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Editorial

Two Years On: Survival Crisis Continues in Chin State

Existing poverty, propelled by two decades of repressive policies through practices of forced labor and arbitrary measures, to name a few, and finally a natural disaster, that's what it takes to push a population in western Burma to live on the edge of survival.

Two years after Chin State was struck by massive rat infestations and subsequent food crisis, the population continues to struggle for survival. The new updated report by Chin Human Rights Organization “**On the Edge of Survival: *Continuing Rat Infestation and Food Crisis***,” finds that rat infestations and related shortages of food continue to spread through more areas of Chin State, with more Chin families and communities deserting their native places in search of food and survival.

Meanwhile, Burma's ruling military regime, the State Peace and Development Council, continues to exacerbate the situations through neglect and human rights abuses against the affected population. As this issue of Rhododendron attests, the use of forced labor, arbitrary confiscation of food, livestock and properties from Chin civilians – practices that further undermine livelihood and survival, still continue to take place within some of the worse hit areas.

The magnitude of the crisis is clear; over a fifth of the entire population of Chin State has been gripped by extreme shortages of food, and the effects are crippling. Over 50 deaths have been reported as a result of malnourishment and related diseases. The effects of the flowering and dying of bamboo and rat infestation, the root of the current crisis, are expected to last for as many as five years. The World Food Program (WFP), which is now working on the ground in some affected areas with local partner groups, found food consumption in Chin State to be ‘worse than any other regions it visited.’

Yet response to the crisis has been limited to date.

The term ‘famine’ is politically charged and as such usage is often problematic. But according to the WFP, the definition of famine is a serious food crisis, “made worse by governments’ failure to deal with the situation.” Based on this definition, Chin State is indeed facing a famine.

However, more affected Chins are still unreached by the aid efforts. Despite the ongoing efforts from various fronts including from inside Burma and cross border aid delivery from India, more aid is needed to tackle the crisis.

But out of the worst crisis in recent memory emerged an overwhelming sympathy and solidarity from Chin communities in exile all across the globe. Chin churches and communities have responded to the crisis by raising funds and sending donations to the aid efforts.

Meanwhile the crisis continues and its long-lasting effects continue to threaten lives and push the Chin people on the edge of survival. The critical point for action has come but it has not concluded. More aid is needed.

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS

Sexual Abuse against Chin Women

SPDC Cabinet Minister & His Aides Accused of Rape

12 July 2009

Brigadier-General Thura Aung Ko, SPDC cabinet member and Deputy Minister for Science and Technology and seven of his security aides from Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (274) were accused of rape involving four local Chin women from Cin Dwe village of Kanpalet Township during an official visit to southern Chin State in March 2009.

The accusation stems from an incident that took place on the night of March 19 after a traditional bonfire ceremony put together by the villagers to entertain the visiting official.

"The Village PDC Chairman was responsible for arranging the most beautiful girl in the village for Thura Aung Ko's overnight company,' reported an eye-witness.

The local villager who participated in the ceremony reported that at around midnight seven Burmese soldiers from Mindat-based LIB 274 who provided security for Brig-General Thura Aung Ko forced their way into the quarters where three local women staying and gang raped them all night long.

"The whole village including parents of the victims knew what happened but everyone kept quiet for fear of reprisals," he said.

The villager said that the girl who was forced to spend a night with Thura Aung Ko was later rewarded with 'entrance permit' to go to nursing school. But the remaining three victims who were gang raped by the soldiers, all of whom are tailors by profession, skipped the village out of shame.

Local PDC members who failed to provide sexual entertainment to visiting high officials, have on previous occasions faced harsh rebuke from military authorities for "bad hospitality," the

villager said.

Military Officers Accused of Spoiling Young Girls

9 July 2009

Some Burmese army officers stationed in Kalay, Sagaing Division are accused of spoiling young Chin girls by enticing them with money to perform sexual companionship.

More young girls from poor family backgrounds are recruited to caddy golf clubs for army officers who play golf, who then later use them for sexual companionship, said a local boy who also caddy for the officers.

