

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING MUST BE DONE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA DUE TO COVID-19 AND LIMIT CROWD SIZES



September 8, 2020

HURFOM: On September 6, 2020, the Union Election Commission (UEC) released a statement directing candidates to conduct their election campaigns via social media due to COVID-19. Candidates have responded that this will be difficult.

"We haven't decided yet how to start our campaign. But it must be different from what we did in the previous election. If we follow the procedures, our campaign won't be effective. We can't [easily] visit one house after another. We aren't allowed to gather more than 30 people so it's difficult to draw the attention of the people. But

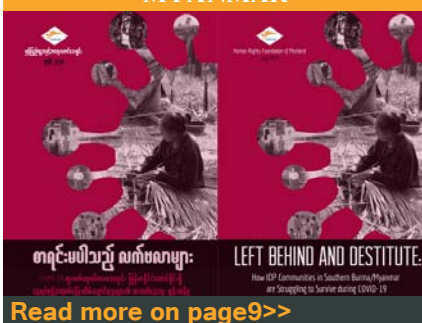
we have to do an election campaign so we'll mainly rely on social media," said U Win Maw Oo, the Secretary of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

The UEC has allowed up to 50 people to gather for the purpose of election campaigns, but some election candidates feel this is not adequate. Meanwhile, door-to-door election campaigning needs permission from homeowners, and people are hesitant to talk to strangers due to COVID-19, this leaves social media as the best available option.

"There are lots of challenges in the election campaign. We aren't allowed to gather more than 30 people, and must stay 6 ft apart during the campaign. [Door to door campaigning requires having to take care of everyone's health,] and try our best to

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PRESS RELEASE: IDP COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE AS COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS AND QUARANTINE MEASURES CAUSING DESTITUTION IN SOUTHEASTERN BURMA/ MYANMAR



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Ye plans to open "Mon Language Class"



July 29, 2020

HURFOM: In order to create a systematic learning environment of mother tongue language, Ye Township's Mon Language Teaching Committee plans to open "Mon Language Class" in Ye Town, Southern Mon State. according to the Chair Nai Lon.

"The class is for ethnic Mon people, but who can't speak or write in the Mon language. If you can't speak or write your mother language, your tribe will become extinct. Some parents requested we teach the mother language, so we've decided to open the class," said Nai Lon, Chair of the Committee.

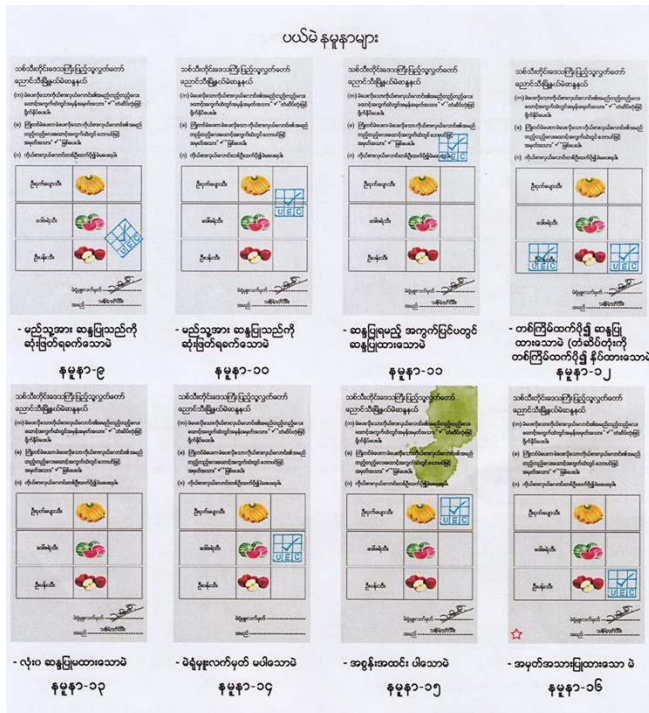
The class will open in August.

"The class will be open for 45 days without a break. The class time is four hours a day. We are hoping 90 percent of attendees can learn their mother

[Read more on page3>>](#)

News

FIRST TIME VOTERS WORRY ABOUT HOW TO ENSURE THEIR VOTE COUNTS IN THE GENERAL ELECTION



July 10, 2020

HURFOM: The Union Election Commission (UEC) announced on July 1, 2020 that the 2020 general election will be held on November 8.

However, for some living in remote or rural regions of the country, the election and voting process brings different worries.

Metropolitan populations have regular and easy access to the UEC or political parties so they have few problems with the voting process. But the rural population in remote areas do not know how to cast their ballots, and voting processes have changed over time.

First time voters who live in remote areas are worried their ballots may be classified as invalid ones as they have no experience in the voting process.

"Voter lists are already collected in our region. Now we have the right to vote in 2020 but I and all villagers have

never voted before. So we're worried our ballots may become invalid," said an election activist from Kyarinnseiky Township, Karen State.

People from the Ye Chaung Phyar region, Kyaung Yaw village track, Ye township did not cast their votes in 2010 and 2015 elections. As a result, they lack confidence in the knowledge of the election process.

There are 19 villages in the Ye Chaung Phyar region, all are under the control of the New Mon State Party.

"We're helping people in Ye Chaung Phyar region to exercise their right to vote. I think they will get a chance to cast their votes in this election. But there is no voter education and training," noted Nai Loon, a resident from Ye.

Nai Loon, pointed out that it is possible first time voters who do not understand how to mark their ballots and the voting process may make errors when casting their votes.

"So even if they are granted the right to vote, most of their ballots might become invalid," explained Nai Loon.

