

# The Mon Forum

Issue No. 5/2007

May 31, 2007

Publication of The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (BURMA)

## Contents

### News:

- (1) Six hundred villagers forced to work for a week to welcome Lt. Gen Maung Bo
- (2) People forced to grow Castor Oil Plants
- (3) Junta collects money and confiscates farms for development project
- (4) Mon state authority round up unlicensed cars again
- (5) Burmese Army strengthens militia by forcibly training locals
- (6) Women and elders forced to guard gas pipeline

### Commentary:

ILO Should Extend its Monitoring Space on Forced Labour Issue in Burma

### Report:

- (1) Economic Deterioration and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Burma

## Some Acronyms in This Issue

SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council,
CRC-	Convention of the Rights of the Child,
ILO-	International Labour Organization
IB -	Infantry Battalion (of Burmese Army),
PTA-	Parent and Teacher Association,
MLCC-	Mon Literature and Culture Committee

## News

### Six hundred villagers forced to work for a week to welcome Lt. Gen Maung Bo

June 4, 2007

Over 600 villagers were forced by Burmese Army Battalion No. 31, stationed in Khaw-zar Town, to repair a road and work in other areas for a week to welcome Lt. Gen Maung Bo, sources in the town said.

Yesterday, Col. Than Toe of Military Operation Management Command from Ye Township, came to check the security aspects and the preparation to welcome Lt. Gen Maung Bo, who will arrive in Khaw-zar town today, said a Khaw-zar resident.

The army has stopped not only people in town from going to work in their farms and gardens, but also forced people from two villages nearby to repair the road. Local carpenters have been forced to work on unfinished buildings in town like the USDA office, the TPDC office and other government buildings.

The people were made to work for the army from May 23 to 25 and from May 30 to till June 2.

People in Khaw-zar suffered big losses because they could not tend their fruit gardens and this is the season when durian fruits fall from trees. The fruits will rot if they are not collected in time.

Garden owners lost Kyat 10,000 per day because they were prohibited by the army from going outside the town and villages. Approximately,



A group of villagers from Yin Ye village forced to repair roads in Khaw-zar Sub-township

## ILO Should Extend its Monitoring Space on Forced Labour Issue in Burma

Processes of cooperation between International Labour Organization (ILO) and Burmese military regime, SPDC – *State Peace and Development Council*, has been and delayed and protracted for some years.

Conscription of forced labour for portering services to the Burmese Army and for development projects in the rural areas have continued. In addition, the civilians in both rural and urban areas have had to pay fees if they cannot perform the duties as ordered by the authorities.

Those monitoring labour conditions in Burma have been heartened to learn that the SPDC have opened a channel for 'complaints' for people who have suffered from the practice of forced labour. This was due in no small part to the great work and approach of the ILO's Liaison Office in Rangoon.

Despite this improvement, the ILO still needs to ensure that the SPDC is acting to enforce this new regulation by allowing the people's complaints to reach SPDC leadership. The ILO also needs to monitor and apply pressure to the SPDC such that they follow through with punishments against perpetrators in accordance with the agreements made.

The people in rural areas are quite afraid of the Burmese Army as they have been terribly mistreated for many years. They have never known what it is to be able to make 'complaints'. Many in the rural communities are wary of making complaints lest they face retaliatory action from the SPDC or military.

Therefore, we would like to request that the ILO extend their monitoring spaces not only in the areas close to or in the cities, but also to the remote areas. The ILO should establish a mechanism/process to get complaints from those who suffer from the military's practice of conscription of forced labour, and from those who have had to give payments instead of labour contributions.

one thousand durians need to be collected at this time of the year in the Khaw-zar township area, a resident said.

This is the best time for the yield because so much fruit cannot be collected every day later. One durian costs around Kyat 500 to 700, he added.

Garden owners said that it is only once a year that they generate big income from the gardens. But they could not go to the garden for the past week.

Most people in Khaw-zar Township eke out a living from fruit gardens and farming.

Furthermore, about 20 carts were used to carry bricks from the brick kiln to the battalion for a week. All the farmers had to clean and dismantle their carts to store under the building roof.

Villagers were grumbling and said that they will have trouble growing crops during heavy rains because the army is forcing them to work for Lt Gen Maung Bo's visit.

Khaw-zar was raised to township level from village level by the military in 2003 and the Lieutenant General occasionally comes to check on how the town is developing.

Besides those from Khaw-zar, people from villages along the road such as Kaloh, Hangan were forced to repair the road.

