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Some Acronyms in This Issue

SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council
BGF-	Border Guard Force
IDP-	Internally Displaced Person
TBBC-	Thailand-Burma Border Consortium
MRDC-	Mon Relief and Development Committee
NMSP-	New Mon State Party VOA- Voice Of America
SLORC-	StateLaw and Restoration Council
KNU-	Karen National Union
LIB-	Light Infantry Battalions

News

Khaw Zar town residents struggle with new people's militia tax

By IMNA:

According to IMNA's field reporter in Mon State's Khaw Zar sub-Township, Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 31 has ordered residents of Khaw Zar town, the region's largest community, to form and fund a new 10-person people's militia.

According to town residents, a meeting about the new militia was held on April 14th at the town's Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) office. Reportedly, the town's quarter headmen explained that each of Khaw Zar town's 700 households must now pay a monthly tax of 3,000 kyat to fund the salaries of the new militia; each household must also contribute an additional 50,000 kyat to the new militia's arms fund.

" [There are] two quarters in our town, the two headmen held the meeting. We will find the people who want to be in the militia, but the [rest of the] villagers have to pay for them [monthly salaries] and for their guns," stated a villager who attended the April 14th meeting.



The entrance to Khaw Zar town, the largest community in Khaw Zar sub-Township

2010 Elections with Non-Politicians Candidates

Burma's long-standing problems can be traced to its genuine political clashes between the country's military rulers and its democratic opposition parties, and these same military rulers and the country's ethnic minority. However, the military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) does not want to solve Burma's political problems, but instead wishes to continue maintaining its power in the upcoming 2010 elections.

The SPDC's electoral laws and party registration laws have already prohibited active political leaders and political parties from participating in the elections, because they could not tolerate having debates with many political leaders and ethnic minority group leaders, who have long been involved in fighting for democracy and peace within Burma. For example, the laws have restricted the National League for Democracy (NLD), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and another ethnic minority political party, the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) from participating in the elections.

This is the regime's intention, as it does not want politically active parties and those that have political ideas to get involved in this election. This means that now in both the Union Parliament and State/Division Parliaments, there will not be many political discussions and debates. The SPDC does not want opposition parties in the country's parliaments.

Instead, the SPDC that former government servants, low-profile and new political figures, and retired former political leaders become involved in elections. Some of these new politicians, retired government servants, and military commanders were previously involved in the 2004 - 2008 National Convention, in which many strong and active political parties boycotted.

There will be elections in Burma late in the year 2010. Participating will be elected political parties and members of parliaments from both the Union and State/Division parliaments. However, the parliaments are controlled by active representatives from the Burmese army as well as retired army commanders, and so the parliament representatives will be silent; there will be no debates, no discussions and no agendas for democratic reform in Burma.

If there is no political, social, and economical improvement within Burma in the near future, the country's people will once again take to the streets, and demand change.

Reportedly, widespread reluctance to join the new militia has sent even the most financially challenged members of Khaw Zar town scrambling for funds.

"If we join the people's militia, we will get 100,000 kyat for one month, but no one wants to join. Every resident is trying to pay money for them [trying to afford the taxes], some of have problems getting the money, but they are trying because they don't want to join the militia," a second villager reported.

Despite the sizable paychecks that village militia members often receive, the job is often regarded as highly undesirable inside Burma, largely because of the dangers associated with it. Village militia members are at the mercy of their superiors in the Burmese military; during times of conflict, militias

are often caught in the crossfire between Burmese battalions and insurgent groups. Reportedly, many Khaw Zar town residents fear that their new militia will soon be caught up in a potential war between the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and the New Mon State Party (NMSPP), following the latter's recent decision not to convert their armed wing into an SPDC-controlled force.

According to IMNA's field reporter Khwa Zar town's quarter headmen have, for the last 10 days, ordered town residents to spend the hours between 6 am and 10 am building a security hut next to the town's TPDC office. Once the community's people's militia is formed, the group will use the hut as a checkpoint for maintaining the town's security.



News

SPDC township authorities arrest and extort fees from residents not included in family lists

May 14, 2010

Moulmein: According to HURFOM field researcher, since May 5th, 2010, joint forces of State Peace and Develop Council (SPDC) included members of Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC), Police forces, People's militia, Immigration and Military Intelligence have been cracking down on residents and family members whose names have not been listed on their families' lists in Moulmein Township, Mon State. Residents claimed that some family members have been arrested and had fines extorted as punishment for failing to present their names on the families' list.

