

Monthly Report

“I Will Never Go Back:” Human Rights Abuses in Mon State and Tenasserim Division

The fighting has been taking place in these regions for almost five decades already. Now, I am getting into my 55th year, and people are still engaged in serious fighting since I was young. There is no way to count the number of people who have been murdered between the authorities' forces and various rebels groups.

Nai Nyan, 55, resident of Paukpinkwin village.

Introduction

The Burmese military government has continued to face resistance from insurgent forces in the area of Sothern Mon State and Northern Tenasserim division. Violence has continued in the area despite a ceasefire signed in 1995 with the regional Mon ethnic leadership, the New Mon State Party (NMSP). In a 4 square mile area around Pukpinkwin village, Burmese army militarization has led to widespread human rights abuses such as seizure and destruction of civilian property, forced porter services and arbitrary execution. After the last 10 years of these abuses, HURFOM researchers have found that the region's estimated 800 houses have dwindled, with only 150 to 170 still remaining. HURFOM's research indicates that between January and March 2009 an estimated 70 to 80 families have fled to the Kyone Bine village in Tavoy district alone. These 4 square miles have been severely depopulated as human rights abuses have made the region increasingly uninhabitable.

HURFOM is monitoring ongoing human rights abuses and incorporating documentation from reports in November 2008 and January 2009. This report focuses on ongoing abuses in Sothern Mon State and Northern Tenasserim within a 4 square mile area around Paukpinkwin village. The following accounts of abuse are compiled from a larger sample of researchers' interviews with refugees who have lived in and around Paukpinkwin village, and have since fled the abuses of the last three months. For the sake of security, villagers' names have been changed.

The report will focus primarily on the 4 most common forms of abuse practiced by Burmese army battalions and occasionally Mon insurgent forces in Paukpinkwin village and the surrounding areas:

- **Arbitrary Executions**
- **Destruction of Civilians' Houses and Property**
- **Plundering and Looting of Food Supplies**
- **Using Villagers in Forced Porter Service**

The report additionally explores the impacts of abuse on local economies and food production, as well as individual accounts of villagers who have suffered human rights abuses in the region.

Arbitrary Executions

A 60-year-old man from Paukpinkwin village said:

These executions are the result of a power struggle between the army and Chan Dein for control of this area. Our village has lost four members of the VPDC [Village Peace and Development Council] in a very short time.

Most parts of Tenasserim Division are still classified as 'Black Areas' (free fire zones), a Burmese military term, meaning the Burmese Army forces have full authority to fire on or execute anyone who they suspect to be a rebel sympathizer or supporter. Various insurgent forces such as Nai Hlone, Nai Bin and Nai Chan Dein, have also committed infrequent human rights abuses against the local villagers. Thus, civilians have

been suffering from the power struggle between the Burmese battalions and the insurgents in these areas. The local civilian population is largely defenseless¹ against accusations of being a rebel or Burmese supporter by both groups and can be killed at any time.

In the northern part of Tenasserim Division, where the armed conflict has continued between Burmese battalions and the Mon insurgents, villagers have been killed arbitrarily, at times simply while returning home late in the evening. Two such incidents of arbitrary execution occurred in Paukpinkwin village, according to a recent HURFOM report; the responsible groups were the Nai Chan Dein led Mon insurgents and Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 107.

At around 10 p.m. on the night of April 2nd, eight members of the Nai Chan Dein group entered Paukpinkwin village in Yebyu Township and went to the home of the VPDC headman Nai Bok, 45, to demand a 'tax' of 700,000 Kyat, which they had ordered the villagers to pay by March 30th. Nai Bok's VPDC colleague, Nai Nyae, 43, was brought to the same house and both men were confronted. Shots were heard and the men's bodies were later found outside the headman's home. A villager in the area at the time of the shooting said:

I heard three shots, then I heard a Chan Dein member say, 'this is what would happen to anyone who followed the Burmese army's orders regarding their group,' After that, there was silence and then I heard them run away. The headman's neighbors came out of their homes and found the two men's bodies.

In this case, news of the Nai Chan Dein group's activities in Paukpinkwin traveled fast. By 5 or 6 a.m. the following morning, a column of fifty soldiers from LIB No. 107, led by Major Khin Mg Chin arrived in Pauk Pin Kwin. The soldiers seized two other members of the Paukpinkwin VPDC, secretary Nai Dod, 40, and Nai Lwayi, 38, and took them out of the village. An eyewitness noticed the group near the local Bhidae Monastery and followed them to a nearby farm in the direction of Kinbun village. This is what they saw:

The army tie[d] them to a coconut tree near a small hut on the farm. They questioned them for a while but I was too far away to hear what they said. Then they shot them dead. Afterwards Major Khin Mg Chin proclaimed loudly that they would weed out anyone from this area who supported any of the rebel groups. After the soldiers left the villagers gathered by the bodies which were still tied to the tree. Everyone was distressed because four members of the VPDC had been killed in only twelve hours by two different armed groups.

