

The Mon Forum

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Some Acronyms in This Issue

NMSP-	New Mon State Party
MNLA-	Mon National Liberation Army
SLORC-	State Law and Order Restoration Council
NGOs-	Non Government Organization
GONGOs-	Government Organized Non-Government Organizations
SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council
WCRP-	Woman and Child Rights Project
CRPP-	Committee for Representing People's Parliament
USDA-	Union Solidarity and Development Association

News

Continuous Rice Extortion for Burmese Army

(May 2005, Ye Township, Mon State)

In order to stock-pile food supplies especially rice, battalions of Burmese Army in Ye township, Mon State, still collected paddy from the local Mon farmers without payment.

Burmese Army's Infantry Battalion No.61, which is under the command of Military Operation Command No.19 that bases in Ye, has been taking rice from the local farmers in northern Ye township, in Duya village-tract and Ain-Din village tract respectively.

"They take two "baskets" (about 66 kilograms) of paddy per acre. They ordered us to send the rice to them on time. They do not want paddy. They want us to crush paddy into rice and send it to Village-tract Peace and Development Chairperson's house", a farmer in Ain-Din village said.

"Battalion commanders told us that they will pay 1100 Kyat per basket. But they did not give us money yet," the farmer said. Until the end of May, no payment was confirmed.

Battalion No.61 officer, Captain. Moe Aung Khaing joined with village-tract headman and planned to take rice 2500 baskets from the farmers in the area and started collecting the rice since May 20. The army only set the price 110, 000 Kyat for 100 basket of paddy while the paddy price is 200,000 Kyat for 100 basket in market.



A paddy-buying center by the regime in the past

No Sign of Political Improvement

The recent bomb blasts in Rangoon, the capital of Burma, shows that there is no sign of political improvement not only for the dialogue between the regimes and oppositions, but it is founded there is 'disunity' in the regime.

Although the military regime SPDC has blamed to some opposition groups in the Thailand-Burma area, but many people even in Rangoon believed that the bomb explosion was committed by the 'inner cycle' of the Burmese Army.

The regime has never tried to solve the problems or conflict in peaceful way but always uses force and power. The recent dismiss of the Military Intelligence including its chief, the former Prime Minister Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, has created a very unstable power struggle among the Generals. The people also remarked that the Burmese Army is keen to use force and 'violence' accordingly to its history during the coup in 1962 and 1988 pro-democracy uprising.

More bomb blasts rumour came out in Rangoon and the people are afraid of resting in public places and buying goods in the markets.

National reconciliation is needed not only among the groups those involved decade-long conflict, but also among the commanders of Burmese Army or the ruling regime.

"We have to husk paddy by our money. We have to pay 100 Kyat per basket and send it to village headman home. If we late, we have to send it to Ye Town with our own transport cost," the farmer explained.

Similarly to the Burmese Army's battalions in Ye Township, some battalions in Kya-inn-seikyi and Kawkareik Township of Karen State also collected rice from the local farmers, said a village from Kya-inn-seikyi Township.

There are over 10 military battalions in Ye Township and the Burmese Army confiscated thousands acres of orchid plantation lands from Mon farmers during 1999-2004 in their troop deployment program.

Although Burmese military regime issued a statement that the authorities are not going to buy paddy from the farmers in 2003, but the regime's armed force, the Burmese Army in Mon State, started buying paddy at low price in Thanpyuzayat Township in early 2005.

(Based on the News from Independent Mon News Agency)

Forced Relocation in Three Pagoda Pass Town

(May 2005, Three Pagoda Pass, Thailand-Burma Border)

With a plan to set up a 'casino' gambling den, creation of drinking bars and entertainment space, the Township authorities in Three Pagoda Pass relocated about 50 families of town residents from the heart of town without compensation.

The houses which were under the order of forced relocation in Quarter No. 3 and No. 4 of the town.

Accordingly to the civilians, the authorities also planned to build a road into the area and build the above-mentioned building in order to attract Thai tourists and gamblers to involve in casino in the border town.

"They (the authorities) plan to have an open and large gambling zone in this border like the zone in Cambodia border", a local town resident gave his opinion.

The order for relocation of those houses and families came from Township Chairman on May 8 and the authorities set the deadline to destroy all their houses on May 23. They also added that if the town residents refused to destruct their own houses, they will come and destroy instead.