According to information based on local sources, the crackdown started on May 5th, and has been occurring every night around 10 P.M. to 12 midnight by the joint forces (known as multi-forces), targeting the persons whose names were not listed on the families' list or guests who have not asked permission from the local TPDC office to stay as guests with residents. An eyewitness, Nai Htoo, 30, confirmed that the SPDC joint forces consist of 12 persons in total and they have crackdown some households in his village, Pha-Ought, arresting 5 men who were originally from other areas of Mon State and who were married and now living in Pha-Ought village.

"The arrested men were mostly from other areas of Mon State. I heard 5 men were arrested on the night of May 5th. Out of the 5 people, two men are from Kyaikmayaw and another Tow from Paung Townships of Mon State. I don't know the original place of another ones." Nai Htoo confirmed to the HURFOM field researcher on May 11th the original locations of the 5 people arrested.

A reliable source who closed to the Township authorities of Moulmein reported that those 5 arrested persons were detained at Pha-Ought police station for one night, on May 5th, and were then asked to pay 50,000 kyat each to get free next morning. A 66 year old ethnic Mon villager who requested that his name be kept anonymous, reported:

They (I assume police Officers from Pha-Ought village) demanded 50,000 kyat to free from each [of the] 5 arrested men as a punishment fee or

fines. It is not fair. According to [the] law for failure to ask permission to stay in a village, it [punishment] should be only a few kyat as fine payment. Now they [the police officers] have tried to make money by extorting [more money] from the guests or the people who have got married here.

The residents told the HURFOM researcher that they had no idea about the joint forces who have been cracking down in their village and are confused as well as worried about other villagers who have been not registered on their families' lists.

"My son-in-law is not from this village. Hence, if the group comes and checks my family list, he might be arrested. So I suggested staying away from this village during this month." Nai Tin, 65, a resident of Pha-Ought village said. "It is also quite weird that the headmen from my village did not know where these group of people [members of joint-forces] are from. I think he lies. He should know and inform to all villages before the incidents occur."

According to a 60-year-old resident who has knowledge of and experience with local politics, these continued crackdowns on residents' houses might be linked with the recent bomb explosions around Mon State. He also estimated that the Mon State authorities are attempting to recheck the exact numbers of the families' members who were able to vote for the upcoming general election, which is rumored to be held in October of this year. "If my assumption is not wrong, this action [the recent night crackdowns] might be directly associated with the recent bomb blast," a local politician explained to HURFOM's field reporter. "The Mon State authorities are very serious about security during this period. The other possible issue is the confirmation of the list of the eligible voting population in this village for the general election."

In similar instance of increased security measures implemented in Mudon, a neighbor township of Moulmein, the local authorities have been issuing curfew to township residents to make better security according to a member of a government servant living in Mudon Township. "The curfew started at 9 P.M and the local authorities issued since the second week of May. Even in Mudon downtown, the town is very quiet after 9:00 PM," he added.

Report

Like water poured in the sand: Southeastern Burma in a post-ceasefire world

Introduction:

On April 22nd, 2010 the New Mon State Party publicly announced its final refusal of the State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) Border Guard Force (BGF) proposal. The refusal was issued despite widespread reports that Southeast Command Major General Ye Myint had informed the party at an April 7th meeting that such a move would lead to a return of the NMSP's "pre-ceasefire relationship" with the SPDC¹.

During the week of NMSP deliberations, held at party headquarters in NMSP-controlled territory in Tavoy District, Tenasserim Division, tensions rose. SPDC battalions were cited amassing along the border of NMSP-controlled territories in Tavoy District and farther north, near Three Pagodas Pass. Sensing the threat of an impending battle, hundreds of residents living in NMSP territory in Tavoy District and southern Mon State fled their homes, finding refuge in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps along the Thailand-Burma border.

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) would like to express its grave concern regarding the repercussions of the end of the NMSP's 15 year-long ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government. While the agreement failed to halt many of the human rights abuses levied against the citizens of Mon State and NMSP-controlled areas, HURFOM's evidence, collected since mid-April 2010, indicates that a total removal of the ceasefire, either in the immediate future or in the time period following the upcoming 2010 Burma elections, will prove disastrous to the region. Such a move potentially threatens southeastern Burma with massive population displacement, the overcrowding and impacted security of IDP camps located along the border, economic upheaval, and widespread human rights abuses; in essence, a return to, or even an exacerbation of, pre-ceasefire conditions.

