

KAOWAO NEWS NO. 136

Newsletter for social justice and freedom in Burma

November 13- 30, 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
kaowao@hotmail.com, www.kaowao.org

On SPDC to register the New Mon State Party soldiers list (Nov 13)

NMSP should not give their soldiers list to junta. I think it is a betrayal to its own soldiers if NMSP gives the list. The soldiers will not be safe if the junta get the list.

The current situation is a time bomb for junta. That's a reason to collect the cease fire groups' soldiers list as soon as possible. The junta is preparing to wage a war with all rounds of opposition groups one by one. The junta seems to be ready to die on their chairs. The training of militias around the country is in progress, the arrests and execution of activists are in process and the propaganda media is in increasing. On the other hand, a talk with Suu Kyi to put opposition groups on hold of movement is in the attention of international media.

Now, Lt. Gen Ye Myint is testing the situations and preparing steps of cease fire group in doubt of cease fire groups will become together to break the ceasefire agreement and return to firing.

Junta seems to be systematically preparing to clean the democracy groups first, then to go to cease fire groups. So, the junta wants to separate the ceasefire groups and democracy groups for a while first in order to make them easy to crack down. This time is safety first. We all believed before that the weak point of junta is dialogue and media war. But the thing that the junta most fears is neither dialogue nor media war. It is only dying. So we logically know that the junta is fearing bullets that can kill them, burning fire that can burn their bodies and freedom spirits that can kick off their evil souls.

Banya Htaw Weang (New York, USA)

I am very impressed on your opinion page in Mon version. This is where we can open our points of views to Mon community around the globe. I really love everyone's suggestion.

It is so amazing to have seen such a good idea and points of views.

Kwae Mon (Canberra, Australia)

SPDC increase troop numbers in Three Pagodas Pass - Thanbyu Zayat Highway

Kaowao: November 30, 2007

Karen State -- A source from Three Pagodas Pass has told Kaowao that Burmese troop numbers around Three Pagodas have increased in recent days.

"Today a further eight Burmese military troop units were placed along the Three Pagodas Pass and Thanbyu Zayat (Than Phyu Za Yat) Highway to 'clear' groups who are not part of ceasefire agreements. They have also added more troops near Aplon Village, between Mae Za Li and Myine Thar Yar villages."

Another source from a prominent ceasefire group added that almost 1,000 soldiers were part of the Burmese Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 36, led by Colonel Kyaw Min Oo and Lt-Col Maung Maung San and Major Min Htun.

The Karen Nation Union (KNU) has stated it is unusual for so many troops to be present, and that there is more this year than at any other time.

"We believe it is strange how so many troops from Burma Army Division 88 have arrived from along the river. There are so many more than in previous years, so the military will control more new places," said Major Saw Hla Ngwe, KNU's spokesperson from Information Department.

The townships of Three Pagodas Pass and Kyainn Seikyi hold the main Burmese military bases in Wai Ka Naing (Anan Kwin), Taung Zun, Kyainn Seikyi, and Phayar Ngote To village, including Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 51 in Three Pagodas Pass. On November 22nd, the Division 88 military troops arrived at the frontline of this area. Given the troops already present they now number in excess of 2000 soldiers.

LIB No. 403, 405 and 406 are under Military Operation Management Command No.8 and have been stationed near Phayar Ngote To village in Kyainn Seikyi area.

LIB No.338, 339 and IB No.28, which are under the operation of the Burma Army Division 88, have been placed along the railway in an effort to eradicate any oppositional forces.

According to a political analysis group, "The reasons why SPDC soldiers have arrived along the Three Pagodas Pass railway and inside the town are to prepare the Three Pagodas Pass railway and also to begin the work required for connection with the Asia Railway."

This news has concerned ceasefire groups who are worried for their people given the probable influx of landmines in the area.

A head of a Three Pagodas Pass ceasefire group told Kaowao that, "The SPDC has stated their military will put landmines here, so the villagers around here will face more daily hazards. The troops will also confiscate land from villagers and in order to prepare the bridge and build their roads they will once again force villagers to work."

At the end of October this year, the SPDC planted over 1000 landmines along the Kawkareik and Thingan Nyi Naung highways to 'clean out' the area and to protest strongly against alliance groups.

Burmese authorities investigate video shops

Kaowao: November 30, 2007

Mon State -- Video shop owner has reported to Kaowao that videos taken during the September revolution are now being sought by Burmese authorities.