The two men executed on April 2nd were known to be unsympathetic towards Nai Chan Dein and had declined to collect money from the villagers to pay the group. The Nai Chan Dein group has been actively taxing villagers in the Yebyu Township, located in northern Tenasserim Division and southern Ye Township in Mon State.

"These executions are the result of a power struggle between the army and Chan Dein for control of this area. Our village has lost four members of the VPDC in a very short time," commented a 60 year-old villager about the shootings. In January and February, the group demanded payments of 5 to 7 million kyat from at least 5 villages in the area. In November, the group kidnapped and ransomed over 100 villagers, and also executed 3 villagers suspected to be informants after a Burmese army ambush killed 3 of Nai Chan Dein's soldiers near Ko Mile village in Ye.

Villagers have found themselves "living between two fires,"² punished also by SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) army battalions in the area when they are suspected of supporting the insurgent groups. In January, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 107 beat the headman of Amae village to death. He had returned to the original site of his village after it had been forcibly relocated by SPDC soldiers in an attempt to separate insurgents from local supporters.



A camouflage hut is seen in the jungle area near Kinbun village, Yebyu Township.

¹ While villagers do not use arms to defend themselves, they oftentimes will hide, flee, lie or bribe soldiers to survive.

² Quote can be found in HURFOM's January 2009 monthly report.

Paukpinkwin village finds itself leaderless and effectively lacking a village administration. Like many villages in southern Ye and Yebyu, villagers are reluctant to take on leadership roles because doing so risks shouldering blame and abuse at the hands of both rebels and the SPDC army.

Another incident of arbitrary execution of innocent civilians by the Burmese Army occurred just 20 miles to the south. On March 4th two villagers from Alaesakhan village, Kaleinaung Sub-Township, Yebyu Township, were shot by Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 282. Khin Taung and Nai Ah Bu, 22, encountered troops from LIB No. 282 as they returned from cutting wood in the forest near a farm owned by Nai Ohwn Kyaw in the Kyaungywa Kwin area. The troops shot both men for a still unknown reason. Nai Ah Bu was killed on the spot; Nai Khin Taung was wounded with 2 shots to his thigh, 2 to his chest and another that glanced off his skull; he spent 6 weeks in the hospital.

The next morning, troops from LIB No. 282 encountered 2 villagers from Alaesakhan. The soldiers informed them that the bodies needed to be recovered, giving them the location and telling them to contact their headmen once they were done. The troops then also confiscated a packet of candles, 1 pyi (2 kg) of rice and 1 pyi (2 kg) of sticky rice. According to a source who spoke with these villagers, they immediately went to the location of bodies. "We found a dead body on the ground with a chainsaw near Nai Ohwn Kyaw's farm at around 8 a.m. I felt afraid after what we saw there." The source also said they found the wounded Nai Khin Taung on the ground nearby, who had spent the night alone bleeding and untreated.

LIB No. 282 has taken no responsibility for the shooting nor the treatment of the men. The employer of the two woodsmen has provided compensation, including compensation to the family of Nai Ah Bu, as well as the cost of his funeral. He also paid for Nai Khin Taung's medical expenses. HURFOM has not been able to confirm why the two men were shot, but a 50 year-old villager from Alaesakhan village speculated that, "the men were coming back from the forest very late with a chainsaw. The army battalion probably suspected they were supporting the Mon rebel group in some way and killed them."

Destruction of Civilians' Houses and Properties

A fifty year-old victim from Paukpinkwin, whose house, belongings and approx. 150 baskets of rice were burnt down by Burmese Army LIB 107 on April 17th, 2009:

People screamed and cried when they saw smoke over the roofs of their houses. As for me, I was twice as devastated twice as the others, because all of my efforts and hopes are gone along with my house.

During the second week of April, many parts of southern Burma celebrated the traditional water festival to bring in the New Year of Burmese and Mon Culture. However in Paukpinkwin village, Yebyu Township, residents' valuables, homes and property were engulfed in flames. After being accused of having links to the frequently active Mon armed splinter group led by Nai Chan Dein, 36 of the residents' homes were torched by soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion No. 107, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Khin Maung Chin. HURFOM field researchers have since met with some of the homeless victims whose houses were burnt down on April 17th, 2009.

That evening a 50 strong force from Light Infantry Battalion No. 107 arrived in Paukpinkwin village, and, under the command Lt. Col. Khin Maung Chin, began setting fire to homes in the western part of the village. Villagers believe the incident was carried out in retaliation for perceived support of the Chan Dein Mon armed group; this event followed closely after the killings of four village leaders on April 2nd and 3rd, who were also the victims of the power struggle between the Burmese battalion and the Mon armed insurgent group. A young man from Paukpinkwin who witnessed the events said:

The soldiers separated into two groups of 25. One group entered the village from the north and the other from the south. They then began to burn the 36 houses near the Ball Ta Moi Monastery. After that they fired their guns in the air and ordered the people inside to get out their houses. People took anything they could and ran away.

