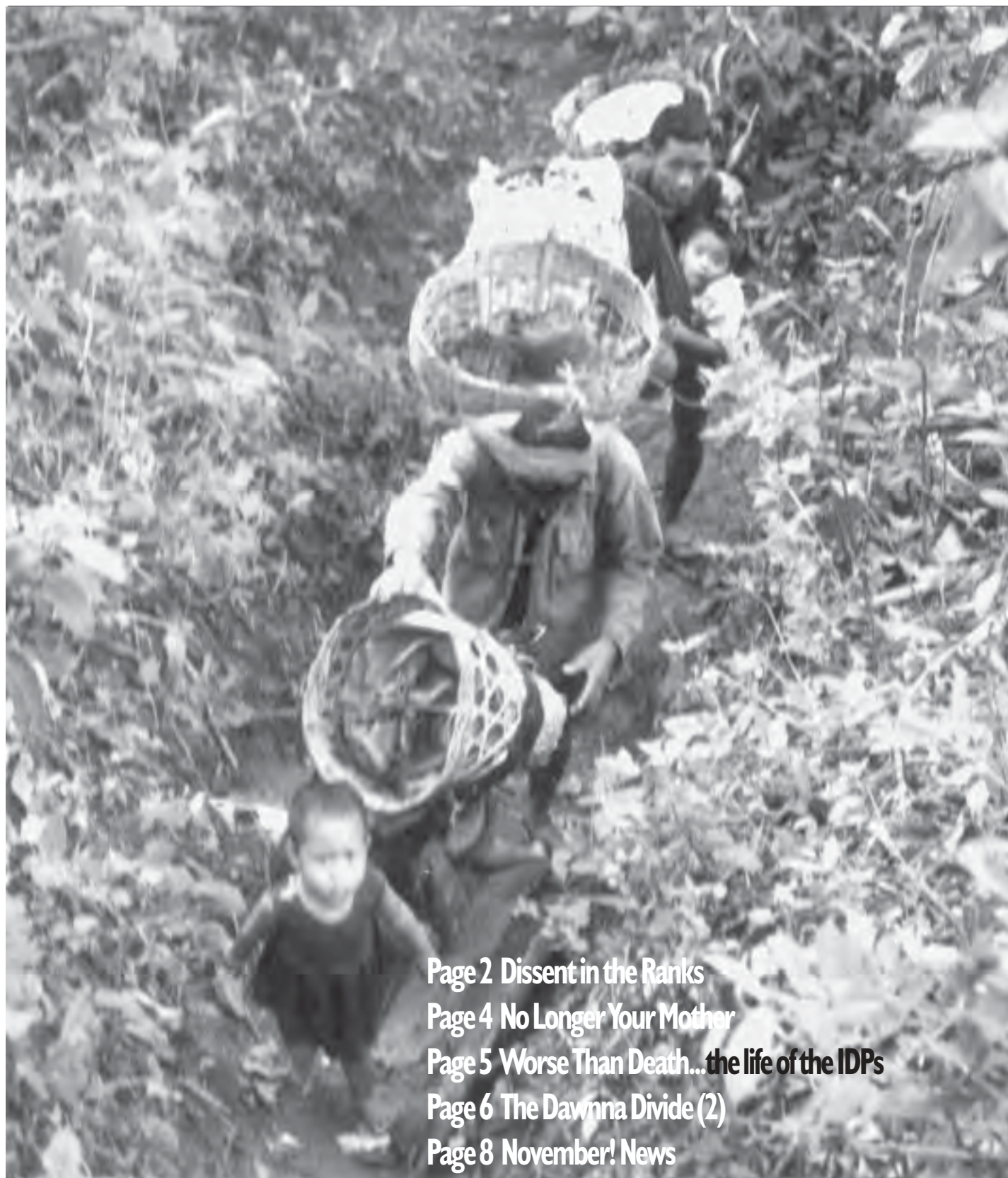




Burma Issues

November 2002

VOLUME 12 NUMBER 11



Page 2 Dissent in the Ranks

Page 4 No Longer Your Mother

Page 5 Worse Than Death...the life of the IDPs

Page 6 The Dawna Divide (2)

Page 8 November! News

DISSENT IN THE RANKS

"Bore not thy country's belly. Abase not thy country's forehead. Fell not thy country's banner. Pluck not thy country's eyes. Break not thy country's tusk. Sully not thy country's face. Cut not thy country's feet and hands. But you have done all those things. How then can you be surprised that no-one has rallied to you?" She was a Queen by Maurice Collins ¹

Since 1988 the Burmese militaries personnel base has swollen from 186,000 to 450,000, an increase of 242 percent. ² The determination in which they have systematically recruited soliders has seen them persuade, conjoin, arrest, bribe and threaten men and children to join their ranks. In many cases naivety and ignorance played a part, in many others the promise of family support, enough food to eat and exemption from taxes were enough to persuade a man. The reality of a soliders life is far from these promises of a comfortable, secure position though and there are more and more defectors who are getting the opportunity to portray the Burmese military in a more realistic light.