"Any videos taken in September and possibly kept in our shops are being thoroughly investigated in Mawlamyine and rural areas. The authorities are investigating video shops because revolution videos and CDs have been distributed throughout Mon state since the beginning of November," he stated.

Another video shop owner from Mawlamyine said, "The police men came into my store and asked us to give them a list of name of anyone who had rented any CDs or videos of anything to do with the September revolution. But it is not easy to find out

who rented anything to do with the monk's revolution as we didn't burn only the monks' revolutionary footage; we combined it with Burmese video." In rural areas the police have been ordered to find out about these 'mixed' CDs and DVDs.

According to one computer shop owner from Malawmyine, "The police came and investigated all our VCDs and also ordered us to stop copying CDs."

In Thanbyu Zayat Township nearly all Karoh Pi (Krait Pua) villagers have video players. "The head authorities are chatting with the video shops and ordering owners to liaise with them if they find any material including footage or audio of the Saffron Revolution," said one Karoh Pi villager.

The authorities of Mon State townships have continued to demand all tea shops and restaurants cease to play anything even remotely negative toward the SPDC; if a shop plays The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) Channel, authorities ban their UBC license.

Scared of marching troops villagers sell paddy at low prices

Independent Mon News Agency: November 28, 2007

Anxious villagers scared of hundreds of Burmese soldiers marching from Mon to Karen State, along Thanphu Zayart through Three Pagodas Pass have panicked and sold their crops to storages and other food suppliers.

Most villages from Makathar area and other territories sold their crops at throwaway prices in other areas because they wanted to avoid their crops being confiscated by Burmese troops.

"The current price of paddy is 200 Baht per basket (one basket is 42 pounds), but they just sold it for 70-80 Baht per basket". They began selling it since yesterday, a villager said.

The villager recalled villagers from Makathar saying that now they had money and could go anywhere and stay away from Burmese soldiers. The villagers sold the paddy after they received information from the Karen National Union (KNU) about Burmese soldiers marching to their territory.

The villagers harvested their paddy in a hurry before time compared to last year because the Burmese military authorities based in TPP prohibited them from going to farms, plantations, and hunting. The order came before the Burmese soldiers came to Karen State.

A few villagers who own farms and plantations near the villages are going there during the day. They did not stay over night and did not go far from the village. Some villagers are still hiding from Burmese soldiers.

A motorcycle trader said that the Burmese soldiers are every where in Mezeli and he saw the vehicles and artillery being towed along the Thanpyu Zayart- Three Pagoda Pass road.

The Burma battalions are now based in about five places in Kyainn Seikyi and Three Pagodas Pass townships, but they plan to expand to four more places in these townships.

Burmese revolution?

By Katy Anderson

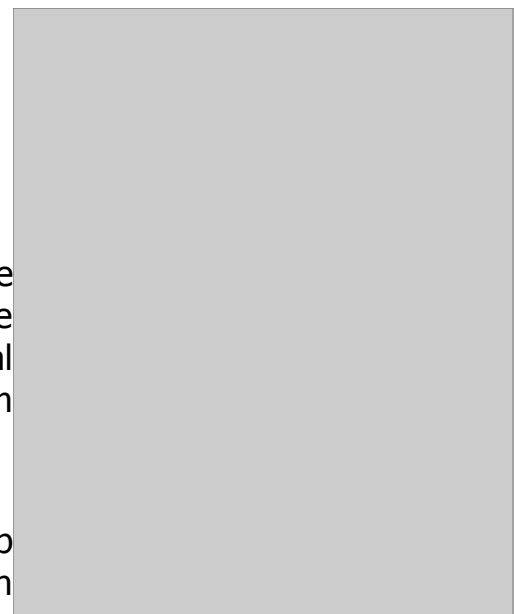
News Editor

Gauntlet: November 15, 2007

September's "saffron revolution" in Burma looked like it could be an end to what has endured military rule for close to 50 years. Despite the government's brutal suppression of the monks, there is still optimism change can be made.

The University of Calgary's development studies club hosted a talk to raise awareness about the situation in Burma Thu., Nov. 8.

One of the speakers was Cham Toik, a member of



Cries around the world have been heard in support of Burma's monks.

Credit: [Geoff MacIntosh](#) / the Gauntlet

the Mon community who had participated in armed resistance against the military regime, but put down his weapons and founded the Burmese Kaowao newsgroup.

