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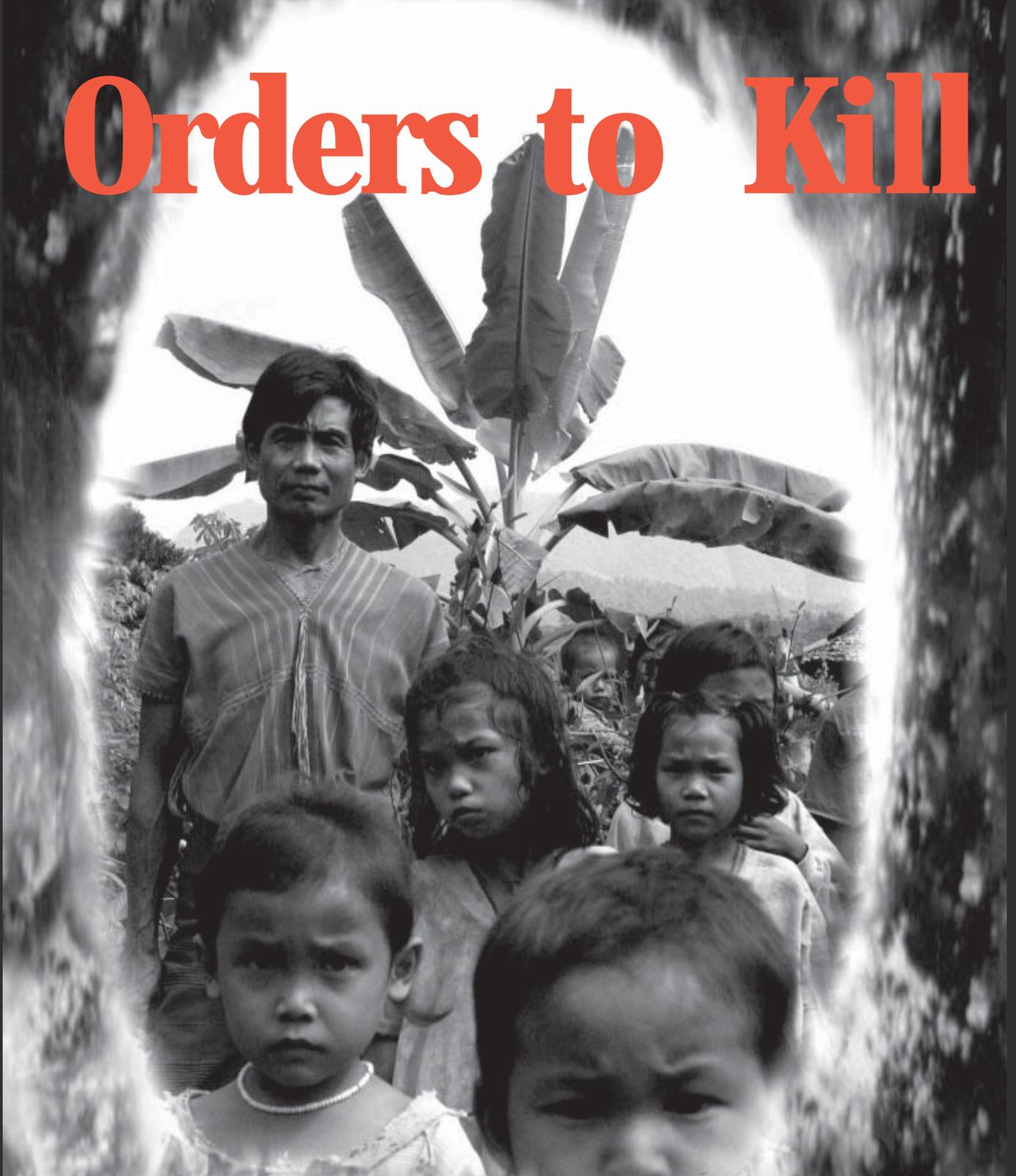
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Orders to Kill



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED KAREN PEOPLE (CIDKP)



