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Chin Human Rights Organization

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- UN Special Rapporteur Tomas Quintana said ethnic Chins from western Burma face denial of the right to learn their own language, as well as the right to freely practice their religion...
- Chin refugees including children and elderly in India are left homeless ...
- Burmese soldiers are accused of breaking their own rules by selling selling alcohol in Matupi Township...



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Arbitrary Taxation and Extortion

Hakha Town, Chin State
(Photo: CHRO)



Locals Forcibly Demanded Money by Fire Brigade Department

05 March 2011: Captain Tawh Thang and seven members from the Department of Fire Brigade in Hakha, Chin State made a house-to-house visit on 4 March 2011, forcibly demanding 2,000 Kyats each for what was named as a penalty for not maintaining fire equipment.

The surprise check was said to be conducted throughout the town, with no official notice and instructions given in advance and the locals were fined for not properly keeping the fire equipment such as fire-hook, its handle, ladder and dust bins.

"The group came around 10am in the morning and asked where the fire equipment were. As we didn't have any of these, they started writing down our names and demanded the penalty fees," said a local woman from Hakha Town.

Locals who couldn't afford to pay on demand were ordered to go and make a payment to the fire department by 15 March. They were also threatened of being detained for two nights in jail if they failed to meet the demand.

Another local from New Bazaar block said: "When I said I didn't have any equipment, the three-starred soldier said that it has been over 10 years the local have been asked to keep the fire equipment, that notices were given in advance, and that we had to be fined for failing to follow instructions."

It was claimed that the money forcibly collected from the locals was meant for repairing the fire engine, whose front parts were completely damaged after an accident in February 2011, according to an 'unnamed' employee of the Department.#

Soldiers Killed Domestic Animals, Forced Locals to Serve as Porters in Paletwa

11 March 2011: Burmese soldiers patrolling southern Chin State's Paletwa Township are on a rampage of killing domestic animals and forcibly recruiting porters to carry military supplies.

A section of Burma Army patrol unit led by commanding officer with the rank of Sergeant Major forcibly took three chickens in Bawngwui village and one goat in Tuikinwa village to feed the troop while patrolling the area last month, according to a local whose name is kept anonymous.

The same patrol unit also forced three local villagers from Tuikinwa village to carry their weapons and rations.

Rev. Shwekey Hoipang, who has been to the area several times and had lived in Paletwa for five years in the 1990s as a Christian preacher, said: "The military and local authorities in Paletwa Township always intimidate villagers and then take whatever they want from the villagers such as food, domestic animals and money. They also deliberately take porters on Sunday so that the villagers cannot attend their Christian worship services."

"The military in this part of Chin State are like licensed criminal gangs," he added.

Soldiers stationed in Chin State are under instruction from Naypyidaw to be self-sufficient, according to the local right group Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO).

Paletwa Township, which borders Arakan State in the south and India's Mizoram State on the north, is the most heavily militarized area in Chin State. At least 20 of more than 50 army camps in Chin State are stationed in Paletwa Township.

[continued onto next page]

The two villages, Tuikinwa with around 80 households and Bawngwui with over 20, are about 12 miles away from Paletwa town, the biggest in the township.

Civilians - including women and children - are frequently forced to porter for the State army, conduct sentry duty, and to construct and repair army camps in Chin State, according to a report submitted by CHRO to the tenth session of the UPR Working Groups of the Human Rights Council in January 2011.

CHRO said hundreds of civilians in the Paletwa and Matupi township areas of southern Chin State have since 2006 been forcibly conscripted and or made to participate in militia training conducted by LIB 538 and 550 based in Arakan State, and LIB 140 based in the Matupi area.

More than 12 Burmese military battalions are now permanently stationed in Chin State, according to CHRO.#

Burma Army Soldier Abducted Local Girl to Become Wife

12 March 2011: An SPDC soldier from Light Infantry Battalion No. 289 stationed in Yawngwa Village of Paletwa Township forcibly held a young local girl to become his wife in the second week of February 2011.

The incident took place around midnight when three Burmese soldiers kidnapped a 15-year-old daughter of Pu Aih San and Pi Thin Hung from Lower Ye Aye Chaung village, who was spending a night in Yawngwa village on her way back from shopping in Sami village.

"As soon as the news broke out, her parents went to the military station. The Captain asked the girl in front of her parents and the girl didn't say a word. Then, the Captain called upon the three soldiers and they confessed they captured her to become their friend's wife," said a local witness, who asked not to be named.

"Having no other options, her father asked a total of 20 Lakhs for a bride price and abducting his daughter as a Khumi tradition of marriage. However, the Captain simply denied by saying he couldn't give the money as Burmese don't have such tradition," added the witness.

The 15-year-old young girl was believed to have been threatened by the soldier as she didn't speak, was shaken and looked frightened during the interrogation made by the Captain at the military camp, according to witnesses accompanying the parents.#



(Photo: Pu R. Hram Ceu/YCCF-International)

Locals Demanded Money for Hakha-Hmandaw Road Opening Ceremony

22 March 2011: At least fifteen villages nearby and along the Hakha-Hmandaw road connecting Chin State's capital, Hakha, and Hmandaw in Sagaing Division were ordered to pay 5,000 Kyats per household on 18 March 2011.

"We first heard that it was an order made by Chief Minister U Hung Ngai. After making a proper investigation, U Hung Ngai actually said help would be needed from the villages if 20 Lakhs spared for the opening ceremony was not enough," a local told Chin Human Rights Organisation.

It was later learned that the money was collected under the leadership of village chairmen and road construction committee, according to the local.

A local from Dauchim village said: "The village chairman said that they would start collecting after the meeting. And the village convenor went from one house to another demanding 5,000 Kyats last Friday."

The 62-mile road passing seven villages including Hakha, Aive, Hmaikhah, Ruadeu, Ruan, Awlek, and Hmandaw, was officially opened on 19 March 2011 by Chin State Peace and Development Council Vice Chairman Col. Zaw Min Oo.

With the banner labelled in Burmese, the opening ceremony was held in welcoming and honour of the 66th anniversary of what was previously observed as Resistance Day, Burmese Armed Forces Day, which falls on 27 March.#

Chin villagers Forcibly Demanded Domestic Animals for Military Rations

31 March 2011: Burma army soldiers patrolling in Falam and Thantlang Townships of Chin State forced local villagers to contribute their domestic animals for military rations in March 2011, Chin Human Rights Organisation's source said.

Section Commander and his soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion No. 269 based in Tedim Township forcibly demanded two chickens and 20 cups of rice from Haimual village on 24 March, and another two chickens and 40 cups of rice from Thingcang in Falam Township on 12 March.

"The soldiers came to the village and ordered the village headman to get chickens and rice from the local villagers. They were patrolling in the villages that their military unit is assigned to control," said one of the locals, who asks not to be named.

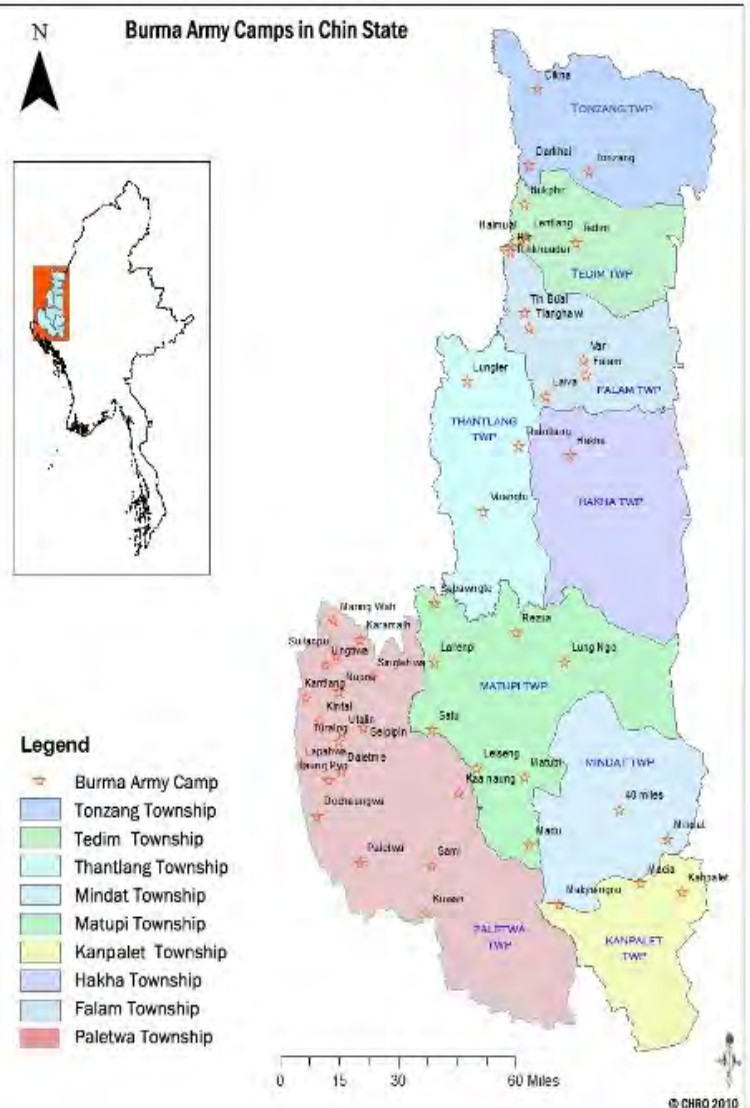
Villagers from Thinghual village in Thantlang Township were ordered to provide two chickens and 40 cups of rice by the same group of Burma army soldiers on 20 March 2011.

