

# The Mon Forum

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## Contents

### News:

- (1) Development Project Employed 140 villagers in Forced Labor
- (2) Artillery battalion collects tax on rubber plant
- (3) Battalions plant summer paddy using farmer's equipment

### Commentary:

SPDC Should Admit There Is Humanitarian Crisis

### Report:

SPDC's Major and Minor Development Projects and Impact on Mon Civilians

## Some Acronyms in This Issue

SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council,
IB -	Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
LIB-	Light Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
AR-	Artillery Battalion
NLD-	National League for Democracy
FDI-	Foreign Direct Investment

## News

### Development Project Employed 140 villagers in Forced Labor

February 13, 2007

140 local Mon Villagers from Ye township were ordered by local army officers to build two bridges for the development project in the area.

The army officers of LIB (31) forced civilians from two villages, Yin-ye and Toe Thet Ywar Thit, Khaw-zar sub-Township to construct two bridges in southern and northern Toe Thet Ywar Thit village. The construction started on February 2, 2007.

The Lieutenant Colonel Kyaw Myint, Southeast Command, based in Mawlamyine, called a meeting for the two villages, Yin-ye and Toe Thet Ywar Thit to discuss the building of the bridges in the last week of January.

"The local military unit gave us only 20 cement bags per bridge. They ordered us to construct two bridges in southern and northern Toe Thet Ywar Thit village," said a Yin-ye villager who has been forced into bridge construction work for the third time.

The local military administration demanded money from villagers working on the bridge constructions. Each house was forced to pay 15,000 kyat



Civilians Work on Development Bricks Project

## SPDC Should Admit There Is Humanitarian Crisis

Along with deteriorated economy in Burma, there have been various problems in health, education, livelihood and food security. Not only the ethnic people in the conflict areas have suffered from food-shortages and other health problems. Even the people in the urban people suffer similar situations because of joblessness and lack of income in their families.

UN agencies have always expressed concern regarding the situation of the humanitarian crisis and have requested to have more accesses to the people. But SPDC always denies these accusations and has restricted the movement of UN Agencies and other International NGOs that provide humanitarian assistance to civilians. SPDC still denies some health care agencies access to people suffering with HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and other diseases.

But UN Agencies still keep their 'constructive dialogue' to maintain their mandate in Burma. After the SPDC leadership moved to the new capital "Naypyidaw" (or Pinyinmana), they have ignored the social and humanitarian issues facing the population. More and more people are facing a dire situation in the country consisting of food shortages, unemployment, lack of health care and education services.

Until now, the SPDC has refused to admit that there is a humanitarian crisis in the country. This reflects a lack of serious concern for citizens welfare. The people face more suffering ahead, regardless of their complaints. This crisis could prove to be volatile. Therefore, it is necessary for SPDC to admit what is really happening in the country and allow the humanitarian agencies to work for the people. If they allow this to happen, the people of Burma will support them.

in Yin-ye village. In Thet Ywar Thit, villagers were forced to pay between 2000 and 8000 kyat. Toe Thet Ywar Thit has over 200 households and Yin-ye about 400.

People have to bring to bring their own food and any tools they need for building the bridges. Furthermore, the workers contribute labour without getting pay from the military's Southeast Command, the villager added.

There are four quarters in Ye-yin village. Three villages were forced to build three pillars of the bridges and another was forced to collect materials to mix with cement, such as sand, stones, rock, and concrete.

People who refuse to contribute their labour to the bridge construction, were forced to pay for the cement to be used on the bridge as punishment.

The military government implemented their project in local villages in Southern Ye, using forced labor. People were forced to work for three weeks in a month. Some people don't have enough food to support their family because they have to go the government development project, depriving them of the time that they would normally work their own farms and orchards. Many people from the areas escaped to Thai-Burma border areas, living in IDP (Internal Displaced Persons) camps.

## Artillery battalion collects tax on rubber plant

January 18, 2007

Residents of Mon State in Burma who are close to the army battalions are also not free from trouble created by the military authorities. For instance, even though rubber plantation owners have paid money to the battalion as rubber plant tax they are not treated differently.