Following Lt. Gen Maung Bo's last visit in the second week of May to Khaw-zar in the southern part of Ye township, people in Mudon Township were forced to take care of Castor Oil plants along the highway.

■ ■ ■

### People forced to grow physic nuts

May 29, 2007

After the onset of the rainy season as of May, the military regime has ordered people to grow Castor Oil plants and forced people to buy the seedlings of the nuts at a higher price and then plant them.

The Township Peace and Development Council in Kyaikmaraw directed each family to grow 300 Castor Oil plants and pay Kyat 90,000 (US \$ 72).

"The government officer sent 30 Castor Oil seedlings to our village," a villager said.

Depending on the status of residents in Thanpyuzayat Township, TPDC officers are selling Castor Oil seeds. A family is told to plant three kilograms of the seeds and has to pay Kyat 3,000 (2.5 US \$) per kilogram.

State owned television channel, MRTV is advocating the cause almost everyday by broadcasting how to grow the plant for the people's benefit.

However local people in southern Burma do not seem to accept the government project. They are just growing what the government assigns and no one looks at it as a business project. Many Castor Oil plants which were forced to be grown last year, died. Last year each family was asked to grow one to 10 plants on their own land. Most of the plants died.

But in Mudon Township the TPDC only ordered plantation owners along the highway to grow plants.

Recently a Kyone Paik villager, near Mudon town was forced to clean the grass and make way for planting along the main road so that it looks good during Lt.Gen Maung Bo's visit.

The regime started the project two years ago to produce bio diesel to reduce importing diesel.



## Junta collects money and confiscates farms for development project

May 24, 2007

The Burmese military junta has been forcibly collecting money and confiscating land from villagers of Kawkareik Township, Karen State for a township development project meant for the Karen splinter group led by Brigadier General Htain Maung (Htay Maung) which signed a peace deal with the regime.

About a hundred houses are envisaged in the township development project which is located in Naungbo village, Kawkareik Township west of Gyaing River.

"Five villages paid Kyat 5 million (over \$US 3974) to the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) for the project," a villager who paid the money said. Kaw-been, Kaw-poke, and Kaw-paline village were included in the fund collection drive.

The villager said the order to collect the money came from the higher authorities. That money is meant for

the expenditure incurred for construction of the houses.

Not only has the Burmese Army been collecting money for the construction, they have also seized farmland from farmers. The farmers are unhappy with the confiscation of their land but are unable to do anything about it. It is uncertain how many acres have been confiscated for the development project.

Villagers said about 10 houses have already been built on the site and the project requires a lot of timber to build houses for Brigadier General Htain Maung's group.

Brigadier General Htain Maung's group reached a peace agreement with the SPDC in February and the junta supported his group with over 100 tons of lumber, 100 acres of rubber trees, five tractors, and other equipment.



## Mon state authority round up unlicensed cars again

May 23, 2007, *Kyaikmayaw, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, Mon State*

Beginning on May 23, 2007, the police force from Moulmein Capital seized about 15 unlicensed cars and parked them in the Mudon police station during its cleanup of unlicensed cars in the town.

"The police have set up a check point on the main road, at the corner of the three way junction in Chaung-Hna-Kwa, Kyaikmaraw Township," Nai Nyi (not real name), an eye witness from that area reported. The crackdown at midday, by the police from the capital of Mon State, Moulmein (Mawlamyine) was sudden, added by Nai Nyi.

According to field reporter, about 15 unlicensed cars were seized; some cars which were traveling from the town to the border were confiscated. The cars will be sent to the capital of Mon state after the owners are interrogated.

About 30 unlicensed cars were also seized in Thanpyuzayat town and some in Karen state on the way to Myawaddi border town. The crackdown will continue up to southern Burma.

"In the General Check Point, in the entry of Thanbyuzayt (locally known as Su-Paund-gate), I saw more than 10 unlicensed trucks from Three Pagoda Town stopped by the traffic police and Army." Reported by Nai Win Mg, a resident of Phaung Sein village, Thanbyuzayat township.

Thousands of illegal cars were seized in crackdowns in 2003-2004 and the military regime gave the cars to its senior military leaders. Hundreds of cars of ethnic ceasefire groups were also seized but those of the Wa group, the DKBA and Karen groups were returned.

## Burmese Army strengthens militia by forcibly training locals

May 31, 2007

Training is being forcibly imparted to local people to strengthen the militia at the Burmese military base in Hpa-an township, the capital of Karen state. The idea is to have a strong militia to defend the country.

The Light Infantry Battalion No. 310 of the Burmese Army is conducting the training for the first time in all villages in the capital of Karen State in keeping with the Burmese military government's decision. The battalion has directed the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) to arrange the training for them.