"The situation is still the same," said Toik. "Human rights violations are worsening, but there is a hope. The opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is willing to talk--she is always willing to talk--but the military junta is also willing to talk."

Toik explained information is the power, noting that because of the strong media control, the people inside Burma are not informed about what is happening inside of their own country.

"We had no computer, I had to use internet cafes," said Toik, who started Kaowao news out of Thailand in 2001. "Later on, we've improved. We have volunteers and a radio program."

Kaowao's hardcopy publication is distributed in Thailand and in the refugee and migrant communities, as well as migrant communities in Malaysia and has 14,000 online subscribers worldwide, explained Toik.

"Information played a very important role in September's uprising," he said. "In the 1988 uprising, even though about 3,000 were killed, the information had leaked out only in very little bits. This time, there was a huge impact because of information technology, so it played a very huge role, and the world is closely watching. The international community is well informed this time."

Another one of the speakers was Foothills obstetrician gynecologist Paul Martyn, who has worked in Burma with the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit in refugee camps along the border between Thailand and Burma.

Martyn explained he found the courage and the resilience of the people at the camps amazing.

"Health security is the guarantee of secure healthcare for all people, it's a basic human right that's being denied to pretty much all people in Burma but especially the ethnic minority," said Martyn. "Most of the ethnic minorities don't have basic health care services. The government right now is spending 40 per cent of their GDP on military and three per cent on health. They have the second-worst health care system in the world."

Martyn said he had always had a political interest in Burma, and when he was contacted by the SMRU he didn't hesitate to go and work with malaria and pregnancy

in the country.

"I was involved with this group that essentially treats pregnant women who have malaria and they've done a lot of ground breaking research in anti-malaria drug therapy in pregnant women," said Martyn. "I'm a gynecologist obstetrician, so my roll was to teach the traditional birth assistant how to deliver babies safely and how to ease the complications of pregnancy."

<http://gauntlet.ucalgary.ca/story/11920>

Migrant Watch

Migrant worker kidnapped and Forced to Pay

Kaowao: November 21, 2007

Kuala Lumpur -- According to a source from the Zathapyin (Hta Plang) community in Kuala Lumpur, a Mon national was kidnapped by the head of a major gang in Masegit Jarmat, Kuala Lumpur. The incident took place on November 15th while Nai Si Thu, aged 35, from Zathapyin of Pa-An Township was working as a fruit seller in the local market.

It is alleged two men appeared at the fruit shop masquerading as customers and asked Si Thu to carry their items to their car, which they had parked on a nearby road. When Nai Si Thu arrived at the car, it is believed the men forced him into the car before quickly driving away.

While in the car Nai Soe Myint, from Burma, phoned the victim's relatives in Kuala Lumpur and demanded 45,000,000 Kyats. The victim was tortured and was close to death when he arrived at the Malay and Thai border. The next day Nai Si Thu's relatives paid 5,000,000 Kyats to Lin Lin Tun's bank account in Kawthaung, Thailand-Burma border.

The source told Kaowao that Nai Soe Myint also threatened the victim's relatives with death if they refused to pay. As a result, Nai Si Thu's relatives have all fled back to Burma.

Another source alleged Nai Soe Myint was working as a Burmese Agent in Malaysia and earning large amounts of money. When Si Thu and his group could not pay back their debt for transportation to Malaysia, a quarrel occurred between the two men and Nai Soe Myint was injured. In retaliation, Nai Soe Myint called his Burmese gang and

caught Si Thu at work.

The Malaysian NGO, Tenaganita reported that 65 percent of trafficking victims in Malaysia are used for forced labor. Malaysia is a destination country for a significant number of men, women, and children who are trafficked from Burma for labor exploitation. Many victims voluntarily migrate to Malaysia to work in factories, construction and agricultural sectors, or as domestic servants, but are later coerced into debt bondage or involuntary servitude.

Migrant Working Group to petition Govt on foreign workers policy

The Nation: November 20, 2007

The Migrant Working Group (MWG), a coalition of 19 labour rights organisations, announced Monday that it would petition the government to rethink its entire policy towards foreign workers from neighbouring countries, saying the current policy and mechanisms are unfair.

The MWG is expected to meet with Deputy Prime Minister Sonthi Boonyaratglin to urge him to reconsider his recent proposal that calls for the expulsion of foreign workers who become pregnant.

Sonthi has said the growing number of children born to foreign workers from Cambodia, Laos and Burma is alarming and suggested that they be repatriated.

