

The Mon Forum

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Some Acronyms in This Issue

SPDC - State Peace and Development Council

USDA- Union Solidarity and Development Association

NLD- National League for Democracy

NMSP- New Mon State Party

News

'Yes' votes stuffed by poll station staff in Mon State

13 May 2008, *Loa Htam*, IMNA

Polling station staff stuffed 'Yes' votes for the constitutional referendum in Thoungpyin village of Lamine Sub-Township, Mon state, said a poll station staff member.

Before the polling station closed, one of the staff members Zar Kyi Htway filled a lot of leftover ballots with 'Yes' votes on behalf of those voters who did not come to vote, said the staff. "I saw that she was completing support votes for a long time," she continued.

"We received 1129 votes for, 925 against and 267 disqualifying votes on the constitution in the polling station in Thoungpyin village," she said.

A commission member told IMNA, "All of our family members are aged over 18, but none of us received ballots to go to the polling station to vote. We are not involved in any opposition movement so I do not understand why we did not get the chance to vote."

Only about 2600 out of 9000 eligible voters received ballots to vote for the referendum in Thoungpyin village, he added.



A woman casts her ballot at a polling station in Hlegu township, 30 miles north of Yangon, Myanmar, (AP Photo/Xinhua, Zhang Yunfei)

Manipulation in the People's Referendum

The ruling military regime planned to win the May 2008 People's Referendum at any cost because they already plan to win the 2010 Elections. In the People's Referendum, the SPDC authorities and their supporters from USDA and other organizations manipulated votes.

In the case of manipulation, the SPDC authorities pressured all government public servants to give a 'Yes' vote in the Referendum, as well as heavy-handed encouragement for pre-voting, a process where they registered the names of these servants and forced them to tick 'Yes' on the ballot paper.

Similarly, before the May 10th Referendum the SPDC authorities and Referendum Commissions gave 'Yes' votes on behalf of elderly people, migrant workers absent in the community, and other absentees.

The SPDC authorities already ordered all poll stations and Referendum Commission staff to produce a strong 'Yes' vote. Therefore local authorities and USDA members used various ways of manipulation throughout the Referendum process to ensure the SPDC would achieve the result it wanted.

The Referendum will not produce the correct result and will not reflect the desires of the people of Burma.

The majority of eligible voters did not receive ballots and Voting Commission members voted instead of the voters, according to an authoritative source from the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC).

Thoungpyin village is one of the strongholds of activists' in Mon state and the result from the poll station has shocked villagers, said local observers.

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Bodies floating to Mon State

IMNA, May 17, 2008

Bodies and flotsam from the Irrawaddy and Rangoon (Yangon) Division are floating to Mon State, according to fishermen in Kyaik-khame in Mon State.

Fishermen in Kyaik-khame Thanpyuzayart Township said bodies, animal carcasses and flotsam in the wake of Cyclone Nargis were being swept into Kyaik-khame areas into the Gulf of Martaban Sea.

"Bodies and animal carcasses are getting caught in the fishing nets. Some bodies had hands holding onto something as a last ditch attempt at surviving," the source added. Refrigerators and some house-boats also washed in with the tide in the sea.

In Kyaik-khame Town in southern Burma (Myanmar) one man died and about 14 fishing boats

in sunk during the cyclone. Approximately 10 million Kyats worth of fishing boats were lost.

Not only were fishing boats damaged but over 200 acres of summer paddy were destroyed in the floods.

One Mon National primary school under the education department of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and about four villages in Khaw-za Sub Township were destroyed.

Nearly 100 houses in Sin-gu, Sonparauk, Maher and Hangan in Khaw-za were damaged and the families are now living with relatives. Half the households in Sonparauk village suffered damage.

The roof of a government high school in Thanpyuzayart was also damaged.

Mon organizations on the Thai-Burma border recently held prayer services and handed out charity for people who died in the cyclone.



