BURMA
HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

Violations Against the Dignity, Livelihoods and Fundamental Rights of the People of Burma

Human Rights Documentation Unit
NATIONAL COALITION GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION OF BURMA

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September 2008

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The Burma Human Rights Yearbook is dedicated to the people of Burma who have sacrificed their homes, freedom, and lives to lifting the veil of terror that shrouds the truth in Burma today.

Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2007

Written, edited and published by the Human Rights Documentation Unit
September 2008
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The Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) is indebted to all of the sources cited throughout this report. The HRDU would like to thank all of the organizations and individuals for their valued contributions that led to the production of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2007*. Last, but by no means least, the HRDU would like to express its sincere gratitude to the indebted team of volunteers who assisted in the production of the 2007 edition of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook*, the production of which would not have been possible without your generous support. This report represents the fourteenth annual edition of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook*.

Front Cover: The faces and events of 2007. Clockwise from top: SPDC army soldiers from LID #66 on the streets of Rangoon on 29 September 2007 during the suppression of the Saffron Revolution Protests *[Christian Holst]*; one of the many destroyed villages in northern Karen State *[FBR]*; Karen IDPs fleeing through the rain and mist in June 2007 *[KHRG]*; the bodies of three civilian villagers murdered by SPDC army soldiers lay strewn along this path in Papun District, Karen State in March 2007 *[KHRG]*; the "Saffron Revolution" protests on the streets of Rangoon on 24 September 2007 *[Reuters]*; civilian villagers performing forced labour building a road for the SPDC in Karen State in March 2007 *[KHRG]*;and labour rights activist Daw Su Su Nway protesting against increases in fuel prices in August 2007 *[DVB/Reuters]*.

Rear Cover: The faces and events of 2007. Left to right, from top to bottom: A Buddhist monk covers his face from the smoke rising from burning motorcycles in Pakokku, Magwe Division in September 2007 *[AP]*; an IDP hiding site hidden deep in the forests of Karen State *[FBR]*; SPDC army soldiers on the streets of Rangoon in the bloody crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators *[AP]*; Buddhist monks walk past a barricade on the streets of Rangoon which reads "Restricted Area" *[unknown]*; prominent activist Daw Mie Mie leads a demonstration through Rangoon in protest of the fuel price hikes in August 2007 *[DVB/AFP]*; the remains of Maw Dtaw Hta village in Karen State which was burned to the ground by DKBA soldiers in June 2007 *[KHRG]*; villagers from Toungoo District fleeing their village with whatever possessions they can carry ahead of an advancing SPDC army column in December 2007 *[FBR]*; villager harvesting paddy in October 2007 *[FBR]*; a Burmese woman sheds tears on the streets of Rangoon at the sight of the long columns of Buddhist monks *[AFP/Getty Images]*; a 13-year-old boy receiving treatment after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine in northern Karen State *[FBR]*; Karen IDPs moving deeper into the forest after SPDC army soldiers established three new camps near their homes *[KHRG]*; and a group of Buddhist monks are stopped *en route* to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon on 26 September – the first day of bloodshed during the Saffron Revolution protests *[Reuters]*.

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Though the HRDU retains copyright of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook*, it does not belong to one organization alone, but to all the many varied and diverse peoples of Burma who have lived too long under the oppressive weight of military rule. The *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* is thus dedicated to the people of Burma who have sacrificed their homes, freedom, and lives to lifting the veil of terror that shrouds the truth in Burma today.

The Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) is the research and documentation department of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). This, and all previous editions of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* may be viewed on the NCGUB website at www.ncgub.net or on the Online Burma Library at www.burmalibrary.org. Questions or comments can be submitted to HRDU at enquiries.hrdu@gmail.com.

Preface

The year 2007 represented a turbulent year in the history of Burma. It was a year in which we witnessed people from all walks of life coming together in the largest public display of dissatisfaction with the military regime in almost 20 years. Regrettably, it was also a year in which we witnessed the brutal and bloody crackdown on those peaceful protests, including the unforgivable and unforgettable attacks on and killings of Buddhist monks. In reference to the colour of the robes worn by the monks, the international media named this peaceful mass movement the *"Saffron Revolution"*. These protests represented the biggest demonstrations conducted in Burma since the popular democratic uprising of 8.8.88.

Responding to the brutality visited upon the protestors and dedicated to the memory of the monks and laypersons who lost their lives during the Saffron Revolution, late in the year, the Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) commenced work on a report documenting the events leading up to, during, and following the September protests. This comprehensive report, entitled: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, was based on over 50 eyewitness testimonies to the protests who had fled the country following the crackdowns as well as information gathered by a team of researchers working clandestinely within Burma.

The situation of human rights in Burma largely disappeared from the international limelight for about a year during the transition from UN Human Rights Commission into UN Human Rights Council in 2006. Meanwhile, human rights violations in Burma continued unabated without the notice of the new UN Human Rights Council. It was not until images of the brutality visited upon the participants of the Saffron Revolution were broadcast worldwide by local and international media that the Council was compelled to act and convened a Special Session on 2 October 2007, thus bringing the human rights situation in Burma back onto agenda again.

The year 2007 also witnessed the first time in almost four years in which the regime had permitted the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation on Human Rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, to return to the country. However, by his own admission, little was accomplished in what was to become his final visit to the country in his role in the mandate. Professor Pinheiro resigned as the Special Rapporteur on Burma in early 2008. Perhaps reflecting some of the frustration associated with the mandate, in his final report to the UN Human Rights Council, Pinheiro stated that the systematic and widespread human rights violations that have continued to be committed in Burma *"are not simply isolated acts of individual misconduct by middle- or low-ranking officers, but rather the result of a system under which individuals and groups have been allowed to breach the law and violate human rights without being called to account"*.

The consistent non-compliance of the Burmese military regime to the 30 consecutive resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council (previously Commission) undermines the credibility of the UN system and the prevalence of international law. However, since the international community bore witness to the ruthless crackdown on the September 2007 Saffron Revolution, we have heard the voices of increasingly more of the world's respectable citizens and leading human rights advocates advocating for international intervention from the perspective of the Responsibility to Protect principle.

The systematic and widespread perpetration of rape and sexual violence against women, enslavement (forced labour), religious persecution and torture in combination of the litany of other human rights abuses being committed in Burma with near complete impunity constitute crimes against humanity according to Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The Burmese Generals should no longer be permitted to hide behind the wall of national sovereignty as they have done so for years. It is time for the United Nations and the international community to draw the legal conclusion that the human rights violations being committed in Burma are tantamount to crimes against humanity and that the SPDC's leaders must be held to account for these crimes.

In my capacity as the Coordinator of the Human Rights Documentation Unit, it is my honour to introduce the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2007*. This, the 2007 edition, marks the fourteenth annual publication of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* on the situation of human rights in Burma that has been produced by the HRDU. I sincerely hope that the records which the staff of the HRDU have systematically compiled over the years will serve as useful tools not only in the arena of international advocacy in the present day, but also as a credible and reliable body of evidence which may one day be used as a leading resource in seeking justice for the human rights crimes that have been committed in Burma.

Dr. Thaung Htun

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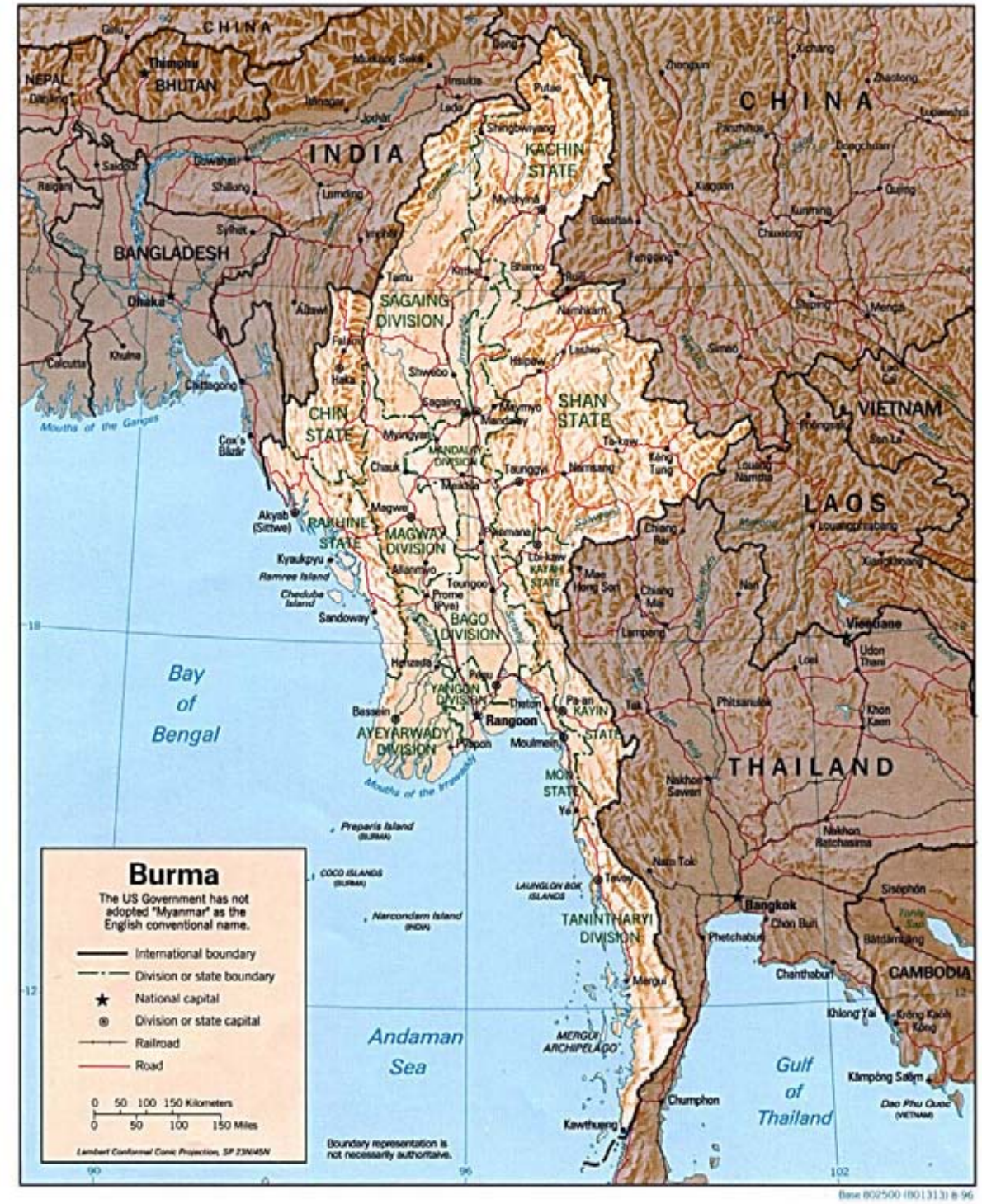
Map of Burma



Source: *CIA World Factbook: Burma*, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 31 May 2007.

BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Historical and Political Background

Constitutional Period (1947-1962)

On 4 January 1948, Burma gained its independence from the British who, in the nineteenth century, fought three wars against the Burman Empire and finally conquered it in 1886. On the eve of the Second World War, the Japanese secretly promised to help Burma recover its freedom by training 30 youth led by Gen. Aung San who then formed the nucleus of a national army. During the war, the Japanese drove the British out of Burma and governed the country directly under military rule until 1 August 1943, when it was granted independence under its protection.

On 27 March 1945, the armed forces of Burma revolted against the Japanese and joined the Allies. Also during the war period, the leaders of the new army, together with an underground civilian group, formed a broad anti-Japanese coalition, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). The AFPFL and the army were led by Gen. Aung San. On 19 July 1947, Gen. Aung San and some of his colleagues were assassinated while the constituent assembly that was writing a new constitution was in recess. U Nu, a civilian and close colleague of Aung San, was able to lead Burma to gain its independence on 4 January 1948. A parliamentary federal union system was introduced as the basis of the system of governance.

Independence did not bring peace and progress to Burma. Within three months of independence, the members of the Communist party in Burma revolted, resulting in the defection of two army battalions. In January 1949, following growing hostility between the ethnic Karen and Burman, the Karen also revolted. Several other political and ethnic groups also took up arms against the State. The multiple insurgencies nearly caused the Union of Burma to completely collapse. Prime Minister U Nu managed to keep his government in power and he gradually recovered control of the people and territories, though the country remained unstable.

During this tumultuous period, democracy took root and began to grow. However in 1958 unity among the leaders of the ruling AFPFL dissolved. Prime Minister U Nu proposed that the parliament decide which group should govern the country. U Nu won by such a narrow margin that within a few months he resigned and recommended that Gen. Ne Win, the head of the army, replace him and conduct new elections.

Gen. Ne Win's provisional government, comprising senior military officers, was short-lived, lasting only 16 months. When the promised elections were held, a U Nu-led faction won. After he resumed leadership U Nu called a meeting for February 1962 where he planned to discuss with all ethnic leaders a way to find a solution to their grievances through peaceful and open discussions. However, before U Nu could instate his recommendations for peace, Gen. Ne Win led a military coup to seize power on 2 March 1962. Gen. Ne Win established a Revolutionary Council comprised of 17 senior officers, effectively ending the constitutional period.

BSPP Military Rule (1962-1988)

The Revolutionary Council established a military dictatorship replacing the parliamentary federal system enshrined in the constitution. In July 1962, the Revolutionary Council created its own party, the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), after having failed to win the backing of the established political parties. The Revolutionary Council published its first ideological statement entitled, "The Burmese Way to Socialism" at the end of April 1962. A year later it moved to a policy of rapid nationalization and assumed direct control of the economy. In 1971, the BSPP transformed itself into the governing structure though it retained the same military rulers, many of whom had retired from the armed forces. In 1974, a new constitution was adopted with additional centralized powers, serving to further entrench BSPP's position as the only legal political party in the country.

The second constitution of independent Burma differed markedly from its predecessor. The *Pyithu Hluttaw* or People's Assembly, a single chamber legislature, became the highest governing structure in the country and U Ne Win, who was the head of the BSPP, took over the Presidency. Under the one-party regime, freedom for the people of Burma was largely repressed. Furthermore, civil strife continued with the military instigating campaigns against the forces of the ethnic nationalities and the Burma Communist Party (BCP). During this period, the ruling regime faced popular unrest. Workers staged violent strikes in 1974 and 1975. Students also demonstrated throughout this period. A particularly serious student protest erupted in 1974 after a struggle between the students and the regime over the proper burial of the remains of U Thant, the third Sec. Gen. of the UN. In 1981 Ne Win abdicated the presidency but continued to head the BSPP. Political mismanagement and instability also severely affected the economy. For example, in 1987, following intense criticism from Ne Win, the regime demonetized three banknotes without warning or reimbursement. As a result, nearly 70 percent of the currency in circulation became worthless.

Tension within the country escalated to a breaking point in 1988. In March 1988, a teashop brawl led to the death of a student from the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) after the intervention of riot police. Daily protests by RIT students ensued and spread to other universities. After twelve days of violent clashes with police, the regime closed the universities. The riots left several students dead and missing. When the universities reopened in June, the students resumed protests, calling for accountability into the student deaths and injuries. The military, however, responded with force, killing at least 20 more students and arresting hundreds of others. And once again the universities closed.

The wave of social unrest spread as the people of Burma became unified in their demand for political change. In response, the military declared a state of martial law. On 23 July 1988, the BSPP appointed Gen. Sein Lwin as the new party head and later president. To demonstrate opposition to continued military rule in the country, students and activists organized a peaceful, nationwide strike on 8 August 1988. The now notorious 8888 uprising led to the death and arrest of thousands of protestors and demonstrators at the hands of the regime.

Following the protest, on 12 August 1988 Gen. Sein Lwin was replaced by a civilian lawyer named Dr. Maung Maung. The period of civilian rule was not only superficial but short-lived. On 18 September 1988, the military regained power through a bloody coup. During the month of civilian leadership, agents of the military spread rumours that criminals had been released into the general population, the water supply was poisoned and that other heinous acts had been committed in order to stimulate an environment of fear and chaos. The revived military dictatorship forcibly took control under the name "State Law and Order Restoration Council" (SLORC). Opting for martial law, SLORC suspended the 1974

constitution and brutally suppressed all opposition through force, resulting in thousands of deaths and arrests.

SLORC Military Rule (1988-1997)

On 23 September 1988, having established himself as Burma's leader, the head of the SLORC, Gen. Saw Maung, assured the public that the sole aim of military intervention was to restore law and order, improve the economic conditions of the people, and organize multiparty elections as soon as possible. He insisted that it was not his intention to *"cling to State power for long."*

Within months parties began to register with the advent of a new election law. The National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the national hero Gen. Aung San, quickly emerged as the leading opposition party. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi travelled throughout the country attracting large crowds, despite the SLORC decrees limiting public gatherings to four persons. As her following expanded, the military tried to discredit her. They accused her of not having "pure" motives, disparaged her marriage to a foreigner, questioned her loyalty to Burma, and suggested that she was being manipulated by Communists in her party. Unable to sway her supporters, in July 1989 SLORC placed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest and disqualified her from participating in the elections. In spite of these tactics, the NLD achieved a landslide victory in the elections held on 27 May 1990, winning 392 of the 485 seats contested. In contrast, the SLORC-backed National Unity Party (NUP) won 10 seats.

Rejected by popular vote, the junta refused to implement the results claiming a constitution must be drafted before Parliament can convene. Meanwhile, the SLORC maintained control over the country through martial law. On 27 July 1990, the SLORC promulgated Declaration 1/90 confirming this stating, *"*[the SLORC] *is not an organisation that observes any constitution; it is an organisation that is governing the nation under Martial Law."* Following this announcement SLORC began to arrest, harass, and intimidate NLD members as well as members of other political parties. As time progressed and the SLORC persisted in its refusal to hand over power, in December 1990 members of the elected Parliament established the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) with the support of all major ethnic groups struggling to assert themselves within Burma.

On 24 April 1992, two years after the elections, SLORC issued Order No. 11/92 titled the "Convening of a National Convention." It indicated that a National Convention (NC) would be convened *"in order to lay down basic principles to draft a firm constitution."* On 2 October 1992, however, without consulting any political or ethnic leaders, the regime delineated six objectives to "guide" the NC. The sixth principle essentially guarantees a dominant role for the military in any future government. In January 1993, the convention finally assembled with 702 delegates, of whom only 106 were elected representatives. The remaining delegates were either handpicked by the SLORC to "represent" workers, peasants, intellectuals, national races, and service personnel, or were "specially invited persons." Regardless, meetings were repeatedly suspended after ethnic delegates persist in opposing a centralized state structure. Overriding such opposition and alternative proposals, the regime imposed another 104 principles to "guide" the constitutional drafting process. Furthermore, to suppress opposition to the NC, the SLORC also issued Order No. 5/96 on 7 June 1996 prohibiting criticism of the NC. The order carries a potential 20 year sentence.

On 10 July 1995, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from almost six years of house arrest. Although her release initially raised hopes for an improvement in the human rights situation in Burma, nothing changed. Rather, the pace of political arrests and persecution

accelerated dramatically after November 1995 when the NLD withdrew, along with other groups, from the SLORC-controlled NC due to its undemocratic processes. SLORC responded to the NLD withdrawal by expelling the NLD permanently from the convention. Increased targeting and harassment of NLD members and supporters followed. On 9 November 1996, a group of about 200 young men attacked Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade with iron bars and sticks. The men were thought to be members of the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), a puppet organisation created by the regime to feign civilian support for the regime and intimidate the pro-democracy movement. In December 1996, more than 2,000 people, including hundreds of students, were arrested after engaging in peaceful demonstrations calling for genuine reforms. Public gatherings on weekends in front of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's home have been banned since the end of 1996.

Hostilities between the SLORC and armed ethnic resistance groups meanwhile continued throughout this period. The SLORC maintained a military presence throughout the ethnic minority areas, instigating attacks against resistance fighters. Singapore, China, and Pakistan supported the SLORC campaign by supplying the weaponry needs of the regime. Thailand disregarded increased offensives against border groups after the SLORC granted timber and fishing concessions in the border areas. In 1989, the SLORC heightened aggressive tactics in an effort to pressure opposition groups into one-sided ceasefire pacts. At this time, several resistance groups succumbed to the regime's pressure and signed onto restrictive ceasefire agreements. Meanwhile attacks have continued in the ethnic minority areas. During the offensives, the military committed a range of human rights violations and abuses against ethnic minority villagers living within the conflict zones.

SPDC Military Rule (1997-Present)

On November 15, 1997, the SLORC was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Although the three most senior members of the regime retained their posts in the SPDC, 14 former members – all senior military officers – were replaced and a four - member SPDC advisory group was established. In late November three members of this advisory group were placed under house arrest. The three were former Tourism Minister Lieutenant-General Kyaw Ba; the former Commerce Minister Lieutenant-General Tun Kyi; the former Agriculture Minister Lieutenant-General Myint Aung. A number of their aides and staff at other ministries were also placed under investigation. Following the detention, the advisory group was dissolved on December 10, 1997, less than one month after its formation. Officials said the members of the advisory group no longer held their military posts. The changes did not stop there. On December 20, there was an unexpected reshuffle within the second tier of the military regime's cabinet. Another eight posts in the cabinet were reshuffled and one new member was added. SPDC leaders conducted another reshuffle of top generals in November 2001, and in March 2002 arrested four relatives of former top general Ne Win. The four were accused of plotting to overthrow the current government in a military coup, and were sentenced to death for treason in September 2002.

The Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) was formed on the 16 September 1998 in response to the military regime's failure to cede power thus enabling the elected representatives to form a parliament and the NLD to form a government. Two hundred and fifty-one elected MPs (52% of MPs elected in 1990) gave their authority to the ten founding members to form the CRPP. This was based on the principle articulated in the 1974 *Pyithu Hluttaw* Law that requires State Authorities to convene parliament if 34% or more of the members of parliament so desire. The CRPP's objective was to convene the Parliament until all MPs elected were able to do so. The CRPP's first act was to issue a proclamation that repealed all SLORC & SPDC orders, decrees, notifications, rules and

laws. The SPDC declared the CRPP to be illegal. However, despite serious restrictions and the almost immediate arrest and imprisonment of Chairman Dr Saw Mra Aung, the CRPP survived and on September 16, 2002 held a ceremony at NLD headquarters to celebrate its fourth anniversary.

In September 2000, there was a major crackdown by the SPDC on NLD leaders, during which Chairman U Aung Shwe, and Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo were detained and General Secretary Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. This act appeared to be the catalyst for the initiation of UN brokered 'talks' between the regime and Daw Suu. On January 9, 2001 the UN Secretary-General's Spokesman announced that there had been ongoing dialogue between the SPDC and the NLD since October 2000. While the content of the talks remained secret, this news was hailed as a significant breakthrough and a positive step towards democratic transition. In the following months, the SPDC allowed a number of NLD offices to reopen and released substantial numbers of political prisoners, acts which were hailed by the international community as a sign of the regime's sincerity towards pursuing change.

On May 6, 2002, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from 19 months of house arrest, though Burmese intelligence continued to monitor NLD leaders and attend many NLD meetings in Rangoon. Following her release, the junta allowed Daw Suu and the NLD a greater measure of freedom to travel around the country and to meet with representatives of foreign governments and international organizations. The regime recognized the NLD as a legal entity and permitted the party to reopen approximately 90 out of 300 offices throughout the country. However, to a lesser degree the SPDC continued to monitor and restrict the activities of the NLD and Daw Suu through harassment and threats. Other political and ethnic opposition groups remained banned.

By the end of 2002 the dialogue had ground to a halt and the economic situation inside the country had worsened. It had become increasingly evident that the regime lacked the will to pursue substantive reforms and was using the dialogue as a tool to deflect international criticism and garner increased aid and investment. For the first half of 2003 this sentiment continued, as the SPDC repeatedly stalled in scheduling new talks or allowing UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail to come to Burma. While Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD were able to engage in several campaigning tours in the first half of 2003 and NLD offices continued to open, harassment perpetrated by members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and other state sponsored actors was relentless.

On May 30, 2003, Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD members and supporters were violently attacked by members of the USDA and other state organized individuals armed with bamboo sticks and metal rods on the road to Depayin, Sagaing Division. The attack resulted in the re-arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD Deputy Chairman U Tin Oo, and all members of the Central Executive Committee of the NLD. In addition, unknown numbers of NLD members and supporters were killed, injured, or imprisoned during or following the attack. NLD offices across the country were ordered to close and all political opposition activities were banned.

The attack on the NLD and the ensuing crackdown on the democracy movement resulted in international outcry and demands for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as well as an independent and transparent investigation into the events of 30 May. The SPDC has not allowed such an investigation and claims that the attacks were instigated by the NLD. Moreover, the SPDC reports that only four people were killed and 50 people were injured in the attack. Eyewitness accounts and unofficial sources indicate that the actual numbers of dead and wounded are significantly higher. In addition to other international reactions, the crackdown on the democracy movement resulted in tougher sanctions enacted by the United States and the European Union.

Despite repeated calls for more open lines of communication, the SPDC increasingly withdrew from further discussions and throughout the first half of 2003 the regime refused to schedule more talks. Beginning in 2003 and continuing throughout 2005, the regime excluded Razali Ismail, the UN Special Envoy for Burma, and Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, from entering the country. Razali resigned his office on 8 January 2006 citing an inability to effectively carry out his mandate, and Pinheiro continued to be denied access to the county throughout 2006.

On 25 August 2003, the SPDC reshuffled, removing the relatively moderate General Khin Nyunt from the position of Secretary 1 and placing him in a newly created position of Prime Minister. Lt Gen Soe Win, who is believed to have planned the 30 May attack on the NLD, replaced Khin Nyunt as Secretary 1. Seemingly to deflect international criticism following the Depayin Massacre, Khin Nyunt announced a seven-point roadmap to democracy just five days later on 30 August 2003, which included reconvening the stalled 1993 National Convention through which a State Constitution would be drafted. Thereafter, the Constitution would be voted on in a national referendum, and free and fair elections would eventually ensue. Yet, the plans for the National Convention included no mention of the participation of the NLD or ethnic groups.

By the end of 2003, the SPDC was placing greater emphasis on the participation of the ethnic groups in the National Convention, both ceasefire and non ceasefire. Most ethnic ceasefire groups had initially indicated that they would participate if certain conditions were met, such as the release of all political prisoners or the equal participation of all political and ethnic groups, both ceasefire and non ceasefire. However, despite the fact that these conditions went unmet, 34 ceasefire groups sent delegates to the National Convention, which was convened on 17 May 2004. This included the 17 major ceasefire groups and various splinter groups.

On 7 April 2004, seven of the nine NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) members had been invited to attend the 2004 National Convention. The two excluded CEC members were the detained Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo. The invited CEC members initially reported that the NLD's attendance was likely but contingent upon the SPDC's agreement to a list of requests. These requests included, among other things, the release of the remaining two NLD CEC members in detention, the release of all political prisoners and the reopening of NLD offices across the country. The NLD's requests also addressed the fact that the 2004 National Convention was to follow the "104 basic principles" and "six objectives" which had been created for the 1993 National Convention from which the NLD walked out in 1996. The "104 basic principles" and "six objectives" had been created to steer the constitution drafting process and ensured the military's dominance in a future government. The SPDC did not meet the NLD's principle demands and therefore the NLD boycotted the 2004 session of the National Convention.

In total, 1,076 out of 1,088 delegates attended the 2004 session of the National Convention. Only 15 MPs elected in the 1990 elections attended. In addition, only seven legally registered political parties that participated in the 1990 elections attended. Eight political parties, aside from the NLD, boycotted. These included the National Unity Party, the Kokang Democracy and Unity Party, the Union Pa-O National Organization, the Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization, the Lahu National Development Party, the Wa National Development Party and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy. The Shan State Kokang Party was absent.

The 2004 session of the National Convention proceeded under highly restrictive conditions which suppressed the freedoms of opinion, expression, movement, assembly and association of the delegates. Moreover, Order No. 5/96, enacted by the SLORC in 1996, was maintained allowing for imprisonment of up to 20 years those who expressed political

views which were considered a threat to the stability of the State. This law effectively prevented expression of opposition to any SPDC policies. The National Convention was recessed on 9 July 2004 with the next session was scheduled for early 2005.

In November 2003, the SPDC sent a delegation to meet with Karen National Union (KNU) leaders in Mae Sot, Thailand. The KNU had been fighting against the government in Rangoon for over 50 years. This visit was followed by a KNU delegation visit to Rangoon. By the end of 2003, the KNU and SPDC agreed upon a verbal ceasefire and formal ceasefire discussions commenced in early 2004. Yet, by the end of 2004, a formal ceasefire agreement had yet to be reached. Despite the verbal ceasefire agreement, SPDC offensives in Karen areas continued, with concomitant human rights abuses.

Following the KNU's decision to engage in ceasefire talks, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) also announced plans to engage in ceasefire discussions in late 2003. While talks had been scheduled for early 2004, progress was thwarted when the KNPP and SPDC disagreed over the KNPP's position of negotiation. Throughout 2004 both fighting and human rights abuses perpetrated by state sanctioned actors continued to be reported in Karenni areas. Despite this, the KNPP continued to express the desire to engage in formal ceasefire discussions with the military government.

On October 19, 2004, the SPDC reshuffled again with the removal and arrest of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and many of his affiliates. Lt Gen Soe Win was appointed as the new Prime Minister and Lt Gen Thein San replaced Soe Win as Secretary 1. The reshuffle included several other shifts in government leadership and was viewed as a consolidation of hardliners among the top leadership of the SPDC. As Khin Nyunt had played a key role in the formation of most ceasefire agreements, his removal raised concerns regarding the status of these agreements with the new government leaders. However, the SPDC indicated that all ceasefire agreements would remain unchanged.

