

## MON YOUTHS CALL FOR UNIFICATION OF ALL MON POLITICAL PARTIES AT 6TH ANNUAL MON YOUTH DAY



January 8, 2018

**HURFOM:** Organizers of the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mon Youth Day called for the unification of all Mon political parties into a single, inclusive entity, during the December 28<sup>th</sup> 2017 event in Kamarmo village, Chaungzone Township, Mon State.

*"As we now have the chance to be involved in politics, we don't want disunity amongst the Mon political parties. We just want a single political party that can represent all Mon people. We will also look for a solution during the upcoming Mon Political Conference in January 2018. We will never give up,"* said Nai Janu Oo, secretary general of the Mon Youth Forum (MYF), the primary organizer of the event.

According to Nai Nyan Seik Raman, a member of the event organizing committee, a petition for unification circulated during the ceremony and the signatures collected will be presented at this month's Mon Political Conference.

*"Disunity amongst the adults also has an impact on the youth, because [most youths] are influenced by their particular leaders. However, we only want a single Mon political party which will represent*

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## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2018 STATEMENT



International Women's Day  
8-3-18

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## LOCALS IN THANBYUZAYAT TOWNSHIP PROTEST OVER ENCROACHMENT ON RELIGIOUS LAND



February 22, 2018

On February 19<sup>th</sup> 2018, about 200 residents from Kyaikkhami Town, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, held a protest against the encroachment on religious land by local administration. The dispute concerns the use of land belonging to

the Mya Sein Yaung pagoda by the local fire department.

*"They [local administration] have gradually been infiltrating religious lands. We are worried that Mya Sein Yaung Pagoda will be swallowed by houses. We've organized this protest in order to protect our religious land,"* said Mi Win Mon, a Kyaikkhami resident.

Protestors believe they were misled by the town administration over the original bid to use the land. Locals say the Kyaikkhami administration said the land would be used to build a water storage tanks for the local fire

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News

# LACK OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS RAISED AT MON POLITICAL CONFERENCE



January 18, 2018

WCRP: Members of the women's committee at the Mon Political Conference held last weekend in Mawlamyine, Mon State, have voiced their concern over the lack of women's participation in politics. While women's marginalization in the political sphere is slowly decreasing, they argued more needs to be done to encourage and empower women to engage politically.

**Photo credit: Mon Young Monk Network**

*"Mon women often [think they] lack the experience to participate in politics. [Many] women still think that politics is not a woman's concern. We need to provide a lot of encouragement for them to be involved in politics. It is very important for women to be involved in the political system in order to influence political decisions [that affect them] such as policy and legal reform," said Mi Cherry Soe, member of the steering committee for the conference.*

*She added, "currently, CSOs [Civil Society Organizations] are stronger [than in the past, but] ...they are not involved in decision-making or policy reform. If women can be involved more in a decision-making role, it has the potential to find solutions for current problems, such as sexual violence."*

In addition, committee member Mi Ngwe Lay argued that it is not enough that women's groups are increasingly invited to participate in political events, but that capacity must be built and promoted in order for genuine and meaningful participation to occur.

*"It is very important for women to be involved in political issues. It is also important to promote their roles and leadership skills. The situation now is better than before. Mon women were invited to participate in politics less in the past. Nowadays, we don't need to request to participate in this event anymore. They welcome us. [Now], women have a chance to participate as a chairperson or committee member at the Mon Political Conference. We only have a few women who have the experience to participate in political issues well and we must build and promote our skills so that we may be involved in all roles in the political sector."*

She added, *"we must encourage all women to be involved not only in this Mon Political Conference, but to participate in every discussion which is related to political issues and to participate in changing the attitudes of people toward women's involvement."*

The Mon Political Conference was held in Mawlamyine, Mon state from January 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> 2018. The conference was organized by monks and Mon CSOs, including the Mon State Youth Network and the Mon Women's Network.

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## MON YOUTHS CALL FOR UNIFICATION OF ALL MON POLITICAL PARTIES AT 6TH ANNUAL MON YOUTH DAY



all Mon people. So we oppose all [political] parties which refuse to unite," continued Nai Nyan Seik Raman.

He also confirmed that if necessary, MYF will organize a protest to pressure

Mon political parties to form a single party.

*"If we have many different [political] parties we will fail in the elections. We can't cover the whole country; we can only compete for the election in our*

*region. So, if we have many different parties, we will not be able to get enough votes and will lose to our opponents. That's why Mon youths have been demanding to have a single and inclusive Mon political party,"* explained Nai Nyan Seik Raman.

According to a young participant at the event from Mawlamyine, the disunity amongst Mon political parties makes choosing who to support in the elections challenging and a single, inclusive Mon political party would make the voice of Mon people stronger.

Nearly 1,000 participants attended this year's Mon Youth Day ceremony, including Mon youths, monks, and members of civil society organizations (CSOs).

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## LOCALS IN THANBYUZAYAT TOWNSHIP PROTEST OVER ENCROACHMENT ON RELIGIOUS LAND

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department, but once the pagoda agreed to the use of the land, the local administration began planning to build houses for the fire department's staff instead. Complicating matters more is the pagoda's lack of documentation for ownership of the land.

*"The senior monks agreed [to the land use] after holding a meeting. The Local Senior Monk Association said building a water storage tank [for use in fighting fires] is in the public interest and it will benefit Kyaikkhami residents, so they decided to agree to the land use,"* said

Ko Myo Myint Oo, Chief of the Thanbyuzayat Religious Affairs Office.

The protesters marched from the Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery in Kyar Kan Ward and marched to the Township General Administrator's office shouting for the end to the abuse of religion and calling for action to be taken against the Thanbyuzayat Township General Administrator. They also called upon the Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan to take action on the issue.

*They [local administration] have gradually been infiltrating religious lands. We are worried that Mya Sein Yaung Pagoda will be swallowed by houses. We've organized this protest in order to protect our religious land,*

News

# EXCELLENT FORTUNE DEVELOPMENT GROUP COMPANY PUSHING AHEAD WITH CONTROVERSIAL STONE MINING PROJECT

January 10, 2018

**HURFOM:** Excellent Fortune Development (EFD) Group Company Ltd. is pushing forward with a controversial stone mining project by Mount Bleh Patoi located near Dani Thakyar and Magyi villages, Ye Township, Mon State, despite a lack of consensus among local residents.

According to a former Magyi village administrator, the project poses no harm to local communities and would spur economic and social development.

*"We've been underdeveloped for years. We've never dreamed of a developed society. The company has informed us that this stone mining project on the mountain will do no harm to the villagers. We've accepted their proposal because we want development such as roads, electricity, health, and education services. There is no personal profit. We've accepted the project only for local development,"* said the former administrator.