Human bodies float alongside animal carcasses and debris in the wake of Cyclone Nargis

News

NMSP arrests smuggler with amphetamines

Lawi Weng, May 17, 2008

Over 3,000 amphetamine pills were seized and a smuggler was arrested by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) near Three Pagodas Pass (TPP) on the Thai-Burma border on Friday evening, according to a source in the NMSP.

Saw Moe Win (38) is from the Karen ethnic minority. According to a news source close with the NMSP, this latest smuggler is linked with the activities of the armed ceasefire group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).

The smuggler had hidden 18 packets of amphetamine underneath the jacket he was wearing. Each packet contained 200 pills. It is alleged he was paid THB 1,000 per border-run.

He was arrested while driving his motorcycle across the NMSP checkpoint near the Thai-Burma border.

The pills were MDMA, type WY+R, and according to the smuggler they originated in Pegu division.

This arrest was not an isolated incident in the area. In February the NMSP arrested a smuggler for attempting to traffic over 8,000 pills.

The TPP border township is under the administrative control of the Burmese military regime. Ethnic cease-fire groups including the NMSP, Karen Peace of Front (KPF), and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) are also based in TPP and have some control over the area.

The majority of residents in TPP are from ethnic minorities including Mon, Karen and

Shan. Most of the families depend on logging and furniture trade for their survival.

The NMSP, in a bid to stop narcotic smuggling in their area of control set up the anti-drug department in 2002. The Thai border military authorities have encouraged the NMSP to take action against narcotics smuggling in keeping with the Thai government's 'War on Drugs'.

After the NMSP began taking action against narcotics smuggling on the TPP border, there has been less drug smuggling and fewer arrests in the Thai military border check point, especially those located in the NMSP-controlled areas.

In the past, at least 10 smugglers were arrested annually on the Thai military border checkpoint and it was easier to access drugs on the TPP border.

The NMSP detained the smuggler and will charge him for a jail term.



Arrested amphetamine smuggler with seized pills

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Seven residents arrested in Referendum Chaos

Mon Son, May, 12, 2008

Seven residents of Mudon Township, Mon State were arrested by police while the Burmese military junta held the referendum on Saturday.

"Seven people hurled stones at a car carrying junta officials when it was going around Mudon Township, Mon State telling people to vote 'Yes'", said Nai Htwe, a Mudon resident.

Nai Htwe went on, "People hated the sight of the authorities in the car so they threw stones. Now they are under detention."

The Burmese junta held the referendum on Saturday despite people's misery following Cyclone Nargis' lashing of Rangoon and the Irrawaddy delta.

Another Mudon resident said when she went to vote she didn't see the 'No' booth. So she had to vote 'Yes'.

The Burmese regime deceived Mon state people.

A resident in Lamine sub township Ye township said the authorities took the identity cards from them before holding the referendum and told people that villagers did not need to vote on May 10. They would vote for them.

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Report

Referendum 2008; Burma's Road to a False Democracy

SPDC announce 92.4% approval for the constitution

Introduction

Under 46-years of military rule the people of Burma have had to live with near-constant intimidation and oppression leading to adversity politically, economically and socially. These people live in fear of the government's intelligence and cannot speak freely. Ethnic minorities are ignored or marginalized by forced relocations and guerilla fighting. People are imprisoned for daring to challenge or question a highly suspicious and edgy government.

From the time they came to power the military government has purportedly been drafting a constitution, as part of their 'Roadmap to Democracy'. Critics say the draft constitution is step one in the junta's plan to maintain its vice-like grip on power, to enshrine and legitimize a military dictatorship. Conversely, Burma's authorities say it is part of a long transition to a civilian government, following the scheduled 2010 election.

