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Some Acronyms in This Issue

GDP-	Gross Domestic Product
SPDC -	State Peace and Development Council,
GAD-	General Administration Department
IB -	Infantry Battalion
LIB-	Light Infantry Battalion
PMF -	People's Militia Force
AR-	Artillery Regiment
MAS-	Myanmar Agriculture Service

News

Continued abuse on International Human Rights day in Khaw-zar sub-township

Khawzar, December 2009: Human rights day, celebrated to honor the rights of all people, saw to let up of human rights abuses in Burma. The headman of an often abused village in Khawzar sub-township was beaten extensively by Burmese army forces.

On December 10th, International Human Rights Day, the village headman from Magyi village was visited by soldiers from Burmese army Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 31. According to source close to a villager that witnessed the assault, soldiers began beating the headman as soon as he came to the door of his house, leaving him no opportunity to even speak. In the assault the headmen suffered severe head injuries, rendering him forgetful.

According to one Magyi villager "The authorities suspected that villagers [in the town] were connected to the Mon splinter group – some of Mon splinter group live in our village – that's why the authorities tortured the village headman." While reporter received reports that other villagers were tortured due to their suspected involvement with Mon splinter groups, reporter was unable to confirm these cases.



Entry road to Khawzar Sub-town where countless instances of human rights violations continues to prevail by the local SPDC Army IB No. 31

Farmers in Mon State are in Trouble

Generally, in many countries, when the farmers are facing troubles – problems in crop production, traders’ business monopolies, crop price reductions, etc – the government intervenes and helps its nation’s farmers to overcome these problems. In many countries, the government is even *required* to help farmers in various ways.

The farmers in Mon State faced many problems this year, due to a series of insect attacks and dramatic crop reduction in the whole of Mon State. The insects infested rice plants in the paddy fields, and all paddy grains became weightless. In some rice fields, the farmers lost parts of their crops, while some farmers said they have lost their whole fields. In general, it is estimated that farmers affected by insect attacks could get only 30-50% of their expected harvests this year.

In such a situation, the Burmese military government should go and help the farmers with some subsidies in order to aid their families. Instead, now the government is planning to pressure the farmers in Mon State to sell some amounts of their crops to the government.

In Mudon Township, the government authorities have pressured Mon farmers to grow more dry season crops in order to replace the crop harvests lost during 2009’s rainy season. In growing dry season crops, Mon State’s farmers again have to spend a lot of money to buy gasoline to bring water by engine pumps to their farms, and to buy chemical fertilizer to increase paddy crop production. The Burmese government authorities in Mon State have ordered that the acres of rice growing lands be increased from the 700 acres grown last year, to 2,500 acres for this year. Some farmers who have less experience in dry season rice cultivation are facing many difficulties.

The plight of Mon State’s farmers is that their suffering has doubled, not only through natural disasters, but also through human-made disasters.

International Human Rights Day was established to recognize the day the United Nations General Assembly announced the formation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The holiday is generally seen as an opportunity by countries to publically reaffirm their commitment to addressing human rights issues internationally and worldwide.

Despite pressure from countries internationally, and increased United States diplomatic efforts with the Burmese Military Junta, it is widely recognized and documented that human rights violations are continuing against ethnic minorities on Burma’s borders.

The beating of Magyi’s headman is the most recent episode in long string of arrests and assaults from a Mon splinter group and Burmese army forces in the heavily targeted Khaw-zar sub-township.

On October 25th, 30 villagers from Yinye village were kidnapped by the Nai Bin splinter group in exchange for ransoms from families. According to a November article by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, IB No. 31 then arrested 37 villagers, beating and abusing them to get information about local splinter groups.

Villagers are well aware of the pervasive regional abuses, “One of the soldier from the IB No. 31 was struck by a bomb outside Yinye village. one explained “They [IB No. 31 commanders] got angry at the villagers, that’s why they tortured them.” At that time villagers have reported that those tortured were the

village headman Nai Kyaw Hein, and 2 members of the people’s militia, Nai Nwe and Nai lan Par.

One Yin-ya villager recounts how he was tortured once he was capture, “They tied me to the betel nut plant and then they beat me with bamboo. They tortured me in many ways – they laid my body on the ground and beat my back. I felt very bad but I couldn’t do anything to them.”

One Yinye villager now living in exile along the Thai-Burma border explained villagers who are beaten and tortured by authorities are sometimes unable to continue work, after which some leave their villages because they afraid the soldiers will return to commit human rights abuses again.

Villagers forced to carry stones for Burmese army battalion

Dec 2009, Ye Township

Villagers in Lamine Sub Township are forced to carry stones for construction project on a Burmese army battalion head quarters.

Last week villagers from Taung Bone village and Taung Pyin village, Lamine Sub Township, Ye Township, Mon State, have been ordered to load and carry stones to Burmese army Infantry Battalion IB No. 61 out of Ye town.

According to one villager from Taung Pyin who was forced to load small stones, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No.587, ordered the two villages to collect small

stones at a rope bridge, from a nearly dry riverbed 3 miles away at near Aru-Taung village. Each village was forced to provide a truck to then carry the cargo from Aru-Taung, 12 miles to Ye town. According to villagers forced to work, they were not compensated for the time they spent loading stones.

According to the truck driver Taung Bone village, 1 truck was only be able to make 2 trips a day. The first day 2 trucks were available, so only one trip was made, but the next, only 1 could be loaded with stones, which required it to make 2 trips in 1 day.