The authorities also instructed to the civilians that they can buy 'land plot' outside of the town with 3000 Baht (75 US Dollar) for 40 feet in length and 20 feet in width.

"Those who have no relatives in the town face much difficult after they destroyed their houses. They have no place to stay and stay in the bushes or near the streets. The authorities did not provide any temporary places", said a woman whose her family was ordered to relocate.

Most families who faced forced relocation are poor families and they have no money even to buy small plot of lands. Some community leaders also requested the authorities to allow them to stay on 3-6 months and then they would find the new place, but the proposal was totally rejected.

Report

The Civil Society Organizations in Mon Areas Under the Limited Space

I. Ceasefire and Growth of Civil Society or CBOs in Mon State

Although there have been many negative developments after 1995 the ceasefire between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the current military regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)¹, such as the continuation of human rights violations, economic deterioration, population migration², lack of community and border development, however, the people in Mon areas could travel and communicate easily and could launch the community's practices more than before ceasefire. This is also the positive development after ceasefire for the Mon Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in southern part of Burma.

Ceasefire has also created a moral encouragement to the Mon people in both rural and urban areas. The community's activities of the Mon people that had taken only in cities, towns and universities have widely extent even into the Mon villages in the rural areas, which areas were under the conflict situation before ceasefire.

Before ceasefire, the freedom of movement and association in the rural areas of Mon communities had been totally restricted. Any activities were terribly accused as 'supporting' programs to the NMSP, and the activists are always suffered from the arbitrary arrests, detention and summary execution.

After ceasefire, although the regime SPDC does not officially allow the freedom of movement and association in the whole Burma including the Mon areas, however, the brave community leaders and community members have locally founded the organizations especially for the maintenance of Mon literature and culture, and Mon national education.

As a most civilized people in Southeast Asia in the past, the Mon people invented and developed many high-standard Mon literature and culture³. The Mon people have mainly concerned for the disappearance of Mon literature and language, many community organizations have tried hard in maintaining the literature. Since 1962, after Burma's strongman Gen. Ne Win seized the political power, he not only destroyed the democratic system of political structure in Burma, he also totally prohibited the teaching and practicing of non-Burman ethnic language in ethnic areas⁴. He also prohibited freedom of religion and home-rules systems of ethnic people.

Since then, the Mon people have hardly struggled for the maintenance of Mon literature. However, they had been restricted in many ways by the Gen. Ne Win's Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), the activists were always arrested by the government.

On the other hand, under the policy of 'Burmanization' implemented by the BSPP government and the current military governments, the Mon people have also concerned about the disappearance of Mon 'identity' and they have been tried in order to maintain the identity. They have organized to hold 'Mon National Day', and encouraged the Mons to wear Mon traditional dresses and others.

Anyhow, after the ceasefire, although the military regime did not withdraw the restriction against the freedom of association or assembly, as the community level, the Mon people have tried to build up community's activities related to the maintenance of Mon literature and culture, and their identity.

At the same time, because of the economic deterioration, unemployment, poverty and the regime authorities' illegal tax extortion, thousands of Mon people especially fled into Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore to find works. However, these migrant workers communities are the main supporters to the villages' activities and organizations in Mon areas.

Among many negative developments in the Mon areas after ceasefire, there has been some growth of community-based activities that have been challenging the SPDC's tense restriction.

¹ The NMSP reached the then military regime, State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which is the similar group of current regime on June 29, 1995.

² There are over 500, 000 ethnic Mon migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia who are working in mainly in agriculture, fishing and construction industries.

³ See *The Mons: A Civilization of Southeast Asia* by Emmanuel Guillon, published by The Siam Society Under the Royal Patronage, <http://siam-society.org>

⁴ Teaching of Mon language was allowed in the government schools officially during the parliamentary era in Burma from 1948 to 1962.

II. The community organizations came into existence

While the military regime in Rangoon has allowed the activities of its hand-picked or Government Organized Non-Government Organizations (GONGOs) such as Union Solidarity and Development Association, Maternal and Child Care Association, Myanmar Red Cross Society and others, it has never recognized the community organizations as official organizations.

