

# **KAOWAO NEWS NO. 132**

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

**August 20- September 12, 2007**

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## **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

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Dear Kaowao,

Many years ago I had contact with the MNDA near Prachuap Khiri Khan. I visited their camp in Burma. We exchanged letters and photos but after a couple years the letters stopped coming. It has been so many years now since I lost contact but my interest and hopes for the Mon people have not stopped. I appreciate you info to keep me updated.

Thank you,

Jim

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### **Mon rubber farmers head north**

Kaowao: September 12, 2007

Mon businessmen glittery-eyed over the prospect of setting up rubber plantation projects are heading to northern parts of Mon State and central Burma.

“Betel nut is not a good choice nowadays because of the dry weather and rubber has a good potential market in the future,” said Nai Khin from Ye.

According to one rubber farmer, an acre of land for a rubber plantation in the Ye area is about 700,000 to 800,000 Kyats; the land in Kyaik Hto of northern Mon State and Pha-An in Karen State ranges from just 50,000 to 100,000 Kyats.

“There is not enough wild land in southern Mon State due to land confiscation by the Burma Army and many acres of land are already cultivated by local farmers. Some rubber businessmen even went as far as Yangon and Pegu Divisions in search of more land for rubber plantations.”

San Lwin, a businessman from the Three Pagodas Pass border town said a lot of land in the area, especially along the World War Two Japanese railway, has been developed into rubber plantations.

Civilians are purchasing this land partly because they do not want to keep money due to inflation. Also, traditional betel nut growers face difficulties due to dry weather and deforestation. Perhaps the biggest factor behind the land purchases however is that southern Mon State is situated in the 'Black Area' targeted by the Burma Army and is therefore unstable for business due to human rights violations including land confiscation and forced labor. The Burma Army also does not allow villagers to collect rubber latex in the confiscated rubber plantations and farmers have to pay illegal taxes and bribes.

Nai Khin added that southern Mon State also faces a labor shortage as many skilled farmers and workers have migrated to Thailand and Malaysia where they can earn more money. As a result plantation owners have to pay a high price for day-laborers to work on their plantations.

Mon State has approximately 3,000,000 acres of rubber plantations. Rubber trees are also grown in Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division, Karen, Arakan, Shan, and Kachin States. The rubber compounding factories in Mon State produce exports for China and neighbouring countries.

The SPDC also plans to extend the rubber agriculture program countrywide by assisting farmers who want to plant rubber. Each acre of rubber plantation requires an annual investment of between 500,000 and 700,000 Kyats for the first seven years. The official statistics show Burma (Myanmar) produced almost 62,000 tonnes of rubber from 302,000 hectares (746,370 acres) in the 2006-07 financial year that finished March 31.

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## **Migrant watch**

### **Migrant workers in Maharchai arrested**

Kaowao: September 12, 2007

Hundred of migrant workers have been arrested in Samut Sakhorn west of Bangkok according to local eye witnesses.

Nai Htow Ong, a Mon community leader from southern Ye who works at Maharchai fishing industry, said about 600 migrant workers were arrested this week but most of them were later released at the police station after paying a fine.

“They were not deported to the border (Thai-Burma) this time but most of them had to pay about 2,000 to 3,000 Baht to the local police,” he added.

A young Mon, Nay Lin who just arrived at Maharchai from northern Ye, said it is difficult to get a job without Identity Cards or Worker Registration Permit nowadays.

Some brokers in close contact with the local police sell ID cards for undocumented workers, allowing migrant workers to apply for jobs without fear of arrest. It has not been confirmed if these IDs are duplicated from registered workers or completely fabricated. The IDs that include the workers name, photo, address and expiry date are sold for 500 Baht.

A Mon social worker in Bangkok said local Thai communities are not well informed about migrant workers as the Thai media normally releases negative news stories that paint a bad picture of immigrants and are biased in favor of Thai employers. He added that the Maharchai area is infamous for lawlessness, where local Mafia gangs cooperate with Thai employees and many workers are abused.

It has been estimated that 200,000 migrant workers from Burma live in Samut Sahorn and Samut Somkhram (Maharchai and Meklong) Provinces.

According to Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB) based in Bangkok, the migrant population in Maharchai is predominantly of Mon or Burman ethnic extraction. Over half of these workers are women and young girls. Many workers come to Thailand so that they are in a better position to be able to assist their families and friends they have brought with them to Thailand or those who remain back home in Burma.