“They said they want to repair their base,” a man who was forced to gather stones explained. “But they didn’t pay for the cost of car oil. We had to buy it ourselves. We don’t want to do this but we are because they have ordered [us to].”

“LIB No. 587 ordered the headman and villagers that this had to be done,” the owner of the Taung Bone truck explained. “We carried stones for 2 days. I don’t know who will carry for the next days. [We had to pay] all our costs.”

According to the coordinator from the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), LIB No. 587 has been forcing villagers to work as unpaid manual labor collecting stones and bringing them to IB No. 61, since summer season of 2006. It is unclear to observers or villagers what exactly the base is constructing with all the stones.

This latest instance of forced labor in Taung Pyin and Taung Bone is part of a larger system of continued human rights violations. HURFOM’s coordinator explained, “This has already happened before. Not only that, between 2004 to 2007, LIB No. 587 confiscated 250 to 300 acres of rubber plantations villagers in Lamine Sub Township. The military then cut the old of rubber trees down to make firewood and forced [farmers] to grow them again.”

IB No. 48 kills 3 in Pegu Division

HURFOM, Dec 2009, Pegu: According to a former village resident, three Hsaw Law Kho villagers were killed and over a dozen more were tortured by Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 48, in Than Tha Bin Township, Thauungoo district, in Pegu division on November 5th.

HURFOM’s field reporter spoke to Saw Doh, a 42 year-old Saw Law Kho villager, one month later on December 5th in the Three Pagoda Pass border area. Saw Doh recounted the atrocities committed by IB No. 48 in his ethnically Karen village, which left him no choice but to flee to the region. According to Saw Doh, in the first week of November 2009 IB No. 48 was ambushed by Karen National Union (KNU) soldiers near Hsaw Law Kho village. A large number of IB No.48 soldiers were hurt or killed in the attack.

The next day the Hsaw Law Kho village headman received information that IB No. 48 planned to enter the village, and he warned Hsaw Law Kho’s male residents to leave the village to avoid being conscripted as porters for the battalion.

Saw Doh reported that on November 5th, IB No.48 attempted to enter the village, but were attacked en route by a second assault from the KNU; one soldier in the battalion was killed, and three more were hurt. After the ambush, IB No. 48 entered Hsaw Law Kho village, and arrested the village headman, 45 year-old Saw Kae Too, and two other male residents who had decided to remain in the village; these individuals were Saw Kae Doe, 25 years-old, and Saw Luu Kar 30 years-old.

Saw Doh then watched 40 soldiers from the battalion attack the three men, beating them with gun butts and kicking them several times. Next, the IB No. 48 commander ordered his soldiers to collect the female residents of Hsaw Law Kho village. The soldiers collected around 20 female villagers of various ages, as well as a large number of children.

The battalion’s commander accused the women of having family members in the KNU forces, demanding of the women, “where are your rebel husbands?” The commander then insulted the women’s Karen ethnicity, after which the commander and soldiers began beating the women and children gathered before them with gun butts and bamboo rods, and kicking them. Some of the victims received head wounds or broken arms, and others received more serious injuries. Saw Doh reported that the IB No. 48 commander then shot the three arrested Hsaw Law Kho male residents in front of the female villagers. Before leaving the commander ordered his soldiers to confiscate some quantities of rice and cooking materials from the female villagers’ stores.

According to Saw Doh villagers endure abuse, arrest, and forced labor at the hands of Burmese soldiers nearly every month, although the events of November 5th were the first incidents of execution. Burmese army battalions frequently harass villagers due to their Karen ethnicity, accusing their victims of being KNU supporters or KNU soldiers. Many villagers have already fled to other locations, and only 30 households remain in the village.

Most of the villagers in Hsaw Law Kho village rely on agriculture for their survival; farming rice, betel nuts, coconuts, and several types of fruit. Saw Doh reported that at the time of his departure from the village, most of the male residents had failed to return to the village. This individual also explained that following the death of the Hsaw Law Kho village headman, the remaining villagers were too frightened to leave the town’s boundaries to farm, and a food shortage had ensued; many of the villagers are reportedly making preparations to move to safer areas of Pegu division.

Personal Accounts

Personal account from escaped torture victim from Yin Yae village, Southern Ye Township, Mon State:

The following is an individual account gathered by HURFOM's field reporter during an interview with a victim of torture committed by Burmese army Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 31. The victim, Nai Ha Rain, is a 36 years old plantation owner who had been living and working, with his wife, 2 children and parents, in Yin Yae village.

Yin Yae is located in the southern part of Ye township, Mon State, Burma. The region is defined as a "Black Area" by the military government, allowing soldiers to enforce a "free fire" policy. Burmese military units often show little restraint committing abuse and intermittent extrajudicial killing when dealing with civilian populations, treating all communities as potential insurgent group sympathizers.

According to Nai Ha Rain's account, his ordeal began in the middle of November when soldiers from IB No. 31 came and collected around 30 Yin Yae residents: "They took us on about a half an hour walk from the village. When we arrived in a beetle nut plantation, they started tying my hands to the sides of the betel nut tree. After that they order me to put out my legs. They put one bamboo pole under my knees and another one above my knees. They moved these bamboo poles [up and down my shins] slowly, slowly."

"It was the most serious pain I have ever faced before. They asked nothing from me – they only moved the bamboo [along my shins]. Then another soldier came and held my nose and it made it so I could not breathe well."

