

5. Deprivation of Livelihood

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

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

5.1 Introduction

Contrary to the claims of the junta, Burma’s economy remained weak and the population repressed throughout 2006. Though agriculturally fertile and rich in natural resources, Burma still suffers from widespread poverty and gross underdevelopment. Decades of economic mismanagement, corruption, and policies that directly target the food supplies and livelihoods of the civilian population have brought about conditions under which it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a sufficient standard of living.

Burma’s economy continues to rely heavily upon agriculture. The agricultural sector accounts for 56.4 percent of Burma’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs approximately 70 percent of the labour market. In spite of this, many of Burma’s estimated 19 million farmers must struggle to make ends meet while 25 percent of Burma’s approximately 47 million people continue to live below the poverty line.¹ Land confiscation, forced labour, state interference in domestic markets, forced rice procurement, extortion, and restrictions on the movement of people and the transport of goods have threatened farmers’ livelihoods and severely affected their ability to adequately provide for their families. Many farmers, particularly those in ethnic border regions, live at the subsistence level, harvesting just enough food to feed their families and selling or bartering what little excess they produce in local markets. State-sponsored agricultural projects such as the nationwide enforced cultivation of physic nuts have placed additional burdens on already strained resources.

A number of Burma’s ethnic border areas are still host to continuing armed insurgencies where the SPDC and their proxy armies hide behind the guise of counter-insurgency operations to destroy civilian food supplies to serve the dual purpose of undermining the resistance as well as subjugating and thus controlling the local population. The civilian population suffers the most acutely from such methods which ultimately result in a situation where many villagers and farmers are not able to acquire an adequate supply of food to feed their families. Examples of this can be seen in northern Karen State where SPDC army forces continued to mount attacks against unarmed civilian villagers and their food supplies throughout the year. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Ethnic Minority Rights).

According to Transparency International, who each year produces the *Corruption Perceptions Index*, Burma was ranked as the second most corrupt nation out of the 163 countries in the survey, down from its rank of fourth in 2005. In the 2006 survey, Burma shared its place with fellow pariah states Iraq and Guinea, each scoring a deplorable 1.9 out of the maximum 10 on the index, in which the lower scores indicate a higher level of corruption. The only country to receive a lower score was Haiti at 1.8.² Although Burma signed the UN Convention on Corruption on 2 December 2005, the SPDC has not yet ratified it.

In June 2005, Burma expressed interest in joining the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), to which they were finally accepted in March 2006 despite the protest of some member states. The inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF), however, which is charged with combating money laundering, declared that Burma remains the only country on its blacklist, after Nigeria was removed from the list in June 2006. The list, first drafted in 2000, was originally comprised of 23 countries that were of concern to the Task Force for implication in illicit money transfers. In an apparent attempt to compel Burma to reform, the FATF then issued a statement to call on all “*financial institutions to scrutinize [sic] transactions with persons, businesses, or banks in Myanmar [Burma]*”.³

Moreover, in the 2006 *Index of Economic Freedom* prepared by the U.S.-based Heritage Foundation, Burma was declared as having the world’s third least free economy. Citing “*pervasive corruption, nonexistent rule of law, arbitrary policymaking, and tight restrictions on imports and exports [all of which] make Burma an unattractive investment destination and have severely restrained economic growth*” as reasons for Burma’s poor performance in the survey. It was found that while Burma’s score in the poll had marginally increased in the past year, some indicators, such as the country’s fiscal burden, had further deteriorated.⁴ In another report, produced by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Burma was accused of scoring negatively on achieving progress towards their stated Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The report, entitled *Millennium Development Goals: Progress in Asia and the Pacific 2006*, maintains that Burma has fallen even further behind in attaining their MDGs by 2015, labelling it as one of the “*countries of most concern*”.⁵

Inflation

According to official SPDC figures, Burma’s inflation rate has quadrupled over the past year and a half, from a stated 3.76 percent in March 2005 to 16.44 percent in September 2006. The official figures also claim that GDP growth had reached 13.2 percent during the 2005-2006 fiscal year.⁶ The validity of such claims, however, remains somewhat dubious. Sean Turnell of Burma Economic Watch (BEW) has maintained that, “*official statistics released by Burma’s ruling military regime, [claim] Burma’s economy grew by an astonishing 12.2 per cent in 2005. Beating even the previous year’s stellar performance of 12.0 per cent, and coupled with double-digit growth all the way back to 1999, by these measures Burma is the fastest-growing economy in the world*”.⁷ According to statistics quoted in the CIA World Fact Book, Burma’s inflation rate was estimated to reach 25 percent in 2005, thus ranking it as third highest in the world, while GDP growth stood at 5.2 percent.⁸ Some sources believe even this estimate to be generous, arguing that Burma’s GDP growth had fallen from 2.9 percent in 2005 to a forecasted 1.9 percent in 2006.⁹ Accurate figures are difficult to obtain with official statistics being unreliable.

On 6 November 2005, the regime commenced the relocation of the war office and a number of SPDC ministries from Rangoon to the new administrative capital at Naypyidaw near Pyinmana in Mandalay Division which was officially named as the new capital in March 2006. The construction of the new capital placed tremendous strain on the already struggling economy and numerous reports of land confiscation and the widespread use of forced labour quickly emerged from the region.

The official exchange rate of the kyat, Burma’s national currency, remains unrealistically fixed at six kyat to the U.S. dollar. The black market rate, however, in which most business and commercial transactions in Burma are conducted, hit an all-time low of 1,450 kyat to the

U.S. dollar in late March 2006. The slump came just days after the SPDC announced a plan to grant a salary increase to the nation's estimated one million civil servants, from Senior General Than Shwe "*right down to the country's road sweepers*".¹⁰ On 24 March 2006, the SPDC declared that effective 1 April 2006 (to coincide with the commencement of the new fiscal year), all civil servants would receive a five to ten-fold increase to their monthly salaries, presumably to make the prospect of working for the SPDC more attractive.¹¹ Under the new system, civil servants earning 3,000 kyat per month would now receive 15,000 kyat and those getting 7,500 kyat would now receive 80,000 kyat, while day labourers would now receive 500 kyat, up from 100 kyat per day. Soldiers and military officials also benefited, with rank-and-file soldiers said to receive an increase from 3,000 kyat per month to 15,000 kyat, while the monthly salary of SPDC leader Senior General Than Shwe was raised from 200,000 to 1.2 million kyat per month.¹² One Rangoon-based analyst estimates that the SPDC will need approximately 100 billion kyat to implement the salary increase and believes that they will simply raise taxes and print more money in order to come up with this amount.¹³ Critical of this approach, Alison Vicary of BEW advises that "*[n]o one with a modicum of economic understanding, would recommend this policy... It is actually one of the stupidest policies imaginable - there is no other outcome, than bigger problems*".¹⁴ Less than one month after they received their pay increases, civil servants were told that 10 percent of their salaries would be withheld and placed into the bank on their behalf, though they were not permitted to retain the bankbooks or access the money.¹⁵ Many of the perks such as free bus travel and electricity subsidies that civil servants had enjoyed in the past were also lost following the salary increase.¹⁶ (For more information, see the subsequent section on Additional Factors Affecting the Cost of Living). Whether the civil servants have benefited from the new salary system remains questionable.

In the wake of the announcement, basic commodity prices shot up almost immediately. Some reports stated that certain basic goods such as rice, cooking oil and tea had already increased by up to 30 percent within days. A 15-litre tin of cooking oil sold for as much as 16,500 kyat in Mon State in early April, while in Rangoon, the price of a 50-kilogram sack of rice jumped from 14,400 kyat to 17,000 kyat.¹⁷ In April 2006, the SPDC formed three Commodity Price Control Committees (CPCC) in Naypyidaw, Rangoon, and Mandalay ostensibly to combat rising commodity prices throughout the country. Chaired by Rangoon Mayor Brigadier General Aung Thein Lin, the committees are reportedly comprised of "*responsible personnel*" from various associations representing rice and cooking oil dealers, as well as rice millers and goldsmiths. According to reports, it appears that the primary function of these committees was to fix commodity prices for basic items such as rice, cooking oil, salt, and onion, regardless of whether or not such fixed prices reflected the true market value. One of the first tasks completed by the committee was to conduct a market survey on such items in each of Rangoon's 45 townships, and fine or revoke the license of any dealer deemed to have raised prices "*excessively*". The cost of low quality or 'broken' rice was fixed by the committee at 400 kyat per bowl (1.5 kg / 3.5 lb), approximately half its market value. In August, at least ten rice merchants, including the patron of the Myanmar Rice and Paddy Merchants Association, U Nyein, were arrested for selling rice in Rangoon for more than 1,000 kyat per bowl.¹⁸ The prices, however, refused to go down. In late August 2006, press reports claimed that rice and cooking oil prices remained inflated, prompting the SPDC to open over 100 official rice stores in Rangoon, allegedly selling their rice "*at a rate far lower than the market rate*". The report, however, did not state at what rate the rice was being sold, nor where the SPDC had acquired it from.¹⁹ (For more information, see Section 5.2: Situation of Farmers in Burma).

Fuel prices also soared, affecting transport costs and thus exacerbating the already-spiralling commodity prices. Black market rates for a gallon (3.8 litres) of diesel jumped from 3,600 kyat to 3,800 kyat.²⁰ By August 2006, the cost of a gallon of diesel had reached 5,000 kyat in markets in Buthidaung, Arakan State, while the costs of petrol (gasoline) and engine oil had skyrocketed to 4,500 kyat and 8,500 kyat per gallon respectively.²¹ (For more information, see the subsequent section on Additional Factors Affecting the Cost of Living).

Confidence in the stability of the kyat reached a record low and there was a rush of people seeking to convert their savings into gold, which is generally considered to be a far more secure form of currency and less susceptible to falling exchange rates. As a result, gold prices shot up across the country from 340,000 kyat (US\$270) per tical (0.56 ounces / 15 grams) of 24-carat gold to 450,000 kyat (US\$310).²² The SPDC quickly blamed the 25 percent increase in gold prices on the “*excessive greed*” of Burma’s gold traders, who were warned that any further price hikes may result in their licences being revoked.²³ Business along Burma’s borders also suffered with numerous reports of a marked decrease in border trade, forcing numerous small businesses to close.²⁴

According to one commentator interviewed by HRDU, the rise in commodity prices has resulted in a corresponding rise in petty crimes. The increasing costs of living have driven the costs of even the most basic goods beyond the means of most people, particularly in some of the more remote regions, and with starvation looming closer; more people are turning to theft to feed their families.²⁵

Economic Sanctions

On 1 August 2006, U.S. President George W. Bush signed the Executive Order renewing economic sanctions against Burma for a further year under the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003. The Act, first signed by President Bush on 28 July 2003 following the USDA-led attack on Aung San Suu Kyi’s motorcade near Depayin on 30 May 2003, imposes a total ban on all imports from Burma, freezes all SPDC assets in the U.S., prohibits the issuance of visas to high-level SPDC and USDA members, and forbids all financial and technical assistance to Burma from the U.S. A Whitehouse statement announcing the extension of sanctions declared that “*President Bush has signed today a bill renewing the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003 and extending import restrictions against the regime, as a sign of his serious concern about the Burmese regime's continuing refusal to act on its professed commitment to democratization.*”²⁶

On 27 April 2006, the E.U. announced that they were extending sanctions against Burma for another year in accordance with the E.U. Council Common Position on Burma. The sanctions, first introduced in 1996, enforce an arms embargo, a ban on all non-humanitarian financial and technical assistance to the junta, travel restrictions against SPDC officials, and a freezing of SPDC assets within the E.U. The Common Position cites the lack of democratic transition, the SPDC’s failure to allow an open and democratic National Convention, the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, harassment of the NLD and other political groups, serious and widespread perpetration of human rights abuses, and the increased restrictions imposed upon NGOs and international organizations as grounds for extending the sanctions.²⁷

Opinion over the effectiveness of economic sanctions is divided. Some commentators, such as U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell, believe that sanctions present the most effective means of applying pressure on Burma to reform, stating that “*Sanctions are a tremendous loss of face for the SPDC, a scarlet letter, particularly in the international arena*”.²⁸ Those from the other camp, however, do not share the same optimism. Many argue that support offered by Burma’s neighbours is helping the junta to circumvent the impact of western sanctions. In the face of growing pressure from U.S. and E.U. sanctions, Burma’s generals have been increasingly turning to their non-western allies for support. For instance, Thailand’s imports from Burma doubled during 2005 to almost US\$1.5 billion, the vast majority of which is spent on the import of natural gas.²⁹ Similarly, China’s trade with Burma had also doubled during the five years leading up to 2004 and in 2005 had reached US\$1.2 billion. To further strengthen ties with China, Prime Minister Soe Win embarked on a five day diplomatic trip in February 2006, his first to China since being appointed Prime Minister, to sign various trade agreements including deals regarding energy, information technology and agriculture.³⁰ Likewise, India and South Korea have both been vying for a stake of Burma’s abundant energy reserves and are thus also strengthening their relationships with the SPDC.³¹

Many commentators argue that Burma’s long history of self-imposed isolation and indifference to international opinion has made the current regime remarkably resistant to international sanctions. Compounding this is that sanctions are not supported by all countries, perhaps most notably by neighbouring countries China, Thailand, and India, who constitute the regime’s most ardent supporters, financially as well as politically. In the words of one observer, “*China has been the source of virtually everything Burma has been deprived of by the West - weapons, essential goods, funds for infrastructure development, investment and markets for its products*”.³² Without pressure from those countries who are supporting the junta, whose policies towards the SPDC serve to bolster the position of the military, western economic and trade sanctions are likely to produce little effect.³³

The imposition of sanctions, however, has not been completely without effect. In late March 2006, Canadian mining firm Ivanhoe Mines Ltd. was forced to temporarily close its copper mine near Monywa in Mandalay Division when the mine could not access funds held in offshore bank accounts as a direct result of the imposition of U.S. sanctions. According to a report released by Ivanhoe, “*Both the mine’s insurance broker and the offshore banking institution terminated their relationship with the mine on account of these sanctions*”.³⁴ Ivanhoe later reported that the mine was able to resume production after remaining closed for approximately one month, adding that the U.S. sanctions “*seriously impact[ed] the mine’s ability to function in a normal way*”.³⁵

The regime has responded to the sanctions throughout the year by publicly condemning those imposing them during speeches and through regular denunciations published in SPDC mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar*.³⁶ Also, on 10 April 2006, a spokesperson from the SPDC foreign ministry announced that they were re-establishing diplomatic links with North Korea. This move comes after a hiatus of more than 20 years, following a failed assassination attempt by North Korea on the South Korean president on 9 October 1983 while he was in Rangoon on an official visit. Some reporters maintain that this is an attempt to muster as many allies as possible from whom to acquire additional military hardware to offset the effects of western sanctions and arms embargoes.³⁷ Then, in early November 2006, a closed-door meeting was conducted in Rangoon to attempt to come up with new strategies to bypass U.S. and E.U. trade sanctions. The meeting was attended by more than 100 SPDC officials and businessmen, including representatives of the Ministry of Commerce and

members of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI). According to one of the businessmen in attendance, one proposal was to export Burmese goods while concealing the fact that they had originated from Burma.³⁸

Additional Factors Affecting the Cost of Living

Throughout the year the SPDC has imposed many short-sighted and erroneous economic policies upon the population that have produced pernicious effects upon people's food security, detrimentally affecting rice prices and raising the cost of living.

In October 2005, the SPDC ordered a nine-fold increase in the price of fuel and imposed a ration for consumers of only 60 gallons (227 litres) per month. This immediately resulted in higher transport costs, followed by rising commodity prices. The effects of higher fuel costs have continued to be seen throughout 2006. On 22 August 2006, the SPDC Ministry of Energy proclaimed that under new restrictions, petrol and diesel would only be sold to trucks that transported foodstuffs. Trucks transporting goods other than food could not purchase fuel, lest they bought it on the black market where prices are higher. Truck drivers from Rangoon and Mandalay had protested the order, professing the disastrous impact that such a policy would have on their livelihoods. All of their complaints, however, fell on deaf ears.³⁹ According to one truck driver, profits had dropped off to zero, causing many drivers to look for other lines of work. In August 2006, the price of a gallon (3.8 litres) of petrol in Buthidaung in Arakan State had risen to 4,500 kyat, while a gallon of diesel cost 5,000 kyat. All of these costs were then passed on to consumers. Transportation costs skyrocketed. The bus fare for the 16 mile (26 km) journey between Buthidaung and Maungdaw in Arakan State increased from 500 kyat in 2005 to as much as 2,000 kyat in August 2006.⁴⁰

In January 2006, the amount of fuel supplied to the SPDC-operated Inland Water Transport Corporation in Arakan State was drastically cut to save on fuel consumption. Boats that were previously supplied with 16 drums of diesel fuel were now only provided with seven drums to make the same journey. Routes that used to take two nights to complete now take three nights, as the pilots must rely on tides and currents in the absence of enough fuel. The trip from Sittwe to Buthidaung used to take eight hours, but now demands 14 hours with the fuel cuts. Similarly, the journey from Sittwe to Mrauk-U, which used to take only five-and-a-half hours, now requires 11 hours to complete, while the fare has been almost doubled from 300 kyat to 500 kyat. The higher costs and the longer transport times have had a negative impact upon the lives of the people of underdeveloped Arakan State where water transport remains the primary mode of transport.⁴¹ One report maintained that by August, rising costs and longer travel times had reduced demand to where ticket sellers worked only one day out of every three.⁴²

In December 2005, local authorities in Kachin State began to confiscate all unlicensed cars and motorcycles and send them to Naypyidaw where they were said to be distributed among civil servants and military officials. A resident of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, reported hearing that the SPDC had ordered at least 2,000 motorcycles to be seized from Kachin State alone.⁴³ Other reports asserted that local authorities in Pa'an in Karen State were ordered to fill a quota of 300 motorcycles, while those in Three Pagodas Pass on the Thai-Burma border was under orders to produce a further 80.⁴⁴ At Bhamo in Kachin State, the SPDC declared 16 February 2006 as the deadline for an amnesty under which all unlicensed motorcycles could be voluntarily handed over to local police, despite the fact that the SPDC has not issued vehicle licenses in Bhamo since 2004. Anyone caught in possession

of an unlicensed motorcycle after the deadline would face heavy fines and arrest in addition to the confiscation of their motorcycle. Local businessmen, however, reported witnessing a number of seizures and arrests prior to the deadline. Many people, who rely on their motorcycles for transportation and who had paid up to 500,000 kyat for them had taken to hiding their bikes and only using them at night.⁴⁵ Other parts of the country were also subjected to motorcycle seizures. On 27 April 2006, five people were arrested and 14 motorcycles were confiscated during a raid in Meikhtila in Mandalay Division. A number of people abandoned their bikes and fled, however, those living in the homes where the motorcycles had been deserted were arrested instead.⁴⁶ In mid-July, a further 16 motorcycles were seized during a raid in Moulmein, Mon State.⁴⁷

In the midst of the nation-wide vehicle seizures, local SPDC authorities in Buthidaung and Maungdaw of Arakan State raised the fees charged on vehicle registration. In mid-May 2006, license registration fees for motorcycles jumped to 13,000 kyat from 8,000 kyat, while registration for cars and trucks increased from 35,000 kyat to 45,000 kyat. Similarly, the cost of a driver's license increased to 7,000 kyat, up from 5,000 kyat.⁴⁸

Extreme shortages of electricity throughout the country allegedly impelled the SPDC to implement renewed electricity rationing measures in parts of Rangoon in December 2005. Many rural areas of Burma, particularly the ethnic border areas, do not receive any electricity at all, while those parts of the country that do have been facing power cuts for most of the past decade, despite the SPDC's claims that electricity production and consumption are both on the increase. Electricity rationing continued in Rangoon and in other parts of Burma throughout 2006. In January 2006, Rangoon reportedly had a daily demand of 450 megawatts of electricity, but only possessed a generating capacity of 385 megawatts; meanwhile the total national generating capacity stood at a paltry 845 megawatts of electricity. The power cuts have caused many small factories and businesses to close down. The owner of a pet shop in Rangoon reported that his business had suffered when a number of his fish had died after his water purifiers and oxygen pumps stopped during one of the power stoppages. Many businesses have had to buy their own generators, and those businesses that could not afford these have suffered. Many people in Rangoon subjected to power cuts are unable to even fill their water tanks during the blackouts and some have reported having to get up in the middle of the night when the power comes back on just to do so. Some Rangoon residents have reported that their neighbourhoods only receive running water from 6:00 am to 12:00 pm and so *"[t]he timing of electricity supply and timing of government water supply has to coincide. Otherwise, we have to buy water to fill up our water tanks"*. Even in sections of Rangoon that do not face power cuts, residents endure regular *"brownouts"* where the voltage drops to levels that are insufficient to operate standard household appliances in the absence of special voltage regulators. However, not all parts of Rangoon experience electricity rationing procedures. Main roads, tourist areas, and affluent neighbourhoods inhabited by senior military officials and expatriates are not subjected to such rationing measures.⁴⁹

In April 2006, it was reported that Rangoon's electricity supply had suffered even further. Where previously, Rangoon's six downtown townships had enjoyed 24-hour electricity, they now undergo blackouts for six hours every day. Meanwhile, Burma's new capital, Naypyidaw, and nearby Pyinmana have benefited from a round-the-clock uninterrupted power supply. A resident of Pyinmana reported that *"Five months ago, we got power only once in two days and sometimes every alternate day if we were lucky. But now we are getting*

regular power supply. Sometimes there is no power for only half an hour or an hour. That's all". Residents from Pyi also reported power cuts.⁵⁰

Despite the electricity rationing, the SPDC Ministry of Electric Power raised electricity rates ten-fold to 25 kyat per unit on 1 May 2006. Previously, civilians paid 2.5 kyat for one unit of electricity while civil servants paid between 0.25 and 0.5 kyat. The rate increase immediately followed the massive salary increase for all civil servants that took place in April. (For more information, see the preceding section on Inflation). The sliding scale that existed in the past under which the rates of civil servants were heavily subsidised was abolished and their electricity rates were brought into line with the rest of the population. Shortly after the announcement, AFP quoted one 40-year-old woman to say that she was afraid to see her next electricity bill, expecting it to jump to 15,000 kyat from the 1,500 kyat that she typically paid.⁵¹ The electricity rate hike quickly sparked fears that spiralling commodity prices would be further affected as a result of rising production costs.

