

The Mon Forum

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Some Acronyms in This Issue

- SPDC- State Peace and Development Council,
- CRC- Convention of the Rights of the Child,
- ILO- International Labour Organization
- IB - Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
- PTA- Parent and Teacher Association,
- MOMC- Military Operational Management Command
- PDC- Peace and Development Council,
- UNCRC- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- USDA- Union Solidarity and Development Association

News

A Mon Civil Society Leader was Arrested

Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State

July, 2005

A Township Mon Literature and Culture Committee (MLCC) Chairman, Nai Sein Aye was alleged as an organizer for the people uprising early of this month and the court will decide his case at the end of this month, according to his family.

Nai Sein Aye, 55, Thanpyuzayat Township MLCC Chairman was arrested on July 8 after Col. Khin Maung Zee, the commander of No.4 Military Training School's asked him for a meeting and then detained him in Township's police station with accusation he was an uprising organizer.

No. 4th Military Training School is under the command of South-East Command in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State and Col.Khin Maung Zee is also the head of the School and also newly formed "Sa-Ya-Pha", the military intelligent apparatus in the area. The new military intelligent apparatus was founded after the SPDC leaders kicked out the former Intelligent Chief, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, who is also the Prime Minister.



An examination of summer Mon Literacy school in Kaw-Kareik Township

SPDC Finds Tactic to Block Openness

Current leadership in SPDC has not tolerated much to the activities of the local NGOs, INGOs and the civil society organizations.

The recent arrest of a Mon civil society leader and pressured to Mon schools, Mon literacy training and prohibiting practices of the people's organized activities are the signs of SPDC's lack of tolerance.

There is also news that the SPDC leadership is finding a best and sustainable strategy in order to have control on the local NGOs, INGOs and UN Agencies. SPDC organized demonstrations against ILO have spread to cities and towns. Soon or later, it will resign as a member of 'ILO'.

These tactics are totally the consolidated plans to control every thing in the country, not only the Burmese people but also the activities of civil society and international organization.

This sign is a blockage to the openness or the SPDC's so-called 'disciplinary democratic transition'. However, it is also a challenge for the international community and civil society in the country how do they react to the SPDC's new strategy.

Since the arrest, Nai Sein Aye has been detained in Thanpyuzayat town police station. They could not find anyway for the conditional release of him, because of the allegation is so important case.

Nai Sein Aye was very active for community activities and he applied to local military authorities to register his committee an official organization in the mid-2004.

But his committee was denied for registration by the local township authorities on May 4, 2005. He and his members are also forced to sign an agreement of not involving in any activities by Thanpyuzayat Township Peace and Development Council's Secretary U Pyi Aung Moe.

He and his committee members were also frightened by the secretary such if they are organizing a meeting or forming a group and collecting money for his committee, they would be arrested and detained with law act no. 5 A (forming illegal organization) and be sentenced to 5-7 years imprisonment with hard labour.

Nai Sein Aye led MLCC has been working for community development especially opening the Summer Mon Literacy Training School and involved in the religious activities. There are many similar MLCC organizations in different Mon areas and are not disturbed like this MLCC in Thanbyuzayat Township.



Mon Literacy students in Mon State

CATWALK TO THE BARRACKS

Conscription of women for sexual slavery and other practices of sexual violence by troops of the Burmese military regime in Mon areas

Report of Woman and Child Rights Project (Southern Burma)
In collaboration with Human Rights Foundation of Monland (Burma)

Press Release

July 18, 2005

Systemic sexual violence on show in southern Burma

A new report by Mon rights groups exposes official conscription of "comfort women" by Burma Army troops and other evidence of systemic sexual violence in "peaceful" Mon areas of Burma .

The report " Catwalk to the Barracks" by the Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) - Southern Burma and the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) documents sexual violence by troops of the Burmese military regime against 50 women and girls aged between 14 and 50. Half of the incidents took place recently, since 2002.

Despite the ceasefire between the New Mon State Party and the military regime since 1995, the regime has deployed 20 more battalions in Mon areas, leading to increased incidents of sexual violence.

During 2003-2004, village headmen in southern Ye township were ordered by the Burma Army to provide young women each night to serve as "comfort women" or sex slaves at the local barracks. Schoolgirls were also forced to parade on a catwalk for the entertainment of military officers.

All the rape cases in the report were committed with impunity, attesting to the continuing lack of rule of law in Burma .

The authors of the report urge the international community, especially ASEAN members, to pressure the Burmese regime to end state-sponsored sexual violence and to begin a process of meaningful political reform.

"How is it possible that a regime that openly conscripts "comfort women" is now being considered for the chair of ASEAN?" asked WCRP coordinator.

Executive Summary

This report exposes the ongoing and increasingly brazen use of sexual violence by Burmese Army troops in Mon areas of Burma. This is despite the ceasefire between the main Mon political party, the New Mon State Party, and the Burmese military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) since 1995, and despite the regime's repeated denials during the past few years that its troops are practicing systematic sexual violence.

The report details 37 incidents of sexual violence against 50 women and girls, aged 14 to 50 years old, and reveals evidence of widespread conscription of women into sexual slavery by Burmese Army troops. Since many women are unwilling to reveal that they have been raped owing to fear of stigma and reprisals by the army, detailed information has only been collected about a small portion of the actual number of women who have been raped.

