

BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007
CHAPTER 6

**DEPRIVATION OF
LIVELIHOOD**

“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 circumstances beyond his control.”

- Article 25 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

6.1 Introduction

In Burma, military rule, first established in 1962, has effectively destroyed a once robust economy through decades of misguided economic policies, rampant corruption, cronyism, and disproportionate spending on the military. In the face of this continued military rule, Burma's population faced significant and increasing difficulties in maintaining an adequate standard of living throughout 2007.

According to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Burma's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was only US\$ 281 in 2006, making it one of the ten poorest countries in the world.¹ It has been estimated that 95 percent of the population lives on less than US\$1 a day, with a staggering 90 percent surviving on less than 65 cents.² Tony Banbury, the regional director of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) has estimated that at least five million people in the country are going hungry,³ with reported malnutrition rates of more than thirty percent in children under five.⁴ (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health). In some parts of the country the situation is even more acute. The UN has identified more than 70 percent of the population of Chin State as living in poverty, with 40 percent simply not having enough food to live on.⁵ In Arakan State 60 percent of under five-year-olds are moderately underweight.⁶

In early 2007, the UN calculated that the average share of household expenditure spent on food was as much as 70 percent of the entire family budget; a damning indictment of the very low income level of the population.⁷ Furthermore, Burma is the only country in the world where beriberi, caused by a deficiency of thiamine (vitamin B1), is one of the major causes of infant mortality. This is directly attributable to the inability of families to diversify their food intake.⁸

Burma's wealth of natural resources would provide a more prudent government with enough cash to plug its fiscal holes, bring inflation under control, and start making infrastructure investments. For instance, large and exploitable natural gas fields in the Gulf of Martaban and the Bay of Bengal could deliver income of around US\$2 billion a year for the next 40 years. Most of the gas currently being exported is piped to Thailand, with supplies about to come online subject to a three-way bidding war between China, India and South Korea. However, profit from these industries, as well as other State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)-controlled extractive sectors, such as gems and timber, are largely used to sustain the elite and their military apparatus. Further significant sums are swallowed up in grandiose vanity projects that do not properly address infrastructure, human and economic development, nor health and education.

The junta is widely estimated to spend upwards of 40 percent of its national budget on defence alone.⁹ In recent years, the SPDC has also spent large sums of money on moving the site of its capital out of Rangoon. The regime initiated this abrupt relocation to the remote jungle town of Naypyidaw in November 2005, including the forcible transfer of many civil servants. While the motives for this move remain unclear, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated that *"about 1–2 percent of GDP has been spent in the last few years by the [junta] on the move"*.¹⁰ Other economists have estimated that investment in Naypyidaw is absorbing all recent increases in gas revenues and more.¹¹ Another high cost projects taking place in 2007 included a planned nuclear reactor, which the SPDC maintains will be for the development of medical isotopes, however, in a country which spends only 0.8 percent of GDP on the healthcare sector, this seems highly questionable.¹² It is far more likely that the SPDC has designs on becoming a nuclear power to serve its military as much as for the self-declared prestige that this would give them. Other such projects have also included a high-tech IT development labelled *"Yadanabon Cyber City,"* built on 10,000 acres of isolated land, much of which was confiscated from local residents; and a new military hill station resort to the northeast of Mandalay, replete with luxury villas, an artificial beach and a *"man-made stretch of water to lap onto it"*, replicas of famous pagodas and palaces, and a

new airport.¹³ Meanwhile, the health and education sectors continue to be grossly underfunded. The budget for the Ministry of Health in the 2006/2007 fiscal year accounted for just 0.8 percent of the total national budget while allocations for the Ministry of Education comprised 1.9 percent of SPDC expenditure.¹⁴ (For more information, see Chapter 12: Right to Education, and Chapter 7: Right to Health).

SPDC spending has, for many years, been in excess of its capacity for revenue generation. The SPDC has largely responded to these fiscal deficits through the running of the Central Bank's printing presses, leading to rapid monetary expansion, and concomitantly chronic levels of inflation within the country of roughly 50 percent in early 2007. Levels of inflation far outstrip average wage levels, creating widespread food insecurity for many, due to factors of affordability rather than of supply. In 2007, the SPDC did attempt to address its fiscal deficits, but none of these measures touched upon the central problem of extravagant and wasteful spending. Instead, the junta attempted to improve its collection of taxes, including mounting investigations into tax exemption by major companies.¹⁵ Nevertheless, crony companies, such as the Htoo Company owned by Tay Za (a close personal friend and ally of Senior General Than Shwe), the Aung Thura Mann Company, which belongs to a son of General Shwe Mahn, and the Zakabar Khin Shwe, a business owned by the paramilitary *Swan Arr Shin* ('masters of physical force'), continued to receive discretionary tax exemptions.¹⁶

With SPDC borrowing from the Central Bank increasing a further 20 percent in the first six months of 2007,¹⁷ and world oil prices rising significantly, the SPDC took a dramatic turn in its efforts to balance its books in August 2007. A significant drain on SPDC reserves comes via its need to import processed fuels. Though a net producer of raw energy through its extraction of natural gas, Burma's worn-out and obsolete refining infrastructure means that it must import much of its usable fuel.¹⁸ The SPDC has a monopoly on the sale of fuel, which it sells at SPDC-controlled stations at subsidised rates. However, on 15 August 2007, and without warning, the SPDC increased the price of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) five-fold, doubled the cost of diesel, and increased petrol prices by two thirds. Not only did the hike make transport costs prohibitive, but with fuel forming the basis of all basic commodity prices, the cost of food and other goods soon began to increase dramatically. The price rises precipitated small demonstrations which snowballed into the largest protests seen in the country since the 1988 uprising. The SPDC's response was one of violence and repression, absent of any attempt to address the economic demands of the protest participants.¹⁹ Moreover, the crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, and the unprecedented worldwide attention that it received, provided additional stress to Burma's fragile economy with the tourism industry, which employs approximately 500,000 people, losing considerable revenue due to a sharp drop in foreign visitor levels.²⁰ (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution - The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

Not only has the financing of the armed forces created macroeconomic instability throughout the country, but a significant percentage of the population have seen their livelihoods threatened or destroyed as a result of systematic human rights violations perpetrated by the military against civilians. These violations, which include forced labour, forced rice procurement, arbitrary taxation and extortion, forced relocation, land confiscation, and looting of money and property, are endemic in rural and, in particular, ethnic minority areas. Under the SPDC's, somewhat ironically entitled, 'Self-Reliance Program' the army are effectively permitted to commit such abuses so as not to put too much of a strain on the SPDC's central reserves.

State-sponsored agricultural projects, such as the nationwide enforced cultivation of bio-fuel crops, and restrictions on trade imposed in an attempt to control rice prices, have placed additional burdens on the already strained resources of rural populations.

The situation is even more acute in some ethnic minority areas, where armed resistance to the regime has persisted. In these areas, the SPDC and its proxy ceasefire armies destroy civilian villages and food supplies, and block access to crops. Throughout 2007, such attacks on civilian communities were particularly widespread in northern Karen State where SPDC army soldiers persisted in their long-standing offensive. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). Despite its standard policy of non-disclosure, in June 2007, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was provoked to publicly condemn such actions, stating that:

*“The Myanmar armed forces have committed repeated abuses against men, women and children living in communities affected by armed conflict along the Thai-Myanmar border. These have included the large-scale destruction of food supplies and of means of production. The armed forces have severely restricted the population’s freedom of movement in these areas, making it impossible for many villagers to work in their fields. This has had a significant impact on the economy, aggravating an already precarious humanitarian situation. Furthermore, the armed forces have committed numerous acts of violence against people living in these areas, including murder, and subjected them to arbitrary arrest and detention. They have also forced villagers to directly support military operations or to leave their homes”.*²¹

6.2 Inflation

The budget deficit of the SPDC has risen from five percent of GDP in 1998 to seven percent in 2007.²² With SPDC spending, year upon year, consistently outstripping its capacity for revenue generation, financing is instead largely procured through loans from the Central Bank. However, these loans are only fundable through the 'running of the printing presses,' (i.e. the printing of more money). In 1988, there was 20 billion kyat circulating inside Burma. While the SPDC has not released any statistics on the matter since 1997, economists, using sources such as the consumer price index, have been able to estimate that the total amount of money in circulation stood at 1.3 trillion kyat by 2007.²³ Such monetary expansion has inevitably been accompanied by high levels of inflation. Widely accepted estimates claimed the rate of inflation in Burma to have reached chronic levels of between 50-60 percent by early 2007.²⁴

In recent years, the consistently upward trend in the cost of living faced by the citizens of Burma has been further aggravated by periodic jumps. Such spikes have come about, not only through the 'running of the printing presses', but also as a result of indiscriminate attempts to shift the SPDC's financial burden onto the Burmese population.

In October 2005, for instance, the SPDC increased fuel prices by almost 900 percent while drastically reducing fuel subsidies, leading to increases in fuel prices of almost 900 percent. The price of a gallon of petrol in November 2005 was 1,500 kyat, up from 180 kyat in the previous month.²⁵ Then, in April 2006, the SPDC announced a 10-fold salary increase for civil servants. The increase was largely financed through the printing of more money.²⁶ While middle and lower ranking civil servants were in desperate need of such a salary increase, the SPDC then announced that 10 percent of their incomes would be withheld and deposited into a bank account on their behalf, although they were not allowed to keep the bankbooks or access this money.²⁷ Fringe benefits such as free bus travel and electricity subsidies were also lost following the salary increase.²⁸ Meanwhile, the price of basic goods such as rice and tea increased by up to 30 percent within days of the pay increase.²⁹ As a result, the ostensible benefits of the salary hike were largely negated for civil servants and merely served to further impoverish the private sector. In May 2006, the SPDC Ministry of Electric Power increased the rate for electricity 1,000 percent. This move immediately followed the pay increase for civil servants, and the abolition of subsidised rates for those civil servants.³⁰ By April 2007, a year after the salary increase, the National League for Democracy (NLD) reported that, "*Basic commodity prices have increased from 30 to 60 percent since the military regime promoted a salary increase for government workers in April 2006,*" concluding that "*Inflation is the critical source of the current economic crisis*".³¹

Meanwhile, salaries, particularly for those in the private sector, remain miserably low, averaging about 1,000 kyat a day in urban areas and as low as 300 kyat per day in rural areas. Research, published by Save the Children UK in 2007, found that while the average household income in Burma was an equivalent of approximately US\$1.10 per day, the average cost of just feeding a household stood at US\$1.15.³² While the SPDC's own fiscal mismanagement has been the leading factor in inflation, the regime's limited attempts to control prices have ignored the root causes and have instead been aimed at regulating prices; fining and punishing those traders who charge more than the set price for certain goods, in spite of the fact that the SPDC often sets such prices far below the prevailing market rates. In July 2007, the SPDC responded to the dramatic increase in rice prices over the previous two months by ordering the sale price of the commodity to be frozen at markets in Rangoon. One trader working out of the Bayinnaung Rice Market in Rangoon reported that;

*“Rice that comes in from the districts [outside Rangoon] is bought by the Myanmar Rice Traders Association [MRTA] and they pay only 18,000 kyat [per 50 kg sack] ... Because of that, no one wants to bring rice to Rangoon and none of the brokerage houses are trading. You can say that the business has come to a standstill, they say that they are doing so that they can sell the rice on to the public and keep prices low, but it is too late to try to control the prices”.*³³

Despite heavy controls over freedom of expression and assembly, there were numerous incidents in the first half of 2007 in which people felt moved to protest their plight in the face of sky rocketing prices. The 88 Generation Students’ Group organised a letter writing campaign in which people were encouraged to air their grievances in letters addressed to Senior General Than Shwe. The ‘Open Heart’ campaign, as it was called, included letters from pensioners which stated that, *“[t]he pension I receive now is not even enough for a meal, we have fulfilled our duty for our country, but the government [has] failed to take responsibility for us”*. A young girl living with her grandmother similarly listed her daily expenditures which amounted to 600 kyat, which she had compared to their daily income of only 400 kyat. Likewise, a monk wrote that he no longer wanted to receive alms from people, as the prices for ordinary staple goods had increased drastically in the preceding months, and that the population was largely unable to continue to support the monastic community in addition to their own families.³⁴

On 22 February 2007, a group of approximately 25 people protested peacefully in a Rangoon market displaying placards reading *“Down with consumer prices,”* and *“We want 24 hour electricity”*. Nine persons were arrested in relation to this protest, though were all later released on 27 February without charge.³⁵ In the same month, U Than Zein, a retired seaman, who later asserted he had no interest in politics, was compelled to post some home made satirical posters on his fence, after his daughter had told him four eggs were selling for an exorbitant 300 kyat. He was arrested that day and charged with causing a public disturbance, although the case was later closed and Than Zein freed.³⁶ Similarly, on 19 June 2007, Maung Kyaw Naing was arrested, in Taungup Township, Arakan State after staging a solo protest against the prevailing high levels of inflation and unemployment. His mother and sister were also arrested in relation to the protest. All three were later released.³⁷

In March 2007, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) reported that *“macroeconomic stability [in Burma] remains elusive with monetized fiscal deficits feeding high inflation.”* The ADB report highlighted the fact that wastefulness and disorganization in the management of public and capital spending associated with a shift of the new capital to Naypyidaw have attributed to poor economic performance.³⁸ Likewise, in its evaluation of Burma’s economic problems, the IMF concluded that the SPDC could rein in inflation, and boost growth to 10 percent a year, if it undertook reforms such as cutting unproductive state spending, unifying a complicated *“multiple exchange rate”* system, and liberalising agriculture to give farmers more freedom to grow and sell their crops. It also called for targeted subsidies to address *“deteriorating social-economic conditions”*.³⁹

In the face of this advice, on 15 August 2007, the SPDC increased the price of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) five-fold, doubled the cost of diesel, and increased petrol prices by two thirds. In Burma, the SPDC has a monopoly on the sale of fuel, and the effect of this unexpected rise in the price of rationed fuel on the general population was immediate, with fuel prices forming the foundation of all basic commodity prices. Charles Petrie, the UN Resident Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator in Burma, spoke out against the hike stating; *“It’s a policy that has been applied in a draconian matter that doesn’t take into account the fact that people lack the reserves necessary to absorb such shocks”*.⁴⁰

Compressed Natural Gas, in which the steepest increase was introduced, had been widely promoted by the SPDC for use in commercial vehicles, and the majority of public buses in Burma's urban areas are powered by it. As a result, bus fares increased sharply. The majority of urban populations in Burma, especially the poor, live in satellite towns, after the junta razed the slums in the cities and forcibly relocated the homeless in 1988. Many people living in these areas therefore generally need to commute to their places of work. Those earning around 1,000 kyat a day had to pay anywhere up to 800 kyat for transport, leaving just 200 kyat a day for food and other living costs.⁴¹ Those who could not afford this were forced to walk, some of whom had to walk for up to two hours in each direction. Meanwhile, others, unwilling to do this, opted to sleep out on the streets rather than travel to and from their homes each day.⁴²

Moreover, approximately 70 percent of Burma's population work in the agricultural sector (most of whom work at the subsistence level) and many depend on various machineries for irrigation, processing, and transportation of crops, all of which require fuel. Shops and businesses in Burma are also heavily reliant on fuel to power their generators during the frequent electricity blackouts.

Almost immediately, the price of basic commodities increased significantly, and continued to do so for some time following the price increases. An unofficial consumer price index, maintained by an unnamed but reportedly leading Rangoon-based economic journal, based on "a basket of essential commodities" showed a 35 percent spike in prices as a result of the fuel price increase. "These price rises are crippling for most residents in Rangoon," one Burmese economist reported, "They could hardly afford food before, [but] now their weekly budget for essential foodstuffs is going to buy even less - their purchasing power has been reduced by more than 20 percent virtually overnight".⁴³ In September 2007, a UN economist based in Rangoon told the *Asia Times Online* on condition of anonymity that he "estimate[s] that now the vast majority of Burmese people are spending over 80 percent of their monthly salaries on food".⁴⁴

The steep increases in the price of fuel and basic commodities also caused hardship for Burma's HIV/AIDS patients. HIV/AIDS activist Daw Phyu Phyu Thin reported that the cost of a month's course of antiretroviral drugs (ARV) had increased from 30,000 kyat to 37,000 kyat, and patients living outside Rangoon were finding it ever more difficult to afford to travel to Rangoon for treatment.⁴⁵ (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health).

The fuel price hikes served to catalyze the population of Rangoon, and other major towns and cities, into taking to the streets to protest their plight. Beginning August, and continuing into October 2007, the people of Burma took to the streets in the hundreds of thousands. It has been estimated that at least 227 distinct protests were staged throughout the country, during this time, in a total of 66 towns and cities.⁴⁶ The protests were met with violence, repression and intimidation by the SPDC and its agents, the exaction of which is documented throughout this *Yearbook*, and with specific detail in Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement.

6.3 Additional Factors Affecting Persons Livelihoods

Electricity Supply

In December 2005, the SPDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to build a series of five hydroelectric dams along the Salween River where it passes through Burma. Rather than providing electricity for the local population, it has been estimated that Thailand will receive as much as 85-90 percent of the energy produced by these dams, and the SPDC will in turn receive significant profit.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the areas around the proposed dam sites in Karen and Shan States have seen the large scale forced relocation of surrounding communities, as well as increased incidents of abuse such as forced labour. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription, Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights, and Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

Meanwhile, funding for power generation and infrastructure within Burma continued to be grossly neglected by the SPDC in 2007. Just one of the dams currently being built on the Salween has a generating capacity three times that of all of Burma's current capacity, which in January 2006 was a trifling 845 Megawatts.⁴⁸ In April 2007, Bangkok-based independent commodities consultant, Juergen Hartz commented:

"It is hard to believe that a country as energy-rich as Burma has so little electricity, I wonder how many people realise that Burma's 55 million or so people have to make do with less than 7 percent of the electricity which its neighbour Thailand, with a population of 60 million, uses each year. Put into generating capacity figures, that's 1,800 megawatts, compared with Thailand's 26,000 megawatts. The whole of Burma doesn't produce enough electricity to run the air conditioners in Bangkok".⁴⁹

In May 2006, the SPDC Ministry of Electric Power increased the rate for electricity by 1,000 percent. Despite this significant hike, there was no discernible improvement in supply through 2007. For many in Rangoon, the lack of power has also meant a lack of water as most pumps are electric. *"We normally get about six hours [of electricity] per day, but we can't do anything since it usually comes on at night. For the last two weeks, we only get three hours a day"*, reported Daw Htwe Htwe, a 50-year-old Rangoon housewife, who complained that the outages prevent her from cooking or cleaning.⁵⁰ In early 2006, a resident of Rangoon whose neighbourhood only received running water for six hours each day explained the difficulties that this had caused for them in stating that, *"[t]he timing of electricity supply and timing of government water supply has to coincide. Otherwise, we have to buy water to fill up our water tanks".⁵¹*

One unidentified UN Development Programme (UNDP) officer, stationed in Bangkok, stated off the record that:

"It does not take a lot of imagination to quantify the benefits of having an adequate and reliable electricity supply, however, in Burma's case the acute shortage of power right across such a large, populated country is damaging to all forms of development, economically, educationally and in health terms".⁵²

In April 2007, a Rangoon businessman reported *"Now we average about four hours per day with power in our industrial zone; about a 50 percent decline from eight hours per day in March. Many factory owners have to rely on generators mostly. The price of diesel is also going up now, but we have no choice".⁵³* Also In April 2007, another Rangoon resident lamented, *"We've had only nine hours of electricity in the last three days".⁵⁴* In July, Rangoon enjoyed a rare period of uninterrupted electricity as heavy monsoon rains gave the

country's hydropower plants a boost. For businesses, the timing of the surge was unfortunate as it coincided with an annual slump in sales.⁵⁵ By November 2007, electricity blackouts in Rangoon were once more a regular occurrence. *"When the electricity comes we are glad. Rice cookers are turned on but the supply is cut off abruptly leaving the rice half cooked"*, stated a resident of Lanmadaw Street in Rangoon. Moreover, areas previously classified as VIP areas by the Rangoon Divisional Electricity Department, such as Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone in Bahan Township, had been removed from the list and were suffering the same shortages as other townships.⁵⁶

On 12 April 2007, it was reported that the electricity supply to the whole of Myitkyina Township, Kachin State had been cut off. The electricity is supplied by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)-owned Mali Hka River Hydroelectric Power Plant. No reason was given for the power cut by either the KIO or the SPDC. While there are over 100,000 inhabitants in Myitkyina, the report stated that priority for electricity from the plant is given to SPDC military bases including Northern Regional Command Headquarters in Myitkyina, the homes of SPDC personnel, SPDC administrative offices and certain favoured civilians. Electricity blackouts are, unsurprisingly, common in the area.⁵⁷

Residents of Mon State and Pegu (Bago) Division also complained about a grossly insufficient and irregular electricity supply in February 2007, with power available only a few days a week. In Mon State, one resident reported that, *"Power supply is available when people sleep. It is not available when people need it most"*. Another resident of Thanbyuzayat Township commented that when power comes for a few hours the residents try to cook rice, but often the power cuts before the water has boiled, meaning that valuable rice is wasted. Many are forced to rely on candles for lighting: *"Eat dinner before dusk because the candles are expensive. That's why I eat dinner and sleep early"* a Mudon resident said.⁵⁸ Similarly, in December 2007, residents of Mon State complained that they were receiving electricity for just one day a week. Moreover, when electricity was available, frequently at night, the supply was reportedly so low that the voltage was not sufficient to run even the simplest of household appliances. While some villages in Mon State were investing heavily in infrastructure so that they would be capable of receiving electricity, others were reluctant, lacking faith in the SPDC's power supply, and as a result of the poor SPDC record in power supply, many residents of Mon State have, instead, been forced to turn to the private sector for their power supply.⁵⁹ Private company KTO (Ko Than Oo and Brothers Electric Mart) supplies electricity twice a day from 4:00 am to 7:00 am and again from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm to about ten villages in Ye Township. The cost of this service, however, is prohibitive for most, costing 700 kyat for one unit of electricity, rather than 50 kyat per unit from the SPDC.⁶⁰

Residents of Sittwe (Akyab), the capital Arakan State, have reported that they have not received any electricity from the SPDC for a decade. Instead, private companies sell power at 300 kyat per unit, compared to 25 kyat per unit charged in Rangoon, with electricity only supplied from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm, ironically coinciding with the SPDC's main propaganda push on state television. *"As soon as MRTV's evening news ends, the blackout starts"*, stated one Sittwe resident.⁶¹

In April 2007, it was reported that residents in Chin State were being charged 300,000 kyat by the authorities for the installation of electricity meter boxes, which are sold for 30,000 kyat in central Burma. The meter boxes are reportedly sold out of the office of SPDC Major San Aung, wherein buyers are made to promise not to discuss the price of the meter boxes. The cost was prohibitive for most residents who were unable to purchase the meter box anywhere else and therefore forced to forego electricity. *"They are making the poor people poorer. They come up with so many ideas to enrich themselves. But they push the people below the poverty line"*, stated one local.⁶²

In the face of constant power outages, many businesses across Burma, from small supply shops to large hotels, are forced to operate their own generators, increasing their costs significantly, in addition to contributing to noise and environmental pollution. As one photocopy shop owner reported, *“I now charge two different prices for photocopying: 20 kyat per page with government-supplied power and 50 kyat with our own generator”*.⁶³

Meanwhile, Naypyidaw and the larger SPDC army bases in central Burma are reported to receive an almost constant supply of power. In referring to Naypyidaw, one student commented, *“It’s very strange that all the roads are brightly lit even though they are almost deserted day and night, while the crowded roads in Rangoon have no lights”*.⁶⁴

Corruption

In 2007, the Berlin based NGO, Transparency International, a global coalition against corruption, ranked Burma, alongside Somalia, as the most corrupt polity in the world. In producing its listings, Transparency International ranks countries according to perceptions of the misuse of public power for private benefit, such as the bribery of public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds and the strength of anti-corruption policies.⁶⁵ Likewise, the World Bank’s, *1996-2006 Worldwide Governance Indicators* report, released in 2007, ranked Burma, alongside North Korea and Somalia, at bottom in its rankings of a range of variables such as control of corruption and government effectiveness.⁶⁶

With SPDC spending on public sector wages woefully inadequate, there is clearly an incentive in allowing such corruption to go largely unchecked. It not only enables the SPDC to provide its military cadres with economic opportunities at no direct cost to itself, but placates and sustains all levels of the civil service, from doctors down to army recruits.

According to the *Irrawaddy*, the Ministry of Telecommunications, Post and Telegraph is reputed to be one of the most corrupt of the SPDC’s departments. Staff members are known to accept bribes to install phone lines and approve mobile phones. Bribery is also rife within the Ministry of Education, where theses for doctorate and master degrees can be purchased on a thriving black market. Also according to the *Irrawaddy*, a thesis paper guaranteed to earn a master’s degree can reportedly be bought for approximately 300,000 kyat.⁶⁷ Similarly, corruption is rife in the public health sector, where doctors’ pay is so inadequate that they are forced to either extort money from those seeking treatment, or else moonlight by running private clinics after hours on top of their jobs in public hospitals.

