

# The Mon Forum

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## Some Acronyms in This Issue

MRP- Monland Restoration Party  
HRP- Hongsawatoi Restoration Party  
NMSP- New Mon State Party  
MAS- Agriculture and Irrigation Service  
LIB- Light Infantry Battalion  
MND- Mon National Day  
CCCMND- Central Celebrating Committee of the Mon National Day

## News

### Regime continues its assault on the Mon Cultural Museum in Moulmein

Lawi Weng, Wed 27 Feb 2008

The Burmese regime has modified statutes in front of the Mon Cultural Museum in Moulmein to hide their traditional Mon garb. The statues were originally painted to look as if they were wearing red and white Mon national dress but are now painted completely white.

The move comes after the regime changed the name from the "Mon Cultural Museum," to the "Literature and Cultural Museum of the Burmese Cultural Ministry." The museum exhibits Mon artifacts including traditional Mon dress, palm-leaf scripts, musical instruments and furniture.

Access to important artifacts has also been restricted by the regime. Mon manuscripts written on palm-leaves are stored on the first floor, which has now been closed to the public. The texts are vital to people researching Mon history and literature, and Mon historians worry they will be destroyed by the regime, said a monk in Moulmein.

The monk, who visited the museum to view one of the most famous texts, "A Brief Account of Mon Kings," written by a well-known



Statues modified to obscure traditional Mon dress in front of the former Mon Cultural Museum in Moulmein

## International organizations can, and should, help protect the people of Mon state

SPDC authorities and army troops in Southern Mon state and various parts of the Tenasserim Division have openly committed various types of human rights violations since the movement of international organizations began being restricted in conflict areas.

In the past, organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross and some UN Agencies were able to protect civilians in Southern Township. The ICRC encouraged the Southeast Military Command in Moulmein, the capital of Mon state to cease some types of human rights violations such as conscription, forced labour, extortion, arbitrary arrests, land confiscation and killing.

We believe that the presence of international organizations can reduce human rights violations in rural conflict areas. Unfortunately, these organizations have not been present for some time. And the frequency of human rights violations is dramatically increasing.

UN Agencies, International NGOs, faith based organizations based in Rangoon and any other organizations that have lines of communication with the SPDC should seriously attempt to build a presence in southern part of Burma. For now, the human rights violations will continue.

monk in 1745, could not find it in its usual place. “At first I couldn’t find it and thought it was stolen,” he said. “Then I asked a museum official and he said it had been moved to the first floor.”

Historians and local residents do not feel that the recent changes at the museum are coincidental or benign actions by the regime. Many feel that the actions are part of an ongoing attempt by the regime to erase Mon history and culture, a goal the regime has been striving towards for decades.

According to Mon political analysts, the regime fears a strong and unified Mon culture will encourage the group to seek independence, as the group did in 1978. Mon language studies have been banned in regime schools, Mon libraries forcibly closed and communities targeted for repression.

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## Burmese soldiers burn plantations to punish suspected rebel supporters

**Mi Kyae Goe, IMNA, Tue 26 Feb 2008**

On February 22nd Burmese Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 31 burned twenty plantations in Ye township, Southern Mon state. The fire was



**Google Earth image of a Burmese army base in Khaw Zar sub-township, Southern Ye Township, Mon state**

started after soldiers could not capture Mon rebels thought to be in the area.

The rebels are members of the Monland Restoration Party (MRP), formerly the Hongsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP), which separated itself from the New Mon State Party

(NMSP) after the NMSP signed a ceasefire with the regime in 1995.

The soldiers set fire to the plantation using only a lighter, but the plantations were so dry the fire spread quickly, said Nai Chan Done, the MRP operations officer. Most of the plantations produced lemons, nipa palm, areca palm, pepper, pomelo, and lime.

For as long as the MRP has been fighting the regime, the regime has been targeting villages suspected of supporting the rebels in an attempt to cut the group off from its support networks. "Not only did they burn down the villagers' plantations, but they also beat up some villagers," Nai Chan Done added.

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## Burmese Army forces villagers to relocate

**Mi Kyae Goe, 20 Feb 2008**

The Burmese regime is forcing villagers in Mon state to relocate to land being sold by the regime at high prices.

Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 31, which operates in Kaw-zar sub-township in Southern Mon state, has ordered residents of the Kyone-kanya village to move into an area near to a new road, claiming it will improve the development of the village.

"The army wants people to dismantle their houses and rebuild them close to the road," said a Kyone-kanya villager who was forced to relocate. His sister was also forced to relocate. "Villagers don't want to leave their neighborhood because they love their homes. But they have to move because they fear the army," he added.

The Burmese Army is selling the plots of land for 150,000 Kyat (126 US \$) to villagers who must dismantle their existing homes and 400,000 Kyat (336 US \$) for others.

Lieutenant Colonel Ye Lwin Oo and Major Tun Tun Naing, of LIB No. 31, are responsible for the relocation order, a source in Burma said.

The same battalion ordered the relocation of over a hundred Bayoun-nage village households and destroyed others July 2007.



**Mon women wearing traditional dress at a Mon National Day celebration near the Thai-Burma border**

## Mon National Day is celebrated in Burma

**Loa Htaw, IMNA, Feb 22, 2008**

Ten birds were released in Mudon Township, Mon state, on the 61st annual Mon National Day (MND). The birds were a symbol of peace for everyone in the world, said Mon people who attended the celebration.

"We want every life in the world to have peace," said Dr. Soe Lin, the chairman of Central Celebrating Committee of the Mon National Day (CCCMND), which was responsible for releasing the birds. Dr. Soe Lin is also secretary of the Mon National Democratic Front and a former political prisoner. He added that the birds represented an especially important symbol of peace for people in Burma right now, pointing to recent assassinations of opposition leaders in Pakistan and the Karen National Union in Karen state, Burma. "We don't want others in Burma to see a similar fate," he said.

The birds were released in Mudon Township, and while 2008 marked the 61st MND, it also marked the first time Mudon Township acted as a central celebration place. About twenty community leaders from each township also attended the central MND celebration.

"Mon people have to struggle for themselves to exercise their right to self-determination," said Dr. Soe Lin at the celebration. "On this 61st anniversary Mon National Day our people have experienced both happiness and dissatisfaction and continue to face difficulties in our future," he said. "We have to pass through the difficulties with the unity and strength of a people together, not as individuals alone," he added.

**Continued on page 10**

## Report

# A two crops policy that barely yields one: the failed Win-pha-non Dam project

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## Introduction

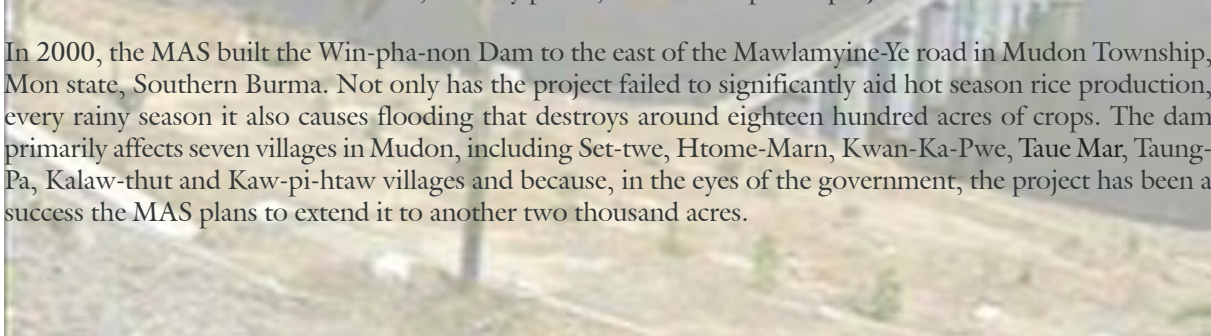
**H**eavy-handed, but poorly designed and managed, government policy has kept Burma's economy in steady decline for decades. This report details one such failed policy, an irrigation project designed to enable farmers to grow crops in the dry season. Unfortunately, the project has not only failed to achieve its goal but has actually reduced the amount of arable land in the area. The failure of the project has, in turn, highlighted the existence, and consequences, of corruption within the military regime. Instead of reporting the failure of the project, local officials file reports of a successful project, making reform and future success impossible.

