefore, the Convention room will be full with persons with uniforms and persons 'who bold their heads' to the regime.

Until now, the regime has been quite to invite the representatives from the legal political parties including the National League Party (NLD) led by Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other banned political parties. Many ethnic political parties were banned after 1990 general elections, but those parties recognized them as they have been active.

There is no sign that the Prime Minister and the regime would invite NLD and other ethnic political parties, which won over 95% seats in the parliament to attend this National Convention. Without allowing the people representatives, the regime 'move forward' to hold the National Convention. Hence, it would be 'Sham National Convention'.

Denying the people representatives from the political parties, which won 1990 elections is similarly denying the people participation in decision making processes of political life in Burma.

The Mon magazines which contain about the well-known Mon monks and religious things are allowed to print only once a year or twice a year, confirmed by the Mon monks.

Restriction against the printing of Mon books have been seriously implemented by the Censorship Board since the last 2-3 years and the Mon publishers have gotten rare permission for printing books.

The Mon publishers confirmed that it is more harder during this military government's era if compared with the previous military regime – BSPP (Burmese Socialist Programme Party), which ruled Burma from 1962 to 1988. The source said at that time, the Mon books, which contains of the translation from the Burmese language were allowed to print as books.

Accordingly to another monk from Rangoon, he compared the current situation with 3 years ago. He said that last 3 years ago, they had to apply for 6 months to get permission to print a book or magazine. It was still fine if compared with the current situation. Now, they could not get any permission for printing.

To overcome this situation, the publishers also approach the New Mon State Party, which agreed for ceasefire with the regime for providing them to print the books. Since 2002, the Party also allowed the Mon publishers to print many books, to produce yearly calendars and to produce CD songs.

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Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline exploded

October 17, 2003, Mudon Township, Mon State

A part of Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline, which transports gas from Yatana on-shore gas station to a new cement factory in Myaingkalay village in Karen State, exploded near Kwan-hlar village of Mudon Township in Mon State after mid-night.

The loud explosion occurred near a railway at western part of the village and it made the villagers in the area frighten. The villagers from two Mon villages, Kwan-hlar and Yaung-daung urgently moved to the eastern part of the villager to avoid the dangerous situation.

The villagers did not know the reason of explosion, but most of them believed that the gas blew up normally in a junction of pipeline. Due to lack of skills by the Burmese engineers in the construction of the pipeline, the gas has regularly spilled in the junctions of the pipeline and then blew up seriously and loudly.

A local artillery regiment bases nearby the area does not confirm for the loss in the explosion and they have arrived to the explosion site suddenly. This battalion, Artillery Regiment No. 318 under the command of Burmese Army's Southeast Command has to take responsibility for the security of this pipeline.

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Special report of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)

Executive Summary of “No Land To Farm” Report

Land confiscation and other human rights violations such as killing, rapes, forced labors, various kinds of tax extortions are still widespread in Mon's areas, southern Burma. Although the New Mon State Party (NMSP) has reached cease-fire with the present Burmese military regime, State Peace and Development Council – SPDC (the then State Law and Order Restoration Council – SLORC) since in 1995, the abuses of human rights by the Burmese army are still far to an end in Mon's areas. After the cease-fire agreement, the Burmese military regime has increased deploying its troops in Mon's areas in order for the regime to occupy the areas, which had been under NMSP's control before 1995. The SPDC ordered its local commanders to confiscate paddy farmlands and plantations from local Mon civilians to provide food supplies or incomes for military personnel and to construct military barracks for battalions in the region. In some cases, the land was confiscated under the name of government's so-called development and population transfer projects.

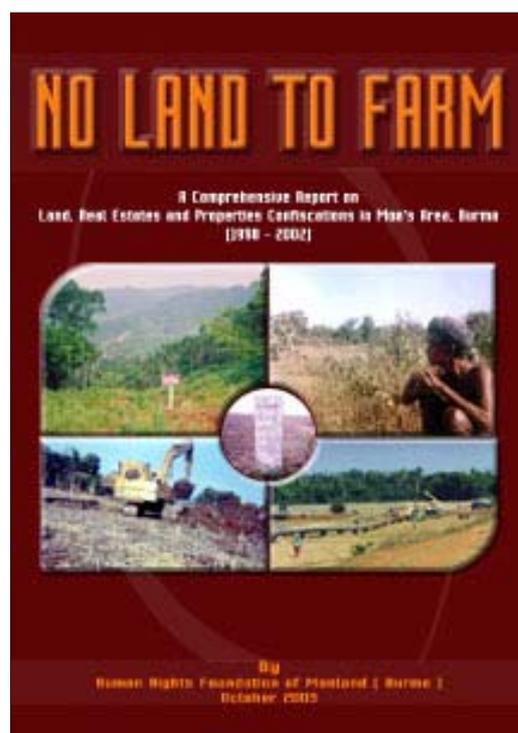
Land confiscation by the Burmese Army have been widespread in Mon State. The most severe cases were found in Ye township, southern part of the State. The Burmese military regime has deployed thousands of Burmese troops in the area since 1995. Ye Township was once recognized as a black area, which government could not gain full access due to insurgency. However, after the Burmese Army stationed its Military Operation Management Command (MOMC) No. 19, in 2001, Ye Township has become the center of Burmese military operations in the region.

Nearly eight thousands acres of farmlands with paddy, rubber, betel nut and orchards in Mon State were confiscated between 1998 and 2002. Many families have been affected by this land confiscation (Note: in Burma, average land area owned by a family is only 10- 20 acres). None of the landowners received full compensations for the value of their lands or plantations. The New Mon State Party and the landowners had appealed to local authorities, Burmese Army commanders, for compensations or land substitution, but their appeals were quickly rejected. Although the farmers were eager to appeal their cases to high-ranking authorities, the majority have had very limited access. These poor farmers could found no places to seek legal helps. A few of the farmers who were able to bring their cases to the attention of the Southeast Command Headquarter, the highest authority in South-eastern Burma, were allowed to harvest their crops for 2 to 3 years under restricted conditions and were paid small amount of compensations.