Defectors from the Burmese army haven't often had a voice, those in the past that have made it out of Burma and across the borders are few and far between, their stories and voices effectively silenced by a Burmese military that fears the sounds of emission those voices can produce. The intensity in which the military has chased down and either imprisoned or killed defectors is evidence of how little they want the defectors stories revealed. (see Box "No Longer Your Mother".)

The cone of silence that has enveloped the Burmese militaries treatment and conditions of its soliders is starting to lift, defectors are making it to the border areas and they are telling their stories, stories that leave you wondering how does an army that is so obviously trying to strengthen its position through sheer numbers,

hope to maintain such an army when they treat their soliders so brutally and with such neglect. This of course does not excuse nor make redundant the behaviour of soliders and their responsibilities for their own behaviour. At the same time it would be presumptuous to say this is becoming a common trait but the cases that are starting to emerge does make you question the reasoning behind the Burmese militaries treatment of its own soliders.

Food shortage is not something new to Burma, the majority of the population has lived with severe food shortages for a long time. That this has now seeped into the armed forces is also of significance. That the military cannot afford, or just plain refuses to feed their soliders could lead to serious consequences. A defector from the Burmese army interviewed by Burma Issues described the food situation as this, "It's worse than pigs' food. For instance, there are insects and worms in the soup and we had to eat rotten fish paste and dried fish". ³

Reports filtering from the ethnic areas have always maintained that soldiers would forcibly take villagers crops, that villagers would be required to hand over a certain amount of rice each year, that they are forced to feed soliders whenever they come to their villages. When your commanding officer supplies you with little or no food and then points you towards a village and says, "there's food there, go and get it", what sort of reaction would we expect humans to have. When the average soldier is paid 4000 kiat per month and sufficient rice for the month costs him 5000 kiat, the robbing of villages seems inevitable. Is this suggestable as a tactic of the Burmese military in enacting brutal human rights abuses on villagers?

According to another soldier interviewed, prior to 1988 the Burmese military had provided relatively comfortable support for soliders families. They had been exempted from certain taxes, they were provided with food and also financial sup-

Defectors from the Burmese army haven't often had a voice, those in the past that have made it out of Burma and across the borders are few and far between, their stories and voices effectively silenced by a Burmese military that fears the sounds of emission those voices can produce.

Burma Issues is a publication of the Peace Way Foundation and is distributed on a free-subscription basis to individuals and groups concerned with the state of affairs in Burma.

P.O. Box 1076
Silom Post Office
Bangkok 10504, Thailand
durham@mozart.inet.co.th

port should anything happen to the soldier during fighting. After 1988 this ceased to be the case, the enticement of family support no longer seems to be a justifiable reason for becoming a Burmese soldier. Soliders were often isolated from their families and homes, leave to visit them often denied. "I recieved a letter from my family because my father was seriously sick at that time. Then I asked permission from the higher-ranking commanders to go back but they didn't let me go back home". Another soldier described how his father had been taken away to be a porter four times despite having a son who was a Sergeant in the Burmese army.⁴ What may have originally been a very good reason for joining the Burmese army, (ie being able to provide for your family) now seems to be the very reason many soliders wish to leave.

Disillusionment also came from the corruption that exists within the ranks of the Burmese military. Benefits from a soldiers life only came when you reached the higher ranks of command, a Private's salary barely being enough to survive on. Corrupt higher officials would make all sorts of deductions from a lower ranks salary. In an interview with a Burmese soldier he told of his pay being 4500 kyat per month, in reality he recieved only 1000 of that, the rest of it being taken for things such as festival fees, building a hall fees or deocraton fees, but more likely ending up in the pocket of a corrupt commander. When a soldier died in the front line, commanders would often not report their deaths, the soliders salary would continue to be paid and that commander would pocket it for himself. Soliders who were promoted to higher ranks often had to wait months to see their salary increase, others, despite expressing concern about this never saw an increase in their salary at all.

