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Disappearance of Army Chief of the New Mon State Party
Kaowao / March 14, 2008

General Nai Aung Naing, the army chief of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), has disappeared after recently leaving for medical treatment in Rangoon, say Mon sources.

In December 2006, Gen. Nai Aung Naing received permission from the NMSP in to
obtain long-term treatment in Rangoon. But he disappeared after he checked in for medical care at Pang Hlaing health center in Rangoon, the former capital of Burma, said a source in the city.

‘Nai Aung Naing left from Three Pagodas Pass (Border Town) on the fourth of last month, and then from Than Phyu Zayat to Rangoon on February sixth. The party gave for him a pension of long-term health care first class. He disappeared after February sixth. We are still trying but cannot confirm where he is,’ Nai Ong Mangye, the NMSP spokesman, told Kaowao. A pension of first class health care is the highest available pension and gives Nai Aung Naing the chance to receive all expenditures for health care.

Pamphlets opposing the upcoming referendum are being spread throughout Mon state, and now say that Nai Aung Naing was arrested by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The pamphlets ask for his release, in Mon and Burmese, and their publisher is unknown.

Mon political analysts, however, mostly believe Nai Aung Naing is in willing contact with the SPDC, and may be negotiating disarmament.

At the 6th Central Committee meeting held in at 2005, Gen. Nai Aung Naing became the army chief of the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), the NMSP’s military wing. While he is seventy-six years old, he is renowned for his service as an excellent fighter who was wounded twice, once in the hip and once in the abdomen. He currently suffers from diabetes and a pain in the stomach.

A rumor from Mergue (Myeik),Tennasserim, southern Burma, holds that Nai Ong Naing disappeared because he is attempting to contact the Monland Restoration Party, an armed Mon rebel group which does not currently recognize the 1995 NMSP-SPDC ceasefire.

To clarify the NMSP position on the referendum, last month the Bureau of Special Operation from the SPDC met with NMSP officers at Three Pagodas Pass. On March ninth the NMSP released a statement opposing the referendum because of problems with the constitution and the fact that it was not drafted with input from a tripartite dialogue.

The examination of 2 subjects in a day at southern Mon State’ town
Kaowao / March 14, 2008

Ninth grade Basic Education High School students in Southern Mon State have been forced by the regime to take their exams under especially difficult circumstances.

Citing security concerns, officials in Khaw Zar sub-township instructed students to take two exams per day, doubling the usual one-exam-per-day schedule. The increased work load makes passing the exams difficult, according to parents of Khaw Zar students.
They (authorities of town) announced the examination started on the 27th (of February) and must be finished in three days. All the students got tired so they couldn't pass it well. How could they? Their teachers are angry and dissatisfied with the attitude the authorities have towards their students,' said one mother of a student in Khaw Zar.

The examinations were scheduled to cover Burmese and Chemistry, English and Physics and Mathematics and Biology in three days.

According to a source close to the Education Department of Ye township, the shortened exam scheduled was blamed on ongoing conflict between Mon rebels and the Burmese army. Attacks in the area occur almost daily.

After Khaw Zar village was promoted to the rank of town standard by the SPDC, the Mon High School of the NMSP' Education Department was dispossessed by the regime to reform the Basic Education High School.

But the Education Department of the NMSP had inaugurated another Mon Middle School (8th grade) at town again.

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**Dam Repairs May Disrupt and Destroy**
Smulk Chan / March 14, 2008

Mon State; News has surfaced that Junta authorities in Southern Mu Don Township will work on Win-pa-non Dam, which has sustained long-term damage and cracks. This news has caused great concern for villagers whose fields are set to sustain damage, and those in the greater area whose taxes may be increased as a result of the planned work.

The authorities have decided to release water from the dam to patch the fissures forming at the base of Win-pa-Non Dam located near Abit village, Mu-Don Township. It is believed this flooding will threaten at least eight surrounding villages. As yet no villager has received official Dam plans or flood notices from authorities.

According to a villager who lives near the dam, 'Win-pa-non dam is located near Ah-bit village, along the Moulmein to Than phyu Zayat Road. Its base inside has slowly become more and more cracked, so they plan to rebuild it in the near future. To do this they will release the water, causing distress to the eight villages in the surrounding area which face flood from the dam water.'

'They (authorities) want to complete the dam work before the rainy season, which means they only have two months to act. The villagers along the Dam were forced to plant Summer paddy that will now be flooded, along with our other plantations like melon and vegetables.'
Since the rumours started villagers have had growing concerns about tax collection and forced labor in the repair process, said a villager.