## Background

Fifty years ago, Burma was one of the richest countries in South East Asia. After independence in 1948, and a coup in 1962, Burma quickly lost that status. Following the coup Ne Win, the country's new leader, ordered farmers to plant rice crops during two seasons instead of one. The policy was an attempt to regain the country's position as the world's largest rice exporter, and in 1973 it was implemented and backed with heavy penalties. The two crops policy, like Ne Win's economic policies in general, was not a success and the subsequent decades did not bring prosperity. The current regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has not had a better effect on the economy. It absorbs much of the country's income, spending 40% of GDP on the military and less than a dollar per person on health and education combined. The subsequent erosion of human capital, combined with economic mismanagement that frightens away foreign investment, has left Burma one of the poorest countries in South East Asia.

While economic growth in Burma may be stagnant, its population is steadily increasing. According to regime figures, the annual growth rate is 2.02 percent and with a current population of 54 million people Burma will be home to an estimated sixty million people by 2010. Even for a government that many feel cares little for its people, this presents an obvious problem: how to feed such a large population? To solve a rice crisis that some feel may be impending, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation Service (MAS) initiated a nation-wide initiative to increase rice production. The policy is reminiscent of Ne Win's early post-coup plans, and while much of the land in Burma can only produce one crop a year, in the fertile rainy season, the MAS hoped to increase production through development projects designed to enable a second crop to be planted during the hot season. While the MAS hoped the policy would result in the cultivation of about four million acres of summer rice, the reality is about half that and the number has been steadily decreasing since 2002. The obvious conclusion is that, in many places, MAS development projects have been an utter failure.

In 2000, the MAS built the Win-pha-non Dam to the east of the Mawlamyine-Ye road in Mudon Township, Mon state, Southern Burma. Not only has the project failed to significantly aid hot season rice production, every rainy season it also causes flooding that destroys around eighteen hundred acres of crops. The dam primarily affects seven villages in Mudon, including Set-twe, Htome-Marn, Kwan-Ka-Pwe, Taue Mar, Taung-Pa, Kalaw-thut and Kaw-pi-htaw villages and because, in the eyes of the government, the project has been a success the MAS plans to extend it to another two thousand acres.



## The dry season failures of the Win-pha-non dam

MAS officials designed and implemented the Win-pha-non project without input from local farmers and, unsurprisingly, it has proven insufficient to enable hot season farming. The dam was built with two primary flaws – it is too small to hold sufficient water for large-scale hot season farming, and it is poorly located for water distribution. The new dam canal runs through a low point in the topography of the area, with fields gently rising in elevation on either side, and water from the dam only reaches the lower fields. The rest are left high and dry.



**An irrigation channel in Taung Tawe Mar village, Mudon township, Mon state**

In spite of the fact that the dam does not provide farmers with the water they need, the regime has ordered rice to be grown during the dry summer season. Were Burma a more developed nation, this would not present a problem; irrigation pumps could make short work of the elevation change. But most Burmese farmers do not have the capital to invest in the equipment, and even if they could afford the initial costs high fuel prices would make operating the pumps prohibitive. This is especially true after the regime doubled fuel prices in August. And, once the lands have become dried by the hot season, irrigation becomes incredibly difficult, as the water just runs off the land and is not absorbed by the soil. Farmers in such a situation are allowed to grow flowers and groundnut instead of rice, but this offers little respite as the soil in the area is not suitable for such crops.

The government order instructing farmers to grow summer crops comes backed by stiff repercussions; failure to heed the order risks heavy fines and land seizure. “They called us into meetings more than ten times after the winter harvest and said that we had to grow rice again in the summer,” recounted a farmer in Mudon. “We did not dare to refuse them; we could only nod our heads.” “If we profited from planting crops in the summer, we would plant crops in the summer,” added Nai Soe, another farmer in the area. “We are the people who do the farming and we know better than the government. They do not need to tell us what to do.”

