

Volume XII. No.V. September-October 2009

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Rhododendron

Chin Human Rights Organization



A dying bamboo forest in Dai area of Southern Chinland
Photos taken in Spring 2009

Rhododendron News

Volume XII, No.V

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EDITORIAL

Bottom Line: Rights Conditions Unlikely to Improve Post Elections

The United Nations rights expert is due to visit Burma for the third time in late November since assuming his position in May 2008. Tomas Ojea Quintana, a lawyer from Argentina, is the fourth rights envoy to be appointed by the United Nations to investigate allegations of human rights violations in Burma. Only a handful of countries in the world, which face the most serious allegations, have a human rights investigator appointed by the world body.

One of Mr. Quintana's three predecessors Mr. Rajsoomer Lallah resigned in frustration at the lack of human rights progress in Burma in 2000 after having served for four years as the UN rights investigator. The Mauritian lawyer who was denied entry to Burma several times said, "We are faced with a country at war with its own people."

In his last report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2008 before leaving his position, Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the Brazilian international rights expert likened the Burmese regime's commitment to human rights and democratic reform as a fairy tale. He told a panel of the world's highest rights body, "If you believe in gnomes, trolls and elves, you can believe in this democratic process [in Burma]."

Before his first visit to Burma in August 2008 as newly appointed UN rights envoy, Mr. Quintana was initially upbeat about possible progress in the areas of human rights "Hoping to engage in a constructive dialogue [with Burmese authorities] to improve human rights."

It was not to be so. After 17 years since a UN human rights expert was assigned to Burma, we are back at square one. Mr. Quintana recently told the United Nations General Assembly of an ongoing "alarming patterns of widespread and systematic violations [of human rights]."

Mr. Quintana is set to make another trip to Burma later this month, possibly in the last week.

But it is important to note that the recommendations he made during his last trip to Burma has not been positively responded to by the ruling military regime. And those recommendations included the fundamental questions of institutional reforms needed to effectively address human rights.

The UN rights envoy specifically emphasized the need to fundamentally reform the armed forces and the judiciary. Unfortunately, this is not likely to take place any time soon or in the post election period under the new constitution backed by the military.

As the UN rights expert pointed out in his latest report, the people of Burma will not enjoy their human rights without addressing the institutional aspect of the problems.

The military-backed constitution is already fraught with recipes for continued human rights violations and provides for an entrenched atmosphere of impunity for perpetrators of human rights. And without affecting institutional reforms, protection of human rights in Burma will continue to remain a daunting challenge in many years ahead.

Some optimists view that under a new semi-civilian government, Burma will inevitably but gradually loosen its tight reign on freedom. It can even be cajoled into embracing some of the basic international rights instruments that guarantee fundamental human rights.

But the fact remains. Perpetrators of rights abuse who tend to be direct agents of the State, including members of the armed forces will continue to enjoy impunity, shielded from any kind of prosecution. This is because the State's interests are so often closely tied to the kind of human rights violations that have been taking place across the country.

The issue of forced labor provides a classic example. It took more than a decade for the regime to even admit that the practice of forced labor existed. Nine years after the regime has supposedly outlawed the use of forced labor, the practice is still as widespread and commonplace as any other time in the last twenty years. And rarely had anyone been prosecuted for ordering the use of forced labor. Instead, civilians who report forced labor incidents have been routinely intimidated, harassed and punished.

It takes a serious political will to address human rights. Any measures to combat violations require the full backing of the system, accompanied by firm enforcement mechanisms being put in place. None of these is evident in the current scenario or the system provided by the military-backed constitution.

Human rights conditions are not likely to improve post elections even under the best of scenarios. And that's the bottom line.

ARBITRARY MEASURES

Residents Facing Shortage of Drinking Water due to Privatization

4 September 2009

Residents of Paletwa town are facing shortage of drinking water supply and financial exploitation following the decision by the local municipal office to privatize its water supply system.

The Paletwa Township Municipal Office this summer subcontracted the management of its drinking water supply system to a local business man U Aung Kyi. Since then, residents have started complaining about shortage of water supply.

"We used to have one common tap installed for a neighborhood and that was able to

supply enough drinking water for everyone. Now we are facing a regular shortage of water," a local school teacher said.