The Burmese Army not only confiscated farmlands, orchards, and plantations, but also forced the farmers and landowners to work in the confiscated lands. In some areas, farmers and villagers were forced to work in building military barracks on the confiscated lands. In those cases, the landowners were forced to provide building materials such as lumbars, bamboos, and thatches needed for construction. In addition, the military collected money from local civilians to help cover the expenses of building new barracks and battalions.

Massive land confiscation by the army forced thousands of local civilians to landless, jobless and homeless. Consequently, prostitutes and crimes have increased in the areas. Many young men and women have painfully left their homes and illegally entered Thailand for employment opportunity, while many other had fled to Thai-Burma border areas to escape from brutal oppressions. Those who are not able to leave remain in town and villages in poverty, starvation, helplessness and fear. Land confiscation has exerted severe negative impacts on not only local economy but also social and moral of the local people.

This report compiled the results from 20 case studies conducted between 1998 and 2002. The data were obtained from personal interviews with farmers who live inside Burma and who had fled to the Thai-Burma border. We also visited some confiscated sites inside Burma to collect the data. The studies also covered some parts of the Tenneserim Division and Karen State although the stress was placed on the areas inside Mon State. We report the summaries of land confiscations and human rights violations taken place following military deploment in Mon's areas and we endorsed our recommendations to the SPDC, NMSP, Thai government, and international community for further action on this regard.



The Cover of “NO LAND TO FARM” report

Recommendations

A. Recommendations to the SPDC

- To create social, political, and economic development in the country;
- To comply with the obligations under UN's declaration of human rights;
- To restraint further military expansion in ethnic areas in order to maintain peace and stability in the country;
- To ensure that citizens, especially who live in rural areas, are not abused by undisciplined military personnel and soldiers;
- To grant landowners the rights to file legal actions against local army, authorities, and police who confiscated their lands;
- To end all land confiscations and other human rights abuses in Mon areas and grant fair compensation to farmers for their losses caused by land confiscations.
- To commit to the establishment of a democratic parliamentary government in Burma;

B. Recommendations to the NMSP and Other Armed Forces

- To protect local people who fled to the Thai-Burma border areas while they are seeking for temporary sanctuary;
- To develop a new mechanism to give protection to local people from various types of abuses committed by the military regime;
- To respect, protect, and to fight for the rights of farmers and local people;

C. Recommendations to the Royal Thai Government

- To provide humanitarian helps to the victims who fled to Thai-Burma border and who are seeking for temporary sanctuary in the Kingdom;
- To carefully observe the nature of conflicts in Burma, that is, to listen to or hear from both sides, Burmese military regime and the people of Burma
- To adopt a new pragmatic diplomacy with the government of Union of Burma for maintaining peace and stability in the region;
- To actively involve in solving political and economic crises in Burma;

D. Recommendations to United Nations and International Community

- To help stop human rights violations in Burma via its representatives and local offices;
- To increase human rights violations monitoring programs in rural areas, especially in black and gray areas in cooperating with local human rights organizations, community groups as well as religious associations in the country;
- To expend development programs in the rural areas, where there are very limited health care, education and employment opportunity;
- To help transfer skills, technology, and resources to local people, especially for agricultural developments in the country.



A confiscated rubber plantation in Ye Township, Mon State, Burma.

Report

Human Rights Violations, Militarization and Labour Migration from Southern Burma

I. The deep analysis on population migration

Many people around the ASEAN and other countries, which do not know the deep problems of Burma (Myanmar) think about the illegal migrant workers from Burma leave their country because of poverty, economic mismanagement by the regime (SLORC/SPDC) and unemployment. In reality, illegal population migration in Burma also deeply relates to the regime authorities and Burmese Army's various types of human rights violations and militarization policy in the non-Burman ethnic areas.

Among the neighbouring countries, which has economic growth, Thailand is a closest country that received nearly one million (unofficial number) of migrant workers from the countries because of many Thai industries also demanded for the cheap labour from Burmese migrant workers. However, that is a burden for the Thai government in labour management. Burmese migrant workers are always accused of taking employment done by Thai workers.

Thai Ministry of Labour has also tried to register Burmese migrant workers to know the exact number of migrant workers and to limit the number of workers only in set workplaces: such as construction industries, fishing industries and agriculture works. However this program is not so success because many Burmese migrant workers do not come and register with a fear that they would be deported back one day in the future.

Burmese migrants workers, over 70% of them are Mon, Karen, Shan, Tavoyan and other ethnic civilians, are working not only in the areas in cities for the construction works (such as Bangkok, Chaing Mai and other cities) and fishing districts (Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, and Ranong) in Burma, they are separating in many workplaces along Thailand-Burma border. Along Thailand-Burma border, the Burmese migrant workers are especially working in agriculture works. Some of migrant women are also pushed to work in sex industries of Thailand.

Similarly to Thailand, some non-Burman ethnic and Burman people also went into Malaysia to have works illegally especially in the rubber plantations in the countryside areas. Some migrant workers also work in Malaysia with legal work-permit and this type of workers are working in cities. Some little number of migrant workers also migrate to Singapore with passport and work in the cities with work-permit.

