

The Mon Forum

Issue No. 2/2008

February 29, 2008

The Publication of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (BURMA)

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News

Cholera outbreak in Mon State

By: Lawi Weng / HURFOM

Sixty-one Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of Mon ethnicity have contracted cholera in Ananbon village in an area controlled by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in Ye Township, Southern Mon State, .

According to an NMSP health program coordinator in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, forty-five people were diagnosed with cholera on March 4th, while the other sixteen contracted the virus over the previous two days. Two cholera patients died last week in the village, according to a local resident.

The clinic in Ananbon village has been so overcrowded that patients have had to be moved to Jagatrao village, one hour's walk from their homes.

Infected persons are being treated by medics at NMSP-funded clinics in the two villages.

Mon health care authorities in Sangkhlaburi sent two hundred bottles of glucose to the clinics to try to prevent the outbreak from spreading. According to a Mon health worker, and they will send another two hundred bottles of glucose. He said that the clinics do not have enough

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Cholera victims in a "liberated area" of Ye Township

Photo: MNHC

There will be no free and fair People Referendum

In order to officially endorse a new regime-drafted Constitution in Burma, the ruling military regime, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), will soon arrange for a People's Referendum. But until now, the people in Burma have not seen any copies of the draft constitution. They have are not being given the chance to read the Constitution and discuss it. Even if they had the time, the Burmese Army also does not allow people the freedom of expression to discuss on the issue.

Although the SPDC does not print and distribute Constitution officially to the public, they put most of the articles of the new Constitution in a book called "Basic Principles and Articles for New Constitution adopted by National Convention." This book describes all principles in constitution, notably that the members of the armed forces are guaranteed twenty-five percent of representation in all branches of the government. This is clearly an undemocratic Constitution.

Now, the military regime will sure to get people to vote for this Constitution. They will not allow international monitoring and experts to observe in People Referendum. They will not allow people to discuss or examine the constitution. But the people will be forced to vote.

It is clear that the People's Referendum in May will be not free and fair. The new Constitution will not guarantee democratic rights or equal rights to ethnic nationalities. Peace and reconciliation in Burma will not occur after the constitution is confirmed.

medicine, but that he would ask the Thai government hospital in Sangkhlaburi for emergency aid.

The cholera virus spread quickly because villagers do not cover toilets after they are used, he added.

Many people in Mon State lack information about health care. The international medical organization, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) left the area in December 2005 due to a dispute with Burmese authorities over travel restrictions. However, MSF opened a malaria clinic in Sangkhlaburi in mid-2007

to treat and diagnose Mon patients. Mon refugees first crossed into Thailand in 1990 following fighting between the Burmese army and the NMSP. Initially, local Thai authorities allowed the Mon people to stay in refugee camps. Then, with the help of international aid agencies, the refugees were able to establish their own camps near Sangkhlaburi.

The NMSP reached a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government in 1995. According to a 2004 Burmese Border Consortium report, there are some 40,000 Mon refugees internally displaced or in temporary settlements inside Burma.

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SPDC tightens security in response to anti-referendum activism

Fri 14, March 2008
By Loa Htaw, IMNA

The Burmese military junta has tightened security along the highway from the Mon state capital of Moulmein to Ye Township in an attempt to stop the distribution of pamphlets opposing the referendum, said locals.

Four to ten soldiers have been patrolling the main road and passing through villages since the second week of March, say residents.

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SPDC police patrolling a village in Ye Township

Photo: HURFOM

News

New Thai Governor targeting Mon workers

Lawi Weng, HURFOM

In Samut Sakhon, Mon migrant workers report that the new governor of the province has issued a slew of restrictions on the cultural expression of Mon workers.

The restrictions include bans on traditional Mon dress or involvement in Mon national issues. "We don't know what the new Thai governor's policy toward Mon workers will be," the chairman of the Mon Cultural Center (MCC), based on the Thai-Burma border, said in reference to the restrictions "But we feel that our way of life is being threatened."

On February 8th, the Bangkok Post published an article describing crackdowns on Mon people living in the province. For decades, Mon people living in Thailand have held a two or three-day festival surrounding Mon National Day. Until this year, thousands of Mon people have gathered to celebrate their culture and commemorate ancestors. Things were different in 2008, however, and Samut Sakhon's new governor imposed severe restrictions on the festival.