"They moved the bamboo for nearly half hour, after which they ordered that I [be made] to sleep upside down and they started another kind of torture; they hit my thighs with thorns [while I hung]. They did it for a half hour without asking me anything."

"As they did this, I thought they did this [to me] because of the reason – in the last few weeks one soldier stepped on a landmine which had been lain by an insurgent group near Yin Yae village. They [IB No. 31] were very angry with the villagers. On November 25th around 30 villagers was detained by Nai Bin Mon insurgent group and villagers had to provide three million kyat [to the group for their release]."

"In doing this, they [IB No. 31] did not want us to communicate with insurgent group or supported them. But they knew well, if we did not do what the insurgent group wanted, [the same thing] would happen to us. The reason [for our torture] was clear. They were not only not protecting us from insurgent

[forces] but also torturing us [after we had been kidnapped]."

"After I was detained by soldiers in the forest for three days they took me to [Yin Yae] village and asked villagers if I had brought money to the insurgent group. We spent a night in Yinyae village and I took this as my best opportunity to escape from the village at that time."

"I ran all night because if they caught me I would die. I was so afraid. In the morning I rented a motorbike and arrived in this safer place."

"Besides me, another 29 people were tortured in the same way. They included the village headman and militia members from Yinyae village. [Other victims] included Nai Ah Zaw, Nai Nine, Nai Weedja, Nai Ong Hamay, Nai Ong Soe, Nai Kyaw Hein, Nai Beatoe. The rest of the people I did not know their names. I do not know what happened to [them] after I left village."

As previously reported by HURFOM, on November 10th, soldiers from IB No. 31 came and arrested 37 members of the village, subjecting the group to beatings and verbal abuse, for their decision to pay the Nai Bin insurgent group for their freedom after being kidnapped on October 25th. Residents previously told HURFOM that they would be willing to pay the same amount to IB No. 31 to end the harassment and abuse, though HURFOM has been unable to confirm if any of the arrested villagers have paid a ransom or been released.



The victim, Nai Ha Rain

Personal Accounts

During the second week of December 2009, HURFOM's field reporter met with Mi Soe Yee, 50, originally from Kanni village, Kawkareik Township, an individual who had lived in the Halockhaneer resettlement camp for roughly 18 years. She described her experience of living in the resettlement camp.

When she first arrived in Halockhaneer resettlement camp 18 years ago, she received support from the Mon Relief Development Committee (MRDC) including rice, blankets, and mosquito nets. The MRDC originally gave each individual over the age of 12 a tin of rice [1 tin = 15kg] per month, while children under 12 received half a tin. However, Mi Soe Yee reported that in 2003, the MRDC decreased its support of the camp residents, and individuals over the age of 12 in Halockhaneer received only half a tin per month, while children under 12 received only one fourth of a tin.

According to Mi Soe Yee, before 2003, she earned her income by collecting bamboo shoots during rainy season, and collecting rice stubble from rice paddies during summer season, which she sold to support her family. During this time period, before 2003, the MRDC still gave her support every month. When she got sick she could go to the Khalacknee camp hospital and receive free medical treatment.

In 2005, the MRDC change its food support policy, and she only received half a tin of rice every three months. She faced a difficult situation, but she managed to earn sufficient income by collecting bamboo shoots and rice stubble. During rainy season she grew rice through highland cultivation, and thus managed to produce sufficient food to feed her family.

Mi Soe Yee claimed that in 2007, the forest surrounding the camp began to be cut down, and rubber plantations were planted in the area instead; many investors from the nearby town of Sangkhlaburi invested in rubber plantations. Increased amounts of bamboo and rice fields were replaced by rubber trees, and she could not gather enough rice stubble or bamboo shoots to support her family. She sold her highland rice cultivation land to an investor, who planted rubber on the land.

She reported that since 2007, she, her family, and her fellow camp residents have faced a very difficult situation, because they can no longer earn any money from collecting stubble. According to Mi Soe, many of her fellow residents in Halockhaneer have traditionally relied on collecting rice and bamboo shoots for income.

The MRDC also reduced its food support again in 2007, only providing her with half a tin of rice every six months. Fewer jobs were available to the camp's residents, and some moved out of the camp. Many residents have

refused to move despite their financial difficulties, because past experiences in Burma have made them afraid of soldiers and of government authorities.

Mi Soe Yee told HURFOM, "All of my difficulties are because of the rubber plantations because they took all of our annual income, we could work on the rubber plantation but we can only work for a few days [a week] because many of them use machines [instead of laborers] to clean weeds."

"As for now, the hospital has nothing, even though we go to the hospital, they have no medicine for us. We have to rely on medical workers from the New Mon State Party training, once they have finished their duty [in Mon State] they work in our village," she added.

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In second week of December 2009, HURFOM's field reporter met with Mi Myint Than, 38, originally from Yinyae, Ye township, who has lived in the Halockhaneer resettlement camp for roughly 10 years. She described the experience of life in the resettlement camp.

In her interview, Mi Myint Than explained that when she first arrived in the resettlement camp, she received support from the MRDC, including rice rations and blankets. When she arrived in the resettlement camp, she and her family had enough food to eat because the MRDC gave so much support that they only had to find sufficient money to buy curry. When she fell ill, she could go to the hospital and be treated there for free.

