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NMSP Agrees To New Round of Peace Talks, Holds out on Ceasefire

By Azan, Kaowao: January 27, 2012

The New Mon State Party (NMSP), a prominent ethnic armed group, will participate in another round of peace talks with the Burmese government beginning on the first of February in Moulmein, capital of Mon State, according to sources from the NMSP.

Nai Hong Sar Pon Khaing, NMSP spokesperson said that his party has already appointed Nai Rot Sa, the party’s vice chairman, to lead the delegation for the talks.

“This round of talks might not be the time for us to sign a ceasefire agreement. However, this could eventually lead to an agreement if we get the points that we want from the talks,” said Nai Hong Sar Pon Khaing.

The peace mission will include seven leaders from the NMSP, as well as Mon community leaders from Mon State including Mon Buddhist monks, according to the NMSP.

The NMSP held its first peace talk with Aung Min, Burmese Railway Minister, on December 22 in Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand.

Even though the party has said that they expect no advantage from accepting a new ceasefire with the Burmese government, the NMSP may have no option but to agree to a truce in the meantime, as many other major ethnic armed groups, such as United Wa State Army, Karen National Union and Shan State Army-South, have signed ceasefires with Naypyidaw.
In particular, the ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burmese government is seen to have pressured the NMSP to have a ceasefire soon, as both the KNU and NMSP are based in areas near each other along the Thai border.

NMSP leaders say that they would still like to abide by the policy of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which is to only agree to a nationwide ceasefire first, and then hold political talks between the Burmese government and the ethnic groups together as a group.

However, Nai Hong Sar, Secretary of the NMSP, said that the policy of UNFC was weakened after the KNU and the Chin National Front agreed to individual ceasefires with the government.

“If we ethnic groups are united, we can tell them how we want to solve our conflicts. But it is impossible now as some groups have already taken ceasefires,” said Nai Hong Sar. The disunity among the ethnic armed groups has been taken as an opportunity by the Burmese government to create misunderstanding, distrust, and divisions among the ethnic groups, said critics.

Mon community leaders said that the NMSP should hold firm to the principle of having a nationwide ceasefire, while also demanding the release of Min Nay Win (aka Nai Yekha) and Min Myo Thwe, two prominent Mon political prisoners who remain behind bars serving life sentences.

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Mon Leaders Discuss Possible Parliament
By Azan, Kaowao: January 24, 2012
The Mon will establish a new parliament in the future after having a long debate at the 6th Mon National Conference. While some people think parliament is too much to imagine, others believe that there should be a parliament in order to prepare for the future of Mon State.
Nai Htaw Mon, the chairman of New Mon State Party (NMSP) said that he did not agree to have a parliament while there was a need to do more to take consensuses from the Mon people in Mon State.

“We will have parliament like from an opera. Many people will laugh it,” he said.

However, Nai Kasauh Mon, the director of Human Rights Foundation of Monland said that the Mon should have a shadow parliament and he does not agree what Nai Htaw Mon said.

“There is a political change in Burma. We need to prepare for it,” he said.

Nai Khin Maung, who is the senior member of Mon National Democratic Front, and his party won five seats during 1990 election, said that there is too fanciful to establish a parliament for the Mon.
“If there is parliament, we need to have a government. Where is our government?” asked Nai Khin Maung.

The debate regarding the parliament lasted half a day at the conference while the Thai-Mon and the Mon overseas agreed there was a need to have a parliament.

The Thai-Mon proposed to let NMSP leaders lead at the government, but the NMSP leaders said that they will discuss with their members which of them are going to participate in the government of the new parliament.

The new parliament will take one year to write the constitution according to agreements stemming from the conference, an elected committee will draft the constitution and the establishment of the parliament it estimated takes 2 years.

This is the first time the community leaders of Mon considered establishing a parliament, however, they believed that the Mon should have a government even though it is not real one, but will act like a government.

The community leaders said that the current Burmese government has established their own government even though no one recognizes them. But, today they continue to run their government.

Therefore, the Mon community leaders said that they need to establish parliament in order to show the Burmese government that they are ready to run the Mon State.

The Mon held the Sixth Mon National Conference held at the Thai-Burmese border from Jan. 18 to 20, and about 100 ethnic Mons took part in the conference—not only representatives from Mon State, but also expat Mons, and some from the Thai-Mon community.

The participants discussed Mon affairs including ways to strengthen the Mon military, education, and where the Mon party lies with regard to the current wave of changes in Burma.

Ceasefires without Political Dialogue Will Not Solve Burma’s problems, Say Ethnic Leaders
By Azan, Kaowao: January 23, 2012
Without the government’s willingness to engage in genuine political talks with ethnic groups, ceasefires will be unable to solve Burma’s political problems, according to Nai Htaw Mon, Chairman of the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

Speaking at the 6th Mon National Conference, Nai Htaw Mon said, “It is easy to make a ceasefire, but it is difficult to have political talks. We [NMSP] took the ceasefire for 15 years, but there were no political talks [with the Burmese government] during that time.
“The ceasefire only resulted in a lot of our members resigning from our party. Our people blamed us after a lot of our troops resigned. Therefore, we do not want the ceasefire, actually,” said Nai Htaw Mon.