The organizations came up together in Mon State and formed themselves without the permission of the regime in Mon State. Many organizations know that if they asked the permission for the formation of organizations to SPDC, they understood that they would be not allowed or barred.

Since the regime does not have any policy and agendas for encouraging the maintenance and promotion of Mon literature and culture, the community leaders are quite sure the formation of their organizations will not be allowed and registered by the authorities. In Mon areas, most organizations are under the patronage of Mon Buddhist monks and it is lucky because the authorities always try to avoid rising conflict with Buddhist monks.

In Mon communities, the Buddhist monks are the leaders of the people and they have much influence to the people in the community including village headmen⁵. In most cases, many village-level organizations such as Mon literature and culture associations, Buddhist culture teaching associations, Mon youths' organizations, library groups have been formed in most of Mon rural villages and these organization intend to provide small service to the community in order to have the children learn Mon language and to let them understand the religion.

Since the SPDC believes that the foundations and objectives of the organization do not pose any danger and no opposing ideas against their rules, they have just allowed them to exist. Additionally, as the regime agreed for ceasefire with the main opposition force, NMSP, they just have not concerned for the activities of many other small Mon organizations in the Mon communities.

However, the regime does not want the NMSP sends influence to these organizations. If the leaders of NMSP led and formed an organization in villages or other places in the SPDC controlled, the authorities (especially Military Intelligence in the past) tried to get information and stopped the activities. Sometimes they openly informed to the NMSP leaders to not form any organization or launch any activities in their controlled areas.

In most situation, the SPDC authorities just have concern that the NMSP officials will apply their political agenda to these organizations. Later, as the NMSP leaders understood on this situation, they stayed in distance from these organizations and their activities.

Many literature and Buddhist culture associations in the rural villages have come up to coordinate each other in their activities voluntarily. Later, they also formed a loose coordinated Township level organization in order to extend their activities the whole area of Township. By taking example from one Township, another Township also formed the similarly type of coordinating body and those Township level organizations launched their activities in harmony.

The senior Buddhist monks as patronages lead most of these coordinated organizations, it makes difficult for the authorities to disturb the activities of the mentioned organizations, because they do not to confront against the monks.

In general, the organizations are independent from both the armed oppositions and the military regime, but most of their activities are performing for the service of social needs, literacy and spiritual supports. On the other hand, they also got a larger support from the community people, because the villagers could directly involve in the activities in fund raising, meeting, management and etc.

Whether these genuine community based organizations are categorized as 'civil society' or not by the sociology experts, however, most of their activities are empowering the grass-root people for some extent of development.

But the military government in Burma still do not allow for formation of labour union, peasant union, lawyers' society, civil servants groups and others. The regime has a main concern that these organizations could be the political opponents and oppose the State power gripped by the military governments for decades.

⁵ Over 95% of the Mon people believe in Buddhism and are proud of they are the people who met the Lord Buddhist during his intensive meditation and donate foods for him.

III. The CBOs' Activities, Challenges and Restriction by the Authorities⁶

1. Mon Literature and Buddhist Culture Association (MLBCA)

These organizations are currently formed as a big umbrella organization that comprised about 16 Townships of Mon areas in Mon State, Karen State and Tenasserim Division. In Karen State, there are three main townships: Kya-inn-seikiyi, Kawkareik and Pa-an, and Mon people are the local inhabitants, where Yebyu Township in Tenasserim Division has the majority Mon population.

The main activities of these organizations are conducting the Mon literacy training in summer season (it is in April and May) and producing booklets, curriculum textbooks for the children who attended dry season (summer) literacy training. Accordingly to the registration of the students in 2005 summer season literacy training, about 63, 000 students in 16 townships enrolled in the training and completed their studies. About 1, 000 volunteers of young Buddhist monks, university students and community youths involved as 'teachers' in teaching the students.

Mudon Township alone, there were 10, 000 students that comprised from over 50 Mon villages have involved in summer season literacy training and the Mudon Township Mon Literature and Buddhist Culture Association celebrated a closing ceremony in the second week of April, 2005 in Mudon Town's central plaza. Thousands of Mon people from many Mon villages came and attended the ceremony. The ceremony was also accompanied with the speeches of the senior monks and traditional dancing.