In early February, the Bangkok Post documented an Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) notice issued prior to the festival prohibiting activities that encourage "national sentiment." The chairman of the MCC verified this report, and described another order issued by the governor banning signs written in the Burmese or Mon alphabet. And in a separate letter to organizers, the governor ordered that they shorten the festival by a day, disclose the names of organizers and deny the participation of unregistered Mon workers. It even went so far as to prohibit singing and dancing.

One hundred Thai police mobilized to enforce the ISOC notice, blocking entry into the Ban Rai Charoenpol temple in Samut Sakhon, where the celebration was slated to take place. According to the chairman of the Mon Unity League (MUL), police demanded money and threatened to arrest workers, registered and unregistered. "We are very sad for the workers – even those who have work permits had to pay two thousand baht (sixty US dollars)," the chairman said.

The prohibition followed a notice issued in October discouraging public and private entities from supporting events held by migrant workers from Burma. The MCC chairman also described an order from the governor directing employers of Burmese workers to restrict the rights of workers, even those with work permits. "Burmese people work harder jobs, for longer hours and less salary than Thai workers," the MCC chairman said. "And now the workers cannot go out, they cannot meet friends, they cannot meet in groups or go to the temple. They feel like they are prisoners. The only difference is they get a salary." Workers defying the order risk being arrested, he added.

The MCC chairman also said that the governor directed employers to deny housing to pregnant women and pressure them to return to Burma. "People can only be here for work, nothing else," he said. "No political activity. No national issues. And no families."

Some question the ISOC's authority to restrict cultural events like the Mon National Day celebration. Such restrictions cannot reasonably be related to national security, raising questions about the motivation behind the new policies. "What they are trying to do is definitely not for national security reasons. This country won't be safe if the authorities exploit the law," Surapong Kongchantuk, vice-chairman of the Lawyers' Council of Thailand's Human Rights Sub-Committee on Ethnic Minorities, told the Bangkok Post.

Another Thai Mon expert quoted by the Bangkok Post explained that the actions are motivated by an ISOC belief that anything strengthening Mon cultural unity is inherently a political act.

Some Mon rights groups feel that the recent restrictions are a misunderstanding, and the chairman of the MCC said he hopes that the governor will come to understand the difference between cultural expression and political activism. "The festival was just supposed to be an opportunity to donate food to our monks and commemorate Mon leaders," the chairman of the MUL said, echoing his counterpart at the MCC. "It was about Mon culture. There was dancing. Not talk about politics."



Report

Another Cut: the SPDC Campaign to Erase Mon Culture

I. Introduction:

Burma is home to over a hundred ethnic groups and subgroups. While the military government has, quite deliberately, refrained from conducting a thorough or accurate survey of the country's ethnic make up, it identifies eight "major national ethnic races," of which there are over one hundred recognized subgroups. Of these groups and subgroups, official census data estimates that nearly seventy percent of the population is ethnic Burman, though this number is thought to be exaggerated in an attempt to bolster the legitimacy of the Burman dominated State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime.

Burman dominance was not, however, always the rule; for over a thousand years Mon kings ruled territory that encompassed much of the Southeast Asian mainland. Most of the population in Northern and Central Thailand was Mon until only six or seven hundred years ago, and the Mon remained heavily in the majority throughout central and southern Burma until the 1700s, when they finally lost their kingdom to the Burman king Alaungphaya in 1757.

As should be expected from such a large and historically dominant group, the Mon have had immense cultural influence on other peoples in Southeast Asia. Not without founding have the Mon been called the "vectors of civilization;" evidence of Mon language, art and architecture can be seen throughout the region. The Burmese alphabet uses all Mon characters, and the Mons are most notably credited with bringing Theravada Buddhism to the region.

Ironically, the Mon now mostly occupy Mon State, the smallest state in Burma. In some ways, this disconnect, between their historic and current positions, gives the group a unique grounding from which to position its struggle with the SPDC; where some groups seek to *establish* autonomy, the Mon are attempting to *reclaim* it. The Mon's place atop the history of their region is, perhaps on some level, not lost on the SPDC regime and it has consistently sought to undermine, even erase all together, the group's history and shared identity. For decades the regime has restricted expressions of Mon culture; language development, as well as the study of Mon history and literature, has been banned, restricted or harassed and cultural sites and museums have been manipulated or hijacked outright.