“Boy caddies normally make 500 to 1000 Kyats per evening. But these days only girls are hired and they get paid from 2000 to 3000 per one evening,” the boy said.

Local residents report a rise in prostitution and cases of sexually transmitted diseases in their neighborhoods where more young girls are increasingly joining the illegal sex profession. They blame army officers as being responsible for turning the girls into prostitutes, although no one dares to publicly denounce them.

“We would normally take quick actions for this kind of activity had those responsible not been authority figures themselves,” said one neighborhood elder.

There are around 100 regular members in the Kalay Golf Club, mostly made up of military officers and officials from various government departments.

Freedom of Religion

Church Construction Decreed to Stop

14 July 2009

Local authorities in southern Chin State have ordered construction work to cease for a Christian church building in Kanpalet, a congregation member has told Chin Human Rights Organization.

Construction work for the Gospel Baptist Church in Kanpalet Town, which began in early 2009, has now been indefinitely suspended following an order issued by the Township Peace and Development Chairman and the local Religious Affairs Department official U Lin Htein.

"The congregation received a written order from the Township officials through the Church pastor Rev. U La Wei in the last week of April notifying us to cease the construction work," the church member said.

"As of now, the congregation is forced to hold worship services at the pastor's residence. The pastor has written to the Township and District officials requesting permission to continue the

church construction but has received no response," he added

The Gospel Baptist Church, first established in Kanpalet Town in 1990 by the Matupi native Rev. U La Wei, now has a congregation member of over 40.

Christians Forced to Donate Chickens for Inauguration of New Buddhist Pagoda

5 August 2009

Three villages in Thantlang Township were forced to donate chickens toward the celebration of the inauguration ceremony for a new Buddhist pagoda in their area, a local resident reported.

On 8 June 2009, Sergeant Htun Htun, patrol unit commanding officer from Lungler-based Light Infantry Battalion (269), by a signed written order, asked three villages to send six roasted chickens per village to his battalion base in Lungler for the purpose of an upcoming inauguration ceremony of a new Buddhist pagoda in Lungler Village.

The villages affected by the order were Ti Khuang Tum, Thing Hual and Tahtlang of Thantlang Township.

“As Christians, villagers were naturally offended by having to provide the chickens for pagoda inauguration. This is religious persecution. But what else can we do other than complying with military order,” the local said.

Religious Assembly Restricted

10 August 2009

Local authorities in Thahan area of Kalay Township, Sagaing Division issued threats to take action under the Unlawful Association Act against leaders of a Christian congregation made up of Zaniat tribe from Chin State’s Falam Township who were planning to hold a church fellowship program.

Church leaders were immediately forced to pay 30,000 Kyats to the authorities in exchange for permission for their program to proceed. Another 5000 Kyats was demanded from the organizing committee by soldiers based in the local area.

“All that was required before was that we inform the local PDC office prior to the function. We thought that that still was the case until the intelligence officers showed up and demanded money for clearance permits,” an organizing committee member said.

The fellowship program was planned for July 24 with an expected attendance of over 500.

Local SPDC authorities are reported to frequently disrupt services during worship periods by walking in the church building uninvited and making measurements of the church. Church leaders in the area also report about being regularly summoned for interrogation by local

authorities.

Forced Donation and Labor Exacted to Build Buddhist Pagoda

2 July 2009

Local authorities in southern Chin State are accused of collecting forced donations and compelling area Christian residents to perform forced labor to build a new Buddhist pagoda, a local resident informed Chin Human Rights Organization.

The pagoda which is named Aung Daw Mu in Burmese is being built at Kin Hli Village of Mindat Township.

“The donation is supposedly “voluntary” with a minimum amount of 500 Kyats per household. A monetary fine is imposed on failure to contribute ‘voluntary labor,’ which one person per each household must perform on a weekly basis,” the resident said.

Local authorities are collecting the donation by visiting residences, making people feel obligated to pay the donation, he added. He said that villagers are engaged in collecting sand and making bricks for the pagoda construction.

