

## LOCALS REJECT MCL'S ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT OF ITS COAL POWERED CEMENT FACTORY



August 22, 2017

**HURFOM:** On August 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, a public consultation on Mawlamyine Cement Limited's (MCL) environmental and social impact assessment (EIA/SIA) reports for its coal powered cement factory in Kyaukse Township's Pyar Taung Region was held at the Rehmonnya Hotel in Mawlamyine, Mon State. However, critics say the submitted reports are not in accordance with current environmental laws.

According to MCL, they followed instructions by the Union Government in 2016 and the reports match the current environmental laws; however, information

they presented in May 2017 is based on data collected in 2013. Therefore, according to the Pyar Taung community leader Nai Ye Zaw, the reports submitted by the MCL are incorrect and unofficial.

*"Lots of changes have happened during the period [since 2013]. The environmental and social situations are very different [from the past]. So the report is not official. We can't accept those reports,"* said Nai Ye Zaw.

He continued that the MCL's reports have violated the rules and regulations of the EIA and SIA laws. After reporting to the government, the EIA and SIA reports must be shown to the public within 15 days, but MCL failed to do so. Moreover, incorrect and outdated data and information have also been included in the report.

According to Daw Khin Ohnmar Htwe, an adviser from *Resource and*  
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**THATON DISTRICT JAIL CELLS OVERFLOWING WITH YOUNG DRUG USERS**

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## VILLAGERS PROTEST DISMISSAL OF ADMINISTRATOR



September 25, 2017

On September 21<sup>st</sup> 2017, locals organized two protests in HmameKaNane village and Mawlamyine in Mon Stateto voice their displeasure over the dismissal of HmameKaNane village administrator U Aung Ko from his position. Protesters

are unhappy with the authority's decision to fire U Aung Ko, citing a lack of due process.

*"There was no proper investigation. [Our administrator] was dismissed after a member of parliament submitted a proposal. We are not satisfied [with the process], so we've organized protests,"* said Daw Than Aye, a local protester.

U Aung Ko's dismissal came after Mon State Member of Parliament (MP) Daw Mya Thein Gee Maw (Mudon) proposed the termination of his duties, accusing him of corruption, selling public land for his own profit, and holding a bias. Protesters from Hmame Ka Nane village  
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News

# YE TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS URGE GOVERNMENT TO ACTION OVER RISING RATES OF DRUG USE BY YOUNG PEOPLE



July 28, 2017

According to Ye Township residents, the use of narcotics amongst local students and young people is on the rise. Some believe this is due to poor anti-drug strategies by local authorities who fail to arrest and punish drug dealers and smugglers in Mon State.

U Aung Naing Win, secretary of the Ye Social Society (YSS), said he has witnessed first hand the dramatic rise in the use of drugs by young people and school students.

*"At the [Mon] state [government] school in Hangan village, the students have been caught with drugs in their hands. There were similar catches in Khaw Zar. Drug paraphernalia was also found at the high schools in Ye City,"* he said.

Police mishandling of drug-related information in communities has discouraged local residents from taking action and reporting information to authorities.

*"We [used to] inform the police [about the presence of drugs in the community]. But they failed to protect the informers. When police reveal the names of informers, they disappear for a while. They haven't been arrested by the police, but disappear for a while [for their own safety],"* said a villager who wished to remain anonymous.

According to some, treating visitors to drugs has become commonplace in southern Burma. A young man told a HURFOM reporter that each time he visits his friend in Kaloh village, he is escorted to his friend's plantation and invited to drink an unknown liquor made from leaves.

*"We boiled the leaves and drank the liquor. I've visited him very often. He's treated me with the liquor every time I've visited him. After that I've started to use drugs and now I'm addicted to drugs,"* said a young man who also wished to remain anonymous. The young man was most likely drinking kratom liquor, a drink made from locally growing leaves with opiate-like properties, the use of which has been widely [reported](#) throughout Mon State and Mon areas of Burma.

Many young drug users soon find themselves addicted and turn to small-time drug dealing or smuggling in order to be able to afford to continue using.

*"If you're very new to drugs, don't experiment with them. Even if you're freely provided with drugs, don't use them. Your lives will be destroyed. I regret [that I've used drugs]. I advise that never dealing with drugs is the best,"* said the young man.

In response to the rise in drug use in Ye Township, local villagers formed a Drug Elimination Team and in June 2017, in tandem with civil society organizations from Ye City, they sent a letter to the Myanmar Police Force and Mon State Minister of Security and Border Affairs Colonel Win Nyne Oo, asking them to take action.

According to official statistics from the Mon State Police Force, there were 125 drug-related cases between January to June 2017, with 210 males and 17 females arrested and charged with drug-related offences.

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## THATON DISTRICT JAIL CELLS OVERFLOWING WITH YOUNG DRUG USERS



September 8, 2017

**HURFOM:** There are not enough cells in Thaton District's jail to deal with the youth drug problem, according to Nai Nyan Seik, an office administrator for the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in Thaton District, Mon State.

His comments come after the Thaton District NMSP has recently received an overwhelming number of parents asking for help with their children who are abusing amphetamines.

*"The parents of youths come to our office every day and ask us to put their sons in our cells due to their addiction to drugs. Our cells are over capacitated as it is. Even though parents request [a spot for their children] we can't accept anymore inmates,"* he said.

He added that, parents come from as far away as Kyaikmayaw, Mawlamyine District and Kawkaik Township, Karen State to ask for help with their children. This places an extra burden on the Thaton District NMSP who are struggling to control the youth drug problem in their own district, often releasing arrested drug users as there is no space to hold them.

*"We have about 70 cases which are related to drugs in our [Thaton] District cells. Only one or two are about other crimes. The drug users [in custody] are between 20 to 30 years old. After using drugs, they have many problems in their life and we can do nothing for that,"* said to Nai Nyan Seik.

It is believed the current surge in drug use among young people over the last several months is linked to the [Burma Army's seizure and closure of several NMSP checkpoints](#) in February 2017, providing drug traffickers safer passage when bringing amphetamines into Mon State.

Amphetamine usage has even infiltrated local schools. According to Mi J—, a student from Thanbyuzayat Township, *"the grade nine (standard eight) students and some male students from the school are using a lot in the classroom. I am not sure teachers know about it or not. They bring it with them and they don't even care if the other students see it."*

Unfortunately, the abuse of amphetamines by young people in Mon State is not new. *"For the last two or three years, parents having been coming and requesting we keep their sons in our NMSP jail due to their worry that Burmese authorities will arrest their children over their drug use. Parents from Kyaikmayaw, Kawkaik, Bilin, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, and Ye townships have requested the NMSP to hold their sons in custody and educate them about drug use,"* said to Nai Nyan Seik.

Although the NMSP in Thaton District has been inundated with requests by parents from all over Mon State and Mon areas to hold their children in custody, Burmese authorities have warned the NMSP about arresting drug users who reside outside of NMSP jurisdiction, in addition to pressuring the NMSP to refrain from trespassing into Burmese controlled areas.