A local monk added:

I think this has happened in addition to the murders on April 2nd and 3rd because of the ongoing power struggle between the army and Chan Dein group. Lt. Col. Khin Maung Chin ordered the villagers to inform the army if the rebel group returned to the village again. The burnings are a punishment because the army knows that there is some communication between the villagers and the rebels. Now, the situation is very bad. All the villagers are terrified and are afraid to do anything. The village quarter which was

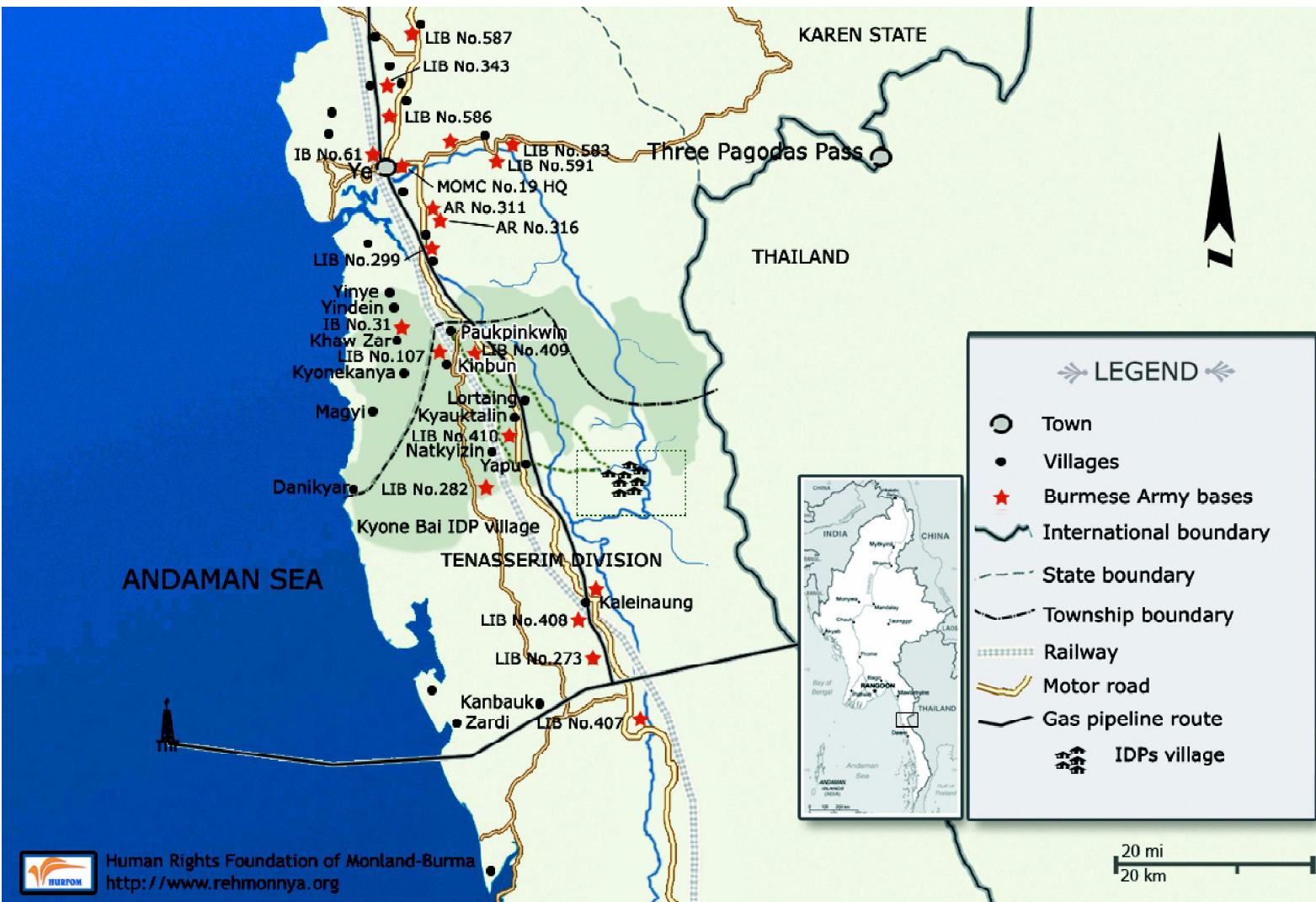
burnt by the army is near the monastery, so the monks no longer receive food from the people there. We now have to cook for ourselves.

Of the 36 houses that were burnt, 17 were almost completely destroyed and the remaining 19 were severely damaged. The residents who were left homeless lived in the Monastery for two days before moving elsewhere. Since 2005, approximately 120 houses in Paukpinkwin village have already burned, and hundreds of residents have fled their homes.