At the same time that forced donations and forced labors are being exacted for Buddhist pagodas and monasteries, construction of Christian church buildings is prohibited in Mindat Township.

The construction of Aung Daw Mu pagoda started in March 2009 with an estimated budget of 20 million Kyats.

Forced Labor

Civilians Forced to Replant Jatropha

2 August 2009

Civilians in Falam Township have been ordered to replant jatropha after previous plantings were discovered unsuccessful.

Township PDC Chairman U Zaw Win Htay, in anticipation of upcoming inspection by State officials, ordered the immediate replanting of jatropha in Falam Township, threatening punishment for any household failing to comply with the order.

The planting was first initiated on 25 April 2008 with Zaw Win Hay collecting 1800 Kyats from each household to buy the jatropha seeds.

“I came to Mizoram in late March in search of work for our family survival. With the new order of replanting, I am not sure if my children can afford to do it. In fact I don’t think any household in my village can afford to do it again. But then they will have to find a way to comply with the

order,” one villager said.

Forced Porter Demands on the Increase

8 August 2009

Incidents of the Burmese army demanding forced porter in Thantlang Township is increasing in 2009, according to villagers affected in the area.

Villagers point specifically to soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (269) based in Vuangtu Village of Thantlang Township as regularly compelling them to carry loads of military supplies and rations several times a month.

“Four to five villagers, including their horses in the villages along the way between Vuangtu Village and Thantlang Town are forced to porter for the Army on a regular basis. Not to mention people, even animals fall victims to the army’s repression,” said one villager interviewed by Chin Human Rights Organization.

He continued, “Everyone here is struggling for the next meal. Not only is the military government doing nothing to help us, they are always exploiting us through this kinds of repressive practice. Sadly, there is nothing we can do.”

He said that villagers, already faced with survival difficulty, are forced to bear serious additional burdens due to incessant recruitment of forced human porters and domestic animals such as horse that can be used for livelihood purpose.

Municipal Authorities Demand Forced Labor

15 July 2009

Despite having paid regular fees to the local authorities for exemption from forced labor duties, households in Kanpalet Town of southern Chin State still find themselves having to perform forced labor, a local resident reported.

“Municipal authorities demand forced labor to clean the town streets whenever high officials visit the town. Any household that failed to provide one person face a monetary fine of 500 Kyats per day,” he said.

The Kanpalet resident said that such a demand for forced labor is despite the fact that each household has paid regular fees to the municipal authorities in order to be exempt from forced labor duties.

Child Students Made to Work for Teachers’ Profit

22 July 2009

Primary and middle school children from Kanpalet Township have been compelled to work picking and gathering wild orchid buds from the forests for as many as three days a week by the school administration and teachers, a local reported to Chin Human Rights Organization.

The students, most of who are under the age of 12, are picking and gathering the priced wild orchids, which the teachers and members of the school administration are selling for their own profits.

“The school and the teachers are using these children by exploiting their labors, without consideration of the children’s educational well-being,” the local said. He said that the wild orchid buds are stored in one of the school quarters and then sold by the teachers to their business contacts in Mandalay in central Burma. One kilogram of wild orchid buds is worth 15,000 Kyats in Mandalay and 8,000 Kyats nearby Mindat Town. He said the profits never go to the school funds but end up in the teachers’ pocket.

At current market price of 15,000 Kyats per kilogram, a yearly profit is estimated to be as much as 6 million Kyats.

The picking season for wild orchid buds run from winter through the end of monsoon.

Extortion & Arbitrary Measures

SPDC-backed Women Organization Collecting Forced Membership Fees

3 August 2009

Chin women and girls across Teddim Township are required to pay forced membership fees for the SPDC-backed Myanmar Women Affairs Federation; an area resident has informed Chin Human Rights Organization.

A deadline for voluntary payment was set for the end of May 2009 with Daw Cin Ngeih Lun the clerk of the Township MWA chapter assigning U Aung Zaw Moe to collect the fees. When no one voluntary made the payment by the set deadline, the Village PDC Chairman of Fartlang forcibly collected the funds.