In addition to the absence of voter education are challenges of distance. 10 villages in Yebyu Township, Tavoyan District of the NMSP controlled area had the right to vote in the 2015 election but the polling stations were very far from villages and poor transportation.

The result was that just a few people cast their votes in that general election.

The right to vote for the Mon and Karen people in Chaung Hna Hkwa region, Kyarinnseiky Township was denied in 2015 due to security reasons.

Acceptable methods for marking the ballots have also changed over time. In the 2010 election, voters had to place a check mark beside the name of their candidate. In the 2015 election, voters were required to use a rubber stamp placing it beside their choice.

The UEC has not yet announced the detailed procedures of how the electorate must mark their ballots in the 2020 general election.

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News

MNEC FACING A SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS DUE TO LIMITED SALARY RATES



Photo: MNA

July 14, 2020

HURFOM: The Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) has a limited budget that provides a small salary to its school teachers. As a result, education activists have noted the MNEC is facing great difficulties appointing qualified teachers for Mon national schools.

International donors to the MNEC have limited support for teachers' salaries. Each teacher receives only 60,000 Kyat a month. In some regions where local donors make additional contributions,

a school teacher may receive a salary of about 100,000 Kyat/month.

With such limited funding many school teachers are not willing to take on this employment.

The MNEC has had to find other bargaining points to recruit teachers. This includes negotiating about student criterion, such as only accepting those who have recently passed their matriculation exams or university students taking distance education programs.

"High-quality teachers want higher salaries, but we can pay only a small amount so we can't appoint them. Not having enough teachers also impacts the education of the students. The root cause is that we can't pay high salaries," said an activist from Pa Nga village, Thanbyuzayat Township.

A shortage of qualified teachers will likely reduce the percentage of high school students who will pass their studies in the coming years. In the 2018-19 academic year, there were 114 matriculation students from Mon national schools and only 11 passed their exams. The pass percentage rate was just 9.65.

"This [academic] year there has been no improvement [to increase salary budgets]. We all have tried our best but there is no support. The biggest problem is that we don't have high-quality school teachers. Salary rate limitations have made things difficult," said Nai Min Aung Zay, the Director of MNEC.

The MNEC has three basic education high schools, and all are cooperating with the Department of Basic Education under the Ministry of Education.

Ye plans to open "Mon Language Class"



Photo: Aung Ko Ko Oo

language during these class hours," said Nai Lon.

Due to financial constraints, the committee said they could only open the class in Ye.

"Some villages requested we open classes in their communities. But the committee did not get financial support from anyone, and we have to run the classes on self-reliance. We can't support the attendees with a travel fee. We want to run the class sustainably, we can only support the class teachers," explained Nai Lon.

With these classes there will be more opportunity for everyone to learn the Mon language.

The Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) has been helping draw the curriculum and teaching techniques.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING MUST BE DONE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA DUE TO COVID-19 AND LIMIT CROWD SIZES



explain to home owners about what we've done. But I worry that they might not trust us. We also have to move around from one village to another, and it's also a challenge (such as increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission)," said Mi John Da Non, a candidate from #1 Kyaikmayaw constituency of Mon State Parliament.

Independent candidate, U Aung Naing Win for the Amyotha Hluttaw

(House of Nationalities) from Ye Township said, *"COVID-19 is a world pandemic disease, we must exactly follow the rules and regulations. I'll do a door to door campaign to explain my policies. But I do need permission from the home owners. Also I will use social media to explain my policies, my objectives and my action plan."*

The Mon Unity Party (MUP) will use brochures, stickers, and vinyl promotions in their election campaign. Their policies

and procedures will be announced through loudspeakers and described in songs, according to the Party Secretary.

"We have challenges related to the election campaign. But we must follow the instructions of the Ministry of Health. As we aren't allowed to gather a mass of 9more than) people, it's difficult to make everyone aware about our party's policies." said Nai Layi Tama, Secretary #1 of the MUP.

People's interest in politics has declined due to the pandemic, and it makes election campaigning difficult, added U Win Maw Oo. *"If we conduct a door to door election campaign, we don't know what will be the response from the UEC. We should talk about that. If we don't discuss [this point], the UEC might accuse us of breaching their rules and regulations, and we will be the ones to suffer,"* said U Win Maw Oo.

The UEC announced that the 2020 election campaigning period will start at 6 am on September 8, 2020 and end at 12 pm on November 6, 2020.

THOSE WHO WERE IN QUARANTINE DUE TO COVID-19 MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS, STILL HAVE RIGHT TO CAST ADVANCE BALLOTS



July 22, 2020

HURFOM According to the Mon State Election Sub-commission, eligible voters for the 2020 general election who experienced movement restrictions due to COVID-19 still have the right to cast their advance ballots.

"Those who have stayed in quarantine are similar to [the situation of] those who have been admitted to hospitals. As they are under the Ministry of Health [protocols they are assumed to be

patients), and voting law allows them to cast their advanced ballots," said U Hein Linn Htet, the Director of Mon State Election Sub-commission.

The Mon State Election Sub-commission filed a report to the Union Election Commission indicating that voters in Mon State who experienced movement restrictions, including being in quarantine centers are still able to cast their advance vote.

If an eligible voter is admitted to hospital, in order to help his/her cast their

advance ballot, the Ward or Village Election Commission must contact the official of the hospital and the official is responsible for following the legal procedure regarding advance voting. The official has to give the envelope that contains the voter's ballot to the Commission, according to the electoral law.

"If a voter had to stay at a quarantine center outside his/her constituency, he/she has to apply for an advance ballot with Form #15. But if the quarantine center was located in the constituency, the voters can send his/her advance vote to the Ward/Village Election Commission," explained U Hein Linn Htet.

