

Rhododendron News
Volume XI, No II, March-April 2008
Chin Human Rights Organization
www.chro.org

Table of Contents:

Editorial

- Double Jeopardy: When Global Food Shortage Meets Local Crisis

Situations in Chinland

- More Communities Flee Famine Affected Areas
- Government-backed Opium-Growing on the Increase in Chin State
- SPDC Army Forced Villagers for Porters
- Gospel Baptist Church's Silver Jubilee Postponed
- Efforts to Help Victims of Famine Underway
- Fears for Famine-Hit Chin Grow as Corruption in Local Authorities Rules

Statements & Press Release

- Critical Point: Humanitarian Disaster in the Making in Western Burma
- Food Relief Hampered for Famine Victims in Western Burma
- Chin Famine Emergency Relief Committee (CFERC) Formed
- Asylum Seeking Mother and Children at Risk

Referendum

- Thura Aung Ko campaigns for referendum in western Burma
- Professor Dr. Salai Tun Than To Stage Hunger Strike
- Referendum Failed in Chin State: Mock Poll Suggests
- Go To The Poll, Cast Your Vote With Clear Conscience

News & Events

- Global Day of Prayer for Burma Held In London
- CNF Marks 20th Anniversary of Chin National Revolution Day

Opinion & Commentary

- The UN and Burma: the UN Good Offices Mission May Need Alteration
- Back Cover Poem
- The People And The Nation

Editorial

DOUBLE JEOPARDY: WHEN GLOBAL FOOD SHORTAGE MEETS LOCAL CRISIS

Food shortage is a global phenomenon affecting hundreds of millions of people around

the world and creating potentially explosive situations and instabilities in many parts of the world. But people in western Burma are facing a double jeopardy: skyrocketing food price created by global food shortage and unproductive local harvests caused by a natural cycle of bamboo flowering that has historically brought devastating crisis in the region every half a century.

Bamboo is the primary vegetation in much of southern Chin State and the areas along India-Burma borders. The type of bamboo species found in this region flower only once in every five decades or more. But when bamboos blossomed into flowers they produce large quantities of seeds, attracting rats to the areas. Scientists believe that rich nutrients in bamboo seeds cause rats to multiply quickly. But when the seeds are exhausted rats then turn to standing crops, literally decimating entire rice fields overnight. For the vast majority of people in the area, subsistence farming is their only source of income and survival. For many communities only a tenth of their usual harvests remained after rats have attacked their crops.

Hundreds of families have fled the area after depleting whatever they have left including their livestock such as cows, chickens and pigs. Others are foraging for food in the jungle by digging out wild roots and picking whatever edible vegetables they can find in the forests.

Meanwhile, the military regime has not provided any kind of aid to communities affected by this crisis. Instead, the authorities have seized food aid provided by private donors and church groups and resold them at overpriced rates to the very people to whom the food was being delivered. In some cases, local authorities have warned against any sort of aid delivery to people in southern Chin State citing concerns that such assistance maybe connected to opposition groups in exile.

Ironically, at the very same time when Chin people are struggling for their very next meal and face starvation on a scale unprecedented in recent memory, the military regime was exporting 100, 000 Metric Tons of rice to Sri Lanka.

By contrast, the Indian government has spent tens of millions of dollars into emergency programs and preventive measures intended to manage and combat the latest crisis with unprecedented level of inter-departmental coordination between the federal and state governments of Mizoram and Manipur, both of which lie adjacent to Chin State. In fact, in 2000 it was serious enough to prompt the Indian government to scramble an emergency session of its National Planning Commission to deal with a massive regional food shortage with the expected synchronized flowering of bamboos in Mizoram and Manipur States.

The most immediate concerns remain food for communities that are already starving and the potential outbreak of disease such as malaria and dysentery especially among communities that are on the move as monsoon season is fast approaching and they lack basic medical attention. But the crisis will also have longer term negative impacts that could potentially permanently transform the demography and livelihood for people in the

area.

The need for urgent humanitarian aid to people in western Burma cannot be overstated. They are in a double jeopardy: the effects of global food crisis and unresponsive attitude of the military junta on the one hand and local food shortage caused by bamboo flowering on another.

Situations in Chinland

MORE COMMUNITIES FLEE FAMINE AFFECTED AREA

16 March 2008 : A mass migratory movement of people is being reported in Tonzang Township of northern Chin State due to devastating famine caused by bamboo flowering, coupled with soaring food price and lack of food aid from the government.

The bamboo started flowering from late 2006 in this area. The event was followed by acute shortage of food and harvest for communities dependent on subsistence farming. They became desperate after selling off all their livestock such as chicken, pigs and cows to buy food.

Few families have received some financial assistance from relatives living abroad. But the majority of people are finding themselves without any form of assistance.