Thaton District's jails cells are currently overflowing with young people addicted to drugs. Even though there are rehabilitation camps for drug addicts in Mawlamyine City, families from rural parts of Mon State prefer to avoid the city and bring their children to Thaton District, where they hope their children get the help and education to put their lives back on track.

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# LOCALS REJECT MCL'S ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT OF ITS COAL POWERED CEMENT FACTORY



Environment Myanmar Ltd. (REM), even though the Burma environmental laws were approved in 2014, the rules and regulations on EIA were only officially released on December 29<sup>th</sup> 2015.

MCL Executive Officer U Zaw Lwin Oo responded that they had already understood that the EIA and SIA reports must be submitted [to the government] prior to the construction of the factory and they submitted the reports to the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry in 2013.

"We constructed the factory only after we got permission. When the factory was finished, we were told that the EIA report must be re-submitted. So it's difficult to do so," said U Zaw Lwin Oo.

According to the environmental specialist U Soe Aung, Burma requires three environmental reports – Initial

Environmental Examination (IEE), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and Environmental Management Plan (EMP).

"The MCL must amend their EMP report to include six phases – Corrective Action, Construction, Operation, Decommission Factory, Decommission Project, and Monitoring. The MCL's report must be based on these phases and their report must cover past, present, and future situations. No one will accept the report if it is submitted in the wrong format," said U Soe Aung.

"As MCL has already been operating [in Kyaikmayaw Township], if MCL decides to draw their environmental management plans systematically, the local people will accept the company," said Daw Khin Ohnmar Htwe of REM.

More than 100 participants joined the August 17<sup>th</sup> consultation, including the Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan,

the Minister of the Mon State Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Dr Min Kyi Win, government officials, local monks, civil society groups, and local residents.

"We constructed the factory only after we got permission. When the factory was finished, we were told that the EIA report must be re-submitted. So it's difficult to do so,



# VILLAGERS PROTEST DISMISSAL OF ADMINISTRATOR

disagree with the MP's accusations and want justice for their administrator.

*"People don't know exactly why [the administrator] was dismissed. If there is a report that the administrator abused public land and was involved in corruption, there must be an investigation at the ground level. Removing an administrator without any proper investigation is just an abuse,"* said U Maung Aye, a resident of HmameKaNaNe village.

Village Administrator U Aung Ko said he received the letter of dismissal on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2017, but did not know why he was removed from his position.

*"I had to sign warning letters two times in the presence of the township administrator. The first time was for that I was weak in performing my duties and the second time was for that I yelled at a villager who accused me of having*

*a bias when providing development funds to villagers,"* said U Aung Ko.

However, in response U Myint Than Win, Office Director of the Mon State Government, said after receiving a proposal from MP Daw Mya Thein Gee Maw to take action on HmameKaNaNe Administrator U Aung Ko, he instructed the district administrator to conduct an investigation and submit a report. According to U Myint Than Win, it was found that HmameKaNaNe Administrator U Aung Ko did not respect his colleagues in the Mon State Parliament, performed weakly in his duties, showed little cooperation with villagers and prominent persons in the village, and had many complaint letters filed against him. Therefore, the district administrator had reported that U Aung Ko was unfit for his position.

*"We can't dismiss a village administrator as we wish. We have been*

*investigating the HmameKaNaNe case for a long time,"* said U Myint Than Win.

Since Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan took office earlier this year, ten village administrators have been investigated for alleged misconduct. Eight of them have already been dismissed and two are still under investigation.

*"People don't know exactly why [the administrator] was dismissed. If there is a report that the administrator abused public land and was involved in corruption, there must be an investigation at the ground level. Removing an administrator without any proper investigation is just an abuse,"*



News

## 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL RAPED TWICE BY HER STEP-FATHER IN YE TOWNSHIP



July 6, 2017

A 14-year-old girl from A Sin village, Ye Township, Mon State, was raped twice by her 48-year-old step-father.

On May 12<sup>th</sup> 2017, the girl's mother, Daw K—, went to the hospital in Ye City to stay the night with her nephew who was ill and receiving treatment at the local hospital. She left her daughter and her 11-year-old niece with her husband at home. That night at around 10 pm,

the perpetrator asked Daw K—'s daughter to fry some beans for him. When she came out from her bedroom, the perpetrator covered her mouth and raped her in front of her room. Daw K—'s 11-year-old niece saw the incident and the perpetrator threatened both of the girls saying he would kill them if they told anyone about the incident. On June 9<sup>th</sup> 2017, the girl's step-father came to her room and raped her again while her mother was out selling beans.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the victim told her mother that she had been raped by her step-father and her mother reported it to the Ye City Police Station around 8 pm that evening. The perpetrator was arrested that night and the police have charged him under Penal Code #376 (punishment for rape).

On June 27<sup>th</sup> 2017, the girl's mother reported that, *"after the incident the girl feels shy and does not want to go to school. Even though I encourage her to go to school, she does not dare to go. Her teacher knows about it because my daughter's friend told their teacher. I am not sure whether the headmaster knows about it or not. I feel very sad for my daughter. I feel this incident has destroyed my daughter's life. I want him to be punished for his actions [even though he is my husband]."*

The girl has suffered from stomach pain since she was raped and received x-ray tests in Ye Hospital on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, however the results have not yet been released. Before the incident, she attended grade eight at high school in A Sin village, Ye Township, Mon State.

## ATTEMPTED RAPE OF 11-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN YE CITY

September 15, 2017

On August 26<sup>th</sup> 2017, a 17-year-old man attempted to rape an 11-year-old school girl in the An Na War Quarter of Ye City, Ye Township, Mon State. The girl's grandmother reported the case to the Ye City Police the next day.

On the evening of the incident, the girl's grandparents were sleeping in their bedroom, while their son, their 12-year-old grandson, and the 11-year-old girl were sleeping in the front of the house. The grandmother was awoken when her brother living in the house next to them began shouting her name around 1 am in the morning. Upon rising the grandmother saw the door to the house was open. The grandmother then heard shouting from her granddaughter and

exited the house to find the girl outside without any pants.

When asked, the girl told her grandmother that the perpetrator — who had previously lived with them in the house for two weeks — had taken her outside while she was sleeping and attempted to rape her. When the girl awoke, the perpetrator told her not to shout out and threatened her with a knife. Then he grabbed her and took off her pants. However, the girl immediately shouted for help and called for her grandmother and the perpetrator ran away.

The girl's grandmother said, *"She goes to school every day. We encourage her and do not talk about it [the incident] to her anymore because we are worry*

*that she may feel bad. Her health is well and even among her friends we do not allow them to talk about her problem. We want everything to happen in accordance with the law. It has affected her whole life and I feel unhappy for my granddaughter."*

The perpetrator was arrested by the Ye City Police and charged under Myanmar Penal Code Section #376 (Punishment for rape) and Section #511 (Punishment for attempting to commit offenses punishable with manual labor or imprisonment).