The NMSP viewed that there is no political advantage with a ceasefire, even though several other major ethnic armed groups have already agreed to ceasefires with the Burmese government, such as the Karen National Union, Shan State Army-South, and United Wa State Army.

From the political viewpoint of the NMSP leaders, the government wants to take advantage of ethnic armed groups through ceasefires, which the NMSP leaders said that the government only wants in order to get recognition from the international community by showing they are working towards peace in the country.

Some representatives at a recent conference encouraged the NMSP to hold talks with the government in order to improve the situation in Mon State, where there is currently a lot of illegal drug use among Mon youth. The representatives also believed that the NMSP should accept the ceasefire while the other ethnic armed groups hold peace talks with the government.

Nai Kasauh Mon, the Director of the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, based in Thailand, said, “There will be less value in peace talks if the NMSP does not take part in them while the other ethnic armed groups do.”

Nai Sunthorn, the Chairman of the Mon Unity League, based in Thailand, said that the NMSP should continue to request to have a nationwide ceasefire if there is an opportunity to have peace talks again.

Nai Htaw Mon said that he views that the main things the government needs to change is the 2008 Constitution, because the military was able to take all the main positions in the government.

The NMSP does not support the 2008 Constitution, and the leaders of the NMSP are concerned that if they accept a ceasefire with the government, the government will then force them to follow the undemocratic principles of the 2008 constitution.

“We believe that there will be inevitable confrontation with the government in the future unless the government changes the 2008 Constitution.

“They [the Burmese government] have had their political roadmap, which allowed us walk this road after we had the ceasefire. But we will not agree to walk on this road unless they change the constitution. So, this might lead to fighting again,” he said.

The NMSP leaders said that they do not want to fight with the Burmese army if it is possible, as the Mon people will suffer from the violence. Their main goal is to solve real the political conflict.
About 100 respected Mon leaders from Mon State, abroad, and the Thai-Mon border joined the three-day conference and discussed Mon affairs, including how to strengthen the military, education, and how to participate in new political opportunities in Burma.

Regarding potential peace talks, the NMSP has informed the Burmese government that they have free time to meet again after January 25. However, according to the party, the government’s representatives have not confirmed plans to meet.

Meanwhile, the Mon people have asked the NMSP to demand the Burmese government release Min Nay Win (aka Nai Yekha) and Min Myo Thwe, two remaining prominent Mon political prisoners who were sentenced to life in prison.

“I will continue to fight for our people’s freedom”

An interview with Ashin Zaw Latt
By Akar, Kaowao: January 17, 2012
Ashin Zaw Latt is a prominent Mon Buddhist monk who was arrested on January 7, 2010. He was incarcerated as a political prisoner after launching a poster campaign in Mon State encouraging people to oppose the 2010 elections. The military regime sentenced him to 15 years in prison, but he was released on January 13 as part of the Burmese government’s amnesty for 651 political prisoners. He is currently 30 years old, and hails from Mudoon Village, Chaungzone Township, Mon State.

Akar, an editor of Kaowao News, spoke with Ashin Zaw Latt after he arrived in Rangoon on his way back home to Mon State.

Are you still wearing your Buddhist robes?
Ashin Zaw Latt: I am still a Buddhist monk. But in prison I was not allowed to wear my monks’ robes. I will wear my robes again when I get to my village.

What are your future plans now that you are out from prison?
Ashin Zaw Latt: My aim is to be a good journalist. I need to study hard in order to be prepared. The reason why I want to be a good journalist is that our Mon media is very weak. Regarding news in our community, there is no big space for freedom. In order to have a developed Mon media, I believe that we all need to join hands to work for it.

Do you have any plans to be politically active?
Ashin Zaw Latt: I want to tell all of our Mon people to be active in politics. We still do not have our freedom yet. I will continue to fight for our people’s freedom, and I believe will be joined by other people. To have our freedom, we must all fight together.

How can you be eager to continue to be active in media and politics, as these were the things that got you sent to prison for over two years?
Ashin Zaw Latt: I need to continue to be active with these things, even if they put me in prison again. This is my straight decision. Media put me in prison for ten years [sentence]. Politics got me one year in prison. For distributing the Guiding Star newspaper, they sentenced me to four years in prison. They [the military government] charged me for three different charges, and sentenced me to fifteen years in prison total.

How did you feel while you were in prison?
Ashin Zaw Latt: They (Burmese authorities) transferred me from Insein Prison to Pathein Prison [in the Irrawaddy Division]. I saluted and sang the Mon national song every day after I arrived in Pathein, as I love our Mon people, and I also want our Mon people to struggle for our freedom, according to the song.