Religious buildings and Buddhist monasteries were not exempted from the rate hike either. Some of the larger monasteries in Rangoon that house several hundred monks were reported to have received monthly electricity bills of as much as 100,000 kyat. Such exorbitant bills prompted some monks to appeal to both the Ministry for Religious Affairs and the State Sangha Maha Nayaka (head monks) Committee for a reduced electricity rate for Buddhist monasteries. Their appeals went unanswered.⁵²

The tariff increase will be felt most by those living in larger urban centres. Many of the smaller towns only receive electricity two days a week, while most rural areas are still without any electricity.⁵³ According to some reports, residents of Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State, only receive electricity for two hours per day.⁵⁴ A resident from Mandalay was quoted by DVB to say *"It doesn't make any difference as the electricity cost shoots up and there is no electricity"*.⁵⁵



A 'jungle market' set up in the forest of northern Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, in September 2006. Markets of this sort represent one of the only ways for many displaced villagers to acquire food. Villagers from SPDC-controlled villages and relocation sites sneak out into the forest with whatever foodstuffs they can carry to meet IDPs at pre-arranged locations to trade with forest produce such as cardamom, betelnut and forest fruits. [Photo: KHRG]

In a purported attempt to lower local rice prices in various parts of the country, the SPDC prohibited rice traders from transporting rice or paddy from one state or division to another. Traders from Pegu Division were forbidden from carting paddy to neighbouring Mon State. Likewise, those from Mon State could not transport their paddy or rice to Tennasserim Division. Similar restrictions were also enforced in Irrawaddy and Rangoon Divisions. The order allegedly led paddy prices to drop from approximately 7,000 kyat to 5,500 kyat per (25 kg) basket in parts of southern Burma, however, rice prices in rural areas as well as in Rangoon continued to rise.⁵⁶ Similarly in Arakan State, the transport of rice is also prohibited, to the extent that rice cannot even be transported from one township to the next. In August 2006, the junta began a crackdown on rice that had been transported to Akyab in which they seized an unreported volume of rice as it was brought into the Arakan State capital. Previously traders and local merchants were able to transport their rice by paying bribes to have local authorities look the other way, but beginning in August, all such favours ceased and all of this rice was seized. Local townspeople feared that restrictions of this sort would further inflate rice prices and may spark social unrest, possibly even leading to “rice riots” such as those Akyab experienced in 1967 in which many people were killed.⁵⁷

In many parts of Karen State, where the SPDC has been leading a military offensive against unarmed Karen civilians since November 2005, many roads have been blockaded, villagers prohibited from travelling to their fields, and the transport of rice apart from that for use by the military has been forbidden. The result has been that very few villagers are able to acquire enough food. The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) maintained that in November 2006, most villagers in Toungoo District of northern Karen State only had a two month supply of rice left and few places where they could acquire any more.⁵⁸

Throughout 2006, Burma experienced a number of natural disasters and unusual weather patterns that had adverse impacts on people’s livelihoods and the rising costs of living. On 29 April 2006, tropical Cyclone Mala lashed southern Arakan State and the Irrawaddy Delta with winds reported to be up to 240 kilometres per hour. Hundreds of homes were destroyed, trees uprooted, and a number of fishing boats were sunk. According to one eyewitness, at least five factories were destroyed, and cars were hurled through the air in the Hlaing Thar Yar industrial zone near Rangoon, which was claimed to have endured the brunt of the storm.⁵⁹ Official figures published in the *New Light of Myanmar* claimed that 21 people were killed and a further 14 remained unaccounted for, however, the death toll may well be higher than this.⁶⁰ Local people reported that SPDC authorities failed to implement any relief or assistance for the affected communities.⁶¹ Although, according to a report by the *Narinjara News*, on 3 May, Western Regional Command Headquarters in Sittwe issued orders to the 50-odd SPDC army battalions stationed in Arakan State to provide 50,000 kyat to a special relief fund set up for the cyclone victims.⁶² What the report failed to mention, however, is that this money was probably extorted from local villagers and townspeople and that it is quite unlikely that any of this money would ever be given to the victims.

Heavy and unseasonal rains have also had an impact upon the amount of food that villagers and farmers around the country have been able to produce. Heavy rains in Mon State caused the Bee Ree River to break its banks and flood the nearby Ye marketplace in July 2006, killing six and destroying estimates of between one million and 100 million kyat worth of produce and other goods. Local environmentalists blamed the flooding on unchecked logging that has resulted in large-scale deforestation of the area. Widespread flooding was also said to have occurred in neighbouring Kyaik Mayaw, Mudon and Thanbyuzayat Townships around the same time.⁶³ Similarly, KHRG reported that flooding in nearby

Thaton District of southwestern Karen State adversely effected rice harvests and had left villagers in the region without enough food to eat throughout 2006.⁶⁴ In central Burma, unseasonal rains and heavy frosts in January 2006 destroyed many plantations along the banks of the Irrawaddy River,⁶⁵ while heavy rains and landslides had destroyed an estimated 60 percent of hill fields in northern Arakan State in September.⁶⁶ Also in September, it was reported that heavy rains falling over Sha Daw Township in Karenni State caused the Pawn River to break its banks, damaging an estimated 500 acres of sesame, corn, peanut and betelnut plantations in the region. Saw Lon village was particularly hard hit, sustaining damage to approximately 150 acres of sesame and betelnut that were planted alongside the river.⁶⁷



An SPDC-run rubber plantation in rural Pa'an District, Karen State. The land for this plantation was confiscated without compensation from local villagers, who have since been forced to do labour tending the trees and harvesting the rubber. None of the profit from this enterprise is returned to the villagers; it is probably divided between local and higher-level SPDC military officers. *[Photos and caption: KHRG]*

5.2 Situation Facing Farmers in Burma

An estimated 70 percent of Burma's labour force is employed in the agricultural sector where rice, comprising the staple diet for the nation's almost 50 million people, is cultivated extensively across the country. The SPDC, despite its claims to the contrary, has continued to interfere in domestic markets and impose centralized control over food production throughout the country.

Various different agricultural development schemes have been embarked upon in Burma over the years, ostensibly to boost the production of rice and other agricultural produce. The majority of these projects, however, have proven to be little more than misguided "get-rich-quick" schemes devised to raise revenue and export earnings for the regime at the expense of those whom they are alleged to benefit, ultimately causing untold suffering upon the farmers of Burma.

Right to Own Land

Under existing laws, farmers in Burma have, for all practical purposes, lost the right to own land. Many of the laws pertaining to land rights and land ownership reflect Burma's socialist past. Various domestic laws stipulate that farmers in Burma have tenancy rights to their land, but not actual ownership. Under these laws, ownership of the land is retained by the state. According to the Settlement and Land Records Department (SLRD), under the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, *"The State is the sole owner of land. Only cultivation rights are recognized in the agricultural land and are not transferable without the permission of the authorities"*.⁶⁸ The Land Nationalization Act and Agricultural Lands Act, both promulgated in 1953, state that the right to transfer, partition or lease land can only occur with permission from regime authorities. Furthermore, rights of ownership that were initially granted to farmers under the Land Nationalization Act of 1953 were annulled with the implementation of the 1963 Tenancy Act which cancelled farmers' ownership of the land and effectively made them tenants of the state. On 18 September 1978, the Trade Ministry issued Notification No. 4/78 which granted new powers to the regime while at the same time stripped farmers of what precious few rights they retained. The notification stipulates that the junta could confiscate farmers' land for failure to plant the "appropriate" crop as determined by the military, or once harvested, for failing to sell the full crop quota at the appointed price.⁶⁹

There were numerous reported cases of land confiscation throughout the country during 2006. With 70 percent of Burma's workforce being employed in agriculture, the loss of farmland equates to the loss of livelihood. Farmers are almost never compensated for the loss of their land and in the few reported cases where they have been, it has generally been well below the market rate. (For more information, see the subsequent section on Land Confiscation below).

Further threatening the land rights of farmers in Burma have been the recent moves by the SPDC to lease sovereign Burmese soil to foreigners for development. According to reports, a number of agreements have already been reached with various Thai developers and businesses, some of whom have allegedly already signed 30-year contracts to lease "unused" farmland in southern Burma to grow sugarcane.⁷⁰ In a remarkable coincidence, the KHRG reported in January 2006 of a massive 5,000 acre sugarcane plantation in Thaton District of

Karen State, built on land that was confiscated from local villagers in 2000 without any form of compensation. Following the confiscation of their lands and livelihoods, those same villagers were then ordered to cut down all of the trees, dig up all of the stumps and sow the field with the earmarked sugarcane crop, in addition to being ordered to mill the cane following each harvest.⁷¹ Though no concrete evidence has as yet emerged to confirm it, it is possible that the “unused” farmland under development by these Thai companies is the same plantation referred to by KHRG. Similar agreements were explored with Bangladeshi businesses during the year. A verbal agreement was reached between the two countries in 2004, but broke down when they could not agree on who would work on the farms. According to reports, Bangladeshi businesses are prepared to lease farmland in western Burma for between US\$8 and US\$15 per acre.⁷² Should this venture come to fruition, it is highly likely that the land to be leased will simply be confiscated from local farmers without remuneration or recourse to justice.

Under a plan that was initially drafted in November 2003, three industrial zones are slated to be built in eastern Burma to attract more foreign investment. The three zones are to be established in Myawaddy and Pa'an in Karen State and Moulmein in Mon State, covering areas of 173, 178 and 124 hectares (427, 440 and 306 acres) respectively. The project is to be implemented in a joint venture between Burma and Thailand in 2007 and once built will be leased to foreign businessmen, who, owing to proximity, will most likely also be Thai. Local sources report that land confiscation, forced relocations and forced labour can be expected to result.⁷³ According to one report, an unnamed Thai company has already completed a feasibility study on the construction of the industrial zones which has been submitted to their Burmese counterparts for consideration. Once completed, Thai factories are expected to relocate to the zones where overheads and labour costs are cheaper. Meanwhile, another similar industrial zone, the Thilawa Special Industrial Zone in Thanlyin Township of Rangoon is expected to soon become Burma's first industrial zone operating completely on foreign investment.⁷⁴



A Karen villager from Ler Poh village in the wreckage of her rice fields in Thaton District, Karen State after these were prematurely burned off by SPDC army soldiers in April 2006. IB #235 was reported to have burned many villagers' fields in the area, claiming that the rice might be used to feed resistance groups. Prematurely burning a field when much of the scrub littering the field is still green results in an incomplete burn which, in turn, means that only that part of the field which was burned can be used for planting. To recover from this disaster, the villagers said they would have to cut and haul large amounts of wood into their fields in the hope that it will dry in time to allow a more complete burn later. *[Photo: KHRG; disregard the incorrect date stamped on the photo]*

Forced Sale of Crops

In April 2003, the SPDC declared that from the beginning of 2004, Burma's 40-year-old Paddy Procurement Policy would be abolished. The Paddy Procurement Policy, which was executed by the Myanmar Agricultural Produce Trade (MAPT), permitted the forced sale of rice and paddy to the SPDC at fixed and heavily discounted prices far below the prevailing market rates. The policy was justified by the SPDC as a means of feeding the ever-increasing armed forces, despite the fact that the SPDC has required its frontline troops to “live off the land” since the late 1990s. (For more information, see the section addressing Looting and Expropriation of Food and Possessions below). The quantity of rice that must be sold to the military is typically dependant upon the size of the farm; the larger the area of the land under cultivation, the more rice that is demanded from it.

Despite claims made by the SPDC that the Paddy Procurement Policy had been brought to an end and that they would no longer interfere in the nation's rice trade, there were numerous reports that the policy of the forced sale of rice to the military at reduced cost continued to be practiced throughout 2006. For instance, farmers in Pegu Division were ordered to sign contracts forcing them to sell between six and 15 baskets (150-375 kg / 330-827 lb) of rice per acre of cultivated land to the military for less than one third the established market rate.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, in Rathidaung in Arakan State, farmers were forced to sell two tins (31 kg / 55 lb) of paddy per acre to local village authorities (on behalf of the military) at the reduced rate of 1,000 kyat per tin rather than the market rate of 1,500 kyat.⁷⁶ One report maintained that Western Regional Command, based in Sittwe had issued orders to all Village Peace and Development Councils (VPDCs) in Arakan State that each village was expected to sell a minimum of 5,000 baskets (125 tonnes) of rice to the army following the 2006 harvest.⁷⁷ Other parts of Arakan State reported to be affected by these orders include Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Ann, and Taungup, as well as Platwa in southern Chin State.⁷⁸

Farmers in Paung Township of Mon State, likewise, received orders from the) to sell two tins of paddy (21 kg / 46 lb) per acre to the SPDC at the rate of 1,745 kyat per tin; a little over half the local market rate of 3,000 kyat per tin. According to one farmer from the region, the paddy had to be transported to Moulmein at the expense of the farmers: “*We have to send the paddy very far, near Moulmein. We also have to pay for the cost of transporting it by car. There is nothing left for us*”. Those who failed to comply were threatened with arrest.⁷⁹ Other reports from Mon State repeat these accounts and add that in early 2006, SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Division (LID) #44 camped along roadsides that farmers used to transport their harvest to market so they could force them to sell their produce at half the prevailing market rate.⁸⁰ Renewed demands were issued to brokers in Mudon Township of Mon State in December 2006. At a meeting with SPDC authorities, local rice brokers were told that each township was obliged to sell as much as 30,000 baskets of rice at less than half the market rate. At that time, a basket of rice sold for 5,000 kyat, though the SPDC said that they would only pay 2,000 kyat. It was also reported that on 22 November 2006, the SPDC had announced that it planned to enforce rice purchases from 79 townships across the country.⁸¹

There were also credible reports in July 2006 that the junta-backed Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) has been demanding seven tins (73.5 kg / 161 lb) of paddy per acre of farmland from farmers in Rangoon Division.⁸² KHRG argues that the

SPDC simply renamed the Rice Procurement Policy as a tax, known locally as *ta won kyay*, or “obligation” tax. In parts of Thaton District of Karen State, villagers must give eight baskets (168 kg / 368 lb) of produce to SPDC army soldiers for each acre under cultivation. KHRG points out that “*Even when weather conditions are favourable, which has not been the case for the past few years, and when the villagers are free to access their fields (which also has not been the case for the past few years), this amounts to being, at best, more than ten percent of their entire harvest, and at worst much more*”.⁸³ At a press conference in January 2006, a representative of the Shan Relief and Development Committee (SRDC) asserted that though the SPDC claimed to have ceased the Paddy Procurement Policy at the end of 2003, “*the Burmese army continues collecting paddy from local farmers [in Mong Nai Township of Shan State], using force if met with any resistance*”.⁸⁴

Dry Season Paddy Crops

There are two dominant types of rice cultivation practiced in Burma: irrigated flat field rice farming practiced in the plains and along the banks of rivers where the land is flat, and hill field rice farming where flat land is at a premium and rice is grown on hillsides. Irrigated flat field rice cultivation is more common in the central plains of Burma while hill field rice farming is more common in the steeper and more mountainous ethnic border regions. Irrigated rice fields are typically divided into rectangles and other regular shapes by low dirt dykes so that the level of water in each separate field can be regulated independently. The fields are generally burned in April-May to remove any stubble remaining from the previous harvest and to return much-needed nutrients to the soil. The fields are ploughed following the onset of the first of the rains which usually fall in June. The seeds are then sown in one of the fields specially prepared as a nursery, and once sprouted, are transplanted to the other fields. The paddy (unhusked rice) is then left to grow through the rainy season and is typically harvested from October to December. Hill field rice farming, also commonly referred to as ‘jhum’ or ‘swidden’ agriculture, employs a system in which a family owns a number of separate hill fields which they rotate between each year. In some areas, a family may own as many as eight to ten fields. Once a field is used, it is left to stand fallow for a number of years to allow nutrients to leach back into the soil before it is to be used again. After the villagers have decided which of their fields to cultivate, the trees and scrub that had become established in the field since its last use are cut down in February-March and are left to dry in the sun. Once it has sufficiently dried out, this brush is then burned in April-May and provides additional nutrients for the seeds which are then sown after the first rains, usually in June. Similar to the flat field cultivation described above, the rice growing season coincides with the rainy season from June to October and the crop is harvested between October and December.⁸⁵

For the past several years, however, the SPDC has been promoting the cultivation of a second rice crop each year, in an apparent attempt to increase paddy production throughout the country. This system, known as summer, or dry-season paddy cultivation, is placing tremendous strain on those farmers subjected to it. The traditional rice growing cycle described above is designed around the premise that only one crop is to be raised in the one field per year. Growing a second crop during the summer months is demanding too much from soil that is already suffering from overuse. The cultivation of rice, whether grown in hill fields or irrigated flat fields demands a lot of water to keep the paddy properly irrigated. This is typically not an issue during the rainy season, but can become a severe problem during the summer months when rain is scarce. Many farmers have been ordered to construct additional dams and irrigation canals to ensure that the summer paddy receives an adequate

water supply, all without compensation. Working on development projects of this sort at the behest of the SPDC results in less time that the farmers have available to spend tending to their crops. Many have also been forced to invest in expensive fertilizers, pesticides, and farm machinery which they would not be able to produce a second crop without. These are not offered freely to the farmers, but must instead be bought from the military, often at inflated prices. Farmers who do not buy the necessary materials are not able to partake in the summer paddy program and their land, officially designated for double cropping, is confiscated and given to a family who could afford the additional costs. (For more information, also see the section on Right to Own Land above). As a result, farmers will often take on large debts to buy the necessary fertilizers and seeds to participate in the program. In some areas though, farmers have had their farms confiscated by the SPDC when they were unable to repay loans they had taken out to buy the necessary supplies. Summer paddy production has been especially promoted in the Irrawaddy Delta region, which is rich in both land and water resources.

One farmer from Tamu District of Sagaing Division reported that even though they are struggling to yield a crop during the rainy season, local SPDC authorities continue to force them to plant summer paddy: *“Currently, they (the authorities) are collecting the identity cards of the farmers. They are threatening to confiscate their paddy fields if they do not grow summer paddy, and take actions on them”*.⁸⁶ Similarly, in Shan State, the SRDC reported that since the SPDC abolished the paddy procurement policy, villagers living in Mong Nai Township have been forced to produce a second rice crop each year. (For more information, also see the preceding section on the Forced Sale of Crops). According to the report, the farmers must plough their fields in March, transplant the seedlings in April, and then harvest the crop in July with the entire harvest going to local SPDC army battalions.⁸⁷ There were also reports that farmers in Magwe Division were ordered to produce a summer paddy crop in 2006. Magwe Division has traditionally been a region of sesame and bean plantations as the low rainfall does not lend itself to growing rice. Despite this, farmers have been ordered to not only cultivate two rice crops each year, but were also ordered to harvest their crops before they had fully ripened, ultimately ruining the entire harvest.⁸⁸ Farmers in Mudon Township, Mon State were also ordered to cultivate paddy during the summer months. According to a report by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), SPDC police officer U Myo Myint ordered local farmers to grow the crop or risk having their lands seized. Farmers faced little choice but to buy water and have it delivered to their farms at great expense so they could cultivate the crop. The report spoke of how no one was willing to grow the summer crop as *“the cost of cultivation is high and the returns are low”*.⁸⁹ Similarly, villagers in the nearby Doooplaya District of Karen State also reported being forced by local authorities to plant a summer paddy crop. One villager interviewed by KHRG made the following complaint:

“The VPDC ordered us to plant paddy in [the] dry season but our villagers cannot do that yet. We think we will never plant paddy in [the] dry season because in [the] dry season all of the streams and ponds are dried up, and we cannot grow paddy without water. Another reason is that we traditionally release our livestock to graze freely in [the] dry season, so if we plant paddy we’ll have to fence in our paddy fields because we can’t expect everyone to restrain their livestock. But there’s no way we can fence all our fields”.⁹⁰

5.3 Physic Nut Agricultural Development Project

Over the years, the SPDC (and the SLORC before them), have embarked on various different grand agricultural schemes, all of which have been promoted as *"the way forward"* or as the universal solution to all of Burma's economic worries. The latest of these is the mass cultivation of physic nut as a biodiesel crop (an alternative fuel source that can be used as an additive to, or substitute for petroleum-based fuels). In reality, this project, like those before it, amounts to being little more than a get-rich-quick scheme devised by, and for the benefit of the military, which not only does not profit the population who are forced to implement it, but further deprives them of their livelihoods.

