

# **KAOWAO NEWS NO. 131**

**Newsletter for social justice and freedom in Burma**

**July 22-August 13, 2007**

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Readers' Front**

**Elder Mon leader sparks comments worldwide**

**MAU urged to be more proactive**

**More Thai Mon students join bi-lingual education in the Kingdom**

**Unicoding Mon Language**

**Floods along Zami River destroys 32 houses**

**Environment, Sustainable Development And Globalisation:**

**Burmese nuclear and weapon proliferation amid state instability**

**NMSP facing new challenges: A new election or a new battleground?**

**Statement on the 19th Anniversary of the 8-8-88 People's Uprising in Burma**

\*\*\*\*\*

## Readers' Front

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to the Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to serve better the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. Additionally, we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news. We reserve the right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,  
Editor  
Kaowao News

kaowao@hotmail.com, www.kaowao.org

---

### *On the NMSP is Facing New Challenges by Banya Hongsar*

After reading the article “New Challenges by Banya Hongsar”(see article below) a broad conclusion is that Mon like any other ethnic nationality is facing a systematic ethnic cleansing onslaught of the Myanmar Generals and is unable or unwilling to respond. As an academic, we vision this, and one of the best ways to respond in the long term is by educating the younger generations and to instill them with the knowledge and wisdom of what is right and wrong. Hence the AEIOU Programme for higher education.

Annually we contact the education committees of the resistance groups including the NMSP (but only a few if not none of them take the initiative to contact us)

with the result that this year due to some misconnections the traditional matriculation examination centers in Moulmein and Thanbyuzayat are missing. If the ethnic leaders can concentrate more on education rather than others, we would be in a better position to respond to this ethnic cleansing policy. Lamentably this is not confined to Mon only but also to all other ethnic organizations.

Prof. Kanbawza Win

Dean and International Relations Director of the AEIOU Programme, CMU  
Professor of the SFU British Columbia, Canada

\*\*\*\*\*

### Politics

#### **Elder Mon leader sparks comments worldwide**

Kaowao: August 13, 2007

A comment from a well known Mon leader has sparked tens of blog posts worldwide by Mon activists on whether the Mon should take up the armed struggle again to fight against the central Burmese government.

The 80-year-old president of the MAU, Mr. Damrong Pongbangkadee, known by his native village as Nai Bangdee, gave a closing speech at the regional meeting of Mon Affairs Union (MAU) last month which sparked international attention in the Mon media and among the Mon community.

The President of MAU has taken a tough stance against the New Mon State Party who he feels continues to neglect the situation of the Mon people, saying that, “if they (NMSP) do not defend our people, I will establish my own armed forces to fight.” In response to the growing dissatisfaction with the NMSP ceasefire

agreement that has led to continued abuse by the Burmese government, he would start from a small group and fight because the suffering of Mon people is “getting worse and I cannot sit around and watch it.”

“We have been awaiting change: in their 4 year’s Plan, then in their 8 year’s Plan and now that I am 80 years old, we are still waiting,” the former freedom fighter continued. The president directed his comments to his audience, which included thirty Mon nationalists along with the NMSP and MUL members who were also in attendance at the two-day meeting.

His speech was welcomed by the local Mon community, later the Australia based Mon National Council welcomed his statement that triggered a debate worldwide on breaking the ceasefire.

“The MNC will contact Nai Damrong to let him know that he is not alone. There are many Mon who stand behind him. The MNC will give him full moral support at this stage. We can raise awareness to support Mon Resistance financially and materially. The MNC can also take the role of information and lobbying for the Mon Resistance force in the future,” said Nai Thet Naing, MNC’s Secretary of International Affairs.

A retired officer of the NMSP from Waengka village said, “it is time for the NMSP to reconsider its ceasefire policy since human right violations continue and civilians are fed up with the deteriorating situation.” The relationship between the NMSP and the SPDC junta is not improving and the general public is concerned for the future of the Mon movement while the SPDC is holding its final session of the National Convention in Nyaunghnabin near Rangoon.

However, some activists see the comment as only his individual viewpoint and the intention of the MNC is to take full advantage of any attack on the cease-fire NMSP leaders.

“Whenever the opportunity arises, the MNC is quick to make a personal attack as result of the painful enmity embraced by some of the MNC members,” said a Mon activist from Canberra, Australia.