What do you want to say about the fact that two other prominent Mon political prisoners, Min Nay Win and Min Myo Thwe, were not released in the recent amnesty, and remain behind bars?

Ashin Zaw Latt: I thought all three of us would be released at the same time when I heard about the amnesty. We all will work together again after they are released. But, even without them, I am not discouraged. I will do everything that I can do.

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Photo Exhibition Highlights Difficult Lives of Children from Burma
By Azan, Kaowao: January 17, 2012

Twenty-three photos were sold during the first three days of a photo exhibition of children from Burma held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which began on January 7, according to Hong Sar, an ethnic Mon photographer whose works are included in the exhibit.

Each 8”x12” photo in the show is priced at 600 baht. However, some people who came to the exhibition paid more than the requested sales price, as all proceeds will be donated to help children from Burma.

The photo exhibition, titled “Dreams of Lost Children”, is fundraising event for children. The photos will be on display through the end of this month at Chiang Mai’s Second Floor Gallery and Café. The photos in the exhibition highlight the true life of Burmese children staying in poor conditions among abandoned garbage in a rural area near Mae Sot, Tak Province.

Photographer Hong Sar says, “I intended to highlight the lives of these poor children in order to get more attention from other people. The people [who see the photos] may be able to find ways to help them.

“There are children who have no parents living there. As they do not have parents, they have to struggle hard in their lives. I feel people should not ignore these poor children.

“If we all just ignore these children, it will be easy these children to fall into the hands of human traffickers,” he said.

Hong Sar is 28-years old, and is the first Mon photographer I know of to exhibit his work in Chiang Mai.

For him, he says that the camera is just a material. However, he uses his heart and memory to capture the type of images that he wants.

One of his favorite photos, which was also the first to sell on the first day of the exhibition, is of a child eating food among a pile of garbage at the dump. The child is eating alone, wearing only boots, and sitting in a squat position with a small spoon and plate.

“I had good feelings and emotions when I took this child’s photo. I knew people would respond to this image,” he said.

Born in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township of southern Karen State, Hong Sar’s family moved to Halockhani Mon Refugee Camp in 1998 after facing many human rights abuses.

Hong Sar’s father was a famous photographer in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi in the past. However, Hong Sar says that he would rather be a successful photographer than a famous one.

Two of his photographer friends, one from Indonesia and another from Lithuania, supported him to hold the photo exhibition, as he has had the dream for a long time, but could not afford the costs of the exhibition alone.
About fifty people attended the opening of the exhibition. All of the exhibited photos were taken during a three-month period in late 2011.

“I like being a photographer because one photo can tell many words to the people,” said Hong Sar.

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**Leading Mon Monk Released In Amnesty, Vows to Continue Political Activity**

By Akar and Azan, Kaowao: January 16, 2012

Monks sentenced to Burmese prisons are not allowed to wear their robes inside jail. Even though they are not allowed to wear their robes, they continue to function as monks according to Ashin Zaw Latt, a prominent Mon Buddhist monk, who was released from Pathein Prison on 13th January as part of Burmese President Thein Sein's amnesty for 651 prisoners.

Speaking by phone after he arrived in Rangoon from Pathein, Ashin Zaw Latt said that although he was wearing normal clothes, he was still a Buddhist monk.

“They did not allow the wearing of robes in prison. This is why I have to wear normal clothes. But, I will wear my robe again when I get back to my village,” he said.

Ashin Zaw Latt was sentenced to 15 years for giving inside information to exile Mon media in Thailand and for distributing and smuggling the Mon newspaper ‘Guiding Star’ and for participating in Mon politics.

Ashin Zaw Latt was arrested on January, 2010, and spent two years in prison. He is 30 years old now and is from Mudoon village, Chaungzone Township, Mon State.

“They sentenced me 10 years for giving news to outside media. They put me in prison for one year for political activity. I also got 4 years for I distributing the ‘Guiding Star’ Mon newspaper,” he said.

Even though he had to spend hard time in prison for two years, he said that he will continue to work with the media. His aim is to be a good Mon journalist, but he said that he needs to study more to be a good one.

“My aim is to be a good journalist. Our Mon media is still weak. We do not have a lot of space of freedom in our community. Therefore, I made the decision that I need to work on this,” he said.

Ashin Zaw Latt was transferred to Pathein Prison after he was sentenced for 15 years, which is far from Mon State, making it difficult for his family to visit.

To keep himself in high spirits in Pathein Prison, he said that he sang a Mon national song every day at 6 pm.

“I saluted and sang alone a Mon national song everyday at 6 pm in prison after I arrived in Pathein Prison as I would love for the Mon to have freedom,” he said.

The ethnic Mon in Burma do not have freedom yet, and he said that he will continue to fight for the people to have self government and join the people together.

“They (government) sent me to prison because I was involved in media and politics. But, I will not stop doing this now that I am free,” he said.

