

The Mon Forum

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Contents

News:

- (1) Forced name change for Mon Cultural Museum by SPDC regime
- (2) Local police ban beer sale in Mon state
- (3) International human rights day held at Mon refugee camp in Thailand
- (4) Burmese junta force farmers to cultivate summer rice
- (5) Forty villagers tortured for their possessions
- (6) Patients required to pay private clinics before receiving hospital treatment
- (7) Monks require hometown police recommendation making passport
- (8) Burmese regime force farmers to feed army

Commentary:

National Reconciliation in 2008 in Burma

Report:

Analysis of SPDC human rights violations in 2007

News

Name of Mon Cultural Museum forcibly changed by SPDC

Moulmein - December 21, 2007

The Mon Cultural Museum, which has been open to the public in Moulmein for decades, has been renamed by the SPDC regime, a source from the capital city of Mon State reported.

The name was changed from the 'Mon Cultural Museum' to the 'Literature and Cultural Museum,' obscuring the museum's Mon focus. The decision was made by the SPDC Cultural Ministry, and the museum is under the control of the cultural minister within the Archaeology National Museum and Literature Directorate.

The Mon Museum, located at number 50 Htawai Bridge Road and Baho Road in Moulmein, was established over thirty years ago. Its aim was to encourage the Mon people to research the past and discover more about a history that is one of the oldest in South-east Asia, dating back centuries.

According to a Buddhist monk from Moulmein, "The SPDC first consulted Mon historians and Mon monks but went on ahead and changed the museum's name. Because of the complete disregard shown to the



Old sign for the Mon Museum in Mawlamyine and the museum's new sign [top right]

National Reconciliation in 2008 in Burma

The Burmese people have been suffering from political oppression, dire economic circumstances and human rights abuses for over four decades. It is time for this to end, and the international community must become involved.

Unfortunately, the international community does not have a coordinated strategy toward Burma's military regime and has no plan to encourage movement toward genuine national reconciliation or political dialogue.

Although the violent crackdowns in September were tragic, they can at least highlight for the international community the brutality of the regime and the Burmese people's demands for peace and reconciliation. The people know the regime pays only 'lip service' to their goals and do not support them. Now the world does as well.

Democratic opposition under the leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) is ready to take part in dialogue with the regime in search of a 'win-win' solution. Although non-Burman ethnic nationalities have many different organizations, they are planning to form a united platform ready to take part in the political process.

The SPDC, on the other hand, continues to oppose the political process. While the regime professed willingness to enter into dialogue after receiving pressure from the UN, it refuses participation in practice. All the while Burmese people hunger for peace and national reconciliation that can be followed with political stability and economic progress.

Mon people, knowledgeable monks now disagree with the government ideas in many ways; the government has consistently shown us they don't care about our rights and participation in Burmese society."

According to a prominent Mon historian, the museum is a Mon museum and should contain the word 'Mon' in the title so its focus is clear to the public. He went to say that, "Although this Museum was not named in the Mon Language, we could understand what it was, but others won't. Now the government has removed the word 'Mon'. This is very confusing and shows how deceitful they can be, but it also proves how untrustworthy they are in handling our affairs."

A university student in the area said, "Mon university students are unhappy and dissatisfied with the government's attempt to destroy and dissolve the Mon culture.

Moreover, the symbol of Mon nationality in Moulmein is being eroded away. At major points in the capital city of Mon State the highly symbolic Mon Brahminy Ducks (Golden Sheldrake) have been substituted with lacquer. Sadly our monks, Mon Historians and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) couldn't prevent our culture from being repressed by the Burmese government; the only Mon symbol left is a big shop near the Than Lwin River (Salween)."

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Local police ban beer sale in Mon state

Tue 29 January 2008 Lawiweng, IMNA

Selling of beer has been prohibited by the local Burmese police in Kalawthut village, Mudon Township, Mon state, said residents. The step was taken after two beer shop owners were jailed last November for selling beer to students.

The police ordered shop owners not to sell beer. No reason was given for the ban on beer. The police just wanted money from the shop owners, said Mai Pai who was detained.

Another shop owner Nai Ka Lar said he was poor so he had to sell beer. Still the police tried to arrest him.

If some one wants to buy beer the shop owners have to bring beer from elsewhere where they have hidden it.

They don't store beer any more in ice boxes as they are worried about police checks, explained Aung Min a consumer in the village.

Continued on page 15

International Human Rights Day held in the Mon Refugee Camp

by HURFOM

On December 10th, more than five hundred Mon and Karen refugees celebrated international human rights day at the Halockhani refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border.

