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Contents

News:

- (1) Mon Civil War Continues in Southern Ye
- (2) Junta Extends Weather Warning Sites in Mon state
- (3) Food Crisis Looms in Refugee Camp on Thai-Burma Border
- (4) Sea Fish Avoided, Pork Price Soars

Opinion:

- (1) UN and international community need to prioritize issues in Burma

Commentary:

SPDC's Failure in Cyclone Mission

Report:

Trouble Brewing; Before, During and After Cyclone Nargis

Some Acronyms in This Issue

MRP-	Monland Restoration Party
SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council
VPDC-	Village Peace and Development Council
IMNA-	Independent Mon News Agency
ASEAN-	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
IDPs-	Internally Displaced Persons
NLD-	(National League for Democracy)

News

Mon Civil War Continues in Southern Ye

By HURFOM, June, 15, 2008

Fighting recently between the Burmese army and Mon rebel groups has resulted in death and injuries on both sides. In the second week of June alone there were two ambushes launched from each side, both with serious ramifications.

Burma army troops under the command of Infantry Battalion No.31 were ambushed by Mon guerrillas on June 10; a captain and four soldiers were killed.

Mon guerrillas under the command of the Monland Restoration Party (MRP) fired on junta troops traveling in trucks and motorcycles from a hill near Kabya (Mahae) village at approximately 3 p.m.

A source close to the Burma Army told IMNA that Captain Thein Khet Hlaing, a lieutenant and three soldiers died at the scene and some soldiers were injured. Another attack later in the same week killed three soldiers and a Mon rebel Major.

"As our troops were retreating from the road we were attacked by Burma Army soldiers and two more of our soldiers were killed. A villager also died," added Nai Pan Nyunt who split from the New Mon State Party (NMSP) six years ago.



The Burmese soldiers complete military training in Southern Ye, Mon State.

SPDC's Failure in Cyclone Mission

There are many sorrowful stories emerging from our contacts inside, telling how the people of Burma have suffered from Cyclone Nargis which devastated so many communities in the divisions of Irrawaddy and Rangoon. Various sources, including UN Agencies, have estimated that over 130,000 people are dead, 250,000 people face an extremely difficult ongoing situation and about 2.5 million people are suffering with a lack of shelter and food.

Prior to Cyclone Nargis, the ruling regime was made aware of the impending storm but failed to warn the people of Burma, people who had not experienced such a storm in their history, and any life-saving relocation of the people in advance was not accomplished by the regime.

Additionally, after the cyclone the delay in opening up the areas affected for the UN and international relief agencies increased the death toll and contributed to the spread of communicable diseases. Neglecting corpse collection and the safe burial of dead persons made the situation all the more dangerous, as water sources became contaminated and unusable for cyclone survivors living in displaced communities. Entire families who perished in the cyclone have gone unrecognized and unidentified as authorities failed to reach the area and expert foreign relief teams were denied access.

Aid is still yet to filter through to over 50% of cyclone victims, who remain solely responsible for sourcing their own food and water in hazardous conditions. Realizing they could not rely on the regime, many Burmese communities sympathetic with each other's situation have teamed up to help each other as best they can.

The SPDC has shown they are out of touch, uncaring and have no capacity to deal with this situation. Although this failed mission has led to widespread tragedy across Burma, the regime simply does not care.

Following the clash, Burma army troops barred people from traveling along the Ye-Khaw Za road. The army arrested six people including some from the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) for supporting Mon rebels active in the area.

The VPDC chairman in YinYe village, Nai Maung Ba (47), Secretary Nai Kyaw Hein (41) and member Nai Sein Maung (41) were arrested by Burmese soldiers from Infantry Battalion No.31 based in Khawzar sub-township on the night of May 29th. Nai Gare, Nai Kya Kaung and Nai San Yi were arrested on May 28th when they went to pay money as demanded by Mon rebels.

They were arrested for supporting the rebels and taken to Yindein village where they were severely beaten by soldiers. "The soldiers beat our village headman the way someone would beat cattle and pigs to death. They beat them in front of the villagers," a YinYe village who was an eyewitness told IMNA. Family members and relatives were not allowed to meet them.