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### **SPDC launches census in the Mon cease-fire zone**

Kaowao: September 7, 2007

Sangkhlaburi -- The State Peace and Development Council will issue identity cards for civilians under the administration of the Mon cease-fire area according to local sources.

The SPDC's local authorities and immigration officers informed the village headmen to be prepared for a census that includes the gathering of house hold lists and registration according to Major Nyan Tun, the liaison officer of the New Mon State Party. The immigration department will visit the area controlled by the NMSP including Joo Kha Prao and Panang Pein near the Headquarters of the NMSP next week and conduct a survey to issue registration cards in the future.

Normally, citizens in the war zone or so called "Black Areas" are prohibited from their fundamental rights including the right to vote, to apply for a citizenship, and to hold a passport.

A village chairman from Yebyu Township said that not only the Mons but Tavoyan, Karen and Burmese under the NMSP's administration area will be registered. The villagers can travel after issuing the ID. However, this census may be a part of the SPDC's Road Map plan preparing for a referendum and general election after the National Convention which ended recently.

The villagers near the Thai Burma border such as Baleh Donpite and Jong Kwee are permitted to register at Three Pagodas Pass border town with the cost of 550 Thai Baht for a house hold list and 1800-2000 Baht for a citizenship registration card.

In the past, civilians under the NMSP's controlled area are regarded as supporters of the rebels and are not allowed to travel or to vote in the election.

There has been no complete population census done in Burma for many decades.

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### **Khawzar: mobile phones confiscated on who gets the biggest slice**

Kaowao: September 7, 2007

Ye – Local authorities have confiscated mobile phones in response to arguments on bribes paid among Burmese soldiers and Khawzar Sub-township Peace and Development Council.

In southern Mon State, very few individuals have access to a mobile; the general population rely mostly on a land phone in the city. Most unregistered mobiles are owned by money exchangers to exchange money for migrant workers who live abroad to be given to their family or friends.

Most of the mobile owners in Khawzar area pay bribes from up to 20,000 Kyat per month to the SPDC or the commander of the Burma Army.

“Some phone owners in Khawzar assigned the illegal taxes to the head of SPDC and some were assigned to Burmese soldiers in order to keep their businesses going. In these cases due to the imbalance of money divided between SPDC and the No. 31 Infantry Battalion the problem reached the head authorities and they have now shut down all overseas phones,” phone owner Nai Yei said.

Some new soldiers have arrived after troop exchange in Khawzar Sub-Township and the new officer plans on acquiring the money aggressively from phone owners by confiscating phones. Some phone owners were ordered to bring their phone or a requested amount of money.

“Starting on August 24, the Burma Army’s captain increased bribes for this month so much that most phones have now been confiscated. In the past, we paid them (Burmese soldiers) 20,000 Kyat per month, but when the new Captain arrived they demanded 25,000 kyat and when the next Captain came this amount increased again to 30,000 Kyat. There is nothing left for us,” said ‘Ma Mya’ (not her real name).

“Some phone owners stopped their phones and moved their businesses from Ye Township”, said another phone owner.

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### **Three Pagodas border crossing with Myanmar reopens**

Kanchanaburi, Aug 28 (TNA) - The Thai-Myanmar border at Three Pagodas Pass in this western province was reopened Tuesday after being closed for five months.

On the border at Three Pagodas Pass, in Sangkhla Buri district, some 350 km northwest of Bangkok, authorities from Thailand and Myanmar jointly witnessed the reopening of the border gate by a Myanmar government official following an order by his country's government.

Traffic at the border point will be allowed exclusively for a tin mining concessionaire to transport tin into Thailand. The company is under contract to the Myanmar government.

Temporarily the border has been opened for three days only, between August 28 and 30, after

which it will be closed again until September 6 when nationals of both countries will be allowed to cross the border.

Myanmar authorities sealed the border at Three Pagodas Pass for the last five months without giving any reason. (TNA)

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### **Mon refugees forced out from Umpium Camp**

Kaowao: August 21, 2007

Local Thai authorities from Umpium refugee camp near Maesot, Tak Province, forced a group of Mon refugees to leave the camp.

According to Ougkar Mon, a social worker from Maesot, 89 Mon refugees including women and children were forced to leave from the Umpium refugee camp and temporarily stay in Maesot under poor conditions. As they had no other place to seek safety, the group entered the camp again but was forced out by the camp authorities on August 1, 2007.

