

The Mon Forum

Issue No. 6/2004

June 30, 2004

The Publication of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (BURMA)

Contents

News:

- (1) SPDC planned to confiscate another 1700 acres of land

Report:

- (1) Logging, Gas Pipeline and Impacts to the Mon People

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
KNLA-	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU-	Karen National Union
NMSP-	New Mon State Party
MPF-	Mon People Front
DKBA-	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
KPF-	Karen Peace Force
MI-	Military Intelligence

News

SPDC planned to confiscate another 1700 acres of land (June 2004, Mon State)

Burmese military regime, SPDC, recently planned and measured about 1700 acres land belonging to the civilians for new confiscation in the middle part of Mon State and in southern Mon State Burma in order to build a dam, the local Mon people said.

In southern part of Ye township, the military government measured more than 700 acres land in east part of Ka-lort village near a water fall in 2002 where the government planned to build a dam for hydroelectric power and water for cultivation.

“I am not sure what is the government going to do in this land. But I heard from the government authorities that they will create plantation and farms in lower part of the proposed dam and take water from there,” a government officer said.

In eastern of Thanbyuzayat Township near the Wae-khami village, some government soldier and land surveyors measured about 1000 acres of land, according to a source close to the land surveyor said.

According to source, the military government is planning to build a new dam in the area, where it has a river called Win-yaw and a valley area.



A new confiscated land by SPDC's Township government in Naing Hlone village of Mudon Township, Mon State

SPDC's National Convention and Human Rights Issue

On May 17, without inviting the representatives from the National League for Democracy and its leaders including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and other representatives from the ethnic political parties, the regime SPDC has held the National Convention with its hand-picked representatives in Rangoon, the capital of Burma.

While the National Convention was holding in Rangoon, over one thousand of political prisoners including monks, students, democracy activists are still in prisons. The regime has not released them even though the International Community has several times asked the SPDC.

Since the SPDC violates the rights to the freedom of expression and association by putting the political activists in prisons and jails and refuse of 1990 General Elections, the National Convention did not uphold any issues to develop for the democratic principles and protection of human rights.

Although the regime has claimed it will proceed to democracy and establishment of peace, in reality, they never applied any principles for democratic society and respect of every people's human rights in the country.

Therefore, it is a need for the International Community to continue give pressure until the regime accept for democratic change and respect of human rights.

Win-yaw river flows from Karen State, which is in eastern part of Mon State.

“This Wae-khami dam is an implementation of Gen. Khin Nyunt when he came to Thanpyuzayart Town to get the support from the people for his post as Prime Minister in March 2004,” said Mr. S— C—, a Mon community leader in Thanbyuzayat Town.

In both areas where the military government measured the lands and planned to build dams have rubber plantations and fruit plantations which are belonged to the Mon civilians in Thanbyuzayat Township and Ye Township, Mon State. Because of it, the local people are worrying about their loss of their lands, according to the community leader.

These lands converted from the forestry lands to plantation lands since over 20 years ago, and the civilians could have opportunity to grow rubber trees and various orchid plantation and they have main income from these plantations.

After the New Mon State Party made cease-fire agreement with the regime SPDC, it has confiscated thousands acres of land for their military bases and many other businesses related to SPDC's militarization policy.

Even the New Mon State Party claimed to the regime

and local military commands to give back lands to civilians or to pay for sufficient compensation cost, there has been no reasonable reply from the regime. Last year in August 2003, when the NMSP leaders met self-appointed PM Gen. Khin Nyunt, they also claimed to give back lands to the civilians because they said the amount of confiscated lands are more than required. Although Gen. Khin Nyunt promised it would give back or negotiate with to commanders of Burmese Army, the NMSP has not received any reasonable reply from the regime.

Thousand number of Mon people in the rural areas who lost the land became jobless in Ye township Mon State where a lot of land were confiscated in 1999-2003.

In the recent HURFOM's report “No Land To Farm” issued by Human Rights Foundation of Monland, over 8000 acres of lands belonged to Mon people were confiscated during the period 1998 to 2002, and the people lost about 1.5 Million US Dollar for their lands and other properties.

(Source: Independent Mon News Agency)

■ ■ ■

Report

Logging, Gas Pipeline and Impacts to the Mon People

I. The Exploitation of Natural Resource

Burma, which is well-known for its rich natural resources, such as natural gas in western sea, forestry in eastern border with Thailand and China, mining in northern areas of Kachin State and fishes in western sea of Mon State and Tenasserim Division, has attracted foreign companies from neighbouring countries and western countries.

In 1988, after the current regime, SPDC (the then SLORC) seized bloody political power from the pro-demonstrators, the new regime opened up the country, selling various types of natural resources: gas; logs; fishes; jades and other in order to get foreign money. Hundreds of Thai fishing trawlers entered into the seas of Mon State and Tenasserim Division and caught thousands ton of fishes. Over 20 Thai logging entered into eastern part of Burma's border and cut thousands ton of logs.