Methodology:

Information for this report was gathered by HURFOM field reporters during April and May of this 2010. Reporters interviewed recent arrivals from Tavoy District, Southern Ye Township, and Three Pagodas Pass Township currently residing in the Halockhane and Blehdonphite resettlement sites, located on the Thailand-Burma border; interviews were also collected from families still living in the above mentioned areas, and from individuals residing along the major routes from Tavoy District to Halackanee Camp. Interviews were also collected from volunteers and aid workers representing the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), and the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC).

The report will be divided into 3 major sections: (I) A thorough background on Mon State's pre- and post-ceasefire periods, and a description of the current mass influx of new arrivals into NMSP-controlled IDP sites; (II) a description of the sites, along with the needs and security concerns that accompanied the NMSP's April 22nd announcement and the resulting influx of IDPs into these camps; (III) and finally coverage of the potential agricultural and economic impacts of the ceasefire's breakdown.

Editor's Note: As of this report's publication in the final week of May 2010, the security situation in Mon State remains highly fluid; the number of IDPs taking refuge at the camps along the Thailand-Burma border varies by the day. HURFOM's audience should note that evidence for this document was gathered during the weeks between April 18th and May 10th 2010, and is meant to give an overall understanding of the current state of affairs in Mon State and NMSP-controlled areas.

All names have been changed for security purposes

1 "New Mon State Party announces final 'government militia' decision", *The Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA)*, April 24, 2010, <http://monnews.org/p=258>

Background

Pre-ceasefire period:

From 1989 to 1994, the armed conflict between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Burmese military government, the State Law and Restoration Council (SLORC), forced the multi-ethnic residents of southeastern Burma to flee from their homes and villages, and subjected the citizens of this area to a wide variety of human rights abuses.

According to data collected by HURFOM in the early 90s², SLORC soldiers often assaulted and beat villagers during attempts to extract information about the activities and locations of various insurgent groups in Mon State. Summary executions were also employed when villagers were not compliant with battalion demands or when individuals were suspected members of insurgent groups. Such abuses were particularly common in “black” or “free fire” zones, located predominately in what is now southern Mon State.

Civilians were frequently conscripted to work, without payment, on projects like: the Ye-Tavoy railway, the Yadana gas pipeline to Thailand and various army barracks and buildings at battalion bases. During SLORC offensives or patrols, villagers were also conscripted as porters and made to carry munitions and other supplies. As a result, many villagers who lived in black areas from 1993 to 1994 fled to resettlement sites along the Thai-Burma border.

Southeastern Burma was also plagued with abuse and conflict generated by a number of armed groups. The Karen National Union (KNU), the Burma Communist Party (southern), as well as a collection of Mon insurgent groups who had splintered off from the NMSP, were a few of the key actors. In an effort to weaken the insurgent groups, SLORC employed the “Four Cuts” policy, a military stratagem that targeted civilian support to the NMSP and other anti-SLORC armed forces, typically by confiscating suspected economic and agricultural support bases; such strategies were extremely detrimental to the villagers who owned the farms and businesses seized by Burmese troops. During the final years of the pre-ceasefire area, the SLORC also launched the “Self Reliance” policy which encouraged troops to extract resources from local communities, confiscate land and control areas to influence insurgent territories. The “Self Reliance” policy is still prevalent in certain areas of Mon State.

Post-ceasefire agreement period

On June 29th 1995, the NMSP agreed to a ceasefire with SLORC, a move intended to end the widespread suffering incurred by human rights violations in the region. The party was granted the right to station its armed wing in 12 separate areas of Mon State and granted territories outside the state, in Thaton District in the north and Tavoy District in the south; land confiscation and forced labor were to end.