"The commander, with his six soldiers, arrived in our village. They not only forced us to provide chicken and rice for their food but also collected names with details including age, gender and family member registration form. But we didn't know the reason," said a local from Thinghual village. #

Locals Forced to Provide Chickens for Soldiers

10 April 2011: Local villagers of Lungler in Thantlang Township were ordered to provide five chickens for Tactical Operations Commander Colonel Aung Myint and his six soldiers who were travelling in the areas on 28 March 2011.

The order was made through members of Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) by Lieutenant Colonel Zaw Tun of Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion No. 269 stationed in Lungler village.



"We received an order from Lieutenant Colonel Zaw Tun that a pig or five chicken be made ready for his boss Colonel Aung Myint and six soldiers," said one of the VPDC members, whose name is not revealed.

"When they arrived in our village on 28 March, we hosted them with chickens as they were only six altogether although we had a pig worth of 1 Lakh at hand. The total cost was over 50,000 Kyats," added the VPDC member.

Colonel Aung Myint, Tactical Operations Commander of North Western Command No. 1 based in Hakha Town, Chin State was known to be visiting to inspect the Lungler military army camp and Thantlang-Lungler road.

The VPDC member said that the locals might have to contribute for the amount of money spent for hosting the Colonel and his soldiers as the VPDC has not got any financial resources at all. #

Burmese Soldiers Extorted 22 Lakhs from Cattle Trader

20 April 2011: A cattle trader from Cekan village, Kalay Township in Sagaing Division was forced to pay a total of 22 Lakhs for his 22 cattle near Run river in Falam Township by an 'unknown' lieutenant and his soldiers on 11 April 2011.

The trader, whose name is not revealed, was stopped and threatened under the order of Lieutenant Colonel Zaw Tun of Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion No. 269 stationed in Hakha Town that his cattle would be seized if he didn't pay one Lakhs for each cattle.

"One cattle costs between two and four lakhs in Sagaing Division. Now that I paid the demanded amount to the soldiers, I don't know how I am going to pay off my debts. Even if I could manage to sell all the cattle, I don't think I could get back the capital amount," the cattle owner told Chin Human Rights Organisation.

"I am aware that the soldiers are patrolling in the areas and that they normally demand money from the traders. But this time they are demanding too much. I am now worried that I won't be able to come back to do this business."#

Soldiers Forcibly Demanded Money from Local Grocery Trader

23 April 2011: Soldiers from Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 89 stationed in Darkhai village of Tonzang Township forcibly demanded 20,000 Kyats from a local trader from Tuilang village on 15 April 2011.

The 'unnamed' Company Captain of Kalay-based LIB No. 89 and his five soldiers stopped the local trader in Fartlang village of Tedim Township while he was traveling with 20 horses carrying general commodities toward Mizoram State in India.

"I was asked to give 20,000 Kyats as I was accused of trading illegally between Burma and India," said the trader, whose name is kept private for security reasons.#

Soldiers Demanded Money for Alcohol License

26 April 2011: 49 households from Bukphir, Fartlang and Bulfek villages of Fartlang village tracts were ordered to give 1,000 Kyats of a monthly fee for their alcohol license to the military authorities in mid April.

An 'unnamed' local said that the order came after Corporal of Tedim Police Force, and Lieutenant and his soldiers from Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion No. 89 stationed in Bukphir village held a meeting on 14 April 2011.

"We have learned that families from villages in Fartlang village tracts along the Indian-Burma border that sell alcohols have got to pay one thousand kyats per month and are threatened that failure in making payment will result not only in terminating the license but also in taking legal actions against the licensees," added the local from Fartlang village.

"The local people work closely with the military authorities to obtain licenses for selling alcohols, there will be problems in the communities and it would be completely opposite to what the local religious groups have been campaigning and trying to stop the sale and trading of alcohols in the areas."

Five soldiers were put on duty along the trading roads between Tonzang and Mizoram, and Tedim Township and Mizoram to forcibly demand money from the traders, according to the locals.

The locals said that eighteen soldiers of Kalay-Based Burma Army LIB No. 89 arrived in Darkhai military camp in Tonzang Township on 13 April 2011 but the name of the Company Captain has not been known.#



Local ways of distilling alcohol in Chin State (Photo: TTS)

Forced Labour



Locals Forced to Work on Road Construction in Matupi Township

03 April 2011: The local military authorities have ordered Calthawng villagers including women and children in Matupi Township to work on the Matupi-Hakha road construction under the supervision of Mindat District Construction Department, Chin Human Rights Organisation's (CHRO) source revealed.

The village headman was given responsibilities to get the local people to make what the military authorities have named 'voluntary contributions' for the state-run road construction, according to a Calthawng local, who took part in the road works.

"We are told to work in groups from each block and the work has started since last week. At least one person from each family in the block has to voluntarily contribute and any family that fails to follow the order would be penalised," the local told CHRO on 25 March 2011.

It is claimed that the authorities provide a can of fish paste and less than half a bottle of oil per family for the voluntary contributions.

"Some villagers do not want to take the provisions out of their frustration. We heard that the road construction will go on until our village area is finished," said the local, whose asks not to be named.#

"We are told that we must work on the road in front of our own house to make it wide enough for a truck to go and that it must be completed before the end of this month. They said it is a voluntary service but it is in reality an order because we have no choice but to do what is asked for," said a Chin local.



Photos of Forced Labour in southern Chin State

05 April 2011: Burma's military authorities have forced locals including children and women in Matupi Township in southern parts of Chin State to work on road constructions since last month.

This collection of photos taken last month and obtained from Chin Human Rights Organisation's sources is another evidence of the ongoing forced labour, which the authorities called 'voluntary contributions' in Burma, with no payment given to the locals.#



Civilians Forced to Take Militia Training in Chin State

07 April 2011: Burma's military authorities have forcibly ordered local people including government employees to participate in the militia training in Hakha and Thantlang towns in Chin State since late last month, a source from Chin Human Rights Organisation said.

About 50 people, who were reportedly selected by the authorities for the over-two-week programme, took part in the inauguration ceremony held at Town Hall in Thantlang on 30 March 2011, according to a Thantlang local, who asks not to be named.

In Hakha town, the training was conducted from 22 to 31 March. However, unlike Thantlang, the trainees were recruited from among people who had previously participated in the 'volunteer firemen' training back in October 2009 and 2010 respectively.

The trainees were asked to pay 3,000 Kyats each for their uniforms.

"The training ran until the end of March. They didn't teach us much. Just like last year, we were asked to practice a 'left-right' marching, and taught how to make and break up a line like soldiers. The only difference [from the previous training] was that we had to pay for our uniforms," said one of the training participants from Hakha.

Participants said that they were threatened with 'monetary fine or other penalty' if they failed to attend the training and that some locals were travelling to the nearby villages in order to avoid it. #

Burma Army Forced Villagers to Porter in Chin State

08 April 2011: Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 140 patrolling in Matupi Township of Chin State forcibly ordered 16 locals including a 16-year-old boy from Khuangan village to carry their military equipment on 25 March 2011.

The locals were forced to travel on foot from Khuangan to Tingsi village, carrying heavy loads on their backs while the Battalion Major rode on a motorbike hired by the village authorities, according to one of the local porters.

Villages Forced to Work as Night Sentry Guards

10 March 2011: A CAPTAIN of Light Infantry Battalion No. 55 based in Sinletwa village of Paletwa Township, Chin State forced locals from a total of 13 villages to work as Night Sentry Guards in each village from 18 February 2011.