Dozens of Burmese soldiers and their supporters were killed by Mon rebels while the Burma Army executed dozens of rebel supporters in the same way in earlier years. Recently Burmese troops tried to arrest retired NMSP members by planting a bomb at a polling station during the May 10 referendum and attempting to frame them.

Many retired NMSP members escaped from their homes however Nai Show, a former NMSP medical worker, and two villagers from Yindein village were arrested. Using torture they were forced to confess to having planted the bombs, although they denied having done so. The 35 year old medic, Nai Show, sustained such significant injuries from torture that he is now unable to speak coherently.

The military regime is trying to wrest control of the area from Mon rebels and has upgraded the village to a sub-township allowing the post of government administrators.

To control the area, the army has banned local people from going to work outside the villages. During 2004-2005 the Burmese Military Southeast Command launched a military offensive against Mon rebels and forced young women to entertain military officers and soldiers in the barracks. Dozens of women from the area were raped and were made to work as sex slaves in the barracks.

MRP troops have been active in the area for more than six years and demand financial support from villagers. Because of this many of its supporters were executed by government troops and some are still under detention. Recently the military government seriously tortured Yin Ye village headman and some villagers for funding the MRP.

Opinion

UN and international community need to prioritize issues in Burma

Lawi Weng, May 29, 2008

The extension of the detention period for pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for a further 12 months marks yet another sad day for the people of Burma .

The junta's aspirations are clear. Releasing Suu Kyi may help promote democracy in Burma , and they don't want that. They cannot allow her or her prominent followers, some of whom they continue to pursue and arrest, to re-enter the political arena.

Extending her detention also signals the junta's singular lack of respect for the international community, as pleas for ushering in democracy and release of political prisoners are repeatedly ignored.

Many people inside Burma had hoped that pressure from the international community would see to Suu Kyi's release this year, 18 years after her National League for Democracy won the general election.

With the United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's visit, many hoped the icon of democracy's release would be discussed, but the focus remained firmly off politics and steadfastly on the emergency response to Cyclone Nargis. Although understandable, it was nonetheless disappointing to see the future of Burma's political prisoners off the UN General Secretary's agenda.

At times it seems as though these groups holds the junta's hands, ignoring the people's thirst for democracy and thus perpetuating the junta's stranglehold on power.

Recently, the problems with Mr. Ban Ki-Moon's approach have become clear to the people of Burma. His one-sided approach was designed to break down the barriers between the UN and Burma, in an effort to reach the cyclone-affected areas. However, he was speaking with a dictator desperate to accept aid only if able to retain absolute power.

Although the approach of prioritizing cyclone aid over political prisoners is fair, this is an all-too familiar pattern when UN-Junta discussions take place. There is always something more pressing than Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's ongoing struggle for democracy.

The special envoy's trip headed by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari focused on economic reforms rather than policy and democracy. Although still valuable, it fails to address the full scope of the problem inside Burma. This is very similar to the policy of feeding the junta first and beating them later.

The UN and ASEAN need to analyse the junta's psychology. Every time these international organizations hold discussions with the

military government it allows it to feel like a legitimate, legal government. They become increasingly proud of themselves 'working for the people', while they continue to arrest opposition members.

The international community should be aware of the country's overall crisis and not only Cyclone Nargis. Aung San Suu Kyi's detention and all that it signifies has been a crisis for many years.

The junta may try to use the constitutional referendum to fend off criticism about its undemocratic governance. They may continue detaining Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for the rest of her life.

The international community at this time has a duty to the people of Burma. Their eyes are focused on the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis – now they must look further and see that the destruction and devastation of Nargis was nothing compared with what the people of Burma live with every day under a military dictatorship.