Girls under the age of 15 are also obligated to pay membership fees.

“We don’t know exactly how much the membership fee is for this year, but the total amount that a whole Village Tract had to pay last year was 85,000 Kyats. The official instruction is that the membership fees must be collected and submitted at the regular Township Peace and Development Council meeting at the end of May,” said an informed resident.

Security Forces Extort from Cattle Traders

7 August 2009

A Chin cross-border trader based in Kalay, Sagaing Division has had his entire business ruined during a single trip to the Indian border when he was extorted more than 3 million Kyats by Burmese soldiers and police.

Lalthangliana, a resident of Kalay was on his way to the Indian border with a herd of 40 cows to sell to Mizoram when policemen at Ruun Station extorted 800,000 Kyats on 28 June 2009. Going further, Burma Army patrol unit from Light Infantry Battalion (289) based in Tibual village of Falam Township again forced him to pay 250,0000 Kyats for selling his cattle to India.

Thangliana paid from 50,000 to 150,000 Kyats for each of the 40 cows he bought so he could sell them to India for profits.

According to cross-border traders, Burmese soldiers from Tibual based LIB 298 have spent most of their time patrolling around India-Burma border in order to prey on cross-border traders.

Excessive Charges Imposed on Phone Use

12 August 2008

Local residents are complaining the excessive charges applied to customers for phone usage by the local Telephone Exchange office at Htauhkyant village of Kalay Township, Sagaing Division.

According to the local residents, the Exchange office is charging 400 Kyats per minute for long distance outgoing and 100 Kyats per incoming calls. For incoming calls from abroad, receiving customers are paying 1,000 Kyats a minute, with a call duration limit of 20 minutes per each use.

U Win Pe, the head of the Exchange office defended the high usage fees, "It is not as if we are charging high fees because we want the money for ourselves; officials from higher up demand that we show a greater amount of income than the expenses in our financial reporting."

Money Collected from Public for New Electricity Generator

4 August 2009

To solve problems of frequent electricity blackouts, local authorities in Falam Township are collecting money from the public in order to buy a new electricity generator.

The initiative started in January 2009 during a public meeting at the football field in Falam in which the Chairman of Falam Township Peace and Development Council announced;

"We have arranged a way to solve the problems of blackouts in the Town. We have tasked the head of each Ward/Block with the responsibility of collecting money from the residents to buy a new generator. Be ready to pay."

House owners have to pay 2000 Kyats while town residents living in rented houses are charged

500 Kyats per household. The project has yet to materialize as of August.

2010 Elections

Chin Villagers Forced to Endorse the 2010 Elections

6 August 2009

Some Chin villagers in Thantlang Township are required to sign to endorse the upcoming elections in 2010 as part of the newel process of the Family Registration Card.

Acting on official orders from above, the Village Tracts Clerk in Thing Hual area of Thantlang Township has asked villagers to sign an endorsement form approving the 2010 elections as a condition to have their new family registration cards issued.

One Village PDC Chairman commented, “The order from the SPDC says that everyone must sign the endorsement. Of course, ordinary people don’t know what it is all about. If they did, no one would sign it voluntarily.”

Villagers have paid 250 per household as a fee for mandatory renewal of their family registration card.

SPDC Seeks Support for Elections through Promise of Development Aid

9 August 2009

Local SPDC authorities in Thantlang Township has offered some financial help to some communities with their existing self-support projects in exchange for promise to support the planned elections in 2010.

A villager whose community has initiated its own road construction project four years ago said, “We didn’t just started the project, the SPDC was fully aware of our initiative yet they never offered us help all those time. This offer of assistance is obviously not out of generosity but in exchange for our promise to support the 2010 elections. But then who are we to say “no” to the assistance, which is in fact very small amount, after they had provided to us.”

He stressed that the actual amount of assistance was not made through public announcement but was secretly handed to the local Village PDC Chairman.