The government threats are not idle, and in February 2008 the Burmese military confiscated two hundred acres of rice paddies, claiming it did so because the farmers had not planted hot season crops. According to Aung Min, a farmer in Thum Mar village, the army simply put up a sign announcing that it now controlled his land. Over a hundred other farmers suffered the same fate, and the total value of the seized land is estimated to be three million Thai baht.

While farms in Mudon have been seized before, the army only did so during harvest time and the land was always been returned after the army had taken the crops. This stands in marked contrast to nearby Ye Township, where thousands of acres of rubber plantations have been seized and held by the army. After the recent spate of land confiscations, farmers in Mudon worry that they will begin suffering like people in Ye. Mudon farmers seem to have little hope that their land will be returned; a Mon human rights worker in the area reports that farmers are selling cattle and carts, which they have no use for without land to work on.

## Corruption with the MAS

The Win-pha-non Dam’s failure to increase rice production in Mudon township is not simply born of honest mistakes. While genuine ineptitude certainly plays a significant role, corruption within the MAS cannot be



**Farmers digging an irrigation channel in an attempt to bring water to summer crops in Taung Taue Mar village, Mudon township, Mon Stae**

ignored. If farmers do not want to plant summer crops, they can pay MAS officers two thousand kyat for the privilege.

In addition to directly undermining the goals of the Win-pha-non dam by accepting bribes, dam officers annually sabotage any hopes that the failings of the project will be remedied. Part of the dam officers' responsibilities include making reports on the results of the project. Like anyone in the area, the officials know the

project is a failure in both the rainy and hot seasons. But rather than make an honest report of Mudon's rice yields, the dam officers pad the numbers. They even go so far as to plant crops in a summer rice field between Kalawthut and Taung Pa villages, which they photograph to use as proof of the project's success. Ironically, even the people charged with administering the project cannot successfully grow a summer rice crop; the dam officer's plants grow big enough to flower, but they are not strong enough to produce rice.

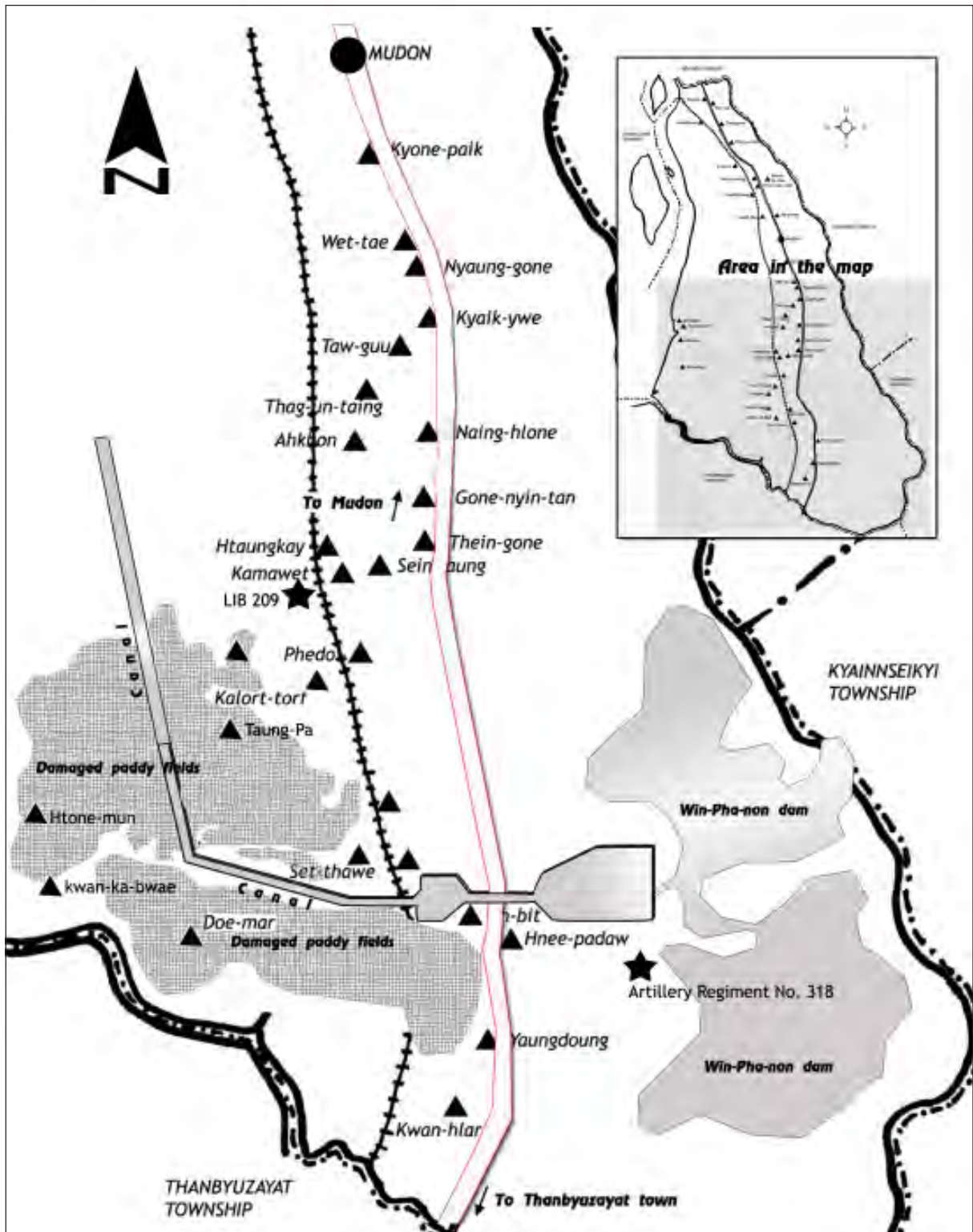
According to government statistics there are 670,000 acres of rainy season crops and 100,000 acres of summer crops in Mon state. According to the same numbers rainy season crops yield sixty-five baskets per acre, while hot season crops yield seventy. In total, Mon state ostensibly produces 43,550,000 baskets of rice during the rainy season and 7,000,000 baskets in the hot season. Farmers close to the Win-pha-non Dam, however, report very different numbers. Those affected by flooding can harvest only one crop per year, yielding only twenty baskets per acre, and these numbers are down from fifty baskets per acre.