The celebration entertained the people with a festival and opera performance, each designed to explain a portion of the UN Human Rights Charter. "These operas make people more aware of the human rights charter," said a Mon human rights worker at the camp.

The Halockhani camp is home to about a thousand displaced people. "Even those who are not aware of the human rights charter at all still liked to participate in the ceremony," the same worker explained.

It was the first time a celebration had taken place at the camp and it remained a special day for all the people. Children even took part, and games were held during the day.

Mi Kao Htaw, one of the women at the Halockhani camp, was happy to join the celebration and listen to a speech about the human rights charter and human rights issues in general. She said that the operas touched her the most because the performance made her more aware about human rights.

The chairman of the camp and members of the NMSP attended the celebration as well. The chairman read the human rights charter and briefly explained how it is violated every day by the current regime.



Children competing in games on international human rights day.

He advised the people to be strong and become more aware of their human rights so that they can protect themselves.

The chairman also encouraged human rights NGOs to keep educating the people to further increase their awareness.

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Burmese junta force farmers to cultivate summer paddy

Wed 23 January 2008,

The Burmese military regime is forcing farmers to grow rice this summer while withholding necessary water supplies from the government controlled dam, alleged farmers in Mon state.

The regime attempts to increase summer agricultural production throughout the country every year by forcing farmers to plant during the hot season. But, every year, it refuses to supply the necessary inputs such as water, fertilisers and pesticides that make cultivation during the hot season possible.

The regime is pressuring farmers to cultivate summer rice, groundnut and sun flowers despite being aware that little will be harvested, said a farmer.



Rice fields suffering because insufficient water is provided by the Win-pa-non dam

Farmers located near the dam were forced to cultivate summer rice while the rest of the farms were forced to cultivate groundnut

and sun flowers.

Farmers who did not grow groundnut and sun flowers were forced to pay two thousand kyat each. Farmers who owned farms near the dam received extra pressure to

cultivate summer rice. If they refuse, a government decree orders their farms to be seized and forbids them from planting during the fertile rainy season.

Local authorities do not supply water from the dam and farmers can only get water by bribing authorities or using irrigation machines. The machines are expensive to run because Biodiesal prices are high this year, said farmers.

“If we were to profit from cultivating summer rice, groundnut or sun flowers, the government would not need to force us to plant it. We are the people who do the farming and we know better than the government,” said Nai Soe, a farmer in Mudon Township.

The government hopes to cultivate summer rice on about four million acres per year, but it has only been able to cultivate an average of 2.5 million acres. The amount of land cultivated in summer has decreased consisently every year since 2002.

The summer rice crop, which is planted from November to April and harvested from March to June, was planted on 2.7 million acres across the country, according to government statistics.

The Burmese government has been ordering farmers to grow summer rice since 1962 and forcibly implementing the order since 1973. According to the agricultural department, the aim is for the country to to harvest surplus rice that can be exported, increasing incomes across the country.

Burmese people are heavily dependent on agriculture. Eighty percent of the population works



The Win-pa-non dam in Southern Mon State

in the agriculture sector and it provides forty percent of the country’s income.

Many farmers, however, do not accept the regime’s rationale. “The government wants farmers to work all the time whether they profit or not. The regime does not care. They only want farmers to work all the time and not to have free time. If farmers have free time, the government is afraid the people will go against them or protest,” said Nai Soe.

When the regime started implementing the project, they supplied inexpensive farming kits to farmers and farmers had no reason to complain. But after 2002, the government ceased supplying anything and the situation worsened, said an expert on Burmese agriculture.

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Some acronyms in this issue

- SPDC - State Peace and Development Council (*Burmese regime*)
- IB - Infantry Battalion (*Burmese army*)
- LIB - Light Infantry Battalion (*Burmese army*)
- ILO - International Labour Organization
- USDA - Union Solidarity and Development Association
- NMSP - New Mon State Party

Report

Analysis of SPDC Human Rights Violations in 2007

I. Summary of this report

In 2007, forces of the military regime were widely involved in crack downs on demonstrators and people suspected of supporting demonstrators during widescale protests in September. The regime used a variety of forces, including army, riot police and government sponsored groups of civilian thugs like the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and Swan Ar Shin to carry out the crack downs. While the SPDC claimed that as few as ten demonstrators died in the crack downs many sources, including media, human rights defenders and citizens report that about two hundred people were killed. Regime forces were undaunted in their use of violent tactics, even in cities and towns where news and information could leak to the international community. This begs the question of how the regime treated ethnic civilians living in remote areas.

Conflict between Mon rebels and Burmese troops is ongoing in Ye Township. Because of the conflict, villagers have been forced to abandon their homes. The entire village of Broung Ngae, for instance, with a population of five hundred, was forced to relocate.