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Orders to kill

The Burmese regime has announced it will held another round of talks to draft a constitution that it hopes will convince the international community it is serious about moving towards democracy. The military dictatorship has ordered 1,000 delegates representing “all walks of life” to spend the next two months working on the constitution. But once more there’s no place for Burma’s legally elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi or for any real dialogue with ethnic leaders. The regime has baffled international observers by not only refusing to let Aung San Suu Kyi attend but also by extending her house arrest for another year. The venue for the public relations event boasts a golf course, gym, swimming pool and beauty parlours. Unlike in previous regime announcements about “Democracy Talks” and “Democracy Road Maps” where the international community showed some enthusiasm the latest efforts have been met with skepticism. Delegates have been barred from speaking to the media, prompting the UN human rights envoy to Burma to label the event a “mass house arrest”. The United States have named Burma as an “outpost of tyranny”, the UN Security Council has agreed to discuss Burma and, ASEAN countries have called for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

But far away from the gyms, golf courses, beauty parlours and constitution talks the situation continues to deteriorate for ethnic people. Karen people in their thousands are still being forced from their homes by the regime. Farmers are shot and killed by Burmese soldiers as they work their fields. Children are killed and maimed by land mines as they walk to school. Health care in Burma is non-existent and forced labour for “development projects” is on the increase. It seems the only orders the regime obeys are to enslave and to kill innocent villagers.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: email kidpc@cscoms.com - hlahenry@hotmail.com or write to CIDKP , PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.



Born to learn

Name; Pa Yuu Hser
Age; 9 years old
Grade; KGA
Location; Koh Kay

Pa Yuu Hser was born in a jungle hideout. It has been his only home since the Burmese army forced his family to leave their village. They and the other villagers are now part of the 150,000 internally displaced people eking out a living in hideouts in the mountains of Karen State.

Pa Yuu Hser parents earn their living from slash and burn farming. In spite of living rough in the jungle, Pa Yuu Hser's mother wants

him to get an education and sends him to a school close to the border.

Pa Yuu Hser likes school and is happy to attend class every day, but says he does not have nice clothes to wear like the other children. He says his mother cannot afford to spend money on new clothes.

"My parents have to mend most of my shirts, but even though I do not have nice pants and shirts, I enjoy studying," said the proud schoolboy.

He goes to school as other students do. But when he returns to his home for

lunchtime - he is lucky he sometimes gets to eat the food leftovers from breakfast, but if his family have taken the rice to eat while they farm he goes hungry.

When fruit is in season there's plenty to eat.

"I eats melon and other wild fruits and have tried bitter gourds seed but it's too sweet for me", Pa Yuu Hser says smiling at the thought. Pa Yuu Hser says his life is simple, but going to school makes a big difference.

"I want to learn. I want a better future for me and my family."



Clinic cuts to the heart

Naw K'yo Paw, seven, suffers from a heart disease. She lives in Thay Baw Bo on the Thai Burma border. According to Kanchana, a health worker at Mae Tao Clinic, Naw K'yo Paw needs to go to Chiang Mai for treatment of a heart abnormality.

"Her lower heart chamber has a hole in it and a narrow passageway that restricts the blood flowing into her lungs and prevents it from being filtered properly."

Kanchana says the young girl cannot play or run as a normal child.

"Naw K'yo Paw gets tired easily, her lips, fingers and toes tips go purple from a lack of oxygen in her

blood. This stresses her because she does not know what is happening. If she pushes herself too hard she could lose consciousness and die."

Kanchana says Naw K'yo Paw needs to see a heart specialist in Chiang Mai, because there is not one in Mae Sot.

Naw K'yo Paw's father, Saw Pu Lu Ku, has tried his best for his daughter and says.

"I work to get 60 bah a day. I am a day worker and can't choose my work. In a month I might only get 10 days work. I want my daughter to be healthy but I can't afford the medical bills because we're poor."

Saw Pu Lu Ku took his daughter from their village in Burma to Thailand in a desperate bid to find help. He eventually found his way to Mae Tao Clinic.

Many Burmese come to the Clinic to get free medical treatment. Saw Pu Lu Ku says the medics at the Clinic are enthusiastic, willing to look after poor patients and try to find funding assistance to help them. Health worker, Kanchana says.

