

Report

Burmese government pressure on communities for support in 2010 election

Introduction:

While the Burmese government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has yet to release the election rules for the coming 2010 election, the SPDC has been proactive in preparations to secure its grip on power within a newly formed civilian government. The result has been a systematic effort by preexistent government controlled civilian groups and military forces, to create a climate untenable for the development of resistance or political thought separate from the SPDC party line.

This report by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) is the 2nd in a series that will detail these SPDC pre-election preparations. In this report HURFOM has focused its documentation efforts in the area of Mon and Karen States, and Tenneserim Division, on 3 key elements of SPDC preparations for the 2010 election. First, on the use of information reporting and spying within communities, second, on militia recruitment disguised as community welfare training, and third on the increase in militia and police recruiting in communities. In the final section before the conclusion, HURFOM has documented instances of tax extortion to fund the increase of police and militia forces in the area, as villagers are forced to pay for the cost and maintenance of new units.

Background:

The Burmese military government has long sought a way to legitimize its rule, both to internal dissent, and to the international community that has often criticized the widespread social unrest, and human rights abuses in Burma.

In 1990 the then ruling military junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) allowed the first democratic election in the country to take place since 1962. Having proposed political party registration days after regaining power in a coup, the SLORC aimed to follow through on its promise for a “democratic” election. Behind an effort to pacify the raw emotion that stemmed from the 1988 student uprising, the government hoped to legitimize its own rule by ensuring the victory of its own party, the National Unity Party. To ensure its own victory, SLORC administrators imposed numerous restrictions on members of parties registering, arrested viable competitors and party supporters, restricted travel, and threatened candidates and supporters with violence. Despite this an estimated 20.8 million voted in the election, with little reported disruption, and much to the surprise of the SLORC, elected the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Su Kyi, to 392 or 485 parliamentary seats.

Despite the overwhelming electoral success of the NLD, SLORC officials refused to cede power to the election victors. Ultimately as members of the NLD moved towards creating their own government despite SLORC stalling to all the formation of a new government, the possibility of a real democratic transition failed as SLORC troops arrested politicians who had won in the election, and violently suppressed protests by students and monks. political registration

After the constitution was amended by the Burmese government, it was approved in 2008 in an election that has been heavily criticized as being fraught with abuse and fraud. This constitutional amendment has set in motion the Burmese government’s goal of holding elections in 2010. For many Burma watchers and political observers inside and outside the country, this election represents an opportunity for the Burmese military regime to attempt to legitimize its rule through an election process. HURFOM believes that despite broadcasted pretenses of intentions to hold free and fair elections, the SPDC firmly intends to use the current pre-election period to overwhelmingly organize communities in its favor to ensure its electoral success in 2010.

Use of Information Reporting and Spying Among Communities in Pre-election Period:

One of the key tactics employed by SPDC forces has been to divide civilian population and rely on widespread surveillance and fear to suppress dissenting opinion. HURFOM field researchers have documented numerous and often completely transparent accounts of civil servants, teachers and civilians being forced to recruited to work as informants.

According to an order intercepted by HURFOM, the Anankwin based SPDC Tactical Command, operating under SEC of Moulmein, instructed all its military camps located in Kyainnseikyi Township to make widespread use of informants and spies within their populated areas under their control. The order states, "All commanders from Infantry Battalions [IB] and Light Infantry Battalions [LIB] operating under the Anankwin Tactical Command must undertake their duty to organize the educated young people to be able to use as our informants and concrete [key] members within the communities before the upcoming general election."

On October 18, 2009, Colonel Myat Aye Htun, 46, commander of LIB No. 283 which operates under the command of Anankwin Tactical Command, started collecting young men who have high levels of education in the battalions' controlled areas. "They collected 70 young men, most of them are young ethnic Karen, and some Burman, men," reported Saw Doh, a 34 year-old local resident of Anankwin village, Kyainnseikyi Township, Karen State. "The training started on October 25th under the title of "Information Reporting Training," organized by LIB No. 283 trainers. The training took a week and the venue was at the LIB No. 283 battalion compound."

A HURFOM field reporter was also able to meet with one of the trainees from the battalion's "Information Reporting Training", who divulged that most of the topics covered during that training addressed how to secretly report on and gather news and information from the villagers and communities. "This training was sort of on spying on people and how to report back to the official or the authorities in a short time. The trainers mostly focused on how to participate in leadership roles in the upcoming general election which will be run by the government in 2010." said Saw Nay Htoo, a 22 year-old Karen resident of Kyainnseikyi township.