Although the perpetrator has been arrested and charged, the grandmother reported that the police have not yet informed them of the next steps.



## News

# PRIVATE COMPANY TO PROVIDE ELECTRICITY FOR SOUTHERN BURMA

September 14, 2017

**HURFOM:** On August 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, Bedok Construction and Engineering Co., Ltd. (BCE) organized a public consultation meeting with local community members in the Rehmonnya Monastery in Lamine, southern Ye Township, Mon State. Company officials, member of Mon State Parliament Dr Min Soe Linn, the village administrators of Lamine Sub-township, as well as local villagers joined the meeting to discuss about providing electricity in their regions.

BCE is currently providing electricity in the Ngyan Tae Quarter of Mawlamyine City, and the company has already been granted permission from the union government to distribute electricity in Mon and Karen states and parts of Tenasserim Division.

According to the meeting, the company has four priority areas for providing electricity: Kyaikmayaw Township; southern Ye Township; northern Ye Township; and southern Burma. However, the company has decided to postpone its project in Kyaikmayaw and to start with nine villages nearby Lamine Sub-township.

The company is ready to begin operations and hope to provide electricity to the local community members before the end of March 2018.

*"The [electricity] fee will be very much cheaper; the company will charge only 285 [kyat] per unit. In the past, we had to pay 600 [kyat] per unit. The fee is defined by the price of petrol. When the electricity power plant is finished, it will cost twice as cheap. But the electricity provided by the state [Burmese government] only costs 35 kyat per unit. We still have to pay nearly 300 kyat per unit. We're feeling frustrated as we don't have equal rights,"* said Nai Oak Sar from Taung Pyin village of Lamine Sub-township.

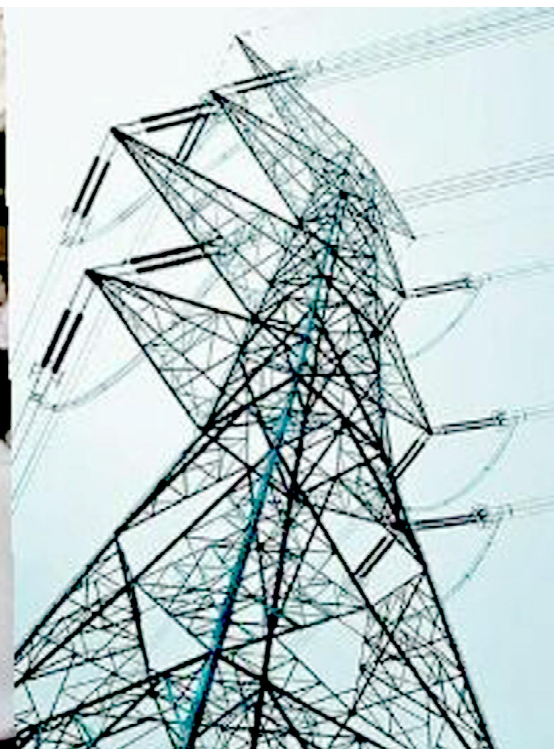
According to the villagers, the electricity fee charged by BCE is 285 kyat per unit; however, the fee may vary up to 20% in accordance with a rise or fall in the price of petrol. The company will inform the villagers one month in advance if the fee is changed. The electric meter boxes will be set up freely and the villagers have the right to manage the electrical wiring system in

their houses. The electricity will be distributed 24 hours a day.

The price of electricity is expected to fall over time. BCE will charge 285 kyat per unit in the first two years and 265 kyat in the next three years. When the company has been granted permission from the government to distribute electricity from liquefied natural gas (LNG), the electricity fee will drop to 245 kyat per unit.

During a consultation with local residents on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 in Ye City, Ye Township, Mon State, Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan promised that all of Ye Township would have access to electricity within 18 months.

Most of the remote villages in Burma rely on self-funded projects to get electricity. Locally-formed Village Electricity Committees are notorious for corruption, mismanagement, and having little transparency. However, the Minister of Electricity and Energy has admitted in Parliament that it was next to impossible to demolish all Village Electricity Committees now, but promised to end corruption amongst committees.



News

# PARENTS CONCERNED ABOUT HIGH TUITION FEES AND STUDENT SCHEDULES IN MON STATE



July 12, 2017

**HURFOM:** The parents of middle and high school students in Mon State government schools have expressed concerns about costs surrounding extra 'tuition' fees and the lack of downtime in their children's schedules caused by obligations to attend extra study sessions before and after regular classes.

'Tuition' is a common practice throughout Burma in which school teachers or people from outside the school system charge a fee to teach the same lessons taught during class time before or after school. In addition, while not every student attends 'tuition', most students attend 'extra time' classes which teachers conduct for an hour and a half after the regular day has finished.

According to a grade 8 (Standard 7) student in Mudon Township, students get up early in the morning and go to tuition around 5:30 am, then continue to study at their school until 3 pm, after which they attend 'extra time' classes until 4:30 pm with their teachers. Following this, they go directly to tuition until 6 pm, leaving students little time to relax.

The student detailed that many school teachers who teach 'extra time' only lecture on the basics during the day and demand a fee for the added support after regular school hours, asking for 1,500 kyat (US \$1.10) per month for grade 8 (Standard 7) students.

Even though students can study at their school without attending morning or evening tuition, students feel they will not pass exams if they do not attend, which is why parents allow them to go to tuition even though it is a large financial burden. The school teachers or external educators who teach tuition explain the same lessons from school in more detail during these after school classes and if the students understand they can go back home.

The Mon State Ministry of Education has stated that any form of collecting extra fees by teachers, including tuition, donations or selling school/classroom seals, is prohibited. However, students are required to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$3.67) per month in school fees and 1,500 kyat per month for 'extra time' fees.

Yet, despite the prohibition by the Ministry of Education, teachers still find a way around the ban and conduct tuition classes.

A Mudon Township parent explained that, *"due to my child's school teacher being unable to teach tuition, I allow my children to live in their teacher's house and to study hard to get a high score. We need to spend 2,700,000 kyat (US \$1,983.13) per year for grade 10 (Standard 9) students and 3,400,000 kyat (US \$2,497.28) for grade 11 (Standard 10) students per year. We can break down the fees we pay to the teacher up to three times: first, we have to pay part of the fee at the start of tuition in March; second, in July we pay again while students go back home to*

*take a rest for 10-15 days; and lastly, in October we need to pay all the money that we have yet to pay."*

Similarly, even though school teachers from Kalaw Taw and Nyne Hlone villages in Mudon Township are not allowed to teach tuition, they ask the students to attend night study classes and sleep at the school, which costs students 200,000 (US \$146.96) or 300,000 kyat (US \$220.43) per year. However, some parents cannot afford to pay for this and their children face difficulties in attaining quality education. In addition, for the grade 10 (Standard 9) students who live at their teacher's house, they need to annually pay 500,000 kyat (US \$367.32) if they do not eat food there and 1,000,000 kyat (US \$734.63) if the students live there, including food costs.

