

**News, Personal Accounts, Report & Analysis on Human Rights Situation
in Mon Territory and Other Areas Southern Part of Burma**



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Contents

News:

- (1) **Mon National School are threatened to Close Down by Burmese Army**

Report:

- (1) **Lesson from the Mon Refugee (Involuntary) Repatriation**

**Some Acronyms
in This Issue**

- SPDC-** State Peace and Development Council,
- SLORC-** State Law and Order Restoration Council,
- IB -** Infantry Battalion (*of Burmese Army*),
- LIB-** Light Infantry Battalion (*of Burmese Army*),
- BBC-** British Broadcasting Cooperation
- BCP-** Burma Communist Party
- KNU-** Karen National Union
- NMSP-** New Mon State Party
- MPF-** Mon People Front
- USDA-** Union Solidarity and Development Association
- MNRC-** Mon National Relief Committee

News

Mon National Schools are threatened to Close Down by Burmese Army

(May 2004, Ye Township)

The battalions of Burmese Army which launched the offensives against a Mon splinter group in Ye Township, Mon State, threatened the Mon teachers to close down all Mon national schools which provided basic education to 13,000 Mon students.

Accordingly to the Mon teachers in Ye Township, the commanders of Burmese Army in the area called meeting with the Mon teachers who are operating the Mon schools, and forced them to close down all schools and converted them to government schools.

Forced conversion of the Mon schools to government schools came from a decision in the meeting of Burmese Army's senior commanders accused by the local Mon teachers.

"It is a military government's policy. On March 11, Gen. Maung Bo (*from Defense Ministry*) and Southeast Command's Commander, Thu Ra Mying Aung, arrived to Ye and ordered the local authorities and commanders of Burmese Army to close down all Mon national schools and then operate government schools instead", said by a Mon teacher.



A Mon National School

Commentary

The Relation between 'Rule of Law' and Protection of Human Rights

In Burma, various cases of human rights violations committed by local authorities and members of Burmese Army on a daily basis. Some human rights violations are systematic because of the regime, but many are related to the authorities' or army's corruption.

Serious human rights violations - killing, rape and torture in the rural areas where the Burmese Army is launching military offensives are - very much systematic, because the Burmese Army put fear on the local civilians to not revolt against them and cooperate with the Burmese Army. Similarly the arrest of civilians to use them as 'porters' has been systematic, because there is logistic problem in their army.

However, many SPDC authorities and all ranks of Burmese Army's commanders have collected various types of tax or money from the civilians are much related to corruption. SPDC never claims to fight against this corruption that happen among their authorities and army commanders.

Sometimes, the local authorities and army also confiscate the lands belonged to the civilians and share among themselves, without a plan adopted by the regime, but they found income for themselves. The people who suffer from this type of violations have no place to put their cases in trial.

Therefore such lack of 'rule of law' also created a lot of human rights violations in the communities.

Most of Mon schools in the area are operated by the New Mon State Party's Education Department and teachers are also employed by the NMSP. The schools have operated over 30 years since the Party operated the revolutionary and adopted administration including providing education to the children.

After 1995 NMSP ceasefire with the regime, although the NMSP retreated its troops in the area accordingly to the agreement, but it still operates the Mon education system by opening Mon schools and providing education for the children.

The NMSP also refused to close down all these schools and its spokesperson said, it will complain the Southeast Command about the cases.

In December 2003, SPDC's Southeast Military Command from Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, sent over 1000 troops in south Ye Township and tried to uproot the activities of a Mon splinter group, which launched military activities against the Burmese Army after the withdrawal of NMSP troops from the area since 1997.

The offensives took over 4 months and at the end, the Burmese Army could get some control in the area. After its control, the commanders of Burmese Army

appointed the favour men to be village headmen, and formed many its supporting groups such as Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), Women's Affairs Committee and other militia groups.

After the Burmese Army occupied the whole area, it again tried to close down Mon schools and disturbed the NMSP's administration activities.

In Ye Township, about 67 basic primary and middle schools are operated by the NMSP's Education Department with the local communities, while NMSP pays salaries for all teachers. There are about 7000 students attend schools in southern part of Ye Township and 6000 students attend schools in northern part of Ye Township.

Since the SPDC authorities and Burmese Army is afraid of being compete the Mon schools and government schools, the Burmese Army tried to close down the Mon schools all.

Because the schooling cost is cheap, no requirement for additional classes like students in government schools, the number of student in NMSP's Schools are gradually increasing and some students even from the government schools move to Mon schools.

Report

Lesson from the Mon Refugee (Involuntary) Repatriation

I. Political Background or the Root Cause of Mon Refugees

The population displacement in Mon areas and fleeing of Mon refugees to Thailand are the results of political conflict and civil war which occurred before and after Burma retained Independence from British colony¹, which based on the political disagreements between majority ethnic Burman dominated central governments and other ethnic leaders.

In a similar situation to many other non-Burman (minority) ethnic groups in Burma, the Mon leaders who represented the Mon people during the pre-Independence of Burma has asked the Burman leaders who involved in negotiation for independence process of Burma for racial equality and greater autonomy Accordingly to the historical 'Panglong' agreement in Shan State, even though some ethnic autonomous States such as Kachin State, Shan State and Chin

Special Region were created, but the Mon State, Karen State and Arakanese State were not created².