Meanwhile, two other Mon political prisoners have not been released yet in the amnesty despite the high hopes of Mon people. They are Min Nay Win (aka Nai Yekha) and Min Myo Thwe who were sentenced to life in prison.
“I thought three of us (he, Nai Yekha and Min Nay Win) would be released at the same time when I heard about the amnesty. We all will work together again after our release, I thought. But, even without them, I am not discouraged, I will continue to do whatever I can” said Ashin Zaw Latt.

Ashin Zaw Latt was Freed in an Amnesty of Burma
Kaowao: January 13, 2012
Ashin Zaw Latt, a Mon Buddhist monk who has been held as a political prisoner since 2010, was released from today Pathein Prison in an amnesty granted by Burmese President Thein Sein that freed 651 prisoners.

Speaking to Kaowao by phone from Mon State on Friday, Mi Dee Thar Win, a sister of the monk, said, “During noon time, he called me by phone and told me he was released. He will come back home by himself and no need to come and pick him up in Yangoon (Rangoon).”

Ashin Zaw Latt was arrested on January, 2010 and he was 30 years old now from Mudoon village, Chaungzone Township.

Ashin Zaw Latt was arrested on January 7, 2010 and he was sentenced for 15 years in Insein Prison, from the Insein Prison court in Rangoon after the military regime accused him of opposing the 2010 election launched poster campaigns in Mon State.

He was charged the others acts as well, such for violating “Electricity Act”, 4 years for Publication Act and 1 year for disturbing the security and peace of the state.

The broken “Electricity Act” refers to the cache of computers, printers, and hard drives that the defendant had stored in his residence at the time of his arrest.

Meanwhile, Min Nay Win (aka Nai Yekha) and Min Myo Thwe who were Mon political prisoners, have not been released yet according to their families and the two persons are still being kept at Insein Prison in Rangoon.

NMSP Will Not Discuss Ceasefire until Fighting Ends in Kachin State
By Azan, Kaowao: January 12, 2012
The New Mon State Party (NMSP) will not meet with Burmese Minister of Railways Aung Min this month to discuss a ceasefire between the armed group and the central government, as the Tatmadaw continues with its military offensive in Kachin State, according to Mon sources.

“We have no plans to meet Aung Min because they [the Burmese government] have ignored our demand to stop fighting in Kachin State,” said Nai Hong Sar, the secretary of NMSP.

Aung Min requested a meeting with leaders of NMSP during the peace talks in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, on December 23.

“Our policy is based on the decision of the UNFC [United Nationalities Federal Council]. We will not enter into a ceasefire alone. Instead of having an advantage, we are worried that we will have a disadvantage if we take the ceasefire individually,” said Nai Hong Sar.

NMSP and Mon community leaders have doubts about the Burmese government’s intentions to have peace talks individually with various ethnic armed groups while continuing to fight against the Kachin Independence Army.

The NMSP has asked the Burmese government to declare a nationwide ceasefire in order to bring peace to the entire country.
“They [the current government] are still acting the same as the previous military regime, as they came from the military,” said Nai Hong Sar.

In 1995, the NMSP agreed to a ceasefire with the Burmese military regime that lasted 15 years, but no political talks ever took place during the ceasefire period, even though the military regime had agreed to hold such talks with the NMSP.

The NMSP proposed to have a federal system in Burma at the national convention for political reforms in the country, but members of the military regime turned down the proposal at that time.

The current Burmese government told NMSP leaders to sign a ceasefire agreement, and has encouraged them to participate in the country’s political processes in order to propose rights for the Mon people at parliaments. However, the NMSP leaders view that no genuine political change in Burma is possible while the government’s forces continue to detain political prisoners and continue to fight against the Kachin.

The NMSP concluded their 8th Congress on January 3, which was held for three weeks at the party’s headquarters. During the congress, one executive committee member of NMSP, Nai Shwe Thein, retired.

Members of the party elected three new central executive committee members. The party also elected eight new central committee members during the congress.

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KNU Instructs KNLA troops Not to Fire on Government Forces
By Azan, Kaowao: January 10, 2012

The Karen National Union (KNU), which has been engaged in civil war with the Burmese military for over 60 years, has instructed personnel of its armed branch, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), not to fire on government troops amid ongoing peace talks with the national government, according to Karen sources.

Speaking to Kaowao on Monday, Captain Htat Nay of KNLA Brigade 6 said, “They [KNU leaders in Dooplaya District or Kawkareik Township] sent a telegraph to us on January 2 instructing us not to begin fighting or disturb government troops while the troops travel along the roads in Karen areas during the peace talk process.

“Therefore, Light Infantry Battalion No. 283 from the government’s Military Southeast Command safely arrived on January 8 in Three Pagodas Pass from Moulmein, without encountering fighting with our troops.”

Usually, government troops traveling from Moulmein to Three Pagodas Pass face attacks in KNU-controlled areas, and many government troops have been killed by KNLA troops from ambushes along the roads.

On January 2, KNU also requested ideas from all of its members for possible peace talk agreements with the government, to Captain Htat Nay.