According to the Ministry of Information, as of July 10, 2020, there were five quarantine centers that accommodated 1,400 returnees to Mon State.

News

PARENTS WORRY ABOUT SCHOOL OPENINGS AMIDST FEARS OF COVID-19



Photo: EN

July 15, 2020

HURFOM: Although prevention and control measures in response to COVID-19 have not been lifted, the Ministry of Education has announced that school registration for basic education in high schools must be done between July 13th to the 17th, 2020.

Parents are expressing concerns about their children returning to school and possibly being infected by the disease.

"Schools are being reopened and there is the requirement for registration, but

we're afraid of the disease. If we refuse to register then our children's education will be impacted. So we went to register, but with fear," said a parent at No #2 Basic Education High School, Mudon.

All high schools across Burma will be opened on July 21, 2020 and if there is no spread of the disease after two weeks, then middle and primary schools will open.

The Ministry of Education released a statement on June 23 that those who come to school must wear masks and

face shields. Students and teachers must maintain a distance of 6 feet and food must be served at separated tables. Snack shops that do not follow COVID-19 rules and regulations are not allowed to be opened and posters related to COVID-19 education must be visible at all school premises.

"There is no local transmission in Mon State but we're worried that one of the students might get infected from another area. If the disease spreads during the school season, it's too dangerous for our children. We know that school teachers are well-prepared but we can't stop worrying as we're parents," said another parent from Mudon Township.

In order to control the spread of COVID-19, the National-Level Central Committee on Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has extended all restrictions and prevention and control measures for COVID-19 up to July 31, 2020.

Mon State has more than 1,500 primary, middle and high schools that accommodates 400,000 students.

ADMINISTRATORS SAY VILLAGERS MORE INTERESTED IN ELECTION THAN EVER BEFORE



Photo: Mon Saw Noal

July 23, 2020

HURFOM: The Union Election Commission (UEC) has announced that the 2020 general election will be held on November 8, and the voters' list will be released on July 25.

According to some village Administrators in Mon State, Mon villagers are showing great interest in the election.

"There is more interest than the previous elections. Only one third of the population in the village were interested in the previous elections, but this time, more than half of the village population has shown their interest. Many villagers said they couldn't wait to check for their names on the voters' list (on July 25) — so we can say they're interested in the election," said Nai Htar Wara, a village Administrator in Thanbyuzayat Township.

Village Administrators are busy preparing to announce the voters' list and are urging villagers to check that their names are on the voters' list.

"We've formed a youth group in our village. When the voters' list is announced, they will tell villagers to go and check the list. And they will

help villagers to correct and amend the voters' list," said Nai Mon Saw Noal, the village Administrator for Naing Hlone village, Mudon Township.

The first iteration of the voters' list will be released for 14 days from July 25 to August 7, 2020 at village/ward election sub-commission offices. Those who want to correct, amend or register a complaint about the list can file reports during this period.

"We've formed a youth group in our village. When the voters' list is announced, they will tell villagers to go and check the list. And they will help villagers to correct and amend the voters' list,"

News

VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN IN YE CHAUNG PHYAR REGION SUSPENDED



July 23, 2020

HURFOM: The Union Election Commission announced that the 2020 general election will be held on November 8th and the voters' list will be announced on July 25th.

Election activists in Ye Township, Mon State have been trying to help people in the Ye Chaung Phyar Region, to secure their voting rights by ensuring their names are on the voter's list. These efforts have faced a lack of cooperation from local authorities. The region is in southeast Myanmar and is under the jurisdiction of the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

"We've already prepared everything to collect voters' lists. Also we've talked with the NMSP about security issues. But the local election sub-commission and the government authority have done nothing," said Nai Maung Nyine, a member of the Mon Unity Party (MUP) who works for a Ye Chaung Phyar voter support organization.

There are 19 villages in Ye Chaung Phyar Region controlled by the NMSP and the Ye Election Sub-commission and local

authority have done nothing to help the people get their voting rights, reported activists.

"We've collected the voters' list and gave it to Ye GAD - General Administration Department. We have to wait and see whether those will be included in the July-15 voters' list or not. If not, we'll find the root cause and adopt a future plan. We never give up helping people in the area," said Nai Lon, another Ye resident and voter rights activist.

The NMSP and the MUP did meet in the first week of July, and the MUP urged the NMSP to help people in Ye Chaung Phyar to secure their voting rights.

The NMSP did allow the collection of voters' list in 10 villages but refused in another 9 villages claiming the villages were very close to their headquarters, and they were concerned about security, according to a central committee member of the MUP.

According to the Mon State Election Sub-commission, there are more than 203,000 eligible voters in Mon State. The Ye Immigration and National Registration Department has also been

trying to put 50,000 people that do not have a National Registration Card (NRC) onto the voters' list.



We've formed a youth group in our village. When the voters' list is announced, they will tell villagers to go and check the list. And they will help villagers to correct and amend the voters' list



News

30% OF RESIDENTS IN REMOTE AREAS DO NOT HAVE NATIONAL REGISTRATION CARDS – IMPACTING THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE



August 6, 2020

HURFOM: The Civic Action for Free and Fair Election 2020 Project (CAFFE Project) has found that 30 percent of residents in remote areas do not have National Registration Cards. Without the NRC it is difficult to exercise voting rights.

CAFFE conducted a survey in nine townships in Mon and Karen States and Tenasserim Division, specifically areas under the control of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) as well as villages with Internally Displaced Person (IDP's) that resulted in these findings.

The townships included, Thaton, Paung, Chaung Zone, Thanbyuzayat and Ye in Mon State, Kawkarate and Kyarinnseiky towns of Karen State and Yebyu township of Tenasserim Division.