The order, which required four to five locals to guard the village throughout the night, was issued one day after a clash between the Burma Army soldiers and Chin National Army (CNA) on 17 February 2011 near Sinletwa village.

A local person forced to participate said, "While we are performing night sentry duty we are given strict instructions to make an immediate report to the nearest army camp if we see any rebel persons coming into the village. At the same time, we are warned that our whole village will be punished if we fail to give the information to the Burmese soldiers."

The villages forced to guard as night security included Sinletwa, Khungwa, Shweletwa, Shin-oo, Kinwa, Leite, Bilawng, Pawngmu, Wayung, Saikel, Yaritawng, Karameik and Kungpying. #



"Our village headman made an announcement saying that any family with no government employees had to make a contribution. Some who heard the arrival of Burmese soldiers ran away and hid somewhere," said the local porter from Khuangan village.

"But others didn't run away because they knew that the village headman and leaders could be beaten up or fined if there were not enough people from the village to carry their stuff," added the porter.

It was known that the 16-year-old boy was eventually included in the list in order to make the numbers of porters demanded by the soldiers.

"We were told that we might have to keep on travelling as they couldn't get enough people in Tingsi village for portering," said the local porter. #

Local Forced to Participate in Golf Road Construction

15 March 2011: More than 40 locals in Hakha Town were forced to construct road leading to No. 3 Golf Course as part of the 'Town Circular Road' programme, Chin Human Rights Organisation's source disclosed.

"We are told that we must work on the road in front of our own house to make it wide enough for a truck to go and that it must be completed before the end of this month. They said it is a voluntary service but it is in reality an order because we have no choice but to do what is asked for," said a local, whose name is kept unrevealed.

Local road in Chin State
(Photo: Aidiiz)



It is claimed that twelve special groups led by New Bazaar Block Chairman Pu Hrang Kep were formed for the road construction project, which was known to be sponsored by the government.

"Even though it is a government-financed project, we are ordered to work on the road as volunteers. We heard that there is an understanding between the groups and the local authorities. And still, we are given a deadline," added the local, participating in the road construction.

Chairman Pu Hrang Kep is claimed to have been given an official contract of the road construction project.

In October 2010, Pu Hrang Kep was accused of using the budget granted for repairing the road ditches in the New Bazaar block for his own benefit and of forcing the locals to actually work on the required renovation. #

Three Locals Ordered Daily to be on Standby for Portering

18 April 2011: Falam-based Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Saw Htoo of Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion No. 269 stationed in Lunger village of Thantlang Township ordered three villagers to get

ready on a daily basis for portering if needed for two weeks from the second week of March 2011.

Lieut. Col Saw Htoo, since his temporary posting to the village, forcibly placed the locals on standby to carry military equipment and

rations for a section patrolling between Lungler and Tibual military camps, according to a local, whose name is not revealed.

A local from Tlanglo village told Chin Human Rights Organisation: "We are not sure why they travel back and forth between Lungler and Tibual villages. Porters from Lungler have to go up to Hnathial village of Falam Township and those from Tibual have to go up to Tlangpi village of Thantlang Township."

Up to date, Burma Army soldiers patrolling in Chin State along the Indian-Burma border not only force locals as porters but also commandeer motorbikes owned by the villagers.

"The military authorities forcibly ask members of Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) to pay for the motorbike fuel they use," said one of the local villagers. #

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Freedom of Religion**Chins Denied Language, Religious Rights, Says UN Rights Expert**

15 March 2011: Reporting to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma Tomas Ojea Quintana said that ethnic Chins from western Burma face denial of the right to learn their own language, as well as the right to freely practice their religion.

The UN rights expert said the Burmese military regime has banned the teaching and learning of ethnic Chin language in official government schools since 1990, noting that such restrictions have resulted in the loss of 'access to part of the Chin culture and traditions.'

The Argentinean lawyer said that the denial of language right is a direct contravention of Burma's international human rights obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says that "education should develop the child's respect for his or her own cultural identity, language and values."

Burma acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.

According to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), the denial of language right has left more Chin children unable to read or write in their own language.

Meanwhile, the Special Rapporteur said that he found disturbing evidences that Burma's military regime is using State resources to promote Buddhism through education. He said that in Kanpalet Township of southern Chin State, Chin Christian children are coerced into converting to Buddhism by offering them free education, uniforms and monthly rations through the Border Areas Ethnic Youth Development Training School.

"Required conversion is in fact considered to be indoctrination," Quintana said, concluding that the practice violates both the rights of the child and freedom of religion.

In his opening oral statement to the Human Rights Council, the UN rights expert highlighted the case of a Chin woman religious leader from Hakha, who was



UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma Tomas Ojea Quintana (Photo: CHRO)

forced to read a statement at a televised event denying allegations of restrictions on freedom of religion, against her will.

Dismissing Quintana's report, Thant Kyaw, the Burmese regime's representative at the United Nations in Geneva said both the oral presentation and written statement of the Special Rapporteur "did not reflect the true situation" in Burma. Thant Kyaw said that the ethnic people are "given the opportunity, on their own discretion, to teach supplementary education in their own language."

As part of his ongoing mandate to report on the situation of human rights in Burma, Quintana recently made a trip to Malaysia where he met with Chin and other ethnic community-based organizations, as well as interviewed individual refugees and asylum seekers.

Commission of Inquiry Call Renewed

Saying that rights violations in Burma continue to be both systematic and widespread, the UN rights envoy renewed his call for an independent international investigation of rights abuses in order to address the issue of accountability and end the culture of impunity in the military-ruled country.

Since the Special Rapporteur first recommended the idea of a Commission of Inquiry in early 2010, the call for an international investigation of rights abuses in Burma has been supported by 16 countries to date, with the endorsement of Denmark and Latvia last week. #

Other Abuses



Chin Youths Investigated Following Panglong-Related Stickers Distribution

02 March 2011: Local authorities of Burma's military-turned-civilian government have conducted an investigation in attempts to find out who is responsible for distributing a sticker during Chin National Day celebrations on 20 February 2011 in Chin State.

Some youth leaders as well as university students getting involved in organising the Chin National Day celebrations in towns across Chin State are said to have been targeted for the interrogation regarding the stickers that read 'To the Glory of 20th February' and 'Welcome the Second Panglong!'

The organising committee members of Chin National Day celebrations are mostly targeted and asked if they know who made and distributed the stickers, and how the stickers are related to the celebrations and Panglong, according to one of the university student leaders in Kalay Myo.

Another student from Kalay Myo said: "Some university students go into hiding and villages away from the towns while others stop using emails and internet. They know that the authorities have been looking for those who are responsible for the stickers and those who are thought to be related to it."

The investigation is known to have been conducted in Tedim, Tonzang, Falam and other towns in Chin State where the stickers are seen and believed posted in public areas.

This year's February 20th marked the 63rd anniversary of Chin National Day. However, the military authorities forced local communities to use a banner reading 'Chin State Day' against the wills of the people.

Five youth leaders were detained and interrogated in connection with the stickers distributed during the Chin National Day celebrations but were freed after more than 300 local youths demanded their immediate release in front of the Police Station in Tedim Town.

It is claimed that the investigation which includes visiting houses of those suspected could be a reaction taken as a sign of threat and intimidation to the public.

As of today, no one is reported being arrested or jailed in association with the ongoing investigation. #

Alcohol Licensing Fuels Abuse Among Chin Students

14 March 2011: Rising alcohol abuse among Chin students studying at Kalay University has been linked with a growing number of licensed distilleries near the university campus.

Kumaing (Mile 9) village is located on the inter-state border of Chin State's Tedim Township and Sagaing Division's Kalay Township. On the Kalay side of Kumaing is the Kalay University, which has the highest post-secondary level enrolment of ethnic Chin students in all of Burma.

"There are now 32 different households on the Chin State side of Kumaing, who have been licensed by the local authorities to produce locally distilled rice wine. Each distillery produce at least 30 bottles a day," said a former student residing in Kalay Town.

Students of Kalay University, who are predominantly ethnic Chins from Chin State, are the primary consumer.

"At least 100 bottles are being sold to the students every day. Imagine the alcohol consumption rate among the students!" he said.

One bottle of alcohol is sold at 600 Kyats (About 60 cents US). In exchange for their alcohol production permits, each licensee pays 100,000 (100 USD) Kyats a year to the local police.

Alcohol problems among Chin students studying at Kalay University has been reported for some time. But in recent months, there has been an increase in the number of Chin students consuming alcohol, along with other alcohol-related social problems, including brawls and motorbike accidents that often turned fatal, as a result of drunk-driving.