He also said that the fact that village communities such as Congthia and Zephai Villages were have initiated such self-support road construction projects were because their was no government initiatives in the first place.

Chin Students Barred from University Campus Residence Ahead of 2010

19 July 2009

Chin students studying in Kalay University have been made ineligible to live in residences on the university campus for the 2009 academic year according to an order issued by the SPDC Education Ministry.

The measure to exclude Chin students from the campus residences became effective in early 2009 following an official letter from the Education Ministry instructing the Rector of Kalay University to that effect, a Chin student studying in the University said.

A female Chin student said, “We are not allowed on campus residence this year. We face a lot of inconveniences living off campus and renting a place. Up to seven students have to share a small room which makes it more inconvenient to study; this on top of noisy neighbors.”

The rector of the University himself is apparently kept out of the dark as to the reason Chin students aren’t allowed in the campus residences by the Ministry of Education, according to the students. But it is widely believed the measure is a security precaution ahead of the 2010 elections due to fear of possible campus unrests that could happen around the time of elections.

Meanwhile, the proposals by the university administration to construct a campus residence at Kalay Science and Technological University to ease students’ education costs has been turned down by authorities apparently for the same reason.

Internet Cafes Shut Down

17 July 2009

Authorities in Kalay Town, Sagaing Division have shut down a number of privately operated internet cafes in an attempt to monitor internet users and online traffic flowing in and out, as part of a security preparation for the upcoming elections in 2010, a local resident has informed Chin Human Rights Organization.

But despite the shut-down a few internet cafes remain in operation, such as the ones operated by the Communications Department and Thitsa Oo Internet Cafes in Thahan, so intelligence personnel can easily monitor internet users.

“My café was shut down by authorities. The line is still cut off. Customers are still asking if the internet is now working. The two remaining internet cafes have now posted a notice on their wall cautioning customers not to write anything related to politics because there are always plain-cloth intelligence officers in the room. This (posting the notice) was something we didn’t have to do previously”, said an internet café operator who can not be named for her personal security.

Forced Recruitment to Join USDA

16 July 2009

Local authorities in Sagaing Division and neighboring villages in Chin State’s Falam Township

are forcibly enlisting villagers in the junta's civilian proxy Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), an area resident said.

The USDA chapters are now being formed in parts of Kalay Township of Sagaing Division and Falam Township of Chin State with local authorities forcibly signing villagers' name onto USDA membership. According to residents, the USDA is being hastily organized in the area ahead of the 2010 elections.

"Our village received an order on June 22 instructing us to organize a USDA chapter at the earliest time possible. According to the order, 15 people out of every 50 household must enlist in the membership," the unnamed resident explained.

"Nobody wants to join the USDA because they are just the civilian agent of the military regime. On top of this, once enlisted in the USDA, 20 members from each Village Tract are automatically obligated to undergo militia training. This would mean having to forfeit work for our own family survival for long periods in the midst of the survival crisis," he continued.

The USDA chapters are being forcibly organized in Htautkyant and Kya Inn Village Tracts of Kalay Township, Sagaing Division and Wai Bulah and Kamun Chaung Village Tracts of Falam Township, Chin State.

Others

School Building Project Still on Hold Due to Corruptions

6 July 2009

A building project for a new elementary school at Kywe Nan Kyay Village, Gangaw Township, Mergui Division has yet to start despite the fact that the public has paid construction funds collected by local authorities, Chin Human Rights Organization has learned.

Although set for completion by the end of April 2009, building materials such as wood have yet to be purchased, according to local residents. The public has paid a sum of 3,000 Kyats per household towards the construction costs.

"Each of about 70 households in the village paid 3,000 Kyats. There are also other donations by individuals and institutions such as the local monastery, which contributed 200,000 Kyats; 100,000 Kyats by the USDA as well as individual donations in tens of thousands of Kyats," a local resident and mother said.

When asked by villagers as to the reason of the delay, the Village PDC Chairman said that additional funds were being raised due to insufficient funds. However, a villager responsible for managing the funds said that the money was used by the Village PDC Chairman to make some short term investments for his personal profits.