While the Win-pha-non Dam affects only a tiny fraction of agricultural land in Mon state, the difference between yield numbers reported by the government and those actually harvested by farmers is striking. If corruption within the Mudon MAS is anything but the exception to the rule, yield totals used by the regime are likely to be radically inaccurate.

## The rainy season failures of the Win-pha-non Dam

The failures of the Win-pha-non Dam go beyond simply falling short of enabling hot season farming; the project has actually decreased the amount of land available for cultivation, which helps to explain the sizable difference between yield numbers reported by farmers and those recorded by the government.

When the MAS built the dam in 2000, they created an artificial canal to drain the water in place of the old river. They widened the river and built high cement walls on its either side, with smaller canals feeding into it designed to accommodate former tributary streams and water draining from villages in the area. Where the natural water system could accommodate the influx of water during the rainy season, the system designed by the MAS is unable to cope. The tributary canals are located away from their predecessors and water trying to enter the river along its old pathways is stopped by impenetrably high cement walls. During the rainy season, when the volume of water flowing into the river is high, a large amount of water backs up outside the walls of the canal. While MAS officers have opened small holes in the walls of dam to allow the old tributaries to join the river, they are too small and large amounts of water submerge rice paddies in the area.



Map of Win-pha-non government dam, Abit village, Mudon Township, Mon State

The resulting floodwater is cloudy and dirty from soil erosion. As the fields are flooded and the water sits on the land, the soil sticks to the plants and they are not able to support the combined weight of water and soil. The strength of the rice plants gives way within a week, and they fall over to die.

Farmers lost nearly eighteen hundred acres of crops in 2007, and the land has produced less rice every year since the dam was built, say farmers. Before the dam was built farmers produced around fifty baskets of rice per acre in the rainy season. Five years later, that number had been cut in half and in 2007 some farmers



**Flooded rice crops in Kalawthut village, Mudon township, Mon State**

yielded as little as ten baskets an acre. The reduced yields, however, require significantly more work to produce; farmers now have to plant two or three times to reap one harvest. All the while it makes the farmers replant extra crops, the flooding makes working the land that much harder. Working in the deep water is miserable. People are wet, the water is full of leeches and even a moment's rest requires trudging to sometimes far-away embankments on the edges of the rice paddies.