According to a plantation owner, the Burmese Artillery Regiment No.318 based near Ab-bit village in Mudon Township, Mon State collected money from owners among Ab-bit village at the rate of about Kyat 500 per plant. The area has about 200 acres of plantations.

Now about four owners have paid the tax. Most owners are watching the situation and wondering whether they should pay. This tax is taken twice a year, the owner said.

However, the battalions have not started collecting taxes from land owners who are close to the town yet. According to land tax laws for rubber plantations, the plantation owner must ask for annual interest at the end of the year, after they get the land for 30 years.

A plantation owner in Mudon Town said, "We must shut down scraping liquid rubber if we have to pay rubber plant tax again to the battalions."

## News

Now rubber plantation owners have hired workers for about Kyat 1,400 per acre a day. Some owners hired workers by paying half the income they make from their products.

Wages for hiring people have also increased by about Kyat 400 compared to last year. The price of good rubber flat is about Kyat 1,000 per pound. The middle grade is about Kyat 750 and the low grade is about Kyat 500. Good rubber flat was priced at about Kyat 1,300 last year. "Trading and selling rubber flat is no longer so profitable."

In addition, some rubber plantations near Ab-bit village where the artillery battalion collected the money in Mudon, were confiscated. About 100 acres were seized by the artillery battalion and about 50 acres of pasture in the west of Kamawet village was taken away by the township authorities in 1998.

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### **Battalions plant summer paddy using farmer's equipment**

Wed 24 Jan 2007

Farmers in Mon State, Southern Burma are being forced to part with their farming equipment like ploughs for the Burmese Army battalions to cultivate fields that they own. In addition they have to provide forced labour.

According to a Khaw-zar villager, the Burmese Infantry Battalion No.31, under the command of Military Operation Management Command No.19

ordered farmers to bring cows and carts to plough the fields.

"IB No 31 plans to cultivate about 20 acres near Khaw-zar Town and the farmers were ordered to plough the fields from January 20. One village must provide two carts and four cows. The battalion arranged for four carts a day," he said.

The battalion used a number of water buffaloes for ploughing. All the labourers were being forced to work in the fields for the battalion from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No.209 which is based in Kamawet village in Mudon Township, Mon State is also into ploughing for summer paddy in Taung-pa village near Ab-bit Dam with machines procured from farmers.

According to an owner of a farm in Taung-pa village, "The LIB No.209 cultivated summer paddy on about 100 acres this year, but last year they just cultivated about 20 acres."

The surface of the paddy fields in these areas is not the same. Some fields are deep and some are shallow. The irrigation water from the dam is also a little hot for watering paddy, said the owner. The LIB No.209 did not get a good yield.

On the other hand, the State Peace and Development Council is being buying paddy as ration for the army since the beginning of this month by paying a lower price than that prevailing in the market.



Government Propaganda Growing Summer Crop

## Report

# SPDC's Major and Minor Development Projects and the Impact on Mon Civilians

## Introduction

Burma's ruling regime, the SPDC continues to announce ongoing infrastructure projects aimed at aiding the development of Burma. Whilst on the surface appearing to hold many benefits for the people of Burma, a closer investigation uncovers the many deleterious effects upon the civilian population that accompany these projects. This report examines the wide ranging effects of government development projects on the people of Mon state in particular. The effects examined range from the displacement of civilians who are forced to flee to border areas, to land confiscation, illegal taxation, human rights abuses and the problems posed by the SPDC's sanctioning of the resettlement of migrant workers on confiscated Mon land.

## I. Deteriorated Burmese Economy and Suffering of the People

By the mid twentieth century Burma was commonly regarded as one of the countries possessing the greatest chances for development in the South East Asian region. Enjoying vast natural resources and recent independence from British and Japanese rule, Burma was in a position to be able to exploit its natural advantages, financing its own development, as well as attracting FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) thereby providing crucial capital inflows, and those of a technological nature. Added to these conditions were the absence of external threats and favourable ratios of population to land mass. Burma also had a ready made transportation network in the Irrawaddy River system and seventy five percent of the world's Teak forests (Open Society Institute, Opportunities and Pitfalls, p20).