Exploitation of the natural gas fields in the Andaman Sea and the construction of a pipeline across southeastern Burma to Thailand is a major threat to Burma's environment. The construction is led by America's UNOCAL and France's TOTAL oil companies, in partnership with the Burmese regime, the \$1.2 billion pipeline project was pushed through without the consultation or approval of local residents or an independent environmental impact assessment. The pipeline area is now thoroughly militarized by the Burmese Army, armed faction of the regime. Local residents have suffered serious human rights abuses, and thousands have been conscripted as forced laborers on infrastructure projects. The pipeline's route has destroyed or damaged forest habitats home to a number of rare animals.

UNOCAL and TOTAL, the biggest corporate investors in Burma, are today the target of consumer boycotts and shareholder actions in the United States and Europe. UNOCAL faces lawsuits in California that charge the company with abetting human rights violations associated with the pipeline project. The linkage between the denial of human rights and environmental destruction is seen as clearly in Burma as anywhere in the world today. However, these companies have 'no will' to withdraw their investment and support the military regime with many hundreds of million Dollar every year to grip in power.

In term of forest, southern Burma's forest holds one third of mainland forests resources, where the home of ethnic Mon, Karen, Tavoyan and other nationalities. Deforestation is increasing, and an analysis of current information shows that Southern Burma's remote border's forests are now threatened. Although agricultural conversion, fuel wood-cutting, and charcoal production are the main causes of deforestation in the lowland areas of southern Burma, logging appears to be an important factor in the fragmentation of the remaining intact forests that cover the mountainous border areas.

Most of the forests are located in the mountains that locate along the border. The area of Karen State, Tenasserim Division and other mountain part of Mon state have been largely deforested since the turn of the century as a result of agricultural conversion, firewood cutting, and charcoal production.

Heavy logging, by both the regime and their contracted companies and by ethnic minorities armed groups and their contracted companies, is a major cause of deforestation in Burma's border areas. Two factors have played a particularly important role in maintaining both a supply of, and demand for, Burma's timber: the regime's economic and security policies and the regional timber trade.

Some detail description of the current logging businesses, gas-pipeline, and the related impact to the Mon people and other ethnic groups who live in southern part of Burma is as below:

II. Logging Business in Three Pagoda Pass border town

Logging and furniture making industries in Three Pagoda Pass

In Three Pagoda Pass Town, there are about 200 home industries that produce wood wares including heavy materials such as furniture, and decorative lacquer wares. A businessman from that town said that round about 100 tons of wood is daily used depending on the demand of the market. The use of woods is more in the dry season (from January to May) and became less in rainy season (from June to October) while there is difficult communication in mountainous areas.



The furniture and lacquer wares are the main products of Three Pagoda Pass

The kinds of wood used as raw material include not only hard wood such as iron wood and Pa-dauk (*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*), but soft wood such as htawk Kyant (*treminalia tomentosa*), (*michelia champaca*), Auk-chin-zar (*diaspyros ehretioides*), and (*melanorrhoea*) that can be used for marking handicraft works and lacquer wares.

Most furniture and lacquer wares are officially exported to Thailand from the border point of the border town. At least 10 trucks per day involve in trading of these materials.

Yearly wood production and transportation

In the Three Pagoda town, there are only local 10 businessmen who are operating logging industry in large scale. However, the amount of wood they are trading is about 1000 tons on yearly basis, while about 100 tons of wood is under the trading of many small merchants. Generally, wood is transported various villages and areas such as from Ma-yan-taung-chaung, Mae-za-li, Ah-pa-lon villages of Kya-Inn-Seiki Township, and Mae-ka-the and Ta-dein villages of northern part of Three-Pagoda Township, through land route in summer time and river route in raining season.

The cutting of the logs almost in KNU, NMSP control areas to where the regime or Burmese Army could not have control at all.

Taxation

From 1991 up to 2003, there had no any specified authorities that would take responsibilities for which logging areas. In the KNU areas, the businessmen have to give tax to KNU for logging in the areas permitted to extract wood. In Mon areas it has to be given to NMSP. As taxation is made basing on the specified stretch of land, contract system is practiced.

However, on the way to the Three- Pagoda Town, the extracted wood has to pass many checkpoints of SPDC and they have to pay 1200 Baht per ton of wood to each checkpoint. If a lot of tons of wood would be transported, there is negotiation between the merchant and in charge of each checkpoint.

After that, in the Three Pagoda Pass border town, they have to pay 600 Baht per ton of wood has to be given to the SPDC's forestry department. It is also needed to give 100 or 200 or 300 Baht to other checkpoints set up by other armed groups such as KPF – Karen Peace Force (so called Houng-tha-yaw Karen armed groups), DKBA, NMSP and Peoples' Militia group.