Some local residents agree with the former Magyi village administrator, arguing that there is only a small proportion of villagers who disagree with the project.

*"The company said they will fulfill the request of the villagers. If they really keep their promise we've decided to agree with the project. Nearly all of Dani Thakyar villagers have shown their approval. Just 10% of the villagers have opposed the project,"* said Nai Taung Sein, a resident of Dani Thakyar.

The proposed project generated controversy after reports that threats and administrative misconduct were used to coerce reluctant villagers into approving the project.

The rift in opinions on the project is between villagers in central Dani Thakyar village and those who reside on the outskirts. Nearly all villagers and monks in central Dani Thakyar have approved the project, however, villagers residing on the outskirts of

Dani Thakyar and some Magyi villagers and local monks have decided to oppose the project.

According to venerable Monk U S— from Magyi village, the villagers from Dani Thakyar agreed to sell their land for the local project out of respect for Abbot Sanda Tarra, who was born in Dani Thakyar. Abbot Sanda Tarra is a prominent and powerful monk in the area who initially decided to sell the land near the mountain to EFD.

U S— also contends that in December 2017, Abbott Sanda Tarra informed the villagers from the outskirts of Dani Thakyar who opposed the project that there may be consequences, including a police investigation due to their refusal to approve the project, and that he would not protect them.

Despite the mounting pressure, local residents like U Shwe Thein, a plantation owner from Dani Thakyar village, continue to oppose the project, saying, *"if the company occupies the mountain, we, the villagers from the outskirts of Dani Thakyar village, will be in trouble. If there is no mountain, we will be struck by [high] winds [that would no longer be blocked by the mountain]. The plantations nearby the mountain will be destroyed. Most of the villagers rely on plantation work. So if their plantation has been destroyed, they will be in trouble."*

Venerable Monk U S— added, *"we don't fear any threat. We've been continuing our opposition to the project."* According to U S—, some local residents are afraid of the Abbot Sanda Tarra's brother, a former member of a Mon splinter group who has been threatening villagers over their opposition to the project.

EFD has yet to apply for permission with local authorities to conduct the project. Deputy staff officer of the Khaw Zar Land Records Department (LRD) U Aung Zaw Win stated that the company must apply for permission to use the land with the Ye Township LRD.

*"The company informed us that they would call us when they had an agreement with the villagers over the project. But, to date, they haven't called us yet. They also haven't applied for permission to use the land. [EFD] has to negotiate with the villagers properly. We have to conduct a land survey even if they already have an agreement. We have to check which kind of plantations are nearby the mountain and what kind of soil the project area has, and then we must to report our findings."* said U Aung Zaw Win.

According to U Aung Zaw Win, permission for EFD's project will be decided based on the submitted findings.

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## News

# HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT BY LOCAL VILLAGERS AFTER NMSP AGREE TO SIGN NCA



February 7, 2018

HURFOM: After meeting with State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) announced they will sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on February 13<sup>th</sup> in Naypyidaw.

News of the NMSP's announcement was met with expressions of hope for increased development by villagers living in the surrounding area of the NMSP's headquarter. Expectations are high that the NCA will bring better infrastructure and telecommunications

to local villages, as well as initiate local development programs.

"We have had high expectations [for local development] for a long time. The phone companies have already set up their telecommunication towers but they are not operating yet. The villagers are dying of hunger for phones and roads. I think it's definitely okay this time," said Nai Khin, an ethnic Tavoyan who lives in Pa Nan Bane (Ye Chaung Phyar) village, located in a NMSP-controlled area.

During the rainy season, because of bad roads and a poor transportation system, students and patients in NMSP-

controlled areas have difficulty getting to schools and clinics.

"After finishing Standard Four (Grade 5), the students in Joe Ha Baru and Pa Nan Bane have to join the school in Nyi Sar – the NMSP's headquarters. Some students go to school by bikes, but some have to go on foot," said Seik Hlane, an official from the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC).

Most of the villagers who live in the surrounding area of the NMSP's headquarters make their living on plantations or other agricultural activities.

The surrounding area of the NMSP's headquarters includes two regions – Pa Nan Bane (Ye Chaung Phyar) that has eight villages and Ba Lae Don Phike that has 12 villages. These areas are also known as a NMSP development area. Even though these two regions have many villages, houses, and people, the transportation and communication systems are very poor.

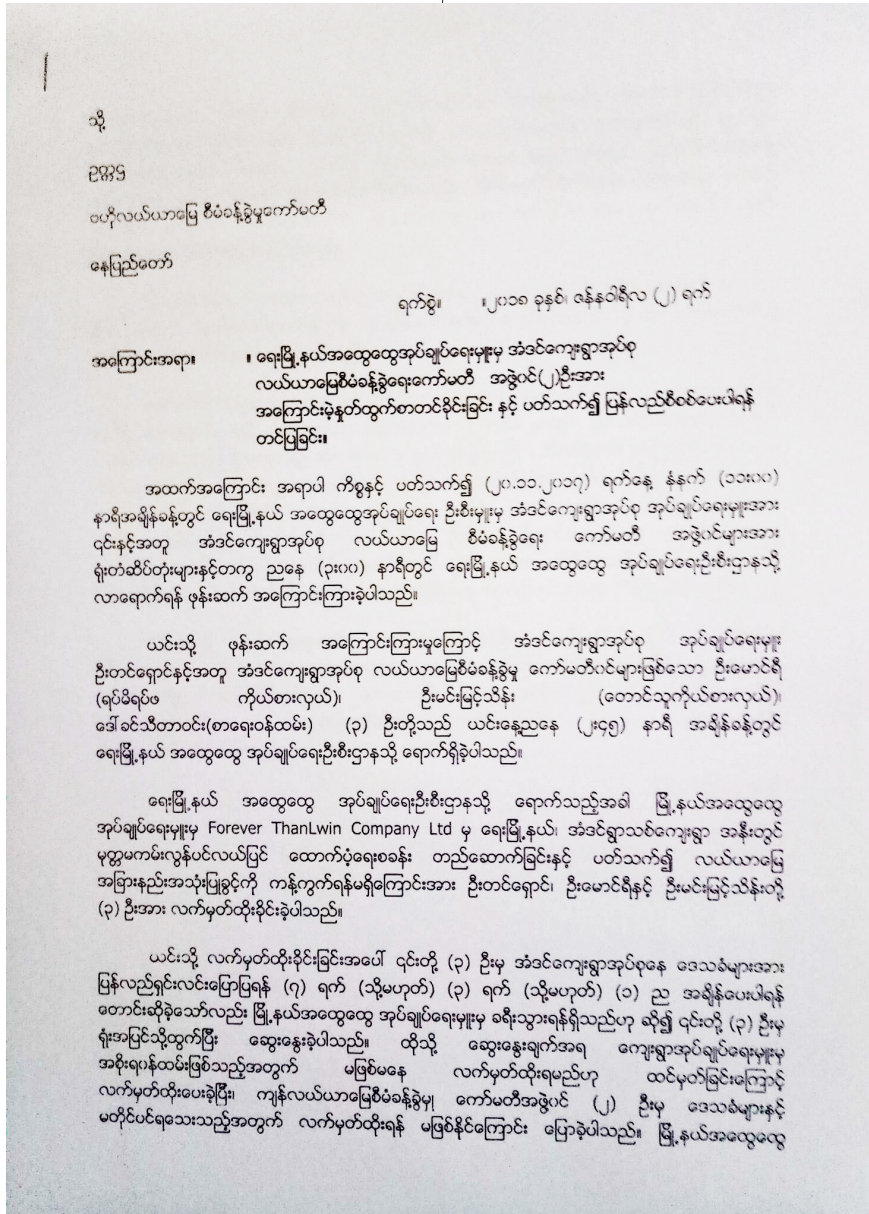
Central committee members of the NMSP have also promised that they would gear up on working on local development projects and improve road and telecommunications after signing the NCA.