The time for the UN and ASEAN to act on these everyday atrocities is now. There is an emergency situation in Burma that has been going on for many decades, that begins with the detention of innocent people like Aung San Suu Kyi, and continues with widespread oppression and violence towards everyone. This situation needs an emergency response now

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Report

Trouble Brewing; Before, During and After Cyclone Nargis

The Lead-up

Cyclone Nargis ripped through Burma on May 2nd and 3rd, with the Irrawaddy Delta and Rangoon divisions the worst affected areas. This was the first large-scale natural disaster to hit the Burmese people and numerous people were killed; to date it is estimated 78,000 people died and 56,000 are still missing, while over 2.4 million people languish homeless and hungry. These survivors are in desperate need of aid, with poor living conditions leaving their health in jeopardy.

Before Nargis hit Burma, Indian and Thai meteorological agencies warned the Burmese government that a large cyclone was likely to hit the country. Conversely, Burmese weather forecasters announced the cyclone was not likely to hit the country, leaving the people unprepared. No emergency plans were laid out, no evacuation plans suggested.

A BBC journalist based in Burma interviewed the head of the Burmese weather forecast department in Rangoon early on the day the cyclone hit the country; the department head stated that Nargis would probably not hit Burma, and that it would pass through the usual cyclonic route, near Sittwe township, Arakan State. He went on to say that in the highly unlikely event that Nargis hit Burma, it would not be a disaster.

Even if a large-scale evacuation was overlooked, critics now state that if the Junta had put plans into action to rescue the cyclone survivors early, not as many people would have died. Put simply, in the days and weeks that followed Nargis, woefully inadequate assistance was offered to the people.

May 2nd, 2008

Quote from an IDP in Laputta: "The flooding started; at first the water came up to our knees, but before long it raised up to the second floor. Our whole family had to scramble up to the roof to escape being washed away, we stayed there in the rain for a long time. While we were on the roof, the wind began. It was hard to hold on, some of my children blew away in the wind."

Nargis hit at 10 am on the 2nd of May and finished shortly after midnight, with some villages sustaining 70% damage in that time. With high winds and heavy rain, sea levels rose significantly along shore lines with widespread flooding. Many victims were holding trees to defend themselves against flooding, however the



Satellite images display Burma's coastline before and after the highly destructive Cyclone Nargis swept through

storm blew in at the same time and rendered their survival efforts useless. Whole areas were wiped out by water and wind.

Burma's former capital Rangoon was torn apart, with one local estimating over 90% of trees were flattened in Rangoon and surrounding areas. Billboards, previously plastered with 'Vote Yes' referendum propaganda, lay flattened alongside trees and houses, while monsoonal rains and tidal surges meant roads ran like rivers, with human bodies rushing through the torrent next to trees and debris. Rice stores were filled with rapidly toxifying rice, rendered useless even as stock feed.

The country lost all media access, and the Junta censored already heavily restricted print media and radio, and deemed any media-in-exile who reported on events 'western puppets of propaganda'. If the Junta spied people listening to exiled radio stations like BBC, RFA, and VOA, those people were arrested on suspicion of being political activists in opposition to the government. Even in the face of a large-scale natural disaster the military government remained paranoid and highly suspicious.

With little in the way of clean-up organized by the government, the situation quickly deteriorated into chaos. A simple journey that once took an hour took one witness six hours; a morning bath was made near-impossible with a communal bathhouse filled with putrid water; drinking water doubled in price while the price of eggs tripled. Each day water supplies became more lethal, as broken pipes allowed sewage and toxins to flow freely through bodies of water already heavy with corpses. This was coupled with large areas of stagnant water which, in Burma's tropical conditions, provide the perfect breeding ground for bacteria and mosquitoes. Many people were either prone to suffer from, or already suffering from water-borne illness. One source told us that, "The children and elderly are the worst affected, with so many already ill a disaster like this seems enough to tip them over the edge." He went on to say that clean drinking water was non-existent for weeks in outlying areas, and although it could be found inside Rangoon, high prices excluded most people from buying it. Even where water purification tablets were sent, in coastal regions where salt water burst through banks and flooded water supplies, they were rendered useless.

Even in the less affected areas, damage was significant. A reporter recently returned from Mon State in Eastern Burma said the damage was obvious. "Many rubber trees had fallen; I cannot imagine the impact this will have on farmers who rely on rubber for their livelihood. Based on my observations I would say every garden had sustained damage, with 50%-100% of trees down."