II. Background:

In 1947, Aung San, the father of independent Burma, addressed ethnic leaders at the historic Panglong Conference and implored them to work together in the struggle against colonial Britain. "If we are divided, the Karens, the Shans, the Kachins, the Chins, the Burmese, the Mons and the Arakanese, each pulling in a different direction, the Union will be torn, and we will all come to grief. Let us unite and work together," he said and, perhaps because the constitution Aung San championed would grant them the right to secession in ten years, the leaders in attendance agreed. Aung San's vision for an independent Burma would be realized, but he would not live to see it. He was assassinated barely six months after Panglong, and when willingness to recognize the rights and demands of ethnic groups was not shared by his successors, the country was plunged into a multi-flagged civil war.

While the conflict(s), which featured armed ethnic and political groups fighting the Burmese government, and sometimes each other, had been going on for decades, the targeting of civilians did not begin in earnest until a coup in 1962. After the coup, which replaced the country's democratic government with the State

Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the regime began targeting ethnic peoples across the country, regardless of whether they were men, women, children or armed. The strategy, called *Pya Ley Pya*, or the “four cuts” policy, was aimed at weakening rebel groups by eliminating their support base. The idea was to cut off rebels from their supply of recruits, intelligence, food and finances. The policy often entailed whole-sale military operations against unarmed civilian populations – villagers were harassed, conscripted as forced laborers, tortured, killed and villages were razed and burned while villagers were forcibly relocated from “black,” rebel-controlled, areas into “white” areas controlled by the government. By the close of the century, the combination of the brutal four cuts policy and geopolitical changes that left ethnic rebel groups without international supporters meant that most of the major armed ethnic groups had little choice but to enter into ceasefire agreements.

In many places, however, the campaign of human rights violations did not cease. While the regime has officially retired the four cuts policy, in reality many of the same tactics continue. Ostensibly, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) – the SLORC’s different-in-name-only successor – only continues its repressive policies because small, splinter groups continue to fight, refusing to recognize the ceasefires of their larger former organizations. But although they fight, the percentage of the country designated as a “white” area continues to grow every year.

Even as the SPDC seems to consolidate control of the country, the specter of strong ethnic groups with secessionist tendencies continues to haunt the regime. In a cruel twist, the regime seems to be using Aung San’s plea for national unity and strength to justify weakening the unity and strength of the ethnic groups that make up the nation. Even where the ferocity of the four cuts policy is not replicated in white areas, the regime continues to implement policies designed to promote the “Burmanisation” of populations. Manufacturing a homogenous, “Myanmar” identity, from which there is no desire, or ability, to launch independence movements, seems to be the ultimate solution to the SPDC’s “ethnic problem.”

III. Attacks on Mon culture

A. Rewriting history

The majority of students in Mon state attend government schools. In spite of the obvious and important role they played in the history of Burma, and all of Southeast Asia, the Mon receive little class-time. Older Mons report that in previous incarnations of junta textbooks, the dominance and contributions of the Mon were downplayed. And in the current edition of SPDC textbooks, the word “Mon” never appears; when important Mon kings are referenced, they are labeled “Myanmar,” the name the SPDC uses to paint over ethnic differences in Burma.

Mon history, for instance, tells of a bell made in 1480 by the Mon king Dhammazedi. The bell, the largest in the world, was lost when the raft of a Portuguese trader attempting to steal it sank in the river. The bell has never been recovered, and much has been made of doing so because the bell is reputed to be crusted with

gems and cast of copper and gold. In SPDC textbooks, however, not to mention coverage by government-controlled media, the bell is credited to the “Myanmar king Dhammazedi.”



Photo: IMNA

Students attending Mon language summer school classes in Thanphyuzayat Township

This example is not an exception; it is the rule. SPDC attempts to rewrite history are not unsuccessful, and HURFOM researchers report encountering people who believe the country has always belonged to Burma.

B. Erasing a language

Mon language and culture cannot be studied in government schools. While even the SPDC admits that there are two million Mon people in Burma, and nationalist leaders put the number closer to four million, no more than a third are estimated to speak Mon. While some contend that the dearth of Mon languages skills stems from lack of interest of the people, a more likely reason is that the SPDC makes it very difficult to learn Mon.