The report corroborates the findings of earlier reports on sexual violence in Shan and Karen States, showing the use of rape as a strategy of control by the junta's troops, and revealing a pattern of abuse that provides strong evidence that rape has become systemic under military rule in Burma. The lack of rule of law and climate of impunity for military rape have caused SPDC's troops to become increasingly emboldened in their acts of sexual violence.

Many rapes took place during military operations against armed groups still active in southern Burma, such as the Karen National Union and a Mon splinter group; SPDC troops gang-raped, beat, kicked, slashed and killed women as "punishment" for supporting rebel groups.

However, sexual violence is not only occurring in areas of conflict, but in “peaceful” areas under full SPDC control. The SPDC has deployed 20 more battalions in the southern Mon area since 1998; these troops have seized land from local villagers and forced them to work on military plantations and guard infrastructure projects such as gas pipelines. The increased troop presence has caused increased incidents of rape of local women.

During operations in 2003-2004 against rebels in southern Ye township, SPDC troops brazenly conscripted scores of “comfort women” from nearby villages, who were forced to work for the troops by day and were forced into sexual slavery at night. They also forced about 30 young women, including schoolgirls, to stay at their base and take part in a military “fashion and beauty show.”

Over half of the documented cases of rape were committed by military officers, often in front of, or together with their troops. Many of the rapes took place in the women’s homes or in other villagers’ houses, frequently in the presence of other family members.

In contrast to the SPDC’s claim that “effective action is taken against those who commit rape according to the existing laws of the Myanmar Armed Forces,” in none of the cases in this report was legal action taken against the perpetrators of sexual violence. In most cases, the community leaders did not dare to report the incidents of sexual violence to the military battalion commanders for fear of reprisals. Those that did were scolded, beaten or threatened to be killed. In one case complainants were forced to sign a written statement pardoning the rapist.

Significantly, half of the rape cases documented in this report took place *after* June 2002, when the Shan report “Licence to Rape” first drew international attention to the Burmese regime’s use of sexual violence, and UNGA resolutions on Burma began highlighting the issue. Burmese Army troops have therefore continued to flagrantly commit sexual violations in Mon areas precisely while the regime has been denying to the world that this practice exists.

It is evident that political reform is urgently needed to address the problem of military rape in Burma. Unless the system of impunity for military rape is ended, and the political problems relating to equal rights for ethnic peoples and the restoration of democracy in Burma are solved, the culture of violence will continue to escalate, and the suffering of all civilians - including women and children - will continue.

Recommendations

The (Mon) Woman and Child Rights Project - Southern Burma (Myanmar) in collaboration with the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) make the following recommendations:

To the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

1. To immediately stop its militarization program throughout Burma, implement a nationwide ceasefire and withdraw all Burma Army troops from the ethnic areas;
2. To fully implement the resolutions on Burma adopted by the UNCHR since 1992.

To the Royal Thai Government

1. To provide protection and allow humanitarian assistance to civilians who have fled from human rights abuses (and not just “armed conflict”) in Burma, and allow UNHCR to extend its activities for the protection of the refugees from Burma who suffer from systematic persecution;
2. To continue the RTG’s efforts for democratization in Burma by coordinating with Burma’s immediate neighbours and other ASEAN countries, to demand that the SPDC hold genuine political dialogue with the pro-democracy opposition, including the National League for Democracy (NLD) and United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), and non-Burman ethnic nationalities.

To members of ASEAN:

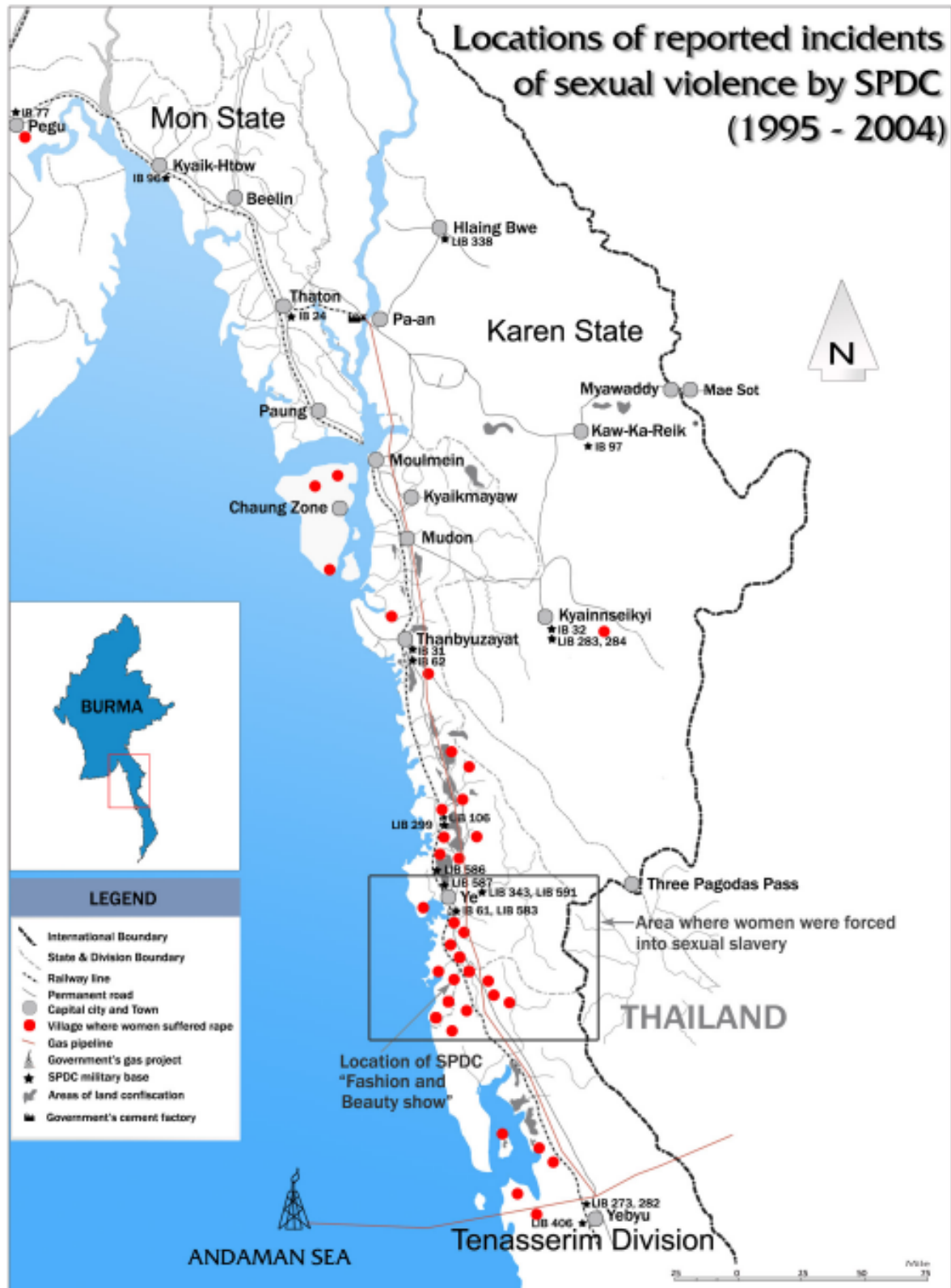
1. To raise the issue of state-sponsored sexual violence in Burma with the SPDC, based on its obligations under the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN region which was signed by SPDC on June 30, 2004;



2. In order to end state-sponsored sexual violence, to use economic and diplomatic means to pressure the SPDC to begin a process of meaningful political reform, and to actively support the efforts of the UN and other key stakeholders to achieve peace, human rights and democracy in Burma.

To the international community:

1. To call for UN bodies to authorize comprehensive sanctions against the regime including an arms embargo until genuine democratic reform takes place in Burma
2. To coordinate with Burma's regional neighbours, particularly ASEAN members, to pressure the SPDC to begin a process of meaningful political reform, which will lead to a restoration of democracy and the rule of law.



Report

High Drop-out Rate in Government's Schools and SPDC's Oppression against Mon National Schools

I. Burma's Education in Less Progress

After the pro-democracy uprising in 1988¹ led by the student leaders, who drew up thousands of civilians into the streets to protest for the restoration of democracy in Burma, they were in confrontation with the Burma's power monopolized, Burmese Army or *tatmadaw*. In September, 1988, then the Burmese Army seized the political power from the demonstrators by killing hundreds of students, Buddhist monks and civilians.

After seizing the political power, the Burmese Army re-named itself as 'State Law and Order Restoration Council (SPDC)' and controlled the whole power and closed down all level of schools, universities and colleges for years². Children have lost the opportunity for their education and thousands of university students had waited for the opening of their students.

Before opening the universities, the regime created many small scales of universities and colleges in different parts of Burma – in each State and Division and even in District and tried to divide all students into small groups in each of their State/Division in order to control the students more easily.

Since the students are leading to topple down the military governments for many times after Burma's Independence, the soldiers and the students are historical enemy. Therefore, the new regime of SLORC which later changed its name as 'State Peace and Development Council'³ would not like to encourage the students' education as a whole as the stereotyped mind-set in the military leaders.

From 1988 to 2005, the regimes, both SLORC and SPDC, has failed to response for the education sector as below:

- The government allocated insufficient budget to education. The students and their parents could not get low cost of stationary and text materials from the government schools. They have to buy almost school materials from outside shops in high price.
- The salaries to the school teachers are so small and therefore, many teachers resigned from their works. The remaining teachers in schools are unable to spend full-time at the schools and find jobs in outside. Therefore, the students could not learn fully in the schools. Some teachers also arrange an outside 'tuition classes'⁴ and encouraged the teachers to attend their classes in order to get money from students. Many poor students could not afford to pay for these tuition classes and they fail in final exams.
- The government has not allocated budgets for school building and repairs in all areas. The government authorities just gave the orders to the local headmen and let them constructed the schools or repair the schools. Although the government propagandizes of opening schools, installing computer system and other school facilities, they normally collect from the civilians and the authorities are just in opening ceremonies.
- Since the government has very less interest to the education sector, the educational authorities have no intention to improve the education of the students or they failed for an education

¹ Before 1988 popular uprising in Burma, there were some small demonstrations organized by the students in March 1988 and June 1988 respectively. Students were also killed even before the uprising demanding for the democratic reform in the whole country which was well-known as '8-8-88' uprising that started on August 8, 1988.