The parents of students who live in Thanbyuzayat Township explained that students who study in grade 10 (Standard 9) and 11 (Standard 10) have to pay an annual fee of 1,200,000 kyat (US \$881.67) for them to live at their teacher's house and access regular tuition there. On the other hand, the parents also need to support their child in their daily expenses and monthly 'extra time' fees from the school.

The parents are worried about the high cost of tuition fees and other expenses for their children's education. If school teachers do not teach tuition or open night study class in their house, but rather teach the students in the classroom properly, the students would not need to live in their teacher's home and parents would also not need to worry about the affording their children's education.

According to a grade 7 (Standard 6) student from Wae Ka Lee village, Thanbyuzayat Township, *"we need to study at school and also 'extra time'. We are often exhausted by the challenging schedules because, after 4:30 pm when school lets out, we rush to attend tuition. In school there are many students and since teachers cannot give one-on-one instruction, we feel we have to attend tuition after school in order to get more assistance. We have no time to rest and we are always in a hurry."*



## News

# TRADITIONAL WEAVING BUSINESSES IN MUDON TOWNSHIP STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

September 14, 2017

**HURFOM:** Traditional weaving businesses in Mudon Township are struggling to survive due to declining profitability with the influx of modern weaving technology.

*"Nowadays, traditional weaving businesses cannot compete with modern weaving machines, so they will gradually disappear. We are stuck with this job because we can't do other work and don't have enough money to invest in another business. Even if it isn't profitable enough, this is all we can do [for our livelihoods]. After paying wages to workers, only enough for our meals is left for us. It's impossible to do traditional weaving as a long-term business. The world is changing everyday,"* said a weaver from Kyaik Roi.

Traditional weaving was once a popular profession in Kyaik Roi, Ta Gon Tyle, Nyne Hlone, Kamarwat, and other villages in

Mudon Township. However, traditional weavers have faced a huge challenge with the creation of modern weaving machinery.

*"It doesn't create enough profit. We have to pay nearly 4,000 kyat (US \$2.94) to a single worker per day. A traditional weaving machine leaves only 1,000 kyat (US \$0.75) [profit] to us per day. If you have 10 weaving machines, you can earn 10,000 [kyat] (US \$7.35) and if you have 20 machines, you can have 20,000 [kyat] (US \$14.69). I have only five machines so I can earn between 5,000 (US \$3.67) to 10,000 kyat per day. [Sometimes], I can only earn the same amount as a daily worker. I don't have another job so I have to continue what I'm doing. But it will be difficult in the future,"* said Mi Cho, an owner of traditional weaving machines.

Most traditional weavers produce ethnic Mon and Karen clothing, bags,

and scarfs, and the products are sold in Mudon and Mawlamyine in Mon State, as well as Hpa-an in Karen State.

Demand for traditional Mon and Karen clothing is at its highest prior to Mon and Karen national days, and traditional weaving businesses enjoy higher profits during these periods.

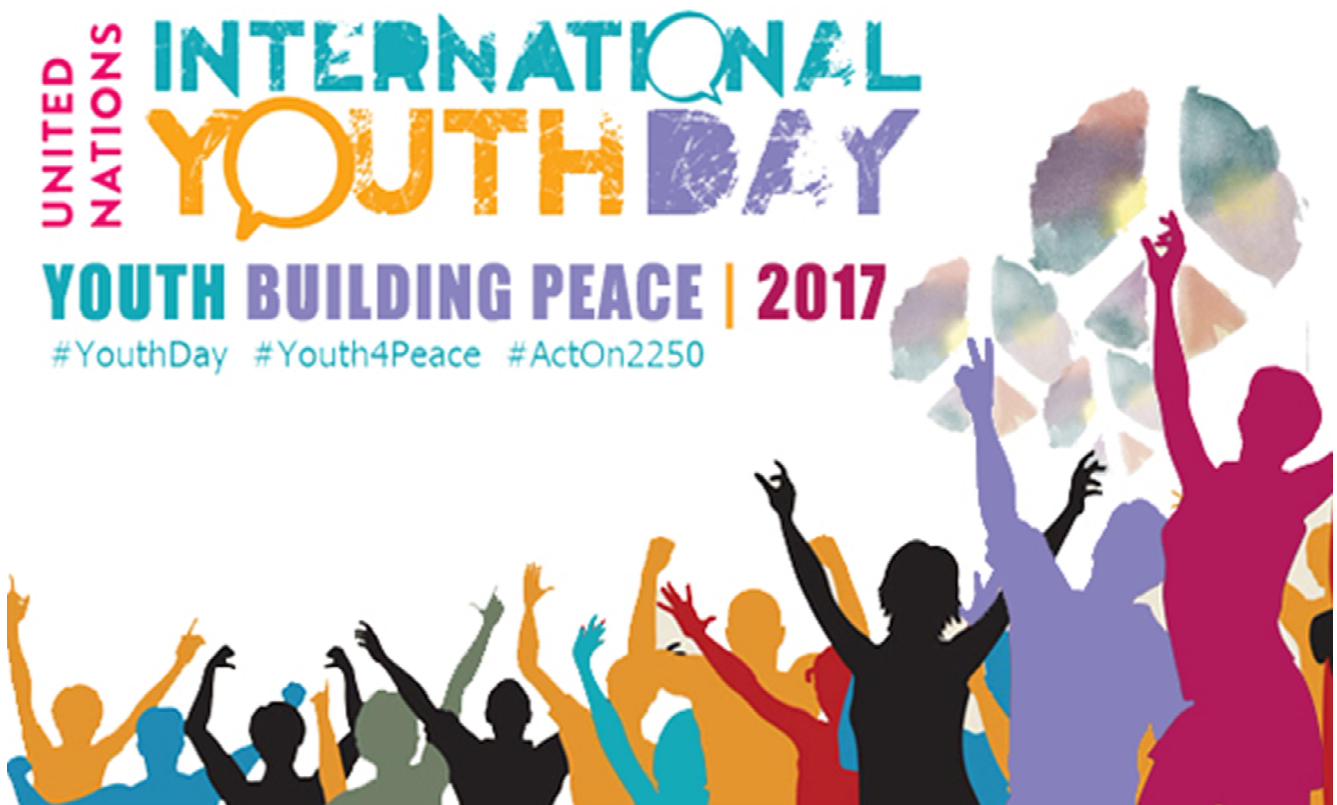
Clothes made by traditional weavers are thicker and more expensive than clothes made by modern weaving machines. However, customers who prefer hand-made clothes have been buying clothes made by traditional weavers.