In conjunction with the reshuffle, the 1983 law on the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) was annulled on October 22, 2004. The SPDC reported that the NIB, which had been under the leadership of Khin Nyunt, was no longer appropriate for the well being of the people. As a result, the NIB and organisations within its apparatus, such as the Military Intelligence Services (MIS), were disbanded. In the months that followed, 300 top level former MI agents were arrested, some 1,500 were allowed to "retire," and about 2,500 were transferred to combat duty. Dismemberment of the NIB, however, has not meant the end to MI in Burma. Intelligence operations have since reorganized now functioning under the Office of the Military Affairs Security and reporting directly to the regional military commands.

The removal of Gen. Khin Nyunt as prime minister and dissolution of the NIB also led to three mass prison releases over the course of 2004. However, out of the 14,318 prisoners released from November to December 2004, only 76 were political prisoners. Among the 76 political prisoners released was Min Ko Naing, chairman of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), who had been imprisoned for over 15 years. Another mass release of prisoners occurred on 3 January 2005, with the NC a little over a month away and the regime desperate to gain political favour. The SPDC released 5,588 inmates from prisons around the country, however only 23 political prisoners were among those released. In 2006, there were no mass amnesties and at the close of the year the number of political prisoners was estimated to be 1,114, a figure that did not include the significant number of prisoners detained in military bases and secret jails.

Since the ouster of Gen. Khin Nyunt, the military leadership line-up has been in constant flux. Power struggles between SPDC chairman Sen. Gen. Than Shwe and his second-in-command Vice Sen. Gen. Maung Aye continued throughout 2005 spurring rumours of another potential ouster. At the end of May 2005 and in August 2005, the regime underwent

yet another major reorganisation with a reshuffle of about half of the regional commanders. In addition, several high ranking SPDC officers were removed from their posts in August 2005 and placed under house arrest or "permitted to retire," including the Director General of the SPDC Office Lt. Col. Pe Nyein, Director General of the Prime Minister's office Soe Tint, as well as Brig. Gen. Pyi Sone and Than Shwe who are attached to the Prime Minister's office. 2006 saw the continuation of this power struggle within the upper echelons of the SPDC. On 26 January 2006, Lt Gen Myint Swe, who is known to be a close ally of Sen. Gen. Than Shwe, vacated his post as commander of the Rangoon Command, to be appointed as chief of the newly created Bureau of Special Operations (BSO) under the Ministry of Defence. The creation of BSO directly limits the power of Maung Aye-aligned Hla Htay Win, and the move is seen as a weakening of Maung Aye. Subsequently, a large scale shake-up was initiated in mid May, which called the country's top 12 generals together, and on 16 May it was announced that four top officials were said to be ready to "retire". Sen. Gen. Than Shwe is reportedly favouring a younger generation of graduates from the National Defence Academy who are supposed to contribute to a new program of economic liberalisation and transition to civilian government with Sen. Gen. Than Shwe taking on the role of President-for-Life.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to feign some level of stability and progress within the country following the ouster of Gen. Khin Nyunt, the regime announced plans to recommence the NC on 17 February 2005. However, in the lead up to the February 2005 session, the junta made efforts to stifle all potential opposition to the process by targeting and harassing opposition groups. Political and ethnic minority leaders were subject to arrest, detention, and other abuses at the hands of the SPDC in an attempt to silence resistance to the regime's agenda. The regime arbitrarily extended the detention of ten prominent political dissidents, including NLD leaders, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo as well as several elected MP's. Military build-up and increased hostilities in the ethnic areas also continued. The SPDC also arrested several prominent Shan activists and leaders, including Gen. Hkun Htun Oo and Gen. Hso Ten, chairmen of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and the Shan State Peace Council (SSPC) respectively, only days before the February session was scheduled to resume. These leaders were later handed severely harsh sentences ranging from 70 years to 93 years of imprisonment. The February 2005 sessions adjourned on 31 March 2005 without achieving any genuine progress towards democratic reform.

Before the NC was again reconvened, the SPDC made the unexpected move of relocating its ministries, civil servants and operations to the remote village of Pyinmana, Mandalay Division, located about 320 km. from Rangoon. The move occurred at the auspicious time of 6:37 am on 6 November 2005. Without advanced notice, civil servants were forced to relocate to Pyinmana, leaving families and businesses behind. The civil servants meanwhile found the site of the new capital near Pyinmana, later named Nay Pyi Daw ('place of king' or 'royal city'), unprepared for their arrival, with basic accommodations, facilities, and commodities lacking. Those who tried to resign were threatened with imprisonment, causing some to go into hiding. The site itself was reportedly surrounded by barbed wire and under heavy military guard. No official reason was given for the surprise move, although analysts have suggested factors to include; concerns over possible civilian protests in Rangoon, foreign criticism of the SPDC, a fear of a foreign military intervention, and the need to locate the SPDC more centrally to direct its military campaigns against ethnic insurgencies along the eastern border. Building and construction at Nay Pyi Daw continued on a massive scale throughout 2006, for which land was confiscated from thousands of local residents, and villagers and convicts alike were conscripted as forced labourers. The SPDC gave its civil servants a substantial salary increase in an attempt to soothe the pain of relocation; greatly agitating already spiralling rates of inflation within the country.

In December 2005 the NC again reconvened, adjourning on 31 January 2006 without any discernable advancement. It once more resumed its activities on 10 October, recessing on 29 December 2006. Participation in both 2006 sessions remained highly unrepresentative with several political and ethnic minority groups excluded from the proceedings. Like past Conventions, a majority of the delegates in attendance were members of SPDC-sponsored organisations, such as the USDA. Furthermore, open discussion was largely circumscribed by the regime who actively stifled all proposals initiated by delegates that were not in keeping with its predetermined agenda. On 18 October 2006, the 179th session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Governing Council in Geneva passed a resolution concerning the NC process, since endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, stating:

> *"[T]he National Convention, in its present form, is designed to prolong and legitimize military rule against the will of the people as expressed in the 1990 elections, and that any transition towards democracy will fail so long as it is not genuinely free, transparent and reflective of the people's will, and preceded by the unconditional release of all political prisoners and the lifting of all restrictions on human rights and political activity".*

In the face of no real progress toward democratic reform and continued human rights abuses, certain sectors of the international community made some attempt to pressure the junta for reform. In September 2005, the global law firm DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary published 'Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma', a report commissioned by Vacláv Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, and Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. The report provided a detailed argument of why the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should act on the situation in Burma, and added huge impetus to the international campaign to bring Burma before the Council. Following its publication, the U.S. took up the case of placing Burma on the UNSC's agenda. Due to opposition from China and Russia, on 2 December 2005, the 15 Council members reached a compromise to receive a briefing on the situation in Burma.

UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, briefed the Council on 16 December 2005. In response, the SPDC invited Gambari to visit the country, where he was allowed to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Subsequently, Gambari again briefed the Council on 31 May 2006, and the U.S. stepped up their attempts to pursue a UN Security Council resolution underlining the international community's concerns about the situation in Burma, including the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the need for an inclusive and democratic political process. Whilst France, Britain and other council members supported the U.S. position; Russia and China continued to oppose their efforts.

On 1 September 2006, the U.S. formally requested that the President of the Council, Greece, put Burma on the formal agenda of the Council. On 15 September, after procedural voting of 10 in favour (United States, Argentina, Denmark, France, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Peru, Slovakia and United Kingdom), 4 against (China, Congo, Qatar, Russia) and 1 abstention (United Republic of Tanzania), Burma was officially adopted onto the formal agenda. Three prominent members of the 88 Generation Student group; Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and Htay Kywe, were arrested in Burma on 27 September 2006, after issuing a statement in support of the impending UNSC debate. On 29 September, the Security Council initiated discussions on Burma, but continued opposition from China and Russia as well as South Africa frustrated attempts to pass a resolution.

The year 2006 also saw a significant toughening of the ILO's stance towards the Burmese regime. At the ILO Governing Body meeting in March 2006 the members agreed to begin reviewing new courses of action which could be taken against the regime for its non-compliance with the Forced Labour Convention. The key sticking point was the continued

lack of any viable complaints mechanism for accusations of forced labour, and the new practice of prosecuting people for *"false complaints"*. Three options for future action were presented to the annual ILO conference in June. Two involved referring Burma to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the other would see the establishment of an ad hoc tribunal to rule on the matter. In response to this increased threat of international legal measures the regime immediately released Su Su Nway, imprisoned after bringing convictions against local officials for forcing villagers to work on a road building project. The SPDC later released another high profile prisoner, Aye Myint, who was being held on similar charges. Despite these releases, it was widely felt among ILO members that the actions did not go far enough and as a result the ILO remained firm on its insistence that effective action on the establishment of a complaint mechanism had to be made by November 2006. This deadline subsequently passed with no further progress on the issue. The ILO Governing Body then agreed to begin full preparations to refer Burma to the ICJ for an advisory opinion on the matter and placed the issue on the agenda for a final decision at the Governing Body meeting in March 2007.

Whilst the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has traditionally preached non interference in the internal affairs of its member states, 2006 saw unprecedented pressure placed on the SPDC from its neighbours, compelling Burma to decline its first opportunity to chair ASEAN. The SPDC also agreed to host an ASEAN envoy to assess their progress towards democratic reform. After constantly delaying his visit, the envoy was finally authorized to visit the country in March 2006, although he interrupted his mission when the SPDC refused to allow him to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Subsequently, several ASEAN members issued very critical public statements highlighting the significant absence of progress, in terms of democracy and human rights, within Burma.

Regardless of international pressure and condemnation, the regime continued to commit severe and widespread human rights abuses against the people of Burma, throughout 2006, including forced labour and portering practices, forcible recruitment of child soldiers, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, rape, torture, forcible relocation and confiscation of property. Furthermore, the regime continued to heavily restrict fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, movement, and religion. Whilst such abuses were committed under the rubric of security and development; in actuality they significantly impeded civilian's attempts to sustain their livelihoods, and created large scale human insecurity within the country.

Harassment against political organisations continued, with a widespread campaign mounted throughout 2006 to pressure members of the NLD and SNLD to resign their posts, and the regime again extending the terms of house arrest for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo on 27 May 2006 and 13 February 2006 respectively. On 12 February 2006, Burma's Union Day, the NLD issued a statement offering to recognise the SPDC as the country's legitimate government de jure. The unprecedented proposal came on condition that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi be released from house arrest and a parliament convened in accordance with the election results of 1990. The NLD further pressed for its offices to be reopened nationwide and for a cessation to the pressure on its members to resign. The NLD's Union Day proposal was formerly rejected in April by Information Minister Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan who warned that the NLD could be criminalised as it maintained contact with *"terrorist"* organisations. A succession of bombings beginning in 2004 and continuing throughout 2006 had led the SPDC to assert that its political rivals were responsible, declaring the NCGUB, the Federation of Trade Unions – Burma (FTUB), the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), the National League for Democracy-Liberated Area (NLD-LA), the Karen National Union (KNU) and the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), to be terrorist organisations. All these groups denied these charges, and the junta failed to provide any concrete evidence to substantiate its claims. Numerous arrests of political activists occurred throughout 2006 under charges of terrorist activity.

Meanwhile, the situation in many of the ethnic states continued to deteriorate. In November 2005 the SPDC launched a large scale military offensive in the Karen areas of Nyaunglebin, Papun and Toungoo, which continued throughout 2006. During the offensives SPDC forces deliberately and directly targeted Karen villages and their inhabitants, and operations resulted in egregious and large scale human rights abuses. Estimates place the number of Karen villagers who were forced to abandon their homes and live as IDPs in the forests at 25,000. Another 3,000 found shelter in refugee camps in Thailand, whilst around 2,000 camped at an IDP settlement near the Salween River. In central and southern Shan State, security forces continued to engage the Shan State Army -South, with the SPDC employing other ethnic militias as auxiliary forces to suppress the rural population in these areas. The military maintained a program of forced relocation of villagers in the region that was accompanied by killings, rapes, and other abuses of civilians. In ethnic minority areas where the SPDC had established near total control over the local population, forced labour and extortion were rife, often enforced through the threat of arrest and torture.

BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 1

ARBITRARY DETENTION ENFORCED OR INVOLUNTARY DISAPPEARANCES

"No one shall be subjected to arbirary arrest, detention, or exile."

- Article 9, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

1.1 Introduction

Throughout 2007 the situation for the citizens of Burma, including the thousands of political prisoners held in Burma's numerous prisons, deteriorated. Burma's military junta, the SPDC, continued a policy of arbitrarily detaining and harassing the political opposition, pro-democracy activists, members of ethnic minorities, and ordinary citizens. While politically motivated arrests were carried out all year, a spike in arrests was seen during and after the pro-democracy protests in August and September. The extensive arrest campaign carried out by the military regime after the protests resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of citizens, including numerous monks and nuns. By the first week of October it was widely estimated that up to 6,000 persons, including at least 1,400 monks, had been arrested since the beginning of the protests.[1] Not counting the arrests made during the protests, there was an overall increase of at least 704 political prisoners in the year 2007, pushing the total number to 1,864.[2]

The eruption of protests throughout Burma in September 2007 seemed for a brief moment to offer hope for political change in Burma, but this hope was quickly extinguished when the military regime responded to the protesters with a violent crackdown, and an extensive arrest campaign. Especially significant was the junta's response to the protesting monks. Perceived by the SPDC as a distinct threat that could undermine the regime's hold on power, thousands of monks were arrested during a series of raids on monasteries throughout Burma. Human Rights Watch described the situation as follows:

> "*The government crackdown included baton-charges and beatings of unarmed demonstrators, mass arbitrary arrests, and repeated instances where weapons were fired-shoot-to-kill. To remove monks and nuns from the protests, the security forces raided dozens of Buddhist monasteries during the night, and sought to enforce the defrocking of thousands of monks. Current protest leaders, opposition party members and, activists from the '88 Generation students were tracked down and arrested- and continue to be arrested and detained."*[3]

The year 2007 then, has been extremely significant, not only for the widespread popular protests, but also for the extraordinarily high amount of arrests that took place in its wake. Pinpointing the exact number of arrests has been difficult. On 2 October, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed resolution S 5/1, requesting the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Burma to be invited to the country to assess the human rights situation, and investigate reports of arbitrary arrests, killings and other human rights abuses.[4]

However, the Special Rapporteur was only granted limited access, hampering his ability to fulfill his mandate. Leading human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have claimed that the lack of access to information resulted in an artificially low number of arrest and death estimates. The SPDC claimed the September crackdown resulted in 2,927 arrests; though, this figure was widely contested among opposition groups and international observers that have estimated as many as 6,000 arrests took place.

During his November visit, the Special Rapporteur was told by Burma's Minister of Home Affairs that of the alleged 2,927 arrestees, 2,836 had been released, leaving 91 in detention. Of those remaining in detention, most were held on charges of terrorism while others were still under investigation. Furthermore, at least 15 individuals had been sentenced to prison terms of up to 9.5 years for their roles in the protests.[5]

The majority of arrests took place from 18 September to the end of the curfew on 20 October, with massive numbers of arrests carried out at the height of the crackdown, on 26, 27, 28 and 29 September. In addition to the arrests made during the protest crackdown, many arrests were carried out in night-time raids at homes of activists as well as at a large number of monasteries. While the raids on monasteries were largely carried out by the military, many of the raids and arrests of activists were carried out by non law enforcement officials, such as members of the USDA and Swan Arr Shin.[6]

Since the lifting of the curfew on 20 October, the Special Rapporteur continued to receive reports of further arrests and releases. Of the arrestees, between 500 and 1,000 were still detained when the Special Rapporteur released his report in early December. In addition, 1,150 political prisoners held prior to the protests had not been released.[7] Moreover, as of 9 December opposition groups held lists with names of 635 persons who remained in detention after being arrested as a result of the anti-junta protests.[8] According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), by early December at least 28 individuals arrested in relation to the protests had already been sentenced to prison terms of up to 20 years.[9] In late December, 3 months after the protests, the junta continued arresting protesters.

Recent History

One of the key indicators of Burma's lack of freedom is the high arrest levels across the population, particularly arbitrary arrests. Many of those who are constantly being targeted for arbitrary arrest are the political opposition and human rights activists. The main opposition party National League of Democracy (NLD), which won the majority vote in the 1990 elections, has seen several of its members detained, including its two top leaders, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, who have been in and out of house arrest since the early 1990s. The two leaders were last arrested following the 30 May 2003 brutal attack upon their convoy during a political tour in Depayin, Sagaing Division.[10] In August 2003, whilst the two were still under house arrest, the SPDC announced its "roadmap to democracy", which would include the continuation of the National Convention (NC) to draft a new constitution. Though, it is important to note that the NLD, along with other opposition parties, have never participated in the National Convention. This boycott was a result of the illegitimacy of the rules set forth by the SPDC that banned freedom of expression from the convention. On the occasion of a session of the National Convention in May 2004, Amnesty International criticised the junta for its continued practice of arrests, surveillances, and intimidating opposition members.[11]

When Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt was arrested and removed from office in October 2004, the SPDC also charged many of his chief agencies with surveillance of perceived political dissidents, disbanding the agencies and arresting many of their members. However, this was not by any means the end of military intelligence activities in Burma, merely a transferral of responsibility to the Office of the Military Affairs Security (OMAS) in February 2005. OMAS has been under the leadership of the Directorate of Defence Services and SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe,[12] with the force named SaYaPa, or Military Security Force (MSF).[13] This was followed by the Special Bureau of police (SB) also increasing their surveillance roles in 2006.

The Year 2007

In 2007 the SPDC continued its pervasive strategy of monitoring, intimidating, interrogating and detaining NLD members, 88 Generation Student leaders, and other political and social activists. This harassment continued despite the junta's repeated claims that it is seeking to move towards democracy. In July 2007 the National Convention finished the redrafting of the 1974 Constitution, which had been in progress for the last 13 years. The delegates of the National Convention were handpicked by the regime, which excluded the NLD and other opposition groups from the drafting process. Due to the drafting process being strictly controlled by the SPDC, many observers have asserted that the National Convention and the seven point "roadmap to democracy" contain little hope for substantive political change.

Throughout 2007, the junta systematically impeded the free actions of a civil society in Burma by arresting and harassing socially concerned individuals and groups. This assertion was maintained by UN Special Rapporteur Sergio Pinheiro, who in December 2007 stated that *"over the last two years, the Special Rapporteur has received several reports alleging the government's involvement in cracking down on several initiatives by people to organize themselves, even for non-political purposes, such as social and economic issues."*[14]

Rising inflation and soaring commodity prices led to a few small-scale protests in the first half of 2007, most of which ended swiftly with arrests of the participants. For example, in February 2007, nine activists were arrested in Rangoon after protesting against Burma's worsening economic conditions. Moreover, in April at least eight people were arrested after further small-scale economic protests were launched. (For more information, see Section 1.2: Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests, Detention and Disappearances).

Aside from the arrests made during demonstrations, many have also been arrested for trying to better their economic conditions through enhanced labour rights. On 1 May 2007, 33 persons were arrested after attending separate workshops on labour rights. While most of those detained were subsequently released, six of the workshop organizers were sentenced to lengthy prison terms.[15]

Arrest Campaign Following the September 2007 Saffron Revolution

The latter half of 2007 saw a spike of arrests as the military regime carried out a brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protestors in September. Following a policy of systematic oppression, SPDC authorities intimidated and harassed pro-democracy groups by arresting activists without legal justification and utilizing harsh interrogation methods. For observers outside the country, the September protests offered a glimpse into the regime's willingness to use force to quell popular protests. Unfortunately, the junta's brutal response was not an isolated event, but rather a continuation of policy that has existed since the 1988 uprising.

After forcefully putting down the street demonstrations, the authorities started its search for suspected protest participants and supporters. In addition to arresting suspected protesters, the SPDC arbitrarily arrested persons for donating food or water to the protesting monks, for applauding the protest on the sidewalks and for providing shelter to protestors in hiding.

On the night of 25 September a curfew was imposed, and military trucks roamed the streets of Rangoon shouting through loudspeakers, *"We have your photos. We will come and take you."* In an effort to arrest protesters, the authorities matched photographs taken at the demonstrations with those held by each town's governing office, the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC), to locate the residency of each protester. The authorities also went from house to house looking for protesters. This can be conducted rather easily

as residents in many areas of Rangoon are required to display photographs of household members outside their homes.

A strict curfew that forced people to stay in their homes led to effective late-night raids by the SPDC, accounting for the arrest of hundreds of protestors. Moreover, on occasions where the authorities were unable to find a suspected protester, they would often arrest his family members, holding them hostage until the suspect turned himself in. A report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Burma commented on this issue:

> "*State security groups have continued to search for and detain specific individuals suspected of involvement in the anti-government protests primarily through night raids on homes. It has also been confirmed that the authorities have resorted to arbitrary and unlawful detention of family members or close friends and suspected sympathizers of protesters currently in hiding. This constitutes hostage taking- explicit or implicit pressure on suspected protestors to forward as a condition for releasing or not harming the hostage. It is a violation of fundamental rules of international law."*[16]

SPDC army soldiers arresting three men in Rangoon in a crackdown against protesters on 29 September 2007. *[Photo: AP]*

1.2 Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests, Detention and Disappearances

> *"The judicial system, far from affording individuals basic standards of justice, is employed by the Government as an instrument of repression to silence dissent."*[17]
>
> - UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro

Burma's military regime has long relied on vague and antiquated laws to legitimize its actions against the political opposition. Many of the laws in use today originate in British colonial law, while others have been created since independence. The lack of legal clarity leaves much room for interpretation on both the prosecutorial and protective sides of the law. Unfortunately the regime is often guilty of stretching certain laws beyond recognition, while ignoring others. The SPDC has for years exploited the vagueness of some of these laws, to provide for the imposition of imprisonment by a court for conduct defined broadly enough to encompass peaceful political resistance. While there is a legal framework in place to guarantee the rights of defendants, this framework is often only partially implemented in political cases, or simply dismissed entirely.

In order to imprison and sentence activists, the junta frequently turns to section 505 (b) of the *Penal Code*, using it as a blanket charge against protesters and pro-democracy group leaders. Under the penal code, section 505 (b) states that:

> *"Whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement, rumor or report... (b) with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility... shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to two years, or with [a] fine, or with both."*[18]

The ambiguity of this law allows it to be utilized in multiple contexts and situations. The SPDC has used it to sentence citizens for "offences" ranging from making complaints about forced labour to the watching of a wedding video of General Than Shwe's daughter.[19] Whatever the situation, section 505 (b) has been the favored law for retribution against pro-democracy activists and citizens alike. The section was used against many of the September protesters, even against persons who were merely offering water and food to monks.

The SPDC also makes use of other laws which have coalesced under the general umbrella of 'security' legislation. Primarily, these laws emanate from the *Emergency Provisions Act* (1950), the *Unlawful Associations Act* (1908), and the *State Protection Law* (1975).

The *1950 Emergency Provisions Act* is a commonly used alternative to Section 505(b), used to sentence people for political reasons. The Act carries with it the possibility of a death sentence if convicted of articles 2, 3, and 4, all of which concern assisting in an act of treason. Two of the most common articles used in sentencing are Articles 5 (e) and 5 (j), which state that:

> 5 (e) *"If anything is done intentionally to spread false news knowing it to be false or having reason to believe that it is false or if any act which is likely to cause the same is done"*[20]

> 5 (j) *"[Anyone who] causes or intends to disrupt the morality or the behaviour of a group of people or the general public, or to disrupt the security or the reconstruction of stability of the union."*[21]

Both articles carry lengthy seven year prison sentences and heavy fines. Article 5(j) has been used so widely in the indictment of political prisoners that '5J' is often used as short hand to denote a political prisoner."[22]

Another law often used to charge members of the pro-democracy movement is the *1908 Unlawful Associations Act*, which criminalizes association with groups, most often of a political nature. This Act comprises multiple articles which have been used to charge activists. The "offences" can range from something as simple as an individual who *"takes parts in meetings, or contributes or receives or solicits any contribution for such an association, or any way assists the operations of an unlawful association,"* as in article 17(1), to an individual that *"encourages or aids persons to commit acts of violence or intimidation or of which the members habitually commit such acts,"* as in article 15(2).[23]

The *1975 State Protection Law* allows the state to restrict a citizen's 'fundamental rights' during times of duress. SPDC authorities use this law to detain any individual or restrict them to residence for up to five years without charge or trial if they are suspected of "having performed, or is performing, or is believed to be performing an act endangering the state sovereignty and security, and public law and order…"[24]

Another law used by the SPDC to repress political activism is Section 143 of the *Penal Code*. Following the September protests several NLD members were charged under Section 143, for unlawful assembly, which can lead to up to six months' imprisonment.[25]

These laws have severely restricted the rights of individuals, and political groups within Burma. Contorted and misused, overtime, these laws have eroded the basic civil liberties and protections needed to guard against a repressive state.

Disappearances

In December 2007 Pinheiro's report noted at least 74 cases of enforced disappearances, while Human Rights Watch said that hundreds of protestors remained unaccounted for. Such estimates were echoed by other groups, including the AAPP which claimed the location of at least 300 remained unknown.[26]

In some cases, disappeared persons have only been found when it is too late to rescue them. In such cases it is often difficult to prove the responsibility of the authorities. However an indication of state involvement is reluctance to find and punish the perpetrator, especially in case of political activists. In the months following the September protests, several persons were reported missing and some of these were later found dead. For example, on 17 October 2007, prominent activist Nyi Pu Lay was found dead in the Gwa River. According to an anonymous source, "his body was floating on the Gwa River and when the police learnt about it, they immediately took it away and cremated it. His family members identified him from his clothes". Nyi Pu Lay was a member of the NLD and was missing for four days before being found.[27] (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions).

Arrest and Pre-Trial Interrogation and Detention

Numerous reports have documented cases of arrest without charge, prolonged detention, pre-trial interrogation, and torture, within the Burmese legal system. These conditions often accompany politically motivated arrests, and individuals are denied contact with family, lawyers, and medical professionals. As mentioned above, many of the laws utilized by the regime have eroded individual protections against such acts.

Detailed reports issued by Amnesty International have raised a number of concerns about the administration of justice, highlighting laws and practices regarding detention, torture, trial, and conditions of imprisonment. Political prisoners are frequently held incommunicado in pretrial detention, facilitating the use of torture and other forms of coercion, and are denied access to family members, legal counsel, and medical care. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB) reported that 5 political prisoners died in custody in 2007. Prisons are often overcrowded, and in 2007 the ICRC continued to be barred from conducting visits to prison facilities.[28]

Regime security forces often conduct nighttime raids; arresting people without providing legal justification, or any information to family members. This was seen in multiple cases throughout 2007, especially after the onset of protests in August and September. Monks and suspected political leaders were arrested under the cover of darkness, and taken to undisclosed locations to face interrogation. Once in custody, individuals often face harsh interrogative tactics, such as physical abuse, denial of food and water, and sleep deprivation. In 2006 the AAPPB released a report detailing the torturous conditions detainees met while in custody. The report outlines the three types of torture prevalent in detention facilities; physical torture, mental torture, and sexual torture, stating that:

> *"Among the physical torture endured, brutal beatings are the most common. These beatings frequently last until the prisoner falls unconscious. In many cases the prisoner is forcibly woken from his or her unconsciousness to be tortured and abused again. Other physical torture includes: rolling an iron bar up and down the shins (known as the Iron Road), until the flesh is ripped; forcing political prisoners to assume positions of an 'airplane,' 'motorbike, 'semigwa dance,' or 'crocodile;' tying political prisoners down for an extended period of time with ropes or chains; water torture; beating a single spot on the prisoners body for hours on end; burning with cigarettes, hot wax, lighters or electric rods; and electric shocks. Among the mental torture inflicted is the use of incommunicado detention. When a political prisoner is arrested, neither their families nor a lawyer is informed of where they are being taken. It often takes weeks, months and even years to learn of a loved ones location. Incommunicado detention is a noted precursor to torture as no one can be held accountable. It also causes untold mental suffering for the individual detained. Other mental torture includes blindfolding and hooding a prisoner; blaming the prisoner for torture; witnessing other prisoners being tortured; no legal recourse to defend oneself; false releases; lack of family visits; isolation and solitary confinement; playing on phobias; using inappropriate titles of address. Sexual abuse also occurs during interrogation, including: threats of rape, harassment; molestation; beating or electrically shocking an individual's genitals; and one documented attempted rape of a male political prisoner with a dog."*[29]

Interrogation methods have changed little since the report was authored in 2006. In fact, the magnitude of arrests made during the September 2007 protests, may have resulted in larger scale violations. (For more information, see Chapter 2: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the HRDU report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

As a result of the large number of arrests during the September 2007 protests, detainees suffered worsening conditions as the detention facilities became overcrowded. The influx of new prisoners led the regime to create ad hoc detention centers. These new facilities were grossly overcrowded, exposing prisoners to cramped and unhygienic conditions. Moreover there were reports of insufficient food and water, as well as a lack of sanitary facilities. One account of the prison conditions was stated by a former detainee in an Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) report:

> *"I saw people being beaten there. There were people with fractured skulls, with hands bound by rope. We went hungry at mealtimes, and also were not allowed to bathe. They didn't feed us. For over 150 women there was a single room to one side for discarding excreta. Just only this room. After a while it began to stink ..."*[30]

A report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Burma also found prison conditions far below acceptable standards:

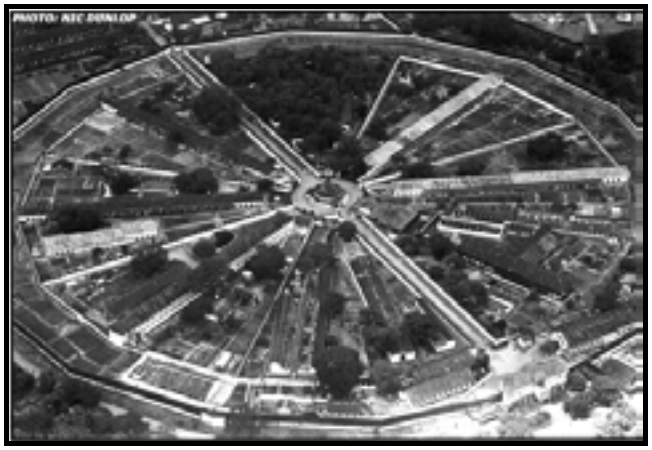
> *"Credible sources report that detainees were held in degrading conditions in a special punishment area of Insein prison, commonly known as the "military dog cells", a compound of 9 tiny isolation cells measuring 2 meters by 2 meters constantly guarded by a troop of 30 dogs. The cells lack ventilation or toilets, and the detainees (mostly political prisoners) have to sleep on a thin mat on the concrete floor and are only allowed to bathe with cold water once every three days for five minutes. A recently released detainee testified that he was made to kneel bare legged on broken bricks and also made to stand on tiptoe for long periods. Further reports confirm that monks held in detention were disrobed and intentionally fed in the afternoon, a time during which they are religiously forbidden from eating."*[31]

The Burmese legal system does provide minimal protections to those in legal custody, but unfortunately the language is ambiguous. Articles 330 and 331 of the *Burmese Penal Code* ban interrogators from causing 'hurt' or 'grievous hurt' to prisoners during interrogation. The *Burmese Penal Code* also states, under Articles 323 and 325, that detainees and prisoners should be free from 'hurt' and grievous hurt' outside of interrogation. Article 166 states that injury of an individual should not be carried out by a public servant.[32] Because the legal code fails to adequately define and prohibit torture, the provisions provided through the legal system offer little protection, as they can easily be sidestepped or ignored by the jailing officials.