One worrying factor that emerges is the reasoning behind these men's desertion from the Burmese army. In many cases there doesn't seem to be any particular horror at the acts they have carried out, the numerous human rights violations, the displaced villagers and the intense hunger the majority of people are now experiencing. This lack of awareness of what they have done will lead to worrying repercussions for the future of Burma. Perhaps a positive aspect that has emerged is the relative openness and acceptance of the ethnic armies, the ethnic people and the refugee camp communities that have embraced these defectors despite the documentation of the abuses the Burmese military



*Soldiers on patrol
BI (1997)*

has carried out on their own people, and while I would not presume that this is always the case, the fact that these circumstances are occurring can only be encouraging for Burma's future.

The conditions described are hardly satisfactory, in fact they are hardly enough to survive. How then is it that more soliders have not deserted to search for a better life and herein lies the cunning of the Burmese military. As one former Burmese soldier told BI in an interview when asked why he stayed so long, "What other option did I have".⁵ By deserting they are condemning themselves to a life on the run, imprisonment, death, at the very least not being able to see nor live with your family in any type of security. If they stay they endure the harsh conditions described above. The Burmese military has perfected the game of cutting off options, they are now experiencing though a group of hungry, angry men, disillusioned with the life they thought the army would afford them, disgruntled with the conditions they have been forced to work in, and increasingly louder in their voice of dissent. If the Burmese continue to treat their soliders with such brutality and insignificance they will see the slow disintegration of their support base...and those voices are becoming stronger.

၁၁

Tha Lay

Endnotes

1. *She Was a Queen* by Maurice Collins, AVA Publishing House, 1996
2. *Myanmar's Expenditures on the Military, Health and Education*, Nonviolence International, August 2002
3. BI Interview, April 2002
4. BI Interviews, April & September 2002
5. BI Interview, September 2002

NO LONGER YOUR MOTHER

The following is taken from an interview with a defector from the Burmese Army undertaken by Burma Issues in September 2002.

He originally joined the Burmese Army under pressure from his friend, he was twenty years old and wasn't aware of the political consequences of such an act. They made him sign a piece of paper that he would stay with the army for ten years after which he would be free to leave if he chose. After ten years he was not allowed to leave and finally after 18 years he just walked away and went back to his family in Shan State.

He was tracked down and arrested whilst hiding in the house of his wife and family in Shan State. The local military took him to their military base and he was later handed back to his battalion where he was held for two months, he did not receive a trial and was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment. When first arriving at the base he is beaten repeatedly with a stick, he says it was given as punishment for running away from the army, he is kept in a cell by himself and was given a small amount of rice to eat.

After being held at the military base he was sent to a prison in Shan State where he is kept in a cell with one other person. His family were allowed to visit twice a week, they could bring him food and water but they were not allowed to bring him things like letters, pens, books etc. He said it was like being blind inside the prison, there was no way for them to hear about what was going on outside the prison, they weren't allowed newspapers or reading materials.

There were many diseases in the prison but there was no medicine or treatment for the prisoners, this was very serious for them. If you were in a very serious condition they would check what you were charged with and this would determine whether they would get you treatment or not. If you were charged with a specific offence they were more likely to send you to a hospital, if you were in jail for a drug offence they weren't so likely to get you treatment. Even if you were sent to the hospital there was not enough medicine to deal with all the illnesses.

After two months in prison he became a

porter. He was offered a 6 month reduction in his sentence and 45 kyat/day if he agreed to go and be a porter. He was sent to Karenni State. He worked in the military field and doing road construction. There is no payment, he never sees the 45 kyat/day they had told him he would receive but he does say the food is a little better than in the prison.

There were over 100 porters at his location, he thinks there were the same number of porters as there were soldiers. They had more than enough porters so they didn't need to use villagers. When asked what operations the soldiers were undertaking he said he wasn't sure, they just seemed to be attacking villagers, doing field duty and using communication equipment.

He was beaten and tortured many times as a porter using many different instruments. He saw that many people had to carry very heavy loads and when they cannot do this anymore and they ask to rest the soldiers just beat them and call them lazy.

Conditions in the Burmese army

After 1988 the situation became very bad, not just for the soldiers but also for their families. If your husband died whilst being a soldier you only received a small amount of money. It meant that soldiers families did not have enough money to return to their home state and there are cases of wives prostituting themselves to try and get money. In the past support for a soldiers family was much better. His father has been taken as a porter 4 times, he saw no benefit for his father at having a Sergeant in the Burmese Army.

