The Lost voice of the abducted and abused

The Plight of the Porters

* Cheated by the SPDC Military
* Abused and exploited
* Kidnapped
* Treated like an animal
* Landmine threat
* Beaten and made to work as human minesweepers
The Plight of the Porters

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has used civilian porters to undertake some of the most dangerous tasks on the battlefield. Often kidnapped, coerced, or cheated, civilian porters were forced to act as human minesweepers or carry unbearably heavy loads through the line of fire. Due to criticism from the UN International Labour Organization for the use of civilians as porters the SPDC is now using porters recruited from Burma’s prisons. Prisoners can be arrested on trumped up or minor charges and then tricked into becoming porters, often after being offered a reduction in their sentence. Life is short, nasty and brutish for these unfortunate souls. If exhaustion, hunger, bullets or landmines don’t kill them their officers don’t hesitate to commit murder when a porter appears worthless to them. Escape can be their only option. This issue of Burma Issues is devoted to the plight of porters with interviews with some of the lucky ones who have made it over the border to Thailand.

Cheated by the SPDC Military:
A Convict Porter’s Story

By Cha Mu and Moegyo

“My name is Tin Hlaing. I am a thirty-five year old ethnic Burman. I’m single and have six siblings. On 15 July 2008, I was arrested at the Than Lin Bridge with three of my friends. I was carrying marijuana in my bag, just enough for four cigars. I am not a seller of marijuana; I just use it for myself”.

“I smoked marijuana because I was not allowed to go school after the 8888 Uprising. During the 8888 Uprising, I was just a high school student and did not know much about it. However, I used to go and talk to university students who were involved in the Uprising. Because of this, when I applied for the school, they did not accept me”.

“I was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment and sent to Mokpalin Prison in Mon Township. The prison commander, U Kyaw Soe, was a very corrupt man. While at the prison, the prisoners were forced to dig and carry rocks. I was imprisonment for almost three years until I became a SPDC military porter”.

“One day, prison authorities told us that there would be work outside the prison, building a road on the Thai-Burma border. They said that anyone who would like to be taken for this work could go there. So I decided to go to do this work”.

“They do not choose any military deserters, who are arrested and put in jail, as porters because they know how to shoot guns. The SPDC soldiers are afraid that these prisoners would take their guns and shoot them”.

“There were thirty of us prisoners who left the prison and traveled to where soldiers from the SPDC Battalion 357 had arranged to collect us. Within a few days, I suddenly realized that we had been told a lie and we were being sent to work as war porters at the Thai-Burma border, where fighting had broken out between the SPDC and a DKBA brigade that did not want to be a border guard force”.

“At first, the SPDC soldiers talked very nicely to us. But when we arrived in the battle area, they started showing their true colors by speaking to us very rudely, swearing at us, kicking us with their jungle boots, and sometimes hitting us with the butts of their guns. We were forced to carry baskets full of water, yellow beans, fifteen kilograms of rice, 120mm mortar shells, and soldiers’ backpacks. The soldiers only carried their guns and wore a bullet belt around their waist”.

“When the soldiers on patrol entered a village, they stole everything they could find – spoons, pots, pans, and plates – and put them
in our baskets. When our baskets were full, they tied the stolen things on the side of our baskets. So the baskets on our backs looked like Christmas trees. Our baskets were very heavy, weighing almost 30 viss (48 kg), and when we put them on our backs, we could not walk with our backs straight. We had to walk with our backs bent over all the time. Most of the porters were over forty years old and none of them were under eighteen years old. I have witnessed, that if a porter was no longer able to carry the loads, they would kick the porter’s legs very hard, and would shoot and kill them”.

“Also, when the soldiers entered a village, they smashed the windows of the houses and broke down the doors if they were locked. Should the people go back to their villages, they would see that they have no belongings left in their houses. Not even a single plate was left for the villagers. They also took the villagers’ beds and put them on the ground to sleep on. All the houses in Palu Poe are now empty and damaged”.