Price of wood

In summer time, as transportation is easy going, the price of one ton of wood happens 4000 – 4500 Baht, while in raining season, it cost 5500 to 6500 Baht. The companies from Thai side of the border often purchase woods with a good price, for iron-wood 16, 000 to 17, 000 Baht per ton and for Pa-dauk 20, 000 to 30, 000 Baht. (The exchange rate in June is 1 US Dollar is about 40 Baht).

The price of Pa-dauk wood is more expensive than other types of woods because the furniture factories could make a very beautiful materials from this type of wood. Therefore, many businessmen in the area tried to get this type of woods and ordered their men to find out this type of woods as much as possible.

Who is it beneficial to and who is suffer from the revenge of the nature?

According to the businessmen or merchants, they have no many benefits from this business, due to variety of tax collections to be paid, heavy charges for transportation and labour, and instability of market. On the other

hand, who have benefits are DKBA and other armed groups who collect much tax, Thai companies who trade in these furniture, SPDC's check-points which took a lot of tax from the merchants. A DKBA unit headed by Cap. Lay Win, by making a long-term contract with a Thai logging company (Sil-hook), is running logging business in large scale in areas of Kyun-chaung, Ah-pa-lon, Mae-ta-bywee and Mae-za-li areas of Kya-inn-seikyí Township and the areas of Three Pagoda Pass Township.

On the other hand, SPDC authorities are also exploiting variety of taxes from domestic manufacturing industries and merchants. Every furniture manufacturing industry has to give between 100 and 500 Baht per month per ton of wood and every truck loading with wood is charged for entrance of the town plus 1000 Baht per ton.

To sum up this, the people in the area are suffering from the revenge of the nature or deforestation in the area. A man, aged over 50 years, from Three Pagoda Pass Town explained his experience:

“ When I was 30, there as a lot of forest in the areas along the border (around Three-Pagoda Pass) with Thailand. At that time, in summer, it was not so hot as now. For us, the water was running down from the mountain steams all months in the whole year. Now, even in the raining season, I feel sultry. In the previous summer, we had to buy water for bathing with the prices of 5 Baht per bucket. I supposed that in this Three Pagoda Pass town area, 3,000 to 4,000 acres of woodland had been totally cleared away.”

III. Logging in Mon State and Tenasserim Division, southern Burma

A. Forced logging for new battalion in Thanbyuzayat Area

Since Year 2000, many Burmese Army's battalions have deployed in southern part of Mon State. Thousands of land belonged to the Mon people in the areas concerned are confiscated. Additionally, for the construction of the battalions and daily use of wood, civilians from Mon State were ordered to collect lumber for many new battalion in Mon State.

As an instance in Thanbyuzayat Township,

In January 2004, Anin and Htin-yuu (Kwan-proi) villages of Thanbyuzayat Township were forced to cut down trees and saw it into 280 tons of lumber, which will be used to construct a new artillery regiment No. 315 which was deployed under the command of Southeast Command, based in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State. A local villager said Anin and Htin-Yuu villages were busy cutting logs after receiving an order from the authorities in early January. He added that the order they received from the village headmen was o cut down trees from our areas and saw it into lumbers. If they could not provide this amount of lumber, then they have to buy 280 tons in total required by the army. Because of that order, the villagers who could arrange to buy lumber from other places, they have to cut all of our rubber plantation trees.

The local people in the area also grow rubber trees as their livelihood by selling the rubber latex to traders. Rubber compound sheets are also exported to Thailand and Malaysia from Burma. However, when the Burmese Army went woods and lumbers, they took every thing they got from the villagers.

According to the source, Mon farmers need to find laborers and hire the equipment needed for the logs and pay for all expenses. For those who have to buy lumber from the outside, they have to pay 200, 000 Kyat per ton. The villagers complained this is the first time that they have had to provide lumber to the authorities and the Burmese Army under force.

B. Logging by DKBA in Ye Township.

A pro-SPDC outfit armed group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), has cut thousands tons of logs in southern Burma including in areas occupied by the local population. This armed group surrendered to the Burmese Army or SPDC since 1993 and it gets a special business opportunity to do any type of business and they are allowed by the regime.

Recently, the DKBA soldiers even invaded into Mon villagers' plantations and farms in Ye Township and cut trees for their own business. A trader from northern Ye, Mon State said, “They even go and cut down trees in the villagers gardens. The villagers are afraid to stop them because they hold guns and the Burmese soldiers have to turn a blind eye“. Even the villagers did not satisfy much but they had no place to complain.

“The DKBA enters the pristine forested area in the northeastern part of Ye Township and cuts thousands of tons of trees for logging business”, confirmed a New Mon State Party official from Ye.