The repair costs are estimated at one thousand million Kyats; a large portion of this money will almost certainly be collected in taxes from villages around the dam, a fear confirmed by head villagers who currently are forced to collect taxes of around 70 million Kyats from high-level villages, including Kalot-Sot.

An observer from the area said that the areas most seriously threatened by the proposed floods are those located in the surrounding low-lying areas including Kyone Kapui village, Taung Pa, Htaun Mahn, Kalot Sot, Kot PeHtaw, Doe Mar, Phal Doe, Abit village to Yang Dang and Sant Tow. Most of those villages earn their livelihood through agriculture, largely through rubber and paddy plantations. He added that authorities began work on widening the canal with two bulldozers early this month.

The area was originally ear-marked as a government development project, with aims to grow two strong crops in the area and showcase the Win-pa-Non Dam, one of three dams in Moulmein district. This project began in late 2001 by the No. 4\textsuperscript{th} position in the junta, second General Secretary Lt. Gen. Tin Oo, who later died in a helicopter crash near Pa-an in Karen state southern Burma.

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**Ministry of Education running fake diploma mill**

Kaowao: March 2, 2008

For a small fee, the Ministry of Education, Myanmar Examination Board is handing out illegal recommendation marks obtained in matriculation examination for university graduates.

According to a Burmese student who studies in Thailand, “Any student who wishes to study abroad but who was unsuccessful in the matriculation examination could obtain the tenth standard official document and other various kinds of recommendations from the examination board through brokers.”

He claimed, “A certificate for tenth standard recommendation is 50,000 or 60,000 kyat, a university degree goes for 100,000 kyat through a broker. Moreover we could buy subjects, at least 3, written into the certificate.”

Daw May Nyein, a retired Burmese Lecturer at a Burma University commented, “The youth lack many opportunities, they have no access to education, no training opportunities and they have no chance at receiving high quality education, so I have proposed to the Burmese authorities to take responsibility in solving this ongoing fabrication of certificates and degree and apply justice as soon as possible.”

She continued on by saying that young people from Burma have no exit. In time they
discover the only way out is to go overseas and they don’t really care whether it’s legal or illegal. In reality this is not good but their lives inside Burma are very restricted from having no opportunities, no economic prospects, no training whatsoever. The government must do something fast and do it with justice and fairness.

A student with fabricated documents from a broker told a Kaowao reporter, “Only the Myanmar Examination Board has the power to produce fake matriculation certificates however we now can get it from a dealer costing 60,000 kyat. This document is for used obtaining immigration benefits for leaving the country.” He admitted that some of his friends hold fake certificates and now attend university.

A foreign service agent; however, (overseas broker) claimed that these recommendations are not fake, they help the student to study abroad and it costs approximately between 60,000 and 100,000 kyat in Burma.

A broker from Rangoon explained, “This recommendation includes a red symbol stamp after an agreement from the Myanmar Examination Board minister and chairman for Non- Migrant Worker ED (Education).” He added, “Except photo, one needs nothing we can do everything. A red symbol and other stamps are real but in an illegal way.”

Ko Soe Naing who is studying at a Thailand university complained about Burma ’s education system saying, “how terrible the system is and that corruption is hindering the education of young people.”

Commentary

The Celebration of Mon National Day Worldwide is Over: But our dreams are still strong and much work remains to be done

(By Siri Mon Chan)

The 61st celebration of Mon National day is over but the struggle for our rights continues. Celebrations occurred in February, 2008 around the world with thousands of people from all nationalities attending.

Mon National Day commemorates the birth of the Mon Nation. According to our traditional history, the founding in 573 CE of the Hongsawatoi Kingdom in lower Burma by two brothers, Sammala and Vimala marks an important date in our heritage. The Mon National Day is celebrated back home in Burma in the areas where the Mon live, including in Mon State, Karen State, Rangoon and Pegu. In recent years, the celebration has substantially grown in Mon communities across Asia, Europe, Australia and North America where Mon have resettled and for the first time in many centuries are able to celebrate with dignity and freedom.
Members of the Australia-Mon community celebrated Mon National Day with their hearts brimming with pride. We have not forgotten our Mon brothers and sisters inside Burma who live in fear and are denied the right to enjoy their traditional national holiday which they all cherish so much. Mon National Day is often banned by the Burmese military regime and in Thailand this year the Thai provincial authority caused problems that prevented Mon migrants from attending and enjoying their festival. On the other side of the world, the celebration gained recognition and support from western state governments, such as Australia, the United States, and Canada.