“Whenever we ate our meals, we were not allowed to use the spoons and plates that we had to carry. The soldiers used them and we had to eat by hand from the plastic bags. The food for the soldiers was sardines, dry fish, milk, and bean curry. For us porters, we had to eat rice, fish paste, papaya, and beans. We could not have them all in the same meal. In the morning, we could only have fish paste and in the evening, only rice with beans. The soldiers did not give us enough time for our meals as we had to walk all the time. So when we opened our rice in the plastic bag, it was already rotten; but we had to eat it anyway, because it was all we had”.

“The soldiers do not walk on the street or the path because they are afraid of landmines. They even climb very steep mountains to avoid them. They forced us to walk in front of them with minesweepers and made us clear away the landmines. Sometimes, the soldiers forced us to go into damaged houses to get fruit like papaya, coconut, and banana since they dared not go themselves because they were afraid of landmines”.

“We felt that that the soldiers would force us to carry the heavy loads until we died. So we decided to escape, even if it meant our deaths. Because if we continued to stay with them, we would have surely suffered more or died. We were not afraid of the KNU or DKBA, should we have met them. We believed that they would not shoot or kill us. But even if they wanted to kill us, they would have shot us and we would have died directly. We did not need to suffer more burdens and physical abuse by the SPDC soldiers”.

“While in prison, we heard from our friends, who used to be SPDC porters, that the KNU would not shoot us; they would only shoot the SPDC soldiers. We saw that every soldier had one set of ordinary clothing which they sometimes wore on the battlefield. At times, they exchanged their clothing with ours so that the DKBA and KNU would not shoot at them. Sometimes we found that the soldiers were very scared and afraid”.

“At 11am on 13 December 2010, the soldiers told my friend and me to fetch water from the Moei River. They had just come back from fighting, were tired, and eating lunch. Usually every time they asked us to fetch water, they followed us with guns; but on that day none of them followed us. So we decided to run to escape and hid in the bush by the side of the river. The soldiers came looking for us, but did not find us. They talked amongst themselves and said “Oh, they have already crossed to the other side of the river””.

“When it became dark we crossed the river. When we got to the Thai side we slept on a pile of straw. In the morning, we met some villagers who had crossed the river to Thailand to flee the fighting at their village. They shared their food with us and we stayed with them”.

“This is my story about being tricked into becoming a military porter. With the new fight-
ing in the Karen area, the SPDC military is using more and more convicts, like me, to carry their things into the battle area and conduct minesweeping. I have heard that the reason why the SPDC uses convicts as porters is because a United Nations organization criticizes the regime if they use regular civilians. However, the SPDC does not use military deserters, who have been rearrested and put in jail, as porters because these prisoners know how to shoot guns. The SPDC soldiers are afraid that they could take their guns and shoot them”.

“If we commit a crime we should receive a fair punishment, but not be forced or tricked into being a military porter. Convicts are human beings too. Is it fair for someone like me, who was being punished for having only a little marijuana, to carry heavy loads onto the battlefield, sweep for mines, be beaten, and be shot? I don’t think so”.

“I ask people outside of Burma who read this to have their governments and the United Nations put strong pressure on the SPDC to stop using convict porters. Please try to have them protect us like they do for the regular civilian porters”.

To bring true and lasting peace and justice to Burma, Burma Issues strongly urges the international community to keep pressure on Burma. We further ask that this pressure is backed up with action and not just with words. When crimes are committed, they are investigated, and if found to be true, justice is given according to the law. Thus, when the SPDC regime commits crimes against its people, such as using convicts as forced porters, the international community has the responsibility to seek the truth; judge the crimes according to Burmese, international and humanitarian laws; and take forceful action, where appropriate, to end all systematic abuses of these laws by the military regime.