“After finishing Standard Four (Grade 5), the students in Joe Ha Baru and Pa Nan Bane have to join the school in Nyi Sar – the NMSP's headquarters. Some students go to school by bikes, but some have to go on foot,



News

# ANDIN VILLAGERS REQUEST INVESTIGATION AFTER COMMITTEE MEMBERS SACKED OVER REFUSAL TO REZONE FARMLAND FOR MYANMAR OFFSHORE SUPPLY BASE



"In my opinion, the general administrator doesn't have the authority [to dismiss farmland committee members]. The company [requesting the use of the land] must meet with the [entire] farmland committee first and request their consent. This is the official procedure. But the company didn't meet with the committee and directly negotiated with the general administrator. The administrator used his power [to get the approval of the farmland committee members] so the procedure wasn't in accordance with the law," said U Thaung Sein, a community leader in the New Andin village.

Reports surfaced last month that on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2017, Ye Township General Administrator U Tin Nyunt ordered Andin village Farmland Management Committee members to give their consent for farmland to be used for the Offshore Oil and Gas Supply Base project nearby New Andin village.

The only two elected committee members refused to give their consent citing a lack of transparency with local residents who knew nothing about the project. They were subsequently forced to resign from the committee.

Local residents disagree with the dismissal of the committee members and are requesting the re-appointment of the two committee members.

"The villagers have been unhappy with our dismissal. They want us to re-gain our position. I want to quit my duty. But if I am re-appointed, I will work for the committee again because I respect the desire of the villagers and want to serve the village," said former Farmland Management Committee member U Min Myint Thein of Andin village.

HURFOM contacted Ye Township General Administrator U Tin Nyunt, however he refused to comment on the situation.

January 15, 2018

**HURFOM:** Villagers are upset over the dismissal of two Andin village Farmland Management Committee members in Ye Township, Mon State. U Maung Ye (Villagers' Representative) and U Min Myint Thein (Farmers' Representative) were forced to resign by the Ye Township general administrator after they refused to agree to rezone farmland for use in the planned Offshore Oil and Gas Supply Base.

On January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018, Andin village tract community leaders, monks, and villagers submitted a report which recommended an investigation over the dismissal of the pair to the Mon State Farmland Management Committee, Upper House of Parliament (Naypyidaw), Land Investigation Committee (Naypyidaw), Mon State General Administration Department, Mon State Parliament, and the Mon State Complaint and Appeal Letter Review and Assessment Committee.



## News

## GROUP CALLS FOR GREATER LEGAL TRAINING FOR VILLAGE ADMINISTRATORS AS KEY TO RULE OF LAW

February 12, 2018

**WCRP:** On January 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Mon State Rule of Law and Justice Coordination Team (RLJC) held an event in Mawlamyine with local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to identify and discuss the challenges to rule of law in Mon State.

According to many of those who attended, a lack of legal knowledge among village administrators is a primary problem. Village administrators are often the first point of contact for those seeking justice, and poor understanding of legal processes and obligations can be damaging to rule of law.

This is particularly the case for issues of sexual violence. Noting the recent increase in reports of sexual violence against children, Daw Khin Than Htwe, Chair of the Mon State Women and Children Upgrade Committee (MWCUC), explains, “small problems can become bigger, as most village administrators do not understand about laws regarding

*child rights and violations. It is very important for them to have legal knowledge and to deal with cases properly to get justice for each citizen. The village administrator and their team’s relationship with citizens is very close, therefore they are the first to hear of such cases.”*

Many families who do report sexual violence to village administrators report a lack of access to adequate justice. A lawyer from Legal Clinic Myanmar said, “we have some information and have also seen that in many cases where crimes are committed, the administrator pressures the victim’s family not to go to the police and to instead negotiate [a settlement] at the administration office.”

Moreover, participants felt that rule of law is also hampered by factors such as corruption in local government departments and staff, particularly among local police departments who process cases, citing a lack of respect for the rights of local people.

*“There is no rule of law as staff from the government are corrupt against their own citizens. If we talk about corruption, we have to start talking about people’s spirits. If we could change each staff’s thoughts or spirit, rule of law would automatically be available,”* said a male representative from the event.

Participants at the event recommended that the government implement a regional model for solving these challenges, which would see village administrators taking formal legal action against perpetrators.

According to Daw Khin Than Htwe, this comes down to providing better education for village administrators on rule of law. *“The administrators never attend our events, even though Mon State ministers and Members of Parliament accept our invitation and join us. Administrators are the first point of travel on the path to rule of law. I would like to suggest that if the group [RLJC] invites them and provides legal training, they would be more likely to join.”*

## FAMILY OF RAPE VICTIM TO APPEAL DECISION TO JAIL PERPETRATOR FOR ONLY 3 YEARS

January 16, 2018

**WCRP:** A sexual assault victim and her family are upset over the decision by the Kyaikmayaw Township Court to sentence her attacker to only three years in jail. The family is planning to appeal the decision at the Mawlamyine District Court.

*“We are not happy with the decision. The victim reported that she was raped by [him]. The perpetrator was sentenced to jail for only three years even though he committed the crime. The victim’s family will appeal the case at the district level. We heard that the perpetrator also sued the victim’s family [for falsely accusing him],”* said Mi Cherry Soe,

Project Director from Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization (JCSDO), which is supporting the victim.