Most soldiers want to leave but feel they have no options. They are not allowed to leave the army voluntarily and if they run away they cannot get jobs and they constantly have to be on the run so they don't get caught. He said military life now is very, very difficult.

He asked what did independence mean? Burma has supposedly been independent for 50 years now but he wanted to know if his experience was really independence, if it was then he failed to see the conditions of an independent country.



WORSE THAN DEATH...THE LIFE OF THE IDP's

In November 1998 when the villagers of Daat Baw Klo were hiding in the jungle 3 miles to the west of their partially destroyed village, there was an old lady in her seventies named Hpee PeeTe' (Granny Tiny). She, along with her children and grandchildren's families, were hiding because their village had been invaded and destroyed by the Burmese government troops in the 1997 offensive.

The situation for people like this in hiding is very harsh as the Burmese troops are constantly searching the surrounds of the villages and destroying everything they see; rice plantations, barns and temporary shelters used by the villagers hiding from them. The hiding villagers can be shot on sight without any warning, many are killed, wounded or captured.

Living in this type of situation the hiding villagers (Internally Displaced People) have to shift from place to place in accordance with the number of search and destroy activities in the area. In many cases troops will appear in their vicinity without advance warning leaving villagers no time to carry any belongings with them: many flee empty-handed... food, clothing, utensils, houses, anything left behind is either looted or destroyed by the Burmese troops.

Every time this group had to shift or flee, the old and weak Hpee PeeTe' had to move on the back of one of her sons or grandsons backs. She was fed up with her life and she no longer wanted to be a burden for her children in their cruel and difficult lives. She wanted her children to know her feeling about this.

She would express discontentedly about their difficult life to her children, quaveringly imploring them, "I'm already too old in these difficult days and have become a burden to all of you. I want to die as soon as possible. Without me you would not need to take care of me and carry me when you flee. You will be able to carry more needful things for your families". She would say this whenever the children were around. Her children felt incredible sadness and were unable to find any words to console her.

One day when her children had returned from harvest and were resting under the shades of their huts, a young boy rushed up to their huts and cried hurriedly, "Pa Yaw Hellee, Pa Yaw Hellee". (Burman coming! Burman coming!)

Everybody rose hurriedly, put their ready packed belongings onto their backs and started to flee. Some women searched and gathered up their children and carried them away. The dogs dared

not bark at the approaching strangers but instead ran in front of their masters.

Seeing everyone busy and rushing Granny Tiny called out for help. "Come carry me, Come carry me. I cannot run". Hearing her call one of her unmarried grandsons threw away his heavily packed basket and rushed to take her. The sound of gunfire burst behind them and some bullets whistled over their heads. The sounds of frightened chickens, birds and pigs joined the crackling sounds behind them.

After dashing through the clumps of bushes under the forest for more than 10 minutes her grandson started to walk with normal steps and tired breathing, catching up with the others who were resting and looking back to them. He put her down on the ground and spoke gaspingly, "Granny, you've said again and again that you don't want to live anymore, you want to die. Why then did you call out for me to carry you. This is the time to die. Now I've lost all my belongings because of your calling".

She was also tired but she responded sharply, "Naughty thing, don't you know that those evil troops are worse than death. Even though I'm in my seventies, they'll still see me as a woman".

Hearing this everyone wanted to laugh but they were too tired to laugh. It was not the time to laugh and all they could do was respond with a long sigh....

As the wild animals and insects of the jungle remained silent because of the strange cracking sounds of the incident, it sounded like that sigh echoed over their whole land but still not heard by the rest of the world.

The situation of the IDP's in Burma still goes largely unrecognised by the international community. They are typically in areas that have little accessibility to outside groups and NGO's, their existence one of constant fear, movement and lack of access to the basic necessities of life.



Burma Issues will be focusing on the topic of IDPs in the coming year, planning awareness raising, campaigning and advocacy work to try and create some effective action and response to this situation. Anyone interested in this topic is welcome to contact Burma Issues, we would also recommend contacting CIDKP (kidpc@cscoms.com) and the recently released report from BBC "Internally Displaced People and Relocation Sites in Eastern Burma".

THE DAWNNA DIVIDE (2)

Last month Burma Issues reported on the social and political conditions of the predominantly KNU controlled East Dawnnna Mountain area. This week we will focus on the West Dawnnna area, a Burmese controlled area, and the different living conditions this entails to those living there. The purpose of these reports is to give people a greater understanding of the living conditions and daily issues facing the villagers in the ethnic areas. While human rights violations are well documented we sometimes forget that there are human faces behind those numbers, with human stories of courage, perserverance and community togetherness, despite the overwhelming odds that state otherwise. By understanding these peoples daily struggles we can all work towards an effective resolution to the problems in Burma.