Each village has sent 20 to 30 trainees to be included in the militia in the village, according to sources close to VPDC.

The VPDC's in the township do not have enough members in the militia so villagers are being trained.

But most villagers in the township denied this because VPDC are hiring people for the training, a source revealed. To pay the hire charges VPDC's are collecting money from the people.

Ma Ma Hlaing from a family which paid up, said, "I paid Kyat 3,000 to the VPDC of Kyone Pe village. Every family in my village paid Kyat 3,000 for 30 trainees."

The training has been on for the last 16 days and the VPDC had to pay for all those sent for the training.

The VPDC's had to buy shirts and shoes for the militia members. And they had to pay Kyat 2,000 per day for the trainees as ordered by the battalion. "We paid Kyat 6,000 to the army for a uniform for the militia members, a VPDC member said.

Most VPDC's don't want to do the training because they have shell out a lot of money. However they have no option but to accept because they cannot defy the order, a VPDC source said.

The training has already been held in neighbouring Mon state. The military regime started the training as of 2003 after the assassination attempt on Daw Aung Sun Su Kyi in Depayin, upper Burma.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

## Women and elders forced to guard gas pipeline

May 28, 2007

Women and people over 50 years of age are being forced to guard the gas pipeline running past villages in Mon State, despite the commitment given by the Burmese military junta to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

One person from each household in Kalawthut, Kawn-ka-bue, Doe-mar, and Set-thawe villages has to undertake patrol duty every month from evening to midnight.

Women and elders are pressed into guard duty more than able bodied men to safeguard the gas pipeline.

"Women do guard duty because villagers are worried about threats to male members of the villages by Burmese troops," said a Kalawthut villager.

Burmese soldiers stopped guarding the pipeline about two months ago in these villages.

But some villages like Hnee-padaw, Young-doung, and Kwan-hlar do not

have to do patrol duty but have to pay the salary for the guards every month.

One household pays Kyat 2,500 per month, a youth from Young-doung village said.

"Villagers in three villages have to pay Burmese soldiers about Kyat eight million (about US \$ 6,557) per month."

Continued on Page 13...



Villagers forced to construct fencing to protect a gas pipeline.

# Report

## Economic Deterioration and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Burma

---

### I. Introduction

The international community has for some time been aware of the humanitarian crisis facing the Burmese population. Growing levels of information coming from inside Burma point to the continuing human rights abuses suffered at the hands of the military. Less well known or investigated, are the direct links between the state of the Burmese economy and the dire situation in which many Burmese find themselves. This report highlights the ongoing mismanagement of the Burmese economy and the effect that this is having on ordinary people. The failure of the regime's economic policies have had many repercussions on the general public who struggle with unemployment, rampant inflation, lack of training, healthcare and education, illegal taxation, and forced labour practices. These economic factors have led to international sanctions, lack of foreign investment and an exodus of the rural poor to the borders of Burma and into neighbouring countries, in a desperate attempt to provide for their families. The resultant illegal immigration surge has led to dire conditions for those fleeing the country. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and illegal immigrants face human rights abuses at the hands of the military, little or no access to healthcare and lack of labour safeguards once they begin to work in foreign countries.

### II. Burma's International Obligations.

As this report draws links between the economy and the human rights situation faced by many Burmese, it is essential to firstly outline the obligations of the Burmese government in providing for its citizens. It is important to point out that Burma is not a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, or to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and as such is not bound to abide by the articles of either Covenant. Therefore it is difficult to accuse the regime of failing in meeting its international obligations regarding respect for human rights in terms of these agreements. However, Burma *is* a member of the United Nations (UN) and as is therefore obliged to respect the rules of the UN Charter and also to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). According to Amnesty International the UDHR:

*“enshrines internationally recognized human rights, and many of its provisions are considered to be reflective of customary international law binding on all states. Among the rights provided for in the UDHR are the right to life, liberty, and security; the right to equality before the law and guarantees of non-discrimination; freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile and the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of her/himself and of her/his family.”*

Furthermore, Burma reached an agreement with the International Labour Organisation in 1999 and adopted the ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which commits Member States to respect and promote principles and rights in four categories, whether or not they have ratified the relevant convention or not. Amnesty says these include:

*“freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced or compulsory labour; abolition of child labour; and elimination of discrimination.”*

It is clear from the overwhelming amount of international research conducted concerning the present situation in Burma that the country stands in direct contravention of its obligations to the international community, and more importantly to its own citizens.