Why so many illegal migrant workers (without passport and work-permit) migrate into Thailand and try to seek works in this country. The first reason is they could get easy access into Thailand and many Thai employment or industries also demand cheap labour from them. The other reason is many ethnic people in Burma especially in eastern part of the border where the conflict is on-going situation, have to decide to leave from their homes and work in Thailand for the survival of their families. Even though the Burmese Army or SPDC are not directly forcing them to leave from their homes, but many indirect effects created by the army and authorities have forced them to leave from their homes.

In some families in southern part of Burma: Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim Division, their family members are totally depending on workers in Thailand or Malaysia or Singapore for their survival (to have foods), to have education for the children and to receive health care. Those migrant workers sent money back to their families in even illegal money transfer service, which has phone communication between Burma and other countries.

Traditionally, most young people, both young aged men and women, who are living in the rural areas do not want from their homes from their homes because they want to take care their parents and children at homes and work in paddy farm; rubber and fruit plantations. Many situation has forced them to leave from their houses not only of economic management or unemployment, they have to flee from their houses and seek income in the neighbouring countries to provide money for their families, who are suffered from paying various types of tax to the regime's local authorities and Burmese Army; the constant contribution of forced labour; their lands and properties are confiscated; their family members are recruited as porters in the front-line; whose their family members are in the hospital for serious diseases.

Additionally, some migrant workers including have to flee into the neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, to seek works after they lost their lands due to land confiscation; could not tolerate longer for forced labour; their villages or homes are forcibly relocated; or other reasons.

When a member of a family leave from their homes, it also relates to one reason or more of human rights violations that has been committed by the members of Burmese Army. For example, if the villagers are forced working in a road construction for several days and months, when the family faced difficulties or lack of income, one of their family member had to decide to flee into Thailand to get work and income.

Hundreds of thousands of young men and women in Shan State, Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim Division of Burma, has migrated to seek works and help their families in the villages. In Mon villages, over 50% of young men and women entered into Thailand to seek works. Only about 70% of the total population stay in their native villages and the remaining 30% of the local villagers are in Thailand.

In recent years, the Burmese Army has deployed more and more troops in southern part of Burma and this new ‘militarization policy’ of Burmese Army has pushed thousands of villagers to leave from their homes.

Therefore, putting a name to those migrant workers as ‘economic migrants’ is not totally correct, because they have to flee from their homes not only because of economy in Burma. Various types of human rights violations and militarization policy of Burmese Army that create thousands of migrants are mentioned in details as below:

II. Human rights abuses that creates migration

A. Illegal Taxation

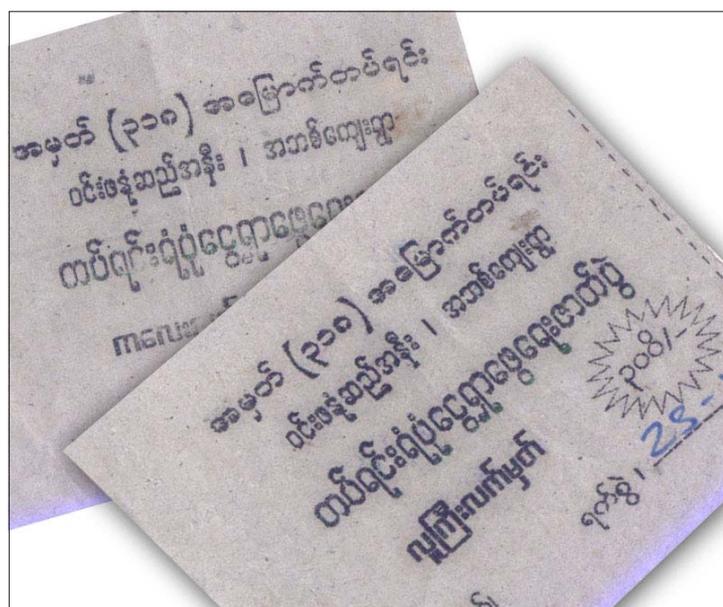
According to a local villager in southern part of Ye Township, Mon State, he said,

“Our village has to pay for porter fee, soldiers’ food cost, road and construction. Every family has to pay 2000-3000 Kyat. Even the army said nearby our village (LIB No. 299), they would not take any porter in the operation, however, they took money from us 500 Kyat per household. The village headmen had to collect money for them every month. But sometimes, they took our villagers to work in their base, but they do not pay. The (village) headmen always said they will have to rebuild the main that close to village or rebuild the old bridge. They took money from every household. But we never found any of construction done by them. Every time the Burmese soldiers came into village, they always asked the headmen to provide them chicken, pork, cooking oil, onion, beer, liquor and cigarette. After the soldiers retreated from villages, the headmen has to collect money from villagers to pay the shops or livestock owners for soldiers’ food. Each time, each household has to pay 200 to 500 Kyat. If the soldiers came about 2 times every week and the village has to pay for their foods.”

Due to less amount of salary payment, no sufficient food supplies and no concrete disciplines to the soldiers, the looting of food supplies and other properties from the soldiers has taken root in the rural parts of Burma. When the soldiers are staying in cities or close to the higher commander, their behaviour is normal, but when they arrived into border areas or in the rural areas, they planned to loot from the people.

In local towns and villages, the civilians also have to pay various kinds of tax, especially tax for development projects, security tax for main roads and other important places, fund collection to for various ceremony, fund for various the regime formed organizations such as Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), Army Veteran Association and other government controlled social organizations.

In most cases, the local authorities or Burmese Army’s battalions in the area raised fund by staging some types of shows and forced the local civilians to buy tickets to watch the shows. Most civilians did not like to watch the shows or they did not have time to enjoy, however, they are forced to buy these tickets.



Tickets of Burmese Army’s battalions for raising fund by staging concert and forced the civilians to buy.