When a government abuses its people as the SPDC regime has, the international community has the responsibility to protect these people through any necessary means. The protection of the lives of human beings should be more important than interfering in the internal affairs of a nation, especially when it involves crimes against humanity, as is the instance with Burma. Crimes against humanity can only be halted when countries stop being politically correct with their words, such as avoiding the use of “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide”, and mount concerted action to save human lives. Too many times, the international community has not acted at all or acted too late as seen in Cambodia, Rwanda, and the Balkans. Burma is yet another example of the international community not living up to its responsibility to protect human lives from those who wish to do harm to their own people. It has been said that Burma is a “quiet Bosnia or Darfur” since the atrocities committed by the SPDC regime against its ethnic people are not widely reported by the international media. It is time to change this for the sake of the people.

On 8 February 2011, Burma Issues interviewed a prisoner porter who recently managed to escape from the SPDC. Previous to being forced to join the army he faced hardships including losing his wife to Cyclone Nargis and wrongful imprisonment. Originally from Irrawaddy Division, the 26 year old has had to leave his family, including a son and a daughter, behind in Burma while he seeks temporary sanctuary in Tak province, Thailand.

“My family own 28 acres of paddy field and we earn our living by farming. We collect enough rice for ourselves and then we sell some of the rest for our family income. In one year, by selling our rice, we earn 400, 000 to 500,000 kyat (6146.81 to 7683.51 USD) and it is enough income so we don’t have to worry about our family”.

“We faced hardship in 2008 when we fell victim to Cyclone Nargis”.

“I came back from my paddy field with a big machete (chopper) in my hand. When the local police saw it they arrested me and said that I’d committed a crime by illegally possessing the machete. They arrested me under article 19c and sentenced me to one year’s imprisonment. I was imprisoned in Myaung Mya prison in Irrawaddy division”.

Abused and exploited: An interview with a prisoner porter

By: Tarsorhtee
“They put me in cell number 4, building number 3. The head of the prison is Oo Myint Thein”.

“I was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment and had to do a full day’s manual work every day in the prison. The head of the prison uses the prisoners for his own private enterprise. His business is the cultivation of vegetables and rice in the paddy fields and he sells the produce for his own benefit. He does not share any of his income with the prisoners. We had to start working at 7 am in the morning and stop at 5 pm in the evening”.

“Before I was sent to jail I was detained on remand for 45 days. The lawyer was waiting for money so my case was constantly postponed. Before I was imprisoned I did not know or understand how to hire a lawyer to represent me as I’m just an ordinary farmer”.

“After I spend 45 days in detention they sent me to the township court. At the township court the process took more than five months, plus the 45 days spent during the period of remand”.

“While serving my period of remand, and then my prison sentence, we had to have breakfast at 11 am in the morning and then our dinner time would be in between 6-7 pm. Our daily meals were yellow bean soup in the morning and then vegetable soup for dinner. We had to pick it ourselves from the prison garden. We had to eat like this every day apart from once a week when we got to eat a kind of meat, but we got only one piece per person”.

“While I was in prison I did not experience or witness any fighting between the prisoners. I didn’t see any activity or program to change the behavior of the prisoners who were working. My family could visit me and could bring food and other stuff, but I had to give or share the food with the prison authorities. Without doing this my family would not have been allowed bring anything in for me. My family could visit me every fifteen days”.

“In prison, if we could not finish the work they assigned for us we would be beaten with a cane for five strokes. My work was to beat the coconut fur. One time I could not finish the work they gave me so I got beaten. As I was a new prisoner I was only beaten three times”.

“While I was serving the prison term I never saw any of the international NGOs or local groups who come to provide help or education to the prisoners”.

“346 battalion came to our prison with army trucks and asked for prisoners to take away with them. They asked for 50 prisoners at Myaung Mya prison. They came on the 2nd January 2011 and took them away. The battalion is based in Mone Koke. There were two battalions, 563 and 346, but I don’t know the name of the battalion commanders”.

“We had to take the military truck from Myaung Mya prison to Inn-sein prison. We arrived at Inn-sein prison on the 3rd of January. After being taken to Myaung Mya prison we were kept in ignorance. I did not have any idea of what I would have to do or where I would have to go. The army did not tell us anything”.