“We all agreed them to let them talk with the government in order to find a political solution because during the 60 years of fighting, there has been very little local development in our community, such as economic, social, education, and religious.
“As consequence of fighting for over 60 years, our Karen people have suffered a lot of human rights abuses,” added Captain Htat Nay.

The KNU says it will continue to hold peace talks with the Burmese government despite the continuation of human rights abuses, including ongoing forced labor, in Karen State.

The Burmese government peace delegation led by Aung Min, Railway Minister, met KNU leaders on December 22 last year, which was the first time the two sides had held peace talks.

Meanwhile, KNLA Brigade 6 has condemned as a terrorist action the bomb that killed four people and wounded over forty others on January 7 at a Karen festival in Anan Kwin village in Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, southern Karen State.

Brigade 6 has issued orders for KNLA personnel to take action against anyone found to be responsible for the bomb, saying, “it is an inhumane action against the Karen people who were enjoying their Buddhist religion”.

Bomb Explosion at Pagoda Festival Kills Four
By Azan, Kaowao: January 9, 2012
A bomb exploded at a pagoda festival on January 7 in Anan Kwin Village, Kyar Inn Seik Gyi Township, Karen State, according to Karen sources. Four people were killed, while about forty others were injured. The bomb exploded around 11 pm at a restaurant in a corner of the festival site while an opera troupe was performing for festival attendees, according to an ethnic Mon who drove a car from Three Pagodas to Anan Kwin for the festival.

“All of those who died were Karen,” he said.

It is unknown who detonated the bomb at the festival. In the meantime, many people are angry that the bomb killed innocent people, according to the driver.

“Many people are angry about this. They are saying, ‘Let them fight each other if they want, [let government troops and troops from Karen armed groups fight each other], but they should not target civilians’,” said the car driver.

Anan Kwin Village is under the control of Burmese government troops from the Military Operations Command (MOC) No.19, which is under the control of the Military Southeast Command in Moulmein.

Meanwhile, the troops from MOC No. 19 have blocked all vehicles from traveling in the area due to the ongoing bomb investigation. This is causing problems for people who traveled to the village from Three Pagodas Pass in Thanbyuzayat Township.

The village celebrates with an annual festival to let the villagers enjoy entertainment and opera performances. The incident is the first time a bomb has killed innocent civilians amid ongoing peace talks between the Karen National Union and the Burmese government.
Mon Community Leaders Express Concern Over Peace Talks
By Azan, Kaowao: December 27, 2011

Leaders of the Mon community told the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to be cautious about making a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government, as they observed that there were no differences between the NMSP’s recent meeting with Burmese Minister of Railways Aung Min and previous peace talks with Burma’s former premier and spy chief Gen. Khin Nyunt.

Nai Sunthorn, chairman of the Thailand-based Mon Unity League, said, “Do not be optimistic regarding the peace talk with Aung Min. I told him (Nai Hong Sar) that there were no differences between the peace talks with Aung Min and Khin Nyunt.”

When the NMSP agreed to a ceasefire in 1995, Gen. Khin Nyunt told the NMSP to express their wishes regarding the rights of the Mon people to the Burmese government at the national convention.

“The NMSP proposed reforms, but they turned them down at that time. Now, Aung Min has told the NMSP to once again request new rights for the Mon people in parliament. They (the Burmese government) may do the same thing,” said Nai Sunthorn.

Burmese Minister of Railways Aung Min met with the NMSP leaders in Sangkhlaburi on December 22 for the first round of peace talks.

Nai Tin Aung, a peace negotiator and a former executive committee member of NMSP, said that he was very optimistic following the talk and that he wanted to encourage the NMSP to hold another talk in January.

Even the secretary of NMSP, Nai Hong Sar, was happy about the meeting, as it gave him a chance to propose what he wanted.

Nai Kao Rot, the former deputy army chief of the Mon National Liberation Army, was less optimistic, saying, “We should learn from the past. We should not believe or follow what they say.”

Meanwhile, some Mon community leaders that have resettled overseas have told the NMSP to measure the difference between the benefits to be gained by the signing of the new ceasefire and those conferred by the previous agreement. They suggested that if there is no difference in benefits received, the NMSP should not accept the ceasefire.

The NMSP signed a ceasefire agreement with the regime in 1995. The ceasefire broke down in 2010 when the NMSP refused to join the Border Guard Force, a proposal by the Burmese government that would have incorporated armed ethnic groups along the border under governmental control. During the 15 years that the ceasefire was in place, there were no political discussions aimed at solving the political conflict in Mon State.

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Christmas Fire Destroys More Than 100 Homes in Mon State
By Akar, Kaowao: December 27, 2011

Approximately 124 homes were destroyed by a large fire in Zin Kyaik Village, Paung Township, Mon State, on December 25, according to sources from Mon State.