Failures to address the problem of torture within the legal system are compounded by the non-transparent nature of the Burmese legal system. Night-time raids, the use of SPDC-controlled civilian organizations such as the USDA and Swan Arr Shin, and incommunicado detention practices, all work to obfuscate the illegitimate practices of the legal system. Concealing the identities of the arresting officials, outsourcing to proxy organizations and failing to provide information, all work to leave the affected individuals and family members with few alternatives to contest the arrest.

Officials often deny the existence of torture, and routinely cover up evidence. This was the case several times in 2007 when individuals died while in custody. Police typically report that the victim died of natural causes while in custody, although marks of physical abuse points to the contrary. In other cases, authorities cremate the bodies before notifying the family of the death. This was reported to have happened in the aftermath of the Saffron Revolution, with reports of over 20 being secretly cremated during the night of 30 September alone.[33] (For more information, see Section 1.9: Deaths in Detention, and the HRDU Report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

The Burmese legal system is further hindered by the multiple actors and groups which become involved in the arrest process. The increased use of mass-based state-controlled civilian groups like the USDA and Swan Arr Shin is in clear contravention to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that, "arrests must be carried out by legally authorized persons."[34] The use of these groups has further infringed on the rights of detainees, because the arrested individual is rarely informed of the charges against him or her.[35] These factors in combination are evidence of a truly flawed and opaque legal system, which is unable to meet even the most basic standards set by International agreements.



A bird's eye view of Insein Prison. *[Photo: Nic Dunlop]*

Denial of Fair and Public Trials and Appeals

Although protections are granted to defendants under the Criminal Procedure Code, they often fail to materialize in the courtroom. According to the law, defendants have several rights including: the presumption of innocence, the right not to testify against oneself or be compelled to confess guilt, the burden of proof must lie with the prosecution, as articulated in Article 342. Furthermore, according to the Criminal Procedure Code, under Articles 208 and 340 defendants also have the right to cross-examine prosecution witnesses, and be allowed to present evidence. Despite these safeguards, numerous reports indicate that defendants are forced to confess during interrogation sessions involving torture or other means of unlawful pressure. Even when defendants are not forced into confession, it is common for courts to prearrange verdicts, without conducting a proper trial. This can be seen from an excerpt of an AAPP report:

> *"Those interviewed reported their trials lasted between five and fifteen minutes, and that the judge often read out their sentence from a sheet of paper. The sentence appeared to be prepared in all cases by the MI [military intelligence], and the judges seemed intimidated by the MI's presence. Only one person interviewed was provided a lawyer; however, the lawyer failed to consult with him regarding his case. None of those interviewed were allowed to call witnesses or speak in their defense. The family members of the political prisoners were most often not informed of their trial date, and in one case, they were purposely misinformed about the trial's proceedings."*[36]

Political prisoners face even greater obstacles to receiving a fair and transparent trial than other prisoners. Defendants suspected of political involvement are often tried using military tribunals in closed court proceedings. In 1989, Martial Law Orders 1/89 and 2/89 were

passed sanctioning the use of military tribunals. These tribunals were subsequently outlawed in September 1992, under Order 12/92. Although Orders 1/89 and 2/89 were revoked, the SPDC continues to hold closed court military tribunals, especially for political trials.[37]

Pervasive corruption, the misuse of overly broad laws, and the manipulation of the courts for political ends continue to deprive Burmese citizens of their legal rights. It is clear that the judiciary is not independent. Judges are appointed or approved by the junta, and judge cases according to the junta's orders. People are held without charge, trial, or access to legal counsel for up to five years if the SPDC considers them a threat to the state's security or sovereignty. According to the US State Department 2006 Human Rights Report, some basic due process rights are reportedly observed in ordinary criminal cases, but not in political cases. The lack of an independent judiciary, denial of counsel, secret trials, and the inability of the defense to call and question witnesses, puts Burma's courts far below international legal standards.[38]

Sentences

As already noted, the Burmese judicial system is especially harsh on political dissidents. In addition to unsanctioned interrogation sessions, torture in custody, and unlawful trials, political offenders are often given the maximum sentence associated with a crime. Moreover, political prisoners routinely face cumulative penalties, as opposed to concurrent charges that are given in non-political cases. This greatly lengthens the prison sentences of political prisoners, leading to longer prison terms than non-political offenders receive for more serious crimes.[39]

Sentencing guidelines for the Burmese judicial system reserve the right to implement the death penalty in political cases, and otherwise. The option of judicial execution remains accessible to judiciary members; who can give political prisoners judicial execution if they are found guilty of treason.

Activists, Opposition Forces and MP-Elects Arrested - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 4 January 2007, Ko Tun Tun, of Nyaungdone was detained after attending a prayer meeting for political prisoners at the Shwedagon pagoda. Ko Tun Tun was approached by five pagoda police and asked to cover the t-shirt he was wearing picturing NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. When Ko Tun Tun refused he was escorted to an undisclosed location by the police.[40] He was released from a psychiatric institution four days later on 8 January 2007.[41]

On 5 January 2007, it was reported that five 88 Generation Student Leaders had begun a hunger strike after being incarcerated for over 100 days. The five student leaders; Min Ko Naing, Min Zeya, Ko Ko Gyi, Ko Htay Kywe and Ko Pyone Cho, had been detained since 27 September 2006. [42]

On 16 February 2007, the SPDC extended the house arrest of U Tin Oo, deputy NLD leader who was arrested in 2003 on charges of disturbing public order.[43]

On 22 February 2007, two protest leaders and three journalists were arrested at a public protest in downtown Rangoon. The protestors were demanding better living standards, 24-hour electricity. The three journalists were released from police custody five hours after being arrested. The arrestees were:

1. Ko Htin Kyaw (protester);
2. Ko Myint Shwe (protester);
3. Ma Sint Sint Aung (journalist);
4. Myat Thura (journalist); and
5. May Thingyan Hein (journalist).[44]

Burmese Military authorities continued to seek out persons involved in the protest, and in the evening the same day several more activists were arrested. The arrested activists included:

1. Ko Hla Myint Aye;
2. Ko Hla Thein;
3. Ko Myo Oo;
4. Ma Kyu Kyu San; and
5. U Ohn Than.[45]

On 23 February 2007, further arrests were made over the 22 February protest. Arrested activists included Ko Tun Tun from Nyaungdone Township and Ko Tin Win from North Okkalapa Township.[46]

On 24 February 2007, Daw May Win (50) from North Okkalapa was arrested from a friend's home in the evening, also over involvement in the 22 February protest.[47]

On 24 February 2007, Arakan State NLD Chairman U Thein Maung, was interrogated in Manaung Township, after junta officials suspected him of distributing NLD party booklets.[48]

On 25 February 2007, police arrested U Ohn Than, who became the ninth person in detention for involvement in the 22 February protest.[49]

On 28 February 2007, Ko Ba Chan Pru a member of the Arakan League for Democracy, was arrested on suspicion of having connections with Arakanese political groups outside of Burma. Ko Ban Chan Pru was arrested after a letter he had written to an outside Arakan opposition political group, was intercepted on the Thai-Burmese border. On 4 April 2007, his whereabouts were still unknown.[50]

On 5 March 2007, Thwin Lin Aung was arrested at Rangoon Airport before departing on a flight to the U.S. He was then interrogated about his involvement as a president of the Myanmar Debate Society which he had set up at the American Center in Rangoon.[51] On 2 April 2007 Ko Thwin Lin Aung was released, however his passport was confiscated, effectively prohibiting him from leaving the country. Thwin Lin Aung was previously a student at the Rangoon Institute of Technology, and served seven years in prison for his involvement in the 1996 student movement before he was released in 2002.[52]

On 7 March 2007, seven persons from Okkalapa Township in Rangoon were arrested in connection with protest that occurred on the 22 February. Ko Htin Kyaw, who had briefly been detained on 22 February for leading the protest, was asked by the police to gather nine protesters who had not already been interrogated. Ko Htin Kyaw was released upon arrival at the detention centre. Authorities told Ko Htin Kyaw that the other nine protestors would be questioned briefly and released. However, they were held in detention for eight days and released on March 14, 2007. The detained protesters were:

1. Moe Aye Soe;
2. Thein Aung Myint;
3. Ko Aye Lwin;
4. Myint Shwe;
5. Tin Min Naing;
6. Win Aung; and
7. Ko Aye Kyi. [53]

On 8 March 2007, Thein Zan was arrested in Thingangyun Township, accused of writing satires critical of the Burmese state run media. His satires had focused on the state media's reporting on the inflation of commodity prices in Burma. He claimed that state run newspapers were using false propaganda to hide the severity of rising electrical and commodity prices.[54] Thein Zaw was charged with violating Article 505, for 'intention of inciting others to commit an offense against the state.' The trial of Thein Zaw was postponed to 26 March by a Rangoon court.[55]

On 8 March 2007, Burmese military officials arrested veteran politician U Win Naing and political activist Htin Kyaw after they held a press conference concerning Burma's political situation.[56] Military officials told U Win Naing he could be charged with a lifetime prison sentence for making "false allegations against the government based on wrong information".[57] The next day, Htin Kyaw and U Win Naing were released, and authorities failed to press charges.[58]

On 14 March 2007, it was reported that Ko Maung San, an NLD member from Kawthaung in Tenasserim Division, was arrested by Burmese authorities after they found a "biscuit tin full of gunpowder" with his name on it. The tin was found on a boat docked in the Kawthaung Port and was addressed to 'Ko Maung San'. After finding the gunpowder, police arrested six other suspects with the same name, on charges of gunpowder trafficking. All other suspects were released but Ko Maung San continued to be detained, possibly because of his position as general secretary of the Kawthaung NLD. Although the use of gunpowder is widespread in the fishing industry, according to the NLD "authorities are treating these materials as criminal explosives."[59]

On 20 March 2007, Kyaw Kyaw Oo and Kyaw Swe were arrested on suspicion of distributing the text of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The two activists are members of the Pegu division of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP).[60] The two were released without charge the next day.[61]

On 20 March 2007, Ko Than Htun and former Democracy Party for a New Society (DPNS) chairman Ko Tin Htay, were arrested for possessing a censored video of the wedding of Senior General Than Shwe's daughter. Police raided Than Htun's house and found a DVD containing excerpts from the wedding. Police also raided Tin Htay's house but were unable to find any evidence against him. Despite this, he was accused of being 'politically active' after police found a picture of independence hero Aung San in is house. In April, Than Htun was sentenced to four and a half years hard labour, and Tin Htay was sentenced to two years hard labour.[62]

On 4 April 2007, Tin Ko, an HIV patient from Magwe Division, staged a solo protest in Rangoon demanding better health care for HIV patients.[63]

On 18 April 2007, Ko Myint Naing and Ko Maung Maung Lay from Rangoon were arrested with five other villagers in Oakpone, Henzada Township. Ko Myint Naing and several other members of the HRDP were attacked by a pro-junta mob wielding weapons. A passing vehicle carrying a monk intervened and took the wounded protesters to the local hospital. On 2 May, Ko Myint Naing, Ko Maung Maung and the villagers were charged with violating act 505(b) for "*showing disrespect to the state*" and sentenced to up to 8 years in prison. The village chairman later sued Ko Myint Naing and all others involved.[64]

On 22 April 2007, Rangoon police and the USDA arrested seven persons protesting in Rangoon's Thingangyun Township. The protestors called for a halt to rising prices and economic hardship in Burma. The protesters included:

1. Htin Kyaw;
2. Thein Aung Myint;
3. Thein Myint Tun;
4. Lay Lwin;
5. Myint Sein;
6. Than Zaw Myint; and
7. Tin Maung Kyi.[65]

On 25 April 2007, former political prisoner Ohn Than was arrested in downtown Rangoon at Thein Gyi Zee market, after staging a solo protest "*to escape from the world's poorest country".*[66]

On 1 May 2007, SPDC authorities arrested 30 persons after they attended a public lecture on workers rights held at the American Center in Rangoon. Of the 30 attendees, 27 were detained and interrogated for several hours before being released.[67] However, police continued to hold six labour rights activists, who were later sentenced in a court set up inside Insein Prison.[68] They were sentenced to between 20 and 28 years imprisonment on charges of discrediting the government, violating immigration laws and engaging with unlawful organisations. All six were sentenced to 20 years under section 124(a) of the penal code on sedition, while Thurein Aung, Wai Lin, Kyaw Min and Myo Min were given an additional five-year sentence under section 17(1) of the Unlawful Associations Act and a further three years for immigration offences.[69] An appeal submitted by the group's lawyer, Aung Thein, was rejected in November by Rangoon divisional joint court (12).[70] The six sentenced activists were:

1. Ko Thurein Aung (32) event organiser, resident of Hlaingthayar Township, Yangon;
2. Ko Way Lin (24) event organiser resident of Mangaleit village, Kunchankone Township, Rangoon Division;
3. Ko Kyaw Min (aka) Ko Wanna;
4. Ko Myo Min;
5. Ko Nyi Nyi Zaw (25) event organiser, resident of Thukhayeithar, Hlaing Township, Rangoon; and
6. Ko Kyaw Kyaw (29) junior lawyer, resident of Ward 20, South Dagon Township, Rangoon.[71]

On 2 May 2007, three Burmese human rights activists were arrested by Burmese authorities for violating guest registration laws. Ko Aung Kyaw Soe and Ko Aye Lwin were arrested for failing to register as overnight guests in Rangoon. The third activist, Ko Yin Kyi, was arrested after going to the police station to check on the status of his friends.[72]

On 15 May 2007, human rights activist Su Su Nway was arrested in Rangoon along with 39 other activists. In two separate incidents, USDA and Swan Arr Shin members claiming to be civilians confronted the two separate groups of activists and began making arrests. The two groups of activists were attending prayer meetings for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[73] During the arrests, Kyaw Kyaw Min, a law student, was severely beaten by the arresting officials.[74] Fifteen protesters were released two hours later, due to overcrowding in the interrogation centre.[75] In a separate report it was stated that Ye Myat Hein, a university student from Hta Tapin Township, was arrested by and unidentified group, calling themselves "the people". Ye Myat Hein was arrested after conducting prayers at the Kyaikdawgyi pagoda in Insein Township. His whereabouts were still unknown on 11 June 2007.[76]

On 17 May 2007, 62 year-old NLD member Tin Tin Maw was arrested in front of Rangoon City Hall after staging a solo protest for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[77]

On 21 May 2007, journalists U Aung Shwe Oo and Daw Sint Sint Aung were arrested on their way to Thilawar port to report on the arrival of a North Korean cargo vessel. The two journalists were employed with Japanese news agency NNN.[78]

On 21 May 2007, NLD member and HiV/AIDS activist, Phyu Phyu Thin, was taken from her home and detained by SPDC officials and special police.[79] Phyu Phyu Thin was released from prison on 3 July 2007 after staging a seven-day hunger strike.[80]

On 24 May 2007, U Htun Lwin was arrested in Myitkyina, Kachin state, after staging a solo protest for the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo. U Htun Lwin was arrested by an unidentified group of people.[81]

On 26 May 2007, military junta officials detained 8 NLD members as they joined prayers for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at pagodas in Rangoon.[82] The 8 demonstrators were taken to the Kyaikkasan interrogation centre and released without charge three days later. They were:

1. Zin Ma Ma Htun;
2. U Zaw Win;
3. U Thaung Han;
4. U Thaung Myint;
5. Ko Pauk;
6. Ko Aung Htay;
7. Ko Win Naing; and
8. U Bala.[83]

On 29 May 2007, Ko Tun Tun, a prominent democracy advocate, was arrested after attending a prayer meeting at Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon.[84]

On 5 June 2007, the SPDC confined 11 HIV patients to Waybargyi Infectious Disease hospital, after they staged several separate prayer vigils to protest against the arrest of Phyu Phyu Thin. The group was detained for three days before being released.[85]

On 6 June 2007**,** three youths from Sittwe, Arakan State, were arrested by police for displaying anti-Shwe Gas Project posters.[86]

On 19 June 2007, Ko Balagyi (aka) Maung Kyaw Naing was arrested for staging a solo protest in commemoration of Aung San Suu Kyi's 62nd birthday. After Ko Balagyi was arrested in the town of Taungkok, Arakan State, police raided his home and detained his mother and sister. Ko Balagyi was released two days later together with his mother and sister.[87]

On 24 June 2007, SPDC authorities and fire brigade members in Rangoon arrested Ko Maung Oo for protesting against the junta's economic policies and calling for Aung San Suu Kyi's release.[88]

On 27 June 2007, Sabe Oo, elder sister of detained HIV/AIDS activist Phyu Phyu Thin, was arrested by SPDC officials after trying to contact her sister at the Kyaik Ka San interrogation centre. After Sabe Oo and several others attempted to enter the centre where Phyu Phyu Thin was being held, the authorities sealed the street leading to the detention centre using barbed wire to block the activists from gaining access.

On 10 July 2007, Ko Min Min, a teacher from Prome, Pegu Division, was arrested after hosting a human rights workshop at his house. Several prominent human rights activists attended the meeting including Ko Maung Maung Lay and Ko Aung Kyaw Soe. Ko Min Min was charged with tutoring without a license. Prome police took Ko Min Min to the Prome police station and failed to release him on bail the next day.[89] On 30 July he was sentenced to three years in prison and fined 30,000 kyat by Prome Court.[90]

On 22 August 2007, 13 leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group and several other activists were arrested in midnight raids. The raids came in response to the 19 August protest, which was videotaped by the junta. The SPDC viewed the protests as a serious threat that would "undermine the peace and security of the state." Those arrested included:

1. Min Ko Naing;
2. Ko Ko Gyi;
3. Pyone Cho;
4. Min Zeya;
5. Mya Aye;
6. Ko Jimmy;
7. Ko Zeya;
8. Kyaw Kyaw Htwe;
9. Arnt Bwe Kyaw;
10. Panneik Tun;
11. Zaw Zaw Min;
12. Thet Zaw; and
13. Nyan Lin Tun.[91]

The 13 activists were sent to Insein prison on the 25 August, and junta officials warned that the activists could face 20 year sentences for their involvement in the protests.[92]

On 22 August 2007, over 150 people were detained in Rangoon after protesting against the fuel prices in Hedan Murlat in Kamayut Township. The arrested protesters were taken away in military vehicles.[93] Seven of the activists, who were arrested near Thamine junction, were:

1. Naw Ohn Hla (protest leader);
2. Htet Htet Oo Wai;
3. San San Myint;
4. Cho Cho Lwin;
5. Thant Zaw Myint;
6. Yee Yee Nyunt; and
7. Daw Tin Yee.[94]

On 23 August 2007, at least 40 activists, including '88 Generation Student Group member Ko Htay Kywe, were arrested by USDA and Swan Arr Shin members.[95]

On 23 August 2007, former political prisoner U Ohn Than was arrested in front of the U.S. Embassy after staging a solo protest.[96]

On 24 August 2007, more than 20 persons were arrested by pro-junta security forces, as they prepared to launch a protest outside Rangoon city hall. The protesters consisted mostly of women coming to demonstrate the rising fuel prices enacted by the SPDC.[97]

On 25 August 2007, SPDC officials conducted raids on the residences' of over 40 prominent activists. Officials used the pretext of searching for "illegal items" to conduct the raids. Sandar Min, of the 88 Generation Students' Group, was arrested after junta officials conducted a raid at her home. In the raids, the authorities confiscated various items, including computers, mobile phones, photo albums, and even a copy of a poem translated by Aung San Suu Kyi.[98]

On 25 August 2007, Ko Htin Kyaw, the prominent activist who called for nation wide protests, was arrested after he joined a protest near Theingyi market. U Zaw Nyunt was also arrested after he engaged the security officials arresting Ko Htin Kyaw.[99] On 8 November it was reported that Ko Htin Kyaw was being held in Insein prison.[100]

On 27 August 2007, over 50 pro-democracy activists were arrested after staging another protest against rising fuel prices. The activists protested by silently marching from a market in Pegu.[101]

On 28 August 2007, three persons from Sittwe, Arakan State, were arrested for distributing water to protesting monks. Those arrested were identified as Ko Ne Win, from MK snack shop; Ko Than from Amyo Tha photo house, and another unnamed man from Sanpya snack shop. Family members were unable to contact the arrested men, who continued to be held as of 31 August 2007.[102]

On 1 September 2007, reports suggested that an estimated 150 protestors had been arrested by police and the state supported USDA since 19 August for protesting against the ruling junta. They were held in four main detention centers: Kyaikkasan Detention Center, Shwe Pyithar Regiment, Insein Prison, and a detention center in Mingaladon Township.[103]

On 3 September 2007, a planned 'long march' from Labutta to Rangoon was halted by authorities and three leaders of the protest march were arrested.[104]

On 3 September 2007, police surrounded the home of human rights activist Su Su Nway (34) who had been in hiding since leading a protest over the increase in fuel prices. Htay Kywe, another prominent activist was reportedly also in hiding after police raided his home in Rangoon.[105]

On 3 September 2007, as many as 14 writers led a protest march in response to the arrest of Ko Kyaw Thu Moe Myint a day earlier. The protest march was cut short after protestors learned of a police van awaiting their arrival along the planned protest route.[106]

On 3 September 2007, U Ray Thein (aka) Bo Aung (39) was arrested in Buthidaung for leading a solo protest for 45 minutes. U Ray Thein had bound his mouth, and placed placards in the market reading "FREE ASSK".[107]

On 5 September 2007, seven activists were arrested in Laputta, as they attempted to stop police from arresting other protest leaders. The arrested were:

1. Ko Aung Moe Win;
2. Ko Kyi Than;
3. Ko Htay;
4. Ko Pauksa;
5. Ko Pho Cho;
6. Ko Maung Kyaw; and
7. Ko Hla Soe.[108]

On 5 September 2007, U Aung Khin Bo, chairman of the Bogalay NLD, was arrested for leading a protest of 14 activists who marched through downtown Bogalay.[109]

On 5 September 2007, Mya Mya San was arrested after leading a group of 15 activists at a weekly prayer vigil at Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon.[110]

On 7 September 2007, two NLD officials, Daw Khin Lay and Daw Mi Mi Sein were arrested by members of the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association in Bogalay for involvement in earlier protests against the ruling junta. The women were arrested in a Bogalay marketplace.[111]

On 11 September 2007, solo protester Ko Soe Win (aka) Soe Aung, from Sar-Kyin village, outside Taunggok, Arakan State, was arrested after staging a solo protest in the market calling for the expulsion of Than Shwe.[112] Ko Soe Win was charged under Section 505 (b) of the penal code and sentenced to four years in prison the same day of his arrest. According to local residents, Soe Win had displayed a placard calling for the release of political activists, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the excommunication of Than Shwe from the Buddhist faith. He was charged with insulting religion and creating a public disturbance. He was not able to meet with a lawyer or family members.[113]

On 11 September 2007, Pakokku authorities arrested four people for having provided foreign media with information concerning the monk led September protests. The detainees were initially held at the police station, but were later transferred to the police jail. They were:

1. U Thant Shin;
2. U Nay La;
3. U Sein Linn; and
4. U Thar Aung.[114]

On 11 September 2007, two men who were arrested for distributing water to monks during the protest on 28 August 2007 were sentenced to two years in prison by the Burmese Military Authority. The men, Ko Min Min (aka) Han Min Soe and Ko Maung Soe Thein, were marching with the monks in Sittwe to protest the recent increase in fuel prices.[115]

On 18 September 2007, NLD member Naw Ohn Hla was arrested in Rangoon by a large group of USDA members. More than 200 members of the USDA came to her neighbourhood and arrested Naw Ohn Hla as she emerged from her hiding place.[116]

On 18 September it was reported that two persons had been arrested and sentenced to two years each for providing water to the protestors. They were given a summary trial on the same day as the arrest, and were denied legal representation.[117]

On 19 September 2007, it was reported that HRDP member Ko Kyaw Soe and his wife were arrested. At the time of report, the reason for their arrest remained unclear.[118]

On 23 September 2007, a schoolteacher in Myitkyina, Kachin State, was arrested after taking pictures of an anti-government protest. The protests took place at the Kyauntai Temple and featured about 200 monks and 500 civilians.[119]

On 24 September 2007, police conducted a further 15 arrests in response to the protests. Among the 15 arrested were:

1. Pyait Phyo Hlaing;
2. Lin Lin;
3. Ko Phone;
4. Ko Phyo;
5. Ko Thiha; and
6. Ko Kyaw Soe.[120]

On 25 September 2007, the military conducted raids, arresting the following politicians and celebrities in conjunction with the protests:

1. Ko Thura (aka) Zarganar, comedian;
2. Par Par Lay, comedian;
3. Khin Mar Lar, celebrity;
4. Myint Myint San, NLD member;
5. Tin Aung, MP;
6. Khin Maung Thaung, NLD member;
7. Myo Naing, MP;
8. Myint Myint Aye, NLD member; and
9. Tin Ko, NLD member.[121]

On 26 September Thein Zaw (19) was arrested for donating food and drinking water to monks at the upper east gate of Shwedagon Pagoda. He was later charged with violation of Section 144 of the State Rebellious Act and Section 5(j) of the 1951 Emergency Provisions Act, and detained in Insein prison. He was not allowed a lawyer, and the prison authorities did not allow his family to meet him until two weeks after his arrest.[122]

On 26 September 2007, pro-democracy politician Win Naing was arrested around 2:30 am at his home in Rangoon, after donating food and water to protesting monks.[123]

On 26 September 2007, U Khin Sein, Chairperson of the NLD in Hopin Township, Shan State, was arrested by local authorities along with over twenty other people in nighttime raids. No reason was given for the arrests.[124]

On 28 September 2007, U Aung Than Soe, an organizer for the NLD was arrested by authorities in Tamwe Township. Aung Than Soe was involved in the September protests, and was taken to Thonegwa Township for detention.[125]

On 30 September 2007, Min Zaw, a Burmese citizen working in Rangoon for a Japanese news outlet, The Tokyo Shimbun, was taken from his home by plain clothed officers. The arresting officials claimed he was being held temporarily for questioning.[126]

In September 2007, Fu Cin Shing Htan, a Zomi ethnic leader and member of Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) was arrested by police as part of a larger crackdown on protestors. Police have refused to release any information concerning his location or the charges against him.[127]

On 1 October 2007, U Zaw Hein, an NLD member from Patheingyi, was arrested by SPDC officials and taken in for questioning.[128]

As of October 2007, Ma Ke Naing Zaw, and her two small children (aged 5 and 1½), had been missing since 27 September. It was said that she had been taken into custody near Rangoon's Sule Pagoda.[129]

As of 2 October 2007, Ma Po Po Pyi Sone, and her sisters, Ma Thida Aung, and Ma Moe Moe Swe, had been missing since 27 September. The three sisters were last seen by Rangoon's Sule Pagoda.[130]

On 2 October 2007, authorities detained U Myat Hla, chairman of the Pegu branch of the NLD, in response to continued protests throughout Burma. U Myat Hla was also detained on 28 September, but he was released from custody the same day.[131]

On 2 October 2007, NLD member, U Than Lwin was arrested by SPDC authorities in Mattaya town, Mandalay Division.[132]

On 2 October 2007, NLD member U Myint Htay was arrested by SPDC officials in Tharsi town, accused of being connected to the September protests.[133]

On 3 October 2007, over 50 persons were arrested by SPDC officials in Magwe Division on unknown charges, but suspected of being involved in the September protests. It was unknown where they were being held. Among those arrested were two Pakokku NLD members; U San Pwint and MP U Hlaing Aye. Other persons arrested in this raid included:

1. U Ba Hmin;
2. U Myo Tint;
3. Ko Tin Nyunt;
4. Ko Kyaw Htay;
5. Ko Myint Khaing; and
6. Ko Khin Maung Myint.[134]

On 3 October 2007, raids in the Mandalay area led to the arrest of several NLD members including U Sein Kyaw Hlaing, U Kyat Soe, U Win Shwe, U Paw Aye, and Ko Ye Tun.[135]

On 3 October 2007, Ko Kyauk Khe (aka) Ko Aung San Oo was arrested after criticizing SPDC's actions against protestors. USDA members arrested Kyauk Khe, claiming he violated act 505 of the penal code. Kyauk Khe was watching a news report on TV in a teashop, when he reportedly shouted "long live the Buddhist religion" in response to images of the military assaulting protesting monks.[136]