Despite the agreement, human rights abuses committed by Burmese soldiers in southeastern Burma continued. Per the demands of the ceasefire agreement, the NMSP decreased the number of its Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) troops in Tenasserim Division and several areas of southern Mon State. After the removal of MNLA troops, SLORC stationed battalions in southern Ye and Yebyu Township in Mon State, and Tavoy District in Tenasserim Division; human rights abuses committed by these battalions continues to be reported. According to the ceasefire agreement, forced labor is banned, however the SLORC (and currently the SPDC) government continued to conscript villagers. From 1995 to 1997, SLORC forcibly recruited thousands of villagers to build a railway from Ye to Tavoy District. The Burmese military’s ongoing “Self-Reliance” policy continues to result in the widespread seizure of property and lands.

Due to the constant conflict and political unrest throughout southern Burma, largely caused by the increasing militarization of southern Mon State and Tavoy District through the addition of 27 new battalions in the region, civilians in southeastern Burma and Mon State continue to flee persecution in their native village, often choosing to relocate to IDP camps in NMSP-controlled areas along the Thailand-Burma border. In August 2006, the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) estimated that there were 70,000 IDPs living in NMSP-controlled areas and border camps; this figure has likely increased dramatically.

Current Period

Starting in early April 2010, HURFOM received several reports from the field reports that residents of NMSP-controlled areas in Tavoy District, specifically in the villages of Johaprao, Pananbein and Suvanabhum,

² From *No Land to Farm*, The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), 2003.

had begun moving their families and possessions from the region in order to avoid a potential war between Burmese troops stationed in the region and the NMSP. According to reports, the mass relocations began in mid-April, when the NMSP was still in deliberations about its decision regarding the SPDC's Border Guard Force offer.

On April 21st of this year, HURFOM field reporters commenced interviewing groups of Tavoy District residents in NMSP-controlled areas. The reporters interviewed families still living in their native villages, individuals who had relocated to NMSP-controlled camps located on the major motorway stretching between



New arrivals at Blehdon Phite resettlement site in late April, waiting for food rations

Southern Mon State and Halockhane IDP site, as well as individuals who had opted to flee with their families all the way to various resettlement sites on the Thailand-Burma border.

Many interviewees expressed uncertainty regarding the safest area for a potential relocation. A military telegram, tracked by the NMSP, further indicated that LIB No. 409, normally covering Mon State's Kanbawk – Myainkalay gas pipeline's security, sent 200 troops to the southern part of Dooplaya district, a northern border of NMSP-controlled area, and very

close to Three Pagoda's pass and Halockhane resettlement site. Several Burmese military battalions – specifically Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) Nos. 282, 273, 591, 583 and Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 31- were documented relocating to various positions both north and south of Mon State, effectively ringing NMSP territory. The threat of attack from all sides has led many to question the wisdom of relocating to NMSP-controlled IDP sites.

Nai Gon, a 40 year-old resident of Johaprao village, located in NMSP-controlled area in Mon State's Ye Township, agreed to an interview with HURFOM reporters in his village on the week of April 24th. He explained his fears regarding relocation:

“You know, it's very difficult to choose the destination, I mean choosing the safest places. We don't know which places are safer. Also, a leader of our village suggested traveling to the far eastern border, to Halockhane IDP site. This place now we currently live in cannot be called a ‘safe place’, because this location is very close to the Burmese battalions that are based in the Three Pagoda Pass [near Dooplaya District, where Burmese battalions are being stationed].”

Researchers learned that Tavoy District residents in possession of sufficient funds have opted to flee to presumably more secure cities in southern Mon State, such as Ye town. Mi Ah Jee, 37, a mother of three children reported to HURFOM from her home in Tavoy District, on April 18th, 2010. :

One of my neighbors and her family members arranged to flee to her native village, in northern Ye township. Of course she has money to spend for transportation from this place to her destination. As for us, we are just preparing to run like others.

On May 10th, 2010, a team of HURFOM reporters went to the Halockhane, Kyaiksoimon and Blehdonphite resettlement sites on the Thailand-Burma border to gather updated numbers of arrivals and information about the newest Tavoy District additions to the camps. According to MRDC records as of the first of May, and comments from resettlement sites' committee members, 600 families had reached the three sites in search of shelter.

A HURFOM field reporter cited in his documentation of a visit to the Bledonphite site in early May:

We found about 200 families who were originally from the areas located close to New Mon State Party (NMSP) headquarters [in Tavoy District]. Women, elderly persons, under-aged children were included [in the new arrival lists]. Residents who live in Chedike, a village located on the way [from Tavoy District] to Halockhane IDP resettlement site are also packing up their belongings and leaving their homes, to avoid the military offensive that are going to occur in the area.