"We understand that there are a lot of people inside Burma who can't afford health care. That's why they come here. We help the children because we want to give them the opportunity to be able to grow up



Salween River Traders

The conflict in Burma between the military regime and that Karen people have created an unusual group of traders. Perched on rafted houses, cum shops on the Salween River these traders sell cooking oil, diesel fuel, footwear, clothing, seasoning spices, chilli, rice and a diverse range of small goods.

The Salween River renown for its dangerously fast currents and huge fluctuations in water drops – as much as 20 meters - adds danger. During the wet season when the river is at its most dangerous traders fear it. In October this year a boat leaving Thaw Let Hta for Ta Khaw Hta sank, killing a mother and her young son. The other three

people were rescued, but 12 drums of diesel were lost.

Cooking oil, packaged foodstuffs, diesel, clothing, toys, bikes come from Thailand to Burma while chilli, onions, goats, cattle and buffaloes for slaughter come in the opposite direction.

Livestock are ferried across the Salween by large boats with room for more than 40 cattle to be sent to Thaw Let Hta on the Thai side. Smaller boats carry as many as 12 drums of diesel fuel. The price of diesel also depends on the world oil prices and the exchange rate between Thailand's Baht and Burma's Kyat (at time of print it was 4.00 baht for 100 kyat).

Along the Salween River, that separates Thailand from Burma, armed groups opposed to the Burmese regime operate. Doing business for the traders can mean negotiating with all sides. Karen, Thai, Burmese and Indians living along the river earn their livelihood by trading, farming, hunting, transporting goods, logging, building boats and fishing.

The river provides a vibrant if unpredictable living for these people. But as one trader told *Inside News* – “life here, may be hard and dangerous, but it is still more secure than living under the regime.”

Pollution kills Salween fish

October was a bad month on the Salween River. A mother and her child were killed when a boat was washed away and sunk in flood waters. Many thousands of fish died as a result of flooding and a severe landslide in China. Local villagers say the landslide made the water to muddy for the fish to survive.

“If you filled a drinking cup with water it was full of silt. Normally when you store water and put in some alum, the water becomes clear and the silt sinks to the

bottom, but now the water remains cloudy and dirty.”

A boat driver on Salween River told *Inside News* that the water was unusually dirty.

“In the wet season we expect the river to be muddy but when water splashes out from the tail of our boat it is usually clear. Now it’s very muddy and reddish brown in color because of the silt.”

Traders say there is plenty of fish but they are all rotten.

“Who wants to buy these fish?”

According to Saw Ko Min who lives in the village of Thaw let Hta many of the rivers giant fish also perished.

“In Myain Gyi Ngu villagers say they got a fish that was as big as a cow, it was smelly and they said they dare not eat it. The smell was so bad they had to bury it”.

Saw Ko Min says he saw some people collecting dead fish floating in the river to make fish paste.

“We don’t know if it is safe to eat or not.”

Salween fish are dying in their thousands - villagers are concerned about plans to dam their river.



Stopping worm infections

There are many different types of worms that can infect people. DR Vit tells Inside News how people can protect themselves.

One of the most common is the hookworm. This is the most common cause of anemia - a blood condition in which there are too few red blood cells - that can be a problem, especially for children and women.

A person becomes infected when young hookworms in the soil enter the skin, usually the feet. The worms go to the lungs and then to the throat, where they are swallowed and move to the intestine. There, they grow and lay eggs, which leave the body with the feces. If this is passed on the ground, the eggs hatch into young worms, continuing the cycle. The adult worm is about 1cm long; they attach to the intestine and do not come out. To find out if someone has a hookworm infection, their stool needs to be tested using a microscope to look for eggs.

