

# **KAOWAO NEWS NO. 153**

**Newsletter for social justice and freedom in Burma**

**July 9 - August 1, 2009**

**Readers' Front**

**Malaysia: Burmese Rights and Drug Issue Long Neglected**

**Mon Politicians Prepare for 2010 Election**

**Army on Four cuts campaign again**

**Youth's Hope for Burma: By Christina Maes**

**New DKBA members sent to frontline**

**Flooding Besets Ye, Mon State**

**Burmese Army officer and soldiers desert, flee to Thailand**

**Tension mounts after three killed in Mon clash**

**Election 2010: Mon veterans contest or not**

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**Readers' Front**

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to the Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to better serve 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.

As Kaowao has shifted our focus to reach out to grass root populations who can read only Mon and Burmese, we are producing more Mon and Burmese versions than English. Please also listen to our Rehmonya Radio program at <http://www.kaowaoaudio.org>.

Regards,

Editor  
Kaowao Newsgroup  
editor@kaowao.org  
www.kaowao.org

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*Tension mounts after three killed in Mon clash*

The root cause of Burma is other than SPDC regime itself. The regime is getting more dirty and trickier than ever by creating conflicts within the ethnic armed groups. The regime tries to degrade the ethnic armed groups who have been fighting for democracy and autonomy to become armed criminals. For ethnic nationalities of Burma it is too bitter to swallow like prescribed medication, but it is true and reality. When people are poor and hungry they look for the opportunity to survive. In current situation who can feed and provide opportunity will gain the power. No one knows when the regime and its army will take their own medicine accidentally.

Mahn Kyaw Swe

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*On Burmese Army officer and soldiers desert, flee to Thailand*

It is clear that the Burmese generals are only a few and there are many soldiers who dislike their leaders. Politicians should reach the real soldiers and tell them how the BA is suppressing not only the civilians but the ordinary soldiers as well.

Yae Win (KL, Malaysia)

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***Migrant Watch***

**Malaysia: Burmese Rights and Drug Issue Long Neglected**

By Siha Ong

Last month, Malaysian authorities arrested five immigration officers suspected of selling Burmese immigrants to human traffickers, according to China Post on July 22, 2009. For the first time, Malaysia has found enough evidence to prosecute government officials who were involved in a racket that forced thousands of Burmese into human bondage. For several years well-documented reports by local NGOs and local media including Kaowao have released news on the situation of Burmese migrant workers and refugees with little being done until now.

Burmese migrants have faced the gamut of abuse at the hands of Malaysian authorities who make a profit by condemning the innocent Burmese to a life of misery after rounding them up from the streets or their places of employment, sometimes even those who are legit, confiscating their valuables and then selling them to sexual bondage in brothels or to agents who force them to slave away for months onboard fishing boats or in restaurants. The host Malay communities have long exploited the Burmese who have no government to back them up, but the local authorities, rather than accepting bribes, soon discovered they could make a higher return by cutting out the middle man entirely and getting directly involved in the slave racket and in the highly lucrative alcohol and drugs entertainment business.

Kaowao released reports and feature stories on the increasing drug abuse among migrant and refugee communities in Malaysia that highlight it as the tip an iceberg related to a sheet of human trafficking. It has been mostly invisible and silenced.

“I separated from my husband because he uses drugs every day and hangs out with friends. I have no money for food to feed our family. He is very weak and has little energy,” said a Mon woman from Kalang, near Kuala Lumpur.

The drugs are cheap and easily purchased. According to a social worker of Mon community, one set (dose) of drugs costs about 2.5 Malaysia Ringgit and they can buy it from the local dealers. A new user consumes about two sets a day with some addicts using up to 10 sets per day. One dose is a combination of three tablets. Normally, a migrant worker in the restaurant earns about 30 Ringgit per day, a construction and auto body shop worker earns about 50 Ringgit per day.

“This is an ongoing crisis for our migrant workers and refugees. I met three people from my village who were sent back because of mental health issues related to drugs,” said Nai Win from Palean in Ye, Mon State.

“Nearly eighty percent of Mon migrant workers use drugs and alcohol; among them about five percent use heroin, ten percent drink alcohol and the remaining use pills. The pills they use are a combination of three tablets sleeping pills called s.w-u.p” said Janoel Ong, Vice-Chairperson of Mon Youth Association based in Kuala Lumpur.

Another drug user told a Kaowao reporter that one pill in the morning gives them energy to work long hours and then another is taken at night to help them get some happiness. When the pill is taken, the user is not hungry but needs a quiet environment. In addition, they consume a lot caffeine soda pop, especially Coca-Cola or Pepsi, which helps them to get high.