According to reports, on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, Daw T—, a 62-year-old woman from Kyune Kone village, Tarana village tract, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, was raped and strangled almost unconscious by her 45-year-old neighbor. After receiving Daw T—’s medical report from Mawlamyine General Hospital, the Kyaikmayaw Police arrested her neighbor and charged him with Penal Code #376 — punishment for rape.

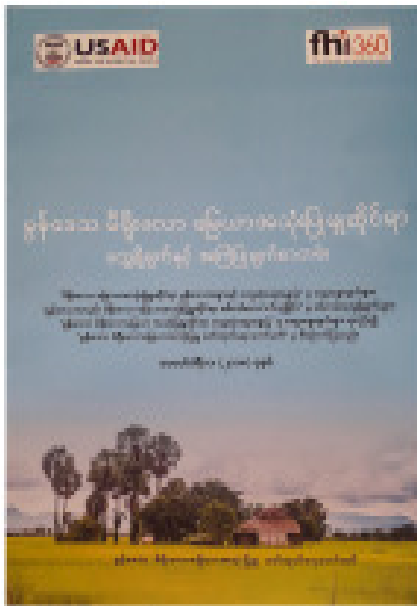
*“The victim did not have very strong evidence. The medical check did not find*

*sperm in the victim’s body and the doctor said that he did not see any signs of injury on her body. Therefore, the court has charged the perpetrator with [Penal Code] #511 — punishment for attempting to commit an offence — and he was sentenced to jail for only three years,”* said Daw T—’s lawyer, Daw Yu Thandar Myint.

Daw T— is also concerned for her safety after reportedly receiving threats from the perpetrator, saying, *“after the perpetrator is released from jail we will need to move from this village. He is not satisfied with his punishment and also threatened that he would do something [to me] after he is released from jail.”*

News

# CUSTOMARY LAND PRACTICES IN MON STATE AND MON AREAS UNDER THREAT, ACCORDING TO NEW REPORT



February 12, 2018

**HURFOM:** Civilians who rely heavily on land for daily survival needs face social injustice, according to a new report by the Mon Area Customary Land Tenure Documentation Committee (MACLTDC). The report released on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2018 in Mawlamyine looks at the customary land tenure practices of Mon people in their communities and followed more than ten months of public consultations and surveys.

According to Nai Sawor Mon, a committee coordinator, they found that there are many threats to traditional community land tenure and ancestral land ownership embedded in existing state laws. Lands that have been transferred by family for many generations in communities are not recognized under current land laws, while some of these lands are categorized as wild and unused by the Burma government.

He added, *“our Mon ethnic people have belonged to these customary lands for several hundreds of years. But according to the laws, we no longer own any lands. We just want the right to work on the land. Therefore, we need to advocate for the recognition of our ethnic people’s land tenure during the peace process. It is an important issue.”*

Committee members involved in the consultation and survey also expressed how laws must reflect customary land tenure in Mon areas. They believe that if land laws in Mon areas are regulated by the Mon State Parliament, the outcome will be much more beneficial than if done so by the Union Parliament.

According to MACLTDC, the committee travelled through 11 townships in Mon State, Karen State, and Tenasserim Division, conducting 19 rounds of public consultations with 639 people from local communities. The committee documented local Mon land management strategies, particularly the systems in place that distinguish land which belongs to individuals and land which belongs to the community.

In order to understand how these two types of land are managed by farming families and community leaders, MACLTDC trained young community activists to conduct quantitative surveys in these townships. The surveyors used two sets of survey questionnaires and conducted interviews with 1,934 people.

Nai Htay Aung, also a committee coordinator, said *“as the son of a Mon farmer it is quite special to conduct this project. Honestly, I didn’t know much about land before we started this project. When we arrived at the rural Mon villages there were many surprising things about Mon people’s definition of land, as well as the*

*differences in land tenures between an individual and the community. We found there were many community lands which were confiscated during previous military governments.”*

Nai Sawor Mon also expressed the challenges currently facing customary land use, especially the expansion and recovery of forestry lands; the government’s recognition of ethnic people’s land as wild and unused in their mapping; and regular arrivals of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and mega projects, and the type of land and water grabs associated with FDI.

Burma’s 2012 Farmland Law does not acknowledge customary land tenure and the 2016 National Land Use Policy does not include an exact description of land use policy in ethnic areas. This allows domestic and international companies to confiscate land and it creates conflicts regarding land issues.

According to the report, land laws in Burma are not strong enough to protect its own civilians, as domestic and international companies and the government have continually encroached in ethnic areas for resource extraction projects, contributing to mass human rights violations in the process.

The committee plans to hold meetings with the Mon State Parliament, Mon State government, and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) to advocate for the protection of customary land tenure and the farmers who practice it.





## News

## FAMILY OF CHILD RAPE VICTIM UPSET AFTER FORGED SIGNATURE CAUSES THEM TO MISS COURT DATE

February 7, 2018

WCRP: The family of a 13-year-old victim of rape from Pa Nga village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, is upset after learning that they had missed the perpetrator's first court date after the mother's signature was forged on the court attendance list.

Daw Ngo explained, *"we didn't know that the Mawlamyine court called us for the first court date as police from Thanbyuzayat did not tell us about it. When they called us for the second court date I found my forged signature on the attendance list of the first court date. I asked a police officer about the fake signature and told him that I am concerned about signing the paper for the second court date. The police officer said nothing would happen and to just sign for the second court date. So I signed the paper for the second court date attendance list."*

According to Daw Ngo, although her signature was included on the attendance list for the first court date, it was not similar to her handwriting. When she asked a police officer about the forged signature he told her that someone from Pa Nga village had signed. But when Daw Ngo asked Pa Nga

villagers, they told her that someone from the police had signed it.

*"They shouldn't be able to do this without telling the victim's family. They should know about trial proceedings. A trial is important because [their presence] is helpful when the court makes a decision on punishment for the perpetrator. Actually, [this incident] can be considered a form of corruption,"* said Mi Cherry Soe, Project Director at Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization (JCSDO). She added, *"due to these kinds of problem, citizens don't trust in the rule of law and have little faith in the government's staff as well."*

According to the victim's mother,

*"we went to the Thanbyuzayat Police Station to sign the attendance list for the second court date and asked the police officer about the fake signature. The police officer told me that if the court asks about our absence at the first trial, just to tell them that my daughter was sick and we could not attend. I replied that my daughter was fine, but that we did not know about the date of the trial and couldn't join. Then he said we know that, but he*

*requested that if the court asks, to just tell them what he said. But the court asked nothing about it and we just stayed quiet."*

On November 15<sup>th</sup> 2017, Daw Ngo's 13-year-old daughter was raped twice by a 58-year-old man. Her daughter had gone to the market to buy snacks and when she passed the perpetrator's house he invited her in to eat a snack in his house where the perpetrator then attacked the girl.