Only some infected people have symptoms. Although the young worms can cause itching where they enter the skin, or coughing when they move in the lungs, the main symptom is from anemia from the worm taking too much blood from the person. If severe, the person can have symptoms such as tiredness, muscle aches, difficulty breathing, looking



pale, or swelling in the arms or legs. If there is not enough iron in the diet (iron is needed for the body to make blood) or blood loss, such as in women who are pregnant or have monthly periods, symptoms are worse. For pregnant women, the health of the baby can also be affected. This infection can be treated using tablets. However, there must also be prevention or the person can be re-infected. To

prevent re-infection it is important people do not walk on the ground barefoot. This is particularly important where stools are left on the ground. Faeces should be properly disposed of in latrines to prevent fouling soil. All those at risk of severe symptoms, such as children and pregnant women, should be treated, especially if hookworm is common in their community, and iron pills given.

Regime's actions speak loud and clear

Speaking at the UN General Assembly in late September New York, Burma's Foreign Minister Nyan Win said his country would quickly achieve democracy if the international community stopped its interference. For most people living in Burma this is nonsense. For the regime words are cheap and any positive action towards democracy is non-existent. The regime boasts about its "development programs" as if they are a benefit to the people, but it fails to mention who pays for every road, school, hospital, bridge, hotel built. For villagers in Burma, development equals forced labour, land confiscation and extortion of money. Villagers supply everything. Burma is ruled by the law of the

gun, having political dialogue is impossible. Ceasefire talks between the Karen National Union and the regime have fizzled out because the regime does not take seriously the Karen's positions on equality, self-determination, human rights and no surrender. To achieve democracy in Burma legal processes have to be respected and peoples' rights have to be protected. Political dialogue has to mean more than "shady deals" that benefit a select few. Until a genuine open and legal framework is agreed to Burma will continue to be a pariah state and its people will suffer the consequences. Last year UNAIDS estimated as many as 610 000 people could be infected with HIV-AIDS.

Economically the country is a mess. Children continue to die at alarming rates from malnourishment. In September 2005, former Czech president Vaclav Havel and Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa jointly demanded the UN Security Council took immediate action against Burma's regime. They said that after fifteen years of total disregard for the UN recommendations the situation in Burma is getting worse. And it will continue to do so, unless the UN Security Council takes immediate action to force the regime to involve all the people of Burma in a real democracy process.



Photo; KHRG



Burma's rice bowl

Half a century ago Burma's was the world's biggest rice exporting country in the world, exporting more than one million tons of rice a year in the 1950s. But decades of military rule have forced production down. The United Nation (UN) World Food Program (WFP) recently said that around 40 percent of children in Burma suffer malnutrition.

Dod Lay Mu, secretary, of the Federal Trade Union of Kawthoolei (FTUK) explains how Burma's rice trade is controlled, the role of the military and their economic policies that affect rice farmers, and why the rice price keeps going up.

"Many villagers can't afford to live in Burma. They have to pay very high taxes and the farmers sell the rice for a very cheap price and

inflation is out of control. They have enough to eat, but not to sell. Their families suffer and they have to do logging and cattle trading to earn enough to live. Some who have buffalo and cattle have to come to the border to sell them. Many don't even want to grow rice anymore. They are prepared to leave their land and come to the border looking for work or become refugees. It is that difficult for them to survive."

Pwo Pwen Doeh, a farmer from Toungoo district says rice tax takes many forms.

"Sometimes rice and money are taken at gunpoint. Unless you give the money or the rice to them you can't cultivate your own rice field. For those who have large farmland, they can survive, but for small farms it is hard to cope with the

tax. Farmers have to give money and rice. If we do not pay the Tawoogyae (bribe) to them they make trouble for us."

According to Thara David, an American PHD student, rice is used as a weapon by the regime against the people of Burma.

David, whose thesis is on the militarization of Burma, says.

"They do it many ways. First, they have a paddy procurement system that extracts nearly 10 to 30 percent of farm rice for the SPDC and soldiers. That is also happening in the center of Burma, in the Irrawaddy delta and through all the ethnic states. Another way is soldiers say they cannot get money from Rangoon or from the SPDC to buy supplies so they use local villagers to cook their rice and other foods."

David says the army steals livestock, rice and vegetables from the villages.

“Militarization of rice and food is about using food as a weapon. This is happening all over Burma. The SPDC uses it to maintain control, not just in Karen State but over all the people of Burma. If they can control the food which is mostly rice they can control the people.”