The 'Clean-up'

For the 2.5 million survivors the outlook is grim. With the Junta creating obstacles for outside aid workers, international aid to the area has largely been kept from the people on the ground. Thirty-five days after Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy delta in Burma, the military regime still blocked access to millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

In the immediate aftermath, one source reported that in Rangoon - Burma's largest city - only minimal drinking water and electricity had returned after one week. The health of survivors lay in the hands of a dictator known to rely on astrological guidance that has so far seen him spend ten times as much on military as healthcare.

Not content with blocking international aid, the junta restricted many local aid teams attempting to travel into the Irrawaddy delta. Many groups were not permitted to travel deep into the delta, and were instead forced to hand over their aid supplies to local authorities. Although the claim was that local authorities would distribute the aid to survivors, many local donors know about corruption among the military officers; according to some interviews on external Burmese media, some donors have had to bribe army checkpoint officers to enable travel into areas outside Rangoon.

On the ground these politics are frustrating. Many cyclone survivors felt impatient with the local authorities as slow-moving aid was repeatedly mishandled by authorities. Corruption is rife throughout Burma's different authority groups, beginning at the top and trickling all the way to the local authorities. In Karen state, a team of monks led a 200-strong group to the cyclone areas to donate food. The army checkpoint did not allow them through and all were forced to return. The team said they were very angry for being refused entry to the areas that needed aid so desperately. Local authorities had requested all aid be handed to them however the monks refused to do so. In one village local people said only the local authority's family were able to eat good food while outside many of the victims stood waiting for food.

In Pyapon, one of the worst-hit areas, trishaw drivers submitted a letter to township authorities in the second week of May, describing how the chairmen of township quarters were selling sacks of rice to the local traders. "We saw them selling the rice with our own eyes. They usually sold the goods at night," said the trishaw driver who wrote the letter and urged others to sign it. An elderly man in a village in Bogalay township reported the village chairman received some supplies, took them for himself then distributed inferior products. Many local aid workers claim that international aid has made its way from the hands of the Junta to the markets of Rangoon. In a recent interview with BBC's Burmese section eyewitnesses confirmed seeing poorly-concealed international aid for sale at Rangoon market. When food is distributed the rations are meagre and of very poor quality; some survivors said they received just two potatoes and a handful of rice per family.

From May 4th the Junta's organized and highly-controlled chaos was evident everywhere; one Rangoon resident said that during a visit to the Irrawaddy delta he had witnessed the police beating three or four children caught begging for food. One young boy said he and some friends were caught by the police as they carried food back to the temporary shelters they now called home. Despite their pleas of innocence, the police beat them badly.

Food distribution was not the only area the government successfully hampered. Weeks after the storm the Junta had done little to clear dead bodies from waterways; one witness reported hearing a general instruct soldiers not to bother removing bodies, as the fish would eat them anyway. Further, the International Committee of the Red Cross said burying the estimated 78,000 killed soon became a lower priority than trying to assist the survivors. As a result, bloated bodies are still scattered around the Irrawaddy delta more than five weeks after the storm hit. Some have been dumped in canals and unmarked mass graves or cremated, while others remain untouched. Survivors in the delta said they initially attempted to identify bodies but were overwhelmed by the numbers of corpses clogging the rivers and washing up on the beaches.



Two boys warily watching police in Daedanaw, after they were threatened with a beating and a 3,000 kyat fine if they were caught begging for food. (Photo: Min Khet Maung / The Irrawaddy)

State-run media showed the dictators helping their people, providing shelter and healthcare. Two weeks after Nargis hit, the head of the state General Than Shwe visited some areas badly affected by the cyclone. This was the first time he ventured out these areas to offer, or even be seen to offer, relief to cyclone survivors. The truth was not shown or published; ten Burmese journalists were arrested in the Irrawaddy delta for attempting to write a news story and taking photos. Burma's Prime Minister General Thein Sein also visited the worst affected areas, saying, "I did not bring anything for you right now. I know your situation now. After I go back, the aid will come soon." However, according to local donors, many villages still lack access to aid from government officers.