Harvesting crops in deep water is incredibly difficult, and farmers must either harvest onto floating bamboo rafts or carry each armload of rice to the embankments. Neither strategy is particularly efficient. Choose the former

and risk losing the entire crop, as it will rot on the rafts in as quickly as one day. Choose the latter and spend more time wading through water and mud than harvesting rice. Either way, farmers still have to transport the harvest from the rice paddies to their homes. This was an easy task before the dam was built, as farmers could load their crops on carts and finish the task in a few trips. Since the flooding began, the farmers have had to carry the harvest on their backs.

The floodwater remains in topographic low points through the hot season, a cruel irony for farmers struggling to cultivate summer crops at higher levels. But the extra water is no boon for the low-ground farmers, because it creates the perfect conditions for native grasses to flourish. The dry season usually provides ideal conditions for removing wild grasses, but as they grow year round farmers are unable to completely remove them from the paddies. Rainy season rice crops must then compete with stronger, faster growing native grasses, a losing battle that results in smaller yields. For lowland farmers who already have to deal with the worst of the rainy season flooding, this is almost too much to bear.

## **Farmers drowning in cycles of debt**

The obstacles raised by the flooding are not simply ones of slightly smaller crops and uncomfortable working conditions. The extra work required to cultivate and harvest rice in flooded paddies forces farmers to hire extra help. For farmers already operating with thin profit margins, this extra expenditure is often sufficient to wipe out surpluses all together.

During planting at the beginning of the growing season, hiring laborers to work the soil costs 2,500 kyat a day for women and 3,000 kyat for men; for 10 acres of land, farmers may hire six workers for at least ten days during the planting, and again during harvest. Farmers who do not own livestock must also hire bulls, which cost an additional twelve baskets of newly harvested rice. Add to this the fact each farm needs fertilizer, which the government officially makes available at subsidized prices. But by the time the fertilizer reach the villages, corruption in the regime means the price is close to the same as commercial fertilizer. Since the latter is much higher in quality, few farmers make use of the government supplies, resulting in an investment of 26,000 kyat per acre. These costs are manageable when the land yields fifty baskets of rice per acre, but when yields drop, especially when flooding requires extra investments of human capital, farmers cannot reap enough to cover expenses.

The result is that farmers have to borrow to pay for their investment and hope that they can repay the loans with the next year's harvest. The regime does make funds available to farmers – one acre of land is eligible for 7,000 kyat at 1.5% interest – but the loans are too small to be of much help. People who borrow from private lenders can get twenty-five baskets of paddy, which they have to repay along with twelve baskets of interest. When harvests are consistently below the needed fifty baskets an acre, as they have been every year since 2002, farmers find themselves trapped in a debt cycle from which there is little prospect of escape. Some have given up and fled to Thailand to look for employment as migrant workers, but they depart Mudon with barely a nest egg, as the value of land in the Win-pah-non dam area has plummeted since the project began. Many others farmers try to stay on their farms, land which they have often inherited and which has incredible traditional importance.

## Conclusion

The Win-pha-non project has been a conclusive failure. Its poor design means it holds insufficient water to support wide-scale hot season farming, and an ill-planned location and MAS corruption means the water does not reach the farms that need it most. The dam's design flaws also means it causes widespread flooding in the rainy season, creating massive obstacles to effective farming and cutting yields in half.

In spite of being well aware, like everyone in the area, of the dam's obvious problems, MAS officers have not only refused to officially acknowledge the project's failure but have falsely reported it as a success. Unfortunately, the corruption within the MAS means both that the failings of the project are unlikely to be remedied and that farmers are going to continue being forced into planting hot season crops. For the foreseeable future, farmers will be stuck in a costly Catch-22: work hard at summer farming when they know they will fail or refuse and risk losing their land.