Therefore, along with the Burma's Independence, the political conflict has been accompanied. After Independence, the Mon and Karen leaders together demanded for creation of Mon and Karen State. However, the democratically elected government in Rangoon responded with oppression - arresting the leaders, assassinating some Mon leaders³, shelling motor shells into Mon villages. Similarly to the Mon leaders, many Karen leaders were also arrested by the central governments.

As a result, when the Mon and Karen leaders have no choice, they have to hold arms, formed the united armed force, and fought back against the central government. At the same time, both the Burmese Army, ' the command of the central government did not try to compromise with Mon and Karen leaders to minimize the problems. Instead of solving the problems, the Burmese Army intensified its offensives in the ethnic areas.

In order to uproot the ethnic rebels' activities and Burma Communist Party (BCP)⁴, the central government has much relied on the force of Burmese Army. So that the Burmese Army also has more chance to expend its troops and applied for more defense budget. However, the Burmese Army could not uproot all rebellion activities, and the civil war has grown. A negative development was the Burmese Army could totally control the civilian elected governments and rejected the democratic ruling system in the country in 1962. In 1974, the Burmese Army commanders changed themselves with civilians' clothes and ruled then country with a single party rule under the name of "Burmese Socialist Programme Party" led by the Burma's former dictator Gen. Ne Win⁵.

BSPP, as a single party formed with army commanders, it has adopted extensive plan in strengthen the force of Burmese Army and fought against various ethnic rebels' groups along n Burma-border areas with Thailand, India and China including BCP. Civil war has intensified since then.

Fleeing of the Mon displaced persons or refugees started since 1948 after the rebellion of the Mon leaders. The Mon ethnic political organization with armed force, Mon People Front (MPF) had involved in the revolutionary from 1948 to 1958. After the surrender of MPF to the central democratic government in 1958⁶, New Mon State Party (NMSP) was formed to continue its fighting against the Burmese Army and central governments.

1 Burma (Myanmar) retained its Independence from British in 1948. The Independence Day of Burma is on January 4.

2. The Mon leaders were not invited in the signing ceremony of Panglong and Burman leaders claimed the Mon leaders should not involve in the Conference because the Mon people lived in plain area of Burma.

3. One Mon leader. Nai Mon Santhu, from Mon Freedom League, was assassinated in Moulmein, the capital of current Mon State in 1948.

4. Burma Communist Party

5. Gen. Ne Win ruled Burma for 26 years under the one-party rule system from 1962 until 1988, when the students and civilians countrywide challenge his rule and he resigned as Chairman of BSPP.

6. U Nu led democratic government promised to form a Mon State under the constitution and therefore, the Mon leaders from MPF agreed to surrender to the government.

During in the years from 1948 to 1958, thousands of Mon people displaced internally and only just hundred numbers entered into Thailand. At that time, Thai government did not have firm control in the border areas and the refugees set the villages up and continuously stay there without fear of any repatriation. On the other hand, the conflict in Burma was not much well-known to the international community while it was in 'cold war' period.

In 1962, when the Burmese Army seized the political power, Mon leaders from MPF were arrested and put in jails, but the Mon State was not really created. Many new generation of young Mons joined to NMSP to revolve against the Burmese Army after the peace talks failed between the Burmese Army and the leaders of all armed groups.

The fighting has intensified after 1970 in lower part of Burma. Burmese Army used various tactics to win war on the ethnic armed groups. Along with the offensives, it also planned to cut off all supports from the Mon civilians to the ethnic rebels concerned.

Among many tactics, 'Four Cuts Campaign' is a well-known tactic adopted by the Burmese Army into to cut off all supports such as - information, recruitment, food supplies, sheltering - to the rebel soldiers. Under this tactics, thousands of ethnic villages in the rural areas are forced to relocate round the military bases of Burmese Army. Hundreds of relocation camps were set up by the Burmese Army during the years from 1970 to 1988 and thousands of ethnic villagers were forced to move into these resettlement camps. Those civilians who refused to live or settle in the relocation camps fled in the surrounding areas and displaced. The offensives launched by the Burmese Army have protracted until 1988 when there was a pro-democracy uprising in the cities of Burma.

In 1980s, although there were small Karen refugee camps were set up by the Karen Refugee Committee, but most of Mon internally displaced persons displaced and settled in NMSP's control areas especially in Three Pagoda Pass area, opposite of Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province of Thailand.

The Burmese Army or the current military regime, SLORC, seized the political power in 1988 from pro-democracy demonstrators. After the seizure of the political power, the SLORC has planned to launch more intensive military offensives against the remaining ethnic armed force. After some breakaway groups of Burmese Community Party (BCP) surrendered to the Burmese Army in 1989, the Burmese Army could reduce its offensives in the northeastern part of Burma. Then, it arranged more offensives against the ethnic Mon rebels (NMSP), Karen rebels (KNU), Karenni rebels (Karenni National Progressive Party), and Shan rebels (Shan State Army and other groups) in eastern and southern part of Burma along approximately 2000 Kilometers long Thailand-Burma border.

In February 1990, while the NMSP which bases in Three Pagoda Pass village prepared to celebrate the Mon National Day, hundreds number of Burmese Army's troops launched offensives against the NMSP Headquarters. The Mon troops from Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) was unable to protect serious offensives and at the end, Burmese Army overrun the NMSP Headquarters and many MNLA bases. This was the beginning of Mon refugee flux in huge number into Thailand.