However, a military coup in 1962, led by Gen. Ne Win, signaled the beginning of a combined social and economic disaster for Burma. Win began to implement the spectacularly unsuccessful "Burmese Way to Socialism". Among the many ways that this centralized planning of the economy managed to isolate Burma from the international economy was to suspend all funding from the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund). Thus, while the rest of the countries of the region were beginning to integrate economically, in the first waves of globalization, Burma was left to founder.

Lack of FDI and funding from the Bretton Woods Institutions (consisting primarily of the World Bank Group and the IMF), combined with inept internal economic policy, served to stunt the growth of the Burmese economy until the successive military governments were forced to concede the failure of their attempts at managing the economy in a centralized fashion. A reconciliation was sought with the World Bank in 1973. With foreign investment still banned and the state run enterprises operating in an inefficient manner, the economy continued to decline until Burma garnered the dubious honour of being crowned a "Least Developed Country" in 1987 by the United Nations.

1988 proved a seminal year for Burma when the government violently cracked down on pro-democracy protesters, resulting in the estimated deaths of over one thousand unarmed civilians. Funding from the World Bank was cut off. However, FDI was allowed in for the first time in 46 years. 1990 saw the first free and fair elections since the prolonged military rule. The elections resulted in a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD). Despite the landmark result, the military failed to relinquish power and remains in control of the country.

Currently Burma, with no recognised external threats to its national security, maintains the second largest army in South East Asia whilst spending a mere 2% of GDP on health and education. Many ethnic citizens have fled to neighbouring countries to escape persecution and human rights violations including rape, torture and extra judicial killings at the hands of an unfettered military. Burma's prisons are home to thousands of political prisoners who languish in substandard conditions and are unable to receive visits from the ICRC, which recently announced its withdrawal from the country.

Those civilians in the countryside who remain free are apt to be conscripted into forced labour on government infrastructure projects, have their land confiscated or be forced to pay exorbitant, illegal taxes.

Those that flee Burma find themselves in an equally precarious position, either in refugee camps facing uncertain futures, or working illegally. Their illegal status creates favourable conditions for the exploitation of migrant workers, whether they are labourers or sex workers. They have no choice but to work for low pay and without the security of workers rights.

Inside Burma, the military regime is able to nourish itself from the country's rich resource deposits, which it is able to sell off to foreign interests. Meanwhile, revenues from the country's resource wealth fail to reach the general public, instead going to the members of the junta and close associates.

## II. Government Initiatives on Major Projects in Mon State

The military regime has sought to develop the infrastructure within Mon State as a method of reaping the economic benefit of the resources located there through such projects as dams and highways. The consequences of these projects on the Mon population have been manifold.

The SPDC have several motivations for developing infrastructure in Mon state. Firstly, it is well recognised that the area is rich in natural resources, including fertile soils. Better highways, railways and dams allow the regime to accomplish several goals at once. Firstly, the regime is accruing the much of its revenue through the extractive industries. It has achieved this goal through its connections with international energy companies (Total from France and Unocal from United States) which have the technology to extract natural gas, in particular. Better transportation represents faster transfers of products to various locations around the region, as well projecting a favourable image toward prospective partners interested in doing business in Burma.

A second benefit of the improved infrastructure is the propaganda value of completed projects. The regime is conscious of the fact that very little revenue goes into developing the health care system, education, building human capital or developing a services industry. The development of any of these sectors would raise the prospect of a society that would ask more questions of the regime's policies. In an attempt to placate a frustrated public, the regime seeks to point out the amount of successful government projects that are undertaken "for the good of the people". The negatives of these projects are kept silent.

Thirdly, better infrastructure means that it is much easier to transport military hardware and personnel into the region. Although a cease fire has been in place with the New Mon State Party since 1995, the SPDC have been attempting to bring under control a rebel splinter group that has been operating independently in southern Mon State. Better roads make troop movements an easier task.

