Interview: 211-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Execution, Refugee, Displacement, Slavery

Name: Nai Shwe
Age: 34
Sex: Male
Ethnicity: Mon
Religion: Buddhist
Interviewed: 4 December 1995
Source: KHRG

[*The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995. Nai Shwe is a refugee who just returned from Ye Township.*]

I just came back from south of Ye Township. I was there for four months. This month SLORC has been resuming the railway construction there. From 1 to 15 December, SLORC announced that about 30,000 villagers from Ye Township must go. In Ye Township alone, each household had to send one family members. They had to come from as far north as Hnitkarin, half way to Thanbyuzayat, and as far south as the border [the border between Mon State and Tenasserim Division, 29 km south of Ye; Hnitkarin is about 35 km north of Ye]. There are six sections in Ye Town and about 30 villages in this area. On 20 November, Ye Township LORC held a meeting on railway construction. They announced to all village and section headmen that the people must go and contribute labour from 1 to 15 December. It was by SLORC quota — about 1,000 people from each village. They had to work between Ye and the [Tenasserim] border, 18 miles' distance. The people must get there by themselves, no help from SLORC. They had to finish the 18-mile-long embankment within the given deadline of 15 days. It was done before. But as the floods during the rainy season destroyed it all in 1995, they had to do again. Some of the line went through rubber plantations and some through paddy-fields. When the rains came, the part that went through paddy-fields was completely washed away, except in places. SLORC does not worry that the floods will destroy the embankment again because each time the floods wash it away, a bit is still left. Therefore, it gets bigger and more solid year by year, this year and again next year, and so on until it's finished. It's crazy. So I thought they probably won't lay the track this year. This year SLORC decided to dam one stream for hydro-power and for the control of water to make sure that it won't destroy the embankment. Right now it is just a plan.

I left the area on 30 November. In Ye, I saw villagers going to the railway. All the people have been going. They must go. SLORC has been applying a system of using the headman of the village to collect the people. As the headmen know the names of the villagers, they just take them to the place where SLORC is presence. The villagers can't flee, but if they really can't go then they have to pay instead. Each family has a quota of work assigned to complete, and if they can't go they have to hire someone else to replace them. If you don't have money you have to do

it yourself. Each family had to dig three earthern pits of 10 square feet by 1 foot deep — altogether 10 feet by 30 feet, or sometimes 10 feet by 50 feet, and carry all the dirt. Hire for each pit cost 300 Ks so that it cost 900 Ks to complete the assignment. There were no convict labourers along this part of the line. Each family was assigned a place within the section that certain village was assigned to complete. If you could do it, you had to give 900 Ks to the village headman and he would find another person. There has been a labour camp at Ko Mine [9 miles south of Ye], but the villagers just stayed at the work site along the rail line.

The village headmen could not say anything to the villagers or to SLORC. They just received an order from SLORC saying, "You have to finish this part of the line", and they had to do it without saying anything. Although they didn't want to, they had to. If not, SLORC would say to them, "You are against the rule of Na Wa Ta [SLORC]" and fined them and so on. SLORC didn't say exactly what was going to happen to you if you didn't finish the work, but everybody knew. They have the right even to shoot you, or to say, "You can't live in this village anymore, get your house and family out of this village." They have that power.

People there also have to pay porter fees regularly, whether they go for railway construction or not. Normally in Ye Township SLORC just wants money, but in Tenasserim Division they want men [for labour]. According to the cease-fire agreement [with the New Mon State Party (NMSP)], SLORC can't take any porters or porter fees anymore in all of Mon State or Ye Pyu Township in Tenasserim. But are they still doing. So the NMSP complained, and SLORC answered "The cease-fire is just between the Tatmadaw [Burma Army] and MNLA [Mon National Liberation Army], military to military. The porters are not being taken by the Tatmadaw, they are being taken by Ma Wa Ta [Township LORC], and Ma Wa Ta is not part of the cease-fire agreement." But the porters are still with the Tatmadaw soldiers. I have seen them. SLORC treats the people just like before and is doing the same things, regardless of cease-fire agreement.

Interview: 212-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Refugee, Displacement, Slavery

Name:	Nai Kyaw Mon
Age:	42
Sex:	Male
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with six children (aged 11 months to 16 years)
Occupation:	Fisherman
Address:	Kywe Thone Nyi Ma village, Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division
Interviewed:	2 December 1995
Source:	KHRG

[*The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995.*]

We arrived here [the refugee camp] six days ago. I myself came first to see the situation and to build a shelter for my family. We left because they demanded too many kinds of "volunteer workers" and I couldn't do it all anymore. The village had to send people twice a month to dig and carry the earth at the railway construction site. We started working there in August. For my family, two people had to go. My wife and my daughter went because I have to be at home and do my work to support the family. My daughter is 16 years old. They had to go for 15 days each time, every month. They had to carry the dirt which the others had dug up. I've been there once — the men dig the earth and then the women carry it up the bank. My wife and daughter had to go and work near Ye Pone and Nweh Ley [about 40 km. southeast of their village]. Ye Pone is a small village along the motorway, near the big village of Kaleinaung.

They forced all the families living on the island to go. [Kywe Thone Nyi Ma is on an Island at the mount of Heinze River.] In 1994, one person from each family had to go, but in 1995 they ordered the whole family to go. We had no idea why so many. Whenever the order came, we just had to comply with. If a family could not go, they had to pay 3,000 Ks. My family never paid because we always went to the work. Each time over 200 people from the village went there. [The village is divided into two halves; each month, the families in one half must go for 15 days, then the families in the other half must go for another 15 days.]

There is an army camp on the island where there are about 12 to 15 soldiers from IB 273. They collected the paddy [quotas from the farmers] in the village where most of the inhabitants were farmers. We didn't have to do any work for those soldiers. I had a small boat and I fished in the small streams around the area with fish-traps.

Q: Have you heard of the gas pipeline? [The pipeline route is 10-15 km south of the village.]

A: I had to pay a monthly fee of 150 Ks for the pipeline but I have never been to the work site. The village leader told us about fees for the pipeline, collected the money and gave it at SLORC camp in Kanbauk. He said if we could not pay, we would have to go to the work site of the pipeline and contribute labour for three days and three nights. Some people from our village had to go. Although nobody went from my section of the village, Tavoy Su, some did from other sections of the village like Kaw Daw Pine. They went and worked at Kanbauk —Mi Chaung Ai work site. [This is exactly where the Total base camp is located.] I didn't hear anything about what kind of work they had to do. Whether we could pay or not, we had to pay somehow. If we had no money, we had to sell something of our own to meet the demand.

Q: Are people from Kywe Thone Nyi Ma still allowed to go to Kanbauk by water? [Total and Unocal have had SLORC build jetty facilities at Ka Daik in order

to bring in pipeline supplies by sea. Ka Daik is on the southern arm of the Heinze Basin, between Kywe Thone Nyi Ma and Kanbauk.]

A: We are not allowed to go there. The SLORC soldiers at the camp near our village gave us an order. They told us that when the ships come in we are not allowed to go to Kanbauk by water or fish there. There are ships which load the lead at Kanbauk and go to the sea [there are mines in the Kanbauk area], but I don't know. We are not allowed to go close to the ships. We can still go to Kanbauk by water except when the ships come.

We left because of fees and forced labour. I am not happy with this railway project. When we were sick at the labour camp, we had to afford for medicines by ourselves and we had to eat our own food. We got nothing from them, only work. Kywe Thone Nyi Ma had about 1,000 houses [other villagers estimate closer to 500]. Many families as well as the singles have left. This year when the harvest period is over, many will come here. If I go back to my village now, they will arrest me and send me to the forced labour camp.

Interview: 213-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Refugee, Displacement,

Name:	Nai Thein Zar
Age:	28
Sex:	Male
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with one child (age three years)
Occupation:	Farmer
Address:	Kyauk Ka Lay village, Ye Township, Mon State
Interviewed:	2 December 1995
Source:	KHRG

[*The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995.*]

My village is eight miles from Ye [north of Ye]. My wife is still in the village. I heard that my sister here [in the refugee camp] was very ill so I came to see her. It took three days to walk here, or two days for a man alone. I just arrived here. If there is someone else who can accompany me, I will go back tomorrow.