The Karen armed group who surrendered to the Burmese Army receives logging concessions from the regime's forestry department. It was reported that the DKBA aggressively cuts the trees close to the NMSP controlled area and even sometimes enters into the NMSP area.

According to the source, thousands of tons of logs in Pa-an Township and Battalion No. 999 of the DKBA areas are being cut down; the "Pago Yoma" range in Pegu Division is also under the logging concessions provided by SPDC's forestry department.

DKBA again contacted businessmen to transport logs and lumber to Mon and Karen States for construction of houses and other building and use in many other purposes. To promote their logging concession, the DKBA sells lumber to Buddhist monks at a low price to build monasteries in Mon and Karen States. The DKBA is exempt from paying an illegal tax to the Burmese Army along the way while ordinary traders have to pay when passing their checkpoints.

C. Logging by DKBA, KPF and other ceasefire groups in Yebyu, Tenasserim Division

Since late 2003, the surrendered groups to the Burmese Army have involved in the illegal logging business in Tenasserim Division, southern Burma, reported the local community. A Mon teacher from Yebyu Township said since last year two Karen cease-fire groups that have a tight working relationship with the Burmese Army in cutting down in the forests slowly. Those armed groups and Burmese Army based in the area also involve in this logging activities for their income.

The two groups Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and KPF (Karen Peace Force), are free from paying taxes or pay less fee when charged by the Forestry Department and Military Intelligence (MI) in the area. Some other dealers who have a good relationship with the Burmese Army also do not have to pay tax when cutting trees.

"Every village in Yebyu Township has at least two (chain) sawing machines which are used for cutting down trees, sawing and trimming," the Mon teacher added. There are over 50 villages in the whole area and therefore, many saw owners involved in serious cutting down of trees.

During the rainy season the loggers haul the logs down from the deep forest using elephants, loaded onto bamboo rafts and transported to the villages, situated along Mon State-Tenasserim Division motor road or Ye-Tavoy motor road. Harvesting and pulling logs from the jungle is dangerous work for the loggers as the stream is too small and has a strong water current, losing control of the logs can cause serious problems when logs are maneuvered onto the bamboo rafts.

The SPDC junta's Forestry Department in Yebyu Township collected roughly between 40,000 and 50,000 Kyat tax for a truck carrying about ten tons of logs. The department and the local Military Intelligence (MI) illegally charge most of the taxes and most taxes do not go Rangoon based Forestry Ministry or Custom Ministry.

According to a Mon community leader, the senior members from the forestry department do not much interest in forest management, do not dare to go into areas under the control of armed rebels and have no political will or idea of protecting the damage being done to the forest and wildlife.

The logging trucks pay about 300,000 Kyats to pass through checkpoints on the way to Mon State from Yebyu Township. There are four SPDC checkpoints along the way; one at the boundary of Mon State, LIB No.229 gate and the other two military gates in Ye township.

The logging dealers also pay the cease-fire group NMSP about 20,000 Kyat for one truck. Nai Blai, one of the dealers said that some NMSP members have been involved in the illegal logging business for sometime.

The local communities are disappointed with the logging business because the people in this area subsist on wild animals and search for food in the forest. "Over the past twenty years there were many areas where we could easily find animals to hunt, but now animals are difficult to find, there is no more now," said Nai Ah Maung a local hunter who used to hunt wild pig, various monkey species, and tigers.

