"In the country, the acreage of cultivated lands has doubled, and so has the output of agricultural products. Growers will succeed in making profits and the income of the State will increase; as far as the people are concerned oil will be plentiful so much that everyone can bathe in oil, stalks of tobacco will be used for warming fires, and paddy will pile up like mountains."

An article in the government-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper (August 6, 1999) rebutting reports of agricultural shortfalls in Burma.
PRESS RELEASE

PEOPLE’S TRIBUNAL STUDIES HUNGER IN BURMA

HONG KONG - SEPTEMBER 1, 1999

The Asian Human Rights Commission has convened a People’s Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma to investigate a widely reported lack of food in the country (also known as Myanmar), its causes and effects.

In April 1999, a cross-section of Burmese society—farmers, refugees, landless workers, former civil servants—appeared before the Tribunal testifying to food scarcity as a nationwide trend. Working with the human rights organisation Burma Issues, the Tribunal has so far recorded depositions from 26 witnesses both in Bangkok and along the Thailand-Burma border. Furthermore, it has studied extensive documentation illustrating the breadth of food scarcity and the impact it has on the lives of Burma’s people, especially the rural poor.

The People’s Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma is composed of three eminent persons distinguished as innovators and leaders of Asia’s human rights movement:

- **Justice H. Suresh**, Bombay High Court (retired);
- **Professor Mark Tamthai**, Director of the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy, Faculty of Arts, at Thailand’s Chulalongkorn University;
- **Dr. Lao Mong Hay**, Executive Director of the Khmer Institute of Democracy based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Though not part of the judicial system, a People’s Tribunal adheres to legal principles, applying the rules of evidence and due process to the question it considers. This alternate approach to justice aims to highlight human rights in situations which the national and international legal systems fail to address. The Tribunal investigates food scarcity to help the international community focus on Burma’s grassroots issues, contributing an important perspective to the movement for democratization and political rights.

The Tribunal’s preliminary findings indicate a strong link between food scarcity and the government’s role in militarization. Respecting the Government of the Union of Myanmar’s right to respond, the Tribunal outlined its findings in a letter and invited the government to share its view, but has yet to receive any reply.

The Tribunal will publish its findings and recommendations on October 15, 1999. All governments, international agencies, NGOs and individuals concerned with economic, social and cultural rights are encouraged to contact the Tribunal Secretariat, c/o Asian Human Rights Commission, to order a copy of the report or request further information. Photographs, documentation and further background information is also available at the Tribunal’s website at: www.hrschool.org/tribunal.

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IN STEP WITH MILITARIZATION

Militarization should be understood as the process whereby military values, ideology, and patterns of behavior achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic, and external affairs of the State; and as a consequence, the structural, ideological, and behavioral patterns of both the society and the government are “militarized.” - Churches Commission on International Affairs, Militarism and Human Rights (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 5.

Has Burma been militarized? The answer to this question has serious implications for democratization: if yes, it means military rule has rooted itself in culture, in the ways power is distributed and how member of society interact.

Rise of the Tatmadaw

When Britain granted independence to Burma in 1948, burning questions over the independent status of ethnic-minority areas remained unresolved. Shortly after the assassination of General Aung San and his entire provisional government cabinet, the country slid into a morass of nationalist and communist insurgencies. The Burma army, or Tatmadaw, was born into the role of suppressing the disunity of a nation which had never been unified to begin with.

Throughout the 1950s the Tatmadaw’s power grew steadily, while political inroads to resolving Burma’s conflicts were few and led nowhere. In 1958, General Ne Win led a military-led caretaker government and in 1962 after another short period of civilian control, conducted a complete military coup. For the three decades of Ne Win’s rule, the Tatmadaw developed a political identity as defender of Burma’s unity against a plague of internal enemies. The Burma army cast itself as savior of the nation’s integrity, and the wars with its enemies raged on.

The 1990s saw the Tatmadaw expand, modernize, and begin to open the nation’s economy to foreign capital. Growing both in size and expenditure, it has become one of the largest standing armies in the world. A succession of military victories and cease-fire agreements has reduced the threat from decades-old armed resistance forces. The Tatmadaw has maintained its leading role in Burma’s government, impervious to democracy and growing international concern for human rights abuse and political freedom. The army continues to pursue its vision of a unified, “peaceful, modern and developed” nation led by strong and vigilant military heroes, while the people have few options for dissent.