"U Aung Kyi is now going around installing individual water connection to each home and charging 50,000 Kyats per home. But the water stopped running regularly ever since," he added

In allocating drinking water in the town, the government officials of high positions are given the first priority, followed by business such as restaurants and then the general public at the very end of the line.

"Only government officials get their water supply regularly. There should not be preferential treatment among people who pay equal tax" a local church pastor said.

Arbitrary Tax Exacted from House Owners

6 September 2009

Owners of new houses built in Falam Township, are facing arbitrary tax exacted by the local Forestry Department. The amount of tax ranges from 25,000 to 50,000 Kyats depending on the size of the house.

One unnamed forestry official admitted that the measure is being imposed due of insufficient salary they received from the government.

A villager of Parte said, "In the month of July, an official from the Forestry Department came to our village and demanded 25,000 Kyats from owners of the two houses newly built in the village."

He said that no official receipt indicating payment was given to the house owners. Instead, the official just noted down payment on his note book.

Villagers filed complaints against the arbitrary practice with the Township Forestry Department by no action has been taken in the matter.

Similar arbitrary collections of tax by the Forestry Department are reported in other Townships of Chin State. Remote rural villages have reported having to pay huge sums to the Forestry Department for construction wood, leading to a significant increase in the price of wood in the area.

Christian Religious institutions Face Heavy Tax Increase

8 September 2009

Authorities from Kalay Township, Sagaing Division have doubled the amount of tax exacted from Christian religious schools and seminaries, CHRO has learned.

Last year, Christian learning institutions paid an annual tax of 100,000 Kyats to the authorities. That amount has now been doubled to 200,000 Kyats this year.

"The authorities are saying that the tax increase is a nation-wide phenomenon for Christian institutions, but we aren't sure if that's really the case," said one Bible school teacher from Kalay.

There are about 47 Christian religious schools in Kalay Township alone with enrolment ranging from 30 to 50 students per each school. Students pay an average fee of 7000 to 10,000 Kyats.

"We were able to operate the school with the revenue from tuition fees without much difficulty before. But we are facing a financial pinch this year," said one Minister of the Lairawn Baptist Church in Kalay Township who also operate a Bible school.

He continued, "The tax is simply too much. We can hardly keep up with our operating cost with some students missing their tuition payment here and there; we can hardly pay the teachers' salaries on a regular basis."

The total number of Bible students in Kalay Township is estimated to be around 20,000, with most of them being Chin Christians.

Authorities Collect Funds for Water Supply Project

10 September 2009

The authorities in Chin State's capital Hakha are collecting 6000 Kyats per household from twon residents to support the cost of restructuring a pond into a drinking water reservoir, according to one local resident.

The Township Peace and Development Council office in August issued an order directing Ward authorities to collect money from the public in the amount of 6000 Kyats per household. The collection of money is on top of existing funding of 10 million Kyats that was already allocated for the pond restructuring by Commander of Northwestern Divisional Command who visited Hakha earlier in the summer.

The authorities have yet to give details about the project.

"The public has not been given any information about this project. We don't know when the work will begin or how many people will be served by the water supply once it is implemented," the local resident said.

Hakha has about 30,000 residents with about 4000 to 5000 households. More residents get their water supply from self-support water supply projects by drawing water from nearby streams and creeks.

Forestry Department Taxes Firewood Use

12 September 2009

Villages in Falam Township, are regularly 'taxed' for using firewood and charcoal for cooking.

Two staff members of the Falam Township Forestry Department namely Za Lian Thang and Kip Kip were reported to tour villages in the Township and collect arbitrary tax from local residents for using firewood and charcoals for cooking.

The majority of Chin villages rely on firewood gathered from the forests for cooking.

"This is the sixth time they have come to our village and collected money from us. They look at the mount of firewood we piled up and demand money depending on how much we have. Now we are afraid to stock up on the firewood and have to gather them in the forests more frequently. This has become a big burden for us, especially when we have to gather firewood in the rain" said one local villager.

The collection is due every four months, with small villages with about 15 households paying 5000 Kyats and bigger villages paying up to 10000 Kyats every collection cycle.

"This is very bad. I have never heard of tax being levied on firewood. It is understandable if they practice this in bigger towns. It is not like the government is providing us electricity. This is causing us a lot of problems," said another villager.

There are eight staffs at the Township Forestry Department. Za Lian Thang and Kip Kip are assigned to Waibulah Village Tract.

