KAOWAO NEWS NO. 148

Newsletter for social justice and freedom in Burma
January 22 - February 13, 2009

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Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to serve better the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. And we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news. 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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62

nd Anniversary of Mon National Day

Dear Kaowao,

Congratulation to 62

nd Mon National Day worldwide! Even though from difficult situation, all Mons worldwide are united to show their national heritage. Thanks for posting all news on
MND events and please relay this message to the Generation of Mon Society (GMS UK). They are one of the best performers among the exile Mons. The Main Committee led by MNDF also have a wonderful information about the Mon history.

Layeh Snong, Ye

Does the Mon still dream for a sovereign Mon State? The dream will never come true with you might and unity. With the current situation, the Mon should consider only for an autonomous state first.

Mr. Patriot, Moulmein

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Statement of 62nd Anniversary of Mon National Day
By Overseas Mon Organizations

We the Mon people from around the world will join together once again to observe the 62nd Anniversary of Mon National Day in celebration of our national heritage and identity. On this historic day, in tribute to our great ancestors, we issue this statement in reaffirming our commitment to liberty and freedom for our people.

Mon sovereignty had existed in Southeast Asia since the early first millennium AD with the establishment of Suvannabhumi (Old Thaton) Mon kingdom. Most of our history enjoyed times of peace, but we also overcame war in difficult times just as we are doing today. The last Mon kingdom, Hongsawatoi (Pegu) was invaded and occupied by Burman King Alaungpaya in 1757. With the fall of Hongsawatoi, 252 years ago, we lost our sovereign kingdom and our right to govern ourselves. Since that time we have been determined to regain our rights to govern our people in our motherland. While this is difficult to achieve, we will endeavor to regain our right to govern our own people. We have endured occupation of our motherland by successive military rule, including the present Burmese military regime.

Since we lost our rights to self-determination, our religious freedom, our right to live within our culture that includes writing in our own language, our economic, social, and political lives have become degraded. This lack of autonomy has caused Mon people to suffer from various forms of persecution and discrimination in our Monland. Below is a list of some of these undeniable rights to our freedom:

1. Countless number of Mon people fled from their homeland since the destruction of Hongsawatoi Kingdom in 1757 to avoid systematic persecution of successive Burman rulers.
2. Mon people have faced various types of racial discrimination by Burmese rulers who view the Mon as a symbol of the historical enemy.
3. We are consistently denied the right to freely learn our own Mon language and develop our literature.
4. The Burmese army confiscates thousands acres of land and plantations that have belonged to Mon people while destroying our livelihood that depended upon the land.
5. Mon people have suffered from various forms of social and moral oppression under the
The current Burmese military regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), plans to hold an election in 2010, in order to legitimize itself through its illegitimate constitution. We believe that the election WILL NOT BE FREE AND FAIR for all the democratic opposition and ethnic political parties in Burma. Therefore, the Mon both inside and outside Burma must consider the circumstances carefully before we adopt any political strategies in this political crisis. We must be vigilant against military rule so that we can free ourselves from enslavement.

On this 62nd Anniversary of the Mon National Day, we reaffirm our commitment to restore our motherland. At the same time, we share the following words of encouragement to all Mon people who live around the world:

1. Because of no political power and the degrading situation we face in our motherland, we should form a Mon organization wherever we live in order to help each other.
2. We must bare our share of responsibility to protect and liberate Mon people.
3. We must continue to build up our national solidarity and carefully strategize every movement for the Mon national liberation.

The statement is jointly issued by:
1. Australia Mon Association (AMA)
2. Euro Mon Community
3. Mon Canadian Society
4. Monland Restoration Council (USA)
5. Mon Women's Association of America
6. Mon Women's Organization of Canada
7. Mae Sot Mon Community (Mae Sot, Thailand)
8. Mon Unity League (Thailand)
9. Association of Finn-Mon Community
10. Mon Refugees Organization, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
11. Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO)

February 10, 2009

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War

Clash between Burma Army and Wa reconfirmed

By Hseng Khio Fah, S.H.A.N: 13 February 2009

Several sources have confirmed that reports on a recent clash took place earlier this month at Hopang Township, northern Shan State, between the Burma Army (BA) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) were accurate.

