

PLANTATION OWNERS ENCOURAGED TO REPORT ARMED GROUP EXTORTION TO GOVERNMENT



August 21, 2015

An unknown Karen armed group has for years extorted money from rubber plantation owners in the area surrounding Anin and Htin-Yuu villages, in the Ye Ta Gon region of Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State. In a new development, the

New Mon State Party (NMSP), the predominant Mon armed group, has encouraged villagers to send letters to the Burmese central government reporting the Karen group's infractions.

According to NMSP Township administrator Nai Htaw Oo, the Karen armed group has for years chased villagers for money, claiming that their plantation land once belonged to Karen ancestors.

However, while this may have once been the case, it is reported that the land was legitimately transferred to Mon farmers many years ago. Nai Htaw Oo explained, "Karen people sold the land to Mon people. Then, Mon farmers turned the land into rubber plantations".

The group reportedly refers to itself as a "land committee". Fees demanded have varied with the size of owners'

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PARLAIN VILLAGERS CONDUCT ECOSYSTEMS STUDY TO COMBAT TOYO-THAI COAL POWER PLANT

[Read more on page16>>](#)

Abundance of **Parlain** Natural Resources and Communities

Parlain Study by its community June 2015



MON STATE FLOODING PROMPTS LIVELIHOOD CONCERNS



August 14, 2015

Villagers in Mon State's Belin and Thaton Townships have reported livelihood concerns due to severe floods.

Flooding in Mon State follows widespread floods throughout the

country, which have claimed the lives of over a hundred people and displaced over a million from their homes.

Mon State villages known to be affected include Don Won village in Thaton Township and Taung Gyi village in Belin Township.

In Don Won it is estimated that 350 of a total 1800 households have been affected, containing 1400 people. Meanwhile, 49 households in Taung Gyi village have suffered, with seven houses completely destroyed.

Don Won's Village Administrator, U Myint Tun, detailed rising concerns about the impact of flooding on local

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Commentary

Will the 2015 elections install a government capable of upholding human rights?

Since 2010, U Thein Sein's military-backed government has ruled the country of Burma, also known as Myanmar. This year, Burma's voters are excited to have the chance to vote for a new government, in elections to be held on November 8. The people want a new government which respects human rights and which has a strong stance on democratization.

U Thein Sein's so-called 'reform process' has been cosmetic, paying lip service to the international community's clamour for reform. For nearly five years, President Thein Sein and his cabinet - almost all of whom come from military backgrounds - have allowed gross human rights violations to be committed by the military and government police forces. In the midst of these abuses, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) has been like a toothless tiger, lying in wait but never acting.

Serious human rights violations committed under U Thein Sein's government include:

1. **Land grabbing and land confiscation by the Burmese Army and investors**, causing countless farmers to lose their land. These abuses have been reported to the Land Confiscation Inquiry Commission, but farmers have not yet received justice.
2. **Crackdowns on protestors opposing foreign investment projects**. Protestors at Latpandaung Copper Mine and elsewhere have been abused by riot police, and have become victims of the harsh use of repressive laws, such as laws against unlawful assemblies and demonstrations.
3. **Detention and murder of journalists**, who try to push for freedom of media and freedom of information. A freelance journalist, Ko Par Gyi, was killed in Karen State under Thein Sein's watch, and his case has not yet received a fair trial.
4. **Detention of student leaders and rejection of education reform**. Many student leaders who took part in non-violent protests earlier this year, in support of education reform, remain in detention.

These abuses, well-publicised in daily newspapers and weekly journals, are accompanied by even more extensive abuses in Burma's ethnic areas.

Ethnic populations in Kachin State and northern Shan State remain at war, as the Burmese/Myanmar Army continues to launch military offensives against ethnic armed groups. Local people have faced continued human rights violations, including killing, torture and inhumane treatment, forced labour and portering, and sexual assault. Many thousands of refugees have fled to the Chinese border. Meanwhile, thousands of internally displaced persons still face shortages of food and assistance.

Foreign companies have pushed for peace and ceasefires in ethnic areas, as they hope for the opportunity to exploit ethnic region resources. Meanwhile, as foreign investors sign MOUs with the government to build dams, mines and coal power plants, no one has consulted the people on projects that will affect their lives and livelihoods.

During U Thein Sein's five years in government the people have had no hope. With elections coming, the people are starting to find hope in political parties and politicians. The people are hoping for a better government following the upcoming elections. A new government which will protect their human rights and freedom. A government which will extend democratic space and exact rule with good governance.

Yet, whatever the result, the 2008 Constitution ensures that considerable power will remain with the military.

As polling day approaches, it's time to wait and see if Burma's new government fulfills the people's hopes.

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HURFOM Activities

HURFOM JOINS CALLS TO POSTPONE INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION FOR MYANMAR NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

July 17, 2015

HURFOM has joined 148 partner civil society actors in calling on the International Coordinating Committee Sub-Committee on Accreditation (ICC-SCA) to postpone official international accreditation for the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC).

From 16 to 20 November, 2015, the ICC-SCA, an international body comprised of accredited National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and tasked with evaluating non-accredited NHRIs' claims for inclusion, will conclude a review which puts the MNHRC on the table for international accreditation. HURFOM calls on the ICC-SCA to postpone the MNHRC's accreditation to a later date, given that the MNHRC is not supported by the people of Burma, nor does it reliably comply with the Paris Principles, which state universal standards by which all internationally accredited NHRIs are required to operate.

HURFOM takes this position for the following reasons:

1) The MNHRC has failed to adequately investigate serious human rights violations

When established on 5 September 2011, the MNHRC announced that it aimed to raise human rights awareness among members of the public and would function according to the Paris Principles. However, the Burmese public and civil society have now lost their faith in the MNHRC, given that it has failed to address the many serious human rights violations that have occurred in Myanmar since it was created. While the MNHRC has said that it is prepared to take action against all serious human rights violations, it has ignored violations committed by the Burmese military, claiming that it does not have the right to investigate these cases. For example, the MNHRC has repeatedly ignored the Burmese army's ongoing use of sexual violence as a weapon in conflict, particularly in Kachin and Shan states.