Mi Myint Than explained to HURFOM that in 2003, not only did MRDC decrease the amount of rice she received every month, but also she lost her husband to malaria. She had to work more to earn enough money to feed her family. Between 2003 and 2006 she and her children could earn sufficient income by collecting rice stubble during the summer season and collecting bamboo during the rainy season. Her two children had to leave school and help her earn enough money to buy food.

In 2006, many investors from Sangkhlaburi came and invested in rubber plantations near Halockhaneer. Many forests and rice fields near the Halockhaneer camp were cleared, depriving residents of income. After the rubber trees were planted in the rice and bamboo fields, Mi Myint Than and her family could not gather rice stubble or bamboo. Instead, they could gather cogon grass from the rubber plantations to make thatch. When

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Report

Election preparations round off a year of abuses against farmers in Mon territory

Introduction:

As preparations by the Burmese State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) for the elections slated for 2010 mount, an increasing amount of pressure will be placed on already burdened rural agricultural communities in Mudon, Thanbyzayat, Ye and Kyaikmayaw Townships. As previously noted in HURFOM's October and November election reports, these preparations have targeted rural communities with the intention of securing political dominance in advance of the government's announcement of the 2010 electoral rules. In taking farmers and community members from their time sensitive-cultivation and harvests of rice crops that are critical for community survival and economy, these preparations have place an excessive burden on agricultural populations.

This HURFOM report will explore how the last 3 months of agricultural disasters and excessive human rights abuses committed by the SPDC have impacted farming communities, so that election preparations undertaken by the government will dramatically impact the livelihood of farmers involved. The 1st section of this report will begin by laying out the background conditions that have contributed to the regional agrarian instability. The 2nd section will focus on the most recent instances of abuse documented by field reporters in Mon State that have most severely impacted agricultural communities. The 3rd section documents instances of militia and "fire brigade" trainings that take farmers from their crops at crucial times during the agricultural season, after which in the 4th section HURFOM will offer analysis on the seriousness of the burden election preparations now place on Mon state farming communities.

Devastation in the 2009 crop season:

To better understand the significance of the human rights abuses carried out against farmers in Mon state, HURFOM will detail briefly the impacts of the environmental catastrophes explored in this report.

Due to a series of environmental catastrophes, both natural and man-made, that have befallen farmers during 2009-2010 rice harvests, the livelihoods of many farmers in Mon state have been severely undercut.



Farmers are cultivating monsoon rice in the previous crop season

This year's abnormally heavy rains and subsequent mass flooding, coupled with the invasion of insects and rodents into rice farms, has impacted Mon State's rice industry in a manner far more catastrophic than anticipated. Many Mon State farmers have lost significant portions of rice crops for the 2009 rainy season, leaving them with no income or monetary resources to invest in summer paddy farming.

The Win-pha-non dam in Mudon Township, and the Katiak dam in Paung Township, have also contributed to significant crop loss through flooding. The dams, originally erected to reserve water for dry season rice paddy agriculture in Mon state, suffer from several design flaws. Neither dam is large enough to accommodate the amount of water that annually pours into the reservoirs during rainy season, and poorly designed spillways must routinely open to flood surrounding paddy fields with water, during the time of year when the nearby agricultural fields need it the least. These conditions have been exacerbated by the August 2009 rainfall in Mon State, leading to the loss of over 70,000 acres of rainy season rice paddies in the resultant flooding. Extensive crop damage has also been sustained in 2009 due to pests. Farmers in Mon state have reported crop losses of un-hulled rice paddy to mites and rats. Furthermore, a blight of insects that lay their eggs in the stem of rice plants has surfaced. The infested rice plants wither and die in the fields, and massive crop losses have been reported in Mon State; rice prices for the remaining harvest have doubled since December 2008.

Ongoing Abuse:

The following abuses are those most commonly committed against farmers living in the Mon State townships of Kyaikmayaw, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Ye. These abuses have continued unabated since the SPDC began placing pressure on Mon state communities for support in the election.

Arbitrary seizure of farmland:

The seizure of farmland by the SPDC has been a long-standing human rights abuse committed against Mon State farmers. Farms that have often been owned by generations of families are taken for use in government building projects or to use as state run farms. This abuse is inarguably one of the most crippling committed against farmers. With millions of kyat invested in cultivation, and few alternative economic opportunities, farmers whose land is sized end up destitute.

During late October 2009, over a hundred acres of farmland were confiscated from 22 farmers living in the Kamawat Sub-Township area in Mudon Township, Mon State. According to a source from Kamawat, the confiscated farmland is largely land that has been left to lie fallow for the past year due to the financial problems faced by many farmers in the area.

According to Nai Sa Neh, a Sein Taung resident who lost 5 acres, starting in May 2009, a number of high ranking battalion commanders from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 209, and authorities from the Mudon township land record department, arrived in a number of villages in the Kamarwat region. The battalion commanders and land authorities collected the names and information of farmers who had opted to leave portions of their fields unfarmed during the 2009 rainy season, the areas of fallow land were measured. This resident informed HURFOM's reporter that LIB No. 209 and the Mudon township agricultural authorities returned to Kamarwat near the end of October 2009, and confiscated unfarmed land in question for the Burmese Army's use.

According to Mi Yin Aye, a Sein Taung village resident:

My farmland was involved in this, 5 acres [were confiscated]. Last year after I farmed I had nothing because my



A confiscated paddy farm by Light Infantry Battalion No. 209 in Kamawat, Mudon Township

crops were flooded. This year, I thought it would be the same situation, so I didn't want to farm all of it [my land]. In summer time, the authorities don't allow us to farm the crops we want, they allow us to farm only what they want us to plant.