II. Mon Refugee Camps in Thailand

In February 1990, after the Mon refugees fled into Thailand, the refugee leaders formed an organization, Mon National Relief Committee (MNRC)⁷, to help those refugees to have foods, sheltering and permission to stay in Thailand.

After the formation of the relief committee, that committee approached the local Thai authorities to allow the Mon refugees to stay in refugee camps. By the help of the international agencies and demand by the Mon relief committee, the Mon refugees are allowed to set up their own camps mostly in Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province. First, the Thai authorities allowed them to set up about 7 refugee camps in Thai soil⁸.

International aid NGOs working for food assistance; providing education and medical care assistance could get free access to the Mon refugee camps to operate their relief activities. About 8000-9000 Mon refugees

7. MNRC had received a lot of supports from the Mon monks in Thailand and Thai-Mon communities in Thailand in order to have sheltering in Thailand.

8. In 1990, the Thai government has no concrete policy on Burma's refugees and they simply allowed them to take refuge, because the concerned ethnic armed groups had also protected Thailand's border from the historically enemy of Thais - The Burmese Army.



One family of new arrivals at Payaw Camp who escaped from the conscription of slave-labours in Ye-Tavoy railway construction in 1994. (Photo: MNRC)

took refuge in 7 camps in 1990. But later on, Thai army and local authorities tried to combine all small camps into a big camp and forcibly relocated the refugees.

The relocation of the refugees just in Thailand had taken place from 1991 through 1993 especially by the Thai Army under the instruction of local government authorities. In some cases, the relocation of the Mon refugees have even taken in the rainy season and the refugees were ordered to move within three days. The treatment to the Mon refugees became worst, year after year.

In early 1994, after the relocation of several small refugee camps, there were only 2 camps - Loh Loe and Payaw remained as big camps. Loh

Loe camp was the biggest one at that time with 6000 refugees among many refugee camps along Thailand-Burma border. Payaw camp had over 2000 refugees.

While the Mon refugees were taking a refuge under pressure in Thai soil, over 2000 of new refugees who especially escaped from the massive conscription of force labour of 110 miles long Ye-Tavoy railway construction poured into Mon refugee camps. As most of these new refugees arrived to Payaw, which was close to the border area, the population suddenly grew up to over 4000 refugees in late 2003.

III. Refugees as pawns in political game

After the Burmese Army seized the political power in 1988, named itself as 'State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)', and opened the country for investment and exploitation of natural resources to many foreign companies especially from Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN)⁹.

Soon after the Burmese Army or SLORC came to power, ASEAN adopted a policy 'Constructive Engagement' to Burma's military government and the regime has allowed many ASEAN companies to invest their capitals in various industries¹⁰. Among many ASEAN countries, Thailand's companies could have more opportunities to exploit Burma's rich natural resources, especially in logging concessions and fishing industries.

In early 1993, Thailand's biggest oil and gas company, PTTEP, planned to buy natural gas from Burma in which Thai government has some shares. On behalf of PTTEP, Thai government signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Burma's military government in mid-1994 under a plan of buying natural gas from Burma's Yatana Gas Field, which the regime could receive 400 Million US Dollar annually from Thai company. Other joint ventures to the PTTEP are: France's Total; United States' UNOCAL and Burma's MOGE.

Since 1994, France's Total oil company planned to build a gas pipeline in Burma from off-shore gas field to Thailand's border. Thai's PTTEP planned to construct gas pipeline in Thailand. However, there were rebel activities in the areas where those foreign companies planned to construct gas-pipeline in Burma. On the other hand, the Thai government also concerned the Mon and Karen rebels' attacks to the planned gas pipeline construction.

As a result, Thai government has put pressure to Mon rebels of NMSP and Karen rebels of KNU, to deal for ceasefire talks to the regime and to have ceasefire agreement. The Thai government believed that if there was ceasefire between the regime and rebel armed forces, there would be safe for their gas pipeline construction.

9. At that time, Burma, Cambodia and Lao are not the members of ASEAN.

10. Constructive Engagement policy normally means a set of policy to not blame and interfere the internal politics of Burma, and engage with regime to have business relations and investment. ASEAN leaders believed if too much pressure to the Burma's military government, the democratic change will be delayed.

In Yebyu Township, where the gas pipeline was passed through, there were more military activities conducted by the MNLA, arm-wing of NMSP.

Since the beginning of 1994, the Thai authorities and army pressured the NMSP leaders to have ceasefire talks with the regime. Initially, the NMSP leaders refused to talk and as a result about 6000 Mon refugees from Loh Loe refugee camps were forcibly relocated by the Thai army into Burma's territory, which was so close to the base of the Burmese Army. This meant when the Thai authorities could not put pressure on the Mon leaders, they instead put pressure on the refugees.

The refugees were involuntarily forced to relocate a location called 'Halockhani', in Burma soil and they had to stay in dangerous situation. The forced relocation took place during February to March in 1994. But in July 1994, the refugees were attacked by the Burmese Army, with a suspicion that the newly resettled camps were rebel shelters. Therefore, thousands of Mon refugees fled back into Thailand across the border. Mon National Relief Committee (MNRC), by representing the voices of Mon refugees who were in dangerous situation, had asked Royal Thai Government to re-settle them again in Thailand. But the Mon refugees' appeal was totally rejected and they are inhumanely forced back to their former dangerous camp-site again. There were a lot of media coverage on the plight of Mon refugees¹¹.