“After leaving Myaung Mya prison we were put in chains. From Inn-Sein prison the army took us to Moulmein, which was the last base before our new destination. When we arrived at Moulmein prison the army unchained us. We arrived there on the 5th of January. We had to stay there for five days”.

“From Moulmein the army sent us to Kaukareik. On the army trucks there were weapons, guns, artillery shells and food such as rice, Yum Yum noodles, yellow beans, sugar and milk. It was then that I realized that I was going to be used as a porter by the army. Each of us had to carry six artillery shells as well as supplies of food. Within battalion 563 and 346 there were around 300 troops and 75 porters”.

“When we were carrying these burdens for the army we had to wear our prison uniforms. They were the color blue. While we were serving as porters we got two meals a day but had to find edible vegetables in the forest for them. Aside from carrying the artillery shells we had to cook for the troops”.

Maung Myint Naing Witnessed Atrocities
“We passed about five villages and five battles broke out while I served as a porter. As we had to carry the artillery shells, we had to stay with the troops and lay ourselves on the ground next to them during the fighting so we could not find a place to hide. However, we were not used as human minesweepers as the army had a minesweeping machine with them. I witnessed 3 porters and 9 SPDC soldiers being injured by the mines. 4 SPDC soldiers were killed by the mines. The injured soldiers were taken to Waw Lay base, where they said their army strategy base was located”.

“When we arrived at the new site, or new base, we did not see the porters who had been injured by the mines but we could hear the sound of gunfire behind us”.

“Those who struggled to carry the heavy loads were beaten by the army. They were kicked with jungle boots, hit with the butt of a gun and punched with fists. Before we could escape 14-15 porters had already ran away and escaped. The army threatened us by saying that if they re-captured the porters they would kill them. I didn’t seen any porters who ran away being recaptured”.

What happened when the SPDC troops entered the villages?

“We entered five villages. Some of them were inhabited and some were not. In one, fighting took place on the outskirts of the village. The troops arrested one old man in his house. He was around fifty years old. The troops took him outside the village and interrogated him. The SPDC tied his hands behind his back, tortured him and beat him. His face was swollen and bruised. They took him with them when they left the village then stabbed him with a knife and killed him in the forest. Captain Yan Naing Soe Win was responsible for the old man’s murder. He is from battalion number 346”.

“When the troops entered and stayed in the village they placed security guards around it. When they entered another village they found a dumb young Karen boy. They took him as
they suspected him of being a member of the KNU or DKBA. They asked him where he came from and what he was doing. As the young boy was dumb he could not give the troops any answers. Due to this the troops said that the boy was only pretending that he could not speak so they beat him, tied his hands behind his back and ordered him to go with them. The troops took him for six days. They interrogated him for the entire time. Before the troops entered the next village they killed him but we do not know who committed the actual murder”.

The reason for trying to escape

“We did not have enough food to eat. The troops provided only two milk cans worth of rice for four people. When fighting broke out we were given no meals, but the soldiers ate Yum Yum noodles. As well as our own loads, we were made to take the burdens of the porters who had escaped but they became too heavy for us to carry. As we didn’t have enough food we also tried to escape. During the night we ran and had to sleep in the forest. For our meals we had to eat banana pith with some Yum Yum noodles that we took with us. We did not know in which direction to run. We just followed the foot path. Some time after 2am we reached the river bank”.

“We were staying on the other side of the river and heard the sound of people speaking. They were speaking in Burmese so at noon we decided to cross the river to ask for help. We did not even know which side of the river Thailand was on. When we crossed the river we met a family and we asked them to help us. We told them that we were SPDC porters and that we had escaped and were in need of help so the family gave us food”.

“The distance between the place we had escaped from and where we were staying might have only taken one hour to walk in the daytime. The day after we escaped the SPDC troops started to search for us. They came to the Thai side of the river, dressed in plain clothes, to find us. We learned this from shop-keepers in a village that we had come across. When we escaped there were still around 40 porters working with the SPDC troops. We knew that they would also try to escape”.