Increased Tolls Cause Fare Hike

14 September 2009

A dramatic increase in tolls collected from vehicles servicing passengers and goods is causing a hike in travel fare and commodity prices in Chin State.

The authorities have recently doubled the mount of tolls collected from vehicles servicing goods and passengers along Hakha-Gangaw road.

Fares for coach bus servicing between Chin State's capital Hakha and Gangaw Town of Mergui Division has now increased to 8000 Kyats from 6000 Kyats as the direct result of increased tolls.

The increase in fare is also related to increased security check points along the Hakha-Gangaw road.

"There are now as many as eight check points along the Hakha-Gangaw road manned by police personnel who charge money to vehicles at every point," one regular passenger said.

He said that he increased toll on vehicles has also driven hotels and restaurant along the way to hike up their prices, leaving many small-time traders in a difficult situation.

Similarly passengers and traders carrying their goods on the India-Burma trade route No. 2 are also facing the same problems as there have been an increased in security check points along the way, which now number 10 check points.

Patients Compelled to Pay for Test on Prospective Blood Donors

15 September 2009

Patients waiting to get blood transfusion in Falam District Hospital are reportedly asked to pay for a 4000 Kyat fee for blood test done on prospective blood donors, placing additional financial burdens on them.

The fee requirement is new in Falam hospital which has never charged fees for blood tests done on prospective blood donors. The blood test is a regular medical precaution meant to ensure patients do not receive blood from donors with infectious disease such as Tuberculosis or HIV virus.

According to one local medical officer working at the hospital, the fee is not necessary because the required medical equipments to do such kind of blood test have been supplied to the hospital by the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF).

"The financial burden placed on patients needing to receive blood transfusion has cost lives. I am not in a position to name the number, but emergency patients have unnecessarily died because of this," a medical officer working in the hospital said.

Charging fees from hospital patients is not the official policy. However, corrupt medical staffs have been trying to get extra money to supplement their meager income by charging unauthorized fees from the patients.

The matter has been reported to the Falam Township Peace and Development Council office but no action has been taken to date.

One former patient of the hospital said that patients requiring surgical intervention for child birth are also charged as much as 100,000 Kyats by hospital staff.

Municipal Officers Collect Money for Garbage Removal, But Garbage Remains

12 October 2009

Although the municipal office in Kalay Myo collected money from the local population for trash removal, garbage containers have not been regularly cleared, according to a local correspondent from Kalay Myo.

“Recently, [the municipal office] collected money; our family gave 5,000 Kyat to clear the garbage from our teashop,” reported a teashop owner. “The dustbins are now full of garbage, but no one has come to empty them,” he said.

The municipal office in Kalay charged households, shopkeepers, teashop owners and vendors along Pyi Road different rates for sanitation services. For sanitation services, the municipal office collect a sum of 2,000 Kyat per month from small shops; 3,000 Kyat from large shops; 4,000 Kyat from small teashops; and 5,000 Kyat from large teashop. Individual households paid 500 Kyat per month.

After the money was collected, the municipal office neglected to fulfill its promise on a routine basis. Only on rare occasions, such as when important officials visit Kalay, are the trash bins cleared. However, usually the garbage bins are removed only once in a month.

According to a local resident, “Garbage is thrown out only when important officials visit. To live by the road is now very unpleasant.”

The municipal office began collecting money for sanitation services in 1996. The official guidelines indicated that the garbage bins would be cleared three times in a week.

Authorities Refuse to Purchase Jatropha Seeds from Villagers as Promised

21 October 2009

The SPDC’s Township Peace and Development Council in Falam Town refused to purchase jatropha seeds collected by local farmers in contravention to an earlier agreement.

In August 2009, the authorities of Falam Town informed village heads in the region that the township office would buy jatropha seeds produced by farmers. With that promise, farmers from three villages collected seeds and approached the Falam TPDC for payment. However, the TPDC refused to purchase the seeds despite the earlier promise.

One Lungte village farmer said, “I have collected 25 tins of jatropha seeds after our village head informed us that the Falam TPDC would buy the seeds at a reasonable price. Other villagers purchased seeds to sell to the TPDC for profit. However, when we went to the office, we were told that they would not buy the seeds. Instead one of the officials told me, ‘if you have difficulty carrying the seeds back, you can leave them here.’”