According to a town resident from Mudon Town, Mon State, she said,

“Township ward council members (Town Ward Peace and Development Council) came to house very often and collect money from the civilians. They asked money from the civilians whenever they build the road or hold ceremony for some important days. We have to pay them at least 500 Kyat each time. For some road construction, we were asked to pay 5000 Kyat per household every month. The civilians cannot refuse whenever they asked. Sometimes, they also came and sold us show tickets for boxing or local theatre. Civilians are not so free and the show place was quite far to watch, but we have to buy their tickets.”

Illegal taxation or extortion by the authorities is always relating to the regime’s ‘Self-Help’ programme, it has instructed that the civilians must do the development projects with their own money, not from the government budget. The regime also found many their supporting groups in the country and they collected fund or do fund raising by taking money from the civilians.

A family, with 5 members spent at least 50000 Kyat per month to be in sufficient living standard. All prices of groceries and foods in Burma are expensive and the people have to be very careful in spending money. They buy only necessary things, goods and foods that they need every day. Many families, who have no business or farms are too hard to find about 30000-40000 Kyat per month. From this shortage of income, they have to pay many illegal tax and fund to the regime and many other organizations, with at least 3000-5000 Kyat per month. The remaining money could not cover for all of their expenses that needed in each family. This situation also forced many young people to go into Thailand to seek work and send money back to their families, who faced various difficulties after paying many illegal taxes to the local authorities or Burmese Army.

Accordingly to a migrant worker from Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, who worked in fishing industry said,

“I tried to send about 30000 Kyat every month, because my parents in village need to spend about 60000 Kyat per month. They could get income from our rubber plantation, but it is not enough. One of my brothers is at college and my mother is often sick. Additionally, we have to pay tax or donation to the government every month, at least 5000 Kyat per month. And, my parents also have to sell rubber at low prices to the army.”

Although the labour cost in Thailand is not so high, however, Burmese migrant workers tried to save their money as much as possible. They are saving the money by collectively renting a room and stay in a crowded situation, buy limited foods for daily meals, restrict visiting to malls and department stores, etc. By this way, a migrant worker could save only 1000-2000 Baht per month, exchanged money into Burmese currency, in Kyat, from illegal money transfer service and send money back to their families in Burma.

A mother from a Mon village in northern part of Ye Township said,

“If my daughter does not send money back to me, I could get a lot of trouble. Because I don’t have money in hands. We produce paddy and I have rice at homes. When the soldiers and village headmen come, they just ask money, and so I could give them cash that send by my daughter. I’m lucky to have this daughter who know the gratefulness of the parents.”

But for the mother at home, she does not know exactly what types of works that her daughter is working in Thailand and how hard it is.

In some areas, as the local authorities or village headmen know well which families have sons or daughters who are working in Thailand and they also ask more tax or fund or donation from these houses. Normally in most Mon villages in the rural areas, the migrant workers sent money back to the organization and therefore, the local authorities and troops of Burmese Army asked more money from them. Thus, the villages which have mainly income from the migrant workers from the neighbouring countries, the authorities and Burmese troops collected more tax or fund or donation for those villages.

In Burma, accordingly to the laws, levying tax to the government is not a big amount of money and the civilians have to pay tax for their house, gardens, farms and other properties. For a normal family, who have one house, a plot garden and a paddy farm, they have to pay less than 1000 Kyat as official tax to the government. However, the civilians are terribly suffered from illegal tax.

B. Constant Constriction of Forced Labour

Although International Labour Organizations (ILO) has pressured to Burmese military regime, SPDC, for years to eradicate the practice of forced labour, however, the regime does not have much ‘political will’ to



A group of forced labourers used by the local Burmese Army's battalions in southern part of Mon State, Burma.

stop all of these practices. The conscription of forced labour also cease in the main cities where many educated persons who know the laws are living, but the use of forced labour still continues in the rural areas and in conflict areas. Normally, in the conflict areas, the arrest of civilians to use in the battle-fields is taken place and thousands of villagers are forced to be porters to carry ammunitions and food supplies for the army. Forced labour in the porter service is serious and inhumane.

battalions have forced the civilians to flee from their homes to escape from their homes. Because these civilians, most of them are farmers, have no time to work at their farms and no food remains at their homes.

Several days and over 30 days use of forced labour by the authorities or the local Burmese Army's

According to a man from Kha-rit village, Kawkareik Township, he said:

“Our villagers are forced to work for nearly three months in Kyone-doe road construction (a 16 miles road from Kaw-bein village to Kyone-doe village in Kawkareik Township, Karen State), so that we have no time to work in farms and fishing in the river. Many poor families like us, who are working hand-to-mouth situation, face a serious difficulty. Village headmen told the villagers, the road must be finished before the rainy season starts (in June). So that I thought I will have no any time to start for cultivation, and therefore, I fled from village. I have no choice, I just came to this border (border areas in Mae Sot District of Thailand) and tries to seek work.”

In this Kawbein – Kyonedoe road construction, the Mon villagers in western part of Kawkareik Township, Karen State, has been constantly forced for nearly 3 months, from March to May 2003, until the rainy season started. Over 7000 households from 31 villages are forced to work in the construction. Because of the continuous conscription of forced labour, many men fled from villages to another areas (in Burma) or for those who stay close to the border also fled to border area and sought works for income. If the men stayed longer in the village, his family could face food-shortage problem and so that he plan to leave and work in Thailand's border area.

When there are serious conscription of forced labour happened in one area, hundreds of thousands of people fled from their homes and they firstly displaced in order to escape from forced labour. Under this circumstance, the displaced persons are quite difficult to remain in the border area and some of them also tried to enter into Thailand's refugee camps. However because of Thai government's strict policy on accepting the new refugees, it is quite difficult for the ethnic refugees from Burma to take refuge in camp.