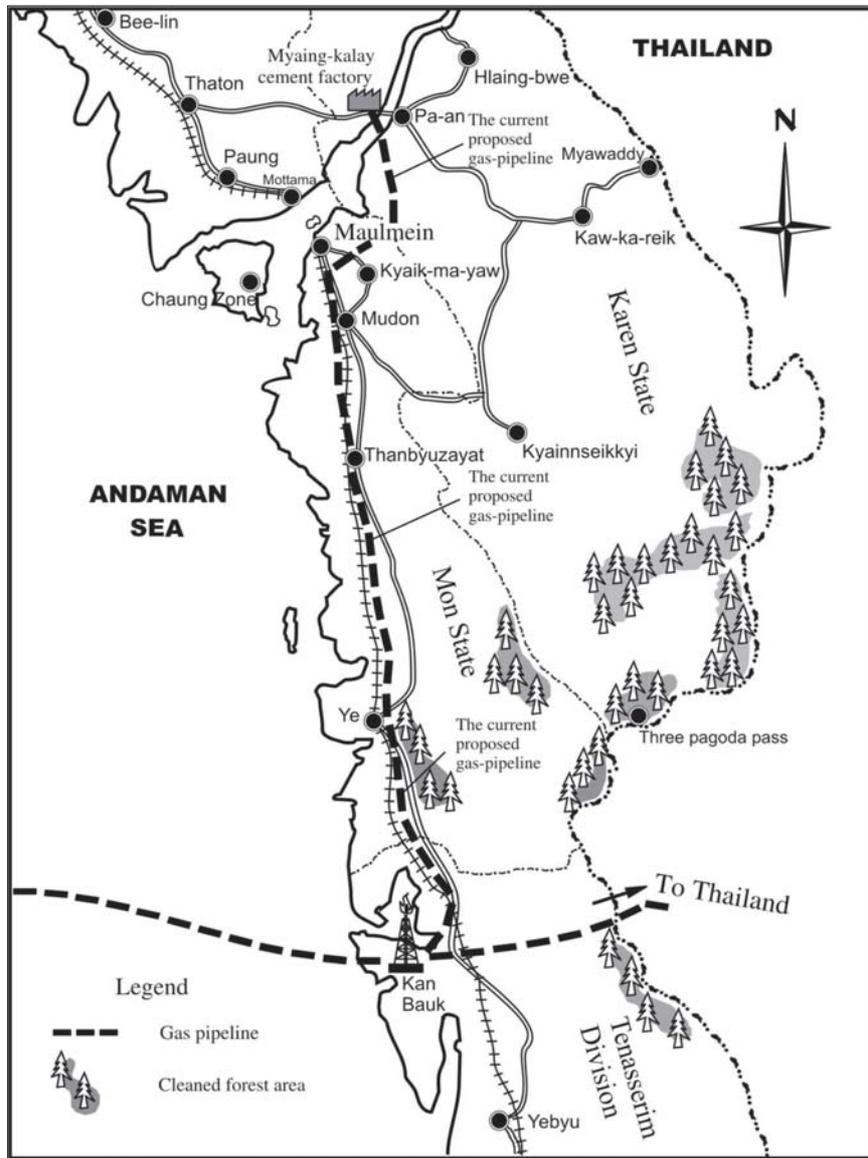
Monkey (Gang in Mon language) are extinct in this area after the high rate of deforestation and over-hunting for over five years now, said Nai Cay Mon, an environmentalist. "The weather in Yebyu Township has gradually changed, it is different from last year and the water in the stream is getting more shallow.

"Our villagers (from Kwethalin village in Yebyu Township) have to dig a canal in the deep stream to keep water in summer. In the past, this stream was deep and clean throughout the whole year. The summers are longer and hotter than before," observed a village headman in that village said.

After the cease-fire, the Burmese military government, SPDC and the NMSP authorities have both played a significant role in the destruction of tropical forest by allowing logging traders to cut logs in southern Burma, according to a local source from the logging traders in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division.

For one ton of log, the traders have to pay 6,000 Kyat to the NMSP and 15,000 Kyat to the SPDC local authorities; 5,000 Kyat to local forestry department authorities; 5,000 Kyat to Military Intelligence ; and 5,000 Kyat to the local military battalion, said a trader from Yabu village, which is the main center for log and lumber trafficking in southern Burma.

The log buyers or traders who buy logs DKBA and KPF transport their logs to Ye township and they pay 130,000 Kyat to the two parties: 20,000 Kyats to NMSP and 110,000 Kyats to SPDC authorities per one ton of log or lumber. The logging market in this area has grown since the NMSP and SPDC reached a cease-fire agreement in 1995.



Map of Kan Bauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline and the cleared forest areas

In 1997, due to soil erosion from mass logging, several landslides took place around this area after a heavy downpour of rain, which killed over 100 people and affected thousands of acres of farmland. According to local elders they never experienced landslides like these in the past, it is viewed that depleting of logs has contributed to landslides. "Landslides are a direct result of the forest being destroyed", a Mon soldier said, appraising the environment.

IV. Impacts from the Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipelines

A. Demand of building materials

This Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline was built since 1999 and it passed a half lower part of Mon State. The gas pipeline brings gas from Yatana gas field, which is exploited by multinational petroleum companies UNOCAL and TOTAL, and provide the required energy for a cement factory in Myaingkalay village, Pa-an Township of Karen State.

During the regime SPDC and local Burmese Army battalions built the pipeline, they also confiscated many hundreds acres of paddy farmlands, rubber and fruit plantations and house gardens. Some villagers in villages near Thanbyuzayat Township were suddenly relocated by the regime authorities.

Later on, every year, the total Burmese Army's battalion troops always request more materials from local villagers in Thanbyuzayat Township to build the security huts along and to fence Kanbauk-Myaingkalay pipeline in Thanbyuzayat Township.

The local Burmese Army battalions in Thanbyuzayat Township, IB No. 61 has always concerned about the possible sabotage of the gas pipeline by the rebel soldiers and ordered the local villagers to provide a lot of bamboo and wooden poles in order to build several huts for guards along the route. Additionally, they ordered the villagers to fence along the pipeline route to prevent the access from the rebel soldiers.