Whatever the motive, on May 10th 2008, while most of the country reeled from the devastating effects of Cyclone Nargis 8 days prior, villagers were corralled into polling booths and coerced, sometimes forcibly, into voting yes. The government continued with the referendum in most states and divisions as planned, although delayed voting until May 24th in areas where the disaster destroyed million of houses and thousands of people's lives, leading some people to suggest that although the junta loves the country, they do not love the people. Instead of helping disaster victims, military officers worked for the referendum campaign to ensure their future power with a majority vote on a document largely unknown and widely misunderstood.

Like others outside Rangoon, many Mon people did not know why a referendum was being held, or what the outcome would mean for them as the junta failed to explain what the draft constitution was, or provide copies for adequate perusal. From the time the new draft constitution was finalized just two months were allowed before the referendum was held on May 10th.

The Constitution

Although it was 14 years in the making, very limited access was provided to the draft constitution. Those who did see it have suggested it is fatally flawed and a prime example of a dictatorship that remains drunk on power while refusing to accept ethnic minorities, and remaining fearful of prominent pro-democracy campaigners including Aung San Su Kyi. The clause forbidding anyone from contesting an election if they are a foreigner's spouse is a blatant attempt to ensure people's hero and tireless pro-democracy campaigner Suu Kyi remains out of the picture, given her marriage to Briton (the late) Michael Aris.

Many Burmese analysts were surprised the military government announced the referendum so soon after completing the draft document, stating that more time was needed for the voters to read copies of the



Public copy of the SPDC Draft Constitution

draft constitution and enter the vote with adequate knowledge on what it was they were voting on. As is usually the case in Burma, the junta refused the people's desires. On a very basic level, many Mon people were unaware what the draft constitution even looked like, as no copies were available for purchase within Mon State. No official distribution took place, with copies only available for purchase from a small number of shops inside Rangoon for four weeks prior to the referendum. At 193 pages long, and with countless convoluted clauses and sub clauses, the constitution does not make for an easy read.

If more time had been allowed to read and properly understand the draft constitution, some of the finer details would result in immediate dismissal; a widespread 'No' vote was not an option for the government. So rather than release copies and allow for adequate reading time the junta instead simply explained some of the 'facts'; the people were led to believe that under the new constitution the military would only take 25 percent of the country's power, a prospect not so unsavory for the people. A closer inspection of the draft constitution however would reveal that any president-elect must be ex-military personnel with at least having good skills military experience.

The role of the military, in line with the draft constitution, would remain steadfastly rooted in governing the country, with the buck ultimately stopping with the military commander in chief; a democratic society should see ultimate power firmly in the hands of the country's citizens. The military commander in chief would also hold the power to declare a 'state of emergency' at his will and subsequently gain all power – legislative, judicial and executive. The multiple flaws in constitution mean that, basically, the document does not promote democracy.

Referendum Campaign – Moving Further Away from Democracy

With limited information about the constitution available, and the voting date fast approaching, a largely unrivalled propaganda campaign began in earnest in mid-March. At this time and until the referendum, confusion reigned supreme with the junta's cryptic messages broadcast and plastered across billboards, tea shop walls across the country littered with pro-constitution pamphlets and posters, and people being arrested for discussing the constitution.

The junta deliberately and unashamedly bombarded the people with messages blaming the country's poverty, lack of democracy and questionable future on the absence of a constitution, going so far as to say a positive vote would equal a step towards democracy and to a real future without poverty. Billboards ran with messages including, 'To Approve the State Constitution is the National Duty of the Entire People' and, 'It is a Duty of Citizens to Ratify the Constitution - Cast 'Yes' Vote'. State-run television and radio broadcasting similar messages in the aural form, performed by leading Burmese celebrities. Full-page advertisements were run in state-run papers, and some private journals were forced to publish the junta's strong 'Vote Yes' propaganda.



Protesters in front of the National League for Democracy headquarters in Rangoon on March 27, 2008.

Real democracy needs to allow opposition to the constitution. There was no freedom of assembly, no freedom of the press, nor did the junta release any political prisoners or allow an independent judiciary.

