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Some Acronyms in This Issue

SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council
LIB-	Light Infantry Battalions
AR-	Artillery Regiment
VPDC-	Village Peace and Development Council
IB-	Infantry Battalion
SEC-	Southeast Command
CC-	Coastline Command
NMSP-	New Mon State Party

News

Villages in Kyaikmayaw Township forced to contribute money towards castor bean mill

HURFOM, Kyaikmayaw, October, 2009

According to a HURFOM field reporter, the Kyaikmayaw Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) has commanded that 9 villages in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, each contribute 500,000 kyat towards the purchase of a castor bean grinder and the construction of a castor bean mill, to be set up in the area as the next step in the Burmese government's nascent biodiesel production project.

In 2005, the military junta forced residents throughout Mon State to incorporate castor bean plants into their rice farms, rubber plantations, and even into their private gardens and front fences; at the time, the Burmese government announced that the castor oil collected from the beans would be used to create biodiesel, but the bean harvests have never been collected from the residents of Mon State. The recent announcement of the construction of a castor bean mill is the first instance of government interest in the biodiesel project to be shown for 4 years.

HURFOM's field reporter claims that On October 15th, the Kyaikmayaw TPDC commanded the 9 villages' headmen to commence collecting the funds necessary for building a castor bean mill in the area. The official TPDC-issued letter ordered each of the villages listed to contribute a minimum of 500,000 kyat towards the mill's creation. The villages ordered to contribute funds are: Kawpalaing, Kawthat, Thangalaung, Taranar, Thamathat, Kyungone, Kawkhanane, Annhlar and Kawswe.



Photo of sapling castor bean plants in the township PDC compound in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State

Commentary

National Politics Party, NUP and USDA Start a Secret Campaign for 2010 Elections

Unsurprisingly, Burma's 2010 elections will not be free and fair, even though the ruling military government has yet to announce any restrictive or biased election laws, elections processes, or political party formation laws. The SPDC has already privileged the secret campaigns of certain military commanders, the National Politics Party (NPP), and other SPDC-supporting political groups like the National Unity Party (NUP), and the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

In Mon State, according to news from local political analysts, Brigadier Gen. Ohn Myint (a Mon State native from Mudon Township and the former SPDC's Minister for Mining and National Resources) and the military commanders from the Southeast Command, traveled to many Mon villages and had official discussions with local community leaders. Brigadier Gen. Ohn Myint has promised to the villagers in Mon State that he will provide for a great deal of community development projects in the future. This is an attempt at 'vote-buying' in Mon State.

According to an unconfirmed information source, Brigadier Gen. Ohn Myint will be promoted to the office of Prime Minister of Mon State if he wins in the elections, as he is a native to Mon State. Currently, he is the chairman of the Mon State USDA. All current military commanders will be retired when the electoral laws are announced, and they will form a political party under the name of National Politics Party (NPP).

In a similar situation, the country's former socialist party under a new name, the NUP, started their campaign activities in mid-2009. They have contacted the former socialist party members (who ruled Burma from 1974 to 1988) and their relatives, to invite them to apply as members to the newly-formed NUP. They also have secretly met with village leaders and tried to buy votes from the people. They promised that if they win in the elections, a greater percentage of their budget will go to their voters.

While there is no clear procedure for the 2010 elections, the SPDC has already allowed their supporting political parties to commence their election campaigning, while they have not allowed pro-democracy parties like National League for Democracy (NLD), or ethnic parties like the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD), to do the same.

If it relies on the 2008 constitution, the SPDC does not need to include any opposition parties in Parliament, and they do not have to allow any political debates. If political debates should happen to attack the Burmese Army, the country's military leaders can legally seize power from the civilian government.

What do these elections even stand for, if they just prolong the life of the dictatorship in Burma?

A Kawpalaing villager named Nai Minn Aung said, "The local General Administration Department [GAD], which is still under the control of the TPDC, commanded the Village Peace and Development Council [VPDC]'s chairman to collect 500,000 from our village. The GAD claimed that the money they're collecting is just for buying the castor bean powdering machine and other stuff that they need to buy for the project. In our village, the village headman has already collected 100,000 kyat, it is that estimated every household has paid 2,000 to 3,000 kyat."

HURFOM's reporter documented the amount of money that each village has already contributed to the project: Kawpalaing 100,000 kyat, Kawthat 200,000 kyat, Thangalaung 100,000 kyat, Taranar 300,000 kyat, Kyungone 50,000 kyat, Kawkhanane 20,000 kyat, Annhlar 30,000 kyat, Kawswa 50,000 kyat, and Thamathat 150,000 kyat.