Thai government does not accept any refugees, who flee from human rights abuses but accepted them when there is serious fighting or offensives in their areas. Therefore, thousands of displaced persons along eastern part of Burma bordering with Thailand could not get easy access to Thailand. However, the members of those displaced families always tried to move into Thailand to seek works to get income to feed their family.

According to a displaced person who worked in a Thai border town, he said,

“My family and me left from our (native village) in southern part of Ye Township since 1997, when the (Burmese Army) soldiers forced us to work in railway (110 miles long Ye – Tavoy railway). We sold our houses and came to the border. We could not go into refugee camp because we are Mons (after 1995 New Mon State Party ceasefire with the regime, all Mon refugees were spontaneously repatriated to the border areas where under the control of NMSP). So that I decided to enter Thailand. We came here (a Mon village) with a whole family, but I can go into Thailand alone for work. Then I sent money back for my family, who live in the village.”

This is an stance of family member of displaced persons illegally entered into Thailand and worked for income to feed their families. In Mon State and Tenasserim Division, many thousands of people fled from their homes and illegally stay in Thailand because of the constant conscription of forced labour.

In the construction of Ye-Tavoy railway road, hundreds of thousands of civilians fled from their villages permanently and planned to stay in the border areas. Their lands and houses in the villages were also confiscated by the local authorities or village headmen or army. For such families, they are afraid of being punished by the soldiers or authorities and decide to stay in the displaced situation.

Therefore, the population displacement in eastern part of Burma bordering with Thailand is directly connecting with massive illegal migration into Thailand.

C. Looting crops and paddy tax

In Burma, amazingly the farmers are facing food-shortage in the period before the harvest season. The reasons are the farmers' crops in the rural communities are always looted by the soldiers during their military offensives and military patrols. The local village communities are always accused as 'rebel-supporters' by the Burmese Army and when they found foods in the rural areas, they took all these foods. If they could not bring all, they just burnt them down some of these crops.

In the regime controlled areas, the authorities also set the order and forced the local farmers to sell the set amount of paddy in the price. For several years, the successive military governments in Burma have forced thousands of young people to flee from their homes and migrated to the neighbouring countries to seek income. Because these young people need to help their poor farmer parents, they have to work in other countries.

According to a farmer from Mudon Township, he said:

"Because of my two sons are in Thailand, it is helpful for me. I always face the problems with the authorities every year, after I could not sell the set amount of paddy to them. They told me to sell 15 baskets per acre of land. My paddy were destroyed because of flood and I could not produce much crops. Again, I had to sell the full amount of paddy to the government. I could produce only about 200 baskets from my farms, but I have to sell them 150 baskets for 10 acres of lands. I told them my land's soil is bad and always under flood and so that to consider for the reduction. But they refused."

"After I paid labour cost, oxen cost (he needed to hire oxen for land ploughing) and I left only 50 baskets. My two sons sent me money from Thailand, then I bought 100 baskets from the traders in expensive prices and then sold the government at low price. I have no choice. If I could not get money from my sons in Thailand, I could be detained or my lands will be confiscated."

The farmers or the parents in lower parts of Burma has much relied on the money that sent by their daughters or sons from Thailand. Because of the government's paddy-buying policy, the local farmers are always in deep poverty and over 50% of farmers in Mon State has relied on money sent by migrant workers by the neighbouring countries.

In Mon State and Tenasserim Division, there has been less and less young people who could work in farms because many of them migrated into Thailand. Therefore, 'labour shortage' problem also occurs for agriculture works and even elderly people have involved in working in the farms. Farmland owners also have to pay for high labour cost for the labourers remained in the village and so that they have to pay a lot of money from their revenue after selling their crop products. After paying the labour cost, the farmers remained only little amount of money with them. When the authorities planned to buy paddy from them as low-price, they remained very less amount of rice.

Farmers are always in debt during the rainy season, because they left no crops at their houses and borrowed money from other creditors. If they could not pay back their debts, they have to sell their lands or livestock. These situation and hardship in the farmer families have forced many young farmers to leave from their homes, to seek income and help their parents (elderly farmers) at villages.

For those young farmers, sometimes, they arrived at their homes and worked in farms, however they always to work in Thailand or Malaysia.

Accordingly to a migrant worker in fishing industry:

"Labour cost in my village is very low and we have to work back-breaking works every day. We have to work about 12 hours per day but received only about 1000 Kyat, that is equal to 25 Baht. In Thailand, if we worked for 8 hours, we get 150 Baht. Therefore, I don't want to work in paddy farms again. It is better I send money back to my father and he can hire a labourer instead of me."

However, even the farmers in the villages could not easily find labourers to work in the farms even they pay them with high rate of labour cost.

In this type of migration, the local farmers always encouraged their sons or daughters at villages to migrate into Thailand, Malaysia and work there. They even never know how is dangerous for the migrant workers especially women to live in other countries in insecure situation. Some of them sold their properties and gave their sons or daughters to use in travel to the neighbouring countries, while the travel cost to these countries is 2-5 times higher than the cost traveling by planes.



A SPDC's paddy-buying center in Kyaikmayaw Township of Mon State, Burma.

Many farmers in Mon State and Tenasserim Division believe that if their family members are not in Thailand, they could no longer maintain their lands and properties due to intensive high amount of tax from the governments. Most farmers said, they could not survive with their own farms, but they could survive only with money sent by their family members who work in the neighbouring.

However, all families who have family members in the neighbouring countries are lucky, some of them could not get permanent works, have to change one work to another, the employers lie them for wages, and those workers could not send money back to their families. Some migrant workers disappeared and they could not get any contact with their homes and families. In such situation, the farmers could not totally rely on the worker members in neighbouring countries.