SPDC officials also abuse their positions in order to profit from the lucrative black market trade in fuel. With a quota of two gallons (7.5 litres) per day per person at official petrol stations in Rangoon, and just six gallons (22.7 litres) per week in Mandalay, Burma is run on fuel bought on the black market. According to an unidentified Rangoon-based economist, regional SPDC army commanders, who receive a quota of 90,000 gallons a month, get rich because they sell at least 50 percent of their quota on the black market, with profits shared amongst their senior commanders. Similarly, when the security forces apprehend smugglers bringing fuel into the country, the seized fuel is typically sold by the armed forces for their own profit.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, in late 2006, the SPDC did initiate an anti graft campaign, with a particular focus on the Customs Department, wherein corruption no doubt results in significant amounts of lost revenue for central SPDC reserves. In early 2007, over 100 custom officials were arrested in the purge and were sentenced to lengthy jail terms, including the department’s director-general who was sentenced to 66 year’s imprisonment. Nearly 400 other officials were released without charge, with sources from inside the department claiming the wholesale releases were driven by fears that further investigations would

ultimately expose corruption cases involving Daw Kyaing Kyaing, wife of SPDC chief Senior General Than Shwe.⁶⁹

In February 2007, the initiative was widened to focus on other departments and ministries within the SPDC, with Prime Minister Soe Win warning judges against corruption, particularly the accepting of bribes. In addition, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Energy joined the Finance Ministry, Forestry Ministry as well as the Yangon City Development Committee, in inviting complaints from the public about malpractice. The Ministry of Home Affairs reported that all investigations would be dealt with by the ministry's special inspection team, while the Ministry of Energy stated that, "*Quick and punitive action will be taken against staff at all levels for any malpractice including the practice of bribery and corruption, breaking of rules and regulations or abuse of power and position for self-interest and official harassment*".⁷⁰

Many in Burma are understandably reluctant to make such complaints, given the SPDC's proven record of intimidation, harassment and counter-suing complainants against State officials. In January 2007, a group of farmers who had made a complaint against local officials reported that their complaint had been simply ignored. The farmers, from Plomyit village, Aunglan (Myayde) Township, Magwe Division, had reported the officials to the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) for embezzling State funds intended for agricultural loans, but reported that no action was taken against the officials.⁷¹

Moribund Financial Sector

As a result of its budgetary deficit, SPDC spending is predominantly financed through Central Bank loans, as well as through significant borrowing from private banks within the country. In order to minimise repayments on these loans, the junta has instituted strict limits on rates of interest within the country. These interest rates are set well below rates of inflation, meaning that, in real terms, funds kept in a bank actually provide a negative return to depositors.⁷²

As a result, many people choose to deposit money with 'private finance companies', which are little more than gambling syndicates and pyramid/ponzi schemes. When these schemes failed in 2002, the financial sector in Burma collapsed, quickly spreading to banks that refused customers the right to withdraw their money while at the same time demanding the immediate repayment of loans. By mid 2003 the private banking sector had collapsed, precipitating two years of negative economic growth.⁷³

Those banks that were able to reopen following the crisis have continued to be undermined in their operations by the demands of the SPDC. In financing SPDC loans, little funds are left as credit for the private sector. The agricultural sector is particularly disenfranchised with 80 percent of those working in the rural economy not having access to any form of formal credit. Moreover, macroeconomic instability means that what credit is available is generally only short term credit and therefore unsuitable for any form of industrial development. Meanwhile, personal credit is typically only made available to the well-connected cronies of the SPDC.⁷⁴

In late 2006, only 20 percent of the Burmese population held bank accounts, and in 2007 the Central Bank directed all private facilities to limit the amount of deposits they could accept from their customers. The directive was believed to have been issued because SPDC-imposed interest rate limits meant that no profit could be made on loaning these deposits out again.⁷⁵

Divergent Exchange Rates

In Burma, the SPDC fixes the official exchange rate, tying the kyat to the IMF's 'Special Drawing Rights' at a rate roughly equivalent to six kyat to the dollar (US\$1:K6). Meanwhile, Burma's unofficial or 'black market' exchange rate, which is far more reflective of the true value of the kyat, has increased exponentially over the past decade. On 15 October 2007, for instance, this rate stood at US\$1:K1,325, over 200 times more than the official valuation, increasing from 240 kyat to the U.S. dollar a decade earlier.⁷⁶

Those able to access foreign exchange at the official rate (something only the very well-connected can do) can make immediate and sizeable profits by immediately selling it back into the black market. In addition, foreign exchange can be used to buy goods from abroad at prices far cheaper than anyone else can in Burma, vastly increasing an importer's profit margin, or simply providing the well-connected with access to distortedly cheap luxury goods.

The enormous divergence between official and unofficial exchange rates have led the SPDC to institute other, 'semi-official', rates, which fall somewhere between the two. For instance, a rate of US\$1:K450 applies to all funds brought into Burma by UN agencies and international NGOs (INGOs), as well as in calculating excise to be paid by many importers and exporters. Even these semi-official rates provide the regime with a ready means of profit, as UN agencies and INGOs provide the SPDC with foreign exchange at considerably less than half price. As a result, the SPDC directly profits from the efforts of these organizations who are working to alleviate the humanitarian situation in the country.⁷⁷

The effect of distorted exchange rates on the broader economy are immense, ranging from the extraordinary corruption incentive they promote, to the dramatic misallocation of resources to activities that do not match Burma's comparative advantage, but rather the channels carved out by the exchange rate. The crippling effects that such a system has on the economy are in urgent need of being addressed, however, as Sean Turnell of Burma Economic Watch (BEW) has stated, "*Such a reform program is unlikely from a regime that is clearly the existing system's leading beneficiary*".⁷⁸

Nevertheless, and perhaps as an attempt to combat revenue lost through illegal border trade, the SPDC did devalue the kyat for the purpose of calculating duties for cross border trade in February 2007. The Customs Department shifted from a rate 850 kyat to the dollar, to a rate more in line with economic reality of around 1,200 kyat to the dollar. The new rate reportedly only applies to goods traded through Burma's 13 border posts with Bangladesh, China, India and Thailand.⁷⁹

6.4 Economic Sanctions

On 2 August 2007, the United States (U.S.) President George W. Bush formally renewed economic sanctions against Burma which were first introduced in July 2003 under the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act. The Act bars all imports from Burma into U.S. markets, prohibits new investment in Burma, freezes all assets of high-level SPDC and Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) officials in the U.S., and bans the provision of financial services to Burma.⁸⁰

Following the violent SPDC suppression of peaceful demonstrations in September 2007, the U.S. announced further sanctions, specifically targeting the assets of 14 senior SPDC officials including junta supremo, Senior General Than Shwe,; Lieutenant General Thein Sein, the acting prime minister; and Vice Senior General Maung Aye, the commander of the army. The sanctions freeze any of their assets falling under U.S. jurisdiction and prohibit all U.S. citizens and U.S. companies from having business transactions with the 14 listed individuals.⁸¹

On 19 October 2007, President Bush announced even tighter targeted sanctions, adding 11 more SPDC officials, including 10 SPDC ministers, to the list of those whose assets are to be frozen. Bush also issued an Executive Order, targeting cronies of the regime, listing a further 12 individuals and entities for sanctions, including two Singaporean listed companies. Bush further ordered the U.S. Department of Commerce to tighten controls on exports to Burma; particularly on the export of dual-use goods and computers. Visa bans and measures were also implemented that aimed at stopping the U.S. import of gemstones from Burma through third countries.⁸²

Then, in December 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the Block Burmese JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act, cementing and tightening existing sanctions while also imposing further measures. The bill included the prohibition of Burma's rubies and high-quality jade from entering the U.S.; measures addressing attempts by gem traders to dodge U.S. sanctions by laundering gemstones in third countries; the freezing of assets of Burma's SPDC leaders; abolishing tax deductions for U.S. companies working in Burma; and measures to bar Burma's military leaders from using U.S. financial institutions in third countries to launder their money.⁸³ Upon final passage of the Act, congressional annual review and renewal of the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003 will no longer be necessary. It is widely expected that both the Senate and President will offer their full support to the JADE Act, at which time the legislation will go into effect.⁸⁴

The strengthening of sanctions against the sale of Burmese gems was hailed as a positive step by human rights groups and the Burmese pro-democracy movement alike. About 90 percent of the world's rubies can be traced back to Burma, and, together with other gems, constitute the third largest revenue earner for the regime, which tightly controls the entire industry. As Arvind Ganesane of Human Rights Watch (HRW) has stated, "[Gems] provide hundreds of millions of dollars to commit abuses, repress its own people and resist international pressure to change".⁸⁵ Moreover, 99 percent of a gemstone's value is said to come from the stone itself, with labour accounting for a mere one percent of its value. Supporters of the legislation, therefore, argue that the bill effectively targets the economic interests of the SPDC without significantly impacting the daily livelihoods of the Burmese population.⁸⁶

On 23 April 2007, the European Union (EU) also renewed its diplomatic and economic sanctions, first imposed in 1996, against Burma for another year, stating that the country was making no "tangible progress" in improving its deplorable human rights record. The sanctions included a ban on travel to Europe for senior SPDC officials, an assets freeze, a ban of arms sales to the country and a ban on all non-humanitarian financial and technical

assistance to the junta. The EU Common Position cites the lack of democratic transition, the SPDC's failure to allow an open and democratic National Convention, the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, harassment of the NLD and other political groups, the serious and widespread perpetration of human rights abuses, and the increased restrictions imposed upon NGOs and international organisations as grounds for extending the sanctions.⁸⁷

The EU, like the U.S., responded to the violent suppression of demonstrations by the SPDC in September 2007, by strengthening their sanctions. On 15 October 2007, EU Foreign Ministers agreed to impose visa bans and asset freezes on SPDC generals, officials and their relatives; a ban on imports that target Burma's timber, metals and gemstone sectors as well as investment in these sectors and export of equipment to be used in these sectors; and a study on further measures that could include a ban on all new investment in the country. The sanctions passed into effect on 19 November 2007 and covered 1,207 companies in Burma.⁸⁸

In May 2007, the EU and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed to initiate free trade talks, within which the issue of Burma was predicted to be the most significant obstacle. In November 2007, a group of European politicians vowed to oppose any free trade deals between the EU and ASEAN unless Burma makes democratic reforms.⁸⁹

Certain other nations were also moved to impose sanctions against Burma in response to the crackdown on protesters in September 2007. On 14 November 2007, Canada's foreign minister, Maxime Bernier, announced sanctions against Burma including a ban on all imports and exports to and from Burma except for humanitarian goods. The sanctions also banned new Canadian investment, the trade and transfer of technical data to Burma, and imposed a freeze on the assets of Burmese nationals in Canada connected to SPDC leaders.⁹⁰ On 24 October 2007, Australia introduced a ban on financial dealings with 418 named SPDC officials, their families and associates.⁹¹

The democratic opposition in Burma, including the NLD, is largely supportive of sanctions being imposed in Burma, and are clear in their belief that they are an appropriate mechanism given that the nature of the regime is typically to enrich itself at the expense of its populace. In Burma, the economy is widely dichotomised, and the average Burmese citizen lives at a bare subsistence level, meaning that their interaction with international economy is very low. It is rather the military elite and their cronies who interact with international economy. Moreover, the sanctions imposed against Burma, especially those enacted following the September 2007 demonstrations, are particularly well-targeted and thus largely circumvent negative comparisons with the ill-effects that blanket sanctions have had on the people of Iraq. Just as vitally, the sanctions are seen to offer support and legitimacy to those fighting for democracy inside the country.

Nevertheless, the SPDC has been able to minimise the impact of such sanctions for three main reasons. Importantly, Burma has resources such as oil and natural gas that everyone wants. Concurrently, the sanctions enacted are not far reaching enough, and vitally, they are not applied by those countries which support the regime the most. The result is that Burma's neighbours and allies continue to prop up the regime as they scramble for its rich energy reserves, just as Western energy companies continue to operate in conjunction with the regime inside the country.

While teak and gems have been targeted in the latest round of sanctions, their value to the regime has been significantly outweighed by that of oil and natural gas. In the fiscal year ending March 2007, the SPDC earned US\$2.16 billion from the export of natural gas alone, with foreign investment in the natural gas sector a record US\$471.5 million in the same period; accounting for over 60 percent of Burma's total foreign investment.⁹²

Under a grandfather clause, U.S. and EU sanctions permit pre-existing investments to continue, allowing energy companies such as Chevron and Total to continue to support the regime, by piping natural gas to Thailand. According to Total's CEO, Christophe de Margerie, the Yadana investment results in a yearly flow of revenue towards the SPDC as substantial as US\$360 million, yet the project has created only 270 jobs inside Burma.⁹³



A Burmese farmer and his son prepare a field for rice cultivation in Waw, about 130 kilometres north-east of Rangoon in June 2007. *[Photo: AFP/Getty Images]*

6.5 Labour Rights

Despite the existence and theoretical applicability of domestic laws designed to protect the rights of workers, the average worker in Burma continued to suffer under inadequate levels of pay and conditions, without any reasonable avenue for recourse, throughout 2007. The 1964 Law on Fundamental Workers Rights and the 1951 Factories Act contain numerous Articles for the protection of workers rights but are very rarely enforced by the courts. The existing laws proscribe a 35-hour, five-day working week for those in the public sector and a 44-hour six-day, working week for those in the private sector, with overtime pay obligatory beyond these hours. Workers are also entitled to no less than a 24-hour period of rest each week and a minimum of 21 paid days of leave per year. A nominal minimum wage for civil servants and workers in certain traditional industries of 100 kyat a day is far below subsistence levels.⁹⁴

Those employed outside of these sectors are not covered by such minimum wage provisions. In the private sector, market forces generally set wages; however, the SPDC pressures joint ventures to pay salaries no greater than those of ministers or other senior government employees, presumably to give the impression that the highest paid jobs in the country are those employed directly by the SPDC.⁹⁵

In the private sector, urban labourers earned approximately 500 to 1,000 kyat (US\$0.38 to US\$0.75) per day, while rural agricultural workers earned approximately half that rate during 2007. Women do not receive equal pay for equal work on a consistent basis. Moreover, despite being legally entitled to receive up to 26 weeks of maternity benefits; these benefits are frequently not accorded them.⁹⁶

While domestic law permits employers the right to summarily dismiss any worker without prior notice, the 1923 Labour Compensation Act requires that the terminated employee receive due compensation. However, the Act, having never been amended to account for inflation excludes all workers earning over 400 kyat per month.⁹⁷

Not only are the courts unlikely to uphold complaints made under labour laws, but there has been a reluctance to make such complaints through fear of losing a needed job as a result. Moreover, many workers in Burma are unaware of their rights and the SPDC is active in preventing their education in such areas. On 1 May 2007 a group of labour rights advocates organised a discussion on labour rights to be held at the American Centre in the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon. The SPDC's response was harsh. Ko Thurein Aung, one of the organisers, who was bringing a group of workers to the centre, was stopped by officials and arrested; the vehicle and workers were freed only after all publications on labour rights were removed. When the event went ahead there was a large SPDC security presence outside the Embassy. Three further organizers were arrested after the event had finished. Participants at a second meeting which was conducted in a house located in an industrial area were also arrested. In total 33 persons were arrested. While most were quickly released, six were held and charged with treason for forming an illegal organization and for having contact with other illegal organizations. On 5 July 2007, SPDC-controlled media alleged that Thurein Aung and others had received money from abroad to hold meetings with workers in order to discuss *"the difficulties they were facing in an exaggerated manner to create outrage [among the] workers and then to incite protests"*. When their cases went to court, their lawyers eventually deserted their cases under constant harassment from the authorities. In the first week of September, all six were found guilty of showing *"hatred or contempt"* for the regime. Some were also convicted of being members of illegal organizations and violating immigration laws. Thurein Aung, Wai Lin, Myo Min and Kyaw Win were sentenced to 28 years imprisonment, while Nyi Nyi Zaw and Kyaw Kyaw were each sentenced to 20 years in prison.⁹⁸

The right to form trade unions is still a legally recognised right within Burma under the Trade Unions Act of 1926. However, the act legislates that trade unions may only be formed with the prior consent of the regime, and in 2007 no legally-recognised independent trade unions existed within the country. Consequently, there were also no internationally affiliated unions. Moreover, seafarers working on foreign ships were prohibited from making any contact with the International Transport Worker's Federation. The Unlawful Associations Act of 1908 (amended in 1957), in addition to Order No. 2/88 and Order No. 6/88 provided the legal machinery for the SPDC to maintain its prohibition on the formation and activity of free and independent trade unions, with the junta continuing, throughout 2007, to label the Thai-based Federation of Trade Unions – Burma (FTUB) as a terrorist organisation, thus criminalizing any person or organization within the country who had contact with it. As no legal trade unions existed in 2007, workers were not afforded the right to organize and bargain collectively, and workers were generally prohibited from striking. (For more information, see Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press).

While the SPDC, its agents, cronies and allied ceasefire groups made significant profits on the sale of gems, conditions for workers in their mines have been reported to be horrendously poor and dangerous. Burma's gem mines are closed to foreign visitors and reliable information on them is hard to come by. However, a report by the *Telegraph* (UK), in July 2007, discovered that accidents are common and mines often collapse in the sandy ground. *"When it collapses they don't have time to save themselves,"* reported one person. The mines operate in 12-hour shifts around the clock, with some mines paying a daily wage of 1,150 kyat (US\$0.87), while others pay miners a commission based on what they find. One inhabitant of a mining town reported that *"The bosses mix methamphetamine with the drinking water to give the workers more power. It's common"*.⁹⁹

The minimum legal age for the employment of children in Burma is 13; however, this law, like most other labour rights laws, is rarely enforced. Children in urban centres are commonly employed in the informal sector in food preparation, street vending, garbage collection and light manufacturing. In rural areas, children must often work in their family's agricultural plots, assisting their parents and older siblings to bring in the harvest. In 2007, as in 2006, reports continued to emerge, testifying to an increase in child labour in the cities of Burma, as a result of the worsening economic situation.¹⁰⁰ It has been estimated that there are as many as 100,000 children working in teashops in Rangoon alone.¹⁰¹ While, *"In Mandalay, children of the age of 4, 5 and 6 work as waiters ... more and more children aged between 6 and 7 were working in restaurants. When I asked these children why their parents had not sent them to school, they said that their parents could not afford to. They had to drop out at the 2nd or 3rd grade. They can't even calculate the price of 3 or 4 cups of coffee,"* reported one Mandalay resident. Children can be hired for far less than an adult performing the same role.¹⁰² Meanwhile, unemployment in Burma is estimated to be around 30 percent, despite official figures of 10 percent, while many more are either underemployed or engaged in activities of very low productivity, such as subsistence farming.¹⁰³

6.6 Interference and Abuse in the Agricultural Sector

As the Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma stated in his report to the Human Rights Council in March 2007, “Some 75 [percent] of the population is engaged in agriculture (including fisheries, forestry and livestock), which accounts for 40 [percent] of the gross domestic product. Land and natural resource issues therefore lie at the heart of livelihoods in Myanmar”.¹⁰⁴ However, the SPDC has consistently and significantly hindered rural livelihoods through the imposition of centrally-decreed orders. More often than not, these have either been misguided, heedless of farmers’ needs, exploitative, or all three. The SPDC has also instituted or sanctioned further policies and actions which are solely designed to support the SPDC and its armed forces at the expense of farmers, who had been operating at levels of bare subsistence to begin with.

Right to Own Land

According to existing Burmese law, “The State is the sole owner of land. Only cultivation rights are recognized in the agricultural land and are not transferable without the permission of the authorities”.¹⁰⁵ As such, farmers are technically leaseholders on State property, and are tightly controlled in what they are permitted to do with that land. The regime last updated its rights and procedures relating to land management in September 1998. According to those regulations, land cannot be mortgaged, sold or otherwise transferred or divided without approval by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation’s Central Committee for the Management of Culturable [Sic.] Land, Fallow Land and Waste Land.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the law provides for numerous situations in which the State can immediately terminate a lease, leaving farmers with little security of tenure. While the Right to Cultivation Act of 1963 stipulated that household members can inherit the right to cultivate land, this requires the official permission of the Township and Village Land Committee along with that of the Settlement and Land Records Department. In many areas, such as in Karen State, the recognition of land ownership follows local customary law. One study, conducted in 2005, found that only 23 percent of Karen villagers surveyed held any government land deeds, while over 70 percent assumed their land rights through customary ownership or that assigned by village elders. The SPDC, along with the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), have exploited this situation to evict farmers who have inherited the land from their ancestors.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, Notification No. 4/78, which was enacted on 18 September 1978, declares that failure to sow the allotted land with the earmarked crops as directed by the SPDC, or failure to sell the full crop quota to the SPDC at the stipulated price, will result in confiscation of land.¹⁰⁸ In practice, both civilian and military powers evict farmers from their land under circumstances not even provided for by these abusive laws.

Moreover, no provisions are evident in the SPDC’s proposed constitution to provide for future secure land and housing rights of citizens, to protect the right to fair and just compensation as a result of legal or illegal land or property expropriation, or guarantee traditional practices of ethnic minorities in relation to land and natural resource management, such as collective property rights and swidden agriculture.

Given that land ownership laws are capriciously applied as a means to confiscate farmer’s land, it is unsurprising that the authorities are indifferent to any positive obligation placed on them by the plight of those made landless through events beyond their control. In March 2007, it was accused that residents of Kawa Township, Pegu Division were being exploited by local authorities through the mismanagement of land rights. Since the 1970s, these villagers, living near the Sittaung River estuary, have lost tracts of cultivable land to soil

erosion. At the same time, 6,000 acres of alluvial land created on the western bank of the Sittaung River has been divided between high-ranking members of the Pegu Division Peace and Development Council, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and the military. Civil and labour rights lawyer Aye Myint stated that local authorities generally sell the land to businessmen “to avoid legal restrictions imposed by the government.” The market value of the land was estimated to be around 600,000 kyat per acre.¹⁰⁹

Land Confiscation

Uncompensated land confiscation in Burma is common, and is often conducted at the behest of the SPDC for development purposes, and/or enforced as a result of a failure to meet the strictures of the SPDC’s Paddy Procurement Policy (for more information, see the following section on Forced Sale of Crops). In addition to such instances, land confiscation is pervasive in circumstances where both local military and civilian officials evict farmers from their land for a variety of purposes, frequently in the absence of any pretence at justification. Such purposes commonly include: to make way for the creation of new military camps; for the construction of new roads; for the development of military-run plantations, farms or other profit-making ventures; or to turn a profit by leasing that land back to the evicted farmers who must then work on their own farms as serfs to the SPDC; or for lease to SPDC-affiliated companies.

A direct correlation can be traced between an increased SPDC military presence in an area and an increase in incidents of land confiscation. According to Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), in Mon State alone, the Burmese junta has confiscated over 10,000 acres of land since 1995, when the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the SPDC entered into a ceasefire agreement.¹¹⁰

While this practice is most pervasive in ethnic minority areas, farmers throughout the country have no security of land tenure. Prominent lawyer and labour rights activist Aye Myint maintained that he was handling over 600 cases in March 2006, the majority of which were in complaint of land confiscation by the authorities. These cases generally derived from Rangoon, Pegu (Bago) and Irrawaddy Divisions. He reported that military groups and businessmen, who have close ties with the authorities, are mainly responsible for the land confiscation, and as a result of this he would only be able to try a small number of the cases in the Burmese courts.¹¹¹

When land is confiscated, farmers are almost never compensated for the loss of their land and livelihoods. Furthermore, they are often unable to earn income as a daily wage labourer in their area because military-run farms and plantations are generally reliant upon forced labour. The fact that these farmers themselves are frequently called upon to perform this forced labour is an additional and significant hindrance to their ability to seek alternative means of subsistence.