The houses that were burnt down were suspected to have provided shelter to the Mon splinter troops such as Nai Bin, Nai Hlone, San Shae and Nai Chan Dein forces. According to the record compiled in the HURFOM database, the previous torching of homes in the Paukpinkwin villages, was carried out by the troops under the South-East Command's No. 3 Tactical Command and MOMC (Military Operations Management Command) No. 8 in early September of 2005. Nai Gai, 63 year old village, originally from Paukpinkwin, who currently lives in a New Mon State Party controlled area explained his bitter experiences during September 2005:

At that time, Major Myo Min Tun from LIB No. 282 [under MOMC No. 8] commanded his troops to set fire to all houses in the eastern part of my village [Paukpinkwin]. Some people tried to rescue their belongings, but most of their crops and goods which they had stored under their houses were destroyed along with their home. Men were also beaten and some were forced to work as porters when the Burmese troops left the village.

HURFOM learned that many of the 150 households who lost their belongings and houses have escaped to the Eastern border areas where several Internal Displaced Persons (IDP) villages are situated. These villages are assisted by the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC) and Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). Said a field coordinator from MRDC in Tavoy District of NMSP controlled territory:



This map illustrates the region documented in this report, located between southern Mon State and northern Tenasserim Division.

We have already taken in about 200 households worth of people who are only from Paukpinkwin village and Yebyu Township, during the past five years. As the power struggle between the Burmese Army and various rebel groups persists in the area, people will continue to flee their homes.

The villagers own testimonials indicate an even larger number: perhaps as many as 300 out of 780 houses being relocated to the IDP villages, reported the same MRDC field coordinator.

Plundering and Looting of Food Supplies

When the troops of the Burmese Army launch a military offensive, they never carry any rations with them. What they usually do is just loot or steal food from local villagers. Whenever they arrive in a village, they take rice, meat, vegetables and other food supplies by forcing (the local villagers) to provide what they have, and the just take what they want.

A statement made by Nai Rui, 58, originally from Kinbun village, Yebyu Township.

During the Burmese Army military offensives against the Mon splinter groups, led by Nai Chan Dein near in Northern Yebyu Township, the Burmese soldiers were not issued rations or supplies. They were simply expected to loot and steal the belongings or supplies they wanted from local residents. HURFOM field researchers have found that most incidents of looting or stealing committed by the military columns or patrolling units are of livestock such as pigs and chickens, cooking equipment and rice. Reportedly there are two methods that the SPDC military units usually use for looting livestock from local inhabitants. Firstly, incidents of looting in Paukpinkwin, Kinbun and Lawthaing villages, occurred at gunpoint—villagers were robbed. Secondly, soldiers demanded livestock as food supplies through official orders, and without compensation. Both types of theft of livestock have occurred during and after the campaigns against the Mon armed insurgent groups in the northern Yebyu territories by the patrolling military units of Light Infantry Battalion No. 107 and 282.

On the second week of March 2009, 25 soldiers from military column No. 1, commanded by Captain Moe Kyaw from LIB No. 107, entered into Kinbun village and confiscated two oxen that had belonged to two villagers—Nai Did, 35, and Nai A-Thar, 40. According to a family member of Nai Did, the Burmese forces took the two oxen without payment.

They took our ox while we are having lunch on the farm. One belongs to my neighbor, Nai A-Thar, and the other to us. I saw them taking the two oxen away with my own two eyes but dared not try and stop them. The only thing we could do was to inform the village headmen. But I don't really think they can help us get our oxen back. At first, my family had a pair of oxen for using on our two acres of rice farms and for transportation. But now we only have one left.

A similar incident occurred to several residents who live between Paukpinkwin and Kinbun villages, in northern Yebyu Township. On March 12th, five betel nut plantation owners were harvesting the ripe betel nut fruits at their plantations, located along the way to Paukpinkwin and Kinbun village, when a military column from LIB No. 282 passed by. The 50 soldier force, operated by an unknown major, ordered the 5 plantation owners to provide livestock for the troops. Nai Chan, 50, told the HURFOM field researcher that he and his wife were forced to provide chickens and rice as food supplies for the Burmese soldiers.

The troops appeared suddenly while I, my wife and my son were collecting betel nut on the plantation. We were so scared about a possible interrogation, especially because of the Mon Splinter group that was launching a military offensive against the Burmese Army in this area. But luckily they did not ask about rebel activities, and just searched for food. We were ordered to give them a basket of rice and seven chickens from the plantation. After they received what they wanted, they threatened me saying I must inform them about any Mon rebel group activity when we meet them [the Burmese troops] again.

During March 13th to 15th, the same unit from the military column of LIB No. 282, based near western Paukpinkwin village, seized livestock and rice belonging to four villagers who are originally from Kinbun and Paukpinkwin village. Said 32 year-old Nai Oo:

I don't know the name of the commander, but I know that they are from LIB No. 282, which frequently operates and patrols in this area. This was on the 13th [of March], while my dad and I were clearing brush on our plantation; a Captain and five followers with guns came to our plantation and demanded that we give them some chickens. Of course weren't able to say 'No', so we asked them how many they needed. They said ten chickens, but I only had five. Despite this they finally accepted this lesser number and left the plantation. Each chicken was worth approximately 25,000 Kyat at the current market price.