The MWG is scheduled to meet later this week with the governor of Samut Sakhon who recently issued a request to all factories and employers in his province not to sponsor cultural activities for foreign workers for fear that they would dilute Thai cultural heritage.

Migrant Worker Rights Dissolving

Kaowao: November 14, 2007

Samut Sakhorn - In Thailand in what may signal a bigger shift against migrant workers, a source from Monarchal district, has told Kaowao that, "government

authorities are now forbidding migrants to stage their traditional cultural shows in Smut Sakhong province.”

Last October 26th, Governor from Smut Sakhong province, which is also known as Maharchai, 30 kilometers west from Bangkok released a statement from the government banning migrant workers from celebrating their traditional cultural festivals, issued by Governor Veerayuth Ieam-ampar to the province's Employment Office, employers and factory-owners.

In the statement, the government spoke negatively about Burmese migrant workers claiming that workers living in a large numbers in Thailand “...create health problems, stateless children; commit sinful crimes and violations of laws.” The statement went on to say that migrants’ traditional cultural celebrations affect the peace of the country, and may also affect workers’ rights.

Within the factories and on the Internet website www.naewna.com, the government has issued further statements that, “The employers must take responsibility for their employees’ behavior, control them strictly and ensure that at all times they are abiding with the law. If any employees break the rules the authorities will issue serious punishment to the employers.”

An aide to the Maharchai migrant workers has responded, saying “On November the 19th, we will hold a meeting with Thai governors to discuss and reconsider the banning of migrant workers’ literary and cultural rights.” He added that some Non-Government Organizations acting on behalf of the migrant workers are looking at legal options to sue the Thai government if the bans are set to continue.

“These days Thai authorities limit so much, including many ethnic and religious festivals and celebrations.

On November the 11th, Chairman of the Mon Youth Community in Bangkok, Nai Ong Banjul, requested to the media to investigate ways in which the government are oppressing and discriminating against migrant workers. "It's depressing that a fellow human being who happens to be better off socially carefully drafted an official letter to segregate those socially marginalized Burmese from us," he added.

More than 75 per cent of the Burmese workers in Samut Sakhorn province are believed to be Mon ethnics from Southern Burma.

“On November 12th, Thai police came and checked 800 migrants for their documents. They arrested approximately 116 people who were without the correct documents,” a sources from The Nation post.

A 700-strong task force of police officers raided the Smut Sakhong shrimp market on October 31, nearby communities, two seafood factories and a low-income workers' encampment, detaining over 1,200 Burmese immigrant workers, including 30 babies, to check their documents and sources claim daily arrests are now becoming the norm.

Earlier in the year, Phuket, Phang-nga, Ranong and Rayong provinces of Southern Thailand announced provincial regulations prohibiting migrant workers from using mobile phones, driving motorcycles and other vehicles, gathering together for any activities except religious ceremonies, or leaving their living quarters after 9pm unless assigned to the night shift.

Thai Mon slam Samut Sakhon governor's order

Kaowao: November 12, 2007

Thai Mons circulated open letters strongly criticizing the Samut Sakhon governor for his policy of forbidding migrants to stage cultural shows.

Published on November 11, 2007, "It's depressing that a fellow human being who happens to be better off socially carefully drafted an official letter to segregate those socially maginalised Burmese from us," Ong Banjun, chairman of the Mon Youth Community in Bangkok, said in his e-mail to the media and academics.

Ong referred to the notice issued by Governor Veerayuth Ieam-ampar to the province's Employment Office, employers and factory-owners asking them not to allow foreign workers, especially from Burma, to organize any cultural events at all. More than 70 per cent of the Burmese workers in the province are believed to be Mon.

In his letter, Veerayuth perceived migrant workers as causing a myriad problem involving their health, dependants, children without Thai citizenship, criminal activities, disregard for Thai law and cultural ceremonies that would cause security problems for the country.

Ong demanded the government and the Smut Sakhong governor in particular, recognize that the Thai culture venerated by Thais was not pure Thai but mixed with cultures from various ethnic groups from neighboring countries.

Ms. Sukanya Bao-nerd, a Thai Mon working as an archaeologist with the Fine Arts Department, supported Ong. In her letter, Sukanya talked about the beauty of the Mon culture long observed both by Mon migrants and Thai citizens with Mon ethnicity in the province. Why the governor can't see the splendor of Mon culture, which has become a strong point of the province, she wondered.