The price of rice has soared from 16,000 Kyats for one bag in 2006 to as much as 19,000 Kyats in 2008. More households who could not afford rice are eating corns and those who could not afford corns are forced to survive on wild roots and leaves from the jungle. Because of the remoteness, people who have the money are finding themselves unable to afford transportation cost as they need to transport the rice by car or on horseback or by porters through long distance from Tonzang or as far away as Kalay Myo in Sagaing Division.

Amist such difficult time, Tonzang Township PDC Chairman had instructed all village administrative officials in the jurisdiction to collect 1500 Kyats from each household for government's bio-fuel plantation program.

To date these communities have not received any help from the military government and more communities are being forced to migrate out of the area.

Similarly, communities in Thantlang Township such as Belhar, Tluang Ram (A) and (B), Lul Pi Lung, Hmun Halh, Sia Lam and Vawm Kua are now experiencing severe famine. They had requested food aid from the government by their request was turned down by Township administrative officials. As a result, more and more households are planning to move out of the area.

GOVERNMENT-BACKED OPIUM GROWING ON THE INCREASE IN CHIN

STATE

15 March 2008 : Opium growing is on the increase in Chin State as local military authorities are taxing poppy cultivators instead of punishing them, Chin Human Rights Organization has learned.

According to recent reports, poppy cultivation has grown considerably since the beginning of 2008. Burmese authorities have been collecting as much as half a million Kyats from each village in northern Chin State in exchange for permission to grow opium. This practice has encouraged more communities to grow opium for their subsistence.

In one particular incident, Burmese troops on frontline patrol used local children as young as ten years old to identify households who are growing opium. After confirming that the households are growing opium, the army then asked 500, 000 Kyats from that village.

Places like Tedin Township , Tonzang Township of northern Chin State are particularly good for poppy cultivation. In this fertile region, one acre of farmland can produce two to three kilograms (Kg) of pure white opium. This has encouraged more communities to grow opium and created a thriving black market each year.

Cultivation of opium poppy has steadily increased in Chin state in the last five years. But the government did not take any punitive actions on the cultivators. The authorities just imposed tax on their crops, which encouraged more people to grow opium as a means of subsistence.

According to CHRO's source, poppy cultivation is reported to scale (100-200) acres of farmland in Suang Hoih Village , 150 acres in Lam Thang Village of Ton Zang Township, northern Chin state and 200 acres in Toi Tawng hill tract.

SPDC ARMY FORCED VILLAGERS FOR PORTER

9 March 2008 : The Burmese army, stationed at Shinletwah army camp of Paletwah Township , northern Chin state is routinely forcing villagers for porter, a local person reported to Chin Human Rights Organization. Each household has to porter for the army on a rotating basis.

On February 25, 2008 , Burmese army patrol column from Shinletwah army camp forced 18 people from three villages to carry army supplies. Six porters were taken from each of Khungyu, Sin-Oowah and Pathian Tlang Villages . They served on a rotating basis to carry supplies and ammunitions. Each trip lasts one to two days.

The continuing demands for forced porter are adding to the suffering of Chin communities who are already dealing with famine in the area.

GOSPEL BAPTIST CHURCH'S SILVER JUBILEE POSTPONED

Khonumthung News

April 17, 2008: The Burmese military regime is pressurizing the Gospel Baptist Church in Falam Town in Chin state, to celebrate the church's Silver Jubilee ahead of the referendum to approve the constitution.

The Gospel Baptist Church in Falam had planned to celebrate its Silver Jubilee in the second week of May. However, the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) authorities pointed out that the date set for the jubilee celebration is far too close to the referendum date on May 10.

The authorities asked the jubilee celebration committee to advance the date to April 25. "The jubilee committee has finally agreed to celebrate on April 25 because the authorities pressurised them," said a member of the GBC.

The Gospel Baptist Church's Silver Jubilee will be celebrated from April 25 to 27. The Burmese junta announced last week that it will hold the nation wide referendum on May 10 to approve the draft constitution.

The new charter is said to be designed to legitimize military rule in Burma. It also bans democracy icon Noble Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi from contesting the elections as her husband was a British national.

The military regime scrapped the 1974 constitution after it grabbed power in 1988. Since then, the country has been under military rule. Khonumthung News

EFFORTS TO HELP VICTIMS OF FAMINE UNDERWAY

Chinland Guardian

6 March 2008: A fact-finding team will soon be on the ground in famine-stricken areas of western Burma to assess food scarcity situation, thanks to the effort of the recently-formed relief group Chin Famine Emergency Relief Committee (CFERC).

As its primary mission, the team will travel inside Chin State and identify worst hit areas. They will also collect data that could assist in later distributing relief aid to affected communities. Two teams of fact-finders have been assembled to assess conditions in both northern and southern Chin State.