In “liberated” areas controlled by the NMSP, the NMSP Education Department has been able to open Mon National Schools, of which there are currently one hundred and fifty five, plus an additional forty-nine after-school Mon classes held at government schools. All subjects at NMSP schools are taught in Mon, with the exceptions of Burmese and English language classes. But NMSP schools have faced harassment at the hands of regime officials and the army, especially since 2003. Parents in Southern Ye Township report being pressured by the army to stop sending their children to NMSP schools and send their children to government schools instead.

Similarly, a teacher in Khaw-zar Sub-township, also in Southern Ye, reports being harassed by troops in the area. She was threatened, told to stop teaching Mon language and pressured to quit the NMSP school and work at a new government school. “I had a total of seventy students, but only fifty attend the class because they are afraid of the authorities.” She, like many Mon teachers, eventually fled to the Thai-Burma border. The regime makes life difficult in other ways.



Photo: HURFOM

Students taking an exam at a mon national school in Mudon Township

Some students face a long journey to attend school, and risk being shot or tortured for breaking curfews before they can return home. Monasteries are another location where Mon language and literature has often been taught. A monk in Khaw-Zar, however, reports that in May 2007 he was forced hold Buddhist reading sessions in Burmese, rather than Mon.

The NMSP controls only a fraction of Mon State, and the majority of Mon students must attend government schools. For decades, the Mon Literature and Culture Commission (MLCC) offered Mon language classes to students during the dry season holidays. The regime has used a variety of tactics to obstruct the MLCC project. It prohibits the MLCC from using government schools, in spite of the fact that the schools were paid for and built by villagers. Regime officials have often visited villages and order leaders to halt the classes. The classes have remained popular and, starting in 1996, the regime began holding concurrent Buddhist Cultural Training classes in an attempt to draw students away from the Mon classes.

After years of pressuring communities to stop holding the classes and families to stop sending their children, in July 2006 the MLCC was functionally shut down. Allong with other ethnic cultural organizations, in a move that drew international condemnation the regime refused to renew the group’s mandatory registration.

All cultural and literature groups attempting to teach or organize events must register with the SPDC; failure to do so risks arrest. The de facto MLCC ban was lifted in early 2008, but only after regime authorities replaced members of the MLCC with members of the regime-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

For former members of the MLCC, the lifting of the ban is cause for concern, not celebration. “We are worried the USDA members will teach our Mon classes this summer,” said the former MLC chairman. Former members of the group have also been under close watch because the regime suspects that the MLCC was involved in the September 2007 protests. One former member, Zaw Min, escaped to the Thai-Burma border after he was detained and interrogated by special branch officers.

C. Hijacking museums and cultural artifacts

Since early 1990s the government has sponsored construction of new national museums intended to create “Myanmar national culture.” Dovetailing with this, the Mon Cultural Museum in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, is facing ongoing attacks from the regime. In December 2007, the SPDC Cultural Ministry changed the name to the Literature and Cultural Museum. A few months later, the regime modified statues in front of the museum to hide their traditional Mon garb. The statues were originally painted to look as if they were wearing red and white Mon national dress, but are now painted completely white.



Photo: HURFOM

Mon antiques

Access to important artifacts has also been restricted by the regime. Mon manuscripts written on palm-leaves are stored on the museum’s first floor, which has now been closed to public. The texts are vital to people researching Mon history and literature, and Mon historians worry they will be destroyed by the regime, said a Monk in Moulmein.



Photo: HURFOM

Mon palm-leaf scrolls

The monk, who visited the museum to view one of the most famous texts, “A Brief Account of Mon Kings,” written by a well-known monk in 1745, could not find it in its usual place. “At first I couldn’t find it and thought it was stolen,” he said. “Then I asked a museum official and he said it had been moved to the first floor.” The monk also reported that the museum staff, which used to be entirely Mon, mostly students and graduates from Moulmein University, has been changed and now primarily features regime

sympathizers. Taken alone, the incidents may seem slight, but historians and local residents feel that, as a whole, they are neither coincidental nor benign.

D. Targeting important cultural symbols

Expressions of Mon culture have also been restricted. Brahminy Ducks prominently placed at the entrance of Moulmein have been removed and replaced by lacquer. The ducks, also known as the Golden Sheldrake, are highly symbolic for Mon people, and appear on the Mon National Flag.