In December 2005, the head of the Rangoon Division Peace and Development Council (PDC), Lieutenant General Myint Swe, announced the SPDC's new plan to cultivate no less than 50,000 acres of physic nut in each of Burma's nine military divisions.⁹¹ Soon after, reports from around the country began to emerge of land confiscation and the enforced cultivation of physic nut crops. Despite this, the SPDC and the state-run media insisted that the project was being implemented for the benefit of the people, with statements such as *"Growing fencing castor plants is to your benefit, and moreover it will fulfil requirements for fuel for machinery. It is planned that you may also sell the surplus for extra income"*.⁹² On 16 January 2006, SPDC Minister of Industry-1, Colonel U Aung Thaung delivered a speech in which he claimed that the cultivation of physic nut and the production of biodiesel was the only way out of the oil crisis gripping Burma. Not surprisingly, he made no mention of the nine-fold increase in the fuel prices instituted by the SPDC in October 2005. Contrary to the regime's already-questionable claims that their actions were entirely benevolent, in late March 2006, the SPDC announced that they were awarding a five- to ten-fold salary hike to themselves as well as the nation's approximately one million civil servants. The already-spiralling inflation rate shot up over night, taking fuel prices along with it. (For more information, also see the section on Additional Factors Affecting the Cost of Living above). The project was later reported to have been expanded massively to cultivate a total of 8.36 million acres across the country by the end of 2009. In August 2006, the SPDC Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation declared that 1.2 million acres of farmland had already been brought under cultivation of physic nut.⁹³

Native to Central and South American, *Jatropha curcas*, commonly referred to as the physic nut, is also frequently, yet mistakenly referred to as castor. Castor, or as it is known by its scientific name, *Ricinus communis*, is a distinct species that should not be confused with jatropha. Both species are being cultivated extensively around the country, though it appears that the terms castor, jathropha, and physic nut are being used interchangeably in local reports, making it exceedingly difficult to determine which of these two species they are referring to.

The seeds from the *Jatropha* plant are crushed to extract the non-edible jatropha oil, which can be used as an ingredient in the production of certain medicines, soap, candles, and biodiesel.⁹⁴ The press cakes remaining after the oil has been extracted can be used as a high-yield fertilizer and animal fodder. The plant itself is believed to be toxic to the soil and research is ongoing to investigate its perceived carcinogenic properties. Additional to its use as biodiesel, castor oil and its derivatives are used to make a wide assortment of products including soap, perfumes, paints, inks, dyes, plastic, nylon, lubricants, lamp oil, and also as a food additive. Castor oil is also reported to have medical applications as a laxative and in the treatment of skin disorders, cuts and abrasions, and burns. The castor seed, containing low

concentrations of ricin, is highly toxic to humans and predators alike. Some reports maintain that the ingestion of three seeds is sufficient to yield a lethal dose in children and eight seeds for adults. However, once pressed, the toxins remain with the press cake, producing an oil which is non-toxic.⁹⁵ Several children in Dooplaya District of Karen State were reported to have almost died from severe diarrhoea after eating just one of the seeds.⁹⁶ Both jatropha and castor are generally considered to be potentially dangerous crops and thus should not be grown in close proximity to homes where children and livestock may eat the seeds.

According to reports, communities in all parts of the country are under orders to plant jatropha and castor. There were numerous reports released throughout 2006 documenting the forced cultivation of physic nut from each of Burma's seven states and seven divisions. One report even spoke of suburbanites being forced to grow jatropha on the balconies of their apartments in Rangoon.⁹⁷ The vast majority of cultivation, however, has been reported to be along the flanks of roadways. Many villagers and townsfolk have also been ordered to plant physic nut in front of their homes and in their own private gardens (heightening the risk of children eating the deadly seed pods). This, presumably, is done to make it not only far easier for the junta to inspect the crops, but also so that they are far more visible to anyone travelling along those roads and making it easier for the SPDC to promote the 'success' of the project in the junta-controlled media. In other areas, such as in Karen State, the cultivation of physic nut has been described as "*fencing*", presumably to give the impression that it will present no threat to the livelihoods of the farmers being forced to grow it.

While there have been some reports of villagers in different parts of the country being told to find the seeds and seedlings themselves, the majority have been ordered to buy them directly from the authorities at exorbitant prices. In some cases, such as in Keng Tung Township of Shan State, those who were able to acquire the quota of seedlings themselves were still ordered to purchase the allotted 450 plants from the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) authorities at the rate of 120 kyat per plant.⁹⁸ Complicity of TPDC and VPDC (Village PDC) authorities in the forced purchase of jatropha and castor seeds and seedlings was observed across the country during 2006, many of whom relied on village registration lists to exact their demands. There was no apparent standardization dictating the cost charged for seeds and seedlings and prices were set by local authorities on an *ad hoc* basis. This accounts for the wide variations seen in the prices charged in different parts of the country. The cost of one bowl (1.5 kg / 3.5 lb) of seeds varied from 3,300 kyat in Karen State to as much as 12,000 kyat in Shan State.⁹⁹ Similarly, the prices charged for seedlings varied across the country, with prices starting around 200 kyat for three seedlings in Shan State, up to 350 kyat each in Mudon Township of Mon State.¹⁰⁰

Failure to cultivate the assigned number of seeds/seedlings would attract a fine. For instance, townspeople in Falam Township in Chin State were fined 3,000 kyat for not planting the required number of physic nut plants.¹⁰¹ Similarly, townspeople from Bhamo in Kachin State were told that they would not only be fined 3,000 kyat for not taking part in the project, but also that should they complain or criticize the project they would be arrested and prosecuted in accordance with Act 118 of the criminal code.¹⁰² In a similar vein, in July 2006, villagers from Thangtlang Township in Chin State were warned that any comments critical of the jatropha project would attract the death sentence. This, presumably, would also include reporting instances of land confiscation and forced labour related to the project. One villager from Thangtlang village ventured that "*The officer [Colonel Tin Hlah] regards a Jathropa [sic] tree more precious than human life*".¹⁰³ In February 2006, soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #515 instructed villagers in Lai-Kha Township in Shan State that they would

be fined 500 kyat for each plant that died. Some villagers, recognising this as a threat to their livelihoods, fled the village soon after, knowing that there is insufficient time to tend to their fields as well as ensuring the physic nut plants survived.¹⁰⁴ Reports from Karenni State maintained that TPDC authorities in Loikaw Township ordered villagers who had not yet been forced to partake in the physic nut project to grow oranges instead. The villagers had to pay for the orange seeds and seedlings at their own expense.¹⁰⁵

While climatic conditions in some parts Burma are ideal for cultivating physic nut, the environment in many regions where the project has been implemented is far from suitable. According to the Centre for Jatropha Promotion and Biodiesel, the optimal annual rainfall for the cultivation of jatropha ranges from 300 to 1,000 mm.¹⁰⁶ Much of Burma, however, receives far higher annual rainfall levels than this. According to the BBC weather service, in Akyab of Arakan State where the average annual rainfall is 5,156 mm, the optimum annual rainfall is exceeded in each of three consecutive months during the wet season. Likewise, the rainfall for Rangoon far exceeds the ideal growing conditions, receiving 2,610 mm of precipitation annually.¹⁰⁷ Other sources state that Toungoo in Pegu Division receives an average of 2,370 mm of rainfall each year, while Ye in Mon State receives 4,641 mm.¹⁰⁸ It would therefore seem ill-advised to attempt to cultivate the crop in parts of Burma experiencing annual rainfalls either in excess or short of this range and thus comes as no surprise that so many plants are dying due to the unsuitability of the climate. According to one villager from Mudon Township in Mon State, *"Most of the castor oil plants on both sides of the motor road are dying because it is not compatible with the region. [They] cannot live [grow] here because of heavy rains"*.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, conditions in Shan State are not proving conducive to the cultivation of physic nut. The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) reported in April 2006 that many villagers in Loilem Township were ordered to buy new seedlings to replace each one that had died.¹¹⁰ Similar fears were reported to be shared among Karen whose plants had also died.¹¹¹

In observing their insistence to persist with the project, one could be forgiven for believing that the SPDC is utterly oblivious of the unsuitability of the climate in different parts of Burma for growing physic nut or of the suffering that they are affecting unto their own population. A far more plausible explanation, however, would be that with their pride at stake, the regime simply refuses to concede defeat in the face of the international attention that this controversial project has attracted, particularly when neighbouring India is enjoying great success implementing an almost identical project.

According to the UN News Centre, the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) Fund for International Development (OFID) awarded a grant of US\$12.3 million to the SPDC in November 2006 *"to increase the productivity and value of oil crops and their derivatives"*.¹¹² While it was claimed that the funds were to be used primarily to develop the production of edible oil crops, namely, sesame, groundnut, sunflower and soybean, there were oblique, almost secondary, references to the funds also being used for the development of oil palm. The report added that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) would provide technical assistance to the project over the next three years. While oil palm is an edible oil crop, it can also be cultivated as biodiesel, and has been developed as such in Burma on various occasions in the past. Since these announcements were made, there has been some speculation that these funds may be used towards the physic nut project.¹¹³ However, the UN Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Rangoon has since stated unequivocally that these funds would not be used for the cultivation of physic nut in Burma. However, given the similarities between the two projects, caution must be taken to

ensure that these funds do not find their way into the physic nut development project in that it is being implemented in much the same way as countless other projects in the past: the military pockets any money earmarked for the project for themselves and forces the villagers and townsfolk of Burma to execute the project at their own expense without reaping any of the benefits, with the success of the project being largely dependant upon the use of forced labour, land confiscation and extortion. However, should any of these funds end up being used to implement the physic nut development project (which is plausible), this would mean that, at best, the OPEC and the FAO are financially and technically supporting the regime's use of land confiscation, forced labour, and extortion to implement the project, and at worst, that they are knowledgeable of, and therefore complicit in these acts. According to Geoffrey Mrema, director of the FAO Agricultural Support Systems Division, *"The goal of this project is to increase the productivity and value of oil crops and their derivatives, while ensuring low cost edible oil supplies for consumers and assuring that sound policies are implemented and institutions are strengthened to develop a sustainable and competitive oil crop sector"*.¹¹⁴ Presumably, the "sound policies" that he refers to do not include forced labour, land confiscation, extortion, or fines and death sentences for anyone who is critical of the project.

This is not the SPDC's first attempt to produce biodiesel. In 2003, the junta ordered villagers in parts of Dooplaya District in Karen State to plant belleric myrobalan, also known by its scientific name, *Terminalia belirica*.¹¹⁵ Similarly, farmers from Sittwe in Arakan State and those from Seikphyu Township in Magwe Division have received orders to also plant the crop.¹¹⁶ The seeds of belleric myrobalan boast a high methyl-ester content, satisfying the minimum requirements enshrined in various international standards for biodiesel crops. They have also traditionally been used as an ingredient in Ayurvedic herbal medicine in India. HRDU has not been able to ascertain whether or not this project produced any tangible results, however, the fact that this project does not appear to have been widely promoted or implemented would suggest that it has not. Further supporting this is the massive scale in which the SPDC has embarked upon the cultivation of jatropha and castor oil for the production of biodiesel while apparently neglecting belleric myrobalan cultivation.



Villagers and townsfolk alike have been ordered by the SPDC to cultivate physic nut as a "national duty" in the SPDC's latest forced agricultural development program. These young seedlings were photographed in rural Pa'an District of Karen State in October 2006. [Photo: KHRG]

Various different theories as to the motives behind this project have emerged. The SPDC insists that this project is being undertaken for the good of the population; so that they will have access to cheaper and infinitely renewable fuel sources for their own use and so that profits can be made by selling any excess in local markets. This claim, however, remains highly unconvincing. The project is being forced upon farmers and townspeople against their will without so little as the opportunity to complain about it without attracting penalty. Furthermore, it is being implemented with the systematic and widespread use of forced labour, land confiscation, and extortion of local communities. It is hard to distinguish the benefit that any of this presents for the population. Other, somewhat more credible, theories suggest that in light of skyrocketing global oil prices, biodiesel is being promoted as a substitute for or additive to petroleum-based fuel sources. A number of other countries in the region, such as Thailand, India and Malaysia, among others are producing biodiesel in an attempt to offset their reliance on petroleum-based fuels. Thailand, for instance, has announced its plans to have all of its cars running on a mixture of 90 percent gasoline and 10 percent biodiesel by the end of 2007.¹¹⁷ According to reports, in 2003, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had promised to waive all taxes and duties on castor and jatropha imports from Burma, suggesting that Burma was being considered as a source of biodiesel and that physic nut was being cultivated in Burma for the primary purpose of export.¹¹⁸

Another theory, popular among conspiracy theorists in Burma's teashops, is that the generals are acting on superstitious astrological beliefs to counteract support for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In Burmese, physic nut is known as *kyet suu*, which in astrological terms can denote Monday-Tuesday, while Suu Kyi's name can mean Tuesday-Monday. According to this theory, *"the act of planting kyet suu can neutralize Suu Kyi's powers and prevent her seeds of dissent from taking root"*.¹¹⁹ *Kyet suu* also means "noisy chicken" in Burmese, which according to another theory is reminiscent of the Burmese proverb, *"kyet suu, luu ma suu"*, which translates as "when chickens make noise, people will not". According to this theory, the mass cultivation of physic nut will, through inexplicable astrological influence, silence the people and quell all political opposition.¹²⁰

Land Confiscation, Forced Labour and Extortion – partial list of incidents for 2006

Arakan State

In mid-April 2006, NaSaKa authorities based in Kyaung Daung, Buthidaung Township issued orders to the VPDCs of several nearby village tracts to each arrange for the *"handing over"* of 5 acres of farmland for physic nut cultivation. Some farmers managed to successfully bribe the VPDC authorities not to confiscate their land. One villager from the area said *"I have only two acres of farmland which was seized for physic nut cultivation. So I have nothing now to support my family. The [junta] gave no compensation for the confiscated farms. I don't know how I will look after my family members"*. Villagers in the area believe that they would then be used as forced labour to tend what were their own fields for the military. The following village tracts received the summons:

1. Goat Pi;
2. Kyun Pauk;
3. Kyaung Daung;
4. Tin May;
5. Atta Bogoli; and
6. Panzy.¹²¹

On 9 June 2006, villagers from Kyauktaw Township were forced to attend a 30-day training workshop on the cultivation of physic nut against their wishes and at their own expense. Each of the 5 villagers ordered to attend the training had to pay 10,000 kyat to Military Operations Command (MOC) #9 to cover the cost of the training. While attending the training, these villagers were unable to tend to their own livelihoods at a crucial time when they would otherwise be out in their fields planting their paddy.¹²²

On 28 June 2006, an unspecified number of villagers from 7 villages situated along the length of the Maungdaw-Kyin Chaung motor road in northern Maungdaw Township were ordered to plant 17,600 physic nut seedlings along the sides of the road as well as in a "government plantation" owned by the NaSaKa. "Government plantation" is often synonymous for confiscated land. The following villages were those affected:

1. Aung Thabray;
2. Tet Chaung;
3. Bandula;
4. Rankha Zadi;
5. Salay Daung;
6. Don Nyo; and
7. Wailar Daung.¹²³

A report released in October 2006 claimed that members of the USDA had been extorting 500 kyat for the cultivation of physic nut from each household in Akyab. The report further maintained that SPDC authorities had recently (dates not disclosed) confiscated "a significant amount" of farmland from local paddy farmers along the Akyab-Ra Chan Byint motor road for the physic nut project.¹²⁴

Chin State

In January 2006, every household in Falam Township received orders to cultivate one acre of physic nut. Those who failed to meet their quota were fined 3,000 kyat by U Zaw Win Htay, chairman of the Falam TPDC.¹²⁵

Since April 2006, all civil servants in Chin State have been ordered to provide unpaid labour cultivating jatropha for the military. Villagers were also forced to do forced labour on the jatropha plantations. Many villagers are busy tending to their own livelihoods and are therefore not free to do the work for the regime, so they must hire daily wage labourers to go in their stead for 1,500-3,000 kyat per day. Though the labourers are hired by the villagers themselves, the SPDC demands a further 500 kyat from each household which they ironically claim is to pay the labourers. One female civil servant from Falam Township reported that, *"I am pregnant and cannot do work at the plantation. That's why I called [hired] some workers to do my job for me and am paying them Kyat 1,500 a day. My salary is only Kyat 26,000 a month. I do not have much balance after I passed on the work to others"*.¹²⁶

On 11 April 2006, *Khonumthung* released a report claiming that villagers living in Rizua were instructed to plant a 2-acre plot of land with 1,000 physic nut seedlings. One villager quoted in the report remained highly sceptical towards the project: *"[The] castor oil plantation will take up all the time and there will be no time left for other work needed to be done for subsistence. Castor oil has to be planted alongside the road, where the authorities can see. Yet the fertility of the soil for the plantation has not been tested. The project will not succeed"*.¹²⁷

In the second week of May 2006, Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #1 commander Colonel Tin Hlah and TOC #2 Commander Colonel San Aung announced the SPDC's new plan to establish 'model villages' with jatropha plantations in each of Chin State's nine townships. One villager stated that *"It is uncertain when the plan will be executed. However, the [junta] will exploit the people again and they will be forced to implement the [junta's] proposals [projects]"*.

Unofficial reports speculated that there would be 12 such model villages, including:

1. Mindat;
2. Kanpetlet;
3. Paletwa;
4. Matupi;
5. Tiddim;
6. Tonzang;
7. Falam;
8. Haka;
9. Thantlang;
10. Rizua;
11. Cikha; and
12. Rih.¹²⁸

In May 2006, SPDC authorities confiscated 8 acres of farmland belonging to Reverend Khup Hlei Thang in Bomba village of Falam Township for jatropha plantation.¹²⁹

At an unspecified time in mid-2006 (possibly in April or May), Company Commander Captain Pyi Ngaing of IB #266 ordered all villages under his control in Thantlang Township to plant no less than 50 milk tins (9.7 kg / 21.5 lb) of physic nut seeds before the end of June 2006. According to the same report, U Uk Hlei, a local police officer and member of the Thantlang TPDC, ordered every household to plant an additional 1,000 plants as well as ordering every primary school in Thantlang Township to sow 4 kilograms (10 lb) of physic nut seeds across four acres.¹³⁰

In the second week of July 2006, approximately 80 acres of farmland was confiscated from Lungrang and Lungpi villages in Falam Township by the SPDC for cultivation as jatropha and tea plantations. On villager reported *"We are not sure whether to stay or migrate. We will not be able to survive without food if the authorities force us to stop farming. We might be forced to migrate"*.¹³¹

Kachin State

Two unnamed NLD members from Kachin State were arrested in January 2006 and detained for the next two months for allegedly criticizing the physic nut project.¹³²

According to a report released in July 2006, villagers in Bhamo Township were being forced to clear scrubland on the outskirts of Bhamo for the cultivation of physic nut. Each ward of Bhamo town was ordered by Major Hla Thaung to cultivate at least one acre of physic nut. Each household was forced to purchase an unspecified number of seedlings from the authorities for 800 kyat and anyone who refused to take part in the project was fined 3,000 kyat. It was announced that anyone who criticized the project would be arrested and prosecuted under Act 118 of the criminal code, though HRDU has not been able to establish which law (if any) this is a reference to. According to the report, the people of Bhamo

*"insisted that these government projects are economically unviable and that if the junta wants to help the people and itself, it should stop its authorities from meddling in their lives which the authorities neither understand nor try to understand".*¹³³

Karen State

On 19 January 2006, Yeh Htun, chairperson of the Kya In Seik Gyi TPDC, issued a written order document to all villages in the township stipulating that each and every farmer was obliged to plant 200 physic nut bushes each year for the next three years. The order read that villagers *"must plant 83 acres of castor in 2006, 166 acres in 2007, and 166 acres in 2008, totalling 415 acres over three years under our castor planting project"*. VPDC chairpersons were summoned to purchase their village's quota of 2 bowls (3.1 kg / 6.9 lb) of seed at the rate of 3,300-3,500 kyat per bowl. One village head reported that *"the villages around Kya In Seik Gyi have to set aside 1,200 acres to plant castor, and that the acreage must increase every year"*.¹³⁴

According to a report published in March 2006, the Pa'an TPDC even forced middle school (Grades 5-8) students to participate in the physic nut project during the year. It was said that the students were given an order (at an unspecified time in early 2006) to plant 200 physic nut plants each. Forcing students to perform forced labour deprives them of their right to education.¹³⁵

On 2 June 2006, the Kawkareik TPDC distributed a written order document to all villages in Kawkareik Township demanding no fewer than 30,000 physic nut bushes be planted *"as fencing"* during 2006, with a further 70,000 plants to be cultivated before the end of 2008. Presumably, the term *"fencing"* is used to dismiss complaints from villagers that planting physic nut will impinge upon land required for growing food crops. Twice in the order was the cultivation of physic nut referred to as a *"national duty"*, emulating the words used by Senior General Than Shwe in a speech to promote the project.¹³⁶

There were also reports from Kya In Seik Kyi Township of villagers being fined for damage sustained to physic nut plantations by grazing livestock. Major Htun Htun Oo of Light Infantry Division (LID) #88 planted 500 physic nut bushes near his camp adjacent to Paya Daw village and would fine villagers 7,000 kyat each time one of their cattle strayed into the unfenced plantation.¹³⁷

Magwe Division

On 8 March 2006, 30-year-old Yeh Aung from Pe Kone village in Myothit Township was arrested by SPDC authorities for criticizing the physic nut project. Yeh Aung was detained by township authorities after attempting to report the corruption of the Pe Kone VPDC chairperson to higher authorities.¹³⁸

Mon State

Beginning in May 2006, Mudon TPDC authorities and IB #61 have been forcing every household located along the Mudon-Moulmein motor road to buy 70 physic nut saplings for 350 kyat each. The saplings were to be planted flanking the road, in front of their homes, and around their fields. One villager complained that *"It is too much for us, we already work for them. I need to work for my family on a daily basis to earn enough for us to survive. Now, I*

can't do my own job for my family income". These orders were issued to the following villages on top of the numerous other demands that the villagers already faced:

1. Mudon, 200 households;
2. Ba-Yan village, 300 households;
3. Kwan-Tar village, 250 households;
4. Kaw-Ka-Pone village, 350 households;
5. Hmaine-Ka-Naine village, 200 households;
6. Myaing-gone village, 180 households;
7. Kway-Wan village, 350 households;
8. Naing-Pa-Raing village, 320 households;
9. Tha-Yar-Gone village, 180 households;
10. Kyone-Phite;
11. Kan-Ka-Lay;
12. Wet-tae;
13. Nyoung-Gone;
14. Naing-Hlone;
15. Set-twae;
16. Taw-Gu;
17. Thagon-Taing; and
18. Kamar-Wet.¹³⁹