Nai Damrong Pongbangkadee is the current president of MAU and is among the presidium members of the MUL. He was among a handful of Thai Mon who joined the armed struggle from Thailand into Burma when the Mon Peoples Front took up arms against the Burmese central government from 1948 to 1958. From Thailand he went to Monland and worked for the self-determination until General Ne Win seized state power. He later returned to Thailand and started a trading business with his sister Maneewan Pongbangdee at the Thai-Burma border.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **MAU urged to be more proactive**

Kaowao: August 13, 2007

The Mon Affairs Union, the Mon umbrella organization, has been urged by activists to work proactively and decentralize its structure.

The Mon nationalists are impatient with the slow progress of the umbrella organization and the work of MAU since it was founded.

Nai Sunthorn who attended the MAU regional meeting said some delegates suggested the MAU work harder and reach out more strongly to other organizations. The Mon national conference held recently by the New Mon State Party states that the work of the MAU is rarely seen.

Among the participants, the Mon Unity League (MUL) proposed four points to develop better the Mon umbrella organization. The proposals include re-naming the MAU, to develop Formation and Structure, to establish it as an Independent Civil Society Organization and it set up with Strategic Planning Body.

According to the MUL's July update information package, they proposed that the MAU work to encourage the activities of various Mon organizations and that it should not control these organizations. The new umbrella group or highest authority body should be 'Strategies Planning Body' for the whole of Mon people in Monland, Thailand, and abroad. It should not get involved in various activities that are already implemented by Mon organizations. It should provide strategies for these organizations; do an assessment for various issues; analyze the specific issues; find information for strategic planning and advise work plans for Mon organizations.

The MAU was formed as the result of Mon National Conferences held over the last two years in 2005 and 2006. The New Mon State Party sponsored the Mon National Conferences. Mon participants from different organizations based in Thailand discussed the issue on forming an umbrella organization adopted from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mon National Conference in 2006.

The MAU held its regional meeting on July 13-14, 2007 and the upcoming Mon conference will be held by the end of this year.

\*\*\*\*\*

### *Literature and Culture*

#### **More Thai Mon students join bi-lingual education in the Kingdom**

Kaowao: August 12, 2007

More Thai Mon people are enrolling in Mon language classes to revitalize an indigenous culture in the kingdom.

According to Mon Unity League based in Bangkok, Thai Mon communities in Ratchburi, Bang Pong, Pathom Thani, and Nong Joak (near Bangkok) are teaching the younger generation to read and speak Mon in the classroom.

Mr. Sunthorn Sripangern, the President of MUL and Coordinator for Mon Language Program said many Thai Mons are taking Mon language classes in their community this year. Even though the program is self supported by the community, it coordinates with Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) and UNESCO. A workshop on Bi-lingual Education (local and Thai languages) was held in Bangkok in July, organized by the MOE, to plan for teaching in the local community.

The Mon language class will be held not only within the formal education system but also in migrant communities. The biggest organization of Thai Mon, Thai Ramarn Association is planning to support the migrant workers project for adult education. More adult and children at Maharchai, Bangkokadee and Kanchanaburi are learning the Mon language in their respected venues such as in the monastery and government schools.

Mr. Sunthorn also helped Thai Mon Development Center, which has an education program to support many migrant children. The leader of TMDC had some difficulty in contacting the Thai authorities for the continuation of their school and security of children.

Most of the Mon Language Program was self-supported from the community by collecting donation money and other classroom supplies from Mon patriots. Most of the teachers are volunteers, young Mons and Buddhist monks.

School policy developments in Thailand allow about thirty percent of class time to be spent on the teaching of ethnic languages in schools where ethnic people reside. This policy will provide many students with the opportunity to learn their language and increase the odds of survival for Mon language.

In 2003, academics and some Thai-Mon leaders developed textbooks derived from old and culturally rich Mon storybooks and hundreds of palm-leave scriptures found at monasteries in Thailand.

However, the survival of Mon language and culture needs continued support since there is no funding from the government and local authorities. The Mon classes in Sangkhalaburi area, previously supported by the HARP are now facing difficulty because financial assistance has just ended.

Most of the Thai Mon people live in central Thailand; Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Lopburi, Ratchburi and Samutsarkhorn.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Unicode Mon language**

Kaowao: August 11, 2007

A Unicode font is being tested by Mon activist and media group to serve Mon internet users more effectively.