IDP Camps:

Many residents of IDP camps along the Thailand-Burma border have resided in these sites for over a decade. Between 1989-1990 Burmese troops attacked and overran Three Pagodas Pass, the hub of NMSP control along the Thailand-Burma border. According to figures from the Mon National Relief Committee [MNRC, re-named the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC)] in a year 2000 monthly report, over 12,000 civilians then fled to Thailand, and several Mon refugee camps were resultantly set up in Thailand's Sangkhlaburi District of Kanchanaburi Province. Following the ceasefire agreement in 1995, many refugees opted not return to their native villages deeper in Mon State, and decided instead to take up temporary residence at the Halockhane, Bee Ree and Tavoy resettlement sites. Over a decade later, at least 10,000 of these people continue to live at these three sites. These "resettlement sites" are in fact clusters of villages, and often resemble the native villages of their inhabitants, excepting for the fact that their population densities are higher and huts are clustered unusually close together.

According to the MRDC staff workers interviewed during April and May 2010, the Halockhane site, founded in 1994, includes Baleh-hanee, Kyaiksoimon, Balehdonphite, Hteewadoh, Kyaungkwee and Chedaik villages, although the area between and including Baleh-hanee and Kyaiksoimon villages is often referred to locally as Halockhane. The Bee Ree site, founded in 1996, includes Johaprao, Pananbein, Suwanaphum and Burksurk villages. The Tavoy site, also founded in 1996, includes Meipzeip, Kronebaing, Jaodon, Wengnaike and Torlawi villages. According to MRDC figures from January 2009, these sites are home to 3,896 people, 3,265 and 2,226 people respectively. The official MRDC numbers are without question lower than the actual population and include only those who receive aid from the organization. Not reflected, then, are children under 5, "dispersed families" who reside in the camps for shorter spans of time, and new arrivals.

Nai Chan Kohn, an administrator at the Baleh-hanee site told HURFOM's reporters during an interview in the third week of April 2010:

Most new arrival families are not registered by the MRDC [so they receive no support]. We receive new families from other places because of armed conflicts in the deep south of Mon State. When I go to Kyaiksoimon village, every month I find at least 3 or 4 new families building their huts.

IDP Camp Security



Individual donors providing foods at a school in Halacknee resettlement site

If the ceasefire agreement between NMSP and SPDC army *does* break down, the two groups will likely focus their energies on gaining and maintaining control of what are currently Mon and NMSP-controlled territories accorded to them in the 1995 ceasefire agreement. Most Mon resettlement sites are located in NMSP-controlled areas, and may become the sites of front-line offenses between the SPDC and the NMSP. Fearing such developments, most of the Mon, Karen and Tavoyan ethnic people who have been living in resettlement sites in Tavoy District have gradually fled to

presumably safer sites – the Halockhancee, Blehdonphite and Kyaiksoimon resettlement sites – located near the Thailand-Burma border.

A former NMSP intelligence member, who specializes in monitoring the stratagems and movements of SPDC forces predicted for HURFOM's field team during the 3rd week of April that should a war between NMSP and SPDC forces take place, the Halockhancee, Blehdonphite, and Kyaiksoimon resettlement sites will prove to be anything but secure, both for their long-term residents or any new arrivals.

This source was particularly concerned about the camps' proximities to Burmese military bases in Dooplaya District:

There is no guarantee for [the camps'] security. We passed a period of 15 years [since the ceasefire] but the military junta has created brigades and Infantry Battalions, in order to control these regions, at Three Pagodas Pass and Kyainnseikiyi, which are not so far from this area [these resettlement camps]. Then, during the ceasefire period, these resettlement sites are the sites where the Burmese troops and their supporters come frequently. I mean that these places are not strange to them. If they fight with a lot of forces, there is no place to flee except to Thailand.

On the date of HURFOM's reporters' May 10th interview session at Halockhancee, the majority of the new arrivals were women and children. Many of these recent arrivals reported that their fathers and husbands had advised them to flee from Tavoy District in advance of themselves, ensuring that women and children could reach the camp before rainy season, when travel is difficult.