² The regime closed the Universities and Colleges in all parts of Burma for four years in order to plan building many other small colleges and universities.

³ SLORC re-named itself as 'SPDC' in 1997

⁴ Most tuition classes are organized by the teachers from schools and encourage the students in classes to attend these tuition classes with payment.

reform. Text-books, teaching technique, material development and students' supports are insufficient, but the government does not pay much attention.

Since the educational institution in Burma is not effective, there are a high-drop rate in schools and corruption happen among the educational authorities, government authorities and community leaders relating school building and other educational development.

II. Drop-out Rate in High

A. Statistics

According to figures shown by the present regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the school enrolment rate in 2002-2004 was 93.1% at the primary school level, 40% at the secondary school level and 96.5% in the transition rate from secondary to tertiary level⁵.

The percentage of pupils completing primary school, during this period, was 63.8% and the percentage of pupils completing at the secondary level was just over 64%. The report also pointed out that the average percentage of dropouts, at the primary level, was 7.2%, for the period⁶. Nevertheless, the report was to raise concerns in the 36th Session of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) about the validity of such figures.

The reality, according to our sources and reports from several international institutions, is the major problem of the high dropout rates of students in schools, particularly in the case of primary education. In February 2004, for instance, UNESCO released a statistical report, which raised concerns about the high dropout rate of children in Asia as a whole. In the report, it stated;

“In India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar (Burma), only half of children who enter primary school will reach grade five, indicating a dropout rate of 53 percent, 47 percent and 45 percent respectively.”

Particularly in rural and ethnic areas, the student dropout rate both in the primary and higher education levels are always increase in rural and ethnic than in urban area. Few children can enroll for primary education and nearly half of those who enroll do not finish primary education.

According to our own data from inside Burma, particularly in rural and ethnic nationalities' areas, the student drop-out rate both in the primary and higher education levels are always increasing. Few children can enroll for primary education and nearly half of those who enroll do not finish primary education.

This issue is a major concern, within the government education system. Burma became a ratified party to the UN's Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in August 1991, after signing the Convention on 16th July 1991. The protection laws of the children including to access to sufficient education law became legal, in 1993.

In Child Law (of Burma), Section 20 states that;

“Every child shall have the right to free basic primary education in state schools and that the Ministry of Education shall implement a system of free and compulsory primary education. According to Section 20(b) of the Law, the Ministry of Education shall implement measures as may be necessary to ensure regular attendance at schools, to reduce drop-out rates, and make arrangements for children, who are unable for various reasons, to attend schools opened by the state.”

Although free primary education must be granted to all children in Burma, in accordance with Session 20 (a) of National Child Law and Article 28 of the CRC, which has been signed by the government, it has

⁵ ABSFU's Education 2004

⁶ In Burma's Education System, the Primary Level consists of classes from Kindergarten to 4th Standard, the Secondary Level consists of 5th Standard to 8th Standard, and Tertiary Level consists of 9th Standard and 10th Standard.

not generally been made available. Students have had to pay increasingly high tuition costs and school related fees, and these have to be paid by the parents, who find it extremely difficult. As a consequence, the student dropout rate in primary education is steadily increasing. Only students up to the 4th Grade do not need to pay monthly tuition fees, but they must pay for other school related costs and forced donations.

B. High Educational Cost

In Burma, the daily labour cost is too low and a laborer could earn only Kyat 800-1200 per day. When the school opened in early June every year, many poor families faced difficulties to pay for these school entrance fees. Many families have more than one student to enter for the schooling and they have to find too much money even for this enrollment fee.

Again the authorities Township Education Department has invested the demanding enrollment fee in 2002 in major towns and villages but it only focused in the urban areas. The enrollment fee still increases in rural areas where law enforcement is neglected by the state. There is no legal description by the government to how take the enrollment fee and it is much depending on the practices of the teachers to take money from the students.

According to a mother of student who attends No. 5 State High School in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, she said the actual fee for enrollment is only between Kyat 500-1,000 accordingly to laws, however, in most major towns and villages, enrollment fee has increased every year while students still have to pay for other resources and equipment cost in the school. When the schools open, while the teachers ask for the enrollment fee, they did ask for the other fees for resources and equipment, which are not officially approved by Education Department.

Many students from the villages left schools under financial hardship and could not enroll for their children even in the villages' schools. Most villagers are farmers and they just earn money from the farm. Some of adults left the country and work in other neighboring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia to support for their children's education. A few children also sale food, drinking water, snack and local bakery in railway stations other local market to find the end meet. Some children are begging to the passengers in the rails and also on the bus.

In June 2005, at the beginning of 2005-06 schooling year, the enrolment fee for a student was at between 6,000- 9,000 Kyat in the rural areas and between 10,000-15,000 Kyat in the urban cities. A parent from Thanbyuzayat town of Mon State said that she had paid 6, 000 Kyat to the school authorities when her daughter enrolled at school, but she had also been given another bill of fees for 600 Kyat.

Parents as a result must pay for extra costs beside the enrolment fees, which involves paying more taxes and giving more contributions, for instance, forced donations to the local education administration and to government sponsored organizations. To enter some of the more respectable schools in urban cities, for instance, parents need to pay between 400, 000-600, 000 Kyat to headmaster, while teachers need to pay money to the education administration in order to get a position in the schools. In this way, corruption is quickly brought into the system.