In northern Arakan State, the practice of confiscating land is particularly widespread and must be viewed within the context of a whole spectrum of abuses and discrimination suffered by the Muslim Rohingya minority. Within the townships of Rathedaung, Buthidaung and Maungdaw, in which the Rohingya constitute the majority, land is routinely confiscated for the purpose of establishing ‘model villages’. These villages are then populated (often forcibly) by Burman or Arakanese settlers, including the poor tempted by promises, retired civil servants, former prisoners, and former insurgents. It was reported in 2007 that there over 50 such model villages already established in northern Arakan State.¹¹²

Throughout 2007, the SPDC also moved forward with plans to establish six Special Economic Zones (SEZ) within the country as a means to attract direct foreign investment. Areas designated for the project are Thilawa Port in Rangoon, Moulmein in Mon State,

Myawaddy and Pa'an in Karen State, Kyauk Pyu in Arakan State and Pyin Oo Lwin in Mandalay Division. According to the announced plans, foreign investors making direct investment in the SEZs would be categorically exempted from taxation for anywhere between two to eight years.¹¹³ On 14 March 2007, it was reported that thousands of acres of paddy fields were being confiscated by the SPDC in the Thilawa SEZ, leaving thousands of farmers landless. The land requisitioned by the authorities extended into the adjoining townships of Thanlyin (Syriam) and Kyauktan. According to the Chinese news agency, Xinhua, the Thilawa SEZ, designed by Chinese experts, covers an area of 12.8 square kilometres, or 3,200 acres. Daw San Yi, 54, a resident of Bogyoke village, Syriam Township, committed suicide on 6 March 2007, after being evicted from her land. The confiscated land was reportedly auctioned to various Chinese, Japanese and Indian investors.¹¹⁴

Likewise, a 'cyber city' to be called Yadanabon Naypyidaw, currently being built near Maymyo, is being constructed on 7,000 acres of land confiscated from local villagers by the SPDC army.¹¹⁵

Given the callous and systematic nature by which the SPDC have confiscated land from the Burmese populous, depriving them of their livelihoods and offering little to no form of compensation in return, firms and nations attracted by favourable terms for foreign direct investment involving the use of land inside Burma, have a responsibility to ensure their investments are neither catalysts for nor the beneficiaries of such evictions.



Land originally belonging to U Sein Win of Sinkuly village in Hlegu Township, Rangoon Division, which was confiscated by the SPDC. [Photo: *The Burma Fund*]

Land Confiscation – partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 10 January 2007, NaSaKa (border security force) members stationed in Taung Bazaar, Buthidaung Township, confiscated five acres of farmland from Abdul Amin of Darbine Sara village. His land was subsequently returned to him, after paying a bribe of 350,000 kyat to the commander of NaSaKa Area #9.¹¹⁶

On 21 January 2007, approximately 55 Buddhist families from southern Arakan were resettled on land previously belonging to Muslim Rohingya residents of Longa Daung (Ywetnyo Daung) village in Buthidaung Township. Longa Daung village had been scheduled to become a model village and those resettled were reportedly impoverished families who had agreed to move after been given promises of new facilities by the authorities. The NaSaKa personnel confiscated approximately 37 acres of arable farmland from Abu Ahamed, 40, Ahamed, 60, and Mostafa, 60.¹¹⁷

On 27 January 2007, it was reported that the Western Military Command owned 1,071 acres of shrimp farms in Maungdaw Township, which they had previously confiscated from local residents. These farms are reportedly leased to local businessmen for significant profits. In 2007, their rent from 30 separate businessmen totalled 880 million kyat.¹¹⁸

On 27 March 2007, the SPDC army stationed in Buthidaung Township called a meeting for the villagers of Maung Nama, Magh Bill, Kwan Daine, Yet Nyo Daung, Thet Kin Manu, and Washilla Para. At the meeting it was announced that large swathes of land, used by the Rohingya villagers for paddy cultivation, would be confiscated and used to construct model villages for settlers from eastern Burma. The villagers were given no compensation for their loss of farmland or for what would have been their primary, if not only source of livelihoods.¹¹⁹

On 3 May 2007, a joint column of NaSaKa personnel and police officers forcefully requisitioned an irrigation dam used to irrigate paddy fields around Ngarang Chaung village in Buthidaung Township. Its owner, Abdu Sukkur, had built the dam himself, and was charging local farmers for the supply of water provided by his dam. Earlier in the year, Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) Chairman, Kaung Sein Hla, had attempted to buy the dam. When Abdu refused his request he reported the situation to the NaSaKa, claiming that Abdu was extorting huge sums from local farmers in order to receive water. After the confiscation of the dam, control of the water supply was handed over to Kaung Sein Hla.¹²⁰

In the first week of June 2007, the Maung Nama VPDC Chairman, U Nay Naing, confiscated 1.6 acres of arable farm land from Mostafa Khatun in Buthidaung Township. U Nay Naing had previously requested for her to either abandon her land or pay him 200,000 kyat. Mostafa Khatun was subsequently informed by the Chairman that the land had been confiscated on the orders of higher authorities. She has four children who depended on the piece of land for their survival.¹²¹

On 20 June 2007, the NaSaKa seized 140 acres of arable farmland in Shwe Zarr (Shuzar Para) village tract, and 70 acres in Ashika Para (Poung Zar), village tract, both in Maungdaw Township. The land was confiscated from Rohingya farmers for use as model villages.¹²²

On 25 June 2007, NaSaKa officers stationed at Kyaungdaung camp in NaSaKa Area #9, Buthidaung Township, seized over 100 acres of land from the Rohingya inhabitants of Tinmay village. They asserted the land, largely used for growing paddy, was needed for the construction of a pagoda. Villagers attested that there were numerous other sites in the vicinity on which a pagoda could have been built.¹²³

On 2 July 2007, Ramree Island TPDC Chairman, U Maung Than Oo, ordered the confiscation of approximately eight square miles of offshore arable land in Raychawan. The land was used by villagers to cultivate onion and peanut crops during the winter. U Maung Than Oo informed villagers that the TPDC now needed the land to raise funds through onion, peanut and corn cultivation.¹²⁴

On 24 July 2007, it was reported that Kyauktaw-based Military Operations Command (MOC) #9 was forcing local villagers to work on the land it had previously confiscated from them. In all, MOC #9 had reportedly confiscated 282 acres of farmland from local residents. On 22 July, local villagers were ordered to cultivate paddy on 90 of these acres, and to procure 100 tins (1,050 kg / 2,310 lbs) of paddy per acre – a highly unrealistic expectation. The villages included under this order were:

1. Mahamatmuni village;
2. Tharakthapran village;
3. Kyaukway Taungnyo village; and
4. Kyawsuma village.¹²⁵

On 23 and 24 July 2007, Burmese and Bangladeshi officials met to discuss the proposition of leasing land in Arakan State to Bangladesh for commercial ventures. An agreement was reached for the leasing of 50,000 acres of arable land. Several acres of land owned by locals were previously confiscated by the Burmese army throughout the state, without compensation. Many people determined that the land would be leased to Bangladesh.¹²⁶

Chin State

In January 2007, an SPDC Major from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #50, stationed in PaSaing village, Matupi Township, confiscated a three acre tea field from Satu villager U Lehe, for as the site of a new army camp.¹²⁷

Kachin State

On 16 May 2007, it was reported that the military authorities in Myitkyina had claimed ownership of a civilian house belonging to U Tin Aung, and then placed it up for auction. At the time of the report, U Tin Aung's family had refused to remove, despite being issued with a warrant by the authorities.¹²⁸

On 12 July 2007, it was reported that SPDC Artillery Battalion (AB) #372, under Major Ye Yint Thwe, seized over 5,000 acres of land from villagers in Mayan village, Kachin State. The villagers use the land to grow paddy and djenkol bean (*Pithecellobium labatum*); the harvest season for which is the end of July. The army has permitted 50 villagers to continue to farm the land, although they must now present 'Crop Field Identity Cards', issued by Battalion Commander Major Ye Yint Thwe, to troops stationed around the plantations, and pay a tax of 25 djenkol beans for every sack harvested.¹²⁹

On 27 July 2007, it was reported that the SPDC, in conjunction with crony company, Yuzana Co Ltd, had confiscated thousands of acres of land from farmers in western Kachin State, without offering any compensation to the owners. Yuzana has reportedly been granted ownership of the land by the SPDC with little concern for residents and farmers, "*They simply seized my farmland and my house, saying it extended beyond their project areas,*" reported a resident of Naung Mi village who was among those who lost his farmland.¹³⁰

On 23 August 2007, it was reported that local residents were being forced to work in paddy fields confiscated by SPDC army soldiers based in Bhamo District. The paddy fields were confiscated because the farmers were unable to meet the battalion's demand of 15 sacks

(750 kg / 1,650 lbs) of rice per acre every year. Beginning June, villagers from Numlang, Hkatawng Pa, Dali and Tawpe villages were forced to work in the army-owned paddy fields between Daw Hpum Yang Town and Myothit village on a daily basis. Aung Thein from LIB #438 had also issued orders that the villagers' oxen and buffaloes had to work in the army's paddy fields 30 times without any payment to the owners.¹³¹

Karen State

On 24 May 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had confiscated farmland around Naungbo village, in Kawkareik Township, for use by the newly-formed ceasefire group, the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), headed by Brigadier General Htain Maung. The land has reportedly been earmarked for a township development project, for which local villagers have also been forced to pay large sums towards financing.¹³²

On 9 July 2007, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reported the continuing effects of the previous year's land confiscations on villagers living in the vicinity of the recently-established Htee Poh Nyah Lih SPDC army camp in Thaton District. Battalion Commander Colonel Kyaw Than of AB #314 had commenced work on the camp near Gkya Dt'Raw village on 1 September 2006, and in doing so, had ordered the confiscation of the surrounding plantations and rice fields. Previously, the majority of villagers had relied upon toddy palm, rubber and fruit plantations for their livelihoods. However, following the confiscation of their land these villagers were told they no longer had permission to freely collect rubber or toddy from the trees. SPDC soldiers then ransacked the plantations, plundering fruit and cutting down whole trees for use as fire and construction wood. The military also built a brick kiln on the confiscated land and used the newly felled plantation trees as fuel to bake the bricks. Some villagers were told that they would be permitted to collect their rubber if they paid a fee of 75,000 kyat. Although, as most could not afford this amount they were left without access to their former means of livelihood, and the loss of income has left them unable to meet their subsistence needs. The names of the villagers and the amount of land confiscated from each were:

1. Poo Tee Maung Win, 5 acres of rice fields, 11 acres of rubber plantation, 3 acres of toddy plantation and 1 acre of durian plantation;
2. Saw Tee Pah, 2 acres of toddy plantation;
3. Saw Thaw Shwe, 1.5 acres of rubber and toddy plantation;
4. Saw Gkaw La, 2 acres of rubber and toddy plantation;
5. Saw Maung Leh, 3 acres of rubber plantation;
6. Saw Pah La Thah, 3 acres of rubber plantation;
7. Saw Sheh Poe, 3 acres of rubber plantation;
8. Saw Thah Lah, 2.5 acres of rubber plantation;
9. Saw Soe Mya, 2 acres of rubber plantation;
10. Naw Lah Aye, 1 acre of rubber plantation;
11. Saw Poe Noo, 2 acres of rubber plantation;
12. Saw Pee La, 1 acre of toddy and bamboo plantation;
13. Saw Maung Sien, 2 acres of rubber and durian plantation;
14. Saw Dt'Wah Dih, 1.5 acre of rubber plantation;
15. Saw Maung Tu, 2 acres of rubber plantation;
16. Saw Pah Thoo Gklay, 1.5 acres of rubber and toddy plantation;
17. Saw Lay Neh, 1.5 acres of rubber and toddy plantation;
18. Saw Kyaw Bpyu, 8 acres of rubber plantation and 2 acres of toddy plantation;
19. Saw Sah Lwin, 2 acres of toddy plantation;
20. Naw Aye Paw, 2 acres of rice fields;
21. Saw Than Hlah, 4 acres of rubber plantation;
22. Saw Pah Bweh, 7 acres of rubber plantation;
23. Saw Dt'Gku, 5 acres of rubber plantation;

24. Saw Nyah Htee, 5 acres of durian and bamboo plantation;
25. Saw Aung Yay, 10 acres of wood and bamboo plantation;
26. Saw Pah Gkaw, 2 acres of rubber plantation;
27. Naw Mu Kyi, 5 acres of wood and bamboo plantation;
28. Saw Htin Shwe, 4 acres of toddy plantation; and
29. Saw Kah Sheih, 5 acres of rubber plantation.¹³³

Magwe Division

In August 2007, villagers in Pakokku Township reported the uncompensated seizure of their land for a new rail link between Pakokku and Kyan Khin in Pegu Division. The authorities responsible refused to delay the project until the farmers' crops could be harvested. *"The land seized from me had a value of about 400,000 kyat. All the crops we just planted were crushed,"* reported one farmer.¹³⁴

Mandalay Division

On 12 January 2007, a total of 230 farmers, from the Kyatpyay area of Pyinmana, sent a letter of complaint to Vice Senior General Maung Aye, after local authorities had confiscated their lands and compensated them with smaller plots of un-arable low lying land. One complainant informed DVB, *"We can't even produce paddy for ourselves. Our farms are gone. We have to buy the poorest quality rice to eat"*. Staff at the Ministry for Agriculture and Irrigation refused to comment on the matter when contacted by DVB.¹³⁵

On 16 November 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers operating under Captain Ye Mann Aung and Corporal Wunna had confiscated approximately 1,700 acres of land to make way for the construction of a factory in Meikhtila Township, Mandalay Division. The land had previously belonged to 765 villagers from Magyisu, Kyaung Ywa and Shan Te villages.¹³⁶

Mon State

On 19 January 2007, it was reported that Nai That Cho, the VPDC chairman of Duya village, Ye Township, had entered negotiations for the sale of around 300 acres of village commons. He reportedly asked for more than one million kyat from an unnamed company that wants to build a rubber plantation on the land. One villager asserted at the time, *"We objected to it being sold. The pasture provides food for grazing animals, wood for fuel and poor villagers go in for cultivation there"*.¹³⁷

In April, it was reported that AB #315 had increased a tax it levied for the drawing of rubber sap from plantations in Thanbyuzayat Township, by 50 kyat a plant to 500 kyat per plant. The report stated that the plantations, 350 acres of them, had earlier been seized by the military, although it did not specify the date when this had taken place. At that time, the original landowners had been informed that they would be allowed to continue drawing rubber sap for the next five years, on condition they pay the battalion for the privilege. After that time, they would not longer be permitted to draw sap from their former plantations. No mention was made in the report if this time had elapsed.¹³⁸

In early May 2007, AB #315, under the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Myint Shein, confiscated over 160 acres of rubber plantations in Wakali village, Thanbyuzayat Township. The seized lands reportedly contained over 50,000 rubber plants, which had belonged to 26 different owners. These owners were permitted to continue their operations as they paid 750 kyat per plant each year to the battalion.¹³⁹

On 5 June 2007, it was reported that Infantry Battalion (IB) #31 had confiscated land flanking a mile-long stretch of road in Khaw-Zar sub-Township. The land was seized along both sides of the road and reaching 40 feet into local plantations. It was reported that the battalion aimed to sell the land in separate plots on which to construct houses. One unnamed source indicated Lieutenant General Maung Bo had instigated the development so that he could force people to live in close proximity to the battalion, which is stationed at the end of the road, providing the soldiers with a buffer against attacks, and a ready supply of villagers to exploit for forced labour and extortion. Local residents were forced to clean the confiscated land on 31 May 2007. At the time of this report, the army had promised to pay the original landowners one third of the sales price, although locals had stated that they did not expect this promise to materialize.¹⁴⁰

On 2 August 2007, it was reported that LIB #586 had ceased the issuance of rubber tapping concessions to farmers in Ye Township who had been forced off their own land. The land, some 305 acres which encompassed around 50,000 rubber trees, was originally seized from local villagers in 2001. The new orders permit only four of those 28 previous landowners to continue their operations, and at an inflated cost. The remaining land was leased to an unnamed businessman who reportedly maintains close ties with the military.¹⁴¹



This land, once owned by U Thaug Shwe of Kannartali village in Hlaingthayar Township, Rangoon Division was confiscated by the SPDC. [Photo: *The Burma Fund*]

Pegu Division

On 7 June 2007, Pegu Division Police Commander, Myo Swe Win, informed the residents of Kangyi village that their farmland was to be confiscated and redistributed to them in four acre plots which was to be decided by a lottery. A total of 4,894 acres of farmland was seized by the authorities causing heavy losses for owners of large farmlands. While reports suggested possible clashes between farmers, the police commander warned that those who disagreed with the redistribution of farmland would be liable to seven years imprisonment for destroying their residence.¹⁴²

Rangoon Division

On 14 March 2007, it was reported that thousands of acres of rice fields in Thilawa, and the neighbouring townships of Syriam (Thanlyin) and Kyauktan were being confiscated for the development of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The seized land was sold to Chinese, Japanese and Indian investors by auction, leaving thousands of farmers landless. One farmer committed suicide after losing her land. The Thilawa SEZ reportedly covers an area of 3,200 acres.¹⁴³

On 15 November 2007, it was reported that a Rangoon Railway Station in downtown Rangoon was to be relocated to East Dagon Township. A villager near the site of the new station reported that some villagers' land had been taken over by authorities.¹⁴⁴

Sagaing Division

On 12 April 2007, the homes of four families in Kalay were demolished by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #229, so that a military training ground could be built on the site. The land and property confiscated for the army training ground was reportedly worth around 140 million kyat, and the families of Mr. Vum Ling, Mr. Hriang Kep, Mr. Zakam, and Mr. Than Cung, were initially promised new land. At the time this incident was reported on 19 May 2008, no such arrangements had been made.¹⁴⁵

On 18 May 2007, it was reported that over 400 houses belonging to locals were to be confiscated and demolished by the SPDC to extend the Kalay airport and Kalay-Tahan main road in Sagaing Division. The SPDC evicted over 300 households adjacent to the airport. *"The victims are under severe stress and pressure because they believe there is no way they will get compensation for their property,"* a resident of Kalay reported.¹⁴⁶

Shan State

In February 2007, it was reported that LIB #224 had seized the forested land around Ahkhaday village, causing hardship for many villages that relied upon the forest for their livelihoods. Following the land confiscation, local residents were forced to purchase their wood from the army, which the wives of the soldiers also reportedly use to produce charcoal, which they also sell to the villagers.¹⁴⁷

On 21 June 2007, U Maung Maung and U Maung Nyu, residents of Mong Yu village near Burma's border trade town of Muse in northeastern Shan State were arrested for disobeying SPDC eviction orders. It was reported that 26 roadside households in Mong Yu village were being forcibly relocated as part of the junta's Border Trade Zone project. The authorities have not offered any alternative accommodation or compensation to those who they evicted.¹⁴⁸

Tenasserim Division

On 23 March 2007, SPDC-affiliated oil palm, rubber and cashew businesses, operating in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division, reportedly confiscated orchards and grazing grounds owned by Ya-ngeh villagers, without payment of any form of compensation. Furthermore, they imposed a fine of 5,000 kyat for every sapling in those fields eaten by the villagers' livestock.¹⁴⁹

Forced Sale of Crops

One way in which the SPDC has responded to the high cost of supporting its military is through the forcible procurement of rations to feed its armed forces. Under this Paddy Procurement Policy, farmers are ordered to sell a predetermined quota of their harvest to the military at reduced costs, usually around one third the market rate, but sometimes considerably less. While the SPDC officially announced an end to the Paddy Procurement Policy in 2003, the practice has in reality continued unabated. At a press conference in January 2006, a representative of the Shan Relief and Development Committee (SRDC) asserted that, *“the Burmese army continues collecting paddy from local farmers [in Mong Nai Township of Shan State], using force if met with any resistance”*.¹⁵⁰

To take but one example, farmers in parts of Thaton District, Karen State must give eight baskets (168 kg / 368 lb) of paddy to SPDC army soldiers for each acre under cultivation. As KHRG point out:

“Even when weather conditions are favourable, which has not been the case for the past few years, and when the villagers are free to access their fields (which also has not been the case for the past few years), this amounts to being, at best, more than ten percent of their entire harvest, and at worst much more”.¹⁵¹

Moreover, as the quota is set by acreage rather than actual yield, so those with failed harvests due to flooding or the regime’s inept authoritarian agricultural policies can find themselves in a situation of having to borrow money to buy rice to pay for the ‘tax’ of a harvest that does not exist.¹⁵²

The most cynical aspect of this Paddy Procurement Program is that not all of the rice procured from farmers is used to feed the armed forces. Rather much of it is exported for SPDC profit. The SPDC maintains a monopoly on all rice exports, and a significant source of paddy is that which is extorted from farmers under this policy. On other occasions, SPDC army commanders sell off their supplies for profit, expecting their soldiers to then demand what they need from local farmers.

Forced Sale of Crops - partial list of incidents 2007

On 3 January 2007, it was reported that authorities in Mudon Township, Mon State had announced that they would ban all local rice mills from operating if they did not receive 30,000 baskets (630 tonnes / 616 ton) of paddy from the township. It was further reported that, not only had the military been collecting paddy from rice mills, but the TPDC authorities were demanding two baskets per acre from farmers. The price offered for the paddy was said to only be 2,000 kyat per basket, compared to the prevailing market value of 6,000 kyat.¹⁵³

On 6 January 2007, it was reported that the authorities in Kyaik Mayaw, Paung and Moulmein Townships, Mon State, had procured 60,000 baskets (1,260 tonnes / 1,232 ton) of paddy from local farmers at less than half the market price. In the same three townships, rice mills were forced to pay ‘taxes’ of between 3,750-7,500 kg each.¹⁵⁴

On 13 January 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had prohibited the transport of rice in Paung Township, Mon State, as they had been unable to procure their demanded rations of 60,000 tins (630 tonnes / 616 ton) of paddy. The authorities had demanded that farmers provide two tins of paddy per acre, for which they were to be paid less than half the market rate. Farmers were particularly reluctant to submit to the authorities’ demands as their crops had been devastated by flooding, and doing so would not have left them with enough for themselves.¹⁵⁵

On 19 January 2007, it was reported that farmers in Kengtung Township, eastern Shan State had been forced to sell rice to a military logistics unit at below-market prices. *“The military leader did not explain what kind of action would be taken if we refused, but farmers began selling their rice because of fear,”* reported one farmer from Kengtung Township. While the market price for rice was 200 kyat per kilogram, the military offered a price of only 100 kyat per kilogram. Moreover, military purchasers complained about the quality of the rice provided and asked for greater quantities at no additional charge. Farmers in this area were forced to sell the military three baskets of paddy for every acre of farmland under cultivation.¹⁵⁶

At the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, farmers in Senwi Township were forced to sell set quotas of rice to SPDC army soldiers from IB #69. A refugee arriving in Thailand reported that farmers in Nam Zaang Zok village, including her family, were required to sell ten baskets (210 kg / 460 lbs) of paddy for each acre of land they farmed. They were only given 6,000 kyat for every ten baskets they sold, at a time when the market prices would have fetched 12,000 kyat for ten baskets.¹⁵⁷

At the end of 2006, SPDC army units in several townships of eastern Shan State issued orders requiring farmers to sell more rice to the authorities in 2007, at the rate of five baskets for every acre of land under cultivation. This was an increase of two baskets an acre over what they were obliged to provide in 2006. The townships who received this order were Kengtung, Mong Khat, Mong Yang, Mong Payak, Mong Yawng, and Tachilek. The rice was to be sold to the military at a rate of 100 kyat per kilogram, which was only half the prevailing market rate. The weight of one basket of rice was set by the soldiers at 33 kilograms, considerably higher than the standard 25 kg, and only very good quality rice was accepted. Many farmers were unable to produce enough rice in accordance with the acreage they cultivated and had to buy or borrow from others to fill up their quotas and sell them to the authorities.¹⁵⁸

In early January 2007, the SPDC initiated its paddy procurement in Sittwe and Mrauk U Townships of Arakan State. The army was reported to be paying the local market price, unlike in previous years. Although, restrictions on the movement of rice ensured that prices remained low.¹⁵⁹

On 16 February 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, had ordered each rice mill owner to hand over 10 “mounds” (357 kg / 786 lbs) of paddy at the rate of 4,000 kyat per mound, which was only half the market rate. Unsurprisingly, rice mill owners were reluctant to sell the paddy, with production low due to floods destroying the crop. One farmer complained, *“The army and [the] NaSaKa have sufficient ration[s], which they grow in the confiscated lands of [the] Rohingya. Why do they collect rice or paddy from the villagers under the alleged reason of their ration?”*¹⁶⁰

On 11 July 2007, in Kyauk Pyu Township, Arakan State, members of the army, police force, VPDC and TPDC, in addition to representatives of the Oo Paine Limited Company - which, according to *Kaladan News* is owned and controlled by the military - began handing out cash advances to farmers for coming paddy season. The move was believed to have been a pre-emptive way of committing farmers into selling their paddy to the authorities in the coming year. A VPDC member reported that the authorities forced farmers of all villages in Kyauk Pyu Township to take the money and threatened that if they didn't, they would be punished.¹⁶¹

On 6 November 2007, it was reported that TPDC officials in Mudon Township, Mon State, had announced they would be collecting 25 kg of paddy per acre from local farmers' current harvests. Late heavy rains in October were expected to produce reduced yields, with the harvest down 20 percent from 2006, nevertheless demands were still being made based on acreage, with no alterations to accommodate the reduced yields.¹⁶²

On 26 November 2007, SPDC army authorities summoned paddy dealers from each township of Arakan State to the Western Command Headquarters located in Sittwe and informed them that they would be forcibly procuring over 4,000 tons of paddy for their troops from the current harvest.¹⁶³

On 30 November 2007, it was reported that the NaSaKa had been forcibly purchasing paddy from the farmers in Arakan State at lower than market prices. NaSaKa personnel in Area #9 employed two agents, namely Ayub, 40, and Abdu Samat, 55, to buy paddy from farmers of northern Buthidaung Township and paying only 120,000 to 130,000 kyat per 100 *tauns* (1,300 kg / 2,860 lbs) at a time when 100 *tauns* of paddy was reportedly valued between 150,000 and 160,000 kyat on the open market.¹⁶⁴

On 10 December 2007, the SPDC Northern Command, based in Bhamo Township, Kachin State began their seasonal forced rice procurement. Under threat of having their lands confiscated, farmers were forced to sell two baskets of paddy per acre for only 5,000 kyat, which was considerably less than the market price of 8,000 kyat for the same volume.¹⁶⁵

Enforced Cultivation and Dry Season Paddy Crops

Paddy farmers in Burma predominantly engage in one of two types of cultivation, generally dependant on whether they are situated in the hills or on the plains. Both systems are premised on the ability of farmers to only raise one crop in the one field per year. However, throughout 2007, as in previous years, the SPDC has been forcibly promoting the cultivation of a second rice crop each year, in an apparent attempt to increase paddy production throughout the country. The actions of the SPDC doubtlessly infer that the junta's intent is to ensure enough paddy for its dual needs of army rations and export for profit. In spite of its Paddy Procurement Policy and monopoly on rice exports, the SPDC promotes its agenda of producing enough rice inside Burma to meet the future demands of a growing population, pledging self-sufficiency for a population double the size of the current one.¹⁶⁶

Dry season paddy cultivation is enforced by the SPDC even in areas where there is simply not enough rainfall or irrigation to permit such a practice. Naturally, this places considerable strain on both farmers and their land. Farmers are forced to construct additional dams and irrigation canals to ensure that the summer paddy receives an adequate water supply, all without compensation. Many have been forced to invest in expensive fertilizers, pesticides, and farm machinery necessary for summer cultivation. These are not offered freely to the farmers, but must instead be bought from the military, often at inflated prices. In Arakan State, in 2007, farmers reported the price of diesel to be 5,000 kyat per gallon (3.8 litres) and engine oil to cost 9,000 kyat per gallon (3.8 litres), while a bag of fertilizer was a further 15,000 kyat.¹⁶⁷ Farmers were therefore unable to recover their costs or earn a profit if they took on a dry season paddy project.