Another reason to conduct projects in Mon State is the fact that it is home to valuable agricultural land that can be expropriated under several guises.

The soils are particularly responsive to the growth of various crops including betel nut, rubber plantations, beans and various types of fruit orchards. Typically these crops have been the principal sources of income for the Mon people, who have a long agrarian history. The army does not have a good record of providing adequate incomes for its soldiers and has let them supplement their income by confiscating properties and produce from local civilians, as well as levying illegal taxes whilst they are engaged in defending the construction of government projects from rebel attacks.

The projects have also allowed for the use of Mon civilians as forced labour. This is in direct contravention of the conditions agreed to by the SPDC with the ILO in the Forced Labor Convention of 1999. There are various types of forced labour employed by the military, ranging from portering to construction.

When used as porters by the military, civilians are often forced to carry heavy loads and walk in front of troops, acting as mine detectors. Consequently, many porters suffer serious injuries from detonating land mines. Porters also suffer from exhaustion due to insufficient nourishment. They are subject to abuse at the hands of the soldiers if they are unable to keep up with the troops. They are regularly beaten.

Villagers are also forced to work in construction projects without pay. This leaves them no time in which to tend their own farms or orchards, which is their only means of income. If they are late to arrive at work they can be fined or shot. Many civilians lose their land altogether as it is confiscated in order for the land to be cleared in making way for the government projects. Many Mon have been forced to flee their villages as they are unable to perform the duties and cannot pay for others to take their place.

Meanwhile, government troops continue the perpetration of human rights violations, such as rape, torture and extra judicial executions, against the Mon population with impunity. Testimony from villagers who have fled to the border or crossed into Thailand, as well as reports from NGO field reporters remaining inside Burma, recount hundreds of human rights abuses in the areas where the Burmese Army operates in Mon state.

The regime has refused NGO access to ethnic areas such that there is no monitoring of the human rights situation in places such as Southern Ye, for example. This means that although the SPDC have ratified conventions such as that with the ILO mentioned earlier, there are no enforcement mechanisms or chances to monitor the implementation of the agreement. The regime is reluctant to cut off the military from an easy source of revenue because it cannot pay its own soldiers properly. Furthermore, the regime lacks the political will to enforce any discipline on its own military whilst that same force is tasked with controlling rebel activity in Mon state.

### **III. SPDC Projects' Confiscation of Mon Properties**

#### **A. Primary Livelihood of Mon People**

There are 2.5 Million Mon people in Mon State (*estimated figure*). There are other ethnic groups including Burmese. Mon State is close to Pegu division and Karen State in the southern part of Burma which shares a border with Thailand. 106 miles separate Moulmein, the capital of Mon State (which is called as Mawlamyain by SPDC) from Thailand.

Most Mon people live near the sea and grow vegetables and rice for their survival. They live in Southern Burma in the lowlands close to the Andaman Sea. They like to live in the areas that provide enough space in order that they are able to grow rubber plants.

Rubber plants are the most viable option in providing long term income for people, who are able to earn daily income from making rubber oil.

Most Mon live in rural areas. If they become financially successful, they tend move to townships such as Thanbyzayaut, Mudon, and Moulmein. Many people who have managed to move to townships are often garden owners. Even if they relocate to Townships, they continue to operate their gardens by hiring other workers to provide the labour.

There are 770,000 acres of crop land and 272,000 acres of gardens in Mon state. Due to the quality of the natural resources, in particular the soil, people are able to survive from their daily jobs and can earn money from working gardens and crops. People have different jobs in each season. They cut bush in the gardens during summer, whilst in the rainy season, people cultivate paddy. In winter, they work on crops for cultivation and reap the paddy harvest.

Following the military coup in 1962, when Ne Win, seized control of the country, a program of nationalization was enforced. Ownership of some properties of Mon people, including farms and gardens were assumed by the military. The aim of this exercise was to eventually export agricultural products to neighboring countries.