A source close to the Kyaikmayaw TPDC claimed that the castor bean mill will be set up in Tarana village.

An area resident who also works closely with the Kyaikmayaw TPDC said, "The extortion money will be used in the setup of the castor bean grinder

machine in the area. As I heard it, they will build it in Taranar village.

Taranar is quite a big village in the area, and has a huge amount of acres of castor beans that the government forced the village to plant. The Township General Administration Department's General Secretary directly commanded the 9 villages' chairmen to collect the money. The statement set up the due date on November 10, for the money. If a village can't afford the money, they [the TPDC] said they would make trouble."

According to HURFOM's reporter, village headmen have already started collecting funds from their villages, even though the punishment for refusing to contribute to the mill's construction has not been explicitly stated.

Nai Khun Nai, a 35-year-old resident of Kawpalaing village said, "Our village have about 150 households, and each household has paid 2,000 to 3,000 kyat minimum. Most of villagers are jobless. They have to rely on their sons or daughters who are working in Thailand. They also have to consider the local taxes to be paid every month."

Report

“I am very tired”: Three months of abuses along the Kanbawk to Myaing Kalay gas pipeline in Northern Ye and Southern Thanbyuzayat Township, from August 2009 to October 2009

Introduction:

Much has been written on the human rights abuses leveled by the Burmese Army against the Karen and Mon villagers who live along the gas pipeline that runs through the Mon state from Kanbawk, in northern Ye Township, to Myaing Kalay, in the Southern Thanbyuzayat Township. In recent months, however, ongoing abuse inflicted by Burmese army battalions against the villagers has intensified. The presence of Burmese Army battalions in the area has plagued the villagers for more than 15 years. Since 1994, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has deployed 20 army battalions in the area as a means of protecting the Yadana pipeline — the second natural gas pipeline that runs through the area — from rebel attacks. Various armed rebel groups exist in the area, including the KNU, the KNLA, and an unnamed, 30 –strong ragtag Mon splinter group.

The human rights violations documented in this report occurred between early August and early October of 2009. The human rights violations discussed here were perpetrated mainly by two different Burmese Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) and one Artillery Regiment (AR): LIB No. 106, LIB No. 62, and AR 315. Three kinds of abuse have occurred in this region. First, villagers have been forced to act as human shields between Burmese Army battalions and rebel groups, and many of them have disappeared or died. Second, villagers were forced to work without pay and were taxed. Third, villagers were tortured, in the sense of physical harassment, emotional abuse, and forced interrogation. HURFOM hopes that chronicling the abuses suffered within this area of Burma during such a short time period will provide a snapshot of the ongoing abuse suffered not only by the villagers living in the Ye- Thanbyuzayat border area, but also by the thousands of villagers who struggle to survive along the pipeline.

Three HURFOM reporters and their respective networks of contacts spent three months in the 80 to 85 mile radius of the pipeline. The reporters gathered testimonies from 12 different villages in the region, most of which are ethnically Karen. In all cases reported, names have been changed to protect the identities of their owners, but the ages, occupations, and ranks reported are factual.

Cases of Villagers Forced to Act as Human Shields, and Subsequent Disappearances and Deaths

The “Kanbawk to Myaing Kalay” gas pipeline, which brings gas to two cement factories, has never been sabotaged by rebel soldiers. However, much of the fighting between the rebel soldiers and the Burmese Army has occurred near the soldiers’ base off the Moulmein to Ye road and the Ye to Tavoy railway tracks near the pipeline. Since the fighting between the rebel groups and the army occurs both in the rural areas and near the main road, the local Burmese Army battalion is constantly on high alert. The army is concerned with the security of the whole area in Southern Thanbyuzayat Township, but its main focus remains the security of the pipeline project.

When fighting between the army and the rebels has occurred in the area near the natural gas pipeline, the Burmese army has traditionally accused local villagers of being rebel-supporters. The army has also been known to interrogate local village headmen and their supporters in order to ascertain the identities of rebel contacts or

supporters. Occasionally, suspected villagers are arrested and even killed during these interrogations. Alternatively, suspected villagers are sometimes quietly arrested by Burmese soldiers and taken away without any notification to their families. Many of these individuals are later used in porter services or as human shields and minesweepers in the Burmese military's various operations against the rebel insurgency. Villagers who have been forced into such services are frequently killed during clashes between the Burmese military and the rebel groups. Such killings, disappearances, and use of human minesweepers and human shields, has thus far only been documented in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State.