### III. Current Political Situation and Economic Policy in Burma

#### A. Corruption / Taxation.

The Burmese economy is in many ways inefficient, to such an extent that large amounts revenue that the government would normally collect is lost within a system riven with corruption. In an average democratic society, with normal levels of government taxation, revenue would be collected and redistributed back into the community in the form of public works. These injections into the public sphere usually manifest themselves as government expenditure on hospitals, school or roads for example.

The Burmese economy, on the other hand, is not benefiting from the taxation policies of its government. Evidence suggests that the government has for all intents and purposes turned a blind eye to taxation issues in the past. Most notably the regime has rarely collected personal income tax. In most systems of government, personal income tax is a normal part of a fixed and regulated taxation system. The SPDC has in effect cut off what should be a source of constant revenue for the economy.



**The Burmese army setting up a new tax check-point for motor bikes in Ye Township**

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit Report of 2006, the SPDC has in fact increased tax collection by some 60%, however it is still reliant on the central bank for the majority of its public expenditure.

The SPDC's laissez-faire attitude toward taxation is typified by the permission it grants to the Army such that they may “live of the land”. Basically this has provided carte blanche for the Army to extract exorbitant taxes from the rural poor. These have not been taxes of the legislated variety however. The Army, through its individual members has been able to apply fiscally punitive measures against poor villagers as it sees fit. Of course, the reason

that the SPDC has been forced to give this order is that it cannot afford to pay the members of the second largest army in South East Asia properly. Perhaps this would not be the case if the SPDC had legitimate revenue raising taxation schemes in place.

Hand in hand with the problem of illegal and irregular taxation, is the problem of corruption. Many refugees from Burma offer various eyewitness accounts of immigration and police officials taking bribes in order to let people cross into Thailand or return to Burma. Often, if they are unable to give money, officials will simply take private property instead. Because there is neither oversight nor strict guidelines in place, the amounts that are extorted from people vary on the day depending who is on duty at border crossings or military checkpoints. The government has no political will to stop these practices. Some estimates put the value of the black market operating inside Burma, as well as across its borders, as being equal to the legitimate market. A crackdown at border crossings would severely hinder illegal trade. This would be counter productive to the regime when so much of Burma's trade occurs with the neighbouring countries of Thailand, India and China. Thailand and China also constitute the source of many Burmese imports.

Corruption is not just a factor at the borders however. The dire state of the Burmese economy means that government spending on wages in the public sector is woefully inadequate across the board. First hand reports of refugees fleeing to the border recount the conditions in Burma's public hospitals where doctors must be bribed in order to guarantee constant medical attention. Doctors not wishing to turn to corruption have been forced to set up private clinics, which the vast majority of rural poor cannot afford to access.

## **B. Inflation**

As an example of the regime's inept and careless policy implementations, last year public sector wages were increased by up to 1200 per cent. These are the sorts of knee jerk reactions which lead to the various problems concerning instability that plague the Burmese economy. In this example alone, it is obvious that measures such as this would have inflationary effects. In another example, fuel subsidies were suddenly ended in October 2005, leading to an immediate 900 per cent rise in fuel prices. In fact the DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia) Market Information and Analysis Section states that inflation in Burma in 2006 was estimated at a staggering 26.3% p.a. An inflation rate of this level makes it very difficult for the average Burmese person to be able to afford a basic standard of living. This is especially the case in a country that suffers from 10.2% unemployment as well as having a quarter of the population living under the poverty line (CIA World Fact Book).

An international corollary of inflationary policy measures is to send a message to foreign investors that the Burmese economy is highly unstable and subject to violent changes in economic policy over the short term, thus creating a poor investment environment.

A simple example of the inflationary problems in the country is the price of rice. Many in Burma are concerned about rice supplies in the country and the price continues to soar. Currently it costs Kyat 30 000 for a basket of rice.

The SPDC has tried to stabilise the price, but it is currently going up nevertheless. The SPDC has placed a prohibition on rice trade with other countries in order to avert a crisis in the country. Sources close to Napyidaw suggest the rice issue may lead to demonstrations.

There are several factors that have led to this recent supply decrease-price increase including; the amounts exported (against SPDC regulations, but achieved through bribery), heavy rains that have destroyed recent crops and disruptions to the ability of farmers to produce quality crops due to interference from the regime through its dam projects.

Simple rises in the price of staple goods have far reaching effects in a population earning on average, very little. This is especially the case when increased prices of basic items are not equaled by commensurate increases in wages.