It was great to see many Mon nationals gathered together on this auspicious day wearing their Mon National clothes. It is important that we celebrate and confirm our cultural heritage. It was also very encouraging to see representatives of different nationalities and the Australian mainstream community in attendance and enjoying Mon National Day.

This year’s celebration included speeches, Mon cultural dances, music, traditional food, a photographic display and documentary show. Speeches were given in Mon and English by members of the Mon senior members of parliament, minister from ACT and academics form Australia’s leading university, ANU. Their speeches reminded the audience of the ancient history of the Mon people in Southeast Asia and the importance in preserving our language and culture in today’s ever changing world.

After the speeches, food and drink were offered, popular Mon songs were featured, and the highlight of the evening, live dance performances on stage. Mon women, who had prepared months in advance, marveled the audience with their grace and brilliant costumes of gold and red. Mon authentic food made for the western palate was much appreciated by the participants. This was a very enjoyable social occasion - but one with a serious meaning. Like Mon communities around the globe, the Australia-Mon are rightly proud of their ancient heritage, and are keen to celebrate the continued relevance of Mon identity in the twenty-first century.

Now the official cerebration of the 61st anniversary of Mon national day in Australia and worldwide is over, but much work remains to be done. Our dreams of achieving Mon national independence is still strong after over 250 years after the fall of Hongsavatoi in 1757. Preserving our language, culture, and most importantly building unity among all Mon to work together for our national independence will be a major challenge for all of us in the coming years.

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**Destruction of more farmland by Burma Army**

Kaowao: February 28, 2008

Ye, Mon State – The Burmese army has destroyed by fire garden farms and orchards owned by Mon villagers in southern Ye after accusing them of sheltering Mon armed guerrillas.

According to a source from Khaw Zar Sub-Township, the Burmese soldiers were
searching for four deserters who defected from Regiment No. 408, based in Kalein Aung, Yebyu Township.

One of their men stepped on landmine and died instantly from the blast. In retaliation, the troops from Regiment No. 408 burned down all the betel nut and rubber farms near Yaen Dein village, on February 26, claiming that the villagers and their gardens provide shelter for Mon guerrillas led by Chan Dein who split from the Honsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP).

“The villagers later returned to their farm gardens to burn off the fire but it is a bit far from their village and their efforts were in vain,” said a Mon farmer Nai Blai. Over 10 million Kyat worth of betel nut, lime, and rubber plantation were razed and destroyed due to the fire.

About 50 guerrillas are active in this area and a minor skirmish occur during the Burma’s army operation searching for the 4 deserters on February 25 reported the source in Khaw Zar, with no confirmation from the Burma Army and guerrilla sources.

Recently, Light Infantry Battalion No. 31 ordered that each residence must carry the new travel document for their own security. The document costs villagers 1000 Kyat per household. The SPDC authorities have increased security and their presence along the sentry gates and ordering villagers to work on a rotating roster taking greater responsibility for security.

The Mon guerrillas are active in remote areas of Southern Ye and Yebyu townships in areas named as the “black area” (killing zone) by the Burma Army. Several villagers have been caught in the crossfire and are frequently arrested, tortured, raped and killed by the Burma Army and abused by the Mon splinter group during military operations.

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**Mon National Day kicks off worldwide**

Kaowao: February 21, 2008

Mon National Day Committees in their new homes and host countries are preparing for the big annual Mon National Day celebration and have been working hard to unite their people in an event that will draw in thousands for fun and entertainment.

In most locations, such as in Malaysia, Thailand and back home in Burma, Mon National Day will be celebrated on Friday, February 22, but in the US, Australia and Canada the grand event will take place on the weekend.

According to the Mon Affairs Union (MAU), the Mon community at the Thailand Burma border area is joining the event with the New Mon State Party at Palai Japan village.

Overseas Mon Coordinating Committee (OMCC) is also drafting a joint statement for the
61st Anniversary of Mon National Day.

The Thai-Mon community have already hosted the event on February 2nd and 3rd at Ban Rai Thai Mon village near Samutsakhorn fishing community but the event was not attended by migrant workers due to harassment by the Thai local police.

The Three Pagodas Pass Mon community has to celebrate with low-profile modest festivities this year as a bomb went off to disrupt the event and celebrants are wary of another possible attack this year.

Mon National Day is largely celebrated back home in Burma in areas dominated by Mon inhabitants in Mon State, Karen State, Rangoon and Pegu. The celebration has grown in Mon immigrant communities across Asia, Europe, Australia and North America where Mons live and enjoy some freedom.