A border based Mon activists held a discussion to launch the Mon script to the unicode system. The meeting was attended by Mon Unity League, Mon Youth Progressive Organization, Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) and Kaowao Newsgroup. Their intention of creating the Unicode system is to easily send Mon fonts via the Internet at a higher speed.

According to Kaowao team member, Asohn Vi who organized the meeting, said that even though the Mon Unicode was temporarily initiated by Nai Aue Mon and

Kaowao, internet users can still not search the Mon and Burmese versions because the Mon font is not fixed or registered with an international search engine.

The meeting agreed to temporarily use a Mon font (Zawgyi one Unicode) created by Nai Chan Mon of IMNA. The Mon font created by Chan Mon can be used in both Microsoft Word for online and Page Maker.

The young Mon activist, Nai Aue Mon will invent the testing for another code number for the same Unicode.

The Independent Mon News Agency and Kaowao Newsgroup are based on the Thai Burma border. The Kaowao website is visited by over 700 viewers per day after it launched Burmese and Thai versions. Previously the website was visited by over 200 per day in English and Mon.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Environment

#### **Floods along Zami River destroys 32 houses**

Independent Mon News Agency: 10 Aug 2007

Floods have destroyed 32 houses including three house-boats where the Zami River originates, including areas along the course of the river inside Burma following two days of heavy rains.

Floods rendered 80 families homeless and destroyed 29 houses in Chanugzone village.

"The families have lost most of their belongings. They could manage to cling to some belongings. The flash floods took them by surprise," said a said ferry boat team officer who distributed relief yesterday.

According to eyewitnesses the flood waters came from the place of origin of the river. The Bleah Doon Phike camp is situated in the Zami's area of origin, about five kilometres from the Thai-Burma border line, Sanghklaburi district, according to a New Mon State Party officer.

Patients in the camp hospital beside the river have been moved to higher ground. Besides flooding landslides have occurred and the party official believed that rubber plants worth 800,000 Baht have been destroyed.

"Our village has also been affected. Flood waters reached our village but it was not so bad. Taung Poart village in Kya-inn-seikyi Township have also been flooded," said Kaw Pa Lort villager who lives in the Zami River valley.

Residents living in Zami River side said some paddy fields had been destroyed by the floods but could not say how much.

Following the heavy rains, floods also occurred along Ye River and currently Ye Town market beside the river is closed.

There is one feet of water on the market floor and the shop owners have moved their property to their home and closed the market. Ye resident claimed more than five people died in last year's flood.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Environment, Sustainable Development And Globalisation: A Plea To Indian Legislatures**

**By Dr.Zafar Mahfooz Nomani**

Countercurrents.org: 31 July, 2007

The impact of globalization on environment and sustainable development needs to be continuously addressed in Indian context which profoundly remains in the transition. In spite of the potential of globalization to economic convergence it paved for an increase in inequality resulting in increased environmental impacts such as climate change, protection of the ozone layer, biodiversity and desertification. These international trade arrangements and environmental agreements contain very few provision for harmonizing trade and environment trade and development. The increasing tendency of trans national corporations to establish global standards for environmental performance enhances the contribution of FDI to sustainable development. The Commission on Sustainable Development urged creditor countries and international financial institutions to implement speedily the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. It also urged HIPC countries to develop national poverty strategies in a participatory way so that debt relief would be linked with poverty eradication. The Agenda 21 refers to national sustainable development strategies as important mechanisms for enhancing and linking national capacity so as to bring together priorities in social, economic and environmental policies. National sustainable development strategies provide an opportunity to put into practice common principles of strategic planning for sustainable development. The substantial human and institutional resources required for the formulation of national sustainable development strategies may impose a burden on India.

The United Nation's Global Compact initiative, as a partnership between the United Nations, the business community, international, labour and civil society organizations commit to open markets while meeting the socio-economic needs of the world's people and contributing to a more humane world. The main principles promoted by the Global Compact are taken from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization's fundamental principles on rights at work, and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development all of

which enjoy universal political support and a strong international legal foundation. Understanding the links between globalization and sustainable development is essential to more integrated and strategically focused Indian legal policy making. It allows Governments, International organizations and other stakeholders in the development process to make proactive adjustments to changing conditions in the enabling environment for sustainable development at the national level and through international cooperation.