Beside their enrolment fees, students need to pay their monthly school tuition fees and other expenses, for example, fees for text books, multi-media classrooms, school materials, sport fees, membership fees for the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and donations for local social events, and these are all payable to the schools and local authorities. Most parents are not in an economic position to pay these extra costs and it becomes a big financial burden upon families. In rural areas especially, there are not enough teachers, and local residents have to bear the financial burden as well as the responsibility for hiring new teachers and school furniture when it is required. It can be noted, that compared to the salaries of government staff of between 3,000 - 4,500 Kyat per month, primary school teachers, in general, receive between 4,700 - 4,900 Kyat per month for each person.

C. 'Heart Beating' to Parents

As a result, primary school students and their families suffer subsequently from the numerous expenses and taxes. Many families even they lived in the cities or in a rural villages, their income is not so much

“Every Township Quarter has about 100 children who can not go to school this year. About 90-96 families have a very low income situation and depend on a hand-to-mouth living,” a town businessman said.

The source reported that admission fee in the towns/cities have increased from the last year. In addition, border trade is shut down due to the Thai-Burma border closure, so families will find it hard to have income from the jobs or trades relating to the border. The local authorities are asking parents of children from Grade 2 and under to pay 360 Thai Baht, Grade 3 and 4 480 Baht, and Grade 5 and over 500 Baht for admission fees and general expenses.

Last year, schools in Mudon and Thanbyuzayat Townships in Mon State charged 2,500 Kyat for primary school, 2,980 Kyat for middle school and 3,600 - 41,000 Kyat for high school. Some schools are asking about 6, 700 Kyat, which includes a renovation fee.

Parents are also required to pay other costs for textbooks, paper, pens and a yearly contribution to the PTA fund. The books at government schools are twice as expensive as those in the market, but students must buy books from government schools instead.

Despite education at the primary level being free under the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), many parents cannot afford to send their children to primary schools in Mon State. Similarly to Mon State, other areas southern part of Burma such as in Pegu Division, Karen State and Tenasserim Division, the parents face similar problems.

As the government schools, the students and parents have to pay a lot of money to the teachers and educational officials, many poor families who have less than 1000 Kyat per day face much difficulties in providing education to their children. If a family has about 2 or 3 children and above, they surely faced serious difficulties for the schooling additional cost and finally, they have to pull out their elder children from schools.

As an instance,

Mehm Kyaw Htwe (15 years old boy) who is currently a cattle waiter (similarly to cowboy) from Dama-that village of Kyaikmayaw Township said that he used to study in his village's middle school till 7th Standard. In last year's school season, unfortunately he had no chance to enroll his class because his parents could not provide him the enrolment fee and other additional fee.

“My Dad and Mom told me that this year; I need to stop for one year study because they could not pay for me. This year, my parents could not run their business so well and thus I had to stop going school, I think. But my younger sister and brother who are studying in primary class are still in school. It is fare because I am the eldest person among my brother and sister and I have to give them chance to study. Now, I am earning money by working as guarding my aunt's cows and I will be continues my class next coming school season (2006-2007).

Although he expect to attend school again, but because of many environment and situation, the students those left from schools could not have easy opportunity to attend schools again.

D. The high entrance cost

While the Mon National Schools allow the students without any type of entrance in every year's school opening seasons, however, the students and their parents have to pay a lot of fee to the teachers and educational officials at school during the school opening season. It is hard time for many poor families who have many children to attend schools to get education. The school opening season of Mon National Schools is also in June every year.

But if compared with the government schools, many parents believed that entrance cost to Mon schools is less. Many of them in the rural villages, who could not enroll in government schools moved to the Mon schools.

Accordingly to a parent from Mudon Town in Mon State, she expressed as:

“The entrance fee (the government school) is 4,000- 6,000 Kyat for one student and that is for school materials and maintenance cost. If the parents could not pay in cash but they have to

donate building materials needed to repair the school, such as cement, logs, and galvanized iron sheets. If they could not donate, the children will lose the chance to attend the schools.”



Basic Education High School in Kamawet village of Mudon township, Mon State

The demanding fees for the school fee or others are varied from one school to another

because it is not set according to the laws. The teachers and education officials could demand any amount of money as their desires, but the students' parents could not refuse it.

As an instance,

The school entrance fee varied in different areas in Mon State. Some schools in Mudon and Thanbyuzayat Townships of Mon State charge 3,500 Kyat for a primary school level student (from 1 Grade to 4 Grade), 4,500 Kyat for a middle school level student (from 5th Standard to 8th Standard) and 7,500 to 60,000 Kyat for a high school level student. But in the same Mudon Township, every student in Hnee-pa-dool village's school, the students had to pay about 6,700 Kyat per head including for all costs that need to spend in school including repairs and maintenance.

In Pa-An Township of Karen State, the entrance fee is much higher than in Mon State. Accordingly to a Mon woman from Pa-an Township of Karen State, she said, that “the entrance fee for a middle level school student fee is 5,250 Kyat per head and I can't afford it to pay for my four children. So I've had to pull my children out of school”. There are many sad stories of the parents who could not afford to pay for the entrance fee in Karen State and Tenasserim Division where there are less employment and income if compared with Mon State.