Mon migrant workers in South Korea celebrated Mon National Day on February 7th at a Korean monastery in Seoul. According to Nai Blai organizer of the MND, there are over one hundred Mons working in Korea and almost all of them attended this event. The event was organized by Mon singer Gong Chan, Nai Tin Min and Nai Blai.

The MND was also celebrated in London, UK on February 16, 2008 with cultural performance and traditional food.

Mon leaders in 1948 implemented the first Mon National Day to bring together people in a meaningful way based on cultural heritage and political aspirations as a people. The 1st Mon National Day Ceremony was celebrated at the cinema hall of Wae Dut (Ywa Lut) in Beelu Kyun Island, Mon State. According to the booklet written by Rev. Abbot Palita, 7 leaders who organized the event were Rev. Kusala, Mon Pho Cho (President of UMA), Nai Pho Aung, Nai Pho Sein, Nai Htaw Aa, Nai Chan Mon (Secretary of UMA) and Nai Pyaing.

In Canada, jointly hosted by the Mon Canadian Society, Mon Women's Organization and Mon Buddhist Temple (Canada), the Mon National Day in Calgary will be held from 6 p.m. to midnight at Southview Community Association. The Mon Canadians will hold this event as a 10th year celebration featuring cultural performance led by Mi Ohnmar and a live music band led by Nai Reh Nai.

“We name our band ‘Band Mon Poey’. It is a great opportunity for us to welcome Canadians and friends in honouring our heritage. We also want to highlight the same spirit 10 years ago when we started this celebration in Canada’, said an organizer of the MND in Calgary.

Eric Snider, a longtime Canadian supporter of Burma recalls the first celebration in Canada, “It was my pleasure to be a part of the first celebration of Mon National Day in the city of Vancouver more than 10 years ago and I am glad to know that you are continuing the fine tradition that I was part of then. Let us live and work for the day
when it will be possible for the Mon community to celebrate this day as gladly and openly in the heartland of the Mon people in Burma itself as it is done in more than a dozen countries around the world today.”

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**Changes to Travel Document Requirements**

*Kaowao: February 21, 2008*

Ye, Mon State -- Burmese military junta and authorities have been cooperating in their security efforts and subsequently making profits from local villagers.

Southern Ye Township military commander, Kha Ma Ya (Light Infantry Battalion) No. 31, declared each residence must carry the new travel document for their own security. The small and simple document costs villagers 1000 Kyat per household.

A Khaw Zar villager told Kaowao that these documents were required not only of plantation owners but also daily workers who were forced to purchase and carry the document whenever traveling to or from the village. He said, “The military are empowered to query everybody that travels to and from the farms; they even stop women and children as they now expect us to all hold this document. We were previously allowed to hold one pair of documents per household but they now refuse this rule, opting instead to enforce one document per person and therefore increasing their profits greatly."

This traveling document was issued in Khaw Zar Sub-Township and currently documents are held in the New Mon State Party (NMSP) area, Southern Ye Township alongside Khaw Zar and Han Gan villages.

Authorities have now increased security and their presence along the sentry gates and ordering villagers to work on a rotating roster taking greater responsibility for security.

Karen and Mon armed groups are active in remote area of Southern Ye and Yebyu townships and the area is named as a black area (killing zone) by the Burma Army. Several villagers have been arrested, tortured, raped and killed by the Burma Army during military operation to wipe out guerrilla groups.

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**Summer Paddy Cultivation Ordered in Mon State**

*Smulk Chan, Kaowao: February 21, 2008*

SPDC authorities ordered farmers to grow their summer paddy in Mon State in order to improve the development of the countryside local sources from Mon State reported.

“The junta is placing these orders last month in Mudon and Thanbyu Zayat, and around
villages including Chak Toie, Dai Mai and Saung Min. They forced this without supplying enough water for the farmers in each village,” said a farmer from Mudon, Mon State.

Farmers in these areas have been ordered to cultivate the summer paddy; those who do not grow the paddy have to pay a tax of approximately 10,000 to 15,000 Kyats.”

A Kalaw Thaw (Klot Sot) farmer told Kaowao, “If we do not cultivate the paddy by ourselves, we have to pay the tax and allow them to cultivate on our farms. That is why we follow their orders to an extent and cultivate our own farms to retain ownership and protect them from damage. If we allow them to cultivate on our land they promise to provide for us; however, we don’t want to allow them to claim ownership of our paddy, and we don’t like them to work on our farms because they don’t know the land the way we do. So we worry about their methods may cause the destruction.”