“I have decided to stay here for four or five months in order to earn some money then I will go back home. I have to do this because I have still not finished my prison term. If I can stay here I will stay and work until my prison term is finished and then I will go home. If I go back now the police will find me and arrest me”.

“I don’t want to speak to the SPDC troops. I have a pain in my heart and I hate them because they treated me very unfairly and very badly. They abused and exploited me”.

“We heard from the SPDC troops that they are going to attack the DKBA because the SPDC gave them an opportunity to cease fighting, but instead they are trying to separate themselves and hide in the jungle in order to rebel against the SPDC”.

Escape date: On the night of 03/02/2011

“Four people ran to escape but we lost one on the way and we could not find him. We heard from people that the Thai army has arrested him”.

“When we escaped we were still wearing our prison uniforms. We took them off on the other side of the river. There had been a battle at a village and the villagers had run away and there were some cloths left. We took them and changed from our prison uniforms. After that we crossed the river to this side (Thai side)”.

“Among the porters there are Burmans, Burmese Indians, Karen and other people. As we are from the same country and are all Buddhist they should not treat us like this”.

“When the troops entered the village they took all the villager’s belongings such as food, clothes and other property. They killed and ate pigs, chickens, goats and took anything else they liked. They entered the monastery and took everything inside, destroyed it and broke the glass in the temple”.

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Going live in early March with updated people’s stories, articles, databases, video, photo galleries and much more.

“Let us work so the next generation does not have to suffer”
A former prisoner recalls how SPDC soldiers deceived and tricked him into becoming a porter for the military.

“I was sentenced to seven years in Henzada Township, in Irrawaddy division Burma because I was caught dealing Marijuana. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) soldiers told me that if I carried military material for the infantry on one trip I wouldn’t have to go to prison. At the time I thought that if I followed them I would be spared from prison so decided to go. After I followed them I realized that they had lied to me. They cheated me. People like me who decide to take the military’s offer aren’t freed, but made to work indefinitely as a porter”. Says Htoe Htoe, a 37 year old Burmese man coerced into working as a porter for the military troops.

“I had to face many problems when I was working as a porter for the SPDC and nearly died. The SPDC soldiers treated me like an animal. If I was tired and couldn’t work they beat me and kicked me. One time when I couldn’t carry their supplies for them they hit me very hard on my eyebrow with their gun and I suffered for many days. I learned my lesson so went with them and had to carry rice and heavy ammunition”.

“When we arrived at the outskirts of a Karen village, the villagers were afraid that a battle would commence so they fled. They left their homes, their animals such as chickens, ducks and goats, and any possessions they couldn’t carry such as mattresses and blankets. When the SPDC soldiers arrived they cooked the villager’s animals and pillaged their belongings. They broke locks to get into the houses so they could see what they could steal. They then made me carry their loot”.

“The soldiers torture porters and treated me very poorly. When they are in battle they send the porters ahead to clear the path of landmines. If you are afraid to do this for them they will kick you and beat you so I decided to escape so I wouldn’t suffer any more”.

“The infantry soldiers are not liked in their community. When they battle they fight for themselves and not their community. They injure and kill their own people but do not report it to their elders. If I was to report it and tell the truth about the soldiers they would kill me as this would create trouble for them back home. We can’t fight them or we will die”.

Treated like an animal:
Minor criminal tricked into being a prisoner porter

By: Burma Issues
This is the story of a child who was forcibly recruited by the SPDC to fight in the Wa Lei offensive. To protect his identity the subject wishes to be referred to as ‘Maung Maung’ (a pseudonym).

Two years ago, during the dry season, fifteen year old Maung Maung’s aunt came to visit him in his home town of Thone Wa village. Shortly afterward they traveled to her house near Paya Gyi section in Pegu town, Pegu District. After staying there for four or five days his aunt gave him 1,500 kyat and her permission to go to a tea shop. Shortly after leaving the house, however, Maung Maung encountered a group of twenty Burmese soldiers who were kidnapping people to work as porters.