Local guides, who hire themselves out to escort travelers across the jungle to the border, said that the clash took place while they were guiding a group of travelers.

The clash took place 20 miles south of Hopang, near Pangyao village last week. One of the guides interviewed by SHAN however was unable to pinpoint the exact date. Other sources say it happened on 3 or 4 February.

Some Wa officers from the area also confirmed the fact, but refused to reveal the exact date.

"It was as an accidental affair," SHAN quoted a Wa official from Panghsang headquarters on 10 February.

Some border watchers comment that the reason that both sides are reluctant to speak out is because they don't want to flare up the emotions. They also do not want to draw the world's attention to them.

Tension between the two sides has been on the rise after Lt-Gen Ye Myint, chief of Military Affairs Security and his delegation was forced to disarm on January 19, when making a visit to the Wa territory.

In the meantime, Panghsang, headquarters of the UWSA is preparing to hold celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of its successful overthrow of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) on 17 April 1989.

Many of its ceasefire alliances along the China-Burma border including the National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS), commonly known as the Mongla group, Kokang group and National Democratic Army- Kachin (NDAK), a member of Peace and Democracy Front in Burma have also been invited, sources said.

There were 15 armed groups that had concluded ceasefire with Rangoon: 9 in Shan State, 2 in Kachin State, 3 in Kayah (Karenni) State and 1 in Mon State until 2005, when two of them: Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) and Shan State National Army (SSNA), both based in Shan State, were forced to surrender.
Shadow UN Marked Founding Anniversary with New Campaign  
Chinland Guardian: 12 February 2009

The Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organization (UNPO), widely known as the shadow United Nations body, marked its founding anniversary this week with calls for new attention to the rapid rate of global environmental destruction, which threatens the survival of some of the most vulnerable peoples in the world.

February 11, 2009, marked the 18th anniversary of the founding of the UNPO at the Peace Foundation at The Hague in 1991. With an original founding membership of 15, the organization now boasts a membership of over 60 worldwide, whose voice are not represented in major international fora and decision-making process such as at the United Nations. The UNPO's membership consists of organizations from indigenous peoples, minorities and unrecognized or occupied territories, who are committed to "protecting and promoting their human and cultural rights, to preserve their environments and to find non-violent solutions to conflicts affecting them."

Among many of its core objectives, the UNPO chose the issue of environments as this year's special theme to promote environmental awareness with the launching of the UNPO Day of Action "Earth, Exploitation and Survival." The campaign aims at highlighting the destruction of the environments as they relate to the challenges and suffering of indigenous people, many of whom are its members. The campaign is now launching an online petition calling for world citizens to support its cause at http://www.unpo.org/content/view/8278/236/.

Despite its relatively recent inception, the UNPO has a membership spanning from all continents. The organization is now widely regarded as an alternative world body. Members of the UNPO from Burma include the Chins, Mons and Shans. The Chins are represented by the Chin National Front when it was formally admitted to the organization in 2001.

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Building a bridge to the future: The 62\textsuperscript{nd} Mon National Day  
Kaowao: February 9, 2009

The Main Committee of 62\textsuperscript{nd} Mon National Day will host the annual celebration in Beelu Kyun Island on February 10, 2009. The MND promises to be another fantastic event with many people anxiously awaiting the grand celebration at the Kamar Moor village comprised of over three thousand households on a Mon island.

Mon leaders first conceived the event in 1948 when the future had looked promising after the Second World War. After several conferences at Kamarwet and Pa-Nga villages during 1947 and 1948, the first celebration kicked off at Ywa Lut Monastery in Moulmein according to the statement by the MND main committee. Rev. Palita, the well-known Mon Abbot wrote the first Mon National Day gathering was also held at the cinema hall of Kwan Wai Tut (Ywa Lut Village) in Beelu Kyun in 1948.