Speaking to Kaowao by phone from Mon State, an official from the Burmese government in Paung Township said, “About 993 people became homeless and the value of the houses that were destroyed is over 90 million kyat.”
The fire started around 11 pm from an electrical problem inside a house in the village, said the official. “I went there to have a look this morning [December 26]. Most houses were nice houses that were burned down. The firefighters could not put out the fire as there was a lot wind,” said the source.

The location of the home where the fire started was east of the railway. Ten homes burned very quickly, then the fire moved to the west of the railway and destroyed the houses that reside along the railway, according to residents.

About ten firefighting trucks from Zin Kyaik, Paung, Thaton, Mottama, and Moulmein came to stop the fire, which was finally put out on December 26 around 6 am.

The Burmese authorities have created temporary camps for the victims who lost their homes, and the authorities have also provided food and clothing.

Zin Kyaik Village is 255 miles from Rangoon and 24 miles from Moulmein. The village contains about 3,000 houses in all.

NMSP and Burmese Government Take First Step Towards Ceasefire Agreement
By Akar, Kaowao: December 22, 2011
Upon concluding a peace talk with the New Mon State Party (NMSP) today in Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi province, Aung Min, Minister of Railways and peace negotiator for the Burmese government, told journalists that he would do whatever he could in order to achieve peace in Burma.
Aung Min said that he was very satisfied with his meeting with NMSP leaders and announced that he would hold one more talk with NMSP in January with the aim of signing a peace treaty.
“I trust them and they trust me. I am very satisfied with this meeting,” Aung Min reported.
Speaking at a press conference after the meeting, the secretary of NMSP, Nai Hong Sar, said that his delegation requested that Aung Min encourage the Burmese government to arrange a nationwide ceasefire, end fighting in the Kachin area, release political prisoners, and allow the teaching of the Mon language in public schools and the official use of the language in governmental departments.
He said that his delegation also proposed a three-step permanent peace process that would involve the building of trust through ceasefire agreements, political discussions with all ethnic groups in Burma, and the proposal of constitutional amendments to the parliaments based on agreements reached through the discussions.
The NMSP also proposed the establishment of liaison offices and an agreement by which Burmese and NMSP troops would inform one another when entering into each other’s respective territories. The party suggested that these developments take place with the initial establishment of the ceasefire.
Nai Hong Sar said, “We cannot say that we are completely satisfied with the meeting today. It can only serve to build trust.”

In regards to the peace talk today, two respected Mon Buddhist monks that participated in the meeting said that they have doubts based on Aung Min’s statements at the meeting. The two monks said that Aung Min told Nai Hong Sar that the government would be willing to have political discussions soon after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, suggesting that the first step in the process would only involve a peace agreement.

According to the monks, Nai Hong Sar revealed that he has doubts regarding the prospect of political talks by pointing out to Aung Min that political discussions never took place following the previous ceasefire agreement between the NMSP and the Burmese government. The NMSP signed a ceasefire agreement with the regime in 1995. The ceasefire broke down in 2010 when the NMSP refused to join the Border Guard Force, a proposal by the Burmese government that would have incorporated armed ethnic groups along the border under governmental control.

Activists Raise Concerns Over Thai PM’s Visit to Burma
By Azan: December 21, 2011
Burmese rights activists are concerned about the upcoming two-day visit to Burma by Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, during which Yingluck hopes to further development plans with the Burmese government.

Saw Frankie, a Karen environmentalist working for Another Development for Burma (ADFB), said that development projects from Thailand frequently move to Burma as the initiators do not have to pay a lot of attention about the effects the projects have on the livelihoods of Burmese people.

“They have to pay a lot of attention to the impact their development projects in Thailand as Thailand is a democracy, and the people of Thailand know how to fight for their rights when development projects adversely affect their lives,” he said.

“They do not have to care about this in Burma,” he added.

Burmese human rights activists report that that there are ongoing human rights abuses in the Tavoy area where currently the Italian-Thai Development (ITD) company from Thailand is implementing a massive development project in Tavoy named the Tavoy Deep Seaport and Economic Zone.

According to ADFB, which is closely observing the situation of human rights abuses related to the Tavoy project, there are about 1,880 houses in five large villages located at the site of the planned economic zone site, and the relocation of 12,700 people will be necessary.

The company plans to relocate the affected villagers to Pawa Village in the northwest of Tavoy. The company has built houses for the victims of forced relocation, but the structures are different sizes and quality, which causes concern for the people about what type of houses they will receive from the company as compensation.

The Burmese and Thai governments agreed in May 2008 to begin construction on the Technical Zone of the Tavoy Deep Seaport, which allowed ITD to begin implementation of the project.

The project is eight times larger than the Map Ta Phut Industrial Zone in Rayong, Thailand, which is run by the same company, according to the Foundation for Ecological Recovery. Map Tha Phut is estimated to have cost some 370 billion baht (US $10.5 billion), while the
Tavoy project is estimated at around 303 billion baht ($8.6 billion).
Thai environmentalists are worried for the Burmese people who will be affected by the project, and who may be unaware of the full environmental affects.