Several farmers complain that it is not the right time to grow the paddy in this season and it has been difficult to obtain the water from the stream. Without regional support with materials, the farmers have to purchase water and fertilizers by themselves to successfully cultivate the summer paddy.

A farmer forced to cultivate the summer paddy said, “We are fully aware that we lose money, energy and waste our time for zero personal profit, however we have to cultivate the paddy because we live in fear of the government and their power. We are afraid our farms will be destroyed.”

The problems farmers face to cultivate the paddy in summer affect not only farmers but their children’s education; generally children have to help their parents and do not have time to study for their exams.

This project was ordered by the SPDC in an effort to demonstrate how Burma as a country is developing. In Mon state, Mudon, Thanbyu Zayat and Ye townships have been forced to grow paddy in each village, while in Karen state farmers whose farms lie near the dam were forced to cultivate the summer paddy while the remaining farmers were forced to cultivate groundnuts and sun flowers.

Traffic police in festivals to extort motorbikes owners
Kaowao: February 20th, 2008

Mon State -- the number of blue-uniformed traffic police has been reduced, with their presence now only visible at the main check points as they come to the villages and seize any unlicensed motorbikes.

“Because of all different festivals in the rural communities at the beginning of February, many traffic cops from town come to the villages and seize any unlicensed motorbikes,
usually at the entrance to the village. They threaten to fine villagers too,” said Nai Soe, a Malawmyine-Ye vehicle driver. He stated that the cops target on motorbikes and arresting owners during the village festivals.

“They don’t always impound the bikes but instead request the owner pay a fine. They travel around all villages as undercover cops and make quite a bit of money,” he added.

According to a La Mine villager, “At the moment it feels like everyday our township faces the same thing with motorbikes being seized and villagers being threatened with significant fines. The traffic cops wait outside the village, often concealing themselves until the last minute, so they are almost like robbers, sneaking out and seizing the bikes, threatening and fining the villagers.”

Like in Malawmyine and Ye cities, the police do not always impound the vehicles, opting instead to place heavy fines of up to 40,000 Kyat on villagers, at the same time verbally abusing them as ‘beggars’ when they ask for the return of their bikes. “You know the really disappointing part is they wait for festivals to act like this. This type of behaviour is also common around wedding ceremonies and our Buddhist ordination ceremonies. This hurts all the villagers, and taints what should be a happy occasion,” he added.

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**Announcement of Mon National Council on the SPDC’s Constitutional Referendum**

Date: 19/02/2008

Military Regime announced on February 9, 2008, that it is going to hold a referendum in May 2008 on the state constitution, made by SPDC, which would enshrines the legitimate power of Military to play a major role in party politic and to lead the country in the future.

Why SPDC tries so hard, after it had cracked down the uprising of Buddhist monks, to make such announcement; it is vividly clear that it wants to thwart the pressure of the Democratic Forces around the world and the will of Burmese people which demands an immediate change towards to a Democratic Society by through meaningful dialogue between SPDC and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mon National Council sees this Constitutional Referendum as a dirty trick played by SPDC which desperately tries to push Burmese people into a dilemma position where there is no choice for Burmese people except to dance along with the dirty tune played by it.

If Burmese people are going to cast their votes against the constitution which is made by SPDC, SPDC is quite happy with the result because it enables SPDC to take time, may be ten years or more, to reconvene the so called National Convention for rewriting a new constitution while SPDC is still on the throne of power, or if the Burmese people choose to cast their votes in favor of the constitution the outcome of that would mean that the
Burmese people are willingly accepting and recognizing the legitimate power of Military to play a major role in their party politic and to lead their country in the future.

Mon National Council strongly condemns this constitutional referendum as a dirty trick of SPDC and MNC also would like to advise Mon People as well as all nationalities of Burma to demonstrate their objection by all means towards such kind of constitutional referendum immediately before SPDC could really carry out its dirty plan which would shove the nation into a catastrophe and at the same time to put more pressure upon the SPDC to respect the will of Burmese People which demand a meaningful tripartite dialogue.

Mon National Council strongly urges SPDC to abandon its dirty trick at once and to go into meaningful dialogue with sincere intention without any delay with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and democratic forces in order to make a real change and a concrete step which could lead to a democratic society.

Down with the SPDC’s dirty trick!

Min Aung Myint  
Secretary (Human Rights Affairs)  
Mon National Council

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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.