The MNHRC is guilty of various prominent failings. It failed to launch extensive inquiries into recent student demonstrations, where students were arrested for protesting, signaling a clear breach of their right to free speech. In such situations, the MNHRC is expected to intervene forcefully, acting in a capable and honest way. However, it instead failed to act as demanded by international standards, neglecting its responsibility to protect students' rights. The MNHRC has also responded ineffectively to recent cases of religious conflict and the arrest of individuals involved in the land rights movement. Other prominent disappointments have included the MNHRC's failure to defend Kachin man Brang Shawn against charges brought against him by the Burmese Army, and the MNHRC's poor investigation of the killing of freelance journalist U Aung Kyaw Naing (a.k.a. Ko Par Gyi).

2) The MNHRC protects the government and military, not ordinary citizens

The MNHRC does not exhibit the independence expected of an internationally accredited human rights body. All of the above failings can be attributed to the

MNHRC's complete lack of independence from Burma's government and military. Overall, MNHRC investigations have served to protect the government and military, elevating their voices while neglecting those of civil society actors and ethnic populations.

3) The MNHRC is not transparent

The MNHRC fails to be fully transparent. This is particularly clear from the process by which it selects its members. When the MNHRC chose new members in 2014, this was not discussed with parliament, nor was it raised with CSOs. Reportedly, even the commission's previous members did not know that they had been removed from their positions. Such actions clearly fail to meet the levels of transparency expected of an internationally accredited human rights body.

4) Postponing accreditation will send a clear and public message

By withholding accreditation, the ICC-SCA will send a clear and public message to the Burmese government and MNHRC. Only by postponing accreditation can it be made sufficiently clear that the commission's current conduct does not meet the standards set by the international community, and that reform is urgently required.

In order for the MNHRC to fulfill its duties and gain public trust, it must increase its levels of effectiveness and accountability. Further, the government should respect the MNHRC's independence, allowing it to operate without interference. HURFOM believes that the MNHRC should not be accredited until these conditions have been achieved and the body complies fully with the Paris Principles.

GENUINE “ECOTOURISM” in Ye Township, Mon State?

July 8, 2015

With plans underway for “ecotourism” development in Mon State’s Ye Township, HURFOM explores the issues, concerns and underlying concepts surrounding these proposals. Overall, HURFOM concludes that planned developments in Ye Township risk endorsing abuses in the name of “ecotourism”, rather than promoting genuine ecotourism.

What is Ecotourism?

We begin with the question: what exactly *is* Ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a concept that has become very popular in recent years. While it is unconfirmed who initially coined the term, it is believed to have originated in the late 20th century, with use by academic Claus-Dieter (Nick) Hetzer in 1965. Hetzer defined four principles of responsible, or “eco”, tourism:

- Minimizing environment impacts,
- Respecting host cultures,
- Maximizing the benefits to local people, and
- Maximizing tourist satisfaction (Weaver citing Hetzer, 1965; p. 5).

Today, the International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as, “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015).

In the modern world, ecotourism means supporting village-based, small-scale enterprises. It is usually contrasted with mass tourism, or traditional tourism, which operates through large-scale projects run by big companies, building huge infrastructure developments in tourist zones.

Ecotourism stems from motivations to change society by promoting new relationships between people, the environment and people around the world from different cultures (Wall, 1996; p. 108-117). Ecotourism usually builds on adventure and culture tourism, providing new means to preserve nature and culture in countries with burgeoning tourist industries.

A Glance at Thailand’s Community Based Ecotourism (CBET)

In 2013, 20.2 percent of Thailand’s GDP came from tourism, with forecasts suggesting that Thailand’s tourism industry will continue to grow into the future (Bangkok Post, 2014). As tourism has increased in Thailand, the country has seen various cultural impacts and forms of resource exploitation.

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In recent decades, communities in Thailand have turned to ecotourism to protect and sustain their national resources. According to Jian Ping Wang (2004), ecotourism in Thailand is seen by many as a success story. However, Wang's paper explains that ecotourism in Thailand developed as a form of Community Based Ecotourism (CBET), which is the result, not of national-level policy or regulation, but of the practices of communities and private organizations.

For example, in Northern Thailand, which is home to numerous indigenous communities, ecotourism is practiced by private partners and NGOs, in partnership with local communities. While private and NGO partners provide funding, training and marketing assistance, the indigenous people contribute land, labour and local knowledge of the area (Wang, 2004).

Although Thai ecotourism is not regulated by governmental policy, private organizations, local authorities and indigenous communities have collaborated to develop CBET. Together, they have learned about good and bad practices for ecotourism, making Thailand well-prepared for rising tourism; Thailand has strong knowledge of the pitfalls of tourism and how sustainable tourism can be developed.

We now look at the question: Will Myanmar be just as prepared as its tourist industry starts to grow?

Ecotourism in Kaw Zar, Ye Township, Mon State

As Myanmar has started to open up there has been a massive wave of development projects, with investment being attracted from numerous countries. Among various places of choice, Ye Township, Mon state, has been the target for many new investments. Recent projects have included the building of a coal power plant in Ann Din village and the development of mining across the Township. In addition, Ye Township is home to many attractive beaches and islands, which have begun to attract the attention of the country's growing tourist industry.

Recently, the beaches around Kaw Zar village, including Kabyar Wa beach, have been put forward for development by a company called Aurum Company Limited. While Aurum Company Limited proposed the project to the Mon State Government last year, their plans have only recently been more widely received.