The refugees include former members of HRP (Honsawatoi Restoration Party) that split from the New Mon State Party and fought against the Burma Army in southern Ye.

“Many of us came from southern Mon State and Ye area. We are scared of being sent back and we don’t want to resettle at Halockhanee and Bang Tom Yang refugee camps because it is very close to the New Mon State Part (NMSP) area and we don’t feel safe there,” said Hongsar, a former member of Nai Hloin group that operated in southern Ye.

Overseas Mon organizations from Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States wrote a letter to Ms. Elizabeth Kirton, UNHCR Officer in Maesot, Thailand to follow up the case.

“We urgently request your office to provide the much needed humanitarian assistance and protection to the Mon refugees,” said Nai Pon Nya Mon, Chairman of Monland Restoration Council (MRC) based in the USA.

“We, the Mon community around the world, are writing to request your further assistance in response to the current situations of Mon refugees. We are deeply concerned for the safety and poor living conditions of over 80 Mon refugees including women and children who were

forced out of the Umpium by the camp authority,” the petition letter read.

According to the UNHCR office in Maesot, the office is dealing with the local Thai authorities to urge them to allow the Mon refugees to enter the camp. But no fixed date was given when they would be allowed to enter the camp.

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## **Pregnant refugee woman seeks protection in Malaysia**

Kaowao: August 20, 2007

Mon refugees in Malaysia are seeking protection following the recent raids on refugees and migrants in Kuala Lumpur.

According to Piung Chan, a social worker from Mon Refugee Organization (MRO) based in Kuala Lumpur, 33 Burmese nationals were arrested in the early morning hours on August 17, 2007. Those arrested included a group of 9 Mon nationals and Chin and Burmese asylum seekers as well.

Among those arrested is an eight-month pregnant woman, Ms. Mei Korn Thaw, who is recognized by the UNHCR office as a refugee and who is reportedly unwell. “Her unborn baby and the girl both are in poor health, she has an appointment to see the doctor on August 23,” said Piung Chan.

As with all forced migrants who have left due to extreme poverty and refugees fleeing human rights abuses in Burma, 24-year-old Ms. Mei Korn Thaw and her husband fled from Sam Hlea village in Karen State to escape military suppression.

The Malaysian authorities and RELA (Peoples' Volunteer Corps or Ikatan Relawan Rakyat) armed with sticks and batons raided their makeshift shelters in the morning about 6:30 a.m. The refugees were arrested for illegal entry or for lacking proper documentation papers. After the raids, they were sent to Semenyih Detention Camp, an hour and a half east of KL. They are not allowed visitors and most will spend from one to six months in jail or a camp with the men being lashed or caned.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office recently registered about 90 Mon refugees after an officer paid a rare visit to the MRO office earlier this month on August 14.

Only a handful of Mon asylum seekers have been recognized as refugees in Malaysia despite increasing numbers there. Over 9000 Mon asylum seekers have registered with the MRO offices in KL and Penang and about 250 people have been able to register with the UNHCR in the past two years. According to unofficial estimates there are approximately 100,000 Burmese refugees in Malaysia with most working in the construction and restaurant industries.

Since human rights violations continue in southern Burma, many Mon have fled to Malaysia where they are classified as illegal immigrants by the government and are labeled as criminals by Malaysian society and who live under miserable conditions.

A recent report by Project Maje titled “We Built This City” documents the terrible working and living conditions of the Burmese people and the violations committed against them by the Malaysian authorities, while the refugees have contributed significantly to the development of the country. Burmese labour has built the many luxury hotels, condos and roads, which has brought prosperity for the Malaysian people.

Burmese refugees, even those with work permits or who have been recognized as refugees by the UNHCR, have been arrested, caned, and tortured by the RELA. The Malaysian NGOs have condemned the actions of RELA and called on the Malaysian government to abolish it because it reportedly commits brutal and violent acts by attacking, assaulting, kicking and beating refugees, including woman and children, with batons and sticks while conducting their search and seizure raids.

For more information on Burmese workers in Malaysia, visit the Project Maje's report <http://www.projectmaje.org/malaysia.htm>

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## **U.S. moves closer to cutting off funding to U.N. Human Rights Council**

By JUSTIN BERGMAN, AP: 2007-09-07

UNITED NATIONS - The United States would cut off funding to the U.N. Human Rights Council under a bill passed by the Senate, the latest action by Washington to target an agency it has harshly criticized since its creation last year.