Farmers must also provide the additional labour of planting, tending to, and harvesting their dry season crops. Furthermore, the effect on the soil of double-cropping can be crippling. Farmers who do not buy the necessary materials are not able to partake in the summer paddy program and their land, officially designated for double-cropping, is confiscated and given to a family who could afford the additional costs. In January 2007, a farmer from Nanpoat village, Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, reported that all paddy farmers from the surrounding area were being forced grow 15 acres of summer paddy, stating that:

"It is not suitable to grow paddy in Kachin State in summer. If we grow rice in summer, the soil will be unusable to grow the crop in the rainy season. So we don't really want to grow [it]. But they said our farming permission would be revoked if we didn't grow it".¹⁶⁸

Along with summer paddy, farmers in Burma have variously been forced to plant crops such as physic nut, tea, sesame and sunflower, as well as different and expensive varieties of rice, all under central SPDC directives. Little concern is given for the wishes and needs of individual farmers, nor is the suitability of the climate taken into account. Moreover, farmers are generally given little instruction as to how to tend their crop, and reports have highlighted the low quality of seeds forcibly sold to farmers by the SPDC. In April 2007, the Office of the UN Resident Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator in Burma reported that SPDC *"policies of 'directed' agricultural production have resulted in depleting yields for small farmers, who are ever more unable to pay for the inputs they are obliged to purchase on credit"*.¹⁶⁹

In August 2007, it was reported that an SPDC program promoting the cultivation of a new strain of hybrid rice in areas of Shan State undergoing opium crop substitution, had resulted in four consecutive years of poor harvests and driven many farmers either into heavy debt or having to abandon their farms altogether. While hybrid rice can have an increased yield of 15-20 percent over traditional paddy varieties, in order to achieve these results, there is a heavy reliance on fertilizers and pesticides, additional water and often mechanized farming equipment, all of which are either in short supply or beyond the financial reach of most farmers in Burma, the majority of whom operate at the subsistence level. One SPDC official from the Ministry of Agriculture in northern Shan State reported:

"Sinn shweli [generic name for hybrid rice varieties imported from China's Yunnan and Sichuan provinces] seeds need a lot of water and fertilizers, otherwise a low quantity of rice is produced. Shan State has little flat land and there is often not enough water to grow sinn shweli rice. In the view of agriculture officers, sinn shweli rice is not suitable for northern Shan State, but we have to pursue the policy and follow the orders of our superiors".¹⁷⁰

To make matters worse, the instructions for the only available fertilizers and pesticides are all in Chinese, unreadable to most in Shan State. Meanwhile, the SPDC, Chinese businesspeople and ethnic ceasefire and militia group leaders have made significant profits through the buying and selling of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, which the SPDC forces farmers to purchase from them. Given that the farmers are also forced into cultivating summer crops, the financial burden has proved simply too much for many. Farmers have been forced to sell their land, in many instances to the same Chinese businesspeople who sold them the seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. On other occasions land is simply confiscated by militia groups or local businesspeople working with the SPDC so as to create large commercial farms.

According to an article published in the *Asia Times Online*, almost all of the rice produced under the double-cropping program is slated for the export market to China, even as local communities suffer a declining standard of living and subsist without enough food to feed themselves. The SPDC's enthusiasm for the rice is apparently both a result of a desire to increase agricultural exports to China and enrich the personal business interests of the officials and military officers involved in the trade. The new commander of the Northeast Military Command, Major General Aung Than Htun, is reportedly responsible for the issuance of business permits to Chinese companies involved in the importation of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and farming machinery, as well as for companies involved in commercial farming and the export of rice to China. Chinese companies also reportedly *"donate"* two hectares of land to the military or government departments when they lease land from indebted local farmers.¹⁷¹

The most widespread program of forced cultivation instituted by the SPDC during 2007 was that of the bio-diesel crop, physic nut; being planted in two varieties throughout the country: jatropha and castor. In December 2005, the head of the Rangoon Division Peace and Development Council (DPDC), Lieutenant General Myint Swe, announced the SPDC's new plan to cultivate no less than 50,000 acres of physic nut in each of Burma's nine military

divisions.¹⁷² Soon after, reports from around the country began to emerge of land confiscation, forced labour and the enforced cultivation of physic nut crops. The project was later reported to have been expanded massively to cultivate a total of 8.36 million acres across the country by the end of 2009. In August 2006, the SPDC Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation declared that 1.2 million acres of farmland had already been brought under cultivation of physic nut.¹⁷³

Throughout 2007, communities in all parts of the country continued to be under orders to plant jatropha and castor. Villagers were ordered to buy a set amount of seeds from the authorities at exorbitant and inconsistently arbitrary prices. Every available bit of space has been expected to be utilised, with roadsides and gardens being used alongside farms. Both jatropha and castor are generally considered to be potentially dangerous crops and thus should not be grown in close proximity to homes where children and livestock may eat the seeds, which are known to be toxic with their ingestion potentially fatal. The belated acknowledgment of this fact, with reports of school children dying in at least one area, has resulted in some TPDCs issuing orders that the seeds should not be planted in public spaces such as schools.¹⁷⁴

While climatic conditions in some parts Burma are ideal for cultivating physic nut, the environment in many regions where the project has been implemented is far from suitable. According to the Centre for Jatropha Promotion and Biodiesel, the optimal annual rainfall for the cultivation of jatropha ranges from 300 to 1,000 mm.¹⁷⁵ Much of Burma, however, receives far higher annual rainfall levels than this. According to reports, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has urged the regime to study the suitability of the plant for Burma's diverse agro-environments.¹⁷⁶ Despite such warnings, the abject failure of crops in many parts of Burma in 2006, and the impact the program has had on basic food security, the SPDC was unrelenting in its plans throughout 2007. For instance, physic nut plantations had largely failed throughout Chin State in previous years, and an SPDC survey in January 2007 had revealed the climate and soil in Chin State to be ill suited to the crop. Nevertheless, orders were issued anew in 2007 for the planting of jatropha throughout the state.¹⁷⁷ Those who failed to cultivate the assigned number of seeds have been liable to punishment, as have those who publicly criticise the scheme.¹⁷⁸

Enforced Cultivation and Dry Season Paddy Crops - partial list of incidents 2007

Arakan State

In February 2007, it was reported that many farmers in Mrauk U Township had been forced to cultivate summer paddy. TPDC chairman, U Hla Yee, ordered the following villages to participate on the dry season cultivation. U Hla Yee informed farmers that those unable or unwilling to comply would have their farms confiscated:

1. Paung Duck village;
2. Pauk Taw Byint village;
3. Tean Nyo village; and
4. Sin Owe Gri village.

One local resident remonstrated that, in order to cultivate paddy in the dry season, farmers would have to borrow a water pump to provide water for the paddy, and that the costs of fuel and fertiliser required would leave them unable to cover their costs. Meanwhile, another farmer reported:

"We would like to accept the government's program to cultivate paddy during the dry season to promote our yearly earnings, but it is impossible to cultivate paddy in the dry season in our area because we have no mechanisms to completely undertake such a project".¹⁷⁹

On 1 April 2007, at a meeting convened by SPDC officials in Buthidaung Township, village chairmen were instructed to oversee the clearing of land for physic nut plantations and to collect money from local residents for the cost of physic nut saplings. The same villagers had also been compelled to purchase and plant seeds in 2006. Following the meeting, VPDC members began collecting funds from villagers. Each household was forced to pay between 5,000 and 20,000 kyat, depending upon the size of the family and its financial status. Authorities also ordered that each village provide 10 labourers each day for the clearing of weeds from plantations.¹⁸⁰

On 28 April 2007, the Maungdaw Township TPDC issued directives that every family in the township must participate in the planting and cultivation of physic nut crops. The number of saplings a household was expected to plant depended on their family incomes. Generally, poor villagers were ordered to plant 50 physic nut saplings, middle income families were instructed to plant 150 saplings, and wealthier families, 250 saplings. The villagers were told that anyone failing to do so would be punished or fined. The authorities further instructed that any villager who owned fallow land should use it for the cultivation of physic nuts or face having that land confiscated. Some uncultivated land was subsequently taken into the possession of the SPDC. Physic nut harvests in the same area in 2006 were reported to be unsuccessful.¹⁸¹

On 19 May 2007, Major Zaw Zaw, the commander of NaSaKa Area #8, ordered the residents of Inn Din village, Maungdaw Township, to purchase physic nut and rubber seedlings at a cost of between 4,000 and 7,000 kyat, depending on the household's financial status. Once purchased, the villagers were then ordered to plant their seedlings at plantations that were owned by the NaSaKa.¹⁸²

On 11 December 2007, the Maungdaw Township SPDC agricultural officer ordered farmers to grow sunflowers amongst other extra crops in their farms. According to a local villager, the agriculture department provided farmers with one kilogram of sunflower seeds per acre, demanding 2,500 kyat for every kilogram of seeds that they were given. Similarly, on 14 December 2007, an unidentified Tactical Operations Commander based in Buthidaung ordered the VPDC chairmen of all model villages in the area to grow sunflower and subsidiary crops in their farmlands.¹⁸³

Chin State

In the first week of January 2007, the chairman of the Tiddim Township TPDC convened a meeting with all VPDC chairmen in the township. At the meeting, village chairmen were instructed to provide funds for the planting of jatropha seeds in the area. Tuisenphai village and Thinglei village, for instance, subsequently submitted 35,000 kyat in accordance with the quota they were set. The planting was required to be completed by the end of March 2007.¹⁸⁴

On 5 January 2007, it was reported that villagers in Paletwa and Matupi Townships were being forced to labour on numerous SPDC-run projects including the planting of jatropha, negatively impacting their ability to tend to their own livelihoods.¹⁸⁵

On 24 February 2007, it was reported that the Thangtlang Township TPDC Chairman, U Lai Too, had collected 4,000 kyat from each household in the township for the replanting of jatropha plants. It was reported that similar announcements were expected to follow in Falam and Haka Townships. At the time of this report, villages had not yet received their seeds, and there was much speculation as to whether they would receive the same variety as in previous years. Physic nut plantations had largely failed throughout the state in previous years, and an SPDC survey in January 2007 had revealed the climate and soil in Chin State to be ill-suited to the crop.¹⁸⁶

On 21 April 2007, it was reported that farmers in Falam Township were being compelled to buy a new variety of rice seeds called “*Shwe Pyi Aye*” (‘Peaceful Golden Land’) at a cost of 3,750 kyat a tin (12.5 kg / 27.5 lbs) that they were forced to plant in their fields. Authorities required each village to purchase between 40 and 60 tins of the seed. Local varieties of rice seeds would have cost the farmers a much reduced 2,500 kyat per tin. The authorities provided no information about how to cultivate the new seeds or whether to plant in flat irrigated fields in hill fields. In many instances, the introduction of new paddy varieties has proved disastrous for local farmers where local climatic and soil conditions have proved ill-suited to the new seeds, which has ultimately resulted in reduced yields.¹⁸⁷

On 3 July 2007, it was reported that 85 villages in Thangtlang Township had been threatened with a fine of 10,000 kyat or imprisonment if they failed to cultivate at least five acres of jatropha in their farms. *“The villagers are purchasing the seeds from TPDC office and the seeds have to be sowed in farms belonging to villagers. We feel that the plantation project will fail as it had earlier,”* commented one villager in the township.¹⁸⁸

On 30 July 2007, it was reported that civil servants in Chin State were being forced to replant over 7,000 acres of jatropha trees, previously destroyed in a 2005 forest fire. In June 2007, Mr. Khuang Lian Thang, chairman of the Falam Township TPDC, had conducted an inspection of the jatropha projects in remote areas of Falam Township, which resulted in a directive being issued for civil servants to replant jatropha in Lung Rang and Tlang Zar villages. Since that time, it was reported that State employees had attended to their office duties for only three days a week, with offices sometimes closed for the entire week as the staff were busy planting the seeds. Civil servants were also forced to spend their own money to buy jatropha seeds from the TPDC office.¹⁸⁹

On 30 August 2007, it was reported that, TPDC Chairman U Lai To, had issued renewed orders, to the residents of Thangtlang Township, to purchase both jatropha and tea seeds from the authorities. Households were ordered to pay 8,000 kyat for half a kilogram of both tea and jatropha seeds, which they were directed to sow over two acres for each crop. The directive was reported to have originated from Major General Hung Ngai, the new Tactical Operations Commander stationed in Hakha. While the market price of jatropha seeds was 6,000 kyat a kilogram and tea seed, 8,000 kyat, it was mandatory for locals to buy tea and jatropha seeds from local administrative offices.¹⁹⁰

Kachin State

In January 2007, one farmer from Nanpoat village, Mohnyin Township reported that all rice farmers from the surrounding area were being forced grow 15 acres of summer paddy. He complained, *“It is not suitable to grow paddy in Kachin State in summer. If we grow rice in summer, the soil will be unusable to grow the crop in the rainy season. So we don’t really want to grow. But they said our farming permission would be revoked if we didn’t grow it”*. An official from the Mohnyin Township agricultural office admitted farmers had been forced to plant summer crops but stated that, *“We asked them to grow the crop they like; anything that will suit their lands”*.¹⁹¹

On 19 February 2007, the Village Administrative Office (VAO) of Pa La Na village, on the outskirts of Myitkyina, issued a written notification concerning the cultivation of summer paddy in the area. The notification was signed by the village head, U Win Naing, and stated that while owners of rubber plantations in the area had already agreed to contribute 2,000 kyat towards the project, the VAO was required to collect further funding from local residents.¹⁹²

On 17 August 2007, it was reported that residents in Mansi Township were being forced to labour for the SPDC on a continual basis, including being forced to work on castor oil plantations. One Mansi resident explained:

"People from our area are often forced to labour not only on Saturday but also on Friday and other days. We are forced to labour whenever they, the SPDC, want. Even today, we have to clear [the bushes from] beside the road for growing castor oil plants. Every quarter has been forced to do so in turn."

Castor oil plants are grown all along the roadside from Mansi to Bhamo. According to reports, one of the castor oil plantations in the area where local residents were forced to work in June 2007 is owned by the SPDC-aligned Myanmar Women Affairs Committee (MWAC).¹⁹³

On 23 August 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities had ordered all civilians and civil servants in Bhamo Township to grow castor oil plants in their area.¹⁹⁴

On 16 December 2007, it was reported that four SPDC army battalions had begun ploughing farmlands belonging to local farmers in preparation to grow summer paddy in areas of Kachin State. In early December 2007, several paddy fields owned by Wuyang villagers in Waingmaw Township, were forcibly harvested as preparation to grow the summer paddy under the direct orders of Northern Regional Military Commander, Major General Ohn Myint. Farmers reported that the machines used by the soldiers to harvest their fields reduced the yield by 30 percent. As the battalions were ploughing the fields close to the roadside, farmers were ordered to grow summer paddy in the rest of their fields. *"The authorities provide nothing to support growing summer rice. It will be impossible to grow summer paddy ourselves and make profits,"* farmers in Wuyang reported.¹⁹⁵

Karen State

From January 2007, many villages in Dooplaya District were forced to cultivate summer paddy, despite the fact that the crop has typically been unsuccessful in the past; due largely to insufficient water during the dry season. Each farmer was forced to plant one and a half baskets of paddy seed and the villagers were wholly responsible for its ploughing, cropping and transport. If they failed to produce the quota demanded, they were forced to buy an amount equivalent to their deficit on the open market.¹⁹⁶

On 23 February 2007, it was reported that the residents of M'Hee Gkalah village, in Kya In Township had made a loss of approximately 500,000 kyat from summer paddy planting in 2006, but were still being forced to do it again in 2007. Each farmer had to plant one and a half baskets of paddy seed and the villagers had to do all the ploughing and cropping and then transport the crop to the SPDC at the end. A failure to produce the quota demanded, resulted in the farmers having to buy rice on the open market in its place.¹⁹⁷

In May and June 2007, heavy flooding in Thaton District prevented many local farmers from carrying out the initial stages of the crop cultivation cycle. This significantly impacted on their eventual harvest which they brought in later in the year. The flooding followed failed attempts at cultivating heavily fertilised dry-season paddy crops under orders from the SPDC. Despite heavy costs for fertiliser, which villagers were required to purchase, the farmers ended up feeding the dead dry-season paddy plants to their livestock as the grains were too stunted for human consumption.¹⁹⁸

Karenni State

On 9 August 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #216 killed a buffalo after it had wandered into an SPDC-owned castor oil plantation in the Narnahtaw area of Loikaw Township. The soldiers then carried the carcass to their camp where they ate it. No one came forward to complain about the incident or to claim the animal, as to do so would have left them liable to a fine, reportedly equal to the cost of the animal plus the cost of ammunition used in its slaying. While soldiers operate under orders to kill any animals which stray into their fields, these plantations have been developed on land formerly used for pasture by local cattle farmers. Local villagers have reported that as a result they are now very short of suitable grazing land for their cattle.¹⁹⁹

On 22 August 2007, it was reported that an identified commander of LIB #530 had convened a meeting with the village heads of Htee Sa Kah, Loilin Lay and Tilon village tracts, concerning the lower than expected yield from local castor oil plantations. At the meeting, he provided 750,000 kyat for Loilin Lay village tract, 640,000 kyat for Htee Sa Kah village tract and 550,000 kyat for Tilon village tract for use in improving the productivity of their plantations. He then demanded that each village tract must return three times that amount within three months. Residents stated that there was no possibility that they will be able to raise that amount of money, regardless of what the soldiers expected.²⁰⁰

Magwe Division

On 7 March 2007, residents in several areas of Magwe Division were reported to have complained over the fact that they were being forced to plant castor oil crops.²⁰¹

On 31 June 2007, a group of 20 villagers from Pwintbyu Township filed a forced labour complaint with the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning their forced employment on an SPDC castor oil plantation. One of the complainants, Ko Kyaw Khine Shwe, reported that:

“There were about 100 men and 75 women who had to dig 800 cubic-foot holes in the ground from 7:00 am in the morning until about noon. They didn’t even let us have a break for water. They told us we would have to come back the next day also.”

The authorities forced the group to work for four more days on the site or pay a fine of 1,200 kyat. *“We only earn about 800 kyat a day and can’t afford to pay the 1,200 kyat so we had to agree to work,”* stated Ko Kyaw Khine Shwe. Since the time the letter was sent, a copy of which was posted to the local authorities, and up until the end of July, officials had questioned the complainants five times. Pwintbyu Township TPDC officials have defended their actions claiming that tending to castor plants was the peoples’ *“legal responsibility”*. This was a reference to earlier speeches made by Senior General Than Shwe, who had referred to the cultivation of physic nut as every citizen’s *“national duty”*. Ko Kyaw Khine Shwe rebutted these claims, asserting that each household in the village had fulfilled their duty of growing seven castor oil plants long before they were forced to work in the field.²⁰²

On 3 December 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities in Taungdwingyi Township, had forced local farmers to grow sugarcane which would then be bought by the authorities, or face punishment. However, when the time to harvest had arrived, local authorities advised the villagers that they would no longer buy the sugarcane due to fuel shortages at the local sugar refinery.²⁰³

Mandalay Division

In July 2007, TPDC officials ordered farmers to grow paddy crops in unsuitable areas in Mahlaing Township. Moreover, the SPDC arrested those who refused to obey the order. Those who obeyed the order were faced with failed harvests in December 2007, which left them with no income. Some farmers were forced to sell their land and cattle to pay the debts that they had incurred as a result. U Chit Yan, a farmer from Habyebin village, was among those detained for not complying with the chairman's orders:

“On 29 July [2007], the township chairman ordered me to clear the banana plantations my family has owned for generations, and he gave me five days to clear it, but I couldn't do it on time as there was some heavy rain, and then he held me in detention for 24 hours.”