The decreased yields and increased costs associated with the two crops project have quantifiable consequences for farmers in the area, many of whom are mired in cycles of debt from which it will be difficult to escape. The failings of the Win-pha-non project also highlights issues that may have consequences for the whole country. If MAS officers in other regions are misrepresenting rice yields like the officials in Mudon, the central government in Naypyidaw will be operating under the illusion that it has significantly more rice than it does. And if the fears of a rice shortage that triggered the MAS policy are well founded, the gap between actual and reported yields will create serious problems for the Burmese people. There is perhaps no better evidence of this than the fact that the regime announced in February 2008 that it would make four hundred thousand tons of rice available for export to Bangladesh.

Some, however, question whether feeding the people is really the motivation behind development projects such as the Win-pha-non dam. For though they do not serve their stated purposes, they do an effective job of



Part of the Win-pha-non dam in Mudon township, Mon state



**Parched summer crops, foregrounded by small amounts of water pumped at great expense to farmers**

keeping people continuously at work. In the estimation of one political analyst inside Burma, the projects are designed not to help the people but to keep them too busy to mobilize politically. "The government wants farmers to work all the time, whether the farmers get profits or not," echoed a farmer in Mudon. "They do not care about the farmers. They only want us to work so that we do not have free time. Free time means time to talk and organize, and that is what the government fears."

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Before this MND youth were able to actively take part in preparations, selling national day lottery tickets and Mon flags as fundraisers across Mon state. The CCCMND has always encouraged Mon youth to take part in national activities.

Until this year the junta had restricted the participation of Mon youth, limiting travel and banning the sale of lottery tickets and Mon flags. But MND is still not an official Burmese holiday, and Mon students in grades six to nine had to spend the day taking exams.

A teacher teaching Basic Education in Moulmein said that the order came from higher authorities through the Mon State Education Department. The teacher said that he did not think it was a coincidence that the exams were scheduled on MND. The order said no schools could close on February 22nd and schools in rural areas would spend the day taking the test. The fact that the order specifically targeted rural schools is a fair indicator of the true motivation for the policy, as it is rural areas that show the strongest interest in Mon national issues.

Students at the Kamawet Village high school, Mudon Township, attended school but wore Mon national dress in protest, said witnesses in the area. Students are banned from wearing Mon national dress in junta schools and the act served as a strong statement of the student's anger at being prevented from attending the MND celebration.

In spite of the junta's quiet attempts to undermine the festival, many felt MND was a success. "This year more people celebrated Mon National Day and almost all of them held Mon flags as they marched during the celebrations," Dr. Soe Lin said. "Almost all the clothes stores in Mon state ran out of Mon national dress."

The CCCMND held MND celebrations in nineteen townships and villages in Mon and Karen state, as well as several places where there are strong Mon communities, including Pegu and Rangoon. The New Mon State Party (NMSP) also celebrated MND in areas under its control in Moulmein, Tha-ton and Tavoy districts and the Thai-Burma border area near Three Pagoda Pass Township, Palaing Japan village.

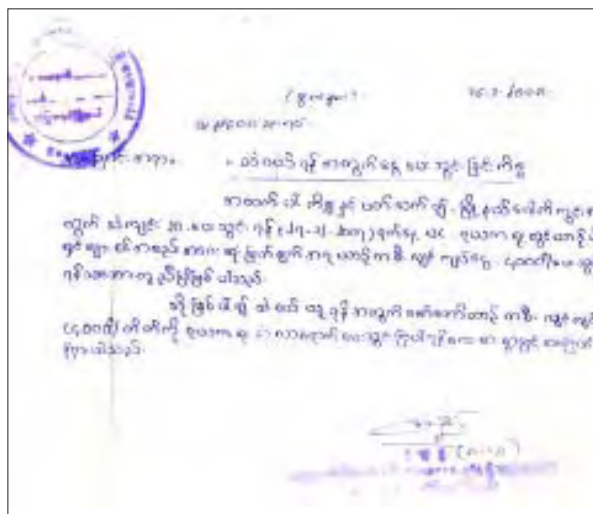
MND traditionally falls on the first waning of Maigh, the ninth month in the Mon lunar calendar, February 22nd in the Gregorian calendar. The first MND was held in 1947 in honor of the founding of the Hongsawatoi, Mon Kingdom in 1116 of the

Buddhist Era, 573 AD, in what is now the Pegu division of Southeastern Burma.