Forty tins of jatropha seeds were similarly brought to the TPDC by farmers from Kamunchawng village. They were similarly turned away and told to leave the seeds without payment.

In 2006, the SPDC initiated a program to develop jatropha plantations throughout Chin State. To start the program, the authorities collected money from villagers block by block. The aim of the program was to develop bio-fuel from the jatropha plants. However, the government now refuses to purchase the jatropha seeds produced by the plantations.

One local resident criticized the action of the SPDC saying, “With the forthcoming 2010 election, the government informed the local people that they would purchase the jatropha seed just to gain support. However, their promises and actions are completely different. They are just lying to the people.”

SPDC Slashes the Salary of Civil Servants in Chin State

17 October 2009

The SPDC not only provides very low salaries to civil servants, but they have also recently reduced the salary of civil servants in Chin State by 150,000 to 200,000 Kyat each year, according to a Chin civil servant.

One staff member of the government education department in Falam Town said, “I am a senior high school teacher and my salary is 48,000 Kyat per month, but I only receive 35,000 Kyat at most; the rest is taken by the government for various reasons- to purchase tea seeds, to pay for visiting guests, and other expenses incurred by the department.”

He continued to say, “The authorities never inform us in advance about reductions in our salary. They just take as they please. We are very upset with this action.”

According to a civil servant transferred to Chin State from another province in Burma, the problem in Chin State is more extreme than in other areas of Burma. He said, “Before I was transferred to Chin State, I stayed in Magwe Division. Reductions in salary happened often over there, but the scale was not as much as it is here in Chin State. At most, the authorities would take 500 to 1,000 Kyat. Here, the cut is about 2,000 Kyat. As a result, our livelihood is greatly affected and we are struggling for our survival.

Vegetables and agricultural products in Chin State are not as available as in other regions of Burma. Consequently, the price for food is more expensive. In Chin State, 800 Kyat is necessary to live on, whereas in other areas of Burma 200 Kyat would be sufficient. The present salary of civil servants in Chin State is insufficient to cover food and education expenses for children.

Currently, there are about 10,000 civil servants in Chin State, according to a government staff member at the Hakha Auditing Office. Civil servants contribute an estimated

7,000,000 Kyat per year to government expenses. This amount is in addition to the sums collected by the government from students and other civilians.

Revenue Dept. Demand Exploitative Sums from People Going Abroad

10 October 2009

The Revenue Dept. in Kalay Township, Sagaing Division is charging an exploitative sum of money from people trying to go abroad to work.

People who want to go abroad to work are by law required to obtain Form (17), which enables them to obtain a Burmese passport. The Revenue Department is charging as much as 40,000 Kyats to issue the form, one Kalay resident said.

“A friend of mine who wanted to go to Malaysia as a legal foreign worker was charged 40,000 Kyats for Form (17). It costs as much as 70,000 Kyats if you obtain it through an agent,” the Kalay resident said.

In previous years, people paid as little as 1000 Kyats to obtain Form (17).

Due to increasing economic hardship, more Chin residents in Kalay area have been going to neighboring countries to work by selling their houses and properties.

“The Revenue Department has noticed this increasing trend and tries to exploit people. The actual fee required by the government to issue Form (17) is only 1000 Kyats,” he said.

Soldiers Extort from Oil Workers

9 October 2009

Burmese soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (89) based in Kalay, Sagaing Division are reported to illegally extort money from oil workers who transport crude oils from an oilfield to Kalay Town.

Kyatmauk oilfield is located 30 miles from Kalay Town of Sagaing Division.

A group of soldiers from LIB (89) has recently set up a post along the route to the oilfield.

“The soldiers are demanding 1000 Kyats each person passing through the post carrying crude oil to Kalay. They charge 5,000 Kyats on any vehicle transporting the oil,” one worker reported.

About 500 workers are passing through the post two to three times a week and about five vehicles pass through several times a day.

Crude oils extracted from Kyatmauk field is sold to a Chinese businessman in Kalay who is the only buyer authorized by the authorities. Selling crude oil to any other businessmen is prohibited and carries penalties.

In August, a Chin worker from Taungphila was gang beaten by ‘volunteer firemen,’ a government-vigilante group after he tried to sell crude oil to a different buyer in Kalay. He ended up being hospitalized for two weeks at Tahan’s Wesley Hospital for injuries sustained from the beatings.