When Maung Maung was arrested he thought that he would be released shortly as, being a child, he would have been unable to carry the heavy loads required by the army. He was right - they didn’t take him as a porter. Instead he was taken as a young recruit for the army and was sent to a battalion based in Pegu town, Pegu district. Once he arrived at the battalion’s headquarters he was taught how to dismantle and assemble guns for twenty days. He was also made to paint buildings in the battalion’s headquarters. During his training he saw another twenty children of the same age as himself.

He was then sent to a new battalion based in Daik-U town, Pegu division, which was under the control of Division 66. He served in the battalion for one year and eight months, under the leadership of U Than. Maung Maung, the unfortunate child soldier, didn’t know the exact rank of U Than but guessed that he was the highest ranked soldier there as any order that came from above came directly through him.

After that, in the three months leading up to January 2011, he was ordered to go to the Myawaddy area and serve in the offensive at Wa Lei, still under the control of Division 66. Times were desperate as there was a terrible lack of rations. During the Wa Lei offensive Maung Maung heard from other soldiers that U Than Soe, who was of a two stripe rank, and another three soldiers had raped two Karen women and that U Than Soe had personally decapitated them.

Maung Maung’s memories of the Wa Lei offensive aren’t too clear, however there is one memory which still haunts him; “They did give treatment to wounded soldiers but those who were seriously wounded and might have only lived for another fifteen minutes were shot dead and it is the most unforgettable thing that will stay with me for the rest of my life”, recall Maung Maung, an escaped child soldier.

Maung Maung says; “Our life is; we eat what is fed to us, do what is asked of us and we don’t even have the value of a dog! I fled because we didn’t have anything to eat”. He also added that during the Wa Lei offensive there were over forty child soldiers of a similar age as himself. They had arrived together but now there are only nine left as all the others have died.
Refugees from Oo Krae Hta are on the run and taking refuge in a Thai-Karen village called Maw Ker Thai which is located in Phopra district, Tak province, Thailand. There are 70 houses in Oo Krae Hta village and most of the villagers are farmers from the Karen ethnic group. The whole population of the village had to leave their homes. Some are now living on Thai farms and some are hiding in the jungle. They have been on the run since early 2011 so people have started working as laborers on Thai farms. Others have found their way to Bangkok and are trying to find jobs in the city because they do not have the food they need to survive as they have been on the run for a long period already.

“We had to run because troops from the Burmese military attacked our village [Oo Krae Hta] with mortar shells and they hit some houses and one of the monasteries” said U Mya Oo Yee, who is taking refuge in a Thai farm in Maw Ker Thai.

The villagers could have lost more of their belongings but made preparations to send them to acquaintances on the Thai side (Maw Ker Thai) before the Burmese troops arrived at their village. The villagers were sure that the troops would arrive at Oo Krae Hta because it is situated between Waw Lay and Myawaddy.

The current fighting, between the SPDC and a splinter group of the DKBA that refuses to become a border guard force (BGF), broke out on the day of the Burmese General Election (7th November 2010). After their refusal to become a BGF the SPDC launched a strong offensive against the DKBA group, who are led by Saw Ler Pwe also known as Na Ka Mwe. The objective of the SPDC offensive is to occupy Waw Lay which is the major base of the DKBA. The SPDC troops are advancing from Myawaddy and Kawkareik to Waw Lay and there are several Karen villages between the towns. Due to the offensive, fighting has broken out inside and around these villages and thousands of villagers have been driven out and forced to cross to Thailand and take temporary shelter.

“Both sides have laid many landmines in the villages but the DKBA informed us and promised to remove them after the offensive. The villagers witnessed a dog losing a leg after it triggering a landmine in the village. They took pity on it, retrieved it and took it to the Thai side. The experience has made us scared to return. How can the DKBA know exactly where the SPDC has laid their landmines? Even after the fighting is finished we don’t dare to go back as there will still be lots of undiscovered landmines” said Chit Baw, a refugee. He added, “A 2nd lieutenant in the SPDC lost a leg due to a landmine. We need peace. We want to go back home and work. We don’t want any more fighting or landmines. We are just ordinary villagers”.