The Chairman of Mudon Township Mon Literature and Buddhist Culture Association, Rev. Palita, also expressed in his speech about the importance of Mon literature. An excerpt of his speech was:

"The Mon language was invented and wrote in stone scripts since 800 years ago. And, in 1020 (it was 1658 A.D), the Mon people used the language as an official language in Mon kingdom especially for administration. Only the people who can read and write the Mon language can have the chance to be officials in the kingdom. In 1119 (in 1757), after the Mon kingdom, Hongsawatoi, was annexed (by the Burmese king), the Mon people lost the chance to develop their language. So that, the Mon people have main responsibility to maintain our language."

The parents of the children also expressed their willingness to encourage their children to attend summer literacy training in order to learn how to read and write the Mon language and to study Mon history and civilizations.

Accordingly to a parent from Three Pagoda Pass Township, a border town with Thailand, he said:

"I want the children to know how to read and write Mon language. After they can read Mon language, they will be more interested in reading of Mon history and understand how the high civilization of the Mon people. Summer literacy training is a great opportunity because it is only one-month to learn Mon language."

Summer (dry season) Mon literacy training was arranged only at the end of the government's schooling or academic year. In March, the SPDC's Education Ministry holds the final examinations for all basic education levels students and their schools closed in mid-March. Soon the end of the government's exams, the organizing members of Mon literature and Buddhist culture associations plan for the arrangement of 'summer literacy training'.

Recently, although the associations could conduct summer literacy training in village community, but later they could have gradually extent to town quarters or wards. The Mon monasteries and the Mon communities in some quarters of cities or towns also involved in the literacy training. Normally, the majority of people in cities and towns in Mon State are Mon people, but most of them are practicing speaking in Burmese language. But some communities in cities and towns are interesting to let their children learn Mon language and so that they have arranged summer Mon literacy training.

At least two to five quarters in towns or cities currently involve in literacy training and the number of the students has also increased up every year. On the other hand, the organizing coordinating committees of the program also arranged the opening and closing ceremonies of summer literacy training in towns and cities in order to attract the Mon people who live in there to have interests in participation.

Challenges:

Enormous challenge for these organizations is 'resources'. Although the MLBCA in the various townships, village tracks and villages have encouraged boys and girls from almost poor families in the communities to

⁶ The establishment of Mon National Schools in the rural communities is also the activities of Mon CBOs. But in this report, *The Mon Forum* excluded about Mon national education, because it has already reported in many of previous issues.

attend summer Mon literacy training, however, they could not support them with necessary learning 'materials' such as textbooks, writing books and other necessary stationeries. Those poor children have to buy the stationeries by themselves and borrowed 'used textbook' from elderly students. As the MLBCA main committee could not distribute the free copies of textbooks to the poor students, many poor students do not have textbooks.

Most of the teachers during the literacy training are 'volunteers' and the program does not have consistent in appointing teachers, teaching techniques and duration. However, at the end of training, the Township MLBCA always conducts a final exam and let all students entered into the exam to answer the same question sheets. But in some villages and communities, they still develop their own question sheets and still have less coordination with the Township MLBCA.

Another challenge to all levels of MLBCA is financial resources. During the whole period of literacy training started from opening ceremony up to exam and closing ceremony, the associations have to spend some money. But most of the association, which is from the poor communities do not have sufficient fund to conduct the training and so that they have to collect money from the community people who are already poor.

Only some experienced village MLBCA adopted suitable funding-raising programs in the communities. Especially they sell things or foods in the villages' pagoda festivals and other occasions in order to cover some expenses during the training period.

Restriction by the Authorities:

The SPDC authorities in Mon State or Karen State have never appreciated to have holding of Mon literacy training and they have restricted in many ways to prohibit these activities. When the MLBCA requested the permission from the authorities or village headmen, they never issued the official permission to them in order to operate the training smoothly.