CAFFE has released a report titled **“Not to Lose Your Civil Rights”** highlighting the impacts residents face without having an NRC.

People surveyed expressed a desire to vote in the 2020 election..

“Young people in the 18-50 age range want to cast their vote, if they can get NRC cards,” said Nai Kasauh Mon, the Director of CAFFE Project.

According to an official with the Ye Township Department of Immigration and Population, priority has now been given to process those who are on the voter list, but who do not yet have an NRC.

The Department will grant NRC cards to people who live in the New Mon State Party (NMSP) controlled area, but only after the party has finalized an agreement with the government.

“The NMSP requested by letter that we grant NRC cards to the villages in their controlled area. We reported to the Mon State Department of Immigration and Population and after that, the report went to the Mon State government. As this issue is also related to the peace process, a high-ranked official of the NMSP should meet the Mon State government. We don't know what happens next. As the NMSP signed the NCA, they need a recommendation from the President Office, I think. Also we don't know how

the Mon State government responds. Anyhow, we'll follow the instruction from the government,” said the official of the Ye Township Department of Immigration and Population.

Ye township has more than 200,000 eligible voters as of July 25, 2020, and more than 50,000 voters do not have NRC cards.

“After negotiating with the election commission, we prioritized granting NRC cards to those who are in the voter list but don't have the card. We don't want them to lose their voting right,” said the Ye Township official.

Many people surveyed by the CAFFE Project do not have voting experience, so they also need election education training from Community Based Organizations (CBO's).

“The village administrator and the department of Immigration and Population should cooperate to grant them NRC cards. Ethnic people can't speak Burmese well so the CBOs should also help them,” said Mi Myint Mon from the CAFFE Project.

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News

LOCALS MAKE 4 DEMANDS RELATED TO MINING OPERATION OF BALAE KHA BOI MOUNTAIN IN MA GYI VILLAGE



Photo: Aung Naing Win

August 7, 2020

HURFOM: Myanmar Shwe Aykarit Mining Company Ltd has plans to conduct exploratory mining at Balae Kha Boi Mountain in Ma Gyi village, southern Ye Township, Mon State, to assess its development potential of natural resources.

In response a local community based organization, called Mon Area Community Development Organization (MACDO) and local youth have cooperated to release a report titled “Socioeconomic Research in Balae Kha Boi”.

To discuss their report, local residents traveled to the Mon State Parliament on August 5 to meet with lawmakers.

The group is calling for 4 things. i) For Myanmar Shwe Aykarit Mining Company Ltd., to withdraw their mining operations from their area. ii) To allow customary land tenure on their lands. iii) To investigate ties between the village authority and the company for alleged unlawful land trades. iv) That lawmakers provide help to solve land disputes.

“When coming to buy land, the company didn’t call all the landowners.

They only called one person and let him escort them to see all the land. And they just (secretly) sold and bought the land. The company said an acre of land was priced from 3 to 7.5 million kyat but when they bought the land, they just gave 1.2 million per acre. Villagers are divided on the land issue. Then, the company did a land survey themselves without a surveyor clerk. So we want lawmakers to investigate these unlawful actions and support us with help,” said a Ma Gyi resident.

Lawmakers suggested Ma Gyi residents apply for a Land Use Certificate Form #7 for their land and not to trade land at the moment.

An official of MACDO said, ***“If we introduce our report just in Ye, it won’t be effective. So we’ve decided to do it at the parliament. We can send our message directly to lawmakers at the parliament. And this issue is not one we should tolerate. That’s why we chose to first introduce our report at the parliament.”***

According to the report, local residents rely on the mountain for their plantation work, water resources and fishing industry. The mountain plays a key role in their livelihood. They are

worried mining operations could destroy the mountain and even lead to heavy wind and rains no longer being blocked by the mountain. On top of these concerns, they worry their natural resources in the land will be lost.

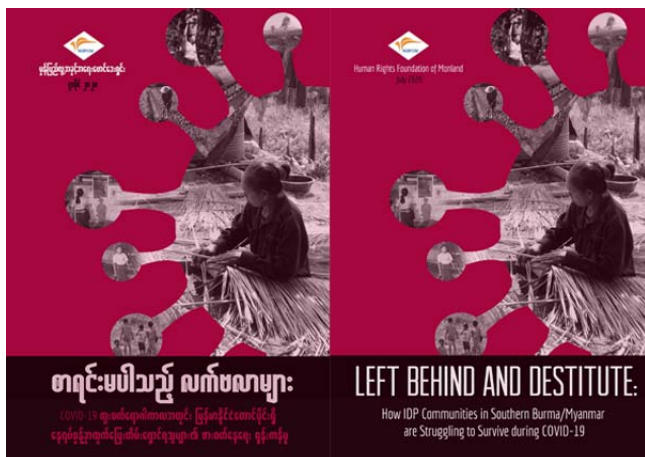
“This mountain is the one on which nearly all villages have to rely on. Nearly all villages get water resources from the mountain. If something happens to the mountain, there will be a huge impact on us,” said a Ma Gyi resident.

Myanmar Shwe Aykarit Mining Company Ltd has not held any information sessions explaining their mining plans, nor have they requested prior consent from the local residents.

This mountain is the one on which nearly all villages have to rely on. Nearly all villages get water resources from the mountain. If something happens to the mountain, there will be a huge impact on us,

News

PRESS RELEASE: IDP COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE AS COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS AND QUARANTINE MEASURES CAUSING DESTITUTION IN SOUTHEASTERN BURMA/MYANMAR



July 15, 2020

For Immediate Release

HURFOM, 15 July 2020: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in remote communities in southeast Burma/Myanmar are struggling to survive. COVID-19-related restrictions on the freedom of movement in these areas—often under the administration of multiple ethnic armed organizations (EAOs)—make it almost impossible for villagers to access livelihoods, generating looming food shortages, exacerbated by the start of the rainy season. In response to these issues, HURFOM is publishing: “Left Behind and Destitute: How IDP Communities in Southern Burma/Myanmar Are Struggling to Survive during COVID-19” ([English](#) / [Burmese](#)).