On September 26, 2009, a group of 28 Burmese soldiers led by Captain Thant Zin Latt entered Tu Lae village, which contains roughly 150 households, in Thanbyuzayat Township. They arrested 16 villagers whom they suspected of being of rebel supporters, including two village headmen, and later used them as human minesweepers and human shields. All arrested villagers are ethnic Karen residents of Tu Lae. After the soldiers brought the arrested villagers to the outskirts of Tu Lae village, Captain Thant Zin Latt ordered his soldiers to give each arrested villager equipment, ammunition, and rations to carry. Then, Captain Thant Zin Latt ordered Saw Chit Sein, Chairman of the Tu Lae Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC), and the rest of the arrested villagers to march in front of the military column as human shields. Ah Naing, 35, a Tu Lae villager who witnessed the arrests by the military column of LIB No. 106 in Tu Lae village, recounted the story to HURFOM's reporters. HURFOM's reporters were able to obtain the names, ages, and ranks of the Tu Lae villagers included in the arrest; none of the following information has been changed.

- 1) Saw Chit Sein, 45, Chairman of village PDC,
- 2) Saw Lular, 33, Secretary of village PDC,
- 3) Saw Pwin Htoo, 46, villager,
- 4) Hti Kaloo, 51, villager,
- 5) Saw Kaloh Min, 27, villager,
- 6) Saw Ta O Paw, 21, villager,
- 7) Saw Maung Kwe, 24, villager,
- 8) Saw Taloh, 24, villager,
- 9) Saw Thiha, 32, villager,
- 10) Saw Chan Tha, 16, villager,
- 11) Saw Chala, 16, villager,
- 12) Saw Kyaw Linn, 20, villager,
- 13) Saw Kyaw Linn Phaw, 18, villager,
- 14) Saw Taw Pho, 16, villager,
- 15) Saw Phar Linn, 36, villager,
- 16) Saw Yinn Yoe, 32 villager.



A Tu Lae villager who witnessed the arrests by the gas pipeline security troops from LIB No. 106



Soldiers from gas pipeline battalion LIB No. 106 checking their ammunition before leaving their temporary base in Thanbyuzayat Township

Another female eyewitness, Ma Moe, 30, reported to HURFOM's reporters that "I also saw Captain Thant Zin Latt and three soldiers beat our Chairman Saw Chit Sein, and Secretary Saw Lutha. Because of their complaints against the military, they were accused of being in contact with KNU soldiers. The group leader [Captain Thant Zin Latt] asked all the arrested villagers about the updated activities of the KNU in this area. The villagers denied the accusations of the captain, but the soldiers still used them as porters and human shields for their military operations against KNU." Ma Moe is a relative of Saw Chan Tha, one of the victims of the arrest and a resident of Tu Lae village.

About a week later, 12 out of the 16 arrested villagers returned to their home village; 4 more remain missing. One returnee, who asked his name to be withheld, told HURFOM's reporter the story of Saw Yin Yoe, aged 32, who was murdered by Captain Thant Zin Latt during the armed clash between the KNU and LIB No. 106 groups:

“Since they [the Burmese soldiers] used us as human shields to prevent injury to themselves, I knew we were in a dangerous situation if the KNU troops came and attacked the Burmese troops. On September 27 at about 3:00 PM local time, the fighting started between LIB No. 106., led by Captain Thant Zin Latt, and KNU troops led by Captain Saw Na Na in Yun Chaung Pya valley, southeast Thanbyuzayat Township. As soon as I heard the gunshots, I laid down on the ground and tried to hide behind a stone. During the fighting, I saw Captain Thant Zin Latt shoot Saw Yin Yoe, 32, while he attempted to flee during the fighting between. The bullet struck under his chin and he died on the spot.”

Unpaid Labor

Like in many other townships in the Mon State, Burmese Army commanders carry more authority than the locally-appointed Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) leaders, as their battalions represent the national government. Army battalions frequently override the authority of the village headmen. The “self-reliance,” or “self-help program,” as it is officially called, is the Burmese government's means of allowing its army battalions to form a parasitic relationship with villagers throughout Burma. Under this program, battalions are allowed to force villagers to work on agricultural projects without pay, to demand contributions of foodstuffs and supplies, and to extort taxes. The program began in the Ye- Thanbyuzayat border area in 2003. Battalions LIB No. 106, IB No. 62 and AR No. 315 are based in the region and handle the security of both the gas pipeline and the surrounding area.