I am a farmer. The SLORC has been planning to take 10 tins [about 160 kg.] of paddy per acre from my farm. We just heard before I came. All farmers would have to pay the same this year. I have already started harvest, but not finished yet. I thought I could get 100 tins of paddy from three acres of my farmland. They would take 30 tins. In 1994, I had to give them two tins of paddy per acre. In 1994, at the beginning of rainy season before we planted, the Township official came to

and searched for paddy in our houses. They took three tins by force and didn't pay anything. Then I had to give three more tins to SLORC who paid 70 Ks per tin. The leader from the big village of Taung Mon collected the paddy and then he himself went to give it to the army. He took it by train which went to Moulmein or Thanbyuzayat, so I don't know where it goes. I only knew we had to give it to Taung Mon village leader, and he took it to the train station. [Note: this 500% increase in paddy quotas (from two tins per acre to ten tins per acre) is happening in the same year that SLORC is boasting of a 500% increase in rice exports, from 265,000 tonnes to 1.2 million tonnes. A severe rice shortage is sweeping the country right now.]

In 1995, they would pay us 70 Ks per tin. In 1994, the market price was 225 Ks per tin. Just before I came here, I heard that the market price was 410 Ks per tin. Even though the rice has not been ready yet, the merchants come to the fields and offer us 410 Ks. It is the same in the market. [The merchants are clearly expecting the rice shortage to worsen and prices to rise even higher.] I have no idea why it is so expensive this year.

To feed my family, the rest [the 70 tins he gets to keep] should be enough. But I had to hire two bullocks to plough my field and I had to pay the bullock owner with paddy. So after I paid it, I would not have enough rice for my family. I would have to get some from my parents. Those farmers who could not meet the demand of SLORC had to run away or hide whenever the SLORC officials come. Later on when SLORC caught them, they have to pay by borrowing from others.

They also made the villagers in our area grow vegetables around the SLORC camp where they guarded the bridge. Each village was responsible for sending five people and two bullocks. They summoned us to their camp which was not so far from a field belonged to the villagers. It was near my village, but the owners were from Mon Hnin village. SLORC forcibly took the field and the owners dared not say anything. We had to use the bullocks to plough the field and the others had to gather the grass and weeds and grow vegetables. We had to go by turn and each time lasted for eleven days. From our village, every five people had to go for each time. There were about 70 houses in my village. The other villages were also responsible for sending people to contribute labour. They were also forced to grow chillies. I didn't know about other seeds because they had not been grown when I left. SLORC troops there was from IB 106.

Three days ago they said that we would have to go and work on the railway. The village leader told us about it after they held a meeting. The village leader asked the army to spare us from growing vegetables if we would have to work on the railway. Because if we had to do both, the burden on the people would be too heavy. Then the monks said, "This is harvest time, and the people are very busy. They have to reap the paddy, so please don't make them go now. After the harvest they can go to the railway." The monks said if we had to go at once, our paddy would be destroyed. But they didn't listen to the monks. The monks asked the village leader to

go again and tell that to the army. Before I came here, he went to talk to the army, but I didn't hear the result yet. They won't listen.

The village leader told us that we'd have to go to build the railway on 2 December. I have been working there twice — the first time for eight days and the second time for two days. That was about this time in 1994 when every family had to go. For this year also every family had send one person. They didn't tell us where or for how long. I arranged for my family by hiring one person to go for me. I had to pay him 700 Ks. Those who didn't want to go had to hire someone else to go for them. Some people in my village or at the construction site were available to hire. This time, people who have money will hire substitutes and then they can reap their paddy. Those who have no money, their paddy will be left in the field. That is why the monks asked the army to let the people finish the harvest. But the army said to the monks, "We won't stop it because this is a Government project and it is by order." The village leader told me they said that. We cannot disobey. Everything is by force. If I have no money, I cannot stay in that area anymore.

The SLORC Army said, "Now we are working on this railway and we won't make any military operations, so don't be afraid of going as porters or anything." Before, all the people were afraid of being taken as porters. But since the construction of railway started, they haven't been seizing porters. But I don't know for the future. Before, we never had to pay porter fees because the big village paid them, then we were forced to pay a monthly fee of 100 Ks per house. The village leader says we will have to keep paying in the future.

Interview: 214-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Refugee, Torture

Name:	Nai Ong Mon
Age:	47
Sex:	Male
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with six children (age 9 to 19 years)
Occupation:	Farmer
Address:	Taung Kon village, Yebyu Township, Mon State
Interviewed:	2 December 1995
Source:	KHRG

[*The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995.*]

I left my village about 15 days ago. It took four days to come here [the refugee camp] with my family. We came because I could not go to the railroad construction site and afford to pay the money they asked for anymore. Every month I had to pay 4,000 Ks to SLORC for porter fees and railroad construction fees. All families had

to pay that much.

Our whole family had to work at the railway construction site. If you have three people in your family then three people have to go, and if you have four people then four people have to go. Those who could not work were able to take a rest. We had to go once a month and each time lasted for 15 days. You had to pay 4,000 Ks if you could not. If you could not pay the money, they would conscript you by forced to work there. No one was arrested in our village because every family paid the money or went to contribute labour. In our family, we did both. Whenever we could, we went and when we couldn't go, we paid. The last time we went was in September. Our whole village had to go. I went with my two daughters who were 17 and 19 years old. I thought at that time there were more than 200 people from our village, three people from some families and two people from others. There were about 200 houses in the village which is located to the west of Kywe Thone Nyi Ma [just north of the mouth of the Heinze River, near the Andaman Sea coast about 50 km south of Ye]. We had to go and work near Yebyu [about 20 km north of Tavoy along the Tavoy River, at least 80km from his village]. It took us two days to get there. We went by boat and by car. We ourselves had to hire the boat and the car to get to the construction site! We also had to pack rice for our meals there. SLORC didn't give anything. When we finished our assignments, we had to hire a car ourselves to get home. Hiring the car cost 300 Ks per person. For round trip it cost 1,800 Ks.

Each time, we were at the work site for 14 days. I had to dig earth. One thousand people had to dig 12 earthern pits. Then we had to carry the dug earth to the railroad [embankment]. While I was digging, my daughters were carrying the dirt. Soldiers were guarding us. I saw about 3,000 forced labourers and about 40 soldiers. That was only in our section. All the labourers were villagers. They divided the villagers into a group of 6, 7 or 9. Everyday, we started working at 8:00 a.m., stopped at 10:00 a.m., and then worked again from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Any villager who rested during those hours were beaten with sticks once or twice.

We slept in the place assigned for us and made our own shelters. As it was not a camp, each family had to make their own shelter. If you had a shelter you could sleep in it, otherwise you had to sleep in the rain. We had to gather leaves to make a roof, but there was no leaf to make a good roof for our shelters. [September is still monsoon when it rains almost constantly. Proper leaves for roofing are very difficult to get except in late dry season, April-May.] During working hours, we had to work whether it was raining or not. The embankment we built in the rain often faced erosion. Whenever it happened, we had to dig and fill it under the rain without resting.

We took our own food to the work site. They did not give us anything. If we didn't bring food along with us, we'd have to be starved. We had to take our own tools — spades and hoes — that we needed. There were sick people. They had to find medicines for themselves. SLORC did not provide any of them, but there were shops selling medicines at the work site. I didn't know who owned them. SLORC

didn't give any money to the sick people to buy medicine, and when the sick people got better they had to go back to work to finish their quota.

Q: I have heard that now SLORC is giving money to people who contribute labour in some places. Is that right?

A: I never heard that, and I never received any money.

Q: SLORC said that people who work on the railway get to watch TV and video shows at night — was there anything like that?

A: Each person had to pay 15 Ks if he/she wanted to see the video show. I had no idea where SLORC got the video machine. In our village, we had to pay the same fee if we wanted to see a video. [Note: In many villages, someone buy a TV and VCR and use it to make a living by running a small video cinema, 15 for Ks admission. SLORC claims to be providing such shows free of charge for railway labourers, but other reports have shown that they show this by confiscating equipment or ordering VCR owners to show movies at their own expenses. Even if they do this, the soldiers still charge admission fees to the labourers.]

Q: Have you heard about the gas pipeline project? [His village is about 15 km north of the pipeline route.]

A: Yes, we heard about that. We had to pay a monthly fee of 150 Ks for that. The SLORC soldiers made us pay. They came to our village once a month to collect the money. These soldiers were from Kanbauk and Phaungdaw area [Phaungdaw is where the pipeline is to come ashore, and Kanbauk is on the route right beside the Total Oil base camp] of LIB 404. These soldiers collected money from our village once a month. They collected it from the village leader. They said that this money was for "pipeline volunteer workers". [The expression he used for "volunteer workers" was "loke-ar-pay", the Burmese expression used by SLORC with reference to all kinds of forced labour.] They said if we didn't pay we had to go and work for three days at Phaungdaw work site. I had no idea what they were doing there. I never had to go because I always paid. Nobody in our village went there because we all paid. The only time when I was there [passing through the pipeline route area], I didn't see any pipe, I only saw them cutting down trees, pulling logs, and putting up buildings to make a camp. I saw only soldiers.