The soldiers from IB No. 61 asked the villagers from 6 Mon villages near Thanbyuzayat Town (*in the north and south of the town*) to provide them two wooden poles and two bamboos from each household. If one household failed to provide the set amount of building materials, they may have to pay 1000 Kyat as a fine.

The soldiers also ordered to the villagers to bring all these building materials to their set places in their bases just outside of Thanbyuzayat Town. In forcing the villagers to provide these materials, the commanders of IB No. 61 just ordered via village headmen and then the headmen have to manage to provide full amounts of building materials.

The gas pipeline often blew up because of low pipeline quality and low quality of technique. Sometimes, the pipeline was also sabotaged by the rebel, especially Karen National Liberation Army.

Therefore, the local military battalions, which take responsibility of gas pipeline, have great concerns of possible sabotage. As a result, they have constantly forced the local villagers to provide building materials to build necessary protective guard huts and fence. And the local villagers are also forced to guard the pipeline on a regular basis.

B. Security for gas pipeline in Tenasserim Division

The Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline started from Kanbauk village, where the Yatana gas station is situating and then passes in Yebyu from the south to north and into Mon State.

Started on year 2000 to until today, in order to take security in the area, the Burmese Army's LIB No. 273 ordered the villagers from Natkyisin village to guard roads and pipeline. Every household in Nat-kyi-sin village tract had to guard for the security of these infrastructures and to fight against the rebel troops when they came into their village tract. This village tract has about 8 villages totally.

"We have no land to live, no money to give them and no food to eat", said by a local young villager who escaped from Nat-kyi-sin village. His family fled from their native villages to escape from their native villages to avoid from forced labour and tax extortion.

Sometimes, the villagers are also forced to work in the battalion (LIB No. 273) works when the army repaired their barracks or other works in the battalions. Accordingly to a villager, he said, "after we arrived their battalion, first, we have to cut down all big trees and clean the grounds where the army needed to build the military barracks. After finished cleaning, the soldiers forced us to dig long trenches and bankers, and build fences. For our village, we had to group 3 groups totally and each group contained at least 10 villagers. If one village cannot go and work, they have to find one substitute, who can go and work with cost of 400 Kyat per day. For the household, who have no husband or adult, they have to spend 25,000 Kyat per month for hiring the substitutes".

When the gas-pipeline passes through in one area, the villagers are forced not only to guard the pipeline but also to build the infrastructure for the Burmese Army which has responsibility for the pipeline.

C. Forced women for the security of gas pipeline

By giving reason for so-called village security, LIB No. 282 under command of Coastal Region Command that is taking responsibility for the security of gas-pipe line is forcedly posting not only men but also women as night sentries at Sin-gone, Pyin-gyi and nearby villages.

A group of young men who fled Sin-gone and Pyin-gyi villages to Thai-Burma border intending to work as illegal workers explained their experiences in condition of anonymity as followed:

"Sin-gone village has about 200 households. Through the village heads, ordered not only men but also women to take sentry duties. According to the military's order, women of Sin-gone and Pyin-gyi villages have to take guard duties in rotation from 6 p.m. to the next day's 6 a.m. If they could not performance and duty substitution should be made. The so-called "defense expense" must be paid from at least 2,000 kyat to 3,000, 6,000, 8,000 or 12,000 Kyat. It means the men must attend the military training and the women take night guard duties. Anyone who disobeyed must be expelled from the village by order. All these excessiveness were practically implemented by the village heads

under the rein of military. Though that the women were being recruited as sentries is morally awful, nobody dare to say. Not being able stand those awful things, we, as you see, have come here to take refuge and seek livelihoods.”

It is so dangerous for the women to take guard at night along the pipeline route. If the rebel force came and sabotaged the pipeline, they could not stop them. When the Burmese soldiers came they could be raped or face sexual harassment.

D. Impact to Agriculture

When the gas pipeline was constructed and passed into the paddy farms, rubber and fruit plantations, depending on the level of lands, sometimes, the construction workers put the pipeline under the water and sometimes they put the route above the ground.

In the paddy farms, whether the construction workers immersed the gas pipeline under the water or on the ground, the farmers still faced problems for their works in paddy cultivation. First the authorities in every area ordered to the local farmers to not plant their paddy about 20-30 feet both sides of the route. And, so the farmers lost a lot of the lands.

Besides they lost some lands, the paddy farms are also divided into two parts and the farms, who owned these lands have found a lot of difficulties in cultivation of their farms. First they found difficulty of water flow to the whole area of their lands and otherwise, it makes them too difficult to bring water because pipeline. The most difficulty they have found is to bring their ploughing equipment. Most of these equipment are men-made tools and when the farms plough their lands in one part of their farm lands and then moved to another part. When they moved, they have to carry their equipment along with them and brought their cattle to cross the pipeline. If the pipeline was under water or underground, it would be easier for them to carry. But it is on the ground, it makes them to heavy to carry these equipment and difficult to bring their cattle across the pipeline. According to a Mon farmer from Mudon Township, he explains:

“Because of the gas pipeline route, my farm was divided in two parts. I have about 6 acres of land and about 4 acres are in the west of pipeline and the remaining are in the eastern part. It makes me many difficulties in ploughing the lands before we could plant paddy plants. As we formed the lands in many small spaces (to be available for ploughing with cattle and men made equipment) and we often have to carry our equipment when we moved from one space to another. These equipment are heavy.”