As well as around the world where Mon communities have resettled, the 62\textsuperscript{nd} MND will be held in many cities and villages in lower Burma, but the committee will host the main jubilant event at Kamar Moor of Takok Khamine (Beelu Kyun). "The MND main celebration is held in
a different place every year and last year was in Mudon. We rotate this event to build solidarity among the local communities and other Mons," said Dr. Min Soe Linn, organizer of the MND.

Meanwhile, organizers of Mon National Day committees are preparing for the celebration which will fall on February 10 this year.

In Malaysia, the Mon refugees and migrant communities are preparing to celebrate in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and other locations. Local talent, such as celebrity Nai Ai Mon and his band will entertain the crowd with a live concert and refugees are rehearsing for their traditional dances for the February 10th event, according to Nai Lawi Mon of Mon Refugee Organization (MRO) based in Kuala Lumpur.

In Thailand, several Mon national day events will be held throughout the kingdom, including Bangkok, Phuket, Phang Nga, Tak, Samut Sakhon, Ratchburi, Prachuap Khiriknan and Kanchanaburi Provinces. Maharchai, the largest Mon migrant community in Thailand has had to scale down entertainment festivities after recent police crackdowns on the migrant working community there.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana of the U.S.A, Monland Restoration Council (MRC) put on a sparkling show to their American hosts that featured cultural performances, live concerts, Mon spicy cuisine and speeches from American and Mon community leaders. About four hundred people joined the event on February 7 according to Nai Kun Yekha, the leader of MRC.

In the United Kingdom, the Generation Mon Society (GMS) hosted the national day event on February 7 at Greenford, London. The event was well attended by solidarity friends and community members.

The Mon community in Akron, Ohio and the Mon Canadian Society in Calgary are working hard to put on their event which will feature performances by children dressed in their traditional clothes and Mon women dancing their intricate moves, followed by Mon cuisine and speeches from community leaders on February 14.

Mon National League for Solidarity: Ethnic Issue should be solved as priority
Kaowao: February 7, 2009

A spokesperson for the Mon National League for Solidarity (MNLS) says the political crisis in Burma will not be solved until the ethnic issue is rightly addressed.

Nai Myint Soe, the leader of MNLS based in the USA, said by telephone to Kaowao that this year is a critical moment for all nationalities and it is essential to be act decisively to establish a common goal for Burma's future.

The MNLS statement, released on February 5, 2009 for the 62nd Anniversary of Mon National Day, called attention to the Panglong agreement to highlight the problem of governance that has existed in Burma from the formation of the Union of Burma. When Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, the Burmese central government failed to guarantee the
rights of non-Burmans as agreed to in the Panglong Agreement led by General Aung San and his fellow countrymen. Rather than solving the root cause that addressed the issue of equal rights including self-determination, the Burmese government ignored the agreement.

Nai Myint Soe who was a founder of the Overseas Mon National Students Organization (OMNSO) said some opposition groups have no clear vision or understanding on political issues of the ethnic nationalities and label their movement as a separatist or insurgency uprising. The MNLS also criticized the exiled government National Coalition Government of Union of Burma (NCGUB) led by Dr. Sein Win as a failure to unite the opposition camps.

The MNLS urged all Mons to work together for the cause of the Mons for the present generation as well as the descendants of the Thai Mon who fled the militant Burmese king U Aung Zeya over 250 years ago. It also appeals to the international community to increase pressure on the Burmese military government to speed up the process of a democratic transition in Burma.

Mon activists, who took part during 1988 uprising and who now live in the USA, founded the MNLS in 2007.

Soaring Kyat hurts Mon community worldwide
Kaowao: February 6, 2009

Bangkok – The soaring Burmese currency, at the money exchange market, is hitting the Mon community worldwide with many migrant workers are reluctant to send money home.