In our village, each family had to pay 300 Ks for porter fees every month along with the pipeline fund. As soon as we came back from the railway labour camp for the last time, I told my family to start getting our things together and then we came here. At the moment I have no plan to move from here. If we can stay here we will stay. If they try to send us back we will not go back, we will move to another camp. For now I dare not go back to our village. Nine families from Taung Kon [village] have already run away and arrived here. Other families have run away to other places like Halockhani.

Q: The companies building the gas pipeline said it was making the villagers happy. How do you feel about it?

A: They got everything and we got nothing. The past is over, never mind about the past. But now what can we do? Now we cannot pay anymore. So we came here.

Q: What about the railway? SLORC says it will benefit the people.

A: What they say is all useless garbage. We gain nothing from it.

Interview: 215-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Refugee, Torture

Name:	Nai Aung Sar
Age:	25
Sex:	Male
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with one child (age 6 years)
Occupation:	Fisherman
Address:	Kywe Thone Nyi Ma village, Yebyu Township, Mon State
Interviewed:	3 December 1995
Source:	KHRG

[*The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995.*]

I arrived here [the refugee camp] almost four months ago. Last season I had to work for the railway construction. That's why I came here. SLORC tortured us. I saw it with my own eyes. They just picked up a stick from the ground, a bamboo stick about this big [2" diameter], and hit with that stick. I saw people bleeding and unconscious. If someone could not work they accused him of being lazy and not eager to work, and beat them very hard. After being beaten, the soldiers were forced them to work. The soldiers didn't care what would happen to you. If we were sick at the labour camp, we didn't receive any medical attention. If someone asked for medicine they would not give any, but beat the person for asking. If we couldn't work we were subjected to beatings and pay money. Since we were poor and couldn't afford to pay money, I had to come here. As all the labourers suffered the same things, they were afraid and then they fled to the border.

About 20 days ago I went back to Kywe Thone Nyi Ma. I was just trying to find out if people in my village continued to work at the railway construction. Just 15 days ago Ma Wa Ta [Township LORC] ordered the villagers to go for forced labour for 15 days each time. One person in each family had to go, rich and poor alike. If one could not go, he/she had to pay 3,000 Ks. I talked to my friends who were together with me at the labour camp during the last season and they told me that this year would not be easy. They told me they had to contribute labour for 15 days every

month and if they could not work, they had to go to the labour camp and pay the SLORC soldiers 3,000 Ks. They told me they also had to take their own food. There were so many poor families in our village. As they did not have much time to work for their living, they had nothing to eat. Eventually those poor families would have to come to the border. About 30 families have already left this year, and 50 families left last year [before rainy season in June 1995]. Some came here, and some went along the route to Nat Ein Taung to get into Thailand and seek for jobs. My friends advised me I should not stay there anymore. Many of them are also planning to flee. So I came back here 15 days ago.

Our village was divided into three parts — East, Middle, and West — and there were about 500 houses. Each section was responsible to contribute labour for 15 days whenever their turn came. About 80 people had to go for each turn [the others in the section pay the money to be spared from going]. This year they had to go and work between Kaleinaung and Yebyu. At the labour camp, we had to do everything asked by the SLORC troops. Sometimes we had to make fences, bunkers and barracks, collect firewood and dig foxholes for the soldiers near the labour camp.

The soldiers at Kywe Thone Nyi Ma were from LIB 406. Different battalions treated the people in different ways — LIB 409 is very bad and LIB 406 is good. There were about 25 soldiers there. Although we didn't have to do it all the time, they ordered us very often. We also had to pay a monthly porter fees of 300 Ks. We had to pay it to the chairman of the village. If the soldiers asked him for pork, we had to provide pork. If they asked him for 1,000 Ks, we had to pay it. If they asked for alcohol, we had to give it to them. We had to provide anything they asked for. The village head divided the amount among all the villagers. We also had to give them eight baskets of paddy per acre. I was not a farmer, I was a fisherman. So when they asked me for fish, I had to give it to them. They also collected tax depending on the size of your boat. If you paid them tax, then you could fish. It varied depending on the size of the boat — for a bigger boat the tax was much more.

The villagers also had to pay 150 Ks [per family per month] for the gas pipeline. We had to pay it for two years already. The village head collected the money and he himself went to give it, I thought to the soldiers.

Q: SLORC says these projects are good for the people. Do you agree?

A: I don't believe what they say. The way we have to work for the railway and the way they treat us, I think there will be no benefit for our people. I only saw that they tortured the people.

I got back here 15 days ago. I don't want to go back to Burma anymore, I want to stay here. I will find a job here and make a living. I will move to any place that the authorities prepare for us, but I will never go back to Burma until Burma gets democracy.

Interview: 216-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Refugee, Slavery

Name:	Mi Pan
Age:	39
Sex:	Female
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with one child (age 9 years)
Occupation:	Farmer
Address:	Kyauk Ka Din village, Yebyu Township, Mon State
Interviewed:	2 December 1995
Source:	KHRG

[The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995.]

I arrived here [the refugee camp] four days ago. It took three of us — my husband my daughter and I myself — six days' to walk. We came by ourselves. Although my husband was 54 years old, SLORC continued to ask for labour and for money. As he is too old, he can't go to work there nor we have no money to pay. That's why we came here. They not only made us to pay porter fees, but also forced to go with them as porters. As my husband couldn't go, he attempted to hire others to go for him. When we couldn't hire anyone, SLORC forced us to give them 200 Ks. Before we left our village, as the village leaders told us we'd have to contribute labour for railway construction, we ran away and came here. We are the only family to be here from Kyauk Ka Din village although we heard other villagers talking about running away and coming here before we left. In Kyauk Ka Din, there were about 100 families and 100 houses. I heard others saying that first they would harvest their rice and then they would escape and come here. As the families would finish their harvest in December, they could come in the same month. I didn't ask anyone else though I heard three or four families talking like that. People were afraid of SLORC's awareness if they mentioned their plans. We will stay here for the future. I have no wish to return to Kyauk Ka Din. As we just arrive, we haven't heard anything about what the Thais say [about the upcoming repatriation]

Interview: 217-HRV: Livelihood, Forced Labour, Child, Refugee, Torture

Name:	Nai Tint Win
Age:	28
Sex:	Male
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with three children (age 1,2, 7 years)
Occupation:	Farmer

Address: Paukpinkwin village, Yebyu Township, Mon State
Interviewed: 3 December 1995
Source: KHRG

[*The following interview was conducted by KHRG in a Mon refugee camp in December 1995.*]

I arrived here two months ago. It took us about 10 days to come, with my whole family. We left because SLORC forced us to do railway construction. Besides that, the soldiers also forced us to work for them in their camp. We had to clean the camp, cut bamboo for their buildings, and gather leaves and make roofs for them. At least 10 people had to go once a month. The SLORC camp used to be outside the village. But as they moved it into the village in 1995, they summoned the villagers every month. There were about 500 houses in the village. They rotated the people for camp labour the same as those for the railway — sometimes we had to go build the railway and sometimes we had to go work in their camp. If we could not go, SLORC forced us to pay 3,000 Ks. The nature of the work is the same whether it is railway labour or camp labour.

This season I had to go three times for railway labour and each time it lasted for 14 or 15 days. The last time I went was in September 1995. After that I left my village and came here. I had to dig the earth and build a 12-ft-high embankment. It was near Yebyu [about 120 km south of his village]. It took me four or five days on foot to get there, bringing my own food for the whole trip. We also had to take tools like baskets, hoes and spades. I always walked because I could not afford the bus or boat fare.

About 15 or 20 people from my village had to go at a time. When we got there, we saw about 2,000 or 3,000 people were working at that place. Elderly men, women, young women, and children about 13 or 14 years old were working there. Some people were beaten by the soldiers. Anyone who arrived at the work camp without tools or baskets was beaten. The soldiers beat them and asked, "Why did you forget your tools?" Some people were subjected to beatings when they took a rest because of tiredness. They hit them hard with bamboo sticks and tree branches. Some people were bleeding and some lost consciousness. They didn't care what would happen to the people they hit. Those who lost consciousness or were bleeding were left without help because the others were afraid of being beaten by the troops in case of helping them.

We had to start working early in the morning. At 10:00 a.m.we stopped to cook and eat. We had about two hours' break to make baskets to carry dirt and then we worked again. When it was not raining, we all slept in the open field, and if it was raining we made shelters for ourselves and slept. Some people got wet in the rain. Those who were sick were not spared from working. SLORC didn't give any medicine. Some people brought medicine with them. Anyone who was seriously sick was allowed to go back to their village to take medicine. But they normally said the

sick people were lying, and didn't allow them to go back. I heard that some people died at the railway construction from serious illness.