According to a short video clip shown on Myanmar National TV, Aurum Company Limited has invested US\$ 12 million in the Kabyar Wa Beach development project, working in cooperation with the Mon State government. The project site spans 8 miles from North to South and is divided into four zones:

Zone (1) From Kaw Zar to the beginning of Kabyar Wa beach, up to Kabyar Wa Northern bridge,

Zone (2) From Southern Kabyar Wa village to Tayoke Htauk village Northern beach bay,

Zone (3) From the Southern part of Kabyar Wa village to Kaw Zar Chaung Wa, and

Zone (4) From Kaw Zar Chaung Wa to Ma Gyee Chaung Wa.

The company has drawn on the idea of ecotourism in their marketing of the project, promising that the project will encourage "community-based tourism". Managing Director of Aurum Company Limited, U Htay Thwin, said, "This area is not developed yet. However if we compare it to other regions, the resources and forest in these areas has not yet declined. And so, with our new



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development plan, we will be able to invite more investments, enhance community-based tourism and improve local enterprises". U Htay Thwin also said that the company will upgrade existing infrastructure as part of the project, building roads, a healthcare center, a public library and a community market.

However, there are concerns that the project will not live up to these promises; in particular, that ideas of "ecotourism" and "community-based tourism" are being used as marketing buzzwords, rather than signifying a real commitment to protecting Ye Township from tourism's negative impacts. There are worries that "ecotourism" projects will end up exploiting local populations, rather than following the positive model seen in Thailand.

Locals' Worries and Concerns

Providing substance to these fears, residents have expressed concerns that Aurum Company Limited will exploit ideas of "ecotourism" by mobilizing unethical methods of acquiring land around Kabyar Wa beach for their development project.

The Aurum Company Limited has stated that they will cooperate with the Mon State government in order to acquire land. However, land in this area is mostly owned by local people, who use their land to grow betel nut and other regional crops. Raising concerns about future land acquisition, many landowners in this area do not have owners' documents or land titles, with land instead passed from generation to generation through customary tenure. It has been suggested that people living in this area are particularly unlikely to possess land titles, given that in previous decades the region was a "black area", under the control of rebel groups rather than government authorities (Weng, 2008).

Min Zayar Lwin, a graduate from Yangon Economic University, explained:

"I am worried that there will be abuses under the name of ecotourism. For example, as the project land area is mostly owned by locals, if there are cases of land confiscation the authorities will cooperate with the

company [...] I am afraid that the company and authorities will continue land grabs, just like in other development projects in other areas. If abuses occur, as a local person I must protect my rights."

A villager from Kyone Nye village, who owns a plantation growing cashew nuts and other seasonal crops, reported that:

"This project is planned by Aurum Company Limited, in collaboration with some locals from Ye, and the State Government also has a stake in the investment. I worry that, with the government and companies working together, they will offer unjust compensation again, like in Kyiakmayaw Township [where land was acquired for cement production, with low rates of compensation]. Many people in this area cannot speak Burmese and they have simple livelihoods that depend on these resources [their land]. I worry that this will be no more after the development."

Elaborating theoretical aspects behind these concerns, Dr. Manoj Potapohn, from the Faculty of Economics of Chiang Mai University, added:

"Land grabbing is a problem, and it is political by nature. Generally, in former socialist countries where market institutions are not well developed, those in power are tempted to get land through confiscation rather than using the market. Myanmar is still a mosaic of people with different ethnicities and still has the issue of inter-ethnic relations to sort out. [In terms of good practices] there is, for example, the use of fair compensation for people negatively impacted by development projects and [...] weighting negative effects with positive ones to make sure the region won't be left behind."

Meanwhile, locals' concerns go beyond fears about future land acquisition. Naing Soe Naing, 40 years old from Kyone Nye village, explained worries about possible cultural effects of the development project on Ye Township's communities:

"From my experience, many women in Thailand have become prostitutes because of economic development and

[...] tourist attractions. And local cultures are affected as other popular cultures arrive. I was uncomfortable when I saw this [in Thailand] and I worry for our region with the growth of this development project. I think that, before inviting investments, the authorities should consider protecting [local areas] from popular culture influences."

What Next for Ye Township?

Within a capitalist economy, the fundamental mission of the state and market is to create a good business climate, and in doing so increase profits. However, this becomes a concern when it affects the resources and wellbeing of local communities. While models of ecotourism in Thailand show that profit and social responsibility can go hand in hand, it seems likely that this may not transpire in Myanmar's tourist industry. Instead, we see fears that destruction of local communities will be committed under the guise of "ecotourism".

It is very difficult for a country like Myanmar, where transparency is infrequently practiced by both the government and private companies, to develop genuine ecotourism. Moreover, although there are many tourism development projects in Myanmar, there is no comprehensive national ecotourism strategy. In order to protect local communities, such as those in Ye Township, the government should take the lead in facilitating cooperation between various actors to promote ecotourism; this should include governmental agencies, NGOs, local communities, environment groups, and other related bodies.

People will always want to travel to new places, to explore beautiful surroundings and encounter local cultures and heritages. Sustaining and protecting these natural resources and cultures is a crucial role for all actors. Only if this takes place can local populations hope for true "ecotourism" and development in their communities.

Activities

STRATEGY MEETING FOR ANDIN COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT OPPOSITION

July, 2015

Moulmein

From July 13-14 a two-day meeting was held in the Monastery of Dhammar Loka Pali-yart-toi in Myae Ni Gone, Moulmein, aiming to prepare a coordinated strategy to oppose the proposed coal-fired power plant in Andin Village.

HURFOM joined the meeting, which was also attended by four venerable monks from Andin and Moulmein, and Mon State MP Dr Ong Nine Oo. 25 ordinary citizens also attended, coming from organizations that included the MATA Foundation, Ye Social Society (YSS), Mon Youth Forum (MYF) Myanmar Multi-Media Institute (M3I), Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance Foundation (TEERA), Dawei Development Association (DDA), Mekong Watch, Earth Rights International (ERI) and Paung Kuu.



Attendees discussed concerns about transparency, accountability, corruption, clean-coal technology and possible environmental impacts.