According to Nai Oo, troops also demanded livestock from his neighbors, Nai Nyan, 45, Nai Pyae, 57, and Mi Ngwe Yee, 50, the next day.

Some of them were forced to provide both livestock and rice without compensation. Among these victims, Nai Pyae lost more than the rest of us. I still remember last year, in November, his three oxen disappeared from near his plantation. Later he found out from witnesses that some soldiers from IB No. 31, which was temporarily based in the western part of our village, took these oxen without his permission. Now, he has no oxen to use for farming.

In addition to the theft and looting of food, which is normalized behavior among Burmese troops located in these conflict regions, soldiers also resort to the theft of valuable nonperishable items, such as gold ware, clothes, and electronic devices.

In the last week of February, a military column from IB No. 31 reportedly approached Paukpinkwin village and looted a gold chain weighing 1Kyat (the Burmese unit of measurement equivalent to 15.16 grams) from Ma Nyunt, 39, while she was on her way to Mihtawhla lay village, in the western part of Paukpinkwin village. Said her husband, who asked that his name not be reported:

Her gold chain was taken by an unknown captain, the head of that military column from IB No. 31 which had temporarily came and patrolled the area for the Chan Dein Mon rebel group. Before her gold chain was stolen, she begged the captain not to take it and instead take 10,000 Kyat, but her appeal did not work and the Captain removed the gold chain from her forcibly. That piece of gold was the only thing of value we had. My wife became so depressed when she lost her gold chain.

After that incident, Ma Nyunt discussed with her husband the possibility of fleeing back to Mihtawhla lay village, where a lot of her extended family live. He responded that it would be unsafe to flee there because the area was just as dangerous as Paukpinkwin. Finally, their family and some neighbors decided to flee to the New Mon State Party controlled area in Tavoy District. "Here it's much safer than Paukpinkwin. The only problem is the lack of job opportunities for me so I can feed my family," Nai Myint, 38, a neighbor of Ma Nyunt, told the reporter.

A similar incident of forcible looting was committed by a military column from the Burmese Army LIB No. 107 and LIB No. 282, against a Mon family who lived near Kinbun village, the neighboring village of Paukpinkwin village. According to local sources, the incident occurred the second week of April, just before the traditional water festival and New Year's Eve. About 30 soldiers of LIB No. 282, commanded by Captain Kyaw Zwa, reached Kinbun village on the evening of April 11th; they knocked on the door of Nai Kon Gyi's shop based out of his home, and asked for batteries to use for their two-way radio set. Captain Kyaw Zwa wanted small size batteries (locally known as AA size), but Nai Kon Gyi did not have AA batteries and instead give the troops the larger size batteries he had available. Captain Kyaw Zwa became angry and ordered one of his soldiers to seize the stereo system, which was worth 150,000 Kyat at market price. A neighbor of Nai Kon Gyi, who witnessed the looting, reported to a field researcher in late April:

The troops (the Burmese troops) stole Nai Kon Gyi's stereo system without paying for it. After the troops left the village, the 15 year-old son of Nai Kon Gyi cried because the stereo had been stolen. This kind of abuse has been occurring for a long time in the so-called 'Black Area'. People have lost not only valuable property, but also loved ones because of this ongoing armed conflict between the rebel and the government forces. I think no one can help to stop these conflicts.

At times the looting of civilian valuables and belongings is a direct result of accusations over suspected Mon rebel support. In a case of theft of two sets of oxcarts (cart and oxen), worth at least 1 Million Kyat, from Lawthaing villagers, this came as a punishment for providing transportation to members of the rebel force. This incident occurred during the last week of March and the first week of April 2009, while Yebyu-based LIB No. 107 commanded by Major Khin Maung Chin, was launching their major offensives against 50 soldiers from the Nai Chan Dein Mon armed group, who are mainly active along the border of Mon State and Tenasserim Division.

“My uncle lost an oxcart set (a pair of oxen plus a cart) to the Burmese Army, led by Major Khin Maung Chin and his troops. They first accused my uncle of providing three soldiers from Nai Chan Dein with their equipments and supplies. But my uncle claimed he had only helped ordinary villagers from Lawthaing village on the way to their village. But the Burmese Commander did not accept his explanation, and ordered his troops to seize the oxcart. My uncle was crushed, and could not talk to anyone for several days,”

said Mehm A-Din to the field researcher. He added that he oxen and the cart, which were seized without any compensation, had been worth a market price of 1,000,000 Kyat.

Another instance of looting occurred on the road between Kinbun and Paukpinkwin village, by an unidentified SPDC battalion during the last week of March. The looted goods were worth approximately 800,000 Kyat, reported a villager who preferred to stay anonymous.