If compared with the students in rural villages, the students in the cities or towns have to pay more and various fees to the teachers and educational officials. In Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, fees for school enrollment, text books and sports cost over 2,000 Kyat; fees for school repairs and new buildings cost from 9,000 to 30,000 Kyat; and these are besides entrance fees. The parents also have to pay for computer maintenance at schools in both the urban and rural areas. In response, the school teachers say to the parents that they have not received enough budget from the government for school repairs and new buildings. Instead of the government's budget, the people need to pay.

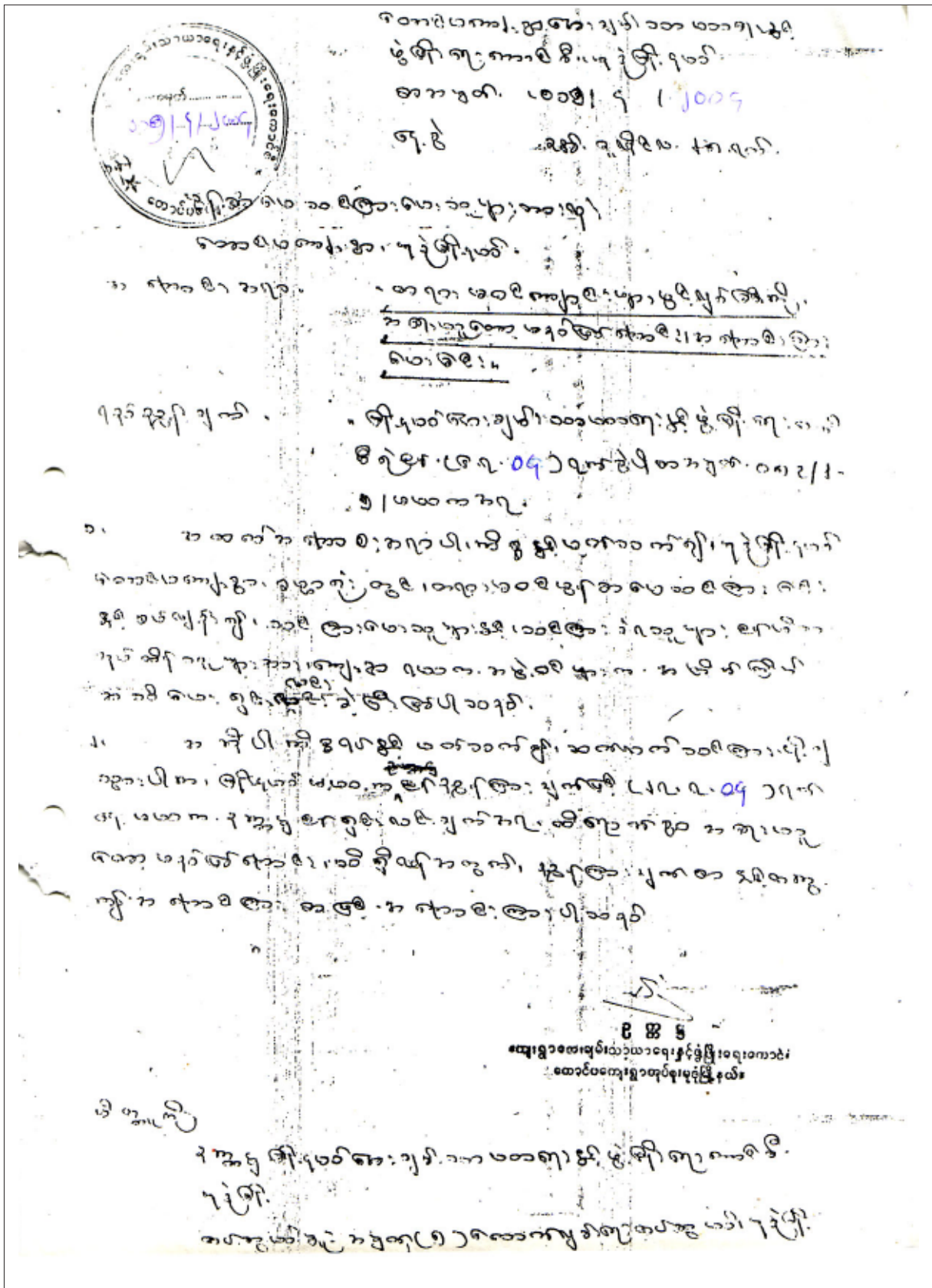
Government assistance towards education, for instance, is significantly less than the military budget. Moreover, the government scheme, the so called “Self-reliance Program”, really hurts families of primary school students, as it freezes or fades out “free primary education”, which in turn reduces government responsibility. The authorities, therefore, do not take measures to ensure that all children can attend primary school. “Free education at a primary level” is just a slogan of the government and one of the many pretexts in the present time in Burma.

III. Oppression against the Mon teachers, schools and education in 2005

A. Ceasefire Agreement and Discussion on Education Program

NMSP reached cease-fire agreement with SPDC on June 29, 1995,⁷ and the occasion was celebrated in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State. In about 5 rounds of ceasefire negotiation before ceasefire agreement

⁷ The former Prime Minister of Burma, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt attended in the ceasefire ceremony and in discussion about the border development program and promised to promote education in Mon areas.