According the villagers the Village PDC Chairman is known to regularly siphon off money by

collecting more money from the public than authorized. Farmers who pay the funds by their rice paddy instead of cash also report regularly being ripped off by the Chairman by requiring them to pay huge amount of rice.

Farmers Cheated of 1 Million Kyats of Pooled Development Funds

7 July 2009

U Maung Maung, Chairman of Kalay Township's Htauhkyant Village Tract PDC has been accused of embezzling one million Kyats from irrigation development funds collected from farmers in the area.

Farmers alleged that U Maung Maung refused to return over one million Kyats collected from them after a self-support irrigation development project he was presiding over was allegedly scrapped by higher authorities.

Touting that it would supply enough water for over 10,000 acres of farmlands in the area, the irrigation development project was started by U Maung Maung after convincing farmers to contribute money for the construction three years ago.

"Farmers had paid 2 tins of rice per one acre farmed for the last three years towards the funds. After higher authorities have ordered the project shut, U Maung Maung never returned the remaining funds," the project book keeper said.

Nearly two miles of trench have been dug since the construction started in 2008 with an estimated cost of 700,000 Kyats. After the project shut down, U Maung Maung kept the remaining money of over one million Kyats. Over 2 million Kyats was collected from the farmers for the construction over a period of three years.

Refused by Hospital for Having No Money, Cancer Patient Died

11 July 2008

A cancer patient died two days after she was refused by hospital staff for having no money for treatment, Chin Human Rights Organization has learned.

Family members say that Daw San Tin who was suffering from breast cancer was rushed to a government hospital in Gangaw, Mergui Division from nearby Letpanchaung Village on April 14, 2009. After discovering that the patient had only 2000 Kyats, hospital staff refused to admit her saying that she didn't have enough money for the treatment.

A cousin of the patient said, "We brought her to the hospital when we discover that her condition was serious. First they ask us money for medicines and then more money for her paperwork. When we told the nurse we only had 2000 Kyats, she went back inside to talk to other medical staff that didn't appear to pay attention. She came back out and told us to go home because we didn't have enough money."

Daw San Tin died two days later.

In a separate incident, on March 28, 2009, a patient by the name of U Ko Aung Kyi who had spent over a month in the hospital receiving treatment was prematurely discharged and sent home from the hospital after medical staff discovered that he was struggling to keep up with the medical bills.

Medical staffs at Gangaw hospital are known to give preferential treatment to patients who can pay money by giving them extra care and attention, and deny admission to people with serious medical conditions, if they have little or no money.

USDA Members Go Unpunished Despite Failing to Comply with Official Orders

4 July 2009

Local authorities in KyaukHtuh Township of Mergui Division are yet to take any action against members of junta-backed social organization Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) who refused an order requiring all area residents to maintain the streets in front of their houses, a resident informed Chin Human Right Organization.

The order requiring house owners to maintain the streets came from the Township PDC office and date back several years. According to the local resident, ordinary households who failed to comply with the order which require them to lay sand on the street in front of their houses have regularly been fined and punished.

“Before the local USDA chapter opened here recently, all households are obligated by the order. If you see unpaved spots in the street, you could tell that the house beside them belong to the USDA members,” the resident explained, adding that local officials are reluctant and afraid to take action against the USDA.

Similarly, USDA members in nearby Gangaw Township are above any orders and always escape punishment for failure to comply. Unlike ordinary folks, households with family members in the USDA apparently do not register their guests with the local PDC office.

FOOD CRISIS IN CHINLAND

More than 30 Chin Families Flee to Mizoram

13 August 2009

More than 30 families from Chin state, western Burma, recently fled to neighboring Mizoram in northeast India because of the on-going famine.

More than 30 Chin families flee to Mizoram

The Chin peoples who fled to Mizoram state

A villager in Wadaingkung, Mr. Khin Oo, who made the village census list, said that more than 170 people shifted to Mizoram last June and July from 15 villages having 36 families in Paletwa Township, southern Chin state to escape the famine.