When I worked for the railway, my family stayed behind and worked in the field to grow paddy. Then when I got back home, I worked very hard for my family to make sure there would be no problem for them supposing I had to go to the railway again. I could only stay at home about 15 days before going again. All the families in the village had to go and work. We were divided into two groups and when one group went, the other could stay in the village. Then when one group came back, the other group had to replace them. After arriving back in the village, sometimes we had to go and work for the soldiers' camp in our village. We had to clean the camp and find firewood for the soldiers. It's only a small camp. Each family also had to pay a monthly porter fees of 200 Ks.

Along the way here, we were careful to avoid SLORC. I asked people to get information about SLORC and if they went one way then we went another. I don't want to go back to Burma. If the Thais don't force this camp to move then we'll stay here, otherwise we'll move to another camp. No way can I go back to my village. I am afraid of SLORC. If we arrive back at our home, SLORC will ask us why we ran away. I'm afraid of them, and I'm afraid of the railway construction.

Interview: 218-HRV: Livelihood, Detention, Slavery, Refugee, Torture

Name:	Nai Tin Maung
Age:	25
Sex:	Male
Ethnicity:	Mon
Religion:	Buddhist
Family:	Married with three children (age 1 month and 3 years)
Occupation:	Schoolteacher
Address:	Northern Ye Township, Mon State
Interviewed:	4 December 1995
Source:	KHRG

[Nai Tin Maung was among the 16 refugees who were subjected to arrest after the attack to Halockhani refugee camp on 21 July 1994 by SLORC troops from IB 62 led by Lt-Col Ohn Myint. All of them were forced into portering when the troops marched to Ye. On arrival in Ye, all of them, except Nai Tin Maung, were released several days later. Being a schoolteacher in the refugee camp, Nai Tin Maung was subjected to detention, interrogation and imprisonment for two years. The following story was told in his own words after his release.]

Last year I was a teacher at Halockhani [refugee camp]. I was teaching Mon and English. I had been at the Thai border for three years. I was living in Plat Hon Pai section of the camp. As a teacher I was a member of NMSP [New Mon State Party],

but I had no connection with MNLA [Mon National Liberation Army, armed wing of the NMSP]. When SLORC came I was staying in the camp. I saw the army come into the camp. They arrested me as a member of NMSP because the villagers told them I was a teacher. [On entering the camp, the troops called for all the teachers, and he was the only one there.] They handcuffed me in the village, then they took me as a porter. With me fifteen other villagers were also taken by SLORC, but later they were released. They didn't release me.

When I was brought with them they didn't tie me up. I had to be a porter. The load was quite heavy. I was carrying heavy artillery shells and a base-plate of 82 mm. mortar. [A mortar consists of a heavy tube set up on a heavy flat metal base-plate, weighing well over 10 kg] Some of us had to carry loads and some did not. Those who didn't have to carry loads were handcuffed to make sure they would not escape. Four people out of our 16 were handcuffed and used as guides. Three of us were members of NMSP, and the rest were villagers. [SLORC only knew that as a teacher, he was a member NMSP — they didn't know that two others were with the NMSP Agriculture Department] I had no idea why they were taken.

We were with IB 62. It took us four days's walk from Halockhani to Ye. When we left I saw them burning Plat Hon Pai. On the way, I saw them burning three villages: Plat Hon Pai, Ka Mon, and Klay Taing. These villages were very far apart. One village was burned down because a villager shot at SLORC soldiers and then ran away. They burned down the other because a battle had taken place near the village. When we were porters, we were beaten two times. Once we were beaten at night. Because of rains, we had to sleep in the rain in a sitting position. Although that night was very cold and raining, they did not allow us to lay down, to warm ourselves in our longyis or to go to the toilet. So we were noisy and the soldiers beat us with a stick. Also, when people could no longer walk fast, we all were beaten. They beat everybody. They hit us on the head and shoulders with sticks. Along the way they gave us just a little rice. They never gave us enough food and no curry, only salt and fish-paste. They didn't say anything to us.

When we got to Ye, the other 15 people were released. The soldiers told me I was guilty because I had connections with the Mon rebels. They said, "Tell us how long you have been working with Mon rebels." When I told them I wasn't, they beat me. They asked me how many were Mon soldiers of the 15 villagers. I told them none were Mon soldiers, and they said, "Only you?" So I said, "Yes." They asked how long I had been a teacher and I told them one year. They asked "Who pays you?", and I told them the villagers paid me. [Note: on arrival in Ye, the other 15 captives were released. Most of the soldiers then proceeded north to IB 62 base in Thanbyuzayat, while some took him further north to IB 62 headquarters in Mudon.] When we arrived at IB 62 headquarters in Mudon they asked me, "Are you a teacher?", "Do you have any connection with organisations?", and things like that. I said, "Yes. I had contact with N— from NMSP." Then they kept asking, "Who is N—?", and I told him he was a Township Secretary. When they asked me about Major S-— and his Company, I told them I knew nothing about that. Then they

beat me and said, “You know him. You are lying to us.” They slapped me in the face. They kept asking questions like that for about one hour and then they sent me to No. 5 Military Intelligence Unit. Personnel from MI 5 came and took me by car, with three or four soldiers guarding me. Their headquarters is in Moulmein. It is a big camp, I think there are 30 or 60 soldiers there. At their camp they threatened me. They showed me a place and said “Get in there. That is your place.” It was like a prison cell. They gave me some food and I had to call the guard when I needed to use the latrine. They interrogated me for three-five days. They beat me for one or two days and then they didn’t. They punched my face and kicked me. After six days, personnel from MI 5 took me to the police station. Nothing happened there and I stayed only one day. After that they took me to Moulmein prison and then to a court where I was tried.

I had to appear before a court, and the judge asked me whether I had any connection with NMSP. I said “Yes”, so he told me “You know that you are guilty for co-operating with NMSP?”, and I said “Yes.” Then he sentenced me to two years' imprisonment. Since they knew about me and it was no use to lie, I told them the truth. They gave me the chance to get a lawyer but I didn’t because it would make no difference. The judge was a civilian and the court was full with many people, all police.

Then they gave me prison uniform — two shirts and two longyis in white colour [prison uniforms are made of very rough white material] and put me in Moulmein prison. There are five buildings in the prison compound. The place I slept was like a hall where there were about 200 people. It is about 200ft long and 50 ft wide. They leave a space at the centre for walking and people sleep on either side. It is not enough space for 200 people. It had a wooden floor, but they didn’t give us mats. They gave us one blanket. There is a place with a bucket to defecate and three or four pots to urinate. In the morning, they came and collected all the pots to use as fertiliser.

In our room some prisoners were murderers, rapists and pickpockets while some were in for fraud. But about 160 or 170 were like me, accused under Section 17/1 [contact with “illegal” organisations, a standard charge for political prisoners] and 17/2 [rebellion against the State]. Some were rebel soldiers and some were charged with co-operating with the rebels. All the political prisoners were in my building. In daytime we had to work. At 3:00 p.m. we stopped working, took a bath and ate. After that we had to line up for roll call, and at 6:00 p.m. we all had to go back to our own building. At 7:00 p.m., they blew a whistle and we all had to be at our sleeping places. We could sing or laugh until 9:00 p.m., but no sound was allowed after 9:00 p.m. and everyone had to sleep and be quiet. If someone had to go to the toilet they had to shout “Piss!” or “Shit!” You could go only if they allowed you. If they didn't answer you couldn't go. We woke up at 5:00 a.m. and we were allowed to pray. From 6-7:00 a.m. they rang the bell and we all had to line up and get boiled rice gruel made of rice, salt and water, and then we had to go to work. Then at 10:00 a.m. we got a meal of rice and some vegetables boiled in water with salt. At 4:00

p.m. we got another meal which was not different from the morning one. The food was not enough for me. They gave us only one plate of rice. There were so many kinds of work — feeding the pigs, metalworking, weaving, gardening vegetables, cooking at the mess hall, and so on. The political prisoners had to work the same as the criminals. Then the authorities sold the pigs and the things we made, in the market. Criminals had to go for [Ye-Tavoy] railway labour, but not political prisoners.

Prisoners who got sick were checked in the prison and if necessary they were sent to the hospital outside. But you had to pay them money first. You had to pay 500-600 or 1,000-1,500 Ks to the warden. In prison hospital, they just had a few medicines like Paracetamol. Basically they had no medicine at all. If you gave money to the guards, they would buy some for you. In prison we made our own medicine for malaria. We took 6 or 7 small bugs [he named a type of insect that lives between the cracks in floorboards], mixed it with jaggery from palm trees and Flying Man digestive powder, rolled it into a pill and swallowed it. I got sick once with malaria, for one whole month. I didn't go to the prison hospital but I bought medicine for myself. I had money because my mother brought it when she came to see me. She came one time every three months. The guards didn't allow her to see me. She told them my name and gave money to them. The guards took 200 out of every 1,000 Ks before they gave it to you. Being a political prisoner, I was not allowed to see my family.