HURFOM field reporters learned that farmland has been confiscated by LIB No. 209 from many residents of Kamawat Sub-Township, as well from citizens of several nearby villages, including Sein Taung village, Htaung Kay village, and Hbae Doe village. HURFOM's reporter was also able to speak with individual villagers who had lost farmland. These residents include Nai Bai, a Sein Taung resident who lost 2 acres; Nai Sa Neh, a Sein Taung resident who lost 5 acres; Nai Hla Myint, a Sein Taung resident who lost 6 acres; Nai Poe Ta, a Sein Taung resident who lost 5 acres; and Mi Ma Yee, a Htaung Kay resident who lost 5 acres.

Maintenance duty for gas-pipelines:



Villagers from Waeyet and Waekhami are gathering to work for the gas pipeline [Photo taken on December 4th, 2009]

During the last few months, research conducted by HURFOM field reporters shows that many farmers in Mudon and Thanbyuzayat townships, Mon State, whose paddy lands are located along the Kanbawk Myaing Kalay gas pipeline, have once again been ordered to perform pipeline maintenance by the Burmese army battalions in charge of the pipeline's security. This process often requires lengthy time commitments and the use of the farmers' own food supplies and work tools. Farmers suffer particularly when sentry duty is required during harvest time, as unattended crops will languish.

A HURFOM reporter living in southern Thanbyuzayat observed that in the second week of November, roughly 70 individuals, most of them paddy farmers from 4 different villages located along the pipeline in Thanbyuzayat Township who were busy with their rainy season crop harvest, were ordered to work along the pipeline. The residents of these villages have been charged with the task of building fences for the pipeline and reburying areas of pipeline that had become exposed by heavy downpours during the recently-ended rainy season.

A 50 year-old Karen resident of Waekhami village named U Tar Tar told HURFOM's field reporter that the headman of his village received orders from two gas pipeline security battalions, Infantry Battalion (IB) No 62, and Artillery Regiment (AR) No.315, to take responsibility for pipeline maintenance. In Waekhami village, every household has been ordered to provide one individual for pipeline labor. Each worker has also been commanded to supply his own materials for covering and fencing the pipeline, such as bamboo and coconut branches. Missing a day of pipeline labor results in a 3,000 kyat fine.

"We villagers have had to take responsibility for these kind of activities every single year [after rainy season ends] since the gas pipeline arrived [in 2001]," A villager, U Tar Tar, said, explaining why this duty has caused him troubles. "Even though we are busy on our farms we have to work on it [the pipeline] first."

According to Mi Aye Myint, a Waeyet villager, both men and women from her village are being forced to work on the gas pipeline; many must bring their small children with them to the pipeline, since failure to arrive for a day of work means paying a fine of 3,000 kyat to Sergeant Sa Yar Kyi, from the Thanbyuzayat-based IB No. 62.

A second Waeyet resident complained, "Villagers in Waeyet have to work on the pipeline nearly every single month. Even though we pay for security, 2,000 kyat a month, every month we still have to work on it. This

gas pipeline is a kind of hell for the villagers. Since it arrived [in 1995] it not only fails to benefit us, it also harms us.”

Extortion of money for cost of tractor:

SPDC military battalion extortion of villagers and farm communities is a common abuse in Mon State, one that saps farmers of what little financial or material wealth they may have. Instances of cash or farm animal extortion is widespread. Often seeking some financial gain, battalion soldiers, or village and township peace and development councils, will make demands of ‘taxes’ under the pretense of legal justification.

On October 25th, the Mudon Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC)’s chairman U Kyaw Maung, his secretary, 5 members of the General Administration Department (GAD) and the agriculture committee held a meeting in Kamawat village to order local residents to donate money towards the purchase of a farm tractor to be used within the region.

The three villages that were included in the meeting were Kalotort, Kamawat, and Taung Pa villages. At the meeting the Mudon TPDC informed the three villages that each would have to pay a total of 200,000 kyat. The TPDC and individual VPDCs began collecting the money, however, according to HURFOM field reporters, during the collection process TPDC members collected more money than was originally decided by the TPDC at the meeting. This taxation will continue into 2010 and 2011, according to villagers.

Residents in the area’s villages were skeptical of the proposed intention of purchasing a community tractor. “I don’t believe the TPDC chairman when he talked about buying the farm tractor. But, we need to pay if they collect money from us because they are the ones with power,” said Nai Myoe, a 55 year-old Kamawat villager. “If I estimate the extortion payments I’ve had to pay in October, the cost is over 7,000 Kyat [not including the cost of the tractor].”

Previous TPDC proposals to purchase community mini tractor have yielded nothing, making area residents skeptical of this new proposal. Min Shin, a 36 year-old Kamawat Ywa-thit villager explained, “A couple years ago they said they would buy a mini tractor and collected residents’ money. But we have not seen any mini tractor they [supposedly] bought. I think now again they will make me play the same role.”



A farm tractor which purchased with the community’s donation money in Mudon Township

For farmers in the area, the cost of a tractor puts even greater pressure on the already trained funds available to farmers after this year’s poor harvest. “For farmers like us, it is not sustainable to live for long term in this village. We are only relying on our farm products [to earn a living],” Nai Myoe clarified to the HURFOM field reporter. “This year, we only harvested 60% of our farm’s produce. The authorities don’t know the plight of their residents. They just know about collecting money. It’s

the reason our life is difficult to continue in our future.”