As a result of widespread use of informants by SPDC forces and local authorities, ethnic Karen villagers from Kyainnseikyi and Phayathonezu Township have felt threatened and insecure, local residents have reported to HURFOM field reporters in the area.

Authorities have been recruiting and forcing locals to undergo training to gather information in an attempt to catch people giving information to exile news agencies. Additionally, authorities have led trainings to track and observe the movements of the individuals who are supporters of the Karen Nation Union [KNU], its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA], and non-government ethnic culture, religion, literacy, community based, and charity organizations.



Police carry out surveillance during a monk festival in Mudon Township, Mon State.

"Even though they attempted to set up spies and informants in this community, I don't think they would benefit from their newly recruited members. Most of the young man who joined were not willing to participate

to the training – most of them were forced to join to fill the numbers of required participants by LIB No. 283 soldiers," explained U Toe, a 59 year-old former school teacher from Kyainnseikyi Township, Karen State.

According to reports from area residents in Kyainnseikyi town, civil servants and school teachers are also believed to have been tapped by SPDC forces to work as informants, especially to watch the activities of NLD members or armed cease-fired group members' activities. "I feel quite awful to know that the local government is attempting to appoint more informants. We have to be very careful before saying something about the upcoming general election or criticizing the constitution drawn by the government. As you know, the [the SPDC] dogs¹ are located everywhere," vented a former New Mon State Party member who currently lives in Kyainnseikyi Township, Karen State.

¹ Using an insult to refer to members of the Union Solidarity Development Association, militia forces and other pro-regime organizations.

According to a Nai Hong Marn, 26 years old, a member of Mon Literacy Association and a volunteer of the Summer Mon Class who lives in Taung bauk village, Kyainnseiky Township, the commander of LIB No. 283 recently asked the civil servants and government run schoolteachers to closely monitor the activities of village-level Mon and Karen Youth Associations. "They [local battalions and civil servants] are targeting us because they thought that we could make trouble in the upcoming general election. Non of us are interested in their general election because we already know the winners," Nai Hong Marn stated. He continued, explaining that most of the government schoolteachers have been appointed as informants by local authorities' since the September 2007 monk led "Saffron Revolution"² and the numbers since. He continued, "Most of the school teachers and some civil servants are also the heads of the Union Solidarity and Development Association [USDA] and they are responsible for constantly reporting about the movement of all associations, KNU and NMSP ex-member activities. Anytime they could cause harm to any of us."

In an effort to increase the number of new pro-government members and informants, local SPDC administrators have employed different methods to recruit from among their communities. From the minutes of a Township level USDA monthly meeting obtained by HURFOM in September, The USDA promised all key members who are able to organize 30 recent graduates from local high schools to become key USDA members, that they would receive a CDMA³ mobile phone. According to the minutes, the reasoning behind this decision is that it would give opportunistic existing USDA members who want a CDMA mobile phone for their individual use, a chance to earn one.

A 65 year old former civil servant and resident of Chaung Zone Township, Mon State, expressed his opinions on the USDA's methods of persuading local educated young people to be their informants or key members:

Nowadays, as you know every family is facing economic crisis' and these kinds of opportunities provide a [reason] to join any pro-government organizations such as USDA, People' militia, or whatever they want. It is not because they are willing to join but because of the current economic crisis. The government already learned the weak points of the civilians, so it is not so difficult [for them] to extend their members to be used in the upcoming election.

Another method used by the informants and the members of pro-government organizations is to limit the movement of the community based organizations (CBO) members by closely monitoring their activities and reporting back to local authorities. In order to keep tight security in the area, the battalion commanders and USDA township leaders instruct key members of the village's USDA and militia groups to watch the resident closely, and to compile a "black list" of unaffiliated villagers.

A young man from Taung Pyin village, Ye Township, who asked to remain anonymous, explained his concern over his personal security after he has refused all attempts to be recruited by pro-junta civilian groups:

The 'black list' is a list of the villagers who they couldn't pressure to become their supporters. Like me; I am sure my name would be on their list because I always refuse to join pro-government organizations. We have been monitored since last summer, when at that time we launched the Mon Summer School Program in collaboration with the Monks Association⁴ in the village. I think the point of using this method is to sew fear among the communities. So, the fear [will] grow bigger and bigger so that no one can oppose them, and later [they can] force the people to join the government backed organizations like USDA, Peoples' Militia or whatever.