“Most of us have been moving into a situation of destitution. Yes, the situation is one of moving from poverty into destitution, and this virus [COVID-19] has made us increasingly isolated by the lockdown,” said 44-year-old Nai San Oo. “New regulations and rules make it very hard to access our jobs; we cannot afford to feed our families. Now that some restrictions are lifted, it is already too late, and the rainy season has begun. We did not have a chance to work to collect and store foods during the dry season.”

Like much of the rest of the world, movement restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus have had severe economic consequences for Burma/Myanmar. On 28 April 2020, the Union Government launched its COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan, intended to alleviate the economic fallout caused by the pandemic. Among its seven goals and 76 actions, includes mitigation strategies aimed at the household level, including cash transfers to the most vulnerable and in need, including IDPs. Aung San Suu Kyi praised the plan, claiming it left no one behind. However, our data shows that some remote IDP communities are being left behind and in danger of experiencing severe food shortages.

“It is hard for me to say ‘NO’ when my children come and ask for more food,” said mother of three, Mi San San Aye. “I know that we cannot feed them enough. This is the hardest time for me during these lockdown periods. My husband left me...about 2 years ago, and I tried to survive on my own, collecting tall grasses and working in the rubber plantation.”

Compounding these issues are the large numbers of returning migrants from foreign countries, themselves out of work due to stringent government restrictions enacted to curb the spread of COVID-19 and which are placing enormous pressure on communities in Mon and Karen states. Already stretched thin as they grapple with their own government’s orders restricting citizens’ movements and thus their ability to work and generate an income, these IDP communities are now faced with an increasing number of returning migrant workers who they must also support.

According to Nai Shwe Win, an activist in Mae Ga Row village, Kyaikmayaw Township, “The government gave nothing but instructions. There was no practical support. Nearly all villages in Kyaikmayaw Township has difficulty taking care of the returnees and their health. The organization donated a thermometer and another Mon organization supported us with hand sanitizer, masks, and brochures. I saw that my village followed the government’s instructions well, even though there was no support from them [government]. I want to request the government to support people with equipment and material in order to allow them to be able to follow the government’s instruction.”

The full report can be found below:

“Left Behind and Destitute: How IDP Communities in Southern Burma/Myanmar Are Struggling to Survive during COVID-19” ([English](#) / [Burmese](#)).

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News

INTEREST IN THE ELECTION AND VOTERS LIST ACCURACY IS LIMITED



July 30, 2020

HURFOM: With the public release of the initial 2020 voters list, interest amongst voters appears to be low. Only 4,000 voters have come to check the list in the last 4 days.

There are 208,000 eligible voters in Ye Township and less than 2% have come out to verify if their names are on the list. The initial list is open for the electorate to review from July 25 to August 20 in order to determine if there are errors.

The collection and compilation of voter lists can result in some voters having wrong names, or wrong NRC numbers, which can result in their being excluded from the list.

“Those who have the wrong name and/or wrong NRC number must send a complaint with forms and there will be a correction. We’ve filed a report (to the UEC – Union Election Commission) for those who have been excluded from the list and those who don’t have NRC. At the moment, the members of the particular election sub-commission are very busy with correcting and amending the information of the voters,” said an

official of a village/ward election sub-commission.

Most of the voters who have been excluded from the voter list are those who have changed their address.

“Recently they lived in another ward and now they moved to this one so their household list still remains in their former ward. So their names have been excluded from the list (of the new ward). But if they request they want to vote in their new ward, we will do what they want,” said U Tun Myint Oo, the Chair of Election Sub-commission in Yan Myo Aung Ward, Ye Town.

The village/ward Administrators have been delivering election education brochures, putting up posters and providing election education with loudspeakers in their villages. Despite these efforts, the numbers who turned out to check the list have remained small.

U Tun Myint Oo said, ***“In Yan Myo Aung Ward, about 50 voters came to check their list in a single day. Other wards will have the same number. As the voter lists are based on the household list, it’s enough if only one member of***

each household comes to check the list. For example, 300 people who checked the voter list can cover about 700 houses.”

According to some people, some voters have not had time to check their vote list as they have to struggle for their livelihood, and some intentionally ignore the voter list as they have little interest in politics.

“Recently they lived in another ward and now they moved to this one so their household list still remains in their former ward. So their names have been excluded from the list (of the new ward). But if they request they want to vote in their new ward, we will do what they want”

News

MANY ERRORS IN VOTER LIST FORCES UEC TO EXTEND DECLARATION PERIOD



August 12, 2020

HURFOM: On August 6, 2020, the Union Election Commission (UEC) announced the declaration period (verification of names) of the voter list will be extended for another 7 days – from August 8 to 14.

The reason for the extension, given by the sub-election commissions, is because there are too many errors in the initial voter list.

“I’ve never heard that the declaration period of the voter list had to be extended. The previous UEC just made

a first and second time declaration (verification) of the voter list (They never extended the time). The extension is due to too many errors,” said Daw Aye Aye Thi, the Secretary of the Sit Kel Gone Ward Sub-election Commission of Mawlamyine Township.

Sit Kel Gone has 4,500 eligible voters and as of August 7, only 254 of residents came to check the voter list. 126 voters requested a correction, meaning there was an error rate of nearly 50 percent.