I saw two people died in prison from sickness. The guards only beat the newcomers. Every new prisoner is beaten by the chief guard. For the first one or two months they regard you as a new prisoner and beat you. After that you become an "old hand" and no more beatings. I was in the prison for 16 or 17 months. I was released on 28 October [1995]. The prison authorities gave back all my belongings and I went back home. But my family is here [at the refugee camp], and my people at home are in trouble because of SLORC. I came here because I don't want to see SLORC's face anymore. I was released because some majors from MNLA came and vouched for me. About 30 people from my group and 20 people from another group were released [after SLORC/NMSP cease-fire agreement was reached in June 1995, the NMSP requested the release of certain political prisoners]. I think the Mon leaders negotiated it with SLORC. As for me, my opinion in two words is that SLORC is no good.

Interview: 219-HRV: Livelihood, Displacement, Refugee, Forced Labour

Source: KHRG

[*The following report was collected in November and December 1995 by a human rights monitor who visited the area north of Myawaddy, Karen State.*]

I travelled to Tar Doh Thu Hta on the Moei River near Mae La in November 1995

hoping to cross the river there [the river is the border]. But as a few travellers there reported problems with the Burmese, I went to another place further south and crossed there in the same month. I went to Thee Wah Bu village on Meh Bleh river, which I couldn't recognise well, partly because I hadn't been for a long time and partly because it has changed. About 10 years ago it was a village which was well inhabited, with a well-kept road, houses and a school. Before it had 50 houses. But now if you enter the village, you don't even know you're in a village because it's so quiet! The houses were unkempt and I could see a few people sleeping in them, presumably most must be sleeping outside the village. I talked with some of the villagers and they said that there were only 18 households left. Of those who had gone, some went to Thailand and some fled further into the hills. The villagers said, "We must make two or three houses each, so if Na Wa Ta [SLORC] or Ko Per Baw [DKBA] come we can flee to our places in the fields". They have also taken all of their household items and hidden them in the rocks and cliffs in the area to make sure that SLORC or Ko Per Baw cannot take them as they have already suffered this in the past.

Thee Wah Bu is in the T'Nay Hsah village-tract, along with B'Wee, Thay Mo Pah, Wa Klu Bu and Htee Wa Klay, and all these villages have experienced the same situation. The number of houses in each of these villages respectively is 17, 8, 25, and more than 20. There is no school amongst them all, and only two monasteries.

In November, I travelled around the area of these villages and found that many fields were not being cultivated and many people were ill, but they had no medicine to cure themselves. People said that since the beginning of 1995, it has been not only very difficult to stay and cultivate but also the way to Thailand has been more and more troublesome [SLORC and DKBA are systematically blocking the escape routes for refugees]. Village leaders said to me, "It is getting more and more difficult, when will things be better?" I could see that. The parents hope for better times but if the youths cannot keep their determination to help their families working in the fields, then all happiness will be lost. When I saw babies, I had the heart to them as they are growing up in the midst of sicknesses pressing upon them and with no opportunities to learn. I saw this and was angry but could do nothing. Inwardly I was thankful that we Karen who stay in the refugee camps in Thailand are blessed that our brothers and sisters from other lands give us food, clothing, medicines and other help that we need.

In the same month, I left B'Wee for Day Law Pya. In the fields, I saw that a few people were working and that they still had some of their buffaloes. There were also a few people along the path, but not like before. The houses are all in disrepair like in other villages. People's lives in this place are as water on a ku leaf. [Water beads on a 'ku' leaf - if you touch the leaf the beads shake and scurry around, and they are easily knocked off the leaf.] I stayed in Meh Bleh Wah Kee for three days. One day I went to a coconut seller, who said to me, "If you can climb the palm you can eat as you please and you need not pay me, because soon Na Wa Ta or Ko Per Baw will come, and if that so they will take and eat them all anyway." Although

Meh Bleh Wah Kee and Day Law Pya were both very pleasant places, the people there live in fear and are always steeling themselves for SLORC or Ko Per Baw to come and oppress them. They said that Ko Per Baw and SLORC came two times already and most of the people fled and hid. If not, they ask people about weapons and frighten people by saying that the people are hiding guns or Kaw Thoo Lei [*KNU soldiers*].

In the afternoon on one day in December, two groups of women — three or four in a group, passed through the village, following each other. They were grandmothers carrying children, with baskets on their backs and woven bamboo trays on their heads. They had left their village and were going into the hills, going like this, trip by trip, until all their household possessions were removed. I asked one elderly woman, "Why are you carrying all of this? You can run anytime and hide only yourselves, really". She answered to me, "Don't speak like this. The 'raw food eaters' [presumably meaning SLORC or DKBA, who steal their livestock and food], they take everything until it is gone and nothing left for you. So it is better to carry everything away now." As night was falling they went again, and went slowly and quietly from the village. I went to a person's house and looked inside to see what was left, and saw only two wooden water carriers without any water in them. I spent the night there. That place is part of Taree Kyo village, close to Htoh Thu Kee.

During November and December, I was travelling around and visiting people in this village-tract. Whenever people saw us they would ask, "How long until things become better?" I heard that question in so many places, and I know that they hope to have a decent government and to be free from this oppression. In December, I went to Loh Baw village and listened to a village elder from Pah Klu. He said that that very afternoon, Maung Chit Thu of Ko Per Baw had sent a verbal message to Pah Klu, Loh Baw and other villages. It was to effect for the next three days that each village had to send at least 30 people to clear land, bringing their own food and a total of 400 logs — each at least seven feet long and three hands in circumference — all to Ker Ghaw village. The message also said, "If you do not do as we instruct you to do and then something will happen to you, don't say it was our fault". Maung Chit Thu is a Ko Per Baw company commander in Ker Ghaw village. He stays near the Kho Khat monastery by the Meh Bleh river, and moves around the area. Maung Chit Thu did not say where they would have to do the land clearing work, nor what would be done with the logs. Pah Klu and Loh Baw are good places. But when they heard Maung Chit Thu's order, their faces became full of troubles. I know that right now the villagers must finish their harvest, and some said to me, "I will finish my harvest, then I will flee to Thailand if the way is open, or otherwise I must run to a faraway place."

In December, I went to Pah Klu in the morning and met an old friend from school, so I was very happy. He brought a melon to cook. As I was cooking rice, we heard that SLORC and Ko Per Baw troops arrived at Lay K'Tee Kee village. Thus we had no time to cook the melon and we ate rice with chillies and salt and then went back

to Loh Baw village, where we slept at night. Villagers there said to me, "There is no way we can encounter Na Wa Ta or Ko Per Baw". The people there must just run without thinking about things. After finished eating in the next morning, we left immediately as we heard that the Burmese would come to Loh Baw Po. After we separated, I went back to Htee Wah Klay. Later that day when I was there cooking rice, people came fleeing from Loh Baw, saying that the Burmese had already arrived in Loh Baw. Therefore we left without finishing our cooking, back into the hills to head back to Thailand. The villagers had heard that the Burmese would be doing something around the Meh Bleh and Moei rivers and also in the hills, but they didn't know what. So many people said that once their harvest is finished they will flee to Thailand. We slept in the hills along with four elderly women, two babies and two teenagers. They were carrying bags and baskets and had followed behind us. When we asked them they said they were fleeing to a refugee camp, so we came back together. Finally, we arrived back in Thailand. I felt restless and dissatisfied.

Interview: 220-HRV: Livelihood, Displacement, Refugee, Forced Labour

Source: KHRG

[*The following report was collected in November and December 1995 by a human rights monitor who visited the area north of Myawaddy, Karen State.*]

At 12:00 noon on 22 December 1995, a meeting was held at the monastery in Htee Sah Ra village. The meeting was attended by Nay Aung, officer from Strategic Command and Township LORC in Myawaddy, a village LORC official, officials from Timber Excise Department and Health Department, an official from Education Department and officers from IB 88 based in Meh Bleh village as well as Htee Sah Ra village leaders and the public. Commander of IB 88 opened the meeting by saying that in the past as the leaders and members of Htee Sah Ra village community had not worked together with the Myawaddy leaders, a new village administrative body in the region consisting of Htee Sah Ra, Ker Ghaw, Kwee Lay, Sgaw Ko, Pah Klu, Meh Bleh and Kway Sha villages would be formed. He said village leaders from each of these villages would have to work together with Myawaddy leaders. Furthermore, he said that if they needed something done they could inform the authorities in Myawaddy for examining the prospect of giving assistance. He then pointed to his badge, numbered '88', and said that they are a peaceful battalion. Having said that, he left the meeting.