Some of the restriction to the Mon literacy training as below:

- The authorities through the government school teachers ordered the ethnic Mon parents in the communities to not send their children to Mon literacy training. Sometimes, they pressured the parents that if they sent their children to the literacy training, the government schools will not give pass to their children in the final exams⁷.
- The SPDC authorities opened the competed 'Buddhist Culture Training' in the government schools and organized (sometimes pressured) the ethnic Mon parents to attend their trainings, which were taught about Buddhism in Burmese language. They also provided better resources to the children who attended their training than the Mon literacy training.
- The authorities also pressure the MLBCA committees to not hold any literacy training in government schools, in public places, in the community centers. But later on, all literacy trainings moved into monastery's compound under the protection of the Mon monks.
- The authorities pressured against those non-Buddhist monks volunteer teachers to stop teaching of Mon language in the literacy training. They ordered the Mon nationality government servants to not involve in the program or to not support any activities related to the program.

However, as the Mon community people have supported and involved in the program with their own strong willingness that the SPDC have not succeeded in stopping the literacy training.

2. Artists and Traditional Mon Dancing Performance Groups

Along with the existence of widespread summer season Mon literacy training, conducted by the Township Mon literature and Buddhist culture associations, the Mon dancing performance groups, which maintain the tradition Mon dances mixture with the current development of western style singing songs, also play an important role of maintaining Mon language. Many of these performance groups have used only Mon language in their performance and the villages or quarters of cities and towns where the Mon people are populated have rented these performance groups. Therefore, there have been less and less room for the performance groups who speak in Burmese language get performance contract from the Mon communities.

Performance of Mon traditional dance has gradually became as a business in Mon State and many former Mon dancers set up many groups in a competition. The groups are contracted by the Mon villages to perform in their villages' pagoda festivals and other important occasions.

⁷ The government schools issued 'pass' or 'failure' results in April or May every year and the school teachers do not include the name of students those attend the training.

Traditionally, in order to entertain the villagers during their villages' festivals or in some important occasions – Mon National Day ceremony, (traditional) New Year festival⁸, closing ceremony of summer literacy training and others – the village headmen or the committees concerned always hired these performance groups to perform in their villages.

Additionally, the Mon community still maintained their performance of old tradition, which is slightly different from the modernized dance performance and these groups, also coordinated each other and formed coordinating organizations recently.

After the Mon kingdom was annexed since 18th Century, the old Mon tunes of songs and dance styles, which had been used for the royal families during the era of Mon kings have gradually lost and therefore, the groups have tried to maintain the cultures of old dance styles, tunes of songs and music playing techniques. On February 21, 2005, the group of old Mon performance from Thailand and Burma hold a meeting and planned for the protection, maintenance and promotion of their performance. They hold the meeting for two days and they had adopted the following activities:

- Having the Mon communities understand and accept the old traditional Mon cultures and extent the performance in the communities
- Having encouragement to the professionals of Mon dance performance to be survived with the performance activities



A senior Buddhist monks give prizes to outstanding students after training

- Transferring the old traditional dance style or culture to the Mon new generation

After the meeting, the groups also formed a coordinating group in order to conduct the activities effectively and monitor each group's performance and their improvement.

Among them, a group from northern part of Ye Township, in a semi-conflict area of Mon State, have trained many teenagers and students how to perform the old Mon traditional Mon dances. Even some young age of boys and girls were performing on the Mon National Day's stages and the community praised them.

Since the lost of Mon kingdoms, the Mon people have lost their opportunities of maintaining old literature and culture. Therefore, currently whenever they have opportunity, they have tried and maintained their cultures and literatures.

Besides the old Mon traditional dance and culture performance groups, there are also two western styles Mon pop groups, which are so influence to the Mon community especially to the young Mon people. All songs are composed in Mon language and they have developed the styles of song writing and usages like the Burmese artists' pop song communities. Later on, they have gradually enlarged the song industries and their new styles of composing songs are attractive to the audience.

Challenges:

As the speaking of Mon language and use of Mon literature is totally restricted in the public places and in mass communication, the use of Mon language is limited. Therefore, when the artists and dancing performance groups are developing the use and style of language in their performance, they faced some difficulties to find out appropriate vocabulary and usage in Mon.

As most of old Mon palm leaves have been disappeared or destroyed, and additionally confiscated by the

⁸ Mon New Year festival is similar to Burmese and Thai new year called *Songkaram* and it is in mid-April of every year.

BSPP governments, the dance and cultural performance groups could not have much reference in developing their languages. Some groups also followed the language styles of Burmese language speaking performance groups and translated words by words.