The movement of local civilians in conflict areas has also been restricted, and villagers lives were threatened if they attempted to attend to their farms or workplaces outside of time-blocks specified by the government. The restrictions were in effect in Ye and Yebyu Township for all of 2007, and the restrictions severley affected the livelihood of the villagers.

In 2007, although the International Labour Organization (ILO) intervened to prohibit the use of forced labour, SPDC authorities and the Burmese army continuously conscripted villagers in various townships in Mon State, especially Yebyu Township in the Tenasserim Division, to work on various projects – road construction, agriculture, guarding gas pipelines and others. Hundreds of villagers were also forced to attend militia training and then patrol their own areas in the stead of Burmese Army troops. Forced military recruitment was especially painful for targeted communities because many people did not want to support or join in military activities.

The SPDC's consistent use of violent tactics to repress the Burmese people, as well as the militarization of the Burmese countryside, indicates that it is not ready to embrace democratic change. Moreover, the regime shows no signs of halting its violent crack downs or preparing for dialogue with democratic opposition groups like the National League for Democracy (NLD) or ethnic nationalities.

II. SPDC human rights violations in 2007

A. Summary of the events surrounding the September protests

In the second and third weeks of August the SPDC regime increased fuel prices by five hundred percent. Much to the regime's surprise, 88 Generation student leaders and their followers responded by taking to the streets. Authorities countered by using the USDA and Swan-ar-shin to disperse the peaceful demonstrators, attacking demonstrators, arresting them and sending

them to unknown detention centers to be kept for unknown amounts of time. The protests, however, did not cease. Buddhist monks in Pakokhu, in upper Burma, continued demonstrations in early September until police, instructed by the regime to crack down on protestors, bound them, openly beat them in public and removed them to detention centers.



Desperate: When terrified protesters fled, they left their sandals behind

The violence against the monks was felt to be an action against Buddhists throughout the country, and young monks demanded authorities make an official apology. The regime refused. In response, monks in various cities including Pakokhu, Mandalay, Rangoon and Pegu agreed to boycott the regime, announcing that they

would not accept alms from members of the army, police or their families. For members of the army and police who, like the rest of Burma, are largely Buddhist, this was a significant threat because it called into question their very status as Buddhists.

Beginning in the second week of September, monks from various cities of upper Burma, including Rangoon, Pegu and Moulmein took part in peaceful protests, praying for compassion from the regime and better socio-economic circumstances for the people. The reaction of the authorities was swift, and showed no tolerance for dissent. If the monks continued their protests, they government announced, they would forfeit their status as Buddhist monks and face intense repression.

The protests continued. By September 24th, their numbers swelled and began to include civilians as well as monks. On the streets of Rangoon, over one hundred thousand people took part in non-violent protests, marching and praying for peace. Similarly large number of protestors took part in demonstrations in other cities in Burma.

The protests continued to grow for the next two days, and the SPDC Minister for Religious Affairs officially declared that protestors would face 'suppression' if the demonstrations did not cease. Serious crack downs began on September 26th. Large numbers of troops moved into the cities and took up stations on important streets and intersections as well as at pagodas and monasteries, planning to prevent protests. They also barred monks from praying in Sule and Shwedagon pagodas in Rangoon. On the night of September 27th, SPDC security force raided the well known Rangoon monasteries of Ngwe Kya Yan, Chauk Htet Kyi, Moe Kaung Kin, Min Kin and Thein Pyu because authorities believed them to be the primary housing for monks taking part in the protests. Those arrested were beaten, before being removed to detention centers for interrogation. During the day, regime security forces and groups of government sponsored civilian thugs began beating protestors and shooting into the unarmed crowds. The bloodshed would continue until the protests ended on September 29th.

B. Human rights violations committed by the SPDC during the September protests

Killing:

Substantial photographic, video and spoken evidence indicates that regime forces fired into groups of peaceful demonstrators in Rangoon, killing both participants and those simply watching.

2007)

Perhaps the most widely-known victim was a Japanese photographer, Kenji Nagai, who was shot in close range by a Burmese soldier. While many more people were killed, the exact number is difficult to calculate because the regime strictly controls the flow of information within Burma. Officially, the regime contends that ten people were killed and another eleven were injured. Residents of Rangoon, however, estimate that the number of victims is much higher. Even the international media estimates that more than two hundred people were shot or beaten to death. Buddhist monks were among the victims, some of whose corpses were seen floating in Rangoon's Lake Ngamoeyeik.