The junta did not allow a public debate during the referendum campaign, only positive discussion for the constitution was permitted. The local media were forbidden from reporting on any attempts at a 'No' campaign.

In short, the new constitution is not allowed to be criticized, and anyone who attempts to do so may face more than ten years imprisonment. Some who dared recommend a 'No' vote were severely beaten before being arrested; more than a hundred young members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party were arrested, beaten and imprisoned for wearing T-shirts that said 'Vote No'. Even so, determined to register an oppositional voice, the NLD launched its campaign in opposition to the constitution, with leaflets stating, 'For the people who have the right to vote, we would like to encourage again all voters to go to the polling booths and make an 'x' mark without fear'.

The junta launched vote campaigns just once per village across Mon State. Although many people were invited to these 'information nights', attendees were minimal aside from pro-constitution Union Solidarity and Development (USDA) members. Others who attended were subjected to the type of propaganda rampant throughout the lead up to the referendum. Attendees were told a 'Yes' vote was a vote for democracy, while a 'No' vote would ensure a poor economic situation for at least 15 years. At no stage were the specifics of the draft constitution discussed.

From the beginning the referendum to vote on the draft constitution was flawed. The voting commission was given full run of the media, launching massive 'Vote Yes' campaigns, while the opposition was given no such liberty. Independent election monitors were banned, as were foreign journalists seeking to report on the referendum. Both of these omissions are serious in disestablishing any international credibility. While propaganda was splashed around the streets, a less obvious campaign of intimidation and coercion took place across the country.

In Mon state alone military officers across several divisions threatened public service personnel to vote 'Yes'. In Balu-gyun public servants were threatened by military agents to vote 'Yes' or face dire consequences while in Moulmein nursing school students were told to give a positive vote, and were made to attend the pre-referendum ceremony held on April 22nd in Moulmein. If they failed to attend or refused to vote 'Yes', they forfeited their chance to attend their school's next level.

The intimidation and improper practices continued with pre-voting. In Mon state the junta sent vote boxes to ceasefire and NMSP-controlled areas, with enough ballots for everyone listed on their ID inventories. All votes had to be entered prior to May 10th at which point the ballot boxes were returned to the nearest town, usually Ye or Three Pagodas Pass. Many Mon refugees were wary of this arrangement, largely because their votes were not counted in front of them; some stated that although they opposed their constitution they were unlikely to place a cross in the box.

A New Mon State Party (NMSP) source claimed that in every village of Moulmein the SPDC, town authorities and the military forcefully threatened villagers to vote 'Yes' or face 3 years imprisonment or a heavy fine, leaving voters disillusioned and fearful for themselves and their families if they voted with their conscience.

May 10th, 2008

After two months of relentless campaigning, and in the wake of Cyclone Nargis, what was fast becoming a farcical referendum went ahead on May 10th. Transparently dishonest, authorities openly cheated by rigging votes, ballot stuffing and candidly intimidating voters to vote 'Yes'.

Case Study:

On the day of the national referendum, May 10th, a polling station in a

Southern Ye Township village was threatened by heavily armed military personnel, and at least one villager arrested for



Local Red Cross members help a disabled voter in casting her vote during a demonstration of the ruling junta for the referendum on the constitution in Rangoon. (Photo: AFP)

unknown reasons. At approximately 11pm in neighboring Kaw Hlaing Village, armed soldiers led by Warrant Officer Myint Than from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) Number 31 entered the polling station situated at the Basic Education Middle School. Many villagers reported Myint Than had been drinking heavily and appeared drunk as he waved his firearm around.

The manager of voting commission personnel present at the polling booth requested Myint Than remove his soldiers promptly, as staff and voters felt threatened. The manager then sustained a heavy beating in front of his staff and voters, with soldiers using gun butts to his head and back in such a frenzied attack he is still unable to walk.

The manager was held in high regard by the villagers, who saw him as a good leader determined to stand up for their rights. It is believed that Myint Than and his soldiers entered the polling booth with an intent to destroy the contents, as a high 'No' vote had reportedly been recorded at the site.