Then the Township LORC official spoke. He said that previously as this region had been under the control of Village LORCs, the situation has not been so good, but things will be getting better and the conditions in the villages will be pretty reasonable in the future under the administration of Township LORC. He announced that they would begin registration of the village population and requested the village elders to begin assigning numbers, after which they will conduct a full registration

process. He said that people who did not present at the time of registration and have their names recorded as members of the village community would be regarded as outsider and if military units from other areas caught them to work as porters or such like, the Township LORC would have no obligation to step in. The Township LORC officer requested the village elders to also register the number of bullocks and bullock carts to facilitate the process in case of demands by SLORC.

Finally, he said that those who had finished 8th Standard in a Burmese state school and would like to be health workers or teachers could give their names to the Township LORC who would arrange for the training. He then asked the villagers if there was any other things they would like to do, such as fish farming, the people answered that they couldn't do this because there were no places available.

The Timber Excise official spoke next saying that in the previous days although there has been no system of regulation for trading in logs, from now on rules and discipline world be imposed. After about 45 minutes, the meeting ended and the medics present examined villagers and prescribed medicine.

However, the situation has not been improved as said by the Township LORC officer reported. At presently IB 88 has greater power than any of those other groups and their duty is to move around Meh Bleh region. For example, on 23 December they sent an order to Htee Sah Ra village ordering the villagers to build a five-ft-high bamboo fence along both sides of the road leading out of Htee Sah Ra, and build it such that a person could not even fit their hand through the gaps, let alone pass through the fence, in order to prevent land mines from being laid on the road [building a fence this solid will require a great deal of bamboo and labour]. Villagers in Meh Bleh village have been ordered to construct this fence starting from their own village all the way to Htee Sah Ra while villagers in the latter village have been ordered to continue the fence out the other side of the village to unspecified point.

Furthermore, Township LORC is currently calculating the size of people's farms in order to levy taxes on land holdings. Ko Per Baw are ordering the villages to collect all scrap metal, which Ko Per Baw will sell to get funds. A unit from SLORC LID 22 operates a small checkpoint on the way to Thailand and they demand 100 Ks from every person coming from Thailand and 50 Ks from every person going to Thailand. Many villagers are saying to themselves that if the situation continues to worsen, they may try to go to Thailand until things get better.

[Usually, SLORC uses village registration in order to determine forced labour quotas for each village, as well as a way to decide how much money, livestock, rice, etc. to extort from those villages. In this case they may also use the registration process as an opportunity to capture people who are suspected of having relatives in the KNU, to hold them hostage, or to screen and arrest anyone they don't like in the village. Anyone who doesn't register will likely be subjected to arrest at any time if found in the region. Failure to register would be seen as grounds to torture or execute anyone, on the assumption that only KNU people would avoid registration.]

Interview: 221-HRV: Livelihood, Refugee, Forced Labour, Child, Women, Disappearance

Source: KHRG

[*The following account was given by villagers who were fleeing the area of the Kru Tu — T'Nay Hsah road construction, in southern Pa-an Township, north of Myawaddy, in an interview with an independent human rights monitor at the end of December 1995.*]

Starting from dry season of l995 [October], people have had to go to dig and construct a car road from Kru Tu village (Kyon Doe in Burmese) to as far as T'Nay Hsah. All villages in the region adjacent to the road had to go. They were being forced by SLORC troops from IB 88 based at T'Nay Hsah village and a few DKBA soldiers. At the time that we went, the construction of the road had come as far as Noh Pyu village. We heard that the construction will continue until Paw Yay Bu in District 2. In Ber Kho area of T'Nay Hsah District, all villages had to attend the road construction. We went together in a group of ten people, amongst fifty people working there. The road is built five feet high [a five-feet-high embankment] and wide enough to accommodate two cars side by side. We had to take our own food and received no pay. If one of us assigned was unable to go, his wife or children had to go. If there were no young people in the house, the elderly, even with white hair, broken teeth and stooped over, had go and cook for the SLORC soldiers. There were also some ten-year-old children who carried the earth in trays. We were amongst fifty people at the road construction. After we finished our assignment, our names were again selected by lot so that we had to go again. As we were not free to attend to our occupations, my family had to borrow rice from others at the time when we had to go for the road construction. If nobody went, we had to find other people to go for us or pay 200 Ks per person per day, or else they said that they would come and take our possessions and livestock. As for me, all I had at home was a pot and some plates. We came here secretly and we didn't tell anybody.

We heard that the motorway will have a gravel layer, and that the stones for this will be worked from the T'Nay Hsah cliff which needs a sacrifice of seven women and 30 men. The women must be young and unmarried. [We have no previous reports of SLORC conducting 'human sacrifices' although there are a few radical elements within DKBA with some extreme and unusual beliefs. The call for a sacrifice is most likely a rumour based on the fact that SLORC has specifically requested young unmarried women. It is more likely that the people are being called for forced labour quarrying gravel, and in the process SLORC is requesting young unmarried women so they can rape them — SLORC units generally prefer to rape women who are young and unmarried. The fact the villagers would believe that SLORC is capable of human sacrifices simply reflects the level of barbarity they are used to from SLORC.] In December, SLORC soldiers came to Kler T'ku village and called one 16-year-old girl to go back with them to T'Nay Hsah. The following morning, her mother went after them and then SLORC soldiers said that they had already let

her go the previous day. Since then people haven't seen her so far. Since the news on a sacrifice of 37 people at the cliff has been widespread, the villagers there are is great fear.

Now the SLORC soldiers are staying at T'Nay Hsah. I heard people saying that they are from LID 88. As we could not bear the sufferings any longer, we fled along with some of our family members. We must return to get others who are still in the village. We left on 20 December 1995.
[*Note: the road construction project is still going on.*]

Interview: 222-HRV: Livelihood, Slavery, Women

Source: KHRG

[*The following report was submitted by an independent civilian human rights monitor who visited the Day Law Pya area.*]

One unit of SLORC IB 88 and DKBA organised themselves at Sgaw Kho, and then left Sgaw Kho on 3 December 1995, went to Pah Klu on 5 December, Loh Baw on 6 December, and Htee Wah Klay on 7 December. On 8 December, they returned to Loh Baw Maw Ber Htah where they saw villagers in a hut next to the fields, where they had gone to work, and shot at them. Neh Saw Ker (30, a Karen Buddhist and married with children from Day Law Pya) was seriously wounded in his right shoulder. They also shot and killed two bulls and three cows belonged to Kyaw Met of Day Law Pya.

On 10 December, the same troops arrived at Meh Bleh Wah Kee. Some of the male villagers fled to save themselves, leaving the young and elderly women behind. More than ten people were arrested and forcibly taken from the fields they were working in. Naw May Lah (30, female, Karen Buddhist farmer from Meh Bleh Wah Kee) was among the group. They were forced to carry extremely heavy army equipment across the Dawna Mountains, to Ber Kho on the other side. They had to carry it for two days. An elder of Meh Bleh Wah Kee followed them. On 13 December, the SLORC soldiers released them in Htee Hseh Ker area and they were all able to return with the elder.

Interview: 223-HRV: Livelihood, Slavery, Detention, Forced Labour, Execution, Displacement

Source: KHRG

(*During an interview with KHRG, the following account was given by a young Karen civilian who was at the Karen New Year celebration at Wah Baw village, about seven miles east of Lamaing which is about 20 miles north of Ye and on*

halfway along the road from Thanbyuzayat to Ye.)

On 21 December 1995, the Karen people were celebrating Karen New Year's Day like the years before. They were holding the ceremony peacefully — they had dancing and competitions, and they made offerings to the elderly who gave blessings to the young. I was there at that time. There were over 1,000 people there. Although there are only about 50 houses in the village, villagers from all villages around Wah Baw were attending the ceremony. I think 11 Don Dance groups came. You can imagine — in each group there were 20 or 30 people.

The celebration started at 8:00 a.m. and the SLORC troops composed of Lamaing-based IB 106 and Ye-based LIB 343 attacked and destroyed all the things. About 240 troops under Southeastern Command [commanded by Maj-Gen Ket Sein] were combined for operation. We think they left their battalion camps at night and arrived outside the village early in the morning, before the break of dawn. They divided into two groups: one group took position on the hill beside the village and the other raided the village. At that time we were in the field [the celebration was held in an open field just outside the village, where the villagers had erected a stage]. They just fired and attacked the village without seeing any enemy there. And they ransacked every house and took everything. While we were all running on hearing the shooting, the troops on the hill saw the crowd scattering around and shelled into the gathering. I think the shells were 60 mm [small mortar], not 81 mm. Because in my experience I have seen 81mm and 120 mm mortar which are very strong and explosive. But the vibrations of these shells were not that strong. We couldn't count how many shells! They opened fire on us both with small arms and mortars for about one hour .