Dance and performance groups still could not establish an official school of 'cultural dance school' in the heart of Mon State, although many of them have strong desires. Most of the performance leaders believe that without a proper institution, it is difficult for them to transfer the cultural performance practices to the young Mon generations.

Restriction by the Authorities:

The local authorities in Mon State have watched against the local Mon dance groups more as their performance industry have grown since after ceasefire. On the other hand, as the authorities could not understand on the usage of Mon language, they have a serious concern on the openness and out-speaking in the Mon performance groups. At the same time, many Burmese language speaking performance groups also cooperated with the authorities and conspired in many ways in order to win over the Mon performance groups.

Some restrictions to Mon dance performance groups applied by the authorities are as below:

- Since 2002, the authorities ordered the groups to not wear western style clothing (*wear in long trousers and sport shirt or other styles similar to a westerner*) in their performance. The authorities claimed that they planned to maintain the Burmese culture. If the performance groups are against the order, they can be imprisoned or they will cut off their performance license or registration.
- After the growth in number of Mon performance groups, the authorities did not register to some new groups by claiming the number of the Mon performance groups are limited, while they still allow the Burmese language speaking performance groups to unlimitedly register in their board.
- The authorities ordered the Managers of Mon performance groups, to translate all contents what they artists are talking in all sections of the performance – opera, funny stories, life stories, cultural dancing, singing and the Buddhist stories and others. As the authorities have the serious concern of the artists are attacking the government policy, out-speaking on the government's corruption, they have forced the managers to translate all contents from Mon language to Burmese language during the registration and applied to the authorities. Only when the authorities agree with the texts and language, then they allowed the Mon performance groups to start their activities.

Whenever there is a Mon performance group is performing, the authorities always checked on them by taking their own translators let they translate what the artists are talking in each performance. Some artists especially comedians who created jokes against the government policy or authorities' corruption are always arrested, detained for some days, received for warning to stop joking and then they are released.

3. Mon National Day (MND) Celebrating Committees

In every year, the Mon people in various parts of Mon areas celebrate the Mon National Day on a day of Mon lunar month, 1st waning of Maik (in February of every year). As the date of Mon lunar month is not directly coincided to the western calendar, the dates of Mon National Day are different in every year. But it also lies on one-day from the first week of February to third week of February each year.

The celebration of MND was held in many different places from village tract to cities. Even a small Mon community in village acknowledge this day in their minds and plan to hold every year.

The MND is also a remembrance day of the establishment of Mon kingdom in Hongsawatoi, near Rangoon (the capital of Burma), since over 1000 years ago. The Mon political leaders during the pre-independence time from British ruler in 1947 set the day of 1st Waning of Maik (the Mon lunar month) as 'Mon National Day' in order to motivate the patriot ambition of the Mon people to cooperate with them in the demand of greater autonomy.

Since 1947, first the Mon people in the big Mon village held this important occasional day and very less number of people acknowledged about this MND. However, after 1962, after the military government seriously oppressed the Mon people in term of freedom of association, BSPP, their patriotism had grown and the villagers in rural community started celebrating the MND in various places. First, the BSPP authorities seriously restricted them to stop holding this occasion. Many of their leaders were arrested and some were put in prisons. However, later more and more people have hold this MND and the BSPP authorities could

not manage to suppress and put all of them into jails.

After 1988, after the new group of Burmese Army, SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) seized the political power in Rangoon after killing thousands of students and civilians in the cities' streets during the pro-democracy uprising; it adopted the plan to restrict the holding of MND. Under its martial law of the assembly of the over five people was unlawful, the SLORC authorities ordered to not hold the MND.

But after 3-4 years of restriction, the Mon people in some big Mon villages planned to hold the MND again in their villages and they organized their celebrating committees. As the authorities and intelligence officers did not have the concrete plan to restrict the MND, some villages can hold the MND without problems. Later on, they has gradually organized and extended the celebrating committees, and extended more areas to hold the MND.

After 1995 ceasefire, the Mon people in both rural and urban areas have attained more encouragement because of ceasefire as they considered as 'peace' and they widely organized the celebrating committees of MND and planned the MND cerebation in more systematic ways.