In April 2003, many farmers in the whole part of Burma were happy when they heard the regime, SPDC's press conference about the regime would cease buying paddy from farmers at low price. The farmers thought they would be more independent to sell their paddy crops and could get more price for their paddy. However, in October 2003, the regime formed 'Merchant of Enterprise' with the traders and the authorities forced the farmers again to sell their paddy to this Enterprise. The farmers would get the lower price than the market price for their paddy.

D. Land and properties confiscation

Since 2000, after the Burmese Army confiscated many thousands acres of lands in Ye Township, southern part of Mon State, and other Townships in Karen State and Tenasserim Division, many local villagers who lost the lands have to flee from their homes to seek the new lands or new works. The land confiscation has been always connected to the Burmese Army's 'military deployment' and army's 'self-reliance' program.

In some areas, the villagers or civilians were relocated because of infrastructure projects: such as gas pipeline construction, motor road and railway construction, bridge construction, and others. In the infrastructure projects, the local authorities not only confiscated their lands, they drove them out from the houses. Therefore, they lost both their lands and properties.

As an instance,

In October 2003, the SPDC authorities in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State ordered 1400 civilian families to relocate their houses suddenly in order to build inner city railway road. The set route of railway road passes through Hlaing and Myay-ni-gone city wards of Moulmein and the civilians who live right on the road had to destroy their houses and moved the places where the regime set new

relocation site. The civilians are paid with only small compensation cost for their lands and houses that they have belonged for years.

After losing the properties and lands the civilians tried to move to another areas or to the regime's relocation camps or satellite towns set by the authorities. In both satellite town and relocation camps, the civilians could not get easy access to the employment, they have lack of foods, water and sanitation, and health care.

Many civilians of relocated families would stay on in the resettlement camps or satellite towns in many difficult situations for survival. Therefore, the families decided to send their family members to Thailand or other neighbouring countries to seek works in there and send money back to the families.

During 1998 to 2002, while many thousands acres of lands in southern part of Burma were confiscated by the Burmese Army, some landowners, who had been totally relying on the lands for the survival abandoned their villages. After these families moved from one place to another, they faced that they are quite difficult situation for survival. Then some families decided to flee into Thailand for works and residence illegally. A local farmer from northern part of Ye Township, who lost the lands said:

“First I moved to Three Pagoda Pass together with my family to find works. In there I could find only seasonal works and I could not have enough income to feed my family. Therefore, I entered into Thailand and worked in this plantation (in Kanchanaburi Province). First I came alone, and then I brought my family.”

Similarly to the Mon families, many Shan, Karenni, Karen, Tavoyan and other ethnic families, who lost their lands or properties or displaced because of systematic persecution of Burmese Army also fled into Thailand as a whole family and try to stay in many plantation areas and engaged in agriculture works.

In this type of migration, the families had to bring all of their members together with them because they have no lands or houses or other properties to be survived in their native areas. These families even lost their future and could not decide where they would reside. But they just could move into Thailand, because it is a closest neighbouring countries, not to Malaysia and Singapore. It is typically more difficult while migrating in family than individually.

The above-mentioned farmer explained his migration as:

“We could not move very quick into (deeper areas of) Thailand. We were afraid of being arrested by the soldiers. I moved to a plantation and worked for one or two months with my family. Then when we know the ways, how to avoid the (Thai) police, then we moved further areas. We stayed one month or two months. When the landowners accepted us as permanent labourers at their farms, then we could stay for years.”

In Thailand's agriculture works, Burmese migrant workers satisfied to work because it is not so hard for them because they have experience of backbreaking works in Burma or during the Burmese Army used them as 'porters' or the regime authorities' conscription them as 'forced labourers'.

Military deployment and land confiscation by the Burmese Army have also made the decrease of the crop production in farms or plantations because of the farmers themselves could not work to product crops, but the army tried to take their crops without any charge.

III. Militarization and its effects

A. Forced recruits for military training

After May 30 incident of 'killing' party members of National League for Democracy (NLD) in upper Burma in (Depeyin Township of Sagaing Division), the military government, SPDC propagandized that there will be the possible foreign invasion and the possible pro-democracy demonstrations in the country.

Therefore, the regime has recruited hundreds of thousands of civilians in southern part of Burma to attend the basic military training schools in the military battalion bases concerned. The military training took 2 weeks to one-month period to complete the course. By the order of SPDC's Defense Military, the Township authorities and the local military battalions coordinated in recruitment of the trainees in every area to attend training.

The authorities and army commanders firstly recruited their main supporters such as members of USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association – which was formed by the regime), local militiamen, village headmen, firemen from fire brigades and government servants. Then, additionally, the army and authorities forced all men between 18 to 40 years old to attend training.

The trainees faced many hardships. The schools did not provide them uniform, foods, and others. So that the trainees had to take every thing from their houses and more terribly, they could not work any work during the period of training schools. They must be in schools, 2 weeks to one-month, and so the remaining families faced various difficulties. For example, a trishaw driver (who transport the passengers in cities and towns in Burma), he is a hand-to-month labourer and if he could not work for one day, his family would face food-shortage problems.

After training, the civilians and even the regime supporters faced serious situation at homes under the militarization policy. All trainees were formed as groups: such as ‘People Vigorous Association (PVA)’, ‘Anti-Demonstration Force’, ‘Anti-Foreign Force’ and all of them were given some duties to State defense. These groups are used by the regime as ‘Paramilitary’, they are totally under the command of the closest Strategic Commanders. If necessary, those commanders could order these forces to involve in fighting or to patrol the areas for the security. They also equipped them with some guns and let them face with the rebels.