Militarization in Daily Life

By definition militarization permeates the political, economic and social aspects of public life. Militarization blurs the distinction between State needs to be achieved by military means, and popular needs to be achieved through participation and dialogue—a distinction crucial to democracy. The army’s primacy means its goals are paramount, and therefore its methods are always justified. Management of the rural economy demonstrates this conflict: the state’s inescapable need to recruit, feed and equip a huge army justifies it overriding, overwhelming even the most basic human need—food.

Administrative mechanisms which orient economic policy towards military interests include crop taxation, the paddy quota, monocropping, irrigation programs using forced labor and similar resource development projects. All are conducted without consulting farmers, but depend on their participation. Dissent or non-cooperation is met with military harshness: threats, land confiscation, relocation and even violence.

In addition to administration of public policy, propaganda demonstrates militarization. Daily media reports laud the army’s success in guiding agricultural development. Officers publicly inspect dams under construction, check specifications on new tractors, explain the virtues of new strains of rice, and otherwise reinforce militarization’s fundamental credos: the army has everything under control; what’s good for the army is good for the nation; and without the Tatmadaw, Burma would be hopelessly lost and backward.

Militarization also extends into the education system. School texts reinforce a regime of rote instruction based on discipline, duty and respect for superiors. History texts offer a lineage of martial heroes and great men, role models lionized for the brave conquests which made modern Burma possible. Patriotic magazines remind people that the Tatmadaw is successor to this tradition of noble martyrs. Foreign enemies, jealous neo-colonialists, and a plague of internal traitors waiting to usurp power simply beg the Tatmadaw’s continuing vigilance.

Despite its good press, the army still suffers from popular opinion. People make no mistake about the cause of their hunger. Burma’s poor farmers and peasants seem to recognize that ultimately militarization is incompatible with food security. The right to food

Continued on page 5

August 1999
The right to food, which stems directly from the right to life, is a most basic and fundamental right and has been enshrined in international law. While the government of Burma has not ratified any of the international covenants directly relating to hunger, the human rights standards set by the international community give a context in which to examine the issues of hunger and food scarcity. The most basic of these international legal documents is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25(1)
Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstance beyond his control.

In response to criticisms, including those of the Burmese government, that human rights are not a universal concept and are Western fare imposed upon the world, a group of Asian human rights related NGOs drew up a human rights charter rooted in regional culture. This valuable document gives insight into an Asian perspective on human rights as they relate to hunger and other basic needs.

Asian Human Rights Charter [1998], Article 3(2)
Foremost among rights is the right to life, from which flow other rights and freedoms. The right to life is not confined to mere physical or animal existence but includes the right to every limb or faculty through which life is enjoyed. It signifies the right to live with basic human dignity, the right to livelihood, the right to habitat or home, the right to education and the right to a clean and healthy environment, for without these there can not be no real and effective exercise or enjoyment of the right to life. The state must also take all possible measures to prevent infant mortality, eliminate malnutrition and epidemics, and increase life expectancy through a clean and healthy environment...

Article 7(1)
Every individual has the right to the basic necessities of life and to protection against abuse and exploitation. We all have the right to literacy and knowledge, to food and clean water, shelter and to medical facilities for a healthy existence. All individuals and human groups are entitled to share the benefits of the progress of technology and of the growth of the world economy.

The above passage moves beyond the rights of individuals and begins to examine the responsibilities of States towards their populations. The 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development focuses even more closely on the obligations of the State.

Declaration on the Right to Development, Article 8(1)
States should undertake, at the national level, all necessary measures for the realization of the right to development and shall ensure, inter alia, equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income. Effective measures should be undertaken to ensure that women have an active role in the development process. Appropriate economic and social reforms should be carried out with a view to eradicating all social injustices.

The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [1966] takes a similar approach to States' duties but goes further to look at specific goals that States should take into consideration in fulfilling their obligation to provide food to their people.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11 (1-2)
[The parties] to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take...the measures, including specific programs, which are needed:

To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources.