If the situation continues they won’t be able to work or survive so it is necessary for them to find sanctuary in Thailand even though they don’t have food or shelter there and have to hide in Thai farms or the jungle.
A 24-year-old man, who wishes his identity to remain secret, managed to escape from the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to Thailand. He was one of a group of 31 prisoner porters who were selected by the SPDC from Pakukku prison, Pakukku District, Magwe Division, Burma. They were forced to work as porters in January 2011 in the SPDC offensive against the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in Dooplaya District, Karen State Burma. He told Burma Issues of the dangers he managed to escape from.

He was imprisoned on 19 December 2010. Eleven days later, on 30 December, after being selected by the SPDC, his legs were chained to the rest of the group and the prisoners were taken away.

On 3 January 2011, after an arduous journey, the 31 prisoners arrived at a SPDC military base camp at P’Lu Lay Village, Myawaddy Township, Dooplaya District, where Military Operations Command 12 and Tactical Operations Command 1 and 2 were stationed. They were then placed under the control of Infantry Battalion 231.

They were put into pairs and chained to each other. The soldiers then forced the group to carry food and weapons (81mm guns, medium mortars and bombs) from cars to the military base camp which was providing support for the SPDC’s offensive against the DKBA. As well as carrying supplies the porters also had to cook for the soldiers.

The group of prisoners was forced to carry boxes full of weapons to the battle zone. The 24-year-old witnessed porters, who had accidentally dropped the boxes, being beaten by the soldiers. The SPDC also used the prisoners as human minesweepers. One group was equipped with 2 mine detectors and forced to walk in front of a group of soldiers. Other porters weren’t so lucky and had to search for landmines without any mine detection equipment.

Some of the porters were over the age of 50 and couldn’t handle the heavy work. When they wanted to take a rest the SPDC soldiers beat them. The porters weren’t allowed to use toilets, instead they had to use plastic bags.

The SPDC soldiers confiscated and ate the P’Lu Lay villager’s livestock (chickens, pigs and dogs) and animals from the local temple.

On 10 January the 24 year old and 6 other prisoners (including his brother) were selected by SPDC soldiers to carry weapons from the military base camp to a battle zone near P’Lu Lay Village where the SPDC and DKBA were locked in intense battle.

When the 7 prisoner porters were making their way back to the SPDC camp the 24 year old managed to escape with his bother and another porter. To try and prevent them, SPDC soldiers threw grenades and shot at the escaping prisoners. Fortunately none of the 3 prisoners were injured and on the following day they crossed the Thai-Burma border and arrived in Thailand.

The Burmese army has since increased the number of soldiers and porters in Dooplaya District, Karen State. The fighting is still on-going and the fate of the other porters is unknown.
**NEWS BRIEF**

* ASEAN endorses new Burmese regime and promises to work with it even though Burma has not fulfilled its obligations to ASEAN since joining in 1997. Indonesian Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, described the recent elections as “conducive and transparent” during an ASEAN retreat on the island of Lombok.

* The new parliament in Naypyidaw appoints former general and outgoing prime minister Thein Sein as its new president. To strengthen its grip on power the military-backed USDP has also announced party members Tin Aung Myint Oo and Sai Mauk Kham as his vice-presidents.

* Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) have been warned by a state-run newspaper that they will meet “a tragic end” if they remain opposed to the new parliament in Naypyidaw and continue to support the West’s economic sanctions on Burma.

* Human rights groups send an open letter to the Thai Labor Ministry after legal Burmese migrant Charlee Diyo is chained to hospital bed by police in Bangkok after a horrific work accident.

* Karen groups mourn the anniversary of the assassination of Mahn Sha while the SPDC’s Waw Leh offensive continues to kill and displace the people the respected leader loved so much. Mahn Sha was gunned down on 14 February 2008 outside his home in Mae Sot, Thailand.

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We would like to request our readers to kindly notify us of any changes to your mailing address. You can inform us at burmaissues@burmaissues.org

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