Environmentalists said that Burmese people may face similar issues to the local people in Thailand who contracted cancer from poisoned water as a result of the Map Ta Phut project. Rights activists said that development plans from Thailand should ensure the health, safety, and desires of the Burmese people rather than only taking care of agreements with the Burmese government.

Nai Aue Mon, the coordinator of Human Rights Documentation and Dissemination Project from the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, said, “ITD has ignored the rights of the people, and the company has done whatever it wants to do to the people after they got the agreement from the Burmese government to implement the project.

“It is important to know how to fulfill the desires of the people. They should not ignore the rights of the people,” he said.

Media and Press Freedom Continue to be Limited in Burma’s Parliaments
By Azan: December 17, 2011

Media and press freedom are not balanced in Burma’s Parliament as the media is only infrequently briefed by members of parliament, even though there are details of talks mentioned in newspapers from the government’s higher officials, said an ethnic Mon member of Burma’s Upper House of Parliament.

“The media is not allowed to publish the details of what we talk at parliament. However, they publish everything when the higher ministers talk,” said Banyar Aung Moe, an elected member of the Amyotha Hluttaw, or House of Nationalities, from Ye Township in Mon State.

He said that press freedom still faces an uphill battle in Burma’s parliaments, as the media is unable to report what the majority of parliamentarians discuss in parliament.

Many members of Burma's Upper House of Parliament have in mind that they want to have political change in Burma. However, there are also some members of parliament who would be happy to continue with Burma’s military system of government.

“They like power as they know that they have benefits from it. There are hardliners as well in parliament who do not want to look toward the future generation,” the Mon parliamentarian said.

As a member of the All Mon Region Democracy Party, the only ethnic Mon party in parliament, Banyar Aung Moe said that he will continue to propose the rights of ethnic people, even though the government has tried to postpone the issue from being discussed at parliament.

“I will keep proposing the issue of ethnic rights at parliament whether they like it or not. There should be equal rights and self-determination for the ethnic people,” he said.
Although Burma's new government has recently made some tentative political and economic reforms, there has been no change in the attitude of the country's leaders toward the decades-old ethnic issues, according to prominent Mon politicians.

Nai Hong Sar, Secretary of the New Mon State Party said, “The government has changed the flow of democracy. But, we do not see anything yet that they have done to promote the rights of Burma's ethnic people.”

Ethnic People Organize Charity Concert in Denmark to Benefit Kachin Refugees
By Azan: December 14, 2011
Ethnic people from Burma, including Mon and Chin people, held a charity concert in Denmark to raise funds for Kachin refugees who have fled to the Chinese border following recent fighting between Kachin and Burmese government troops.

Nai Htaw Monzel, an organizer of the concert, said that over 100 people joined the concert, including many local Danish people. The event raised 11,689 Danish krone ($2,071 US) to help the refugees.

Svaneke Bryghus, a well-known producer of beer in Denmark, and a shop called Netto offered free beer and juice to the Mon and Chin activists during the concert.

“We do not intend to raise a lot of money from the concert. We just intend to let other people know about the situation in Burma – especially in Kachin State where there is currently intense fighting and a lot of human right abuses,” Nai Htaw Monzel said.

During the concert, the organizers showed video and photos taken in Kachin areas where human rights abuses have forced tens of thousands of Kachin refugees to flee to the Chinese border.

There are over 200 ethnic Mon and Chin from Burma living in Denmark as refugees who have resettled in a third country.

Organizers said that they felt sad and moved to help when they saw recent news reports about Kachin refugees, so they came up the idea to hold the concert, which was led by a Chin singer.

During the event, some Mon and Chin youth sang modern songs, including Burmese songs, while Mon children also performed traditional dances.

“Mon and Kachin are different ethnic groups. We have different literature and culture, and even our religious beliefs are different. But there is one thing is similar between us, which is that we are oppressed by the military government,” said Nai Baw Koug, another organizer of the concert.

“Therefore, we need to help each other,” he said.

Fighting broke out in June in Burma’s northern Kachin State, which is partly controlled by the Kachin Independence Army and its political wing, the Kachin Independence Organisation, after a 17-year ceasefire was broken.

Meanwhile, Refugees International is extremely concerned for the safety of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) that are living in various camps in KIO-controlled areas whose shelters and camps are directly between the Burmese army and the KIO bases, said Lynn Yoshikawa, Refugees International's Southeast Asia Advocate.
"The conflict in Kachin State requires both immediate humanitarian assistance and long-term assistance," she told a news conference in Bangkok, after a recent visit to Myitkyina, the state capital, and other ethnic areas.

Aid agencies and sources in the area estimate between 30,000 and 40,000 people are living in makeshift jungle camps in KIO-controlled areas not accessible to many aid organizations, including the United Nations.

NMSP to Hold Party’s Congress
By Azan: December 11, 2011

The New Mon State Party (NMSP) will hold its party’s congress on December 21 to elect new leadership and to analyze the current political situation. Significant policy changes in order to strengthen the party’s political standing will also be discussed, according to party leaders.