Irregularities and wrongdoings on May 10th were many. Under the junta's referendum law the final ten people to cast their vote were permitted to remain and observe the vote count. Such observer's saw military personnel unashamedly changing 'No' votes to 'Yes' votes.

According to the referendum laws, the polling stations were to open at 6 am and close at 4 pm. Many polling stations in Mon state did not open on time and closed early; at least 10 polling stations were not opened at 6 am and closed much before 4 pm in Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Chanug Zone townships, said a leader of the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF). In other towns across the country some polling stations closed before noon and most before 3 pm. Some observers have suggested the polling stations were closed early after poll station staff were threatened by higher authorities that they would be sacked from their jobs if their polling stations got more 'No' votes than 'Yes' votes.

In one of the most blatant example of vote-rigging, many people attempted to vote but were told that someone had already voted on their behalf. Other examples of irregular electoral practices saw voting officials telling voters they had no choice but to place a tick in the box, pulling back curtains and watching the ballot be completed, demanding fingerprints be taken with ballots, moving the ballot box and demanding 'No' voters use one surrounded by military officials, asking voters to complete their personal information but removing the ballot before they ticked or crossed, placing a tick in the box themselves and handing out ballot papers with an affirmative vote already present.

Results

The Junta is now claiming a 92.4% positive vote following a 99% voter turnout, as declared by the head of the Referendum Holding Committee Chief Justice Aung Toe. Even in fully-functioning democracies a 99% voter turnout is unheard of. These results do not reflect the people's true wishes for their country, but rather provide a clear example of the authority's intimidatory tactics and hard-line threats at work.

The votes from 47 townships across the Irrawaddy Delta and Rangoon division will do little to curtail the overwhelming positive result. For many groups these alleged results come as no surprise given the atmosphere in the lead up to the referendum. Indeed, some critics go further to say that the referendum was a sham, as regardless of the true results the junta were always sure to get the result they sought, or at least announce they did. The NLD has stated the results claimed by the military government are unacceptable, false, and do not accurately



Burma's Information Minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan (Photo: AFP)

reflect the true feelings of the population of Burma.

As predicted by many critics and observers, the junta manipulated voting either in the lead up to the referendum, on the day of the vote or during the count itself. Like in 1990 when the results of the election were dismissed, we now face a victory cry loud enough to drown out those in opposition, from humble and brave 'No' voting villagers to the international community.

Conclusion

Unfortunately the arrests of opposition activists, media censorship, bans on political meetings and gatherings and various other forms of widespread repression were not confined to the lead up to the referendum; this is how the people of Burma live every day under a military dictatorship.

The junta's 'Roadmap to Democracy' is anything but, and may only result in further deprivation of basic rights to the people of Burma. Real change must occur so any future referendums can be genuine. Despite feeling like potential catalysts for change through voting, most people inside Burma know the real power remains with a junta and its cronies, willing to rig any vote so as to retain power.

To try and force a democracy is in itself anti-democratic. It is important the international community does not pay heed to the results of the junta's latest exercise in authority, and should instead demand real change toward democratic reform inside Burma, and processes that recognize and include all ethnic minorities and all political parties.



News

Pre-vote Under Control of Mon Ceasefire Group

May 6, 2008, HURFOM

In the lead up to the May 10 referendum, pre-vote boxes were sent to New Mon State Party (NMSP) controlled areas yesterday, according to a NMSP officer in Halockani camp.

The pre-voting period will conclude by May 10, in line with the Three Pagodas Pass Vote Commission instructions to the NMSP.

"All the votes will be given to the head villager who will then coordinate any outstanding voters," a NMSP officer explained. The party has to send all the votes to township authorities at Three Pagodas Pass; votes sent must correspond to the total numbers on the ID lists collated by the voting commission during their 'ID drives' in controlled areas recently.