HURFOM previously launched a documentary film (“Touching Fire”), covering local opposition to the coal-fired power plant, and is now in the process of collating data about the plant and possible impacts in the Parlain region. At the Moulmein meeting HURFOM promised to compile a full report on the plant, and to organize opposition to the plant among Mon people in Thailand.

Other commitments made at the meeting included a promise by the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMDP) to oppose the plant if negative environmental impacts

could be shown. Meanwhile, YSS, together with Equality Myanmar and other CBOs, pledged to educate local people about the power plant and support any subsequent protests.

Asia Justice and Rights workshop on supporting victims of human rights violations

31st July – 2nd August 2015

Mae Sot

At the beginning of August HURFOM representatives attended a three-day workshop organised by the Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) in Mae Sot, focused on supporting survivors of human rights violations to claim their rights and attain justice.

17 participants attended, coming from 9 different civil society and human rights documentation groups based on the Thai-Burma border. Specific discussion topics included: approaching Transitional Justice from the perspective of victims; trauma healing and self-care in human rights work; mechanisms for assisting survivors to claim rights; participatory methods for documenting victims’ stories; and learning experiences from other post-transition counties.

Key activities included:

- ☐ Discussion of past and recent human rights violations in Burma, their impacts, patterns of violations and locations
- ☐ Networking and exchange among organizations representing victims, aiming to together develop strategies to strengthen victims’ voices and rights to justice, truth and reparations; assist access to entitlements; and fight against impunity for gross human rights violations.
- ☐ Exploration and strengthening of community-based strategies for reparations and rehabilitation
- ☐ Support for strategic litigation initiatives for serious human rights abuses
- ☐ Capacity-strengthening for local civil society actors, to assist them in documenting human rights violations and providing holistic services to victims’ communities
- ☐ Dialogue with policy-makers on strengthening accountability and preventing human rights violations

Activities

Human Rights Documentation and Photography Training

July, 2015

Moulmein

From July 11-14 HURFOM organized a five-day Human Rights Documentation and Photography Training in its office in Myine Thar Yar Ward, Moulmein. 11 participants from Ye Township joined the training, which was conducted by members of HURFOM, with assistance from Nai A-son V from the Myanmar Multi-Media Institute (M3I).

Topics covered included categories of human rights violations, documentation and interview methods and basic photography training.

Human Rights and National Law Training

August, 2015

Kyaikmayaw

From August 21-22 HURFOM organized a two-day Human Rights and National Law Training in Kaw Don Village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State. 37 participants attended, comprised of 27 males and 10 females.

The training included group discussions and analysis. Topics covered included international human rights law, the 2012 Land Laws, fundamental rights of citizens according to the 2008 Constitution, and village-level rules and regulations. The attendees greatly enjoyed the training and urged HURFOM to organize more trainings in their area. Thanks were due to the abbot of Kaw Don Village, who provided meals throughout the training.

Myanmar Land Law Workshop organized by Partners Asia

July, 2015

Rangoon

One HURFOM staff member joined a two-day Myanmar Land Law Workshop in Rangoon from July 15-16, organized by Partners Asia.

The first day included discussions on topics including land loss and conflict, land laws and directives and the rule of law. Burmese lawyers also joined the workshop to share their experiences of land dispute cases.

The second day included training on land documentation and registration, and discussions about inclusive land laws, different types of judicial practices and cooperative procedures. Land in Our Hand also joined the second day of the workshop, providing trainings on how to write land reports.

Election Vetting Training

July 27-29, 2015

Rangoon

One HURFOM representative attended an Election Vetting Training from 27-29 July in Rangoon, organized by ND-Burma.

The training, held in the Rangoon office of Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), was attended by over 20 participants from 11 organizations. Organizations represented at the training included AAPP, HURFOM, TWU (Tavoyan Women's Union), KWAT (Kachin Women's Association of Thailand), AASYC (All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress), HRDP (Human Rights Defender and Promoter Network), Burma Issues (BI), PWO (Palaung Women's Organization), TSYO (Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization), FPPS (Former Political Prisoners Society), and KNDG (Kachin Development Networking Group).

Sessions were conducted by trainers from ICTJ (International Center for Transitional Justice) and ND-Burma, and focused on transitional justice, human rights documentation, vetting presentation, interview skills and work plans.

Parlain Ecosystem Report released in four languages

September, 2015

HURFOM, in collaboration with Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), supported villagers from Parlain region, located in Mon State's Ye Township, to conduct research into the importance of local ecosystems and natural resources in their area. The study was conducted by Parlain villagers, with the aim of using findings to combat plans to build a coal-fired power plant in Andin Village, located in Parlain Region.

The final report was published in June 2015, with versions in four languages: Mon, Burmese, Thai, and English. Amongst other concerns, the study highlighted how the coal-fired plant would significantly disrupt the local fishing industry, which plays a key role in Parlain's economy.

Activities

HURFOM VISITS FLOOD-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN MON STATE



From August 9, 2015, three HURFOM staff accompanied the Shin Saw Pu Association on a two-day visit to flood-affected communities in Bilin and Thaton townships, located in Mon State.

HURFOM delivered emergency aid to flood victims in Don Won Village (Thaton Township) and Taung Gyi Village (Bilin Township). Victims were provided with food, clothes and other basic necessities, alongside cash donations totaling one million Kyat.

Authorities were in general welcoming of efforts to provide assistance, though in Thaton Township relief visitors were asked to provide details of the organization from which their donation came.

In Don Won Village - a Karen village also home to Pa-O and Burman populations - it is estimated that 250 of a total 1800 households were affected, with a total of 1400 individual victims. Around 1000 acres of farmland surrounding the village were also reported as submerged, causing livelihood concerns for local farmers. Some villagers reported that the flooding had significantly impacted their livelihoods, forcing them to borrow money in order to survive. Meanwhile, some students in Don Won were left unable to go to school, as they could not afford the fee to take a boat to reach their school.

In Taung Gyi Village 49 households were noted to have suffered, with seven houses completely destroyed.