Took part in a peaceful demonstration through Rangoon on September

Arbitrary Arrest, Detention and Imprisonment:

According to a source inside in Rangoon, regime forces and supporters began arresting people after demonstrations against high fuel prices began in August. Many student leaders in Rangoon were arrested, both during demonstrations and at their homes. From August until the end of September, 344 students, monks and other activists were arrested and put into detention centers at Kyaik Ka San Field and the Government Technical Institute in Inn-sein Township.

The same source calculates that over two thousand people were then arrested during the wide-scale protests in late September. Those arrested were not limited to participants in the protests, and street vendors, people walking on the streets, parents escorting children home from school, high school students and others were detained by the regime as well.

Most detainees did not receive trials and do not know how long they will be imprisoned. Families have no way of knowing the fate of their loved ones, some even resorting to pleas on foreign radio programs like BBC and RFA. Fortunately, some detainees have been released. But the majority remain in prison. It is important to note that the number of protestors to have been released is far smaller than that estimated by the international community because the regime has been releasing common criminals and claiming they are political prisoners.

Torture and Mistreatment: 1

Monks and demonstrators were often beaten as they were arrested. Once imprisoned, detainees were treated inhumanely, deprived of food and sleep as well as subjected to further beatings and tortured during interrogation. Torture and inhumane treatment of this sort is frequently used by the regime, and the SPDC explicitly instructs its forces to use 'torturing methods' when gathering information.

C. Conscription and forced labour

During late 2006 and 2007, the conscription and forced labour by local authorities and the Burmese army continued in southern Mon State. HURFOM is based on the Thailand-Burma border, and its human rights workers frequently meet with fleeing victims of forced labour.

HURFOM interviews indicate that forced labor practices in Mon State are chiefly comprised of the following:

- Bridge construction on highways
- Providing security for villages, specific areas and gas pipelines
- Supplying firewood to Army brick kilns
- Cultivation of castor-oil plants
- Recruitment into militia forces

Forced labor in bridge and highway construction:

The Burmese army occupies the entirety of southern Ye Township, and has improved roads in the area so that they better meet the military's logistical demands. Civilian passenger trucks had encountered few problem using the roads prior to the military-driven improvements, but the roads and bridgers were insufficient to handle the weight of military vehicles. From the end of January 2007 until April, residents of Khaw-za Sub Township were forced to work as unpaid laborers constructing bridges on the Ye-Tavoy highway. SPDC IB No. 31, based near Khaw-za Sub Town, also forced villagers in Ye Township to work on bridge construction.



The Civilian forced to Labor in Bridge Development Project

With the cooperation of Ye administrative authorities, the commander of the local IB coordinated two groups of fifteen unpaid village labourers. The troops also demanded the villagers use cement in the bridge construction, but provided insufficient cement for the projects, forcing village headmen to collect money from the villagers to so that additional supplies could be purchased.

Providing security for roads and bridges:

From the first week of June 2006 until the end of 2007, Mon and Karen inhabitants of every



A Government's check point on Moulmein-Ye Highway

village between the Alesakan and Mayan-chaung villages in Northern Yebyu Township were ordered to provide security along the Ye-Tavoy road by LIB No. 409 Lt. Col. Aung Naing Myint. Village headmen from Alesakan, Kyauk-ka-din, Kywe-talin, Yapu and Mayan-chaung villages were ordered to send eight villagers per day to guard the highway after armed clashes between Mon rebels and Burmese troops at the end of April left authorities concerned about possible attacks on bridges.

Any gaurds who failed to protect bridges, due to deliberate planning or inadvertant negligence, were subjected to severe beatings.

Providing security for gas pipelines:

From August 2006 until April 2007, IB No. 62 near Kwan-hlar village in Mudon Township forced local inhabitants, including women and young children, to patrol the Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline. Villagers from Kwan-hlar, Yaung-daung, Kalort-tort, Hnee-pa-daw, and other villages were required to take full responsibility for the pipeline's safety. Failure to safegaurd the pipeline ensured violent reprisals. Effectively protecting the pipelines necessitated standing gaurd 24-hours a day, a task virtually impossible for men who devote all their time to rice cultivation during the rainy season. The burden then fell on women and children, who were forced to build posts every five-hundred meters and gaurd the pipeline at night, in spite of the dangers.

Conscription into militia forces:

From November 2006 until January 2007 the Burmese army ordered every village headman in Mon State to select thirty-five villagers for militia training, forcing many to abandon their farms and lose their crops. Civilians in Southern Ye Township were forced to participate in the training, or bribe IB No.31 four hundred thousand Kyat (\$304 USD). Most people are too poor to afford the bribe and were forced to undergo training in counter-insurgency and anti-demonstration tactics, as well as how to quell internal uprisings or defend against foreign invasion. The men were then subject to military orders and forced to patrol their own villages areas and fight rebel groups should they approach.