The party officer added that many people are planning to vote soon.

"The ballot paper has two sides. One side is to tick Yes or No while the other side is for your full address. People have to write their full address including ID numbers," said an eyewitness, a Mon human right worker.

Many people were worried that in instances where

they vote against the constitution the vote commission may alter their vote to one in support; votes will not be counted in front of an independent body, making transparency and accountability minimal.

According to the NMSP, votes will be counted in Kyainnseikyi township in Karen State.

A villager who plans to vote against the constitution in Halockani Mon Refugee Camp said, "If the vote is not counted in front of us, although we can close the vote envelope, they can open it, remove our vote and replace it with their vote."

An NMSP officer said, "The vote doesn't seem fair because the people can not see the vote counting in front of them. Also, the people have to write their full address including ID number, which makes a lot of people scared."

He explained that if the area was under the government's control some people may not dare to vote 'No' because they are worried about their security.

The vote commission continues to campaign strongly with their 'Vote Yes' propaganda. According to a Pegu division arrival on the border, in some areas the junta has offered awards to good organizers if they can coordinate many people.

News

Approximately 60 timber vehicles pay bribes and cross checkpoint

IMNA, May 13, 2008

About 60 vehicles carrying timber from Three Pagodas Pass (TPP) Township, on the Thai-Burma border town, entered Thailand crossing the check-point at 5 a.m. today, even though the border gate has been closed on both sides since May 2005.

Most of the timber are teak, the gum-kino tree, a kind of ironwood tree from Thapyu area, Zemi River in the the Karen National Union (KNU) area.

According to a timber businessman in TPP, "All the timber vehicles passed the checkpoint gate directly by making part payments in advance as taxes to the Lieutenant- Colonel Hla Min in TPP".

The timber businessman said all vehicles paid the taxes for crossing the checkpoint. The charges are about 30,000 Kyat per vehicle. Most of them were six wheel and ten wheel vehicles. At least 1.2 million Baht was paid to the Lieutenant- Colonel.

"The timber owners directly paid Daw Saw Khin, a businesswoman in TPP. They paid her yesterday to get permission for today," he added. She collected about 30,000 Baht from six wheel vehicles and 50,000 Baht from ten wheel vehicles. She is a trusted person of the Lieutenant-Colonel and has great influence over businessmen.

A lumber machine owner said "Most businessmen were unhappy with such high taxes. The businessmen paid only 10,000 Baht earlier."

According to another businessman, the number of timber vehicles entering Thailand is more than before because in the past only about 10 vehicles went into Thailand.

Due to vehicles carrying timber, a bridge in quarter one in TPP was damaged. The timber carried by the trucks could be well over 100 tons.

"The timber would go to Bangkok directly. Thai businessmen invest in trading in timber," the timber businessman said.

He added, "The Thai border committee, the Lieutenant-Colonel, and the TPP chairman have a nexus and are involved in allowing vehicles carrying timber passing into Thailand."

He went on to say that the Lieutenant-Colonel Hla Min will go back soon from TPP township because a new military officer who will take charge has arrived in TPP.

Since both authorities closed the border, residents use the way beside the main road. The border was closed after the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) abducted two policemen on May 22 in Sangkhlaburi District Kanchanburi Province. They were released on May 26.

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Burmese authorities cheat and threaten to get 'Yes' vote

IMNA, May 11, 2008

Residents in Mon State were cheated and threatened to mark 'Yes' in approval of the draft constitution.

According to a Mudon resident, most people were afraid to cast a 'No' vote because of threats by the authorities and USDA members. They voted 'Yes' against their will.

She said, "The authorities put the 'No' box inside the poll station, and the 'Yes' box outside, where everybody can see. So people were afraid of entering inside the room where the 'No' box was." At the polling station, armed security guards were watching civilians and government servants were also present to monitor the people's votes.