The new economic policies and the structural adjustment programme often predict environmental impact without accuracy because of the complex interplay of various economic, social, political and ecological factors. These are put into effect in an effort to meet India's severe balance of payments crisis, and to propel its economy into quicker growth and global integration. A part from direct fiscal policies, the major components of the new package include boosting exports to earn foreign exchange, liberalizing industrial production, dropping barriers to the entry of foreign companies and goods expanding privatization and cutting government spending. The drastic nature of the NEP package has understandably underscored natural environment conventional economists advocates an exploitable resource, and sink into which the effluents of affluence can be thrown.

Indian companies are also squeezing natural resources at a faster pace for shrimp farming in most valuable brackish wetlands and lakes. Agri-business consortium has been proposed by the government, ostensibly to help small and marginal farmers, which is to give a boost to commercializing Indian agriculture to cater to expanding consumerist markets. In the new liberalized atmosphere, the environment departments in all states and at the centre are going to become everyone's punching bag and will find it harder and harder to enforce their regulations. Industries have been cleared adjacent to a Marine National Park and protected areas of wildlife officials. The destructive potential of the liberalized economy justifiably identified tropical islands, rainforests, coral reefs and marine waters and genetic store houses.

World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in its report entitled "Global Challenge Global Opportunity" has identified water and sanitation, energy, agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and human health, as the moot point. UN Environment Programme (UNEP) believed that "A consumer lifestyle based on the desire for mobility, convenience and product disposability has undercut the further advancement of resource efficiency and waste reduction".

South Africa President Thabo Mbeki, that “a global human society based on poverty for many and prosperity for a few, characterized by islands of wealth surrounded by a sea of poverty, is unsustainable. The tragic result of this was the avoidable increase in human misery and ecological degradation, as seen in the growth of the gap between North and South. The international community needs to fight the global apartheid the elimination the global apartheid between rich and poor.

The India today needs to usher in a season of transformation, a season of stewardship to make long overdue constitutional commitment to protection and improvement of environment and security of future generation. Government’s organizations and financing institutions need to use their resources effectively to improve their performance and to set up their cooperation, working as one to overcome hunger and to consolidate the primary role of sustainable agriculture and rural development in food and environmental security. Indian legislatures should rise to occasion and act in a manner that fundamentally changes the lives of the poor and instill confidence by implementation of laws and policies to usher a humane, equitable and environment friendly society.

The author is faculty of Law, Aligarh Muslim University

[zafarnomani@rediffmail.com](mailto:zafarnomani@rediffmail.com)

\*\*\*\*\*

### Opinion

## **Burmese nuclear and weapon proliferation amid state instability**

**By Mats Henriksson**

In Kachin State in early July 2007, the SPDC’s state commander, Maj-General Ohn Myint held a speech at a city hall meeting in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. In his speech to the audience he vowed to “kick KIO (Kachin Independence

Organization) up to the mountains if they persist in their demands for an autonomous Kachin State.”

The Major General did not hesitate in further telling the residents of Dum Bang village in Hukawng valley that, “We must fight the Kachins and destroy them and their community.” Such is the mindset of Burmese military personnel and government officials who rule with impunity in Burma.

According to the SPDC, the norm of government policy on its citizens is using military force, along with extra judicial killing, torture, bullying and intimidation. To deal with the threat of the KIO is also to target the Kachin belief system as was done recently when the Major General set out to confiscate KBC’s (Kachin Baptist Church) Kachin Theological College compound and the Jaw Bum Compound in Nawng Nang village, 10 miles north of Myitkyina. The Major General ordered the village administrators to remove all Christian crosses away from the village entrances.

Another example of impunity by the Burmese government is to refuse to address the criminal behavior of its officers. In early February 2007, 4 schoolgirls from Dukang Village, Kachin State, aged between 14 and 16 years old were gang-raped by 3 Burmese officers and 4 soldiers.

Gang rapes almost always happen near the Burma’s army military bases in remote areas of the country. Infantry Battalion 138 base at Munglang Shidi Village, IB 138 led by Lt-Col Soe Win was responsible for gang-raping the 4 schoolgirls, the SPDC authorities later sent the girls to jail while the rapists remain free. In April the victims were released from the jail in Putato. No information or news on an investigation was forthcoming from the state’s police institutions; the reason is because there is no state institution to investigate such cases, no competent judiciary, no legislature and a complete lack of commitment by the government.

There are rules and regulations to govern the people, but the SPDC soldiers who raped the girls, Major Zaw Min Thet, Captain Win Myint Oo and Captain Kyaw

Ze Ya, according to local sources, will remain free as long as there is no competent judiciary system or independent institution to bring them to justice.