In some places, for the security of the pipeline, the authorities and army also ordered the local villagers to make bamboo-fence along the pipeline route in both sides to prevent the rebels’ attack against it. In this case, besides the pipeline, two rows of long bamboo also divide the farmers’ paddy-farms, and they faced worth situation not only to carry their equipment from one part to another, but also they found that the water flow could not move and some of their lands do not get enough water for ploughing the lands and to plant small paddy plants. In some farms, because of the prevention by the fences, water flow into some farms and there are over amount of water and it also killed the plants grown by the farmers.

To prevent the flood into their farms due to fences, some farmers also organized each other and built the water canal to take out over amount of water from their farms.

As an instance,

“A group of farmers from Galaing-padaw village of Thanbyuzayat Township decided to build a water canal near gas pipeline on May 18, to prevent water flood that flow into their farms. The pipeline also passed through near their farms, and the construction workers put the pipeline just above the ground and ordered the villagers to fence along the pipeline. As the fence barred along the pipeline, there was flood in some farms last year and some wastes also moved into their farms and so the soil was ruin and their crop production was also reduced. This year, before the rainy season, the farmers who were effected for the same reason organized each other and planned to build a water canal without the support from the authorities. The farmers shared their own money and hired some labourers and dug the canal.

“According to a farmer, he said that the soil in farms and paddy plants were destroyed by flood and wastes, which flow together with water. Many other farmers’ paddy plants were also destroyed and so they came together for a decision to dig a water canal to bring the over amount water away from their farms.

“The group of farmers also involved in digging earth for canal and they also hired some more labourers

to dig together with them. One farmer said that each farmer had to spend about 40,000 Kyat to hire labourers, to rent trucks to carry earth and for foods. He also added, if they did not build that canal, they could not produce the paddy crops and their families could not survive.”

Last year, although the farmers, whose lands are along the gas pipeline, could not produce crops well because of flood and wastes, however, they have to sell full quota of paddy amounts to the regime at low price. Most farmers had to buy paddy from markets and then sold to the regime's paddy-buying centers. If they failed to sell the full amount of paddy, they would be punished again.

After gas pipeline sabotage, the local authorities and army commanders from many battalions collected more tax from the civilians by showing the reason that they would expense more for the security of gas pipeline. They also complained that they would also increase the number of their militia troops in the area and the villagers needed to provide salaries to those new militiamen.

In Mudon Township and Thanbyuzayat Township, with the order by the authorities and army, the village authorities needed to increase the number of labourers in their villages and collected fund from the villagers again. They also needed to pay 8000 - 12000 Kyat per month salary to one militiaman and the village authorities have to take responsibility to collect this fund.

In some village, when some villagers refused for paying the salary of the militiamen and complained that this activity was against the SPDC's Order No. 1/99, that described to stop use of forced labour, and refused to pay, the army from the near battalions and commands also involved in forcing the villagers to get payment. As an example, when the villagers from Kwan-hlar village refused to pay for the salary of new militiamen in their villages, they were also ordered by army from IB No. 32 to pay it as quick as possible.

Movement restriction against the local paddy, rubber and fruit cultivated farmers also created an enormous impact for the crop production in the area. According to an order in southern part of Ye Township, the farmers are not allowed in both daytime and night-time to go and travel to their plantations or farms. If they go at day time, they must be beaten and if they go at night-time, they must be killed. The order is in a continual existence until now, the farmers have to totally abandon their permanent works that supporting them earning income for their livelihood. Many farmers lost many millions Kyat from selling paddy, rubber, lime, orange, durian and other fruits.

But in other area, the authorities and army ordered to not walk along or cross the pipeline at night-time from 6 o'clock in the evening until 6 o'clock in the morning. And, they also do not allow any farmers who stay close to pipeline to sleep at night in their farm huts. This order creates time limitation for the local farmers.

In traditions in Burma, the farmers always go to their farms for work in early morning because they have to walk half an hour or an hour from their houses in villages to farms. Similarly, they need to spend the same hour in return to their homes. Thus, most of them tried to get up early morning and go their farms. Now, as they have time limitations, they delayed in their working and could do less works in comparing with the previous time. This makes also reduction of crop production from their farms.