D. Movement Restrictions against Civilians and Buddhist Monks

Movement restrictions prior to the September protests:

In Southern Ye and Yebyu Townships, the Burmese army restricted the movement of local villagers, creating difficulties for farmers whose land lies far from home. Many were unable to both finish their work and return home in the time allotted by the military, causing farmers to lose their crops. After an entire village was burned and its villagers tortured until they relocated, a curfew was put in place on Han-gan and Kaloh villages in Ye Township, as well as the entire Khaw-zar sub Township.

The curfew was installed by Military Operation Management Command No.19, and anyone outside their homes after 9pm was forbidden from using electric lights and had to instead rely upon candles. The order applies even in times of emergency, when activities like rushing a patient to the hospital demand clear lighting. Villagers who violate the curfew can be dealt with at the discretion of the local Burmese Army battalion, and soldiers have standing permission to shoot on sight.

Command No. 19 also requires villagers to inform the battalion should they have new information about Mon insurgents. If they do not report information, or if they have none but are suspected of lying, they will be punished, beaten and can be expelled from their township. After troops under the command of No.19 Military Operation Management Command (MOMC) launched an offensive against Mon insurgents in Southern Ye township, over three hundred villagers, comprising one hundred households, were forcibly relocated. These villagers had to abandon their crops, and currently live without homes or shelter.

Movement restrictions following the September protests:

Fearing that the momentum of pro-democracy demonstrators in September would spread, people moving around within Burma were subject to exhaustive searches and severe travel restrictions. SPDC authorities in Mon state increased the number of police forces and soldiers deployed at check-points controlling entrances to towns and cities in Mon State. Riot police, militia and regular police forces were also posted in every railway and bus station, as well as harbours and ferry sites. Augmenting official forces, the USDA and Swan Ar Shin were instructed to closely monitor Buddhist monks and students from Moulmein University.



Protester in front of a Mon monastery in Rangoon

On September 22nd, travelers were rigorously checked by SPDC military forces, riot police, regular police and militia at the Ya-khaing-gone check-point, outside Moulmein. According to one HURFOM reporter, a female resident from Mudon Township described soldiers checking bags, purses and even wallets at the town's gate. Travelers were also required to produce identity cards at checkpoints throughout the country. Failure to do so resulted in immediate revocation of travel permission.

According to one person who has a close relationship with the USDA, the USDA and their people's forces were ordered to hold weekly meetings at village-level offices so they could maintain high-alert status. Militia leaders taught attendees at the weekly meetings how to disperse groups of people using a variety of violent tactics, including beating people with bamboo sticks. USDA and other groups were then ordered to stop all protests should they occur, and HURFOM field reporters in Mudon Township report that villagers are still being closely monitored.

The authorities also placed special emphasis on monitoring monks in Moulmein city, including at the Sein-mama, Thin-baw-lae, and Thadana 2500 Monastery. USDA members and riot police patrolled monasteries on motorbikes, as well as monitored each quarter in which the monasteries reside. The offices of the National League for Democracy (NLD) were also under obvious watch, as were the homes and offices of other political parties and ceasefire groups. Simply visiting Rangoon, according to one political activist living in Moulmein, meant remaining family members were subject to questioning by regime forces.

A member of the Mon Liaison Office in Moulmein, who contacted HURFOM by phone, reported that members of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) were closely monitored after the group showed support for the September protests:

After the NMSP declared their support for the monks and protesters in the strike we are feeling under great pressure. They often come around our offices, especially the Mon Liaison Office and the Mon Commercial Office. One army truck and a motorbike purposely came and stopped in front of the office and watched our activities. I think these people are probably local USDA members. This took place a day or two before the protesting happened in Moulmein. In our office, we had to warn our members to contact each other wherever they went. We feel restricted staying in Moulmein.

The SPDC also strictly controlled the flow of goods and information in Southern Mon State. This caused commodity prices to rise, as traders could not easily send or receive goods. Vegetable traders said that moving local products from one place to another had been stopped entirely. A

Yin-Dain villager who teaches at the Mon National School reported that restrictions were related to the protests. In late September a HURFOM field reporter outlined how LIB No.31, under MOMC 19 was instructed to take special action while the momentum of the protests was high. According to one villager, who was close to LIB No. 587 in Ayu-taung village in Ye Township, the Battalion commander called all available regime forces to an emergency meeting everyday during the second half of September.