Many cyclone survivors need aid and equipment to regain their livelihood. Two weeks after the cyclone hit, the world worried for the cyclone victims in poor living conditions and with deteriorating health care. The world asked the Junta to provide aid and let the survivors work in their fields freely. The Junta however, continually refused international aid workers.

International Community vs General Than Shwe

The Junta asked for 11 billion dollars in aid from the international community to aid with cyclone survivor resettlement. In response, fifty countries sent delegates to an Aid Forum on cyclone survivors in Rangoon. Many foreign delegates questioned why the junta needed more than the international community's estimates, and queried their request for monetary aid only. The world was not able to provide the requested amount,

and instead demanded the Junta request provide more details about how 11 billion dollars will be spent on resettling survivors from Cyclone Nargis.

The US, French and British sent navy marine aid to the Burma's ocean border in a huge offer of assistance to cyclone survivors and the UN Secretary General tried to persuade General Than Shwe to accept the proffered aid. After two weeks at sea the foreign ships were forced to return home with full cargo, having never received the General's permission. Although most people on the ground agreed that the Nargis' survivors are in desperate need of foreign aid, the Junta claimed that aid from the international community, especially US, was not wanted or necessary.

In the last week of May, ASEAN held a meeting for the 'Burma disaster' and discussed how best to handle and persuade the junta to allow free aid. The Prime Minister of Burma, General Thein Sein, told the meeting the country agreed to allow access to aid workers lead by ASEAN. They continued to refuse US, French and British aid. In that same week, the UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki Moon was permitted to visit the Irrawaddy Delta for the first time. During his visit, he met General Than Shwe in Naypyihtaw who promised to allow all aid workers to enter and help the country's cyclone survivors. In the first week of June, the Junta granted visas to all aid workers. However, many of them were only permitted to work around Rangoon division and not the Irrawaddy delta, which was the area most seriously affected by Nargis.

Analysts said the Junta were anxious about receiving foreign aid largely because the environment for an uprising in the Irrawaddy delta is perfect, as many cyclone survivors become frustrated about the lack of aid and how their government has handled the disaster, leaving them in appalling conditions. The government is fearful that foreign aid workers may learn how to attack Naypyihtaw or that conflict may arise between the US army aid workers and the Burmese army. General Than Shwe holds grave concerns for his own power, as to allow the US army access to the delta area may give them the strength required to attack the Junta.



Publicity stunt: Snr-Gen Than Shwe visits IDPs outside Rangoon (Photo: AFP)

The international community is the Junta's number one enemy, largely because they view any offers of help as interference designed to create instability inside Burma. The Junta called the pro-democracy opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD) a puppet of the western world. They often condemn the NLD for having cooperated with the international community to tarnish the reputation of the country. The Junta's bitter enemy is the US. The Junta has a bad human rights abuses record and because of this the US has attempted many times to bring Burma to the UN Security Council (UNSC), accusing Burma of being a threat to international security. But, Burma has big supporters in Russia and China who are able to use their powers of veto in the UNSC and render any anti-Burma claims useless.

Some world leaders have accused the junta of committing crimes against humanity for failing to offer sufficient aid and repeatedly refusing foreign aid. There has been some suggestion the Junta should be brought before the Hague Court for these crimes against humanity, and the US defense minister slammed the Junta as murderers who would continue to kill their people in the wake of cyclone Nargis if they continue to refuse international aid.

Despite this, the Junta continues to refuse large offers of international aid and has stated the Burmese people do not need international aid and could instead survive on the local foods they were used to like frogs, fish and water greens. These statements of General Than Shwe were published in the opinion page of state-run media, and went on to suggest that the situation was not bad enough to warrant the acceptance of, and potential transfer of power to, international forces.

Now

In Burma today, the overwhelming sense is that the regime is more concerned with keeping foreigners out than allowing aid in. Unless international relief arrives quickly, the death toll of Cyclone Nargis will continue to rise at an alarming rate.