Other sources from the Thai Burma border reported the use of Yaba (crazy medicine in Thai) is also booming along the border areas. The Mon community source from the Three Pagodas Pass estimated that over fifty percent of youth are using the illegal Yaba, a combination of methamphetamine (a powerful and addictive stimulant) and caffeine.

The other concern is the spread of STD and AIDS because of drugs and alcohol. Many migrant workers have received no education on drug abuse and AIDS in Malaysia. “When the Cyclone Nargis

hit and killed our people in Burma, it was visible and people talked about it. Drugs and alcohol is much worse and killing us softly, but it's all forgotten," said Nai Sorn Ong from his tiny, dark and smoky room in Klang.

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## **Politics**

### **Mon politicians prepare for 2010 Election**

Kaowao: August 1, 2009

Moulmein -- Some activists and politicians are planning to form a Mon political party after failing to persuade the two main political parties, New Mon State Party and Mon National Democratic Front.

"Why not we take our chances? It rarely happens in twenty years and there will be some political platform provided by the SPDC. Our country is in a very deep economic crisis. It is a time to work together and build a prosperous economy for Burma," said Nai Moe Win, a businessman from Mudon.

According to a Mon youth leader from Moulmein, the capital city of Mon State, a new working group has been formed to prepare for the upcoming 2010 election. The group is comprised of veterans from both the New Mon State Party and Mon National Democratic Front. The formation of the new committee follows the 14th anniversary of ceasefire agreement between the NMSP and military junta, on June 29.

Dr. Banya Aung Moe, a veteran of the New Mon State Party and Mon community leader also believes that it is important to contest as a single political party rather than doing it individually. He further said that the Mon people should form a moderate or liberal democratic party instead of an extreme nationalist party. Dr. Aung Moe has published articles about the importance of the election urging the people to decide on who will be the best leader to promote culture, social affairs, and community development.

Some senior monks also have urged the Mon to contest in the election so that the Mon community will have full representation in the future parliament.

Many political observers believe that the local population is worried that if the cease-fire deal between the NMSP and SPDC breaks, the Mon army will fight against the BA. During the cease-fire period, local farmers and businessmen have invested into business initiatives and developed land into agriculture especially rubber plantations.

"We have already developed much land and if fighting breaks out, we will lose it. Even some NMSP leaders don't want to lose their business ties in the city," said a businessman from Ye.

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## **Army on Four cuts campaign again**

**S.H.A.N. August 1, 2009**

Following a series of attacks staged by the anti-Naypyitaw Shan State Army (SSA) 'South' that had inflicted heavy casualties on junta patrols roving the countryside, the Burma Army is launching a major retaliation campaign against the populace, according to reports coming to Thailand.

Several villages have been burned down, their occupants forcibly relocated and some beaten and detained by units under the command of Mongnawng – based Military Operations Command #2 since 27 July. So far, units involved in the latest "4 cuts" drive (cutting food, funds, intelligence and recruits to the armed resistance by local populace) include at least the following infantry battalions (IBs) and light infantry battalions (LIBs): IB 9 Loilem, IB 12 Loilem, IB 64 Laikha, IB 248 Mongnai, LIB 515 Laikha.

Villages affected include: Hokhai (Lahu), Mongkeung township; Tard Mawk (Shan), Laikha township; Holom (Shan), Laikha township; Kunhoong (Shan), Laikha township; Wan Yerng (Shan), Laikha township; Nawngtao (Lahu), Kehsi township; Mongleum (Lahu), Kehsi township; Zizaw (Shan), Kehsi township; Pakang (Shan), Kehsi township.

The Lahu villages were relocated from northern Shan State to the south following a 3-year massive 4 cuts campaign (1996-98) that destroyed 1,500 villages and displaced more than 300,000 people.

"The officer that came to our village was polite and did not look happy," a woman that fled with her family to Laikha was quoted as saying. "He told us that he had been ordered to burn the village. 'As a soldier, I cannot disobey. If you have anything you want to take with you, please collect them and leave.'"

For most other villages, they had not time to take much. "The soldiers came in, drove us out of our houses and started burning after spraying them with liquid fuel that smelled like kerosene."

At least 200 houses were razed to the ground in Tardmawk, Holom and Kunhoong alone. Long Ti, Tard Mawk tract headman was reportedly beaten while under interrogation and taken to Laikha.

"This is what we call *am pay maw, paw kark* (You can't do anything to the pot, so you smash the cooking spoon) behavior," a survivor said. "Why do they treat us like this if they want our support?"