Numerous sources from Mudon Township stated that local Military Intelligence (MI) officials and secret police personal have conducted training exercises in the township, on identifying villagers who give information to foreign news media or Burmese exile media sources during this pre-election period. MI officers taught security force personnel methods for identifying press sources. Authorities have also placed increased restrictions on money transfer services, and SPDC military forces have demanded that telephone owners keep a list detailing who has used the phone, to be reported each week.

According to Nai Tamah, a 45 year-old resident of Kyaikmayaw, a key member of the Township Mon Literature and Culture Committee in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, he believe he is being targeted after numerous encounters with government police forces:

² Buddhist monks took to the streets of Rangoon in September 2007 leading a wave of civilian protesters, after discontent over the removal of gas subsidies by the Burmese government. This protest became popularly known as the

"Saffron Revolution" due to the color of Burmese monk's robes.

³ Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) mobile phones

⁴ The Monks Association is an association of Mon, Karen, and Burmese monks and novices, that play a leading role in involvement in community campaigns to promote ethnic minority summer school and literacy schools.

During this times, we all have to care about the watch dogs of the government forces and their followers in our communities. We noticed that the township PDC in collaboration with para-milita members, secret police troops and USDA members, are attempting to monitor closely what the CBOs [community based organizations] are doing before the 2010 general election. Additionally they [the authorities] are trying to restrict our movement, including personal traveling. I was stopped 7 times along the road when I visited my sister's family living in Pegu during the second week of October. The police asked for my ID, the purpose of my visit, the date of my arrival – so many things. It was quite strange them checking me, and I felt that I was on their watch lists.

Since the beginning of October, authorities of Mon and Karen States have been launching a campaign to track down the civilians who give information about government pre-election activities, such as launching military training, collecting families lists and recruiting young educated people, to the internationally based media organizations such as Voice of America (VOA), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). At many locations in each township under Karen and Mon States, military officers have been trained in how to identify the sources used by international radio and news agencies. In addition, authorities have increased their surveillance over phone services. According to sources from the NMSP communication surveillance section, new phone tapping facilities have been installed with the assistance of agencies from the Chinese government. Local sources that run private money transfer services through Thailand's registered mobile phones from Mudon township have reported to HURFOM that the MI officers ordered then not allowing strangers to use their services without informing the local authorities first:

Ma Ngae, 28, who has been running a phone business for 3 years, said of the new restrictions against phone owners and on the recruitment of new customers in Mudon Township:

The order from the Mudon Sa-Ya-Hpa [Military Intelligence], with the date of October 1st said that no strangers were allowed to use any mobile phones or money transfer services without permission from the local authorities. This means, each time we get new customers [who want to] use our services, we are required to inform them [the local authorities] first. After the local authorities are finished checking the customers information, they [the customers] can use the services...no political talk is allowed through my phone service because it can totally destroy my business and my life.

Between mid-September and mid-October 2009, government informants, key members of township USDA offices and MI officers have been busy monitoring NMSP leaders' trips around Mon State and NMSP controlled districts in preparation for the upcoming 2010 elections. Nai Htaw Mon, Chairman of the NMSP, and members of the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) have been touring in townships in Mon State and NMSP controlled districts to meet with civil society organizations, Township Literature and Culture Associations, and Buddhist Monks Associations. Nai Htaw Mon and members of the CEC have been conducting meetings to explain and discuss important elements of the NMSP agenda, activities and strategies in advance of the 2010 general election. According to HURFOM reporters based in Mudon Township, plain clothes police personal, and MI agents and informants have been conducting significant monitoring operations at meetings held by Mon leaders, where the potential decisions regarding the SPDC's offer of forming a Border Guard Force or People's Militia offers have been discussed⁵.

A HURFOM reporter in Mudon Township spoke with a 25 year-old Buddhist Monk from Mudon Township, Mon State, who was an eyewitness to undercover agents gathering information at meetings between NMSP leaders and assorted Mon civil society organizations:

I saw many undercover agents and informants communicating though radios, and who were apparently busy reporting about the NMSP and civilian meeting. I suspect that there were some undercover agents amongst the Buddhist Monks as well. But it is very hard to identify without any evidence...They [the Mon State SPDC] are very serious about the general election information. The time when Nai Htaw Mon from the NMSP and his fellows came and met with the leaders of Mon CBOs [community based organization] leaders in our monastery, I saw more than 5 secret police in plain closes and some USDA members in front of the monastery.