Ne Win passed away a few years ago, however, his nationalization policy still continues through the military government in Burma. The current military government has confiscated thousand of acres of Mon land. This has been justified by the simultaneous announcement of intentions to implement development projects in Mon areas.

The military government development projects have employed many army battalions who have subsequently confiscated land belonging to Mon people. Following these confiscations, thousands of Mon people were

displaced to resettlement sites along Thai-Burma border. There are over a half million (500, 000) Mon people (*estimated figure*) who have migrated illegally into Thailand, working as cheap labor.

Some land that has been confiscated for development projects by the Burmese army has been re-sold to raise revenue for the battalions. People who have suffered from these thefts have no avenues through which to make complaints, and furthermore they understand that any complaints made can lead to punishments inflicted by the military authorities.

## B. Development Projects and Displacement

The Burmese military government often announces development projects in ethnic states as a way of demonstrating that they are attempting to help the ethnic groups economically as well as developing the country. The SPDC illustrates this by highlighting that many engineers are building bridges, highways and railways. The government also claims that that GDP is growing at a rate of 12% per annum. Most international economists regard this figure with suspicion.

There are reports from outside the country that development projects have forced local people to resettle in sites on the outskirts of towns. There are more than 1000 people who have been forced into resettlement sites. Some people have no choice but to go and live as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) along the Thai-Burma border.

Development Projects cause many difficulties for civilians who have had their land confiscated and yet receive no form of compensation from the military. Civilians have lost their property and have been forced into living on the edges of towns with no adequate health care, food or water supply. More than ten thousand acres of land have been appropriated by the Burmese army for the SPDC's development projects (*No Land To Farm – a comprehensive report on land and properties confiscation report produced by HURFOM in 2004*).

## IV. SPDC's Minor Self-reliance Related Projects

### A. Brick Making Project

Brick making facilities are one of the army's development projects. The army uses the bricks for building highways, railways, bridges or battalion accommodation in the areas. These projects have been operating for many years in Mon State and have made use of many villagers as forced labour. This was typified by the use of forced labor in the building of the Ye-Tavoy railway in Tenasserim Division in 2000.

Brick making projects require large tracts of land, water and timber. The army confiscated land from people such that they may extract enough soil to be able to stockpile it for making bricks. The project destroyed the land resources and environmental resources by cutting timber to burn the bricks. The brick makers dig large ponds around 20 by 10 feet, to get to the muddy soil, which is the best for making bricks.

The project requires ten acres of land to produce the amount of soil needed. The brick makers will dig ten ponds to get a large pile of bricks before they burn them. After the brick makers extracted the requisite soil, the lands were unusable for the purpose of growing paddy.

Many farm owners said that the army did not mention that their lands were being confiscated. They only mentioned that they will use the land for one year. The owners were informed that after one year, the brick makers will leave. However, the brick makers did not leave the land. Even though the land owner informed the army officers of the situation, the officers did not take any kind of action.

### Case Study

In order to understand how government projects can have an impact upon villagers, who are struggling to get by economically at the best of times, it is necessary to simply look at a case such as that of Nai Won Kyit. Nai Won Kyit was previously the owner of a small plot of land that unfortunately was chosen by the military as a

possible production site for a brick making facility. His land was located in Taung Pyin village in La-mine Sub-town of Mon State.

Without permission, and not even with consultation or warning, Nai Won Kyit was forced out from his land as the military base decided to confiscate it in order to construct a brick making facility.

This confiscation was the result of a decision made by Colonel Hla Myint, the leader of the Light Infantry Battalion No 587. Although it is an easy, arbitrary decision for a military colonel who has a secure profession and income to make, the consequences for Nai Won Kyit are far reaching and serious.

The problem for Kyit was the fact that his land was located near the Taung-Pyin village's water reserve, making it an ideal choice for the brick making facility.