FORCED LABOR

40 Villages Ordered to Perform Forced Labor

25 September 2009

40 villages in Thantlang Township have been ordered to perform forced labor to repair an army camp at Vuangtu Village by order of camp commander Major Myo Zaw Win from Light Infantry Battalion (266).

The order affects about half of all the villages in the entire township and is the largest forced labor program ever exacted in Chin State at one time. With at least 40 persons from each individual village, the total number of people participating in the forced labor is about 1600.

Each laborer is to bring with him the necessary tools and rations for the duration of work. The work is to begin on September 28th 2009, and each of the 40 villages is to rotate working every two days.

“40 persons from our village have been ordered to engage in repairing the camp at Vuangtu. We have been asked to bring a knife and rations for ourselves. The order says that our job is to put a security fence around the camp,” said a villager of Belhar.

“Major Myo Zaw Win had initially ordered work to begin two weeks earlier, but ended up postponing the date to the 28th of September in compliance with villagers’ request to do so since villagers were busy with their farm works,” said another villager from Zephai.

Chin villagers acknowledged that forced labor on a massive scale has significantly declined since 2008. But there have been increased orders of forced labor affecting masses of people since the beginning of 2009 in the area.

There are about 50 Burma Army camps around Chin State, which have all been built and maintained using forced labors of Chin civilians.

SPDC Force Civilians to Perform Night Sentry Duty

15 October 2009

The SPDC are regularly calling for two civilians to perform night sentry in Kalay Myo, according to a local resident from Block No. 19 in Kalay Myo.

The authorities are requiring two rotating night-time sentries in Kalay's 25 districts under the pretext of security. Households unable to perform the sentry duty are required to pay a penalty of 1,000 Kyat per night of missed sentry duty. The infirm and widowed are not excused from serving as a sentry.

"Since the 2007 monk-led demonstration, the authorities have required civilians to perform night sentry," said an anonymous source. "The main task of the sentry is to conduct night-time household checks for guests and to report to the police any people assembled in groups at night."

Sentries performing night sentry are required to report to the police information about people who leave their homes after 10 pm and those who gather in groups. The sentry is also responsible for making routine household checks. According to a Kalay resident, families with family members found to be absent are required to pay 1,000 Kyat as a penalty.

Civilians Face Hardships Due to Forced Sentry Duty

18 October 2009

The Burma Army has been forcing villagers in Paletwa Township in southern Chin State to serve as sentries since early this year, which has interfered with people's daily livelihoods.

According to one local resident, "Every village is required to provide two people on a rotational basis to serve as a sentry for the Burma Army soldiers. We were told that we will be punished if we fail to do so."

Light Infantry Battalion No. 289 of the Burma Army is requiring two persons daily from villages in the region to serve in army sentry posts. The sentries are responsible for reporting regularly to the army officials. The Burma Army issued the order through the village headmen who are responsible for ensuring villager participation.

The villagers are facing more and more hardships as the sentry duty increasingly interferes with people's daily life.

One observer of the situation said, "I studied the situation in 11 villages and when I asked the villagers about their problems, most of them responded that the men were unable to properly work for their family's livelihood because of the guard duty. Family heads had to report for duty once every two weeks so they can not travel to their fields or spend the night on their farms."

Another anonymous source said, “Sometimes, villagers are forced to perform sentry duty for two week periods. As a result, they have no time to work for their family’s livelihood.”

Civilians in Matupi and Thantlang Towns are similarly called away from their livelihoods to perform various forms of forced labor, such as road construction and portering. As a result, they are forced to flee from Burma as they are unable to provide for their families.

In addition, the Burma Army routinely confiscates and kills the domestic livestock of villagers. Villagers are forced to cook meals and provide alcohol to patrolling soldiers without compensation. This is exacerbating conditions for villagers who are struggling to earn a livelihood and provide for their families.

Forced Labor and Portering Continues in Chin State

19 October 2009

Local villagers in Zimpui Village in Tiddim Township in northern Chin State are forced to flee due to repeated calls for porters and laborers by the Burma Army.

The Burma Army has required villagers to carry army rations for patrolling soldiers and engage in road construction, sentry duty, searches for deserted soldiers, and the building of army camps. Villagers are forced to work for the army without any compensation.