In May 2006, villagers from Mudon and Thanbyuzayat Townships were ordered to cultivate physic nut in front of their homes. Villagers living along any of the main roads were ordered to plant between 5 and 7 plants or face arrest. The saplings had to be bought from the TPDC for between 150 and 250 kyat. Even homes that were located far from the road had to have physic nut planted in front of them. A number of rubber plantation owners from Kamar-Wet, Taw-Gu, Thagon-Taing and Naing Hlone villages in Mudon Township were ordered to sow one bowl (1.5 kg / 3.4 lb) of physic nut seeds, which they had to first purchase for 5,000 kyat.¹⁴⁰

It was reported in May 2006 that villagers from several villages in southern Mudon Township were forced to plant physic nut along the Rangoon-Tavoy motor road. Villagers who failed to work on the project were fined 300 kyat per household by the Mudon TPDC.¹⁴¹

On 16 October 2006, one villager from every household in Paing Ka Ma, Lat Tat and Kawloh villages in Mudon Township were forced by the Mudon TPDC to plant 4 rows of physic nut alongside the motor road. Those who did not show up were fined 500 kyat.¹⁴²

Shan State

On 6 November 2005, soldiers from IB #66 ordered several villages in Nam-Zarng Township to plant 600 physic nut bushes per household by 4 January 2006. The villages (and the number of household that comprise them) which received this order included:

1. Wan Pung village, 48 households;
2. Naa Lao village, 24 households;
3. Loi Yai village, 20 households;
4. Tai Kaao village, 30 households;
5. Pet Lak Ho Oo village, 20 households; and
6. Naa Khaa village, 21 households.¹⁴³

On 16 January 2006, every household in Muse received orders to assist in planting 1,200 physic nut seedlings in and around the town. According to Sai Aung Myo Hlaing, a resident of Muse, this was unusual as *"Previously they [SPDC] didn't call the people from wards [from urban areas], only the people from village tracts [from rural areas]. Now they [also] call the people from the wards as forced labour"*. The land that was to be cultivated was reported to have been confiscated from the farmers of Muse, Kyukok and Pangsai.¹⁴⁴

On 22 January 2006, IB #32 issued orders to villagers in Mawkmai Township stipulating that each household was obliged to grow no fewer than 1,000 physic nut plants alongside all of the main roads. At the same time, SPDC army soldiers began cutting down and uprooting physic nut plants that villagers from this area traditionally cultivated as hedge fences around their farms and homes. This was presumably done to force the villagers to buy new seedlings from the military. The Township Forestry Department was furthermore ordered to cultivate 3,000 acres of physic nut, prompting the department chairperson to resign from his position and enter the monkhood.¹⁴⁵

In January 2006, villagers living in the Wan Paang relocation site adjacent to Kunhing were ordered to cultivate physic nut around Kunhing and alongside the motor road as far as Ka Li village – a distance of approximately 8 kilometres (5 miles). The seedlings had to be purchased from local SPDC authorities for 45,000 kyat per truckload. Those who could afford it were able to bribe the SPDC army soldiers 5,000 kyat to avoid having to go for labour, although those in this group were few in number. Alternatively, some villagers hired others for 1,500 kyat per day to go in their place. No one was paid for their labour and each had to provide their own tools and food.¹⁴⁶

In January 2006, every household in Mong Pan Township was ordered by LIB #332 to grow 200 physic nut plants around their homes. As a result, Paw Thao Laek, a 76-year-old villager from Mong Pan, died while returning from collecting physic nut seedlings from a nearby abandoned village. It would seem that he died from exhaustion while helping his widowed granddaughter who was unable to do the labour herself as there was no one else left at home to look after her 3 young children.¹⁴⁷

In January 2006, villagers from Ho Nam village in Loilem Township were forced to grow physic nut along nearby roads and around their village. The villagers were forced to buy the seedlings from the local SPDC army battalion at the rate of 1,500 kyat for every 1,000 seedlings. The soldiers would inspect the plantations every 2-3 days and order the villagers to *"replant those that they said had not been properly planted ... [and] replace those that had died"* at their own expense. Every village in Loilem Township had received orders to cultivate at least 5 acres of physic nut. Anyone failing to comply with the orders was ordered to do 5 days forced labour for the military. Furthermore, soldiers from IB #12 confiscated farmland from local farmers and began to grow physic nut plantations of their own. However, it is quite unlikely that they tended to these fields themselves.¹⁴⁸

In February 2006, each of the 31 houses in Paang Ae village in Lai-Kha Township were ordered by LIB #515 to cultivate 60 physic nut plants along the shoulders of roads in the area. Villagers were fined 500 kyat for each plant that died, forcing many villagers to abandon their homes and move to other areas.¹⁴⁹

In February 2006, villagers from Wan Lao village in Kunhing Township were ordered to plant physic nut alongside the motor road from Wan Lao to Kunhing. Each of the 150 houses

from Wan Lao was ordered to plant 450 seedlings which had to first be bought from the SPDC at the rate of 200 kyat for 3 seedlings. Wan Lao villagers estimated that they were compelled to do forced labour for as many as 15 days each month.¹⁵⁰

In March 2006, 8 village tracts from southern and southeastern Kunhing Township were ordered to collectively cultivate approximately 8 square miles (13 km) of physic nut in 2 separate locations. One field, covering 3 square miles was to be built on the western side of the Nam Paang River, while the other, stretching over 5 square miles, was to be built on the eastern shore. The villagers were told by soldiers from IB #246 that they could find the required number of seeds and/or saplings themselves, or else buy them from the military at the rate of 150 kyat per plant or 1,500 kyat for every milk tin (195 grams / 6.9 oz) of seeds. The villagers were only given 2 months to plant the fields, but would then still be held accountable for their maintenance until such time as they become productive (approximately 3 years). The village tracts which were affected by this order included:

1. Kaeng Lom;
2. Kaeng Kham;
3. Wan Lao;
4. Ho Yaan;
5. Saai Murng;
6. Wan Tong;
7. Wan Phaai; and
8. Waeng Phui.¹⁵¹

On 10 May 2006, SPDC army soldiers from IB #246 confiscated 25 rice fields, each covering 2-4 acres, in Kunhing Township, Shan State for use in the physic nut development project. To add insult to injury, the villagers were later ordered to buy two bowls of physic nut seeds per family at the rate of 4,500 kyat per bowl.¹⁵²

Beginning in May 2006, farmers in Keng Tung Township have been forced to buy physic nut saplings from the TPDC and plant them as fencing around their hill fields. Village heads were summoned to a meeting on 1 May 2006 where there were told that all hill farmers were under orders to plant no fewer than 450 physic nut bushes around their fields, regardless of where they were located. The saplings had to be bought from the military for 120 kyat per plant. Any plants that were acquired from sources other than the military were not counted towards the quota. All 450 plants had to be purchased from the military. Any farmers that did not comply and plant the appointed quota of bushes had their fields confiscated.¹⁵³

5.4 Situation of Labour in Burma

The conditions of labour in Burma remained poor throughout 2006. Despite the existence of various laws that supposedly protect the rights of workers, employees still found themselves subjected to inadequate pay and exploitation, and with little recourse to complaint. The 1964 Law on Fundamental Workers Rights and the 1951 Factories Act are two of the most important laws regulating the conditions of labour in Burma. These laws, however, are generally only enforced on behalf of those employed by the regime, and even then only rarely. The vast majority of the population (approximately 70 percent) is employed in rural agriculture, and as such scarcely experience these laws upheld. According to the laws, it is prescribed that workers in the public sector should work a 35-hour, five-day working week and a six-day, 44-hour workweek for those in the private sector. Everyone, regardless of which sector they work in, is entitled to payment for overtime beyond these hours. Workers are also entitled to no less than a 24-hour period of rest each week and a minimum of 21 paid days of leave per year. Although in reality, few, if any of these rights are ever provided for. Similarly, there are occupational health and safety (OH&S) regulations in place, but the regime has never provided sufficient resources to meet these needs. Besides, few workers would complain about working conditions, knowing that they would likely lose their job in doing so.

With the exception of junta employees and those engaged in a handful of traditional industries, the vast majority of Burma's labour force is not covered by minimum wage provisions. Employees therefore often find themselves the victims of exploitation and are paid salaries that are largely insufficient to meet their basic living costs.

Prior to April 2006, when the junta awarded a 500-1,000 percent salary increase to the nation's estimated one million civil servants, the minimum daily wage for a low ranking public servant was 100 kyat per day. Civil servants enjoyed various subsidies and additional allowances, although many of these were abolished with the salary hike. Even in the presence of these subsidies, the vast majority of civil servants could not earn wages sufficient to provide themselves or their families with a decent standard of living. As a result, widespread corruption and absenteeism has been reported in the public sector. (For more information, see the section on Inflation above). Meanwhile, textile factory workers in the private sector can earn between 500 and 1,000 kyat, working up to 17 hours per day, while rural farmers in ethnic areas make approximately 300 kyat per day.¹⁵⁴

The minimum legal age for the employment of children is 13; however this law is rarely enforced. Children in urban centres are commonly employed in the informal sector in food preparation, street vending, garbage collection and light manufacturing.¹⁵⁵ In rural areas, children must often work in their family's agricultural plots, assisting their parents and older siblings to bring in the harvest.

The 1926 Trade Unions Act stipulates that trade unions can only be formed following the approval of the junta, which of course is never granted. The few trade union movements that have emerged over the years have been outlawed and labelled as "*terrorist organizations*" by the regime. With trade unions criminalized, workers are unable to strike or organize and bargain collectively for better working conditions. (For more information, see Chapter 11: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press).

Existing labour laws give employers the right to summarily dismiss any worker without prior notice. Whenever this occurs the 1923 Labour Compensation Act requires that the terminated employee receive due compensation. However, the Act, having never been amended to account for inflation excludes all workers earning over 400 kyat per month, which in effect constitutes the entire labour force.



Internally displaced Karen villagers from Nyaunglebin District returning from collecting some of their rice from hidden storage barns in the forest. This photo shows the KNLA escort (right) who accompanied the villagers because of the high level of SPDC army presence still in the area.
[Photo: KHRG]

5.5 Other Factors Contributing to the Deprivation of Livelihood

The people of Burma are subject to an extensive array of demands for money, food, supplies, and labour. Civil and military authorities continue to issue these demands to villagers and townsfolk with alarming frequency. In areas of armed conflict, some villages must meet daily demands from numerous different sources. Such demands are designed to deprive people of what little time and money they have.

Official figures for the 2005-2006 fiscal year maintain that the education and healthcare sectors were allocated 8.9 and 3.3 percent of Burma's national budget, respectively. However, most independent and international observers view these figures with some scepticism, believing these amounts to, in fact, be much lower. Meanwhile, the SPDC claims that military expenditures accounted for only 24 percent of Burma's national budget during the 2005-06 fiscal year; although this statistic appears to be highly conservative, with most observers estimating the defence budget to be closer to 50 percent.¹⁵⁶ Yet, despite such a high allocation for the military budget, the armed forces do not receive sufficient funding and the civilian population is typically expected to make up for the shortfall.

Villagers have faced considerable burden since 1988 when the SPDC initiated the "Self-Reliance Program", requiring SPDC army battalions and local-level civil authorities to obtain their own supplies and funding from local communities. Villagers in areas of armed conflict are fully expected to support locally-based SPDC army battalions. They are ordered to perform forced labour building and maintaining army camps, while supplying all necessary materials and using their own tools. No compensation is given for this work and they must even provide their own food. Villagers are also forced to give money, food and whatever other items military personnel demand from them. Furthermore, tens of thousands of acres of land have been confiscated from local communities without compensation. The Self-Reliance Program permits SPDC army soldiers and officials to make regular demands of villagers with impunity.

The junta has prided itself on its national infrastructure and development projects such as the building of roads, bridges, schools, and medical facilities. The SPDC maintains that these projects will benefit all and transform Burma into a "*modern developed nation*" in which the people will thrive and prosper. However, these projects are implemented at the expense and detriment of the people of Burma. The junta claims that these projects are being carried out for the benefit of the people, though in reality they serve the military far more than they do the local communities. The projects are almost invariably under-funded and the local people are often called upon to not only contribute funds and materials, but also their uncompensated labour towards the projects.

Forced Labour

Forced labour is arguably the most pervasive of all human rights violations being perpetrated in Burma today. It is not only the incidence at which forced labour is utilized, but also the way in which forced labour impacts upon every aspect of the lives of the people of Burma. Essentially, any time spent performing forced labour for the military leaves less time available to spend tending to livelihoods. The labour is almost never paid, and on those few occasions when it is, that which is paid is negligible. Furthermore, those performing it must

supply their own food, tools, and all necessary building materials. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription).

Villagers and townsfolk are consistently ordered to pay the military an intricate system of fees and taxes under the ruse that this money will then be given to those performing labour for the military, which of course it never is, and ultimately amounts to being little more than simple extortion. (For more information, see the following section on Fees, Taxes and Extortion). Furthermore, those performing forced labour are habitually beaten, verbally abused, tortured and on occasion even summarily executed should they displease the soldiers that they are working for. In areas of ethnic conflict, where the use of forced labour is ubiquitous, the risk of encountering landmines increases exponentially as villagers are ordered to perform labour in areas suffering heavily from landmine contamination. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Landmines).

Despite the regime's insistence that forced labour is no longer exercised in Burma and the introduction of Order #1/99 and its supplemental orders banning the practice, incidences of forced labour being used throughout the country continued to be documented during 2006.

Fees, Taxes and Extortion

The people of Burma are being driven deeper and deeper into poverty by an extensive system of officially sanctioned fees and taxes as well as unofficial or arbitrary demands for money and goods. An endless array of fees exists that obliges the civilian population to pay for everything from road construction supplies to state-sponsored sport ceremonies. The constant demands are seriously threatening people's ability to provide for their families as much of their income ends up lining the pockets of corrupt officials and military personnel. Many villagers are unable to meet the regular demands and, as a result, are often forced to flee their homes to avoid punishment by the authorities.

The SPDC also often extorts money from villagers and townsfolk to cover the costs of regime-sponsored ceremonies and festivals. These can include religious and sporting festivals as well as anti-opposition rallies or pro-SPDC ceremonies, all of which are designed to ostensibly show the nation's overwhelming support of the military regime. The SPDC rarely provides enough money, if any, toward the costs and the people are expected to make up for any shortfalls. Many of these SPDC-sponsored festivals and ceremonies have been cunningly scheduled to coincide with other important events such as harvests or religious and cultural festivals which the people must forego to attend the pro-SPDC events.

Forced Labour Fees

A common practice, particularly in conflict areas, is for the villagers to pay compulsory "porter fees" to the local SPDC army battalion or any of their allied ceasefire groups. These fees are extorted from the villagers under the pretext that they are then to be given to villagers who are performing forced labour for the military. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). This, however, rarely happens and the money typically ends up in the pockets of the corrupt local commanding officers. The amounts demanded are set by each different officer and can vary widely from a few hundred to several thousand kyat per household per month. Despite the payment of these fees, the villagers are still ordered to do forced labour for the SPDC. Numerous other forced labour fees also exist for each of the various forms of forced labour that villagers are forced to do, including *set tha*

(“messenger”) fees, *wontan* (“servant”) fees, and *loh ah pay* (“voluntary labour”) fees. Many villages located close to more than one army camp are regularly ordered to pay a range of these fees, often in combination, to each of the nearby camps.

Arbitrary Fees, Fines and Taxes

Many SPDC army officers stationed in areas of ethnic conflict, as well as officials in central Burma, exploit their positions to advance their own personal wealth by extorting vast sums of money from local villagers with impunity. There have been repeated cases of officers who have become quite rich during their postings around the country. In addition to the range of “official” taxes, fees, and fines that civilians are subject to, they must also pay several “unofficial” or arbitrary levies. Villagers are often required to cover the cost for the construction of army camps and buildings, or at least supply the necessary materials. In such instances, the amounts demanded often far exceed that which is required to meet the costs of the building materials. Often some sort of feeble explanation is given regarding what the money is to be used for, although those paying it have few delusions and know that few, if any, of these are true. In some instances, no explanation is given whatsoever, and people are only told how much they must give.

Moreover, villagers in conflict areas are also forced to compensate the military for the cost of weapons and equipment lost whenever soldiers desert from the SPDC army. Furthermore, there have been documented cases of villages in areas of ethnic conflict who have been fined for destruction of military property when one of them was killed after stepping on an SPDC landmine.

Arbitrary Fees, Fines and Taxes – partial list of incidents for 2006

Arakan State

On 1 January 2006, 50-year-old Mohammad Kobir from Kyingthama Palley Daung village in Buthidaung Township was detained by the NaSaKa after his daughter married without official permission. Both the bride’s and the bridegroom’s parents had applied for the marriage permit, yet were met with an “*unbearable delay*” in having it awarded. Unable to wait any longer, the young couple went ahead and married without the necessary permits and ultimately had to flee the country to avoid arrest. Mohammad Kobir then had to pay a “fine” of 300,000 kyat to settle the matter.¹⁵⁷

In what the *Kaladan News* described as “[c]ontinuing with their favourite pastime of making a quick buck, police officers of Buthidaung Township are extorting money from villagers in Arakan State”, on 10 February 2006, police officers from Buthidaung arrested seven Rohingya villagers for the crime of having “*relatives in foreign countries*”. Relatives of the seven men had to pay fines of 30,000 to 40,000 kyat each for their release. Those arrested included:

1. Moulvi Baser, 50;
2. Moulvi Noor Alam, 35;
3. Baser Ahamed, 48;
4. Ulla Meah, 65;
5. Aul Kalam;
6. Moulvi Nozir, 65; and
7. Azi Rahman, 60.¹⁵⁸

On 15 May 2006, SPDC authorities began extorting money from Rohingya households in Myint Hlut village tract in Maungdaw Township who had family members abroad. The SaRaPa (military intelligence) claimed that it had learned of approximately 200 Rohingya who had gone to Malaysia to find work so they could support their families back home. Each family suspected of being in this situation was forced to pay demands of between 50,000 and 200,000 kyat for each family member abroad.¹⁵⁹

On 1 July 2006, 5 Rohingya villagers from Aley Chaung village tract in Buthidaung Township were summoned to the NaSaKa camp in Buthidaung and ordered to each provide one cow and 1,000 kyat. They were not told why they had to provide these to the NaSaKa; only that they were required to produce the requested items by the following day. The five villagers were:

1. Ali Ullah, male, 35;
2. Nazu Meah, male, 25;
3. Kafiya Ullah, male, 45;
4. Amin Ullah, male, 27; and
5. Nur Zahan, female, 22.¹⁶⁰

On 3 July 2006, 35-year-old Rohingya Ruhul Amin of Aggri village in Rathedaung Township was arrested by the NaSaKa after learning that he had just returned from working in Malaysia for the past four years. He was detained in a nearby NaSaKa camp and was only released after handing over 300,000 kyat to one of the officers.¹⁶¹

On 1 August 2006, 24-year-old Rohingya doctor Mohammed Salim was arrested by the NaSaKa for privately treating patients in his village in Phar Wup Chaung village tract in Maungdaw Township. Shortly after arriving home from treating the patient, he was arrested by the NaSaKa, detained in their camp, and tortured. He was only released after paying the soldiers a “fine” of 70,000 kyat.¹⁶²

On 15 August, 27-year-old Kala Meah of Prine Daw village in Rathedaung Township was fined 50,000 kyat by the NaSaKa for going to Bangladesh to seek medical treatment. Doctors in Rathedaung hospital were unable to treat his ulcers and referred him for treatment in Maungdaw, however, he was not able to be treated there either. He then went to Bangladesh where he received treatment in a medical college in Chittagong. He was apprehended the day after he had returned home.¹⁶³

On 11 September 2006, the NaSaKa began extorting money from local villages to fund the renovation of a primary school in Myint Hlut village of Maungdaw Township. According to local villagers, the authorities had been collecting between 1,500 and 2,000 kyat from each household though the report did not state which villages had been forced to pay. *“If they collect the money as scheduled, they will accumulate a huge amount. Will all the money be spent for the renovation of the school?”*, said one villager who said that he expected much of the money to be retained by the commanding officers. Another individual from a nearby village stated on condition of anonymity that *“The [NaSaKa’s] main goal is to extract money from the villagers of Maungdaw and Buthidaung by coming up with pretexts such as development work for the villagers”*.¹⁶⁴

At around 10:00 pm on 12 October 2006, a group of Rohingya men were talking and drinking tea in a private home in Tin May village, Buthidaung Township when a NaSaKa patrol overheard them and arrested them for gossiping. The men: Zaffar Ahamed, 40, Rahman, 32,

and Zakir Ahamed, 55 were accused of discussing “*anti-government matters*” and were “*severely beaten up in front of their family members*”. The men’s families intervened and agreed to pay a bribe of 50,000 kyat for their release. One of the villagers who had witnessed the incident said:

*“We have to do forced [labour], we are socially discriminated against, arbitrarily arrested and tortured. Money is extorted from us on false cases and our movement is restricted. Our sons and daughters are banned from marrying, our young generation is deprived of education, our land is confiscated, new Buddhist settlers are invited to Arakan to settle, our economy is crippled on a daily basis and we are politically and religiously oppressed. In such a situation, how Rohingyas will survive in Arakan is a big question?”*¹⁶⁵

On 20 October 2006, 50-year-old Rohingya Mubarak Ali of Tin May village in Buthidaung Township was fined by the NaSaKa for going to Bangladesh to seek medical treatment without official permission. Mubarak Ali had long suffered from Tuberculosis (TB) and wished to travel to Bangladesh where he could be treated, yet in spite of this, he was refused permission to travel. Then, on 15 November 2006, he went anyway and was arrested upon his return five days later and fined 50,000 kyat for travelling without permission.¹⁶⁶