In order to gain food supplies and other battalion-related expenses needed to support themselves, these battalions usually order the villagers in to work on their confiscated rubber plantations, to build their army barracks, and to work on other local development projects like repairing bridges or re-constructing roads. The residents have also been forced to work in confiscated rice paddies, to guard the pipeline, and to act as porters during military offensives. The workers receive no recompense for their time or their work

From the first week of August to first week of October 2009, the gas pipeline security battalions forced the local residents to build their security huts and ordered the villagers to handle the security of the pipeline without reimbursement. HURFOM's reporters received 7 testimonies, all of which report the use of unpaid labor by the local SPDC battalions against those who lived along the pipeline. Villagers who were unable to perform their assigned tasks were forced to hire replacements at the cost of thousands of kyat. Forced

security duties place additional strains on villagers who are already struggling survive.



A group of ethnic Karen villagers building a security hut for the gas pipeline near Wae Won village, Thanbyuzayat Township

According to a Ko Maung Shwe, 48, a resident of Wae Won village, Thanbyuzayat Township who was forced to build a security hut in front of his farm:

“The Burmese Army Captain That Naing Soe forced me to build a security hut in front of my farm. I had to buy all of the wood, bamboo and leaves for the roof, which cost about 12,000 kyat. All of the villagers have to pay a set amount to buy building materials, but I had to pay extra for the security hut. But I did not dare to complain to the



A security hut located on a IB No. 62 confiscated rubber plantation near Wae Kha Mi village, Thanbyuzayat

captain because I know that he is a notorious officer in IB No. 62. Due to the unpaid labor we are forced to do, we are becoming poorer and poorer. I have four children and a spouse to feed, and I need to earn 5,000 kyat a day to support and feed them. In our village, very few parentage families can earn enough income. We suffer a lot of abuses and will never get enough time to earn a livelihood.”

Like Ko Maung Shwe mentioned, most of the residents from Wae Won village have struggled to earn sufficient incomes since the 1994, when the army battalions were first posted in their areas. The

worst situations that HURFOM reporters found involved households of elderly individuals with no adult children, and widows whose only children were ages 7 to 16. HURFOM’s reporters found that no families were spared from forced labor.

A 15-year-old boy from Wae Taw village, Thanbyuzayat Township expressed his feelings about being forced by the No. 62 Infantry Battalion to take on sentry duties:

“In my house, there is only me and my eight-year-old younger brother. My parents have worked as day laborers in Thailand for the past two years. When my village headmen instructed me to guard the pipeline, I was very frustrated by the order, but I had to go. I have had to guard two times this year already. No one in this village dares to complain about the Burmese Army’s orders, even village PDC crew. I understand the situation, but I feel sad that it is happening when my parents are far away.”

This boy also informed HURFOM’s reporters that there have been about 5 children under 16 who were forced to take part in sentry duties along the pipeline over the past three months. The use of under-aged children as sentry guards is a major point of contention among Wae Taw villagers, many of whom feel that the emotional immaturity of the children makes them obstacles to the pipeline project’s security.

“My opinion is they [underage children] should be free from guarding the pipeline because they are not strong enough compared to adults. If they see strangers or members of a rebel group who are going to bomb the pipeline, how can they respond? They may not have the ability to take the necessary actions in such cases. It is nonsense to let children take care of the gas pipeline,” said Saw Doh Doh, 46, a local farmer.

Residents from Anaeni village, Thanbyuzayat Township, were also forced to take on sentry duties and to build eleven security huts with their own funds. Guard duties cut into their agricultural time, and many families have found it difficult to find the funds necessary to maintain their fields.

“We are too tired to guard the pipeline. We have wasted a lot of income and time for more than a decade. Because of this pipeline, two acres of my farmland have been confiscated by the army, and I have been beaten by IB No. 62 commanders [for being absent during sentry duties and for not paying security fees] during the past three years. At the moment, all villagers are forced to guard sections of the pipeline throughout the day and night. Commander Major That Nain Soe from IB No. 62 has demanded this of our village PDC since August of 2009. Before that, we only had to guard at night, but now, we must guard the pipeline for 24 hours a day. Consequently, we cannot take care of our crops and plantations. When we harvested this year, we could not buy the required amounts of agricultural products. Most villagers are not able to earn enough money to survive. If we can work freely in this area, without forced labor, taxes and restriction by Burmese Amy battalions, we may become rich families,” U Aung Gyi, 56, a resident of Anaeni village, Thanbyuzayat Township

said. [HURFOM reporter talked with him on October 10, 2009 1430]