With a population of about half a million, Chin State has no higher learning institution. Chin students must pursue their post-secondary education outside of Chin State, such as Kalay in Sagaing Division.

In his report to the United Nations Human Rights Council this week, UN the rights expert Tomas Quintana noted that the lack of higher learning institution in Chin State places extra financial burdens on parents, as well as added barrier for access to education for the Chins. #

Two Chin Girls Hunted Down in Connection with Burma Army Deserters

01 April 2011: The military authorities in Tonzang Township of Chin State have been searching for two Chin girls who were suspected of guiding the two army deserters to run away from the military training camp in Fartlang village in Tedim Township, Chin Human Rights Organisation's source disclosed.

Section Commander Captain Aung Win Hteik, of Burma army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 266 stationed in Darkhai village in Tonzang Township was said to have ordered Sergeant Aung Ngwe and seven soldiers to visit Fartlang village in search of Ms Ding Lam Cin, 14, and Ms Biak Lun, 15, on 16 March 2011.

"The soldiers came to the village, looking for the girls. We heard that the girls were suspected to be responsible for those two soldiers who left the military training in January 2011," said a local villager, whose name is kept anonymous.

The two girls fled their native village into Mizoram State of India as the Section Commander gave an order to arrest and take them to a military camp in Darkhai village, according to the local.

On 15 January this year, Maung Pyi Sung Oo, 18, and Maung Khup Hlei Mang, 19, both from Burma Army LIB No. 266 deserted the military training camp in Fartlang village.

Sergeant Aung Ngwe forced locals villagers in Fartlang to search for the two deserters and to keep guard of all the surrounding roads throughout the whole night and day on 15 and 16 January 2011.#

Burmese Soldiers Sell Alcohol Despite Ban

11 April 2011: Burmese soldiers are accused of breaking their own rules by selling alcohol in Matupi Township, Chin State - against a ban they supported, Chin Human Rights Organisation's source revealed.

Burma army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 140 and No. 304, both based in Matupi Township, set up a place offering alcohols for purchase near Phaneng and Hnawte villages, according to a Chin local, who asks not to be named.

"The sale of alcohols in Matupi had been banned by the local community and religious groups in partnership with the military authorities. Some locals who sold alcohols were even arrested and put in jail. Now that the authorities themselves do not follow their own orders, the people start drinking again," said the local from Matupi Town.

Tactical Operations Commander Zaw Min Oo, now the Chin State Minister for Border Security Affairs, was said to have imposed an order, prohibiting the trading and selling of alcohols in the region since last year, with a warning of imprisonment and fine in place.

"Some locals who continued selling alcohols were jailed for over two months in Pakoku prisons. But no actions have been taken against the soldiers being engaged in this business," said the local.

The local religious groups were reportedly said to have funded the anti-alcohol action programme in efforts to combat alcoholism in the area.

Traditionally, Chin Christians do not approve of drinking alcohol and have taken a very conservative view of the use of alcohol, according to a report 'Carrying The Cross: The military regime's campaign of restriction, discrimination and persecution against Christians in Burma' by Benedict Rogers.

"To undermine this, since 1992, the SPDC has brought in large quantities of a liquor known as "O.B", a mix of methyl and ethyl alcohol, from Rangoon," said the report.

"Not only is it highly addictive, it is also extremely toxic. This is sold on the streets, especially on Sundays, to young people. Boys and girls as young as 12 years old have been sold the alcohol by the army and the police."

In some parts of Chin State such as Thantlang and Hakha towns, local communities and religious groups have been actively engaged in fighting against the trade and use of alcohol.

Alcohol-related cases topped the list of problems facing the Chin communities in Malaysia, according to a recent report by CDAC (Chin Disciplinary Action Committee), a volunteer community-based organisation tasked with tackling domestic issues.#

Chin State Chief Minister Remains on EU Travel Sanctions List

15 April 2011: Despite the recent relaxing of travel sanctions on some selected civilian members of the Burmese regime, the Chin State Chief Minister remains on the list of individuals banned from traveling to the 27 European Union (EU) member countries.

Former Chairman of the now dissolved Chin State Peace and Development Council Brig-General Hung Ngai 'retired' from the Burma Army in early 2010 to allow himself to compete as a 'civilian' candidate of pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) for the Chin State Legislature from Mindat Township.



Chief Minister of Chin State Pu Hung Ngai
(Photo: CHRO)

Meeting in Luxembourg earlier this week, the Council of European Union extended for another year economic sanctions on Burma that have been in place since 1996. But the EU also lifted travel restrictions on some civilian members of the regime - including the new foreign minister and 18 deputy ministers from several ministries.

An ethnic Chin Buddhist, the 55-year-old native of Tui Pan Village of southern Chin State, got himself elected as USDP candidate for the Chin State Parliament from Mindat constituency No. 2, and was subsequently appointed Chief Minister of the impoverished State.

As Brigadier General, Hung Ngai served as Deputy Commander of the Coastal Region Command and was part of some key large-scale military offensives against ethnic Karens, and earned several combat medals.

He was appointed head of the junta administration in Chin State in mid 2000s.#

Chin State Minister Implicated in Past Rights Abuse

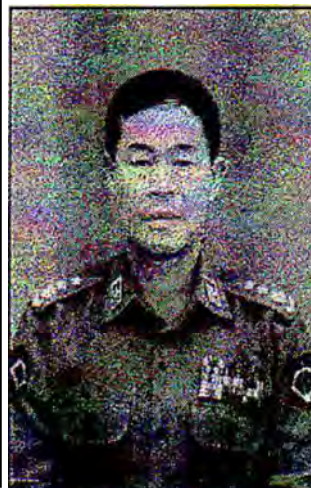
17 April 2011: Colonel Zaw Min Oo, the recently-appointed minister of Security and Border Affairs of the Chin State government, has been accused of serious past human rights violations in his capacity as commander of Tactical Operations Command, based in southern Chin State's Matupi town.

The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) - a local watchdog monitoring rights situation in Chin State for the last fifteen years - has said it has documented evidences that Colonel Zaw Min Oo is responsible for a range of human rights abuses against civilians in southern Chin State.

The alleged abuses: Colonel Zaw Min Oo ordered the forced recruitment of underage high school students into the Burma Army in Matupi Township; imposed arbitrary tax on struggling farmers amid the food crisis in 2007; ordered the arbitrary arrest, detention and torture of four Chin villagers, including two women in July 2008; troops under his command (from Light Infantry Battalion 304) pillaged livestock belonging to Matupi residents in May 2008. When the owners complained, Colonel Zaw Min Oo asked them to pay for the bullets used to kill their livestock instead.

"How can someone with such a long history of serious human rights abuses be a legislator, much less a cabinet minister?," said Salai Bawi Lian Mang, Executive Director of CHRO. "This just shows how entrenched the culture of impunity is in Burma," he said.

Renewing economic sanctions against Burma earlier this week, the European Union (EU) said it supported the UN Human Rights Council's resolution calling for an end to impunity in Burma. (continued on next page)



COLONEL ZAW MIN OO

Portfolio: **Chin State Minister for Security and Border Affairs**

Rank: **(Colonel) Tactical Operations Commander, Southern Chin State (Appointed as Army Representative to Chin State Parliament)**

Ethnicity/Religion: **Burman/Buddhist**

Burma Army Personal ID No: **Infantry 17616**

Implicated in Rights Abuses: **Extortion, Arbitrary Arrest & Detention, Forcible Recruitment of Child Soldiers**

As commander of Tactical Operations Command No 2, Colonel Zaw Min Oo was Deputy Chairman of the now dissolved Chin State Peace and Development Council. After the November 2010 elections, Col. Zaw Min Oo was one of four ethnic Burman army officers appointed as army representatives to the Chin State Legislature to fill the 25 percent legislative seats reserved for the army under the 2008 constitution.

Born on September 23, 1959 at Lay Myathna Township of Irrawady Division, Zaw Min Oo received a Bachelor of Science (Zoology) degree (distance education) from Patheon University before joining the Burma Army. He was decorated with various military medals - including the Maing Yan-Maetharaw medal - for his role in the offensives against the Karens and Shans in the mid 1990s.#

Food Crisis and Humanitarian Situation



Photos of Mautam Food Crisis in southern parts of Chin State

19 March 2011: A selection of some photos taken and collected during the course of late 2009, 2010 and 2011 is presented depicting the 'food crisis' situation facing Chin locals in remote areas of government-ignored Chin State.

Local villagers have been suffering from the ongoing mautam-caused food crisis in southern parts of Chin State in Kanpetlet, Matupi, Mindat and Paletwa townships since 2007.