Militia Recruitment Disguised as Civilian Welfare Trainings:

In many instances throughout the targeted areas, HURFOM field reporters have documented SPDC military and junta-backed civilian groups conducting training for community development groups, for example volunteer fire fighters, but are reported to have little to do with the advertised purpose. Residents have reported that these trainings often contain a high volume of military training, crowd suppression training, and lessons in how to organize villagers to support the junta in the 2010 election.

⁵ The SPDC proposal to augment Burma's ethnic ceasefire groups into a wing of the Burmese army has been a sensitive one. As part of the SPDC's

During October and November of 2009, concerned that there will be anti-government demonstrations in southern Burma, the SPDC and its Southeast Command (SEC) have been working to form various anti-strike groups. These anti-strike groups are formed by the widespread use of civilians, ostensibly friendly to the SPDC, to suppress dissidence in their home villages, break up protests, and provide increased coverage for the SPDC to areas the Burmese army might be spread thin. The formation of the anti-strike has been on the rise recently though these instances have been ongoing since the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

In one example, HURFOM field reporters have documented cases in which SPDC authorities have been forcing thousands of USDA members and local village leaders to arrange these two-week military led training courses under a program titled, "Training for Emergence of Qualified and Effective Fire Brigade". These military trainings began in early October, in all Mon and Karen States, and Tenasserim Division. According to reporters and local sources, the Burmese Army has trained hundreds of local township and village leaders, young educated villagers and members of the town and village militia forces in these anti-strike tactics thus far. In many cases, training by Burmese army instructors has consistently including basic weapons training –holding, shooting, cleaning and loading guns. In each training, only a small portion of the elements of the course were related to the role of a citizens fire brigade. Apart from the military training sessions, trainees are required to learn how to organize the community, how to lead the civilians in the upcoming 2010 elections, have been instructed in how to confront demonstrators, to use tear gas canisters and to split and disperse crowds.

According to Nai Tun Myain, a villager from Pa Nga, his village headman received a letter ordering the recruitment of 7-15 villagers to undertake a fire brigade training in Thanbyuzayt, "In the letter, it said we had to attend fire brigade training, but only in the first half-day did they explain about killing fires, during the rest they taught us how look after machine guns and use them effectively. They also taught us about the situation in Burma and talked to us about the 2010 election."

Nai Tun Myain explained that most of the trainers came from Rangoon. One trainer named U Aung Myint, taught the recruits about the government's opinion on the situation in Burma, telling them, "All of you have to work for the government and help government to win the election in 2010. All of you are the main key for the government to win election, and to control all of the country by leading at the local level in the villages".

In this case, the main subjects of the training focused on dealing with villagers who are against voting for the government in the elections, how to detain villagers who attempt to create discord in the village or who try to disrupt the voting process, and how to intimidate the villagers to vote for the Burmese government in the election. The trainees were also instructed to watch the local Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) members to ensure their allegiance to the Burmese government during the elections. Lastly all trainees had to promise to be faithful to the government, and to follow the government's rules.

A fire brigade training was also held in Kyaikmayaw Township, according to a Kyaikmayaw resident. In Kyaikmayaw, smaller trainings were held in individual villages, rather than the mass training held in Thanbyuzayat.

Instances of disguised military training have gone on for years, but have been on the rise as pre-election preparations by the SPDC have increased. A retired 62 year-old school teacher, U Myo, reported to HURFOM his experience in the Burmese Army's military training during 2003.

"This kinds of emergency training courses used to be held in several places in southern Burma by Southeast Command during the past six years. In this time, a lot of school teachers who worked in my middle school in Yebyu township were forced to join a 10 day long military training conducted by local military troops. The authorities forced all government servants including medical workers, teachers and office staff to attend the basic military training school at that time. They divided up the government servants in groups and forced them to attend the military training school in rotating shifts".

Completely dropping the premise of a civilian community training, those groups that have completed training have often then been equipped with guns by local Burmese army battalions, and formed into "Village Defense Forces", or "Village Peoples' Milita Force"s. Like military units the militia's have a base where weapons and equipment are stored, though the militia members themselves stay at their homes.

Increase in Militia and Police Recruiting within Communities:

Since September, HURFOM has documented a marked increase in the regime's recruitment of police and militia personnel among communities in each township of Mon and Karen State and Tenasserim Division. In regards to this action taken by the SPDC government, many Burmese political observers both inside and abroad

surmise that these are the effects of the government's local administrative bodies to prepare for the upcoming 2010 general election.