They also pounded the village with two or three mortar shells, causing their own troops got injured. Two soldiers died, according to the porters. They took eight porters from the village, and later these porters told us they had to carry these wounded soldiers. But these two soldiers died on the way to their base. Fortunately, no one else died from the shelling, but one of the villagers was arrested, cut down, stabbed in the chest and clubbed to death with a bottle. He was just an ordinary villager. He wasn't taking part in the ceremony as he was drunk and asleep. So they dragged

him into the field, asked some questions and then clubbed to death with the bottle. They broke it on his head and then stabbed him with the broken bottle in the belly. His name was U Plaw Toh (30, from Wekame village, Thanbyuzayat Township). It happened while they were raiding the village.

They conducted house-to-house search and took everything. Some soldiers, on seeing anyone wearing a necklace, snatched it right off his/her neck and took it. One of the villagers was ordered to come down from his house and then he was gunned down. One of the soldiers shot him in his knee. They said, "Come down from the house!", and as soon as he was on the ground, they shot him. They shot on purpose from right in front of him to injure him. That villager knew one of the SLORC medics because the SLORC camp is near their village. He told us later. When he saw the medic, the medic asked, "What's happened?" He said, "I've been injured." The medic said, "What are you doing here?", so he said, "I just came to attend the festival". The medic said, "Didn't you know not to come here?" and he said, "No. I didn't know." So the medic treated him with a bandage. Aiyy! That villager's name is Ohn Yi (32, from Wah Ko village).

Some people managed to escape from the village but some women and men were arrested as they were not able to get away. Aside from the one who was clubbed to death and the other who was shot, eight men [sic: actually nine] were taken and forced into portering. They were released when they reached the military camp. In the village, the soldiers fired a lot with carbine [rifle] and G3 [assault rifle]. They shot at random, whatever they saw. Of course, they'd like to shoot at everyone, but as the villagers were running they just shot at anything moving. While one of my friends was in a house with a sick person, a child came and told him, "SLORC troops are coming", then he jumped down from the house and ran away. They shot at him. Fortunately he managed to escape, he narrowly escaped. The sick man stayed behind. Later, we heard that they were going to burn down that house. But the sick man asked for mercy and said, "How can I carry these things?" He had malaria and was given intravenous at the time. So they didn't bother him, they just took everything from the house and went away.

We stayed away from the village for two or three hours, hiding on a hill just opposite the hill where the SLORC troops were positioned. One of the houses was also burned down. We could see the smoke coming out from the village. It was U Maung Thaung's house. He is 44 years old. Three cows were shot. They just shot them and injured them. One cow died and the other two were injured so that it could not be used anymore [to pull carts or plough]. They just shot and left them behind. The soldiers got all of our things.

We think the troops stayed in the village only about one hour. Because just two or three hours later, some villagers went around and said it was all quiet. When we went and saw, the troops had already left. We saw the injured man and the dead body, the house that was burned down and the cows that were shot. The injured man was carried into a house by some villagers and later transferred to the hospital,

maybe at Lamaing. I think he would get proper treatment there. But maybe first SLORC would force him to promise not to tell anything.

From the village they stole money, clothing, three cows, necklaces, and so on. Clothing, money and 40 silver coins [possibly colonial-era Indian rupees, which are still used as a valuable form of currency in some parts of Burma] from one villager's house was looted. We guessed the overall losses estimate at 100,000 Ks. On the way back to their battalion, the troops passed some other villages. One of them is Klay Taung which is close to Wah Baw. They stopped and took everything from the shops; they took bottles of beer, just drank a little and threw them away and destroyed them. The appointed Ya Wa Ta [Village LORC] headman in that village was not able to prevent them from doing anything.

We cannot imagine why they attacked Wah Baw [as opposed to New Year celebrations elsewhere]. In charge of that area from KNU thought that SLORC wouldn't disturb anything because the KNU had sent a delegation to Rangoon to meet SLORC leaders. So they should not have disturbed that ceremony. We can't find any reason why they came and attacked. Because if SLORC wants to achieve genuine national reconciliation, they shouldn't order their troops to attack and destroy Karen ceremonies. It must have been ordered. Under military discipline, the commander of the battalion cannot send his troops to do anything unless he gets an order from his superior. These troops are under the Southeast Command at which Maj-Gen Ket Sein is commander. So they cannot just do whatever they want, without any orders, right?

Q: At the time of the attack were there any Karen troops in the village?
A: Yes, they were around the village. But for the sake of the villagers, they didn't retaliate. Because if they had shot back, SLORC would say, "Oh, this is a KNU place", and burn down all the houses. There were about 100 Karen soldiers there.

Q: Did SLORC know they were there?
A: I don't know, I'm not sure.

Q: In the village, did SLORC give any indication that they were looking for Karen troops?
A: No. Maybe they asked the man they killed about that. But they didn't mention to anyone else. Maybe they knew that the KNU was around there. But even if the KNU was there, it doesn't matter. That celebration, that morning, did not concern with the KNU, it concerned the Karens as a whole. So no matter who is there, they should let them celebrate, if they respect each other, if they respect the customs of other nationals. They can attack the KNU anytime, anywhere. SLORC always tries to suppress other nationals, every ethnic people. They don't want to see any other ethnic nationals' customs influencing their people.

Q: What else is going on there?

A: They asked labour for the construction of Ye-Tavoy railway after the Karen New Year Day. But the village headman begged for pardon by saying, "We are going to make a ceremony and after that we can provide you the labour". Each house had to send one person. If you cannot go, you have to hire someone else to do it. This is the first time people there had to go. How long it will take for a term depends on the work -- you have to dig holes, and carry dirt.

I also heard that around Wah Baw village, the fields will be used for an oil-palm plantation. They had a contract with Singapore, and also Daewoo Company of Korea to cultivate oil-palm. People supposed that they could be conscripted as labourers to grow it without any wages. They have not started yet. Thirty-thousand-acre wide plantation will be around Ye-Lamaing area. They won't care whose land it is, on the mountain or around the villages, they will do it. The villagers knew this from SLORC sources. [SLORC officers and officials often tell village leaders about plans for the area, even when they are not supposed to.] They will take land owned by people. These people have been living there for generations. They have had to clear their own fields, and own them. But SLORC will not clear new fields, just take the ones that belonged to the people. And they will conscript the local people as labourers. [This plantation may be intended for the purposes of "countertrade", a practice used by many foreign companies in Burma: they make their profits in kyats, which cannot be exported, so they buy domestic agricultural products from SLORC and export it to retain their profits.]

The witness also provided the following partial list of people who suffered in the attack:

No.	Name	Age	Village	Things lost / Remarks
1.	U Pwah Htoo	31	Duh Leh	3,000 Ks in cash and clothing
2.	U Maung Thaung	44	Wah Baw	House burned down
3.	Bee Lin	30	Wah Baw	Cow shot dead by SLORC
4.	Kyi Nyo	60	Wah Baw	Gold necklace, weight eight gram, 8,000 Ks in cash, clothing
5.	Maung Maung	58	Wah Baw	Gold necklace, weight eight gram, 20,000 Ks in cash, a cow, and clothing
6.	Ohn Yi	32	Wah Ko	Shot, kneecapped
7.	U Aung Soe	32	Wah Baw	20,000 Ks in cash, 40 silver coins, clothing
8.	Pan Ee	60	Wah Baw	Clothing
9.	U Plaw Toh	30	Wa Ka Mein	Beaten and stabbed to death
10.	U Maung Wai	46	Wah Baw	30,000 Ks in cash, two cassette

			recorders, clothing, all furniture destroyed
11. U Tin Lwin	30	Wah Baw	Conscripted as porter
12. U Tun Shwe	46	Wah Baw	Conscripted as porter
13. Thaw Heh	45	Wah Baw	Conscripted as porter
14. Hot Thaw	30	Wah Baw	Conscripted as porter
15. Kya Teit	37	Wah Ko	Conscripted as porter
16. Bah Ko	37	Wah Ko	Conscripted as porter
17. B'Na Klo	28	K'Nyein	Conscripted as porter
18. Po Tote	21	K'Nyein	Conscripted as porter
19. Pan Li	30	K'Nyein	Conscripted as porter

20. Other things, amount uncountable, belonged to the villagers' stalls in the field were all stolen or destroyed.

Interview: 224-HRV: Livelihood, Displacement, Execution, Religion

Interviewed: 8 January 1996
Source: KHRG

I was in Pa-an District. But we couldn't reach other villages there because most parts are controlled by SLORC. But there are still some parts where we can go. We were living in the east of Dawna Range in Pa-an Township, Hu Way village-tract and Meh Pleh Kee Wah. There are eight or nine villages in each village-tract. I went to nine villages. We started two weeks ago and we were there for 10 days.