IB No.62 brigade 2, under Captain Naing Lin, has been based in Wae Taw village, Thanbyuzayat Township, for three years. The troops in the area have forced Wae Taw residents to guard the pipeline's security for most of that time. According to the Saw Kar Kwel, a Wae Taw villager who was hired to guard the pipeline:

“We have about 40 households in our village. The troops made a rotating system that says that every person in a family has to provide security for the pipeline. Many residents hired me to guard for them. They paid me 15,000 kyat a month. While I was guarding the pipeline, I needed to stay in the army camp all day and night with IB No. 62 troops. When the soldiers patrolled the pipeline, I also needed to follow them. If the soldiers were still in the patrol hut, I needed to find wood to make a fire for preventing mosquito or leech bites. I also needed to get fire all through the night. In Wae Taw village, if people can't afford to patrol the pipeline, they usually hire me to replace them.”

The Wae Won village headman, Saw Sar Loo Bo, told HURFOM that IB No. 62, based in Phown Sein village, Thanbyuzayat Township, forced residents to pay Burmese Army battalions to guard the pipelines. The estimated rates of extortion in the areas are 16,000 kyat per household for 5 months in Anin and Kyaung-Ywa villages, 8,000 kyat per household for 2 months in Welwon village, and 16,000 kyat per household for 5 months in Anaeni village.

In the rainy season, sometimes due to flooding, the pipeline appears above ground. When this happens, the Wae Won village headman claims that the troops force the area's residents to make a fence to secure the pipeline. On October 5, 2009 the residents had already sent their money to the Battalion.

Villages in the area who do not deal with mandatory guard duty still face financial difficulties due to their proximity to the pipeline. According to HURFOM's reporters, in 2009, the IB No. 62 commanded that rather than having Wae Kha Mi's villagers take responsibility for guarding the pipeline, the troops from the battalion would take on guarding responsibilities for a fee of 2,000 kyat per troop.

Villagers in Wae Kha Mi village must also fence the pipeline during the rainy season. According to Daw Thin Thin, a Wae Kha Mi villager, “Flooding from the river washed away the ground that was covering the pipeline. We are usually forced to cover the pipeline with tree branches and bamboo, and to fence in the pipeline areas. Every year, when the pipeline appears out from the ground, we are forced to cover and fence it.”

For the past 5 years, Wae Kha Mi villagers have also been forced to participate in the Burmese government's castor bean program. In 2005, the Burmese government ordered villagers all over the Mon State to begin planting castor bean plants on their farms. The beans were supposed to be ground and turned into biodiesel, but thus far the beans harvested every year have gone to waste. Wae Kha Mi, village headman of U Pher



Photo: HURFOM

A villager from Wae Won village fencing the gas pipeline near his village in early September

Hool, told HURFOM that on September 09th, 2009, IB No. 62, which is based in Wae Kha Mi village under Captain Hlaing Soe, forced the residents to plant castor oil beans on both sides of the Ye-Moulmein motor road that passes through the village. The captain reportedly commanded Wae Kha Mi village's headmen to plant 5,000 castor bean plants in the area; the villagers also had to pay 20 kyat for each plant. After planting was finished, the farmers were required to maintain the plantation, under threat that a damaged field would result in the villagers being forced to replace the

plants, again with their own funds. The captain ordered the farmers to finish planting by September 27, 2009.

Arbitrary Taxation by Burmese Army gas pipeline security forces

Besides the financial pressures presented by pipeline guard duty, residents of Wae Won and Wae Taw villages must also pay multiple taxes implemented by the battalions based in the area, and on many occasions, must provide for food and other supplies to the battalions. HURFOM reporters met a group of residents of Wae Won and Wae Taw villages on the Thai-Burma border in early October. They learned that the villagers were abused by SPDC battalions, both IB No. 62 and LIB No. 106. About 4 military columns of 20 soldiers from each battalion have been patrolling the pipeline since 2000.

“We have no more time to work, no money to give them and not enough food to survive,” explained Saw Phoe Wah, 24. His family fled their native village in early May, 2009 to avoid forced labor and the battalions’ arbitrary tax extortions. According to one villager, Dae Phoe, 23, “We had to cut down all the big trees and clean the grounds for them to build their barracks. After we finished cleaning, the soldiers forced us to dig long trenches and build fences. From my village, we had 3 groups of at least 10 villagers. If a person could not work, they were responsible for finding and paying for a substitute, at the cost of 5,000 Kyat per day. Families with no adults suitable for labor also had to hire someone or pay the soldiers.”