### **C. Economic Sanctions**

Burma's poor democratic record has also served to hamper the progress of the economy. The 1988 student uprising that was brutally suppressed by the regime, led to a cessation of international development assistance. The junta's refusal to acknowledge the result of the 1990 election, as well as the treatment meted out to political prisoners, especially the country's elected leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has led to international embargoes against the Burmese economy. Notably the world's largest economy, the US has led the way in imposing economic sanctions, including a ban on Burmese imports, but more importantly a ban on providing financial services to Burma.

The greatest way in which the regime's behaviour has hurt the Burmese economy has been the international isolation from financial markets. For many years the junta saw fit to keep Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) out of the country. Whilst the nearby countries such as Thailand have flourished in recent years, Burma languishes far behind developmentally. Recently, the SPDC have opened the doors to large foreign corporations in order to exploit Burma natural gas and mineral resources. The results of this development are difficult to judge in terms of the benefit to the Burmese economy. Resource contracts, such as those with China are said to be valued in the hundreds of billions of dollars; however the benefits to the wider community are not evident. There are arguments to be made that increased spending on infrastructure projects, for example, are actually just as beneficial in keeping the SPDC in power as they are for the greater population. This is evidenced by road and railway projects to the south, which some claim to be aimed at facilitating troop movement for controlling insurgencies.

### **D. Burma's Over-Valued Currency**

One US Dollar is worth 1,200 Kyat at the current black market exchange rate. The average amount earned by Burmese is 1,500 (1.2\$) Kyat per day. According to the BBC, the real problem is that wages and salaries are not rising as prices increase. Local Burmese economists estimate an average family of five needs more than 80,000 kyat (about \$110) a month to live, including food, medicine and transport but, excluding luxury goods. The average monthly income of a professional worker teacher, university professor or government official is less than 10,000 kyat (\$13).

## E. Poor Health Care in Rural Areas

Clinics in many villages throughout Burma don't have enough medical equipment, medical goods or medicine to cure serious diseases, such as Hepatitis. Hepatitis is a widespread disease in rural areas in Burma. Newborns are quickly infected by the Hepatitis disease because of the use of old equipment in the clinics, according to a medic who works in a clinic in Kalawthut village, Mudon township.

Most women in villages have to save money as soon as they become pregnant in order to have enough money for hospitalization to deliver their babies. Otherwise, they will have to deliver their babies with a midwife in the village, which in terms of healthcare, is dangerous.

In 2004, the cost of delivering a baby was 200 000 Kyat, according to a woman who delivered her baby girl in a private clinic in Mudon Township. Most women in rural areas have no choice but to give birth in the village. This is because they cannot afford hospitalization. Furthermore, there are difficulties associated with travel to hospitals. The women cannot provide complete care for their children because they have a lack of knowledge about health issues.



**Child with Chicken Pox, treated with Iodine**

## F. Unemployment, Migration and Internally Displaced Persons

With the unemployment levels in Burma doubling over the last year, high inflation and a general lack of opportunity, many Burmese have chosen to flee to the border areas, or to escape altogether into neighbouring countries.

In southern Burma, the people of Mon State have fled for several reasons. Conflicts between military forces and the Mon National Liberation Army, and more recently between the military and Mon rebel forces, have created unbearable conditions for many Mon. Traditionally, the economy of Mon state has been characterized



**Border police apprehend illegal immigrants in jungle, on the Thai side of the border**

by agricultural production, as the state possesses large tracts of fertile land which have typically been worked by villagers growing fruit trees, betel nut and rubber plantations.

Civil war has had a vast impact on this agrarian economy. A cessation of major hostilities was followed by a ceasefire in 1995. However, a break away faction of Mon fighters, disgruntled by the peace agreement, continued to fight in the area. Greater military incursions into the cease fire zones, under the pretext of flushing out rebels, have continued ever since. Given the directives from the SPDC for the military to “live off the land”, it is not surprising that the presence of the military in the Mon state cease fire areas has led to vast human rights abuses as well as the deprivation of villagers of their traditional sources of income.

The economic impacts of the military’s operations against the rebels, listed below, have been wide ranging and ongoing since 1995, prompting an exodus of the rural poor to the Thai-Burma border.