"Data collection is just the first step in what will be a very challenging task," explains a CFERC spokesperson. "Raising enough funds and getting the help to where they are needed will be an even more challenging job," he acknowledges.

Initial information obtained from sources inside Chin State suggests that the southern townships of Matupi and Paletwa are worst affected by the famine. A steep and dramatic decline in crop production has caused massive shortage of food for many communities dependent on farming for their livelihood. But there are reports food shortage is a state-wide phenomenon.

The current crisis of food shortage is primarily attributed to the flowering of bamboos in vast areas along Chin State borders with India. In a stunning chain of events, the flowering of bamboos causes the explosion of crop-eating rodent population, which leads to the destruction of crops and subsequent famine for the local population.

“Much of the existing international humanitarian aid distribution for Burma has been largely focused on the Thai-Burma border. It is a matter of great urgency that the international community pays more attention to situations on the western border,” says Salai Bawi Lian Mang, Director of Chin Human Rights Organization.

Aggravating Factors

Tragically for the Chin people this natural cycle is aggravated by arbitrary and repressive policies of the military junta, which have seen increased imposition of various bans and restrictions on already desperate farmers. A complete ban on clearing new forest for farmland is in place in parts of northern Chin State while communities in the southern parts are faced with excessive levies on their meagre crop productions.

According to the Chin National Front, one of the leading ethnic forces opposed to Burma's military regime, a typical Chin family pays as much as 400, 000 a year to the military authorities in taxes and fines.

FEARS FOR FAMINE-HIT CHINS GROW AS CORRUPTION IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES RULES

Van Biak Thang
Chinland Guardian

11 April, 2008: Fears are growing among Chin communities worldwide for victims of famine-hit areas in Chin State as delivery of humanitarian aids has been hampered by corruption in the local authorities, a source disclosed.

More than 300 bags of rice donated by Roman Catholic Church and 150 bags of rice by the Church of the Province of Myanmar were seized and sold at an exorbitant price for profits by the local authorities according to Chin Human Rights Organisation's reports. Salai Bawi Lian Mang, Executive Director of Chin Human Rights Organization said: "We again stress the importance of quick action to respond to the dire humanitarian situation in Chin State. Timely response could really prevent a disaster. And unfortunately, the military regime is not interested in solving this problem."

Mizoram-based Chin Famine Emergency Relief Committee (CFERC) reportedly claimed that Burma's military regime still denied the current situation, saying 'no famine in the country' when a Church in Germany contacted. The committee is actively involved in sending out a team of volunteers to famine-stricken areas for fact-findings and reports amid risks of possible severe punishments from the military dictatorship.

An increasing number of villagers mainly in the Paletwa Township in Southern Chin State are fleeing to the Indian border despite warnings from the military government. Chin communities, churches, organisations and individuals alike have stood actively

united in contributing and supporting to ease the situation since the outbreak of the ongoing famine.

Chin Human Rights Organization is calling on the State Peace and Development Council to allow unhindered humanitarian relief effort in Chin State and to create a conducive environment for delivery of basic needs for communities suffering starvation and famine in Chin State.

The famine which is causing serious shortage of food is believed to occur once every fifty years following a mass flowering of bamboos whose abundant seeds lead to an influx of rats that destroy all the crops. At least three devastating famines due to bamboo-flowering have been recorded in Southern Chin State since the 1860s

Statements & Press Release

CRITICAL POINT: HUMANITARIAN DISASTER IN THE MAKING IN WESTERN BURMA

18 March 2008 - Ottawa, Canada: Chin Human Rights Organization is calling for urgent and concerted international relief efforts to address growing humanitarian crisis in Chinland that has brought much devastation to hundreds of villages along Burma's western border.

A severe reduction in harvest and food productions following simultaneous mass flowering of bamboos through vast areas of the state is causing massive shortage of food for communities primarily dependent on traditional agricultural system.

Bamboo is the main vegetation in much of southern Chin State and the areas along the border with India's Mizoram. Mass flowering of bamboos is usually followed by an explosion of rat populations, leading to the decimation of basic crops and paddy fields in the area. At least three devastating famines associated with bamboo flowering, which happens about every 50 years, have been recorded in this area since the 1860s.

Chin Human Rights Organization believes that at least 120 Chin villages along the borders with India and Bangladesh, totaling no less than 50,000 people or roughly ten per cent of the entire population of Chin State, may be directly affected by the famine. According to latest information, at least 150 families from southern Chin State have fled to Mizoram and Bangladesh.

A further mass migratory movement of people is likely as more communities are finding themselves rapidly running out of food supplies.

“We are at a critical point because it really is a humanitarian disaster in the making. Without timely and effective response, the consequence could be disastrous. It is a matter of great urgency that the international community pay immediate attention to this situation,” says Salai Bawi Lian Mang, Executive Director of Chin Human Rights

Organization, who recently returned from a visit to India-Burma border.