“Names and national registration numbers could be wrong during the data collection. When hand writing

was digitised, there might be some errors also. But just having errors can’t violate voting rights. You can complain up to and on the day before the election. They can correct your voter list with Form #12 on election day,” explained U Hein Linn Htet, the Secretary of the Mon State Sub-election Commission.

In some cases, entire family members were excluded from the voter list. The most frequent type of error is voter’s name exclusion.

“It’s acceptable if one or two household [members] were left out, but excluding the whole family is unacceptable,” said U Saw Phay, the Chair of Myine Thar Yar Sub-election Commission of Mawlamyine Township.

Even though the period of voter list verification has been extended, voters have not shown a strong interest to check their lists, mostly due to livelihood struggles linked to COVID-19.

According to the Mon State Sub-election Commission, as of August 6, there were 174,000 people who came to check the list, and 16,000 people requested corrections, amendments and/or submitted complaints.

MUP SAYS, UNION PEACE CONFERENCE SHOULD BE HELD ONLY AFTER THE ELECTION



August 15, 2020

HURFOM: In order to address the “Union Accord Part 3”, of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the Union government, the Burmese military and the ethnic armed organizations (EOs) have agreed to hold the 4th Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong over 3 days, from August 19 to 21, 2020.

Not everyone is in agreement with this decision. Nai Tala Nyi, a spokesperson with the Mon Unity Party (MUP) believes the conference should be held after the 2020 election.

“The Union Peace Conference is important we should take time to hold it. Now, in the period of COVID-19 and the [pending] election, we don’t have time. If we rush to hold it, we can’t get an effective outcome. The MUP thinks the conference shouldn’t be held before election,” said Nai Tala Nyi.

The Conference was originally planned to be held from August 13-15, 2020 but was postponed to August 19-21.

“The NLD government has done what they want. When trying to amend the 2008 Constitution, they just proposed undemocratic facts. They didn’t think about the “Federal System” and minority rights. So it is difficult to get genuine peace,” continued Nai Tala Nyi.

As they are not satisfied with the progress and purpose of the 21st Panglong, the MUP has decided not to send their high-rank members. Instead, only middle-ranking representatives will join the conference.

The conference will be limited to just 230 participants, coming from the government, the military, the EOs and political parties.

News

LOW MATRICULATION EXAM PASS RATES FOR MNEC STUDENTS: CALLS FOR MORE NIGHT STUDY BY STUDENTS AND IMPROVEMENTS TO MNEC ADMINISTRATION AND TEACHER TRAINING



Photo: ENAC

August 15, 2020

HURFOM: In the 2019-2020 academic year, out of the 3 Mon National High Schools, only 12 of 144 students passed their matriculation exam.

In the Andin Mon National High School, 51 students sat for their matriculation exam and only five passed. The successful students were the ones who regularly joined in the extra-class programs run at night.

A student who passed the 2019-2020 matriculation exam said, *"I want to [recommend] that Mon national school students should join night study. We can get extra time of study during the night class. The teachers have drawn the time table and we have to study three subjects a night. If not, we don't know the correct way of studying. I'm a local student but I joined the night study. I came back home at 10:30 pm. The more we have contact with the teachers, the more we understand our lessons. I just advise [others] to go to night study."*

Students from other villages have to stay at the school hotel in order to join the night study, but local students go back home after school hours and often do not take extra classes.

"Students who come from away have to stay at the school hostel and study at night. Local students who go back home might not do any extra studying. Most of them spend time with their phones. So if possible, all students must join the night study classes. Now, this is optional so most of the students didn't join the night classes," said one teacher.

The pass rate of matriculation exams of the Mon national high schools has been declining for three consecutive years. In response the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) decided to develop initiatives to improve the pass rate, reported Nai Min Aung Zay, the Director of the MNEC.

"The project design involves retired schoolteachers and officials from the Department of Education. We must be

committed to our project," said Nai Min Aung Zay.

The Director explained that *"two facts account for the pass rate declines. The administration, and the experience of the school teachers. Some teachers haven't graduated and they have to look for guide books to teach their students. So the result isn't good."*

The MNEC has three Mon National High Schools, 18 Mon National Middle Schools and 112 Mon National Primary Schools. Together these schools educate about 12,000 students. In addition there are 92 schools which are run under both the MNEC and the Department of Basic Education of the Burmese government.

"The project design involves retired schoolteachers and officials from the Department of Education. We must be committed to our project,"

News

NEIGHBOUR RAPES 6-YEAR-OLD CHILD



September 19, 2020

HURFOM: On September 12, 2020, a 50-year-old man from Zay Jo Ward, Mawlamyine, Mon State, raped a 6-year old child.

The rapist lived nearby the child's family home, and lured her to his house.

"I was cooking in my house. Her father went to his job. He took my daughter when she was playing with her friends. She spent a long time in the house. When she came out, there was a hundred [Kyat] note in her hand," said the mother.

The mother asked her daughter's friends what happened.

"I and my neighbours together asked my daughter, and she replied the man gave her a hundred [kyat] note three times. I will take legal action against the perpetrator," stated the mother.

A Mawlamyine-based organization called, "Warm Heart = Nwe Htwe Thaw Yin Kwin" has offered assistance to the family.

"We've been trying to get in contact with an organization that can provide legal aid to the victims. When legal proceedings start, our organization will give full support. We are also requesting help from the Department of Social Welfare," said Ko Aung Nine Oo of "Warm Heart = Nwe Htwe Thaw Yin Kwin".

The perpetrator has been charged under the Burmese Criminal Act section #376 Punishment for Rape and #511 Punishment for attempting to commit offences, and has been detained at the Mu Pon Police Station.