Forced summer paddy cultivation:

Rice paddy farmers in Mon state are now regularly forced to grow a summer season rice crop in addition to the normal rainy season yield. These summer crops provide little financial benefit to farmers that have already spent the previous few months growing rainy season crops. Farmers are often forced to choose between



Members of Myanmar Agriculture Service (MAS) and Township Irrigation Department meeting the local rice farmers in Mudon Township

planting the summer season crop or paying hefty fines to local battalions. Farmers that do agree to plant summer season fields often then must pay for large quantities of fertilizer to prepare their fields for a second crop.

On the third week of November 2009, the Mudon TPDC commanded farmers in Mudon Township to plant summer paddies on their farmlands. According to the Nai San Nyunt, who was forced to plant 5 acres of summer rice paddy, “we don’t have enough money to plant summer paddies. We also lost about 2,000,000 kyat on our rainy season paddy this year. We cannot plant a summer paddy without money. I think our family must borrow money from our neighbor to plant the 5 acres of summer paddy commended by the TPDC.”

Information from HURFOM’s field reporters proved that the forced planting of summer paddies between the years of 2008-2009 was the result of a direct command from the Burmese government in Naypyidaw to authorities in the Mon State townships of Ye, Mudon, and Thanbyuzayat.

According to a government staff member, who is working in the Township Administrative Department:

They [Naypyidaw government, Township Administrative Department] already know that the farmers did not get enough rice from their rainy season paddy crops. The orders are related to the country’s economy. If we compare it with the previous years’ rice paddy production, this year is only one-third [of the expected production rate]. The only thing the government can do to increase the rice production for this year is by forcing the farmers to plant summer rice paddies.

In second week of November, HURFOM’s field reporters went to the two villages in Thanbyuzayat Township where authorities have already commanded farmers to plant summer paddies. 10 farmers were interviewed about the struggles they faced planting summer paddies.

Nai Pan Htun, a 50 year-old who was forced to plant 5 acres of summer rice, explains why he was ordered to plant more rice paddy:

The Township Agriculture Committee and Land Survey Department commanded us to plant summer paddies in the places that VIPs [government officers] can see when they are traveling. The Agriculture Manager promised that they would give gasoline for the water pump engine, and that they would give us fertilizer. They also promised this last year, but nothing happened. Last year, we could plant rice well because we succeeded in our rainy season paddies. But I can imagine for this year [how bad planting rice will be].

Nai Mya Maung, who was forced to plant 6 acres of summer rice paddy, explained the difficulties and risks that endanger farmers forced to plant a second rice paddy crop:

If we begin planting our summer paddies, it will cost us at least 70,000 kyat for each acre. If we plant, there are many steps to worry about: In May, the paddy plants will sprout; in March, the rice paddy plants will bloom, and the final step is cultivation in June. If the rain falls in June, our entire paddy will be destroyed. It’s the primary steps to worry about when planting the summer paddies. Our farmers never get support from the government if we compare ourselves with other countries. We saw how in other countries, the governments give farming materials and money to support their local farmers to help them implement their farms. But, we have to stand on our own feet and use our own money to implement summer farms here. At the end, nothing will be left from our farm. We will just waste our money and time implementing summer paddies.

Forced summer paddy planting has also been noted outside of southern Thanbyuzayat Township. Farmers in the western Thanbyuzayat villages of Kwan Tart, Kyone Kadat, and Kyaikami, have been pressured by local authorities to plant summer rice paddies.

Mi Than Kyi, who owns 20 acres of farmland in the area, said:

Only one-third of the expected rainy season rice was received in this year, we had not finished cultivation yet... In total we got around 4 cow carts of rice. Now the local authorities have pressured us to plant summer paddies. They forced us to plant 5 acres of summer crops. The village headman said 'if you do not want to plant, you have to pay 50,000 kyat for one acre.' If we plant rice, we also have to spend that same amount of money [50,000 kyat] to plant one acre's worth of a summer rice paddy crop.

According to HURFOM's field reporter, local authorities have decided to plant 80 acres of summer paddies as a token gesture in Kyaikami and Kwan Tart areas. At the end of November, the authorities collected about 30 farmers in the region, and pressured them to plant summer paddies.

Forced labor on agriculture projects:

Forced labor details often take villagers from their homes and farms for long periods of time. Without financial compensation, villagers are expected to provide for their own food. In addition to being physically demanding, the forced labor can come with risks of construction accidents or the rare assault from insurgent forces. Here, HURFOM examines recently documented cases of forced labor suffered by farmers living near two of Mon State's dams, Win-pha-non and Azin.

Due to the previously mentioned heavy rains of 2009, the Win-pha-non and Azin dams' water runoff canals filled up with excess silt. The Mudon authorities ordered farmers in region who live near the dams' water canals, to dredge the canals during the first week of November.

In early November 2009, Mudon TPDC chairman U Kyaw Maung, and authorities from the Mudon Irrigation Department led by U Win Maung, commanded farmers living near the dams to spend a week deepening the water canals that run across their farmlands; the forced labor occurred during the farmers' rice paddy cultivation periods. The villages in question that are crossed by the water canals are the settlements of Mayan, Kwan Tar, Kawkapone, and Hmeinkanein.