Despite an increase in the number of aid workers receiving visas, in the Irrawaddy delta cyclone survivors are still yet to receive any official aid, with most aid destined for the region instead handed to authorities who redistribute it or hoard it. Some substandard aid was offered by local authorities; in some areas survivors are so desperate that the corrupt authorities' offer of waterlogged rice not usually fit for human consumption was readily accepted.

In the Irrawaddy delta, 20% of crops were destroyed, and almost all properties sustained heavy damage, animals were killed and cultivation machinery was destroyed. The Delta area was previously known as 'Burma's Rice Bowl', as the majority of Burma's economy-boosting rice-crop comes from the Irrawaddy Delta. The big concern now is that Burma will soon have a rice crisis as thousands of farmers were killed and the sea water destroyed their crops and due to high salinity potentially irreparably damaged the fields for future rice production. However, determined and resilient cyclone survivors claim that if only the government would provide aid they could grow enough rice at least for their own consumption.

Some critics have focused on the Junta's inaction prior to Nargis, suggesting that because they knew about the cyclone evacuation plans should have been put into action. The Junta was irresponsible with the lives of it's people and because of this, some people condemn then and demand compensation for the cyclone survivors. The Burmese deputy defense-minister Aye Myint counters that, saying that the government gave enough warning to the people prior to the cyclone's arrival. A brief and confusing statement was printed in the newspaper and therefore the government can absolve itself of responsibility for the dire situation now facing so many of its people. Many others have bowed out of this argument, stating that it only serves to detract from the appalling treatment of the people of Burma in the aftermath of Nargis.

The Junta claims it has completed relief operations and will now turn to reconstruction. They will implement this second scheme for resettling Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and allowing them to grow rice freely. On the ground however the truth couldn't be more different; many IDPs have been forced out from their makeshift homes to work on labor farms, and to reconstruct their own houses with rationed bamboo - five pieces per family. They have no food to start growing food, diseases are rampant throughout the makeshift refugee camps, and in some camps up to one quarter of inhabitants are suffering from serious diarrhea. In the past two weeks tens of thousands of IDPs have been ordered to leave the camps and return to their devastated homes.



Military-issued waterlogged rice rations (Source: Internet)

Now, six weeks after Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, about 54 percent of the affected population has received some sort of humanitarian assistance, according to UN estimates. That means about 1 million people have gone without adequate shelter, water, food, and access to health care for over forty-five days. Eyewitnesses state that many people still stand by roadsides begging for food; despite the desperation of the situation police fine people who beg for food 3,000 Kyat (approximately THB 100).

As a strongly Buddhist nation, many prominent people of Burma are stating this natural disaster was evil intervention designed as retribution to a junta that brutally murdered and detained many monks during last year's Saffron Revolution. Their beliefs state that if a government is truly good no harm will come to the country. Burma's government is not good and has failed to provide its people with what they need in the wake of a mammoth natural disaster.

The people's requests were not major. Having lived under a military dictatorship for too long, these people are strong and resilient; prior to Nargis, 70% of the population of Burma survived on less than \$US1 a day, below the international poverty line benchmark. Now tens of thousands of people are surviving on coconuts and filthy water, with the Junta openly declaring that because they are jungle people they can easily survive without need of aid. They need clean drinking water, shelter and basic medicine. They need their fundamental human rights adhered to.

***Due to communication failures in the wake of Cyclone Nargis, this article was written with the assistance of worldwide news agencies.*

News

Rangoon Residents Pay for Repairing Power Infrastructure

Htaw Rot, IMNA, May 30, 2008

The Burmese Junta have been demanding money from residents in the former capital Rangoon to repair basic electrical infrastructure in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, though repairs were yet to begin, claimed residents.

Regime-run television, however, reported that Lt Gen Myint Swe led officials in repairing power transmission lines along the roads using the government's own resources.

In truth, the authorities have repaired power infrastructure on the main road but small roads and quarters remain unattended. However the Burmese government newspaper reported that about 2,928 electric poles, and over 560 handrails have been repaired.