This strategy also allows farmers to care for and earn incomes from rubbers plantation and rice crops that would otherwise be abandoned during a flight to the Thailand-Burma border. While risky, this option is in fact really the only means by which families of new arrivals have any chance of making incomes. MRDC workers interviewed by HURFOM in April explained that the new arrivals from NMSP-controlled territory currently make up a mere 10% of the population already previously settled in IDP camps along the Thai-Burma border. Finding employment in the camps is nearly impossible.

The information by HURFOM's field reporters during the April 27th and 28th interviews shows that most of the recent arrivals in the camp had been touched by pre-ceasefire abuses; previous experience had prompted many to make the moves into IDP camps along the Thailand-Burma border, despite the financial risks involved. Nai Tin, a 64 year-old Johaprao resident, who fled from the NMSP controlled area with the whole family since April 22, told HURFOM that pre-ceasefire trauma had influenced his family's decision to flee:

The situation before the ceasefire was terrible. When the military entered a village, you had to prepare to run. You have to be involved in portering. You were inquired about the rebels. If you could not speak Burmese fluently, you would be bound and hit. If you were unlucky, you would be shot. A lot of my friends died in front of me in this way. We were afraid of the Burmese, and did not dare to face them. Now, the Mon and Burmese are having conflicts. Even the high-rank leaders of the NMSP are collecting their property and starting to move [from NMSP controlled territory in Tavoy District], so we have to do the same, because if we do not move, we are very stupid. We already know that this place [.....camp] is not safe if there is a battle, but we have to play it by ear.

Current circumstances and needs of of Halockhancee and Blehdonphite resettlement sites

Since the arrival of the first wave of Tavoy District IDPs in April 2010, supplies at the Halockhancee and Blehdonphite have become increasingly strained. Shelter is limited – reporters learned from MRDC sources in April that the new arrivals are being housed in monasteries in the camps. Aid workers and residents of the camps alike report that without immediate reinforcements of food, water, and other necessary items, the camps will face an immediate supply crisis.

Said a volunteer from a private donor group, who asked to remain anonymous:

According to our research, the camps' most urgent needs are: a basic water supply system and a drinking water supply system, a sanitation system, average daily food supplies for 600 people, huts or some

kind of shelter, medicine, and clothes. We did a field study and this list of needs was made when we were arranging to help them [the new camp arrivals] as best we could.

Beyond the tangible necessities of food, water, and medicine, residents at the two camps are becoming increasingly concerned about long-term needs, should the new arrivals from Tavoy District opt to remain in Halockhancee or Blehdonphite for extended periods of time. Large numbers of the new arrivals are children under the age of 18, and the educational needs of this under aged population have yet to be addressed.

A male teacher from Blehdonphite resettlement village, shared his worries about the camps' education systems:

We don't know how deep the friction is and can't predict when the war starts. One is sure, that children and ladies have to stay here till the situation calms down. I don't want children to feel sad whenever there is a battle. Now, even though they have to flee from their homes, I want to provide them, as best I can, with educational support wherever they are. Now, I am teaching the children poems and literature in the compound of this monastery. I guess that most of them cannot attend the school when the schools start with the rainfall. I suggest that supporting materials [for teaching] are needed to create a chance to continue their education.

Many interviewees indicated that a deadly health crisis could quickly develop within the two camps without an immediate response to the two sites' supply needs. Nai Bai who has lived in Halockhancee for over 10 years and was born in Paukpingwin, Yebyu Township, told HURFOM that he was concerned about the effects of malnutrition in the camp:

The basic foods, (I mean rice, cooking oil, salt, fish paste, etc;) shelters, and medicine are needed. Some groups of children lack food. They have no money to purchase food. It will be very bad if they are ill. If donors don't want to make donations after the [potential] battle, these children and people will die of hunger and malnutrition. There are many examples of people dying while running from war, even if there is no war. We want to say nothing if there is a job to do. However, even the people who are already here do not have a certain job, so they could earn no money.

Economic Impacts of War

Flight from villagers' native communities is proving to be financially problematic. Those who have resettled at IDP camps rarely find replacements for the jobs and the regular incomes they enjoy at home. Tavoy District residents who have fled with their families include farmers and investors in rubber and betel-nut plantations. To document the economic impacts of their flights from their communities, HURFOM field reporters met with both plantation owners who have fled, and those who have chosen to remain in their properties.