In order to provide the manpower for the day to day running of the brick factory the battalion was forced to bring in labourers from outside the village. They did this by hiring labourers from other parts of Burma, namely ethnic Burmans from the middle regions of the country. It is possible to speculate that there are many reasons for choosing Burmese workers. One of which would be to surmise that Burman workers are easier to control than Mon, who have shown a distinct reluctance to cooperate with the military in view of their previous horrendous experiences with forced labour and human rights violations. Regardless of the reasons, hiring Burman labourers raises it own concerns among the Mon residents of Taung-pyin.

The battalions gave the Burman immigrant labourers areas of the confiscated lands on which they were able to build huts in which to live, without bothering to ask whether the farm owner was in concordance with this maneuver. The Burman workers were able to construct five huts to house themselves during their working tenure.

Naturally, this raised the question in the mind of the land owner of whether the workers would eventually leave or not.

In total, Nai Won Kyit lost the use of four acres of his land, which obviously could have been used to produce agricultural products for himself and his family. Normally this land would have been used to cultivate rice paddy.

To make matters worse, the bricks that are being produced in the factory to which Nai Won Kyit has lost his property are not even being sold in any great amount. In fact there are still bricks stockpiled at the factory a year after they were first produced. This raises serious questions as to whether or not there is such an urgent need for bricks that productive agricultural land needs to be confiscated by the military.

In the beginning, Colonel Hla Myint attempted to placate Nai Won Kyit by telling him that this theft of his land was only temporary. In order to ease the anxiety of the farmer, and presumably to reduce the chances of his complaining to higher authorities, the military along with the village headman told Nai Won Kyit how the land was necessary for the production of bricks, but that this would not last a long time.



Making Brick for Development Project in Civilian's Land

Regardless of their assurances however, a year later the factory is still making and selling bricks from the farmers' property. The military have also allowed the Burmese brick makers to stay in their lodgings as long they continue to produce bricks.

The climate of fear that the military has created in southern Mon State is such that the farm's legitimate owner is too afraid of the ramifications if he were to ask the brick makers to leave his land. He has merely been able to express that he wants them to at

least be gone by the time the rainy season comes. The reply from the military was that the brick makers will stay for the whole year in order to keep production going.

“It is OK if they lived here and sold bricks for the whole year and then they left. But we are worried that they will take our property,” said the land owner. This statement expresses a fear based on previous experiences of landowners in the area, who have lost property to Burmese migrant workers who have remained following the completion of other government projects.

At the end of the day, Nai Won Kyt is deprived of the opportunity to grow the paddy that he normally would. He must suffer the financial consequences of this situation. He was told by the military that he would be compensated financially the equivalent of the amount he would have received from growing rice, but of course, he has seen no compensation.

## B. Dam Projects



Land Was Destroyed by Water Flow Canal

There are two large dams in Mon State. One is called **Jain** Dam and the other is Win-pa-non Dam. Jain Dam has proven itself to be a success, people within its reach can grow two crops and they can get the electric power from the hydropower.

Win-pa-none Dam however, is a failed development project (*The Mon Forum* No. 10/2006, October 2006). Win-pa-none Dam is close to the high way between Mudon and Thanbyuzayaut township. The dam is near to Abit Village, Mudon Township. The dam is located east of the high way and the dam's water canals flow to crop fields through eight villages, Abit, Zat-toe, Domar, Kwan-ka-poe, Taung-mom, Taung-pa, Kalawthut, and Kawpehtaw.

There were 1560 acres of land destroyed through the digging of water canals. The land owners did not receive any kind of support from the military government who destroyed the land.

The military government proposed the growing of two crops on 5,000 acres of land along the canals. But the dam project neglected to bench the surrounding areas, creating uneven fields with high and low points. The results of this oversight were to create some areas that flooded and others that cannot receive any water at all. The dam officers did not allow the release of enough water to grow summer crops since the dam began operation in 2000. Some farmers tried to grow summer crops, but the water ran out halfway through the summer, while the paddy plants growing up. The result being that all the plants died.

In rainy season, the canals halt water coming from seven villages and every rainy season all the crops surrounding the water canals were flooded and the farms outputs were heavily reduced.