At least an estimated 150 villages are severely affected and struggling for their daily survival after their crops and cultivation have been destroyed by a plague of rats and 'unusual' weather.

It is estimated that over 100 villages along the Lemro (locally called Phunglong) river where the majority population are of Dai Chins, are also in need of emergency relief aid, according to Dai Community in Burma.

In its report released in October last year, the World Food Programme (WFP) said that there will be a significant reduction on crop production for many households due to the fact that crops were damaged by rodents.

Difficulties in accessing the affected areas due to remoteness and lack of 'accessible' roads have made both NGOs and local teams unable to collect necessary data and information. WFP also admitted that some parts of the worst affected areas are not assessed due to inaccessibility.#



Food Crisis in Chin State Likely to Worsen, says OCHA

10 April 2011: The ongoing situation of food insecurity in Chin State is expected to get worse, with the coming of monsoon that dramatically reduces access to other off-farm income-generating activities, according to OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

In a report issued on Friday, the OCHA in Burma fears that higher cost of basic commodities such as food items and seasonal water shortage anticipated during the dry season will add to the humanitarian problems facing the Chin locals in both urban and rural areas.

The report stressed the prices of basic food items and fuel have risen by 6% to 15% in March 2011 across Chin State, compared to those of last month, according to the recent market survey of WFP.

"The higher cost of living may be one of the compounding factors, leading to a deterioration of food security in the region," highlighted the report based on a survey update conducted last month.

In Chin State, subsistence farmers normally start their cultivation such as corn and millet in March, with harvest expected in September.

Food insecurity in Kanpetlet, Matupi, Mindat and Paletwa townships of Chin State still remains a challenge following severe devastation caused by the ongoing rat infestation and crop failure last year.

The report also said that emergency stocks of rice, previously received from the humanitarian partners, are reportedly running low, especially in the worst-affected areas in Kanpetlet Township.

In its 'Food Security Situation' document issued late last year, the WFP clearly stated that Paletwa Township, which has also been severely affected by the mautam food crisis since 2007, was not assessed due to inaccessibility and remoteness.

Meanwhile, the WFP (World Food Programme) is implementing for the first six months of 2011 the 'controversial' Food-for-Work and Food-for-Training programmes in Matupi, Thantlang, Hakha, Tedim and Tonzang Townships through its cooperating partners, according to the OCHA's report.

It is also reported that the local authorities has just granted CARE Myanmar permission to provide rice assistance to 36 villages in Mindat Township while food distribution is to begin in 58 villages in Kanpetlet for a period of two months by France-based Solidarites International in cooperation with WFP.

Other local and international NGOs engaged in responding to the humanitarian issues in Chin State include CAD (Country Agency for rural Development), Ar Yone Oo, GRET (Groupe de Recherche et d'échange Technologiques), Merlin, World Vision, UNDP, UNICEF, AusAid and YMCA.#



Water Shortage Looms Over Chin State

24 April 2011: People in Chin State have faced a severe shortage of water due to problems resulting from the dry season and the 'non-operational' water supply systems still in use across the northwestern State.

And a 'corrupt' management system practiced by the local Municipal Department has also been ascribed to the cause of water scarcity in the mountainous State of Burma.

A local from Tedim Town told Chinland Guardian: "We are now in a very difficult situation. People just rely on the community-dug well, which is not far enough for the local population. To the worse, even the hospital has no water any more."

The 'unmaintained' water pipelines are not in good condition as the local authorities have 'exploited' for years by supplying water only to those families that can afford to pay for the demanded money, according to the Tedim local.

"We have heard that there is still plenty of water in Sial Tang dam but the authorities who are in charge of the water supply give only to a limited number of people."

In Hakha Town, people are said to get water supply for only 10-15 minutes a day from private storage, built and maintained with a monthly fee paid by the community members.

"As the government-run water supply system is not working and reliable, local people within their circle or group share financially and store water on their own initiatives. But these are not enough even for themselves and the people are facing difficulties," a Hakha resident told Chinland Guardian.

In its March report, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said seasonal water shortage is anticipated during the dry season (March-May) in both urban and rural areas in Chin State.

The OCHA also said the increase in urban population, and the depletion of water sources as well as aging water supply systems in rural Chin areas are affecting water availability, adding: "This problem could be further exacerbated during the dry season."

Some people in Tedim Town are said to have gone down the hill to fetch water from Lamzaang stream, which is about 3 miles away.

Last year, Aung San Suu Kyi-led NLD (National League for Democracy) made contributions toward helping local people in Falam Township who were facing water shortage in the area.

It was reported that each household in Cinmual village received only two buckets of water a day and that some people had to get water from a stream about 9 miles away.

Early this year, NLD also donated rice and water pipes to Kanpetlet and Thantlang townships in Chin State, which have been ravaged by a plague of rats and water shortages, according to sources.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is engaged in improving the water supply systems in a total of 79 villages in Tonzang, Tedim, Falam, Hakha and Thantlang townships while UNICEF is also collaborating in 10 villages of Mindat Township to address the issue of access to safe drinking water and hygiene, according to OCHA.#

Situation of Refugees

Development Displaced 40 Refugee Families in Malaysia

21 March 2011 - KUALA LUMPUR: Around 40 Chin refugee families were asked to vacate an 'abandoned' building to make way for the development of Kuala Lumpur International Financial District (KLIFD), a key project under the Malaysian Development Plan.

According to a statement from the developer, the first batch of occupants has vacated the premises following an amicable settlement with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Chin Refugee Committee (CRC).

A Chin refugee who lives in the neighborhood told Chinland Guardian that the last of the occupants are set to vacate the building today.

"We are in active talks with various stakeholders to complete the relocation of residents and businesses at the site of KLIFD. We are committed in ensuring that

the relocation is carried out in a manner that is fair and equitable to all the parties involved," said Shahriza Embi, a spoke person of 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

KLIFD is a RM26 billion (8.5 billion US\$) project that will be jointly developed by 1MDB and an Abu Dhabi-based company in the Malaysian capital.

Shariza said the building once occupied by Chin refugees comprising two blocks of three and four-storied buildings, were supposed to have been vacated for development within the last 90 days.

"The owners and occupants already received compensation but when the project stalled and the buildings were not demolished, many occupants stayed on. We thank UNHCR and CRC for their kind assistance and guidance in ensuring a smooth transition for the Burma refugees. We believe that there will always be an equitable solution for the occupants of KLIFD," she said.

CRC coordinator Kennedy Lal Ram Lian said he recognized 1MDB's sincere effort in looking for the best solution for the parties involved.

"The Chin community is satisfied with the move and happy that they are now relocated from an unsafe, abandoned location," he said.

According to the statement, the refugees involved were not expecting to receive any further compensation.

Family Homeless in India

Meanwhile, in the Indian capital of New Delhi, a Chin refugee family has been living in an open roof verandah for the last 10 days after their landlord had locked them out of their rented room due to failure to pay rent for the last three months.

The head of the family Lai Ram Thang said, "We owe the landlord a total of 6,000 Indian Rupees for rent for three months. When he realized that we were not in a position to afford the rent, he decided to evict us. I feel very sorry as I am not able to provide even a room for my family to live."

Lai Ram Thang and his family, which includes three young children, from khua Ngang village of Matupi

(Photo: CHRO)



Township fled to India in January 2009 to evade forcible recruitment for a three-month military training conducted by Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion No. 104 stationed in Matupi town in southern part of Chin State.

Plato Van Rung Mang of Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) said eviction by local Indian landlords is common occurrence for refugee families in Delhi who face a daily struggle to make ends meet working in factories and other low-paying jobs. He said that in the last year alone at least 15 Chin families were evicted from their rented rooms.

About 10,000 Chin refugees are currently living in the Indian capital. # ***With reporting by Thomas Chong***

Eviction Left 15 Refugee Families Homeless in Delhi

24 March 2011: Fifteen Chin refugee families, a total of 58 members, are camping out in makeshift shelters in an open space behind the UNHCR Office in Delhi, India after they were evicted from their quarters by the local Indian landlord yesterday.

The families, including children and elderly with health problems, were reportedly forced to move out after the neighbors make complaints to the manager of the flat, Mr. Babulo.

"We were told by the manager that the other neighbors didn't like the smell of our food which includes fish paste (Ngapih). Although we actually refrained from eating ngapih after their initial complaints, they still wanted us out of this area," said Mr. Joshua Hrang Lian Kap, one of the evicted family members.