- 1) Travel Restrictions – In an attempt to cut possible lines of support between villagers and rebels, the military have regularly used travel restrictions. These restrictions take the form of curfews and compulsory travel documents that regulate the movement of workers between their villages and farms. The aim is to eliminate the possibility of villagers providing food or harbouring rebels in the plantations or villages. The economic costs are such that many villagers cannot work for as long as they wish on their plantations. Other costs are the fines implemented by the military if they are caught without their travel documents or caught in the plantations outside of the curfew. These fines on villagers who are already poor make it difficult for villagers to support their families.
- 2) Forced Porterage – Many villagers have been used by the military as porters to carry military materiel on long marches. Whilst it is in contravention of the forced labour convention to which Burma is a signatory, the economic effect is the impact that is felt by those forced into the practice. Many porters are taken for long periods of time, usually given insufficient food supplies, sometimes for up to three weeks in a month. Often they are used at the front of columns as human mine sweepers. The time provided free of charge to the military leaves as a little as a week in which to tend their own farms. Again, depriving the rural poor of opportunities to support themselves. Often, these porters will suffer serious injuries as the result of detonating mines during their portering duties, rendering them unable to work their farms. This leaves only the young and women to perform difficult manual labour.
- 3) Land Confiscation – The military’s attempts to crush the rebel resistance has led to a great increase in troop numbers in Mon state. Greater troop levels necessitate housing and infrastructure in the region. With no consultation or compensation to locals, many Battalions of the military have simply confiscated large areas of private property. These areas have been used to establish military barracks, official quarters and branches of military business, such as brick making facilities. The military has also simply confiscated entire plantations. In the case of rubber plantations, the military then charges the former owners to enter the plantations to tap the rubber. Farmers suffer great losses of revenue from being charged to access what is rightfully their own property. They suffer further losses when the military take their fruit and sell it at market.
- 4) Forced Labour – Although promoted as infrastructure projects for the good of the population, government development projects, especially in Mon State have also served to facilitate a swifter military response to the threat of rebel activity. Better roads and railways mean faster

transportation of troops and materiel into conflict zones. Companies are often told that they do not need to provide labourers for projects. The military uses civilians as forced labour and keeps the wages that would have gone to contracted workers. Labourers are often forced to work three weeks out of every month, leaving little time for them to be able to tend their own crops and provide for their families. If they are unable or unwilling to go to the work sites, they can pay a replacement worker or a monetary sum to the military.

With the aforementioned conditions on the ground it has become increasingly difficult for the population of Mon State to continue their agrarian lifestyle. Many see the prospects of earning an income from the land as untenable due the military presence in the area. Large amounts of income are lost through illegal taxation, the confiscation of land, arbitrary detentions, extortion and outright theft. Most who gain their income from the land are not wealthy by most standards even under good conditions. The added burden of supplying the military with food, supplies, petrol and fines is enough to force many Mon families to flee the region.

The economic situation that forces many IDP's to relocate is replicated in the border regions. Here villagers encounter precious little opportunities for finding gainful employment, having left most of their farming equipment behind in the attempt to flee quickly. Most are reduced to hunting in the forest for animals to eat or sell, and to collecting fruits that can be sold at market. People can only grow vegetables in the camp in order to feed their family. They also grow crops on surrounding mountains for the family's survival throughout the year. However these crops are sometimes destroyed by wild pigs and at times they face food shortages.

The poor economic conditions in Mon State have inadvertently lead to health problems for many Mon, as they are forced into jungle regions in order to reach the border areas. These areas are breeding grounds for infectious diseases; malaria and tuberculosis cases are common. Those faced with health problems are usually too poor and/or ill to return to the hospitals in Mon State. Previously, NGOs such as Medecins Sans Frontieres administered medical help to IDP's along the border regions, however their activities have ceased as of 2006. MSF cites the reason for their departure as being the SPDC's oppressive monitoring and regulation and restriction of their activities. SPDC policy has deprived many thousands of IDP's and refugees from accessing urgently needed free health care.

There are massive problems facing IDP's inside the Burmese border. However, successful entry into Thailand does not guarantee that these problems will cease. Medical care for refugees can be prohibitively expensive. Travel to cheaper clinics is also expensive and many Mon do not have the identification necessary to pass through the immigration checkpoints that would allow them access to other facilities deeper in Thailand.

Supposing that illegal immigrants do make it through the border region disease free, their problems do not stop there. Many illegal immigrants enter Thailand in the hope of joining thousands of others in agricultural and fishing industries, either in Thailand or further south in Malaysia. Other workers find themselves engaged as sweatshop labour in the border regions or in Bangkok.

The workers in these industries face little labour protection from the Thai authorities. As illegals, they are subject to awful working conditions, long hours and are paid less for what

a Thai can earn for performing a similar function. The fear of deportation is enough to keep complaints about working conditions to a minimum.

#### **IV. Burmese IDPs in Limbo**

Numbers of IDPs fleeing to the Thai-Burma border increase each year as the civil war continues between the ethnic armed groups and the Burmese military forces. Some IDPS have crossed into Thailand to work as low paid labourers in the construction, fisheries, agricultural and textile industries.