After the Mon refugees faced a serious pressure, the NMSP leaders agreed to talk with the regime for ceasefire. If not, the refugees who lived in Burma camps would be further attacked by the Burmese soldiers. After three rounds of cease-fire talks to the regime, there was a deadlock and disagreed on the territorial control between the NMSP and SLORC. Then, some Thai authorities and businessmen again pressured to the NMSP leaders and threatened that if NMSP refused to talk, there would be a pressure to force the remaining 4000 refugees out from Thai soil¹².

Therefore, NMSP leaders resumed cease-fire talks in the beginning of 1995. In June 29, 1995, NMSP and SLORC reached an agreement. Accordingly to the agreement, the NMSP has 12 permanent ceasefire zones, mostly in the border area along Thailand and southern part of Mon State.

Even though the NMSP has ceasefire, Thai authorities and Thai army still wanted all Mon refugees to go back to Burma immediately. After ceasefire, the Thai local authorities and Thai Army informed to the refugees that they must need to return homes at the end of 1995. MNRC, by representing the Mon refugees had struggled to get the international involvement in the repatriation process.

IV. On a 'half-way' repatriation of Mon refugees

In August 1995, the NMSP and MNRC asked the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) to involve in voluntary repatriation. UNHCR office in Bangkok accepted the request and informed to UNHCR in Geneva to deal with Royal Thai Government and Burma's military government to have a mandate for the involvement of repatriation.

After the forcible repatriation of 6000 Mon refugees in early 1994, only 4000 Mon refugees remained in Payaw refugee camps, which situated opposite of Yebyu Township of Tenasserim Division, southern Burma. UNHCR would deal in this 4000 Mon refugees in the voluntary repatriation, if it got mandate from Royal Thai Government and Burma's military regime.

Even though the UNHCR received mandate from Thai government to involve in the repatriation the Mon refugees, but the military regime SLORC refused for the mandate of UNHCR. Thus, UNHCR could not get any involvement in the repatriation because it could not help the returned refugees on the other side of the border in the 'country of origin'.

Whether UNHCR involved in the repatriation or not, the Thai authorities and army did not want the Mon refugees to stay longer in Thailand and so that they pressured the remaining 4000 Mon refugees to cross over the border. As the pressure has gradually intensified, the NMSP leaders, MNRC and the refugee leaders had to decide to let the refugees return into NMSP controlled areas even there was no international monitoring.

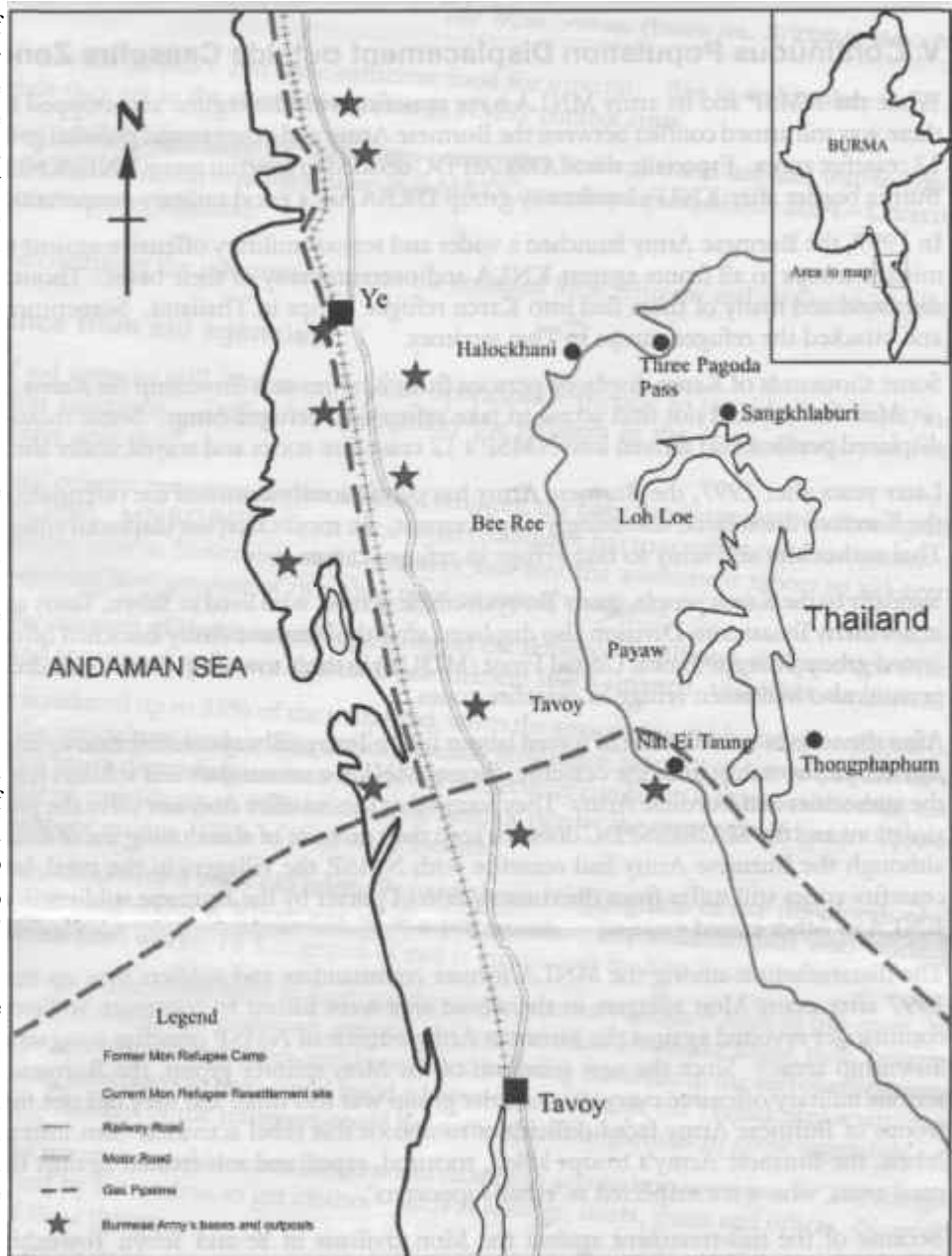
In March 1996, all the remaining Mon refugees returned to NMSP areas, which are close to Thai border under its firm control. MNRC has continued facilitating for assistance to these refugees and set up three resettlement sites for the refugees. The resettlement sites are: (1) Halockhani; (2) Bee Ree; and (3) Tavoy.