David says farmers are at risk from being ordered to be forced labourers by soldiers who arbitrary order them to carry food, dig ditches and carry munitions and supplies.

“They also tax them on their rice crops saying ‘the people rations are our rations’.”

Rice is Burma’s single most important crop. According to government statistics the country’s rice exports fell 63 percent in 2004. A report recently released by the Ministry of National Planning and Development said Burma exported 125,600 tons (US) of rice in 2004, worth US\$19.53 million, compared to 445,000 tons (US) in 2003 valued at US\$53.28 million. The ruling military junta had imposed a six month ban on rice exports from January 2004 to ensure sufficient rice for the people and to keep domestic prices affordable.

Saw Dee, a farmer in Tangoo says in 2005, the price of rice skyrocketed.

“It hurt ordinary people who have to work hand-to-mouth. Sometimes, they have nothing to eat. Before they can eat they have to work first so they have money to buy rice. Rice, farmers produce goes to the government traders who reap all the profits”.

Thara David says the only ones to live well are soldiers and those people who live far away from the control of the army.

Union leader, Dod Lay Mu says unless Burma has real change farmers and urban consumers will continue to suffer high rice prices. “The only ones to prosper are the Generals. Our country was once the rice bowl of Asia but has now been reduced to the begging bowl.”

now a begging bowl



Ceasefire joke!

Making the ceasefire agreements between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burmese regime look like a sick joke the Burmese army attacked villagers in Toungoo District, Northern Karen State. The attacks happened on 26 November when the Burma Army IB 73 (Columns 1 and 2) attacked forcing 900 villagers Hee Daw Kaw to flee. On 28 November the soldiers burned 30 houses and forcibly took one villager, Sho Sar, captive. The 900 villagers are now in hiding and living in basic conditions.

Orders to Kill

The Karenni Information Centre reports that Burmese army troops killed a six-year-old child and two Karenni villagers on November 15, 2005. At 9.45am, Burmese Army Light Infantry Brigade 421, commanded by Major Zaw Zaw Lin, arrived at a paddy field near Kutaru Village, west of Mawchi in Southern Karen State. The soldiers opened fire on villagers working in the field. They killed three people; Saw Henry, 62 years old (two bullets in chest), Naw Shenay Paw, 22 years old (one bullet in her chest) and Nae Lay Htoo, 6 years old. The Burma Army's shots also left Lay Lay Wah, 15, seriously wounded.

Army mines kill Karen

Two Karen men were killed after stepping on landmines on 31st August planted by Burmese



Burmese army torture villagers

army soldiers operating in their village district. A Mau Pu villager, Saw Per Kaw, 24, stepped on one of the Burma Army land mines and lost his left foot. He died from his injuries on 4 September 2005.

Saw Thaw Kaw Htoo, 28, stepped on another Burma Army land mine, lost both of his feet and died immediately. He is survived by his seven months pregnant his wife.

Burma Army LIB 590 and IB 60 had previously attacked villages of displaced Karen people in the Hti Hkgo, Ler Klah and Mau Pu areas of Nyaunglebin District, Western Karen State.

Life on the run

Burmese army attacked internally displaced villagers and forced as many as 400 people to flee and hide for one and a half months. Some have tried to return to their homes, but the army has laid mines and destroyed many houses leaving villagers destitute. People from Kwee Lah village lost everything when the Burmese Army destroyed their homes.

Schools have been closed have not yet reopened. Along with the destruction of homes, the Burma Army stole the roofing thatch and walls to make their own shelters (which they destroyed before leaving). The Burmese soldiers stole villagers' property and materials such as cooking pots. They destroyed cooking pots, water containers, sleeping mats and rice sifting baskets by punching holes through them. Free Burma Rangers (FBR) named four Burma Army battalions as being responsible for the attacks — LIB 4, IB 76, IB 42 and LIB 12. FBR says due to the attacks and occupation of this area by the Burmese Army, people have not been able to take care of their farms. IDPs now have to work to recover rice from fields overgrown with weeds and damaged by vermin. Using their knives and bayonets soldiers systematically destroyed baskets for winnowing and sifting harvested rice. This ruined villagers food supplies.