On 15 November 2006, Habibur Rahaman and Hafiz Ullah, both 25-year-old Rohingyas from Maungdaw, were arrested by the NaSaKa for possessing Bangladeshi mobile phones. Habibur Rahaman was held for 4 days, while Hafiz Ullah was detained for one week. Both men were released only after they each paid a bribe of 35,000 kyat.¹⁶⁷

On 20 November 2006, 55-year-old Ramzan Ali, a Rohingya living in Akyab, was arrested by the NaSaKa for having “*the temerity to change a few poles and fences of his house without seeking permission from the authorities*”. The NaSaKa have declared it illegal for anyone to renovate their homes without first receiving permission, though this law appears to only be upheld when the transgressor is a Rohingya. Ramzan Ali was detained for 2 days and fined 250,000 kyat before being released.¹⁶⁸

Chin State

In the first week of January 2006, Major Myo Naing Oo of LIB #266 based in Lungler village demanded 1,200 kyat from every household from the 24 villages surrounding his camp. The funds were claimed to be used for the maintenance of the SPDC army camp, although much of the money ended up in Major Myo Naing Oo’s pockets. “*The army forces us to pay for the construction of their camp every year, and the amount would be around 1,000,000 kyat every year. The camp is constructed and renovated but not all the money is used. The surplus money collected from the people will go in to the pocket of the camp commander*”, said the village head from one of the villages in the area. The 24 villages that were issued this order included:

1. Tlanglo village;
2. Tlangpi village;
3. Farawn village;
4. Lungding village;
5. Vanzang village;
6. Sopum village;
7. Thangzang village;

8. Sihmuh village;
9. Bungtlang village;
10. Bungkhua village;
11. Lungler village;
12. Ralpel village;
13. Dawn village;
14. Zangtlang village;
15. Fungkah village;
16. Ruabuk village;
17. Ruakhua village;
18. Saikah village;
19. Hmunlipi village;
20. Hriangkhan village;
21. Thau village;
22. Tikir – A village;
23. Tikir – B village;
24. Banawhtlang village; and
25. Hmunhlah village.¹⁶⁹

In March 2006, members of the Chin youth organization, Mara Thyutliapy (MTP), approached Tactical Operations Commander Colonel San Aung of Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #2 seeking permission to host their annual youth conference on 8 April 2006, though their request was met with a demand for 3 million kyat which was to be paid before permission would be granted.¹⁷⁰

The “*Tazaungdaing*” festival marking the Buddha’s birthday was celebrated on 4 April 2006 in Christian-dominated Matupi, the Chin State capital. The festivities, however, were marred not only by the imposition of a Buddhist celebration in a predominantly Christian area, but also by the fact that all civil officials and “*government*” employees were forced to pay 2,000 kyat towards the festival, regardless of whether they were Buddhist or not.¹⁷¹

On 1 May 2006, Sergeant Soe Myint of LIB #140 shot and killed Chin villager Ma Heih’s pig and then had the audacity to charge her 5,000 kyat for the bullet. The sergeant then demanded that Ma Heih carry half of the carcass to his camp.¹⁷²

On 29 October 2006, Tactical Operations Commander Colonel San Aung hosted a volleyball tournament, demanding that each household in Matupi Township contribute 300 kyat towards the expense.¹⁷³

On 14 November 2006, the NaSaKa arrested Salay Ahmed of Zinbow Nyar village tract in Maungdaw Township following information that he was using a Bangladeshi mobile phone in spite of the fact that the NaSaKa had outlawed their use. He was then detained at the NaSaKa camp for three days and only released on 17 November after payment of a 1,000,000 kyat bribe.¹⁷⁴

It was reported in November 2006 that U Zaw Win Hte, chairperson of the Falam Township TPDC, demanded each of the approximately 5,000 households in Falam Township to pay 100 kyat towards a “*general fund*”. Those living in the larger urban centres such as Falam town were exempt from paying, presumably so this extortion can be conducted without the knowledge of higher authorities. Some widows and others without steady sources of income

were forced to sell their domestic animals so they could pay the demands. No reports have emerged how this money was spent, though one villager who spoke on condition of anonymity claimed that “[a]ll the money collected from the people seems to go into their pockets. No work has been done for us with the money collected. Every year they collect funds in this manner. The money is sure to be spent in their business ventures”.¹⁷⁵

Irrawaddy Division

In September 2006, it was reported that Myo Lwin, the supervising officer of the Wakhema Township fire brigade had been extorting money from local residents. It was reported that he had been extorting 1,000 kyat from every household under the guise of “fire safety”. Furthermore, Myo Lwin had imposed unofficial laws dictating that all cooking fires must be extinguished after cooking meals, or else face a fine of 2,000 kyat. According to one local housewife, “We have to extinguish fire from 5am to 11am. In the evening, from 5pm to 8pm. If guests come to our house we dare not cook rice and curry for them. ... If caught, you are taken to the fire brigade office and fined 2,000 [kyat]. If you are caught cooking rice and curry, you have to pay 2,000 [kyat] to fire fighters. As we are day labourers, we can’t afford to pay 2,000 [kyat]”.¹⁷⁶

Kachin State

It was reported that in the end of July 2006, SPDC authorities had extorted 500 million kyat from villagers in “Man-Maw” (Momaik) Township in southern Kachin State for the ongoing construction of the new capital in Naypyidaw. According to the report, every household in the township was forced to contribute, although the amount demanded from each home was not known at the time of the report.¹⁷⁷



The remains of Htee Hsa Per village in Toungoo District, Karen State. SPDC forces set fire to 16 homes in Htee Hsa Per village on 16-17 December 2006. The residents of the village had already fled into the surrounding hills by the time the soldiers had arrived. [Photo: KHRG]

Karen State

On 9 July 2006, the LID #66 division commander demanded 30 viss of pork, 3 sets of monk's robes and various other goods worth 500,000 from Kler Lah villagers in Toungoo District for a festival celebration at the Bawgali Gyi army camp.¹⁷⁸

On 25 August 2006, LIB #351 Company Commander Yeh Win arrested a Taw Koh villager on charges of having contact with the resistance after discovering two disposable alkaline batteries in his hut. The possession of batteries is prohibited in many parts of Karen State for fear that the villagers will give the batteries to members of the KNLA who may use them in their walkie-talkies or homemade landmines. The villager was fined 30,000 kyat before being released. Had the soldiers actually believed that the villager was a member of the KNLA they simply would have executed him rather than letting him go after paying a bribe. Arrest and extortion under the pretext of helping the resistance is common.¹⁷⁹

On 9 September 2006, LIB #351 Battalion Commander Than Tate demanded 23,000 kyat from fish farmers in Hteh Htoo village, Nyaunglebin District. He said that the villagers would have to purchase a travel pass for 20,000 kyat to be allowed to leave the village to tend to their fish. Furthermore, they had to pay an additional fee of 3,000 kyat that would permit them to sleep in their field huts and remain away from the village for up to five days.¹⁸⁰

On 11 September 2006, the Operations Commander based in Kyauk Kyi summoned all fishermen to a meeting where he demanded all those with fish farms to pay 100,000 kyat for each pond that they owned. There are 23 fish farms in the area so the villagers were forced to pay a total of 2,300,000 kyat to the commander.¹⁸¹

Mon State

In February 2006, SPDC authorities demanded money from Ham-Gam village in southern Mon State to cover the costs of a flood mitigation project. Each household was ordered to pay 30,000 kyat towards widening and deepening a nearby stream to prevent it from flooding during the rainy season. The money was reported to 'hire' an SPDC bulldozer and pay for its fuel, though according to a local villager, *"only the richer households [could] afford to pay the hefty sum of thirty thousand [kyat], while the poorer ones [paid] three thousands [kyat]"*. According to the report, the 45-odd members of the SPDC-affiliated USDA, *"Women Affairs Committee"* (MWAFF or MMCWA), and SPDC-appointed schoolteachers were exempt from paying, while the village-appointed teachers who receive salaries of only 5,000 kyat per month were forced to pay. The widening of the stream ate into a number of farmlands along the banks of the stream, although the 3 villagers who were affected were not compensated. Ham-Gam village is comprised of approximately 3,000 households; though official household lists only record 2,000 houses – allowing the local SPDC army officers to pocket the money extorted from the 1,000 additional undeclared households after paying his superiors.¹⁸²

Following an explosion on the gas pipeline cutting across southern Mudon Township on 1 February 2006, several villages in the local area were ordered to pay huge monthly *"security fees"* to SPDC army officers. The demands ranged from 50,000 and 100,000 kyat, depending on the size of the village.¹⁸³

In April 2006, the Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) reported that SPDC army soldiers operating under Southeast Command had recently started to extort up to 100,000 kyat from ferryboat operators each time that they crossed under the Thanlwin Bridge stretching from Moulmein to Muttama.¹⁸⁴

Starting on 12 May 2006, each of the 2,500 households in Kyaik Kha Mi village in Thanbyuzayat Township were ordered to hand over 1,500 kyat for the purpose of upgrading roads in the area.¹⁸⁵

It was reported that in June 2006, the Kyaik Mayaw TPDC declared that they would install 15 computers in a unspecified high school in the township and that they would need a sum of six million kyat to accomplish this. The township authorities then proceeded to demand between 5,000 and 7,000 kyat from all of the approximately 2,000 households with students. By the third week of June, the TPDC had already extorted ten million kyat from the villagers.¹⁸⁶

On 15 August 2006, 119 different businessmen from Three Pagodas Pass were summoned to a meeting with the TPDC where they were told that they had to contribute 140,000 Thai baht between them. The more affluent business owners were ordered to pay 4,000 baht each, while furniture factory owners and the owners of weaving businesses had to pay 2,000 baht and 500 baht respectively. The money was said to be used towards the construction of a new artillery battalion camp at nearby Naga Taung on the Thai-Burma border. The businessmen were only given 4 days in which to pay the demands.¹⁸⁷

It was reported in August 2006 that SPDC authorities have begun to fine Mon youths for adhering to their traditions of preparing food for the elderly each week. Under the tradition, the youths cook and donate food for elderly members of their community adhering to the Buddhist precepts each week on the Sabbath during the period of Buddhist Lent. However, members of the VPDC in Nyaung Gone village have started collecting ‘taxes’ of 1,000 kyat from these groups of youths as they are gathered and prepare the food. Failure to pay the demands attracts a 4,000 kyat fine. Either way, the youths are forced to pay.¹⁸⁸

During September 2006, TPDC authorities forcibly collected 1,000 kyat from each household in La-mine Township for the La-mine Township Administrative Championship (LTAC) football game. The 11 Mon villages comprising the township were each required to pay 80,000 kyat, while the 5 smaller Karen villages were each ordered to pay 40,000 kyat. Ta Mok Nin, one of the Mon villages, refused to field a team and thus was fined 300,000 kyat.¹⁸⁹

It was reported in September 2006 that Min Tha, the deputy director of Customs Department, for La-mine sub-Township has begun ordering small businesses which own computers to pay an additional tax to register the fact. According to one businessman, who said on condition of anonymity, *“I just own a computer, printer, and a scanner. I have to pay 60,000 [kyat] for this year but next year I have to pay 30,000 kyat as an additional rate. ... I earn less than 10,000 kyat a month and this amount of tax will affect me badly”*.¹⁹⁰

In September 2006, villagers from Mudon Township were ordered to provide the names of family members working in Thailand, along with how much each of them earned. It was believed that upon returning from Thailand, they would be forced to pay tax to the SPDC. The villagers were also ordered to pay 200 kyat for each name that they provided to the

VPDC. The villagers were warned that anyone returning from Thailand whose name was not on the lists would be arrested.¹⁹¹

It was reported in mid-December 2006 that every household from 7 villages in Kawkareik Township were forced to pay 3,500 kyat towards the inauguration of a new high school. According to Nai Mon, a local member of the Mon Literature and Culture Committee (MLCC), *“There are over 2,000 households and each household had to pay Kyat 3,500 Kyats for the high school inaugural ceremony”*. The affected villages included:

1. Kanni;
2. Koh Kyaik;
3. Koh Layan;
4. Koh Phaik;
5. Koh Kar;
6. Ywear Kalay; and
7. Tadar Oo.¹⁹²

Rangoon Division

In August 2006, it was reported that restaurant owners in Rangoon were ordered to collect an additional ten percent tax on food from their customers. Restaurant owners, however, reported that customers had refused to pay the new tax.¹⁹³

Shan State

On an unspecified date in early 2006, 21-year-old Zaai Pan from Keng Tung was stopped by two traffic policemen at an intersection as he was riding his motorcycle to the local market. Unable to find any problem with the bike, or with Zaai Pan's license or driving, the officers demanded 3,000 kyat for failing to “look to his left and right before he turned at the junction which was a breach of the traffic law”. While Zaai Pan was arguing his innocence, an SPDC army soldier who was not even wearing a helmet turned the same intersection without indicating or even looking. When he questioned the policemen why they had not stopped the soldier, asking, *“Why didn't you stop that man and fine him like me. He just did and I did, but he didn't even care to look left and right?”*, he was simply told to shut up and mind his own business.¹⁹⁴

In early 2006, farmers in Wan Kha village tract in Kyawk-Me Township were ordered by LIB #502 to pay levies for growing crops on their own land. Rice farmers were obliged to pay 5,000 kyat for every two baskets (50 kg / 110 lb) of seed sown. The farmers were told that failure to pay the tax would result in confiscation of their farmland.¹⁹⁵

In April 2006, villagers from Pung Pa Khem village, Murng-Ton Township living in newly constructed homes were ordered to pay a ‘new house’ tax by soldiers from LIB #528. Each of the 36 bamboo homes built since the beginning of 2006 had to pay 10,000 kyat, while the 15 two-storey concrete and/or timber houses were forced to pay 50,000 kyat each.¹⁹⁶

On 1 May 2006, LIB #332 issued an order to all 150-odd households in the “new town” quarter of Murng-Pan to contribute 1,000 kyat per month towards the peoples' militia force. Murng-Pan reportedly hosts a peoples' militia of approximately 70 villagers who must accompany SPDC army soldiers on patrol as well as guarding a nearby pagoda.¹⁹⁷

In late-May 2006, every household in Keng Tung Township was forced to pay 400-500 kyat to cover the costs of making copies of videos of a drug-burning ceremony held on 25 May 2006. A total of 15 videos were produced, at the stated cost of 1.3 million kyat each, and were to be distributed to “*foreign dignitaries*” and journalists who had attended the ceremony. However, it was reported that only six of the videos were distributed, while the others sat in the township office collecting dust.¹⁹⁸

At the end of July 2006, SPDC authorities extorted large sums of money from Muse and Nam-Kham Townships in northern Shan State to contribute to the building costs of the construction of the new capital at Naypyidaw. Other townships were also claimed to also have suffered from extortion but the amounts demanded from them were not disclosed. The amounts reported are as follows:

Muse Township, 550 million kyat; and
Nam-Kham Township, 275 million kyat.¹⁹⁹

It was reported In October 2006 that SPDC officials at airports in Shan State had been extorting up to 3,000 kyat from every passenger who wished to fly. Those passengers who did bring additional money to pay the extortion were refused permission to board, had their tickets taken away from them and were instructed to catch the next flight, which depending on the location, could be several days away.²⁰⁰

Taxes for Development Projects

Concerned with enhancing its international image, the junta has attempted to show the world all the ways that it is developing the nation and improving the living conditions of its population. The regime has thus initiated many national infrastructure and development projects which they tout to the international media as proof of not only the good work they are doing but also their inherent benevolent nature. These have included the construction of new roads and bridges, schools and medical facilities, dams, and various agricultural projects. (For more information on the SPDC’s latest agricultural project, see Section 5.3: Physic Nut Agricultural Development Project). However, Burma’s social, education and healthcare sectors remain seriously neglected by the SPDC and suffer from an acute shortage of funding. Consequently, local people are commonly ordered to pay for the costs of many of these development projects as well as then being forced to provide their unpaid labour for the projects. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). Though the SPDC invariably takes credit for the various national infrastructure and development projects, it is the local people who are most often responsible for the financing and construction of such projects. Funding provided by the SPDC towards such projects is typically either grossly insufficient or misappropriated by corrupt SPDC army officers and officials, and villagers are then ordered to provide the money and supplies necessary to complete the projects. It is therefore quite difficult to believe the SPDC when they claim that their development projects are being undertaken for the sole benefit of the civilian population when so many of them involve extortion from the local populations that they are claimed to be for the benefit of.

Checkpoints

Travel in Burma involves negotiating passage through a series of checkpoints manned by the SPDC and several of their allied ceasefire groups. Passage through a checkpoint is typically only secured after payment of a toll or fee, the amount of which varies from checkpoint to checkpoint and is set by those manning it (or by their commanding officers). Most towns and larger villages have permanent checkpoints stationed at all points of access and egress. Similarly, in many areas of armed conflict, villages are enclosed within fences leaving only one or two gates through which villagers may pass, each of which is monitored by a checkpoint. Many roads are also dotted with successions of checkpoints. In some areas, civilians must negotiate at least a dozen such checkpoints, each of which exacts their toll of cash or goods from the travellers. (For more information, see Chapter 12: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement and the subsequent section on Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation).

Checkpoints – partial list of incidents for 2006

Arakan State

On 3 April 2006, SPDC army soldier manning “Army Outpost 18” on the outskirts of Maungdaw arrested and detained three Rohingya from Nanragoon village in Buthidaung Township as they returned from working Maungdaw Township. The three young men: Mohamed Salim, 18; Shamsul Alam, 19; and Zani Alam, 19; had acquired travel permits allowing them to travel to Maungdaw Township for work for a period of no longer than two months. Just prior to the expiry of their permits, the men returned home and were searched on reaching Army Outpost 18 where the soldiers discovered 50,000 kyat on Mohamed Salim, 60,000 kyat on Shamsul Alam and 40,000 kyat on Zani Alam. The money was confiscated and their travel permits destroyed. Two days later the three men stood trial in Maungdaw for travelling without permits and were each sentenced to three years imprisonment. Army Outpost 18 has become locally infamous for misappropriating money and goods from Rohingya. It has been reported that the soldiers also bother to stop Rohingya and allow all others to pass freely without harassment.²⁰¹

It was reported in June 2006 that Sergeant Aung Myo Lwin, an SPDC army intelligence officer based at the Maungdaw checkpoint has been extorting 5,000 kyat from each passenger before permitting them passage onwards to Bangladesh. Previously, travellers would pay a 300-500 kyat ‘toll’ at the checkpoint or up to 1,000 kyat if they were transporting goods. The tariff increased only after Aung Myo Lwin arrived, who is believed to be pocketing the money for himself.²⁰²

Karen State

In the beginning of October 2006, SPDC authorities manning the checkpoint at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot checkpoint were issued with computers, prompting the toll for those wishing to cross into Thailand to take a ten-fold leap. Previously, Burmese travellers were only charged 100 kyat at the checkpoint to go to Thailand, but since the introduction of the computers, the tariff has increased to 1,000 kyat.²⁰³

Mon State

It was reported in December 2006 that the new road linking the border town of Three Pagoda Pass with Mon State has no less than 28 checkpoints established along its 60 mile (96 km) length, despite the fact that the road has not even officially opened yet. It was reported that all armed groups operating in the area, including the SPDC, DKBA, Karen Peace Force (KPF), New Mon State Party (NMSP), and KNU all man checkpoints along the road's length. (For more information on each of these groups, see Chapter 8: Ethnic Minority Rights). Buses that ply the route are easy targets and, according to one driver, must pay at least 15,000 kyat at each of the checkpoints. During 2006, six new checkpoints were reported as having been built on the road; three of which are manned by SPDC army soldiers and three occupied by KPF soldiers. As a result of the proliferation of more checkpoints, and thus greater cost to the driver, the bus fare has increased by more than 5,000 kyat in the past year to 35,000 kyat for the journey.²⁰⁴



Photo taken in April 2006 inside of the remains of what was once a Karen villager's home. SPDC army soldiers have systematically targeted civilian villages in for destruction throughout 2006. Clearly visible is the salt container spilt by the soldiers and sheets of split bamboo which would once have been wall panels. [Photo: FBR]

Looting and Expropriation of Food and Possessions

In 1998, the SPDC launched its Self-Reliance Program, in which rations distributed to battalions in the field were drastically cut. It was announced that frontline SPDC army units would have to "live off the land" and acquire rations by their own means from local communities. This, quite obviously, resulted in a sharp increase in looting and the expropriation of food and possessions from local communities. In much the same way as all other abuses they are subjected to, the villagers and townsfolk dare not protest or speak out against the soldiers knowing that they will likely be beaten and/or be relieved of yet more of their belongings. Under the Program, the practices of extortion, looting, and the expropriation of food and possessions are not only condoned, but encouraged by the SPDC.

People are frequently ordered to provide SPDC army units with food, alcohol, clothing, cash and building materials. These demands are often issued to villages in writing in the form of order documents. The soldiers also make regular *ad hoc* demands of villagers whenever they enter a village or encounter them on a path or out in their fields.

In many parts of Burma, SPDC army soldiers order villagers and townsfolk to provide them with building materials such as logs, timber, bamboo, palm roofing thatch, and mud bricks. Payment is almost never made, and on those rare occasions when it is, it is typically well below the prevailing market rate. While some of the building materials are used to repair local army camps, most of it finds its way into Burma's commercial markets where it is sold for profit, none of which is ever given to the villagers who did all of the work.

Theft and looting by SPDC soldiers and officials is also rife. There have been repeated reported instances of armed soldiers walking into shops, taking what they please, and leaving without paying. Shopkeepers report that they are too afraid of what the soldiers might do to them to object or demand payment.

