

NLD Statement 82/2000:

National League for Democracy
No: (97/B), West Shwegonedine Road
Bahan Township, Rangoon

Statement 82(6/00) (translation)

1. Information about the arrests of 25 farmers who have been unable to supply "duty paddy" in the Koon-gyan-gone Township of Rangoon Division has been received. The township authorities ordered the arrests and detention which commenced on the 18 May 2000.
2. Our information is that the inability to supply rainy season "duty paddy" crop has been because of the stringent financial circumstances of the farmers, infestation of pests, and destruction of the grains due to excessive rain during the drying period.
3. However, the farmers appear to be doing their utmost to fulfil their obligation in respect of the summer crop. They have sold and pawned their small possessions to raise enough capital for the job but water supply is insufficient because prohibitive demands are made by the authorities and the red tape involved for the purchase of diesel oil.
4. The stages that have to be negotiated for every time this oil is purchased are:-
 1. Obtaining the "OIL BOOK" and paper from the agricultural officer on the field.
 2. This has to be presented and endorsed by the Land Records Officer on the field.
 3. Then the Village authority chairman has to approve and endorse,
 4. Back to the Agricultural Officer on the field
 5. Present the book at Township Land Records office.
 6. Obtain the signature of the Township Agricultural Manager,
 7. Finally purchase at the shop where diesel oil is sold.
5. The farmer has to spend kyats 1200/- to 1500/- greasing the palms of those in authority in the process.
6. Information we have received is that these "oil books" are issued to many others who are not summer crop paddy farmers and obtainable from the agricultural authorities and related authorities at a cost which is beneficial to them. All are working to make money for themselves.
7. This depletes the supply for the farmers. Unfavorable weather conditions during harvest and drying time make matters worse and the poor farmer cannot supply the quota of summer crop to make up for the shortfall of the winter crop.
8. U Than Htay (Taungkoo West village), U Aye Kyi (Taungkoo East village), U Aung Win, and U Than Win (Kha-lauk-ta-ya village) are some of the 25 farmers who have not been able to supply the quota demanded. They face charges under Section 406 and have been incarcerated at the Police Station.

The families of these farmers have had to resort to selling their lands, buffaloes and cows, take loans with interest and buy paddy to make up the quota. Others who have nothing are still in custody with the charge hanging over their heads.
9. Those terrified farmers whose families made up the shortfall should have been released but one U Hla Myint (a go-between in litigation) from Taung-gone village threatened them and said that the authorities would have to be paid and application for bail had to be submitted. He demanded Kyats 28,000 from U Japangyi and U Aung Win from Taung-goo east village and U Hla Htay from Taung-goo west village. Also our information is that the Police Officer U Khin Kyu who was in charge of the township police station where these farmers were held was most abusive, intimidating, and despicable using intolerable language against the farmers and their relatives.

10. The rains are now over and the farmers need to get into the fields and plough and prepare the soil. Those farmers at the police station are being prevented from doing their normal duties.

11. We demand emphatically that this unjust persecution, arrest and prosecution and intimidation of the farmers be immediately halted. Those farmers under detention be immediately released. As a matter of fact the administrative authorities should not pressure the farmers who are genuinely incapable of supplying the quota of "duty paddy".

The full quantity of diesel oil needed by the farmers for the production of the summer paddy crop should be made available to them and not appropriated by self-serving masters. We denounce such practices.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

Rangoon
2 June 2000