While villagers reported that they faced flooding every year, flooding this year was unprecedented. Flood victims outlined urgent needs for rice and rice seeds.

Flooding in Mon state was part of wide-scale flooding throughout Burma in August, which affected over a million residents nationwide. Flooding in Mon State was overall less acute than in other areas, with houses, clinics and schools completely destroyed in Arakan and Chin States, and in Irrawaddy Region. While HURFOM initially hoped to visit flood victims in Arakan and Karen states, this unfortunately became unfeasible due to difficulties arranging air tickets.



News

GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS POSE DIFFICULTY FOR MNLA ANTI-DRUG ACTIVITIES, SAYS MNLA LEADER

July 22, 2015

On 18 July, 2015, a group from the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), the New Mon State Party's (NMSP'S) armed wing, arrested two drug dealers as they travelled through Sakhan Gyi Village, Thanbyuzayat Township, located in Mon State. Nai Cheain Kakao, an MNLA leader who coordinated the operation, spoke to HURFOM about the arrests. He also discussed worries that government restrictions on armed groups' movements preclude hopes for success of the MNLA's campaign to eradicate drug use in Mon regions.

According to Nai Cheain Kakao, the MNLA's recent arrests were carried out as drug dealers Zaw Moe and Thiha, both aged 20 and from Karoppi Village (of Thanbyuzayat Township), returned from a trip to Sanpya Village, just east of Sakhan Gyi. The MNLA had been aware of these dealers for a long time, having been informed that the two men had been selling drugs to village youths and boatmen in Karoppi Village's port. In this instance, the drug dealers had gone to Sanpya village to buy fresh supplies of drugs. With the help of local informants, the drug dealers were apprehended by the MNLA in Sakhan Gyi, as they travelled back to Karoppi.

Nai Cheain Kakao explained, "It was 7pm. We have informants in that village. After [the informants] told us [about the drug dealers], we stopped their motorbike on their way back. But, because it was dark, we could not find the drugs. We brought them back to the NMSP's administrative office in Zee Hna-Pin Village and detained them".

The next morning, Nai Cheain Kakao's group tried looking for drugs inside the arrested drug dealers' motorbike. Eventually, the MNLA found drugs hidden inside the motorbike's front light. 49 pills remained from a 50-pill pack.

The MNLA reported the dealers to the district authorities immediately.

While the MNLA made successful arrests in this case, Nai Cheain Kakao discussed how the success of the MNLA's anti-drug campaign is limited by the Burmese government's restrictions on armed groups' movements and activities. In particular, MNLA soldiers are unable to wear their full uniform, including arms, in areas outside the NMSP's control; instead, they must dress as unarmed civilians if they wish to travel in government-controlled regions. This is considered to pose a grave danger to their safety should they attempt to arrest drug dealers.

"Our group cannot make many arrests in the city because we cannot bear arms or wear our uniform there", said Nai Cheain Kakao. "We don't know if the drug dealers and users have guns or not. When we go to arrest them, we might get into trouble if we [aren't armed]".

Nai Cheain Kakao detailed that the MNLA faces similar problems in villages outside NMSP territory. He continued, "There are many people who sell and buy drugs in Sanpya Village. If we had permission to make arrests there in our full uniform [and bearing arms], then at least, if a shooting happened, if they shot we could shoot too".

Nai Cheain Kakao explained that in his opinion such restrictions on the MNLA hinder effective responses to regional drug problems, especially given a lack of action from government authorities. He concluded, "The government restricts us from going here and there, but they don't take action against drugs. It is like they are allowing free drug use. Restricting our travel won't help to resolve the drug problem in Mon and Karen areas".

ADMINISTRATIVE DELAY PREVENTS TEXTBOOKS FROM REACHING MON NATIONAL SCHOOLS

August 14, 2015

Two months into the new school year, students in Mon National Schools have been left waiting for new textbooks due to administrative delays. UNICEF, who are to provide the textbooks, say that the books cannot be printed until permission is received from the Mon State government.

The new primary school textbooks, fully funded by UNICEF, contain amendments from books used during the previous school year. While the current school year began two months ago, students in Mon National Schools have yet to see any sign of the updated

textbooks. Reportedly, teachers have continued to use old books as they wait for new materials to arrive.

Mi Seik Pon, chairperson of the Thanbyuzayat Township Teachers' Association, explained, "We are still waiting for the textbooks to be printed and we are wondering why the printing has taken so long [...] As the Mon State government has not signed [to give their approval], UNICEF cannot print the textbooks".

According to Mi Seik Pon, UNICEF policy dictates that textbook printing can only begin once UNICEF has received official government permission.

She continued, "We are not sure why the Mon State government has not signed [their approval], but we assume that it is because they haven't got permission yet from the central government".

While concerns remain, it is expected that the delays will be resolved and the textbooks will soon go to print.

Last year, Mon National School textbooks were provided by the Shalom (Nyein) Foundation. With the Shalom Foundation unable to continue provision, UNICEF has stepped in to fill resource gaps.

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August 21, 2015

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According to NMSP Township administrator Nai Htaw Oo, the Karen armed group has for years chased villagers for money, claiming that their plantation land once belonged to Karen ancestors.

However, while this may have once been the case, it is reported that the land was legitimately transferred to Mon farmers many years ago. Nai Htaw Oo explained, "Karen people sold the land to Mon people. Then, Mon farmers turned the land into rubber plantations".

The group reportedly refers to itself as a "land committee". Fees demanded have varied with the size of owners' plantations. Reportedly, owners of small plantations have been asked to pay sums of 100,000 Kyat, while larger plantation owners have been charged 150,000 Kyat.

The NMSP has advised landowners against paying these fees. However, fearing retribution, some farmers have submitted to the Karen group's demands.

While Ye Ta Gon plantation owners have reported their problems to the NMSP many times, the NMSP has to date refused to take decisive action against the Karen armed group. According to Nai Htaw Oo, the NMSP fears that this could lead to an outbreak of conflict that would worsen matters for farmers.