11. "HUNGER FOR PROTECTION - the Mon refugees in 1994". a report released by Mon National Relief Committee describes all detail information of the forcible repatriation happened to the Mon refugees, attacked by the Burmese Army, re-crossing into Thai soil, and then another forced repatriation.

12. The MNRC's report - 'HUNGER FOR PROTECTION' also describes the situation of the remaining 4000 Mon refugees.

Thai government of Ministry of Interior (MOI) allowed the basic food assistance for these returned refugees until they could rely on themselves. Thai government allowed to stock the basic food supplies on Thai side of the border and delivered food to the Mon refugees who lived on the other side of the Burma. The returned refugees received 3 years full amount of basic food assistance from the international aid agencies. After 3 years food assistance, the aid agencies gradually reduced some amounts of food to them with an objective to encourage them to create 'self-reliance' situation.

Less than 5% of the total returned refugees went back to their native homes in various townships in Mon State and Karen State. As they have been well-informed about their situations at their homes, most of them refused for



Map of former Mon Refugee Camps and current Resettlement Site

returning homes as they knew that a lot of human rights violations were committed by the regime authorities and members of Burmese Army.

For example, when thousands of Mon refugees relocated into NMSP control area and resettled in 3 resettlement sites, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Mon, Karen and Tavoyan in Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim are forced to construct 110 miles long Ye-Tavoy railway until 1998¹³. Thousands of Mon civilians in Ye Township (*in Mon State*) and Yebyu, Tavoy, Long-Ion Townships (*in Tenasserim Division*) have displaced and many of them also migrated into Thailand.

The returned refugees are well-informed on the situation what were happening in their native homes. Therefore, many of them decided they would not return their homes. They knew that if they went back they would face the regime's various types of human rights violations especially - conscription of forced labour; collecting of taxation; and others.

Another reason was for the refugees or displaced persons who fled from their homes for some decades could not go back to their homes, because they have no lands or houses in their native villages or towns¹⁴.

¹³ The Burma's military regime, SLORC, conscripted hundreds of thousands civilians in southern part of Burma and built this Ye-Tavoy railway. Over 90% of the railway was built with human.

¹⁴ Some families displaced for over 30 years and they have stayed in NMSP territory for several years and then in refugee camps in Thailand. For over 30 years displacement, their lands and other properties in the native villages were already taken by the authorities or Burmese Army.

V. Continuous Population Displacement outside Ceasefire Zones

While the NMSP and its army MNLA have ceasefire with the regime and stopped fighting each other, but there was still armed conflict between the Burmese Army and other armed political groups outside of NMSP's 12 ceasefire zones. Especially, the SLORC/SPDC decided to overrun many KNU/KNLA bases along Thailand-Burma border after KNU's breakaway group DKBA has a good military cooperation with Burmese Army.

In 1997, the Burmese Army launched a wider and serious military offensive against the KNU. It brought a massive troops to all fronts against KNLA and overrun many of their bases. Thousands of Karen refugees displaced and many of them fled into Karen refugee camps in Thailand. Sometimes, DKBA also followed and attacked the refugee camps in Thai territory.

Some thousands of Karen displaced persons from Kya-inn-seik Township (*in Karen State*) and Ye Township (*in Mon State*) could not find access to take refuge in a refugee camp. Some thousands number of Karen displaced persons also arrived into NMSP's 12 cease-fire zones and stayed under the protection of NMSP.

Later years after 1997, the Burmese Army has continuously launched the offensives against the KNLA and the Karen civilians faced unceasingly displacement. In most cases, the displaced villagers were refused by the Thai authorities and army to take refuge in refugee camps.

Similarly to the Karen people, many Tavoyan ethnic people, who lived in Yebyu, Tavoy and Long-lun Townships in northern Tenasserim Division also displaced after the Burmese Army launched offensives against an ethnic armed group, Mergui-Dawai United Front (MDUF) in these township areas. Hundreds of Tavoyan displaced persons also had taken refuge in ceasefire zones.