"Most of the times, we felt that they were hostile to us. Our children got beaten up for no reasons and our

properties stolen. We faced verbal and physical abuses. Their intention is clearly to drive us out from this location," continued Mr. Joshua.

The families are now camping out in an open space by the back entrance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees office, hoping to get assistance and protection from the UN refugee agency.

"They were informed to vacate the rooms on 15 March 2011 by the landlord, who threatened to take legal actions against them if they failed to comply. So, they had no choice but to move out as they couldn't find any other places that they could afford," added the Chin resident in Delhi.

Meanwhile, it has been reported that 42 Burmese refugees were arrested from their work places, including from local restaurants and factories in a police raid in Aizawl, Mizoram State of India on Tuesday.

At least as 100,000 Chins and other migrant workers from Burma, are estimated to be living in Mizoram State. *(continued onto next page)*



(Photo: CHRO)

Refugee Girl Rescued from Attempted Sexual Assault

A Chin refugee girl, 14, was rescued by passers-by around 3pm Indian local time yesterday from an alleged attempted rape by a local Indian while she was washing clothes. Originally from Lingtui village in Matupi Township of Chin State, the girl was allegedly being approached by a naked neighbour identified as Mr. Waahid when passers-by intervened.

"Suddenly, the girl cried out loudly and the nearby



(Photo: CHRO)

people rushed to her help immediately. And the incident has already been reported to the police," said a Chin resident in the neighbourhood.

The girl, who is looking after her mentally challenged mother, came to New Delhi in January 2007 and has been recognized as a mandated refugee by the UNHCR in April 2007.

Last year, at least 30 refugee women were reported to have been sexually assaulted or violently beaten by local Indian men during attempted sexual assaults. #

More than 20 Chin Refugees Arrested by Malaysian Immigration

28 March 2011: The Malaysian Immigration carried out daylight raids in parts of Kuala Lumpur, arresting more than 20 Chin refugees in Kuchai Lama and Jalan Pudu wards on 23 and 24 March respectively.

About 20 Chin refugees were among an estimated 30 detained during the raid on Wednesday and only 6 from those arrested on Thursday have reported to Chin Refugee Committee (CRC), according to *Seihnam* newsletter yesterday.

It is believed that refugees holding the UNHCR registration card would soon be released.

"We don't know the exact number yet but some Chin women, who haven't got registered by the UNHCR, are also arrested during the raid in Kuchai Lama. We have learned that they are now detained in Bukit Jalil detention centre," said a CRC member.

Meanwhile, Chin refugees working at a construction site off Kuala Lumpur were robbed at knifepoint in their house while sleeping by a gang of 13 members allegedly comprising two Burmese, one Chin and 10 Indonesians at night on 15 March 2011.

"We didn't know how they could get into our house though the metal doors were properly locked. Two persons holding knives threatened us and they took our possessions including mobile phones and money," said Mr. Tin Lian, one of the victims at Daman Sarah Construction, which is about one hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur. #

More than 50 Refugees Arrested on Thai-Malaysian Border

02 April 2011: The Malaysian Immigration has arrested more than 50 Chin refugees including women near Ipoh city of Perak State in Malaysia around 1am local time last Saturday while heading for the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

The Chin refugees, who are believed to have been smuggled out of Burma towards Malaysia via Thailand by different 'agents', are being held in a detention centre near the Thai border, according to Chin Refugee Committee (CRC).

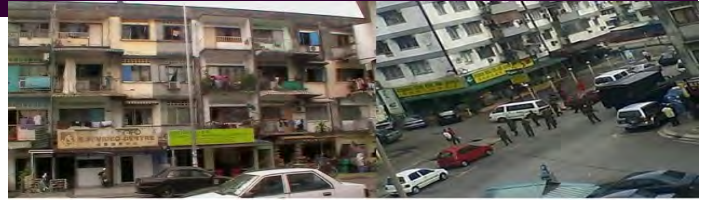
"So far, we have only got a total name list of 37 detainees, with 24 males and 13 females. We have learned that they are being detained near the Thai-Malay border but are not sure if all of them are in the same detention centre or if they have been transferred somewhere else," a CRC member in Kuala Lumpur told Chinland Guardian.

It is claimed that the Malaysian authorities have tightened the security measures along the Thai-Malay border in an effort to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country, currently home to more than an estimated 90,000 UNHCR-registered refugees.

When asked about the responses made by the community-based organisation, the CRC member continued: "There is nothing we can

do in this matter to help those being detained, apart from collecting names and giving the name list to the UNHCR."

In another incident last Monday, the Malaysian Immigration raided a work place in Kelantan State in the north-east of Peninsular Malaysia, arresting about 12 working Chin refugees. As of today, no updates on their situation have been known yet.#



Jalan Imbi in KL where Chin refugees live (left), and daylight raid being conducted in the area by Malaysian authority (Photo: Chin refugee community)

Chin Refugee Stabbed to Death in Malaysia

03 April 2011: Mr. Zaw Ling Aung, 28, was knifed to death by his colleague, Tha Fu, 37, after a fight broke out between the two Chin refugees near Cameroon Highlands, Malaysia last Thursday.

The Chin refugees, both originally from Calthawng village in Rezua sub-township of Matupi in Burma's Chin State, were known to be good friends working together in a cultivation, according to the *Seihnam* newsletter.

"The reason why they were fighting is not clearly known yet. However, we learned that the incident took place where they met after they reportedly had a telephone conversation. We were told that Zaw Ling Aung died instantly after Mr. Tha Fu used a knife against him only one time during their fight," the *Seihnam* editor told *Chinland Guardian*.

Mr. Tha Fu, aka Pa Tei, has been since held in the custody of Chin Disciplinary Action Committee (CDAC), a community-based body tasked with tackling domestic issues that cause problems to the Chin community in Malaysia.

23 Families Faced Eviction, 48 Children's Education Affected in Mizoram, India

09 April 2011: A total of 48 child students are no longer able to go to school after their families having no Indian identity cards were driven out from Saikhumphai village of Vaphai village tracts in Champhai Township of Mizoram State, India by Vaphai Village Council Court in partnership with Joint Action Committee on 6 April 2011.

It was said that three families left the village on 6 April and 17 the next day in accordance with the order issued by Champhai Police Officer-in-Charge that said of 8 April as the latest date.

One of the family members said: "Some families make a makeshift shelter in the forest near Saikhumphai village and others don't want to describe the exact

Pu Lal Siam Mawi, Chairman of CDAC, said: "We have been working hard for families from both sides to have talks and we are still in the process. If they can not come to an agreement of some kind and solve the problem within themselves, then we will have to take the case to the Malaysian police."

Zaw Ling Aung, whose funeral service was held in Klang Meru cemetery last Wednesday, is survived by his wife and son who are now living in Pintaw-oo village in Kalay Myo, Sagaing Division in Burma.

Another incident was reported among Chin refugees in Malaysia where Ms Lam Cing, wife of Mr. Kap Mang, from Tedim in Chin State, was hacked to death at their home in Sungai Long, Kajang while her husband was working.

Their 8-month-old baby that was left unconscious under the mattress, was said to be in good health hours after being treated at the nearest hospital, according to VOCR (Voice of Chin Refugees).

It is claimed that the Malaysian Police have detained two Indonesian and one Burmese flatmates in connection of the murder.#

place they temporarily put up because they fear Mizoram Police would give them trouble."

It is claimed that the action was taken after the village located on the Indian-Burma border was suspected of being used for smuggling arms and drugs to Mizoram State by those holding Burmese identity cards.

"The families have been staying in Mizoram villages for more than five years and they do not have Burmese identity cards. Therefore, they cannot go back to their country. And they are aware that they would face some kind of punishment from the Burmese authority if they go back," said one of the locals from Vaphai village.

Another evictee said that some of the children are going with their families while others are staying with relatives in an effort to continue education if the -

situation allows them to do so.

The letter written to drive out those families that are not listed in the electoral rolls was jointly signed by Champhai District Officer-in-Charge and other local groups including Young Mizo Association (YMA), Vaphai branch; Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), Vaphai branch; Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP), Vaphai Unit; Mizo National Front (MNF), Vaphai Group; Mizoram Predesh Congress Committee (MPCC), Vaphai Unit; and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP), Vaphai Unit.#

Chin Refugees in Thailand Fear Forced Deportation

14 April 2011: Chin refugees stranded in Nu Poe Refugee Camp on the eastern border are among those reported to be in fear of forced deportation to military-ruled Burma following recent plans announced by the Thai government.