According to a resident in North Dagon, there were no repairs in his township. He said that his company had to use its own money for new concrete poles and had to foot the repair costs.

A Yankin resident claimed that they paid 5,000 Kyat per household, while Shwepyithar Township paid

1,000 Kyat per household for repairing electricity lines. Insein township residents paid 2,000 Kyat per house.

According to a Kachin women staying in Rangoon but who recently moved from Kachin State, the authorities took 40,000 Kyat from her for repairing electricity lines to her home.

Similarly, a Phaw Sein quarter resident also paid 2,000 Kyat. A Rangoon-based journalist told IMNA,



A fallen power pole lies across a Rangoon street after Cyclone Nargis (Photo:TIME)

depending on the damage to electricity lines in their quarter the authorities were collecting money from residents. People were paying between 1,000 Kyat and 5,000 kyat for repairs.



Burma Tops List In Deforestation

Loa Htam, IMNA, June 6, 2008

Deforestation is rampant in Burma. The country tops the list of deforestation in the world, local environmentalists said.

Unchecked deforestation occurs across the country, especially in Shan, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and other ethnic areas, said Aung Ngyeh, secretary of the Burma Rivers Network.

Burma lost 18 per cent of its forests between 1990 and 2005, one of the highest deforestation rates in the world according to the Global Witness. Fifteen tonnes of illegally logged timber crosses the Burmese border into China every seven minutes, 24 hours a day, every day of the year, it added.

“Deforestation continues to increase. However, it is difficult to estimate how much increase there has been as almost all logging is illegal,” said Aung Ngyeh.

A Mon ethnic environmentalist Chan Don compared the forests in Three Pagoda Pass (TPP) Township on the Thai-Burma border in 1998 with the current situation: “Now there is no more forest in the township areas”. People in Mon state are also active in burning of forests for farms and rubber plantations he added.

Over the last three years, businessmen in TPP Township started transporting timber from Kyainnseiky Township areas to the TPP Township after almost all trees on the border had gone, said U Pon, a local businessman. Businessmen on an average bring about six vehicles of timber to TPP township everyday, he added.

Residents have difficulty in accessing timber to build or repair their houses and are now worried about the impact of deforestation in the area, said Aung Myint, a local resident.

Continued on page 11...

News

Junta Extends Weather Warning Sites in Mon State

June 10, 2008, *Loa Htaw, IMNA*

Burmese authorities today extended weather warning sites in southern Burma in Mon state, more than a month after Cyclone Nargis lashed Burma following astrologers' predictions on the weather, said residents.

"According to an astrologer, also a famous monk in Mon state, there may be floods in Mon state in the middle of the month," said housewife Daw Khin Ngwe from Mudon Township in Mon state.

However, the Myanmar forecaster has not provided any information yet. The people believe the astrologer's prediction and are afraid of the flood, said Daw Khin Ngwe.

The authorities recently flew the warning of green flags in the town and warned the people to be careful about the weather, said residents. The green flags have been moved from public sites such as the railway station and state owned Burma Oil Corporation (BOC) in Mudon, residents added.

Last month, the authorities flew the green flags and warned people in the villages along the beaches of

Mon state to be careful about the weather but no such warning was given in the towns.

This morning the BOC in Mudon town in Mon state put up green flags, said Nai Pying in Mudon Township.

A NMSP official in Thanphyuzayart Township also saw the green flags in the railway station of the town.

"I am not sure why they fly the green flags. I think it is only after the international media accused the junta of not informing the people before Cyclone Nargis," said Nai Pying.

After the cyclone the government claimed that they had warned the people before the cyclone and added that nobody can avoid natural disasters, said MRTV, the state run media.

The authorities issued warnings on weather early this month and put up green, yellow and red flags. If the authorities flew the green flags, it implies that people should be careful, yellow means be ready and red means run, said residents.

•••••

Food Crisis Looms in Refugee Camp on Thai-Burma Border

May 30, 2008, *Lawi Weng*

With camp authorities in Ban Don Yang, on the Thai-Burma border announcing a cut in rations for next month more and more desperate refugee camp inmates are attempting to find work outside.