We couldn't confirm which battalion they were from, but we are sure that the force was from a Burmese battalion from Yebyu territories. The soldiers stole an oxcart and a pair of oxen from a betel nut plantation, which belonged to Nai Ong and Mi Myoe, residents of Kinbun, when they were away from their plantation. The owners are from my village and we know them very well. They spoke with the village headmen as soon as their cart and oxen disappeared. A few days later, a young witness secretly told Nai Ong that some Burmese soldiers (in full uniform) had put rations and food supplies on the cart and took it toward the Paukpinkwin village.

Using Villagers in Forced Porter Service

Abuse by using villagers as unpaid porters was routinely mentioned when HURFOM reporters recently conducted interviews with the local residents who fled to Tavoy District and other IDP camps administrated by the TBBC and NMSP. The refugees reported they have been used as porters by Burmese battalions in northern Yebyu township, which is mostly contested by the Mon and Karen insurgency groups.

Nai Deh Doot, 34, newly arrived early in April 2009 to the Chedike IDP village, under NMSP control, and originally from Kinbun village, Yebyu Township, explained his painful experience being used as an unpaid porter by a Burmese military column.

I have been used by the Burmese battalions for porter services many times during the last five years. Most battalions belonged to LIBs No. 282, 273, 299 and 343 from Ye and Yebyu. Each time, I had to carry heavy food supplies that weighed approx. 30 kg. I have experienced and witnessed many bloody and terrible events, such as killings, beatings and sexual harassment against villagers who live in the jungle or hidden areas. Even though they [Burmese soldiers] look like human beings, they do not act like it. They are very impolite and discourteous. You can see on my body how much I have been tortured in the past. [He showed the remaining scars and marks on his legs and back.] The last time I was used as a porter was with a Burmese military column from LIB No.282 in February 2009. They used me for nearly two weeks. At the time, there were very few men left in my home village since the majority of them escaped to avoid abuse by the Burmese forces. When I left my home there was still no village headman. My kids were assured starvation if we had continued to live there.

In the southern part of Burma, the Burmese Army has increased troop volumes to try to solidify control over parts of the conflict zone. In Mon territory, the Burmese junta has strategically deployed more than 20 new infantry battalions and artillery regiments in the last 10 years. These new battalions have sought to uproot all activity of armed insurgent forces in the conflict area, especially in northern Yebyu and Ye Township. At the launch of Burmese military offensives, the Burmese Army commits not only local military battalions, but also imported battalions from other areas in order to serve in joint offensives to improve their familiarity with the area.

Civilian porters are usually treated inhumanely. Though frequently given the arduous task of carrying approximately 20 to 30 kg worth of packs along jungle or paddy fields for several days, porters are routinely provided with insufficient food. Villagers who have constantly suffered in the porter service have tried to flee to Thailand to escape being used as porters on the frontlines of the conflict zones. Many abandon their homes as soon as they return to their villages.

In one example, a resident of Lawtaing, Mg Soe, 38, shared his experiences as a porter during December, 2008:

This was last year in December. Yebyu based LIB No. 282 led by Bo Aye Lwin, pressed me into their porter service. I was ordered to carry ammunition cases, which weighed at least 35 kg. When we neared Mahlwetaung hill, a porter from Mintha village was shot to death for unknown reasons. I was

totally shocked, and my legs were shaky because of the terrible incident that had occurred right before my eyes. Then, next morning, when we had gotten closer to the Mon rebel controlled areas, the Captain, Bo Aye Lwin, ordered all the porters to march in front of the troops. At first, we did not understand why they let us march in the front. Later I realized that we, the 6 porters, were being used as minesweepers. Luckily, none of us were injured or killed by landmines or attacks from the insurgent group. I didn't want to be a porter like that again, and as soon as I got back home, my family and I decided to flee to this IDP village. Here it's a lot better than at my home village we left behind.

Many villagers in this conflict area have mostly had this type of experience, and have fled from their homes not only because of poverty but also out of fear that they could be killed on the battlefield during porter service. Nai Janeh Ong, 56, a former NMSP member who used to live in Paukpinkwin told the field reporter, "If you are really originally from Paukpinkwin village, you will have had to work as porter at least one time in your life. If not, then you are not a real Paukpinkwin villager."

Causing Great Economic Hardship and Food Crisis

Said Nai Thein, 46, a villager who lives near Paukpinkwin village, "this year I don't have enough food to feed my children since I couldn't work adequately because of the Burmese Army's security crackdown with area travel restrictions and forced porter work."

The recent global economic crisis has greatly affected the region. Human Rights abuses by the Burmese Army has pushed the already weakened regional economies to near collapse as villagers suffering from taxation, theft, forced labor and travel restrictions have abandoned businesses and been unable to harvest food crops. Villagers from Paukpinkwin who spoke to HURFOM field researchers described the abuses that have undermined their ability to work and operate the farms that make up the backbone of village economies.

Nai Bo, 42, a villager from Paukpinkwin village Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division, is a logger and farmer. He has three children, and was forced to abandon his logging work and his farm due to extreme taxation.