Another important symbol of Mon culture is traditional dress. This is made up of a *longyi*, which is an ankle-length cloth, wrapped around the waist and worn like a sarong. For men, the *longyi* is traditionally red with a pattern of delicate white checks and worn with a white shirt, often marked by a pattern of red checks. Traditional dress for women is similar.

For many Mon people, wearing traditional dress is an important symbol of cultural solidarity, and is displayed with pride. The regime does not like such displays, likely for the same reasons, and people wearing traditional Mon dress often face harassment or extra scrutiny. A former member of the MLCC, Zaw Min, reports that anyone wearing traditional dress in Mudon Township is likely to be followed and targeted by special branch officers. A Mon human rights worker confirms this elsewhere in Mon State, and reports that he recently had to change out of Mon clothing after he arrived in Ye Township and was followed by special branch officers.

The regime has also issued official bans on Mon dress. Last year, students at Moulmein university were prohibited from wearing Mon dress on campus. While there are some reports that this restriction was eased in late 2007, University officials still frown upon the demonstrations of Mon culture. Children at government schools also cannot wear the national dress, although a group of students at Kamawet Village high school, in Mudon Township, are reported to have worn the national dress in protest against restrictions on Mon National Day celebrations.

IV. Conclusion

Burma is home to over a hundred ethnic groups and subgroups. The economic utility of this is not lost on the SPDC, and tourists and visitors who wish to experience a taste of Burma's many cultures are encouraged to view an "ethnic village" in Rangoon. The village exhibits houses built in the style of various ethnic groups from Burma, and "villagers" dressed in traditional dress go about the daily activities of traditional village life.

A viewer with no prior knowledge of the SPDC would likely, and reasonably, assume that the country is home to a variety of ethnic groups, all celebrated by the regime. Such an assumption would be wildly off base. Every participant in the displays is a hand-picked supporter of the regime and the difference between the freedom given ethnic peoples across the country and the freedom advertised in Rangoon is sizable.

These government controlled exhibitions of ethnic diversity are perhaps the only instances in which such displays are looked upon benevolently. Everywhere else in the country, SPDC fears of secessionary ethnic movements translate into policies designed to erase ethnic difference.

That the show in Rangoon features "Mon" villagers wearing traditional Mon dress is especially ironic, given that the exact same action in Mon State risks harassment by the regime. More importantly, and insidiously, the regime continues to inhibit the teaching of Mon language, obscure symbols and expressions of Mon identity and restrict the study of its history and literature. "If the literature is destroyed, the people will disappear," goes a Mon expression. The regime seems to agree.

Some Acronyms in This Issue

NMSP-	<i>New Mon State Party</i>
LIB-	<i>Light Infantry Battalion</i>
MND-	<i>Mon National Day</i>
CCCMND-	<i>Central Celebrating Committee of the Mon National Day</i>
MLC-	Mon Literature and Culture
SPDC-	State Peace and Development Council (Burmese regime)
MCC-	Mon Cultural Center
ISOC-	Internal Security Operations Command

News

Burmese people fearful of banks, invest in land instead

Fri 29 Feb 2008

By Lawi Weng, IMNA

Burmese people are avoiding the country's unreliable banking system, choosing instead to save money by investing in land. Burma's banking system is among the least stable in the world, and it suffered a severe crisis in 2003.

Most of the land investments are made into rubber plantations, and the rubber sap has been dubbed "white gold" by the regime. Much of Mon state is covered by rubber plantations, even in the mountains.

Land prices have begun to go up, and a good plot of land near a motorway currently sells for 8 million kyat, up from 2 million kyat in previous years.

Rising land prices have surpassed the actual value of land, and people are aware that the land will not profit enough to pay back the investment.

Even were the land-banking strategy to be profitable, there is no guarantee the land will not be seized by the army. Rubber plantations are frequently confiscated, looted and even burned by the army in Mon state.

Burma's banking system suffered a massive meltdown in 2003, after deposit-taking companies defaulted, triggering a run on withdrawals. Burma's twenty licensed private banks soon faced widespread panic, as people attempted to retrieve their money.

Withdrawals were capped, and even halted, and many lost everything they had saved. This recent memory is enough to persuade people to pursue the organic banking strategy, even though people understand its inherent risks.

■ ■ ■

Computer shops investigated for copies of banned film

Fri 29 Feb 2008

IMNA

The Burmese Military Security Force (known as Sa Ya Pha) and Police are investigating computer shops in Mon State to root out copies of the the new movie *Rambo*, which takes place in Burma.