After the serious conscription of forced labour for Ye-Tavoy railway construction against the Mon people in Ye and Yebyu Township since the ceasefire, former MNLA commanders and soldiers felt very uncomfortable to the authorities and Burmese Army. They found that the ceasefire does not solve the problems of human rights violations and the SLORC/SPDC does not keep their promise of abandoning use of forced labour. Additionally, although the Burmese Army had ceasefire with NMSP, the villagers in the rural areas outside of NMSP's ceasefire zones still suffer from the conscription of porter by the Burmese soldiers in their offensives against KNLA or other armed groups.

The dissatisfaction among the MNLA former commanders and soldiers rose up to the peak at the end of 1997 after many Mon villagers in the whole area were forced to construct Ye-Tavoy railway. One former commander revolted against the Burmese Army outside of NMSP ceasefire zone especially in Ye and Yebyu Township areas. Since the new rebellion of the Mon splinter group, the Burmese Army has launched a serious military offensive every year. As the group was too small and they did not the permanent bases, the troops of Burmese Army faced difficulties to uproot this rebel activities. But instead of fighting the Mon rebels, the Burmese Army's troops killed, tortured, raped and mis-treated against the Mon civilians in the rural areas, who were suspected as 'rebel-supporters'.

Because of the mis-treatment against the Mon civilians in Ye and Yebyu Townships, thousands of Mon villagers had to flee from their homes and displaced like Karen, Karenni and Shan villagers along eastern border. Thousands of villagers additionally fled into NMSP's ceasefire zones to take refuge.

However, in the early 2004, after a military offensives launched by the Burmese Army in southern part of Ye Township, thousands of villagers fled from their homes and most of them found ways to migrate into Thailand as they did not have many other choice. None of them would like to take refuge even Halockhani resettlement site, because they felt the site is too close to the bases of the Burmese Army¹⁵. Those villagers from southern part of Ye Township suffered from many types of human rights violations - such as summary killing, cruel torture and degrading treatments, sexual violations, restriction of movement, forced relocation and others.

According to MNRC (which changed its name as: MRDC - Mon Relief and Development Committee - in 2000), it had to set up about 10 villages for IDPs to take temporary refuge and created some livelihoods for them. MRDC also has a policy of encouraging these IDPs to return their homes if their situation was safe enough, because it found it was too hard for the IDPs to live in the areas where were difficult for communication.

VI. The situation of the returned Mon refugees and IDPs after 2000

After returning to the NMSP areas nearly 10 years, the returned Mon refugees are likely isolated by the international community. Some individuals and organizations think the Mon refugees already arrived back to

15.MRDC monthly report, March 2004 - Unrecognized Mon refugees found ways to Thailand.

their homes and they are in peace and have sufficient food for survival. But in reality, they faced a lot of consequences while they are in the resettlement sites in NMSP control areas.

More terribly, the IDPs who fled from the systematic persecution and war could not find way to take refuge in Thailand because there is no Mon refugee camp in it MRDC monthly report, March 2004 - Unrecognized Mon refugees found ways to Thailand.

. The following accounts are the information about the returned Mon refugees and displaced persons.

1. The assistance from aid agencies

A few number of aid agencies still continues its relief operations especially to provide basic food, medical cares and education assistance. Differently from many the refugees in the camp, the current returned refugees could receive only rice¹⁷.

In order to create self-reliance programs for the returned refugees, the basic food assistance has been gradually reduced down since 1998. MNRC/MRDC, the local relief committee has to conduct need assessment of the returned refugees every year in November and December and sent the assessment report to aid agencies. Then aid agencies decided how amount of rice, they need to supply to them.

The provision of the amounts of rice is much depending on the refugees' livelihood, the products from the agriculture lands, and security of each area that each resettlement site is situated, and other conditions.

The amount of rice is reduced up to 33% of the total need, when the situation is stable and the refugees could get more access to the agriculture lands. The decisions made how much amount of rice to provide in each resettlement site is too much depending on the security. If the security condition is worst in one area, the aid agencies has to decide to provide up to 66% of the total need of rice by the returned refugees. However, since 1999, they could not receive 100% of their need for rice.

An adult refugee and a child over 5 years old normally need about 16 Kilograms of rice per month while a child under 5 years old need about 8 Kilograms of rice per month. For an adult man who worked in agriculture or day labour hard works, 16 Kilograms of rice is insufficient for him in one-month.

Besides rice, the returnees themselves have to find another supplementary foods - such as fish-paste, salt, vegetables, meats, beans, cooking oil, seasoning, onions, chilies, and other foods like sugar, milk, beverage. In term of sheltering or housing, the returnees could easily find building materials in the surrounding areas - such as woods, bamboo, thatches - so they could build a better house. Except the Halockhani resettlement site' two sections, many families of the returnees could get some spaces of gardens to grow vegetables.

In term of clothing, the returnees could receive blankets and mosquito nets only in some years. The refugees have to manage and find by themselves to get clothes - such as salongs, shirts, pants and others. Normally they have to buy all of these things.

One international medical NGO also operate its hospital and clinics by cooperating with NMSP's Health Department. Normally, the Mon medic and staff are working to provide health care for the people in the resettlement sites and IDPs in the whole areas.

One catholic NGO based in Thailand, also provides all school materials for all schools and education materials needed by the students in the resettlement sites. There are about 20 schools are operated by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) and NMSP's Education Department. Most of the schools mainly teach the Mon language as primary language and these schools are also known as 'Mon National Schools'.

It is quite hard for the returnees to find available income to find available income to buy sufficient supplement foods, clothing and others.