In Burma, individuals face many challenges when accessing justice for sexual violence. Legal fees and transportation costs associated with taking formal legal action in a court of law can be daunting. Furthermore, length of trials can last years, necessitating even greater costs and days off work for families to attend court proceedings. This often leads survivors and their families to settle for compensation arranged through village administration, rather than seek justice through formal legal channels.

For more information on sexual violence against children and challenges to accessing justice in Mon State and Mon areas of southern Burma, see HURFOM's 2017 report: [Cracks in the Silence](#).

## ATTEMPTED RAPE OF AN 8-YEAR-OLD IN MUDON TOWNSHIP, MON STATE

March 22, 2018

On March 18<sup>th</sup> 2018, at approximately 9 am, 62-year-old U Tun Ti from Kwankabee village, attempted to rape an 8-year-old girl named Mi T— who lives in Kwankabee village, Mudon Township, Mon State. The perpetrator was arrested the following day by Kamarwat police.

Police charged the perpetrator under Myanmar Penal Code #376 (punishment for rape) and Penal Code #511 (punishment for attempting to commit offences) at the Kamarwat Police Station. The Officer U Sein Win from Kamarwat Police Station said, *"we have finished our investigation and are now waiting for*

*permission from the courts. If it is deemed we have sufficient evidence, we will send him to Mawlamyine court. Currently, the perpetrator is detained at Mawlamyine prison."*

Officer U Sein Win explained that, *"on March 18<sup>th</sup> an 8-year-old girl was staying home alone while her grandmother went to Toman village for work. The perpetrator knew the girl was home alone and he went into the house. Daw Main, who lived near the house of the girl, came to the house, seeing the perpetrator taking off the young girl's clothes and touch her chest. Daw Main shouted and the perpetrator ran away."*

Around 5 pm that evening, the girl's grandmother reported the incident to the Kamarwat Police Station and requested that the police charge the perpetrator.

On the morning of March 19<sup>th</sup>, Officer U Sein Win and a group of officers arrested the perpetrator in a field five miles from Kwankabee village.

Reports of sexual violence against children have increased in recent years, leading many to call for tougher sentences for offenders. For more information, see HURFOM's, [Cracks in the Silence](#).

News

# MNEC TO HOLD CONFERENCE TO DRAFT NATIONAL ETHNIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY



February 14, 2018

**HURFOM:** The Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) announced that they will hold a two-day conference in May 2018 to collect data and information on ethnic languages and education around Burma. The MNEC will use this data to draft ethnic language education policies, which they will present to the union government.

The MNEC will invite Karen, Shan, Karenni, and Chin education committees, among others, to participate in the conference and voice opinions and solutions to current problems facing ethnic language education in Burma.

*"Our union has a variety of ethnicities and each ethnicity speaks their own language... We [Mon people] have decided to build a federal union in the future and we've accepted that we must use our own language. The [union-level] Ministry of Education has also accepted*

*this concept. But we do not have detailed policies on ethnic languages and education. The [Burma] government doesn't know how to collect data in order to help us, so they asked us to collect information and draw policies and report back to them,"* said Nai Rot Ga Kao, from the MNEC.

The conference is scheduled for the second week of May and the MNEC are currently planning consultation trips to various education organizations to collect data and learn how the different organizations operate. The MNEC will also encourage these committees to have a stronger voice in advocating for government policies on ethnic language education.

The MNEC was founded by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in 1972. They currently have 133 Mon National Schools and 92 mixed-schools which are controlled by both the NMSP and the government. The MNEC has also

appointed 780 school teachers and 59 education officials.

*Our union has a variety of ethnicities and each ethnicity speaks their own language... We [Mon people] have decided to build a federal union in the future and we've accepted that we must use our own language. The [union-level] Ministry of Education has also accepted this concept. But we do not have detailed policies on ethnic languages and education. The [Burma] government doesn't know how to collect data in order to help us, so they asked us to collect information and draw policies and report back to them,*



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2018 STATEMENT



International Women's Day  
08-03-18

March 8, 2018

Today, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) is celebrating International Women's Day. This year's theme is 'Press For Progress' to help accelerate gender parity. While women in Burma/Myanmar continue to face obstacles to the full realization of their rights, there are many women who are playing important roles in pushing for change.

In recognition of their tremendous efforts, HURFOM spoke with four female trailblazers in Mon communities about the challenges they face and their advice for younger generations in Mon State who want to make a difference.

### Daw Khine Khine Lei

Daw Khine Khine Lei is one of five female Members of Parliament (MP) in the Mon State Hluttaw. She represents Thaton Township (1) and during her time as an MP she has served as a member of the legislative committee and chairperson of the Mon State Hluttaw's Women and Child Right's Committee.

Daw Khine Khine Lei has long worked at promoting and protecting woman and child rights, beginning with her work with Kachin refugee women and children in 2007.

For Daw Khine Khine Lei, violence, particularly sexual violence, is one of the biggest problems facing women in Burma/Myanmar today. She advocates tirelessly for increased education and awareness of women's rights, as well as a stronger legal framework to deal with perpetrators of violence against women.

*"Most women feel ashamed if someone sexually harasses or abuses them. They don't dare to talk about it...society says that it is a woman's fault if it happens. But in this situation women have two choices: you can stay quiet or you can know your rights and fight for them."*

### Mi Jalon Htaw

Mi Jalon Htaw is one of only three female village administrators in Mon State and the first female administrator in her own community of Tara Nar village, Kyaikmayaw Township. After assuming the position in 2016, she reported facing many challenges and instances of discrimination due to her gender. However, she has never given up and continues to campaign for an end to domestic violence and encourages both men and women to support women's rights.

*"Women in our community face a lot of domestic violence. Many rural women do not see domestic violence as a big problem and think it is normal...once I became village administrator, women began to come to me and discuss their problems and abuse at the hands of their husbands...As a female village administrator women are more comfortable talking to me about women issues."*

For Mi Jalon Htaw, just asking for women's rights is not enough. She asks that all women learn about their rights and have the confidence to fully participate in the development of their communities.

### Daw Myint Myint Wai

Daw Myint Myint Wai has been a political advisor to the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) since 2010 and practiced law in Mon State for 14 years prior to her work with AMRDP.