The Burmese Kyat in the market today is valued 30.5 Kyat to one Thai Baht, 860 Kyat to the Canadian dollar and 1050 Kyat to the US dollar according to money exchange group in Bangkok.

"The economic downturn has already hit Burma (Mon State) and I was asked by my family to send some money home. But this low rate and my job is not paying good, I am not able to do it now. Two months ago the rate was 38 Kyat for 1 Baht," said Zaw Nai from Ye who works in the fishing industry, Maharchai.

Most family members of migrant workers in Mon State are local farmers and they have been asked to help their parents back home due to the low price of betel nut and rubber in Mon State. In Ye Township, betel nut farmers are earning less than 8 Kyat per nut and one pound of rubber is about 800 kyat.

A money exchange dealer said the soaring value of the Kyat has slowed down their business and fewer workers are able to send their money. "They don't want to exchange their Thai Baht, Rangit and the dollar like before," said Chan Ong from Bangkok.

"We need some money to circulate our business. I put up my farm for sale over two months ago and still there is no buyer," said Nai Soe, a small business owner from Ye. "We heard the Kyat is getting stronger but for us we earn less and all commodity prices are not cheap," he added. The consumers in Ye pay 5000 Kyat for a viss of pork or beef and 6000 Kyat for a viss of chicken.
"Even though the government media has been positively writing about the developing economy in Burma, the business (land and real estate) is stagnant these days and we have no idea when it will be more profitable," said another businessman Nai Win. "Many people want to sell their garden farms or gold, yet there is no buyer out there."

The global economic downturn is also affecting overseas Mon communities in the US, Canada and Europe. Mon students who work part time are hardly saving enough in British Pounds and many are finding themselves out of work. Others, like Mon workers in the auto industry are being laid off according to sources from Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA. Fort Wayne is the largest overseas Mon Community in exile.

In Thailand's Three Pagodas Pass area, many migrant workers are crossing to the border heading home from the Kingdom. "Right now, the police raid against migrant workers and the wages for rubber plantation workers is low. It is not a good situation, but they have no choice, so they must go back. These people however will return to Thailand after their village festival or Songrant New Year. There is no job back home," commented Nai Ong, a resident of Waengka, Mon village.

Victorious Mon party from 1990 election supports NMSP refusal to compete in 2010
Kaowao/IMNA: January 26, 2009

The Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) supports the New Mon State Party’s (NMSP) recent announcement that it will not participate in the 2010 election, say sources in Burma and Thailand. Their reluctance to participate, however, raises questions about who will represent Mon people in Burma's soon-to-be-formed parliament.

After over two weeks of deliberations in the NMSP's 7th Party Congress, in the third week of January the NMSP announced it will not participate in the election. It left a small potential for participation, however, contingent on revision of Burma's constitution by Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) junta. The constitution was approved by a referendum in May 2008, though both the document and the referendum process have been roundly condemned as undemocratic.

Speaking from Rangoon, MNDF vice chairman Nai Ngwe Thein voiced his party's support for the NMSP decision. "The NMSP and MNDF have the same goals now," he said. "For the MNDF, the election committee has not distributed rules about the election. So we are not sure if we will participate in the election or not. If the Burmese government uses the 2008 constitution, we will not participate in the election. But if the SPDC enters into tripartite dialogue and drafts a new constitution, we will participate."

It is unclear, however, whether the SPDC will be willing to enter into tripartite dialogue or amend its constitution before 2010, when Burma is scheduled to hold its first elections in two decades. Burma's last election took place in 1990, though the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), pre-cursor to the SPDC, annulled the results. The MNDF won five seats in the 1990 election, though it saw most of its elected members of parliament imprisoned rather than sat in parliament.
Lack of participation by the NMSP and MNDF leaves a vacuum in politics in Mon areas, raising questions about who will compete for the seats and, eventually, represent Mon people.