On 4 October 2007, 50 students from the Mandalay area, who had been arrested for their involvement in the September protests, were sentenced to five years of hard labour in Sagaing prison.[137]

On 8 October 2007, Ko Thiha, human rights activist and member of NLD Youth Meikhtila Township, and Ko Wunna Aung from Mandalay were charged under Section 505(b) and sentenced to two years imprisonment for possessing illegal documents. Ko Thiha accompanied Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on her Upper Burma tour and was severely beaten in the Depayin massacre. Ko Wunna Aung had been discussing human rights affairs with HRDP leader U Myint Aye. Ko Thiha and Ko Wunna Aung were placed in Insein prison, cell no. 3, room no. 13.[138] When visiting Ko Thiha in Insein prison, his wife learnt that in addition to the initial two year prison term, he had been sentenced to another 20 year prison term under Section 124 (a) of Criminal Code. He was tried by a special tribunal in Mandalay's Obo prison and sentenced to long prison terms after hearing unknown witnesses.[139]

On 8 October 2007, it was reported that several NLD members had been sentenced to prison terms for reporting a brutal attack on U Than Lwin (70), vice chairman of NLD Mandalay Division. Nyo Gyi, vice chairman of Madaya Township, was arrested along with 8 others. Nyo Gyi was sentenced to seven years in prison under section 506(b) of the penal code of 506(b), charged with abusing and threatening U Than Lwin's attacker. The 8 other defendants, members of Than Lwin's family, and NLD members, received sentences of five years in prison.[140]

On 8 October 2007, SPDC officials arrested former political prisoner Chit Ko Lin and several of his family members in morning raids. Police arrested Chit Ko Lin's mother and mother in-law and attempted to arrest his wife, Thet Thet Aung, but she narrowly evaded arrest.[141]

On 8 October 2007, Ko Thiha, a street vendor in Bassein Market, was sentenced to two years imprisonment by Bassein Township Court under Section 505(b), and placed in Bassein prison. He was charged with informing monks about imminent arrests.[142]

On 10 October 2007, two students from the United States Information Service (USIS) were arrested by Rangoon police for their alleged involvement in the September protests. SPDC officials took Ye Myant Hein and Aye Myint Myint, from their homes in night-time raids.[143]

On 10 October 2007, famous Burmese actor and director, Kyaw Thu was taken into custody along with his wife for his involvement in the September protests. Kyaw Thu and his wife joined several other prominent entertainment figures being detained for their involvement in the protests.[144]

On 10 October 2007, two prominent '88 Generation activists were arrested as they sought medical treatment in a Rangoon clinic. Htay Kywe and Hla Myo Naung, were wanted by SPDC authorities for their involvement in the September protests.[145]

On 10 October 2007, 88 Generation Students' Group leader, Hla Myo Naung, was arrested by SPDC officials in Sanchaung Township.[146]

On 10 October 2007, SPDC officials arrested several demonstrators throughout Arakan State in connection with the September protests. Those arrested included Ko Nyi Nyi Lwin and Ko Aung Naing. The two men were taken to an undisclosed location,[147]

On 10 October 2007, five residents of Pakokku Township, including NLD member U Pike Ko, were charged with damaging public property according to Section 6 (1) of the 1947 Public Property Protection Act, and were given long prison sentences. They were arrested in September on suspicion of passing information to foreign media. A Thayet prison official reported that they had been sent to Thayet prison after their arrest and brought before the prison court on 24 and 26 September. [148]

On 11 October 2007, it was reported that Ko Thet Oo and Ko Zaw Htun, arrested on 15 September, had been charged with distributing illegal materials under Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act. The cases of Ko Thet Oo (39) and Ko Zaw Htun (34), both from Prome, Pegu Division, were heard in the Prome Township Court. It was reported that police personnel temporarily detained and intimidated witnesses and threatened them with being included on prosecution lists unless they testified against the accused.[149]

On 11 October 2007, Ko Kyauk Khe (aka) Ko Aung San Oo, an NLD member in Aunglan Township, Magwe Division, was charged under Section 505(b) of the penal code and sentenced to two years imprisonment for making *'statements conducing to public mischief'.* Ko Kyauk Khe had been arrested on 30 September for shouting a pro-Buddhist slogan in a

local video house after watching footage of the crackdown on foreign media. Witnesses of the incident reported that Ko Kyauk Khe had only shouted *'Long live the Buddhist religion'*, however prosecutors alleged that he had also shouted *"Down with Than Shwe"* and other anti-government chants, and they accused him of supporting the monk-led protests in the township. He was denied the right to a lawyer in court after military officials warned local attorneys not to represent him.[150]

As of 12 October 2007, no information had been released concerning Ko Ngwe Soe, who continued to be missing after he was taken into custody by police on 28 August. Reasons for his arrest remained unclear, and no information was known about where he was being held.[151]

On 12 October 2007, MDC member Ko Aung Gyi (aka) Ko Moe Aung Soe, was taken from his house by several SPDC officials for his participation in the September protests.[152]

On 12 October 2007, three members of the 88 Generation Students' group; Htay Kywe, Mie Mie, and Aung Thu, were arrested after being discovered by police in Rangoon. The three had been in hiding since their participation in protests in August. A man known as Ko Ko, was also arrested, charged with helping the three activists hide.[153]

On 12 October 2007, Naw Ohn Hla was placed under a restraining order in accordance with the 1961 Restriction and Bond Act. She was arrested after being one of the first to protest in August. At a court hearing in Hmawbi, Rangoon division, she was denied a lawyer and the only witnesses were the township police chief, her village tract council chairman and an official beneath him. At the end of the brief trial, Judge Aye Aye Mu instructed Ohn Hla that she was not to leave the township for the next year without seeking a permit, or reside in another part of the country. She was also told to report to the local police station once every seven days.[154]

On 13 October 2007, Ko Min Aung, the assistant secretary for the NLD in Arakan State was arrested by Taungup police, who also seized his house and land, estimated to be worth 8 million kyat. Police did not reveal the charges against him.[155]

On 15 October 2007, former Arakan Student leader Ko Than Kyaw, was sentenced to six months in prison for allegedly attempting to recruit protestors during the September protests.[156]

On 15 October 2007, four NLD members in Taunggok Township, Arakan State were sentenced to imprisonment, accused of taking a leading role in the protests in Sittwe. Party chairman U Kyaw Khine (85) and secretary Ko Min Aung (40) were each sentenced to seven and a half years' imprisonment by Taunggok Township Court. Two members of the NLD Township organising committee, U Htun Kyi and U Than Pe, were each sentenced to four and half years by Sandoway Township Court.[157] They were all sentenced in secret trials.[158]

On 16 October 2007, Khin Htun, committee member of the Ma-au Township NLD, was arrested by police at his house. Police have not specified what charges he is facing.[159]

On 16 October 2007, three members of the youth branch of Mandalay NLD were arrested by authorities. Ko Wunna Aung, Ko Ye Min Zaw, and Ko Soe Khine, were arrested by authorities and taken to an undisclosed location. Authorities failed to release official charges.[160]

On 18 October 2007, U Myint Kyi and Zaw Min, two political organizers from Katha Township, were each sentenced to two years in prison, charged with violating section 505(b).[161]

As of 18 October 2007, the SPDC started targeting Burmese nationals returning to Rangoon airport, for their participation in anti-junta protests overseas. The junta arrested several people, matching their faces with photos taken at anti-junta protests abroad. Burmese nationals with any connection to protests abroad were taken directly to prison.[162]

On 18 October 2007, four 10th grade students were arrested in Mandalay after participating in the protests. Thura Koko, Wunna Koko, Maung Wathone and Maung Ye Myint Lwin, were all taken into custody by SPDC officials. Family members did not receive any information about their location or the charges against them.[163]

On 19 October 2007, three people in Arakan State were arrested by NaSaKa officials after they passed out information concerning the recent protests. The men were identified as Mohammed Yunus, Nurul Islam, and Mohammed Eliyas. They were severely beaten before being taken to a military camp in Sittwe. They were on 29 October believed to be held in Insein prison.[164]

On 22 October 2007, Ko Thein Swe, NLD coordinator in the Irrawaddy region, was arrested at his house in Phyar Pon Township, Irrawaddy division, on the evening of 22 October in connection with the public demonstrations in September. Ko Thein Swe's father U Myint Swe, a people's parliament representative from Phyar Pon Township, met his son during a prison visit in Insein on 24 December 2007 and said he would be brought to court on 2 January 2008. On 28 December 2007 it was reported that Ko Thein Swe could face a long-term jail sentence when charged with six offences at Bahan court on 2 January 2008. He was to be charged under sections 143 and 145 of the penal code on unlawful assembly, which could lead to a jail term of up to two years; section 147 for rioting, which carries a two-year sentence, and under section 505 (b) for incitement of offences against the state, which could lead to another two years' imprisonment. He is also being charged under section 124 for not disclosing information on high treason to the authorities, which carries a seven-year penalty. In addition to the charges related to the protests, he was given an additional and unrelated charge of selling pornographic materials under obscenity laws in section 292.[165]

On 22 October 2007, it was reported that four NLD members had been sentenced to prison terms for violating section 505 (b) of the penal code. People's parliament representative Myint Kyi, NLD communication department member Zaw Min, and U Shwe Paing and U Chan Aung, two political organizers from Intaw Township, were all sentenced to two years in prison.[166]

On 24 October 2007, student activists Ko Thwin Lin Aung and Ko De Nyein were arrested by police. No information was released concerning their location or sentencing.[167]

On 25 October 2007, Aung Naing, an 88 Generation Student Group member, was reported missing, assumed to have been arrested by SPDC officials.[168]

On 25 October 2007, police arrested 8 persons for assisting monks during the September protests, and charged them with "the act of discredit for the country". They had supported monks during a protest in Kalay Township, Sagaing division, by offering the monks food and water. The 8 arrested and charged were:

1. Michel Wint Kyaw;
2. U Ba Min;
3. U Nyo Mya;
4. U Myint Thein;
5. Ko Zaw Moe;
6. Ko Aung Kyaw; and
7. Ko Myo.[169]

On 29 October 2007, 88 Generation Students' leader Ko Htay Kywe and several others were arrested by police in Pegu. Ko Htay Kywe had been in hiding in a rubber compound, but was eventually discovered by SPDC officials. Officials also arrested Ko Aung Gyi and some of his workers in the raid.[170]

On 31 October 2007, it was reported that Aye Cho, an NLD member from Mandalay, had been tried before Yamethin prison court, and sentenced to six years in jail for violating section 505 (b) of the penal code. Aye Cho was then transferred to Myin Chan prison in Magwe. He had been arrested by SPDC officials on 30 September after accusing USDA members of plotting to assassinate NLD leaders.[171]

On 30 October 2007, popular comedian Zarganar was arrested by police for the second time since the September protests. He was released one day after being detained. Zarganar was first arrested on 24 September after he offered alms to protesting monks, and was detained for three weeks. Since his incarceration, Zarganar has been candidly speaking out against the conditions he faced while in prison.[172]

On 30 October 2007, Ko Tin Htoo Aung, of the 88 Generation Students' Group, was arrested by SPDC officials. Junta officials arrested him in front of the Dagon Center in Rangoon.[173]

On 1 November 2007, Tin Yu, a Rangoon man, was arrested by SPDC police after allegedly speaking to foreign media. Tin Yu from Hlaing Tharyar Township, was arrested on suspicion of giving information to foreign media, although authorities failed to disclose which media service Tin Yu had spoken with.[174]

On 2 November 2007, Ko Sein Hlaing, an 88 Generation Students' Group member, was arrested by authorities and subsequently released two days later. Ko Sein Hlaing had been placed on the junta's 'top ten list' after he managed to evade police for two months.[175]

On 2 November 2007, U Thein Zaw, an NLD organizer from Magwe Division, was arrested by Magwe police in connection with the recent demonstrations.[176]

On 3 November 2007, it was reported that Ko Aung Kyaw Moe had been arrested in Hlaing Tharyar Township, Rangoon, for his participation in the anti-junta protests.[177]

On 4 November 2007, Ko Zaw Zaw, a former NLD member from Tontay Township was arrested in Thiri Mingalar market.[178]

On 7 November 2007, three HRDP members were sentenced to two years in prison for violating section 505 (b) of the penal code. Thet Oo, Zaw Htun, and U Panita, a monk who was disrobed since his arrest, were sentenced in a Prome court.[179]

On 7 November 2007, the junta announced that it would "take action" against 91 persons detained over the pro-democracy protests. The junta labeled these as terrorists who committed "violent and terrorist acts."[180]

On 7 November 2007, 9 Muslims from Rangoon were arrested after giving water to monks during the September demonstrations. They were reportedly subject to physical abuse during their incarceration. The 9 persons were:

1. Myot Thant;
2. Nyi Nyi Zaw;
3. Myo Win;
4. Naing Min;
5. Htun Htun Naing;
6. Kyaw Kyaw Satt;
7. Htun Myint Aung;
8. Han Zaw Min Aung; and
9. Thaung Htut.[181]

On 8 November 2007, Captain Win Htun Aung from LIB #3 was forced to flee his battalion after the junta issued a warrant for his arrest. Authorities issued the warrant after Win Htun handed out bottles of water to protesting monks on September 26 and 27.[182]

On 9 November 2007, secretary of Kachin State NLD, U Ne Win and U Ba Myint, an NLD member from Bhamo Township, were sentenced to two years in prison for participating in the September demonstrations. The two men were secretly tried in separate prison courts in Myitkyina and Bhamo. The men were convicted under section 505(b), and denied legal council.[183]

On 11 November 2007, it was reported that 4 NLD members had been sentenced after being found guilty of violating act 505(b), and sections 143, 124(a) of the penal code. The four were identified as:

1. U Myint Oo;
2. U Thar Cho;
3. Ko Htun Htun Nyein; and
4. U Htay Win.[184]

On 12 November 2007, Ko Win Kyaw was sentenced to prison, accused of violating section 505(b). Ko Win Kyaw was arrested on 25 September after offering alms to protesting monks.[185]

On 12 November 2007, Ko Thiha, an NLD Youth member was sentenced to a 'long-term' jail sentence in Meikhtila Township, Mandalay division. Ko Thiha had been arrested along with Ko Tin Ko as the two returned from an NLD meeting.[186]

On 14 November 2007, at least three unidentified persons were arrested in Thiri Mingalar market after they were found handing out anti-junta literature. No further information about the location or identities of those arrested was released.[187]

On 14 November 2007, activist Su Su Nway and a co-worker were arrested in Bahan Township near Kokhine, after police caught her putting up anti-junta posters.[188]

On 16 November 2007, it was reported that private tuition teachers Ko Ye Win, Ko Aye Min and Ko James had been arrested in the last week of October. They are familiar with the 88 Generation Student leaders and ABSFU (All Burma Students Federation Union) Ko Aung Naing, De Nyein Linn and Sithu Maung.[189]

As of 19 November 2007, Ko Khin Maung Soe, who was arrested in the beginning of October, was still missing according to his wife Ma Htay Hlaing. At the time of report no information had been released about his location or the charges against him.[190]

On 19 November 2007, a riot broke out after police attempted to arrest famous Burmese rapper G-Tone. Police attempted to arrest G-Tone after he showed an audience his religious tattoo, of two hands in prayer with prayer beads. Police waited until he had finished his set and proceeded to arrest him. Violence ensued as the audience reacted to G-Tone's arrest. The concert was stopped prematurely and sources were not sure if G-Tone was actually arrested.[191]

On 20 November 2007, three members of democratic opposition groups were detained by junta officials. Dr Myint Naing, NLD MP and ex-political prisoner, was arrested along with Tha Aung and Soe Win, two members of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP). The three men were taken for questioning, before being released later the same day.[192]

On 20 November 2007, Zomi ethnic leader Cin Sian Thang was taken into custody for questioning. Sian Thang's arrest came after several other ethnic politicians were arrested, including: Naing Ngwe Thein of the Mon National Democratic front, Aye Tha Aung Chairman of the Arakan League for Democracy, Ohn Tin also of the Arakan League for Democracy, and Soe Win of the National League of Democracy. SPDC officials released the aforementioned individuals shortly after their arrest. Only Cin Sian Thang continued to remain in custody.[193]

On 22 November 2007, the SPDC reportedly asked Thai universities in Bangkok to provide a list of Burmese students attending the universities. The request came after several protests took place outside the Burmese embassy in Bangkok. The junta also denied visa renewals to some Burmese students in Thailand suspected of participating in the demonstrations. Ko Ko Lwin, a student from St. John's University, was denied a passport renewal after junta officials found out he was involved in the demonstrations.[194]

On 24 November 2007, Ko Ray Thein (aka) Bu Maung, was rearrested by Arakan authorities for staging a solo protest in September. Authorities claimed that Ray Thein was mentally ill and needed to be evaluated by health professionals in Rangoon. However, sources reported that this was only a pretext for interrogating Ray Thein.[195]

On 26 November 2007, U Shan Shwe Tun, chairman of the NLD in the Arakan State was arrested by SPDC authorities at his home. Only fifteen days earlier, on 5 November, he had been released after serving a three year prison sentence. Authorities released no information concerning the 26 November arrest.[196]

On 27 November 2007, Aung Zaw Oo, a prominent HRDP member, was arrested in Kyauktada Township in Rangoon. No information was released concerning his arrest.[197]

On 28 November 2007, Kyaw Thu Moe Myint, a famous Burmese poet, fled to Thailand after SPDC courts sentenced him to another prison term. In February Kyaw Thu Moe Myint was arrested and fined for publishing politically sensitive material, and given 12 days in prison. In November, police informed Kyaw Thu Moe Myint that he would be tried again, and could face up to 18 months in prison. Kyaw Thu Moe Myint fled to Thailand to avoid arrest and further persecution.[198]

On 28 November 2007, Win Maw, a popular Burmese musician and two of his friends, Myat San and Aung Aung, were arrested in a Rangoon teashop by SPDC officials. Win Maw was said to be involved in planning events to mark International Human Rights Day on 10 December, with recently arrested Aung Zaw Oo.[199]

On 29 November 2007, famous comedian Ko La Raung was arrested by SPDC officials after performing in Mrauk U. Ko La Raung performed a show depicting the shooting of a monk. This displeased local authorities, who assumed it was a reference to recent actions by the army during the protests. Ko La Raung was detained for three days before being released after he agreed not to repeat the performance again.[200]

On 5 December 2007, a government appointed village secretary in Arakan State was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for his involvement in the September protests. Ko Win Maung, from Manaung town, Arakan State, was accused of "betraying the state" after he participated in the protests.[201]

On 13 December 2007, it was reported that social activist Ko Htin Kyaw (40) was charged after he demonstrated against declining living standards. Ko Htin Kyaw was accused of "public mischief" and could face up to two years in prison.[202]

On 12 December 2007, student Maung Ye Myat Hein (17) had been detained in Insein prison for over two months in connection with the September demonstrations. He was told he would only be held for a few days, but had still not been released or charged.[203]

On 14 December 2007, Ko Kyaw Min Naing, a member of Taungup NLD, was arrested and drugged by local police. It was reported that police forced Ko Kyaw Min Naing to ingest an unidentified syrup which caused him to lose consciousness for two days. Police had arrested Ko Kyaw Min Naing and another NLD member on suspicion of spray painting anti-junta graffiti on the streets of Taungup.[204]

On 16 December 2007, three members of the 88 Generation Students' Group were arrested in their homes in Rangoon. They were:

1. Min Min Soe;
2. Htun Htun Win; and
3. Myo Yan Naung Thein.[205]

On 17 December 2007, junta officials arrested the parents of All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) member Ko Si Thu Maung, after they refused to cooperate with authorities. U Peter and Daw Nu Nu Swe were arrested after they refused to assist junta officials attempting to arrest their son. The police did not have a warrant, and were refused access into the house by the parents. U Peter and Daw Nu Nu Swe, were charged with violating section 505(b), denied bail, and sent to Insein prison.[206]

On 18 December 2007, three more members of the 88 Generation Students' Group were arrested. They were:

1. Khin Moe Aye;
2. Kyaw Soe; and
3. Zaw Min (aka) Bound Bound. [207]

On 18 December 2007, Aung Gyi, a member of HRDP, was arrested from his home in North Okkalapa Township, Rangoon.[208]

On 18 December 2007, junta court officials postponed the trial of Htin Kyaw to 26 December. Htin Kyaw was arrested on 25 August for protesting in Pabedan Township. He went on hunger strike on 30 November in protest against the junta's arrest of students and monks.[209]

On 18 December 2007, Win Myint, an NLD member from Hlaing Tharyar Township, Rangoon, was sentenced to three years imprisonment on allegations of possessing a weapon. However, his arrest came shortly after he refused SPDC authorities demands on him to leave the political party. On 2 December, soon after turning down the order, U Win Myint picked up a passenger in his trishaw and took him to a bus stop, where Win Myint found police and ward authorities waiting for him. They searched his trishaw and found a nine-inch knife. Although Win Myint insisted it must have belonged to his passenger, the police refused to believe his story and arrested him.[210]

On 21 December 2007, Ko Shwe Thway, Ko Zaw Gyi, and Ko Yazar were arrested and charged with incitement of offences against the state or public tranquility under section 505(b) of the Penal Code and also with defamation. The three residents of Monywa, Sagaing division, were accused of giving water to protesting monks. Ko Shwe Thway was sentenced to two and a half years in prison, while Ko Zaw Gyi and Ko Yazar each received a two year sentence.[211]

On 28 December 2007, four students from West Rangoon University were charged with violation of six offences, and faced a possibility of 12 years in prison. They were to due appear in court 2 January 2008, under the charges that they violated sections 143, 144, 147, 295, and 505 (b). The hour students were:

1. Ye Myat Hein;
2. Sithu Maung;
3. Ye Min Oo; and
4. Kyi Phyu.[212]

Sittwe Prison. *[Photo: AAPPB]*

1.3 Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Ethnic Minorities

> *"As the result of a military campaign characterized by killings, torture and rape of ethnic-minority women, it is estimated that almost 3000 villages have been destroyed since 1996. One million refugees have fled to neighboring countries while 600,000 internally displaced persons now struggle to subsist in primitive jungle conditions. The military junta is also estimated to have imprisoned more than 800,000 people in forced labour camps and to have utilized more than 70,000 child soldiers."*[213]

Burma's ethnic minority regions remained heavily militarised throughout 2007, namely Arakan State, Chin State, Karen State, eastern Pegu Division, Karenni State, Mon State and Shan State. Despite the existence of ceasefire agreements in most of these areas, the SPDC army has a strong presence and remains suspicious of resistance efforts. The Karen National Union (KNU) and the Shan State Army (SSA) are the most formidable of the remaining armed ethnic minority resistance groups, and 2007 saw continual SPDC military activity in areas of Karen State where the KNU maintained a presence. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

The arrest and detention of civilians in ethnic conflict areas is often a result of the SPDC's suspicion of civilian's assisting resistance groups. Whilst some detainees for which the SPDC had genuine reasons to believe were involved in supporting resistance efforts were shown no mercy, numerous other arrestees were simply forced to carry out labour duties for the SPDC. Such duties range from building military camps to portering for the army. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription).

In SPDC-controlled areas of the ethnic minority regions, villagers can face arrest or even arbitrary execution if caught outside their village boundaries without the necessary documentation which they must purchase from the SPDC. Particularly vulnerable to arrest and arbitrary detention are the village heads, who are often summoned to the local army camp and blamed for the actions of their fellow villagers, failure to report local insurgents in the area or simply as a means to demand labour, money and goods from the village. Family members are also subject to arrest in lieu of the accused.

In February of 2007, the SPDC stepped up its campaign in Karen areas. The SPDC has initiated a "shoot on sight" policy in areas not under tight SPDC control. In areas that have been secured by the SPDC, a policy of arrest is prevalent. The current offensive has led to increased displacement of persons and a larger problem of food insecurity. Movement restrictions and constant fear of arrest has disrupted the food production capabilities in Karen State. Essential tasks such as farming and tending to livestock have become impossible for most, leading to the abandonment of entire villages. Those continue to risk working, face the constant fear of imprisonment and even death. This year alone has seen over 2,150 persons arrested, most being forced to work as porters in the field.[214]

Similar conditions could be seen in other ethnic areas throughout Burma, proving the insecurity and instability faced by ethnic groups throughout Burma. Systematic harassment and imprisonment of ethnic minorities was prevalent in all of the ethnic states, although implementation took on different forms in different regions. Highly orchestrated schemes by local security officials, involving the possession of cell phones, foreign currency, and foreign medicines, occurred repeatedly this year.

In Arakan State, the Rohingya continue to be frequent targets for extortion and imprisonment. The Rohingya, a Muslim minority group denied citizenship since 1982, face systematic discrimination at both a state and societal level. Rohingya's are thus particularly targeted and vulnerable to the system of threats, extortion and abuses at the hands of the SPDC, which relies on the threat of arrest to continually suppress and exploit this ethnic minority group. Under threat of imprisonment, they are generally prohibited from travel, and must obtain the permission of the authorities to marry. As the fees garnered from authorities in order to grant permission are often unaffordable and the processing of applications is often delayed, they are often forced to travel or marry secretly.

Arrest and Detention of persons in Ethnic Minority Areas – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 1 January 2007, three Rohingya boatmen were arrested after crossing a river between Bangladesh and Burma. The men were on a boat with several other people when NaSaKa officials detained them. The boatmen were identified as:

1. Rahamat Ullah (30) son of Salay Ahmed;
2. Abul Fayaz (27) son of Idda Ali; and
3. Abul Fayaz (25) son of Bailar.

On 13 January, the men were taken to Rathedaung court where they were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Rahamat Ullah was given nine years, while the other two men were sentenced to five years each.[215]

On 14 January 2007, Haron a Moulvi of Sibin Thaya Zay, was arrested after he was found in possession of a mobile phone. The phone was given to Haron by an Arakan youth, after the youth told Haron he did not know how to use a phone. The youth, whose name is Boygi, is a known informer for the SPDC. Haron was arrested, and later released after paying a 500,000 kyat bribe. [216]

On 15 January 2007, a shopkeeper from Buthidaung was arrested by police after he requested that the police pay for the items they had taken from his shop. The police beat the shopkeeper, and took him to the army camp in Thinga Net village, where he was held for seven days. During his detention, the shopkeeper was tortured, including being tied to a pole and submerged in water. He was released on the seventh day after paying a 60,000 kyat fine.[217]

On 18 January 2007, Sokina Khatun (50) and her son Mohamed Fayas were questioned by police, after seeking medical treatment in Bangladesh. Sokina Khatun suffered from a peptic ulcer and was unable to obtain medical treatment in Arakan State. Sokina and her son had obtained the proper documents to cross the border into Bangladesh to receive treatment. However, upon returning to Burma they were questioned by police who claimed they had crossed illegally. Mohamed Fayas was arrested and taken to the NaSaKa camp. He was detained for one day and forced to pay a 50,000 kyat fine.[218]

On 20 January 2007, two Rohingya men were taken into police custody after they were found in possession of mobile phones. Mohamed Hassain and Abul Hassain were arrested and severely tortured by NaSaKa officials in a detention centre, after admitting they possessed mobile phones from Bangladesh.[219]

On 30 January 2007, ten members of a committee from five mosques in Buthidaung continued to remain in detention without being formally charged. The men had been detained for six months but arresting officials had failed to charge the men with a crime.[220]

On 7 February 2007, it was reported that police in the Maungdaw Township had arrested several local businessmen for being in possession of mobile phones. Reports stated that the police often plant evidence, then return and demand that the accused pay money or face imprisonment.[221]

On 10 February 2007, it was reported that Nurul Ullah (20) from Buthidaung was detained after refusing to give soldiers his cows for use in the fields. Soldiers arrested Ullah and detained him for three days before demanding 30,000 kyat upon his release.[222]

On 18 February 2007, it was reported that Mahfuzul Karim, a Rohingya businessman, was arrested in Maungdaw on human trafficking charges. Karim frequently crossed the border between Burma and Bangladesh for his business. He was taken to a SaRaPa camp and tortured for over 28 hours before being released. He was also fined 1.1 million kyat.[223]

On 7 March 2007, NaSaKa officials detained Mohammed Islam after returning a day late from visiting his aunt in Poung Zar, Maungdaw Township. Mohammed had applied for a travel permit but was late returning to his village in Rathedaung Township because his aunt was ill. When he returned home, NaSaKa officials summoned him to their office and detained him. While in custody he was tortured. He was released a day later after paying a 50,000 kyat fine.[224]

On 16 March 2007, a Rohingya high school student (18) from Buthidaung was arrested by military forces after submitting a complaint against an Arakanese student. The student was taken to Hlet Wat Dad army camp for questioning. He was returned to his relatives three days later in critical condition.[225]

On 20 March 2007, a woman was detained by NaSaKa officials after traveling to Bangladesh to seek medical treatment. Although Sura Khaton had received travel permission, on return to Burma she was taken into custody and told to surrender her passport. She refused, and was detained for two days, then fined and released.[226]

On 5 May 2007, Mohammed Rafique (15) from Pa Dinn village, Maungdaw Township, was arrested for possessing a mobile phone. He was detained by NaSaKa authorities for ten days and severely beaten while in custody. He was subsequently released on 15 May and received medical treatment. On 21 May he succumbed to his injuries and died.[227]

On 17 May 2007, it was reported that three members of a Rohingya family from Maungdaw Township narrowly escaped arrest, but were forced to pay NaSaKa authorities 2.5 million kyat. The police questioned Hussain Ahamed, Somuda Khatun and Hamid Hussain on suspicion of human trafficking, after the family sent a family member abroad for work.[228]