2. Livelihood

When the returned refugees moved onto the Burma's side of the border, they have more opportunities to get access agriculture lands. However most of the resettlement sites are situating in the mountainous areas, there are very limited lands for all refugees to get available lands.

Accordingly to the assessment by MRDC, only about 25% of the total families in the areas could get lands. Halockhani resettlement site is situating totally in the mountainous areas and therefore only about 20% of the

¹⁷ For the refugees in the camp, the aid agencies provide them with all types of basic foods - rice, fish-paste, salt, bean, cooking.

total refugee families could get lands and their lands are also too far from the sites. They have to work about 2-3 hours.

Bee Ree resettlement sites have more space of lands and about 30-40% of the total families have lands. Among all three resettlement sites, the Bee Ree resettlement site could have more chance to produce more rice¹⁸.

Very similarly to Halockhani resettlement site, Tavoy resettlement site has very limited lands and it is also in the mountainous areas and the security situation is always worst in this site. The returnee families in the site could not produce much rice.

The returned families in all three resettlement sites could not produce sufficient foods for the whole year. The produced rice crops are only sufficient for 2-3 months only and therefore, they have bought rice from the market besides the ration they received from aid agencies. Normally, the returnee families use 'slash and burnt' methods of cultivation and therefore, they have to abandon one space of lands in a mountain slopes or a hill in every three years because the soil erosion problems.

Besides agricultures, the families has to struggle a lot to get income. Therefore, they tried to find out many other seasonal works such cutting bamboo shoots in early rainy season and cutting broom grasses in dry season. They could raise some small incomes from these livelihoods. Some small number of people also engaged in cutting bamboo and sold them to traders. However, those livelihoods are much dependent on the outside traders.

MRDC also found that although it tries to encourage the returnee families to have self-reliance, it is too hard for the refugees to survival for the refugees. In its recommendation after the need assessment survey in December 2003, it described the situation of livelihood as:

"Soon after the (involuntarily or spontaneously) repatriation, NMSP and MNRC (the then name of MRDC) arranged for land distribution to the (returned) refugees, in order to establish their stable lives and create 'self-help' conditions in their communities, even though they did not arrive back to their native places. MNRC/MRDC has constantly encouraged and managed along with them to produce sufficient foods in every resettlement site. In every year, MRDC's survey has found even though the returned refugees has tried hard to produce crops in their sites as much as possible, however they still require food assistance from MRDC and donor agencies. Additionally, they could not make available income from other livelihood."

3. Security

The security condition from one resettlement site is different from another and it depends on the location, the activities of different armed groups, and sometimes the fighting occurred in the surrounding areas. Among the 3 resettlement sites, Bee Ree site is the safe one and it is surrounded by the security force of MNLA. Many institutions such as Mon National High School, NMSP's Education Department, Heads of Mon Women's Organization and Mon Agriculture Office base in this site.

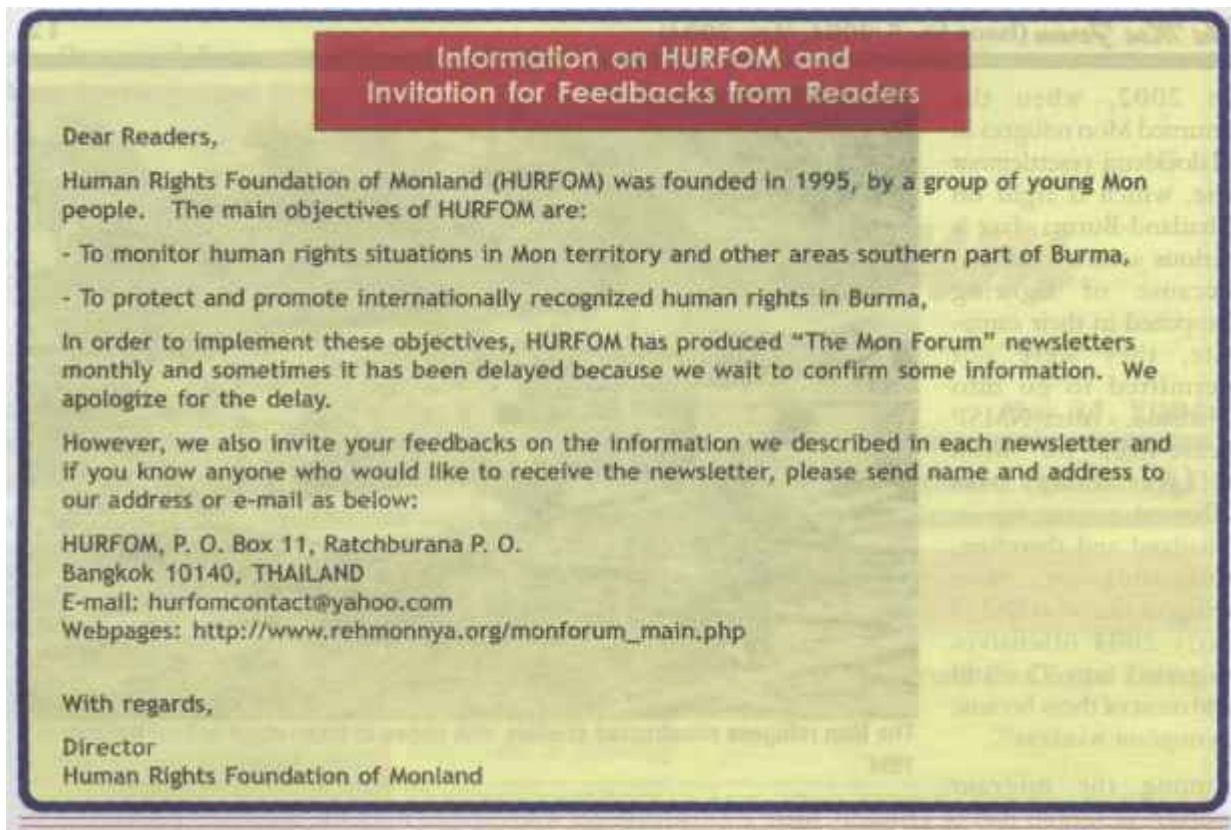
Soon after ceasefire, until 1998, the situation condition has been fine except a few times the Burmese Army came close to some sites especially Halockhani. Sometimes, Thai and Burmese troops also came close to this site because of the border disputes. However, after 1998, the security conditions in all sites have been unstable, and sometimes even fighting happened in the site¹⁹.