According to reports from northern Ye township, Mon State starting in September 2009, the TPDC and local military authorities have begun actively recruiting from villages in northern Ye, to increase the number of security members, local militia, and police forces in the area.

Nai Maung Nay, a 40 year-old resident of Hangan village, told HURFOM reporters that there were just 10 militia, 5 security troops, and 3 to 4 police previously based in his village. Now local SPDC authorities are now trying to involve villagers in the recruitment of security and militia troops. According to Nai Maung Nay, they have requested at least 50 extra members in the different groups. "I noticed that the numbers of policemen are increasing in the village. Before there were only 3 or 4 police in our village, now they will bring 10 more policemen in to this area."

In Kyeikmayaw Township, USDA members typically outnumber militia members, however as a result of the new SPDC emphasis on recruitment, militia members now threaten to outnumber their fellows in the USDA. Rather than being a voluntary force like the USDA, the militia members in Kyaikmayaw Township have salaries, earning 60,000 to 100,000 kyat a month through various taxes and extortions levied on their fellow villagers. In addition each militia member's uniform costs 20,000 kyat which villagers are forced to pay for.

According to Kyaikmayaw residents, the SPDC gives the militias in the township broad license to extort money from villagers. As a result residents have stated that they feel the government's main priority is to control the votes of the villagers for the upcoming 2010 election. One Kyaikmayaw resident, U Aung Kyi, said, "Even though the ethnic politicians hope to get guidelines [for the election] from the government, it is not easy for them to get them because the government has already made plans to win in the 2010 election. The government's opening of these trainings is one kind of activity [for their cause], to get more supporters for the coming election."

During training the SPDC intentions for the use of village militias and police forces are clear. One young Mon man who forced to join the people's militia training run by the local battalion in Paung Township recalled what his trainer told the trainees, "The trainers from IB No. 62 said if there is a demonstration in the future, we, trainees have to confront the demonstrators and if necessary, they need to shoot the demonstrators with guns equipped by the army."

Nai Bu, a 30 year-old trader from Pa Nga village, told HURFOM's reporters that he and 14 other friends from Pa Nga were forcibly enlisted in week long militia training. According to Nai Bu, when he learned that he'd been enlisted, he begged his village headman to remove him from the recruitment list. His request was denied on the grounds, as the headman explained, "We do not see you involved in any activity in village development programs, such the United Solidarity Development Association (USDA), or other such programs. You must be involved in an organization; if you don't want to be involved in any organization you must leave the village".

According to Nai Bu, all the trainees were taught how to look after and use machine guns, general knowledge about the political situation in Burma, and how to organize villagers to gain their votes on behalf of the Burmese government. 156 villagers were involved in this training and were from several villages such as Kareinha Daik, Kyeikpon and Thanbyuzayat town.

Nai Bu reported that of the many trainers, one named U Aung Myint provided the most explicit explanation of the government's plans for the 2010 election, and elaborated on the ways in which the government plans to use the militias to secure its election victory. Nai Bu recalled of U Aung Myint explanation that the government feels that it has a 99% chance of winning the upcoming elections, and it will do anything to attain this final 1%. All the trainees at the session were told they were the government representatives for their villages, and that they were in charge of future voter registration and organizing. Nai Bu informed HURFOM that he believes that the trainers feel that by supporting current military government, they can partake in the government's control over the country.

A former member of the NMSP's CEC, who lives in Ye Township, claims that the Burmese Army's efforts to increase the militias and security forces in different villages and towns are part of the SPDC's preparation for the upcoming 2010 elections. He also believes that by recruiting a few village residents into militias run by the Burmese military, these villagers can pressure their fellow villagers to support the Burmese junta in the 2010 elections:

From what I see, it [the SPDC] is preparing for 2010 election by recruiting the area's residents. They hope they [recruits] will pressure their fellow residents by using their [militia or security force] power. Another reason they are doing this is that they will use these militia people to recruit and persuade the people in the community... They

have their ways of getting residents involved in their system. We can see it when the authorities give the power to jobless people in the village, offering them the chance to have control over the residents in the area around them. Then they will persuade those [that they give military jobs to] to work with them in exchange for doing whatever they would like to do [to make money].