The soldiers also fine villagers who own oxen. Normally, when the soldiers set up temporary bases near the villages, Burmese soldiers warn the villagers to keep their cattle far from their bases. If livestock wander onto a military base, the villagers must pay the soldiers to get their livestock back. Ma Mya Shwe, 31, a female from Wae Kha Mi Village, Thanbyuzayat Township, was a bystander to one such incident. On September 18, after two oxen entered into Temporary Base IB No. 62, Commander Captain Naing Linn and his troops asked the oxen’s owner for 15,000 kyat for the release of each ox. The owner, Nai Ya, age 60, was unable to afford the fine, so the captain lowered the fine to 10,000 kyat and forced Nai Ya to spend the next two days fencing the base as a punishment.

Sometimes, the battalions kidnap villagers for ransom. Higher authorities are often complicit in these acts. In the first week of September, a military column of LIB No. 106, led by Captain Min Nyan Win, arrived in Lein Maw Chan village, a border village of Thanbyuzayat and Ye Townships. The battalion captured two young villagers and took them to Wae Won village, Thanbyuzayat Township. The commander ordered the village headmen and their families to pay 50,000 kyat each as ransom to release them. After the villagers were released, they were ordered not to tell anyone about their kidnapping. “As all of us are afraid of the soldiers. We have to keep quiet to avoid unwanted harm from Captain Min Nyan Win,” said Pho Kyaw, 26, who fled to the border.



Photo: HURFOM

Soldiers from gas pipeline security battalion IB No. 62 seen in Wae Kha Mi village, Thanbyuzayat Township

The combination of land confiscation, forced labor and tax extortion make life difficult for the villagers of Wae Won and Wae Taw. They face a scarcity of land, and are unable to tend to their fields because they must work for the battalions. They cannot afford to pay illegal taxes to the authorities or army. When these problems became severe, many villagers abandon their native villages and flee to other areas.

Under the military regime in Burma, and by dint of having the pipeline project



A 55 year old villager forced to work in early August at one of IB No. 62's temporary bases located in Wae Kha Mi village, Thanbyuzayat Township

commanders are not happy with me, then my villagers will have more trouble later on.”

under their charge, the local battalions have absolute power in rural areas [mostly black or free fire zones]. They also control some administrative activities. Sometimes, they loot the civilians' belongings and charge fines from traders, businesspeople and ordinary civilians. Villagers have no means of filing a complaint, as the authorities are the ones committing the abuses. Even village headmen are unable to protect their villagers. “I am very tired of being a headman,” lamented U Hpa Hoh, a village peace and development officer from Wae Kha Mi village. “If the

Torture

For the purpose of HURFOM's reporting, *torture* is defined as any act that inflicts emotional or physical pain for the purposes of interrogation, intimidation or extortion. HURFOM's reporters have documented 5 different cases of torture in the Ye-Thanyuzayat border area between August and October 2009. These reports consist of beatings, interrogations, and intimidation.

Frequently, Burmese army soldiers have attacked and critically injured villagers in the area as a means of eliminating a possible rebel army supporter. According to HURFOM's reporters, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 106 led by Captain Mya Zaw Aung, made up of 17 troops, arrived at Binkalwe village in Thanbyuzayat Township on September 27, 2009. While the troops were searching for suspected KNU supporters in the village, Mg Shan Pyi, age 35, came back from his farm and crossed the battalion's path. Without knowing anything about his identity or whether he might be connected to the KNU, the troops attacked him immediately, hitting him with their gun butts. He suffered from a severe head wound and asked for help from the village headman, Mg Tin Lel. The headman informed the battalion that he was a member of Binkalwe village and not a part of the KNU, and asked for an apology from battalion's leader, Captain Mya Zaw Aung. The captain apologized to the village headman and Mg Shan Pyi for his battalion's mistake, and swore that such incidents would not again occur in Binkalwe village.

U Pwel, 55, a Binkalwe farmer and witness to the incident, said “Mg Shan Pyi is a quiet man and a normal villager. In our area, [the troops] usually make mistakes like hitting and beating residents without cause and shooting residents. Before, they never apologized to villagers after they made a mistake. Last year, Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 62 shot one villager. His name was Pho Myo, and it happened outside the village. His family didn't get any repayment after his death.”

Sources near Mg Shan Pyi's relatives complained to HURFOM that the injury on his head was so severe that he had to go to Thanbyuzayat Township hospital to receive 6 stitches on his head, which cost about 30,000 kyat.