The activities during the MND are as below:

- *At least for 3 months, the Village Ward or Township Mon leaders (not hand-picked by the regime) started formation of MND celebrating committees at their location separately. They form many Sub-Committees or small working groups in order to committee various activities as team works.*
- *The main Sub-Committees for fund-raising launch their activities to receive sufficient fund to hold the MND. It includes – selling of MND lotteries, tickets for food and participation in MND, creating sports and collect money from watchers and others.*
- *Ask the permission from local SPDC authorities to hold the MND, by including the name of committee members, the detail plans including the location.*
- *Inviting the key persons, especially the Senior Buddhist monks in the area and SPDC authorities, famous academics, senior government servants and other important persons to attend MND. Some persons will be nominated to deliver the speeches in the MND.*
- *Several meetings will be held before the MND ceremony in order to complete the busy works during the MND.*

Almost all the times, the MND include giving respect to the Mon leaders and Mon flag (Shell-drake bird flag); the senior Mon leaders and Buddhist monks give speeches; (sometimes) offering prizes to those who compete writing poems, feature articles, stories in Mon languages; and at the end, Mon cultural dancing performance.

At least about 3-months, sometimes nearly 6-months, the committee members of MND are busy and are volunteers for all activities.

Mostly Mon youths including men and women will include in all activities. Most of them are active and encouraged during the MND. Parents are proud of their sons and daughters involved in the MND's activities, and most parents are too proud if their daughters are selected to be leading dancers in the performance groups.

Thousands of Mon people joined and participated in the MND with their own desires and willingness. In some areas, the Mon villagers or town residents marched to MND ground village by village voluntarily, in silence and in disciplines.



A Mon National Day ceremony

Unlike to SPDC's mass meeting and rally in blaming the NLD

and other ethnic oppositions as 'destructive elements', or in supporting the National Convention or in supporting the SPDC's hand-picked organization Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) the Township PDC always have to force the local villagers or town residents to attend the ceremony without their desires or willingness, the Mon people are fully participating in this MND and they also show up their real desires to the regime and to the world community.

MND or other ethnic people's National Day is also a symbol of how the Mon people or ethnic nationalities in different parts of Burma are proud of their distinct ethnicity or ethnic identity from the majority Burman, while the Burmese military regime in Rangoon, SPDC, is implementing 'Burmanization' policy. On the other hand, it is also the sign of 'political defiance' against the regime in their silent demand for greater autonomy to the regime.

Challenges:

MND celebrating committees always face tough situation in seeking sufficient fund to hold the MND and in many cases, they have to borrow from rich people in towns/cities in order to cover all expenses. They have always to return in high interests to those rich people. Sometimes, they have to promote those rice men to be the key leaders in the committee and let them involve in some key decisions. However, they have to pay back money after MND celebration.

Occasionally, small conflict always occurs during the meeting of the committees. The people have different ideas of fund raising and other matters. However, the influent and senior monks in the communities always could settle the conflict and problems. Mon communities have its own 'conflict resolution' style and the elderly Mon leaders are familiar with various 'problem solving methods' in the communities.

In MND committees, the style of management is not always systematic. Although the committee includes many members, only a small number of activists who have higher willingness and patriot mind-set have to perform more workloads than the other members. Job allocations or job descriptions are not properly adopted by the senior leaders or the Executive Committees of the celebrating committees. In most committees, they do not have the reporting and evaluating processes after the MND. They do not have many records such as information how the people's participation, development of MND, restriction from the authorities, records on the speeches of key leaders and the cultural performance.

Restriction from the authorities:

Since 1998, after the political tension between the regime and oppositions due to the formation of Committee for Representing People's Parliament (CRPP), the SPDC have restricted the celebration of MND in Rangoon, Pegu and Moulmein (*the capital of Mon State*) to not hold the MND ceremony in the 'open air ground' where thousands of the people can join. The SPDC was in fear of mass gathering in the cities and towns and refused to the MND celebrating committees to not hold any MND ceremony in large ground. But the regime still allows to hold MND in buildings such as in monastery or Mon *Dhamma* Hall⁹ or a hotel or a restaurant where only a hundred or less than 100 people can participate.

As the Mon leaders believed that the holding of MND is not relating to 'politics', they have argued that the authorities should allow the ceremony in cities' open grounds. Later, although the celebrating committees in Rangoon, Pegu and Moulmein has requested the SPDC authorities to allow them holding of MND in open ground, the proposals were constantly refused flatly.