Research of ethnic refugees along the Thai-Burma border undertaken by both TBBC and UN advisor Ashely South, claim that there are 500,000 IDPs located along Thai-Burma border. Recently human rights groups based on the Thai-Burma border issued reports detailing how more than a thousand people were used as forced labor by the Burmese army on the construction sites of development projects. They also recounted how people avoided the forced labor and escaped to the IDPs areas.

According to Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) and HURFOM (Human Rights Foundation of Monland) human rights reports, most people are suffering because of the SPDC development projects such as road construction, bridges and the building of children's schools.

#### **V. Humanitarian Aid and Healthcare**

Burma's life expectancy is extremely low, between 55 and 60 according to CIA World fact book. Most people in Burma cannot afford to access health care because they are struggling just to make ends meet. They never go to clinics or public hospitals unless their diseases become serious. They just buy and take medicine from street shops. Most of the street shops owners have no registration or license to sell the medicine.

There is always debate about humanitarian aid flows into Burma among the Burmese exile pro-democracy groups and the international NGOs. The Burmese military totally welcomes humanitarian aid coming into the country. However the question posed by the aforementioned groups concerns the destination of that aid.

"The SPDC just want us to treat their army using the aid that is meant for the people. We have to treat them at the special army hospital in Rangoon," said an international humanitarian aid health worker from Rangoon.

Many people from rural areas are in debt due to the cost of treating serious diseases (such as tuberculosis, diabetes, and hypertension) in the private clinics or public hospitals. These patients should actually be treated with the humanitarian aid that comes into the country from international aid groups. Instead, people have to spend money on transportation, hiring shelter, hiring hospital rooms and hiring nurses.

## VI. Lack of Social Welfare and Education

### A. For rural school children in Burma , an uncertain future



Mon children in a literacy class, in Mudon Township

Many of Burma's children are waiting for the day when they will see a democratic country with a good education system. The parents of many students are concerned about the future of their children once they have completed their educations.

Most students can hardly afford to buy exercise books and pencils, like Thu Ra who is in the ninth grade at Kamarwat village, Mudon Township. His family are farmers who are feeling the pinch and can barely afford the fees to send their

boy to school.

Thu Ra says he feels sad sometimes because he does not know what he will do after he finishes school. Many graduates wind up working on farms, migrate to the city or leave the country illegally as migrant workers.

Like all parents in Asia who place a high priority on education to achieve a high position in society, Burmese parents are no different, and want to see their children enter university to achieve a degree. Many students, who have graduated from universities in the last two decades, have difficulties finding a decent job to bring in enough income to support their family.

In the post independence phase, the Burmese government which had started on a socialist path had vigorously made education available to all children throughout the country. Nowadays the Burmese government is grappling to bring in much needed foreign direct investment whilst simultaneously trying to develop a blueprint for education, matching the educational needs of its population to 'the changing economic and political situation.' The previously stated goal to bring education to all people is now not as important as controlling the ethnic nationalities. The regime pays little attention to the education and health of children who live in rural or remote communities.

#### News from Page 3..

Following the agreement with the ILO, Burma now has complaint centres regarding forced labour in Kyat-pyi Pyinmana. The military regime invites complaints relating to forced labour in the court office. But nobody has dared to complain from Mon State.

According to the Mon community, instances of the regime forcing villagers to work and collecting money is decreasing slowly due to pressure from the international community to put an end to forced labour in Burma.

The Burmese military spends US 1\$ per person on education as opposed to the 40% of the budget spent on the military and focuses more on controlling social unrest, as is reflected in the structure of the layout on the Yangon University campus. Departments and disciplines are physically separated into separate universities and undergraduates and graduates are taught in separate facilities.

A UNESCO report stated that while universities have sprung up, the quality of education is mediocre, with low quality infrastructure, no technical or up to date technology made available for students to learn to meet the demands of a globalized world. Meanwhile those who study overseas are most likely not to return, leading to a drain of tertiary educated members of society, further impoverishing the country's position.

For years now, the country has grown poorer and people are not able to focus on their children's education and instead have to concentrate on providing for their family, a rural teacher explained. "The main shortcoming is lack of funds, but also, we have no electricity, poor infrastructure and committed teachers are not able to get an adequate pay to keep up their morale. Many pupils have to share textbooks and we don't have a lab for science projects," he added.