Looting and Expropriation of Food and Possessions – partial list of incidents for 2006

Arakan State

In early January 2006, 3 soldiers from LIB #564 donned civilian clothing and crept into Palay Daung village, Buthidaung Township late at night. They snuck into the home of 35-year-old Koli Mullah while he and his family slept and stole a bag of rice, some dried chillies and clothing before Koli Mullah woke up and the soldiers fled.²⁰⁵

On 20 January 2006, soldiers from LIB #564 ordered each house in Kring Tha Mar Palley Daung and all other nearby villages in Buthidaung Township to provide 6 logs measuring 12 feet (3.6 metres) in length and 4 inches (10 cm) in diameter for use in the construction of a new army camp. The villagers were not paid for their labour or the materials that they supplied and any household that failed to produce their quota of logs was fined 5,000 kyat.²⁰⁶

On 5 March 2006, NaSaKa soldiers entered Tharay Kondan village in Maungdaw Township and confiscated 12 buffaloes belonging to Haji Ahamed Kobir. The soldiers handed the buffaloes over to their superiors in Buthidaung, alleging that they were being smuggled to Bangladesh, despite the fact that they had been registered with the NaSaKa. Shortly afterwards, the villagers filled out official complaint forms and reported the matter to higher authorities. Within a matter of days, the soldiers returned to the village, detained those who had complained, tortured them, and forced them to sign confessions stating that the buffaloes were being smuggled to Bangladesh.²⁰⁷

On 16 July 2006, 30-year-old Rohingya Abdul Rahim from Koe Tan Kauk village in Rathedaung Township was obliged to pay a bribe of 400,000 kyat to the NaSaKa for permission to build a new home.²⁰⁸

It was reported that by the end of June 2006, the SPDC army battalions stationed in Arakan State under two of the three different Military Operations Commands (MOC) had deposited a more than 460 million kyat into the Myanmar Ubai Ltd. Bank. All of this money had been extorted from local communities. According to the report, the 11 battalions comprising MOC #15 operating in Buthidaung Township had deposited 252,391,415.75 into the bank by the end of June 2006. The breakdown of these deposits are as follows:

1. LIB #535, 21,594,331.08 kyat;
2. LIB #536, 15,684,374.10 kyat;
3. LIB #537, 13,691,934.36 kyat;
4. LIB #346, 32,761,032.75 kyat;
5. LIB #352, 37,531,529.76 kyat;
6. LIB #551, 11,858,898.41 kyat;
7. LIB #552, 13,480,849.73 kyat;
8. LIB #353, 25,863,920.85 kyat;
9. LIB #564, 12,446,329.43 kyat;
10. LIB #565, 14,252,872.14 kyat; and
11. MOC #15 headquarters (HQ) battalion 53,233,743.04 kyat.

Moreover, a total of 209,826,674.41 kyat was deposited by the 11 battalions making up MOC #5. The breakdown of these deposits are as follows:

1. LIB #542, 14,525,866.84 kyat;
2. LIB #543, 17,062,232.66 kyat;
3. LIB #544, 17,657,522.69 kyat;
4. LIB #562, 16,508,514.63 kyat;
5. LIB #563, 16,816,482.78 kyat;
6. LIB #364, 17,240,034.16 kyat;
7. LIB #566, 14,460,124.83 kyat;
8. LIB #371, 14,594,004.00 kyat;
9. LIB #372, 14,803,334.00 kyat;
10. LIB #373, 13,156,101.82 kyat; and
11. MOC #5 HQ battalion, 53,002,456.16 kyat.

At the time of the report, the amounts saved by MOC #9 and Western Command, both of which are also stationed in Arakan State, were not available, but could be assumed to have misappropriated similar amounts from the population of Arakan State as those quoted above.²⁰⁹

On 15 November 2006, SPDC army soldiers confiscated clothing valued at 250,000 kyat that a trader had just bought in Bangladesh because they were of the “*wrong kind*” and were not allowed to be brought into Burma. The trader, 20-year-old Rohingya Habibur Rahaman, from Nayapara village had already been granted permission from the NaSaKa to travel to Bangladesh and to return with clothing that he had bought there. However, as he was returning home, he was apprehended by SPDC army soldiers and detained for nine days. Upon releasing him, the soldiers did not return the clothing.²¹⁰

Chin State

On 4 January 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #266 extorted a large sum of money from Chin traders as they were taking their pigs to market. Ral Ceu, Biak Pum and Hrang Pum, all from Ruavan village were herding their pigs to markets located on the India-Burma border where the livestock would fetch higher prices when they were apprehended by 14 soldiers who demanded 50,000 kyat before they would let them go. The villagers pleaded with the sergeant that they did not have much money although to little effect. The villagers were released and allowed to continue on their way after handing over 48,000 kyat – a reduction of only 2,000 kyat.²¹¹

On 29 April 2006, SPDC army soldiers extorted 150,000 kyat from two Chin traders as they were transporting their goods to Mizoram State in India. The two villagers were stopped by five soldiers from LIB #268 who proceeded to search the loads that they were transporting. Unable to find any fault, the soldiers demanded 250,000 kyat as an “*unofficial border tax*”. The traders beseeched the soldiers until finally they agreed to reduce their demand to the 150,000 kyat that the villagers ultimately paid. Though the soldiers used the term tax to describe their demand, it amounted to little more than simple extortion.²¹²

On 11 May 2006, Chin trader Pi Pen Cuai from Thantlang was ordered to pay a “fine” of 41,000 kyat for using an “*unauthorized land route to sell her goods in Mizoram State, India*”. Shortly after setting out from her home with her three horses laden with goods, local police chased her down and threatened her with 3 months imprisonment and the confiscation of all of her goods. In order to be allowed to continue on her way she had to pay 35,000 kyat to avoid being imprisoned and a further 6,000 kyat to retain possession of her goods.²¹³

On May 25 2006, Captain Aung Kyaw Thein of LIB #355 issued orders to a number of nearby villages demanding that they each deliver 5 chickens to his camp at Shinletwah village. Chickens cost 3,000 kyat each in local markets at the time, so each village was forced to pay 15,000 kyat each month for the soldiers’ chicken. The order was issued to the following villages:

1. Pathian Tlang village;
2. Pintia village;
3. Hemate village;
4. Hemapi village;
5. Sia O village; and
6. Para village.²¹⁴

On an unspecified date in July 2006, Daw Mang Iang was leading her 32 horses, laden with goods to Mizoram State in India when she was stopped by SPDC army soldiers and forced to pay a bribe of 200,000 kyat. Daw Mang Iang, from Cawng Thia village was passing through Nga Lang when 15 soldiers from LIB #266, led by Major Htay Aung stopped the caravan she was travelling with. They group was threatened with imprisonment lest they paid the sum.²¹⁵

On 29 September 2006, a sergeant with LIB #268 extorted one million kyat and 4 head of cattle from traders as they were travelling to India. The traders, from Daidin village in Magwe Division were herding their 29 head of cattle to better markets in Mizoram State of India. Upon seeing the traders as they passed through Lungcawipi village, the sergeant immediately ordered his men to stop them and confiscated their cattle and threatened that the cattle would not be returned lest they handed over 1,500,000 kyat. Not carrying this amount

of money, the traders arranged to borrow the money from local villagers (presumably repaying them on their return from India). However, they were only able to raise a total of 1,000,000 kyat to pay off the soldiers, so the sergeant took the money and also kept 4 of the cattle, which he later reportedly sold for 480,000 kyat.²¹⁶

In November 2006, Major Kyaw Kyaw Oo of LIB #269 demanded between 50,000 and 100,000 kyat from 19 different villages in Thangtlang Township to repair the fences encircling various SPDC army camps. The size of the village dictated how much they had to pay. The villages affected included:

1. Zangtlang;
2. Lungler;
3. Fungkah;
4. Sih Hmuh;
5. Bung Khua;
6. Rua Khua;
7. Rua Buk;
8. Thau;
9. Bung Tlang;
10. Tlanglo;
11. Tlangpi;
12. Lung Ding;
13. Far Rawn;
14. Vang Zang;
15. So Pum;
16. Dawn;
17. Ral pel;
18. Tah Tlang; and
19. Tlang Khua.²¹⁷



Karen villagers from southwestern Papun district preparing their quota of bamboo and roofing thatch demanded by a nearby SPDC army camp in July 2006. Demands of this sort are regularly made of villagers who, fearing repercussions for lack of compliance, often find that they have little choice but to provide that which is demanded. Time spent provided for the demands of the soldiers results in less time that the villagers have to work to sustain their livelihoods. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Kachin State

On 22 June 2006, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers had been charging people with loitering as they queued to buy train tickets in Myitkyina. High demand for train tickets has dictated that many commuters must begin to queue for tickets at 3:00 am though the tickets do not actually go on sale until 6:00 am. The passengers are threatened with between 8 days and 3 months imprisonment if they are unable to meet the fine. Similarly, it was reported that many trains do not arrive at Myitkyina train station until quite late at night and SPDC authorities arrest those who have just disembarked from the train, also for loitering.²¹⁸

Karen State

In January 2006, Pu Plah, a non-commissioned officer (NCO) of the DKBA, reportedly demanded 1,000 shingles of roofing thatch from Ler Kheh Khaw village in Papun District, 500 of which were to go to his camp while the other 500 were for himself. Many DKBA officers have been demanding large quantities of roofing thatch from villages all over Karen State over the past few years which they sell for their own personal profit.²¹⁹

In January 2006, the following villages were issued orders by SPDC and DKBA camps in Papun to provide them with the following quantities of roofing thatch:

1. Kler Ru Der village, 1,750 shingles;
2. Wah Mi Day village, 1,250 shingles;
3. Klaw Hta village, 850 shingles;
4. Toh Thay Pu village, 200 shingles;
5. Hto Lwee Kyo village, 1,250 shingles;
6. Day Baw Khaw village, 1,250 shingles; and
7. Ter Khaw Kyo village, 1,250 shingles.²²⁰

On January 18th, Pah Mya and Tun Kyaing, two DKBA NCOs demanded 1,000 shingles of roofing thatch and 500 lengths of bamboo from a village in Bu Tho Township of Papun District for use in the construction of their camp.²²¹

On 2 February 2006, Captain Than Htun of the DKBA Headquarters Security Force demanded that the villagers of K--- village in Thaton District send him 2,000 shingles of roofing thatch. It was reported that demands of this sort are issued to all local villages on an annual basis so that the DKBA can then sell the thatch in the commercial markets for profit.²²²

On 4 February 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #341 looted the following goods from Kler Ko village in Papun District:

1. 3 ducks;
2. 1 bowl (1.6 kg / 3.4 lb) of rice;
3. half a viss (800 grams / 1.7 lb) of chillies;
4. 1 bottle gourd; and
5. 1 pig weighing 13 viss (21 kg / 45 lb).

The following day, the same group of soldiers also looted one chicken and one bowl of rice from Soe Kee Law village. The soldiers did not compensate the villagers for any of the goods that they had taken.²²³

On 13 February 2006, the Tactical Operations Commander from TOC #663 demanded 1 sack of rice from each household of Yu Loh and K'Mwee Loh villages in Toungoo District. Similar orders for fish paste, chilli and salt were also issued to villagers from Play Hsa Loh village.²²⁴

On 14 February 2006, troops from Column #1 and Column #2 of IB #14 went to Saw Mu Der village in Toungoo District and looted the villagers' belongings and livestock.²²⁵

On 14 February 2006, Bo Tun Nay Lin from IB #48 demanded 1,000 kyat from each villager in Shan Si Boh village in Toungoo District that owned a bullock cart.²²⁶

On 14 February 2006, Column commander Myint Soe from LIB #108 looted 1 pig weighing 35 viss (57 kg / 126 lb), and 3 chickens from the villagers of Play Hsa Loh village in Toungoo District. The following day, Myint Soe looted an additional eight chickens and four ducks from the same villagers.²²⁷

At midnight on 15 February 2006, three SPDC army officers from LID #44 entered a village home in Kaw Pu village tract of Papun District. The soldiers pointed their sidearms at the inhabitants and demanded that they hand over whatever money they had. The villagers said that they did not have any money, but the officers rifled through the house searching for it, ultimately finding a total of 11,000 kyat and 300 Thai baht that belonged to the house owner's cousin.²²⁸

On 16 February 2006, an unnamed DKBA unit based in Pa'an Township, Thaton District demanded 50 bamboo poles of from Meh Theh Khee village.²²⁹

On 21 February 2006, SPDC army officer San Win ordered that the following number of lengths of bamboo from villagers in Thaton District be delivered to the Pa Nwe Kla SPDC army camp:

1. Ka Taw Ni village, 1,000 bamboo poles;
2. Pa Nwe Kla village, 3,000 bamboo poles; and
3. Noe Nyar village, 300 bamboo poles.²³⁰

On 26 February 2006, KNLA soldiers mounted an attack against a DKBA camp at Meh Mweh Hta in Papun District. In retaliation for the attack, the DKBA fined the following six villages in the vicinity:

1. Meh Mweh Hta, 200,000 kyat;
2. Nay Thay Law, 200,000 kyat;
3. Ler Kheh Khaw, 200,000 kyat;
4. Wah Klu Ko, 300,000 kyat;
5. T' Per Pah, 300,000 kyat; and
6. Kler Chit Ko, 300,000 kyat.²³¹

On 5 March 2006 DKBA officer Maung Pu, issued orders to several villages in the vicinity of his camp in Papun District to each give him 300,000 kyat following a skirmish with the KNLA in which a number of DKBA were killed and their weapons captured. The villages which had received this order included:

1. Meh Ku Kee;
2. Meh Ku Hta;
3. Htee Doh Hta;

4. Toh Mu;
5. Dta Per Pah;
6. Kler Hsi Ko;
7. Wah Klu Ko;
8. Meh Mweh Hta; and
9. Nyat Tin Loh.²³²

On 7 March 2006, SPDC army officer San Win demanded that the following goods be delivered to his camp at Pa Nwe Kla in Thaton District by 26 March 2006:

1. Noh Nyar Thu village, 2,000 shingles of roofing thatch and 2,000 lengths of bamboo;
2. Ta La Aw village, 2,000 shingles of roofing thatch and 2,000 lengths of bamboo;
3. Noh Toh Day village, 2,000 shingles of roofing thatch and 2,000 lengths of bamboo; and
4. Htee Poh Thay village, 2,000 shingles of roofing thatch and 2,000 lengths of bamboo.²³³

On 13 March 2006, a column of about 50 SPDC army soldiers from LIB #599, led by Ba Thaung, demanded 500 shingles of roofing leaves and one person from each household to contribute their uncompensated labour to build an SPDC army camp. The following villages in Nyaunglebin were among those affected:

1. Kyauk Pyar village;
2. Nga Lauk Htet village;
3. Thit Cha Seik village;
4. Oak Shi Khin village;
5. Po Thaung Su village;
6. Tai Pin village; and
7. Myeik Ye village.²³⁴

On 14 March 2006, Commander Aye Chan Tha Yan from LIB #341 ordered Klaw Day village in Papun District to deliver 300 shingles of roofing thatch to his camp at T'Kun Htaing. A similar order for 150 shingles of thatch had also been issued to the village in February.²³⁵

On 16 March 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #582 destroyed 15 baskets of rice, 9 cooking pots, 10 plates and 1 bag of salt belonging to villagers from Pee Htee Po Kee village in Mergui-Tavoy District (Tenasserim Division).²³⁶

On 26 March 2006, SPDC army troops from LIB #439 forcibly demanded the following goods from Noh Ghaw village:

1. 29 pairs of shoes;
2. 26 mosquito nets; and
3. 26 sarongs.²³⁷

On 30 March 2006, two columns of SPDC army troops from LIB #1 looted approximately 65,700 kyat worth of belongings from the following villagers from an undisclosed village in Toungoo District:

1. Naw Keh Lar, 3 chickens, 1 bottle of cooking oil, 16 kilograms of rice, 6 kilograms of sticky rice, 1 package of curry powder, 4 knives, and 1 pair of betelnut shears;
2. Naw Moo Mya, 1 viss (1.6 kg / 3.6 lb) of chicken;
3. Naw Ka Paw, 8,000 kyat;

4. Naw Htoo Paw, 1 viss of chicken;
5. Saw Gleh Paw, 2 sarongs and 3 chickens; and
6. 2,000 kyat from the Church donations.²³⁸

On 4 April 2006, SPDC army soldiers from IB #253, led by Bo Saung Ton Lay, ordered the villagers from Pee Htee Khee village in Thaton District to deliver 5,000 lengths of bamboo and 50 wooden posts to Peh Wah Hta monastery.²³⁹

On 13 April 2006, SPDC army troops from IB #20 demanded 1,000 lengths of bamboo and 70 long wooden poles from each of the following villages in Toungoo District:

1. New Htee Tha Saw village;
2. Upper and Lower Htee Tha Saw village; and
3. Kazen Ploh village.²⁴⁰

On 14 April 2006, SPDC army troops from IB #53 demanded 10,000 kyat from Saw Ka Lah of Taw one village in Toungoo District and each of the following villagers from nearby Shan Si Boh village:

1. Saw Maung Ne;
2. Saw Ka Na; and
3. Saw Poe Htoo.²⁴¹

On 16 April 2006, two columns of SPDC army troops operating under LIB #567 entered Plaw Baw Der and Ta Pa Kee villages in Toungoo District demanding the following:

1. 250 kilograms of rice;
2. 8 viss (13 kg / 29 lb) of cooking oil;
3. 5 ducks;
4. 5 chickens;
5. 5 viss (8 kg / 18 lb) of tobacco;
6. 4 viss (6.5 kg / 14.5 lb) of dried fish;
7. 2 cooking pots;
8. 1 blanket; and
9. 1 pig.²⁴²

On 16 April 2006, soldiers from Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) #168 and 522 under Military Operations Command (MOC) #16 entered Plaw Baw Der village in Toungoo District and stole the following goods left behind by the fleeing villagers:

1. Saw Ma Hen Sein: 2 baskets of rice, and 1 duck;
2. Saw Maw Heh Pwey: 1 tin of rice, and 3 ducks;
3. Saw Pey Key Lay: 1 tin of rice, and 1 pig (worth 35,500 kyat);
4. Saw Gay Lay: 8 viss of cooking oil;
5. Saw Ma Nu Sein: 1 viss of tobacco, 2 big pots, 2 blankets, and 1 tin of rice;
6. Naw Hser Paw: 3 chickens; and
7. Naw Ma Thu: 4 viss of dried fish.²⁴³

On 18 April 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #223 entered Mae K'Dee Traw village in Nyaunglebin District and stole belongings worth 1,500,000 kyat from Kaw Hsa Mo after eating her pig. The soldiers also looted property belonging to Paw Kyi Htoo valued at 50,000 kyat and destroyed 10 baskets of paddy seed belonging to Saw Tint Soe²⁴⁴

On 1 May 2006, SPDC army troops operating in Nyanglebin District looted the following items from Bweh Deh village:

1. Saw Pho Taw, 1 large cooking pot worth 46,300 kyat, 1 homemade musket, 1 tin box, 1 traditional Karen costume, 1 rain coat, 10 baskets (250 kg / 550 lb) of rice, 4 knives, and 10 viss 160 kg / 360 lb) of salt;
2. Naw Ku Htoo, 1 large cooking pot worth 50,600 kyat, and 5 shirts;
3. Honey Moo, 1 large cooking pot worth 50,600 kyat, 3 plates, 5 shirts, 3 sarongs, 1 traditional Karen costume, 2 blankets, 15 cups, and a pair of shorts;
4. Saw Ray Htoo, 1 homemade musket worth 56,500 kyat, 2 fishing nets, 2 women's sarongs, 8 shirts, 8 children's shirts, 1 dress, 2 knives, 1 cassette recorder and 1 cooking pot;
5. Saw Peh Htoo Moe, 4 cooking pots valued at 6,000 kyat; and
6. Lah May Paw Moe, 1 homemade musket worth 20,000 kyat, and 1 fishing net.²⁴⁵

On 1 May 2006, a column of SPDC army troops operating in Nyaunglebin District found four paddy barns in Kwee Lah village tract and demanded the following:

1. Saw Di Kee Moe, 70 baskets of paddy;
2. Saw Aye Hsay, 100 baskets of paddy;
3. Pah Doh Mya, 90 baskets of paddy; and
4. Saw Hseh Lay, 150 baskets of paddy.²⁴⁶

On 5 May 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #1 entered Hsaw Wah Der village in Toungoo District and demanded the following:

1. Naw Myay Thaw, 2 baskets of rice, 5 cooking pots, 5 viss of fishpaste, 2 large cooking pots, 1 plastic bottle, 10 viss of betelnut, 2 knives, 240,000 kyat and other items;
2. Naw Mu Su, 1 sack of rice, 2 viss of fishpaste, 5 viss of salt, 3 plates, 3 spoons and 1 knife; and

Saw Pi Pa, 2 homemade muskets, 10 plates, 1 large plastic bottle, clothing worth 10,000 kyat, 1 basket of rice, medicine for family use, 1 viss of chilli, 5 viss of fishpaste, 10 viss of betelnut, 1 cassette recorder, 3 flashlights (torches) and , 3 sets of batteries.²⁴⁷

On 10 May 2006, four columns of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #1 and LIB #108 burned down five homes and three paddy storage barns in Hsaw Wah Der in Toungoo District. Before leaving, the soldiers also looted the following goods:

1. 20 sheets of corrugated iron roofing;
2. 20 big knives;
3. 1 chicken;
4. 1 goat;
5. 25 viss of betelnut;
6. 5 sacks of rice;
7. 12 viss of fishpaste;
8. 10 viss of salt;
9. 1 viss of chilli;
10. 12 cooking pots;
11. 3 steel cooking tripods;
12. 120 baskets of paddy;
13. 9 big plastic bottles (for carrying water);
14. 1 cassette recorder;
15. 2 homemade muskets;

16. 1 air rifle;
17. 3 flashlights (torches);
18. 2 sets of batteries;
19. 5 pairs of flip-flops;
20. 4 large paddy baskets;
21. 3 sleeping mats;
22. clothing valued at 150,000 kyat;
23. medicine worth 70,000 kyat;
24. 24 plates;
25. 6 spoons; and
26. 2 teapots.²⁴⁸