A few days later U Chit Yan was arrested again for not growing what the TPDC chairman had asked, and spent a further seven days in detention. Moreover, he was not paid any compensation for the loss of his family's plantation or for the money that such a crop would have provided him with.²⁰⁴

Mon State

On 20 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #31 forced villagers in Khaw-Zar sub-Township to plough 20 acres of military-owned fields in preparation for the cultivation of summer paddy. Villagers were also forced to supply equipment and animals for the ploughing. LIB #219, based in Kamawet village, Mudon Township was also reported to have sequestered equipment from villages for the ploughing of fields in Taung-pa village near Ab-bit Dam. According to one farmer from Taung-pa village, *“LIB #219 cultivated summer paddy on about 100 acres this year, but last year they just cultivated about 20 acres”*. This additional 80 acres of farmland, though not explicitly stated, would have been confiscated from local villagers. He added that the irrigation water from the dam is too hot for watering paddy during the summer, and that they had not produced a successful yield from the previous year's crop.²⁰⁵

Between 27 February and 3 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #31 forced the local residents of Khaw-Zar sub-Township to work on their summer paddy crops, in the absence of any compensation. Ten villagers per day, drawn from the surrounding villages on a rotational basis, were forced to tend to the 15 acres of farmland owned by the military. Kyone-Kanya, Dot-Pound, Kyone-Kanya, Kyone-Htaung and Win-Ta-Mok villagers were also forced to work digging irrigation canals, building dykes in the paddy fields and carrying various kinds of fertilizers for the paddy plantations. The fields used for the summer paddy had been confiscated from local residents over the preceding three-year period.²⁰⁶

In May 2007, following the early onset of the rainy season, residents of Mon State were forced to purchase and cultivate physic nut seedlings from their local TPDC offices. The Kyaik Mayaw Township TPDC, for example, directed each household in the township to grow 300 physic nuts plants for which they were forced to purchase 90,000 kyat worth of seedlings. In Thanbyuzayat Township, households were instructed to buy and plant three kilograms of physic nut seeds at a cost of 3,000 kyat per kilogram. In May 2007, a Kyone Paik villager, near Mudon, was forced to clear an area along a main road of all vegetation and prepare the ground for the planting of physic nuts in preparation for the visit of Lieutenant General Maung Bo. Many residents of Mon State had previously been forced to grow physic nut during 2006. The project was reported to be mostly unsuccessful, with large numbers of plants dying.²⁰⁷

On 22 November 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had forcibly expanded its oil crop cultivation programme in Mon State, with the cultivable area tripling in size, even though farmers were not interested in growing the crop. In previous years, the SPDC had announced plans to grow sesame on about 1,000 acres in Mudon and Paung Townships. The program has, however, expanded into four further townships, including Ye, Thanbyuzayat, Kyaik Mayaw, and Chaungzon, in which villagers are expected to cultivate sesame, groundnut, and sunflower crops. The local authorities reportedly transported seed from upper Burma, and sold it to farmers at a cost of 30,000 kyat per basket of sesame seeds and 15,000 kyat per basket of sunflower seeds. Commenting on the program, a former manager from the SPDC Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation had said that the poor quality seeds were not good for cultivation in Mon State. One farmer from Kamawet village stated that the farmers would grow the seeds to avoid punishment, but they wouldn't use fertilizer to nurture the plants. In a clear display of civil disobedience, some farmers even reportedly used both the sesame and sunflower seeds as snacks. According to the SPDC-controlled *New Light of Myanmar*, every state and division cultivates sesame, groundnut, and sunflower to lower the imports of such crops from foreign countries, which is ironic in that these three crops are listed by the CIA World Factbook as being among Burma's primary agricultural products.²⁰⁸

Pegu Division

In January 2007, according to a farmer from Nyaunglebin Township, farmers from Pegu Division were being forced to plant summer paddy that would ultimately decrease the quality of their next winter harvests. He further maintained that some farmers had refused to accept the orders, stating that:

*"About three days ago, an order from the [TPDC] was issued to grow summer paddy. If the farmers grow the paddy now it will be late in the rainy season by the time it is done. So they refused the order. We don't know what the authorities will do."*²⁰⁹

On 19 January 2007, it was reported that farmers in Tharawaddy Township were being forced to destroy their bean crops and cultivate summer paddy in their place, despite the lack of suitable conditions and the lack of water. No compensation was paid to the farmers for the forcible destruction of their crops.²¹⁰

In December 2007, SPDC officials in both Pegu Division and Arakan State reportedly ordered local farmers to plant sunflowers in their fields. The seeds were to be purchased from local authorities, who made no commitment to buy the sunflower crop once it had been harvested. Villagers feared that the order was based on the belief that the flowers will help promote the continue rule and long life for the regime.²¹¹

Shan State

Beginning in January 2007 and continuing until at least May, residents of Kengtung Township were forced to grow summer paddy for the military. Each SPDC army battalion stationed in the township allocated a portion of farmers' land to themselves and forced the owners to cultivate a rice crop for the military throughout the summer months. For instance, one Logistics Battalion, based south of Kengtung selected rice fields in Kaad Pha village tract, approximately 16 kilometres (10 miles) east of Kengtung, and demanded that the local villagers cultivate rice for them on those fields. The Kaad Pha village tract residents were also forced to build a dam and irrigation canals to divert water to the chosen rice fields, for which they also had to provide the required sacks of sand for use in its construction.²¹²

Beginning in January 2007, the residents of Naa Khaan village tract in Mong Nai Township were forced by SPDC army soldiers from IB #248 to cultivate a summer paddy crop, for which the entire harvest was to be given to the military. The soldiers selected a number of paddy fields close to water sources on which the summer crop was to be grown, burdening the local farmers with full responsibility for the cultivation of the rice. Not only were the farmers uncompensated for their labours but they were not relieved of any other types of forced labour and extortion imposed on them by the authorities.²¹³

In May 2007, it was reported that residents of Mong Hsat Township had been forced by local authorities to work in planting and expanding physic nut plantations in the area. The work reportedly commenced in November 2006 and had continued at least until May 2007 when the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) had reported it. In November 2006, Lieutenant General Kyaw Win, called a meeting, where he told those in attendance that the people's help was needed to expand the physic nut plantations in the township, which he maintained would one day become income-generating ventures and would help boost the local economy. At the meeting, a local businessman had reportedly asked if there were definite markets for the castor oil once it was produced, to which the Kyaw Win angrily replied, *"How dare you argue with me? Do you think because you have money and a 4-storey house I'll be afraid of you? Do you want to be rolling on the ground in front of me?"*²¹⁴

For the irrigated paddy growing season of 2007 (usually from June to November), farmers in Kunhing Township were forced to cultivate a new strain of rice and ordered not to grow that which was traditionally grown in the area. The farmers were forced to buy the rice seed from SPDC army soldiers from LIB #524. At least 50 irrigated rice fields belonging to the farmers of Wan Paang and Nam Khaam villages, located along the road linking Kunhing with Kaali village tract, were forced to grow the new strain of rice. Seeds of the new rice strain, known as *"Shwe Pyi Aye"* ('Peaceful Golden Land'), had to be purchased at a cost of 20,000 kyat per basket. Farmers were unhappy about the orders as they felt that the rice has both poor nutritional value and quality. One farmer was arrested and detained one night for arguing with the soldiers, and was only released after he had agreed to do as the soldiers ordered.²¹⁵

In December 2007, it was reported that since June 2007, villagers from Naa Khaan village tract in Mong Nai Township had been forced to grow sesame and corn for SPDC army troops from IB #248. The villagers were ordered to grow the crops amongst physic nut plantations that they had also been ordered to cultivate along the road linking Mong Nai and Nam Hsan Townships. The villagers had been forced to grow physic nut plantations in the area since early 2006. These orders coincided with the season they needed to cultivate their own rice crop on which they depended for their survival, however, in spite of this, they were given no reprieve to tend to their own livelihoods.²¹⁶

Tenasserim Division

On 23 March 2007, the villagers of Ya-ngeh village, Yebyu Township, consisting of around 100 households, were ordered to provide a monthly contribution of between 1,000 and 3,000 kyat per household towards a fund purportedly for local castor oil plantations.²¹⁷

On 3 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #282 visited A-ler-sa-kan village, Mergui-Tavoy District, comprised of approximately 100 households, and issued several demands for labour and money. Included in this list, was an order for each household to contribute 3,000 kyat for the funding of a committee to oversee castor oil cultivation in the area. The villagers were further ordered to provide two persons a day to work on the castor plantation without pay or any form of compensation.²¹⁸

6.7 Self-Reliance, Development, and Counter-Insurgency

The SPDC subjects its citizens to numerous demands for their hard-earned currency and their hard-pressed time. Despite the fact that the regime spends over 40 percent of the national budget on its armed forces, and forcibly procures paddy from farmers (for more information, see the section on the Forced Sale of Crops above), army units are, nevertheless, largely responsible for their own supplies and funding. This Self-Reliance Program, introduced in 1988, was given implicit evidence of its continued implementation in March 2007. An internal army document obtained by *Jane's Defence Weekly* instructed battalion commanders to increase the amount of money that they raise on their own in order to supplement central salary and ration disbursement. The document stated that battalions should continue to raise funds through agricultural projects and the sale of seized goods. It even went so far as to accuse those commanders who fail to do so of "sucking oil" from the War Office.²¹⁹

As a result, thousands of acres of land have been confiscated from civilians, without compensation, for army profit. (For more information, see the section on Land Confiscation above). Moreover, the ousted farmers and local villagers are frequently made to act as serfs on their former land, planting and harvesting crops for the army battalions who took the land from them. Numerous other demands are made for the labour and time of villagers under this Self-Reliance Program. Villagers are ordered to perform forced labour building and maintaining army camps and crops, while supplying all necessary materials and using their own tools. No payment compensation is typically given for this work and villagers must even provide their own food. They are also frequently forced to give money, food and whatever other items military personnel demand from them.

Similar demands are made under the rubric of development, with labour, goods and cash demanded from local populations for infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads, bridges, pagodas, schools, medical clinics, etc. The result of such development is promoted by the SPDC as a sign of progress under their tenure, and constitutes a central theme of their rhetoric, both in the national press and international fora. The fact that these development programs are largely directed towards logistically supporting the army and funding the regime belies such claims further.

Villagers living in those areas where armed resistance against the regime persists are not only heavily burdened by the demands of supporting a large army presence in their area; they suffer further economic abuses under the SPDC's Four Cuts Policy. The Four Cuts Policy is a scorched earth counter-insurgency campaign, initially developed in the 1960s to ostensibly defeat armed opposition groups by targeting their supposed civilian support base. The 'four cuts' which lend themselves to the name of the Policy are said to be to cut all supply of food, funds, intelligence and recruits that civilian populations provide to resistance groups. The application of this Policy is in direct contravention of the most fundamental principles of humanitarian law. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

The pervasive nature of such practices compelled the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in June 2007, to brake with its strict policy of non-disclosure and declare that:

"The Myanmar [Burmese] armed forces have committed repeated abuses against men, women and children living in communities affected by armed conflict along the Thai-Myanmar border. These have included the large-scale destruction of food supplies and of means of production. The armed forces have severely restricted the population's freedom of movement in these areas, making it impossible for many villagers to work in their fields. This has had a significant impact on the economy, aggravating an already precarious humanitarian situation. Furthermore, the armed forces have committed numerous acts of

*violence against people living in these areas, including murder, and subjected them to arbitrary arrest and detention. They have also forced villagers to directly support military operations or to leave their homes”.*²²⁰

This statement represents the harshest public criticism of a State power made by the ICRC since its response to the Rwandan genocide a decade earlier.

Forced Labour

Despite the fact that Burma ratified Order No. 1/99 in 2000 banning forced labour, the continued practice of forced labour is both pervasive and well-documented. In some areas, particularly areas of northern Arakan State and parts of Karen State these demands are near continual. Forced labour is mandatory, predominantly unpaid and requires that villagers spend time away from their own livelihoods. In addition to the economic strain that time away from work brings, the people are also required to provide their own food and equipment for the duration of the forced labour duty.

*“This year we’ve been worrying about our food. No one has enough food because our villagers were portering all the time during the rainy season. The villagers didn’t have enough time to cut and clear the brush in their hill fields. So the villagers’ paddy fields weren’t good enough and [the villagers] didn’t get enough food. If we had no problems or situation like this, it would be good for us.”*²²¹

The demand of forced labour is often too strenuous for the already over-burdened people of Burma, especially detrimental during labour intensive times in the crop cycle. Most of those who flee Burma to neighbouring countries cite forced labour requirements as one of the major reasons for fleeing across the border. While this forced labour is almost always unpaid, villagers are nevertheless, consistently ordered to pay fees and taxes under the ruse that this money will then be given to those performing labour for the military. Villagers are aware that such demands are no more than extortion, but are forced to pay nonetheless. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription)

Arbitrary Fees, Taxes and Extortion

Economists have frequently cited the lack of a centralised and consistent system of tax collection as being at the core of the SPDC’s financial difficulties, having significant secondary effects for their entire monetary and fiscal policy. In 2007, the SPDC did make attempts to increase its tax revenue, investigating certain companies for tax evasion, and increasing tax rates in areas across the country including districts of Magwe, Mandalay and Pegu Divisions and Arakan State. In all of these areas, tax rises were met with widespread discontent and petition drives. In Taungup Township, Arakan State, small business owners and retailers were faced with 600 percent sales tax increases. One Taungup salesman reported:

*“Our trouble is, we are faced with high commodity prices. ... Our monthly income is not enough to cover the increases. Besides, people can barely spend these days and business is bad. Some vendors are so discouraged that they said they will give up their business”.*²²²

The authorities responded to such complaints by reducing the hike to a 100 percent increase. Meanwhile, large companies, run by cronies of the regime, have escaped any such demands from the State. Those companies that continue to be provided with discretionary tax exemptions reportedly include the Htoo Company of Tay Za (a close ally of

Senior General Than Shwe), the Aung Thura Mann Company, which belongs to a son of General Shwe Mahn, and Zakabar Khin Shwe, a business owned by the junta-aligned paramilitary *Swan Arr Shin* group.²²³

Instead, continuous and heavy demands are made upon Burma's poor, either to support the military presence in their area, in the name of development, or simply to line the pockets of those demanding them. An endless array of justifications for such fees exists. These vary from tax on collecting firewood and bamboo, to fees for the registration of births and deaths in the family lists, and even on the slaughtering of cattle for the Muslim festival of Eid. The type of taxes and the amounts people have to pay are applied in an arbitrary fashion and which vary from place to place, depending on the local authorities. Often, such justifications are patently false, or evidently do not require the amount of funds being demanded. At other times, money is simply extorted under duress, in the absence of any form of justification. The insincerity of justifications used is given absurd evidence when villagers in conflict areas are forced to compensate the military for the cost of weapons and equipment lost whenever soldiers desert from the SPDC army, or when villagers are fined for the destruction of State property whenever one of their number is wounded or killed after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines).

A significant amount of these demands are made under the pretext of development. With central funding for development projects largely insufficient, and the rhetoric of development central to the justification of continued SPDC rule, the regime relies heavily upon the labour and limited finances of local populations to bring their plans to fruition. Such immoral machinations are damned yet further by the fact that development is conducted without concern for the civilian population's needs and wants; indeed, in many cases, it runs contrary to them. While Burma's social, education and healthcare sectors remain seriously neglected, the construction of new roads and bridges, as well as dams and centrally-directed agricultural projects, serve to raise funds for the regime and facilitate the army's access and control in rural areas, further entrenching abuses.

A further significant source of income for the SPDC is provided by a pervasive system of checkpoints stationed across the country. Passage through these checkpoints is typically only secured after payment of a toll or fee, the amount of which varies from checkpoint to checkpoint and is arbitrarily determined by those manning it. Most towns and larger villages have permanent checkpoints stationed at all points of access or egress. Similarly, in many areas of armed conflict, villagers are ordered to erect fences circling their villages, leaving only one or two gates through which villagers may pass, each of which is monitored by a checkpoint. Many roads throughout the country are also dotted with successions of checkpoints. In some areas, civilians must negotiate at least a dozen such checkpoints, each of which exacts their toll of cash or goods from the travellers. Many such checkpoints in northern Arakan State operate discriminatory pricing against the Muslim Rohingya. (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement as well as the subsequent section within this chapter on the Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation).

One further means of extorting money from the population is furnished by both the threat and act of arrest. Particularly prevalent in rural areas, villagers lacking any discernible rights are arrested under varying justifications, only to be released upon payment of an arbitrarily set fee. Whole villages are often forced to band together to finance the release fee, with the added impetus that the detainee is likely to face torture during their time in detention. (For more information see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances).

Arbitrary Fees, Taxes and Extortion – partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 5 January 2007, Mohamed Fayas accompanied his ill mother across the border from Buthidaung Township into Bangladesh where she was hoping to receive treatment. His mother, Sokina Khatum, was suffering from a peptic ulcer, and due to the lack of medical facilities in northern Arakan, decided to travel from her home in Dabine Sara through Teknaf to Chittagong. They returned home on 10 January 2007. Despite the fact that they had procured all necessary documents for their trip, NaSaKa personnel detained Mohamed Fayas, reportedly informing him, “*We need money, we don’t understand passports.*” He was subsequently released on 11 January only after he had paid 50,000 kyat to the soldiers.²²⁴

On 14 January 2007, a Rohingya *Moulvi* (religious leader) was evidently the victim of an elaborate police set up that was designed so he could be arrested and subsequently forced to pay for his release. It was reported that Moulvi Haron of Sabin Thaya Zay in Maungdaw was tricked by a Arakanese youth into demonstrating how to use his mobile phone. He was then arrested by a plainclothes police officer immediately after producing the phone and charged with the illegal possession of a mobile phone. He was freed the following day after paying a 500,000 kyat bribe.²²⁵

On 28 January 2007, Mokhol Hossain, 42, and Sayed Noor, 20, of Dabru Chaung village in Buthidaung Township, were accosted by police officers while in Buthidaung. Upon finding 25,000 kyat on their person, the officers pocketed the money, and subsequently assaulted their two victims when they pleaded for it to be returned.²²⁶

On 5 February 2007, Rohingya shopkeeper, Eman Hussain, 28, was arbitrarily forced to pay 62,000 kyat for the right to operate his shop. NaSaKa personnel of Camp #5 in Maungdaw Township demanded the money after Eman had constructed his shop in Dankhali (Pa Nyaung Pin Gyi) village.²²⁷

On 21 February 2007, it was reported that fishermen in Maungdaw Township, must pay a weekly, monthly and yearly levy to the NaSaKa for permission to fish in the Naf River. according to reports, the fees were set at 200 kyat a week, 500 kyat a month, or 25,000 kyat a year. Once paid, fishermen are still only permitted to fish between the hours of 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. Furthermore, NaSaKa personnel commonly take the best catches for themselves as additional taxes.²²⁸

On 26 March 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from IB #20 were heavily taxing the Rohingya residents of the Sarki Para area, west of Sittwe (Akyab). The report spoke of how rickshaws are forced to pay a tax on the goods and passengers they transport through military checkpoints in the area. The system of taxes has been in place since 2006, and, like many arbitrary taxes in the region, discriminatorily targets the Rohingya far more than it does the Rakhine.²²⁹

Beginning on 10 April 2007, officers at Buthidaung police station began collecting taxes from Rohingya shopkeepers operating in Buthidaung Township. They were reported to have demanded 10,000 kyat from each shopkeeper. When the TPDC heard of this operation, and questioned the police concerned, they were reportedly told that the tax was only for Rohingya and that proceeds would be used to build a jetty in Buthidaung port.²³⁰

In June 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating under LIB #551 established a border checkpoint at Taung Bazaar, Maungdaw Township, charging 500 kyat per person wishing to cross the border into Bangladesh. Soldiers from NaSaKa Area #3 in Taungbro had already established a border tollgate in 2005, charging 1,000 kyat per person, and collecting taxes on all goods transported through their gate. The NaSaKa were reported to have complained

to the Military Operations Command (MOC) in Buthidaung, claiming that the army was undercutting their operations, although the MOC refused to take any action against the battalion.²³¹

On 8 June 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #550 established a tollgate at the mouth of the Taw Chaung Tip River, a tributary of the Kaladan River, near Kyauk Thai Bin village in Ponagyun Township. Those passing through have been charged a tax on fruit and vegetables, and bamboo and wood. The money collected reportedly goes straight to the army, despite the fact that numerous other groups and agencies are involved in collecting tax at the gate. The USDA, the *pyitthu sit* ('people's militia') the auxiliary fire brigade, and the Rakhine Women's Association (RWA) are all reported to have a hand in the operation.²³²

On 1 July 2007, NaSaKa units stationed in the Pa Nyaung Pin Gyi (Down Khali), Koniya Para and Aley Than Kyaw village tracts of Maungdaw Township began collecting funds for the reconstruction of shrimp dams that had been destroyed by heavy rains in June 2007. Each household were forced to pay between 5,000 and 10,000 kyat depending on its level of income. The dams were originally owned by local Rohingya villagers, but had been confiscated by the NaSaKa who lease them out by public auction, the proceeds of which go directly to their commanding officers.²³³

On 11 July 2007, it was reported that Sittwe municipal authorities had introduced a monthly tax to support local military and civil servant electricity consumption. According to a retired teacher living in the town, "*The municipal authority has been collecting 300 kyat per unit of power on the meter and 500 kyat for the power meter box per month from households in Akyab [Sittwe]*".²³⁴

On 20 August 2007, NaSaKa personnel fined a man after his wife gave birth to a still born baby. Abu Rashid, 30, of Razar Bill village in Rathedaung Township, was accused of strangling the newborn. He was forced to pay a fine of 6,000 kyat and 2 gallons of kerosene. "*How can a father strangle his own baby? It is an atrocious allegation all because they want money from the Rohingya people no matter by whatever means,*" stated a relative of the victim, who was clearly outraged over the fine.²³⁵

On 18 September 2007, it was reported that the TPDC authorities in Maungdaw were forcibly collecting money from businessmen and wealthy families to pay for patrol vehicles. Many reportedly had to donate anywhere from 10,000 to 100,000 kyat to township authorities to cover fuel costs in addition to the costs of these vehicles.²³⁶

On 18 October 2007, the commander of the Nga Yant Chaung NaSaKa camp visited villagers in Maungdaw Township to check cattle lists for every house as yet another means of collecting money from the villagers. Villagers are required to maintain detailed lists of their livestock and have to inform the NaSaKa if a cow dies or gives birth to a calf. If the owner intends to sell any of his livestock he has to pay 2,000 kyat levy for cow or a buffalo and 1,000 kyat for a goat or sheep. The commander fined each villager who had not informed the NaSaKa of a change in the number of cattle.²³⁷

Beginning on 10 November 2007, NaSaKa personnel started collecting fees from fishing boats in Maungdaw and Rathedaung Townships. The NaSaKa introduced fees of 50,000 kyat per fishing boat for the year 2007 as license for fishing in the Bay of Bengal. It has been predicted that this scheme will earn the NaSaKa 30 million kyat per year. It was also reported that they also forcibly demanded the better quality fish from their fishing boats upon arrival in harbour.²³⁸

On 1 December 2007, SaYaPa ('Military Security Force') personnel stationed in Maungdaw Township began forcibly collecting funds for the inauguration of the renovated Wet Kyan Buddhist Pagoda, in Bawli Bazaar. They demanded 1,000 kyat per household. While

widows and the very poor were excluded, Muslim Rohingya were forced to contribute.²³⁹

On 20 December 2007, NaSaKa personnel in parts of Maungdaw Township demanded between 1,500 and 2,000 kyat from each person who wished to sacrifice a cow for the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Azha. In other areas, the NaSaKa demanded three kilograms of meat from each animal sacrificed. The skins of sacrificed animals were also collected by the NaSaKa, who paid only 500 kyat per skin, although the report failed to mention what the prevailing markets rates for the skins were.²⁴⁰

Chin State

In January 2007, U Laito, the TPDC chairman of Thangtlang Township, introduced a new tax on hill farmers in the area, whereby each household was forced to pay 500 kyat in order to gain permission to cultivate their hill fields.²⁴¹

On 15 February 2007, it was reported that the Thangtlang Township TPDC had imposed a much-increased tariff on the transportation of chilli. The new rate was reported to be between 15,000 kyat and 20,000 kyat for a “load” of chilli, although the report failed to mention how much a “load” weighed. Chilli growers in Thangtlang Township sell the bulk of their produce in Kalay, Sagaing Division. It is therefore quite likely that the introduction of this new tax was a new way for the Thangtlang Township TPDC to also get a slice of the pie that they were otherwise missing out on.²⁴²

On 15 April 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers operating under Major San Aung in Matupi Township, had established a monopoly on the sale of electricity meters in the area, which they were selling at extortionate prices. Each meter box was reported to be priced at 300,000 kyat, as opposed to the 30,000 kyat being charged in other areas. One resident commented that, “*They are making the poor people poorer. They come up with so many ideas to enrich themselves. But they push the people below the poverty line.*”²⁴³

On 8 May 2007, it was reported that every household living in 85 villages in Thangtlang Township were forced to pay 1,000 kyat towards the construction of the Mantaw to Hakha motor road. The money was supposedly to be used for the payment of construction workers, and those families unable to pay were forced to send a person to work on the road instead.²⁴⁴

On 13 July 2007, it was reported that an immigration office in Chin State had instituted arbitrarily excessive charges for the issuance of national identity cards. U Tant Zin, an immigration officer based in Paletwa Township had reportedly introduced a charge of 100,000 kyat, well above the official charge of 3,500 kyat for the same service.²⁴⁵

Kachin State

On 22 March 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from IB #29 were charging bullock carts 1,000 kyat to pass through one of its checkpoints during the day, and between 3,000 and 5,000 to pass at night. The checkpoint, close to Pa La Na village, north of Myitkyina is located along an important road for villagers needing access to their farms, paddy fields and the forest where they collect wild vegetables. Local villagers have been forced to pay this toll since 2006, and have reported an increase in forced labour, land confiscation and military taxation problems in the area around Pa La Na village.²⁴⁶

In July 2007, it was reported that numerous SPDC agencies were extorting funds from travellers and traders at major SPDC-controlled checkpoints in Kachin State. The tollgates at the Bala Min Htin Irrawaddy River Bridge in Waimaw Township, Shwe Nyaung Pyin, and

Aung May on the highway between Myitkyina and Bhamo, were all reported to collect taxes on all imports and exports to and from Laiza on the Sino-Burma border. According to local businessmen, all goods are confiscated if the trader does not negotiate with each agency at the gate. According to one trader, there are 18 separate agencies involved in the collection of taxes at these checkpoints, including the army, the military police, the SaYaPa, the "Military Strategic Command" (possibly a reference to Northern Regional Military Command, based in Myitkyina), the customs department, the immigration department, municipal and forestry authorities, the TPDC, various departments of the police force (including the special branch, the anti-drug squad drug squad and crime-suppression units), the USDA, and the auxiliary fire brigade. The tax that a motorcycle carrying goods attracts reportedly ranges between 1,000 and 5,000 kyat, whereas a car or a truck carrying goods can be taxed between 100,000 and three million kyat.²⁴⁷

In December 2007, municipal authorities in Myitkyina began collecting funds from the residents in Dukhtawng (Du Mare) Quarter for the repair of Duwa Road, the main thoroughfare running through that quarter. Households living near the road were required to pay at least 200,000 kyat each.²⁴⁸

Karen State

In early January 2007, Battalion Commander Htay Win of LIB #349 demanded 250,000 kyat from Than Seik village tract in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District.²⁴⁹

On 28 January 2007, Hla Maung of the DKBA demanded money from the following villages in Papun District:

1. Day Law Pu, 14,500 kyat;
2. Wai Tha, 1,500 kyat;
3. Htee Ber Kar Hta, 1,500 kyat;
4. Klaw Day, 13,000 kyat;
5. Kler Kho, 17,000 kyat;
6. Nar Koo Nar, 15,000 kyat;
7. Ku Thay, 15,000 kyat;
8. Noh Law Su, 15,000 kyat;
9. Klaw Hta, 15,000 kyat; and
10. Loe Klo Hta, 12,500 kyat.²⁵⁰

During the last week of January, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #349, led by Battalion Commander Htay Win, demanded 250,000 kyat from the residents of Than Seik village tract, Papun District.²⁵¹

In February 2007, SPDC army Battalion Commander Than Hteik, operating in Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) Township, of Nyaunglebin District, introduced a charge of 2,000 kyat for passes that permitted villagers to travel outside their villages for a period of up to ten days.²⁵²

On 4 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #349 clashed with Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops in the Kyo Gyi area of Nyaunglebin District, in which several SPDC army soldiers were killed. In response, the battalion demanded each village in the immediate vicinity pay a 65,000 kyat fine. The villages forced to pay this fine were:

1. Po Pin Goe;
2. Kyaw Su;
3. Li Pi Wei;
4. Thi P' yaw Dah;
5. Pyi Su;
6. Wei Mu;
7. Hay Tha Wei;

8. Kyo Gyi;
9. Pyi Taung Tha;
10. Ywa Ka La; and
11. Htoe Wa Zet.

The following day, on 5 February 2007, the same SPDC army soldiers accused villagers from adjacent Kyo Gyi village of attacking his unit the previous day. He apprehended ten of the villagers, shot three pigs and smeared the blood on the detained villagers, before demanding 20,000 kyat from each of them. The villagers were then released, but threatened against spreading news of the incident. Battalion Commander Tha Tet also forced villagers from Li Pi Wei, Htoe Wa Zet and Hay Tha Wei to fund the purchase of a new motorbike, at a cost of 1,200,000 kyat. It was also reported that persons from these villages were being forced to pay 1,000 kyat for passes, allowing them to leave their village to work in their fields. Moreover, Colonel Maung Gyi also demanded money from seven villages in this area on 5 February 2007 to cover the costs of roofing thatch to be used in the construction of a new SPDC army camp. The affected villages and the amounts that they were obliged to pay as are as follows:

1. Htoe Wa Zet, 120,000 kyat;
2. Kyauk Se Yik, 120,000 kyat;
3. Thu K'bee, 50,000 kyat;
4. Taw Kyaw Paut, 120,000 kyat;
5. Lei Wei Gyi, 50,000 kyat;
6. Aye Net, 200,000 kyat; and
7. Kyo Gyi, 120,000 kyat.²⁵³

On 6 February 2007, DKBA troops, operating in Pa'an Township, Thaton District, demanded money from the following villages:

1. Naw-ter-yeh, 100,000 kyat;
2. Ler-kar-kaw, 10,000 kyat;
3. Htee-mae-baw, 10,000 kyat; and
4. Kwe-ta-kaw, 5,000 kyat.²⁵⁴

On 10 February 2007, SPDC Major Zaw Win Myit, based in Shwegyin, Nyaunglebin District, demanded money from four local village tracts; allegedly earmarked for new roofing thatch for his camp. The orders stated that villagers should provide money rather than actual thatch, with the amount demanded totalling 840,000 kyat. The four village tracts from which money was extorted were:

1. Pe Deh Gon village tract, 240,000 kyat;
2. Ma Oo Pin village tract, 200,000 kyat;
3. Lipi Wei village tract, 300,000 kyat; and
4. Hay Tha Wei village tract, 100,000 kyat.²⁵⁵

On 15 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #349 (Major Thant King commanding) established a checkpoint at a pier on the Sittaung River in Nyaunglebin District. The checkpoint introduced a levy of 5,000 kyat for each bullock cart of wood and 1,500 kyat for each bullock cart of beans passing through it. Those crossing in empty bullock carts paid 1,000 kyat. In addition, the battalion was reportedly charging villagers residing in the Ler Doh Klo area a monthly tax of 5,000 kyat.²⁵⁶

On 22 February 2007, Hla Maung of the DKBA instituted the collection, once every ten days, of money from the following villages in Papun District:

1. Day-pal-pu, 14,500 kyat;
2. Wae-sar, 14,500 kyat;
3. Htee-per-kar-hta, 12,500 kyat;
4. Klaw-doe, 13,000 kyat;
5. Kler-kho, 17,000 kyat;
6. Na-ku-na, 15,000 kyat;
7. Ku-seik, 15,000 kyat;
8. Noe-sue, 15,000 kyat;
9. Klaw-hta, 15,000 kyat; and
10. Klaw-lo-klo-hta, 12,500 kyat.²⁵⁷

On 26 February 2007, in Kyauk Kyi Township of Nyaunglebin District, LIB #599 Column Commander Tin Soe Aung extorted 200,000 kyat from Ma La Daw village in order to buy 100 tins of rice. On the same day, Battalion Commander Htay Win of LIB #399 demanded 4,200 wooden poles from Own-bin-seik village in Pa-deh-gaw village tract and a further 250,000 kyat from Than-seik village tract.²⁵⁸

On 27 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #282, under Bo Kyaw Moe Lwin, visited Lock-Thine village in Mergui-Tavoy District, where they demanded a tax from four local elephant owners of 50,000 kyat per elephant.²⁵⁹

In early March 2007, SPDC army soldiers stationed at Bawgali Gyi army camp in Toungoo District demanded 1,000 kyat from each family in the adjacent Kler Lah relocation site to build a football pitch.²⁶⁰

On 11 March 2007, Major Myo Zaw Win of LIB #557 began charging 70,000 kyat per motorbike, and 30,000 kyat per person wishing to pass through his battalion's checkpoint positioned outside Sin-pyu-taing village in Papun District. A ten percent tax on all goods was also collected. Those unable to pay had the equivalent value in goods forcibly requisitioned from them.²⁶¹

On 20 March 2007, the battalion commander of LIB #349 demanded 1,000 kyat from each household in Pa-deh-kaw and Ma-au-bin village tracts, of Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. The villagers were not provided with any justification for the demand.²⁶²

On 22 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers under LIB #364 based in Swa Loh village in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District charged a 15,000 kyat toll on each bullock cart travelling in the area.²⁶³

Also on 22 March 2007, Major Soe Myint Aung of LIB #118, based in Thaton Township, Thaton District, shot at No-ta-la-aw village head Saw Thaya, after which he broke into his house and stole 150,000 kyat.²⁶⁴

On 26 March 2007, KNLA troops damaged an SPDC bulldozer in an attack, on the Pa-ya-la-ha road in Nyaunglebin District. In response, LIB #489 battalion commander, Zaw Moe Win, and company commander, Saw Myint, demanded significant sums in compensation from two nearby villages. The villagers were warned that a failure to pay would result in their relocation. The two villages affected were:

1. Htee-ba-baw village, population 420, 38 million kyat; and
2. Weh-gyi village, population 1,500, 170 million kyat.²⁶⁵

On 27 March 2007, Hla Maung of the DKBA extorted 13,000 kyat from Klaw-day village and 20,000 kyat from Ka-paw-hta and Htee-ber-ka-ta villages, all in Papun District.²⁶⁶

On 3 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #282 demanded one person per household from A-ler-sa-khan village, Mergui-Tavoy District for use as forced labourers. Those households unable to provide somebody were forced to pay 3,000 kyat. Villagers were also forced to pay 5,000 kyat into an entertainment fund for the battalion, 500 kyat a month towards the battalion's general extortion, and between 1,000 and 1,500 kyat a month for the soldiers' food. Every household was also forced to pay 3,000 kyat a month towards the costs of a village committee for the management of jatropha plantations, in addition to providing two persons each day to work on the SPDC-run agricultural project.²⁶⁷

In May 2007, it was reported that the villages of Myaung Oo, Aung Chan Tha and Paw Pi Der in Nyaunglebin District, were forced to pay 30,000 kyat to LIB #590 on a monthly basis.²⁶⁸

On 3 July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #22 entered the village of Kaw Ka in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District, and demanded 40,000 kyat. Later that same month, on 27 July, the same troops returned to the village and instituted a tax on charcoal produced therein before throwing 40 bags of charcoal into the nearby river and tying up two charcoal traders and beating them.²⁶⁹

On 20 July 2007, LIB #590 commander, Ko Ko Mo, demanded cash from three villages in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. In addition to this demand, these villages were also expected to pay the same battalion 30,000 kyat per month (see incident listed above, dated May 2007). The three villages which received this order were:

1. Myaung Oo, 100,000 kyat;
2. Paw Pi Der, 200,000 kyat; and
3. Aung Chan Tha, 200,000 kyat.²⁷⁰

On 25 July 2007, the commander of the Ro Ka Soe military camp in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, convened a meeting with local businessmen, during which he demanded 30,000 kyat from each man for the cost of the camp's medical supplies. He reportedly demanded a further 50,000 kyat for his own family.²⁷¹

On 30 July 2007, two villagers, aged 30 and 12, were foraging for bamboo shoots close to the village of Sa Le in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District when one of them stepped on an SPDC landmine. In spite of the fact that the victim lost his foot, he was fined 10,000 kyat by the SPDC for the destruction of military property.²⁷²

On 9 August 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers IB #57, based at Bawgata in Nyaunglebin District were demanding 50,000 kyat from all boats and cars that were transporting materials between Bawgata to Shwegyin and 5,000 kyat from boat operators moving between Bawgata to Taler Bay Hta.²⁷³

On 11 November 2007, LIB #599 demanded 500,000 kyat per village from Nyaung Bin Tha, Mone, and Aw Law Si villages, in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. These funds were reportedly extorted in order to raise additional funds for SPDC military operations in the area. Villagers close to the SPDC army camp at Aw Law Si were also forced to provide the army with animals for food twice a day.²⁷⁴

On 14 November 2007, during the construction of new SPDC army camps near Bplaw Pa Htaw village, in Nyaunglebin District, one villager stepped on an SPDC landmine. He survived the blast, albeit with severe injuries. In response, SPDC army soldiers ordered each of the five villages engaged in building the Tha Kyah Daung camp to provide 50,000 kyat as compensation, even though responsibility for deploying the landmine clearly lay with the SPDC.²⁷⁵

On 28 November 2007, LIB #590 Battalion Commander, Ko Ko summoned all fish pond owners in the plains of Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District to a meeting. At the meeting, he demanded 100,000 kyat from each pond owner. The very next day, Min Thu Ka, another SPDC army officer operating in the area, demanded an additional 10,000 kyat payment from each of the pond owners.²⁷⁶

On 9 December 2007, LIB #430 Battalion Commander, Maung Htun demanded 200,000 kyat from a number of villages in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, to rebuild the pagoda and military camps in Klaw Maw village. Those villages which received this order included:

1. Klaw Maw village;
2. Bawgata village;
3. Shu Kin Tha Ya village;
4. Kaw Tha Say village;
5. Po Pin Gon village; and
6. Ko Myit Tha Ya village.²⁷⁷

Mon State

On 18 January 2007, it was reported that SPDC AB #318, based in Mudon Township, had recently collected money from rubber plantation owners in the area of Ab-bit village. Farmers were reportedly taxed at the rate of 500 kyat per plant. The tax has been collected twice a year and, coupled with increased overheads, has significantly reduced the viability of profiting from rubber cultivation within the area.²⁷⁸

On 13 February 2007, it was reported that both funds and labour were being extorted from the residents of Yin-ye and Toe Thet Ywar Thit villages in Khaw-Zar sub-Township, for the construction of roads and bridges in the area. The implementation of these infrastructure development projects was overseen by Lieutenant Colonel Kyaw Myint from Southeast Military Command based in Moulmein. Besides the large scale and constant demands for labour, 15,000 kyat was collected from each household in Toe Thet Ywar Thit village, along with 2,000 to 8,000 kyat from every household in Yin-ye village. Villagers were also forced to supply materials for use in the bridge construction.²⁷⁹

On 29 March 2007, it was reported that VPDC officials in Kamawet village tract in Mudon Township, had been demanding 200 kyat from local residents as they were checking their family lists. Kamawet village tract reportedly has around 20,000 households comprising the following five villages:

1. Sein-taung village;
2. Thein-gone village;
3. Gone-nyin-tan village;
4. Khaung-kay village; and
5. Kamawet village.²⁸⁰

In April 2007, it was reported that increasing taxes on the motor road linking Thanbyuzayat with Three Pagoda Pass were significantly eating into the profits of passenger vehicle operators. Additional checkpoints were reported to have been added in two places since 2006, bringing the number of checkpoints at which a tax is levied along the route to 19. The majority of these gates are operated by the SPDC, with others belonging to their allied ceasefire groups, the Karen Peace Force (KPF) and the DKBA. These checkpoints reportedly charge 1,000 kyat per passenger. The Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), which operates two of the gates, was reported to charge 500 kyat per person, on top of a flat fee of 500 kyat per vehicle. At two other gates, the KNLA takes 3,000 kyat per vehicle, and an additional 500 kyat per passenger. At one gate, near the Zami River close to Three Pagoda Pass, where all local ceasefire groups operate alongside the SPDC, drivers are

charged a levy of 2,500 kyat per passenger. Those services covering the entire stretch of road must pay 17,000 kyat per passenger in tax for a single journey.²⁸¹

In the last week of March 2007, IB #18 established a checkpoint on the approach to Tom-dot-poit (Kwan Gyi Pyai) village, approximately one kilometre from Three Pagoda Pass on the Burma-Thailand border. According to reports, soldiers manning the checkpoint tax the villagers on everything they bring through the gate. For instance, a tax of five baht is charged for each pack of charcoal taken across the gate, while a vehicle carrying groceries for sale in the village is charged 100 baht. Villagers have also reported soldiers stealing vegetables as they pass. Prior to the establishment of this checkpoint, there were already two other checkpoints on the outskirts of the village, operated by the MNLA and KPF. While the checkpoint was established with the purported aim of combating illegal migration, soldiers are reported to charge human smuggling operations 100 baht per person.²⁸²

On 30 April 2007, it was reported that the police in Paung Township had demanded 10,000 kyat from each resident of Pangone village who had previously visited Thailand for work. The police officer responsible for demanding this tax was reportedly named as Aung Min Lwin.²⁸³

On 9 June 2007, Mudon Township TPDC demanded rice mill owners in the township pay a fee of 50,000 kyat per mill by 15 June 2007. The TPDC announced the tax at a meeting with the mill owners, stating that the money was required for army rations. Mudon Township has over 100 rice mills and they had already given between 100 and 200 tins of paddy for army rations three months earlier.²⁸⁴

On 11 June 2007, it was reported that villagers in Kyaik Mayaw Township were forced to pay around one million kyat towards the visit of Daw Myint Myint Soe, chairperson of the MMCWA in Mon State. Major General Thet Naing Win's wife visited Than Ka Lond village to inspect the MMCWA chapter and also reportedly to check on cases of malaria and dengue.²⁸⁵

On 20 November 2007, it was reported that VPDC chairpersons in Mon State were being forced to pay approximately one million kyat each to the TPDC and the District police officer annually. Payments to the TPDC included costs to support various SPDC-affiliated NGOs in the area, and petrol for police vehicles.²⁸⁶

On 20 December 2007, it was reported that the residents of Karoat-pi village, Thanbyuzayat Township, had been forced by the authorities to pay approximately 400 million kyat for the rebuilding of a bridge. Depending on the relative wealth of each household, they were forced to pay somewhere from 100,000 to 500,000 kyat each.²⁸⁷

Rangoon Division

On 27 July 2007, it was reported that businessmen in Rangoon had been coerced into making donations of cash and commodities to the National Convention. Businessmen reported being pressured to donate between 100,000 kyat and one million kyat to National Convention proceedings, depending on the size of their operations. The forced donations were reported to have contributed to rising basic commodity prices as businesses increased prices to cover the donations. A confidential expense report obtained by the *Irrawaddy* in late June 2007 listed expenses totalling 300 million kyat for one two-month session of the Convention.²⁸⁸

On 23 November 2007, it was reported that the USDA was demanding that residents living in Dagon Myothit Township pay 170,000 kyat per household towards the costs of a water project they were managing. Residents complained about low-quality materials being used in construction of the pipeline project and they also complained that leading members of the USDA had bought mobile phones with the project funds.²⁸⁹

Sagaing Division

On 6 July 2007, it was reported that SPDC army troops stationed in Kalay were going door to door forcing residents to buy posters that were priced at 500 kyat each. If homeowners refused to buy the posters they were forced to pay a 'voluntary' contribution of 250 kyat regardless. One local resident commented that, *"At a time when we are struggling to survive by battling prices of essential commodities mounting daily, people are being forced to buy such posters. Such high-handedness is unbearable"*.²⁹⁰

Shan State

In January 2007, LIB #244 organised a lottery in which the residents of villages in the Maing Khon area were forced to buy tickets. All those who passed in front of the army compound were accosted by troops and forced to purchase tickets. When one villager actually won, he was disqualified from receiving the advertised prize of a motorcycle. The military asserted that the prize winner did not claim his prize on time.²⁹¹

In November 2007, it was reported that the SPDC was regularly extorting money from any hotels in Kengtung that were not run by members of the SPDC or any of their cronies. At least one hotel in the centre of Kengtung had to give money to the authorities based on the numbers of guests checked-in at the hotel on a daily basis. When this report was received, the SPDC demanded 50 baht for each guest who was not resident of Kengtung, at a time when the hotel charged 200 baht per person per night. From this hotel alone, the authorities were getting no less than 5,000 baht per night.²⁹²

In November 2007, the SPDC army soldiers based in Kengtung forcibly collected funds from residents for a hot air balloon festival to be held on 24 November 2007. Every household was forced to donate between 1,000 kyat and 1,500 kyat each. Ten surrounding villages were also forced to raise 50,000 kyat each for the festival.²⁹³

Tenasserim Division

On 25 May 2007, it was reported that residents of Palauk sub-Township and Palaw Township were being forced to contribute money for SPDC road construction projects in their area. Palauk authorities were reported to have collected 50,000 kyat from each household. Residents were informed that their land and houses would be repossessed if they failed to pay.²⁹⁴

On 11 June 2007, an unnamed SPDC army officer attached to IB #282 based in Yebyu Township, forced the village head of Ong-janeh (Kyauk-ka-din) village in Kaleinaung sub-Township, to pay 100,000 kyat towards the construction of a primary school for the children of the armed forces. Money was also demanded from village heads in Yebyu and Launglon Townships. Such demands were made despite SPDC funding of 2 million kyat for the project. Meanwhile, the Ong-janeh village head had previously been unable to procure enough funds for a new cupboard for the village school.²⁹⁵

Looting and Expropriation of Food and Possessions

Just as demands are made upon civilians' cash and labour under the Self-Reliance Program, so too is the expropriation and theft of food and goods sanctioned by the regime. Often, units will send lists of required goods to village heads, demanding such things as soap, oil, chicken, rice, cigarettes and cases of beer. Villagers are even sometimes forced to provide items for military personnel to offer to local Buddhist temples. The armed forces rarely pay for the items they extort.

In many parts of Burma, SPDC units order villagers and townsfolk to provide them with raw materials such as logs, timber, and bamboo, palm roofing thatch, and mud bricks, be it for the construction of their military bases, resale, or supplies for their cottage industries. Payment is almost never made, and on those rare occasions when it is, it is typically well below the prevailing market rate.

Theft and looting is also pervasive, with troops frequently pillaging the remote communities they pass through while on patrol. During one ten-day period in January 2007, a joint SPDC-DKBA task force operating in Papun District of Karen State visited 18 separate villages. During this time, they reportedly looted 37 chickens, two pigs, a goat, a duck, and 20 baskets of rice (500 kg / 1,100 lbs), among other goods and foodstuff.²⁹⁶

Looting and Expropriation of Food and Possessions – partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 7 January 2007, five police officers travelling through Khadur Para village, in Buthidaung Township, stopped at Mohammed Ismail's shop, where they proceeded to loot stock including biscuits, drinks, and cigarettes. When Mohammed, 25, asked the officers to pay for the goods they had taken, he was severely assaulted, before being arrested and taken to Taung Bazaar, where he was detained in Thinga Net village army camp. While detained he was bound and immersed in water for at least seven hours a day up for two days. He was eventually released on 10 January after paying 60,000 kyat to secure his freedom.²⁹⁷

On 23 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers stole and slaughtered a cow belonging to Boshir Ahmed of Hoya Sori village, Buthidaung Township. *"The Army and the NaSaKa have been confiscating our farms for a long time, and now they are killing our cattle for meat,"* reported one local resident. A relative of Boshir Ahmed added, *"The owner is a poor man and only had a pair of cows that helped him support his family. Now, he is helpless and does not know how he will look after his family."*²⁹⁸

On 30 January 2007, SPDC troops stationed in Dabyu Chaung army camp intercepted four businessmen (Moktul Hussain, a Rohingya, and three unnamed Arakanese), as they were transporting goods through Buthidaung. The four men were arrested despite presenting the soldiers with all their necessary documents. The troops then stole 5 million kyat worth of goods from the men before releasing them.²⁹⁹

On 1 February 2007, NaSaKa personnel stole eight goats from Jaffar Alam, 22, a Rohingya trader from Dankhali (Pa Nyaung Pin Gyi) village in Maungdaw Township. Jaffar was crossing the border legally in order to sell the goats in Bangladesh, after already paying taxes to soldiers stationed in NaSaKa camp #5. Despite presenting his permits, he was detained for two days at a NaSaKa camp where he was tortured, causing severe injuries. Though he was later released on 3 February, his goats were not returned.³⁰⁰

On 1 March 2007, policemen from Sabbi Bazaar outpost of Buthidaung Township forcibly plucked five "mounds" (179 kg / 393 lbs) of green chilli from Fayaz Uddin's chilli farm.³⁰¹

On 2 March 2007, police officers in Buthidaung Township arrested Rohingya farmer, Farid, of Phone Nyo Hlake (Phumali) village tract, on the accusation that he had more cattle than he was permitted. He was released the next day after agreeing to give three head of cattle to the police.³⁰²

On 3 March 2007, five policemen from Phone Nyo Hlake Police Station in Buthidaung Township, looted live chickens worth 55,000 kyat from Noor Ahmed, a 22-year-old Rohingya farmer as he was travelling to market in Buthidaung.³⁰³

On 4 April 2007, ten police officers intercepted a Rohingya shopkeeper transporting wares along the river from Sittwe to his village shop in Dabru Chaung village, Buthidaung Township. The police officers justified the requisitioning of Anwar Sadek's merchandise through accusative questioning as to how he was able to afford these goods. While he was being detained, his goods were sold for the police's profit. Anwar remained in custody at the time of the original report (18 April 2007) although no charges had been filed against him.³⁰⁴

On 18 May 2007, NaSaKa personnel robbed the home of a Rohingya in Thinga Net village, Buthidaung Township. On that day, soldiers from NaSaKa Area #9 in Taung Bazaar visited the home of Anwar Hussain, 55, and called out for him to open the door. When he did not do so, the NaSaKa soldiers broke the door down, assaulted his family and looted gold and jewellery valued at 400,000 kyat. When Anwar lodged a complaint with NaSaKa the following day, he was flatly informed, *"Last night we had no patrol party doing the rounds. Your complaint is false. If you come here again, you will be punished."*³⁰⁵

On 23 July 2007, a Rohingya household in Kin Daung village, Buthidaung Township, was looted by SPDC army troops from LIB #551 as they were on patrol in the area. A team of eight soldiers under the command of Corporal Shwe Zaw reportedly forced their way into the family home of Buzuar Meah, after asking his wife, Minara, whether he was home, and being told he was out at market. The troops reportedly looted 400,000 kyat and three ticals (49 grams / 1.7 oz) of gold. Minara was severely assaulted. When Buzuar reported the robbery to local army headquarters he was threatened not to pursue the case. A village elder commented on the incident:

*"We have been persecut[ed] in many ways at the hand of military junta ... but they do not satisfy with it. So, they take a new step to commit robbery against the Rohingya people. It is an open challenge to the Rohingya community as the robbery occurred in broad daylight"*³⁰⁶

On 11 September 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 in Mrauk U Township had confiscated coconut trees, piglets and chickens from several villages for an army husbandry project without any compensation. One village chairman reported, *"Villagers in our village were able to give coconut trees to the army, but they were unable to provide chickens or piglets. The army authorities then asked for money (200,000 kyat) from villagers instead of chickens and piglets"*³⁰⁷

On 30 October 2007, SPDC army troops under MOC #15 looted cattle belonging to Anwar Hussain of Dabyu Chaung village of Buthidaung Township. While a young boy was looking after the cattle, two soldiers simply approached him and took two oxen away. When the owner complained at the army camp, he was eventually given 6,000 kyat compensation. The cost of the cattle on the open market was 250,000 kyat.³⁰⁸