I am a chainsaw man. If somebody wants to hire me to cut down their trees, I go and cut down their trees for them. But I had to leave my village because I couldn't afford to pay the unlawful taxes to the Burmese battalions and police forces anymore. As a chainsaw owner, I had to pay at least 60,000 Kyat to 80,000 Kyat in taxes, depending on how much they charged me. However the police force, which is based close to the railway station near my village, also extorted money from me. Sometimes I have to pay over 100,000 Kyat in monthly taxes. As a logger I only earn 60,000 or 70,000 Kyat per month, plus I have to pay for fuel as well. Thus, I had to leave the village—I would get in trouble if I continue living there since I wouldn't be able to continue paying the taxes.

When I left, I gathered some family with me to move to Tavoy District, the NMSP controlled area. Living in this village (Kyone Bai village) is safer than Paukpinkwin, I think. I arrived on April 12th, 2009 with 20 other families from my home village. But I don't think we can find the regular jobs that will allow us to survive here. I have to go look for work in the neighboring villages. If I cannot find a job we will face a food crisis in the coming raining season. I have no future, but it is enough for me if I can feed my kids and live a peaceful life.

Mi Min, 58, owned a Betel nut plantation of close to 600 trees and 570 rubber plants. Both crops serve as primary sources of income for the region's economy. After accusations by the SPDC forces of supporting rebel forces and deserters from the local SPDC battalion, Mi Min was forced to abandon her farm to escape further potential abuses.

They arrested me on the same day they arrested nine other villagers because of the armed clash with rebel forces on March 10th, 2009. I was arrested separately and they interrogated me about my involvement with rebel activities. Later, soldiers began questioning me about defected soldiers from Khaw Zar based Infantry Battalion No. 31 who hid in my plantation for three days. I was shocked when I heard these questions. I didn't think anyone knew about that. I couldn't provide very good answers because it had happened one-and-a-half years earlier. I tried to tell them what I saw when they reached my betel nut plantation. That fleeing soldier had brought a gun with him. I knew he was a Burmese soldier and was afraid of him and his gun because he could harm me at any time. So I gave him food and medicine

during while he hid here before he left. That was all I knew about the soldier. But, that situation came up while I was arrested by the MOMC troops, and I was so frightened I became weak. [Her 24 year-old nephew told the field reporter that she has been fainting out of fear of the soldiers interrogations about of the fighting]. Later, they stopped interrogating and freed me without a beating. This was the third time I have been arrested by the Burmese troops.

We left my plantation, property, and home on March 24th, 2009 and stayed here [Kyone Bai village, NMSP's IDP village] with my 13 year-old daughter. Some of my relatives and neighbors who were already here built a small house for me. Now, we are surviving by working in the nearby farms. I will never go back [to Paukpinkwin village] as long as they [Burmese battalions and Mon insurgency groups] are still fighting each other there.

Voices from the Victims Regarding the Loss of their Homes



These Paukpinkwin villagers pictured have fled to Kyone Bai IDPs village. Their faces have been blurred for security purposes.

After Light Infantry Battalion LIB No.107 burnt down villagers' houses on April 17th, one victim expressed their troubles as follows:

I grew up in this area and helped them [the Burmese troops for LIB No. 107] whenever they came and inspected the area. But I didn't have time to explain this when they came and burned down my house. My wooden house was completely lost [worth 3 million Kyat, he estimated] along with 46 baskets of rice, which I'd stored under it. I have no idea how I'm going to feed my children in the coming rainy season. I am very new to this area [Tavoy District, NMSP controlled area] and am very worried about food if I cannot find a job.

Nai Khon Ba, 46, is a farmer from Paukpinkwin village, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division. He has been elected as a secretary in his village, Paukpinkwin, twice - once in 2000 and again in 2003. His house had been previously burned down twice before, along with those of other villagers, by the local Burmese Army forces as special punishment for failing to report the activities of Mon rebel groups in the village. He described the second time his home was burned, in January 2003:

At that time, around 50 and 60 houses were burned by IB No. 31 and LIB No. 299. The reasons they gave for burning down our houses, at that time, were related to activity by the Mon insurgents groups led by Nai Hlane and Nai Bin. All 60 families were homeless and finally fled to the eastern Thai-Burma border areas [currently known as Halockhani IDPs camp]. This is the second time they destroyed my home.

Nai Ah Nge, 45, a farmer from Paukpinkwin village, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division emotionally expressed his experiences to a HURFOM field researcher, who spoke with him in a liberated area on April 22nd, 2009.

We couldn't salvage any materials when the SPDC soldiers burned our house. After the battalion left the village, we were able to come back and quickly collect a few possessions, such as cooking pots, some clothes, etc. Then we left the village. While my five kids and my wife were not physically harmed during their (the Burmese Battalion LIB No. 107) attacks, we are left with nothing. Hence, we decided to come and live here (Tavoy Division). This place is quite familiar to me but we don't own have a farm like the other place where we came from; I don't know what I should do in coming rainy season. I need a job right now. The MRDC people (Mon Relief Development Council) have provided some rice, but it will run out in few days.