Recently, with the Karen group failing to respond to years of subtle negotiation, the NMSP has encouraged plantation owners to escalate matters by sending complaints to the Burmese central government.

Nai Htaw Oo detailed, "Some people have paid [money to the Karen armed group]. Some people haven't paid yet. But it is difficult to know how many people have



paid or not, as some don't want to tell us. We will collect a list of the plantation owners who have been asked to pay money to the group. Then, we will try to encourage them to write a letter to the government".

Reportedly, two letters will be sent to the government, one to the central government and the second to the Township government.

Yet, while the matter awaits resolution, plantation owners continue to suffer fear and intimidation. Nai Nyein, a resident of Pa-Nga village, described how the Karen group tried to take away his plantation, claiming that it used to belong to them.

Nai Nyein told HURFOM, "The same problem happens again and again. When we are about to work peacefully again, the problem comes back. The government knows about this but has not solved the problem".

Nai Nyein explained how government inaction has led Mon and Karen armed groups to the brink of conflict. He related, "It is like the government is letting the Karen and Mon fight each other. The Karen armed group extorts money from the Mon people. The NMSP tries to protect the Mon people. There could be shooting between the Karen and Mon armed groups. The NMSP tries to keep calm. If they didn't, fighting would break out very often. These areas are not Karen controlled territories. They are Mon territories. Now, the Karen armed group troubles Mon farmers. The NMSP has to protect Mon people from this trouble. The government stays blind to these problems".



News

CORRUPT OFFICIALS OVERCHARGE FOR ELECTRICITY IN MUDON TOWNSHIP

August 31, 2015

In a case of suspected corruption, households in Mudon Township have reported being vastly overcharged for electricity by their local government electricity committee. In particular, residents wishing to have electricity meters installed in their homes have allegedly paid up to ten times the actual cost to purchase a meter unit.

According to Phae Do Village resident Nai Mile Kyae, households in Phae Do, Kawlaw-Taw, Taung-Pa and Kaw Kapi Htaw villages have been asked to pay up to 900,000 Kyat to purchase an electricity meter. Reportedly, the actual cost of an electricity meter is just 90,000 Kyat. While charges have been consistently inflated, in the past villagers were only charged 450,000 Kyat for the unit.

Deepening financial burdens for Mudon residents, an installation fee is required on top of costs for the meter itself. Meaning that, in total, villagers have paid over 1 million Kyat to have a meter

box installed. Those with larger houses have faced even higher costs. Reportedly, residents with two-storey houses have paid 1.5 million Kyat for the meter box and installation.

According to Nai Mile Kyae, "People know it is unfair and costs too much, but no one dares to go against it".

Fuelling rumours of corruption, it is unclear how the excess money charged has been spent.

Further to concerns over meter installation costs, corruption is also suspected regarding basic charges for electricity supply. While the local electricity committee charges 70 Kyat per unit of electricity, only 35 Kyat per unit is official which committee is required to account to the government electricity department. The remaining 35 Kyat per unit is designated "village funds", to be spent as deemed appropriate. However, these funds are poorly accounted for and, where accounts exist, financial reporting is filled with inaccuracies.

Fostering a sense of injustice, while officials have benefited from high electricity charges, villagers have been asked to foot part of the bill for regional development, including upgrades to infrastructure. Reportedly, the government has contributed only half the funds required to pave the road in Phae Do Village, requiring villagers to pay the remainder themselves.

According to Nai Chit Aye, 55, from Kaw Kapi Htaw Village, concerns over local corruption have contributed to a decline of trust in government.

Nai Chit Aye explained, "Now, those who have electricity installed [in their homes] pay a lot. It should not be like this. For my house, it cost almost 1,300,000 Kyat [...] The government energy department unfairly takes a lot from people. We have come to realise that this bad behaviour is not going to end. No matter what the people want, [government officials] will do whatever they want. People will never have trust in the government".

MILITIA FIGHTER KILLED DURING SOUTHERNYE SPLINTER GROUP ATTACK

September 3, 2015

One government-affiliated militia fighter was killed and another injured in an attack by a splinter faction on militia forces. The clash took place in Da Ni Kyar Village, located in the south of Ye Township, Mon State.

On 25 August 2015, fighting broke out at a monastery in Da Ni Kyar Village, as a splinter group led by Nai Mon Chan attacked a local militia force.

Nai Mon Chan, who established his own group relatively recently, previously served as second-in-command to another splinter group led by Nai Bin. Nai Bin's group were notorious for kidnapping and taxing locals in southern Ye Township, until their surrender in 2012 to Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 31.

The attack took place while five militia fighters slept at their monastery base. According to a monk from nearby

Magyi Village, Nai Mon Chan's splinter group were targeting two members of the militia group who had previously been affiliated with the splinter faction.

Two militia fighters were wounded in the attack, named Nai Dout and Nai Karat. Both were taken for treatment at Ye Town's military hospital. However, Nai Dout's serious condition called for his immediate transfer to Moulmein for further treatment, where he died the day afterwards.

On Tuesday Nai Dout's family gave donations to monks in Taung Pyin Village, Ye Township, in remembrance of his life.

Locals have expressed surprise that, despite the militia group's government affiliation, the government did not pick up the tab for the wounded militia fighters' treatment. One Magyi villager commented, "Even though Nai Dout was a member of a government militia,

the authorities provided nothing". Instead, on the orders of a leading monk from Yangon's Ti La Ban monastery, members of the militia group collected money from residents in and around Da Ni Kyar village to cover the costs of treatment.

In total, 300,000 Kyat was collected in Da Ni Kyar, with other funds coming from Magyi, Mi Htaw Hlar Gyi and Kyone Kanya villages. However, some villagers are alleged to have resisted handing over money, saying that they did not want to give money to support treatment for the militia fighter.