## **B. Falling Education Rates**

There is increasing dissatisfaction among Burmese students over the gradual down grading of the education system. The quality of education is decreasing every year according to Moulmein University. Many distance education students are unable to pass their exams this year. Only two out of ten students are able to pass the end of year examinations according to a previous graduate of the University who now resides on the Thai-Burma border. Even if students are able to graduate, the SPDC is unable to offer them paid employment.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Very few indicators show any upward trends in the Burmese economy based on research of the troubled country. Emerging figures point to a continuing downward spiral for the Burmese economy, even as those other economies of the region continue to prosper. Although the SPDC releases rosy yearly numbers indicating the amazing growth in the Burmese economy, the results of most international research belies these figures.

Most estimates predict the continuing decline of the economy through many indicators. Inflation is expected to continue rising, as is unemployment and underemployment. According to DFAT, the exchange rate management is poor, with the official exchange rate of the Kyat grossly overvalued. Financial sector policies are also ineffective. Tax evasion is widespread which deprives the government of revenue. The size of the black market also deprives government coffers of legitimate taxes.

The problem, however, is not lack of money. Natural gas provides an incredibly lucrative source of wealth for the regime, accounting for around 30 per cent of the country's total exports. However, the manner in which this money is spent is the area that deserves scrutiny. As noted earlier, the

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

Dear Readers,

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

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

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

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

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

With regards,

Director  
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

nation's schools are deteriorating every year and hospitals are not receiving adequate funding. Despite these shortcomings in public policy, the military continues to receive enormous funding.

For many Burmese, life has become not merely difficult, but actually impossible. Many people, such as the Mon villagers mentioned above, have been left with no choice but to flee the country. The Burmese ruling regime, despite the continued urging of the international community, has remained defiant and has demonstrated neither the political will nor indeed the acumen necessary to solve these policy problems. The regime actively flouts the UNHCR by failing to provide the stable economic conditions in which people can pursue a sustainable life style. It is clear that the situation in Burma is not one in which people enjoy the "right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of her/himself and of her/his family." Nor are there working conditions extant that comply with the agreement between the SPDC and the ILO such that there is "freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced or compulsory labour; abolition of child labour; and elimination of discrimination." The military continues to use forced labour on its infrastructure projects as well as forced portering and forced guarding of villages.

In terms of human rights violations, the regime has not abided by the UNHCR which has provisions against arbitrary detention, torture, arrest and degrading or inhuman treatment. 1114 (research from AAPP) political prisoners still languish in Burma's prisons and rural populations in Burma's south still suffer deprivation at the hands of the military.

The economic conditions, exacerbated by the behaviour of the military, have forced tens of thousands of people from Mon State alone. It is no longer viable for these people to continue farming the land when their land can be confiscated overnight, their produce stolen and their villages destroyed to make way for government projects. The dire state of the economic prospects for Mon farmers means that they have no choice but to leave their lands and travel to the border regions in search of greater security. There is a direct link between the government's economic policy, military actions and the abuse of the economic, social, cultural and human rights of the Mon population of southern Burma. Consequences of the government's abuses in Mon State are the poor health care and lack of economic opportunities in the border areas for the IDPs forced from their villages.

# News

## Five Mon Civil Organizations Denied New Work Registration

HURFOM, 08.05.2007

Five branches of the Mon Literature and Culture organization, one each from Moulmein and Kyaikmaraw, and three other local branches, were refused permission to renew work registration for operating in Mon Sate, according to a member of Mon Literature and Culture Committee. The Committee was in Moulmein to speak at the multi ethnic literature and culture meeting held on 2 June, 2007.



Closing ceremony of Mon Summer Literacy Training, Ye Township, Mon State

“The work registrations were applied for in the first week of May, however, we were informed of the decision by the Ministry of Culture at the end of the month,” he added.

The representatives at the conference from Karen, and Shan ethnic civil organizations claimed that they were also denied registration.

The meeting was held in secrecy, as the parties were concerned about the possible reaction of the SPDC, explained a member of NMSP (New Mon State Party) liaison office in Moulmein who attended the meeting.

The Mon Literature and Culture Committees were led by Mon university students. The organizations have held Mon summer literature schools and publish Mon

calendars. The original organization, the Mon Literature and Cultural Committee, was founded in 1970 by Mon university students in Rangoon.

This was the first time the Mon literature and culture committee faced a ban on the renewal of work registrations. The local based Mon literature and culture organizations previously ran summer schools in every Mon village during summer in Mon State.

Recently, the SPDC also denied new work registrations to eleven Burmese NGOs in Rangoon. Instead they allowed the USDA, and SPDC formed pro-the military group, to set up new NGO organizations within the country.

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

Printed Matter



Address Correction Required