“Cultivation has not succeeded because of bamboo flowering and multiplication of rats, which eat the flowers. The rats destroyed all our plants leaving us with no crops,” he added.

Mr. Khin Oo and 15 families shifted to Mizoram state. From their neighboring villagers about 20 people accompanied them. Most of the refugees are staying in Saiha and Lawngtlai district in southern Mizoram state. They are working as casual laborers.

“Other villagers in Paletwa Township also wanted to accompany us when we left. They are sure to follow soon as there are no jobs, no food and no support from any quarter. There is nothing they can do there,” he told Khonumthung News.

Villagers who have shifted to Mizoram belong to Vadaingkung, Wati, Seihsongkung, Valaungkung, Akikung, Taingwa, Tintaungwa, Sanpiah, Athongkung, Sami, Laungzawkung, Michaungwa, and Drawwa of Paletwa Township . There is no confirmation from other townships.

The natural phenomena of bamboo flowering leads to destruction of crops by rats, causing famine. Records with the Paletwa Natural Trouble Helping Group (2008-2009) reveals that 13,610 acres of cultivated land has been destroyed. The cultivators have lost a total of 99,028 tins of rice in Paletwa Township . Similarly, 4,361 out of 7,150 of peanut (oil-seeds) land have been destroyed. A total of 2, 74,816 tins of oil-seed have also been lost in the famine.

(Source: Khonumthung News)

Crops Destroyed by Grasshoppers in Chin State

July 30, 2009

Crops in Chin State have been completely destroyed by grasshoppers.

According to a farmer from Thantlang Township of the Indo-Burma region, all the crops growing in the paddy fields were eaten up by grasshoppers, and the crops could not be saved.

"Especially the paddy crop was spoilt. Flocks of grasshoppers entered the fields and destroyed all the crops, not only the fruits, but also the leaves and trees," a local person said.

He also said that the Agriculture Department had been informed and the farmers had asked for insecticides to kill the grasshoppers and other insects. However, the concerned authorities have not done anything yet to tackle the grasshopper menace.

"We sent word to the township agriculture department office and explained about the problem we were facing and made a request for insecticides. But, nothing has been done yet. As a result, all our crops are being destroyed and we do not know what to do as the cultivation season for new crops is also over," he added.

The Chin people have been facing shortage of food, for a couple of years, due to destruction of crops by rats.

"Rats had eaten up and destroyed the paddy, maize and others crops and people were suffering from shortage of food. Now grasshoppers have destroyed the crops again and the people in the region are concerned about their survival," a member of the Mautam Relief Program based in Thantlang Town of Chin State said.

A similar thing had also happened in Matupi Township of Chin State, according to a trader.

"Grasshoppers fly from one place to another not only in the paddy fields, but also thrive on big trees such as banana tree, mango tree and eat the leaves," he said.

Earlier, crops had never been destroyed by grasshoppers. This occurrence will only escalate the suffering of the people, who have been hit hard in the past due to severe famines.

There are 6,49,904 acres of arable fields in Thantlang Township and the local people grow paddy and maize as their staple food.

Currently, Chin people are getting food and other malnutrition assistance through various foreign NGOs and some individuals.

(Source- Khonumthung News)

Chairman of Chin State Bars Foreign Aid

July 30, 2009

In the first week of July 2009, the Chairman of the Chin State Peace and Development Council issued an order to all Township Peace and Development Councils of Chin State, forbidding them to receive any foreign assistance, a local from Falam Town of Chin State told Khonumthung News recently.

Chairman of Chin State bars foreign aid

Chairman of Chin State Peace and Development Council Col. Hung Ngai issued the order asking people not to receive any foreign assistance or relief.

Tactical Commander (No.) cum Chairman of Chin State Peace and Development Council Col. Hung Ngai issued the order asking people not to receive any foreign assistance or relief for the public through the Chairmen of TPDC.