Nai Ah Nge has also suffered numerous human rights violations by various Burmese battalions throughout the past few years. During the interview with the HURFOM field researcher, he mentioned that Burmese troops from LIBs No. 343 and 299, and IBs No. 31 and 61, have forced him to work as an unpaid laborer, a porter and as a human minesweeper, along with other villagers when the troops launched offensives against Mon and Karen insurgents. He also reports being beaten with bamboo sticks and gun butts until he lost

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 situations in Mon territory and other areas 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:

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With regards,
Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

consciousness in 2003 and 2004 and becoming a victim of torture by Nai Chan Dein Mon insurgency group during March of 2009.

You know, my parents and some of my relatives passed away here in this village; I would really love to stay in my native village. But the situation is getting worse and worse, and I can no longer survive in this area. After my house was burnt down, I had no reason to stay in the village, and left as soon as I was able.

Mi Myint, 48, a widow and Paukpinkwin resident, narrated her own experiences.



Burmese Army bunkers are seen, situated in the hills between Paukpinkwin and Kinbun villages.

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duty, we have to give them 5,000 kyat", a villager said. Though many villagers agree the policy of forced patrols for soldiers without compensation is unfair, even the village headman must remain silent as dissent is punished with beatings.

"First hand, I've seen a young man beaten by a soldier because, talking to himself, he said that this guarding duty was crazy for villagers and unfair. But the soldier overheard what he said and called the young man over and beat him a lot", a source told IMNA, who spoke with a villager that had witnessed the beating.

Troops from LIB No. 31 force the villagers to perform guard duty so that the villagers essentially become a human shield protecting against MRP assault, according to a resident.

"If something happens at the army camp, such as weapons goes missing, or a soldier is killed by the Mon rebel etc., the villagers on duty will be executed." said a villager who fled the village out of fear of the SPDC forces.

"In some ways we can say we are lucky at this point.

Women are not included in guarding duty - only men have to guard the soldiers," said a woman who had fled the village to Thailand. "Three years ago women had to go to the army camp to prepare food and make the beds for the army officers. At that time, some women were raped by the army officers. So many families who were afraid of army fled the village. Some went to Thailand and some moved to another village for safety."

According to a WCRP (Woman and Child Rights Project) report, which was published in 2005 July, in 2003, No. 3 Tactical Command led by Brigadier Myo Win, ordered women from 15 villages in Southern Ye township to come army camp to put on a fashion show.

SPDC soldiers have been forcing the villagers from southern townships to provide security since 2005, according to Nai Aue Mon, coordinator of Human Rights Documentation and Dissemination Project.

Villagers have faced a variety of oppressive tactics regionally, yet want to return to their own villages to continue working their plantations and rice paddies. However they dare not out of fear of the SPDC policies.

When the incident occurred, I heard the voices and firing of guns near my house. I picked up my youngest child and ran. After that I could only watch the fire from my neighbors' houses. Then later on, I realized that my house was also burning because the fire had spread from my neighbors' houses. I had no time to collect things I needed to survive. I took my daughter and two sons and left the village along with 15 other neighbors. At first we didn't know where we could go and live. And now we are running out of food. Both of my sons left two days ago to look for work, but they haven't found any jobs yet. I hope my sons will find work soon. If they get a job we can survive in this new place. I do not want to be rich for the remaining years of my life; all I really want is to be happy and have a peaceful life. All of us villagers in Paukpinkwin village have been losing those kinds of lives for a long time, since we were born.



Refugee villagers build huts near Tor Lwi IDPs village.

Mi Myint has been an eye-witness to various types of human rights abuses committed by both rebel armed groups and Burmese battalions on her villagers throughout her life.

It always makes me depressed whenever I witness these bloody abuses. They are the reason why I am afraid of the armed groups. Whatever [money] they demand of me, I have to give it to them. Sometimes I won't have enough to provide them with what they want, so I have to borrow from the other people to give them what they want.

Conclusion

The individual abuses carried out in the 4 square mile area surrounding Paukpinkwin are representative of the broader abuses committed by the Burmese army within the wider region of South Mon State and Northern Tenasserim Division. As families continue to flee, abuses by Burmese army and, on a much smaller scale, insurgent forces, are carried out in increasingly depleted communities. In one extreme example, the 2 villages of Baraung and Amae have been completely relocated under the Burmese army's counter-insurgency policy, carried out in July 2006 and November 2008 respectively. HURFOM research indicates that 65% of households in Paukpinkwin have been forced to relocate in the last 10 years, and continued instances of abuse by the Burmese Army threaten to condemn Paukpinkwin and the surrounding area to a similar fate of Baraung and Amae.

But for many villagers, some who are elderly or have lived in the area for generations, leaving is an arduous and sometimes impossible task. They are thus trapped, unable to leave, but also unable to live. These families will remain the fodder for future human rights violations as long as the process of militarization continues.

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