Late Thursday, the U.S. Senate passed a foreign operations appropriations bill for 2008 with

an amendment stating that none of the U.S. contributions to the United Nations would be made available to the council. The House passed an appropriations bill with a similar amendment in June.

The council was created in March 2006 to replace the widely discredited and highly politicized Human Rights Commission, but it has been criticized for failing to change many of the commission's practices, including putting more emphasis on Israel than on any other country.

The United States opted against council membership because of what it saw as flaws in the makeup of the body. It has sat on the sidelines as an observer.

Republican Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota, who introduced the amendment in the Senate, called the rights council a platform for "shielding human rights-violating regimes from scrutiny," such as Myanmar and North Korea, while "launching spiteful attacks against Israel."

Coleman has acknowledged the amendment is more about symbolism than in halting the council's operations. The U.S. share of the council budget is only around \$3 million, and the bill would allow the president to ignore the funding cut if he deemed it wasn't in the national interest.

Assistant Secretary of State Kristen Silverberg told a Senate panel in July that the council is funded out of the U.N.'s general budget and moneys are easily transferable.

If the U.S. cuts off its contributions, she said, it is "unlikely to actually decrease the amount of resources available to the council."

John Bolton, the outspoken former U.S. ambassador to the U.N., said that the bill sends a message separate from its financial impact.

"Congress needs to do more of this type of thing. De-funding is a way of showing dissatisfaction" with U.N. policy, he said.

Calls to the Human Rights Council's main offices in Geneva were not immediately returned.

Critics have said the European Union, with only seven members on the 47-seat council, is outnumbered by the powerful Asian and African blocs, each with 13 members. The Organization of the Islamic Conference, which leads criticism of Israel in the council, has 15 members.

Since its creation last year, the council has only criticized one country - Israel, for its military

actions in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. Although it expressed concern for the situation in Darfur, the council refrained from explicitly criticizing the Sudanese government for its widely documented support of janjaweed militias in the region.

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## **Generation Journey – Sangklaburi Project**

September 2007

Generation Journey is a small charity in the United Kingdom, created to support lesser privileged children and elderly throughout the world. The trustees of the charity came to Sangklaburi in 2004 while travelling around Thailand to identify a suitable place to establish a sustainable village for displaced peoples, mainly for children and elders who have no-one to care for them.

The main objective is to establish a self-sufficient village on land near to Songkalia Village that would serve as a home to people with no families or community of their own and to integrate the old and young (the elders passing on their knowledge to the young and the young sharing their energies with the old). The reason for self-sufficiency is to provide all the basic needs for people to live for free – food, clean water, housing and energy (electricity); and then provide education and training programmes that will allow the village residents to make an informed decision about how they would like to develop their community for themselves. Some of the training programmes will provide people with skills that can be used to generate income for their community, but the basic idea is to provide all basic needs so that people do not have to work for money if they do not want to.

The project began in November 2006, with the first project coordinator establishing contacts with the local communities and beginning the first building work, crop planting scheme and programme of activities. Our educational programmes include a ‘Roots and History’ course, which allows children to visit elders in various communities in the area and interview them about their lives. The aim behind this is to provide a link between the different generations, giving the elderly a chance to pass on their wisdom and knowledge to the young. We also take children up to the village site at weekends where we have an Arts and Crafts Centre, which serves as a facility for games and teaching crafts and other skills to less privileged children.

Our work in the local community mainly involves spreading the word about Generation Journey and attracting support and potential residents for the village. But we also provide home-care for several elderly people and others with special needs, which involves cleaning, cooking, food costs, building maintenance, health care and general welfare.

Although the village is not yet complete, the next stage of building work will start in October after the rains and involves the completion of three guesthouses and the construction of an earth brick house and the village Expression Centre (which will be a meeting hall and space for displays, information and children's craft work and performances). The use of earth brick was decided on so that the village could serve as an example of different methods of building and environmentally friendly resources and materials. Most of the buildings will be designed to use recycled materials or natural resources. The only problem we have with this is material for roofing – bamboo and grass roofs do not last long in the rains and mud is too heavy for the roof structure to support, so we may have to purchase lasting roofing materials and timber for the frames (all of which are costly).