E. Torture and inhumane treatment

The SPDC used threats and torture in efforts to cut ties between villagers and Mon resistance groups. In July, during armed conflict between the Burmese army and a Mon rebel group near Han-gan village, HURFOM field reporters reported that regime forces abducted and tortured several villagers accused of having ties to the rebel group. After an armed clash between the army and the rebel group, soldiers from LIB No. 591 arrested suspected rebel-supporters who lived between Koe-mile and Baround villages, Ye township. According to eye witnesses from Koe-mile village, the soldiers bound each villager and brought them the battalion's temporary base at Han-gan village. Three local famers, Nai G—— (50 years), Nai K—— G—— (35 years) and Mehm M—— O—— (24 years) (names redacted for safety), were tortured by soldiers during inquiry about a friend who was also member of a Mon resistance group.

In another incident, Burmese troops coerced two villagers into revealing the locations of Mon rebel personnel. Captain Hla Moe of LIB No. 591 asked for information from Nai A-Kyaw (40 years) and Nai Win Oo (about 35 years). When the men refused to cooperate, they were beaten and water was forced down their throats until they lead the troops through the jungle to the rubber plantation where the rebels were based.

HURFOM's field reporter also documented a case of torture committed by a Sergeant from LIB No. 586 during August 21st and August 24th. The 28 year old victim, Maung San Oo (name changed for safety) from Toe-thet-ywar-thit village, was arrested by Sergeant Thet Zaw Oo and his troops at the edge of Koe-Mine Village, where he was attending the funeral of a relative.

“He was beaten on his back and legs with a bamboo pole. His face is covered with black welts from the torture he received. They accused him of being a reporter for a Mon rebel group. They interrogated him and when they were dissatisfied with his answers, they beat him. We can hear him crying in pain, even from far away,” said a witness from Toe-Thet-Ywa-Thit who did not give her name for fear of similar reprisals.

Mg San Oo, who served for two years as a corporal in the Mon National Libration Army before leaving to care for his parents, is currently seeing a former New Mon State Party medic because he cannot afford hospital fees. He also has had his farmland confiscated and has been supporting his family by clearing other people's gardens and plantations.

In some cases, regime forces have also targeted the economic well-being of villagers. On August 23, San Win Aung, 23 years old, and his sister, Ma Myint, 26 years old, both of Yin-dein villagers, were on their way to sell vegetables when they were beaten by Sergeant Myint Zaw and his soldiers. After arguing over prices, the soldiers, from LIB No. 586, slapped May Myint and asked her if she wanted to die, before flipping over their trays and crushing the vegetables.

According to villagers in the area, San Win Aung and May Myint are not the only people to face such treatment and the past year has seen a rash of similar economically motivated violence. This is thought to be due to a shortage of army provisions and a subsequent military order instructing soldiers to feed themselves however and wherever they can.

III. Consequences of SPDC human rights violations in 2007

A. Growth of civil society

The inadequate social programs, failed economic policies and political repression of the SPDC regime has pushed the Burmese people to demand peace, as well as political and economic reform.

Since the release of the 88 Generation Student Group in January 2007, the growth of civil society and movements toward democracy have become widespread in urban areas and Burman dominated communities. Many political activists and students have begun trying to help people suffering from difficult economic circumstances. In the most high-profile example, well-known actor Kyaw Thu formed a social organization aimed at providing traditional Buddhist funerals for those who cannot afford them.



Su Su Nway marching to court, flanked by supporters.

Dire economic circumstances have contributed heavily to high rates of HIV/AIDS infection in Burma. Many activists and Buddhist monks have formed organization helping victims in urban areas, and are heavily involved in HIV/AIDS education for the people. Unfortunately, monks involved in projects helping HIV/AIDS victims were specially targeted during the September crack downs.

Intense poverty in Burma also results in widespread child labour. Many children have to abandon their education at the primary level and serve as day-labourers and the number of parentless children has grown in urban areas. In response, many political activists, former students and Buddhist monks have set up education programs, especially monastic education, as well as children's homes and other orphan care programs.

In addition to combating child labour practices, civil society groups have worked to protect the rights of adult forced labourers. In 2005, after the SPDC violated an agreement with the ILO promising to end forced labour, well-known labour rights activist Su Su Nway brought the issue to court. She was imprisoned soon after. Upon her release in 2006 she began leading protests against abusive labour practices, only to be imprisoned again.

Activists have also formed groups advocating freedom of expression, assistance for political prisoners and student rights. NLD youth activists and 88 Generation former students have worked to expose information about forced labour, political prisoners and restrictions on freedom of expression, especially for the media. Student leaders have also set up networking projects to help families struggling to cope economically while their loved ones are political prisoners.

These are positive signs that civil society is growing, in Rangoon and other large cities and in spite of significant obstacles. The SPDC regime, however, does not take such a positive view and fears that they will grow into a broad political movement.