``Unfortunately, this tragic natural cycle is made worse by the military regime's repressive policies against the Chin people where the Burmese soldiers are just living off the local populations through forced labor, extortion and enslavement. `` he says.

In comparison, the Indian government has spent tens of millions of dollars in an effort to forestall and manage a massive famine that was predicted in the adjacent northeastern states of Mizoram and Manipur where bamboo grows heavily.

The present area of Chin State covers 13907 square kilometers and roughly one fifth of that area is vegetated with bamboos.

Exacerbating this natural calamity is a man-made catastrophe caused by the policies of systematic neglect and outright repression by the military junta.

A typical urban-dwelling family in Chin State pays over 200, 000 Kyats a year to the military government in mandatory `donations,` fines and taxes, while a rural household is forced to pay at least 100, 000 Kyats per year. Under this circumstance, Chin people have been for years forced to live in abject poverty.

It is important to note that in October of 2007, the United Nations Country Team in Burma and 13 international non-governmental organizations working in the country had already cautioned the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Burma . But rather than cooperating and working together with international agencies to address the crisis, the military regime expelled Mr. Charles Petrie, the head of UN mission in Burma after accusing him of giving disparaging remarks about the country's humanitarian conditions. Given this kind of negative attitude and complete indifference by the military regime, a disaster was just waiting to happen.

Given the magnitude and urgency of this latest crisis, Chin Human Rights Organization is calling on all relevant international aid agencies including the World Food Program to carry out urgent relief efforts in Chin State by any means possible, including through existing aid mechanisms inside Burma and cross-border aid program from neighboring India and Bangladesh.

For more information contact:

Salai Bawi Lian Mang (CHRO Executive Director)

Email: bawilian@hotmail.com

Tel: +1-510-332-0983

Victor Biak Lian (CHRO Member of Board of Director)

Email: vblian@hotmail.com,

Tel: +66-815300702

Amy Alexander (CHRO Regional Advocacy and Campaign Officer)
Email: Amyalex_thailand@ yahoo.com
Tel: +66.85.23.02. 609

FOOD RELIEF HAMPERED FOR FAMINE VICTIMS IN WESTERN BURMA

April 2, 2008 - Ottawa, Canada: Chin Human Rights Organization is concerned that food aid being delivered to famine affected communities in Southern Chin State has been seized by local authorities.

CHRO has learnt that more than 300 bags of rice donated by Roman Catholic Church as relief aid for famine victims were seized by local authorities in Paletwa. A mandatory purchasing order was imposed on residents of Paletwa town by the authorities to buy the seized rice at an overpriced rate. Another 150 bags of rice donated for famine victims by the Church of the Province of Myanmar were also seized and sold for profits by the same local authorities during the month of February.

"People are struggling for their next meal. The seizure of the food aid has left most of us in a completely destitute situation. Only about 40 households in our village have enough food for the next few weeks," says a local villager.

Chin Human Rights Organization is calling on the State Peace and Development Council to allow unhindered humanitarian relief effort in Chin State and to create a conducive environment for delivery of basic needs for communities suffering starvation and famine in Chin State .

"We again stress the importance of quick action to respond to the dire humanitarian situation in Chin State . Timely response could really prevent a disaster. And unfortunately, the military regime is not interested in solving this problem," says Salai Bawi Lian Mang, Executive Director of Chin Human Rights Organization.

Chin Human Rights Organization reiterates its call on the international community, especially the World Food Program and individual governments concerned with Burma to help address the already deteriorating humanitarian situations in Western Burma .

For more information please contact:

Salai Bawi Lian Mang (CHRO Executive Director)
Email: bawilian@hotmail.com
Tel: +1-510-332-0983

Victor Biak Lian (CHRO Member of Board of Director)
Email: vblian@hotmail.com,
Tel: +66-815300702

Amy Alexander (CHRO Regional Advocacy and Campaign Officer)
Email: Amyalex_thailand@ yahoo.com
Tel: +66.85.23.02. 609

CHIN FAMINE EMERGENCY RELIEF COMMITTEE (CFERC) FORMED

20 February 2008 - Aizawl: Bamboo flowering in vast areas of Chin State along the Mizoram border has triggered a massive boom in the populations of rat and subsequent destruction of standing crops and paddy fields, causing a steep decline in food supplies for the largely agricultural local communities. Even in places where no marauding rodent population is reported, unusual climate change in the areas has caused a substantial reduction in harvest and food production.

As a result, hunger and famine are becoming a reality for more communities across the Chin State. Many families have been forced to flee to Mizoram to escape this latest economic devastation while others are struggling to make sustenance by digging out roots in the forest. In the ensuing tragic cycle of events, their livestock are killed after falling into the holes they have dug in the ground in search of food.