According to a computer shop owner in Moulmein, the *Rambo* movie is based on Karenni refugees and relief workers in Burma. The authorities do not want the residents to watch it because the film shows the junta in a poor light.

"After the *Rambo* movie was released the authorities are afraid of it being copied into CDs," a computer shop owner said.

One person was arrested with a *Rambo* CD by authorities in Thaton Township, said an IMNA source who came back from the township. The source was not sure where the authorities had the person detained, or for how long.

After the authorities seized a *Rambo* CD in Thaton Township, they started investigating Moulmein District, a computer shop owner said. Most people in Mon State are keen to watch the *Rambo* movie because it is about Burma.

"All compact discs including music CDs were seized by authorities. They have not given them back yet," he added.



Photo: AP

John Rambo, lead character in a new American film set in Burma

News

Burmese Army kills woman in Southern Ye Township

Fri 7 March 2008,IMNA

At about 5:00 a.m. on March 3rd, troops of the Burmese Army's Infantry Battalion No. 31 on patrol suddenly shot at a couple who were tapping rubber sap. A 30-year old woman, Ms. Mi Nge, died at the scene.

The incident occurred outside Yin-ye village in a southern part of Ye Township. Troops led by Captain Min Ko Htwe and his soldiers from IB No. 31 met the couple early in the morning in a rubber plantation and they fired a shell from a M-79 mortar and shot from a rifle, said a rubber plantation owner from Yin-ye village, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The husband of Ms. Mi Nge, Nai Myaing (32) also received serious injuries in his left leg and was sent to Ye hospital for treatment. They couple were day-labourers who tapped rubber sap at a local plantation. They belonged to Ba-lu Island in Chaung-zon Township in mid Mon State .

The next day, IB No. 31 the troops called a meeting of all villagers from Yin-ye and forced them to collect 80,000 Kyat to pay for treatment of the injured man.

A source from the Mon ceasefire group the New Mon State Party said that IB No. 31 probably suspected the villagers were rebels from the Monland Restoration Party (MRP) and shot at them. MRP rebels led by Nai Chan Done are active in the area and the Burmese Army has alerted its soldiers to be careful.

The Burmese Army has also given orders to villagers not to go out of their villages without permission or before 6 a.m. in the morning. But the order makes it difficult for rubber sap workers who need to work early in the morning.

Because of the conflict between the Burmese Army and Mon rebels in the southern part of Ye Township or Khaw-za Sub-Township area, the local villagers have consistently suffered from various types of human rights abuses – arbitrary killings, arrests and detention, forced portorage, and movement restrictions.

IDPs on Thai-Burma border tricked into signing up for referendum IDs

March 12, 2008

Observers on the Thai-Burma border are suspicious of IDs the Burmese military regime is issuing to people in areas controlled by the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

Officers of the regime are enticing people to sign up for the IDs by promising they can be used for travel inside Burma. The IDs say they are good for travel within Burma for the next two years, but clarify that

the ID does not make its holder a citizen.

The ID offer was greeted with enthusiastic support by hundreds of ethnic Mon Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Halockhani refugee camp. The camp is located near the Thai-Burma border, in Southern Mon State, and is in an area designated as a "black zone"

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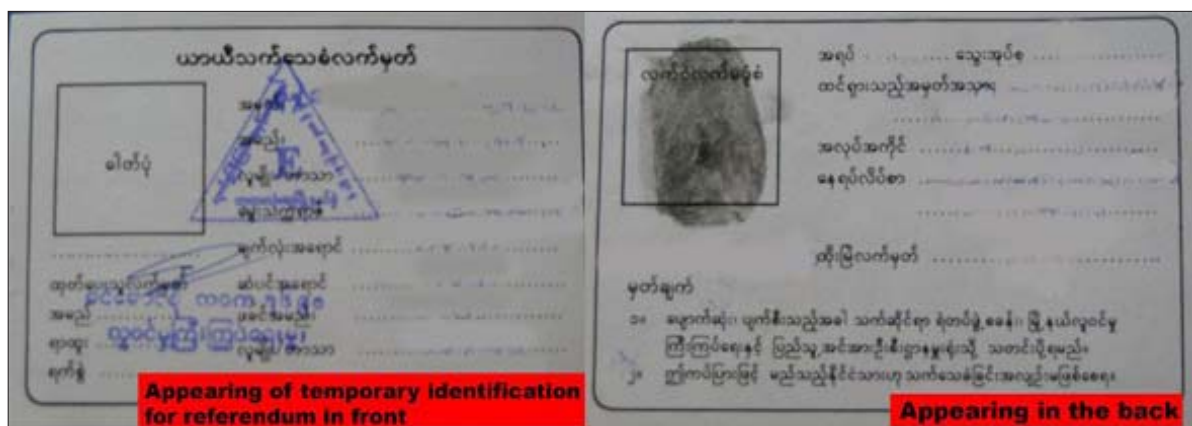