KYAIKMAYAW ELECTION CANDIDATE ROBBED AND INJURED



September 5, 2020

HURFOM: Mi Than Htay, aka Mi Ja Loon Htaw an Administrator of Taranar village, Kyaukmayaw Township, Mon State, and election candidate from #2 constituency of Kyaukmayaw Township was robbed in Hline Ward, Mawlamyine on September 1, 2020.

The robbery occurred when she was enroute to the Office of the Mon State Election Sub-commission. Mi Ja Loon was admitted to the Mawlamyine General Hospital.

While riding a bike with her friend to the election commission office, three men on another bike approached alongside, grabbed her sling bag causing her to fall from the bike, breaking three fingers, and injuring her knee.

"More than 200,000 Myanmar Kyat and 353 US Dollar was lost. And two smartphones, and my ID card were also taken. My three fingers were broken, and one of them [required a steel insert]. I also injured my knee. I don't know if it needs surgery or not. I can't work now and have to use a wheelchair at the moment," said Mi Ja Loon Htaw.

She said the incident has impacted both her election activities and her regular work.

The incident has been reported to both the Hline Ward Administrator and charges have been filed at the Dyne Wun Kwin Police Station.

"One of them was caught on that day. He is from Myae Ni Gone Ward. The remaining two are from Zay Yar Myine but they still escaped. I was informed by the Administrator. I haven't gotten my bag yet. Now it's four days already but the remaining two still escape," said the candidate.

An official from Dyne Wun Kwin Police Station said, *"One of them was arrested on the day of the incident. We're still searching for the remaining two. As it's under investigation, we can say nothing."*

The robbers have been charged under the Burmese Criminal Act #394 – *Voluntarily causing injury in committing a robbery.*

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News

NLD'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN POSTER DESTROYED IN KYAIKMAYAW



Photo: ဂျင်မီ/ကျိုက်မရော

September 15, 2020

HURFOM: On September 11, 2020, a 28-year-old man from Kaw That village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State destroyed a National League for Democracy (NLD) election campaign poster. He was charged by the Kyaikmayaw police under electoral law #57 and #58 for actions threatening the right to be elected.

"After informing the particular election sub-commission, we charged him under electoral law #57 and #58. Now, he has been released on bail," said the incumbent member of parliament, U Khin Zaw Oo who is with the NLD.

According to the Kaw That Village Administrator, the man could not accept that NLD placed a poster in a Mon village, so he destroyed it and accepted the consequences. Members with the NLD village party told the man

to repair the poster but he refused, so they transferred the case to the police.

The Administrator U Min Aung Wayne said, **"After destroying the poster, he himself went to the office of Village Administrator. When we asked him 'what did you do?', he replied nothing, but went back and took the poster he destroyed. We called his parents and let them negotiate with the NLD members. But the negotiation failed and we handed him over to the Kyaikmayaw police."**

MP U Khin Zaw Oo, whose picture was included on the destroyed poster, said, **"We sued him to protect the reputation of the NLD and the candidates. The poster also included the picture of State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the patron of the NLD. If we don't sue him, all of our posters will be destroyed."**

In another incident an election campaign poster of Daw Mi Kun Chan with the NLD in Htan Pin Chaung Kyi village, Paung Township Mon State was also destroyed. She said via social media that she would respond in accordance with the laws.

After destroying the poster, he himself went to the office of Village Administrator. When we asked him "what did you do?", he replied nothing, but went back and took the poster he destroyed. We called his parents and let them negotiate with the NLD members. But the negotiation failed and we handed him over to the Kyaikmayaw police.

News

CANDIDATE SAYS KYARINNSEIKYI VOTER EDUCATION URGENTLY NEEDED FOR NEW VOTERS



September 7, 2020

HURFOM: The 2020 general election will be the first time many residents living in Mon villages, Kyarinnseikyi Township, in Karen State will be voting.

This is because in the 2010 and 2015 elections, the villages were defined as “Black Area” by the government and under the control of the New Mon State Party (NMSP). As a result residents did not have a chance to cast their votes.

A local candidate, Nai Chan Mon, from #2 constituency of Kyarinnseikyi Township is worried that without voter education, their ballots may be deemed invalid.

“Villagers here don’t know how to vote. They’re interested in the election ...some voters have even requested voter education training.

They’re worried about knowing how to properly vote, so their their ballots are not deemed invalid,” he said

This is not the only problem for the area. When the Union Election Commission (UEC) released the first voters’ list on July 25, many errors were found in the Kyarinnseikyi’s list. Some voters were left out, but local CBOs helped them to re-apply in order to obtain their voting rights.

“The UEC has planned to locate a polling station in three villages. If villages are near each other, it’s okay. However, the villagers don’t know how to vote. Some villagers think that one member per household is going to vote. We’ve educated them as we can. But most don’t know (the voting process). The most challenging issue is they don’t know how to vote,” continued the candidate.

He urged political parties and community based organizations (CBOs) to provide the electorate with voter education and training sessions, so that villagers understand the importance of being involved in elections and know how to vote.

Nai Thein Zaw, Secretary of the Kyarinnseikyi Township Mon Unity Party (MUP), also noted that ***“It’s the first time for Kyarinnseikyi villagers to exercise their voting rights, we’ve been worried people won’t come to the polling stations. Even if they do come, I’m afraid their ballots might be deemed invalid. (if they don’t understand how to mark the them.)”***



The UEC has planned to locate a polling station in three villages. If villages are near each other, it’s okay. However, the villagers don’t know how to vote. Some villagers think that one member per household is going to vote. We’ve educated them as we can. But most don’t know (the voting process). The most challenging issue is they don’t know how to vote,



News

VILLAGE LEADER SUES FOR DEFAMATION



Photo: MNA

September 20, 2020

HURFOM: On September 14, 2020, Nai Pha, the hundred-household leader of (Inside) Da Ni Kyar village, Ma Gyi village track, Khaw Zar Sub-township, Ye Township, Mon State announced he will sue a monk and five villagers for defaming him.