In response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis that has been caused by food scarcity in Chin State, an emergency meeting involving Mizoram-based Chin religious denominations, non-governmental organizations and political parties as well as other prominent individuals, was convened on 20 February 2008 (Chin National Day) in Aizawl at Solomon`s High School under the leadership of Chin Christian Relief Committee (CCRC).

The meeting was attended by representatives from 29 religious groups (churches & fellowships) , 13 non-governmental organizations and political parties and 5 independent individuals. The participants unanimously agreed to establish the Chin Famine Emergency Relief Committee to coordinate humanitarian relief efforts towards assisting Chin famine victims.

The following persons were elected to serve in the Committee

Chairman - H Chan Thawng Ling
V-Chairman - Lian No Thang
Secretary - Sui Thawn Tai Thio
Assistant Secretary - C. Lai Ko
Treasurer - Chungi Zahau
Financial Secretary - Ro Za Thang

In addition, 20 more persons representing various groups were elected to serve and assist in the committee`s work.

ASYLUM SEEKING MOTHER AND CHILDREN AT RISK

6 March 2008 - New Delhi: Starting from 26 January 2008 , a Burmese Chin women asylum seeker and her three minor children have been staging a sit-in demonstration in front the UNHCR office in New Delhi , after they were made homeless following eviction by their landlord.

Far Hniang (30), a single mother of three children, Jareemiah (12), Dawt Tha (8) and Ca Dawt Iang (3 months) have been camping out in front of UNHCR office for six weeks now without proper food and shelter. Abandoned by her husband, Far Hniang's application for refugee status remains unprocessed for over a year.

“We come to seek the attention and sympathy for our plight as we have no other place to live and no food to eat. We are destitute without the help of UNHCR. We have no choice but to remain here until we die,” pleaded Far Hniang.

Chin Human Rights Organization is highly concerned for the safety and well-being of the family especially in light of the fact that Far Hniang is still a nursing mother and one of her children is barely three months old. CHRO calls on the office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to urgently respond to their needs. Any further delay could put them into serious jeopardy.

Having gone without proper food for over six weeks, on 5 March, Far Hniang was rushed to a nearby local hospital after collapsing from physical weakness. UNHCR office has not intervened as of today.

Ms. Far Hniang's family fled to New Delhi in November 2006 from Zephai village of Than Tlang Township , Chin state of Burma , in search of safety. Their application for refugee status with UN refugee agency remains pending to this date.

Similarly, due to lengthy delay in registration and processing by UNHCR many Chin asylum seekers are facing a host of problems including lack of food and shelter, healthcare and education for their children.

For more information please contact:

Plato Van Rung Mang, CHRO Delhi Office Assistant Coordinator at + 91-11-25617368
Or visit www.chro.org for background information on Chin refugees in India

Referendum

THURA AUNG KO CAMPAIGNS FOR REFERENDUM IN WESTERN BURMA

Khonumthung News

April 21, 2008: Burma's Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs Brig-General Thura Aung Ko made an official trip to townships in southern Chin state, western Burma to campaign for the referendum to approve the constitution in the first week of April.

On April 4, Thura Aung Ko along with Chin State's tactical commander Brigadier Huen

Ngai visited villages in Matupi town, southern Chin state and reportedly encouraged villagers to cast the 'Yes' vote in the referendum to approve the new charter.

"They said that the military will rule the country for another 15 years if people do not approve the draft constitution, " a villager said.

During the campaign in Thura Aung Ko, around 500 people from Cawngthia, Phaneng, Ngaleng and Kace villages in Matupi were summoned to attend a meeting.

Thura Aung Ko told a gathering of villagers to cast their vote to approve the new constitution so that genuine democracy is restored in Burma soon, said a villager.

The regime is also planning to have only one ballot box in a village for casting votes in the referendum scheduled to be held on May 10.

The local authorities in Matupi Township have already set up a committee with 20 members of the village council to monitor the polling booths, another villager in Matupi Township said.

The polling booth committee has been tasked to persuade voters by whatever means to cast a 'Yes' vote to approve the constitution drafted by hand picked men of the junta after a 14 year long national convention.

Similarly, local authorities in Thangtlang Township are pressurizing locals to cast the 'Yes' vote in the ensuing referendum.

"Actually, the people really don't feel like voting in the referendum. I don't know whether they will cast a 'No' vote if the authorities keep pressurising them," said a villager in Thangtlang township.

According to a source in Chin state, the authorities might take note of the voter's bio-data in the polling booths to identify those who cast the 'No' vote.

The new charter is said to be designed to entrench army rule. It also bans pro democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from contesting elections because her husband was a Britisher.