The meeting of members of congress is held one time every three years according to the party’s system. Leaders expect this year’s congress meeting will take about two weeks.

“This congress is important for our party’s members. Every member of our party has the right to be elected as leaders of the party and to have the right to vote for who they like,” said Nai Hong Sar Born-khuing, a spokesperson of the NMSP.

The party’s congress will hold in Bee Ree River, Ye Township, Mon State, at the headquarters of NMSP. About 100 representative party members are expected to join the congress.

“Our system is five people are represented by one person who is going to attend the congress. Those who are temporary or partial members of the party cannot attend or present at congress,” said the spokesperson.

The NMSP uses the democratic decentralization system within the party, which was established in 1958.

During the congress, members of the party will analyze what they have done in the past three years, and they are also going to analyze the rule of law in party. The party usually uses a voting system to elect the new leadership during the final days of the congress. This will result in a shuffling of leadership after the congress.

The members of the party will present their different ideas and opinions about the current political situation, including how best to fight for the rights of ethnic Mon, and they will decide from the ideas presented what the party will do in the future.

“We set up our party with a system of democracy decentralization. According to the system, we hold the congress every three years,” said Nai Hong Sar, the Secretary of NMSP.

“If we did not hold it, those who have power, they would stay in power forever. Those who do wrong things would be able to keep on doing them,” he said.
Regarding the future political stance of the NMSP, Nai Hong Sar said that if the Burmese government does not agreed to form a federal union in Burma, the NMSP will continue its armed struggle movement.

“If we do not have our armed struggle, the other people will swallow the rights of our ethnic people. Therefore, we need to maintain our armed struggle. If we do not get our rights, our next generation will carry out this armed struggle again,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Chief minister of Mon State, Ohn Myint, in November proposed peace negotiations with the NMSP, but NMSP leaders said that they have doubts about the peace proposal and the leadership said that it will “wait and see” before committing itself, and that it will make a decision after the party congress.

The NMSP sent three representatives to the peace table to meet a delegation from the Mon State government in Ye Township on October 6, but no agreements emerged from the meeting.

Thai Environmental Activists Raise Concerns about Tavoy Deep Seaport Project
By Azan: December 7, 2011
Thai environmental and human rights activists are worried about the impact of constructing the Tavoy Deep Seaport in southern Burma, as it will destroy large area in Tavoy while there is no proper law protection for the environment in Burma.
Speaking at a fact-finding meeting with Mon human rights activists in Sangkalaburi, Kanchanaburi province, on December 2; Premsak Buawattana, a senior member of the Foundation for Ecological Recovery, said, “Thai people have to suffer from the population even though we have laws protecting the environment in Thailand”.
“Burmese people have to suffer from this project, as Burma does not have proper laws for environmental protection,” he said.
The Foundation for Ecological Recovery is attempting to collect facts about the Tavoy Deep Seaport project and its potential impacts, including effects to civilians such as damage to the environment, human rights abuses, damaged livelihoods of the people, and rights to participate in the project.
Beerawat Dheeraprasart, Chairman of the Foundation for Ecological Recovery, said, “We do not see a lot of information printed in the media about this project, even though it is huge project.
“They [the company] hide information within the company. No one exactly knows which businesses are involved with this project, and how much individuals have invested in it,” he said.
The Burmese and Thai governments agreed and signed a contract in May 2008 to build the Technical Zone for the Tavoy Deep Seaport.
The project of the Tavoy Deep Seaport is 8 times larger than the Map Ta Phut Industrial Zone in Rayong, Thailand, and is run by the same company, according to the Foundation for Ecological Recovery.
The amount of investment in Map Tha Phut is 370,000 million baht (10.5 billion US$), and the estimated amount of investment for the Tavoy industrial zone is 303,000 million baht (8.6 billion US$).

“We have learned that they [the previous Thai government] signed a contract for 60 years with the Burmese government. After this, they can renew their contract again if they want to continue to run the project,” said Beerawat Dheeraprasart. The Foundation for Ecological Recovery reported that the Thai Investment Board offered money to build the Tavoy Deep Seaport and Industrial Zone in the meantime, and it requires 4,000 megawatts of electric power to run industries zone. It plans to build a coal industries zone, which will destroy the environment and the livelihoods of the local people.

Hathuethai Kongkoun, another senior member of Foundation for Ecological Recovery, said, “Some people may think the investment may benefit the people. But, in fact, all benefit goes directly to the company. The people have become displaced and unemployed after their land was confiscated.”

According to the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, there are about 20 villages with an estimated population of 4,000 people living in the area of the deep sea project. The Burmese authorities have already forced villagers to move from the villages in the planned area of the Tavoy Building Industries Zone.

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We reserve the right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,
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Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting change and peace within Burma. Editors, reporters, writers, and overseas volunteers are dedicated members of the Mon activist community based in Thailand.
Our motto is “working together for change and lasting peace.”