On 7 April 2007, Liala Begum (18), daughter of Gura Meah hailing from Nyaung Chaung village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, was detained by police for marrying without a permit. The police detained her, and forced her to walk around her village only wearing her 'tami' as punishment. Liala Begum had applied for a marriage permit but was unable to pay the cost.[229]

On 15 April 2007, Osman (22), a Rohingya from Thapay Taw village, Maungdaw Township, was arrested by NaSaKa personnel. They accused Osman of having a romantic relationship with a female he had been seen walking with. The police detained both individuals for questioning. The female was released after two hours, while Osman was detained for one week.[230]

In April 2007, it was reported that Maung Ko Kyi had been missing since 10 March 2006. Captain Kyaw Zayar Win of IB #590 had arrested him after he failed to pay 300,000 kyat (US$ 250) to be released. Reports suggest that he was sent to Armed Battalion #13 to work as a porter. As of April 2007 his whereabouts remained unknown.[231]

On 9 July 2007, Nabi Hussain was herding cattle from Buthidaung to Maungdaw when he was arrested by SPDC military intelligence (SaRaPa). Hussain was arrested along with two other co-workers, Mohammed Salim and Abdul Hakim, because he allegedly had failed to inform SPDC of his movements. Hussain and his two co-workers were taken to the SaRaPa camp, interrogated, and tortured. The following day, Hussain was brought to the hospital by SaRaPa authorities for wounds sustained while in custody. He died shortly after arriving at the hospital. Mohammed Salim and Abdul Hakim continued to be detained.[232]

On 21 July 2007, Mohammed Jamil (27) was arrested after SaRaPa officials discovered that he had married two years earlier without a permit. He was detained and made to pay a 40,000 kyat fine before being released.[233]

On 21 July 2007, the body of a seven-months-old infant was found in a river between Ulet Watad Pyin Chay and Lamber Bill villages, in Buthiduang, Arakan State. Police questioned residents from both villages, and responded by arresting ten villagers from Lamber Bill and Ulet Watad. The villagers were released after paying 10,000-20,000 kyat depending on their financial status. The persons arrested were identified as:

1. Hanifia (50);
2. Motiur Rahaman (55);
3. Abdul Nasser (40);
4. Kala Meah (65);
5. Mohammed Nabi (65);
6. Zahir Uddin (35);
7. Abul Hussain (45);
8. Mozal Ahmed (70);
9. Abdul Salam (30); and
10. Mohammed Harun (40).[234]

On 3 August 2007, it was reported that Mohammed Talukder had been arrested by NaSaKa police in Buthidaung, accused of illegally crossing the Burma-Bangladesh border. He was arrested, tortured and fined 150,000 kyat, which his family was unable to pay. He was forced to sign an agreement stating he would return to the military outpost in Taung Bazaar until he had worked off his fine.[235]

On 5 August 2007, four people were arrested after they were found to be in possession of mobile phones. The arrested individuals could face up to three years in prison. They were:

1. Maung Kuu, from Shwe Zar Quarter in Maungdaw;
2. Joyn, from Shwe Zar Quarter in Maungdaw;
3. Marmad Shar, from Maungdaw Township; and
4. Zarhite Husein from Maungdaw Township. [236]

On 9 August 2007, a newly married Rohingya couple fled to Bangladesh after facing fines and possible arrest for marrying without permission. The couple married in 2006 but was unable to afford the price of the permit.[237]

On 29 August 2007, Fazal Rashid (70) was arrested for illegally crossing the border into Bangladesh after he was found in possession of medicine from Bangladesh. Rashid bought the medicine at a local market in Mrauk-U, but SPDC officials claimed crossed the border. He was brought to an army camp where he was detained for one week.[238]

On 28 October 2007, Abu Talek was detained and interrogated by over 40 NaSaKa officials, concerning the recent death of his daughter. Officials questioned Abu Talek, claiming he had not registered the death of his daughter. Police exhumed the child's body, and brought it to the father for confirmation. Abu Talek cooperated with police and told them that he had already registered the death. Despite his cooperation, he was tortured by police officials. He later fled to Bangladesh, fearing further torture.[239]

Chin State

On 19 February 2007, Lt. Colonel San Aung, the tactical commander of Chin State, ordered the arrest of 9 village headmen in Southern Chin State. The arrests came as reprisal for the deaths sustained by SPDC soldiers during a fight with Chin rebels. Headmen from the following villages were arrested:

1. San Pyah;
2. Way Laung;
3. Si Wa;
4. Lin Song;
5. Khaw Boi;
6. Dar Chung;
7. Tingsi; and
8. Cun-Nam. [240]

On 24 February 2007, soldiers from LIB #140 arrested 17 people on suspicion of aiding local rebel groups. The villagers were taken to Matupi and detained. One of the villagers, U Tin Ceu, was found dead two days later. Witnesses reported that he was taken to another location and executed.[241]

On 22 March 2007, Lt. Colonel San Aung, the Chin State tactical commander, detained and forcibly conscripted over 20 class ten students of Tui Moe Boarding School. Several students fled to India to avoid conscription.[242]

On 9 April 2007, the SPDC arrested 7 villagers in Chin State, on suspicion that they were paying taxes to rebel groups. The SPDC released four of the men claiming that the other three had escaped custody. The three men, Mum Hte, Khun Ling and Tin Cung, were later found dead by relatives.[243]

On 17 June 2007, SPDC officials arrested three Chin youth near the Indo-Burma border on suspicion of being affiliated with the Chin National Front (CNF). The youths confessed to being involved with the CNF, but claimed they had fled from the training camp because of the harsh conditions.[244]

On 30 June 2007, 6 Chin villagers from Matupi Township were arrested after writing a letter to Senior General Than Shwe, protesting the killing of U Tin Ceu and the arrest of 16 others in February 2007.[245]

Karen State

On 7 January 2007, the head of village tract Aung-soe-moe was arrested by LIB #350. No reason was given for the arrest.[246]

On 10 January 2007, DKBA troops, led by Than Ma Na, initiated a program of forced recruitment in Pa-an Township. DKBA forces arrested and conscripted over 51 people from several local villages including:

1. K'ru-she (10 persons);
2. Pwa-gaw (10 persons);
3. No-aw-la (10 persons);
4. Doh-law-plaw (10 persons);
5. Ha-ta-yeh (2 persons);
6. Hta-thu-khee (2 persons);
7. Kyaw-kay-khee (2 persons); and
8. Doh-law-plaw (5 persons).[247]

On 19 January 2007, 6 villagers from Yea-Shan and Zee-Pyu-Gon villages were arrested by troops from IB #75. They were taken to Shan-Zee-Bon camp, Toungoo District. They were:

1. Saw Pa, from Yea-Shan village;
2. Saw Ah Lu, from Yea-Shan village;
3. Saw Kyaw Nee Win, from Zee-Pyu-Gon village;
4. Maung Yu, from Zee-Pyu-Gon village;
5. Saw Ta Kya, from Zee-Pyu-Gon village; and
6. Saw Ta Yo Yor, from Zee-Pyu-Gon village.[248]

On 29 January 2007, SPDC troops from the local military command headquarters shot one villager and arrested two others in Hu-Mu-Deh village, Toungoo district. After killing Saw Taw Luku, the SPDC troops arrested Naw May Mae and an unidentified person. The two were later released.[249]

On 30 January 2007, Saw Has Pra and Saw Win Kyaw, from Kaw Thay Deh village, were arrested by SPDC officials. The two villagers were forced to work as porters for the military.[250]

On 8 February 2007, troops from the LIB #104 entered Kyu-khee village and arrested Tee Hto Yei (50), the village head. The commander, Bo Aye Aung, demanded him to carry military supplies to Ter-paw-deh.[251]

On 9 March 2007, SPDC soldiers stationed at Gkaw Thay Der arrested Saw Ta Gko Gka, after finding him tending to his field. The soldiers took Saw Ta Gku Gka to the SPDC controlled camp at Kler La. After his arrest, soldiers burned his field and home, resulting in the destruction of over 275 kilograms of rice.[252]

On 9 March 2007, three community leaders from Kaw Law Gkah village were arrested by soldiers from IB #373, MOC #5. They were:

1. Saw Ker Mer (50);
2. Saw Du Kler (58); and
3. Saw Paw Hta (32).

The soldiers took them to Khoo Thay Der army camp for questioning. The following day, Saw Du Kler was released, while Saw Ker Mer and Saw Du Kler were transported to MOC #5 headquarters in Kler La. [253]

In May 2007, several families were arrested while they planted rice in the fields near the Kler La – Mawchi vehicle road in eastern Toungoo. The families were arrested by SPDC soldiers from MOC #5, under the command of Kuang Mya; LIB #542, under Battalion Commander Thuang Htin Soe; and LIB # 544, under Battalion Commander Hla Htwin. A total of 12 families were arrested, 3 from Wah Soh village, 3 from Ao Kweh village and 6 families from Ber Ka Lay Kor village. The soldiers later released the women but kept the men in custody.[254]

On 4 May 2007, SPDC MOC #5 soldiers arrested three villagers from Hsaw Wah Der, on their return from buying supplies in nearby Kaw Thay Der. The arrested villagers were:

1. Saw Kya Soe (51);
2. Saw Kin Rin (43); and
3. Saw Ka Lay (50).[255]

On 16 July 2007, it was reported that over 21 people had been arrested for possessing Thai mobile phones. SPDC officials detained those who were unable to pay a fine and sent them to Hpa-an jail.[256]

Karenni State

On 10 April 2007, Saw Lee Reh Kyaw, a member of relief group Free Burma Rangers (FBR), was arrested and later executed. After Lee Reh was captured, he was taken to army headquarters, where he was interrogated and later executed. Two other villagers were also taken by army officials, but their whereabouts remained unknown.[257]

On 11 April 2007, Daw Mu Meh of Dawpapa village was arrested by SPDC soldiers after they found her harbouring a Karenni rebel in her home. The rebel evaded arrest, but Daw Mu Meh was detained for two days before her release.[258]

On 13 April 2007, it was reported that a village chairman and a secretary from Hilikhu village had been arrested after a fight broke out between SPDC troops and Karenni rebels. The condition of the two remained unknown. This incident followed a similar incident that occurred in January 2007, when a chairman from Phukhrakhu village was arrested, and later executed.[259]

On 4 May 2007, it was reported that Saw Lwin and two other Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) members had been arrested after allegedly being found in possession of firearms. The three men were charged with breaching Burma's weapon and sensitive commodities act. The men were sentenced to three years for breaching the weapons act and seven years for breaching the sensitive commodities act.[260]

On 19 October 2007, it was reported that over 50 villagers had been arrested by soldiers in Karenni State. The arrests came after IB #54 was attacked by Karenni rebel forces. The villagers from Loi Kaw Township were arrested on suspicion of aiding Karenni rebel groups.[261]

Kachin State

On 22 November 2007, soldiers from the LIB #241 arrested 8 members of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in a raid on a regional command office. Shortly after the arrests, six of the soldiers were released, but the army continued to hold the commander and assistant commander.[262]

On 23 November 2007, senior intelligence chief, Lt. Gala Brang Shawng of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), was released after being detained by the military junta. His release came after KIO officials made requests to the junta. Lt. Gala Brang Shawng was arrested in October after he was found carrying firearms.[263]

A man is arrested by plain clothes security officers affiliated with SPDC paramilitary forces during a protest in Rangoon on 28 August 2007. *[Photo: DVB/AP]*

Mon State

On 2 March 2007, Nai Pha Dort had been incarcerated since December 2006 on accusations that he was supporting Mon rebels in Khaw-zar sub-township. Although the family paid SPDC officials 300,000 kyat to secure his release, SPDC officials refused to release him. The SPDC also demanded that the family stop sending food.[264]

On 3 March 2007, troops of LIB #590 captured an unidentified villager as he was returning to his village after buying food. The villager was taken to Thit Chat Zeik village where he was tortured. No other information was available at the time of report.[265]

On 16 March 2007, SPDC officials arrested a father, son, and another man, all from Aung Soe Moe village. The identities were withheld and the reason for their arrest was unknown.[266]

On 26 June 2007, over 50 villagers in Bayoun-ngae, Southern Ye Township, were arrested by SPDC soldiers after being accused of supporting rebel groups in the area. The villagers were sent to Han-gan. Reports confirm that ten of the villagers were severely tortured during interrogation. Military officials demanded that the villagers pay 20,000 kyat each to be released. The military officials then returned to the village and demanded 300,000 kyat from the remaining villagers.[267]

On June 2007, a 37-year-old mother from Southern Ye Township reported that her daughter had been arrested after soldiers from LIB #586 were unable to find her. The military forces had accused her of giving support to Mon rebel troops. When the soldiers could not find her, they interrogated her daughter and aunt and then arrested the daughter.[268]

On 3 July 2007, Nai Maw, a farmer, was killed by SPDC soldiers during interrogation. Nai Maw was arrested by SPDC soldiers for selling food to Mon rebels, and died as a result of the wounds sustained during his detainment. The death occurred between Singu and Toe Thet Ywa villages.[269]

In July 2007, Kabya village headman, Nai Min Tin Aung and an unidentified man were arrested by SPDC officials on suspicion of giving aid to Mon rebel groups.[270]

On 14 August 2007, five youths from Hnee-padaw village in Mudon Township, were arrested by police while waiting to meet friends at a public rest-house. The five youths were charged under the "law act of living in shadow". The police demanded 100,000 kyat each for their release.[271]

Pegu Division

In March 2007, it was reported that 12 child soldiers had fled to the Indo-Burma border after attending a training session in Shwekyin, Pegu division. The child soldiers were recruited by Colonel Lwin Oo and Battalion Commander Soe Tin from LIB #349.[272]

Shan State

In February 2007, a mentally unstable man from Mai Hai village, Shan State, was shot by SPDC soldiers. SPDC soldiers claimed the man was a Shan rebel, and proceeded to question the villagers, accusing them of harbouring rebels. After questioning the villagers, the soldiers arrested village headman Kaw-Ta-La. By October 2007 he was still missing.[273]

Between the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, five villagers from Zizawya Khe village in Lai-Kha Township, were arrested and beaten by SPDC officials. The villagers were:

1. Naang Zing Wa (female, 36) was accused of being the wife of a Shan soldier. She was arrested, interrogated and tortured in her house in Zizawya Khe village;
2. Zaai Zit-Ta (male, 43) was accused of having connections with local Shan rebel groups. He was beaten by SPDC officials, but managed to escape with only minor injuries;
3. Zaai Kalaa (male, 39) was accused of supporting Shan rebels. He was interrogated by SPDC officials near Zalaai Khum village before being beaten to death; and
4. Zaai Su and Zaai Zaw Phae, two village headmen, were questioned on suspicion of supporting Shan rebels. The SPDC sentenced them to three months as porters in Nam-Zarng.[274]

On 21 June 2007, two residents of Mong Yu village in Shan State were arrested by police for failing to comply with orders to move their residences. U Maung Maung and U Maung Nyu were told by authorities to vacate their houses, as to make room for the extension of the border trade zone. Police arrested all citizens who failed to comply with the demand.[275]

On 18 December 2007, as many as 100 SPDC troops arrested 9 members of the Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization (SSNPLO). Shan Battalion commander major Bar Pray and eight other SSNPLO members were arrested as they traveled through Palan Naw Ka Village in See Sai Township. The junta failed to disclose the reasons for their arrest, or what charges the nine would face.[276]

On 21 December 2007, a warehouse owner was arrested in Shan State. Local military officials found an overturned truck carrying guns and ammunition, and were able link the arms to local warehouse owner U Li Kyin Kwaw.[277]

The Crime of Reporting Rape

On 3 February 2007, four girls between the ages of 14 and 16 were on their way home from a karaoke shop when they were abducted by SPDC soldiers from IB #138. The four girls were taken to an army camp near Doketan, where they were raped by seven of the soldiers. The group of soldiers involved in the rape included three army officers and four soldiers. [278]

The soldiers released the girls after the rape, and attempted to bribe the girls to stop them from reporting the incident to the police. However, the victims' parents reported the rape, and news of the rape was published by an independent news agency. Local officials subsequently arrested the four girls, charging them with ten accounts including prostitution. The girls were sent to Putao jail, and were awaiting transfer to Mandalay prison when they were released. The four girls were eventually released from prison after the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) visited Putao jail following international pressure. The incident sparked widespread condemnation from human rights groups, sparking several protests in foreign countries.[279]

1.4 Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Civilians

In 2007 the army, police and local officials continued to victimize Burma's ordinary civilians through extra-judicial beatings, killings and arbitrary arrests. The greatest spike of arbitrary arrests occurred in the aftermath of the September protests. Many of these arrests were made against those who had no alleged involvement in the protest. When local officials were unable to find suspected protest participants and supporters, the authorities would in turn arrest the family members and friends of the suspect, holding them hostage until either a fine was paid or until the suspect turned him or herself in. These hostages would sometimes include entire families, children and even the mentally disabled. (For specific examples, see the incidents dated 11 October 2007; 12 October 2007; 19 October 2007 and 21 October 2007 in Section 1.4: Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Civilians).

In addition to the arbitrary arrests made in relation to the September protests, the SPDC also arrested civilians in order to control their livelihoods, to control foreign influence and to limit the use of mobile phones in the country. The junta has maintained its campaign to limit any external influence and uncensored information into Burma. Those caught listening to foreign news networks on the radio or for possessing any type of foreign currency have often been arrested. (For specific examples, see the incidents dated 20 October 2007 and 26 December 2007 in Section 1.4: Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Civilians).

This junta's persistent control on information in Burma has led to a crackdown on mobile phones. Those possessing unlicensed foreign mobile phones in border areas have faced arrest. Moreover, mobile phone owners can be accused of sending information or pictures to the foreign media market, therefore, those who possess such phones or even phone batteries have been subject to arrest. (For specific examples, see the incidents dated 9 October 2007 and 5 December 2007 in Section 1.4: Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Civilians).

While struggling to maintain their livelihoods, many have been arrested for not having proper work permits, while others have been detained for contributing to developmental and social projects. (For specific examples, see the incidents dated 24 January 2007; 22 February 2007; 26 July 2007 and 15 October 2007 in Section 1.4: Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Civilians).

Failing to acquire certain work permits, obtaining foreign news or currencies and possessing mobile phones were only some of the reasons why ordinary civilians faced detention in 2007. Others were still arbitrarily arrested under the suspicion of fleeing the country, driving unlicensed motorbikes and for waging complaints against local authorities.

Arbitrary or Politically-Motivated Arrests of Civilians – Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 16 January 2007, 20 suspects in Arakan State were taken into custody on charges of illegal gambling. Several retired government servicemen and retired officials were taken into custody during the raids.[280]

On 24 January 2007, at least 40 workers in Taungup Township, Arakan State, were arrested by authorities for operating an illegal timber production site.[281]

On 19 February 2007, Jaffar Alam was arrested by NaSaKa officials for transporting livestock into Burma from the Bangladesh border. Despite having paid the required taxes

and obtained the necessary documents to cross the border, Alam was arrested and had his livestock confiscated by NaSaKa officials who failed to recognize his documentation. Alam was detained for two days and severely beaten before being released without charges.[282]

On 22 February 2007, three persons were jailed after organizing a literary event without permission. The Pegu Court sentenced each of the accused to three months in prison.[283]

On 28 March 2007, over 60 farmers from Shan State were charged with pollution violations after burning their fields. The farmers were arrested and held in several locations around Shan State. The arrests came after the Thai government lodged a complaint concerning brush burning in the area.[284]

On 4 May 2007, Christian preacher Tu Rin Tun and his supporter Min Phyo were arrested and sent to Monywa jail after the SPDC claimed that the men had crossed illegally into India. The two men failed to receive permission for travel, and now face up to two years in jail. The authorities have also demanded a 400,000 kyat fine to be paid for their release.[285]

On 22 May 2007, SPDC officials arrested two journalists, Aung Shwe Oo and his daughter Sint Sint Aung, after they covered a story of the reestablishment of relations between Burma and North Korea. The two were on assignment for the Japanese Nippon News Network.[286]

On 7 June 2007, 6 businessmen from Maungdaw and Buthidaung, Arakan State, went missing after their arrest. Seven men in total were arrested, and only one man, Tun Myint, was released two days after being arrested. The identities of the missing men were:

1. Kyaw Myint;
2. Hla Shwe;
3. Joji Mular;
4. Harsan;
5. Hla Myint; and
6. Soe Lay.[287]

On 26 July 2007, over 300 gold miners operating near Indawgyi Lake, Kachin State, were arrested by the SPDC following complaints by local farmers. Farmers in Kachin State claimed that the mining practices were destroying their lands. The miners were detained throughout the state.[288]

On 27 July 2007, 25 persons from Rambree, Arakan State, were ordered to report to the township administration office in response to a forced labor complaint that was submitted to the International Labour Organization (ILO). They were asked to sign a statement invalidating the claim. Authorities arrested U Thein Shwe Maung and sentenced him to prison when he filed a claim with the ILO on 17 July 2007.[289]

On 30 July 2007, Aung Zaw Lin (17), a bus conductor from Mandalay, was arrested and sentenced to seven years for his involvement in a 'punch up' with a bus station manager. Aung Zaw Linn was found guilty of violating criminal act 325, leading to a sentence of seven years of hard labour.[290]

On 28 August 2007, Abul Kalam (13) from Arakan State was arrested by NaSaKa officials because of his father's outstanding loan debt. Since NaSaKa officials were unable to find his father, Noor Hussain, they decided to detain Abul Kalam instead. The police reportedly tortured the boy in custody, and claimed they would release him in exchange for his father.[291]

On 7 October 2007, two men from Arakan State were arrested by NaSaKa officials on charges of attempting to flee to Bangladesh. Nurul Haque and Nurul Islam were picked up on their way home from the local mosque.[292]

On 9 October 2007, Mohammed Sadek was arrested by Maungdaw police after he was found in possession of a mobile phone from Bangladesh. He was arrested but later escaped, only to be rearrested by police hours later. Mohammed was forced to pay the police a 100,000 kyat bribe for his release.[293]

On 11 October 2007, it was reported that family members of Daw Thet Thet Aung had been arrested for her involvement in the September protests. As Daw Thet Thet Aung was not present at her house when the police came to arrest her, the authorities proceeded to arrest her family members instead. Among those arrested were her husband, U Chit Ko Lin, her mother, Daw Su Su Kyi (54), and Daw May Than Yee (70).[294]

On 12 October 2007, junta officials arrested a mentally ill man, Thein Aye, after they were unable to locate De Nyein Linn, an All-Burmese Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU) member. When officials were unable to find De Nyein Linn during a residential raid, they instead took Thein Aye into custody for questioning. According to anonymous sources, Thein Aye suffers from mental illness, and police had not given any other information concerning his whereabouts. It was reported that police later found and arrested De Nyein Linn.[295]

On 15 October 2007, NaSaKa forces arrested four villagers in Rathedaung, Arakan State, for helping the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) dig three wells. Despite the UNDP having gained clearance from NaSaKa, the security forces arrested Yakub Ali, Nur Mohamed, Sainn Gaung, and Nazim Uddin. NaSaKa officials demanded 600,000 kyat for their release, but local villagers were unable to meet their demands.[296]

On 19 October 2007, SPDC officials arrested family members of U Gambira, the leader of the All-Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA), after officials were unable to arrest him for his involvement in the September protests. U Gambira's two brothers, Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw and Ko Win Zaw, his mother and sister were arrested in the raid. His brother Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw is also the secretary for the NLD in Pauk Township. Moreover, U Gambira's father U Min Lwin was later also arrested. The family members were informed that they would be detained until U Gambira was apprehended.[297] However, Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw and U Min Lwin were not released upon the arrest of U Gambira on 4 November.[298] U Min Lwin was released a month later, on 3 December, while Kyaw Kyaw continued to be detained.[299]

On 20 October 2007, Nai Aung Khin, a 45 year-old villager from Kaw-Zar, Mon State, was arrested and imprisoned after being caught listening to news from foreign based media services. He was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for listening to the banned broadcasts.[300]

On 21 October 2007, junta officials arrested the family of exiled 88 Generation Student leader Ko Nyi Nyi in an early morning raid. Ko Nyi Nyi now resides in the United States, but his family was arrested for their connections to other prominent '88 Generation Student activists, such as Ko Htay Kywe. Five family members and two guests were arrested in the raid. The arrested family members were:

1. Ma Thet Thet Aung;
2. Ma Noe Noe;
3. Daw San San Tin;
4. Ko Ko Gyi; and
5. Ko Kyaw Swa.[301]

On 30 October 2007, Win Aung (48), a school teacher from Tenasserim Division, was sentenced to one year in prison for wearing his uniform to a pro-junta rally. Win Aung was punished for disobeying an SPDC order stating that teachers and students were not to wear their uniforms to the rally.[302]

On 17 November 2007, five youths from Hnee-pa-daw village, aged 14 to 18, were arrested by police officers in Kamarwet village, for being in possession of unlicensed motorcycles. The police demanded the youths to pay 20,000 kyat each to be released, and 100,000 kyat for each unlicensed motorbike.[303]

On 28 November 2007, 4 men were arrested as they attempted to transport motorcycles across the border from India's Mizoram state into Burma. A member of the Young Mizo Association (YMA) apprehended the men as they crossed the border. Local authorities suspected the motorcycles were stolen. The four men were identified as:

1. Dalkhena (35);
2. Liannang;
3. Ngindo Nang; and
4. Langa.[304]

On 27 November 2007, Ko Than Naing was stabbed while being arrested by *Swan-Arr-Shin* members, after they were called to his house following an argument he had with his mother, Daw Than Win. His mother had asked local police to talk to her son, but members of the *Swan-Arr-Shin* became involved instead. They stabbed Ko Than when he tried to escape, and then arrested him. His mother requested that he be released but the authorities refused to do so. Ko Than Naing was charged with possession of the knife that the *Swan-Arr-Shin* members had used to stab him with. His mother was forced to sign a document confessing his crime.[305]

On 2 December 2007, an Arakan man was arrested by police after writing a letter to the BBC documenting the human rights atrocities against Rohingya people in Arakan State. Hajee Amir Hakim's letter was intercepted by the NaSaKa, who in turn informed local police. Hajee Amir Hakim was taken into police custody, interrogated, and tortured. He was released on 3 December, after his family paid a portion of the 200,000 kyat demanded for his release.[306]

On 4 December 2007, Tin Lun was arrested and beaten by USDA officials after he confronted a soldier who had insulted his sister. The soldier had propositioned Tin Lun's sister for sex after a party. Ma Than Than Myint declined the offer, and told her brother about the event. When Tin Lun approached the officer, he was accused of interfering in state business. He was arrested and taken to a nearby army camp, and military officials threatened to sue his parents.[307]

On 5 December 2007, Jaffar, a Rohingya man from Bawli Bazaar north village, was arrested when police illegally searched his home. Police failed to give a reason or to issue a warrant for the raid. After searching his home multiple times, police allegedly found a battery for a mobile phone. Police arrested Jaffar accusing him of illegally possessing a phone. The police then demanded 500,000 kyat for his release. He was taken into custody but was later released after paying the bribe.[308]

On 17 December 2007, two Burmese women were arrested by customs officers in Bangladesh, after trying to illegally enter Bangladesh. Ma Thein and Ma Tin were stopped at the border and searched. Bangladeshi officials found they were carrying Burmese identity cards, foreign currency and a hard drive. The women were handed over to NaSaKa security officials, and have faced charges in the Burmese legal system.[309]

On 25 December 2007, three family members were arrested for arguing with another family in Mono Para village, Buthidaung Township. Maulvi Anis, Monir Ahmed, Mohamed Sultan, and Fatema Khatoon, were arrested after Zuhura Khatoon, a member of the other family, was injured. Police demanded a 3 million kyat bribe to release the family; however, the family was only able to raise half the requested amount and was thus not released.[310]

On 26 December 2007, Rashid Uddin, a 13 year-old Rohingya from Sin Oo Khya village, was arrested by NaSaKa personnel when he was found carrying foreign currency. Rashid Uddin was on his way to school when approached by the NaSaKa. Officials arrested him after finding a 500 taka note in his school bag.[311]

Civilians arrested in downtown Rangoon in a crackdown on protesters on 27 September 2007. *[Photo: unknown]*

1.5 Foreigners Arrested and Detained in 2007

On 5 January 2007, 7 Bangladeshi and 48 Burmese Muslims were sentenced to five years in prison for attempting to illegally migrate to Malaysia. The group had been arrested on 20 December 2006.[312]

On 4 February 2007, 5 Bangladeshi fishermen from Nathmura Para village were arrested on the Naff River by NaSaKa officials. The fishermen were detained and had their boats and nets confiscated. Family members of the detained contacted the Bangladesh government, but no action was taken. The fishermen from Nathmura Para (village) of Nila union under the Teknaf Upazila, Cox's Bazaar District, were identified as:

1. Chandranath Jaladash (23) son of Sudar Jaladash;
2. Bogirath Jaladash (21);
3. Hori Jaladash (30) son of Bokto Jaladash;
4. Jodo Jaladash (22) son of Shaher Jaladesh; and
5. Shonjito Jaladesh (12) son of Auzit Jaladesh.[313]

On 16 April 2007, a Thai citizen and another man were arrested by the DKBA, a ceasefire group with ties to the SPDC.[314]

On 21 April 2007, Mohammed Tayub, from Assatali in Bangladesh, was arrested by NaSaKa forces. NaSaKa illegally entered Bangladesh to arrest Tayub, where they claimed that he was a robber. Tayub was returned to Bangladeshi officials on 22 April.[315]

On 28 May 2007, NaSaKa officials arrested a Bangladeshi fisherman and his son on the Naff River in Bangladesh, while demanding 8,000 kyat for their release. When Jahangir Hussain and his son were unable to pay, NaSaKa handcuffed the men and took them to Taungbru camp. The two escaped custody when NaSaKa personnel fell asleep after drinking. Once back in Bangladesh, the father and son reported their arrest to government officials. NaSaKa officials declined to return the fishing boat to its owners.[316]