Burma's state of affairs in which impunity by security forces is an endemic problem resembles the security forces in other countries in the region, in particular Bangladesh. But in Burma they occur also within an environment of genocide and state sponsored terrorism. Hidden within the dense jungle canopy where the ethnic people live, impunity by military personnel reigns supreme over the population in which the Burmese military operates as a police unit not to enforce law but to mete out punishment to those who they see as a threat to the 'security of the nation.'

The objective is to instill fear and compliance on the local people. It is the most ignored of abuses by the international community. Meanwhile the Burmese government refuses to acknowledge that such behavior by state officers exists and either does not have the will, or equally worse, falls back on harboring its criminal personnel. In response to the reporting of such actions by the Asian Human Rights Commission, a Burmese government official stated:

“We would like to inform you that the accusations you described in the letter were groundless and exaggerated. It was mainly based on information obtained from antigovernment elements or neo-colonialists who just want to create unrest in our country for the sake of outside intervention. Our government's position and policy toward law and order situation [sic] is very clear and well known...” (July 2006: source AHRC)

The international community and the regional governments of India, Thailand, Malaysia, China, Singapore and even the United Nations fail to fully address the going's on in Burma with respect to the country's lawlessness and naively focus instead on addressing the massive drug trade while overlooking other forms of criminality.

Another form of impunity that reigns supreme is the actions of the SPDC-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association who bully dissidents. Recently

they attacked 6 members of the HRDP (Human Rights Defenders And Promoters) in Irrawaddy division. The human rights activists were injured after the attack and all were arrested. On 24 July 2007 the human rights activists were charged for inciting public unrest and sentenced in a kangaroo court to between 4 - 8 years in prison by a court in Henzada Township.

Meanwhile an explosion is brewing on the horizon. In Kachin State Hpa Kant Township at Hawng Pa village, a Russian -Burma joint venture company, the Victorious Glory International Ltd. has been drilling for uranium since February 2007, the place for this exploration of uranium is near a jade mine, about 80 miles west of Myitkyina.

According to the Dictator Watch, the SPDC is mining and refining uranium and then bartering for the final product termed 'yellowcake' which is sent to North Korea and reportedly to Iran. In return the SPDC receives missiles and technical assistance on its own nuclear program from North Korea.

In May 2007 Russia's Atomic Energy Agency and SPDC signed an agreement to build a 10 megawatt nuclear reactor in Burma. Recently the North Korean regime was pressured with the help of China and the US to shut down their nuclear weapons program.

How can the international community, especially China, ignore the SPDC's building of a nuclear reactor at their doorstep and allow them to develop a nuclear program amid such instability and lawlessness? If something goes wrong at this nuclear reactor, for example if an earthquake triggers a radioactive leak as happened two weeks ago in Japan, can we expect someone like Major-General Ohn Myint to react in a rational and systematic way as did the Japanese in fixing the problem?

This nightmarish system controlled by these people is not only a threat to the self-interests of the governments in the region, but the source of enormous suffering for millions of people. Burma is not a stable country and the actions of the

Burmese government are a continuous threat to our society and to the other governments. These are reasons why the international community must take greater action in ensuring that a stable government be established in Burma to ensure the rule of law.

Reports on nuclear and weapons proliferation in Burma can be found on Dictator Watch's website [www.dictatorwatch.org](http://www.dictatorwatch.org).

*(The views express here are solely the opinion of the author. Kaowao Editor)*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **NMSP facing new challenges: A new election or a new battleground?**

**Banya Hongsar**

Burma may well hold a general election in 2008 when the new constitution is amended regardless of national and international criticism over its contents. Chinese pressure on the Burmese to sit with the United States government recently in Beijing is a sign that the Chinese want to see things move ahead toward reconciliation, if only on the surface. The cease-fire groups will be allowed to contest the elections if they “return to the legal fold” the so-called peace-deal. On the other side, the fragmented ethnic armed groups / armies are confronting new challenges on whether to accept the legal fold option and disarm to be allowed to contest elections under the threat of increased political suppression.