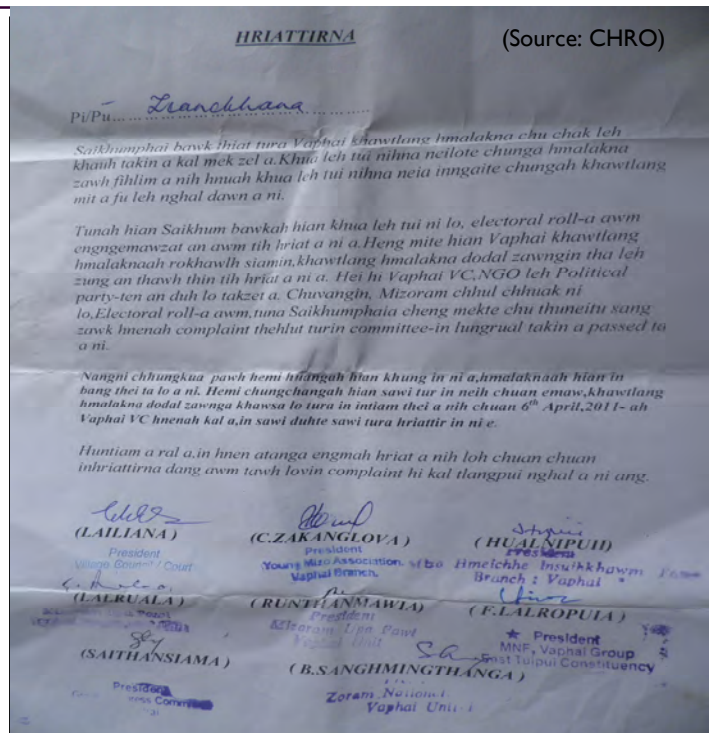
The 'unexpected' plans by Thailand to send more than 142,000 refugees back to Burma have triggered mounting concern among the residents of nine refugee camps along the Thai border.

One of the Chin refugee leaders told Chinland Guardian: "We are really shocked and in despair when we heard about the news that the Thai government is sending us back to Burma."

"The news has affected and hurt us mentally. If this actually happens, our lives will be in grave danger. We are very much worried," added the Chin leader in Nu Poe Refugee Camp.



(Photo: CHRO)



Tawin Pleansri, Thai National Security Council Chief, said the Thai government is in the process of discussion with the Burmese government over their new plans to close down the camps that has existed for more than 20 years, according to sources.

Sally Thompson, Deputy Executive Director of Thailand Burma Border Consortium that urged the Thai government not to forcibly return any of the refugees, was quoted by the Bangkok Post as saying: "There are still new arrivals coming into the camp. There's still conflict in eastern Burma."

There are about 251 Chins, with 105 females and 57 children mostly under the age of 13, currently sheltering in Nu Poe Refugee Camp, home to an estimated 15,000 refugees from nine different ethnic groups from Burma, with the majority being Karen.#



(Photo: CHRO)

Arrested Refugees Demanded Money for Release in Malaysia

20 April 2011: Malaysian RELA and police forcibly demanded money from Chin refugees arrested during their recent daylight raids on three separate occasions in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday and Monday.

"They [refugees] were loaded up into a lorry and driven away. Those refugees, who do not have the UNHCR registration card, were asked to pay between 300 and 500 Ringgits if they would like to be freed. But those having the UNHCR registration card were released later on the same day," a member of Chin refugee community in Kuala Lumpur told Chinland Guardian.

At least an estimated 60 Chin refugees, both 'unregistered' and registered by the UNHCR, including

women were rounded up and arrested on the streets in Penting, Jalan Imbi and Shalam.

A Chin refugee woman arrested on Monday in Shalam off Kuala Lumpur was set free immediately after a ransom amount of 300 Ringgits was given to the Malaysian police, according to *Seibnam* newsletter.

Kuala Lumpur-based Chin refugee communities including CRC (Chin Refugee Committee) and ACR (Alliance of Chin Refugees) are said to have been engaged in trying to get those detained free in liaison with the UNHCR.

In recent days, a series of daylight raids have been reported being carried out by Malaysian police and RELA in different locations where the refugees are residing and working.#

Interview & Opinion

No Sign of Change in Burma: Interview with Ben Rogers

19 April 2011: [CG Note: Benedict Rogers, East Asia team leader for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), was late last month deported from Burma during his last visit to the military-ruled country.

He has travelled extensively on human rights fact-finding missions to Burma on the Thai-China-India-Burma borders as well as inside.

In this interview with Van Biak Thang of Chinland Guardian, a British Christian human rights advocate and author of *Than Shwe's* biography talks about his recent experience, views on the situation of Burma during his trips into the country and to borders, and more ...

Benedict Rogers is also the author of *'A Land Without Evil: Stopping the Genocide of Burma's Karen People'* and of a report *'Carrying the Cross: The military regime's campaign of restriction, discrimination and persecution against Christians in Burma'*.]

Chinland Guardian: *What did your recent deportation from Burma tell you?*

Ben Rogers: It told me that nothing has changed in Burma. If the situation was changing, even slowly, then deporting a foreigner who has committed no crime, who has entered the country on a valid visa, and who had simply written a book, is no sign of change. The MI [Military Intelligence] actually said to me that there was "no change, no change" – so we have their word for it!

Chinland Guardian: *So, your book 'Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant' has been well-received by the regime?*

Ben Rogers: It seems not. It was surprising that they had given me a visa, and I think someone in the system made a mistake. When I asked the MI officer whether he thought my deportation was justi-

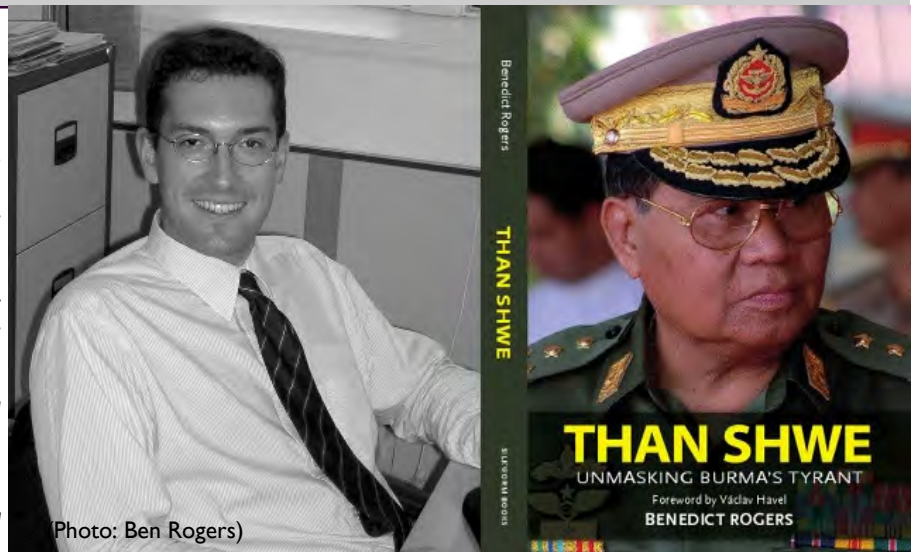


Photo: Ben Rogers)

fied, he said: "I have not read your book, so I cannot comment. I am only following my orders". But then he asked me if I had a copy of my book with me, which was very funny. I told him I did not, but if he gave me his address I would gladly send him one. He didn't respond.

Chinland Guardian: *You mentioned that a group of 'non-uniformed' men met you at the hotel you were staying in Rangoon. Do you think they are people from the new government or the old one?*

Ben Rogers: The system and the people are the same. There is no 'old' government and 'new' government, in reality. There are some new institutions, a few changes of personnel at the top levels, a rotation of positions, but underneath the system is the same.

Chinland Guardian: *You have made several trips to Burma, both inside and borders. Share with us the different pictures that you have experienced between the two.*

Ben Rogers: I have travelled many times to the different borders – the Thai-Burmese border, the India-Burma border and the China-

Burma border, and once to the Bangladesh-Burma border – as well as several times inside the country. Clearly, the biggest difference is that the oppression inside Burma is more subtle. In the ethnic areas and on the borders, you hear and even see evidence of the regime's brutality – I have met many women who have been gang-raped by soldiers of the Burma army, people used for forced labour, refugees and internally displaced people who have been forced to flee their villages. I have visited villages that have been burned down, and met former child soldiers. I've met people who have lost limbs from stepping on landmines, sometimes after being forced to work as human mine-sweepers. I've also met former political prisoners.

Inside the cities in Burma, the oppression is still severe, and economic deprivation is dire, but the suffering is less visible and less physical. Also people are more frightened to talk than they are on the borders, although some people do talk.