The military regime had scrapped the 1974 constitution after grabbing power in 1988. Since then, the country has been under military rule. Khonumthung News

PROFESSOR DR. SALAI TUN THAN TO STAGE HUNGER STRIKE OVER BURMA'S REFERENDUM IN NEW YORK

Van Biak Thang
Chinland Guardian

1 April, 2008 - London, UK: A retired Chin Professor, Dr. Salai Tun Than, arrived in New York, USA yesterday to urge the UN Security Council to monitor Burma's

referendum which is to be held in May, 2008.

Flying from San Francisco on his 80th birthday, a prominent Christian political prisoner intends to start a solo hunger strike in front of the UN headquarter if and until his demands are not considered and met.

"Regarding the referendum, I don't think we can do anything to stop them [the military regime]. But we would like the UN Security Council to take necessary actions by supervising the process," an 80 year-old Burmese scholar told Chinland Guardian.

Admitting he has been talking with a Church pastor in New York for his funeral service in case he passes away during his hunger strike, Dr. Salai Tun Than of Inbyit village in Thayetmyo District added, "We are not fighting anybody but injustice. I will like to spend the twilight days of my life fighting for Burmese people and I will like to do this in the name of God. This is, I think, the only thing I can do for Burma as I am getting old."

In addition to his hunger strike, Dr. Than also plans to give speeches and distribute brochures on Burma's referendum, calling on ASEAN to take part in monitoring along with the UN Security Council and Burma's regime to hold referendum with pro-democracy people including MPs, lawyers and ethnic groups, a source close to the professor revealed late last month.

In 2006 while on his way back to Burma to stage a solo protest against the military regime, Dr. Salai Tun Than was denied getting on board by Thai Airline due to threats on discontinuation of the airline's service in Burma by SPDC if he was allowed.

The professor who once served 16 months of a seven-year sentence for protest in December, 2001 was released in 2003 from the notorious Insein Prison by the military regime after staging a week-long hunger strike from his bed in the prison hospital, also calls on Burmese people and international organisations for supports.

A retired agronomist, Dr. Salai Tun Than established Myanmar Integrated Rural Development Association (MIRDA) in 1993 with aims of cultivating oranges, coffees and teas for villages in Ngaphe Township of Magwe Division. But MIRDA, which was reportedly never allowed to operate officially in the country, faced various repeated interferences from the junta.

REFERENDUM FAILED IN CHIN STATE: MOCK POLL SUGGESTS

Chinland Guardian

April 27, 2008: An early simulated poll conducted by authorities in Chin State's capital of Haka came up with a resounding "no" to the constitutional referendum slated for May 10. The poll, conducted as part of a state-sponsored campaign to educate and persuade voters in Chin State to vote for the new constitution, reveals that the majority of people voted "No" to the new constitution. The shocking result came as the State Peace and

Development Council intensified campaign efforts in Chin State.

Earlier this month, Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs Brigadier General Thura Aung Ko, accompanied by Brigadier General Hung Ngai, chairman and administrative head of Chin State Peace and Development Council were in southern Chin State where they asked people to vote for the new constitution at a public meeting attended by more than 500 people forced to attend the assembly.

"You should vote 'yes' in this referendum unless you wish to have another 15 years of military rule, since it was the time taken to draft the constitution by the army," was the message delivered to the Chin public by the two ranking generals.

Meanwhile in Falam Township of northern Chin State, authorities have warned public employees of termination of their jobs and punishment if they voted "no" in the upcoming referendum.

"The surprising result of the recent mock poll may have prompted the SPDC to change their campaign tactics" observes a local person. Brigadier General Hung Ngai is now campaigning in Thantlang and Haka Township by trying to buy votes by providing 150 bags of rice to villagers who are facing food shortage due to bad harvest.

Report coming from inside Chin state said that 5 people per village including village headmen in Thantlang Township have been summoned by the local authority for training on how to conduct referendum. On April 24, several mock poll station "huts" were built in front of Thantlang town hall where the training was conducted.

GO TO THE POLL, CAST YOUR VOTE WITH CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Dear fellow Chin people,

The referendum is approaching, if you are eligible to cast your vote, please go to the poll and cast your vote because;

The voice of the Chin public in the upcoming referendum will be symbolically significant given that the Chins are co-founding member of the Union of Burma. We should keep in mind that we are from a distinct nation and people who joined the Union of Burma by choice accordance with 1947 Panglong agreement. To make the message short, we, the Chin people should, wholeheartedly participate in the upcoming referendum with a clear conscience and express our sincere opinion based on the following points;

WE SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE UPCOMING REFERENDUM BECAUSE;

- This is a very rare opportunity for the people of Burma, especially the Chins, to participate in this kind of referendum and make our voice and opinion heard.
- It is the rights and responsibility of every citizen to participate in the process of decision making in any democratic society.

- It is very important for us (the Chin People) to participate in the referendum that we have the right to decide our own future and what kind of government we want.