The Burmese military offers us nothing in return other than an election and many doubt it will be free and fair with our rights to self-determination or autonomy in opposing government actions and making decisions for our people rejected outright. The increased tension may compel some to resort to violence and further

fragment political will among the groups. Splinter groups and other armed organizations will fight on while others distance themselves from politics, with innocent civilians bearing the brunt of a divided nation. The role of the Ethnic Nationalities Council as a key player in national reconciliation has failed to bring about a meaningful tripartite dialogue after the Burmese government rejected their proposals. What are we to expect of Burma's future politics?

To give up more, we must get more from the Burmese government. However, regardless on whether there will be an election and a new constitution, at present the ethnic political and armed organizations like the New Mon State Party have only a small representation in Mon State and as such will have little political impact thus weakening the party's political direction. Meanwhile, NMSP faces a difficult balancing act in confronting growing pressure from the military government to respond to the SPDC's possible invitation to contest in a new election and demands for safety and security by their people. Their decision remains up in the air on whether to send a formal or informal delegation to the convention.

General Secretary of the New Mon State Party, Mr Nai Hongsar, repeatedly states that they are playing a "wait and see game" in response to the SPDC sponsored National Convention and a new election on whether the party will contest or adopt "a do nothing" policy toward the military authorities.

Mon State's democracy will be tested in the next election given the new challenges the NMSP faces. One is an image problem in its inability to move forward due to lack of political participation in the urban and rural areas with the majority struggling everyday with grinding poverty and economic hardship. Dwindling membership, lack of organizational morale among senior members and the 1995 cease-fire agreement have all taken a heavy toll on the party's leadership capabilities.

Tens of thousands of Mon have left and continue to do so, to Thailand, Malaysia and other Asian countries for employment and better pay. Worse news and which is regarded as a national emergency by Mon leaders is that many strangers of non-Mon speaking people from Upper Burma have migrated to the heart of Mon State

for farming and gardening jobs that will have a negative effect on the social and political participation of the Mon population in Rangoon, Pegu and Moulmein. All these pose major challenges for the New Mon State Party and the Mon National Democratic Front. The NMSF's President General Htaw Mon, dubbed "Mr. Nice Guy", will have his work cut out for him when he tries to overcome these obstacles when they decide to stand in the elections.

The party's representatives have attended regular sessions of the national convention from 1998-2006 but declined to attend the last one, which led to repercussions by the SPDC. However, the party has little choice to attend the next one given the few assets it has up its sleeve to bargain for political power with the SPDC's unless a formal power sharing is agreed to on the table. The failure of the national convention and the highly criticized new constitution will force the New Mon State party and other organizations into a corner to question the 'Gentleman Agreement,' but breaking the ceasefire agreement is both worrying and unhealthy for the country's future.

The party's top strategist with 30 years of experience, Nai Chan Toi, has been at center stage and remains fully engaged at all levels. Well known as "Mr. Tactic" among party members, Toi drew up a well thought out policy to reach out and consolidate local and exile Mon organizations. He formed a new political forum the Mon Affairs Union (MAU) locally with the national and international Mon organizations, while the former forum, the Mon Unity League known (MUL) transformed its role to better coordinate media and civil society groups to strengthen community development and raise awareness in Mon State and along the Thai-Burma border areas. On another front, the overseas Mon are building a coalition of new ideas and solidarity among Mon exile communities to build support among social and political organizations.

For over 50 years the New Mon State Party is one of the longest standing politically organized parties in Burma. But it has become under increasing pressure in the last decade since the cease-fire agreement with the SPDC, the current military government of Union of Myanmar. The SPDC cut some party members off of their lucrative business deals after the party refused to attend the last national convention and now demands their arms. If the party breaks the ceasefire deal the party will split right down the middle with those fighting the SPDC while others maintain their business links with the government.

The party's bargaining power diminished after the loss of the late president Nai Shwe Kyin, a long serving president and gifted leader who was commander in chief of the party / army for over 40 years in March 2003. But the worst development in the last 10 years is that the military government has taken almost complete control of the liberated areas in southern Burma and which will make it difficult for the party to recover in the future. The government also launched military offensives to flush out armed resistant groups along the southeastern border areas and uses forced labour for border development, agriculture development, militarization and natural gas infrastructure to bring the population to its knees, much of which causing massive internal displacement within the region.