Brave heart battles on

Khin Win Myint, 16, lives in Kya-Inn township in Burma. All her life she suffered ill health. She was born without an anus and with a serious heart problem. She had to excrete through her vagina and as she reached the age when young women menstruate it was about to become a huge health risk.

Khin Win Myint's heart condition needed immediate surgery. These are both expensive health problems to treat. Khin Win Myint's parents are not rich, but were prepared to sell what they owned to get their daughter medical help.

Khin Win Myint says.

"Burma is expensive. Even when you sit down on a clinic chair you have to pay 1,000kyat. You pay for every thing - even for the cost of a pin used to hold paper together."

Khin Win Myint's parents sold most of what they owned to get medical help in Burma for their daughter. None of the treatments worked.

Now broke her parents heard about the Dr Cynthia's clinic in Mae Sot that offered free health care. But the cost of getting through Burma to Thailand was expensive and Khin Win Myint's condition also meant traveling was difficult.

"We heard the Clinic saved many lives so we decided to risk the trip." The seriousness of her condition meant doctors had to operate on her heart first and then attempt to create an anus for her.

Staff at the Clinic found a sponsor to pay for the expensive operations that needed to be done in Chiang Mai, Thailand

"I was surprised that I got the chance to see a specialist doctor in Chiang Mai. It costs hundreds of thousands of baht and we could not afford it. Now I believe I will be cured".

Khin Win Myint's face is blue from the simple task of walking and talking.

"I get tired easily and get headaches. But I also get a racing heart when I see so many doctors and sick people at the big hospital."

Khin Win Myint's mother is relieved her daughter is getting treatment.

"To see my daughter so upset and distressed. I could do nothing. She could not even eat her food. I felt great pity for her, but she's a brave girl."



Teachers plan to do better

Karen leaders would like to open a higher education institute for the 50,000 students who live in Kawthoolei.

Head of Karen Education Department (KED) Saw Lah Say spoke to *Inside News* about plans to provide better education for students after they have completed tenth grade.

“We discussed this with Karen education leaders and our politicians to see what can be done. If we can offer graduates a degree certificate it will be a great help for our young people. We have discussed this issue for years and we now hope that our plans will become a reality in 2006 or 2007.” As many as 100 students attending school in Karen State passed tenth

standard last year but there are many students who had to quit school because of a shortage of money.

“Some Karen students who have finished school try to continue their studies in Burma. Others come to refugee camps to study. But many have to stay at home to help their parents with the farming.”

A head of the education and culture department Saw Per Nu says in his district there are 89 primary schools, 10 middle schools but only two high schools.

“Only two percent in our district passed 10th standard.”

In Toungoo district Saw Ka Nyaw Htoo, a staff member of the education and culture department, says that in his district there are 105

schools: one high school, two middle schools and 62 primary schools.

“We have 1800 students and 120 teachers. The high school has been opened for two years. Only 15 students passed 10th standard. In 2004-2005 the number of students who passed 10th standard will be fewer than the previous year.”

“We need more school teachers to cope with the demand. Many students go to the refugee camps to get an education. If we can get more teachers as planned, we expect our student numbers will increase.”

Currently high school graduates have to travel far distances to further their studies.

“In the future if we can create the opportunity for them to have a higher education in Karen State the cost of their studies will decrease.” According to an education department spokesperson in Mu Traw District, the Burmese army tries to organize villagers under their control to attend government schools as part of a strategy to get villagers to pay for government teachers.

“Any student who presents his name to the army can sit the entrance exam.”

The KED spokesperson said parents think the army school program might be useful because they feel their children can stay in school without harm, so they accept it. They do not know the real strategy of the Burmese army.

“The army plan for them to pay for the teachers the Burmese government employs. For two teachers, the Burmese army demands 5000 to 7000 kyat from

each student that attends the government school. They also demand money for the salary of the teachers — an amount equivalent to 2500 Baht a year.