In mid-June of this year BI Information Collectors traveled to Ta Greh district in the P'Tah area of Karen State. Villages here face the eradication of their ethnic cultures, especially through the Burmese-orientated education system, forced labour through Government Development Programs and high taxes. There were nine villages in this area, each village made up of approximately 50 households and most of the villagers were Pwo Karen. Religion is predominantly Buddhist but there

are also some Muslim.

The majority of the villagers are farmers. Some of them earn their living through rearing animals such as cows, goats, and buffaloes which they then sell to Thailand. Some people have small local businesses such as bringing their products and selling them to the East Dawnnna range and bringing the products from there and selling them back to their village. There is a serious absence of youth in this area, most of them immigrating to Thailand to find jobs and sending money back to support their families. Some families had been able to set up small shops with the money recieved in this way. The villages in this area also have to pay taxes, the same as the villagers from Mae Plah Toh area of the East Dawnnna area. The majority of this tax is porter tax, giving 13,000 kyat every three months to the troops who control the area. They also have to pay tax to the police and every village has to provide 92 baskets of rice per year to the Burmese military. They could also pay in cash, 92 baskets of rice being the equivalent of 32,200 kyat. On top of this is the tax also paid to the DKBA for machinery like tractors. If vil-

lagers cannot pay these taxes they will move, if they are lucky they will set themselves up in a different area, more likely than not they become a part of the increasingly large IDP population. The ethnic areas have become a seething mass of human movement.



EDUCATION

The biggest difference regarding this area is the education system. The Burmese military control this area and the education system and teaching method come directly from the Burmese regime. The children are forced to learn to read and write Burmese only, enforcing the military tactic of eradicating ethnic languages and traditions. The villages have a middle school but there were only three teachers who taught in this school. In one village a teacher was an ethnic Mon who came from Mon State. This teacher had been directed by the Burmese regime to find out the situation in this area, meaning more time was spent in investigating information than actually teaching. This issue is a relevant one. There are sufficient numbers of Karen teachers that could be used to teach in their own areas, ensuring a familiar language and knowledge of the living conditions. The Burmese military have made a particular point of sending teachers to

states other than their own. This automatically makes villages wary of the new teacher, it ensures education in your ethnic language will not be available, a difficulty in itself because many children are only able to speak their ethnic language and ultimately it means any education provided is insufficient and inadequate. Instead more and more people are sending their children to private schools which can provide a better education. This poses a problem for ethnic villagers though who struggle to find the money to support a private school education for their children, often selling their possessions and even their farms in an attempt to get their children a decent education.

COMMUNITY UNITY

In 1999, people in P'Tah area did not get enough water for their farming. To solve the problem, people in P'Tah area collaborated with the people from Ta Nay Cha and Ta Greh district to dig a canal to get enough water for their farming. They started digging the canal in April and they finished this in May, 2002. The depth of this canal is about 6 feet, and about one mile long. Due to the collaboration of the villagers, the canal was successfully finished and they got enough water for their farming. It seemed obvious that the villagers in this area had formed a sense of cohesion with each other, helping each other and collaborating regardless of religion, social welfare and community development. These signs of a unified community are some of the most encouraging aspects of village life in the ethnic areas. That villagers can work together to provide for themselves facilities that the Burmese military cannot or will not provide, is a positive example of grassroots communities taking ownership of their own lives.

FORCED LABOUR

Villages in these lowland areas of Ta Nay Cha township still suffer forced labour from the Burmese Army. A recent example was reported in April 2002 when LIB 549 which is based in Nabu camp, wrote an order to the village tract leaders to construct a car road in the area. One village tract had to send 376 labourers to dig the gravel which was one kilometer away from the car road, this took three days. During that time the villagers had to bring their own food and equipment. Another village was required to dig gravel for 200 holes within three days. The holes were 10 square feet. The army paid the villagers 500 Kyat for each hole just to make people see that it was not forced labor. The village people did not want to do this but did so

because they were afraid of the army.

Following the completion of the road construction the Burmese army said that the gravel which the village brought was not good quality. They ordered the villagers to come back and work again. This affected the livelihood of the villagers who also had to work their paddy fields to provide their food source at this time.