B. Weakening of ceasefire groups like the NMSP

Many ethnic organizations, including the NMSP, declared their support for the September protests and asked the regime to respond in a peaceful manner. The regime, however, ignored the pleas of ethnic political parties and ceasefire groups. After September, when SPDC authorities arranged rallies in opposition to the September protests, regime authorities pressured ethnic ceasefire groups to release statements against the demonstrators and speak at pro-government rallies. NMSP leaders refused.

As the SPDC was pressuring ceasefire groups to support the regime's policies, the regime's forces continued to commit human rights violations against ethnic nationalities. While the NMSP has been complying with a ceasefire for over twelve years, the SPDC has demonstrated that it does not respect the ethnic peoples of Burma or human rights in general.

The lands and properties of Mon people have been routinely confiscated in Thanbyuzayat, Ye and Yebyu Township areas. Although the NMSP has requested compensation for the losses, the authorities have refused. While the Southeast Command claims that it allowed Mon farmers whose lands were confiscated in 2002 to harvest their crops, in practice farmers faced threats when they attempted to work on their farms or plantations.

People in Mon areas have also faced conscription or forced labour and when the NMSP has attempted to address the issue, the regime has told party leaders not to interfere in administrative affairs outside the ceasefire area. The NMSP's failure to win compensation for displaced farmers or protect against conscription has led to dissatisfaction with party leaders, especially in Ye and Yebyu Township areas. This is a deliberate strategy to weaken the NMSP and sow dissension among the people.

Since NMSP leaders agreed to a ceasefire with the SPDC, it has been unable to improve the human rights of Mon people. Mon people in various parts of Mon state have said the ceasefire is not helping them as NMSP leaders promised soon after it began in 1995 and 1996. As a result, Mon people have begun to distance themselves from the NMSP and attempt to solve problems on their own.

NMSP leaders feel that human rights problems and political problems are related; if political problems are not solved it will be impossible to protect human rights. With this in mind, the NMSP has repeatedly demanded the SPDC arrange for a tripartite political dialogue between ethnic groups, the NLD and the SPDC. The hope was, and is, that such a political dialogue could achieve political reform, put an end to violent conflict and guarantee the autonomous rights of ethnic people. That hope remains unfulfilled.

IV. Conclusion

Burma is in political deadlock. Although the UN Special Mission led by Mr. Gambari following the September protests encouraged political talks between the SPDC and NLD, SPDC leaders have not taken dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD leaders seriously. SPDC leaders also continue to refuse to guarantee the rights of ethnic nationalities within Burma.

It is important to encourage that power be genuinely located within the people of Burma. Human rights should be controlled and defended at the community level. The growth of civil society in urban and ethnic communities needs to be encouraged and actively involved in social and economic assistance for the people. Civil communities can strengthen the power of the people and be involved in evaluation of strategies of political reform.

Change in Burma will not come from relying on the political dialogue of elites. Strong democracy must be built on the foundation of strong civil society.

News

Forty villagers tortured for their possessions

January 3, 2008

About forty villagers in Mon State were violently assaulted by Burmese troops from Battalion No - 299. The villagers were trying recover wood left in houses they had to abandon when the Burmese military forced them to relocate their village.

The villagers, including nineteen women, were from Bayoun-ngae village, in Khaw-zar Sub Township, Mon State.

The villagers were forced to relocate six months ago by Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No.583 following fighting between Burmese soldiers and Mon rebels outside the village. After three Burmese soldiers were killed and three more injured in the fighting, troops accused the villagers of supporting the rebels and passing information to media organizations. They also

ordered vilagers to provide information about the movement of rebel groups.

The soldiers then arrested and tortured fifty villagers, as well as burnt two houses and dismantled

many pots and shelves in the temple before forcing some to relocate.

According to a villager in Ye township, the latest villagers to be assaulted were attempting to bring back wood from the homes they had left behind after the soldiers forced them to move and took valuable goods from their houses. The source was unsure of how many soldiers beat the villagers.

The village had about one hundred households and about thirty houses built with wood. The remaining houses were built with bamboo.

An IMNA source said, "They couldn't bring the valuables with them on account of orders by the Burmese troops. Some were resettled in Han-gan village about one mile from their village and some are living in plantations."

Detained villagers had to pay the soldiers over 0.2 million Kyat for their release.

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Patients required to pay private clinics before receiving hospital treatment

Moulmein, HURFOM

Patients without referrals from doctors at private clinics are denied treatment at the public hospital in Mawlamyine.