For some, participation in the election is to do the bidding of the SPDC. "We welcome the NMSP decision not to participate in the 2010 election," said MNDF-Liberated Area (MNDF-LA) general secretary Nai Aut Dhar. An MNDF member of parliament-elect who fled arrest formed the MNDF-LA in Thailand during September 2008. Any group in a democracy has a right to form a party, added Nai Aut Dhar, but it will not benefit the Mon people.

Important Mon monks in Mon State also said they support the NMSP decision, with reservations. "The NMSP and MNDF have the same goals, and Mon monks mostly agree with them," said one of Mon State's most widely respected senior monks, who is a member of both the Mon Affairs Union and the All Mon Monks Association. His identity is being withheld for security reasons. "But Mon people need Mon parliament members so they can work on behalf of Mon people," he added. The monk said that his viewpoints were widely held by monks he had spoken with, 3 of who are equally respected members of the Sangha in Mon State. The identities of these monks are also being withheld for security.

The senior monk felt that the Maha Sangha Nayaka Council provides indication of the need for Mon representation in Burma's incipient parliament. The Maha Sangha Nayaka Council is an association of 47 monks that determines much of official SPDC policy on religious affairs. There is only one Mon member of the Sangha Nai Yaka, the senior monk said, but he has been able to ensure that monastery examinations can be conducted in the Mon language.

A member of a Mon culture association in Thanbyuzayat Township, however, questioned whether Mon representatives in a parliament formed under the current constitution would have any real ability to look after the interests of Mon people. Even if a Mon party participates in the election, he said, they could only win a limited number of seats and would have nothing but very limited power.

A Mon resident in Thailand, near Three Pagodas Pass, meanwhile, dismissed the importance of the NMSP's decision on the election entirely. "Although the NMSP has had a ceasefire for over 13 years, they have not protected the Mon people," he said. "They did just a few things in education, health and regional development. But the NMSP is not able to talk about political problems with the SPDC. If they participate in the election or not, it will not matter. The NMSP can just hold their ceasefire, they cannot do anything else."

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**Festival permit useless in preventing raid by Ye police**

**Kaowao: January 22, 2009**

Ye – In spite of having permission from township authorities in Duya, a village festival was raided by the police force and cash estimated at over eight million kyat was seized.

According to an event organizer, about 15 policemen led by U Shein Linn, General Administrator of the Township, raided a festival in the village of Jawkanee in Duyar at about 9 pm on January 14. The main gamblers were not arrested, but over eight million kyats in cash
were seized and 12 villagers were taken and the village headman was forced to testify as a witness.

A local source reported that the organizing committee and the village headman of Duya had already arranged for the festival by paying bribes to the Township Peace and Development Committee, the local Burma Army battalion, the Intelligence Branch and other persons of concern.

A government employee (civil servant) who spoke under condition of anonymity told Kaowao that village festivals are granted permit only when the local headman pays a bribe. But this time, Township Chairman U Thein Zaw failed to share the under-the-table money with Administrator U Shein Lin. In return, U Shein Lin ordered the police force to crack down on the festival.

Even though over eight million kyat (Burmese currency) and, the gold chain and gold ring of 5 kyat-tha (82 gram) were confiscated, the police force reported that only 110,000 Kyats had been seized.

"We were very disappointed because the village festival is very important where people of all ages gather and have fun. This robbery committed by the government shows the truth in rural Burma. We have nobody to ask for help in fighting this kind of corruption but we want outsiders to know what is happening in our area," said Nai Kyaw from Duya.

TPDC Chairman Thein Zaw is notorious for his greed in taking bribes from the local villagers. Owners of karaoke bars also have to pay the Chairman upon demand for trips he makes to the capital and even for his vacation.

Jawkanee is in Duya (Durae community) of the Palean area. It was a strong hold area of the NMSP and visitors are attracted to the beauty of Palean.