Before, SLORC never came to those villages except maybe once every few years. It is only now, with DKBA, that they come every few days. There are new bunkers for each house, even at the monasteries they have a bigger one. These are to protect from heavy artillery. Because DKBA wants the people to move to their new designated village near Ka Ma Maung [Myaing Gyi Ngu, DKBA headquarters]. So they said, "If you don't move from here, that will not be our responsibility". That meant they would not care about people from that area and if the KNU came in that area they would fight them even right in the village. They would not consider for the sake of the villagers. So the people were afraid and digging bunkers. They have also experienced some fighting in their villages. In this area, there were not so many KNLA Army who were trying to regroup their soldiers. The people didn't know who was in control of the villages and the people were afraid of DKBA and SLORC. DKBA moved around in all the villages I went to. They came every two or three days. Some villages were quite far from their place so they could only arrive there on a weekly basis. There were quite a lot of DKBA, but among DKBA not all were Karen -- the villagers said that most of them were from SLORC. The villagers knew who was Karen and who was not, and they knew SLORC. They saw there were quite a lot of Burmese, and they knew they could not be DKBA, they must be SLORC. They wore DKBA badges, but they could not speak Karen. The villagers told me that DKBA had no badges, only yellow headbands. When DKBA

needed a large force, they could get it from SLORC. In DKBA, they had a problem because some of them agreed to work with SLORC, and some disagreed. I also thought SLORC did not believe DKBA, but they were playing politics.

If the village was near their base, DKBA arrived there every two days. At least 50 came together. Every time they come they steal all the livestock, even the chillies. They did not destroy the houses nor shoot the villagers in the village if there is no fighting. But as they took everything, including clothing in the houses, nothing was left. They gave no reason because they didn't talk to the people. In return, the people are not allowed to visit their base. So they come, they steal everything, and they go back to their base, and next time they come they do the same, every time. Their base is at Kyaw Ko, east of the Dawna Range. In the area, there is a base each for DKBA and SLORC. The commander of DKBA in 7th Brigade area is Bo Tha Htwe, former KNLA who has attended commando training.

The villagers there were in great trouble to get food and medical care because SLORC blocked all supplies from Burma — from Pa-an or from SLORC-controlled villages. SLORC attempted to stop anything from Burma getting to these villages. Even salt, they cut it off. And then DKBA entered all the villages and took the animals, cooking pots and rice. All the pots! So for the villagers it was difficult to cook and they had no rice. Even though they got some rice after the harvest, they could not cook as they had no pots. Therefore the villagers there were staying in the jungle and cooked in bamboo [they use the hollow bamboo as pots]. I went to quite a lot of villages, of which some were quite nice. As they were afraid of DKBA, most of the people were staying in the jungle.

The people told me that six months ago, two villagers in the area were killed because of carrying salt. But nobody could identify who did — DKBA or SLORC. But they are the same. In most of the villages, I think 20% of the villagers were suffering from iodine deficiency. I asked, "Why don't you have salt?" They said, "We have some salt, but not much." It has been great difficulty for them in getting salt. SLORC has a base on the way from there to Pa-an. Between Pa-an and those villages, there were four or five ways people could go on foot. When the villagers wanted to buy something from Pa-an, they used those routes. On each route, there were two checkpoints — DKBA and SLORC — where the villagers had to pay some money. Later on the villagers were not allowed to go. Everything that was carried from Pa-an to the villages had been cut off. SLORC didn't want it to get through.

The villagers didn't stay in big groups — just in a group of two or three families and sometimes just one family, beside a stream in the jungle. When they saw DKBA, they ran to another place. They ran and ran. They didn't know where to run to, they just ran to wherever they thought it was safe at the time.

Whenever DKBA needed porters, they collected money from the villagers. They said that this money was for porters. In these villages, they had another big problem

— DKBA told the leaders of all these villages that they wanted to get 2,000 Ks from each house and it would be the price for one year to pay to DKBA, like a tax. They didn't care whether the house was empty — if it was empty they could burn down. They said, "If you stay in this village, the consequence is not our responsibility." Most of the villagers there are Buddhist, second is Animist, and the third is Christian. Some of them looked Christian but they mentioned themselves Buddhists, I thought because they were afraid of DKBA. The people didn't want to go to Myaing Gyi Ngu because they didn't believe DKBA. The people believed DKBA would not last much longer, because they did such bad things to the people. So the people said that one day there would be trouble for DKBA. There were no volunteers for DKBA, because the villagers hated them. Although DKBA formed a big group, most of them were SLORC. They were even in uniform with a headband. Most were Burmese.

There is a monastery in most of the villages but there were not so many monks, only one or two because they were also afraid of DKBA. All the monks I saw were afraid. I asked, "Why? Did DKBA cause you any problem?" They said, "DKBA came and asked many questions." They didn't care about Buddhism. They usually tried to get information from the monks. They asked, "Have you seen any KNU or KNLA in the area?" The monks just said, "I don't know."

We were in Pu Way village where there were 200 houses. One hour after we arrived, we heard some shooting from the next village, 45-minute-walk's away. It is near the DKBA base, only 10 minutes' walk. So they came. In this village, there was one village guard — KNDO [Karen National Defence Organisation, the KNU's village militia] which had been set up in all villages. Since this area was no longer under the control of KNDO, the village guards became independent. But they had weapons and guarded by themselves. I saw a village guard after he was wounded. He was helping the people to cut up a pig. DKBA saw him and shot at him so that he ran. When all the people ran, DKBA took all the pork and went back. The guard was wounded in the leg. They shot a medium weapon, like M79 [grenade launcher]. He was very lucky because he just had a small hole in his leg. When he was hit, he hid behind a tree. I asked the villagers, "Did you get any pork?", and they said, "No, they took it all". [*The DKBA professes of being vegetarian.*]

I saw the people harvesting. They harvested their paddy in the fields and then they hid it at many places in the jungle. They didn't keep it in the village. They divided it and usually hid it in caves in the mountains. Normally the people wouldn't go in those caves because of danger from snakes and other animals. When the DKBA knew some of the places where the people kept their rice, they took it. The people used to keep one third or a quarter of their rice in the village to eat through the cold season. All that rice or paddy has gone. In the villages, you could not even buy any food. We ate rice with just chillies and salt, but in some villages we just ate rice with salt because we couldn't even get chillies. The villagers were just eating rice with water and salt. They poured water on the rice because it was very sticky as it was a new one. The people boiled some vegetables they got from the jungle and

eat them. Therefore only a few vegetables left in the jungle. In better times, the people didn't eat this kind of vegetable. When we arrived in the villages, people came out from the jungle and then they went back.

The people said that SLORC and DKBA have been doing like this for about one year. In rainy season, they couldn't make many problems. But from the beginning of the dry season, DKBA has appeared everywhere. DKBA and SLORC allowed the people to grow paddy in the rainy season. They waited until the time for harvest and took it.

As the DKBA got 40 or 50 percent of their paddy, the people didn't have enough to survive until next harvest time. So they were afraid. They thought that by the end of cold season [March] they would almost finish all their rice. Then they had no idea what they would do. From these villages to Beh Klaw refugee camp is 12 hours' walk. They feel they cannot go to refugee camps because it is too far to get to those camps. And also if they move in a group towards the border, DKBA will make a problem. DKBA has already laid some land-mines. Nobody has been hurt by those mines yet. But some of their animals have. The villagers also said that they would have to fear DKBA even in the refugee camps. So it is not so much difference between the jungle and the refugee camp. They said, "In the refugee camp, we can't run. We don't know how to run in Thailand, but at least we know how to run in the jungle". So the jungle seemed better for them.

I don't think the people can go on like this until the next rainy season. Maybe the villagers will die. Many people there are suffering from severe malaria and widespread of malnutrition. Even with the pregnant women, only 50% of their children survive. Fifty percent die under two years, especially under two months. For example, one woman gives birth six times and only three will survive. Three will die before the age of two, especially under two months. There is no medicine and when they have a big problem, they have no idea where to go for medical care. I asked the villagers, "When you have someone seriously ill, where do you send them?" and they said, "We have no medicine and we cannot send them anywhere. All we can do is pray before they die. So we pray."

Even the hill Karen said DKBA was crazy. Because the hill Karen wanted to know what were DKBA's aims and objectives, because DKBA came every two or three days and took the villagers' belongings. Whenever they asked, DKBA did not answer anymore. They just said, "We are Buddhist", but the hill Karen said, "We don't know anything about Buddhism, but we know one thing very clearly: Buddhism means no killing, to Buddhists killing is a very big sin. Now you have a gun — is that Buddhist?" And they said DKBA could not answer them. After that, whenever DKBA came to the village, they didn't talk to the villagers, they just went straight to the village head and demanded the amount of money and rice they wanted, and that's all.