Human rights are not only examined in terms individual's rights and States' responsibilities. The UN's Declaration on the Rights of the Child [1963] looks at rights in terms of personal development and how the right to food is necessary to allow each person to fulfill their human potential.

Declaration on the Rights of the Child, Principle 4
The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health; to this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation, and medical service.

Insufficient food is often closely connected with restrictions on the right to work. Workers in Burma are not able to provide adequately for themselves and their families, due to time spent on forced labor and unjust imprisonment.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23
Everyone without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity and supplemented, if
The Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict [1974], Paragraph 6

Women and children belonging to the civilian population and finding themselves in circumstances of emergency and armed conflict in the struggle for peace, self-determination, national liberation and independence, or who live in occupied territories, shall not be deprived of shelter, food, medical aid or other inalienable rights, in accordance with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child or other instruments of international law.

The universality of the right to food is clearly reflected in the international principles that define the relationship between States parties and their people.

\[\text{continued from page 3}\]

Relocation of Refugees

The Thai Army and international aid workers started the relocation of 8,000 Karen refugees from Huay Kaloke camp, Tak, to a site near Oumpium village on the 23rd of August 1999. The long promised move came more than a year after the camp was attacked and burned by the Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA). The new site is approximately 12 km from the Thai-Burma border, also in Tak province. According to a local army commander, Col Chayudh Boonbarn, the relocation will take approximately 40 days to complete, following which time refugees from Mawker and Nhu Pho camps will also be moved to Oumpium. Once the move is complete, 90,000 refugees will live at the new site.

“Relocation of 8,000 Karen refugees begins,” The Nation, 24 August 1999

Nagas flee to India

During the past month at least 1,000 Christians from 8 Naga villages in northern Sagaing division have fled forced religious conversion by the military government, into Indian’s northeastern state of Nagaland. The Nagas populate both side of the Burma-India border. In India, local police chief L.T. Lotha confirmed the exodus and said that most of the Burmese Nagas are settling in Pangsa in northern Nagaland. Rev. Zhabu Terhuja of the Nagaland Baptist church said most of the churches in Sajaing division had been forced to close and that the Asian Baptist Federation had been requested to raise this issue with international human rights groups.

“Christian tribes fleeing country,” Bangkok Post, 21 August 1999

Tourism

The government of Burma is hoping to increase tourism. Between April 1998 and March 1999, arrivals from Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, the three ASEAN countries with direct flights to Burma, made up 19% of the total arrivals. Tourists from Japan, Taiwan, China and the other ASEAN countries contributed 3% to the 200,352 person total and Europeans made up 26% of all tourists. A 28-day visa was implemented, hotel investment applications encouraged and more previously-closed areas opened up for tourism. The subsequent decline of foreign exchange earnings has left the regime little money for tourism infrastructure development or marketing.

This year no new international class hotels have been opened and at least six hotels are stuck halfway completed. Since the crisis began, only two hotel investment applications have been received, each near the border areas of Tachileik and Ranong, where checkpoints have been opened to allow third country citizens to cross from Thailand. In Rangoon, hotels are battling for customers and making almost no profit.

Burmese tourism officials admit they have no marketing money. The total marketing budget for 1999-2000 is only five million kyat (US$14,700) unchanged from 1998-1999.

“Burma banks on neighborly help,” Bangkok Post, 30 August 1999

Factories in Myawaddy

The Thai Chamber of Commerce has sought confirmation from Burma about the possibility of relocating factories from Tak to Myawaddy in Burma. Tak is a home to nearly 30,000 Burmese labor-permit holders who work in more than 100 labor-intensive garment factories. They are among the nearly one million Burmese migrants in Thailand who became illegal following a work permit expiration deadline on August 4.

The private sector believes the government of Burma supports the plan to set up a special economic zone in Myawaddy. An envoy said that Burmese authorities will invite Thai officials and businessmen for talks on the details. The 10,000 rai economic zone site is 5km from Myawaddy but Thai businessmen still need assurances regarding safety and infrastructure, and a clarification from Thai agencies about the legal aspects involved in re-importing goods.