A Mon youth said people in Moulmein (Mawlamyine), the capital of Mon State, were led to believe they could

vote freely and without restriction, but the authorities threatened students from the Government Technical College to cast a 'Yes' vote if they wanted to continue their education.

"If you like democracy, you have to vote 'Yes'. But if you want to stay under Burmese military regime (longer) you vote 'No' ", said a person who faced threats from Burmese army soldiers.

According to the man, the village headmen said that they would not take any responsibility for villagers who chose to vote 'No'; they must take responsibility by themselves if the Referendum Commission makes inquiries about their vote.

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Opinion

The dilemma of 'No' and 'Yes' votes for Burmese people

Mon 05 May 2008

Shyamal Sarkar

The Burmese military junta's desperation in having the draft constitution drawn up after 14 tenuous years of the National Convention is increasing by the day. It is using myriad ploys to win votes supporting the constitution. The regime is using a judicious mix of the carrot and the stick, where it is wooing the electorate and at the same time intimidating and coercing them to cast the 'Yes' vote in the referendum slated to be held on May 10.

The sops vary from offering sacks of rice, packets of salt and edible oil on the one hand, and exemption of various taxes on the other. It has stopped using forced labour and villagers as porters in Chin state for instance, and halted extracting tolls by the Burma Army and Nasaka, Burma's border security force, at checkpoints on the country's border with India and Bangladesh. The tolls, mostly unofficial, lined the pockets of the military and Nasaka officers and men.

Word has gone out from the authorities not to collect tolls from traders who were harassed and forced to shell out money every time they crossed and re-crossed the border. The traders are surprised and have deduced that it is because the junta wants more votes in the referendum. In Shan state for example the regime had ordered opening camps to check eye problems of senior citizens. While done haphazardly, some were given medicine after their check-up and some underwent eye operations free of charge.

In Arakan state, people have been promised that the numerous restrictions on them, including those regarding free movement, would be lifted. In different states different ploys are being used. At the same time, the repressive nature of the junta keeps surfacing with threats of being jailed and fined hanging over people's heads. Those identified as casting 'No' votes in the referendum are being threatened with jail terms ranging from three to seven years and a fine running into thousands of Kyats. The most cryptic threat remains that for the people of Burma democracy will remain a distant dream if they do not cast the 'Yes' vote. The country will continue to be under military dictatorship. Only approval of the junta's drafted constitution, which incidentally ensures continuity of the Burma Army in governance in another garb, will restore democracy, pro regime campaigners say.

Nobody is being fooled by the junta's wily ways to approve the draft constitution and opposition to it is gaining momentum. National political parties, diverse groups of dissidents and many ethnic groups with or without a ceasefire with the regime have been appealing to the people to reject the constitution by casting 'No' votes.

The opposition is not being allowed any leeway to campaign against the referendum. Yet the main opposition political party the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by detained democracy leader and Noble Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has urged the people of Myanmar to cast a 'No' vote in the referendum. Everyone firmly believes that the draft constitution is meant to perpetuate and legitimize military rule.

Activists both inside Burma and in exile have been exhorting people to cast votes rejecting the draft constitution because it was drawn up by 1,000 junta-handpicked people and did not have the consent of people's representatives of the 1990 general elections.

The NLD's stance against the referendum is in keeping with the stand of pro-democracy forces and ethnic groups opposed to the referendum. The NLD's contention is that the constitution is not valid because it was drafted by the junta the way the regime wanted it. The NLD has appealed to the people to go to polling stations and cast 'No' votes fearlessly.

The junta drafted the constitution so that it may play a leading role in governing the country. The President and Vice-President need to have a military background. The Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces will directly appoint three people to key ministerial berths and the army will corner a majority of seats in the National Defence and Security Councils. The new constitution ensures that the army exercises full control over the administration of all military affairs and reserves 25 percent of the seats in both houses. Seventy-five percent of the Members of Parliament in both houses are needed for any constitutional amendment. The draft constitution also has provisions which ban NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi from contesting

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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

Opinion from Page 10..

the polls because she was married to a foreigner.