Many refugees grow paddy on the mountainside for food. Some look for vegetables or bamboo shoots while others hunt for wild animals in the jungle to earn money, worried about an imminent food crisis in the camp, said Nai Taramon, a refugee in the camp.

With many of them working in the jungle, 60 refugees were afflicted by malaria just last month. "This is the first time malaria has been detected in the camp," he said.

Recently, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has made an urgent request for USD 6.8 million as aid to the Burmese refugees.

The camp will provide full rations for this month.

The camp recently provided one basket for adults and half a basket of rice for children under five years old.

Continued on page 11...



Children at Mae La refugee camp on Thai-Burmese border. (Photo: www.cpi.org)

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:

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With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

News

News from page 9...

We face shortage of water every year in the summer since 2005. The weather is also abnormal. The rains started too early this year. When it rains it is quite cold and when the rain stops it is too hot even in the rainy season, Aung Myint added..

The weather in other regions of Burma also affects residents said local environmental groups. People are continuing to suffer from the effects of both local and global environmental problems and the junta must learn from the devastating impact of Cyclone Nargis said an EarthRights Student Union statement on World Environment Day.

Globally, gas emission contributes to global warming, storms are increasing in intensity while locally deforestation and pollution from mining affects the environment, the statement stated.

"High carbon emissions are leading to global warming which is bringing devastating storms as can be seen by the recent Cyclone Nargis," said Nyein Htun general secretary of EarthRights Student Union.

Cyclone Nargis has killed 130,000 people and made 2.4 million homeless. Official statistics said at least 2.43 million acres of paddy were destroyed in the Irrawaddy, Rangoon, and Pegu division in the cyclone hit areas.

Local people say farms in the cyclone hit regions were almost destroyed while farms in other parts of the country have also been affected somewhat. Cyclone hit regions are the rice producing regions

and currently only about 10 percent of farmers have started farming. Burma has about 20 million acres of paddy cultivation, including both summer and monsoon paddy.



News from Page 10..

Many are worried about the impending food crisis in the wake of the cut in rations next month. Not many know how much rations will be slashed. There are 15 kilograms of rice in one basket.

"We will not have enough rice if they cut off rations. We have to work outside the camp. If not, we will starve," said Taramon.

Ban Don Yang camp is located on the Thai-Burma border in Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province Southern Thailand on Thai-Burma border.

The camp is close to the jungle and the refugees have easy access to the forests, which is a liberated area under control of the Mon Army along the Mon Halockhani refugee camp.

Refugees are worried because many NGOs are focused on cyclone victims now and they will be neglected.

TBBC is an umbrella organization providing assistance to more than 140,000 refugees from Burma housed in 10 refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border.



News

Sea Fish Avoided, Pork Price Soars

Rai Maraoh, IMNA, June 10, 2008

People in Southern Burma are avoiding sea fish, firm in their belief that the fish have been nibbling corpses floating from Irrawaddy delta. The price of fish has plummeted by 40 per cent while the price of pork has soared

Although fish is still selling in the markets, the number of people eating fish has dropped significantly, a resident in Mudon said.

“The price of fish dropped from 5000 Kyat to 3000 Kyat per Viss (*Burmese measurement*). Some are still buying fish but the majority now favour pork and chicken,” she added. Now the price of chicken and pork has soared from 5000 Kyat to 7000 Kyat per Viss. The price of eggs has also risen.

The majority of people in Thanpyuzayart Township and Tavoy are avoiding fish.

Not only in Mudon and Thanpyuzayart Townships is it difficult to find sea fish sellers; in the markets in Ye township where some bodies were found floating it is also difficult.

Two weeks after Cyclone Nargis, bodies of victims floated to ocean beaches in Mon state. At least 300 bodies have been buried or burnt by local teams formed by authorities in Thanpyuzayart Township on the Set-sae beach. Some bodies floated in some costal villages in Tenasserim division and southern Ye Township.



The bodies of an entire family float in waters near Bogalay, Irrawaddy Division (Photo: *Burmasitmone*)

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