Mi Aye Than, a 40 year-old of Kawkapone villager, explains how she and her family were forced to dredge the canal rather than attend to their crop:

The Irrigation Department came to our farm and measured how many feet deep more we had to dig the canal. They wanted the canal to be 5 feet deep but we needed to dig 3 feet to get 5 feet. They said that if we didn't want to dig deeper, we had give them 5,000 kyat a day, while they dug it deeper for us. We stopped our cultivation for a while and our family dug deep into the water canal.



Summer rice farmers are digging a water canal near Abit village, Mudon Township

Nai Pan Sein, a farmer from Kwan Tar village, Mudon Township, had to pay for the costs of dredging the portion of canal near his house:

My farm is one in the area that the water canal flows across the most. So the Irrigation Department comes to my farm for digging, but I had to pay them 25,000 kyat for their gasoline [for excavator digging the canal]. About 100

farmers' land has been cut across by the water canal. Some farmers dig the canals on their own but some pay money. The authorities get a lot of money.

Forced sales of discounted rice to the Army:

The SPDC practice of forcing farmers to sell their rice products below the cost of market value is a significant financial abuse. Farmers invest millions of kyat in seeds, fertilizer, manual labor and other preparations, and are dependent on the intended profit to allow their families to survive in the off season as well as to pay for next years rice cultivation. Though the SPDC announced in 2003 that it would no longer be collecting this 'rice tax', the abuse continues in Mon state with SPDC battalions forcing the sales of rice at 2/3rds to 1/2 the market price.

Local farmers who live in Kyaikmayaw told HURFOM's reporters that the local Burmese army battalion has been collecting rice but only giving farmers low amounts of payment.

Ko Myo Wai, 26, a son of a farmer with a 15-acre farm living near Kyaikmayaw town explained:

They [Burmese privates] are still collecting rice paddy from the local Mon farmers with a price two times lower than the current market price. The village headmen told us that the instructions came from the local Burmese battalions Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 210 which is based in Kyauk Tha Lone. The village authorities and 3 quarter masters from LIB No. 210 formed a paddy-buying committee in our village on this November 25th. Then, they demanded our help selling rice with discounted prices to the army's food supply programs. Thus, villagers who cultivated the rainy season rice paddies this year were instructed to sell out their rice at the rate of 3 baskets per acre. They [the army's food supply program] paid 2,500 kyat per baskets but in the market, a basket cost 5,200 kyat in Kyaikmayaw.

Similarly, the residents of Pain-nae-gone village who cultivate rice have also has been forced to sell their crops at low prices for LIB No. 210's food supplies program. "All of us, approximately 145 farmers, were ordered to sell our rice, 15 to 30 baskets each, to the LIB No. 210. I just received half of the current market price," a Burmese-Indian farmer who live in Pain-Nae-Gone village told HURFOM reporter.

Similar instances of forced rice discounts were reported in the Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 61 controlled areas of Ye township of southern Mon State, in the last week of November 2009. IB No.61 is operating under the command of Military Operation Command (MOC) No.19, based in Ye. These abuses reportedly occurred in Andin and Duya village-tract.

Nai Ong Than, a witness from Duya village, told HURFOM's reporter on November 26th:

According to their [army officers'] orders, people have to send their rice to the VPDC compound, located in the middle of the village. They have been taking rice from the local farmers, about three baskets of paddy per acre [a basket contain 66 kg], they ordered this yesterday, and about 200 paddy farmers from my village were ordered to send the rice in on time, and the deadline is December 1st, 2009. They promised that they [the officers] will pay 2,000 per basket.

A 55 year old ethnic Mon farmer from the area explained to a HURFOM field reporter why he fears that he and his family will face a food crisis in 2010:

Battalion and VPDC official told us that they will pay 2,000 to 2,500 depending on how good our rice is...at this time, I am really concerned about next year. I don't think I can feed my family with the 50 baskets of rice that I produced from 7 acres of paddy fields. I am worrying about this all of the time.

Impacts:

The human rights abuses documented above by HURFOM are a sampling of the daily conditions under which farmers in Mon state hope to make a living. The difficulties that these farmers report operating in are

the climate in which the current SPDC 2010 election preparations occur. For the vast majority of villages with in these 4 townships, it is the agricultural community that will bear the full brunt of these preparations.

This means that in addition to the disasters and abuses farmers in Mon state face, they also must bear the full weight of requirements by SPDC election organizers to participate in 2010 election training and activities.

Ongoing SPDC trainings for 2010 election:

Sanyaie, a 56 year-old farmer, from Kropie Village, Thanbyuzayat Township, told HURFOM's field reporter, "The training was in Thanbyuzayat Township from November 1st through the third week of November. It took about 15 days total. The organizer for my village was the chairman of the VPDC, Nai Kharton, who is also the leader of the village militia."

HURFOM's report learned from Sanyaie that 5 farmers from his village, including him, were forced to take part in the fire-brigade training in Thanbyuzayat Town; he was forced to attend, despite his age, because all of his children work as migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia, and he had no sons to take his place in the training course.

First I understand that it was a fire brigade training, because they gave the course the title 'Upgrading Fire Brigade Skills Training'. In reality, the trainer spoke in Burmese and focused more on basic militia training, including using weapons and guns. During the training period all participants got a chance to use the gun in their own hands. In the course, most of the participants were Burmese speakers. They were people who back them [the Burmese military government]. Also there were a lot of people from different villages...I left my job in the village at that time – my monsoon paddy had not been finished harvesting yet. I had to hire other laborers and it cost another 15,000 kyat.