Even in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, the Mon State PDC authorities does not allow the MND celebrating committees to hold the ceremony in the open ground space, where thousands of Mon people can join. Therefore, the celebrating committees have to hold the MND in a *Dhamma* Hall building in the heart of city.

In the MND ceremony in various small towns and villages in Mon State and Karen State, although the Mon community asked the permission from the SPDC authorities officially, but they were never officially received the official allowance for the celebration. However, the committees continued their activities of MND ceremony without waiting for the permission.

Sometimes, the authorities forced the committees to not hold the MND in the open public grounds and ordered to move into the small streets. Because of the constant pressure from the authorities, the local of MND ceremony is not always stable and permanent. There were always arguments between the authorities

⁹ *Dhamma* Hall is the place where the Buddhist monks summon Buddhism or Buddha teaching to the civilians.

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: [hurformcontact@yahoo.com](mailto:hurfomcontact@yahoo.com)
Webpages: http://www.rehmonnya.org/monforum_main.php

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

and the MND committees about the locations. The committees always tried to get places where thousands of people can join to the ceremony and the authorities always denied to provide these types of spaces.

Later almost all the times, the committees always denied the places provided by the authorities, and just held in the locations or grounds where they selected by opposing the orders by the authorities. Sometimes, some activists are detained for short days in Township's prisons. But, later they were released again.

IV. Suggestions to INGOs/ Local NGOs for Coordination with CBOs

Many of international humanitarian and development NGOs have approached into Burma in order support the people who are in deep of poverty and lack, lack of education and health care, deteriorating in development, because of four decades long rule of military governments in Burma.

Many of them preferred to have the people in the rural with humanitarian assistance and development programs. However, many of them still face the challenges of who they need to cooperate, which are their target groups and what programs they may implement.

As described above, the mentioned Mon organizations are the community based organizations (CBOs) in Mon areas and they are really representing the majority Mon people especially in the village communities, to where the INGOs/ local (genuine) NGOs want to allocate their development projects. However, as they are waiting permission from SPDC and do not have real assessment of the needs of the community people, there is very less number of INGOs and the local NGO have been accessing into Mon State.

But many of the SPDC belonged GONGOs – such as Maternal and Child Care Association, Myanmar Naing-ngan Women Affairs Committee, Union Solidarity and Development Association and many other government agencies are monopolizing in the community and they are also implementing the so-called the humanitarian program and development projects. As many evidences found, most of these programs and projects are from TOP-DOWN decision-making process and lack of the participation by the civilians. The programs and projects are allocated by order and provided with a very limited budget from the government and then the authorities forced those GONGOs' officials to collect money and fund from the local people and so that it also created a huge corruption among the leaders of those GONGOs.

In many cases, although some UN Agencies have supported for some development projects to these GONGOs in terms of funding or technical assistance, but very less number of the people in the community knew or

acknowledged the involvement of UN agencies. The majority people do not know the intention of the project as they are not directly participated in the program and UN Agencies themselves too much rely on the government agencies and their GONGOs.

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), which has monitored the situation in Mon areas and have connections with the CBOs in Mon State, want to call to independent INGOs and local NGOs to work more in Mon areas for the humanitarian and development programs for the Mon communities by coordinating with Mon CBOs.



Mon traditional dance groups' meeting

Herein our suggestions are:

- First INGOs or the local NGOs need to build up the capacity of those CBOs in terms of their capacities – management, networking, effective communication, etc.
- Consultation with the leaders of CBOs, what are their organizational needs and needs of the community people. Collaboration should be applied for need assessment among the people, program justification, project management, implementation and evaluation.
- Coordinate with the local Mon CBOs for various programs such as HIV/AIDS prevention, Health Education, Community Participation and Leadership, Water and Sanitation, Adult or Informal Education, and others.
- Explore the possible opportunity along with the CBOs in empowering the people in community – improving the education, improving their capacities, providing the democratic behaviour, encouraging their participation, etc.

As the CBOs are the real representatives of the people, the international community including UN Agencies need to find to directly work with these organizations. At the same both international and local humanitarian and development organizations must build up 'grassroots democracy' in the communities in order to encourage and help a smooth democratic transitions in Burma.

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