The five villagers have been charged under the Burmese Criminal Act article #500 *Punishment for Defamation*, and the monk has been reported to the Ma Gyi Village Track Sanga Nar Ya Ka – a religious authority for the monk

community. The maximum punishment under article #500 is a two-year imprisonment term.

The monk and local villagers accused Nai Pha of misappropriation of community land plots, being drunk during office hours, other personal misconducts, and abuse of power. They filed a report with the Ye Township General Administration Department (GAD) on May 17, 2019.

“We’ve filed a report with genuine facts. There is nothing wrong in our

report. We also have witnesses,” said Nai Shel, one of the defendants.

Nai Pha claims the villagers’ accusations are wrong, and have damaged his reputation. So he sued the villagers for defamation.

The defamation charges led to some confusion for the villagers.

“The Ma Gyi Administrator phoned us on September 4, 2020 (about the matter). But we didn’t know where we had to report. On September 13, we were summoned by letter, so we went to Ye court on September 14. We’re explained that we are being sued. And the court said if we can’t be granted bail, we had to stay in police custody. I had to spend five hours in police custody before being released on bail,” said U Tun Win, one of the defendants.

Ma Gyi Village Track Sanga, Nar Ya Ka summoned the monk on September 19 and the five villagers will have a second legal appointment on October 12, 2020.

OUTH ASSOCIATION PROVIDES FREE MASKS



Photo: Pie Ong

September 28, 2020

HURFOM: The spread of COVID-19 has been increasing throughout Myanmar/ Burma. As of September 26, there were 222 COVID-19 confirmed cases in Mon State.

In order to mitigate infections the Nyne Hlone Youth Association has set up “Mask Stands” in Nyne Hlone and Lat

Tet villages, Mudon Township, in Mon State.

The Youth Association said the “Mask Stands” provide masks for free, for those who forgot to wear a mask when they are going outside.

“Our association has only ten members. We don’t have enough members to deliver masks

individually. And we can’t do it every day. We have our own work to do. So we’ve created a “mask stand” beside the road,” said Min Pie Ong, a member of the Nyne Hlone Youth Association.

The association set up 3 “Mask Stands” in Nyne Hlone village track.

The local people were interested in the activity and donated masks and money to the Association. The youth hope there will be more donors in the future, to maintain the initiative.

“In our village, people don’t wear masks. We want to provide masks for them. And we must educate them to wear masks when going outside,” continued Min Pie Ong.

The Nyne Hlone Youth Association is made up of young volunteers who have provided support to the Nyne Hlone Community Based Quarantine Center.

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

TAVOY DISTRICT RESIDENTS WORRY ABOUT LOSING VOTING RIGHT



Photo: Reuters

August 22, 2020

HURFOM: Villagers in Yar Phu village track, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division, which is under the control of the Tavoy District New Mon State Party (NMSP), are worried they may lose their voting rights because their voter list has not yet been released.

“The (Election) Commission hasn’t collected their voter list yet. But they did in the 2015 election. [Since] there has been no declaration of a voter list, villagers are worried about losing their voting right,” said a Village Administrator to the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) on August 8, 2020.

There are nine villages located under the control of Tavoy District NMSP and most are Mon villages. These villages are all identified using the Mon language.

“It’s good if we have a chance to vote in the election. It’s nice that we can elect our candidates. But we don’t know if we can vote or not. The Village Administrator has said nothing,” said a Ma Rog Chai villager.

People who live in areas that are under the control of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) remain uncertain if they can vote for the election.

“As we live under the NMSP, everything depends on their decisions. If they said villagers are able to vote, we’ll cast our vote. If they say no, we daren’t. But we haven’t heard anything yet. But I wish my villagers cast their votes,” said a Village Administrator.

NOVEMBER 8 ELECTION SHOULD BE POSTPONED SAYS 24 POLITICAL PARTIES



September 27, 2020

HURFOM: Due to high rates of local transmission of COVID-19, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) along with 24 other political parties sent an open letter to the UEC on September 15 demanding the Commission reconsider the date of the election.

Transmission of COVID-19 has been increasing across Burma. There has been a steady and daily increase in the number of COVID-19 patients in Mon State. The current state of the pandemic in the country provides reason for the November 8th election to be postponed, says Nai San Tin, the Joint Secretary of the Mon Unity Party (MUP).

"According to the COVID-19 situation, the 2020 election should be postponed. Hundreds of new patients have been detected daily. We can't imagine what happens next. The increase of patients makes it difficult to hold elections. But the Union Election Commission (UEC) hasn't listened to the political parties. Even their good suggestions were neglected. It shouldn't be like that. For the sake of the country, I think the election should be postponed," said the Secretary.

The local transmission of COVID-19 is having a huge impact on the election campaign.

"The number of patients has increased by hundreds day after day. Now, it's the time to do an election campaign and we are doing it with fear. We have to go from village to village and are worried villagers will not welcome us," said Nai San Tin.

In addition with high transmission rates, people in Rangoon Division, 5 townships in Arakan State and 11 townships in other States and Divisions were ordered to stay at home by the Ministry of Health and Sport on September 25, 2020.

"It is very difficult to do an election campaign [in this context]. We can't stop the election campaign so we must be cautious when doing our work. It's very challenging. If we stop the election campaign, we'll lose our vote. If we decide to do a campaign, we must take care about the disease. We're in a tough situation," said Nai Tala Nyi, a spokesperson with the MUP.

HURFOM

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