On 27 June 2007, 6 Bangladeshi fishermen were abducted by NaSaKa officials on the Naff River. The men were arrested and tortured by the NaSaKa. They were released the same day, but their boats and nets remain in NaSaKa custody. The arrested men from Leda village, Teknaf union, Cox's Bazaar district, were identified as:

1. Abdu Shukur (35), son of Ramjan Ali;
2. Abdul Amin (30);
3. Rofique (25);
4. Mokter Ahmed (40);
5. Khobir Ahmed (20); and
6. Sultan Ahamed (23).[317]

On 19 July 2007, 4 Bangladeshi men were arrested by NaSaKa authorities who crossed into Bangladesh demanding bribes from local woodcutters. When they failed to pay the bribes, NaSaKa arrested the woodcutters. The men were later released after the Bangladeshi government became involved. The arrested were identified as:

1. Abu Sidique;
2. Kolimul Islam;
3. Sayed Alam; and
4. Abdu Rahim.[318]

On 24 July 2007, two fishing boats owned by Bangladeshi citizens were seized and over 24 fishermen were arrested in the Bay of Bengal by NaSaKa forces. NaSaKa officials claimed the fishermen were in Burma territorial waters, however alternative reports contradicted this

claim. The 24 fishermen were taken to a NaSaKa detention facility before being returned to Bangladeshi officials four days later.[319]

On 6 September 2007, NaSaKa forces abducted 2 Bangladeshi woodcutters, Mohmad Ismol (30) and Swe Yu Korim (26), and took them to Degaliyer Village in Okia Township. NaSaKa authorities accused the men of crossing illegally into Burma.[320]

On 12 November 2007, NaSaKa officials abducted 5 Bangladeshi woodcutters from the border area near Naikhongchari. At the time of reporting, the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) were trying to release them. The woodcutters were identified as:

1. Lutfur Rahaman (25);
2. Ashraf Ali (18);
3. Rafique Uddin (16);
4. Abdur Rahman (15); and
5. Mofiz Uddin (13).[321]

On 13 November 2007, 14 Bangladeshi fishermen were arrested by NaSaKa officials near St. Martins Island in the Bay of Bengal. Officials from the Bangladeshi government requested their return, however at the time of reporting their fate was unknown.[322]

On 1 December 2007, a group of 56 Burmese and 13 Bangladeshi citizens were arrested after their boat broke down. They were accused of attempting to illegally immigrate to Malaysia. The group faced the possibility of long prison sentences for violating immigration laws.[323]

On 15 December 2007, a Thai fishing boat was impounded and its crew arrested by junta officials after the boat strayed into Burma waters. The crew was made up of 6 Burmese nationals and 17 Thai nationals. The Thai nationals were sent to Rangoon, while the Burmese nationals were kept at the interrogation center in Kyaukpru.[324]

On 20 December 2006, NaSaKa forces arrested 56 persons on a boat destined for Malaysia. The arrests were made off the coast near Sittwe in Arakan State after the boat's engine had died. Of the 56 persons arrested, 15 were from Bangladesh. NaSaKa forces forwarded the names and addresses of the arrested Bangladeshi citizens to the Bangladeshi government.[325]

1.6 Arrest of Monks

> *"Our spiritual obligation is to freedom, not to silence or submission. Today, we know that several leading Buddhist monks in Burma are still on the run. We do not know with any accuracy how many monks have been killed, how many were forcibly disrobed. We do not know how many monks are in prison. We do not know how many monks have been taken to secret locations. What we know is there is a terrible secrecy and silence over Burma."*[326]
>
> - Ashin Nayaka, International Burmese Monks Organization

The monks have an integral role in Burma's civil society. They have also been involved in the various political movements, and as a result the junta put into place laws to dictate the association and activities of monks, enforced under threat of prison and/or disrobing. Monks taken into custody are disrobed and some are ordered to renounce their vows. The AAPP recorded that as of December 2007, there were 174 monks in prison for political reasons.[327]

Following the monk-led September 2007 demonstrations, aptly named the Saffron Revolution, the junta rounded up thousands of monks after they joined in the national protests. The junta systematically arrested monks, both in the streets and in raids on several monasteries. It was estimated that monks made up 1,400 of the around 6,000 arrested in connection with the protests. There were numerous reports of monks being disrobed and abused during arrest, interrogation and in detention. In a report by Human Rights Watch, U Khan Di, from Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery, described a nighttime raid:

> *"The raid at the monastery was around 1 am. The soldiers shouted to open the monastery gates, and then broke the gate open by hitting it with their truck when no one came to open. Shouting loudly, they were throwing teargas and firing their automatic guns into the buildings of the monastery, and used their batons to beat the monks whenever they saw them. Many monks ran away, climbing into the trees nearby and escaping by hiding in the houses of the neighborhood. I was injured in the head when I was hit by baton charges. I saw pools of blood, shattered windows, and spent casings on the floor when I came back to the monastery in the morning. We found about 100 monks missing out of 230 monks. They took our money and jewelry, and other valuable things they found at the monastery."*[328]

In an attempt to dissuade other monks from joining the protests, the junta imposed particularly severe punishments. In a reversal of the high social status usually accorded to the revered religious members, monks often faced worse conditions in prison:

> *"Those monks arrested after the September 2007 demonstrations were forcibly disrobed and made to wear soiled civilian clothes. Several monks were severely beaten, kicked and hit. No exception was made for the monks in regards to the amount or severity of torture they endured in detention."*

As the crackdown continued, many monks were taken to secret holding facilities while others simply disappeared. Thousands of monks went into hiding, discarding their traditional robes as they returned to their native villages. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion, and the HRDU Report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

Arrest of Monks – Partial List of Incidents for 2007

On 3 July 2007, U Dhamma Tharmi (42), from Yaykha Monastery in Mandalay's Maddaya Township, was sent to Obo prison in Mandalay for staging a protest for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[329]

On 17 September 2007, it was reported that 5 monks who had been arrested after leading recent demonstrations in Sittwe had disappeared. The monks were arrested by the Burmese army troops of Lt. Col. Htin Lin on 29 August 2007 and have been missing since the arrest.[330]

On 18 September 2007, U Warathami, who took part in anti-government protests in Sittwe, was bound hands behind his back and beaten by a number of Burmese soldiers. The initial beating knocked out several of U Warathami's teeth and left him with cuts on his head and ears. He was then taken to a police station and beaten again until he fell unconscious. When he awoke he was returned to his residency at the Dhammathukha monastery.[331]

On 25 September 2007, the military conducted raids and arrested several monks, including Piak Ko from Pakkoku and Min Thu from Mogok.[332]

On 27 September 2007, local residents in South Okkalapa Township surrounded a monastery when soldiers attempted to arrest the local abbot. The monastery had on an earlier occasion been raided and approximately 130 monks were detained, their personal belongings were taken and about two million kyat was seized. The protests from local residents kept the soldiers from entering the monastery a second time.[333]

On 26 September 2007, U Tayzaw Bartha, a 76 year old monk from Kalyarnithein in Pegu, was arrested by junta officials for staging demonstrations and giving public speeches. He was sent to Insein Prison. U Tayzaw Bartha was released after a month, on 25 October, but was rearrested ten days later and sent to Ywar Thar Gyi psychiatric hospital outside of Rangoon. He was kept there for 25 days before being transferred to a monastery in Sakhan Gyi village, Hle Ku Township, where he continued his detention for a further 20 days. U Tayzaw Bartha was released after writing a formal letter requesting to be released. However, his movement continued to be restricted after his released and he was not allowed to return to his monastery in Pegu.[334]

On 29 September 2007, it was reported that a senior monk, who was taken to Insein Prison by authorities to talk to the detained monks, stated that some monks had already been sentenced to six years imprisonment by a specially convened court.[335]

On 1 October 2007, a prominent Arakanese monk was arrested by junta officials in Rangoon. U Kawwidda, abbot of Thatka Thila Zaya Thidi Pati Phatan Monastery in North Okkalapa, Rangoon, was arrested for his alleged involvement in the September protests. Officials declined to release any information as to his whereabouts or charges held against him.[336]

On 2 October 2007, the abbot of Thitsar Mandai Monastery was arrested by junta authorities and held hostage until he could be exchanged for his brother. The arrest came after the junta had searched for the abbot's brother, a monk who was involved in the September protests.[337]

On 2 October 2007, reports from Rangoon suggested that as many as 4,000 monks had been arrested and taken to an abandoned race track on the outskirts of Rangoon. The monks were arrested after junta officials conducted widespread monastery raids across much of Burma.[338]

On 3 October 2007, junta officials closed Rangoon's Maggin Monastery, forcing many of the resident monks to flee. The monastery was a focal point for the anti-junta protests and provided care to HIV/AIDS patients. Maggin Monastery was raided several times, resulting in the arrests of seven monks, including the abbot U Nandiya. U Nandiya became interim abbot after the former abbot, his son, was jailed by the regime. Closure of the monastery resulted in widespread criticism within Burma and from the International community.[339]

On 4 October 2007, junta officials raided five monasteries and arrested 36 monks in the Rangoon area. The raided monasteries were:

1. Shwetaungpaw Monastery, South Okkalapa Township;
2. Dhammazaya Monastery, South Okkalapa Township;
3. Sandilayama Monastery, South Okkalapa Township;
4. Zayawaddy Monastery, North Okkalapa Township; and
5. Pannitayama Monastery, North Okkalapa Township.[340]

On 11 October 2007, 16 monks were brought before a specially convened tribunal inside Thayet Prison. There was no further information on the sentences or charges against the monks.[341]

On 12 October 2007, it was reported that monks from Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery had been disrobed and sent to Insein Prison. According to sources there was a recent influx of approximately 100 prisoners with shaved heads in the prison.[342]

On 17 October 2007, it was reported that Eik Darea, a 26 year-old monk involved in the September protests, had been sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment. Eik Darea was tried in a Sittwe district court in Arakan State. He faced the possibility of completing the prison sentence in a labour camp.[343]

On 29 October 2007, U Indra Panya and U Magindar, both monks from Alodawpyih Dama Sariya Monastery, fled to Bangladesh in an attempt to evade police. The two monks had been wanted for their participation in the recent monk-led protests.[344]

On 30 October 2007, 4 monks from a monastery in Mudon Township were interrogated and severely beaten by local authorities. The monks were suspected of having participated in the recent protests. Locals claimed that over 200 monks had disappeared in the Moulmein area since the protests.[345]

On 4 November 2007, junta officials arrested U Gambira (29), a prominent abbot who took a leading role in the August and September protests. Police claimed that U Gambira was the mastermind behind the anti-junta demonstrations. U Gambira went into hiding shortly after the protests and had been in contact with foreign media since then. On 15 November, junta authorities charged U Gambira with high treason, which carries death penalty or life in prison.[346]

On 8 November 2007, U Khaymarwuntha, a 20 year-old monk from Zantila Kamahtan Monastery in Rangoon's South Dagon Township, was arrested in connection with anti-junta demonstrations. No further information was released about the incident.[347]

On 15 November 2007, U Than Rama, a monk from Arakan State, was arrested during a monastery raid in Sittwe. He was wanted in connection to the monk led demonstrations. Eyewitnesses claimed that police beat U Than Rama as they took him into custody. He was taken to an undisclosed location.[348]

On 16 November 2007, U Sanda Wara, a monk from New Dagon Township, was beaten and arrested by USDA officials when over 150 USDA members raided Aung Dhamma Pala Monastery. U Sanda Wara was taken to an undisclosed location, and no information was released on the charges held against him.[349]

On 24 November 2007, at least 15 monks went missing from Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon. The whereabouts of the monks was unknown at the time of reporting. Seven of the missing monks were identified as:

1. U Egga;
2. U Gawthita;
3. U Zarnaya;
4. U Nanda;
5. U Zatila;
6. U Wilatha; and
7. U Eiktheriya.[350]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that 25 monks from Kaba Aye Sangha University had been expelled from campus and forced to return to their villages. Authorities claimed the monks were expelled due to their participation in the September demonstrations.[351]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that in late November 2007, U Zantila, the abbot of Zantila Rama Monastery, South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon, had been disrobed and sentenced to two years imprisonment. He was charged with defamation after complaining about the seizure of money from the monastery during a previous raid. When Zantila Rama Monastery was raided by government security forces in early October, officials reportedly confiscated 4.2 million kyat from the monastery. U Zantila proceeded to write a letter of complaint to the minister of home affairs, minister of religious affairs and the SPDC chairman. A few days later he was arrested at the monastery by security forces.[352]

On 29 December 2007, monastery officials in Arakan State compiled a list of monks that had been missing since the demonstrations. The list contained 50 missing monks from five townships in Arakan State. The majority of the missing monks came from Sittwe.[353]

1.7 Prolonged Detention

Since the establishment of Burma's 1975 Protection Law ('The Law to Safeguard the State against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts') the junta has been able to prolong detention to any individual without trial. This law allows extra-judicial, executive authorities *inter alia* to order a person's detention in prison (Article 10A) or under house arrest (Article 10B) for up to five years (Article 14) without charge or trial if the person *"has performed or is performing or is believed to be performing an act endangering the state sovereignty and security, and public law and order..."* (Article 7). Despite the vagueness of this law, which has troubled the UN for a number of years, the junta has continued to claim that the law is required to achieve peace and stability within Burma.[354] Furthermore, Burma's Attorney General has maintained that the law will only experience revision when peace and stability has been guaranteed.[355]

The provisions in this law allow the SPDC to unquestionably hold any political threat, such as senior members of the NLD, under house arrest or in prison for extended periods. This process benefits the regime by keeping key leaders, like Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, out of the public eye and attention. Only an internal government review can appeal decisions made from Act 10A, and such measures have ceased to exist in recent years.

The year 2007 witnessed little change in the status of those serving prolonged sentences. The junta extended the sentences of four MPs including U Tin Oo, and Aung San Suu Kyi. The regime continues to hold additional members of Parliament (see section 1.11 List of MP-Elects who remain Imprisoned in 2007), and has consistently ignored their judicial rights. Many of those nearing the end of their sentences are entitled to remission under Burmese law. In spite of this, officials continue to extend the sentences of some of Burma's most influential politicians.

On 19 January 2007, Dr Than Nyein, a detained NLD member, had his prison sentence extended for one year under Act 10A. Than Nyein was first arrested in 1997 and was due for release in 2004, but his sentence has been extended several times since then.[356]

On 16 February 2007, former Army Chief of Staff and long serving political prisoner, U Tin Oo, was denied release again this year. U Tin Oo is a founding member of the NLD.[357]

On 22 February 2007, the prison sentence of Daw May Win Myint, an NLD MP, was extended for an additional year. She was originally sentenced to a 10 year prison term in 1997.[358]

On 25 May 2007, the SPDC extended Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest by another year. The refusal of the regime to release the NLD leader sparked widespread international criticism and resulted in protests throughout Burma. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 11 of the last 19 years under house arrest.[359] On 22 September 2007 she made a rare appearance, when armed guards allowed over 2,000 people, half of whom were monks, to pray outside her home. The pro-democracy leader briefly emerged from her house to greet the protesters.[360]

1.8 Conditions of Detention

Political prisoners are currently held in at least 20 of Burma's 39 prisons. Generally, political prisoners are journalists, editors, writers and poets; parliamentarians; Buddhist monks; political activists belonging to the opposition party, the NLD; political leaders of Burma's ethnic communities; students and family members of activists. Prison conditions vary, but all have been labelled *"generally harsh"* and *"dire"*, which is dangerous to the health and wellbeing of prisoners.[361]

In 2007 prison conditions deteriorated further, partly due to the increase in arrests associated with the September protests. Numerous first hand accounts were released detailing some of the harsh conditions faced by detainees. Several makeshift detention centers were created to house the growing numbers of monks, political activists, and ordinary civilians that were arrested in the regime's brutal crackdown. The AAPP reported the creation of at least eight new dentition facilities, including:

1. Government Technical Institute (GTI), Insein Township
2. Police Centre No. 7, Thanyin Township
3. Aung Tha Paye, Mayangone Township
4. Riot Police No. 5, Hmawbe Township
5. Plate Myot Police Centre, Mandalay
6. Kyaik Ka San Interrogation Centre, Tamwe Township
7. Kabaraye Tharthana Yeiktha, Bahan Township
8. Yakyi Ai, Mingaladone Township[362]

Many of these detention centers were sports stadiums and educational facilities converted into temporary prisons in order to facilitate the influx of prisoners from the protests. Because these facilities were not built or equipped to hold large amounts of people, there were several problems related to overcrowding, lack of water, food supply, sanitation, toilet facilities and medical care. Some rooms were so overcrowded that it was physically impossible for the detainees to lie down, forcing many to sleep sitting. Due to a lack of toilet facilities, guards made the prisoners defecate and urinate on their cell floors. During meals prisoners would only get minimal water and rice soup that was full of gravel and smelled so bad that it was claimed by prisoners that "even dogs wouldn't eat".[363] Such overcrowded and unsanitary conditions led to illnesses and the spread of diseases among the detainees.

As well as the poor sanitary situation posing great health risks, medical treatment was either non-existent or insufficient. UN Special Rapporteur Pinheiro gave a vivid picture of the situation in his December report, where he stated that while the GTI could only host 1,500 persons at a time, Government officials had informed him that 2,500 blankets were made available. Moreover, 488 persons had reportedly been sick under the responsibility of 5 doctors and 15 nurses.[364]

Pinheiro's report made further comments regarding the harsh conditions many political prisoners faced at Insein Prison for their roles in the protests. Many have been punished by spending time in solitary confinement cells, called 'military dog cells.' These isolation cells, measuring two by two meters, are constantly guarded by 30 dogs. Prisoners in this confinement lack ventilation, toilets, are forced to sleep on concrete floors and are only allowed to bathe once every three days for five minutes with cold water.[365]

Problems of overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions are in a long line of problems that leave observers worried about the state of Burma's prisons. In 2006, it was made public that the SPDC intended to cut the already meager prison budget. Due to the funding cuts, prison officials could no longer supply food and other basic commodities to detainees. According to

the new system, food procurement and other basic services were to be self-funded.[366] This new policy has led to an economy of extortion in a prison system already riddled with corruption. The AAPP has reported that many prisoners must pay bribes to avoid torture, as this eyewitness describes:

> "*As soon as a prisoner is arrested, he or she must bribe police officers, judges, various levels of prison authorities, officers of the prison (ordinary prisoners) such as tansees, room in charge, work in charge and discipline keepers, appointed by different prison authorities."*[367]

The rising costs of food and bribes have forced many prisoners to take on work arranged by prison officials, at substantially lower rates than they would receive on the outside market. As labour provided by prisoners is both inexpensive and plentiful, local employers have reportedly begun using prisoners in place of traditional farm animals such as oxen.[368]

Health

The health conditions of prisoners have been high on the list of problems associated with Burma's legal system. The spread of HIV/AIDS, TB, and other communicable diseases, has been on the rise in prisons throughout Burma, due to unhygienic conditions and lax medical care. There has also been a repeated use of needles without sterilization or decontamination, which has led to a rising HIV/AIDS epidemic in the prisons, causing many prisoners to refuse medical care, even in dire circumstances. The use of 'fake' or substandard medicine is also widespread in the jail system. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has made several substantive medical donations, however it has been reported that most of it is sold by the regime rather than supplied to the prisoners.[369]

Many detainees who were seriously injured from the September crackdown were not allowed medical attention, and new detainees with pre-existing medical conditions were denied medication and treatment. Their conditions have generally deteriorated in the overcrowded prisons because of the lack of food, water, and the spread of further diseases from the unsanitary environment. Some detainees have reacted to the worsening prison conditions and lack of medical treatment by launching protests to raise awareness. Political prisoners, such as Su Su Nway and Ko Htin Kyaw, launched hunger strikes to highlight the dire prison situation.

Conditions of Detention – Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 8 May 2007, it was reported that Ko Myint Naing and 5 others from Henzada Township, Rangoon, were denied medical treatment by prison officials in Henzada Jail after sustaining severe beatings by a pro-junta mob. After the arrest, Ko Myint Naing was kept in isolation.[370]

On 23 May 2007, it was reported that Su Su Nway, a prominent human rights activist, was admitted to the Muslim Free Hospital in Rangoon, several days after she was taken into custody. On 15 May, Su Su Nway was arrested along with a large group of activists participating in a peaceful prayer campaign for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[371]

On 24 May 2007, it was reported that the health of U Aye Kyaw (74), a former 88 uprising leader, had rapidly deteriorated since his arrest on 28 February 2007. He was arrested by police on accusations of creating unrest among students during the final exam at Pri Daung government middle school. He was detained at the Pauktaw police detention centre.[372]

On 1 September 2007, a group of detainees at Kyaikkasan Detention Centre launched a hunger strike to protest against the lack of medical treatment being given to those who were injured and beaten during the September protests crackdown.[373]

On 4 September 2007, 41 detainees continued a hunger strike to highlight the junta's unwillingness to grant medical treatment to prisoners.[374]

On 5 September 2007, 11 arrested NLD members were moved from Kyaikkasan interrogation centre to Kyauktan interrogation centre. Those moved include:

1. Ko Kyaw Soe Win;
2. Ko Thant Zin Myo;
3. Ma San San Win;
4. Ko Thant Zaw Myint;
5. Pho La-pyay;
6. Ko Ye Thein Naing;
7. Ko Aye Naing;
8. Ko Mya Hlaing;
9. Ko Thant Zin Oo; and
10. Ko Nay Doon.[375]

On 20 September 2007, reports suggested that the health of detained 88 Generation Students' leaders Min Ko Naing, Mya Aye, Marki, and Ko Jimmy is deteriorating. The four 88 Generation Students' leaders had been held in Insein Prison since their arrest on 21 August 2007. Reports suggest that physical torture was the suspected cause of their deteriorating health.[376]

On 21 September 2007, over 46 prisoners were being kept in harsh conditions at Police Battalion #7 in Rangoon. Prisoners faced unsanitary conditions, denial of healthcare, improper access to adequate water or food, and lack of mosquito nets. The centre was overcrowded and cell windows were permanently shut. The compound was fenced with barbed wire and armed guards 24 hours a day. Of the prisoners, it was reported that Thant Zin Myo was suffering from severe pain in his chest and high fever; Thant Zaw Myint was suffering from such severe pain in his back and abdomen that he could not sit down; and Myo Khin was suffering from frequent and severe stomach cramps, hypertension and a gastro-intestinal infection.[377]

On 3 October 2007, a released detainee from the recent protests, Ma Hla Hla Mon, described the dire situation at GTI:

> *"We were kept in GTI for 4 days. There were 156 persons in one room. All were women. There were also old ones and children. That room was not good for health. There was a room beside the room where we were. We used it as the toilet. They didn't allow us to wash our faces. When we told to them about the foul smell in the room, they moved us to another room. They called the Municipal Servicemen to clean that room. They made a toilet for us, but the toilet was only a ditch. There was no water. They didn't allow the girls to have a bath. Our bodies had a foul smell."*[378]

On 5 October 2007, it was reported that detainees at GTI were not being served enough food, and that the little provided food was frequently taken away by the LID #77 soldiers.[379]

On 7 October 2007, a released monk (18) reported the inhumane prison conditions he experienced at GTI while being detained following the September protests. He claimed to see frequent detainees pass out due to the filthy and unhygienic conditions:

> *"We weren't allowed to move at all, not even to go to the lavatory – we had to just do it where we were sitting. Once in the morning, and once in the afternoon, the guards would come in and give us water, but it would only be one or two bottles for 50 people or more."*

The same monk also maintained that many prisoners, with severe cuts and gashes that had penetrated through the bone, were denied medical assistance. Three inmates died from their untreated injuries.[380]

On 11 October 2007, an anonymous monk (24) reported about his experiences being held at GTI for a period of 10 days following the demonstrations:

> *"There were about 400 of us in one room. No toilets, no buckets, no water for washing. No beds, no blankets, no soap. Nothing. The room was too small for everyone to lie down at once. We took it in turns to sleep. Every night at 8 o'clock we were given a small bowl of rice and a cup of water. But after a few days many of us just couldn't eat. The smell was so bad. Some of the novice monks were under ten years old, the youngest was just seven. They were stripped of their robes and given prison sarongs. Some were beaten, leaving open, untreated wounds, but no doctors came."*[381]

On 12 October 2007, 6 protestors suffering from gun shot wounds were transferred from Rangoon hospital to the GTI interrogation centre. Family members of the detained expressed concern over the medical conditions in the interrogation centre.[382]

On 21 October 2007, famous musician U Ye Lwin (60) reported about his experience of being detained at GTI for 12 days following the September protests. For three days he was forced to sleep in a sitting position because there was not enough room for him and the other 600 detained individuals to lie down on the room's concrete floor. The detainees were given little water and were only allowed to go to the toilet once a day until authorities built temporary toilets three days later. At meal times, the detainees had to wipe their hands on their clothes because they were not given water to wash their hands. For the 12 days U Ye Lwin was there, no one was allowed to bathe, resulting in further foul smelling and deteriorating prison conditions. [383]

On 23 October 2007, it was reported that the health of Myint Thein had been deteriorating since his arrest. Myint Thein, spokesperson for the NLD, was arrested for his involvement in the September protests. He was consistently denied medical treatment and supplies in detention.[384]

On 23 October 2007, Zarganar, a famous comedian who was previously released from detention, reported of the dangers that are occurring inside the prisons because of the lack of medical attention. The prison could not provide medication for elderly NLD members who suffer from gastritis, high blood pressure and even stroke. Zarganar also claimed that the local guards could not provide medical treatment because the detainees were not in their direct custody. The guards needed permission from the controlling detention center's officers before any aid could be given to a prisoner.[385]

On 27 October 2007, a released detainee from Insein Prison, Ma Ohn Mar, reported of the interrogation tactics that were used on her. She was deprived of food and water until all questioning was complete and she was not allowed to receive any medical attention when she was in ill health. Recalling her experience, she stated, *"Finally, late at night, they gave me some water, but the water was very dirty. There were hairs, leaves, and even dead ants in it."*[386]

On 29 October 2007, junta officials separated a family that had been arrested in June 2007. The family was arrested for allegedly threatening USDA members after the members assaulted NLD MP, Than Lwin. Police arrested Than Lwin with several of his family members, and sent them to Mandalay Prison. In October, the junta separated the family by sending Than Lwin's two daughters to different prisons, while denying other family members access to them.[387]

On 15 November, it was reported that released prisoner, Ko Thet Naung Soe suffered from severe mental problems after having sustained torture in detention. Upon his release he suffered from loss of memory, and could not even remember the name and address of his parents. Ko Thet Naung Soe, a 2nd year law student, had been arrested during a solo protest in front of Rangoon City Hall on 18 August 2002. He was at the time sentenced to 14 years. In addition to being tortured, he suffered from lack of medical treatment and his family could not visit him in the prison.[388]

On 14 December 2007, junta authorities banned family members from meeting with imprisoned NLD members in Mandalay and in Taungup Township of Arakan State. Authorities stopped family members from meeting Min Aung, organizer of the Taungup Township NLD, held in Thandwe Prison, and Daw Win Mya Mya, organizer of the Mandalay NLD, held in Obo Prison. Reportedly, at least 8 other NLD members detained in Obo Prison of Mandalay were not allowed to meet their family members. Authorities gave no reason for denying prisoner access to family members.[389]

On 24 December 2007, it was reported that three activists held in Insein Prison had been put in solitary confinement for staging a hunger strike. The three activists were commodity price protester, Htin Kyaw, private tutor and HRDP member Myo Thant (aka) John Naw Thar, and university student Zin Lin Aung. Htin Kyaw began his hunger strike at the end of November to call for the release of all political prisoners. He was admitted to hospital for a short time in early December. Myo Thant and Zin Lin Aung had also been refusing food. According to Myo Thant's sister, Ma Thi Thi Htun, Myo Thant claimed that he would not even drink coffee from 25 December onwards. At the time of reporting, the authorities had yet to give a public response to the hunger strike.[390]

1.9 Deaths in Detention

As of December 2007, the AAPP had documented 132 deaths of political prisoners, 92 of which were in prison, 11 in interrogation centres, 4 in labour camps and 10 shortly after having been released from prison, since the 1988 uprising.[391] According to reported incidents by AAPP, at least 5 political prisoners died in police custody throughout 2007. However, the figure is likely to be much higher, as several deaths occurring in connection with the September 2007 protests remain unaccounted for. Moreover, in December, several activists remained missing. The December report of the UN Special Rapporteur counted 74 cases of enforced disappearances, and other sources report of even higher numbers. In December, the AAPP claimed the location of at least 300 remained unknown.[392]

In January 2007, Maung Chan Kun was arrested by police and died while in custody. His beaten corpse was brought to a hospital; however the police claimed he died of malaria.[393]

On 4 January 2007, Htwee Maung (30), a trishaw driver from Taunggut Township in Arakan State, was arrested by police for causing a disturbance at a traditional variety show. However, eyewitnesses claimed that Htwee was mistakenly arrested, and had no involvement with the disturbance. Police took him to jail in Myepone and he was sent to the local hospital the next morning by the police chief, Station Officer Myo Thant. However, before arriving at the hospital Htwee Maung died from the wounds he sustained in detention. According to a person who saw his body, there were serious injuries to his head and over his right eye, and the doctor who examined the body said that it was an obvious case of "excessive force" by the police. After he died, around 200 other local trishaw drivers rallied outside the police station to demand an investigation, but nothing was done. According to a local source, the victim's family had been threatened not to make a complaint.[394]