Order of Township authority to stop opening the Mon Literacy school in Mudon Township, Mon State

was reached, the Mon leaders discussed several points regarding to Mon Education System. All the points were discussed in the field of border area development program as usual the SLORC had discussed with other ceasefire groups. In brief, all these proposed educational points were in deep connected with objectives of the Mon people to preserve and promote the old Mon literature role. These points were.

- (1) To allow the teaching of Mon Language in government schools in Mon State as a minor subject or outside of daily schooling time,
- (2) To build more government schools in Mon State and promote the levels of the schools in various Mon villages and provide more education assistance to the those schools,
- (3) To assist for a building of Mon National High School in undeveloped area inside Mon State,
- (4) To officially recognize the teaching of Buddhist scripture in Mon language and final examinations in Mon monasteries of the whole Mon State.

Many parts of Mon State were under firm control of SLORC/SPDC, the regime has not allowed the teaching of Mon language in these schools and absolutely prohibited. The NMSP Education Department (a Department under the NMSP's Administration Body) and its supporters could organize only some schools in the area under loose control of the regime, for the teaching of Mon language by coordinating unofficially with local community leaders. The Mon leaders also wanted to allow the teaching of Mon language in all government schools like parliamentary democracy era before Gen. Ne Win seized power from civilian government.

Because of protracted civil war and fighting for many years between the Burmese Army and MNLA troops, most rural part of Mon area has been in undeveloped situation. Hence, the NMSP requested to build more even government schools in the rural area whether these newly built schools will allow the teaching of Mon language or not. The Mon community needs more schools for their children to get access to education.

Similarly, more government school levels in Mon rural area were not upgraded for many years and they have remained as a same level, primary or middle level, for many years. Because of this discrimination, most Mon students lost education access after the passed all grades in their villages' schools. For example, many middle schools in Mon villages such as Kalawthaw (of Mudoon township), and Panga, Htinn-yu Htitkayin (of Thanbyuzayat township) were in the same level for many years and the government didnot upgrade the level of these schools. Other similar over one hundred primary schools in Mon villages are not also upgraded by government for many years. Although these schools have over-crowded student numbers and the village communities agreed to build new schools for their students, the government have always ignored or rejected. When NMSP talked with regime for ceasefire, many village community leaders approached to Mon leaders and discussed to upgrade these schools. On behalf of Mon community, the NMSP also put this issue in the meeting.

Regarding to the teaching of Buddhist scripture in Mon language in several monasteries in Mon State, it was prohibited since over 15 years in BSPP era. The Mon monks have been constantly forced by government's religious ministry to learn Buddhist scripture in Burmese language and enter every year official final exams in Burmese held by government. About 90% of Mon Buddhist monks of the whole Mon State have boycotted the government's plan and did not enter exams held by government.

At the beginning of the boycott, several Mon monks who led this defiant struggle were also arrested and detained. However, the monks never stopped their struggle and the teaching of scripture in Mon language has been continued. Since then, the government religious authorities did not confer the official degrees, or recognition of passing of exams to Mon monks.

B. SPDC's Attempts to Close Down Mon National Education

CASE I

Mon National Schools moved by SPDC, July 20, 2005

Self-funded Mon National School in Lamine, southern Mon State is forcefully moved and given a small compensation to the Mon school authorities after the government authorities planned to build their own school in village. They said that they do not want any compete schools in the communities.

A community leader of Lamine Sub-town in Ye Township⁹ reported the SPDC will force the Mon National School Committee to move it to an outside site. The committee built the school by donation

⁹ In order to have firm control to the Mon communities, those have operated their own schools, literacy training and follow to the administration system of NMSP, the SPDC created many Mon big villages with over 3000-5000 households to be Sub-Towns. It is likely a Town and the SPDC has installed all its administration apparatus.

from the local residents and migrant workers in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and other foreign countries. The school is likely a community school and many poor families could send their children with low fees.

A senior monk from the school committee said the committee spent 20 million Kyat to construct the school but the authorities agreed to compensate only 150, 000 Kyat.

Last year, the authorities had wanted the committee to move the school, but the committee instead challenged the authorities. 'A small compensation was offered, and the committee accepted it,' a local woman said. The committee has to accept the compensation after serious pressure and no choice.

The self-funded private school is not under the administration of NMSP. However, the local Mon community built it after the SPDC, at that time called SLORC, led by Khin Nyunt pledged to NMSP to allow the teaching of the Mon language in private schools. 'You can build your own school to teach the Mon language,' the monk quoted Khin Nyunt as saying.

'Many Mon National schools in Mon State have been built since then. However, some were threatened and closed down by the Military Intelligence (MI) after two or three years,' he added. Hneh-padow village school (Mon National High School) in Mudon Township was ordered to stop teaching after a revered monk respected by the SPDC passed away, the monk explained.

Most of Mon National Schools, which were built after the ceasefire are organized by senior Buddhist monks who have a strong influence in the community. The monk said that they manage the school themselves, not with the cooperation of the NMSP, observing that there could be a problem in the future with the ceasefire agreement. However, they rely on a curriculum designed by the NMSP.

CASE II

USDA¹⁰ against Mon Literature Protection

In February-April 2005, Mon State USDA said that the teaching of Mon language will not support national development and reconciliation. It also ordered its members in Mon State to prohibit the teaching of Mon language in Mon areas.