USDA members, local village headmen, and the civilians had to flee because the Burmese Army really forced them to be in army and to act as soldiers. Most of them would not like to face the life danger situation. Therefore, some USDA members, local headmen and many civilians in the rural areas have fled to the border and then into Thailand.

Many USDA members in Mon State and Tenasserim Division also made passport and then fled to foreign countries, Thailand and Singapore, to escape the Burmese Army’s recruitment of them as members of ‘paramilitary force’. Some of them quickly fled to Thailand border and entered into Thailand quickly with a fear of arrest by rebel armed force.

USDA members are trusted by the regime authorities as their ‘permanent supporters’, and they are offered with some many economic opportunities and have other rights. In most cases, with the order of the regime authorities, the USDA members have involved in many abuses against the civilians. If they quitted as ‘USDA members’, they could not longer stay in the communities, because they fear of revenge by the civilians. Now, while the Burmese Army forced them to be as soldiers, most of them did not want to be hardship as soldiers and therefore, they fled to neighbouring countries as ‘illegal migrant workers.’

Similarly to the USDA members, many civilians in the areas also fled to the border and then into Thailand. Men from most poor families decided to flee because they are always forced to work for soldiers and the families could not get the regular income from works, while some families faced food-shortage problems.

According to a 38 years old man, who fled from military training school in Thanbyuzayat Township, he said:

“They (the soldiers) forced every man in the village to attend training except children and elderly people. They did not give us free foods. The village headmen collected money from the villagers and then gave to the army commander for expenses of foods during training. We were forced to attend over 20 days. I had to abandon all my works of taking rubber latex, and my family lost income. After training, we were asked every weeks to do some works in the army bases and to conduct patrol in the area as soldiers. I could not tolerate longer. We could die if we faced with Karen rebels. We had no experience of fighting. So my wife told me to flee as far as possible. Therefore, I arrived here (in Thailand). Luckily I could find works easily.”

There are many other number of escapees who fled into neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, to escape from military recruits for paramilitary force. This is an attempt of Burmese Army to force every citizen to be in army in order to support the regime. The civilians, who are not soldiers, could no longer tolerate in this militarization policy.

B. Increase of porter service,

In the southern part of Burma, many people in the rural areas said there has been more and more service for Burmese Army’s porter because the increase deployment of the troops of Burmese Army.

A local villager from Khaw-zar village, southern part of Ye Township, Mon State, explained his experience as below:

“Last 5 years ago, there was only one battalion (of Burmese Army) came to our village and it was changed with another battalion bi-monthly or quarterly. Our village headmen has to arrange to provide them with porters on a rotation basis. They requested 3 to 5 porters every time they came. Now, there are about 3 military battalions that came into our village weekly. Many battalions are not from the local areas, but they came from other areas. Every time, they came they asked 3-5 porters each time. The village headmen have to manage in a very difficult situation to provide porters every time they came into villages.



A Group of Burmese Soldiers in a Mon Village of Ye Township, Southern part of Mon State, Burma.

In southern part of Burma, the Burmese Army has increased its troops and tried to control many parts of conflict areas. In Mon State alone, the Burmese Army has increasingly deployed about 20 infantry battalions and artillery regiments. These new battalions have tried to uproot all the activities of rebel armed force in the conflict area, especially in Ye Township of Mon State, and Yebyu Township of Tenasserim Division.

When the Burmese Army launched the military offensives, they have not only used the local military battalions, they have also brought the battalions from other areas in order to give them duties. If compared with the military battalions (of Burmese Army) in eastern and southern part of Burma, where the rebel armies are launching the rebellion activities, the battalions in the western and northern part of Burma have more free than other battalions. Therefore, the Burmese Army Strategy Office have shifted these battalions to eastern and southern part of Burma to fight against the rebel forces.

Therefore, more and more military battalions have been brought to the southern and eastern part of Burma on a rotation basis. These battalions have responsibility to involve in launching the offensives 3 to 6 months and are replaced with other battalions after they performed their duties. All of these battalions have taken civilian porters from the villages in the southern part of Burma, although the International Labour Organization (ILO) has pressured the military regime to stop using forced labour.

Normally, the civilian porters in the porter service are treated inhumanely. They have to carry 20-40 kilograms of loads along jungle or paddy fields for several days. They are fed with insufficient foods during they are in the porter service.

For those, who constantly suffered from the porter service tried to flee into Thailand to escape from the use of porter in the frontline. Many of them faced hard situation during porter service and after they found some porters stepped on land-mines, those porters escaped from their homes soon after they arrived back their homes.

Accordingly to a migrant worker,

“I went for porters for several times. The last time was too hard. I found 2 men stepped on the land-mines, their legs are cut in front of me. I found and I was too afraid to be in the porter service again. Therefore, I had to flee from villages.”

Many migrant workers in the rural areas in eastern and southern part of Burma mostly have this type of experience and they fled from their homes not only because of poverty but also because of their fear, they could be killed in the battle-fields during the porter service.

C. Escapees from Burmese Army

Not only the civilians are facing hardship and have fled from their homes, the soldiers from the Burmese Army also tried to flee from army service and then migrate into Thailand. Some soldiers from Burmese Army were recruited by force and whenever they have opportunity, they always tried to flee from army service.

Whenever the Burmese Army's battalions came close to the border with Thailand, most soldiers tried to flee into Thailand by abandoning their guns or sometimes, they surrendered to the rebel armies and then migrated into Thailand.

The Burmese Army always have serious concerns when their battalions came close to the border as they knew many soldiers would flee if they arrived close Thailand's border.