*"Now traditional weaving can't compete with modern weaving in the market. The owners of traditional weaving machines have a huge challenge to continue their business in the long-term,"* said a local from Mudon.



HURFOM Statement

# HURFOM: INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY



August 12, 2017

Today, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) celebrates International Youth Day. Young people in Mon State and Mon areas of southeast Burma/Myanmar have a genuine desire to participate in their country's transition to an authentic democracy that respects the rights of all its citizens. This is reflected in the large number of vibrant and diverse youth organizations throughout Mon communities on whose behalf they advocate.

In acknowledging young people's unique position to contribute to sustainable peace and democracy, HURFOM calls upon both the Burma/Myanmar government and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to open civic spaces for youth perspectives on the peace process and other issues that affect them and their communities, as they are important stakeholders in Burma/Myanmar's future.

In celebrating Mon youth's efforts to improve their communities, HURFOM wishes to highlight youth perspectives on issues that they feel are important to them, as well as their contributions to their communities in response to the challenges they face.

## Political representation

As Burma/Myanmar undergoes a transition towards democracy, political representation for Mon communities, at both the state and union level, is an increasingly important issue for Mon youth. Engaging politically, several Mon youth

organizations have [called](#) on Mon political parties to unite or have officially [endorsed](#) Mon candidates.

*"We've already held four meetings regarding the unity of Mon political parties. Now, we will try to form a new Mon political party that can truly represent all Mon nationals. But it depends upon the will of the civilians; we support the will of the majority."*

Tala Gong Pone Nyar, Youth Monk Association

## Drugs

HURFOM has extensively [documented](#) the trafficking and use of drugs in Mon communities over the past several years. Recently, communities have expressed concerns over the rising rates of drug use by young people in Ye, Kyar Inn Seik Kyi, Mudon, and Thanbyuzayat townships.

*"We've focused on education and have already distributed thousands of pamphlets. We have educated [youths on] the consequences of using drugs and how to report drug trafficking. We've also held discussions with the police and the [Mon State] Parliament."*

Nai Seik Rot, Mon Youth Educator Organization

## Education

HURFOM has extensively [documented](#) the challenges Mon youth face in accessing education. High tuition fees, under-resourced classrooms, and lack of Mon language instruction

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## News from page no.10

## HURFOM Statement

have led many Mon youth organizations to call for education reforms.

*"Our education system does not create job opportunities. Parents must invest a lot in their children's education, so they must go abroad to work in order to make enough money. We need job opportunities, regulated workplaces, and vocational trainings."*

Nai Ji Kune, Thanbyuzayat Youth Organization

#### Environmental degradation

Mon youth have been particularly active in advocating for the protection of their local environment from harmful development practices. HURFOM has [documented](#) youth activities in protesting Mawlamyine Cement Limited's (MCL) coal-powered cement factory.

*"Some villagers are worried that their water resources have been polluted by chemicals emitted by MCL, and they have roofed their wells. They are worried about their future. We reported our problem, but nothing has changed."*

Nai Mae, Ka Don Si village, Kyaikmayaw Township

Government representatives and peacemakers need to recognize that solutions to the challenges of sustainable peace requires partnerships with a civil society that includes youth representatives. Youth mobilization in peace-building efforts is more likely to be successful if they are given the capabilities and opportunities to work with their state government and other stakeholders. A policy framework and clear guidelines for the government to uplift young people's situations and to encourage their active involvement in maintaining peace and security is necessary.

## News

## SHIPS TRANSPORTING COAL TO MCL'S CEMENT FACTORY HURTING LIVELIHOODS, SAY LOCAL RESIDENTS



July 27, 2017

Residents in Kwan Ngan and Nidon villages, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, are reporting economic and livelihood hardships due to the disruptive activities of large vessels transporting goods for Mawlamyine Cement Limited's (MCL) controversial cement factory in Pyar Taung. Villagers are concerned about the large ships based out of Kaw Doon and Kaw Pawna villages, as they rely heavily on fishing and farming for their daily livelihoods.

*"We cannot setup fishing nets to do fishing. About 15-20 ships use the river everyday. When the large ships come, we have to remove our fishing nets. If we don't do so and the ships crash the nets, we're the ones who have to suffer the loss,"* said U Aung Htoo, a local fisherman.

The large ships are used to transport coal to power MCL's cement factory, as well as to move the cement to market once it is produced.

*"The ships operate 24 hours a day; there is no fixed time [for when they will use or not use the river]. The local farmers travel by boats to go to their farms or do fishing. When this coincides with the large ships, the small boats can sink, while*

*the large boats don't have much problem,"* continued U Aung Htoo.

Prior to the opening of the cement factory, local fishermen reported catching more than 15 *peittha* (24.45 kg) of fish per day; however, the amount of the fish caught has gradually declined as the cement factory began operating, according to U Aung Htoo.

*"We rely on fishing but we can't do fishing now. We don't have farm land so we have to send our children abroad for work and rely on the money they send back,"* said Nai Nyine, another local fisherman.

However, it is not just access to the riverway and water resources that have local residents worried. Soil erosion and water displacement from passing ships, as well as noise pollution from the ship's engines have negatively impacted nearby communities, according to Daw Kyin Ohm, a local resident.

The majority of residents in Kyaikmayaw Township rely on the Attran River for their daily water needs. According to Daw Pyar, a local resident, villagers have noticed water becoming sticky with particles and algae after only five days of storage, whereas, previously, after 10-15 days of storage the water would still be clear.

Locals fear the problems will only get worse if authorities do not soon take action. In order to stop the damage to local livelihoods and the economy, villagers want the large ships to reduce their speed when using the Attran River.

MCL's controversial cement factory began full operations in early 2017. Its opening was met with [large-scale protest by local communities](#) who were upset with the lack of transparency and consultation regarding the use of coal to power the cement factory.

News

# THANBYUZAYAT IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT ACCUSED OF CORRUPTION



August 9, 2017

**HURFOM:** Several local residents have accused the Thanbyuzayat Township Immigration Department of corruption in the form of asking for or accepting bribes in exchange for expediting the application process.

In one case, a local resident applying for a new household document said she was asked to contribute to a fund for the Immigration Department. When she asked how much she had to pay, the staff replied that the amount was up to her. However, when the applicant pressed for the exact amount, the staff raised her hand holding up five fingers, indicating the applicant had to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$3.66) extra for her document.

Reports of bribery are not limited to persons applying for new household documents, but extend to those applying for ID cards as well.

In another case, a villager who had just returned from Thailand had negotiated with immigration officials to pay 30,000 kyat (US \$21.94) to get his ID card as he needed the document urgently. The elder brother of the applicant said that after agreeing to pay the money, his younger brother received his ID card two days later.