Photo: IMNA

Temporary ID issued in preperation for the national constitutional referendum

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:

HURFOM, P. O. Box 2237, General Post Office
Bangkok 10501, THAILAND
E-mail: hurfomcontact@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.rehmonnya.org>

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

News

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because it is controlled by armed Mon rebels. Many were receiving ID for first time in their lives, as the regime has been unwilling to give IDs to people in black zones. For those among the nearly four thousand IDPs in Halockhani, the IDs represented vast potential; legal travel within Burma, and into Thailand, is impossible without identification. The IDs, however, are of dubious quality. Normally, having an ID made in Burma requires extensive family lists, passport photos and a recommendation from a village headman. "This is what made me feel the ID was a fake. The current ID does not need a passport picture. People only have to give their parents names, sign their name and put their thumbprint on paper."

According to reports elsewhere in Burma, the IDs are to be used to identify voters in the referendum scheduled for May. This fact was not, however, disclosed to people in the Halockhani camp. Indeed, in order to receive the ID individuals have to sign a document declaring themselves to be supporters of the referendum.

Many people in the camp cannot read, or can only read Mon, and were hence unaware of the document's details, which are written in Burmese. "I felt very sad after I found out that the form meant I am a person who supports the referendum. But my thumbprint is already on the paper," said one man who recently signed up for the ID.

The ID making process is slated to continue throughout NMSP controlled areas, said a source from NMSP. The process was undertaken with permission from the NMSP, but a source within the party clarified that they did not know the IDs would be used for the referendum.

News from Page 2..

"Not only have more soldiers been deployed but also more intelligence agents in the villages and townships," said one resident.

Recently, Mon university students, youth and monks distributed pamphlets in Moulmein opposing the military junta's referendum.

"The military regime is too nervous. They are afraid there will be wide distribution of pamphlets and people will oppose the referendum," said a dissident.

He said the dissidents are not blinded any more. They know what the government is planning to do for the ensuing referendum and election. They will not support the government, he said.

"Although there is no significant sign of an uprising, I believe if other places start a movement against the government, we are ready to follow suit," he said.

Similarly to Mon state, the regime has tightened security as dissidents in other cities in the country have also distributed pamphlets opposing the junta's referendum.

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News

Three Pagoda border crossing open, for the right price

Fri 7 March 2008
By Lawi Weng, IMNA

Burmese Army intelligence officers have been taking bribes from local teak traders at Three Pagoda Pass a major crossing on the Thai-Burma border, says a local business man.

The officer demands 15,000 baht from each teak truck entering Thailand. The bribe pays for the opening of the border gate, and every day many trucks queue up in the early morning to wait for the money to do its work.

“The Thai gate opens at half past five in the morning. The gate on the Burmese side closes at six am. So, we only have thirty minutes to go across the border,” said a truck driver.

Unless he receives 10,000 baht, the officer also does not allow small trucks or motorcycle taxis to pass through, the truck owner said.

The border crossing is blocked only on the Burmese side; Thai authorities keep their side open. The Burmese gate has been closed since the Karen Buddhist Army kidnapped two Thai policemen.

The trucks exporting teak to Thailand have to pay in advance, usually the day before, said the driver.

Until last year, passing through the border required going through a variety of checkpoints, including



Photo: Matt

The Thai-Burma border crossing at Three Pagoda Pass

immigration, the police and local township authorities. Now only the Burma Army is allowed to guard the gate.

According to an official source, the army intelligence officer does not distribute the “taxes” he gets from the trucks to the ministry of forestation and immigration. He also does not share the fifty percent of the taxes for township development, as other government public servants are required to do.

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Printed Matter

Address Correction Required

⚠ REMINDER: HURFOM's mailing address has changed