Daw Myint Myint Wai advocates for the inclusion of more women in Mon politics and the end to traditional beliefs that a women's only role is to take care of her family. She hopes one day to see a federal union in Burma/Myanmar where women occupy important decision making positions

and work on developing policy related to women's issues.

She believes the key to getting more women into politics is changing both men's and women's attitudes towards female participation in politics. Both men and women need to encourage female candidates to participate in Mon politics.

*"I would like to tell our women that we all have the ability [to work in politics] ...We must put all of our female voices together and ask for our rights. It is difficult to be successful in this if our collective voice is not strong...We must have confidence and help our community as much as we can."*

### Daw Ni Ni Aung

Daw Ni Ni Aung is one of only three female village administrators currently serving in Mon State. Prior to assuming the position of village administrator of Kaw Don village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Daw Ni Ni Aung was involved in community development activities throughout the Pyar Taung region.

While working as a community advocate, Daw Ni Ni Aung was struck by the difficulties local villagers faced on a daily basis and the lack of action by village administrators to improve circumstances. Feeling compelled to run in order to make a difference in the lives of her neighbours through community development, she announced her candidacy and won.

It hasn't always been easy since she took over as village administrator. She reports experiencing discrimination against her age and gender by some members of her community, particularly elders.

*"Some people look down to me as I am female and young...but I campaign for women and their rights, and educate others on the problems that our women currently face...I would like to say to our women that we have the same ability as men and we can work in any situation that they can work."*

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News

# LACK OF SIGNALS AND GATES AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ENDANGERING CITIZEN LIVES



February 14, 2018

**HURFOM:** The lack of signals and gates at level crossings in Mon State are a hazard to drivers and pedestrians, and are frequently the cause of traffic accidents and fatalities.

On February 6<sup>th</sup> 2018, a car holding three senior monks crashed into a train at the level crossing between Nai Pa Rai and Kwaie Wan villages in Mudon Township. One monk succumbed to his injuries at the scene of the accident.

Similarly, on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, a small truck was crossing the train tracks nearby Pa Nga village, Thanbyuzayat Township, when its engine suddenly died. A train passing through at that time smashed the car into pieces. The driver managed to escape death, but he lost his car and the rubber slices he was transporting.

Traffic accidents at level crossings have been reported throughout Mon State this year, including nearby Kha Rai Paring (Kywe Chan Kone) village, Paung Township on January 8<sup>th</sup> and on January 14<sup>th</sup> again in Pa Nga village.

*"Traffic accidents frequently happen at our level crossing in Ka Log Tot village [Mudon Township]. A couple years ago a woman who wanted to escape the rain had sped across the railway crossing and was hit by the train,"* said Nai Zan, a Ka Log Tot resident.

On July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016, Mi Kon Ha Lae, 30, and Mehm Thein Win, 7, had hurried to cross the railway at Kaw Pee Htaw village, Mudon Township, as there was heavy rain. Their motorbike crashed into the train and was smashed into pieces. Mi Kon Ha Lae died immediately at the scene, while Mehm Thein Win was seriously injured.

*"I think there should be some protection at level crossings because accidents are happening frequently right now. Level crossings inside the villages have no gate and busy people don't pay any special attention when crossing the railway. When this coincides with a train, it's dangerous,"* said Nai Bnyair Gajot, a Pa Nga resident.

According to U Tun Htay, the Mon State Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, and Transportation, two gates cannot be

put up within less than a mile of each other, so level crossings inside villages cannot have gates. They only have signs advising motorists to "Stop, Check, and Go." The minister also warned that people should be careful when crossing the railway.

*"Traffic accidents frequently happen at our level crossing in Ka Log Tot village [Mudon Township]. A couple years ago a woman who wanted to escape the rain had sped across the railway crossing and was hit by the train,"*



## News

## BURMA ARMY ORDERS THE NMSP TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF ATTENDEES AT PLANNED NCA FORUMS



March 19, 2018

**HURFOM:** Burma Army Southeast Military Command is limiting the size of New Mon State Party (NMSP) forums with Mon citizens. The NMSP had planned to meet with citizens throughout several districts in Mon State to discuss the recently signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the union government.

"About two or three days before we were to hold the forums, the military contacted us and told us that they will only allow around 30 to 40 people to join each of the meetings. We had planned to meet with around 250 people per district. Because of this problem we have postponed the date of our forums and have not yet met with citizens," Nai Win Hla, head of NMSP's Home Affairs Department.

The forums were planned to be a discussion between the NMSP and Mon citizens regarding the NCA and other Mon political issues in several Mon State districts and NMSP-controlled areas, including border regions.

"According to the policy of Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), while the NMSP must inform the Burma Army regarding any meetings or forums in NMSP-controlled areas and villages, they are not required to gain permission. Now even though we have organized the meetings in our area, the military has come and ordered us to limit the number of citizens we invite. This is not fair. They are bullying us," said Nai Oak Sar, a member of the organizers committee.

On February 13th 2018, both the NMSP and the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) signed NCA with the union government in Naypyitaw. The NMSP is currently in negotiations with the Burma Army to conduct the forums as originally planned.

## MUDON TOWNSHIP LOCALS ANGRY OVER LACK OF FUNDS AND TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT WATER SUPPLY PROJECT

February 12, 2018

**HURFOM:** Local residents are upset after being asked to pay for the completion of a project to supply Ka Law Taw village, Mudon township, with water from the Winphanon Dam, after the Mon State government only budgeted 50,000,000 kyat (US \$37,618) for the project. Currently, only three of the 13 wards in the village are supplied with water from the Winphanon Dam and locals are refusing to pay to finish the project.

*"Our village has a problem due to the government. They should have told us that they could only provide water for three wards. This is the same problem as when they provided us with electricity in our village. They provided too little money and it has only created problems among our villagers. I would like to say that the government should have first met with the locals and explained that they could not fill the needs of all people [in the village] because they only had a small budget. Then locals would know whether they should or should not do*

*it,"* said Dr. Pone Wai Oo, a Ka Law Taw local.

According to locals, every year during the hot season in March and April, residents throughout Ka Law Taw village tract are faced with water shortages. Villagers who do face water shortages are still able to get water from wells in the village and sometimes water is donated from other parts of the village tract.

*"As for me, I don't want them to do this water supply project because it is not good for us if we need to spend our money on that. Moreover, we may need to pay every month if we use the water. Our village does not need it as much. Mostly, we only face difficulties in getting water for two months [out of the year],"* said Nai Chem Non.