One Thanbyuzayat Township resident informed HURFOM that the duration for receiving your ID card after applying is dependent on how much money the applicant is willing to pay. If the applicant can pay 10,000 kyat (US \$7.32), they will get their ID card within a week. The applicant who pays 20,000 kyat (US \$14.64) can get the ID card within four or five days. The person who can pay 30,000 kyat needs only to wait for one or two days.

However, another local resident said that he had to pay nothing while updating his household document. He had to wait for four days to get his document, but he said if an applicant has applied for their document in person with complete and detailed information, it will take just two days to get the document.

*"The ID applicants want to get their card quickly so they bribe the staff. The duration of the process for an ID card is dependent on the number of applicants. But the applicants don't want to wait their turn and bribe the staff to get their cards first. The staff should stop the applicants from bribing them and urge them to patiently wait for their turn, but they don't. So corruption still exists in the Immigration Department,"* said a Thanbyuzayat Township resident.

According to Mehm Chan Mon, another local resident, it should cost only 2,000-3,000 kyat (US \$1.46 – \$2.19) for ID photos and 1,000 kyat (US \$0.73) for the office forms. He said that when he applied, the Thanbyuzayat Immigration Department requested that he provide two witnesses and a recommendation from the village administration. After that he had to wait two weeks to receive his ID card.

Corruption within immigration departments is not confined to Thanbyuzayat Township. *"After waiting for two weeks [to receive my ID card], I went to the [Mudon Township Immigration] Department to get my ID card. After telling me to wait for a bit, the office staff said I should contribute a donation of 20,000 kyat to the department. But I didn't have enough money and asked them to accept 10,000 kyat in donations instead. But they refused, so I had to add another 5,000 kyat. I had to pay 15,000 kyat (US \$10.97) to get my ID card,"* said Mi Nit of Mudon Township.

On December 14<sup>th</sup> 2016, the Ministry of Labor, Immigration, and Population confirmed that 40 officials working at Immigration Departments had been prosecuted for corruption.

*"After waiting for two weeks [to receive my ID card], I went to the [Mudon Township Immigration] Department to get my ID card. After telling me to wait for a bit, the office staff said I should contribute a donation of 20,000 kyat to the department. But I didn't have enough money and asked them to accept 10,000 kyat in donations instead. But they refused, so I had to add another 5,000 kyat. I had to pay 15,000 kyat (US \$10.97) to get my ID card."*



## News

# BURMA NAVY UNIT #43 TORTURES 6 MARINE WORKERS, KILLING 1 IN YEBYU TOWNSHIP



August 23, 2017

On August 12<sup>th</sup> 2017, Burma Navy Unit #43 arrested and tortured six of eight marine workers, resulting in the death of one worker. The eight men were fishing for crab on an island near Mae Tan Taung village, Kywe Tone Nyi Ma village track, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division.

Two days earlier, while patrolling by boat on August 10<sup>th</sup>, a ten-household leader of Mae Tan Taung village found eight marine workers on Warr Island, nearby Mae Tan Taung village. Suspicious of their activity he reported his findings to the 100-household leader U Nyunt San, who in turn reported to Major Zaw Phyto Thu of Navy Unit #43. The navy unit went to the island that same night to investigate the eight marine workers.

*"Three days after we [first] arrived [on August 8<sup>th</sup>] to Mae Tan Taung Island [Warr Island], the Navy, the [village] secretary, and other prominent persons from the village came to investigate us. They found nothing as we had just come to collect crabs. They said we needed to report to the authorized persons and then they went back,"* said U Aung Nyne, one of the arrested marine workers.

On that same day, August 10<sup>th</sup>, the eight marine workers reached out to the secretary of Mae Tan Taung village

administration and submitted a report with their marine business licenses, recommendation documents [from local authorities], and their national ID cards. The village secretary U Min Zaw said he would report [about the marine workers] to the local navy unit so that the marine workers could return to their huts.

However, at midnight on August 11<sup>th</sup>, five soldiers from the Navy Unit #43 came to the hut of the marine workers and arrested six of the workers. U Thein Htike Aung, the leader of the marine workers, was beaten with a bamboo stick during the arrest.

*"They said: 'We instructed you to do a report yesterday. Why didn't you do as instructed? Don't you respect us?' And then they beat us with a bamboo stick. After that, they locked us up with leg cuffs and tortured us for one day and night,"* said U Aung Nyne.

The leader of the marine workers U Thein Htike Aung was tortured to death by the evening of August 12<sup>th</sup> and the navy unit buried his body, according to the Kyaung Your village administrator U Myo Aung. The navy unit intimidated the workers saying they had to bury the truth and say that U Thein Htike Aung had drowned to death. The navy unit also threatened the five workers saying that they would be killed if they revealed the truth.

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, the five workers were sent back to their huts by a navy vehicle, according to the marine workers.

*"The navy soldiers forced us to lie, but the navy officer knows the truth. He called for the family members of the victim and ordered [his soldiers] to unearth the body,"* said U Aung Nyne.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> the brother-in-law of U Thein Htike Aung and the Kyaung Your village administrator U Myo Aung went to the Mawrawaddy Navy Unit to unearth the body at 5 pm and his funeral was held on the same day after the post-mortem examination finished at 6:30 pm, according to the Kywe Tone Nyi Ma village administrator U Su Nge. The doctor and the legislative officials from the Kan Bauk Region were also present during the unearthing of the body, according to the administrator.

*"As soon as we reached the navy unit, the body was unearthed. The doctor conducted a post-mortem examination and told us the result. The person did not have a good heart and lungs. There was no bleeding in the brain,"* said U Myo Aung.

The Ye City Police sent an official letter to the Ye General Hospital to ensure that the five remaining severely injured marine workers would receive treatment from the hospital and the Ye Police also sent the letter to the Yebyu Police in Tavoy District.

On August 17<sup>th</sup>, navy officials visited the five marine workers and supported them with 100,000 kyat (US \$73.66) per person for medical treatment.

However, in order to reveal the truth, the five abused marine workers have filed a lawsuit against the navy soldiers at the Ye City Police Station.

*"The navy officials said the legal proceedings will go in accordance with military or civilian laws. I requested to them that we want to know what will happen and what decisions will be made during the trial and that we want transparency. The officials replied they will do as we have requested,"* said a Kyaung Yaw villager.

News

# WORRY CONTINUES DESPITE WITHDRAWAL OF BURMESE TROOPS FROM NMSP CONTROLLED AREAS

September 14, 2017

**HURFOM:** According to reports, on August 10<sup>th</sup> 2017, around 70 Burmese military troops were ordered back from the New Mon State Party (NMSP) controlled Kanbauk village area in Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township, Karen State, leaving approximately 30 active Burmese Army troops. Despite the withdrawal of the troops, worry of future conflict still remains among villagers.

*"On the evening of August 10<sup>th</sup> the Burmese troops went back. But [we worry] they will come back again. We can't stay calm even though there is no more [Burmese Army] troops coming into our region. We're worrying that they [NMSP and the Burmese Army] will fight each other again like in the past,"* said Nai Jel Toi Nai of Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township.