Accordingly to a meeting minutes received by HURFOM:

"Teaching the Mon language is a barrier to national development and solidarity. The SPDC will not achieve its objective of rural development in the area because of the Mon language-teaching," a USDA senior official of Kyaikmayaw Township said at the meeting February 2005.

At that time, the Mon communities in Kyaikmayaw Township also began to register the Mon children who wanted to learn Mon language after the government schools' close for 'summer holiday', which is also well-known as 'Dry Season Mon Literacy Training', that intends to teach Mon language and about Buddhism to the young Mon children.

SPDC's schools closed in March for long holiday. As soon as school close, the Mon Buddhist monks and the community people arranged for Mon literacy training. Even it is not affecting the government school times, but the SPDC authorities and USDA still do not like the activities of Mon communities.

The source from the Mon community in the township said the USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association) responded negatively after the BBC News (Burmese language program) broadcasted that the government banned the Mon national school in Ye township.

It is a concern in the community; with most wondering why the government's USDA quoted that teaching the Mon language acts as a barrier for rural development. Meanwhile the USDA members in Thanbyuzayat are taking a survey of Mon State's economic situation to persuade people with business opportunities.

CASE III

Close Down Mon National Schools in Ye Township

In July 2004, SPDC's senior leader, Gen. Maung Bo went to Mon State and instructed to the local authorities to close down all Mon National Schools in Ye Township and built up the government. In the implementation, the SPDC leaders also used USDA members from Ye Township to disturb the Mon teachers and existing of Mon schools.

¹⁰ USDA stands for 'Union Solidarity and Development Association', a hand-picked organization of SPDC. SPDC mainly uses this organization in opposing the activities of Mon National Education and dry season Mon literacy training.

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: mforumcontact@yahoo.com
Webpages: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

Accordingly to a Mon teacher in southern part of Ye Township, he said:

"We heard news that if the Mon teachers went to Ye Town for any purpose, we have to be careful to USDA members. They are in the coffee shops, in the bus stations, in railway stations, in the entrance of towns. If they know you are a Mon teacher, they will inform to the police or military officers in town immediately and they must arrest you. We have to be careful during they are trying to close our schools."

In the basic idea of USDA, they thought that any existing organizations in the communities are their competing organizations and tried to abolish those organizations.

Therefore, as the followers of SPDC, the USDA actively acts as opposition to the civil society organizations and do not allow them to exist.

CASE IV

Mon National School is not permitted for repairs

Since the firm control in southern part of Ye Township area by the Burmese Army, the commander from Tactical Command No. 3 does not allow the local Mon villagers to repair the existing Mon national schools in the area, which provided education for the Mon children for years.

In this school season, Tactical Commander, Lt. Col. Nyi Nyi ordered the village headmen from Khaw-za Sub-Town to not repair a Mon National Middle School in the village that provides education to 300 Mon children with age range of 5-14 years old by 8 Mon teachers.

Commander's instruction is normally related to the establishment of SPDC or government school in the Sub-Town to compete against the Mon schools in the area.

The whole Ye Township which includes northern and southern part of Township areas was under the control of New Mon State Party (NMSP) before its ceasefire with the regime in mid-1995, and the NMSP's Education Department established many Mon national schools in various Mon villages that have 50 households to 1000 households. Under the protection of the NMSP, the Mon teachers were recruited and they provided education to Mon children in the villages.

There are about 80 Mon national schools established in both northern and southern part of Ye

New Burmese Army's commander still tried to convert Mon schools under the regime control: In May 2004, there was a tension in April, after the NMSP officially complained about Col. Myo Winn's disturbance



Students from Government's B.E.H.S in Moulmein Capital City, Mon State

against the Mon teachers and Mon national schools. NMSP also sent the letters up to the Commander of South-East Command, to respect the operation of Mon national schools. The Commander replied that the disturbance is just the acts of the commander concerned which was not acknowledged by the South-East Command.

Later Col. Myo Winn was also replaced by another commander. In stead of a new commander, Captain Htay Aung, the battalion commander of IB No. 61, which based on Ye Town has involved in threats against Mon teachers. However, the new

commander was still forcing the Mon teachers to abandon their positions as Mon teachers and converted as government teachers.

A source from southern part of Ye Township reported that Captain Htay Aung of Infantry Battalion No. 61 called a meeting with Mon teachers on May 16 in Yinye (Yang-rae in Mon) village and warned them that they must immediately stop providing education to the children in Mon language and operation of Mon national schools.

Captain Htay Aung, at the meeting, also added that the Mon national schools must be under the government control starting from the next school year in June 2004 and all teachers needed to use all curriculums or textbook produced by SPDC's Education Ministry and follow the teaching instructions provided by 'Ye' Township Education Department.

IV. Conclusion

Under the government school system, because of expensive school fee and additional fees, there have been big rate of drop-out and the children left from schools in early age. But the regime has never done any assessment on the situation and even does not allocate sufficient budget for schools. It shifts most of its budget for the military expenses or to Defense Ministry.

On the other hand, under the 'Burmanization Policy' of the current regime, it does not allow the teaching of ethnic languages in government schools and has planned to assimilate all ethnic people to be the majority 'Burman'.

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

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