People in the cities are less aware about what is happening in the ethnic areas – they don't necessarily know the extent of the suffering.

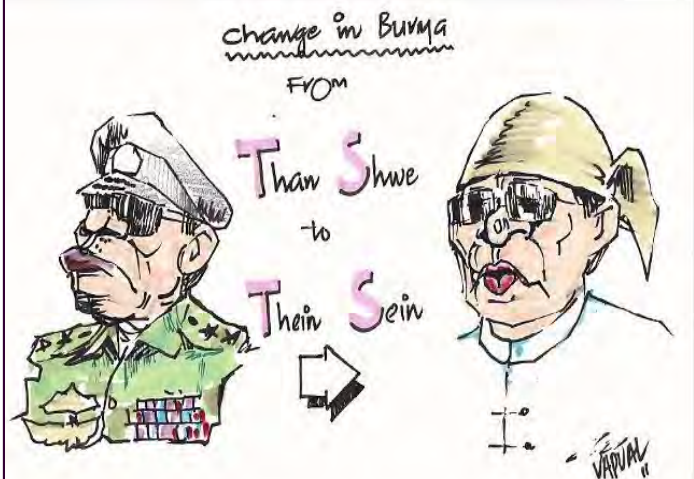
I have deliberately travelled to all the borders and inside the country, because I think it's really important to see Burma and the issues as a whole. There is too much division and polarization. Too many people, sometimes through no fault of their own, are too narrow in their perspectives. Rangoon-based people are Rangoon-centric, border-based people are focused, understandably, on the border, but we need people who see and understand both, and have a complete picture of the regime's oppression of its people. For Burmese and ethnic people, their lack of understanding of each other is primarily due to lack of information and communication, and that's something perhaps outsiders can help with. But for foreigners – diplomats, NGO workers and others – they have less excuse. There needs to be more effort by Rangoon-based foreigners to understand the ethnic issues and the border situations, and – where possible – foreigners working on the borders would do well to travel to Rangoon from time to time as well.#

Changing the Status Quo in Burma

13 April 2011: With the formal dissolution of the State Peace and Development Council on 30th March, the Burmese junta has now 'handed over' the executive, legislative and judicial powers to the new government. A 69-member cabinet, headed by the president and two vice-presidents, was subsequently sworn in at the Union Parliament. This new ruling body came out of a fundamentally flawed and widely discredited electoral process, whose primary purpose was to ensure dominant positions for key junta figures in the new governing structure.

Despite the purported change, most of the same faces in the previous regime are still effectively at the helm of the new government – validating concerns expressed by the international community that Burma's political transition would only be a change in name, rather than any substantive move towards civilian democracy.

Nowhere is this more evident than the former junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe's current position in the new power structure. As head of the new



'Supreme Council' – the secret power house behind the new regime – the 78-year-old dictator will now wield power from behind the scenes. With Than Shwe at the helm, the 'Supreme Council' is composed of top junta officials; Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, ex-Gen Shwe Mann (Lower House speaker), ex-Gen Thein Sein (Current President), ex-Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo (Current Vice-President), ex Lt-Gen Tin Aye (Current Union Election Commission Chairman) and Min Aung Hlaing. While not directly involved in the day-to-day government administration, according to reports the Supreme Council will have enormous clout over the new regime.

An ostensible adaptation from the North Korean model, the new power arrangement will now make Than Shwe the de facto head of state of the Republic of the Union of Burma, like the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il, who exercises exclusive power despite not being the formal head of state. As President of Burma, Thein Sein will be the de jure head of state, although with a nominally symbolic role in terms of exercising real control over the government and the country. Nonetheless, Than Shwe may have set up the new system to allow himself a plodding exit from the political scene.

But Burma's problems are complex, and they involve many different stakeholders. While many of the leading opposition groups, including the National League for Democracy (NLD) boycotted the regime's electoral process, others did choose to participate, and with good reasons. Faced with the dismal prospect of ceding control to the junta's proxy the Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP) – after decades of discrimination, human rights abuses and oppression at the hands of the Burma Army and local authorities – political activists in Burma's ethnic nationality States chose to form parties and participate in the elections –

in an effort to claw back power, at least in the local context.

Many of those participating in the parliamentary process argue that the limited political space allowed by the system can over time be broadened. The simple fact that there is now room to even question the government is, in itself, enough reason to be hopeful that the government can, in some situations, be forced to listen, and positively respond to the concerns of the opposition parties. The creation of the 14 regional assemblies will at least now enable the long-marginalized ethnic groups to have a say in local politics in a way that would not threaten the military's grip on central power. In his inaugural address to the Union Parliament, President Thein Sein said, "The centralization has been reduced and states and regions have been entrusted with rights and powers. They will have to take charge of their own duties."

This remains to be seen, as Thein Sein's words cannot be taken at face-value, given the long history of broken promises by the previous regime, in which he played a key part.

Another area of uncertainty in Burmese politics is the role of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, which has no voice in the new parliament after the 1990 elec-

tion-winning party was disbanded for opting to boycott the 2010 election, along with other political opposition parties. While the NLD's core movement now seems to focus on social activism, the party can find its true strength by providing not just moral leadership, but one that offers concrete and pragmatic strategies towards a genuine process of democratization in Burma.

Meanwhile, it is vital for the pro-democracy opposition groups and ethnic groups both in exile and inside the country - including those now working within the 'new' political structure - to not get bogged down in an endless retrospective debate over the merits of 'participation versus boycott', but rather to find a way to work together in a manner that complements each other's efforts. While the strategies of the two camps - within and outside of the new structure - may be different, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. After all, everyone shares the same goal of affecting genuine democratic change in Burma.

Salai Nyein Chan

The author holds a Master of Arts (M.A) degree in political science.#

Poem & Cartoon

A Refugee's Life

Robert Ngun Sang

20 April 2011

Malaysia

Often I walk alone in empty streets
In the darkest of night, scared to wits
Looking for shelter all the corners
With a pair of slippers in tatters...

Often I walk alone in great despair
On the hottest of day, hard to bear
Searching for peace everywhere
With a pool of tears dried by air

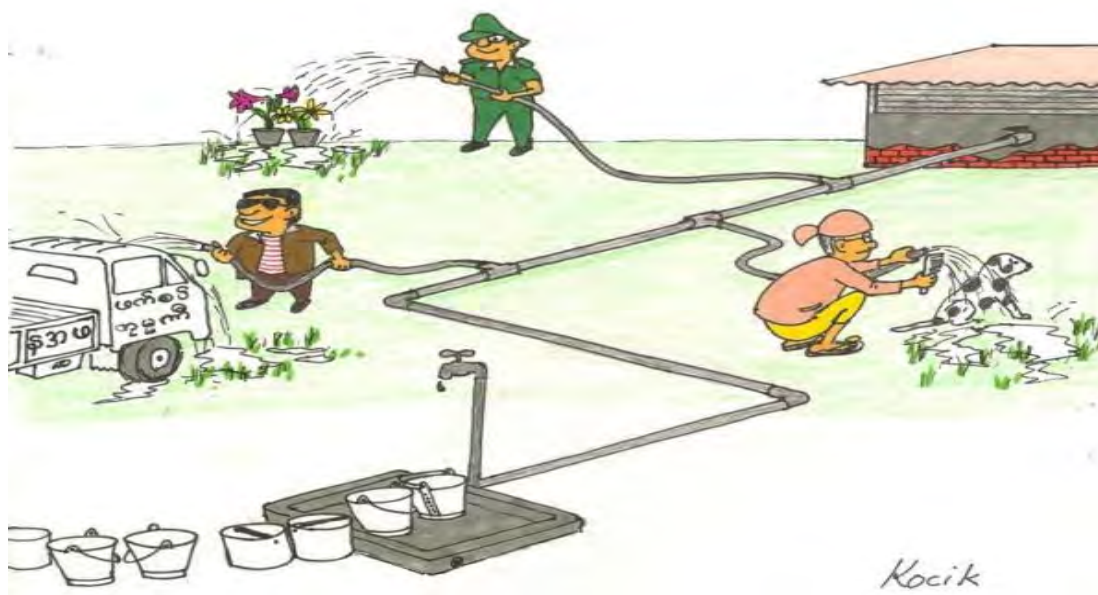
Often I walk alone with fatigue
In the heaviest of rain, so savage
Seeking comfort in every place
With full of pains yet no solace

Still have no good answers come out
Only that I know life is only a struggle!
And I walk and walk on in solitude,
With a heart and hope for survival

SPDC's Promised Democracy



Burma's Nature of 'Attenuated' Water Shortage



Burma's Firing Game