Burmese troops were active in the NMSP controlled area during Mon Revolution Day on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2017; however, the Burmese Army reduced the number of active troops after both sides talked in Ye and Mawlamyine in Mon State.

*"The villagers are worrying that armed conflict will break out like in the past. The community members want the NMSP, the KNU (Karen National Union), and the [Burmese] government to maintain the ceasefire agreement. They want to live peacefully. They have settled down very well and have a fair livelihood and property in their villages. The villagers don't want that the armed clashes break out again,"* said Nai Ba Nyar Lel, an executive committee member of the NMSP.

The 30 Burmese Army troops who are active in the NMSP controlled area in

Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township are from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #32 that is commanded by Captain Myat Kyaw Linn.

Now, as the season for harvesting rubber is approaching, local villagers in Kyar Inn Seik Kyi are worrying that the active Burmese troops will interrupt their daily work.

According to a local source, civilian and Buddhist communities want the NMSP to sign the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in order to guarantee a ceasefire with the Burmese Army.

Tensions between the two groups grew after the [NMSP ignored orders](#) from the Burmese military to refrain from holding military parades in uniform during the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mon National Revolution Day on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2017.

## FARMERS UPSET AS BURMA ARMY DESTROYS RUBBER PLANTATIONS ON PREVIOUSLY CONFISCATED LANDS

September 15, 2017

Farmers in Jone Paw village near Ye City, Ye Township, Mon State are upset that Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #586 has been clearing confiscated rubber plantations and selling the wood. According to reports, four plantations have already been destroyed.

*"The military cut the trees and sold them without any notification to the owners. The military said that they cut the plants as they were no longer productive, but all my plants are good. They have already cut 1,000 plants from my farm,"* said Daw Ngwe Pin, a local rubber farmer.

In 2000, LIB #586 confiscated 341 acres of land from rubber plantations adjacent to their army base in Jone Paw village. The battalion announced that they would allow the land owners to

use their farms for another five years, after which they would have to pay an annual fee in order to continue farming.

According to Daw Sein whose land was also confiscated, if they did not pay the tax, they could no longer use the plants on their farm. *"The military specified the amount we needed to pay on our plants and land. If we can't pay them, we can't use our land. We are allowed to split the fee into three payments over the year."*

The annual tax on farmers' land and plants has varied over the years: between 2006 to 2009, owners had to pay 800 kyat per plant; from 2010 to 2013 around 1,000 to 1,500 kyat; from 2014 to 2015, 700 kyat; and from 2015 to 2017, 350 kyat per plant.

*"If we compare the income from our farm to the money that we need to pay for tax to the military, just a small*

*amount of money for our family is left,"* explained Daw Ngwe Pin.

The challenges local farmers face in their livelihoods with the tax is compounded by fluctuations in the price of rubber on the global market.

*"The price of rubber is not stable. If the price of rubber is higher, we get some more money to spend and if the price is low we don't receive any profit. Some owners can't use their land because they can't pay the tax,"* said U Tin Oo whose land was also confiscated by the military.

Land owners have requested that LIB #586 stop cutting their rubber trees without their permission and to allow them to use their own land freely. According to Daw Ngwe Pin, those who have lost their land plan to report the issue to the union government.



## News

## YEBYU LOCALS IN 'TOUGH SITUATION' AS FOREST DEPARTMENT CLAIMS THEIR LAND IS IN RESERVE FOREST AREAS



August 24, 2017

**HURFOM:** On July 5<sup>th</sup> 2017, Irrawaddy Green Towers Ltd. (IGT) — a local telecommunications company — demanded Mi Aye Aye pay back 900,000 kyat (US \$662.30) in rentals fees they paid for her land after the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry declared her land within the reserve forest area of the Forest Department. Forty-seven-year-old Mi Aye Aye's land is located in Ah Lel Sakhan village, Log Tie village tract, Kalane Aung sub-township, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division.

According to Mi Aye Aye, also known as Daw Myint, the dispute occurred after U San Win, the Deputy Director of the Tavoy District Forest Department, conducted a survey on the reserve forest area in Yebyu Township. She stated that after the Forest Department declared that her two plots of land were included in the reserve forest area, the company began demanding their rental fees back.

Both Mi Aye Aye and her husband Nai Min Thit Oo claim they bought these plots of land for 1.2 million kyat (US \$883.00) from U San Aung, who lives in the same village, on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 in the presence of the village administration and other witnesses. They also signed a land contract during the sale.

As Mi Aye Aye has strong documentation that she is the real owner of these plots of land, U Aung Ye Thwe, an official from IGT, a company who are authorized to setup telecommunications towers in Yebyu, had agreed on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016 to rent her plots of land for 5.4 million kyat (US \$3,973.99) for three years, equal to 150,000 kyat (US \$110.39) per month.

*"The telecom company had rented our land for the price of 150,000 kyat per month and 5.4 million kyat over three years to setup 'Telenor' telecommunication towers. But, on July 6<sup>th</sup> the company informed us [via letter] that we had to pay them 900,000 kyat which is equal to the fees for six months — from December 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 to June 27<sup>th</sup> 2017. The company even threatened us with a lawsuit if we failed to pay back the charges. The July 6<sup>th</sup> letter from the company also stated that the company had ended the contract and won't rent the land again in the future,"* said Mi Aye Aye.

Similarly, six landowners from Log Tie and Yar Phuu village tracts have also been informed by IGT that their rental fees must be repaid to the company as their land plots are also included in the Hein Zel — Kalane Aung reserve forest area.

*"We've heard this news. I think the company is reclaiming the rental*

*charges as they have to make a contract with us [the Forest Department]. If they want to setup telecom towers on land owned by the Forest Department, the company has to sign a contract with the department. After the Forest Department conducted a survey, it was found that local plantations are included in the reserve forest area. We've urged the plantation owners to sign a contract with the department. But even if they have a 30-year contract with the [Forest] Department, they can't rent, pawn or sell their land. They can't even use their land in [any] another way [than as stipulated in the contract]. We also explained the policy of the Forest Department to the company,"* said U San Win, the Deputy Director of the Tavoy District Forest Department.

*"We were in debt so we had decided to rent our land out to the company in order to pay our debt. We bought this land with a contract. The company has reclaimed their money and the Forest Department also said our lands belong to them. We are in a tough situation [now],"* said Mi Aye Aye.

According to U Khin Maung Oo, the Yar Phuu village administrator of Yebyu Township, Tavoy District, Tenasserim Division, the land dispute has informally been reported to U Kyi Soe, the Deputy Speaker of Tenasserim Parliament.