Emphasizing the significance of this election for the SPDC, high-ranking Burmese military officials have toured the country to meet with regional military commanders. According to a HURFOM field reporter in Ye township, Senior General Ye Myint has departed from Naypyidaw, to travel around KS during the 3rd week of September of this year, discussing preparations for the 2010 elections with local military and security authorities.

Arbitrary and Excessive Taxation Abuse From Pre-Election Recruitment:

According to reports from HURFOM field reporters, the most pressing concern for many residents in these areas of increased recruitment has been the threat of extra costs that result from a larger number of militia, security and police forces in the area. Residents of Yebyu Township in North Tenasserim Division have expressed fears that



A police informant interacts with police in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, during November 2009.

recent orders from the Burmese army to the local militias, ordering increased militia recruitments in various villages in the township, will increase the fees that local militias routinely extort from civilian villagers. An associate of the VPDC, from Yapu village in Yebyu Township, explained that increased militia recruitments in the area were on the direct orders of the SEC and Coastline Command (CC), and that both the SEC and the CC plan to oversee militia training in Yebyu Township:

In the last week of September, the command to recruit more militia troops was directly given to the VPDC office in Yapu village. My friend is working at the VPDC office in the village. Before, they just had 7 militia troops in our village. Now, they command that the militia grow to at least 20 troops, and more if possible. They commanded the

village headman directly. The head commander in the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 282, which is based under the Southeast Command, will directly monitor the militia training.

According to area residents, Yapu village contains over 600 households. Most of families make their living through farming, however a small amount of the village's residents are jobless. HURFOM's sources indicate that, while the majority of Yapu village's residents are uninterested in joining the area's militia, jobless individuals are likely to see the militia recruiting efforts as a chance at income and notoriety in Yapu. Mg Chan, a 28 year-old Yapu villager said, "I think most of villagers are not interested in joining the militia training. But they [the military] can persuade the residents who are jobless by giving them some opportunity to get some business using their power in the area. It's probable that they will collect at least 20 people, and maybe more people, to serve in the militia in our village."

In a recent HURFOM story published on October 7th, titled "Military Increasing in Ye Township", the reporter detailed how the increased numbers of militia troops place a financial burden on village civilians. Burma's military government provides militia troops with training and guns, however it does not provide militias with uniforms, stipends or food supplies. The funds for these necessities are expected to come from money extorted from village residents under the SPDC "Self Reliance" policy⁶. Yapu villagers are justifiably concerned that increased numbers of militia troops will mean increased extortion fees.

Yapu villagers were ordered to pay 600,000 Kyat for their village's Peoples' Militia Force [approximately 65 soldiers] to buy uniforms, hats, badges and to provide a stipend for the militia privates' families. This order was given by LIB No. 410, a battalion that was installed for security along the Kanbawk to Myaing Kalay gas pipeline, based near Yapu. Than Htike, a 34 year-old Tavoyan, and father of two children explained, "My family has to pay another 2,500 kyat on top of 3,500 every month. If not they already stated they [the soldiers and VPDC] would arrested me."

⁶ The "self reliance" policy begun by the SPDC in 1996 or 1997 has effectively encouraged military units in Mon and Karen States and Tenasserim Division, to provide for themselves as needed, through theft of resources, arbitrary taxation, and land confiscation.

Many villages in Ye Township, northern Tenasserim Division, have been forcibly ordered to pay millions of kyat to support newly recruited the militia forces and para-militia forces in advance of the 2010 election. Hundreds of households living under the administration of SPDC battalions have had to pay for the expenses of newly recruited militia troops. Thus far approximately 600 troops have been recruited from 12 villages in western and northern Yebyu Township, according to local sources. HURFOM reporters have been conducting interviews with residents who have had to pay these additional extorted costs:

On 11th of October, the headmen of Kyauk-Kadin village collected money from each household to buy 60 uniforms for the village militia force, U Halae, 43, a betel nut farmer from Kyauk-Kadin village, Yebyu township, explained, "We have been ordered to pay 2,500 kyat from each households for buying militia uniforms. The money they received was more than enough I think." According to a 34 year-old business man, Ko Hla Oo who is close to the VPDC of Kyauk-Kadin village, the maximum amount for each uniform is around 15,000 kyat which has already been delivered to LIB No. 282, the source of the uniforms, on October 20th.