Nai Dout came from Kout Htayan Village, Yebyu Township, and previously served with Major Nai Shoun in the New Mon State Party (NMSP). After experiencing personal conflicts in the NMSP he joined a splinter group led by Nai Bin and Nai Mon Chan, but in 2012 left the group to serve in Nai Lin Oo's militia force.

News

STATE AUTHORITIES QUESTION MON STATE COAL PLANT PROTESTORS

August 6, 2015

Police forces have questioned over 350 Mon State villagers, who took part in protests earlier this year against a proposed coal power plant in Ann Din Village.

On May 5, 2015, around 6000 locals gathered to protest against a proposed 1280 megawatt coal-fired power plant, to be built in Ann Dinn Village, located in Mon State's Ye Township. The project, managed by Toyo-Thai Corporation, includes a total investment of US\$2.8 billion and will span the next 30 years. Alongside a mass rally against the plant, villagers also took part in smaller protests, targeting Toyo-Thai's land acquisition.

On June 6, U Aung Myint Sein, village administrator for Ann Din village, along with the village's headman, were called to the police station in Ye Town to cooperate with an investigation into the protests. However, the police officer arrived two hours late to the appointment, by which time U Aung Myint Sein and the village headman had returned home.

Following this, on June 13, 20 residents in Thanbyuzayat Township were called in for questioning by Thanbyuzayat police forces. Reportedly, villagers were told that the Mon State government had written a complaint letter about the protests, and had ordered local police forces to conduct further investigations.

Ten days later, Ye Township police forces investigated another 27 protestors. These included 15 protestors from Ann Din and 12 from Hnit Ta Yote Village. On this occasion, the protestors had taken part in a demonstration of approximately 400 residents, who rallied over concerns about the sale and purchase of land. The protestors were told that they had been accused of breaking articles 427, 447, 451 and 506 of Burma's Penal Code, which rule against mischief, trespassing and intimidation. Charges were reportedly raised in a letter penned by land buyer Ma Yi Yi Htay and land seller U Thar Tay; copies of the letter were sent directly to the Ye Township Police Office and also to the Home Affairs Office, Central Police Office, Mon State Government

Office, and other regional bureaus.

Finally, days later, 346 villagers from Ann Din, Hnit Ta Yote and Thar Garan villages were called to the Ye Town police office, where they were accused of participating in demonstrations against the coal plant. Ye Town police forces took down all the villagers' names and signatures, and told them that their details would be reported to the Central Police Office. Following this, the villagers were allowed to return home.

HURFOM is concerned that villagers who have protested peacefully against large-scale development have been subjected to questioning. State authorities have failed to respect villagers' rights to freedom of opinion and expression. Moreover, repeated calls to questioning are disruptive for villagers' lives and livelihoods. HURFOM calls for full transparency and due process over the power plant project and all investigations regarding it, so that further conflict may be avoided as the project continues.

MON STATE FLOODING PROMPTS LIVELIHOOD CONCERNS

News from page no.1

August 14, 2015

Villagers in Mon State's Belin and Thaton Townships have reported livelihood concerns due to severe floods.

Flooding in Mon State follows widespread floods throughout the country, which have claimed the lives of over a hundred people and displaced over a million from their homes.

Mon State villages known to be affected include Don Won village in Thaton Township and Taung Gyi village in Belin Township.

In Don Won it is estimated that 350 of a total 1800 households have been affected, containing 1400 people. Meanwhile, 49 households in Taung Gyi village have suffered, with seven houses completely destroyed.

Don Won's Village Administrator, U Myint Tun, detailed rising concerns about the impact of flooding on local livelihoods. Approximately 1000 acres of farmland surrounding Don Won village have been completely submerged, while local shopkeepers have seen significant interruptions to business.

Daw Than Kyu, a saleswoman selling the traditional noodle dish Mohinga, told HURFOM that she has to stop her Mohinga shop. She normally makes profit just 2,000 Kyat per day. Reportedly, some villagers have turned to local moneylenders to address livelihood problems, borrowing money at high interest rates.

Last weekend HURFOM, in collaboration with the Shin Saw Pu Association,

delivered emergency aid to flood victims in Don Won and Taung Gyi villages. Victims were provided with food, clothes and other basic necessities, alongside cash donations totalling one million Kyats.

Other organisations assisting Don Won villagers include the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). According to Village Administrator U Myint Tun, a total of 10 political parties and other organisations have rushed to Don Won's aid in recent weeks. In his opinion, social media has been key to mobilising the flood response. He explained, "We face flooding like this every year but this year more people heard about it and came to help, because the people use Facebook".

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OVER 100 STUDENTS HOSPITALIZED BY CONTAMINATED WATER

September 28, 2015



Reports have emerged that over 100 students in Karen State have been hospitalized after drinking contaminated water from a local river

On September 23, over 100 students from Ta Yat Taw school in Karen State's Kawkareik Township, became sick after drinking water from the nearby Jaïne river. Reportedly, local teenagers had contaminated the water with poison in order to kill nearby fish and birds, hoping to sell the dead animals at

market. However, with students at the school drinking directly from the river, this move quickly led to a sudden outbreak of ill health.

Before school started on Wednesday, 100 of a total 300 students began complaining of severe dizziness and nausea. Teachers in the school acted quickly, immediately transferring students to the nearest hospital for treatment.

Nai Aie Non, a health worker in Ta Yat Taw village, explained, "The students started drinking the water at around 8 a.m. By around 9 a.m. they started to get sick and the teacher decided to send them to hospital [...] This is the first time that something like this has happened in this village".

While the outbreak was severe, it is reported that many of the students



have recovered quickly and will soon be able to leave hospital. Nai Aie Non continued, "Now, the situation is better, but the doctors are still checking on the students".

A parent of a Grade 9 student elaborated, "After [my son] drank the water at school he felt dizzy and had stomach pain. His teacher took him to hospital and after we heard about this we went to hospital to see him [...] His condition is improving. We are waiting to go back home".