On 24 December 2007, Maungdaw TPDC Chairman Myint Maung ordered villages in the vicinity of Maungdaw to provide logs to the authorities for use in the baking of bricks. The bricks were reported to be for the construction of the District PDC office, hotels and other SPDC-sponsored projects. Each household was ordered to provide a log measuring 7 ft long and 10 inches in diameter. Families unable to provide the log had to pay 800 kyat. The

authorities also collected logs from local wards in Maungdaw, but only from Muslim Rohingya residents, and not the Buddhist Arakanese.³⁰⁹

Chin State

In January 2007, Mr Robem, the chairman of Koe-La village, Matupi Township, was issued orders by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #140 to collect six chickens, as well as two cups of rice from every family in his village. The supplies were to be delivered to the army camp near Leisen village. Such demands by LIB #140 were reportedly common in the area during 2007.³¹⁰

On 3 January 2007, Captain Nyun Hlaing of LIB #50, stationed in Lailenpi village, Matupi Township, ordered the village chairman, Pu Kharku, to bring five chickens to the army camp. Pu Kharku was forced to collect the chickens from his fellow villagers, who received no compensation for their loss of livestock.³¹¹

On 4 January 2007, a unit of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #50, led by Company Commander Ye Kyaw Soe, demanded three chickens from U Nawl Hlaing, a member of the Hlungmang village VPDC in Matupi Township. Corporal Win Maung demanded the chickens from U Nawl Hlaing, forcing him to prepare and cook one right away and then another when his commander arrived, threatening that his house would be burned down if he did not do so.³¹²

On 31 January 2007, Private Bo Hlaing of LIB #50, based at the Lailenpi SPDC army camp in Matupi Township, stole three chickens from local villager U Ki Sang. U Ki Sang's subsequent complaint to the military was ignored.³¹³

On 6 April 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #269, based in Tiddim, commonly demanded chickens from villagers whenever they stopped in their area to eat.³¹⁴

On 19 November 2007, it was reported that SPDC army troops from LIB #266 stationed in Lunglei village, Thangtlang Township, were forcibly taking rice, chickens and vegetables from villagers residing along their patrol route. *"They ask for food and livestock from villagers in remote areas even as people struggle to survive,"* one villager reported.³¹⁵

Karen State

In early January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #599, operating in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, under the command of Tin Bo Aung, demanded 100 sacks of paddy, worth 200,000 kyat, from Wei La Daw village tract.³¹⁶

On 9 January 2007, a joint DKBA-SPDC task force operating in Papun District commenced a series of attacks against local villages which they also pillaged for supplies. The two commanders responsible for the DKBA force were reported to be Hla Maung and Por Mer (Yo Meh). The SPDC force was reported to be from LIB #525 and was led by Bo Htin Sain. The patrol attacked T'Nyat Law village and Lay Kweih Law on that day. Six chickens were stolen during the attack. On the same day they also attacked Kyo Koh Der village, stealing 1 tin (12.5 kg / 27.5 lbs) of rice and 1 viss (1.6 kg / 3.6 lbs) of sugar. On 12 January they arrived in Htoh Po Pa Der village in Dweh Loh Township, where they reportedly looted 7 chickens, 1 duck, 7 pyi (11 kg / 24 lbs) of rice, 1 pig and 3 viss (4.8 kg / 10.8 lbs) of salt. On 14 January 2007, the same force further attacked the villages of Kin Hta, T'ler Der Day and T'Gaw Kee. During these attacks they looted 5 chickens and 1 pig. On the same day, Hla Maung attacked Htoh Po Pa Der village, taking 1 goat and 3 chickens. The following day, they attacked Mae Thaw Kee and took 5 chickens, 1 viss (1.6 kg / 3.6 lbs) of tobacco and 1

flashlight. On the 15 January, the column attacked Kyo Koh Der village where they stole 2 tins (25 kg / 55 lbs) of rice. On 17 January, Por Mer and Hla Maung attacked Mae Thaw Kee village again and took 11 chickens, 1 viss 1.6 kg / 3.6 lbs) of chilli, and 2 solar panels. On 18 January, the DKBA members of the unit looted 5 baskets (125 kg / 276 lbs) of rice from Chaw-bwe-deh village, 3 baskets (75 kg / 165 lbs) of rice from Hee-poe-deh village, 1 and half baskets of rice (37.5 kg / 83 lbs) from Meh-htaw-hta village, 2 baskets of rice (50 kg / 110 lbs) from Kyo Koh Der village and 7 baskets of rice from Htoh Po Pa Der village.³¹⁷

On 17 January 2007, SPDC army officers from IB #10 arrived at a monastery in Kler Lah with the intention of celebrating the Buddhist festival of Ga Htein Bwe. For this occasion the soldiers invited 10 monks to receive donations in a merit-making ceremony. In order to collect the funds for the donation however, these officers had their soldiers demand money from local villagers from whom they collected 150,000 kyat which the officers then offered to the monks.³¹⁸

On 22 January 2007, Light Infantry Division (LID) #44 Commander Hla Myint Shwe demanded 1,500 shingles of roofing thatch, 750 poles of *may* bamboo (a species of thin bamboo used in construction) and 50 poles of *gklu* bamboo (a species of thick bamboo used to construct floor beams) from Lay Kay village in Thaton District, for use in the construction of a new army camp. Hla Myint Shwe told the villagers that he would pay them for the thatch and bamboo, but the villagers reported that such payment never came. The total financial burden on Lay Kay village for this demand was thus 137,500 kyat.³¹⁹

On 27 January 2007, DKBA troops, operating in Papun District, demanded one basket (25 kg / 55 lbs) of rice from Poe-mu-deh village and a number of goods from the residents of Htoh Po Pa Der village, including; one goat, one chicken, 15 eggs, plates, spoons and pairs of men's trousers.³²⁰

On 28 January 2007, DKBA soldiers reportedly looted 10 eggs, 15 chickens and 36,000 kyat from the residents of Ban-hta and Kin-hta villages, Papun District.³²¹

On 3 February 2007, troops from LID #44 reportedly looted 3 ducks, 2 viss (3.2 kg / 7.2 lbs) of chicken and 1 *pyi* (1.5 kg / 2.4 lbs) of rice, from Hta-hu-lo village in Dweh Loh Township, Papun District. The following day, LID #44 troops looted 3 viss (4.8 kg / 10.8 lbs) of salt, 4 viss (6.4 kg / 14.4 lbs) of chicken and 30 coconuts from Hta-ko-lo village.³²²

On 6 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #3, operating under LID #44, attacked Ler-gay-hta village in Papun District. During the sacking of the village, SPDC army soldier stole the following:

1. Four muzzle-loading hunting rifles,
2. Two *pyi* (3 kg / 6.9 lbs) of rice,
3. One gallon of diesel,
4. Some clothes and blankets,
5. Two bottles of liquor, and
6. 20,200 kyat in cash.³²³

On 19 February 2007, DKBA forces under Hla Maung continued to plunder the villages of Dweh Loh Township, Papun Township, when they demanded 2 *pyi* (3 kg / 6.9 lbs) of rice from each household in Ta-khu-doe village.³²⁴

On 27 February 2007, an SPDC army patrol operating out of Wa-klay-htu, in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District assaulted and shot at villagers in the Khee-thee-day area. During the attack, they stole one machete, one watch, one flashlight, and one pot from Saw Maw Ter.³²⁵

Starting from the end of March 2007, LIB #9 Battalion Commander Min Naing Oo required that local villagers send 10 viss (16 kg / 36 lbs) of pork for his soldiers every week. As payment he gave only half the market value of the pork. As the villagers did not have enough pigs to meet these demands the village heads were forced to request that the villagers purchase the needed pork elsewhere.³²⁶

On 9 March 2007, in Thaton Township, Thaton District, SPDC army soldiers from IB #96 under Column Commander Soe Thar, looted poultry from the following residents of Pah-paw-pu village:

1. Naw Meh Ler, 2 chickens;
2. Tee Shwe Owh, 2 chickens; and
3. Saw Phar Thu, 1 chicken.³²⁷

On 15 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating out of Dweh Loh army camp in Papun District fired at a group of Ler-kay-doe villagers, killing Saw Say Nay Mu. after killing him, the soldiers proceeded to steal 1,300 baht, 17,000 kyat, 2,000 betelnuts, and a watch from their victim.³²⁸

On 21 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #501 entered Tay-mu-der village in Papun District, killing three villagers who had come from Thi-thoo-der village to buy rice. following this, the soldiers looted the following goods from the following villagers:

1. Saw Bweh Kaw, three baskets (63 kg / 138 lbs) of paddy, 20 viss (32 kg / 70.4 lbs) of salt, 10 ducks, 3 knives, 3 carpets (cost 2,500 Thai baht), 2 machetes and 1 mat;
2. Saw Kaw Poe Yay, 2 blankets, 2 mats, 2 mattocks, and 9 chickens;
3. Saw Leh Eh Say, 30 viss (48 kg / 105 lbs) of salt, 4 machetes, 1 knife, 3 scythes, and 1 bronze drum;
4. Saw Baw Say, 1 pot;
5. Saw Thay Gay Mu, 7 tins (87.5 kg / 192 lbs) of rice;
6. Pah Kaw Du, 3 tins (37.5 kg / 82 lbs) of rice;
7. Naw Ma Hseh, 1 tin (12.5 kg / 27.5 lbs) of rice;
8. Saw Khay La, 1 tin (12.5 kg / 27.5 lbs) of rice;
9. Saw Mya Win, 1 ½ tins (18.7 kg / 41 lbs) of rice;
10. Pah Hsah Mu, 1 backpack, 6 sets of clothes, 2 umbrellas and a pair of gloves;
11. Poe Hser Nay, medicines; and
12. Saw Pu Tay, 8,500 baht and 100,000 kyat in cash.³²⁹

On 22 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #1, stationed in Dweh Loh Township, Papun District, demanded 4 viss (6.4 kg / 14 lbs) of pork from the Christian parishioners of Hsaw-bweh-doe village. The following day, the same group of soldiers shot a buffalo belonging to Htoh Po Pa Der villagers for food.³³⁰

On 25 March 2007, DKBA troops entered Hsaw-bweh-doe village in Papun District, where they looted the following from the villagers:

1. Two chickens,
2. One goat,
3. One pig,
4. Two viss (3.2 kg / 7 lbs) of chicken meat, and
5. Two viss (3.2 kg / 7 lbs) of salt.³³¹

On 25 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers under LIB #9, Column #1 (Major Kyaw Zaw U commanding) entered Ler Po village in Bilin Township, Thaton District, where they reportedly looted food from the following villagers:

1. Than Kyi, 10 gourds;
2. Pa Kya Shwe Moe, 1 chicken;
3. Myint Shwe Soe, 1 gourd;
4. Mo Kee Moe, 2 gourds; and
5. Ma Kyi Win, 5 pumpkins.³³²

On 30 March 2007, LIB #9 Column #1 (Major Kyaw Zaw U commanding) and Column #2 (Major Nanda Lin commanding) entered Ber-wa-ta village in Bilin Township, Thaton District, where they looted goods from the following villagers:

1. Tee Maung Toh, a bunch of bananas;
2. Ma Thaung Yi, 6 coconuts;
3. Naw Mi Ri, 3 coconuts; and
4. Saw Hsaw Ko, 5 coconuts and 2 bottles of honey.

Then, as they were leaving the village, the soldiers uprooted 45 chilli plants and stole a number of gourds and brinjal eggplants (aubergines) from the fields surrounding the village.³³³



The burnt and burning remains of villagers' rice storage barns at Dtu Ba village, Lu Thaw township, Papun District on May 17th 2007 following an SPDC attack. Villagers in Lu Thaw have come under increasing pressure as SPDC forces have recently completed a vehicle road linking a network of camps in the northwest to the township's main east-west vehicle road.
[Caption and photo: KHRG]

In the last week of March 2007, Saw Ka Der villagers in Nyaunglebin District fled their homes to escape an approaching SPDC patrol. After the villagers had fled, the soldiers then looted each household's belongings. According to reports, one woman with three children had her child's clothes, cooking pots, and machetes stolen, among other things.³³⁴

On 12 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from an unidentified unit robbed two villagers from Hsaw Wah Der village in Toungoo District. The two villagers, and the goods that were stolen from them are as follows:

1. Saw Ler Per, 350,000 kyat in cash; and
2. Saw Joseph, 3 tins (31.5 kg / 69 lbs) of paddy and 1 tin 12.5 kg / 27.5 lbs) of rice.³³⁵

In April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #2 under the command of Zaw Min Htun arrived at Htee Hsee Baw village, Thaton District and set themselves up at the local Buddhist monastery for three nights. While staying there the soldiers stole chickens belonging to resident villagers for their meals.³³⁶

On 11 May 2007, SPDC army units had launched renewed attacks against civilian villages in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District, where it was reported that any livestock or foodstuffs they came across was plundered.³³⁷

Between 12 May and 4 June 2007, SPDC army soldiers led by Major Sein Than and operating under MOC #5 in Toungoo District, mounted patrols to hunt down villagers still living beyond direct military control to the east of the Day Loh River. As a consequence of this intensified military activity, numerous villages emptied as their inhabitants fled into hiding sites deeper in the forest. It was reported that the soldiers looted whatever hidden food stores they found and destroyed whatever they were unable to carry. It is believed that over 200 tins (2,500 kg / 5,500 lbs) of rice were looted at this time. Those villages affected by this increased troop movements included:

1. Gko Haw Der village;
2. Sho Koh village;
3. Pweh Kee village;
4. Ber Ka Lay Ko village ;
5. Maw Tu Der village;
6. Haw Lu Der village;
7. Maw Bpwe Koh village; and
8. Blah Kee village.³³⁸

On 5 July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #2, led by Myo Aung extorted one chicken and a duck from Ta Oo Kee village in Bilin Township of Thaton District. Following this, they proceeded to Nya Po Kee village where they stole a further 10 chickens. The following day, the same soldiers extorted 7 chickens and 2.5 kilograms of rice from Toe Tae Kee villagers.³³⁹

On 1 November 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219 began patrolling in the areas of Ka Dee Muh Der and Law Gklaw Kee villages located on the border of Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin Townships in Nyaunglebin District. On 12 November 2007, these soldiers looted and destroyed the belongings of villagers living in the area. One villager lost her paddy storage barn which had contained 30 baskets (630 kg / 1,386 lbs). Meanwhile, another villager whose paddy barn had contained 15 baskets (315 kg / 693 lbs) of paddy and 3 baskets (75 kg / 495 lbs) of rice was also destroyed. The soldiers also reportedly looted a nearby field hut from which they stole everything of value, including one muzzle-loading hunting rifle (musket).³⁴⁰

On 19 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers looting the following goods from Lay Baw Koh Kaw Htee village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District:

1. 21 machetes;
2. 14 men's sarongs;
3. 38 women's sarongs;
4. 75 shirts;
5. Seven pairs of trousers;
6. 14 baskets (294 kg / 647 lbs) of paddy;
7. Three mosquito nets;
8. 12 viss (19.6 kg / 43 lbs) of salt;
9. One clay pot full of gold (value unknown); and
10. One radio.³⁴¹

On 1 December 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #377 of MOC #9 based in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District entered Kwee Doh Koh village tract and looted the following items from the following villagers (villagers' names withheld):

1. Saw Ht--, 1 *viss* (1.6 kg / 3.6 lbs) of salt, 2 pots, 1 kettle, 2 cups, 2 packets of tea, 2 pikes, 2 mattocks, 6 plates, 2 large packets of monosodium glutamate (MSG) seasoning, 6 baskets (150 kg / 330 lbs) of rice, 1 frying pan, 1 large gas container, 20 new shirts, 5 new blankets, 15 new men's sarongs, 5 new women's sarongs and 1 *viss* (1.6 kg / 3.6 lbs) of chilli;
2. Saw Gk--, 50 (80 kg / 176 lbs) *viss* of salt and 1 container of engine oil;
3. Saw H--, 9 tins (112.5 kg / 247 lbs) of rice, 2 pots, 15 plates and 2 saws; and
4. Naw B--, 15 *viss* (24 kg / 53 lbs) of salt.³⁴²

Karenni State

On 9 August 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #261 slaughtered a buffalo belonging to a villager from Narnahtaw village in Loikaw Township, after the animal wandered into an SPDC-owned physic nut plantation. After killing the buffalo the soldiers took the carcass to their military base. The fields had formerly been used by the villagers as pasture for their cattle, but had since been confiscated by the military. It was reportedly easy for the animals to stray into the plantations as they were not securely fenced off.³⁴³

On 11 August 2007, Platoon Commander Nah Reh of the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), together with five SPDC army soldiers based in Shadaw Township, slaughtered and ate a pig owned by a local resident. They informed witnesses to the incident that anyone who claimed they owned the pig would be arrested, fined and detained. The pig was reported to have had a market value of approximately 200,000 kyat.³⁴⁴

Shan State

In July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #287 killed and butchered a water buffalo belonging to a villager from Naa Kawng village in Murng Nawng village tract, Kae See Township. On the day of the incident, Lung Ti, 46, had let his buffalo graze in a ravine near his rice field as he stopped to rest for lunch after using it to plough the field. Although, when it was time to start working again after he had finished his lunch, Lung Ti could not find his buffalo where he had left it and so went off in search of it in the surrounding areas. Upon doing so he ran into a group of three SPDC army soldiers who were busy cutting up the carcass of a buffalo. On seeing Lung Ti approach, one of the soldiers picked up his rifle which had been leaning against a tree a few metres away. Fearing that the soldier was going to shoot him, Lung Ti turned and ran away as fast as he could. Only after the soldiers had left, Lung Ti returned to the scene and was able to identify his buffalo from the remains.³⁴⁵

In December 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from IB #248 operating in Loi La village tract, Nansang Township, had been forcing villagers to provide them with water, firewood, chicken and other foodstuffs since May 2007. Local villagers were reportedly required to provide the soldiers with 10 barrels of water daily. The villagers had to deliver the water to the army camp with their own mini-tractors without any form of compensation to cover the costs of fuel. Moreover, two bullock cart-loads of firewood were required to be transported to the camp every five days. In addition to this, each of the local villages subjected to these orders was required to supply 8 *viss* (12.8 kg / 28 lbs) of chicken, 5 *viss* (8 kg / 17.6 lbs) of dried pickled soy bean and 5 *viss* (8 kg / 17.6 lbs) of sesame cooking oil to the camp once a month. The villages affected by these orders included:

1. Kaeng Kham Awn village;
2. Paang Sa village;
3. Phaa Sawnt village;
4. Muay Taw village; and
5. Khaai Paang Sa village.³⁴⁶

Tenasserim Division

On 2 March 2007, an SPDC army soldier fired at a teenage boy three times so as to scare him into giving him his new motorcycle in Koe-Mine in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division. The soldier, identified as being from LIB #299, fired into the ground at the feet of the 17-year-old boy, before taking the motorbike. Though the motorcycle was returned the same evening, it had been damaged. It was reported that, the soldiers had been using local's motorbikes to practice their driving skills prior to Armed Forces Day parades in Naypyidaw. The same soldier was said to have previously forced a resident of Ka-bya village to also give him his motorbike and forcing a local petrol station attendant to fill the tank with fuel at no charge. One local resident had stated that *"All the motorbikes in the area are taken by Burmese soldiers and the police. They take two motorbikes a day"*.³⁴⁷

Destruction of Property

Throughout 2007, SPDC army soldiers continued to implement tactics under its Four Cuts Policy, resulting in the intentional destruction of people's homes, farmland and places of business. Such actions are particularly prevalent in areas where the SPDC army has not been able to exert complete control or where they have been unable to establish a permanent presence that would allow them to do so. Unable to control such areas, the military has sought to instead depopulate them and forcibly relocate all those who live there into SPDC-garrisoned relocation sites in close proximity to SPDC army bases where populations can be readily controlled and exploited.

Villagers' crops and food supplies are among the central targets of SPDC army units under this Policy. In the month preceding harvest (harvest typically occurs between late September and early December), it is a common tactic to beat down, burn, or mine civilian rice fields in these areas. Similarly, SPDC army soldiers often prematurely burn the felled trees and scrub left in villagers' fields before it has been able to fully dry out, resulting in an uneven burn, which in turn reduces the area of the field which can be used for planting. Likewise, the hidden food caches of the internally displaced are also targeted and destroyed by SPDC army patrols.

Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) lists the *"extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly"* as a war crime. Meanwhile, Article 14 of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (1977) states that: *"Starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited. It is therefore prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless, for that purpose, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, crops, livestock, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works"*. The Four Cuts Policy, under which such abuses are committed in Burma, is implemented in flagrant contravention of both of these key documents and represents a systematic plan to undermine what the SPDC deems to be a dissident population and bring it under the SPDC's direct control. (For more information, also see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

Destruction of Property – partial list of incidents for 2007

Karen State

On 1 January 2007, SPDC army troops, operating under the command of Htwe Aye, and stationed in the Ma La Daw army camp in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, burned down a number of field huts during an attack on Kyauk Tan village.³⁴⁸

On 6 January 2007, Strategic Operations Commander (SOC), Kin Maung Oo, ordered IB #60 and LIB #351 to relocate residents of Ko Pu and Hsaw Mi Lu village tracts in Mone Township to Kyauk Kyi. The order followed a KNLA attack on an SPDC army unit in the area. The villagers were forced to destroy their own homes as part of the relocation.³⁴⁹

On 7 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #351 and IB #60 mortared Aung-Soe-Moe village in Nyaunglebin District, destroying houses and the electricity transformer.³⁵⁰

On 5 February 2007, 20 acres of bean plantations belonging to Wel-ka-tat-myaung-daw villagers in Nyaunglebin District, were destroyed by a fire started by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #349 under order of Deputy Battalion Commander That Khaing.³⁵¹

On 26 February 2007, unidentified SPDC army soldiers torched 9 huts and 2 farms around Ter-bo-plaw village in Papun District.³⁵²

On 28 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District burned down 15 huts and 3 farms belonging to Maw-soe, Top-ta-lay-plee and Noe-blaw-hta-dweh-doe villagers.³⁵³



Partially burned hill fields of villagers from Gkwee Hta Mah village in Meh Cho village tract, Papun District, on 4 April 2007. Soldiers from SPDC LIB #219 conducted an irregular burn in order to prevent a complete burn that would have allowed local villagers to cultivate crops on the land. [Photo: KHRG]

On 1 March 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from SPDC LIB #539 destroyed 4 cardamom fields, 6 betelnut plantations, one wooden house and 9 bamboo houses in Mwee Loh village, and 6 cardamom fields, 4 betelnut plantations and 4 houses in Ta Pa Kee village in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District.³⁵⁴

During March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #539 based in Play Hsa Loh in southwestern Toungoo District set fire to large areas of land along a proposed road corridor in the area. This was believed to have been done so that the soldiers could more easily see both civilians and KNLA soldiers alike as they attempted to cross the area. The fires

destroyed a number of rice paddy fields and fruit orchards which lay alongside the route, depriving their owners of their livelihoods.³⁵⁵

On 9 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to LID #44 burned 15 plantation fields to the ground in Dweh Loh Township, Papun District. Another report, clearly discussing the same event maintained that the incident had occurred on 13 March 2007.³⁵⁶

Also on 9 March 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit burned down a villager's paddy storage barn, reported to have contained 22 (275 kg / 605 lbs) tins of rice, which he had hidden in the forests of Toungoo District. The soldiers subsequently captured the villager who had not been released two weeks later when the original report was made.³⁵⁷

On 12 March 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #207, LIB #216 and LIB #219 set fire to the forests surrounding Lay Po, Ta Ler Lu, Htee Mae Baw, Hpwa Hai Lay, Hgaw Kyo Baw and War May Lu villages, damaging 4 paddy farms in Hsar Ri Kyo and 3 in Deh Hta. All of these villages are located in Papun District.³⁵⁸

On 18 March 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #380 and LIB #378 burned 4 farms around Ler-hsaw-doe village in Nyaunglebin District to the ground.³⁵⁹

On 20 March 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit burned down two field huts in Papun District.³⁶⁰

On 22 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #54, reportedly started forest fires in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District, destroying many orchards in the process.³⁶¹

On 23 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers LIB #566, led by Bo Nay Lin Oo, burned down a number of homes in Ler Ker Der Ko village, in Than Daung Township, Toungoo District.³⁶²

Also on 23 March 2007, SPDC army troops operating out of Ta-shu-doe in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District burned down and thus destroyed the farms of Na-ka-hti villagers; Saw Peral, Saw Pa Pi and Saw Maw Lar Htoo.³⁶³

Between March and April 2007, it was reported that LIB #372 Column #2 had burned 62 fruit plantations in the See Kheh Der area of Toungoo District.³⁶⁴

In early April 2007, SPDC army troops from LIB #346 burned fields in the Maung Tay Der and May Daw Koh areas of Toungoo District. In all, 500 acres, including 60 acres of cardamom plants, were destroyed. In Kaw Thay Der village, SPDC army soldiers burned an additional 82 acres of cardamom plants.³⁶⁵