Many of those who have relocated to NMSP controlled resettlement sites in April and May 2010 are attempting to continue farming according to traditional methods, although some have had to resort to working on others' plantations in order to earn a living. Many must supplement their incomes with food rations.

Mi Tin Sein, 47, a Meetzeap village resident from Tavoy District, and mother of 4 who currently lives in Blehdonphite, told HURFOM about her family's struggle to maintain its livelihood:

"In the past in Meetzeap village, our paddy field would provide for 8 months. We farmed and harvested it ourselves and kept the rice seeds. We all did the work with a family spirit, and so we got everything done. When we realized we would have to flee, we immediately hid some rice. My husband is now going back for that rice, and if possible he will arrange to transport that rice here. If we leave the rice where it is hidden, we worry that if there's a battle, the Burmese Army will destroy the rice once they find it. We had a similar experience before the ceasefire. In this new place, we can't farm anything, and so we have to depend on the support of the Mon Relief and Development Committee for 10 – 15 years in the past. If we are to continue living here, the rice from the Mon Relief and Development Committee is essential for us."

Nai Myo, 44, who has lived in Johabrao village for 9 years, but was born in Magyi, Southern Ye, told HURFOM that he felt as though his family's rubber crop had been wasted during their flight from the village:

As you know, we Mon are people who are often in the plantation business. When even the NMSP President moved from our village, most of the villagers felt there was no security for them and so they fled here without taking care of their rubber and betel plants. There are many plantations, valued at 200-400 millions kyat at current prices. We arranged to sell the plantations when we heard about the instability, but we're no longer able to, as the buyer too has been deterred. Although the plantations can still produce a lot of rubber, we feel that we've got nothing for all our effort over the years, because we had to flee as soon as

we saw the Burmese soldiers coming. Our loss pales in comparison to some; for we had only two acres but Nai Tin Aye, from Johaprao, had 20. The most important thing for me is that I am still alive. I wish the fighting would end and that the situation would become stable, so that I could leave my family here and go back to work. If fighting breaks out, I will lose my plantation. The military is sure to seize it.

Some heads of household have continued their work to the extent possible, while sending their families to the Thailand-Burma border, and preparing to flee in the event of Burmese troops arriving at their villages. Most of the individuals left behind work at rubber plantations; in late April 2010, only 40 households had remained in Johaprao and Pananbein villages, in Tavoy district near NMSP headquarters.

Mi Ange, 28 years-old, a mother of two who lives in Phalan village and arrived at Blehdonphite on April 24th told HURFOM's reporter that her father and husband had both opted to stay behind:

My father and my husband remained in the village, but they always hear military movements while they are working. If the situation deteriorates they will flee and rejoin the family in order to avoid war. Or else we'll all starve because there is nothing here.

Impacts on Local Businesses



New arrivals at Halacknee resettlement site receive rations at a school in the camp

once the season when we could work had ended and the rains began. Now, although the road is not yet closed, passenger numbers are very low, since rumors of a coming war began even before the Songkran festival. There are more cars than passengers, and so, many cars are left idle. The situation is so bad, we now offer to take passengers on the short Sangkhlaburi to Halockhanee route, but even then we're still waiting for passengers to hire us".

Locals say that the current situation has had not only a direct impact on the transportation business, but also an indirect effect on the commodity market, which includes raw and high-value materials. The transportation problem particularly affects villagers living near the NMSP-controlled resettlement village of Blehdonphite who make their living producing charcoal and collecting broom sedge grasses.

Ma Than Nu, an ethnic Tavoyan woman who lives near Blehdonphite, told HURFOM that the costs of transportation have now overridden any financial gains she once would have made selling charcoal:

It is difficult for us because we produce charcoal and that is a seasonal business. Usually we transport it by hiring Ye-Phalan passenger cars. We earn enough money to feed ourselves after paying the costs of crossing the MNSP and DKBA checkpoints and meeting our labor and transport costs. There are one or two cars but they don't work. If you want to go, you have to hire the whole car. But this fee is equal to what we would get from selling the charcoal, so it's not economical for us. We don't know when the war will come, so we don't know how to plan for the future.

As both sides prepare for war, the deteriorating relationship between the MNSP and SPDC has had a negative impact on the transportation industry and a knock-on effect on food and other business costs.