He added, "The order said that those who receive foreign assistance are the ones, who oppose the government and the details of names, addresses of the receivers shall be scrutinized and informed to the office."

It has been learnt that the Chin people have been suffering from shortage of food due to Mautam Famine and people in the region are worried the order will stop all assistance, as they survive on foreign aid.

"We are totally dependent on foreign aid. We cannot understand the current order, which has been issued. Under the circumstances, if we do not get aid, we have nothing to eat. If they stop the foreign aid we shall not survive," said a local from Hmunpikawn Village of Falam Township.

Similarly, a local from Tonzang Township also said, "We cannot die of starvation; we have to receive the assistance continuously."

The Chin people have been suffering from Bamboo Famine since 2006 and they are surviving with foreign assistance, which they receive from across the border.

The bamboo famine happens once in 50 years and lasts for 5 years, according to precedent and scarcity of food in Chin State is a widespread phenomenon in the region.

(Source – Khonumthung News)

Increase in school dropouts in border areas of Chin state

21 July 2009

The effects of famine in Chin state has led to an increase in the number of school drop outs, especially, near the Indo-Myanmar border villages.

Increase in school dropouts in border areas of Chin state

Primary School in Paletwa Township

"Since, early 2007, because of the effects of famine in Chin state, Chin people have been struggling for their livelihood. So they have been unable to send their children to school. The number of children not receiving education is going up," said the principal of Tawnglalongchau village, Matupi town, southern Chin state.

"Desperate to eke out a living everyday the families are unable to afford sending children to school," said the principle.

"Our village school has tilled standard seven. We had more than 40 students last year. This year we have about 20 students. Many have not paid admission fees till now," said the principal to Khonunthung News.

"In village government schools, the number of students has come down. Most of students are working as farmers. They have also gone to Mizoram to work for a living," he added.

A few people remain in this village such as children, and elderly men and women. Most of the young people have left school to find work. Most were in 9th or 10th standards," the principal added.

Most Chin people are farmers. They used to stock food for two or three years and could send the children to school by selling vegetables before they were hit by the famine.

The famine comes in a 50-year cycle when bamboo flowers. Rats eat the flowers and multiply rapidly and then destroy crops, food grains stored in go downs and vegetables in Chin state.

Some NGOs are helping out with rice. However, there is no sponsorship for children's education.

(Source - Khonumthung News)

Chin Famine Aid Live Concert in three European countries

8 July 2009: The Chin Famine Aid Live Concert (also known as Mautam concert) will be staged in three European countries from July 11, 2009 to help Chin people in western Burma who are affected by famine.

Chin Famine Aid Live Concert in three European countries

Suntinpar & Dawthleiniang for Chin Famine Aid Live Concert

The live concert is to be organized by Chin communities in Europe and performances will be held in Denmark, Norway and Germany. The singers are Sung Tin Par, Dawt Hlei Hniang, Cung Lian Thawng and Solomon Menrihai, who are very popular in Burma. They will raise money to help Chin people reeling under famine.

The first show will be in Denmark on July 11 and 12, after which it will be in Norway on July 20 and 26. In Germany it will be held on August 1, 2009.

The natural phenomena of bamboo flowering happens once in 50 years and is called 'Mautam' in the local language. It leads to rats eating the bamboo flowers and multiplying. The rats in turn eat crops resulting in famine. Chin people have been facing the effects of the phenomena since 2006 and are living through famine conditions. No one knows how long the effect will last therefore, Chin people are fleeing to neighbouring countries every day.

Chin people are supported not only by Chin communities abroad but also helped by NGOs around the world. However, help is not very effective because of lack of good communication and transportation. In addition such benevolence is not taken kindly to by the Burmese military junta.

The regime continues to ignore any crisis in the country, especially in Chin state. In Chin state, therefore, 85 percent of the population is in debt while trying to earn their livelihood as reported by the World Food Program.

The first Mautam Concert was held in 2008 and February 2009 in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Australia by a combination of Burmese singers and Mizoram state singers from India for aiding Chin people.

(Source- Khonumthung News)