The Mon splinter also launched a military operation against the Burmese Army in Yebyu Township area and it is so close to Tavoy resettlement site. The military operations by both armed groups have taken place near the site, it also blocked the movement of the returnees to get out from the sites, for agriculture and traveling purposes. However, the previous Mon splinter group, which broke away since 1997 has not made much problems to the refugees.

But in late 2001, a military commander from MNLA, Col. Pan Nyunt and 60 men broke away from NMSP and founded a political party, Hongsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP), and an arm wing Monland Restoration Army (MRA) and claimed to fight against the Burmese Army and SPDC. However, in reality, this new group fought against NMSP and tried to extend their control areas.

18. MRDC Monthly Report, December 2003 - Need Assessment in Mon Resettlement Sites and the Request for Food Assistance in 2004.

19. MRDC Monthly Report. January 2002 - Armed conflict and population displacement in Ye Township, Mon State.



After the split, the Burmese Army also tried to attack the splinter group, who mainly took bases in area close to NMSP's ceasefire zone. In November 2001, the Burmese soldiers also burnt down one section of Halockhani, which is called Htee-wa-doe, where many Karen refugee displaced persons were residing²⁰.

Since 2001 until the end of 2002, the fighting between HRP and NMSP regularly occurred, and in April 2002, the HRP's MRA troops also attacked in Halockhani resettlement site. In this case, HRP also attempted to overrun the resettlement site. After this attack, over 60% of the families in the site have fled from the camp. Similarly, the MRA troops also launched some activities close to Tavov resettlement site and die people in diat site were also restricted in their movement as well. The fighting between the two Mon armed groups intensified before the end of 2002. But in 2003, some HRP troops returned to NMSP and the fighting decreased down.

Because of the fighting between the Mon armed groups, the returnee families could no longer work in their agriculture. On the other hand, land-mines are planted by the armed groups and some refugees stepped on mines and killed.

The refugees from Halockhani could return homes in 2003. Nearly all families came back and re-construct their houses, as they have no many choices for places to select and move to other places.

That was the worst time for the security for all families in Halockhani. Even though there was no fighting in the camp-site, the returnee families in Tavoy resettlement site also faced a serious restriction. They also could not work at their farms.

Later in 2003, although the security condition became better, sometimes, the Burmese Army also operated the military operations close to NMSP areas and therefore, the returnee families still have to be careful when they go for farming and other purposes. Security for overall resettlement sites are not so perfect and therefore, even many families the persecution by the Burmese Army from southern part of Ye Township decided to not take any refuge at the sites.

VII. Conclusion

Many people consider the cease-fire in Burma the final solution for die resettlement of the IDPs and returned refugees. This is wrong from *the* studying of the cases of Mon refugee's involuntary (or spontaneous) repatriation. This repatriation of the Mon refugees is also game-end of politics for the Thailand and Burma's leaders toward Mon struggle for self-determination. The Mon refugees have no any right to return back and take refuge in Thailand.

20. MRDC Monthly Report January 2002 - Unstable condition around Halockhani resettlement area

In 2002, when the returned Mon refugees in Halockhani resettlement site, which is right on Thailand-Burma, face a serious security concern because of fighting happened in their camp-site, they were not permitted to go into Thailand. After NMSP cease-fire, no Mon refugee camp was allowed to set up in Thailand and therefore, thousands of Mon refugees like who fled in early 2004 offensives migrated into Thailand and most of them became as migrant workers²¹.



The Mon refugees constructed shelters with hopes to take refuge in Thai territory in 1994

Among the migrant workers in various part of Thailand, there are many people who escaped from the systematic persecution by the SPDC authorities and Burmese Army. Those types of migrant workers will end up their lives in Thailand for many years because they are afraid to return homes in Burma, and even they were deported back to the border by the Thai immigration authorities, the)' always tried to enter into Thailand again.

Therefore, it is not the right time for the repatriation of the ethnic refugees concerned soon after ceasefire between the Burma's military regime and an ethnic armed force. The right time for the repatriation of the refugees only when there are peace, restoration of human rights and democratic and reconciliation transitions taking place. More importantly, the involvement of international community must be in place in any repatriation happened to the Burma's ethnic refugees.

21. MRDC monthly report March 2004

- Unrecognized Mon refugees found ways to Thailand

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