*"The reason they [villagers] have conflict with each other is that they have a lack of knowledge. The government never explained to the locals about their plan or what they would do. They never did what they said they would and now the*

*locals are arguing with each other. There is no unity among the locals. There will be a lot of difficulties to develop the village if there is no unity among the villagers,"* he continued.

Some Ka Law Taw residents felt that the budget provided for the project by the Mon State government should have been spent to expand the local well and pool in order to supplement the local water supply during the hot season.

However, not all villagers agree. Daw Khin Win May said, *"we need to pay money to get water and we will pay it. If we don't have money, I will borrow money from others and give it. It is important to get the water. The village is not developing if we don't have water."*

In May 2017, the village formed a committee to discuss solutions to the water supply problem, but the committee was eventually disbanded. The current village water supply committee was formed afterwards by the local Abbot with 20 other members.

News

## VILLAGES IN THANBYUZAYAT TOWNSHIP TO REQUEST USE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS FOR MON LANGUAGE SUMMER CLASSES



February 23, 2018

**HURFOM:** Even though the time for Mon language summer classes is approaching, some Mon villages in Thanbyuzayat Township have a shortage of class space and may be unable to provide summer instruction. This has led the Summer Class Committee to submit a request to the

Mon State Ethnic Affairs Committee to provide accommodation, according to the Venerable Monk who leads the Thanbyuzayat Township Mon summer classes.

*"Some villages have requested summer classes but they have no vacancies for classrooms. The Ethnic Affairs Committee said to send them the list of*

*villages that have no space for classes. Now, we have collected the list and sent it to the committee, but we haven't received a reply yet,"* said Venerable Monk Soi La Wun Ta, the Chairperson of the Thanbyuzayat Mon Summer Class.

The majority of villages in Thanbyuzayat Township hold Mon language summer classes each year, however this year about ten villages have asked for help in finding space for holding classes.

*"Now, it's the time for matriculation exams and they'll reply after the exams. We are thinking of holding Mon summer classes in the government schools. But we have to make a request to the Ethnic Affairs Committee. If they give us the green light, we'll run our classes in the government schools,"* said the Monk.

Mon summer classes usually start right after matriculation exams have finished and are held in Mon monasteries for several months.

## ACTIVISTS BLAME POLICE CORRUPTION FOR RISE IN DRUG USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN MON STATE

March 20, 2018

**HURFOM:** Police corruption and inaction is fueling the drug trade in Mon State, according to activists from Ye Township. They argue this has led to increasing drug use among young people, particularly teenagers and students.

*"The police are weak in terms of drug control, and by weak I mean that the police are also [corrupt and] involved in the drug trade,"* said an activist from Ye Social Society (YSS).

Rumors of police corruption in the drug trade are fed by stories of close interaction between police officers and drug dealers, and the impunity with which many of the latter seem to operate.

*"The villagers often see police going to a [known] drug dealer's house. We think maybe it is to arrest them or do*

*something [else]. But they never arrest them. We should find out why drug dealers are never arrested. When an arrest is made, the real drug dealer isn't caught; it's only his or her relative that is arrested. We don't know why. The big fish always escapes. Just small-time dealers and users are caught,"* said a resident of Ka Loh Toh village, Mudon Township.

It's not just police who activists say are not doing enough to curb the sale of drugs in villages. Activists report village administrators, although aware of drug dealers in their communities, are hesitant to arrest individuals in their communities with which they have a personal connection.

*"Even though police officials and village administrators have the power [to arrest drug dealers] in accordance with the law, they can't separate their duty from their personal issues,"* continued the activist from YSS.

Locals report that the widespread use of illicit drugs has led to a waning interest in the pursuit of an education among young people, and more criminal and mental health problems in their communities. More needs to be done they say, and not just by police.

*"Even though the police hold the primary responsibility for the spread of drugs [in our communities], parents should also control their children. They should closely monitor them,"* continued the Ka Loh Toh villager.

In December 2017, it was announced a new committee would be formed to combat drug use in Ye Township through advocating for drug treatment and educational programs. However, some locals have dismissed their efforts, arguing it would be much more effective if instead police arrested large-scale drug traffickers and took them to court.



## News

## CORRUPT LAND ACQUISITION BY STONE MINING COMPANIES LEADING TO UNEMPLOYMENT, ACCORDING TO PAUNG TOWNSHIP LOCALS

March 20, 2018

Unfair and corrupt land acquisitions by stone mining companies in Paung Township, Mon State, have led to unemployment, according to locals in Kyone Ka village. Residents also lay part of the blame for the loss of their plantations and livelihoods at the hands of the General Administration Department (GAD) and local Land Records Department.

*"They broke the laws when they took the land for their projects. They [stone mining companies] cooperated with the government to pressure local villagers via the local authorities, taking advantage of villagers' limited legal knowledge. They said farming the land without a Land Use Certificate (LUC) was illegal and that local farmers could be sued for their wrongdoings. They also threatened the villagers saying that in order to avoid any legal action or loss, the villagers must sell their land to the companies at the price offered by the companies. After the locals lost their land to these companies, they lost their livelihoods and have become unemployed,"* said U Saw Tun, a local from Nat Kyi Chaung village.

In addition to the unscrupulous land acquisition, villagers report serious damage to the local environment as a result of these stone mining projects, including the destruction and pollution

of water resources, forest areas, and farming land. Soil erosion from these projects has also increased instances of flooding, causing further damage to streams and paddy fields.

This is further exacerbated by the daily controlled explosions, which in addition to noise pollution, sends debris flying, destroying homes, farmlands, and religious sites such as Buddhist temples and pagodas.

*"Locals are never informed about when stone mining projects will begin to operate. They only become aware of these projects once they hear the explosions. It's clear that these projects were implemented with zero transparency,"* said Daw Zun Pan, a project coordinator with the Network for Social Development and Peace (NSDP).

In October of last year, the NSDP released a report on the environmental impacts and human rights violations resulting from the abundance of stone mining operations in Paung Township. The report also highlighted villager demands for more transparency and consultation with local communities affected by these projects.

Local villagers met with representatives from the Mon State Parliament last Thursday to discuss the issue. Both the

NSDP and local villagers demanded an investigation into whether stone mining companies in Paung Township followed the proper procedures and policies to acquire land and conduct stone mining projects.

*"We will do something to deal with this issue and facilitate a discussion with the government. Cooperating with the [Mon State Natural Resource and] Environmental Conservation Watch Committee formed by the members of parliament and associated government departments, we have been investigating stone mining projects in each township. We will investigate Paung Township on March 20<sup>th</sup>. After collecting information, we will decide if the projects have been running in accordance with the laws or not,"* said Dr. Khin Naing Oo, Member of Parliament (MP) for Bilin Township (1).