CONCLUSION

These Government Development Programs which veil the use of forced labour are predominant in the West Dawinna area. The fact that the Burmese military control this area allows them to enforce these Development Programs. The frustration lies in that when villagers truly need development construction as in the case of the canal, they receive no support from the Burmese military and yet they are forced to carry out construction programs for the Burmese military that have little or no benefit to themselves. These development programs and their benefits to the general population need more attention and investigation.

An equally worrying factor in this area is the complete absence of young people. Freedom of movement is slightly better here than in the East Dawinna region which means young people find it easier to move to the bigger cities or into Thailand and Bangkok. Taxes, price increases and lack of sufficient education have all forced the young people out of this area.

As conditions become harder, more displacement occurs, in many cases villages have lost their will to fight this endless battle to survive. In other more positive cases the determination to create a unified community remains and it is these stories, however few and far between they may be, that give hope for Burma's future.

Last month Burma Issues reported on a group of 70 merit-makers in Shan state who were allegedly bombed by Burmese shells. This was reported extensively in the Burmese-related media. It was later found by S.H.A.N. to be a fabricated report, supposedly planted by SPDC troops to try and discredit Shan organisations, notably those involved in the "License to Rape report". S.H.A.N. were very quick to clarify this situation and offer their apologies for the misinformation. Burma Issues also wish to apologise for printing the story, the true details not coming to our attention until after printing and to clarify that this report is fabricated and should in no way bear upon the integrity of those Shan organisations involved.

news briefs

clarke facing embarrassment over burma link. Kenneth Clarke, former chancellor and deputy chairman of British American Tobacco, faced severe embarrassment this month over revelations that he criticised companies investing in Burma - where BAT has a joint venture with the military junta. Mr. Clarke, who chairs the BAT board's corporate social responsibility committee, said in a letter to a constituent: "I must admit that I do sometimes feel uncomfortable about investment in that country . . . The problem in Burma arises when companies start collaborating with an extremely unpleasant regime which is totally contrary to our notions of civil liberties and democracy." The letter was obtained by the Burma Campaign UK, a leading human rights pressure group, which today launches a worldwide campaign to force BAT to withdraw. John Jackson, director of the pressure group, said: "Ken Clarke is absolutely right. He should get them to pull out immediately."

"Clarke facing embarrassment over Burma Link, Financial Times, November 12

armed fighting between DKBA groups. A daylong of armed fighting took place

between two Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) groups resulting in heavy casualties from both sides this month. The leader of breakaway DKBA group, Major Pha Dae committed suicide, according to a group of villagers near the fighting place in Pa-an district of Karen State, who requested not to be identified. The villagers said that an Abbot very close to Myaing Gyi Ngo, the supreme leader of the DKBA imposed trade restriction on DKBA Battalion (555) at Paw Pa Hta camp, which angered its commander Major Pha Dae. Major Pha Dae, with his 60 armed men, captured arms and ammunitions from soldiers of other DKBA camps along the Thai Burma border and established their separate base at Ta Gaw Ywa Hill, the villagers said. The fighting occurred when the DKBA central troops led by Mat Tat Lam tried to recapture the Hill. "There was internal fighting and a massacre in the DKBA, but we cannot confirm the number of casualties, we are checking," said Major Prayoon Phonok, commander of a civil affairs taskforce in the Burma border region. Burma government troops joined the battle to support the DKBA leaders at the headquarters in Myaing Gyi Ngu, he

said.

"Armed Fighting Arises Between DKBA Groups in Burma", Muslim Information Centre Burma, November 20

"Dozens Feared Dead as Infighting Hits Burma Ethnic Army", Agence France-Presse, November 20

thailand eyes hydro scheme. A top Thai power official said he would meet Burma's military rulers on November 18 to discuss a deal to build a \$5.5 billion, 5,000 megawatt hydropower dam on the Salween River along their common border. State power producer Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) president, Sithiporn Rathanaopas, told a news conference the joint venture deal would supply electricity to both countries. Rangoon-based diplomats say the Burma economy is crumbling because of chronic mismanagement by the ruling generals. Power shortages are common, sometimes lasting days, causing factories to shut down. Sithiporn did not give any more details, but said the dam could start its commercial operations by 2013 at the earliest.

"Thailand eyes \$5.5 bln Hydro Scheme with Burma, Reuters, November 15

**BURMA ISSUES
PO BOX 1076
SILOM POST OFFICE
BANGKOK 10504
THAILAND**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

PRINTED MATERIALS

AIRMAIL