WE SHOULD THINK SERIOUSLY, DECIDE AND VOTE WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE:

It will be difficult for ordinary citizen to understand lengthy explanation of the SPDC's plan to make the military as the main arbiter of power in the future. However, the following few points from the SPDC's 104 basic principles are enough to say "NO" for us (I mean the Chin People from Burma);

- The SPDC Draft Constitution places Buddhism in a special position while putting Christian, and other religions in a subordinate position. We should keep in mind that this point alone make every Chin Christians to vote a big "NO" because about 90% of Chins in Chin state are Christians and religious freedom is a major concern for us (Remember SPDC destroyed crosses one by one and replaced with Buddhist pagodas and statue in many places of Chinland?).
- All Chin political parties Zomi National Congress (ZNC), Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD), Mara People Party (MPP) and several elected MP during 1990 general election in Burma have been declared illegal organizations by SPDC and no Chin political party will have a place in the coming election.
- The distinct culture, language and national identity of the Chins are at stake because;

1. The Commander-in-Chief will appoint 33% of regional and state legislators
2. The Commander-in-Chief will appoint 25% of national legislators
3. State Governments will have no power;
4. The President (not the people) will decide the state and national budget
5. The minister for border area appointed by the commander in chief will be more powerful than Chief Minister of Chin state.

So, tell your friends relatives your community and Church leaders about the above facts. If you are eligible voter, go to the poll on May 10. Think seriously. Then decide, and then cast your vote with clear conscience.

FEAR FACTORS:

Of course, the Burmese soldiers are ruthless, crook and they are xenophobic. But this time we have the golden chance. They put the ballot in front of us. The choice is ours. Whoever is eligible to cast the vote should express his/her opinion without fear this time.

YOU ARE IN THE MAKING OF HISTORY:

We may be small in percentage, number and geographical area, but we are equal to any nation and people in terms of our collective rights, as a people and nation.

SPDC may do whatever they want, but what you chose today will remain in history and shape the future of many generations to come. You are NOT nothing, as SPDC wants you

to think, you are something that you are making history with your vote.

Sincerely,
Salai Bawi Lian Mang
Director
Chin Human Rights Organization
www.chro.org

News & Events

GLOBAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR BURMA HELD IN LONDON

Van Biak Thang

Chinland Guardian

10 March, 2008 - London, UK: Prayer for Burma 2008 was held with more than 200 participants at Emmanuel Centre in Central London last Saturday as part of an international prayer initiative for Burma.

The event jointly hosted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Partners Relief and Development, Karen Aid and the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) called for an end to the oppression and brutalities inflicted on the peoples of Burma by the military regime.

The speakers included Ben Rogers of CSW, Oddny Gumaer of Partners Relief and Development, and Rob Crouch and Shelley Guest of 3P Ministries. Mizo's talented singer Dadudi sang on behalf of the Chins at the service and Goon Tawng of Kachin State gave a short speech on the Kachin.

Churches around the world were urged to pray for Burma during their services on Sunday 9 March, 2008. CSW is also calling on Christians and churches around the world to devote the first week of March to keep watch and pray for Burma.

CSW's Advocacy Director Tina Lambert said: "With recent events including the regime's brutal crackdown on protests last September, continuing offensives against civilians in Karen State and further human rights violations in all parts of the country, prayer for Burma is now even more vital than ever.

"Added to this the assassination of the Karen leader Padoh Mahn Sha Lah Phan, and the regime's efforts to rubber-stamp its rule by introducing a sham constitution through a sham referendum which would exclude Burma's major democratic and ethnic representatives, make it so important for churches around the world to remember Burma, and we hope many people will be able to join us in this important event in London."

A message from a relief-team leader from Karen State, Burma reads according to the booklet by Prayerforburma.org, "I am thankful to all of you who pray and care for the people of Burma and to God who has all things in His hands. As I look around the

beautiful jungle valley we are in and see the rushing streams and rising mountains and enthusiastic new teams I am filled with gratitude. All of this is a gift from God and those of you who help us in this.”

“It is really encouraging that a lot of people come to this service for praying for Burma. But I have seen only a few Burmese. We all need to make more efforts to take part in any activities for our country,” a Chin participant, Sawma told Chinland Guardian.

Burma has been ruled by one of the most brutal regimes in the world. Since taking power in a coup in 1962, the military junta (currently known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)) has gone to terrifying lengths to subdue and annihilate the democratic opposition and the country's numerous ethnic groups. Civilians are regularly used as human minesweepers, bullet shields and forced labourers. Children are abducted and sent to the frontline. Villagers are shot on sight, villages are burnt down, paddy and livestock are destroyed. SPDC has been accused of human rights violations on its own peoples.