Acts of violence like the incident suffered by Mg Shan Pyi are a tool that the Burmese Army uses to intimidate the villagers of the regions they occupy, creating a culture of mistrust and fear throughout the region. HURFOM reporters learned of a second incident of physical violence, occurring in Thuu Lel village, southern Thanbyuzayat township.

U Myint Maung, age 62, witnessed an attack on her neighbor. “On September 13, 2009, Captain Mya Zaw

Aung and his troops arrested Thuu Lel villager Mg Aye Thein near the Shune River, which is 1 mile from the village. [The troops] accused Mg Aye Thein of trying to communicate with the KNU Battalion No. 16 led by Warrant Officer Saw Nar Nar. The Burmese Captain Mya Zaw Aung arrested [Mg Aye Thein] and asked him about the KNU Battalion No. 16 activities in the area. The Captain threatened to kill him if he did not tell about the KNU troops' activities. Because he couldn't speak Burmese well, the troops slapped him, hit his face, and dunked his head underwater. After that, one soldier hit his head and he lost consciousness. The troops thought he was dead, and they threw him beside the Shune River."

On September 14 in the early morning, U Myint Maung told HURFOM that he saw Mg Aye Thein near his durian farm and rescued him. U Myit Maung brought him to his house in Thuu Lel village. He tried to treat him with traditional medicine, but was unsuccessful, so he brought him to Moulmein hospital, where he stayed for two weeks. The fees for medical treatment came to about 80,000 kyat.

According to HURFOM's field reporters, on September 29 LIB No. 106, led by Sergeant Sayar and Khin May Lay, went to guard the gas pipeline. At about 4:00 PM, the troops captured Lein Maw Chan villager A-Chain, age 40, and his cousin Mg Ngae, age 32, when they were on their way home from their farm. The troops accused both of the men of conversing with the insurgent groups in the areas, and of belonging to the KNU. They beat them until they bled from their heads and faces. No one from the nearby farm dared to respond to the men's cries for help. A villager later informed the village headman and his security officers about the case. The headman informed the military that neither victim had ties to any rebel group.

According to U Hla Win, a 52 year-old Lein Maw Chan villager who witnessed the incident, "The village headman paid 40,000 kyat and 12 chickens to gain their release. The troops warned the headman and villagers that if we knew who was communicating with an insurgent group with plans to blow up the gas pipeline, they would kill all of us."

Physical and emotional intimidation

In addition to charging villagers for pipeline maintenance and through taxes, battalions often use physical and emotional intimidation to extort additional money from the villagers, in the form of what is often called "security fees." According to HURFOM field reporters in the area, on September 30, 2009, three villages combined their security fees and sent them to Captain Naing Line Htun, IB No. 62, Brigade 2. Ywa-thar-aye village, including 122 households, paid 16,000 kyat in four months; Pane-nae-taw village, containing 37 households, paid 16,000 kyat, and Ngaputaw village, consisting of 29 households, paid 16,000 kyat.

Occasionally, physical violence and intimidation are combined with extortion. On September 17, 2009, during LIB No. 106, Corporal Myo Thein and 8 fully armed troops took over guarding the pipeline around Sout-palaung village, Thanbyuzayat Township. Thet Naing, age 30, was on his way home from his farm when he encountered the troops.

"A soldier ordered me not to run. I explained to him that I was going home to Sathpalaung Village, but the military refused to let me go. When they saw a knife in my basket, they accused me of being from the KNU Army. The corporal slapped my face and asked for my information. He said he had heard that KNU ordered their troops to explode the gas pipeline in this area. After that, they tied me with a rope and brought me to their temporary camp in Amaeni village. After the Corporal reported to his captain, a soldier said if I gave him 50,000 Kyat, he would release me. The next evening, my relative came and paid the fee to free me from their hands."

Frequently, villagers in the Ye -Thanbyuzayat area are intimidated into informing on their fellow villagers. A Ye township Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) clerks said that MOMC No. 19, which is based in Ye Township, forced a security guard to get information and evidence about a gas pipeline that exploded. The security guard forced the residents of Kyaungyaw and Anin villages to get more information and evidence to report to the MOMC 19.

Ultimately, the tortuous acts leveled by the Burmese army plunges the villagers living in the Ye-Thanbyuzayat pipeline area into a world of distrust, uncertainty, and fear; a world where villagers fear to stray from their homes and farms, where residents are loathe to respond to their fellow's cries of help, and where villagers must pay exorbitant sums for the dubious benefits of the Burmese Army's "security".