As an instance,

“In early July 2003, when the Burmese Army's IB No. 20 arrived a border town, Three Pagoda Pass that bordering Thailand's Kanchanaburi Province, about 3 soldiers fled in the first week of July and went into Thailand. After they fled, the Township SPDC authorities, the battalion commanders held a meeting and tried to re-arrest those escaped soldiers on August. They also announced that if someone could inform them about the soldier escapees, they would pay him/her 5000 Baht as award. However, they could arrest only one escapee, who did not know how to flee into Thailand. The commanders and the authorities also called a meeting with all village headmen and informed them about the announcement.

“Additionally, while the army is trying to find their soldiers, another 6 soldiers fled from the battalion again on July 16. The battalion commanders were too angry and asked the other battalion in the area and tried to arrest those escapees. They also ordered that, if someone kept an escapee, he/she must be arrested and imprisoned for 6 months. And, they also have to pay 1500 Baht fine. However, this time, they could not arrest any person.”

Normally, those soldiers wanted to flee from the army for such a long time. However, while they are in their base that are far from the border, they could not opportunity to flee. If they fled they could easily arrested and imprisoned for their escape. Therefore, when they arrive to the border and have opportunity, they tried to flee from their bases.

In the border area, the Burmese Army deploys its troops on a rotation basis in the border bases and does not deploy a battalion permanently. Normally, the military battalions are changed quarterly. Whenever any battalion arrived into the border areas, some soldiers who are disappointed or who could not tolerate the hardship in the army always tried to escape.

When these escaped soldiers arrived in Thailand, as they could not afford to pay the traffickers to into big cities where too many works are available, however, they try to seek works Thailand's border area. When they have enough money, then they try to migrate deeper Thailand. In the border area in Thailand, those soldier escapees could get works in agriculture.

Therefore, the Burmese Army's militarization policy not only has forced thousands of civilians to flee from the country, but even their soldiers, USDA members and other regime-supporters have to flee from their homes.

IV. Situation in Thailand

Illegal migrant workers have to contact the traffickers to get deeper Thailand to many cities and to get good works with high labour cost. They have to pay 6000-10000 Baht (140 to 250 US Dollar) to traffickers for one person. Even though the payment is expensive, however the migrant workers have to go in a quite to go. They have to use the forest, jungle or river roads where no police check-points. They have to traveled many days to reach to their destinations. With their own contacts, they have to find the employers.

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 e-mail as below:

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Webpages: www.geocities.com/monforum2003

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

Most illegal migrants are always in fear for the arrest by Thai police in the workplaces, because they are working and staying not in a legal situation. Thai government policy has also adopted to deport all of these illegal migrant workers from its country. Every government has attempted to deport back all Burmese, Lao and Cambodia illegal migrant workers to the countries concerned, however, the implementation has not been succeeded as they expected.

In last three years ago, Thai government also tried to register all illegal migrant workers. But only about 25% of the workers registered. Many of them are still remaining illegal and they did not register. Hence, many hundreds of migrant workers are everyday arrested by the Thai police. After arrest, they are detained for one to three months in Immigration Detention Center (IDC) and then they deported those workers to the border.

In Thailand, those migrant workers have no much labour rights. First, they are not allowed to form any labour organizations or trade unions. Since the migrant workers could not form trade unions, they could not bargain for their rights for the salaries and other minimum allowance from the employers.

■ News from page 2

Although the gas explosion did not make direct dangers to the civilians in the area but it has made the villagers frightened. The paddy growing farms and the environment in the area would be directly affected due to explosion. This is the second explosion of gas pipeline in the area and the first explosion occurred in February 2002.

On February 8, 2003, the explosion occurred in northern part of Ye Township in Mon State and the Mon villagers in a village, Lamine, were affected by the bad gas smell.

This gas pipeline passes through villages, paddy farmlands and fruit and rubber plantations in Mon State. Gas explosion often occurred because of lack of skills in the pipeline construction and sometimes,

it was also sabotaged by the ethnic rebel armed group in the area.

The military regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in Burma constructed this pipeline in early 2000 with a main purpose to provide gas for a cement factory in Myaingkalay in Pa-an Township of Karen State. The regime also brings gas from the multinational gas companies, Total (France) and UNOCAL (United States) exploited 'Yatana' gas field in Andaman Sea of Burma.

During the gas pipeline construction, the regime authorities confiscated civilians' farmlands, house gardens and orchid plantations along the route, and the Mon civilians were forced to move.

After the construction, the continual conscription of forced labour has occurred along the pipeline to guard the pipeline, to fence around the pipeline, and to refill earth on the exposed pipe route.



A group of illegal migrant workers from Burma.

The migrant workers could not move from one place to another to seek works for their income. Sometimes, the employers do not pay labour cost to the workers and forced them to leave the workplaces without any payment. The workers have no right to complain about their cases to any authorities.

Currently the negotiation have been on-going situation between Thai and Burmese governments for the deportation of these illegal workers. The Burmese military government also agreed to build deportation centers in some border cities to receive the deported migrant workers.

V. Conclusion

Although many thousands of migrant workers from Burma are deported every month by the Thai government authorities, at the same time, many hundreds of them still migrate into Thailand every day. Deportation could not be ended. Some deportees return into quite quickly after deporting into Burma's soil.

In Burma, both economic hardships and gross human rights violations have pressured them to leave from their homes. Most of the migrant workers sacrifice their life for their families. If they do not go to Thailand for work, their families would suffer from food-shortage problems or serious poverty.

Only when there is a time economically stable, no gross human rights violations and genuine peace in Burma, the people in the country in a stable situation, and the migration of illegal migrant workers would cease. Currently, both sides of the governments' policy to stop the migrants of workers from Burma to Thailand could not easily cease.

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