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

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

With regards,

Director

Human Rights Foundation of Monland

NEW MON STATE PARTY PURSUES PEACE IN SOUTHERN MON STATE

July 15, 2015

An anonymous source from the New Mon State Party (NMSP), the predominant Mon armed group, has stated that peace can be attained in southern Ye and northern Yepyu Townships, located in southern Mon State, if local people cooperate with the NMSP's efforts to rid the area of rebel armed insurgent groups. This news follows reports last week that the NMSP shot dead the leader of a key rebel group active in these areas.

On the morning of 7 July, and with the help of local informants, members of the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), the NMSP's armed wing, arrested and shot dead Nai Chan Dein, leader of the Monland Restoration Army. Subsequently, the NMSP seized weapons, ammunition, drugs and other illicit materials from the group.

Nai Chan Dein's rebel group was active in southern Mon State for the past 15 years. However, according to an NMSP member who wishes to remain anonymous, the group had not been working in line with the goals suggested by their name, instead troubling local residents with frequent robberies and kidnappings.

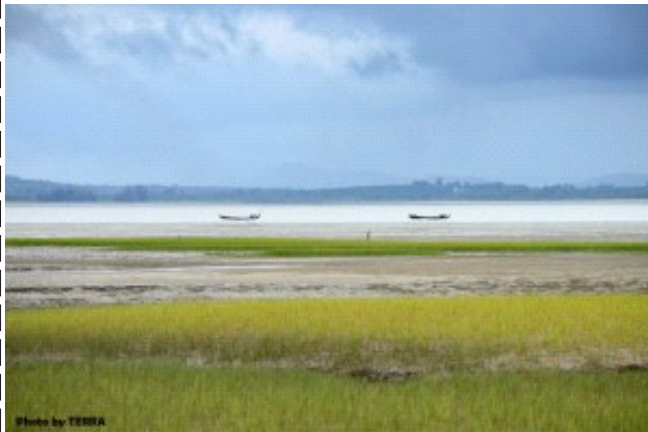
Locals have raised rumors that Nai Chan Dein's group may have somehow gained the support of locally based Burmese army Light Infantry Battalion No. 299, who over the years failed to take any action against the rebel group's activities. According to Nai Aye, a resident from Koe Mile Village, “Light Infantry Battalion No. 299 is based near to us. Chan Dein's group is active in our area, in Koe Mile, Kalae and Han Gan villages. So why didn't the military Light Infantry Battalion No. 299 get rid of them?”.

Nai Aye continued, “Now, the NMSP has eliminated the group, but there are still other groups left out there. As plantations farmers, we need to be very careful while we work”. Talking to HURFOM, an anonymous NMSP source has stated that, while other rebel armed groups remain active in the area, the NMSP will eliminate these groups soon if local residents cooperate with them.

However, residents have raised concerns that the NMSP's campaign against rebel armed groups in southern Mon State may prove counterproductive, exacerbating dangers instead of guaranteeing peace. Nai Mrak Wai, 54 years old, commented, “We are very worried about Chan Mon's group, another armed rebel group which has cooperated with Chan Dein's group. After Chan Dein's death, Chan Mon's group might revolt against us. Although the NMSP is working to protect us, we need to be very careful when we work on our farms, plantations and gardens”.

PARLAIN VILLAGERS CONDUCT ECOSYSTEMS STUDY TO COMBAT TOYO-THAI COAL POWER PLANT

September 24, 2015



Villagers from Parlain region, located in Mon State's Ye Township, have conducted research into the importance of local ecosystems and natural resources, aiming to use this study to combat plans to build a coal-fired power plant in their area. Amongst other concerns, the study highlights how the coal-fired plant would significantly disrupt the local fishing industry, which plays a key role in Parlain's economy.

The study, entitled "Abundance of Parlain Natural Resources and Communities: Parlain Study by its community" was conducted by villagers living in Parlain, with support from Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA) and the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM). The final report was published in June 2015, with versions in four languages: Mon, Burmese, Thai, and English.

The study was planned in reaction to an announcement on 25 April, 2014, by Toyo-Thai Company Limited (TTCL), who stated that they intended to build a 1280 MW coal-fired power plant in Andin village, located in Parlain region. The announcement was met with clear opposition from villagers, who did not want to see a coal-fired plant built in their area.

The study aims to show the importance of Parlain ecosystems and natural resources. The report details that Parlain is an agricultural community, with a varied and diverse ecosystem; notable features of the ecosystem range from hilltop betel nut gardens, lowland paddy fields, and mangrove forests at

the estuary, to aquatic ecosystems that nourish local fisheries. The report highlights the three most important resources for the local economy: betel nut, rice and fish.

Finally, the study considers possible impacts of the proposed coal-fired power plant on the local environment, detailing concerns expressed by members of the community. Importantly, the study explains that project can be split into three components, each producing distinct worries: the project site where the coal-fired power plant would stand, the extended port and jetty to unload coal and deliver coal to the power plant, and the transmission line which would connect the power plant to a grid.

One key concern expressed is that the construction of the jetty would alter the sea floor, changing the marine habitat and disrupting the local fishing industry. Others detailed worries that the coal-fired power plant would greatly change the local natural landscape and replace it with something completely foreign. Finally, others expressed concern that the coal-fired power plant would need a large group of people to operate and maintain the power plant; this is expected to cause large and sudden migration flows to the area, leading to possible erosion of local cultures and traditions.

The research was conceived in a workshop held on 2-3 December, 2014 in the Thai-Burma border town of Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, where representatives from Andin village met with members of HURFOM and TERRA to discuss Natural Resource Management Research.

In total, data collection took six months, from December 2014 to May 2015. Villagers from Parlain collected data themselves, setting up a core research team comprised of youths and monks, largely from Andin village. The research team travelled across Parlain region to collect data from local residents about their relationship with the area's natural resources. In January 2015 the research group expanded to include additional teams from another five villages across Parlain. TERRA and HURFOM played a supporting role: monitoring the study's progress, providing technical support in the field and assisting with data analysis.

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