Environment

It Is Now Or Never

By Aditi Munot, Countercurrents.org: 04 February, 2009

'We have spent too much time thinking, supposing that if we weigh in advance the possibilities of any action, it will happen automatically. We have learnt rather too late, that action comes not from thought, but from the readiness of responsibility' – Dietrich Bonhoeffer (written while in prison resisting Nazis)

Any change will come about only from the readiness of responsibility. Mankind needs to own up to the responsibility of the changes brought about in the climate of this planet over the past 150 years and act accordingly.

Global temperatures are higher by about 0.8°C over pre industrial temperatures. Another 0.6°C is already built into the system. These changes have occurred solely on account of
human activities like clearing of forests, endless burning of fossil fuels and so on. In less than 200 years, we have unleashed into the atmosphere the green house gases that nature took billions of years to bury.

All this reckless burning of cheap fuel has resulted in increasing forest fires, loss of permafrost, intensifying desertification, extinction of innumerable species of plants and animals, rising diseases and so on. The urgency of the problem of global warming is such that if we do not act today, change our needs and habits today, it will probably be too late to do anything. Our lack of action now will lead to global warming attaining certain tipping points which in turn will trigger positive feedbacks in the system. Many rainforests like the Amazon, which are the biggest carbon sinks will eventually become the largest carbon emitters of our planet. Similarly global warming not just results in loss of polar ice caps and glaciers, but also ensures more sunlight is absorbed by the earth as ice is an important reflector of solar radiation. More so, melting permafrost releases trapped methane and carbon dioxide further enabling the cycle of global warming. Once these and such other positive feedbacks like the soil and ocean carbon cycle feedbacks kick in, the situation will be irreversible forever.

The rate at which we are going, sea levels could be higher by meters in a matter of few decades. Even a 20-30% loss of Greenland ice could result in flooding of major cities located in coastal areas. Increasing forest fires and desertification will result in lowering arable land putting an immense pressure on the food supply of an already starving planet. Warmer seas will result in acidification and decaying marine life and loss of plankton – another important protector against sunlight.

We are at a level of over 380 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In the opinion of leading climatologist James Hansen of NASA, we just do not need to stop further emissions but we need to remove some carbon from the atmosphere and cool the planet. And we clearly are nowhere close to doing anything on these lines. In fact emissions are expected to rise by 60% up to 2030.

In a recent seminar, Tim Flannery, the Australian climatologist pointed out that major climate changes in the past have occurred over very short time spans – 2 to 4 decades. He also noted that actual rise in temperature in the past decade has been close to or above the forecasts of worst case scenarios. This simply indicates, the time and rate of climate change are going to be much earlier and faster than any forecast model or prediction suggests.

All global goals are set for reduction and caps in emissions by X% up till 2050. Similarly, the global community is debating on how much developed countries should curtail emissions vis a vis developing nations. These goals, debates, seminars, Kyoto Protocol, IPCC are all meaningless if they do not opt to act now. It might be too late 40 years from now. Temperatures are expected to rise by 0.3°C per decade. At that rate, the global temperature by 2050 will be higher than what the earth has experienced in the past 3 million years, when the temperature was higher by 2-3°C.

Most plant and animal species will not be able to adapt to drastic changes in climate. As of today the list of extinct and on the verge of extinction is ever increasing. More importantly, impediments like roads and highways created by humans will tremendously restrict the migration of forests and animals to safer climate zones. It will be impossible to sustain a human population of over 6.7 billion in the face of higher sea levels and increased deserts.
There will be mass scale diseases and epidemics, poverty and starvation, riots and wars.

The truth is, climate change is no longer a difficulty to be faced by our children or grandchildren. It sure is going to happen in our lifetimes. If we do not change today, correct our lifestyles and consumption patterns now.... There will be no tomorrow. We, the entire global community have to make a choice today, to be able to live tomorrow. Each one of us, every individual, every country, the whole world needs to take it upon ourselves to keep this planet liveable.... For us, our children, all other species with whom we share this planet.

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ABOUT US

Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide more of an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting peace and change 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.