According to one villager who subsequently fled to escape the oppressive forced labor, “The army came to our village so frequently that no one could stay. Even the dogs were afraid of the soldiers because every time the soldiers came and drank alcohol, they would shoot at the dogs. Upon seeing the soldiers, the dogs would run into houses or into the forest to avoid them. We would do the same.”

Since 1996, the Burma Army increasingly relied on civilians for portering. As a result, many families have fled to Mizoram State in India to escape forced labor and portering in Burma. More than 78 families from Tiddim Township have fled to Mizoram since 1996 due to problems with forced labor and portering.

Forced labor and portering is occurring not only in Tiddim Township but throughout Chin State. Every village and district is afflicted with this problem.

Civilians Forced to Provide Money and Build Houses for Government Servants in Chin State

20 October 2009

Civilians in Paletwa Township in southern Chin State are forced to pay for and construct houses for government servants who are unable to afford housing in Chin State. SPDC

has made no initiative to provide proper accommodations to government servants in Chin State. Government servants earn too little to pay for their own housing.

Each household has contributed 2,000 Kyat per year to raise the funds necessary for the construction of housing for government servants. This money is used to purchase the appropriate tools and materials for building a house, including bamboo.

According to one local resident, “We built two houses this year for two health workers and one school teacher. It is not easy to get the bamboo as all the bamboo trees are dying.”

Villagers have been working on the houses for the one to two weeks. Every year, the villagers spend money and energy building accommodations for government servants who earn small salaries.

In addition to providing proper housing, villagers also recruit additional school teachers because the SPDC-hired school teachers are insufficient to meet the needs of the students. Villagers contribute money and material to support the daily needs of locally-hired teachers.

The SPDC also provides one health worker to provide health services to ten villages, which is inadequate to meet the medical needs of the villagers. Medicine is also in short supply, which hinders effective treatment.

Due to lack of school teachers, health workers, and medicine, the education and health of local villagers is incredibly poor.

MILITIA CONSCRIPTION

Hundreds of Chin Youths Conscripted into Militia Service

1 October 2009

Hundreds of youths from Chin State’s southern township of Matupi have been forcibly recruited to serve as government militias.

Interviews with local people and militia recruits reveal that as many as 1160 youths have been conscripted into the militia service in Matupi Township alone since June of 2009.

Acting on orders from higher authorities, the local Peace and Development Council have been secretly enlisting names of Chin youths in the Township to serve as militias. The forcible enlistment was implemented after no one in the area volunteered to sign up for the militia service.

One recruit from Matupi Town said, “I didn’t even know when and how my name got enlisted. I got summoned to the local PDC office on June 15 where they forced me to sign a consent form and took a picture of me.”

The date for the next batch of militia training has not been set, but recruits have been warned not to travel out in the weeks ahead.

15 youths from each of the four wards in Matupi Town were enlisted. Additionally, each village in the entire township of Matupi is also to send 15 youths to train as militia, totaling over a thousand recruits from the entire township.

Youths Flee as Militia Conscription Drive Intensifies

7 October 2009

Young people from Kalay Township, Sagiang Division are fleeing to neighboring countries and other places inside Burma to evade an ongoing draft into government militia service.

Bawi Za Uk, a Chin youth who fled his village of Thayakung in Kalay Township with his peers said, “The authorities were forcibly enlisting the names of youths in the village. Everybody was afraid and trying to flee away. I didn’t know where to go, but I went away with others just like the others.”

Bawi Za Uk said that his decision to flee away from his village came after he heard the news that 10 youths were dragged away from an oil field not very far from his village, as well as, some drunken villagers inside his own village.

Another youth who fled from Thayakung Village said, “Ten people were drafted in a village with 30 households. At least 30 to 40 youths got conscripted from bigger villages. The quota for Thayakung Village was to be about 20, and that’s why I had to flee.”

The conscription drive is also ongoing in Chin State. Hundreds of youths are being conscripted into militia service in Matupi Township.

The mobilization of militia is meant as a security measure ahead of the upcoming elections in 2010. Trained militias are expected to support local army units in providing security, as well as, ensuring that a “smooth” election environment takes place.

Locals Trained to Shoot in Chin State

25 October 2009: SPDC local authorities have given shooting training to a batch of people dubbed 'volunteer firemen' in preparation for helping monitor the 2010 elections, sources confirmed.