“Chamber checks relocation of factories to Myawaddy,” Bangkok Post, 2 September 1999

“Tak firms to discuss plan to relocate,” Bangkok Post, 1 September 1999

Kanchanaburi-Tavoy Road

Construction of a 120 km road linking industry in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand with the port city of Tavoy in Burma is officially set to begin at the end of this year, according Somspol Thirasan, secretary of the Federation of Kanchanaburi Industries. The route had been planned to pass through Bongti village but due to environment and security concerns it is set to be built through Ban Phunamron village in Muang district instead. Mr Somspol said the 1.2 billion baht two-lane asphalt highway project, which is expected to be completed in 2001, will draw labor from the Karen people living along the route. He added that the road would prevent further Burmese immigration by providing jobs inside Burma.

“Path to war becomes roadway for trade,” Bangkok Post, 9 August 1999
T his article is excerpted from reports and personal correspondence from a Burma Issues information collector in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State. He identifies a growing crisis in the local rural economy due primarily to overwhelming militarization and continued civil war. He refers to the three military groups that are operational in this area: the government forces (Burma army), the Karen National Union (KNU), and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), that split from the KNU in 1995-96 to forge an uneasy alliance with the Burma army.

On the 27th of March 1999, I traveled to “P’nakhoh” village and met with village elders, religious leaders and villagers. I was touched when I listened to a young man explain about his problems. He has a wife and one baby. Since his wife had the baby she has been ill. He has no money to find a medic to look after his wife so she has remained untreated. He has to find money for rice and porter fees for the Burma army, the DKBA and the KNU. The KNU taxes only once a year, but the Burma army and DKBA in his area demand at least 1000 kyat monthly.

“Must I become a KNU soldier?,” this young man asked me. “You can’t do that. You need to look after your wife,” I told him. He replied, “I can’t do anything for my wife. All the money I get goes for taxes and fees. We can’t even eat.” He planned to leave his wife and go to look for work. He has no children and his parents are dead. He has no place to live.

“Brother, I can’t help you” I said. But I tried to encourage him: “Please make yourself strong and face your problems as others do.” Then I asked him, “Are there still others in your village like you?” He answered, “Due to the problems created by the government, those who cannot bear to stay in the village any longer want to run, yet cannot.” There is nowhere else to go.

For economic reasons more and more men are being forced to become soldiers, with whatever group they can. I met Phar Too, a farmer in the area, and he told me that he is ordinarily able to grow over 100 baskets of paddy annually, but as there was no rain last season he could only get about 20 baskets. He had to sell all of his livestock and give some of his rice grain to the Burma army, some to the DKBA and the remainder he used to pay off debts. He told me:

“I have nothing left. When the soldiers came to collect money for porter fees, I didn’t have any to give. To avoid being taken as a porter, I’ve had to flee into the scrub every night. So I plan to join the KNLA, and if that’s not possible, then the DKBA.”

In his village, ten men have become KNU soldiers and seven have joined the DKBA. These seventeen men have all left their children and wives in the village. Some of these men are related to each other. For those who have become soldiers, the demands on their households for forced labor and taxes are stopped. Whether the man becomes a DKBA or a KNU soldier, his household is exempted from obligations. [Demands by various groups are made upon the village as a whole, not upon individual households. The village headman is responsible for meeting the demands however the community best sees fit.] Therefore, while the total number of houses in the village meeting these demands has lessened, the burden on the village as a whole has not. So out of a total of about 50 houses in the village now only about half, including those with only elderly, widows and orphans, must bear all the weight of taxation, guiding the Burma army, DKBA and KNU soldiers, and so on.

On the 18th of March, as I was unwell so I rested in a hut. My friend Hsawdihwar visited me there. We talked about how to collect information on human rights abuses and forward it to organizations [outside of Burma]. We talked about how information is a weapon and human rights violators are afraid of it. He also came with information about Kergaw Village. Two thirds of Kergaw villagers are having trouble getting food due to the lack of rain [in the last planting season]. Some of them were already eating only rice porridge. The Burma army barracks stationed at Kergaw was demanding pork and 15,000 kyat in porter fees twice per month. On top of this, if they go on patrol they demand the use of at least two carts and a village to serve as a runner.