Mi Soe, a woman from Thanbyzayaut township, sent her son to a public hospital in Mawlamyine. When she arrived, nurses told her that if she did not have a signed patient registration from doctors her son would not be treated or allowed to stay.

Mi Soe and her son were then sent to the Yadanar Mon private clinic so that they could get a doctor's signature. The doctor gave them his signature as soon as her son arrived at the clinic because he knew he could not handle the boy's illness, Mi Soe said. "He was worried my son would die at his clinic. So he just signed the registration," she added. Mi Soe's son died in a public hospital soon after.

Most private clinics in Mawlamyine do not want patients who seem likely to die because they worry their reputations will be sullied. The reputation of private clinics is very important, because each

prospective patient who chooses a different clinic represents lost profits. Dangerously ill patients, the very people who most need the advanced care offered by private clinics, are sent to public hospitals where care is of poorer quality.

Ironically, people who want to attend the public hospital must first attend private clinics, even if it is likely that they will be immediately sent to a public hospital. The thirty rooms of Yadanar Mon clinic, for instance, are nearly full of patients, many of whom are waiting to go to the public hospital.

Forcing people to attend private clinics before they can attend the public hospital creates serious difficulties for those who cannot afford to pay clinic fees. The result is that people who cannot afford to pay are denied medical care. From the perspective of the doctors, who frequently work at both the clinics and at the hospitals, "if there is no money, there is no illness. This is how doctors make their money," said a health worker in Mudon.

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Information on HURFOM and Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

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

- monitoring the human rights situation in Mon territory and other areas in Southern Burma
- protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM produces the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletter. If publication is delayed it is because we are waiting to confirm information, and it comes with our heartfelt apologies.

We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or if you know someone who you think would like to receive the newsletter. Please email or mail a name and address to:

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

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

News

Monks require hometown police recommendation making passport

HURFOM

Monks needing foreign passports a required to get a local police 'character' recommendation, said an abot in Rangoon.

This is a restriction on the monks, said the aboot. According to him, the order was given last month from Rangoon's Embassy.

Before the September protests, monks weren't required to have passport recommendations. In the case of the recommendation, the junta wants to keep a closer eye on monks activities, said a political analyst.

Previously, monks were only required to state their monastery name in order to get a passport. Today, however, they have to explain their background and prove they are not involved in politics.

Recently passport applications were rejected for lacking a recommendation, frustrating monks, such as Non Dai, who must go back to his hometown Mudon in Mon State, to get a character recommendation.

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News from page 2

According to Aung Min, he can't drink cold beer in the village. So, many youth have to go to other villages to drink chilled beer, he added.

Mi Pai and Nai Tun were detained for two weeks and they were threatened with prison terms for selling beer to students.

Mi Pai said that she did not sell beer to students. She sold beer to adults. She denied the police accusation and she said that the police just wanted to take money.

This was the first time in Kalawthut village that two people were arrested by the police for selling beer.

Two people were forced to bribe the township police 400,000 kyat because they were threatened with prison terms.. The two opened small shops at home and sold some other goods.

Many shop owners in the village sell Thai canned beer. The owners are afraid of the police coming and checking their shops.

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News

Burmese regime force farmers to feed army

Fri, 11 Jan 2008

The Burmese Army is forcing farmers in Mon state to give newly harvested rice to soldiers. The Army is also pressuring farmers to grow groundnut this summer, farmers said.

The farmers, who have been harvesting since the end of December, are being stopped as they take the unhusked rice, known as paddy, from farms to their homes.

In Mudon Township, soldiers have installed checkpoints on the main road so that they can confirm whether every farmer has given paddy. If the farmers refuse, they are not allowed to pass the checkpoints. Only when they agree to give the soldiers a share of their paddy can they return home, said Nai Zan, a farmer in the area.

Most farmers have invested and worked for over four months to make this winter's harvest, and comply with the army's demands because they want to carry the rest home.

"The junta does not invest anything for the farmers and they force farmers to feed their soldiers. They do not help farmers."

The soldiers take one basket or 1500 kyat for each acre and 2000 kyat from farmers who are not willing to grow groundnut this summer.

"I am not going to grow groundnut and have already paid 2000 kyat. Most people will not grow it. It will not benefit farmers," Nai Zan added.

This year, farmers who planted twenty acres harvested a maximum nine hundred baskets of paddy, and a minimum of about four hundred and fifty. The current price for a hundred baskets of paddy is 470,000 kyat.

Burmese farmers struggle to grow paddy in the rainy season every year, yet are still forced by the regime to hand over a portion of their harvest to the army. Farmers also do not want to plant in summer for the government project, as there is not rain or enough water and they will not benefit from the endeavor. (source by IMNA)



Farmers were forced to grow in summer crops

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