"We have to give money to the authorities so they can hire some people for the training. Actually, the trainees include government employees, firemen and locals. I think there are about 60 people currently being trained," a Thantlang local told Chinland Guardian.

The locals are not allowed to travel in the areas where the training is given and the roads are actually blocked, the local added.

One of the firemen trainees was quoted as saying earlier this month that the training does not include anything on how to extinguish fires but how to use guns and shoot to hit the targets.

It is claimed that the village headmen are forced to take responsibilities of the training programs in Chin State since September this year.

Militia Trainees Prohibited Travels

15 September 2009

Burmese military junta authorities have banned travel for those selected for a military training programme out of their respective locations in Falam town and its villages, in Chin state western Burma.

"Authorities of the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) have ordered persons listed for the military training programme not to travel anywhere. My younger brother was to come to Mizoram state but he cannot go anywhere as he is already listed as a participant in the programme," according to a local in Falam town, who arrived in Mizoram state recently.

It is learnt that the authorities asked for 60 persons from each four blocks of Falam town and 15 people each from 96 of village tracts in Falam Township to participate in the military training programme. The people in Falam townships are frustrated because 60 persons from each four blocks have to attend. They will be selected by lottery system.

The military training programme is being conducted in some places in Chin state by force even though the local people dislike the programme. In some places the authorities have already compiled a list of trainees before conducting the programme.

The Mizoram based Chin National Council (CNC) General Secretary Mr. Ralhnin told Khonumthung News, "This is just preparation for the forthcoming 2010 general elections. Recruiting civilians as firefighters and for the police department shows that the military government is trying to persuade them from every corner without taking the opinion of the people."

Early this month some youths from Tayakaung village in Kaley areas, Sagaing division fled to Mizoram, India in order to escape the army's recruitment dragnet. They were listed as trainees.

The military regime has promised to develop the country like other developing countries in the world by the forthcoming 2010 general elections. But most political analysts believe that the junta cannot achieve this. They are under pressure from the countrymen and the international community as they do not believe in justice and fairness for citizens and violate human rights. Source- *Khonumthung News*

FOOD CRISIS IN CHINLAND

Shortage of Drugs in Medical Facilities Results in Eight Deaths

13 October 2009

Eight people have died in Paletwa Township due to shortages in medicine supplies. Without the adequate medical supplies, the medical staffs are unable to properly treat patients.

“A patient from our village approached the village medical clinic, but he was turned away without receiving any treatment because there was no medicine left at the clinic,” said one village resident in Sami village. “The man eventually passed away on October 4, 2009 due to the seriousness of his condition.”

In 2007, the SPDC sent two medical staff to Sami Village Tract to provide services to 11 villages in the surrounding area. However, the SPDC failed to provide adequate supplies of medicine necessary for proper treatment of patients. As a result, eight people, who approached the clinic and left untreated due to lack of medicines, recently died from their ailments.

A local pastor familiar with the situation in Sami Village said that charitable organizations who have requested permission to send their staff and medical supplies to the area have reportedly been refused permission by the Township authorities.

Of the eight people who have died due to lack of proper treatment, five are children and two are women. Their deaths are largely the result of extreme vitamin deficiencies that weakened their immune systems, leaving them vulnerable to diseases. They became jaundiced and had difficulty breathing. Eventually, without treatment, they succumbed to their ailments.

Similar problems have also been reported in Thantlang Township in northern Chin State. NGOs and humanitarian agencies are not allowed to operate freely in Burma and are subject to restrictions by government officials.

Singers Ready for Chin Food Aid Concerts in America

23 October, 2009

A team of celebrated Chin singers from Burma, India and Switzerland safely arrived in the US yesterday to perform in a series of 'long-awaited' concerts organised as part of Global Campaign against Starvation in Chin State to raise awareness and fund for the victims of ongoing bamboo-and-rat-related food crisis in Burma's Chin State.

The quintette, which includes Sung Tin Par, Dawt Hlei Hniang and Mang Tin Sawm aka Solomon Menrihai from Burma, Mimi Lalzamlani from Mizoram State of India, and former ABC music band leader Salai Tawna from Switzerland, is to entertain the Chin and Burmese communities in a total of six main cities in the US.

One of the Event Coordinators in the US, Salai Elaisa Vahnie, told Chinland Guardian: "We are very happy that the singers arrived here safely and in good health. Even though they might still be feeling tired and jet-lagged, the concert will take place tomorrow as planned. We are very proud to say that they [singers] are once again taking a voluntary action for this cause and we pray that the two-month long concerts will be successful and meaningful."