The actions of the Burmese government have had a major impact on the Mon population. All construction on railways, roads, and gas pipelines from Ye region to central Mon State are built with forced labor, until now local villagers are forced to guard the gas pipeline site for security. The cease-fire agreement failed to deliver much needed security and safety for the local population and is a pressing concern with local farmers being banned to farm in the “Red Zone.” Villagers are being forced to guard the gas pipeline construction site under fear of attack by the anti-government armed groups. The party has been silent on a wide range of issues to protect the welfare of local people and indeed all people in Mon State are angry that government troops are taking over thousands of acres of productive farmland.

Despite worldwide condemnation by local human rights groups and international NGOs, the Burmese government maintains a strong presence in almost all Mon major villages, towns, and cities as a military force stealing local resources to support themselves. These are the biggest challenges for the NMSP's leadership to gain legitimacy to seriously push forward on the table with its counterpart, the SPDC for further peace-talks. However, the military might of the Mon National Liberation Army is much weaker than the government's battalions. Mr Nai Chan Toi in his message to the entire Mon population in the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Conference said, “The strength of the Mon people is a key factor to overcoming the present policy of the military government, we must look closely at what is going on around us and choose the right policy.”

Despite the gloom, the NMSP members have continued to be instrumental in its institutional structure and power within the framework of cease-fire agreement in the last ten years assisting in community projects, but the party has limited power and no bargaining chips in political maneuverability in dealing with the hard-line SPDC. But given its limited political power, the NMSP continues to work to for the people by expanding language schools, cultural associations, health clinics, and educational schools in Mon State. The party also sponsored an annual National Seminar and conferences with positive results and much support. The best example of this is the formation of a new Mon political body, the “Mon Affairs Union” which was founded in 2006. Its mission and policy directive is to strengthen the role of the Mon political institutions both in the homeland and in Thailand with the support of the Overseas Mon organizations, a good example of democracy in action.

The NMSP and its armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army are looking at a new policy option under the banner “Social Democracy” for Burma. The “Peace Journal” published by the cease-fire organizations in Burmese outline a new policy initiative tackling pressing issues of the social, health, economic, and political environments. It boasts a 3000-3500 membership and over 800 armed personnel on the ground, the NMSP and the MNLA is now in a new direction to address the burdens of its members' welfare and other educational assistance by running self-help schools, mobile clinic / health care units and child care centres in remote areas of southern Burma. The party is well equipped to administer over 600 schools with a student body of over 4000 and over 20 local health care centres have opened across southern Burma and along the Thai-Burma border to tackle the growing health problems from a broken health care system.

However, with a growing number of internally displaced person (IDP) estimated to be around one million people throughout the country due to various human rights abuses by the government's troops in southern Burma, the Mon National Relief and Development Committee is unable to cope with such a daunting task. This is a new humanitarian crisis, which has occurred in NMSP territory based on the reports available from the local media and human rights agencies. The present settlement site is only a temporary safe haven for IDP and most settlers must build their own huts for temporary sheltering at Ban Ton Young Camp, in the western of Thailand's border to Burma. The party has yet to find sufficient resources and staff to help these people who rely on them. The Mon relief agency has very limited funds for hand-outs but charity agencies from overseas have generated small income-projects within the IDP community. The functions of the party will

weaken if the needs of its members and families are not met in the next few years while the increasing population of IDP poses instability in the settled in border areas.

While the party's resources are limited in challenging the military government on major issues of power sharing and self-government in Mon State, the leaders of the party have been dreaming for greater political representation through a cease-fire process that has weakened the party. The party was shaken to its core when it lost much of its territory after the cease-fire talks and lost out on revenues and a strategic location when two Battalions split in 1996 and 2001. With limited success and territorial control from the ceasefire, the party handles every issue with caution and sensitivity. The assassination of a key politburo member, Col. Min Htut, in 2002 was a turning point for the party's leaders to be more open and work together on policy issues and structural reform within the party.

Within its 27 key central committee members and other local cadres in southern Burma, the party is keeping faith for a long lasting survival based on democratic principles and equality. The party brought in new blood under a new leadership, headed by General Htaw Mon and General Secretary Nai Hongsar, with support of their political mentor, Vice President Nai Rot Sa, and is the first time since it was formed in 1958. These new generation leaders are educated and possess political savvy in dealing with the SPDC's current top officials and are able to judge current trends. Despite the party not receiving support from the Mon population, these leaders are experienced and are open to new political developments and advice. "I am fighting not for welfare rights but for our political rights," Nai Hongsar, the General Secretary once said in a meeting with the Mon Unity League. A country will not develop through aid, but through genuine political representation.