“The Burmese army education program is just another way to squeeze money out of villagers. Villagers and students should not pay for the teachers’ salary. Villagers are also responsible for feeding teachers. If they want to help students they should not collect money from the students. It’s expensive for families, for example, if a family has four or five children and has to pay 2000 to 3000 kyats for each child that’s a fortune many families cannot afford.”

The spokesperson also accused the Burmese Army of embezzlement. “If many students are paying these large amounts there should be lots of money over. But no one knows where the rest of the money goes after teachers have been paid.”

Karen teachers in Toungoo district are paid 3,000 Kyat a year by the Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG) — this is nothing — these teachers do not work for money. They sacrifice themselves, volunteering to help Karen children. Villagers help them with what they can.”

Ka Nyaw Htoo from Toungoo district says

“We would like to raise the standard of our schools but we do not have the means and resources. It is difficult to find more teachers and buy books and stationary. But we determined to improve the education facilities for our young people in Karen State. It suits the regime not to educate Karen children.”

It is well documented by international human rights groups that the Burmese army deliberately targets Karen villages and schools. As a result many schools are in jungle hideouts.



Hope built on fake projects

A special *Inside News* report from Doo Pla Ya District looks at Burmese Army development projects in Karen State. These projects include building schools, bridges and roads. On the surface they look like a good thing, but talk to villagers and they tell a different story.

Villagers say Burmese army officers gathered the heads of villages for a meeting to explain to them about the development projects and promised that the government would pay money to villagers used to build the development projects.

A villager from Khor Ther Si village told *Inside News* that roads, bridges and schools in Karen State are needed. In the past travelling and communication from village to village was difficult. People had to cross mountains and past through jungles.

“We want them, but we have to build them without being paid for our work and that’s wrong.”

Khor Ther Si village receives electricity from Kaw-Ka-reik town and in summer motor vehicles and motorcycles could travel to the village.

Bridges and roads built in the district were built by villagers that were forced to do so by the Burmese army. The villagers were also ordered to pay money to the army. According to Kyone -Doe township chairman, Mahn Kaw Mya Sein, the Burmese army took credit for the projects while acting like gangsters.



“But what they really did was force villagers to work, extorting money from them.”

Mahn Kaw Mya Sein said the army ordered the villagers to pay for the completed school buildings.

“It was a great burden for them to pay. The villagers have to pay two thirds of the total costs. They said that as the development projects were for the village we should pay.”

Angry villagers claim the so-called development projects are nothing more than forced labour and a sham.

“We villagers do not have a peaceful life here, we do not have freedom to work our farms because we have to work on these development projects,” said an unhappy Htee Gu Thaw villager.



Seeing is believing

Mae Tao Clinic on the Thai Burma border sees as many as 3000 people with eye problems each year. Naw Hla Win, a young mother is one of these patients. She came to the Clinic in the hope of having her sight restored. She is from Htee Daw Hta village in Karen State.

Initially she went to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) hospital at Ko Ko on the Burmese side of the border. The trip took two days and she paid for an eye operation there. The operation did not work. She went to Mae Tao Clinic hoping her luck would change. Naw Hla Way says.

“I decide to get my eyes checked at the clinic and hoped they could help me.”

According to Clinic staff, Naw Hla Way has had a terrible run of ill health.

“She has had multiple doses of dengue fever, she does not have consistent or healthy breast milk. Her child is severley malnourished.”

After the birth of her second child Naw Hla Way lost her sight.

“We could not reach the Clinic because we did not have money. The Clinic is a half days walk from our house.”

Mae Tao Clinic’s eye Doctor Jerry says.

“Naw Hla Way blindness has contributed to the ill health of her baby. She is unable to care for her when the father is away on the farm. The eight-month-old baby’s weight is almost the same as when it was born. It now weighs just over five kilos. The mother was feeding it only rice water and salt.”

The doctor urged people to take care of their eyes and if they have a problem to get treatment.

“People should not leave it until it is too late. It’s hard for people in Burma to get proper medical help, but if they can get to the Clinic we can try to treat them.”