However, the Mon State government has been criticized in the past for failing to make good on decisions made by parliament, with problems continuing to exist despite directives to ameliorate the situation.

According to the Thaton District GAD, there are approximately 25 stone mining projects that have already received official permission to operate from the government.

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News

# VILLAGERS UPSET OVER DAMAGE TO PLANTATIONS BY TREASURE HUNTERS SEARCHING FOR WWII LOOT



March 6, 2018

HURFOM: Treasure hunters searching for fabled caches of buried gold and other valuables left by retreating Japanese troops during World War II have residents in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, worried about damage to local plantations.

Excavations by Yangon-based Golden Geo Myanmar Company Ltd. (GGM) began early February near Mount Mane Mala (Samane Blai) at the western edge of Thanbyuzayat Town, Mon State. Angry over the sudden appearance of deep holes in farming fields and increasingly concerned about the use of explosives to aid in the treasure hunters' search, local villagers submitted a complaint to local authorities voicing their displeasure.

In response, authorities from the Thanbyuzayat Township General

Administration Department (GAD) mounted an investigation into GGM's operations. Authorities discovered that GGM did not have any permission to conduct search operations and they were subsequently forced to cease their hunt by GAD officials.

"They have randomly dug holes in the plantations of local people in order to search for Japanese treasure. They knew nothing with certainty, but dug holes for treasure there anyways. If there is blasting, the local people and farmers are the ones who have to suffer from these explosions. No one dares to go there. Everyone is afraid of explosions," said Nai Kyaw Win, a Krone Krote villager.

GGM's search area is located three miles west of Thanbyuzayat Town and is bordered to the south by Krone Kote village. Most of the hills in the area have been transformed into rubber

plantations and the company has reportedly dug holes in these plantations without prior permission from the owners.

"The company dug holes up to five feet wide and 20 feet deep. [Now], there are seven holes and the water has protruded up to ten feet [in some of the holes]. They dug these holes as if they were digging water wells," according to local resident Nai Lin Lin Khine.

Locals also reported hearing an explosion one night and the surrounding villages have felt unsafe ever since. However, no one could confirm whether the sound was due to the search efforts.

Although GGM was forced to stop their search by local authorities, they have already requested permission to continue their search.

"In order to get permission to dig for treasure, we've already submitted a letter to the township- and state-level authorities. We'll continue our search after getting permission. It will be very good for us if we also get permission from the Union Government," said U Win Thein, GGM's Managing Director.

When asked about the issue, Mon State Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Dr. Nai Hong Dane (Min Kyi Win) said, "we have no authority to make a decision on whether to allow a company to search for Japanese treasure. It is an issue for the Union Government."

The hills surrounding Thanbyuzayat Town have long been rumored to harbor buried treasure left by occupying Japanese forces during their retreat at the end of World War II. Similar claims of unfathomable wealth buried by Japanese troops persist throughout Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines.

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## 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:

HURFOM, P.O. Box 35, Sangkhalburi Post Office,  
Kanchanaburi, 71240 Thailand

E-mail: [info@rehmonnya.org](mailto:info@rehmonnya.org)

Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director

Human Rights Foundation of Monland

## MON NATIONAL SCHOOL SUMMER PROGRAMS FACING A TEACHER AND FUNDING CRISIS



March 19, 2018

Mon National Schools are facing a shortage of teachers for its 70,000 students in its summer program due to a funding crisis, according to Nai Mon Ral Gal, joint secretary of the Mon Literature and Culture Committee.

*"Although we must have teachers to teach the students, we have no money to provide a salary for the teachers. It is difficult to get teachers without paying a salary," he said.*

Some townships in Mon State open summer programs for Mon National Schools after the government schools close for the year in March, while some wait to open after the water festival in April. The summer school program operates in 18 townships throughout southern Burma, including all of Mon State and parts of Bago Region.

Nai Mon Ral Gal continued, *"most teachers are monks and we have help from some Mon people who can teach Mon language. We have faced a lot of difficulties this year. We have no money to support teacher salaries. We have to ask them to work for free."*

There are about 1,500 students in the Mon summer program in Rehmonnya University in Mawlamyine, however the school does not yet have enough teachers for their program, which began on March 5<sup>th</sup>.

*"We need a lot of teachers. We posted online [about our need] and some of our friends and some villages will come and help us... We mainly aim for Mon children from Mawlamyine to learn the Mon language and so we accepted students from standards one to nine,"* said A Shin Kaymarsarra, the leader of Mon Summer Program from Rehmonnya University.

Mi Own Kyin, a student's mother from Ning Pring village explained that, *"we are interested in this program because we heard that the program also teaches Mon and English as well. If children can speak English, it is useful for their future and therefore we want them to get English [language training] too."*

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# EXTENDED POWER CUTS TROUBLESOME FOR THANBYUZAYAT TOWN BUSINESSES



March 22, 2018

**HURFOM:** Residents in Thanbyuzayat Town, Mon State, are upset over the lack of warning concerning power cuts. The Thanbyuzayat Electricity Department will be cutting power for the last two weeks in March in order to install a new transformer and improve the town's electrical infrastructure.

The head of the Thanbyuzayat Municipal Department, Nai Min Latt said, "from March 12 to the end of the month there must be a power cut from 8 am to 3 pm every day. The electricity department has to reinforce utility poles and extend power cables from Mawlamyine. In order to perform their task, they have to cut power."

The Thanbyuzayat Electricity Department has already installed a 33,00-KVA (kilo-volt-ampere) transformer, but due to high demand it has been supplementing the town's supply of electricity with the 66,000-KVA transformer in Mawlamyine. As local residents continue to increase their energy consumption, the local energy department can sometimes only provide an output of 100 Volts (V), requiring

households to use their own electrical inverter in order to get 220 V of electricity.

*"We originally planned not to cut the power for the whole day. But our plan didn't work. Now we have to cut the power for seven or eight hours during the daytime. Even though we know the difficulty of the customers, we have no alternative but to do so. Our minister has instructed us to finish our work before Songkran, so we have to try hard and cut the power,"* said a staff member from the Thanbyuzayat Electricity Department.

Currently, the Thanbyuzayat generator can provide 33,000 kVA and it sends equal amounts of power to three sub-generators in Kyaik Kha Mi, Pa Nga, and Wae Toon Chaung (Da Ton Chit).

After installing the new generator, the department will provide double the output of the current generator, which will relieve some of the stress on the electrical grid, according to the department staff. Thanbyuzayat Town's **growing demand** for electricity has led to frequent power outages over the last year.

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