The event called Chin Food Aid Concert will be held on 24 October in Dallas, Texas; on 31 October in Battle Creek, Michigan; on 7 November in San Francisco, California; on 14 November in Los Angeles, California; on 20-21 November in Indianapolis, Indiana; and on 27 November in Washington, DC.

All the takings from the concerts will go towards helping victims of *mautam* food crisis. A report released yesterday by the organising committee said that all proceeds will directly benefit those affected by this famine-like phenomenon.

Since last year, the singers has been voluntarily performing in a series of international awareness and fund-raising concerts organised by Chin communities as part of Global Campaign against Starvation in Chin State in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Denmark, Norway and Germany.

Van Biak Thang
Chinland Guardian

DRUG

Released Prisoners 'Rehabilitated' in Poppy Farms

5 October 2009

Some prisoners who have served out long-term prison sentences are reportedly being employed to work in poppy farms as part of a government 'rehabilitation program,' Chin Human Rights Organization has learned.

According to two interviewees who have ex-prisoner friends currently working at a poppy farm in Tamu Township of Mergui Division, dozens of ex-prisoners are now

cultivating poppy crop in farms located near three villages in the Township namely, Wet Suh, Myothit and Bandulah Villages. An estimated 70 ex-prisoners are now based in each of the three villages.

“We are provided with a house and a solar-energy panel. We are given a virgin plot of land to till and cultivate the poppy. But we get the technical training on how to grow the poppy. We are also provided with the financial capital to start up, which of course we have to pay back,” an ex-prisoner was quoted as saying by his friend.

“It is quite a fitting arrangement for me since I have nothing else to do since my release from prison,” he reportedly said.

A personnel working with the Police Department in Tamu, whose name is kept anonymous, corroborated the claims that such prisoner rehabilitation program exists.

“Not every ex-prisoner gets to enroll in such a program. Only some who do not have family or relatives to go back to after their release back into society, get to go into the program. It is a way of the State rehabilitating them so they could lead a new life in the society. I think it is possible that even current prisoners may also get that chance,” he said.

Junta-Approved Poppy Cultivation on the Rise in Tonzang Township

10 September 2009

Burmese military regime approved poppy fields are increasing by the year in Tonzang Township, northern Chin state in Burma.

A local in Tongzang told Khonumthung News that poppy field acreage is increasing by the year in Thangsih, Thawng Bual Len kawt and other neighbouring villages in Tongzang Township. In 2007 there were only 200 acres of poppy fields. It is almost 1000 acres this year.

The junta authorities collect tax from poppy plantations at the rate of Kyat 50,000 per acre from villagers. The plants have now grown to almost two feet.

“Permission was given by the local military head office, including the township police head. In 2007 the total acreage was only 200 but now it’s almost 1000 acres. The authorities permitted plantations and are collecting taxes at the rate of Kyat 5,000 an acre. The poppy field owners are planting poppy to make more profit than they would get from other cultivations. A daily worker can earn Kyat 3000 a day,” he added.

The regime has been allowing poppy plantation since 2005, which will be valid till 2010. The poppy fields are guarded by an ethnic insurgent group in northeast India.

“The ethnic armed group is known as the underground by locals. They watch and guard the poppy fields so that it is not destroyed by animals or humans. They take poppies as tax. They have identity cards issued by Burma’s Wa ethnic rebel group,” said a local on condition of anonymity.

The Wa known as the United Wa State Army and the junta have a cease fire pact. The group is one of the biggest armed groups in Burma.

Meanwhile, the Meitei insurgency group is also active in the Indo-Myanmar border area in Tamu, Tongzang, Chikha and Tidim towns. They have a rapport with local Burmese Army units.

The poppy cultivators sell green poppies at Kyat 14 lakhs per kilogram. Sometimes they exchange 1 kg of green poppy for a Chinese bicycle. However, the local elders and religious leaders disapprove of cultivation and sale of poppy in their areas and cultivators keeping in touch with underground groups from other countries. But they are afraid to speak their mind as it is permitted by the junta.

Similarly, there are 500 acres of poppy fields in Aisih and SuanHawi villages of Tongzang Township. – **Source *Khonumthung News*.**