The NLD has tried to explain these to the people while NLD youth members are trying to mobilize people in the country to cast 'No' votes in the referendum. The same is true for Mon and Kachin activists for instance. They are using posters, pamphlets and fliers to convince the people to reject the constitution. The NMSP and the MNDF are lending support to activists in Mon state to help propagate the 'No' vote theory. In Kachin state the All Kachin Students Union (AKSU) is on a periodic poster campaign much to the chagrin of the junta. Other groups like the Karen National Union (KNU), the Myanmar Muslim Organization and the Kachin National Organization (KNO) to name a few have pitched in on the 'No' vote campaign.

Their contention is the same that the draft constitution does not represent the views of the ethnic people of Myanmar, adheres to no democratic principles and is meant to allow the junta a fresh lease of life. Just nine days are left for the referendum although some advance voting is taking place in the embassies outside the country and inside, where people have emergencies and have to travel. It will not be a long wait to see what actually happens. Will the majority vote 'No' and if so is the junta aware of it and has planned to rig the referendum? Time will tell.

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News from Page 9..

Villagers in some area like Khaw-za sub Township Mon State were gravely threatened by commanders of Burmese Army from Infantry Battalion No. 31. The commanders said that he did not want to see any 'No' votes in his controlled area and everyone should cast a 'Yes' vote. If a 'No' vote is registered the village headmen from Kapyar, Yein-dein, and Yein-ye villages have to pay a 100,000 Kyat fine for each vote.

According to Ye residents, the Voting Commission ordered village headmen to get vote sin support of the constitution by going from house to house. They were to focus on older people, patients, mothers and migrant workers who would not be able to attend the polling station on May 10th.

It is alleged that older people were old that because their spouse voted 'No' they had to vote 'Yes'.

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News from Page 3...

In Chanugzone township people could vote without interference in the morning although in the evening they were being monitored.

"Although they tried to force us to vote 'Yes', there were still 'No' votes were cast in Thanpyuzayat, Mudon and Kyakkami," said the resident.

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News

Villagers forced to guard pipeline as referendum approaches

May 3, 2008

By HURFOM

Villagers in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, are being forced to guard a section of the Kal Bauk to Myine Kalay gas pipeline in response to rumors that ethnic rebels will bomb the pipeline during the national referendum, scheduled for May 10th.

Recent rains have destroyed fences and removed soil, exposing previously protected sections of the pipeline. Burmese Army Infantry Battalion No. 6 has ordered shifts of three villagers to guard sections of the pipeline, day and night. The civilian guards are not paid, must provide their own food and water and have also been ordered to repair fences along the pipeline.

This is not the first time villagers have been ordered to guard the pipeline; the practice is common throughout Mon State, and it has only been six months since villagers in the area have had to act as an unpaid security force. Villagers must assume full responsibility for the pipeline safety, and have good reason to fear reprisals if the pipeline is successfully attacked under their watch – in Kwan Hlar village, Mudon Township in 2006, a village headman was arrested and tortured after a nearby pipeline was attacked.

“We have to wait because the army order us to. We do not know whether the rumor that rebel groups will bomb the pipeline is true,” said man from Wai Kamai Village, through which the

pipeline passes. In the past, the regime has accused the Karen National Union (KNU) of bombing the pipeline. KNU officials, however, counter that the allegations are not supported with evidence, and argue that past explosions have been caused by leaks at poorly crafted joints in the pipeline.

The Kal Bauk to Myine Kalay pipeline brings gas from the Yadana Gas fields off the shores of Tenasserim Division to a cement factory in Myaingkalay. The Yadana Gas Project has been condemned by international human rights groups and its owner, Chevron, has recently been sued in a United States court for ignoring a variety of serious human rights abuses, including rape, murder and forced labor.



Kal Bauk to Myine Kalay gas pipeline

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