Those villages with a Burma army camp situated adjacent must meet the daily needs of the soldiers whenever instructed. They have to carry water and cut firewood for them. It’s not clear whether the Burma army soldiers are afraid the KNU might shoot at them [while they perform such tasks] or whether it’s just oppression of the villagers. Everyday the villagers have to carry cooking water, cut wood and bake charcoal for the army. The tasks must be performed within “arms-reach” of the soldiers.

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Villages in this area without a Burma army camp, even those located very far from them, must give porter fees just like those villages with a Burma army presence. The danger for remote villages remains that when the Burma army soldiers enter them, they don’t trust the villagers, so they usually abuse, beat and shoot those they see. They kill the poultry and pigs they want and take villagers clothes. If they want to burn and destroy things, they do it.

Virtually all villagers in this region are farmers. During the rains when the people should be concentrating on their farming work, they can’t because they have to labor for the Burma army, and find money for porter fees as well as for other things. If the villagers'
fields are far from their houses and they want to start work early in the morning, they are not given permission to sleep at the fields. Sometimes after good rains when they are ready to hoe the ground and plant seed, they are called to go serve as porters and so their work doesn’t progress.

As the KNU is under-manned it is using mines against the Burma army. Therefore, both the DKBA and Burma army have also increased their use of mines. For this reason, villagers with cattle are often forced [by soldiers] to use their livestock to clear mines. A lot of villagers out looking for stray cattle are also injured by mines.

People have few rights to trade. They are not permitted to set up market places [for security reasons], so for them the best business is to sell liquor from their houses. Doing this, there’s no need to be afraid that you might step on a landmine. Some villages seem like they only have people selling alcohol in them. Most people end up as drunkards; young and old, male and female. Due to alcoholism, people lose interest in work, morality and heritage. They no longer pay attention to their social conditions. Some think they can make their troubles vanish through alcohol, and so they become slaves to the bottle.

Most Burma army soldiers get a monthly salary of 600-800 kyat (about US$ 2), but their superiors typically deduct pay for a variety of reasons until they are left with only 200 kyat. In my opinion, this is why when they go to villages they do what they like and take what they like. They don’t do it in front of their officers. If villagers report some matter to an officer, the soldiers accused will be held publicly accountable, but privately they will be assured that it’s no big deal. Officers can take from the people by demanding fees. The people have no idea what the officers do with the money they collect in fees. After it’s given, it’s gone.

Burma army troops are only receiving rations consisting only of rice. They eat some and sell some. When they don’t have any left to eat, they demand more from the villagers. They typically demand rice grain, fish paste, shrimp paste, salt, chillies and livestock. It’s the same throughout the region. If they pay for things they eat, they give no more than half of the market value. The villagers must make up the other half themselves. Similarly, in January (1999) the DKBA demanded rice grain from the villagers. Villagers had to sell them a basket of rice at the rate of 100 Thai baht each [about 40% market value].

I have also observed that the Burma army troops are poorly equipped and uniformed. They look impoverished. So when they enter villages and see people’s clothes, possessions and livestock, they are greedy. Burma army troops don’t appear pleased to be serving in the armed forces. They look like a dissatisfied and unhappy lot.

Wherever you are in Karen State, what is slowly becoming the big issue is the shortage of food. Fewer and fewer fields are being worked, as people are unable to deal with the constant interruptions and fear.

**HUNGER IN THE RURAL ECONOMY**

This is an edited transcript of a taped interview with Htoelwiwar with a middle-aged male farmer from the Mehplet Doe area of Hlaing Bwe Township, in March 1999.

This year, what are you doing about paddy?

This year we couldn’t do a thing, so we haven’t got enough for our needs. We didn’t grow paddy [for lack of water]. Nothing.

So what will you eat this year?

We couldn’t plant paddy for our food, so if we can get rice grain that’s distributed, we’ll eat that.1 We have to go and carry it back. If people give [rice aid], we’ll pound it [to make porridge which will make the rice last longer] and eat it.

If they don’t give aid, what’ll you do?

If they don’t, I don’t know... A lot of people will drop dead. If they die, I’ll die. If we die, we die. How can you live just on water? Even if you just eat fish paste you can’t make it for more than a week.

Can’t you raise some livestock for income?

If you can buy animals, you can raise animals. But you need a lot of money to be able to do that, and if you haven’t got it, you can’t. The Burma army is a heavy burden. They demand money once per month. Sometimes 400, sometimes 500 [kyat].