The SSA South had launched attacks against isolated outposts and patrols beginning 21 May, the 51st anniversary of the Shan resistance. During the last engagement on 15 July, the Burma Army's LIB 515 suffered 11 killed, 1 captured and 5 assorted weapons loss.

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## Activism

### **Youth's Hope for Burma**

By Christina Maes

Teaching in Sangkhlaburi has opened my eyes to the realities of the millions of Burmese people who have been living under the military dictatorship for over 40 years.

I had read the facts before. The Burmese government has created a situation whereby police, military officers, and leaders are permitted and even encouraged to rape girls and women with no consequences whatsoever. The military regularly arrests and tortures people without reason to create an atmosphere of fear and distrust. These facts are so far from the realities of most Western people that we read them without thinking what they mean. We cannot imagine such things happening to us or to people that we know.

Students in my English class were completing the sentence, “when there is freedom in my country, I will...” Their answers revealed to me the simple yet powerful day to day dreams, hopes, and losses which I believe Westerners will be more able to imagine and truly feel.

“When there is freedom in my country, I will visit many places and meet many people.” Burmese people are patriotic. They are proud of the great histories of their peoples. But they are not allowed to see other places in their country; they cannot meet people from the various ethnic groups to share culture and traditions because the government knows that divide and conquer is a strategy that works.

“When there is freedom in my country I will live with my parents.” As a young woman in Canada, I was happy to leave my parents because I never considered that I would not have the choice to return to them. If young Burmese people, especially those in small villages, want a future, they must leave their families. If not, there is no education, no safety, no employment, and no hope.

“When there is freedom in my country, I will learn about everything.” The heroes and villains of history that have shaped how I see and feel about the world were unknown to my students. They had no opportunity to learn about Mao Zedong or Joseph Stalin. More importantly, they could not learn about Mahatma Ghandi or Nelson Mandela. They could not know about the brave women fighting for equality nor about the brutal dictators who have been ousted by revolutionaries.

“When there is freedom in my country, I will be very happy.” Despite the daily struggles that they endure, I am struck by the generosity and optimism of the people I have met. They are people who take great risks and make many sacrifices for their country. But life in Burma at present does not provide happiness as it should. Even the most brutal dictator cannot kill hope, and so it is imperative that everyone who can continues to work until the day that there is freedom in Burma.

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## **New DKBA members sent to frontline**

Kaowao: July 21, 2009

Sangkhlaburi -- Mon youths made to accept membership by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army from Mon villages in Kawkareik and Pa-an township in Karen State, are being sent to the frontline to fight the KNU, said a Mon youth from Kaw Mate village.

Family members of youth, who have gone into hiding, are being threatened to bring them back. At the meeting point in Myawaddy, a person who can bribe 30,000-50,000 baht does not have to go to the frontline. Such a person can leave for other places. Most of them are heading for Thailand.

Mon youths have got DKBA membership cards after paying 20,000 Kyat, from the Karen Language and Literature Association based in Pa-an. The membership cards help to avoid disturbance from the authorities. Mon businessmen, who are into human trafficking, motorcycle trafficking and other business ventures become DKBA members by taking the name of the DKBA even though they are not soldiers.

According to news agencies, over 100 DKBA soldiers were killed in the joint offensive of the DKBA and the Burmese Army against the KNU brigade 7 in early June.

Injured DKBA soldiers are being treated in Maesot, Myawaddy, Shwe Koukko and Pa-an hospitals. "A Kaw Mate villager and another from Minn Village have been injured. Many people, who are not soldiers, were injured in the battle," said a relative of an injured DKBA Mon soldier.

According to Myawaddy locals, people who are being made to take DKBA membership are suffering from depression because they have to go to the frontline.

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## **Flooding Besets Ye, Mon State**

Kaowao: July 16, 2009

Ye -- Torrential rain has inundated the city market and nearby areas in Ye, southern Mon State, according to local sources.

With rain-swollen rivers dangerously flooding out, residents of Yangyi Aung, River Road (Kannar Lan), Dani Taw, and Chaung Taung were evacuated to other areas.

"The Meteorology department forecasts that the water level at Ye River will rise to the critical mark if heavy rain continues and the tide from the sea rises," said a township authority.

Local people have been disappointed that only relatives and close friends of the SPDC are getting help for moving.

“Every year during the raining season, heavy rain causes Ye River to overflow its banks and the City Market. There was a heavy rain three days ago but it is getting better now. There is no severe damage because we are used to this situation and have already prepared (for evacuation). Our belongings were shifted to other neighbours,” said Ah Soe, a shopkeeper from City Market.