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 2237, General Post Office
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND
E-mail: [hurformcontact@yahoo.com](mailto:hurfomcontact@yahoo.com)
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

Conclusion:

The human rights violations suffered by the villagers in the pipeline area between Northern Ye and Southern Thanbyuzayat Township are by no mean occurring in a vacuum. The residents of villages all along the Kanbawk-Myaing Kalay gas pipeline in Mon State contend with arrest, disappearances, guard duty, beatings, and the like, every day. The abuse documented here is disquieting both due the number of abuse cases suffered during three months and the increasing magnitude of the abuse itself; yet the cases listed here merely represent a very small section of a much larger picture of the human rights abuses suffered by the villagers who live along the Kanbawk-Myaing Kalay gas pipeline in Mon State.



Photo: HURFOM

An LIB No. 106 officer barracks, one of the major perpetrator battalions in this report

Militia recruitments ordered in North Tenasserim Division

HURFOM, Yebyu: Residents of Yebyu Township in North Tenasserim Division fear that recent orders from the Burmese Army to the local militias, ordering renewed militia recruitments in various villages in the Township, will increase the fees that local militias routinely extort from civilian villagers. An associate of the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC), from Yapu village in Yebyu Township, explained that increased militia recruitments in the area were the direct orders of the Southeast Command (SEC) and Coastline Command (CC), and that both the SEC and the CC plan to oversee militia training in Yebyu Township.

“In the last week of September, the command to recruit more militia troops was directly given to the VPDC office in Yapu village. My friend is working at the VPDC office in the village. Before, they just had 7 militia troops in our village. Now, they command that the militia grow to at least 20 troops, and more if possible. They commanded the village headman directly. The head commander in the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 282, which is based under the Southeast Command, will directly monitor the militia training,” he said.

Yapu village contains over 600 households. Most of families survive through farming, but a small amount of the village’s residents are jobless. HURFOM’s sources indicate that the majority of Yapu village’s residents are uninterested in joining the area’s militia; however, jobless individuals in Yapu are likely to see the militia recruitments as a chance to gain income and notoriety in Yapu. According to Mg Chan, a 28-year-old of Yapu villager, “I think most of villagers are not interested in joining the militia training. But they [the military] can persuade the residents who are jobless by giving them some opportunity to get some business using their power in the area. It’s probable that they will collect at least 20 people, and maybe more people, to serve in the militia in our village.”

HURFOM’s story published on October 7th, “Military increasing in Ye Township”, detailed how increased numbers of militia troops places financial strains on village civilians. Burma’s military government provides militia troops with training and guns; the government does not provide militias with uniforms, stipends or food supplies. The funds for these necessities come from extortion money that is collected from village residents. Yapu villagers are justifiably concerned that increased numbers of militia troops will mean increased extortion fees.



Newly recruited female soldiers being trained by a local SPDC battalion in northern Tavoy District, Tenasserim Division

U Pho Maung, a 69 year-old daily worker in Yapu village claims, “It’s around 3,000 Kyat a month to pay the government taxes. Last year we paid 2,000 Kyat to the village security guard. I don’t know how much they will collect because they’re increasing the militia troops. If we estimated all the taxes for each month, it will cost around 5,000 Kyat. Sometimes the LIB No. 282 and No. 273 has collected money for their food supplies, portering and VIP trips costs. It cost another 1,000 Kyat again. We paid around 6,000 Kyat for each month if we combine all the extortion taxes. The money that we earned, we just spend for extortion taxes in the area.”

A New Mon State Party (NMSP) Township Committee member in Yebyu Township reported to HURFOM that many villages located beside the Ye – Tavoy highway have been ordered to increase the numbers of their militia troops; Yapu, Aleasakhan, Kyauk-kadin, and Yay-ngangyi villages in Yebyu Township have all been subjected to militia recruitments.

This source informed HURFOM that, “Increasing the militia troops is not a big burden for the military government, they do not have to worry for their [the militias’] salaries, food supplies and uniforms. They just get the money to run the militia systems by extorting the money from the local residents. By using the militia system, they also can get the residents’ information easily. This is a good outcome for them [the authorities]. In addition, the militia will be useful to persuade and pressure the resident to support the government politically. So that is why the local authorities try recruit more militia as the higher ranking authorities officers have commanded.”

HURFOM

P. O. Box 2237

General Post Office

Bangkok 10501, THAILAND

E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com

<http://www.rehmonnya.org>

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