### Tractor-trailer owners forced to "donate" sand to a government golf course

IMNA. Wed 20 Feb 2008

Every tractor-trailer owner in Thanphyuzayart township, Mon state, is being forced to "donate" a tractor load of sand to the Shwe Phyu Tatana golf course, report locals.



Order statement from township authority demanded cash from Tractor-trailer owners

The Thanphyuzayart Township Peace and Development Council notified tractor-trailer owners by letter in the first week of January 2008.

Each load costs 4,000 Kyat, which tractor-trailer owners must pay at their own expense, and villagers have no choice but to obey the order, said a resident tractor-trailer owner.

After the junta signed an agreement with the International Labor Organization in 1999 it began using the rhetoric of "donations" and "self-help policies" to mask the fact that contributions to the regime's projects are made only by people under duress. The idea that villagers would donate sand to the golf-course is especially ludicrous given that only high-level junta officials are allowed to play on it.

Tractor-trailers are a common form of transportation in Mon State, and the machines are used to carry harvests and domestic goods. Calculating how many tractor-trailer owners were affected by the order is difficult, but Thanphyuzayart township is home to forty-three villages, each with between two and twenty of the machines.

## 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:

- 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" newsletters. 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:

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E-mail: [hurfomcontact@yahoo.com](mailto:hurfomcontact@yahoo.com)  
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director  
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

## New travel restrictions announced in Southern Ye

**Kaowao: February 21, 2008**

Every resident of Southern Ye Township must now carry his or her own travel document, an expensive change to previous policy.

Southern Ye Township military commander Kha Ma Ya, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 31, declared that everyone in Khaw Zar Sub-township must carry the new travel document for his or her own security. The small and simple document costs villagers 1000 Kyat per person, and people caught traveling without the document risk being detained by soldiers.

A Khaw Zar villager reported that these documents were required not only of plantation owners but also daily workers; all are forced to purchase and carry the document whenever traveling to or from the village. He said, "The military is empowered to query everybody that travels to and from the farms; they even stop women and children as they now expect us all to hold this document. We were previously allowed to hold one pair of documents per household but they now refuse this rule, opting instead to enforce one document per person and therefore increasing their profits greatly."

Karen and Mon resistance groups are active in remote parts of Southern Ye and Yebyu townships and the area is designated a "black area" by the Army, which means soldiers may detain or even shoot individuals without question.



**A Burmese army check point in southern Ye township, Mon State**

## Members of Mon Literature and Culture Association replaced by junta thugs

LAWI WENG, February 4, 2008

Authorities in Mon State have replaced members of the Mon Literature and Culture Association (MLCA) with members of the regime backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), according to local sources.

The move paved the way for a seven-month old ban on the MLCA to be lifted in Mon State, said a former member of the group in Ye Township. The lifting of the ban is cause for concern, not celebration, said the former member of the Mon association.

“We are worried the USDA members will teach our Mon classes this summer,” said the former MLCA chairman. Previously, the community group organized classes on Mon language and culture. Former MLC members worry that a USDA-controlled MLCA will be used to as a tool for assimilation.



A summertime class on Mon literature, taught before the MLCA was taken over by junta thugs

Former members of the MLCA are under close watch by special branch police officers, said Zaw Min, a former member who escaped to the Thai-Burmese border. The special branch suspects that the Mon group was involved in last September’s protests and civilian uprisings throughout Burma.

Zaw Min said he was interrogated by special branch officers, but he denied that he had ever been a member of the MCLA. Anyone wearing traditional Mon dress is likely to be targeted by the special branch, he added. This was confirmed by a Mon human rights worker who said he recently had to change out of Mon clothing after he arrived in Ye Township and was followed by special branch officers.

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P. O. Box 2237  
General Post Office  
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND  
E-mail: [hurfomcontact@yahoo.com](mailto:hurfomcontact@yahoo.com)  
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