News

# LOCAL ECONOMY TAKING A HIT AS RUMORS ABOUT MUSLIM MIGRATION CONTINUE TO SWIRL, SAY LOCALS IN YE TOWNSHIP



September 26, 2017

Locals in coastal areas of Ye Township are reporting that the rampant rumors and fake news spreading on social media surrounding the illegal immigration of Muslims and potential terrorist attacks in Mon State are hurting tourism and the local economy. Villagers report that most of the restaurants in Kabyarwa Beach — located 27 km from Ye City in southern Mon State — are closed due to the lack of visitors.

*"At this time last year, we were preparing for the autumn [festive] season. Visitors came to the beach every day. It's not boring like today. Now, we have been facing a lack of visitors for about 20 days since the rumors about Muslim people began,"* said Nai Aung Moe, a restaurant owner in Kabyarwa Beach.

According to the locals, restaurant owners had collected goods and commodities in advance of the autumn season in expectation of large numbers of tourists as seen last year; however, since the rumors of illegal Muslim immigration and potential terrorist attacks began [circulating on social media](#) several weeks ago, owners have been struggling to continue running their restaurants.

*"Before the rumors about the conflict in northern Arakan [Rakhine] State began circulating, the beach had about 100 visitors every day. But now it's silent and uneventful,"* said a local.

As the number of visitors has gradually declined, only the bigger restaurants have managed to continue operating, while smaller ones have been forced to close their doors.

After Burma's Office of the Commander-in-Chief released a statement on September 5<sup>th</sup> 2017 warning of the possibility of retaliatory explosive attacks in larger cities such as Naypyidaw, Rangoon [Yangon], Mandalay, and Mawlamyine in response to the violent conflict in eastern Burma, worry and fear have been escalating in Ye Township.

*"Normally, our region is peaceful. Because everyone has spread and shared rumors about Muslim people, some villagers have tightened security at night. They have been planning to stop [any illegal] immigration of Muslims. They are restless because of the rumors. But in reality, there isn't too much to be afraid of,"* continued Nai Aung Moe.

Many people from Ye Township receive their news via Facebook and lack sources of genuine journalism, leading many to believe what they read on social media. This has allowed rumors and fake news regarding Muslims to spread rapidly within communities, negatively influencing perceptions at all levels in Mon communities.

*"We have strong information that the Muslim people have been trying to build mosques in our region. They already bought the land. It's very reliable. They organized their people to invade our land. We already made invitation letters. We'll organize Buddhist monks and draw up a plan how to offer protection [from Muslims],"* said the Abbot of Toe Tat Ywar Thit village, Khaw Zar Region, southern Ye Township.

As a consequence of the conflict in northern Arakan State, on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2017, Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan confirmed the news of security reinforcements in Mawlamyine City. Similarly, on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2017, the local military unit and police force tightened security in Kabyarwa Beach; however, those security reinforcements have now been withdrawn.



## 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

# FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA LEAVE MON LOCALS WORRIED ABOUT TERRORIST ATTACKS

September 14, 2017

Rumors and fake news spreading over social media of potential explosive attacks in Mon State by Muslim sympathizers have some locals concerned.

"From one user to another there is a message warning [people] not to travel from September 11th to the 25th as Muslim people have been planning to organize a Jihad war. I can't say the news is true, but we feel there is a possibility so we're afraid of being attacked and we have to be careful [in our daily life]," said Nai Jel Toi Nai from Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township.

Rumors started swirling online after Burma's Office of the Commander-in-Chief released a statement on September 5th 2017 suggesting the

possibility of retaliatory explosive attacks in big cities such as Naypyidaw, Rangoon, Mandalay, and Mawlamyine, in response to the violent conflict in eastern Burma.

On September 6th 2017, Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan confirmed the news of security reinforcements in Mawlamyine City.

Moreover, in response to speculation and rumor surrounding illegal immigration of Muslims into Mon State, community organized security forces have begun patrolling villages and river banks in some areas.

"In our region nearby Kawdut village and Kalla Gote Island, security guards patrol the river bank for the whole night. We often heard that there would be illegal immigration of Muslim people

and some said they saw [abandoned] boats of Muslim people. Because of the rumors, the villagers have been worrying," said Nai Ong Jana from Arru Tong village in Northern Ye Township.

"The security guard is patrolling for the whole night in our village. We share the message to our villagers to stay in the village and to tighten security. The villagers have been worrying so they dare not travel anywhere. The students are always accompanied by their parents," said Mi Moe from Thanbyuzayat City.

On September 9th 2017, the Information Committee, a Facebook page run by the State Counselor Office Information Committee, denounced the rumors as fake news and announced that those spreading it will be punished by the law.

# JUSTICE, RULE OF LAW, AND EDUCATION KEY TO BREAKING CYCLES OF GBV IN MON STATE: ETHNIC AFFAIRS MINISTER



July 25, 2017

A joint workshop on the prevention of gender-based violence was held in Mawlamyine, Mon State on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2017. The workshop was conducted by Legal Clinic Myanmar (LCM), Mon Women's Organization (MWO), and Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM).

One-hundred-and-thirty participants from local CSOs and NGOs, as well as representatives from both police and Mon State government departments attended the workshop.

In her opening speech, Daw San Wint Khaing, Minister of Pa-O Ethnic Affairs for Mon State, highlighted that gender-based violence is not only a human rights violation, but a public health challenge and a barrier to political, social, and economic development as well.

*"Our target is to reduce and prevent gender-based violence, and to emphasize that it is strongly needed for our community. Myanmar [Burma] has been signatory to the United Nations CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women] since 1997. That is why we have had a 12-point action plan on gender since 2013,"* said Daw San Wint Khaing.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement released their ten-year National Strategic Plan for the

Advancement of Women in 2013, with a key objective to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

According to the Ethnic Affairs Minister, rule of law and justice for crimes against women and girls are necessary components for reducing current levels of violence. Daw San Wint Khaing also emphasized the need to address the impact of gender-based violence on young children and the importance of education in order to break cycles of violence.

*"When we talk about gender-based violence we need to talk about the impact of that violence [on children]. No matter if they are female or male, when they face this violence during their childhood, they may become the perpetrator [in the future]. So we need to make sure this doesn't happen and start educating them [about gender-based violence] when they are still young,"* continued Daw San Wint Khaing.

Although Burma ratified CEDAW in 1997, its union-level parliament has yet to approve the draft National Prevention of Violence Against Women bill, despite being 'near completion' for several years.

While the bill has had broad support from advocates on women's rights and civil society, others urge the government to include access to resources for survivors of gender-based violence.

*"In order to provide services ranging from medical treatment and psychological counseling, the state should establish and support some assistance centres for both young and adult victims of gender-based violence, including legal representation and vocational education. We don't fully expect integrated services right away, but at least the government should start these processes to reduce levels of impunity and promote fairness in the treatment of victims of gender-based violence,"* said Nai Aue Mon, Program Director at HURFOM.

HURFOM has extensively documented violence against women and girls, most recently releasing Cracks in the Silence, which explored the increasing number of reports of sexual violence against children and the challenges to accessing justice in Mon State and Mon areas of Burma.

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