The party has re-booted its military commission recently with the new appointment of two new young commanders after an illness of Major General Aung Naing recently. Despite the MNLA having limited military personnel and resources, the army is capable of protecting and defending unexpected threats either by the government troops or other enemies. The army proved itself over a 27 days battle with the Karen army in 1998 after a conflict over border demarcation and a tax levy at Three Pagoda Pass. The army also successfully escaped from the Three Pagodas Pass Headquarters in 1991 during a massive attack by government troops. The MNLA has lost only 971 members in the last 50

years of civil war and armed conflict with the government troops. However, this is not to claim that the army is strong enough to defeat and attack the much larger and well armed government troops based in southern Burma. The question is: if there is no Mon army, who would protect Mon political activists and other rights groups if they were under Burma government control? The MNLA deserves some credit for providing security for local rights' groups who have been under threat of brutal attack and harassment by the government for the past 60 years.

The survival of the party is the first priority while the leaders carefully gauge their challenges. After ten years of carefully maintaining its role as an alternative force for the Mon and local population in southern Burma, the party is now facing a daunting challenge whether to contest the new SPDC's sponsored election. Make no mistake, the new election will bear no fruit unless the military government fully promises to sign the accord under a caretaker transitional body. But even then who can be sure that a civilian government would be better. Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo are countries rich in resources like Burma but have yet to see the fruits of a democratic nation; infrastructure and governing institutions are weak with political parties putting money and power ahead of the needs of the people. This is something the NMSP must keep in mind when it looks to the future.

July 20, 2007

*(The views express here are solely the opinion of the author.)*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Statement on the 19th Anniversary of the 8-8-88 People's Uprising in Burma**

**8th August, 2007**

Today is the 19th anniversary of the 8-8-88 people's uprising in Burma. On August 8, 1988, people from all walks of life staged mass demonstration against the socialist rule and demanded democracy, human rights and equality in Burma. Unfortunately, the general uprising was ended by a military coup. Thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators were massacred by the military regime. Despite the persistent oppression by the present Burmese military regime over the past 19 years, the spirit and courage of the 8-8-88 pro-democracy movement are still strong and alive in Burma.

We cannot solely rely on a particular party to bring human rights and democracy in Burma. All citizens of Burma must be involved in the democratic movements to help bring a change in the country. To strengthen our democratic movement, we must support the new generations of democratic forces as well as the 8-8-88 generation who has never given up the fight for democracy and human rights in Burma. In addition, we must assure that the struggle of the people will not be taken advantage by any parties or political groups.

Long-lasting peace in Burma can only be achieved if Burma's constitution guarantees the democratic rights and the rights of all ethnic nationalities. However, the SPDS sponsored constitution which was drafted by regime's handpicked delegates does not guarantee any of these rights. Thus, the SPDS sponsored constitution will bring neither a lasting peace nor a solution to Burma's political problem. It will only prolong the military rule and political crisis in Burma.

On this historic day, in honor of all the comrades who sacrificed their lives for justice, human rights and democracy in Burma, we, Mon people around the world earnestly urge:

- The people of Burma to reject the SPDC's draft constitution which is being finalized by the regime's sham National Convention,
  
- The SPDC to immediately release Nai Yakkha and Nai Cheem Gakao and all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi and Khun Tun Oo, and

■The United Nations and governments around the world to pressure the SPDC to hold a tripartite dialogue comprised of all ethnic nationalities and National League for Democracy.

This statement is jointly issued by:

1. The Australia Mon Association (AMA)
2. Euro-Mon Community
3. Mon Canadian Society of Alberta
4. Monland Restoration Council (USA)
5. Mon National League for Consolidating and Aiding (Thailand)
6. Mon Women's Association of America
7. Mon Unity League (Thailand)

\*\*\*\*\*

**KAOWAO NEWS GROUP**

Email: kaowao@hotmail.com , Kaowao@gmail.com,

Phone: + 66 81 561-0860, 66 85 289 5376, 66 87 926 7519 (Thailand)

+ 1 403 248-2027 (Canada)

<http://www.kaowao.org>  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=1215&lo=d&sl=0>  
Online Burma Library <http://www.burmalibrary.org>

## ABOUT US

Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide more of an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting peace and change within Burma. Editors, reporters, writers, and overseas volunteers are dedicated members of the Mon activist community based in Thailand.

*Our motto is working together for change and lasting peace.*