HURFOM field reporters have learned that these orders have also been given to Kyauk-kadin village's neighbors, specifically Myinzaung, Yapu, Natkyizin, Lort Taing, Lae Kyi, and Sinswe villages of Yebyu Township. On the 12th of October, Major Thant Zin, 38 years-old, Commander of a military column from LIB No. 282 demanded Natkyizin village to pay 500,000 Kyat for the whole militia expenses including the cost of purchasing ammunition, food supplies and uniforms for 60 militia members.

Nai Ohn Maung, 60, a former civil servant expressed his opinion about the Burmese army's recruitment of militia in Natkyizin village, Yebyu township:

Our Village was ordered to provide money within a week, according to the order of the Burmese Army from LIB No. 282. Most of the villagers who closed with the village PDC were now involved in the village PDC forces to defense the village. They [the village militia forces] said they are going to protect the villagers but I don't trust them and I think the purpose of these para-militia forces is for use as pro-government forces like the government uses USDA members to beat and pressure the civilians, like in latest Monk led demonstration.

HURFOM field reporters also spoke with Ye residents who explained that Burmese military groups in their villages, including the militia, security forces and police units are currently being supported largely from extortion money that they get from village residents.

Ma Than Htay, a 45-year-old shopkeeper in Kaloh village explains about the economic burden of the expanded village militia forces:

We have been forced to pay extortion money for the monthly militia for 5 years. The government doesn't offer the militia food supplies or uniforms. Those materials have been gotten just by extortion taxes from residents. For these costs they collect 1,200 to 1,500 Kyat per household in a month. They just had 20 troops in the militia troop before. Now they are trying to recruit 30 more people to be involved in the militia forces, so we don't know yet how much more extortion money we will need to pay them. At the moment, they have not achieved that amount of people they want to recruit yet. We heard from our village headman said that they will increase the militia taxes until to 3,000 Kyat a month. It is a huge amount of money for our lower class population. That money does not include the money for the locally based military army's food supplies and security costs. Both cost would be another 1,000 to 2,000 Kyat more a month.

According to the statistical data gathered by the VPDC, found on signs at the entrance of villages, there are approximately 1,000 households in each of the villages of Mawkanin and Hangan in Ye Township, and between 500 and 1,000 households in each of the villages of Kaloh, Balaingkee, Chaung Gone, and Arutaung. HURFOM's reporters found that villagers from the above mentioned villages increasingly being forced to pay taxes to cover the

Dear Readers,

The 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 southern Burma,
- protecting and promoting internationally recognized human rights in Burma

To these ends, we produce the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletter. We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or know someone who might like to receive the newsletter. Please email or mail us a name and address; our contact information is on the back page.

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

costs of the local security, militia and police forces. Mi Aye, a resident from the area, complained that the extorted costs caused economic hardship for residents in Ye township, saying, "For rich people it does not affect their income and survival to pay for the extortion money, but for the lower class residents we face obstacles to get money and to pay for that extorted amount of money".



Villagers from Htan Bin Chaung sit through instruction at a militia training in Paung Township, Mon State.

Mawkanin village, contains about 1,500 to 2,000 households in Northern Ye Township, and has also reportedly faced the same problems as Kaloh and Hangan villages. Local sources from the area claimed that LIB No. 106, which is based on the Mawkanin village, went to area villages and attempted to convince villagers to join the local militia and security forces.

Nai Thein Zin, a rice trader from the area of Mawkanin village, told a HURFOM field reporter that his fellow villagers are still forced to support to these new recruiting militia members with large amount of money:

Their operations are run by getting extortion taxes from our residents. I believe that if they have more troops they will collect more money. Before they collected about 1,500 Kyat from each household a month. If we combine all the extortion money, including costs for VIP trips, militia and security costs, and battalion extortion money from each months, it would cost [each household] about 4,000 to 5,000 a month. Now they are increasing the number of troops so they will increase taxes to more than they normally collect. But, we don't know by how much money they will increase the taxes.

Conclusion:

Efforts are underway by SPDC administration and military forces to implement significant and pervasive programs of pre-election organization and pressure on civilian groups throughout Burma. The information and accounts published in this report represent only 3 to 4 months worth of preparation work by the SPDC. While this data is a sampling drawn from communities in Mon and Karen States, and Tenneserim Division, even in the most minor instances these acts pose a significant threat to the credibility of any election to be undertaken in 2010. HURFOM hopes that by documenting the process by which the SPDC engages in opinion manipulation and preparation for violent suppression of dissent, enough information can be gathered to allow for a close understanding of the repercussions of these preparations once the election is underway.

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