On 3 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #27 Column #2, led by Bo Yan Naing U, burned and destroyed several rubber plantations below Kyon-ka-wun village in Win Yaw Township, Dooplaya District. Those persons whose rubber plantations were affected were:

1. Lar Paw Owa, 800 three-year-old and 700 five-year old trees;
2. U Kisana, 1,400 trees;
3. U Thein Tin Hla, 2,000 two-year-old trees;
4. U Tway Maung, 800 two-year-old trees;
5. U Thein Win, 200 trees;
6. U Kawt, 800 one-year-old trees;
7. Maung Myat, 100 trees; and
8. Saw Hla Khin, 100 trees.³⁶⁶

Between 4 April and 22 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers razed 4 villages in Papun District. The villages and the date on which they were destroyed were as follows:

1. Kaw-ku-mu-doe, on 4 April 2007;
2. Bo-na-doe, on 7 April 2007;
3. Htee-bway-kee, on 22 April 2007; and
4. Htee-si-khee, on 22 April 2007.³⁶⁷

On 5 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating under LIB #539 reportedly started wild fires in Htee-nya-ber-lo and Klaw Mee Der areas of Tantabin Township, Toungoo District,. The fires destroyed:

1. 24 cardamom plantations and 10 betelnut plantations of Kheh Der villagers;
2. A house worth 200,000 kyat belonging to Saw Kee Ni;
3. 14 cardamom plantations and 15 betelnut plantations of Kaw Po Loh villagers;
4. 25 cardamom fields and 13 betelnut plantations of Ler Klah Der villagers; and
5. 19 cardamom fields of Hu Mu Der villagers.³⁶⁸

On 6 April 2007, a combined force of DKBA #907 Battalion and DKBA headquarters battalions moved into the Kawkareik Chaung-pya area, and burned down all paddy barns they came across. Those persons whose property was destroyed were:

1. Saw De Hgay, 80 baskets of paddy;
2. Saw Eh Kalu, 115 baskets of paddy;
3. Naw Lepoe, 50 baskets of paddy;
4. Kyaw Win Maung, 60 baskets of paddy;
5. Tee Taru, 120 baskets of paddy; and
6. Par Kay, 100 baskets of paddy.³⁶⁹

Between 7 April and 10 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #375 burned three fields and six cardamom plantations in Play Hsa Lo village, Toungoo District, and destroyed 7 fields and a further eight cardamom plantations in nearby Paung Pai village.³⁷⁰

On 9 April 2007, forest fires started by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #566, operating under the orders of Bo Nay Lin U, destroyed 22 cardamom plantations, two betelnut plantations and a total of 155 acres of agricultural land belonging to residents of Der Doh village in Than Daung Township, Toungoo District.³⁷¹

On 22 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating under Major Aung Myo of LIB #505 burned down all 16 homes comprising what was Htee Bwey Kee village in Papun District.³⁷²

On 28 April 2007, SPDC army battalions operating under MOC #1 in Papun District, burned down an office building belong to Kay Pu village tract, along with 11 farmhouses belonging to local villagers. On the same day, MOC #1 troops fired 11 rounds of heavy weapons (though not explicitly stated, these were most likely light mortar shells) into the Si Day area, destroying 26 homes.³⁷³

On 28 April 2007, SPDC army units stationed in Papun District mounted patrols through the Gler-mu, Plo-ta and Da-may-ta areas, burning down numerous houses and field huts in the process.³⁷⁴

Also on 28 April 2007, SPDC army troops burned down and destroyed a number of field huts surrounding the village of Yaw Kee in northern Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District.³⁷⁵

On 29 April 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit burned down Thu-ta village in Papun District.³⁷⁶

Also on 29 April 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit operating in Papun District burned down 5 houses in Kay Pu village, as well as an IDP shelter in the Si Day area.³⁷⁷

On 30 April 2007, SPDC army troops shelled the rice fields near Kay Pu village and Da-may-ta areas with 15 heavy weapons rounds (though not explicitly stated in the original report, these were most likely light mortar shells).³⁷⁸

On 30 April 2007, a column of SPDC army troops from LIB #212 and LIB #220, operating under the command of Captain Than Htwe, completely razed Tah Ho Aw village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. Property hidden in the surrounding forests by the villagers was also destroyed.³⁷⁹

During May 2007, SPDC army soldiers set fire to and thus destroyed a paddy storage barn in Htee Bu Khee village in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District.³⁸⁰



The burnt remains of Naw Deh Lih and Saw Thaw Shwe's rice stores as seen on 13 May 2007 shortly after being destroyed by soldiers from SPDC LIB #220. A charred rice storage basket and winnowing fan lie amidst the ashes. The SPDC has used the destruction of paddy fields and rice stores as a means to undermine the livelihoods of those attempting to live in areas outside of military control and thereby drive them into military-controlled relocation sites. [Caption and photo: KHRG]

On 2 May 2007, SPDC army troops operating out of Sro Kyo village in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District, burned down 5 houses in Htee-si-kee and Kler Loe villages.³⁸¹

On 3 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #212 and LIB #220 attacked Ler Wah village in Nyaunglebin District, destroying all of the property they found in the village.³⁸²

In May and June 2007, SPDC army soldiers from MOC #5, under the command of Major Sein Than, had ransacked food stores at villages including Mah Shoh Gkoh, Pyee Kee, Koh Hah Der and Maw Pway Koh while patrolling in eastern Than Daung Township in Toungoo District.³⁸³

On 7 May 2007, soldiers operating out of the Wah Klei Tu SPDC army camp in northern Papun District attacked Day Bu Plaw village in the Yu Gaw Kee area, during which they burned down four houses in the village.³⁸⁴

On 17 May 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit killed Naw Bu Ru, 27, as she was in her field in the Pana Eh Per Ko area of Papun District. The troops then burned Naw Bu Ru's body in her field hut, after which they also burned seven other field huts.³⁸⁵

On 9 July 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 and LIB #388 patrolled through the area surrounding Saw Ka Der village in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, during which they burned down more than 20 paddy storage barns, 66 hill fields, 117 betelnut plantations, and other numerous other fields and plantations.³⁸⁶

On 9 July 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit operating in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District set fire to and destroyed two homes belonging to Saw La Sweh and Saw Ray Kaw Paw.³⁸⁷

On 13 August 2007, SPDC army soldiers with IB #83 and IB #77 attacked Ga Yu Der village in Papun District, burning down 14 homes and forcing more than 80 villagers to flee from this one village alone. The troops then continued moving north, burning down several homes in Lay Po Der. After crossing into Toungoo District, the soldiers attacked Lay Kee village, burning down many homes and forcing hundreds of people into hiding.³⁸⁸

On 1 November 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219 began patrolling in the areas of Ka Dee Muh Der and Law Gklaw Kee villages in Nyaunglebin District. On 12 November 2007, these soldiers looted and destroyed the belongings of villagers living in the area. Among the items destroyed were the paddy storage barns of a number of villagers, one of which reportedly had contained 30 baskets (630 kg / 1,386 lbs) of paddy, and another which had contained 15 baskets (315 kg / 693 lbs) of paddy and 3 baskets (75 kg / 165 lbs) of rice.³⁸⁹

On 19 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219, attacked Ler Wah village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, strafing it with machinegun fire. As the villagers fled into the forest, the troops moved into the village, ransacking homes, stealing belongings, and destroying food and other property that they were not able to carry away with them. They then set up a temporary camp close to the village for several days, and placed landmines in the village before returning to their camp.³⁹⁰

On 21 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating in Papun District, burned down the paddy storage barn of Hti Moo Ki villager, Saw Wah Der, including all 45 sacks (1,890 kg / 4,158 lbs) of paddy that it had contained.³⁹¹

On 24 November 2007, a combined column of DKBA soldiers from #333 Brigade, #999 Brigade and #907 Battalion entered K'Toe Hta village in Kawkareik Township, Doooplaya District, where they burned down the home of Saw Pa Toe. According to reports, his home was worth at least 500,000 kyat. The soldiers then killed a goat belonging to Naw Mu Poe, worth 25,000 kyat, burned down a hut belonging to Naw La Bu Mo, worth 20,000 kyat and shot cows belonging to Naw Mo Kee before leaving the village. The cows did not die, but Naw Mo Kee then had to buy 30,000 kyat worth of medicine to care for her cows.³⁹²

Also on 24 November 2007, a column of DKBA soldiers entered Thaw Paw Oo Kee village in Kawkareik Township, Doooplaya District. They burned down the home of Naw Ma Kin La, and killed ten of her goats and one ox, leaving in their wake more than one million kyat in damage. In the same village, the soldiers burned down a hut belonging to Naw Ma Sa La, reportedly worth more than 20,000 kyat, and another hut which belonged to Naw Pay Gay worth 70,000 kyat. These soldiers then killed a pig belonging to Naw Ta Loe and an ox belonging to Saw Pa Mu Wa.³⁹³

On 1 December 2007, SPDC army soldiers arrived at the Th'Ay Kee area of Toungoo District. Due to previous SPDC military operations in the area the community of Th'Ay Kee no longer resides in the village itself, but rather in hiding sites in the surrounding forests. Upon detecting the hidden rice stores and huts of displaced villagers, the soldiers burned these to the ground. For some Th'Ay Kee villagers, these rice stores were the last of their provisions.³⁹⁴

Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation

Restrictions on trade, travel and cultivation are frequently imposed by the SPDC, especially in areas of armed conflict, causing untold further difficulties for individuals attempting to maintain a livelihood. Many people living in areas under SPDC control are restricted from leaving their villages and must pay for travel passes from authorities to gain permission to leave. These passes often only allow travel within a short period, sometimes only from dawn to dusk. Others are simply not permitted to leave their villages at all, where anyone who is seen outside their village, for whatever reason, may be shot on sight.

As a result of such draconian restrictions, those who own or work on farms and plantations, as the majority of villagers in rural areas do, lost their primary source of livelihood. Even those who were permitted to travel to their farms on day passes found that this was not sufficient, especially at the time of harvest when farmers are required to stay in their fields and plantations for a period of two to three weeks to scare birds and wild animals away from the crop as it ripens. Those whose fields and plantations are any distance away from their villages face additional problems as much of the time that they are permitted to be away from the village is spent travelling to and from the village. Many villagers who were unable to gain access to their fields were obliged to purchase food from local SPDC army soldiers at grossly inflated prices. In many cases, this food had either been looted from local villages or harvested by the soldiers who then sold it back to the villagers from whose farms the food had been taken.

Trade was also greatly hindered by such restrictions, creating large-scale food security problems for villagers, and preventing them from earning any actual income. SPDC restrictions were often deliberately targeted at preventing trade between villages under direct military control and those in areas where the SPDC had not established a permanent presence. Restrictions of this sort are widely believed to be an attempt to starve the villagers out of the hills by making life in areas which lie beyond direct SPDC control untenable. Such restrictions complimented the targeting and destruction of fields and food supplies in these areas.

Such restrictions are frequently enforced through shoot-on-sight policies, often without any prior investigation as to whether villagers have obtained the appropriate travel documents or not. In one instance, on 1 May 2007, one villager from Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, was shot and wounded by SPDC army soldiers while working in his rice field. After the shooting, the soldiers threatened him not to report the incident, before fining him for working in an area which they claimed was off limits. (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions).

Some travel restrictions are associated with discrimination against specific religious or ethnic minorities, such as in the case of travel restrictions which exist only for the Muslim Rohingya in Arakan State. Travel restrictions are also particularly severe for those who have been placed in relocation sites close to SPDC army bases. For example, 900 persons placed inside a relocation site at Ma La Daw in Mone Township, Karen State were unable to leave the camp without permission during 2007. They were generally permitted to go to markets in neighbouring villages on Tuesday and Saturday only. They were permitted to go to their fields, but only with enough food for one day and had to return to the relocation site by 4:00 pm. The SPDC warned the villagers that they have placed landmines around the relocation site to ensure compliance.³⁹⁵ (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association, and Movement, and Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

The military also continued to heavily control the transportation of rice into and throughout some ethnic areas, such as Arakan State, northern Shan State and Karen State, which led to severe food shortages and loss of income for traders and farmers in the area. The SPDC justifies such policies as a means to combat spiralling rice prices. Although it would appear

that such restrictions have a limited impact in controlling prices in central Burma, they do so at the expense of communities living in those areas in which restrictions apply. According to the World Food Program (WFP), such restrictions mean that prices in mountainous and impoverished border areas, which are inhabited primarily by ethnic minority groups, are up to 30 percent higher than in central Burma – making essential commodities beyond reach of many families. The WFP reports that recent poppy eradication campaigns in Burma have exacerbated poverty, as former opium poppy farmers have received limited assistance in growing alternative crops, and are also prevented from venturing out of their areas in search of work.³⁹⁶

As in previous years, those residing in northern Arakan State, predominately the Rohingya minority, were faced with acute issues of food insecurity in 2007. The situation was exacerbated by heavy storms during the monsoon season. Nevertheless, the SPDC barred the transport of rice from central Burma to northern Arakan State, between the various townships in Arakan State, and in some areas, rice could not even be transported from one local village to another. Other basic commodities including onion, sugar, cooking oil, salt, and chilli are also prohibited from being transported from central Arakan State to the border areas. In July 2007, it was reported that 20 villages in Rathedaung Township were faced with severe rice shortages as a result of the damage caused by Tropical Cyclone Akash. Nevertheless, rice was still not permitted to be transported into the area. By not permitting rice to be transported between regions, some areas face rice shortages and high prices, while in other areas, where there is a rice surplus, rice prices are forced down, thus enabling the military to purchase supplies cheaply. Due to persistent rice shortages, many Rohingya families have been forced to migrate to neighbouring Bangladesh. It is conceivable that such restrictions form a component of the SPDC's widely-recognised attempts of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya in Burma.³⁹⁷



Due to increasing SPDC patrols and the ongoing threat of attack the Yay Ghoh Loh villagers who own these paddy fields, shown here on May 15th 2007, no longer dare to cultivate crops here. This whole area, which includes eight separate paddy fields, had previously been able to produce a yield of about 1,000 baskets [32,000 kg. / 70,400 lb.] of paddy. The loss of this cropland thus means a severe increase in food insecurity, poverty and malnourishment for the local civilian community. [Caption and photo: KHRG]

Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation – partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 5 January 2007, Rohingya farmer, Noor Khobir, 23, was obliged to bribe NaSaKa officers 50,000 kyat to overturn an order barring him from growing crops on his fields. NaSaKa personnel from NaSaKa Area #9 had earlier visited his two acre field in Dum Pine village, Thinga Net village tract, Buthidaung Township, and issued the order without providing any justification.³⁹⁸

Also on 5 January 2007, it was reported that NaSaKa personnel had ordered a Muslim community in Maungdaw to celebrate this year's Eid ul Azha festival with cattle from Maungdaw Township only, and not to bring cattle from other townships even though the prices for cattle are cheaper elsewhere. Since cattle were not permitted to be brought to Maungdaw Township from other townships, the price of cattle in Maungdaw rose significantly during the festival season.³⁹⁹

On 9 February 2007, it was reported that Dabru Chaung villagers in Buthidaung Township, had been barred from visiting a local hill side to collect firewood. On 25 January, two Rohingya villagers were caught by an army patrol when collecting firewood in the area. The firewood was seized, and they were beaten on the spot by the troops. They were later released after paying 1,500 kyat each.⁴⁰⁰

On 13 July 2007, Abdur Rahim, 36, was heavily fined by the military for the sale of his paddy crop. He had sold 100 *taungs* (1,300 kg / 2,860 lbs) of paddy to fellow villagers in Zeditaung village, Buthidaung Township, at the rate of 1,800 kyat per *taung*. Three soldiers later visited his home and interrogated him over how he came to have so much paddy and why he had sold it without their permission. He was subsequently fined 170,000 kyat for selling paddy without permission, leaving him with a meagre 10,000 kyat from what he had made. A village elder reported that, *“There is no restriction on selling a farmer's own produce in their villages, but they have to pay tax to the concerned authority and there is no permission to sell paddy in another town”*.⁴⁰¹

In December 2007, unidentified *“higher authorities”* in Arakan State ordered TPDC officials in Sittwe (Akyab) to prohibit people from carrying rice from one town to another and not to allow them to buy rice to stock up for the coming year. The authorities also ordered officials to collect from farmers for the military stationed in the area for the coming year. This order was issued in the first week of December 2007 in both Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships. It was reported that the people of Maungdaw started facing severe rice shortages after the order had been issued.⁴⁰²

Karen State

On 1 January 2007, village heads in Hin-teing village in Mergui-Tavoy District issued directives to local residents that they were not permitted to leave their villages without purchasing a travel pass from the army, at a cost of 500 kyat each. Villagers were also informed that those who were absent from the village for more than 3 months would no longer be recognised or registered as residents of that village. Implicit in this order is that those who are no longer registered as living in a village will be deemed as being a member of the resistance and shot on sight.⁴⁰³

On 7 January 2007, residents of Aung Soe Moe village in Nyaunglebin District were forcibly relocated to an SPDC-garrisoned relocation site. They were barred from returning to their former village after 6:00 pm.⁴⁰⁴

In early January 2007, it was reported that the farmers of Aung Laung Sein village in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, wishing to stay at their farms required a one-month travel pass issued by Sergeant Win Naing of LIB #599. Each pass was charged at 2,000 kyat.⁴⁰⁵

On 19 February 2007, the SPDC army soldiers attached to MOC #5 and MOC #9 issued orders barring Kler Lah and Play Hsa Loh villagers in Toungoo District from leaving their village, even for work.⁴⁰⁶

In early March 2007, Commander Kaung Mya of MOC #5 posted a public notice at an SPDC checkpoint in the Pa Leh Wah area of Tantabin Township, Toungoo District, which informed the public of which goods could and could not be carried through the checkpoint. Any attempts to take any of these goods through the checkpoint would result in them being confiscated by the soldiers. Those goods which were on the list of prohibited items were all basic necessities and staple foods of local communities and included goods such as:

1. Rice;
2. Fish paste;
3. Salt;
4. Dried tealeaves;
5. Onion;
6. Garlic;
7. Cooking oil;
8. Chilli;
9. Monosodium glutamate (MSG) seasoning;
10. Certain types of slippers and shoes; and
11. Medicines.

As a result of this edict, on 5 March 2007, 10 viss (16 kg / 36 lbs) of chilli was seized from Saw Pau Ki Ni at the Pa Leh Wah checkpoint, as it was considered to be contraband.⁴⁰⁷

On 17 March 2007, Commander Aung Tun Oo of LIB #590 barred the residents of the following places in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, from leaving their respective villages:

1. Tai Pin village;
2. Myet Ye village;
3. Po Thaung Su village;
4. Nye Loud Teh village;
5. U Chit Kin village;
6. Thit Chat Zeik village; and
7. Kyaung Bya village.

The inability of these villages to visit their fields largely impeded their efforts to prepare them for the upcoming planting season. The SPDC also laid many landmines along the eastern edges of these villages seemingly to discourage the villagers from travelling into the hills.⁴⁰⁸

On 1 May 2007, it was reported that –a Karen villager (whose name has been withheld) had been shot and wounded by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #351 in the Ywa Sa Gaw village area of Nyaunglebin District. He was working in his rice field at the time of the shooting. After the shooting, he was threatened by the soldiers not to report the incident before fining him for working in an area which they claimed was off limits to villagers.⁴⁰⁹

On 21 May 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers operating in Nyaunglebin District were preventing the residents of many villages from visiting their farms on any more than two days in any given week. Those villages affected by this restriction were:

1. Maw Ke'tha per ko village;
2. Yu lo village;
3. Kamulo village;
4. Ker Poh Der village;
5. Saw Tay Der village;
6. Kyauk Pyat village;
7. Thay Baw Der village; and
8. Yaw Kee village.

As a result, villagers reported the loss of a large number of trees from their durian, betelnut and cardamom plantations. Many villagers have also been prohibited from building huts in their fields, and told that any huts found would be destroyed. Moreover, they were threatened that any villagers found either in their field huts or in the forest without permission would be shot on sight.⁴¹⁰

In August 2007, it was reported that villagers from the foothills near Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) in Nyaunglebin District of western Karen State, whom had been repeatedly relocated during the first half of 2007, were struggling to survive due to tight movement restrictions. The villagers were reportedly often not allowed to work in their farms or gardens, and were unable to grow enough food or make enough money to feed their families. One villager from the area reported that, *"If there is no work, then there is no money. If there is no money, there is no food"*.⁴¹¹

On 6 November 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers had repeatedly shelled rice fields in the Yeh Mu Plaw area of Papun District with mortars to prevent villagers from attempting to harvest their crop. Two villagers were reported killed and a further nine wounded in these attacks. SPDC army troops were also reported to have been blocking villagers in the nearby Plaw Ko area from accessing over 64 rice fields during the harvest period.⁴¹²

Mon State

On 4 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #31 prevented villagers in Khaw-Zar sub-Township from working in their plantations and farms. The villagers were instead forced to attend national Independence Day celebrations. According to one villager, *"the officers said that if [the] villagers went to the plantation, they will shoot them"*.⁴¹³

On 13 January 2007, it was reported that the Paung Township TPDC had prohibited the transport of paddy in the area. The order was issued as a result of the local TPDC being unable to fulfil its own paddy procurement quota. Farmers in the area were reluctant to sell to paddy to the TPDC for use as army rations because the price they were offering was significantly lower than the market rate. While the going rate stood at more than 6,000 kyat per tin (10.5 kg / 23 lbs) the TPDC was buying it for 2,800 kyat per tin.⁴¹⁴

Between 23 and 25 May 2007, and again from 30 May to 2 June 2007, over 600 villagers in Khaw-Zar sub-Township were forced to work for IB #31 in preparation for the visit of Lieutenant General Maung Bo. During this time, the army also prevented locals from going to work in their farms and gardens, causing some to suffer heavy losses during the limited time period in which durian is best harvested. Reports estimate that many villagers lost 10,000 kyat per day due to the restrictions placed on their movements.⁴¹⁵

On 7 June 2007, following rumours that an unnamed group of Mon armed insurgents under Chan Dein had visited Brong village, Ye Township, the SPDC introduced a curfew throughout many parts of southern Ye Township barring local villagers from travelling to their farms and gardens. Village headmen were ordered to block entry to all village gates after 6:00 pm.⁴¹⁶

On 7 August 2007, it was reported that villagers in Khaw-Zar sub-Township and those in the north of Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division, were prohibited from leaving their villages to work in their plantations and farms. *"We don't have money because we are not allowed to go and work in the plantations and sell the produce. We can't survive for much longer"*, said Nai Blai who had fled to Thailand because of difficulties maintaining a livelihood in her native Burma.⁴¹⁷

Pegu Division

In January 2007, restrictions were placed on the transportation of rice from Tharawaddy Township to Rangoon, with traders required to have a letter of permission from local authorities.⁴¹⁸

Rangoon Division

On 30 March 2007, Rangoon municipal authorities ordered the closure of the Rangoon-Mandalay Thamadi Carrier Service headed by Maung Maung Aung, a younger brother of '88 Generation Students' Group leader, Ko Mya Aye. No reasons were given as to why the order was passed. Activists speculated that it was a means to pressure the '88 Generation Students' Group by targeting the livelihoods of their families.⁴¹⁹

Endnotes

¹ Source: *Indicators on Income and Economic Activity*, United Nations Statistic Division, accessed online at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/inc-eco.htm>, on 5 December 2007.

² Source: UNDP survey, to be published.

³ Source: “Five Million Burmese Are Going Hungry, Warns UN,” *The Independent*, 19 October 2007.

⁴ Source: *Humanitarian Situation UPDATE April 2007*, Office of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Myanmar, 2007.

⁵ Source: *Ibid.*

⁶ Source: *Ibid.*

⁷ Source: *Ibid.*

⁸ Source: *Ibid.*

⁹ Source: “Burma: Security Council Should Impose Arms Embargo: Weapons Sales by India, China and Russia Fuel Abuses, Strengthen Military Rule,” HRW, 10 October 2007; *The Gathering Storm: Infectious Diseases and Human Rights in Burma*, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the University of Berkeley, July 2007.

¹⁰ Source: “As Myanmar’s new capital emerges, analysts question its true costs,” AFP, 6 April 2007.

¹¹ Source: “Fuel price policy explodes in Burma,” *Asia Times*, 23 August 2007.

¹² Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.

¹³ Sources: “Burma’s Largest IT Center Opens - But for How Long?,” *Irrawaddy*, 21 December 2007; “The Generals Who Would Be Kings,” *The Washington Post*, 30 September 2007.

¹⁴ Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.

¹⁵ Source: “Fuel price policy explodes in Burma,” *Asia Times*, 23 August 2007.

¹⁶ Source: “Saffron Revolution in Burma: What’s Next,” NCGUB, October 2007.

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