Other townships in Mon State also faced heavy rains, but there have been no reports of deaths or injuries. Many children in the rural areas suffer from malaria and dengue fever in the rainy season.

Some local people and environmental groups claim that the severe flooding was caused by deforestation upstream of the Ye (Bee Ree) River. Mon State also faced a long summer, and the production of betel nut and other crops decreased due to the dry weather. Many people are aware that flooding occurs as a result of the deforestation but there have been limited efforts taken by the government to reduce deforestation in the area.

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### **Burmese Army officer and soldiers desert, flee to Thailand**

Kaowao: Jul 15, 2009

Twelve soldiers including an officer of the Burmese Army’s Infantry Battalion 32, temporarily based in ‘Three Pagodas’ town on the Thai-Burma border deserted and fled to neighbouring Thailand. A broker in Three Pagoda Pass on condition of anonymity said he helped them to reach a place in Thailand and to get jobs.

The soldiers include Lieutenant Ko Ko Lwin, 2nd Warrant Officer Htay Lwin, and 10 from other ranks. They did not want to mention the place they had reached for security reasons.

The broker said “they have been in touch with me for a long time but I didn’t believe them. However I told them to come to a place on Thai soil. When they arrived, our people brought them safely to the work place. We did not take any money for transporting them because we sympathized with them.”

The soldiers left their battalion five days ago. They were sent as two separate teams.

An officer from the New Mon State Party on condition of anonymity said that his organization knew about the desertions but he refused to talk about it because it did not concern his organization.

Lt. Ko Ko Lwin was a personal assistant to Lt. Col. Khin Zaw, the commander of IB 32. Recently Lt Ko Ko Lwin quarreled with his battalion commander about his motorcycle accident in ‘Three Pagoda’ town. The deserters are from the battalion office on Bayintnaung hill in Three Pagodas town.

To provide security to Three Pagoda town IB 32 was exchanged with IB 24 at the end of March. It is learnt that IB 32 will replace the Light Infantry Battalion 356 soon. Unlike other towns, there are no



permanent battalions in Three Pagoda town.

The Burmese military junta changes battalions every three months in Three Pagoda town. In the border area, battalion commanders have plenty of opportunities to make money under the table because the battalion commander becomes an administrative officer of the town. The Township Peace and Development Council has to follow the commander's order. Locals say that the commander's word is law.

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### **Tension mounts after three killed in Mon clash**

Kaowao: July 11, 2009

Ye -- Mon civilians worry that they will have to pay a huge price as splinter groups become more active in remote areas. Since the SPDC has demanded that the cease-fire NMSP to become Border Guard Force, some retired soldiers have formed armed groups.

A recent fight between a splinter group and the New Mon State Party led to the deaths of three men on June 29, 2009, and has increased tension among the Mon groups. "We are worried because the village headmen were kidnapped by Rehmonya Army and again there is fighting," said Nai Peel, from Ye of southern Mon State.

According to a wireless message from the New Mon State Party, they had an encounter with about 15 soldiers of the Chan Dein group led by Ablai when they entered the old Kwan Paing village, Tavoy District. The skirmish started at 1:33 pm local time and lasted for 20 minutes. As a result, three men from the splinter group; Mehm Zaw Zaw (27 years), Mehm Theik Lwin (26 years), and Kun Ha-dei (24 years), were killed and one more was injured. 1 M-79, 1 Carbine and 1 AK-47 from the group were seized by the NMSP soldiers. "If they did not intrude our controlled area, I am sure it would not have happened," said the NMSP officer.

At the beginning of June, two village headmen, Nai Shwe Thaung and Nai San Htein, were taken by the Rehmonya Army near the base of the New Mon State Party. The group is led by Nai Khin Maung and they intruded into the Battalion No. 3 village. This Mon village is built on the old site of Battalion 3, located near the Three Pagodas Pass border.

A source from the Thai-Burma border reported that the Rehmonya Army is led by a retired Colonel Nai Shaung. The group has also distributed letters at Mon villages near the Three Pagodas Pass and has collected some money from villagers.

At a bull fight gambling session during the Songkrant New Year festival in April, a clash between the NMSP soldiers and Mon Peace and Defence Force (MPDF) occurred in Dhamasa Village, Kyaikmayaw Township. Another clash occurred on April 18, 2009 when a NMSP member Dr. Minn Naung was killed by a gunshot wound to his back close to SPDC's Southeast Command.