In the long term, we intend to establish rain-water saving schemes, irrigation networks, solar and Pico-hydro power (energy from rainfall), water recycling systems, composting schemes and integrated planting schemes. We will also provide information technology equipment and tools for different crafts and trades so that village residents will have everything necessary to learn, teach and produce things for sale locally or abroad.

At present, we are working on gathering information on building costs, acquiring volunteers to help with construction work, research and educational programmes, and preparing for the village opening ceremony, which will probably happen in December or early in 2008. The opening ceremony will involve children's performances (traditional dances, music, martial arts and fashion show), blessing ceremonies, and an opportunity for the children to present new skills and work they have done at the Arts and Crafts Centre during weekends.

We are also trying to find suitable people to live in the village and others to be part of a village working committee that would oversee and manage the village and related activities for the foreseeable future. We are looking for people of all ages and some who do not have a family of their own or have had to leave their families behind in Myanmar because of the political situation there.

Any support or advice is always welcome, so please contact Phil Gardner on the e-mail below if you require any further information or would like to help.

philgardner\_ef@hotmail.com

If you would like to help with the Arts and Crafts activities at weekends, then please contact Nele De Waule on: 089 9569879

Website: [www.generation-journey.org](http://www.generation-journey.org)

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## **The Statement on the 60th Anniversary of the Mon Revolution Day**

The Full moon day of Ka Doi Soi, the Fifth Month of the Year 1369 in Mon Lunar Calendar(28th August, 2007) marks the 60th anniversary of the Mon Revolution Day. The Mon Revolution Day commemorates the beginning of the armed struggle against the central government in 1948. When the British granted independence to Burma, Mon political leaders have peacefully negotiated with the AFPFL leaders, mostly Burmans, for the rights of Mon nationality. However, the reasonable and peaceful demands of the Mon were met with the brutal assassinations, imprisonments and inhumane tortures. Ultimately, the Mon had to resort to an armed struggle.

Since Burma gained her independence from the British, the successive Burmese governments have adopted the policy of chauvinism and have never recognized the basic rights of non-Burman ethnic nationalities. The brutality, violence, and various kind of oppressions by the Burmese government left the non-Burman ethnic nationalities including the Mon with no choice but to resort to the armed resistance, which unfortunately led to over five decades long of ongoing civil war in the country.

In fact, the Mon revolution and struggle for self-determination and sovereignty not only started 60 years ago upon Burma's independence. Our Mon's revolution and struggle to regain our sovereignty and independence began soon after our Hongsawatoi Mon Kingdom was brutally attacked and occupied by the Burmese ruler, U Aung Zay Ya in 1757. Since the fall of Hongsawatoi Mon Kingdom, whenever the opportunities arise, the Mon have revolted against the successive Burmese kings and rulers as the Mon have never surrendered our sovereignty and, are always longing for the independence and sovereignty. .

Today, we commemorate our revolution and struggle to regain our unalienable rights and long-lost sovereignty. In commemoration, we remember with gratitude and reverence all those Mon who have sacrificed and still continue to sacrifice for our national cause not only since 60 years ago when our modern armed revolution has started, but also to those who have fought and scarified since the fall of our Kingdom, Honsawatoi in 1757.

The revolution and struggle for our rights to self-determination, sovereignty and independence remains the sole unifying factor of Mon in Monland and all over the world and offers an undisputed platform for all Mon to express their sense of belonging and hunger to live in peace with their own rule and self-determination. In order to realize our ultimate goal of sovereignty and independence all Mon around the world, Mon in Monland, the Mon armed resistance

groups in the border and Mon in overseas must work hand in hand with each other. The revolution to regain our sovereignty and independence is our Mon National Revolution and, hence it is not only the tasks of the Mon armed resistance groups but also the tasks and responsibilities of all of our Mon. And, in view of people's movements in the world, armed revolution alone is not sufficient in bringing about change. The Armed revolution must combine with people's revolutions inside and outside the country.

Therefore, on this special occasion we earnestly urge all Mon to involve in our Mon National Revolution with whatever we are capable of. Provided that all Mon, Mon in Monland, Mon in the border and Mon in overseas are duly convinced that the Mon revolution is our national revolution and, then work hand in hand with each other wherever we are and whatever we can for our national cause, the ultimate goal of our sovereignty and independence cannot not be far away.

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)

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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.