On 12 May 2006, the commanding officer of IB #30 demanded 200 lengths of bamboo from a village in Meh Cho village tract, Papun District. The commander specified that each piece of bamboo was to be 14 cubits (6.4 metres / 21 feet) in length and two hand spans (46 cm / 18 inches) in circumference.²⁴⁹

On 16 May 2006, DKBA soldiers Pah Thu and Than Htun came to Nya Po Kee village in Thaton District and took one goat from Mu Khee Moe and three chickens from Saw Nya Ko without payment.²⁵⁰

On 2 June 2006, Saw Hla Maung, a deputy battalion commander of DKBA #777 Brigade demanded 30,000 kyat from villagers in Htaw Klaw Kee village in Thaton District.²⁵¹

On 7 June 2006, Sergeant Poe Ye Min of LIB #599 demanded 288 kilograms of rice and 2 litres of cooking oil from Noh Nya Lah village in Nyaunglebin District.²⁵²

On 8 June 2006, Moe Kyo of the DKBA Central Security Battalion extorted the following items from these villagers in Thaton District:

1. Khin Win Kyi Moe, 1 *pyi* (1.6 kg / 3.4 lb) of rice;
2. Saw Hser Paw, 3 *pyi* of rice;
3. Naw Hta Mu, 2 *pyi* of rice;
4. Naw Dah, 2 *pyi* of rice;
5. Naw Kyi, 4 *pyi* of rice;
6. Naw Baw, 4 *pyi* of rice;
7. Naw Eh Say Moo, 3 *pyi* of rice;
8. Naw Htoo Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice;
9. Paw Say Blut Moe, 3 *pyi* of rice;
10. Maung Ta Doh Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice and 11 steel plates;
11. Pah Lay Wah Moe 3 *pyi* of rice and 1 metal plate;
12. Saw Ku aye Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice;
13. Naw Mu Kyi *pyi* of rice;
14. Ma Pya, 4 *pyi* of rice;
15. Pee Thu Meh, 3 *pyi* of rice;
16. Ma Shwee Po, 3 *pyi* of rice, 2 chicken and 1 *viss* of jaggery;
17. Tu Lay Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice;
18. Eh Gay Htoo, 3 *pyi* of rice;
19. Ma Paw Moe, 3 *pyi* of rice;
20. Tee Po Lay, 4 *pyi* of rice;
21. Saw Ahro Moe, 3 *pyi* of rice;

22. Naw Hser Gay Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice;
23. Naw Kha Moe, 3 *pyi* of rice and 1 chicken;
24. Tha Mee Lay Moe, 2 *pyi* of rice;
25. Ma Pyone, 2 *pyi* of rice;
26. Kaw La Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice;
27. Naw Keh Moe, 2 *pyi* of rice;
28. Naw Tu Moe, 4 *pyi* of rice;
29. Naw Mee Wu Moe, 3 spoons and 1 plate; and
30. Naw Paw Say Moe, 2 chickens.²⁵³

On 13 June 2006, Column #1 and Column #2 of LIB #568 went out on patrol in Toungoo District on a search and destroy mission. The soldiers destroyed any IDP hiding sites or hidden food caches that they found. Moreover, the following goods were looted from the following displaced villagers:

1. Naw Doo, 1 traditional bronze Karen drum, 16 kilograms of rice, 1 flask, 2 *viss* of fishpaste, 2 *viss* of tobacco, 5 kilograms of salt, 4 sleeping mats and 1 plastic tarpaulin;
2. Saw Ta Kwee, 1 flask, 640 kilograms of rice and 24 kilograms of sticky rice;
3. Saw Ta Pau, 10 traditional Karen costumes, 1 man's sarong, 4 women's sarongs, 1 pair of pants, 4 scarves, 4 shirts, 1 homemade musket, 2 pairs of flip-flops, 3 *viss* of fishpaste, 1 clay basin, 32 kilograms of rice, 8 chickens, 2 pigs, 4 plastic tarpaulins, 2 knives, 2 kilograms of tobacco and 12 notebooks;
4. Saw Ta Poe Lah, 4 cooking pots, 6 plates, 1 flask and 6 spoons;
5. Saw Bo Hai, 2 cooking pots, 4 plates and 3 blankets;
6. Naw Mu Kay, 5 packets of soup powder, 2 tubes of toothpaste, 3 woks, 4 plates, 3 cooking pots, 8 kilograms of rice, 8 sarongs and 2 flasks;
7. Naw Dee Zel, 480 kilograms of rice, 10 *viss* of salt, 11 plates, 11 spoons, 10 sarongs and 10 traditional Karen costumes;
8. Saw Hset Koe, 1 hammock, 2 pairs of flip-flops, 5,000 kyat, 32 kilograms of rice, 1 sarong and 1 woven shoulder bag;
9. Saw Maung Nay Lah, 2 cooking pots, 3 blankets, 1 mattock, 160 kilograms of rice and 2 traditional Karen costumes;
10. Saw Ah Pau, 5 knives, 32 kilograms of rice, 4 spoons and 2 plastic tarpaulins;
11. Saw Kway Lay, 160 kilograms of rice;
12. Saw Neh Dah, 5 cooking pots and 48 kilograms of fishpaste;
13. Saw Moo Eh, 1 *viss* of cooking oil, 100 cheroots and 2 packets of soup powder;
14. Saw Poe Kay, 2 sarongs and 1 plastic tarpaulin;
15. Naw Moo Leh, 4 cooking pots, 7 plates, 6 spoons, 160 kilograms of rice, 32 kilograms of sticky rice, 1 *viss* of cooking oil, 1 *viss* of onions, 5 knives, 3 blankets, 2 canvas tarpaulins, 5 woven shoulder bags and 1 pair of gold earrings; and
16. Naw Shah, 10 plates, 6 cups, 64 kilograms of rice, 1 hammock, 1 homemade musket, 3 knives, 2 blankets, 1 woven shoulder bag, 2 plastic tarpaulins, 1 cooking pot, 1 wok, 1 water pot, 6 4 clay basins and 30 kilograms of fishpaste.²⁵⁴

On 15 June 2006, troops from LIB #567 destroyed the following items valued at approximately 500,000 kyat belonging to Saw Kah Wah of Lah Maing Pya village in Toungoo District:

1. 3 sacks of rice;
2. 5 *viss* of betelnut;
3. 1 *viss* of cooking oil;

4. 1 earthenware jar;
5. 10 viss of fishpaste;
6. 1 gallon of kerosene; and
7. 1 homemade musket.²⁵⁵

On 18 June 2006, an unnamed DKBA unit demanded large quantities of bamboo from villages in Thaton District. Those villages which received the order included:

1. Ler Kler village, 3,000 lengths of bamboo;
2. Htee Pa Doh Kee village, 1,000 lengths of bamboo;
3. Noh Ka Day village, 1,000 lengths of bamboo; and
4. Meh Theh village, 1,000 lengths of bamboo.²⁵⁶

On 21 June 2006, an SPDC army column made up of soldiers from LIB # 567 LIB #568 burned Plaw Baw Der village in southern Toungoo District to the ground and looted the following items:

1. Saw Tha Ya, 15 baskets of rice, 5 cooking pots, a number of machetes and 2 plastic tarpaulins;
2. Naw Sheh Paw, 1 wok;
3. Naw Than Kyi, 2 woks and 1 chicken;
4. Saw Maung Oo, 2 pairs of shoes and 1 flask;
5. Naw Nya Su, 2 baskets of rice, 1 plastic tarpaulin and 5 blankets;
6. Maung Kweh Tho, 2 plastic tarpaulins, 2 blankets, 3 viss of salt, 5 plates, 5 spoons and 1 earthenware jar;
7. Saw Pa Leh, 50,000 kyat and 1 gold ring; and
8. Ni Tae, 25 plastic tarpaulins and 1 packet of tea.²⁵⁷

On 24 June 2006, an SPDC army column comprised of soldiers from LIB #351 and LIB #536 looted seven pigs and 31 chickens from Saw Ka Der village in Nyaunglebin District. The livestock, claimed to have been taken in retaliation for the escape of one of the villagers that they fired upon, was reported to have been valued at approximately 200,000 kyat.²⁵⁸

On 24 June 2006, a column of approximately 150 men from IB #522 moved through Nyaunglebin District where they extorted a total of almost three million kyat from the villagers of two village tracts:

1. Saw Maung Thein, Kyauk Pya village tract, 316,500 kyat;
2. Saw Po Khet, Kyauk Pya village tract, 114,660 kyat;
3. Saw Kwah Kwah, Kyauk Pya village tract, 274,600 kyat;
4. Saw Po Law, Kyauk Pya village tract, 69,000 kyat;
5. Saw Kwa Po, Kyauk Pya village tract, 27,500 kyat;
6. Saw Pa Tuh, Kyauk Pya village tract, 576,000 kyat;
7. Saw Lay Paw, Kyauk Pya village tract, 103,500 kyat;
8. Saw Lay Yah Po, Kyauk Pya village tract, 22,500 kyat;
9. Saw Ba Aung, Kyauk Pya village tract, 427,100 kyat;
10. Saw Maung Lay, Kyauk Pya village tract, 199,000 kyat;
11. Saw Norton, Kyauk Pya village tract, 571,550 kyat;
12. Naw Paw Htoo, Thay Baw Der village tract, 23,000 kyat;
13. Naw Pleh Paw, Thay Baw Der village tract, 36,000 kyat;
14. Saw Maung Leh, Thay Baw Der village tract, 6,000 kyat; and
15. Saw Win Kay, Thay Baw Der village tract, 99,250 kyat.²⁵⁹

On 30 June 2006, DKBA troops led by Pa Ni Tho looted the following items from Khaw Po Plah villagers in Thaton District:

1. Naw Kay, 2 chickens;
2. Naw Mu Preh, 12 chickens;
3. Ma Htay Nyunt, 6 chickens;
4. Naw Mu, 2 chickens;
5. Maung Po Toe, 2 chickens; and
6. Maung Thaw Teh, 1 machete and 1 men's sarong.²⁶⁰

On 3 July 2006, soldiers operating under MOC #16 desecrated the Christian church in Mya Swa Chaung in Toungoo District and stole the following goods:

1. 2 amplifiers;
2. 1 large (car) battery;
3. 9 large woks;
4. 50 plates;
5. 45 spoons;
6. 2 water buckets;
7. a set of light bulbs;
8. 2 curtains;
9. 2 kerosene lamps; and
10. 8 bibles.²⁶¹

On 1 August 2006, LIB #351 Battalion Commander Than Tate ordered villagers from Set Set Hla Taw village in Nyaunglebin District to buy him a video camera and two sarongs. The villagers had little choice but to comply with his demands and paid 350,000 kyat for the camera.²⁶²

On 4 August 2006, Lieutenant Yeh Win, a company commander with LIB #351 demanded one *viss* (1.6 kg / 3.6 lb) of fish worth 1,400 kyat from the villagers of Hteh Htoo village, Nyaunglebin District. On the same day, Battalion Commander Than Tate also demanded 1 duck worth 2,000 kyat and 4 bottles of alcohol worth 8,000 kyat.²⁶³

On 9 August 2006, LIB #351 Company Commander Lieutenant Yeh Win forced the villagers of Hteh Htoo village, in Nyaunglebin District to build a fence around the village while he took photos of them doing it. After they were finished he demanded 2,000 kyat from the villagers to develop the film. Yeh Win presumably took the photos for propaganda purposes and to show his superiors of all the ways in which he was ostensibly working with the local community to develop the region.²⁶⁴

On 25 August 2006, LIB #351 Company Commander Lieutenant Yeh Win, based in the SPDC army camp adjacent to the Hteh Htoo relocation site in Nyaunglebin District demanded the following from Hteh Htoo villagers:

1. 600 kyat for cheroots;
2. 1200 kyat for one *viss* of fish; and
3. 700 kyat for 1 bottle of alcohol.²⁶⁵

On 26 August 2006, two columns of SPDC army troops from LIB #1 entered Khaw Po Ploh village in Toungoo District and looted the following:

1. Saw Lah Si, 3 chickens, 1 bottle of cooking oil, medicine worth 50,000 kyat, 5 *viss* (8 kg / 18 lb) of betelnut, and 1 knife;

2. Saw Kee Nay Pa, 1 *viss* (1.6 kg / 3.6 lb) of duck, 12,000 kyat, 2 knives and 1 pig;
3. Saw Hsa Moo Ro, 8 kilograms of rice, 1 chicken, 1 blanket, 1 cassette recorder, 1 sheet of plastic roofing and 7 *viss* (11.4 kg / 25 lb) of fish paste;
4. Saw Kyar Bo, 1 chicken and 1 cat; and
5. Naw Ma Chaw, 2 chickens.²⁶⁶

On 3 October 2006, Lay Htoo of the DKBA made the following demands from villages in Thaton District:

1. Naung Ka Dok, 50,000 kyat;
2. T'Ro Kee, 50,000 kyat;
3. T'Roh Wah, 20,000 kyat;
4. Htee Pu Wah 20,000 kyat;
5. Pya Po 2,000 Kyat and 1 basket of rice;
6. Kyet Chay Khat, 10,000 kyat;
7. Ta'Raw Meh, 10,000 kyat;
8. Pa Tee Gone, 10,000 kyat;
9. Bilin Kyo, 5,000 kyat;
10. Wah Paw Mon, 5,000 kyat;
11. Ywa Thit, 5,000 kyat;
12. Auk Ywa, 9,000 kyat;
13. K'Tee Pu, 9,000 kyat;
14. Lah Aw Kheh, 20,000 kyat;
15. Kya T'Raw, 20,000 kyat; and
16. Shwe Yaung Pya, 30,000 kyat.²⁶⁷

On 4 October 2006, LIB #351 Company Commander Lieutenant Yeh Win demanded the following from villagers interned in the Hteh Htoo relocation site in Nyaunglebin District:

1. 1 *viss* (1.6 kg / 3.6 lb) of fish worth 1,200 kyat;
2. 1 bottle of alcohol worth 200 kyat;
3. cigarettes worth 500 kyat; and
4. 1 bowl (1.5 kg / 3.4 lb) of rice.²⁶⁸

On 24 October 2006, LIB #599 Battalion Commander Sein Lwin demanded 150,000 kyat from Hteh Htoo village in Nyaunglebin District so the soldiers could have a new latrine built in their camp. Despite making such a large demand from the villagers for a task as small as this, the commander also ordered four villagers from Hteh Htoo to build the latrine.²⁶⁹

On 28 October 2006, LIB #599 Company Commander Win Tun demanded 100,000 kyat from Ma Taw Gone village, Nyaunglebin District so his soldiers could attend a training.²⁷⁰

On 30 October 2006, Company Commander Win Tun of LIB #599 demanded one tin (12.5 kg / 27.6 lb) of rice from an unspecified village in Thu K'Bee village tract in Nyaunglebin District to feed his soldiers.²⁷¹

Karenni State

In October 2006, police officer U Myint Thein Oo from the Loikaw police station ordered each household in Htee Sa Kha village tract, Loikaw Township to supply 300 shingles of roofing thatch. Village heads who were not able to provide their village's allotment were fined 1,000-1,500 kyat. The thatch was reported to have been used to repair the roof of the Loikaw police station; however, the amount demanded is far in excess of what likely would have been needed and much of this thatch was probably sold by the soldiers for profit.²⁷²

Sagaing Division

On 13 September 2006, Tawng Dum, a cattle trader from Kalaymyo in Sagaing Division had to pay a bribe of 2,800,000 kyat to police to have his 28 head of confiscated cattle returned. Tawng Dum was herding his cattle to Mizoram where they would fetch a higher price when he was stopped by police in Darkhai village in Chin State. The trader later reported, *"Though I begged for pardon, it was of no use. Fulfilling their demand was better than losing everything. Or else they would have confiscated my cows"*.²⁷³

Shan State

In early 2006, SPDC army soldiers from IB #248 who had accrued large debts at three shops in Naa Khaan village in Murng-Nai Township refused to pay what they owed. Every few days the soldiers would arrive and take what they pleased, instructing the shopkeepers to run a tab for everything they took and promising to pay up later. In less than two months, the soldiers had accumulated debts of over 100,000 kyat at each of the three shops. The shopkeepers complained to an officer at the nearby SPDC army camp who said that he would deduct money from the soldiers' salaries to ensure that they were repaid, although a month later the money had still not been repaid. One of the men returned to the camp to complain a second time, where despite seeing the insignia of IB #248 on the soldiers' uniforms, was told that IB #248 had recently rotated out of the area. The money was never returned.²⁷⁴

On 24 June 2006, Commander Aung Nayya from IB #296 demanded 60 viss (100 kg / 216 lb) of pork from Naa Ke and Nam Wawt villages in Kunhing Township. At local market rates of the time, this quantity of pork would have been valued at 240,000 kyat. The village leaders beseeched the commander to reduce his demand as the burden would be too great, to which the commander replied that he could not lessen the amount, but gave the villagers 40,000 kyat towards the cost of the pork. Nonetheless, the villagers still have to shoulder a burden of 200,000 kyat for the balance of the cost.²⁷⁵

Land Confiscation

Under existing domestic laws, farmers in Burma do not own the land that they work. Ownership of all land in Burma is retained by the state; farmers are granted rights to cultivation of the land only. (For more information, see Section 5.2: Situation of Farmers above). According to the Trade Ministry Notification No. 4/78, the regime reserves the right to confiscate any agricultural land should the farmer fail to sow it with the allocated crop or then for not selling the allotted crop quota to the military. However, much of the land confiscation that occurs in Burma is done arbitrarily and without compensation, and those whose land is confiscated generally do not protest for fear of reprisals. Land may be confiscated to build army camps or to make way for roads and development projects (For

more information, see Section 5.3: Physic Nut Agricultural Development Project above). Thousands more acres have also been confiscated under the SPDC's Self-Reliance Program. Once evicted, the SPDC then forces the ejected farmers to work as serfs on their former land. The farmers receive nothing for this work; the entire harvest goes to the military and they are left not only without any land to work for themselves, but also no time in which to do so. In a country where approximately 70 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture, the confiscation of farmland equates as being a loss of a peoples' primary, if not only, source of livelihood.



A Karen villager from Toungoo District pointing at the smouldering remains of his 150 tins (1,500 kg) of paddy in November 2006. Shortly before this photograph was taken, SPDC army soldiers from IB #35 had moved through the area destroying all villages and food supplies they found. Without his paddy, this villager is going to find it extremely difficult to feed his family for the coming year. [Photo: KHRG]

Land Confiscation – partial list of incidents for 2006

Arakan State

According to a report released in February 2006 by the Arakan State Land Survey Department, the SPDC army had forcibly confiscated approximately 200,000 acres of land without compensation from the people of Arakan State since 1988.²⁷⁶

A number of oil-bearing properties were confiscated from the local inhabitants of Rambree Island off Arakan State at undisclosed times during 2005 and 2006. The land was confiscated from the Arakanese villagers without compensation to make way for a joint-venture between Chinese-owned CNOOC Myanmar Ltd and the SPDC's Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise. Local villagers had reportedly been hand-drilling the oil on these properties as their primary source of income since British colonial rule.²⁷⁷

On 12 May 2006, police officers confiscated 60 acres of farmland from local farmers in Kyaukpyu Township for oil exploration. Police from nearby Zinchaung village reportedly arrested three men for protesting against the land seizure. According to reports, they were Maung Win, 52, Thein Ngwe, 40, and Kyaw Hla Thar, 34. According to one villager who has since fled the area, "*They designated Block A near Innpyin village, Block B near Yenantaung village, Block C in Uchay village and Block D in Mintettaung village*".²⁷⁸

On 13 June 2006, NaSaKa authorities confiscated approximately 13 acres of farmland from Rohingya villagers living in Inn Din village, Maungdaw Township.²⁷⁹

A report published in early November 2006, stated that LIB #550 had confiscated many farms in Panila village in Ponna Kyunt Township so the army could use the land as a target shooting range. As a result, those whose farms were confiscated are left without their livelihoods.²⁸⁰

Irrawaddy Division

It was reported on 8 June 2006 that SPDC army authorities had seized ownership of over 1,000 acres of farmland so the military could develop the land as cashew nut and rubber plantations. The villages reported to have been affected by this land confiscation were reported to have been:

1. Theinla village;
2. Khwaylaygyi village;
3. Moekyoepyit village;
4. Thanbyukonekyangsu village; and
5. Shiteintang village.²⁸¹

Karen State

In February 2006, soldiers from LIB #642 confiscated six farms from Meh T'Roh village in Papun District. The land was to be used for the construction of a new SPDC army camp.²⁸²

Magwe Division

In July 2006, it was reported that over 5,000 acres of paddy fields were confiscated from Burman farmers along the Pyinmana-Taungnyo highway to make way for a new SPDC army camp in early 2006.²⁸³

Mon State

In June 2006, IB #31 confiscated approximately 25 acres of farmland from local Mon villagers in Ye Township so the soldiers could build a brick baking factory on the land. The villagers were not compensated for their loss, and by the end of the month were even being ordered to work cutting firewood for the kilns.²⁸⁴

In August and September 2006, LIB #209 confiscated 307 acres of rubber plantations from 25 different local villagers in southern Mudon Township. Meanwhile, SPDC Artillery Battalion #318 had confiscated a further 200 acres of rubber plantations in the same locale.²⁸⁵

On 20 November 2006, IB #61 seized over 45 acres of farmland from local villagers in Ye township. Approximately 35 acres of the land seized were under cultivation as fruit orchards, while the other 10 acres consisted of rubber plantations. Villagers reported not being given any reason why their land was being confiscated.²⁸⁶

Shan State

In January 2006, 37,000 acres of cultivated land were confiscated from local villagers in Muse Township by SPDC army authorities. The land was to be used for rubber plantations operated by the Muse-based company, “*So So Pye Pye*”. The private company is run by Htun Aye, who is believed to be one of the region’s drug barons. The following 16 villages lost many tea plantations and fruit orchards:

1. Terng Long;
2. Ho Po;
3. Waeng Naang;
4. Khu Waeng;
5. Maan Waeng;
6. Paang Long;
7. Kawng Sa;
8. Zaan Sa;
9. Nawng Mo;
10. Paang Kham;
11. Saa Khao;
12. Nam Sim;
13. Maang Haang;
14. Nam Kat;
15. Maan Kaang; and
16. Maan Tham.²⁸⁷

On 24 May 2006, five families who had for the past 20 years been living on the Zawm Mon hill in Keng Tung had their land confiscated to accommodate the expansion of the local police station. The villagers were forcibly relocated without compensation.²⁸⁸

In June 2006, an area of land of unreported size was confiscated from villagers in Murng Laang village tract, Keng Tung Township by soldiers from LIB #314. The land was reportedly to be the site of a vast rubber plantation managed by Chinese businessmen. It was believed that SPDC authorities planned to plant up to one million rubber trees in the area by the end of 2006.²⁸⁹

On 6 October 2006, members of the police force confiscated four acres of farmland belonging to villagers from Wan Huay village in Keng Tung Township so they could grow summer paddy. The fields had just finished being harvested with the paddy still sitting in piles waiting to be threshed. The officers immediately began letting water into the fields which destroyed much of the paddy at the bottom of the heaps, and began to till the land with a tractor brought in specially for the purpose. The villager pleaded with the police officers, but they responded by saying that “*the land did not belong to the farmer but the government and they, as government officials, could choose anywhere they like*”. After that, the officers then brought in a threshing machine, saying that they should not wait for the farmer to thresh it all by hand, for which they charged 300 kyat to thresh each of the approximately 40 piles of paddy.²⁹⁰

Destruction of Property

The SPDC continues to pursue policies and engage in activities that result in the intentional destruction of people's homes, farmland and places of business. In areas of ethnic conflict, the SPDC continues to implement the Four Cuts Policy, a scorched earth campaign designed to undermine the armed resistance by targeting its suspected civilian support base. First implemented in Karen State in the 1970s, the four cuts are said to cut all alleged supply lines of food, funds, intelligence, and recruits from the civilian population to armed resistance groups. Villages located outside areas that can effectively be controlled by the SPDC are relocated to areas that are, typically adjacent to SPDC army camps and/or along roadways. Following their relocation, villages are often burned to the ground or littered with landmines to discourage villagers from returning. The food supplies and livelihoods of ethnic villagers are also deliberately targeted and destroyed by SPDC army soldiers for fear that they may otherwise supply food to the resistance. In northern Karen State, where SPDC army forces conducted a massive military offensive against civilian villagers throughout 2006, incidences of the intentional destruction of villages and villagers' livelihoods were widely documented by groups such as KHRG and FBR.²⁹¹ As KHRG aptly pointed out, deliberate attacks on the civilian population and their livelihoods is conducted in direct contravention of the Geneva Conventions and numerous other international laws.²⁹² (For more information, see Chapter 8: Rights of Ethnic Minorities).