Now, the farmers have to hire more labourers to work in their farms to complete planting of paddy crops or reaping the grains in time. The labour cost is also high to pay rare labourers as many young people from Mon areas migrated into Thailand to seek good work and income. They have to expend more money for the production of their own crops because time limitation or impacts from the security of gas pipeline.

E. Restriction movements near pipeline area

About 210 miles gas pipeline passes through many hundreds of lands of paddy fields, fruit plantations and rubber plantations. The gas pipeline passes many paddy fields, rubber, fruit plantations in Ye Township; many paddy fields, rubber plantation in Thanbyuzayat Township; many paddy fields in Mudon Township, many rubber plantations in Kyaikmayaw Township, paddy fields in Pa-an Township.

Since the gas pipeline passes their plantations, when they go to their plantations or paddy fields in eastern or western part of the route, they always have to walk over the pipeline. Sometimes, as they have to walk along the railway, they are likely moving along the pipeline.

After the gas pipeline was sabotaged in the northern part of Ye Township, the authorities in Mon State, in where the most parts of pipeline lies through, and in Yebyu Township of Tenasserim Division, made the restriction against the civilians's movement, especially to farmers, who have regularly traveled in the area. In the sabotage of the pipeline, the authorities always accused that the local villagers or farmers in the area concerned also cooperate with the rebel armed force.

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:

HURFOM, P. O. Box 11, Ratchburana P. O.
Bangkok 10140, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
Webpages: http://www.rehmonnya.org/monforum_main.php

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

The authorities ordered to farmers and villagers to not go across or along the pipeline at night time and in some area, even in day time.

As an instance,

"The authorities from Ye Township area also ordered the civilians in villages to not go close to the gas pipeline even in day-time. The village authorities and local army personnel declared, if they go close or cross the pipeline in day-time, they must be punished for beating and if they go at night time they must be killed by shooting. In an order issued by LIB No. 299 in the southern part of Ye Township, they officially declared that someone who crossed the pipeline in late evening or at night time will be shot to dead.

"In some villages, the authorities also stick this order on the village offices' blackboards. Many villagers who belonged plantations around the gas pipeline area faced more and more difficult for their travel across the pipeline to arrive their plantations. There are many plantations around the gas-pipeline in both southern and northern part of Ye Township and some hundred civilians' families, who have been dependents on these plantations, are effected by this order.

"According to the villagers in the area, the time while the authorities and army were restricting the farmers, they also need to harvest their fruits. Many of them lost their crops or fruits because of this restriction."

Some villagers tried to go to collect their fruits because most of them were getting ripe, and the collection of these fruits must be on time. If not, the farmers would lose them. Some villagers were also arrested and beaten by the troops of Burmese Army who took security along the pipeline.

As an instance,

"When about 40 year old woman from Koe-mile village went to her plantation across the gas pipeline, she was also arrested by soldiers from LIB No. 299 and after arrest, a group of soldiers beat her. They angered why she did not listen to their order. Because of beating, she got a lot of inner injury, and was brought back to village. The soldiers also ordered to not take her to town's hospital and so she was treated with a local herbal doctor in her village for several days."

Similar movement restriction against the civilians especially to farmers also made in Mudon Township, Mon State. In this Township, the gas pipeline mainly passed through many hundred acres of paddy farms and the paddy growing farmers have to go to their farms every day. Sometimes, the farmers who have to work hard in their farms always came late to their homes in villages.

In May, the village authorities and militia declared that all farmers must not cross into pipeline route area from 6:00 p.m. in the evening until 6:00 a.m. in the morning. Maj. Naing Win of IB No. 31 instructed the militia force in every village that they have rights to shoot anyone who crossed or walked along the gas pipeline.



A truck with a lot of tons of wood on the way to Three Pagoda Pass Town

When there is a security situation occurs in a specific area, the local army battalions their commanders have the highest authority and issue all orders, including the conscription of forced labour.

There orders are also against their own recent SPDC's order No. 1/99, which stopping for the requisition of forced labour in Burma.

V. Conclusion

Since it came to the power, the Burmese Army has no choice to get income to run the country and therefore, it sold out all natural resources without care of environmental impact. As the military government is not elected by the people, it does not make any consultation to anyone in selling these natural resources: logs; fishes; gas and other resources.

After it came into power for 15 years, the local people in Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim Division in southern part of Burma found there are a lot of negative environment impacts to the local people such deforestation and gas explosion. On the other the environment impact has also greatly affect the livelihood of the local people. The people are hard to collect forest products, difficulties in fishing, hardship to get available water, difficulties in farming amid the pipeline route and their movement is restricted.

As long as the Burmese Army is ruling the country and no policy of maintaining forests, seas and natural gas in southern part of Burma, the environmental conditions must be degraded.

HURFOM
P. O. Box 11
Ratchburana P. O.
Bangkok 10140, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
<http://www.rehmonnya.org/>
monforum_main.php

Printed Matter



Address Correction Required