The Global Day of Prayer for Burma is an annual event initiated in 1997 by Christians Concerned for Burma at the request of Burma's democracy leader, Nobel Peace Prize recipient Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

CNF MARKS 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF CHIN NATIONAL REVOLUTION DAY
Chinland Guardian

March 20, 2008 – Indianapolis: Chin National Front and her supporters around the world celebrated the organization's 20th year of fighting for democracy in Burma.

The event took place in many different countries and cities including India and, Washington DC and Indianapolis where the USA Regional headquarters office is located. In every different place of the event, all participants observed a moment of silence for those who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of Chin people.

When asked why celebrate the day in USA, the Regional Committee Chairman Salai Thla Hei said “This kind of celebration is very important because it is the day that the Chin people revolution was born. By doing this, we give our highest respect to our leaders and all members for their efforts and sacrifices. This act I believe also gives a moral boost for our front fighters. I wish to send my full support once again to all members of CNF and CNA. I would also like to encourage younger generations to join this movement”.

In the program conducted in the regional headquarters office, participants including the CNA veterans shared their revolutionary experiences and send their best wishes for CNF as a whole.

In a statement issued from CNF headquarters on this day by Chairman Pu Thomas Thangnou warns the SPDC about the inevitable continuation of civil war in Burma unless the military regime adheres to the call by international community and the ethnic people

for a serious dialogue to bring about change in Burma.

He further calls upon the whole Chin people to be united in national spirit and stand against the military roadmap plan which democratic forces and international see as a sham. He also encourages Chin people to go out and vote “no” at the referendum in May 2008.

According to the front’s website The Chin National Front was formed on 20 March, 1988, dedicated to securing the self-determination of the Chin people and to establish federal Union of Burma based on democracy and freedom.

Opinion & Commentary

THE UN AND BURMA: THE UN GOOD OFFICES MISSION MAY NEED ALTERATION

By Salai Laini
Chinland Guardian

April 23, 2008: The United Nations Secretary General should reconsider its ‘good offices mission’ mandate on Burma if it continues to fail to help Burma move forward to a real democracy, formulating the possibility of pushing for the Security Council action.

The UN Chief Ban Ki-moon, while on his visit to Thailand in December 2007 using his good offices mission prestige and the weight of the world community he represents, warned Burma that the return to the status quo is not acceptable. His special envoy Ibrahim Gambari has been to the country three times to help it move forward from the status quo to a real democratic reform in Burma after September saffron revolution. So far it achieves nothing.

In January 2007 when China and Russia vetoed a resolution on Burma at the UN Security Council, they gave two technical reasons: (i) Burma issue is not a threat to regional security and stability, and (ii) The UN Secretary General good offices mission has its mandate on this issue. If the UNSC takes up on this issue, that will directly undermine the good offices mission efforts.

In contrast, the problem in Burma is continuing to be a threat to regional peace and stability for the fact that thousands of Burmese refugees are fleeing to neighbouring countries causing chaos and instability in the entire region. In recent years, there have been reports narrating that those groups having a close connection with the Burmese generals have been engaged in human trafficking and drugs smuggling activities which invite a serious international attentions and concerns. The cruel atrocities committed by the Burmese regime are well documented.

Thus far, Burma's military rulers have rejected the UN good offices mission offer of sending an independent observation team to constitutional referendum on May 10.

Despite the western governments have rightly dismissed this move as a blueprint for the generals keeping their grip on power, the generals are clever enough to understand that the international community can do virtually nothing without UNSC binding resolution.

Understanding there is no credibility and inclusiveness in the constitutional drafting process, the people in Burma have clearly indicated that they are overwhelmingly casting a "No Vote" at the military backed constitutional Referendum in coming May. But the military junta is using all possible means threatening and forcing people to approve their charter. This kind of actions are only redoubling concerns about the freedom and fairness of both polls, and drafting, deliberating and ratifying the constitutional process as a whole.

Probably this is the best last chance for the United Nations Chief to show that its good offices mission can help the people of Burma by pushing itself to monitor the Referendum in May and general election in 2010. Therefore, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon should fully exercise the good offices mission mandate to implement it. It may use the threat of UN Security Council action if need arises. However, if the good offices continues to fail at this point, it should consider resigning from its mission completely and hand the full mandate over to the UN Security Council.

Such move will pave the way for the Council to fully take over Burma agenda. That will be followed by introducing and implementing binding resolutions on Burma issue and then take the subsequent actions accordingly. This may best help a real democratic reform and national reconciliation in Burma.

Back Cover Poem

The People and the Nation

Plato Van Rung Mang

The nation is created by the people,

And the people are known by the nation they established.

The nation is founded by the constitution,

And the people are raised by the constitution they established.

The nation is run by the government,

And the people are ruled by the government they established.

Thus, the nation is by the people,

And the people are the custodian of the nation.