A villager from Kyone Kadat village worked as a laborer on his family farm, who wished to remain unnamed out of security concerns, explained:

As my village is close to Thanbyuzayat town, in the training the majority of the participants were from my village...We were collecting rice from the farm and were nearly finished at that time. So he and his laborers were working and I went to the town to join the training. That was in November – other people are now forced to join [the training] as well. Some villagers already knew that the trainings are not only fire-brigade training. Most people are not interested in the training subjects. And also there were a lot of rumors about the trainings that those who trained the people are going to use them in the 2010 election period. It means they are very well organized. During the 15 days we were trained to use ammunition, to use guns, and clean weapons.

According to this source, the training also involved trainings on beating people and dispersing protests with through violence, as well as how to surround and contain protests. The Joan Kahdet villager continued:

It seemed like a really advanced training. There was also a political subject training included. Our participants' education levels were not the same. Some had basic education while others had higher education levels, so



An information board from the fire brigade advanced training, Thanbyuzayat Township



for those with basic education, they [the trainers] focused more on how to use guns and sticks. For those who are graduated or have some higher education, they learned how to organize the people. How to conduct a census, and how to give the education of the people for the coming election.

In the case of another villager who refused to give his name due to security concerns, from Taung Pha Lut village, commented on the forced training in his village, and what he believes will be the result of the trainings:



In my village there were a total of 10 participants forced to join the training in November. I cannot say how many farmers had to go – however most of the villagers in my village are paddy farmers and rubber farmers. What I can say is that they had to leave their work and go and join the training, so the rest of the households had to support them by paying 3,000 kyat per household and we have 700 households in this village. We are the tax payers, we are the supporters, and we are forced to support this training. There is no doubt that they are going to use the se people in the future political movements.

Villagers were forced to take part in the fire-brigade training in Thanbyuzayat Town, Mon State [Photos taken on November 7th, 2009]

Impact of election preparation trainings on farmers:

For farmers in Mon state, it is a cruel coincidence of fate that the year 2009 has brought such pressure on efforts to grow crops. However with that being the condition farmers have worked under, pressure by SPDC government forces to coerce farmers into participating in junta backed “fire brigades” and village militias will threaten their already precarious agricultural situation.

The problem is that from each of these abuses, farmers in Mon state face significant economic impacts after an extremely limited rice paddy harvest. For many of the farmers, with reduced volume of paddy they were able to harvest, the addition of these abuses puts an extreme strain on budgets, plunging many farmers into debt. Even in instances where SPDC administration insists on farmers growing a summer season paddy crop, the costs to farmers outweigh and financial benefit that might be gained.

For farmers that have been dependent on cultivating and harvesting their remaining undamaged crop of, missing 1 to 2 weeks of work in paddy fields to attend training can be catastrophic. Farmers that are able will hire laborers to complete the cultivation or harvest for them; however this also adds an additional unconventional cost. The concern that HURFOM hopes to highlight is the long-term negative impacts these preparations will have on farmers. In addition to the possibility to losing any profit, there is an even greater

Information on HURFOM and Invitation for Feedbacks from Readers

Dear Readers,

The 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 situations in Mon territory and other areas Southern Burma,
- protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma

In order to implement these objectives, HURFOM produces the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletter. 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:

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With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

danger of food crisis. Without a large enough harvest, farmers and community member will be forced to choose between rice as a commodity to be eaten, and the means to plant next season rice harvest.

Conclusion:

As these preparations for the 2010 election continue, communities in Mon state, including farmers, will face extreme difficulty surviving. The pressure of the abuses noted above is immense, and each plays a role in undercutting the ability of farmers to survive for another season of farming. Government seizure of farms is



Farmers from Kwan Tar village transferring their undamaged crop to their homes on December first week, 2009

an obvious killing stroke for a farmer's livelihood. Forced sowing of summer paddy wastes farmers' resources, energy, and time in the cultivation a weak crop for government benefits. The extortion of funds, and the forced labor farmers must perform on agricultural and gas pipeline projects, steals the few resources farmers have to cultivate their crop with – money and time.

With much emphasis being placed on election preparations by the government, there is little to no demonstration of understanding of economics in the region. By taking farmers who work at the time-sensitive job of growing rice, and placing them in militarized election training, the Burmese

military government's election preparations threaten to undermine the livelihood of the entire region. HURFOM hopes to strongly emphasize that these practices are ongoing, and will continue as SPDC forces continue to aim for removing community autonomy in the coming election. Without successful rice crops, or legitimate support for farms to renew their capacity to cultivate next season, these 4 townships will likely encounter issues of food shortages and economic stagnation in the following years.



These undamaged crop were not harvested yet in Mudon and Kyaikmayaw townships [Photo taken on December 16th, 2009]



Personal Account from Page No. 5

residents went and collected cogon grass from the rubber plantations, they had to give investors half of their gatherings, despite the fact that these investors never helped with the harvesting.

Many residents are facing a very difficult situation in the camp, because they have no jobs in Halockhane camp, and they do not get enough food from the

MRDC. Many residents also have moved from Halockhane to work outside of the camp, but they face many difficulties, because the income they earn as laborers is not enough for daily expenditures.

Mi Myint Than informed HURFOM that the lands near Halockhane camp are planted with rubber plantations and residents cannot collect rice stubble, as they previously used to do to earn their incomes.

HURFOM
P. O. Box 2237
General Post Office
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
<http://www.rehmonnya.org>

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