So can you sell stuff? Necklaces?

I don’t have necklaces. Nothing. Just a string necklace. Nobody wants to buy that! People sell cattle. I’ve sold all of mine already.

How many people do you have to take care of?

Four. [This year we won’t have] a lot of food for four people. But our love and strength can’t be broken. For other people it’s the same.

Is there a way for you all to go and get food from the monks?

The monks can’t help us. They only have enough for themselves.

Are other villagers suffering as badly as you?

Oh yeah, everyone. Not one family that I know has enough food right now. This year there’s a lot of illness too.

Is there medicine?

How could there be medicine?! Before, people came here once, then they left. They didn’t give a lot. They came once and took care of people one time and went away. I took anti-malaria medicine at that time but it wasn’t effective.

If you had money, where would you go to buy grain?

If we had money, we’d have to go to Huay Shan. It’s far. We don’t dare go. We’re afraid of the army. Anyway, we don’t have money. Half a basket is 1200-1300 [kyat]. One pyi is 150. It’s really difficult to get rice grain this year. We can’t even find salt anymore. A chicken would cost you 1500 [kyat]. If we can’t eat, we’ll just starve.

Can you ask for paddy from other villagers?

Ah! There isn’t a lot of anything. One elder begged from other people, out of starvation. He had no paddy left and couldn’t look after his family. But he didn’t get any. Some people have fled. If you have no paddy, you don’t dare stay.

So won’t you go to [a refugee camp in] Thailand?

We could, but how would my family eat [along the way]?! If I take them there, won’t they end up dying somewhere in rebel territory? We could all end up dead together.

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1 This reference is to emergency cross-border assistance provided by NGOs.
2 It is typical for people in Burma to store wealth as gold jewelry, which is easily transported, hidden and traded for other goods. Its value is stable, in contrast to Burma’s unreliable currency.
3 This reference is to cross-border mobile medical teams organized by some agencies based in Thailand.
4 One pyi is about 2.4 litres liquid measure of rice. At the time of this interview, one pyi/pow low-grade rice was selling in the cities for about 100 kyat. Thus the interviewees identify that in his area there is about a 50% mark-up on the urban price. Due to regional shortages, grain must be transported into rural areas from elsewhere.
“After 1996 prices increased daily. Children’s school fees also increased. I had to borrow from my sister to put my daughter in school. We had to work in the army camp, making furniture. Sometimes we were fed, mostly we were not. Sometimes when the soldiers were on maneuvers, both my son and I had to serve as porters...carrying rations and shells. Army columns moved through the villages eating up the crops.

Sometimes when we could not give them money or go to work, we would pretend to be sick. Sometimes we had to hide. It is difficult to get food...

As we had to work for them so much we couldn’t earn a living. We couldn’t pay our debts. I had no money left for labor exemption fees, porter fees, school fees nor for food. Finally, leaving our daughter with her aunty, our three remaining family members came here.

We have yet to receive rations...” “Khaing Maung Maung,” a 44 year man who recently arrived at a refugee camp in Thailand, on his life as a subsistence laborer in Burma.

“My writing hand broken. My rice pot smashed. My right to write, right to a livelihood, right to have contact with people...all were lost. I want to write. I want to write true articles. For ten whole years, whatever I observed, whatever I saw, whatever I heard, whatever I knew, I had to stifle it all. I could no longer bear it. So I left. I will write. I will speak.” Prominent Burmese author Maung Thara who recently arrived in Thailand, on his life as a banned writer in Burma from his article entitled “Introduction to the people,” in The New Era Journal, August 1999 (BI Translation).

“[As Myanmar economy is characteristically based on agriculture, the more cultivation work is extended, the greater the yield is; the more sufficient paddy is for domestic consumption, the more paddy surplus can be exported and the more foreign currency can be earned for the State.” An August 6th article in the government-controlled New Light Myanmar newspaper outlining the regime’s philosophy of agricultural development.

“Anti-govt elements conspiring to create disturbances: Moves made to sow discord within Tatmadaw [and] incite unrest based on rise in commodity prices.” Headline from the New Light of Myanmar, 14 August 1999