Indeed, the land could produce 50 baskets of paddy for one acre in the rainy season before the dam was built. After finishing the dam, the land was often flooded and many farmers have faced food security issues.

Many farmers do not want to grow summer crops with no profit and without getting any kind of product. This has given the military the excuse to confiscate land from people who do not want to grow summer crops.

The army took 4 acres of land owned by Nai Win Tin and Mi Hla Shwe who are from Zat Toe village. Mi Mai also lost 5 acres of land, which were confiscated. The army then turned these lands over to migrant workers who had remained in the area after the completion of the dam project.

There are seven battalions growing summer crops along the water canals on confiscated land. The dam authorities are afraid of the army and they give them enough water to grow their summer crops. Many

farmers said that if the dam officers gave the same amount of water to them as they gave to the army, then they too could grow summer crops.

It is clear that the army is manipulating the output of water from the dam so that the farmers will be left short of their water requirements. This forces the farmers to refuse to grow summer crops, which will surely fail. As a result the army is able to confiscate the land under the pretext of the farmers not using it productively.

## C. Bridge Projects



Rangoon-Tavoy Railway Development Project

Rangoon-Moulmein Railway was built in 2003. There were 1400 households displaced from the area surrounding the track which is about 178 miles long. The building of this railway is aimed at facilitating future business and transport in the region. The SPDC planned to have a railway from Moulmein to Thailand along the Japanese era's death railway, which was built during WWII.

The officials and the engineers set the route and ordered that houses along the route must be moved as quickly as possible in the middle part of the city of Moulmein. The authorities also promised that they would pay compensation costs to every house according to the actual market prices. But, whenever evictions of the civilians happened in any parts of the city, there were no

compensation paid to evictees.

Before the eviction took place, the Mon State authorities unofficially released some information that 'there would be a major development project undertaken in Mon State, and the people will have better opportunities for communication and transport' after the building of the bridge and railway.

The project has been responsible for the building of many bridges along the high way from Moulmein to Ye township. The project has seen more implementation after the Mon armed group MNLA agreed to a cease-fire with the military government in 1995. Thus allowing a safe passage for SPDC troops to operate in the area and oversee construction of infrastructure.

Although the bridge project is good for transportation, there is an added incentive for the military government. The suspicion is that if the Mon National Liberation Army, the armed faction of the New Mon State Party breaks the cease-fire, the military would more easily be able to bring in hardware in order to suppress the rebels, sources close to the army battalion in Ye claim.

Civilians who are forced to work on the infrastructure projects are required to bring their own wood and their own food whilst receiving no wages for their labour. Every bridge built in Southern Ye utilised timber from villagers (*News IMNA*).

The villagers in Kaw-zar Sub-Town, are often used as forced labor for building bridges. Sometimes, the army also took timber from land owners without permission from garden owners.

## V. A Bad Result: Influx of Migrant Workers

It is estimated that there are 1-2 million migrant workers from Burma working in various industries in Thailand and Malaysia. When these migrant workers are questioned as to the reason why they have had to flee from their country there are usually two answers. Although many of them answered that they faced

### Information on HURFOM and Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995, by a group of young Mon people. The main objectives of HURFOM are:

- To monitor human rights situations in Mon territory and other areas southern part of Burma,
- To protect and promote internationally recognized human rights in Burma,

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM has produced "The Mon Forum" newsletters monthly and sometimes it has been delayed because we wait to confirm some information. We apologize for the delay.

However, we also invite your feedback on the information we described in each newsletter and if you know anyone who would like to receive the newsletter, please send name and address to our address or e-mail as below:

HURFOM, P. O. Box 2237, General Post Office  
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND  
E-mail: [hurformcontact@yahoo.com](mailto:hurfomcontact@yahoo.com)  
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director  
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

unemployment in Burma and low daily wages, many of them placed the blame squarely on the regime's (SPDC) persecution against them.