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## **Election 2010: Mon veterans contest or not**

Reported by Siha Ong, Kaowao: July 9, 2009

Some Mon veterans are planning to contest the upcoming general election, while urging their politicians to represent and fully support their electorates in order to avoid a power vacuum in their respective areas.

“It is important to contest as a single political party rather than doing it individually. Otherwise, we may not win enough seats in the 2010 election”, said Dr. Aung Moe, a veteran of New Mon State Party and Mon community leader based at the Three Pagodas Pass border town. He further said that the Mon people should form a moderate or liberal democratic party instead of an extreme nationalist party. Even though the SPDC has sponsored the general election, it is still under their control, it is time to compromise with the military regime for the benefit of the total population in Burma.

Dr. Aung Moe, a well-known national leader, has been involved in Mon community affairs for several years; first as a university student activist, then for many years as a soldier, and now as a community leader. He has published two articles recently about the importance of the election urging the people to decide on who will be the best leader to promote culture, social affairs, and community development. There will be about 80-90 seats to contest for the National Assembly (Ahmyotha Hluttaw), the People's Assembly (Pyithu Hluttaw) at the Federal, and State Parliament (Pyi-nae Hluttaw). Mon activists have been urged to set up a work plan, select the best candidates, raise fund and open central and local offices. The individuals will not be able to do their work until they form a new political party in accordance with the military government's guidelines.

Colonel Kaorot of New Mon State Party recently told a Kaowao reporter that some veterans from the party will contest, but did not reveal their names.

From a community source in Moulmein, some activists and senior monks have been discussing on whether to contest, claiming that the Mon people need parliament members to act on their behalf.

At the ceremony of summer literacy class in Mon State, a senior monk, Rev Abbot Eindaka, also urged the Mon to take part in the election so that the Mon community will have full representation in the future parliament.

“There are some issues of ethnic minority rights in the new constitution. If we don't take the chance to contest and get involved now, other candidates, such as Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and National Unity Party (NUP) members, will step in and take it,” said Nai Lwin, a Mon activist. The NUP was formed by the military junta with members of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) to take part at the previous elections on May 27, 1990.

The Mon veterans and activists also urge the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to prepare for the upcoming election. One pressing issue on everybody's mind is the Burmese population transfer into Mon State which has threatened the Mon community. If they have no seats, they will not be able to voice their concerns to the government. It is important for the people to be involved, the Mon need to have dialogue, and initiate a process of debate on issues that are of concern; if they are successful, then they can get involved in community development initiatives and cultural affairs such as promoting Mon National Day and education programs for the teaching of the Mon language in their own schools.

Meanwhile, the former army chief of the Mon National Liberation Army, General Nai Aung Naing is reaching out to Buddhist monks and local people to work hard for the election campaign. General Nai Aung Naing formed the Mon Peace and Defense Force (MPDF) to oversee the cease-fire agreement in Mon areas. He is traveling villages and monasteries hoping to organize the public to join his party and participate in the election.

In contrast, the two main political parties, the MNDF and NMSP have stated firmly that they will not participate in the 2010 election. Both parties say that the new constitution, approved by a referendum in May 2008, has many problems that fail to take into consideration democratic rights.

MNDF leader Dr. Min Kyi Win, a Mon MP who was elected in 1990, questioned whether the Mon can fully represent their people in the future parliament due to the fact that ethnic minority rights are written vaguely in the new constitution, which will likely undermine and alter the ethnic rights.

Secretary General of the NMSP, Nai Hongsar, also said that they have to follow the Party's 7<sup>th</sup> Congress in which the NMSP had decided not to participate; however, the NMSP will not obstruct those who wish to contest.

Up until now, the SPDC has issued no official announcement on the election law or its procedures, with the Mon politicians trying to sort out on who will do what, where, and what steps to take.

Nonetheless, the government-backed USDA members are launching their election campaign. In June 2009, the SPDC's Brigadier General Ohm Myint urged Nai-prai villagers of Mudon Township, Mon State to go and vote. Nearly 25 per cent of the seats will be reserved for the military in the future parliament; it is believed that the SPDC will not easily defer the remaining seats to other parties.

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## **KAOWAO NEWS GROUP**

Email: [editor@kaowa.org](mailto:editor@kaowa.org), [webmaster@kaowao.org](mailto:webmaster@kaowao.org),  
Phone: + 66 81 0058-851, 66 83 322 5804 (Thailand)  
Mailing address  
P.O. Box 2, Sangkhlaburi  
Kanchanaburi, 71240, Thailand

[Kao Wao website -- http://www.kaowao.org](http://www.kaowao.org)

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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 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.