Large sections of this rice crop at H--- village, Nyaunglebin District were destroyed when a patrol of SPDC soldiers marched indiscriminately through the field in late November 2006. This incident took place just as the villagers were preparing to harvest the rice, thereby reducing the year's crop yield. *[Photo and caption: KHRG]*

In other parts of Burma which do not experience ethnic armed conflict, SPDC army soldiers have been regularly reported to also have destroyed private property, particularly when it stands in the way of proposed national infrastructure or development projects. On the evening of 14 August 2006, the Tahan market in Kalay Myo, Sagaing Division was gutted by fire under suspicious circumstances. Eyewitnesses reported that the blaze started simultaneously at numerous different locations around the market and spread rapidly, quickly engulfing the 500-odd shops which comprised the market. Four fire trucks soon arrived at the scene but were unable to combat the fire as all of their equipment inexplicably failed at the same time. All 500 shops were destroyed, along with an estimated 100 million kyat worth of stock. None of the shop owners were compensated for their losses. However, two months later there were reports that the SPDC planned to rebuild the market, for which they

were charging shop owners 300,000 kyat per shop. Incredibly under almost identical circumstances on 17 September 2006, the nearby Letpanchaung market was also burned to the ground. Approximately one-third of the 1,000-odd shop market was destroyed in the fire. As Letpanchaung market does not receive electricity, local traders were quick to dismiss the possibility that the fire was sparked by a faulty electrical circuit as had been claimed as a possible cause of the Tahan market fire. Similar to the earlier blaze, the fire was reported to have spread very quickly from different parts of the market which all seemed to flare up at the same time. Though there was no official comment on the cause of the fires, arson was suspected. As one report stated, *"people are curious as to what would cause a fire during the rainy season"*.²⁹³

Destruction of Property – partial list of incidents for 2006

Chin State

On 26 June 2006, Sergeant Me Maung of IB #550 burned down a village headman's home and numerous field huts in Paletwa Township on suspicion that the villagers were supporters of the Chin National Army (CNA). Hen Ngaih, the village headman of Sat Shai village fled the village for fear of arrest and sent his family abroad to Mizoram in India so they would not be apprehended in his stead.²⁹⁴

Mon State

In November 2006, it was reported that vacant homes in southern Mon State were to be destroyed by SPDC army soldiers. According to one source, *"IB #31 has inquired whether three house owners in Kawn Ka Me Toa Take [village] have come back during the last three days. ... If the house owners do not come back, the IB #31 will destroy their homes"*. The area in question has received many demands for forced labour and extortion. Many killings and torture have also been reported from the region. Under these circumstances, many villagers have fled their homes for other villages or Thailand.²⁹⁵

Karen State

On 8 February 2006, an SPDC army unit led by Saya Hla Win burned down 82 field huts and plantations in Nyaunglebin District.²⁹⁶

On 9 March 2006, an SPDC army column of approximately 280 soldiers from LIB #366, #377 and #399 burned a church and the home of villager Doo K'Preh in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. The soldiers also burned six and a half baskets of Lah Gay Do Paw Pa's rice, five baskets of rice belonging to Wah Ler, and four baskets of rice and seven baskets of paddy belonging to Yo Taw Kaw Pa.²⁹⁷

On 15 March 2006, SPDC army soldiers burned down Tee Ko P'Hee Lu village in Nyaunglebin District. In all, 13 homes were destroyed, as was a paddy storage barn belonging to Nya Ko containing 100 baskets (2,100 kg / 4,600 lb) of paddy and another barn belonging to village head Kaw Pya containing 13 baskets (270 kg / 600 lb) of paddy were destroyed.²⁹⁸

On 23 March 2006, an SPDC army column of soldiers from LIB #522 and LIB #567 attacked Nya Moo Kee village in northern Nyaunglebin District. The soldiers burned down the Christian church along with the house beside it and “*systematically ransacked and destroyed*” all of the other homes in the village. Anything of value left behind by the fleeing villagers was stolen and whatever the soldiers could not carry off was destroyed. All of the villagers’ pots and pans were either shot or stabbed full of holes so that they could not hold water and thus rendered useless for cooking. The soldiers ate all of the chickens and four of the pigs in addition to shooting a dog and throwing its dead body onto the roof of one of the remaining homes. Two hidden food caches were also discovered by the soldiers and were also subsequently destroyed. According to reports, a total of 156 baskets of rice were lost; after being either stolen, eaten or destroyed by the soldiers.²⁹⁹

On 24 March 2006, the same SPDC army column mentioned in the preceding incident attacked Maw Lee Loo village, burning all of the houses and two paddy storage barns containing over 400 baskets of paddy. The soldiers also ate all of the villagers’ chickens.³⁰⁰

On 26 March 2006, SPDC army troops set fire to five homes in Kwee Daw Kaw village in Nyaunglebin District.³⁰¹

On 26 March 2006, SPDC army troops burned down five village houses and all of their contents of Saw Pah Ploh and his family in Mone Township of Nyaunglebin District. All of the family’s pigs, chickens, and goats were also taken by the soldiers.³⁰²

On 14 April 2006, soldiers from LIB #223 destroyed a Buddhist monastery and stole a generator, 9 baskets of rice, 20 viss (32 kg / 72 lb) of oil, 5 viss (8 kg / 18 lb) of salt, 60 steel plates and 3 big pots from the monks in Htee Nya Lay Kee village in Nyaunglebin District. The following day the same troops burned a further six houses in Klu Gaw Kee village, ate many of the villagers’ pigs, chickens, and goats and stole medicine valued at 100,000 kyat.³⁰³

On 25 April 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #44 entered Taw Awk Pay Der Daw village in Nyaunglebin District and burned Saw Say Mu’s rice storage barn to the ground, along with the 70 baskets (1,470 kg / 3,220 lb) of paddy that it contained. The soldiers then proceeded to smash in the roofs of paddy barns belonging to Saw Pler Mu and Naw Eh Ro, so that the paddy stored within the barns would be soaked by the rains and thus rendered inedible.³⁰⁴

On either 27 or 28 April 2006, a column of 50 SPDC army soldiers attacked Bway Day village in Papun District. There they burned down eight homes and three field huts, containing ten baskets of paddy seed and 13 viss (21 kg / 47 lb) of salt. The soldiers also ate three pigs, shooting another to leave it to die.³⁰⁵

On 3 May 2006, SPDC army soldiers burned Htee Baw Loh village in Toungoo District to the ground.³⁰⁶

On 6 May 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #108 set fire to the paddy barns of villagers from Hsaw Wah Der village in Toungoo District, burning 50 baskets of paddy in the process.³⁰⁷

On 9 May 2006, a column of soldiers from LIB #240 and LIB #364 captured Saw Nya Ko and Saw Hsa Ri, both villagers from Gha Mu Lo village in northern Nyaunglebin District and forced them to destroy two paddy barns along with the 55 baskets of paddy that they contained.³⁰⁸

On 10 May 2006, SPDC army troops burned down Ah Bwe Der village in Nyaunglebin District and destroyed 70 baskets of paddy.³⁰⁹

On 6 June 2006, SPDC army soldiers found and destroyed 4 paddy storage barns belonging to villagers from Ta Paw Der village in northern Papun District.³¹⁰

On 15 June 2006, an SPDC column made up of soldiers from LIB #362 and LIB #363, operating under TOC #2 of MOC #10 attacked Tah Law Ploh village in Papun District. Of the 40 houses which comprised the village, 13 were burned to the ground. The soldiers also poured all of the villagers' stored rice and paddy out onto the ground before setting fire to it also.³¹¹

On 15 June 2006, SPDC army soldiers set fire to the home of Po Leh Loh in P'Nah Ku Plaw village, Papun District. Three rice storage barns belonging to Po Raw Lay, Naw Boh Thay and Paw Moo Pa were also razed.³¹²

On 22 June 2006, Aung Kyaw Moe of LIB #507 ordered his men to cut down 200 betelnut trees belonging to villagers in the Klaw Mi Der Area of Toungoo District.³¹³

On 23 June 2006, an SPDC army column comprised of troops from LIB #507, #561 and #567 cut down an unspecified number of dogfruit and betelnut trees at K'Mu Loh and Mya Swa Chaung villages in Toungoo District. The soldiers also reportedly ate their fill from the villagers' mangosteen and durian orchards.³¹⁴

In June 2006, SPDC army troops under MOC #16 burned many hill fields across Toungoo District as a component of their ongoing offensive in the area. The following villages had their fields destroyed:

1. Ler Kla Der village, 6 hillfields;
2. Klaw Mi Der village, 37 hillfields;
3. Hu Mu Der village, 11 hillfields;
4. Kheh Der village, 5 hillfields; and
5. Ta Pah Kee village, 10 hillfields.³¹⁵

On 12 July 2006, an SPDC army column from LIB #567 burned down two field huts belonging to Saw Ta Po and Saw Khway Si of Mya Swa Chaung village in Toungoo District.³¹⁶

Between 15 and 22 July 2006, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #368 and LIB #369 were reported to have destroyed many villagers' homes, field huts and rice storage barns in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District.³¹⁷

Mon State

In February 2006, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers cut down a three-acre betel nut plantation worth 7 million kyat in Wear Kwao village. The plantation was destroyed after its owner, Mi Min, was accused of supporting the Mon resistance. The same report maintained that villagers from the area were not permitted to work in their fields and plantations, and in the villagers' absence, SPDC army soldiers would go to the plantations and steal the crop which they would then sell back to the owners. Villagers were not able to refuse to purchase the betel nut. Wear Kwao village was forced to buy back 30,000 betel nuts that the soldiers stole from their own plantations. One villager from the area reported that *"Every household is forced to buy 200 betel nuts from the soldiers at a price they demand"*.³¹⁸

In mid-October 2006, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #31, led by Lieutenant Colonel Myo Min, began demolition of a public market in Yung Ral village in southern Ye Township. The market, built by the villagers themselves at their own expense, was to be demolished to make way for the construction of a new VPDC office. *"The market with its roof made of zinc and constructed with cement and concrete had cost a lot of money. But now it is being pulled down"*, said one local villager. The villagers were not compensated for the loss of their market.³¹⁹

Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation

In many ethnic border areas, the SPDC has imposed year-round restrictions on the movement of civilians. For people living in SPDC-controlled villages, permission must be sought and granted before leaving the village, even if only to tend to their fields. Travel passes are issued only after payment of a fee and generally only permit travel for a finite period of time. In some areas villagers are only allowed to be away from the village during the hours of daylight. This makes maintaining a livelihood extremely difficult. For those who must travel any distance to their fields or to other towns for work, much of the allotted time is spent in transit, thus limiting the number of hours they have each day to tend to their livelihoods before they must return home. In some areas, villagers have been prohibited from leaving their villages altogether. This results with fields which are neglected for lack of access, and crops which are eaten or destroyed by wild animals or wilt before they can be harvested. In some cases, entire harvests have been lost. (For more information, see Chapter 12: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

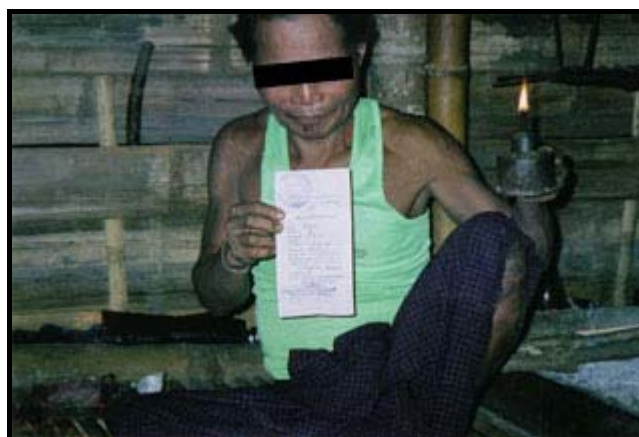
It was reported in February 2006 that in Chin State, travellers must not only acquire travel permits, but must also report which villages they intend to visit, the duration and purpose of their visit, and the name of the person that they will stay with on each leg of their journey. Spending the night in any house other than that which they reported while obtaining their travel pass, will attract a fine of between 10,000 and 30,000 kyat. Furthermore, the host who puts them up for the night also incurs a fine. According to one villager from Matupi, *"Travellers, despite proper travel permits are fined for spending a night with a family they did not intend to stay with. It boils down to sheer exploitation of the people"*.³²⁰

As was discussed above, since August 2006, the junta has imposed broad restrictions on the transport of rice from one state or division to another. This they claimed was an attempt to combat spiralling rice prices. These restrictions created hardship for rice traders who could only sell their produce in local markets where prices were lower. In areas of ethnic conflict, SPDC army units enforced blockades on many of the roads leading into the mountains where

armed resistance groups operate and that the military cannot effectively control. This was a common tactic used in Karen State during 2006, particularly in the north where the SPDC military offensive persisted throughout the year. This resulted in exacerbating what was already an extreme shortage of food in the region. Many villagers, living on the brink of starvation were forced to flee to Thailand or to IDP camps on the border when the hunger proved too great. By the end of the year, over 2,000 IDPs had assembled at a makeshift camp on the bank of the Salween River, the vast majority of whom had fled their homes when their food supplies ran out. (For more information, see Chapter 13: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

Restrictions on transporting rice in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State were renewed in October 2006, where it was reported that a number of villagers had their rice confiscated for having bought it from a different village.³²¹ Townsfolk feared that such restrictions placed over the movement of rice would not only further increase the already-skyrocketing rice prices but also possibly lead to civil unrest.

Within ethnic border areas experiencing armed conflict, a terrible scourge further threatening the livelihoods of those living there is the continued use of landmines. Antipersonnel landmines have been deployed in their countless thousands in many of the regions marking Burma's borders. Some reports maintain that nine out of Burma's fourteen states and divisions suffer from landmine contamination. Incidences of SPDC army units and various ethnic ceasefire armies deploying landmines against civilian villagers have been well-documented. A common tactic employed by SPDC army units is to plant landmines in abandoned or relocated villages to dissuade the villagers from returning. Similarly, landmines are often laid in villagers' fields and plantations, thus preventing them from being able to tend to their crops. There have also been many reported incidences of villagers stepping on landmines while travelling along paths to and from local markets or while collecting water or fishing. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Landmines).



A villager from Papun District of Karen State displaying the travel pass that he was obliged to acquire from the SPDC allowing him to travel outside his village. To travel outside of one's village without proper documentation often results in being labeled as an insurgent and shot on sight. [Photo: KHRG]

Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation – partial list of incidents for 2006

Karen State

On 9 May 2006, Colonel Soe Oo of MOC #16 issued orders to villagers from Maw Keh Tha Per Koh, Baw Bee Der, Aung Chan Tha, Myaung Oo, Meh S'Lee Gone, Pa Doh Kyaw Hta, Kyaw Kyi Paw and K'Muh Loh in northern Nyaunglebin District, and Yu Loh and Tha Pyay Nyunt in southern Toungoo Township to remain within their villages. SPDC army soldiers said that if they saw anyone outside their villages they would kill them on-sight.³²²

On 15 June 2006, LIB #599 and LIB #590 banned villagers from erecting field huts along the length of the eastern side of Kyauk Kyi – Mone motor road in Nyaunglebin District. Furthermore, the soldiers demanded 3,000 kyat for every field hut constructed on the western side of the road, but then, on 25 June 2006, the soldiers threatened to destroy all of these field huts despite the fact that the villagers had just paid to allow them to be there.³²³

On 27 June 2006, the SPDC issued a ban prohibiting villagers living in the 12 villages in the immediate vicinity of Kler Lah in Toungoo District from selling their durian, mangosteen, betelnut, betel leaf, and dogfruit harvests. As a result, villagers from these 12 villages lost a total of an estimated 5,000,000 kyat in income per day.³²⁴

In July 2006, it was reported that villagers in Thaton District were restricted in the volume of rice that they were permitted to buy to feed their families. According to the report, villagers were only allowed to buy eight bowls (12.5 kg / 28 lb) of rice at any one time, *“This volume of rice is sufficient to feed one adult villager for approximately three weeks. Obviously, this decreases rapidly if they also have a family to feed, as most villagers do. Should a villager risk buying more than the allotted one tin of rice and be caught, all of the rice that they are carrying is confiscated by the soldiers and they would most probably be arrested, tortured and ordered to perform forced labour”*.³²⁵

In August 2006, it was reported that all of the villages in the vicinity of the Kler Lah relocation site in Toungoo District were under strict movement restrictions. According to the report, villagers from the following locations were not permitted to travel to other villages, even if only to buy food. As a result, many villagers ran out of food and had to resort to borrowing food from close friends who had some left:

Kler Lah;
Kaw Soe Ko;
Wa Tho Klah;
Maw Pa Der;
Ler Ko;
Ku Pwa Der;
Klay Soe Kee;
Der Doh;
Maw Ko Der; and
Gha Mu Der.³²⁶

Pegu Division

In March 2006, farmers in Nyaunglebin Township were ordered to dismantle their field huts and abandon their farms within five days. One farmer affected by the order said, *“They neither want to see (water) buffaloes nor human beings there. I heard that the villages will also be relocated. ... It would be hard for us bean/peanut farmers to finish our work within five days. You won’t even be able to harvest the beans within five days. It would not be possible to dismantle our farmhouses and return to our village within the amount of time they were reported to have given us”*.³²⁷

It was reported in early June 2006, that farmers in Pegu Division expected a diminished rice harvest for 2006 as a result of being prohibited from building huts in their fields. Throughout the growing season, farmers must spend long hours in their fields transplanting, weeding and tending to their crop. During the harvest season, the time that they are required to be in their fields increases dramatically as they need to scare off wild animals and birds that come to eat the grain as it ripens on the stalks and finally to actually harvest the crop once it has ripened. The heavy workload dictates that farmers must start early and work until very late, sleeping in their field huts. By not being permitted to build field huts and therefore not being allowed to sleep overnight in their fields, farmers must travel to and from their villages each day, drastically cutting into time that would be better spent out in their fields. Ultimately, much of the crop gets eaten or trampled by animals or turns to seed before it can be harvested.³²⁸

Endnotes

- ¹ Source: *World Fact Book 2006*, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 19 December 2006.
- ² Sources: “Haiti, Myanmar and Iraq Most Corrupt”, AFP, 6 November 2006; “Burma Stands Second, Bangladesh Third on Corruption List”, *Narinjara News*, 7 November 2006.
- ³ Sources: “Conditions in Burma and U.S. Policy Toward Burma for the Period September 28, 2005 - March 27, 2006”, U.S. Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 17 April 2006; “Burma Only Country Left on Money-Laundering Blacklist”, *Irrawaddy*, 26 June 2006.
- ⁴ Source: “Burma Ranked Third Least Free Economy”, *Mizzima News*, 4 January 2006.
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