The majority of Mon migrant workers fled from their homes not only because of poverty and unemployment, but also because many of them wanted to escape from the side effects of SPDC's major and minor development projects. These projects forced them to lose their livelihood, land and properties until they are unable to obtain a daily income or yearly crops to feed their families. Therefore, many men who have families, single men, boys, women and girls decided to leave their homes. Even though they know that they may face dangers whilst living in a neighbouring country illegally, they cross the border and work in Thailand and Malaysia anyway.

Mon migrant workers mainly use two cross border points into Thailand: (1) Three Pagoda Pass and (2) Myawaddy border points where they can sneak into Thailand. Some migrant workers cross into Malaysia to seek work as they can earn better income in Malaysia.

The majority of Mon migrant workers who have been working in Thailand for years came from various parts of Mon State, especially from townships of Chaung-zone, Paung, Moulmein, Mudon, Kyaikmayaw, Thanbyuzayat and Ye. The areas like Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Ye Township face continuous land and property confiscation by the SPDC and the Burmese Army in their area. SPDC has also allocated various development projects after 1995 NMSP-SPDC ceasefire in order to have absolute control in this area. Hence, thousands of migrant workers also fled into Thailand and neighboring counties for work.

Almost all migrant workers send part of their incomes to their parents and families via illegal money transfer with an unofficial money exchange rate (Official rate of Burmese currency is 1 US D is 6 Kyat while in the illegal market is 1 US D is 1200 Kyat). No one can rely on the official exchange rate.

Thousands of Mon migrant workers without minimum labour rights in Thailand are working in fishing industries, agriculture and construction industries which are all difficult ways of earning income. They earn from 100 – 150 Baht per day, but have to work about 10 hours a day.

The companies or industries are in need of cheap labour from Burma. Burmese labourers are preferable to Thai labour because they do not need to guarantee labour rights and do not need to provide any benefits to these labourers.

Generally, the migrant workers lose not only their rights and properties because of development projects and human rights violations in Burma, but they also lose minimum labour rights in Thailand, such as full payment of their daily wages, and other labour rights in Thailand and Malaysia. The crack-downs on illegal migrant workers in these countries have taken place regularly. Therefore, the people from Burma, especially migrant workers, have faced a double suffering.



Molumine Railways Terminal Station Outside of The Town

## Conclusion

It is possible to argue that the SPDC's development projects are beneficial to the citizens of Mon state and indeed better roads, railways and bridges are for the benefit of all. However, the costs of these projects on the civilian population far outweigh any benefits that accrue from them.

The SPDC is able to boast of its development achievements, but these come at the expense of the nation's schools and hospitals. The projects are very beneficial to the SPDC and serve as further ways in which the regime can strengthen its grip on Mon state.

These goals are achieved in several ways. Firstly the regime is able to continue to plunder the rich natural resources of southern Burma, simultaneously selling off Burma's wealth to foreign sources and reaping the benefits of confiscating the property of poverty stricken local villagers. The projects allow a greater influx of troops into development areas which has the added effect of driving out possible supporters of rebels in the area. Furthermore, successful completion of projects facilitates a faster future response time to any military threats to the regime in the region, such as those posed by armed rebel factions.

Meanwhile the army continues to perpetrate human rights abuses in the area. The projects which are under the full control of the military, provide the opportunity for the military to make up for the deficit in wages by stealing from civilians. The military achieves this through taxing those who cannot act as porters, or those who cannot perform guarding duties. The military also utilize forced labour without any forms of compensation and are also able to take the produce of farms and gardens in lieu of money, as a form of taxation for whichever types of fines they see fit to levy. Further problems faced by Mon land owners are the use, by the military, of migrant workers who refuse to leave after constructions are complete. The military turns a blind eye to migrant workers, usually ethnic Burmese, who settle upon the Mon land that has been confiscated by the SPDC.

As is clear from the outcome of the development projects upon the civilian population, the construction of better bridges, railways and roads goes far beyond the issue of better infrastructure. The benefits of these projects go directly toward the SPDC's goal of maintaining an iron grip on power in Burma. Meanwhile the people of Mon state continue to suffer from the loss of their land and livelihoods, displacement, forced labour, illegal taxation, and continuing human rights abuses.

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