"We speak the same language and celebrate the same culture, so we're not foreigners to each other," she said.

SPDC to register the New Mon State Party soldiers list

Kaowao: November 13, 2007

According to sources from the Township Development and Peace Council (TPDC), Burmese authorities today ordered the head of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to record a list of all NMSP soldiers' names.

A head of the TPDC Thanbyu Zayat Township said, "In previous years the SPDC ordered us to record a list of soldiers but they would never outline times and due dates. This time around they issued an exact deadline of December 2007. They sent the order by formal mail. This time is more serious than in the past." He added, "The orders for the list were given to the NMSP after the monks protested in Moulmein."

New Mon State Party spokesperson Nai Ong Magnae confirmed the TPDC statement, saying, "In the past the SPDC requested the list from us and sometimes the TPDC and the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) would register the soldiers' numbers in the village."

The SPDC already charges people to register in Ye, Kaw Kreik, Beelu Kyun and Thanbyu Zayat Township.

The NMSP Headquarters spokesman from Ye said, "The TPDC ordered us by mail to include soldiers' names, ages, position (duty), parents' names and responsibilities."

"After the NMSP reached the cease-fire with the SPDC, most businessmen, including Tavoyan and Karen as well as Mon, would liaise with the NMSP. So I wonder now if they register as the NMSP soldiers list and how seriously it could affect our security and business," said an anonymous source.

In Three Pagodas Pass, a car owner said, "Most Thai phone owners in Mon State will relate with an officer of the NMSP, and they also use this officer's name in order to help their business run smoothly. Similarly, vehicle owners and unlicensed motorbike owners use the NMSP's name to travel around and conduct their business. The fact that this time the SPDC are really serious about registering the NMSP soldiers list is not a good sign for us."

Opinion

China can shine by acting on Burma

Teddy Buri

South China Morning Post: November 29, 2007

The fact that Asean members allowed Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein to dictate the terms of their summit in Singapore last week would have pleased many in Beijing. Party apparatchiks and bureaucrats no doubt breathed a sigh of relief; if the spotlight had been cast more fully on Burma, then China would also have been caught in the glare.

But, for Beijing, this sangfroid in the face of failed diplomacy is both counter-intuitive and counterproductive. Burma remains an opportunity that has, thus far, been wasted by the Chinese government.

That's because Burma represents a real chance for Beijing to seize the moment as a regional and now global power, and seek to rein in the Burmese military.

China has some \$1US.5 billion embedded in Burma, and is the second-biggest investor. Large amounts of this money flow through the investment projects straight into the pockets of the junta. Meanwhile, 75 per cent of Burmese live in poverty.

China is hoping to run oil and gas pipelines through Burma. Clearly, this gives Beijing leverage, and its ability to act as a force for change is considerable.

There is also a strategic imperative. Last week in Singapore, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations dropped the ball on the Burma issue. This allows China to step forward, which would result in improved relations not only with Southeast Asian nations but also with the rest of the world, where people are looking to Beijing to take a lead in such matters.

China could use as a template its approach to the North Korean nuclear problem. Here, Beijing has been influential in setting up six-party talks, also involving the US, Japan, South Korea and Russia. This forum has made headway: Pyongyang has reined in its nuclear programme and is waking up to the fact that it cannot stand up to major powers when they unite.

China's role in this has been crucial. Significantly, it represents something of an about-face as, for years, Beijing has either supported the regime of Kim Jong-il or refused to voice criticism. Moreover, China's foreign policy has, for decades, been premised on a principle of non-intervention, precluding any proactive measures.

As a way to resolve the situation in Burma, China must seek to involve Asean, India and the UN in talks to move the military away from the levers of power.

Talk is needed, but so is action. Unfortunately, China made its intentions clear earlier this month, when it voted against a UN General Assembly draft resolution which called for restraint from the Burmese government. Any talks need to be backed by the weight of intent, or they will become meaningless.

Whether China should withdraw its considerable investments from Burma is a question for Beijing. But investing in a regime that puts corruption at its core does not set a foundation for successful negotiations, or garner international kudos. Nor does it present China in a good light in the eyes of many of the Burmese who do not support the military regime.

Further, it does not give China any credit on the world stage. Yet, Burma presents a golden opportunity.

Teddy Buri is a member of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, which is drawn from representatives elected in Burma's last full national election in 1990.

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>

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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.