From late April until early of May car transportation and commodity exchange figures declined, causing hardship especially for those employed as drivers. According to Nai Ba Lai, 43, a driver based on the Thai-Burma border:

We drivers usually come together to make the Halockhanee-Phalan Road passable each year. We have to pay an annual tax to the NMSP. In the past, we could afford this tax and had enough left

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: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

Land Seizure

Since the 1995 ceasefire agreement between the Burmese military regime and the NMSP, the residents living in the Tavoy District villages of Johaprao, Pananbein, Nyisar, and Suvanaphum, near NMSP headquarters, have cultivated "long term plantations", such as, rubber, fruits, betel nuts and traditional hub. About 15,000 Mon residents have lived in these villages since the 1995 ceasefire, thinking their labor-intensive crops safe thanks to the ceasefire's anti-land seizure mandates. The looming end of the ceasefire agreement has made many Tavoy planters fear that their 15 year-long efforts at establishing themselves are wasted.

Nai Min Thein, a 52 year-old merchant, who lives in NMSP controlled area, predicted a grim image of plantation seizure to HURFOM's reporters:

If it [a war] happens, they [the Burmese troops] will seize the plantations. They will build up brigades to produce rubber to fund themselves, or they will hire the people from upper Burma to work on the plantations. For example, you can see them seizing plantations in Ayutaung and Kaloh villages in Ye Township. There, they have no destroyed the rubber plantations which give them a daily income.

Indeed, the vast majority of the new IDPs are rubber tree cultivators who face leaving their valuable plantations at the mercy of the Burmese troops if they flee to safety. According to a 55 year old resident from Phalan village, in Ye township, there are more than 5,000 acres of rubber and 3,000 acres of betel nut in NMSP administrated area near the party's [located near the Head Quarter zone]. Most plantations belong to the members of the NMSP, community leaders and ordinary villagers living in Johaprao, Pananbein, Phalan, Nyisar and Suvanaphum villages. A 34 year old NMSP private from Chedaik explained to HURFOM's reporters that these rubber plantations are the main sources of many recent IDP's incomes. Some households are able to earn between 7,000 and 10,000 kyat per day by selling their rubber products in Ye township. The loss of such funds has been devastating to many.

The plantation owners that HURFOM interviewed often became very emotional when discussing the potential loss of their crops; many told HURFOM's field reporters that the loss of their crops felt as though all of their efforts to rebuild Mon State's economy in the 15 years since the ceasefire had been wasted.

A 46 year old ethnic Mon woman from Phalan village in NMSP-controlled area, who told HURFOM that she and her husband had been forced to abandon their 8-acre rubber plantation, cried as she explained:

As a long plants cultivator, I am very disappointed because all of my efforts between 10 years gone like pouring water in the sand.

Conclusion

While the social and economic gains accorded to residents of southeastern Burma for the last 15 years might fall sadly short of those they were supposed to gain through the NMSP's 1995 ceasefire agreement, a break in this agreement has the potential to send the region spiraling into a scene of widespread human rights violations and economic strife. Mass migration and resettlement is already disrupting long-established communities NMSP-controlled areas in Southern Ye Township and Tavoy District. IDP sites along the Thailand-Burma border are



New arrivals at the Bledon Phite site receiving rations at a monestary, where they are being housed

threatened internally from overcrowding and insufficient supplies, and externally from insecure locations and nearby SPDC military battalion bases. Economic and agricultural losses have left hundreds of new IDPs desperate to recapture their incomes for the year; land seizures threaten to undo 15 years of growth.

In light of interviews, statistics, and commentaries collected by HURFOM's reporters between the months of April and May 2010, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland believes that immediate measures must be taken to prepare IDP sites situated on the Thailand-Burma border for an even greater influx of displaced individuals, should a break in the NMSP's ceasefire agreement with the SPDC lead to war in the near or distant future. Increased funds from the TBBC and international donors are needed in order to gain increased supplies of food, water, medicine, and other necessary items. The sites' proximities to Burmese military bases must be considered, and the sites' security must be made a top priority of the NMSP within any military stratagem that it might plan.

Without a ceasefire agreement to protect the welfare of its citizens, Mon State and southeastern Burma are threatened with a return to the very problems that the NMSP sought to eliminate through the ceasefire agreement made over a decade ago; years of economic development and social change will be, in essence, as wasted as "water poured into the sand".

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