Rice shortage forces teachers out

Karen people place great value on education. In spite of Burmese army attacks, little or no funding from international aid agencies, landmines and forced labour schools get built and children taught. But the school committee of Hko Kay middle school is now facing a new threat, a shortage of teachers because food rations have dried up.

Sein Win, a committee member is a worried man.

“This year’s food supplies (rice) for the teachers will be available only up to December. For the last three months we are unable to find assistance to help our teachers.”

Margaret, a teacher at the school said.

“We need help otherwise we have

to quit and return to the refugee camps in Thailand.”

When the school reopened at the beginning of the year, the committee could support the teachers with rations for nine months only.

The school was opened in 1996 with few staff and students. In 2005 the school has a committee of 11 members. There are six male and nine female teachers. There are altogether 68 female and 82 male students. The head mistress is Thrara Mu Htoo Paw. The village also runs a junior school for young children who cannot attend the high school.

Teachers fear the rice shortage will affect the students’ exams later in the year.

“It’s crucial the children’s studies

are not disrupted. It’s crazy that we have students who want to study and yet we may have to close the school if we can’t get rice to feed the teachers.”

The Burmese army also attacked the village in 2002 and burnt down the school, but the villagers rebuilt it. The school is organised by the village community and is supported by a religious organisation. Stationary and textbooks are supplied by the Karen Education Department. The severe rice shortage in Burma has meant the regime is heavily taxing farmers. The Burmese army is also stealing rice from villages, placing additional strain on supplies that could be used to feed teachers.

Rat attack!

For the villagers of Paw Ka Doe, 2005 has been a hard year. They have had to put up with Burmese soldiers taking their men for forced labour, stealing their livestock and destroying their crops. To add to their troubles a plague of rats and mice are gorging their way through their rice paddy fields. The villagers now face an enormous shortage of food and many of the villagers are considering moving to a refugee camp. Paw Ka Doe village was established long ago and the villagers have no desire to move to a new place. But the lack of food has meant many

families have nothing to eat. They have only what they can forage for in the forests; roots taro, wild bananas, tubers, wild fruits and vegetables. If they can hunt down wild animals they can sell the meat to buy rice. But this comes with considerable risks. The Burmese army has buried hundreds of mines along the side of dense jungle paths. Parents are also concerned for their children's health because of the lack of consistent nutritional food. Some children have had to leave school to work to earn money to help their parents buy rice.

Village elders are also worried many of their people will leave Paw Ka Doe. The village has about 20 households consisting of more than a hundred people. The head of the village does not want his village to disintegrate and his people forced out to other places, but because of the severe food shortage the village head concedes they may have no other choice. He says unless the villagers receive outside assistance Paw Ka Doe will become a ghost village.





Kho-Kay's floating houses

The villagers of Hko -Kay and Paw Ka have developed an unique method of outwitting the Burmese army and maintaining some stability in their lives. They have built their village on floating rafts on the Salween River. Each house is built from as many as 500 bamboos poles. The solid raft or foundation has to be built before the house.

Once the houses are constructed they are secured and anchored to stop them being dragged downstream. The villagers have to be alert to the rising and receding river water. During the wet season when the river water rises they have to constantly tie ropes to a higher position. When the water recedes they have to retie the

ropes to a lower position to prevent the house being pulled out of the river.

These floating homes are also used for people to earn their livelihoods. In Hko Kay there is no flat or level land to build houses. People sell and buy goods from their floating houses as it is convenient place to do their business.

The floating houses situated on the Salween River are also useful as loading bays to move goods on and off the boats. Many kinds of goods, including food, clothing and other items are sold. The floating houses serve another purpose. They keep the villagers secure when Burmese army soldiers are in the area. Villagers can untie the ropes and

anchors and pull themselves across to the Thai side of the border. It also means they can take all their possessions with them, unlike land locked villagers.

Naw Ree Paw, a member of the Karen Womens Organisation (KWO) based at Hko Kay says she stored all the KWO materials, equipment and food in one of the floating houses.

“When the troops approached, we pulled the floating house to the Thai side. When the soldiers left we pulled the houses back to the Karen side.” Karen villagers have turned their floating houses into an unique form of resistance.