On 8 February 2007, Maung Lin Lin Naing (18) was arrested by army officials while returning from Panut village in Daik-U Township, Pegu Division. He was detained by police after being accused of theft by a local shop owner. According to police reports, Maung Lin Lin Naing was found dead the next day after apparently committing suicide. Police took photos of the death and proceeded to destroy the body without informing the family. The family was forced to hold religious ceremonies without the body, and authorities have failed to answer any of the family's questions relating to the death.[395]

On 19 March 2007, Ko Naing Oo was arrested by SPDC officials in North Okkalapa Township after he had an argument with his wife. The man was taken to the police station and died during the night. Naing Oo was examined and found to have a serious head injury, but police claimed he had died of 'a cold'.[396]

On 5 May 2007, Mohammed Rafique (15) from Pa Dinn village, Maungdaw Township, was arrested for possessing a mobile phone. He was detained by NaSaKa authorities for 10 days and severely beaten while in custody. Following his release, and despite the medical treatment he received on 15 May, Mohammed Rafique died on 21 May.[397]

On 23 May 2007, U Maung Thein Aung was arrested in Sittwe, Arakan State, on his way home from work. Police accused him of being a burglar and demanded he pay a bribe. After refusing to do so, he was sentenced in a Sittwe court to three years of labour in Kauk Kouk. Thein Aung died a few days after entering the labour camp.[398]

On 2 August 2007, Ko Kyaw Htay was arrested by Meikhtila police on suspicion of stealing a motorbike. He was in custody for two days before he died of wounds inflicted by the authorities. Police claimed the suspect killed himself by "repeatedly banging his head against the wall". However, upon its return from the police, family members found the entire

body bruised and cut. Consequently, the family refused to cremate the body, against the will of the police, and took pictures to document the wounds of the corpse instead.[399]

On 8 August 2007, Ko Maung Htun was arrested by railway police for stealing food from a local shop. Maung Htun was admitted to a local hospital one day after being taken into custody, and died shortly after being admitted. Police claimed his death came as a result of alcohol abuse, but family members, who were able to view the body before it was cremated, claimed that it contained clear signs that he was severely beaten.[400]

On 9 August 2007, it was reported that U Ohn Kyaing, a pagoda official from Meikhtila, was arrested on suspicion of stealing a valuable relic from the pagoda where he worked in July. U Ohn Kyaing was questioned and later arrested by police. He died in custody on 29 July.[401]

On 30 September 2007, Thet Naing Oo @ Naing Oo (30) son of U Ohn Myint, died in Kyaikkasan Interrogation Center, Rangoon.[402]

On 30 September 2007, Aung Kyaw Oo (42) son of U Soe Myint, died in Insein GTI Interrogation Center, Rangoon. He was allegedly killed.[403]

On 9 October 2007, NLD member Win Shwe (42) died in custody. No other information surrounding his death was released. Shwe was arrested for his participation in the September protests.[404]

On 10 October 2007, the AAPP reported that NLD member Ko Win Shwe (42) had died during interrogation on 9 October. Ko Win Shwe and 4 others were arrested on 26 September 2007 because of their active support and participation in the monks-led demonstrations. After Ko Win Shwe and his group were arrested, they were taken to Plate Myot Police Center near Mandalay. He died as a result of torture during interrogation. However, the body was not sent to his family as the interrogators claimed they had already cremated it. Authorities from Kyaukpandawn Township informed the family of his death.[405]

On 11 October 2007, it was reported that U Than Aung had died in the GTI interrogation center in Rangoon. U Than Aung was seriously wounded by a gunshot and subsequently arrested in a protest on 27 September 2007. Witnesses reported that Than Aung was denied medical treatment during his detention.[406]

On 24 October 2007, U Soe Myint, of Kam villiage tract, Taikkyi Township, Rangoon division, died in Thayet prison, Magwe division. He had been arrested in connection with taking part in recent protest of September and sentenced to imprisonment.[407]

On 30 July 2007, eyewitness reports claimed that Maran Seng Awng (22) from Myitkyina, Kachin State, was beaten to death by narcotics officers. Maran Seng Awng was chased by three police, before being caught, and beaten in the street in front of several eyewitnesses. Seng Awng was taken to the hospital, but died on arrival. Police claimed that Seng Awng died as a result of a drug overdose. His mother lodged a formal complaint against the police, and claimed that the police offered her 300,000 kyat not to pursue the complaint.[408]

1.10 Release of Political Prisoners

Most political prisoners are required to serve the entirety of their sentences, and some even have their sentences arbitrarily prolonged. On the occasion of early release or the suspension of a sentence, political prisoners are threatened with re-arrest for any involvement with political activities. Often they have to sign a pledge not to be involved in politics upon their release. This has created a situation where released political prisoners become constantly vulnerable to re-arrest.[409] Furthermore, released political prisoners and their families are often subject to surveillance, monitoring, and harassment from local authorities.

Among those released were Than Htay, MP from Lashio in northern Shan State, and journalists Thaung Tun and Than Win Hlaing.[410]

On 4 January 2007, the regime released 2,831 prisoners to commemorate the 59th anniversary of Burma's independence from Britain. However, according to the NLD, only 50 political prisoners were freed as part of the mass release. About 20 of those freed from prisons around the country were low-level NLD members, while another 30 were student leaders or other pro-democracy activists. The released included 2 MPs, 3 journalists, and 5 prominent activists from the 88 Generation Student Group. The mass release was seen as an attempt to appease international condemnation over the regime's human rights practices. Those released included:

1. Min Ko Naing, 88 Generation Students' group;
2. Ko Ko Gyi, 88 Generation Students' group;
3. Htay Kywe, 88 Generation Students' group;
4. Min Zeya, 88 Generation Students' group;
5. Pyone Cho, 88 Generation Students' group;
6. Zaw Min, NLD member;
7. Than Htay, elected MP from Lashio, Shan State;
8. Than Win Hlaing, journalist;
9. Thaung Tun, journalist; and
10. Nyein Thit, writer.[411]

As part of the mass prisoner release on 4 January 2007, the junta also released 31 Chinese prisoners who had been jailed in Burma.[412]

On 5 January 2007, SPDC authorities released activist Ko Tun Tun from a psychiatric institution after being detained for shouting politically sensitive prayers at Rangoon's Shwedagon pagoda on 2 January 2007. Ko Tun Tun said he had been seized by officials after he arrived at the pagoda wearing a General Aung San t-shirt, with friend Naw Ohn Hla, who wore a t-shirt bearing the image of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[413]

On 14 January 2007, it was reported that the junta had released over 250 Arakan prisoners on 31 December 2006 in the northern part of Arakan State. It was speculated that the mass releas came in response to strong international condemnation.[414]

On 26 January 2007, over 370 customs officials, who in 2006 had been jailed on corruption charges, were released from Insein Prison. In May 2006 around 500 customs officers had been arrested during anti-corruption raids, and the Head of the Customs Department, General Khin Maung Lin was given a 66 year prison sentence.[415]

On 27 February 2007, military police released 9 protestors in connection with the Rangoon street protests that occurred on 22 February 2007. Ma Kyu Kyu San, Daw May Win, Ko Htin

Kyaw, Ko Hla Myint Aye, Ko Myo Oo, Ko Hla Thein, U Tin Win, U Ohn Than and Ko Tun Tun were released from the Aungthabye interrogation centre in Rangoon.[416]

On 16 March 2007, the SPDC released 50 prisoners from Kalay Myo, to commemorate the 62nd anniversary of Armed Forces Day. None of the prisoners released seemed to have had any political connections.[417]

On 29 March 2007, Burmese border police released 15 Bangladeshi citizens back to Bangladeshi authorities. The 15 persons had been arrested along the Burma-Bangladesh border in separate incidents.[418]

On 11 July 2007, Ko Balagyi was released by junta officials after being detained for almost a month. Ko Balagyi was arrested on the eve of Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday (19 June) after he staged a solo protest in a local market. Police also arrested his mother and sister, but they were released two days after being taken into custody.[419]

On 13 August 2007, Thein Shwe Maung was released from Rambree Prison in Arakan State after being arrested in mid-July for filing a forced labour claim with the ILO. Thein Shwe Maung registered a complaint on behalf of himself and 25 Kanaung Chay villagers after they had worked on the construction of a fish-breeding tank for a private company without compensation. Thein Shwe Maung was detained for over a monthbefore his release.[420]

On 7 September 2007, Ye Thein Naing, who suffered a broken leg while being arrested on 28 August 2007, was released from Kyauktan interrogation centre. It was reported that the release was a conciliatory gesture after Buddhist monks seized a group of SPDC officials as hostages when the officials had used violence against monks during a protest in Pakokku.[421]

On 5 September 2007, protestors, Ko Sithu and Ko Than Lwin, were released at 6 am. They had been arrested a week earlier and held in a government guesthouse in Taunggok.[422]

On 2 October 2007, prison officials in Myitkyina released 90 of the 400 monks detained during raids on 25 September. The raids occurred in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. Although the monks were found to have no involvement in the protests, they were not allowed to return to their monasteries. Instead, the monks were taken to Wuntho monastery, which was run by a junta-appointed abbot.[423]

On October 4 2007, a UN staff member and her family were arrested by junta police as the authorities conducted sweeps across Rangoon. Mynt Ngwe Mon, a programme assistant with UNDP, was arrested with her husband, Than Tun, and her brother-in-law, Aung Kyaw Sint. The UN requested the immediate release of Mynt Ngwe Mon and her family, but the junta had not yet responded at the time of reporting.[424]

On 18 October 2007, 6 prisoners were released from Hopin detention centre in Kachin State. They had been arrested with two others on 26 September. While the six were released on 18 October, the two others, U Ba Myint, NLD Banmaw and U Nay Win, of the Myitkyina NLD continued to be detained. The released prisoners were:

1. U Tin Aye, NLD member;
2. U Ba Maung, NLD member;
3. U Htun Tin, NLD member;
4. Ko Khin Maung Htun, NLD member;
5. U Maung Maung; and
6. Ko Chit Htoo.[425]

On 18 October 2007, Min Htay Win, from Ye Town, Mon State, was released from prison after being arrested for transporting drugs into Thailand. Min Htay Win was arrested on 12

October, and his sudden release came as a surprise to many along both sides of the border. His release came at the request of Major General Hla Oo.[426]

On 19 October 2007, three elderly prisoners were released by junta officials due to their old age. U Ba Hmin (85), U Kyaw Htay (70), and U Than Oo, were released after being detained for their participation in the recent protests.[427]

On 23 October 2007, famous Burmese songwriter, Ko Ye Lwin, was released after spending 21 days in detention. Ko Ye Lwin was arrested for participating in the protests at Sule pagoda on 27 September.[428]

On 24 October 2007, Kyaw Khaing (85), a representative for the Taunggup branch of the NLD, was released from prison.[429]

On 24 October 2007, the military junta released several prominent persons from detention, including film director Min Htin. The junta also released journalists, Maung Yan Paing, Win Ko Ko Latt, and Nay Linn Aung, all of which had been detained since the September protests.[430]

As of 24 October 2007, the following NLD members were released from prison:

1. Khin Mar Lar, wife of poet Nyein Thit;
2. Sein Hla Aung, Mandalay NLD;
3. Saw Lwin, Mandalay NLD;
4. Thein Than Oo, lawyer;
5. Thin Thin, Meogok NLD;
6. U Than Myint, Bogalay NLD;
7. Ko Kyaw, Bogalay NLD;
8. Ko Min Thu, Bogalay NLD;
9. Daw Kyin Than, Bogalay NLD;
10. U Aung Kywe, Wakalama NLD;
11. U Hla Aung, Nyaung Don NLD;
12. Khin Wine, Zeegone NLD;
13. Aye Ko, Zeegone NLD;[431]
14. U Tae Zaw;
15. Ko Aung Htun;
16. Ma Pa Pa;
17. Ma Khin Sein;
18. Ko Soe Win;
19. Ko Tin Htun Aye;
20. Uthan Phae; and
21. Ko Aung Gyi.[432]

On 25 October 2007, it was reported that several NLD members from Arakan State had been released from Kyauk Pru, including:

1. U Thein Maung, elected MP, Manaung Township;
2. U Pru Aung, Manaung Township;
3. U Pyo Nu, Manaung Township;
4. U Shwe Tin, Manaung Township;
5. U San Pu, Manaung Township;
6. U Nyi Pu, Manaung Township;
7. U Chan Tha Aung (aka) U Ran Shwe, Rambree Township;
8. U Maung Shwe, Rambree Township;
9. U Soe Thein from Rambree Township; and
10. U Sein Kyaw (82), from Gwa Township.[433]

On 25 October 2007, it was reported that 73 persons connected with the September protests had been released from Insein Prison. Those released included 50 members from the NLD, including U Hla Pe, as well as 10 women and 13 monks.[434]

On 26 October 2007, NLD members Than Pe and U Htun Kyi were released by SPDC authorities after spending 13 days in prison. The two NLD members were arrested in the raids conducted across Arakan State and were returned to their homes upon being released. Authorities have continued to detain several other NLD members that were arrested during the same raids.[435]

On 30 October 2007, 17 activists were released from a Rangoon prison, including:

1. U Myint Thein, NLD MP;
2. Leh Leh, NLD leader;
3. Han Zaw, NLD division chairman, Magwe Division;
4. Htaung Kho Htan, representative of People's Parliament;
5. Pu chin Sain Thang, Zomi National Congress leader;
6. Amyotharyay Win Naing, veteran politician;
7. Chit Zaw Thet, NLD;
8. Maung Soe, NLD;
9. Nyat Gyi, NLD;
10. Nat Mauk, NLD;
11. Khin Win, NLD;
12. Ye Tint, NLD;
13. Bo Ni, NLD;
14. Par Lay, NLD;
15. Bo Sati, NLD;
16. Kyaw Naing, NLD; and
17. Out Ko Ko, NLD.[436]

On 2 November 2007, Ko Htun Myint, secretary for Bahan Township NLD, was released after being incarcerated on 23 August 2007. Ko Htun Myint was arrested by Special Branch officials and questioned about his role in the demonstrations against rising fuel prices.[437]

On 5 November 2007, Khin Ma Gyi, Khin Ma Lay, and Nyan Sein were released from detention after a Mandalay division court reversed their convictions. They were acquitted of charges that they threatened USDA members in June 2007. The three were part of a group of nine that were charged with threatening USDA members who had brutally assaulted NLD member and MP U Than Lwin. Khin Ma Gyi and Khin Ma Lay are daughters of Than Lwin, and Nyan Sein is his son-in-law. The remaining six are still in prison, although some have had their sentences reduced. At the time of report, the family had no information on the location of U Than Lwin, who had been missing since he was arrested on 2 October 2007.[438]

On 15 November 2007, junta officials released several political prisoners, many of whom were suffering from medical conditions that worsened during their time in prison. Among those released were:

1. Ko Thet Naung Soe, 2nd year law student, solo protestor;
2. Ko Phone Aung, solo protestor;
3. Ko Htun Lin Kyaw, solo protestor;
4. Ko Thein Naing Oo, NLD member;
5. Ko Kyaw Tin, NLD member;
6. Maung Myint, NLD member; and
7. Ma Yee Yee Win, NLD member.[439]

On 17 November 2007, 20 prisoners were released from Buthidaung Township in Arakan State. The released prisoners were all over 60 years old and had been jailed on a range of charges.[440]

On 16 November 2007, four women and an elderly man were released after being arrested for opposing the Irrawaddy dam project. The activists were arrested and taken to Myitkyina police station. The 5 involved in the demonstrations were identified as:

1. Pan Tsun;
2. Lang Myaw;
3. Chaw Ar Mi;
4. Ze Yang; and
5. K. Zau Lawn.[441]

On 20 November 2007, U Hkun Htoo, a Kachin leader, was released from Aung Thapyay detention camp after being held there for two days. U Hkun Htoo was taken by authorities when they approached him for help with negotiations between ethnic rebels and the junta. After being asked several questions, U Hkun Htoo was detained and subsequently released.[442]

On 28 November 2007, Cin Sian Thang, a prominent Zomi ethnic leader, was released from SPDC custody after being held for eight days. Cin Sian Thang was arrested with several other prominent political officials, but remained in custody after the others were released.[443]

On 2 December 2007, military authorities released 10 activists that were arrested during the September pro-democracy protests. Among those released was pregnant female activist Ma May Mee Oo. She was taken from her home on 19 September 2007 and sent to Insein Prison before being released two months later.[444]

On 4 December 2007, it was reported that military authorities had released over 8,500 prisoners between 16 November and 3 December, to mark the completion of the National Convention. However, only 20 of those released had been jailed for political reasons.[445]

On 6 December 2007, junta officials agreed to release 49 Bangladeshi prisoners. The officials failed to disclose exactly when the prisoners would be released, only that it would be "very soon".[446]

On 17 December 2007, Sayadaw U Tayzawhbartha, the abbot of Kaliani Thein Monastery in Pegu, was released from a Rangoon mental institution. The abbot had been detained for 25 days before eventually being released.[447]

On 14 December 2007, 96 monks arrested in the September protests were released. Half of those released were from Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa, Rangoon, including the abbot, U Yeveda.[448]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that 96 monks arrested in the September protests had been released. Half of those released were from Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa, Rangoon, including the abbot, U Yeveda. Although the monks were allowed to return to the monastery, it remained under close surveillance by junta officials and lay people were not allowed access.[449]

On 26 December 2007, NaSaKa border forces returned 4 Bangladeshi monks and 11 Bangladeshi prisoners to Bangladesh. The monks and prisoners were held in Maungdaw Township before being sent back to their respective villages.[450]

1.11 MP-Elects who Remained Imprisoned in 2007[451]

No	Name	State/ Div	Constituency	Party	Date of Arrest	Prison	Remark
1	Dr. Zaw Myint Maung	Mandalay	Amarapura (1)	NLD	00-11-1990	Myitkyina	37 Years
2	Khin Maung Swe	Rangoon	Sanchaung	NLD	05-08-1994	Myingyan	7 Years
3	Dr. Than Nyein	Rangoon	Kyauktan (1)	NLD	28-10-1997	Prome	8 Years
4	Dr. May Win Myint(F).	Rangoon	Mayangone (2)	NLD	28-10-1997	Insein	7½ Years
5	Naing Naing	Rangoon	Pazundaung	NLD	00-08- 2000	Insein	21 Years
6	Kyaw Kyaw, Dr.	Pegu	Yedashe (1)	NLD	18- 09-2002	Toungoo	19 Years
7	Aung Soe Myint	Pegu	Taungoo (1)	NLD	31-08- 2003	Thayet	7 Years
8	Khun Tun Oo	Shan	Thibaw (1)	SNLD	09-02- 2005	Putao	93 Years
9	Kyaw Khin	Shan	Taung-gyi (1)	NLD	25-02-2005	Taunggyi	14 Years
10	Kyaw Min	Arakan	Buthidaung (1)	NDPHR	17-03-2005	Insein	47 Years
11	Kyaw San	Sagaing	Tantse	NLD	17-03-2005	Insein	7 Years
12	Saw Hlaing	Sagaing	Inndaw	NLD	30-03-2005	Kathar	12 Years
13	Khin Maung Win	Pegu	Oaktwin (2)	NLD	31-03-2006	Insein	Detention

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[450] Source: "Monks and Prisoners Handed Over to Bangladesh," *Narinjara News*, 26 December 2007.
[451] Source: “Situation Update of Members of Parliament in Burma,” NCGUB, 1 August 2007.

BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 2

TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment."

- Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

2.1 Introduction

There can be little doubt that instances of torture, and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, continue to occur around the world. However the practice of torture is most widespread, severe and blatant, in those States which are under an oppressive military regime, such as exists in Burma.

International law provides clear prohibitions on the use of torture, as well as other, potentially less severe, forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides that *"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."* This prohibition was repeated in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 7, in much the same terms. However, neither the UDHR nor the ICCPR provided any definition of "torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment". In 1984 the UN adopted the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). This convention went some way to providing a definition of torture. Article 1(1) defines torture as:

> *"Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity."*[1]

Burma is a signatory to the UDHR, however the State has neither ratified the ICCPR nor the 1984 CAT.[2] Nevertheless, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, when practiced as state policy, is in violation of customary international law. The practice of torture is widely regarded as extreme contempt/disdain of the human being. Protection from torture is hence considered a fundamental human right, and has as such obtained the status of Jus Cogens in international human rights law. Thus despite not being a party to either the ICCPR or CAT, Burma is bound by international law and liable for any incidents of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment within its borders which are inflicted by or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official.
It also seems apparent that the many incidents of torture inflicted by the SPDC are in violation of Burma's domestic legislation. Although not explicitly prohibiting 'torture', the 1861 Burmese Penal Code (1957 edition) Articles 330 and 331 prohibits "hurt" and "grievous hurt" during interrogation for the purposes of obtaining a confession or information. Articles 323 and 325 also prohibit the "hurt" or "grievous hurt" of detainees generally. In addition to these Articles regarding detainees, Article 166 prohibits public servants from unlawfully injuring anyone while discharging their duties.

Despite these legal prohibitions, the use of torture throughout Burma remains widespread. Reports from 2007 reveal almost daily incidents of torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against the Burmese population by various branches of the SPDC military regime. Torture is particularly being inflicted on persons who have been detained on suspicion of anti-government activities, including political prisoners and villagers living in areas where there is ongoing armed conflict.

As such, the pro-democracy 'Saffron revolution' of 2007 brought a brutal response from the junta, and in the wake of the demonstrations many more incidents of torture were reported. These gross human rights violations were inflicted on all types of supporters of the pro-democracy movement, even on Buddhist monks. Despite their revered status in Burmese society, monks were subject to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment both on the streets and in detention. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

When a person is arrested on suspicion of political dissent they are often hooded, handcuffed and brought to one of Burma's many interrogation centres where they are questioned and often brutally tortured. *[Photo: AAPPB]*

2.2 Methods of Torture

The practice of torture can take many forms, and the widespread practice of torture by the junta throughout Burma reveals the use of many such methods. The partial list of incidents for 2007, below, demonstrates the use of a variety of torture methods, sometimes depending on the situation in which the torture is inflicted, or the reasons behind the torture. It is also evident that in many cases victims have endured several forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

Methods of torture can be considered in different categories. The definition of torture provided by the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) 1984, outlines torture as *"severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental"*.[3] Thus torture encompasses both the physical infliction of pain and also psychological suffering, inflicted on the victim or their relatives. Some methods, like sexual torture, often involve both physical and mental pain and suffering for the victim.

Physical Torture

The use of physical methods of torture is widespread in Burma, with the primary aim being the infliction of pain either as a means of punishment, intimidation, or obtaining information. As well as causing extreme pain, these incidents are also often mentally distressing for the victim. Physical beating is the most common form of torture inflicted by officers of the military regime and while such incidents often occur in detention or in prison, widespread beatings of forced labourers have also been reported throughout 2007. Such physical beatings can be so severe that they lead to the death of the victim, especially where medical treatment is unavailable or deliberately restricted.

Beatings often involve the use of sticks or gun butts, and victims are often tied or restrained in such a manner that they are unable to defend themselves from such attacks. Illustrative of this is an incident reported in 2007 where the victim's legs were held in a pillory (Kawpok) throughout the night, preventing him from defending himself against beatings and also forcing him to remain in an uncomfortable position for a prolonged period of time.[4] Similarly during interrogations detainees are often forced to assume 'stress positions,' whereby they are made to remain in a certain position for prolonged periods of time, causing immense pain and discomfort. One such example, of which there were several reports throughout 2007, is when the victim is forced to imitate riding a motorcycle, which over prolonged periods of time causes intense pain in the legs and arms. In this scenario victims are often also forced to imitate the noise of a motorcycle, adding to the humiliation and psychological aspect of the torture.[5]

Another common form of torture adopted by SPDC forces throughout 2007 was holding the victim in water for prolonged periods of time. In one such incident, the detainee was fastened to a pole and immersed in a lake for seven hours a day throughout his detention,[6] and in a separate incident NaSaKa officers forced a detainee to stand in water throughout the whole night.[7]

As mentioned above, torture can be so severe as to lead to death. To further compound the effects of torture, victims are often denied medical treatment for their injuries, both inside and outside of prisons.

As well as torture leading to the death of a victim, severe physical torture is also inflicted on victims before being killed by SPDC personnel. In one such incident the victim was killed by police who tied him to a log and rolled him down a hill.[8] In another incident particularly severe physical torture was inflicted on a school boy before he was executed, the SPDC soldiers had repeatedly jabbed him in the eyes and mouth with a knife.[9] (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions).

In 2007, following the pro-democracy demonstrations, beatings were also commonly inflicted on protestors throughout Burma as part of the regime's heavy-handed response and in order to intimidate the population and suppress support for the pro-democracy movement. The beating of protestors on the streets was largely carried out by government backed thugs in civilian clothing, such as USDA and Swan Arr Shin members. No one was spared the beatings, as victims ranged from members of political opposition movements, civilian bystanders and even monks.[10] (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

Sexual Torture

Rape, humiliation and other forms of sexual torture have been widely used by SPDC forces throughout 2007. Whilst incidents have occurred against both men and women, the practice of sexual torture of women is most widespread. (For more information, see Chapter 14: Rights of Women). Such abuses are often psychologically damaging for the victim, in addition to the physical pain involved.

Sexual humiliation is sometimes adopted as a form of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In one such example from 2007, a Muslim girl was forced to parade around naked as punishment for marrying without permission after failing to pay the required bribe to the authorities. Such treatment is particularly degrading and cruel for the individual, and also disturbing and degrading to the Muslim community who considered it an insult to their religion.[11]

Rape is also commonly adopted by SPDC forces, especially in conflict areas, both as a form of torture on its own, but also accompanied by beatings, other forms of torture, and in certain instances leading to death. In one incident, a Rohingya woman was gang raped by NaSaKa personnel during interrogation about her son, eventually falling unconscious and dying.[12] In a separate incident, a forced labourer who was raped by SPDC army personnel later died when she was forced into an abortion.[13] Some cases are particularly brutal; a report by the Karen Women's Organisation released on 12 February 2007 described one case in which a young woman was gang raped in her home by four soldiers, who then killed her by shooting her in the vagina.[14]

Psychological Torture

Most torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment also entails psychological suffering for the victim. Sometimes this is the main aspect of the torture, designed to distress and humiliate the victims. In one incident an SPDC commander smeared the blood of three village pigs on 10 villagers, taking photos of the victims in this state.[15] Such treatment is often disturbing for the wider community. For instance, in its response to the pro-democracy demonstrations in 2007, SPDC personnel inflicted brutal and humiliating treatment on monks, despite their revered position amongst the Burmese people. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

In Burma's prisons, a frequently used method of psychological torture is holding political prisoners incommunicado, which causes both them and their family psychological suffering and heightens their feelings of vulnerability and isolation. This psychological torment is often compounded by the authorities regularly giving false hope of release. In 2007, several reported cases describe how relatives of political prisoners were informed of the imminent release of their family member, only to have the promise withdrawn on the supposed day of release.[16]

The Airplane: Political prisoners are made to assume the position of an airplane. Prisoners must hold this position while imitating engine sounds for extended periods of time, often until collapse. Most are beaten in this position. *[Caption and photo: AAPPB]*

2.3 Torture During Detention

The use of torture remains prevalent in Burma's prisons and detention centres. In 2007 reports of torture of prisoners were common, as was the torture of detainees at the hands of the police, NaSaKa, SaYaPa, army and other SPDC forces. Torture during detention is particularly widespread as a result of the detainee being isolated and under the total control of SPDC officers, making the incident more traumatising for the individual due to feelings of helplessness. The widespread occurrence of torture during detention is particularly concerning when coupled with the arbitrary detention of civilians, many of those detained and tortured have never had a trial, been brought before a judge, or even charged with an offence (For more information see, Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances). The frequency/regularity of such abuses, and the implications for the Burmese population, was noted in a January 2007 report by AAPP which stated that:

> *"People in Burma have to live their lives without any security as a result of lawlessness. They have to live in a situation under which they can be arrested at any time and jailed for a long sentence, or even die during interrogation in police stations and interrogation camps."*[17]

The torture of prisoners occurs regularly and seemingly as part of the established system. In 2007 it was reported that from the moment of arrest a detainee must pay bribes at every stage to avoid beatings and torture. Thus in many cases it seems that the systematic torture of prisoners is adopted simply for the purposes of extortion.[18] In the prisons, torture is carried out at the hands of the prison authorities and so-called 'officers of the prison', who are in fact ordinary prisoners appointed by the prison authorities as discipline keepers. A large extent of abuse/torture of political prisoners is inflicted by these 'officers of the prison'. Furthermore, reports suggest that the SPDC is continuing to utilise a strategy of torture by proxy in employing 'criminal' prisoners as thugs to beat political prisoners.[19] International law is very specific on the fact that the State is still implicated in torture regardless of whether it physically carries out the treatment. Article 1 of CAT makes the point that torture is still relevant to those incidents where the *"suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of, or with the consent or acquiescence of, a public official"*.[20]

Of particular concern are the continuing reports throughout 2007 of deaths in detention following the use of excessive force and torture by various SPDC forces. AAPP reported in January 2007 that six political prisoners had died in Burma's prisons during 2006,[21] and it seems that the continuing use of torture against prisoners and prison conditions will continue to lead to deaths. Torture is also frequently a cause of death in police custody. A statement released by the AHRC in August 2007 reported three such deaths (that were known of) in July alone.[22] In one reported incident, the detainee, who had been arrested the previous night, was found dead by his brother the following morning with extensive wounds on his face and blood reportedly poured from his mouth when the body was moved.[23]

Accompanying the widespread torture of detainees throughout Burma, and encouraging the continuation of such abuses, is the impunity with which the perpetrators operate. For instance, in the above incident the officials claimed the victim had died of a cold and warned relatives against filing a suit over the death.[24] The AHRC have commented that:

> *"The increasingly frequent accounts of bloody assaults by the police and other local security forces speak to the fearlessness with which these personnel operate. Although the military regime pretends to invite complaints against state officers, in reality there are no avenues through [which] they can be entertained properly – least of all where they involve allegations of murder – as all parts of the state apparatus are compromised and controlled."*[25]

Concern for this culture of impunity, which can be seen as contributing to the practice of torture during detention, is echoed by the Special Rapporteur for human rights in Burma, who observed that *"grave human rights violations meet with impunity and are even authorised by law."* The Special Rapporteur's report to the Human Rights Council in February 2007 went on to note concern for the denial of basic rights during detention, and reported receiving numerous reports of torture or ill-treatment during pre-trial detention and deaths in custody.[26]

The Motorcycle: Political prisoners are made to assume the position of riding a motorcycle while making engine noises. They must hold this position for extended periods of time, often until collapse. They are beaten while in this position. *[Caption and photo: AAPPB]*

2.4 Prison Conditions

In addition to the widespread beatings and torture that detainees in Burma face on a daily basis, the dire living conditions in prisons and detention centres often contribute to the suffering, sometimes to the extent of also constituting torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Following the Special Rapporteur's visit to Burma in November 2007, he reported "*appalling detention conditions which fail to meet international standards on the treatment of prisoners and in fact constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment prohibited under international law."*[27]

Often prisoners are denied access to medical treatment when they become ill, compounding the effects of torture and ill treatment that are rife within the prison system. A report from Chin State revealed that denial of basic medication or admission to the prison hospitals had led to the death of several inmates.[28] Such conditions are particularly damaging when combined, as they often are, with forced labour, lack of adequate food and harsh punishments. In addition prisoners are sometimes held in degrading or inhuman conditions, such as the use of 'dog cells', i.e. confining detainees to cells designed for holding dogs.[29]

In 2007 it was reported that prison funds were cut and that prisons were expected to raise their own funds. Naturally this leads to deteriorating prison conditions. AAPP reported that this development has in turn led to an increase in corruption, extortion and the use of forced labour in prisons.[30] Regarding the health care situation, AAPP's report on prison conditions found that *"the prisons routinely deny the right to health care,"* and that *"the cause for being admitted to the hospital is not the health condition of the patient prisoner, but the amount of money he pays",* revealing that health care was used as another source of extortion*."*[31]

This systematic lack of medical care may amount to torture where it is deliberately inflicted on victims, for example for purposes of extortion as noted above. It has been reported that political prisoners are denied treatment more often than their fellow inmates,[32] and following the pro-democracy demonstrations in September 2007 several demonstrators who received serious injuries during their arrest were reportedly denied any medical treatment whilst in detention.[33] The deteriorating conditions in Burma's prisons throughout 2007 are in part due to the continued absence of the International Committee of Red Cross, which has been barred by the SPDC from carrying out prison visits since late 2005.[34] (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

2.5 Torture during Forced Portering and Forced Labour

The use of forced labour by the SPDC continued to be widespread throughout Burma in 2007, despite being illegal under Law No. 1/99.[35] Both prisoners and villagers have regularly been forced to perform work for SPDC forces including clearing roads, building army camps, and portering for the army (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). In some instances the forced labour itself may constitute torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, for example where villagers are forced to act as human shields or minesweepers for the SPDC army (For more information on the use of landmines, see Chapter 4: Landmines). Reports of such abuses were prevalent throughout 2007, in February 2007 for example Free Burma Rangers reported that in Karen State, *"the Burma Army's use of forced labour and human minesweepers is widespread. In many villages this forced labour happens on a daily basis."*[36]

Forced labour is often accompanied by beatings and torture. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma reported in 2007 that, *"In addition to the very dangerous and arduous nature of the tasks, forced labour imposed by the Army is routinely accompanied by other forms of serious human rights abuse."*[37] Incidents throughout 2007 certainly support this assertion, beatings of forced porters and other forced labours were regularly reported, and in some instances forced labourers were also subjected to other forms of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In one such incident in Kyauk Taw Township, Arakan State, two women were pulled out from amongst the forced labourers working on an SPDC army owned rubber plantation, and then gang raped by the soldiers, one later dying during a forced abortion.[38]

Villagers, especially in rural areas, also continue to endure forced labour at the hands of SPDC forces. Many are forced to perform portering duties, work at SPDC army camps, or act as sentries watching for rebel forces in the area. These villagers are often beaten during their work, or punished if they try to avoid the forced labour. In one incident in March 2007 for example, a villager who had run away in an attempt to avoid forced portering duty in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, was later caught by SPDC soldiers and severely tortured, breaking one of his legs.[39] Forced labour, and the torture and ill-treatment that invariable accompany it, is then an inescapable daily reality for many villagers in rural areas.

Prisoners have been used for forced labour in Burma since 1962. These prisoners are forced to build infrastructure, work in quarries, and porter for the army. In 2007 reliance on such labour was as common as ever, with a reported 91 labour camps throughout the country.[40] Compounding the harsh conditions of forced labour, torture and ill-treatment is rife throughout the labour camps. Prisoners unable or unwilling to pay bribes face continual beatings and torture from the moment they arrive. Deaths occur regularly in prison labour camps, either through exhaustion or injury due to the dangerous work conditions, or as a result of being beaten to death by the guards. There are even reports of forced prison labourers committing suicide by jumping into quarry pits. Reports have also suggested that political prisoners have been assigned to hard labour camps and harsh conditions in order to destroy their dignity. [41] In February 2007 accounts from a group of prisoner porters who had escaped showed that they faced similar conditions to those in the labour camps. They were forced to carry army supplies to the frontline without food or rest, and were then beaten and kicked whenever they showed signs of tiredness, fearing execution when they could no longer keep pace.[42]

2.6 Torture of Villagers in Ethnic Minority Areas

Villagers in ethnic minority areas are particularly susceptible to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, especially in areas where armed rebel groups operate. As noted above, villagers in rural areas are often the victims of forced labour. Particularly in areas where SPDC forces are fighting rebel groups are villagers often forced to work as sentries, porters or human shields for the SPDC. Moreover, in recent years several human rights groups have documented the SPDC's use of violence against women from ethnic minorities. The continuation of violence against ethnic minority women was in 2007 confirmed by a report by the Karen Women's Organisation, detailing widespread torture and rape of Karen women.[43]

The 2007 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma considered the effect of military operation in ethnic areas, noting that:

> *"In addition to the heightened risks posed by the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons and anti-personnel mines, the killing, terrorizing and displacement of civilians is often part of a deliberate strategy to separate ethnic armed groups from their civilian populations... Violence against unarmed civilians by the Myanmar military is a very serious concern."*[44]

This concern is justified by later reports in 2007. In one report, a refugee from a village in Thaton District described how SPDC soldiers destroyed his fields, planted mines, and shot at villagers who were found outside the village. He had also been arrested by the SPDC five times and severely beaten and tortured.[45]

In 2007, reports revealed that the threat faced by villagers living in ethnic minority areas had even led to some rural villagers being deserted. For instance, in January 2007 it was reported that the village of Bayoun Hgae in Mon State had been deserted as villagers decided to move to a bigger village where they believed they would face less torture. These villagers had often been beaten by the local SPDC infantry battalions because they suspected them of having links with armed rebel groups operating in the area.[46] In fact, the junta uses one of the main reasons behind the junta's torture of villagers, accusing them of aiding the rebels simply because they are the same ethnicity as the rebels operating in that area. In one report a villager in Mon State recalled that, *"our villagers are oppressed in many ways by the military if the junta loses in the fighting."*[47]

2.7 Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

Buthidaung Township

On 7 January 2007, Mohammed Ismail, a shopkeeper in Khadur Para village, was severely beaten by 5 policemen. The victim had requested payment for goods the policemen had taken, following this he was severely beaten and then detained in the SPDC army camp in Thinga Net village, Buthidaung Township. Whilst detained at the camp he was fastened to a pole and immersed in a lake for at least 7 hours a day. On 10 January 2007 he was released following payment of a 60,000 kyat bribe.[48]

On 25 January 2007, Nurul Ullah of Saykan Para village was detained by police after he refused to part with his cattle to plough confiscated Rohingya land. He was then taken to Zaydi Taung police station where he was detained and tortured for 3 days, then finally released after paying a 30,000 kyat bribe.[49]

On 1 March 2007, Jamal Hussain was tortured by soldiers of the SPDC army (transferred to) Taung Bazaar village tract, after he tried to avoid being forced into porter duties. He was later arrested and tortured by the soldiers, breaking his leg and leaving him in a serious condition requiring treatment in Buthidaung general hospital.[50]

On 4 March 2007, Nurul Hoque, an edible oil manufacturer, was arrested in Pauktaw Pyin village, Taung Bazaar village tract. Hoque was accused of producing edible oil from mustard seeds by using a grinding machine without permission. He was taken to Taung Bazaar police station where he was tortured and detained for three days, and then released after paying a 69,000 kyat bribe to the police.[51]

On March 29 2007, a Rohingya woman in Buthidaung Township was tortured, gang raped and then killed by NaSaKa officers. Amena was alone in her house in Sindiphrang when the NaSaKa forced their way in and questioned her about her son, who they accused of being involved with Rohingya political groups. She was then tortured and gang raped, falling unconscious before being killed. The body was handed over to relatives 2 hours later, but the doctor in-charge at Buthidaung hospital refused to do a post mortem.[52]

On 7 April 2007, police from Nyaung Chaung village forced Liala Begum, an 18 year old girl, to walk around 3 villages naked apart from a 'Tami' covering her lower parts. The girl was subjected to this degrading treatment as punishment for marrying without the permission of the NaSaKa. Her family had been unable to pay the bribe needed for permission. The Nyaung Chaung VPDC Chairman complained against the degrading treatment but to no avail.[53]

On 26 December 2007, it was reported that U Ithiriya, a young monk sentenced to over 7 year's imprisonment for his role in the monk-led pro-democracy demonstrations in Sittwe, is in deteriorating health. U Ithiriya was severely tortured during interrogation by the SPDC military security forces (SaYaPa) whilst in Sittwe prison. As a consequence he was suffering from serious physical and mental health problems which have been compounded by the denial of treatment and a move to poorer conditions in Buthidaung prison.[54]

Kyauk Taw Township

On 4 July 2007, 2 women were gang raped by troops from IB #374. The two women were forced labourers at the army-owned rubber plantation where they were picked up by the soldiers from IB #374, which is led by Cap. Ko Ko Oo. One of the victims, Ma Pyu Pyu Khaine, later died on 17 August 2007 during an abortion ordered by the commanding officer of MOC #9.[55]

Maungdaw Township

On 10 January 2007, Mohamed Ayub (17), a Rohingya shop owner, was severely beaten by the NaSaKa of No.1 camp, Maungdaw Jetty. Ayub was beaten when he asked for compensation for crockery broken by the NaSaKa which they had borrowed without payment. He was then detained in the NaSaKa camp, where he was severely tortured, his legs held in a pillory. He was released after 4 hours and forced to sign a blank paper.[56]

On 1 February 2007, Jaffa Alam, a Rohingya businessman, was tortured by NaSaKa personnel at the Bangladesh border. Although Alam had documents with the relevant permission, his eight goats, worth 280,000 kyat, were seized by the NaSaKa. He was then tied up and taken to the NaSaKa camp where he was detained and tortured for 2 days, leaving him critically injured.[57]

On 14 February 2007, Mahfuzul Karim, a Rohingya businessman, was arrested and later tortured by forces from the SPDC's military security force (SaYaPa). He was charged with human trafficking, smuggling and using a Bangladeshi mobile phone. However, Mahfuzul Karim, of Maungdaw Township, is known to conduct legal business, buying goods from Bangladesh to sell in Maungdaw town and using a legal passport to cross the border. Following his arrest Karim was taken to the SaYaPa camp where he was severely tortured, suffering serious injuries to his nose. He was released after 28 hours following payment of a 1,100,000 kyat bribe to a SaYaPa officer.[58]

On 18 February 2007, Deen Mohamed died as a result of being tortured in police custody. He had been arrested on 19 December 2006 by NaSaKa in Rathedaung Township, along with about 50 other Rohingya boatpeople on their way to Malaysia. They were taken to Maungdaw police station where they were severely tortured. Mohamed suffered serious injuries as a result of torture in custody and on 18 February he was sent to Maungdaw government hospital for treatment. He died within few minutes of being admitted. Eyewitnesses stated that there were bruises, wounds and bloodstains all over the corpse. [59]
On 5 March 2007, Sultan Ahmed, a local fisherman, was arrested and severely tortured by NaSaKa from Area #6. Ahmed was arrested after the NaSaKa boarded his fishing boat on the Naf River, conducting a thorough search. Despite finding nothing they accused him of smuggling fuel from Bangladesh, and then sank his boat. In detention Ahmed was severely tortured before being released the next day.[60]
On 11 April 2007, police arrested, tortured and then killed Nabi Hussain, from Ngar Yant Chaung village, Maungdaw Township. Hussain was initially arrested for allegedly breaking a promise of marriage. He was taken to the local police station where he was severely beaten. They later tied his hands and feet to a log and rolled him down a hill, killing him.[61]

On 15 April 2007, Osman, a young Rohingya, was detained and tortured by NaSaKa personnel from Sector #8. Osman was arrested along with a girl whom he was accused of being in love in with. They were taken to the NaSaKa camp, and the girl was released 2 hours later after being threatened and denying being in love with Osman. The NaSaKa detained Osman for a further week, torturing him at the detention centre on the accusation

that he was in love with the girl. He was finally released on 22 April 2007 after the VPDC Chairman vouched for his good moral character.[62]

On 21 May 2007, Mohammed Rafique (15) died of injuries sustained during torture by NaSaKa from the Pa Dinn Nasak camp. 7 NaSaKa personnel had arrested him from his house for allegedly being in possession of a mobile phone, which he did not have. He was released 10 days later. Whilst in custody he had been severely tortured, evidenced by the many marks covering his body. Despite receiving medical treatment after his release Rafique died of the injuries inflicted by the torture.[63]

On 10 July 2007, Nabi Hussain died after being tortured by SaYaPa forces. Hussain, a cattle trader from Bawli Bazaar village tract in Maungdaw Township, had been arrested on 9 July 2007 for moving cattle from Buthidaung without notifying the authorities. He was taken to the SaYaPa camp, where he was severely tortured during the whole night. After being handed over to his guardians in a critical condition the next morning, he was then taken to Maungdaw General Hospital but died of his injuries at around 11 am. [64]

On 23 August 2007, NaSaKa in area #4 under the command of Major Nay Myo arrested and brutally tortured 13-year-old schoolboy Abul Kalam (13) in place of his father. Abul Kalam is the son of Noor Hussain who has a case against him for an unpaid loan. The boy was taken to Taungbro camp in Maungdaw Township and the NaSaKa said he would not be released until the father surrenders.[65]

On 23 October 2007, Abu Talek was interrogated and severely tortured by NaSaKa personnel, after they had exhumed the body of his one month old baby from a Rohingya Muslim cemetery. Talek, from Gyikan Pyin, Maungdaw Township, was tortured following claims by the new VPDC chairman that the baby was not his daughter. Abu Talek later fled to Bangladesh fearing arrest and more beatings.[66]

On 17 November 2007, a NaSaKa officer raped and killed an 11 year old girl, Taslim Ara, whilst she was grazing cattle on a hillside near Maungdaw Township. The culprit, nicknamed Myint, was then arrested by the NaSaKa captain from area #1 in Maungdaw Township. He was tortured for tainting the image of the NaSaKa and died on 25 November 2007 of severe injuries.[67]

On 20 November 2007, a 17-year-old Hindu girl, Dorgoni, was severely beaten by NaSaKa personnel in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. Dorgoni, daughter of Bandiya from Bawli Bazaar village, was beaten after she scolded a NaSaKa officer for teasing her. She was taken to a clinic for treatment, but the NaSaKa ordered the doctor to release her early because they did not want the case to become more complicated.[68]

Minbya Township

On 28 November 2007, a farmer from Minbya Township, Arakan State, was severely assaulted by the people's militia. Than Hla Htun, from Kapi Kakei village, Minbya Township, was returning home from his farm when he was accosted by the people's militia commander, Myo Naing, and severely beaten for no reason other than a personal grudge. He was later treated for his injuries in Minbya general hospital. Complaints from his father to the Township PDC were ignored.[69]

Rathedaung Township

On 7 March 2007, Mohammed Islam, a Rohingya, was detained and tortured by NaSaKa from camp #25, on the false accusation of crossing the Burma-Bangladesh border. Due to his aunt's illness, Islam was a day late returning from his permitted visit to Maungdaw Township. The NaSaKa physically tortured him and forced him to stand in water for a whole night, releasing him the following day after he paid a 50,000 kyat bribe.[70]

Sittwe Township

On 18 September 2007, U Warathami, a monk who took part in a protest in Sittwe Township, was severely beaten by SPDC soldiers. When the protests were broken up by SPDC soldiers, U Warathami, from Dhammathukka monastery, was set upon by troops who tied his hands behind his back and repeatedly beat him. Describing the incident U Warathami said: *"They restrained me and hit me in the face and also on my head which started to bleed. They also kicked me with their boots. I had cuts on my head and my ears and several of my teeth were knocked out of place."* Following this the monk was taken to the office of the chief of Sittwe police with 2 other monks where he was tied up with a belt and again beaten repeatedly, this time until he lost consciousness.[71]

On 19 October 2007, three persons were arrested by SPDC intelligence forces on the allegation that they had been passing information out of the country about the recent anti-junta demonstrations. The three were severely tortured before being handed over to the Sittwe military camp. It is believed they were later transferred to Insein prison, Rangoon. The victims were:

1. Mohammad. Yunus;
2. Nurul Islam; and
3. Mohammad. Eliyas. [72]

Taungup Township

On 4 January 2007, Htwee Maung, a trishaw driver, was arrested in Myepone of Taungup Township after attending a variety show by the Tahkainglonesein Troupe. After police failed to arrest a rowdy group that had gathered they arrested Htwee Maung in their place. The following morning at 6:00 am he was sent to the local hospital by Station Officer Myo Thant. However on arrival he was already dead. Examining the severe injuries to his head and over his right eye, the doctor described it as a case of "excessive force" by the police. Despite a rally by around 200 local trishaw drivers, no investigation was conducted and the victim's family was threatened not to complain.[73]

On 22 October 2007, two NLD members of Taungup Township reported they had been tortured during interrogation before being given prison sentences. U Than Pe and U Tun Kyi were tortured in an interrogation centre in An Township. Their faces were covered with wet cloths and during the interrogation their blood pressure was monitored to estimate how much more torture could be inflicted before they would die.[74]

On 14 December 2007, Ko Kyaw Min Naing a member of NLD in Taungup, was force-fed an unidentified syrup during police interrogation. The NLD member was arrested by Taungup police in the evening of 14 December 2007 on suspicion of involvement in anti-government activities. During interrogation the police pointed a dagger into his mouth and then poured two glasses of an unidentified syrup down his throat, which caused him to fall unconscious for over 24 hours. Ko Kyaw Min Naing, who was released without charge, has continued to

suffer stomach pain. Out of fear of retribution from the government, authorities at Taungup hospital refused to give him a test that could identify the ailment[75]

Chin State

On 12 February 2007, it was reported that torture and poor conditions in Len Tlang prison labour camp has led to the death of several inmates. There are reportedly around 53 inmates in Len Tlang prison labour camp, and they are regularly tortured at the hands of the prison officials. Particularly severe torture is inflicted on those prisoners not capable of performing the forced labour ordered by supervisor Khin Maung Thein. It was also reported that sick inmates are denied medical care, and often beaten if they are too sick to work. These conditions are believed to have led to several deaths in the camp.[76]

Irrawaddy Division

On 11 January 2007, Myint Thein was arrested by police for interrogation while he was visiting his father's house in Pantanaw. The following day his family were told by police that Myint Thein had died of malaria. However his wife told Myint Aye, of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP), that her husband had not been suffering from malaria and that his dead body had displayed clear signs of torture.[77]

On 18 April 2007, two human rights activists were severely beaten by a group of about 100 people in Henzada Township. The two activists, Myint Naing and Maung Maung Lay, were beaten after attending a training session in Oakpon village. Activists claim that the assault was masterminded by the head of the USDA, U Nyunt Oo, who was seen using a walkie-talkie at the time of the assault. The victims were left severely injured, and received surgery at Henzada hospital before being transferred to Rangoon hospital. Myint Naing later revealed a lack of adequate treatment whilst at Rangoon General Hospital, where his requests for medication for his slingshot wounds were repeatedly ignored.[78] On 24 July 2007, Myint Naing was sentenced, for inciting unrest. He received a sentence of 8 years imprisonment by Judge Aung Min Hein in Henzada Township court,.[79]

Human rights defenders Myint Naing and Maung Maung recovering after they were attacked by who they believe were members of the SPDC-affiliated USDA. *[Photo: NCGUB]*

Kachin State

On 30 July 2007, Maran Seng Aung (22) was beaten to death by special drug squad police in Myitkyina Township. He was sitting by the road near his home at around 9:30 am when 3 officers on motorcycles came and bound his wrists before assaulting him and then taking him away in an auto rickshaw. By 5:30 pm his dead body was in the local hospital, and his mother was warned against complaining about the death.[80]

Karen State

On 2 January 2007, Ti Reh, the headman of Phukra village, was reportedly shot following a KNLA raid on the SPDC military outpost near the village. A KNLA commander claimed that Ti Reh was shot on the orders of the LIB #250 camp commander, following interrogations and beatings. The village secretary and preacher were also detained and interrogated at the camp, their fate unknown.[81]

Mergui/Tavoy District

On 21 February 2007, a private from SPDC IB #282, led by Bo Kyaw Moe Lwin, attempted to rape villager Naw Saw Khee Base. The private entered her house in Lock-Theing village, Klein-Aung Township at night, and attempted to rape her in her bedroom. He left after Naw Saw Khee Base managed to defend herself and beat him on the head with a torch.[82]

Nyaunglebin District

On 5 February 2007, the SPDC commander from Kyo Gyi camp came to the village of Kyo Gyi, Kyauk Kyi Township, and accused the villagers of attacking them the day before. His troops captured 10 villagers, shot 3 of the village pigs, then smeared the blood on the villagers and took photos of them. In addition, the villagers were forced to pay 20,000 kyat each and the camp commander threatened to kill them should news of the incident get out.[83]

Papun District

On 27 February 2007, SPDC soldiers based near Wa-klay-htu, Lu-thaw Town, shot villagers and beat their knees.[84]

Toungoo District

On 15 April 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #371 and LIB #372 entered Yaw Taw Bur and captured and tortured to death Saw Bwe Kyaw Htoo, a 19-year-old school boy. The SPDC soldiers jabbed a knife into his eyes and mouth before executing him. See the photograph shown on the following page.[85]

The body of 19-year-old Saw Bwe Kyaw Htoo who was tortured and then executed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #371 in Toungoo District, Karen State. *[Photo: KHRG]*.

Also on 15 April 2007, soldiers from LIB #371, MOC #5 captured, tortured and finally executed Saw Dtar Hlar Loo, a 24-year-old villager of Tantabin Township. He had been out working in his fields, tending to his rice crop when the arrest took place. See the photograph reproduced below.[86]

The body of 24-year-old Saw Dtar Hlar Loo, who had been tortured and executed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #371 in April 2007 in Karen State. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Karenni State

In February 2007, six porter prisoners escaped to the Thai-Burma border from the SPDC LIB #117 who had forced them to carry ammunition and army supplies. The prisoners had all been transferred to Mahtawgoo prison in Loikaw, Karenni state, to serve as porters. They described being kicked in the chest and beaten on the back when they tired, and there was no food for the prisoner porters whilst they worked.[87]

On 10 April 2007, FBR relief worker Saw Lee Reh Kyaw, was tortured and later executed by SPDC army troops. Saw Lee Reh Kyaw was captured on 8 April 2007 by LIB #427, when they attacked the village of Ha Lee Ku where he was providing medical treatment and gathering information about human rights abuses. He was shot in the leg and badly wounded, the SPDC troops then took him to their headquarters where he was interrogated, tortured, and shot dead.[88]

Mandalay Division

On 1 April 2007, a policeman verbally and sexually harassed a woman, as well as kicking the woman's mother in Northeast Mandalay (Chan Aye Tharzan) Township. The policeman, Naing Linn Htun, from the Pathein Hyi police battalion was reportedly drunk on security duty when he began harassing the woman and then repeatedly kicking the woman's mother. When a crowd gathered demanding him to stop, he fired two rounds with his M-16 in the air to scare them away.[89]

On 15 June 2007, U Than Lwin (70) was assaulted after leading a prayer meeting for the release of political prisoners. Local council members and members of USDA, along with groups of thugs known as *"Swan Arr Shin"* organised by the councils, prevented Than Lwin and his group from praying at pagodas in Madaya Township. A local official also warned them against using a prayer hall at a local monastery, however they went ahead with their prayer meeting. On leaving the monastery they were surrounded by the group, when one man emerged from the crowd and hit Than Lwin in the face with a knuckle duster before running off and hiding in the USDA office. Than Lwin sustained serious facial injuries, including a broken nose and left cheek, needing to be transferred to Mandalay General Hospital for an operation. USDA staff refused police entry into their office to investigate the matter.[90]

On 29 July 2007, Ko Kyaw Htay died in custody at the Meiktila police station, after being tortured. He was arrested by 10 officers on 27 July 2007 on suspicion of stealing a motorbike, and was beaten from the moment the officers arrested him. The victim's sister, Ma Hla Linn Sein, said his dead body showed signs of a severe beating: *"There were wounds on his wrists that looked like they were from handcuffs and he had bruises all over his body, particularly around his pelvis.*" Two friends who went to visit him at the station just hours before his death were not allowed to see him, though they could hear him screaming from the interrogation room.[91]

Also on 29 July 2007, a pagoda official (59) from Meiktila died in police custody whilst being transferred to Meiktila prison. U Ohn Kyaing was arrested, along with 6 other pagoda officials, after the diamond umbrella topping of a local pagoda had been stolen. The officials are believed to have been interrogated, beaten and tortured whilst in detention, and U Ohn Kyaing was then refused medical treatment when he became ill.[92]

On 9 October 2007, the family of NLD member Win Shwe were informed that he had died during detention. Win Shwe had been arrested on 26 September 2007 and detained at Plate Myo police station, near Mandalay. AAPP reported that Win Shwe died under interrogation, his family were given no details of his death and his body was cremated.[93]

On 14 December 2007, it was reported that police had tortured a shop owner in Mandalay's police station #14. The young man had been arrested following pro-democracy demonstrations and interrogated for information regarding the Buddhist monks' involvement in the protests. The report described how the victim was beaten throughout the night for 3

nights, and forced to assume a stress position whereby he was forced to imitate riding a motorcycle.[94]

Mon State

On 6 January 2007, SPDC soldiers arrested about 50 plantation owners and workers from Kwan-tamoi-tae-tat village and Pauk-pin-kwin village because they had food supplies with them when checked. The SPDC army sometimes allows food supplies, yet at other times it does not. Following these arrests 5 of the villagers were thrown into water, beaten and severely tortured.[95]

On 15 January 2007, it was reported that the Bayoun Ngae village had been deserted. Villagers had reportedly moved to the larger village of Han-gan, Ye Township, to avoid torture by the military. The villagers had suffered beatings by SPDC IB #106 and LIB #343, and often prevented from farming, following accusations of links with armed rebel groups.[96]

On 20 March 2007, a 19 year old boy from Ma Gyi village was severely beaten for trying to escape patrol duty. The other men on patrol had already deserted and rather than stay alone Mg C-- M—ran away also. When he was captured by soldiers from IB #31 they beat him until he bled from his mouth, his injuries were very serious and he remained in Ye Township hospital for several months receiving treatment.[97]

In early July 2007, Ko San Win, a hired porter from Three Pagoda Pass was severely beaten by an SPDC army officer from IB #18. Ko San Win was beaten because he was struggling to carry his load due to exhaustion, caused by lack of food and water. He was severely beaten on the head, face and body with the butt of a gun, suffering extensive cuts and bruises to his legs and body. After the beating, he was left in a hut in Maesali village.[98]

This photograph depicts Ko San Win in Palaing Japan (Japanese Well Hospital) as he was being treated for the injuries that he had sustained while portering for the SPDC. *[Photo: IMNA]*.

On 25 August 2007, Tun Naing, the son of a senior NMSP army officer, was assaulted by Cap. Hla Khaing of SPDC IB #586. Tun Naing was severely beaten with a stick when he visited his native village Toe Thet Ywar Thit in Khaw-zar Sub-Township, southern Mon State. He was asked where he was going and who his father was, before being assaulted. After the beating he received treatment from a private medic.[99]

Pegu Division

On 8 February 2007, Maung Lin Lin Naing was arrested by police in Daik-U Township, accused of theft. According to the police record he was found hanged in the Phadoe police lock up at 4:00 pm 9 February 2007. The police disposed of his body on 10 February 2007, and attempts by family and local officials to obtain information about his death and the whereabouts of his body were ignored. Furthermore the family were warned that if they were to complain about the death they would be "shut-up."[100]

On 17 October 2007, Daw Kyi Kyi Nyunt was arrested and subsequently detained and tortured for 2 days by police in Pegu Township, Pegu Division. She was interrogated by district police chief Bo Yee and second in command U Aung Lwin and U Myint Swe. Daw Kyi Kyi Nyunt described being forced to sit on a stool whilst the police kicked her. The police also stomped on her hair, kicked her back, removed her spectacles and repeatedly beat her during questioning, leaving her barely able to walk.[101]

Rangoon Division

On 25 May 2007, 30 members of the NLD were beaten in the Kyaukhtutgyi pagoda in Bahan Township whilst praying for the release of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. They were attacked by 15 people from the military, pro-government militias and members of the USDA, who used weapons hidden in their jackets. The attack was led by Lae Lae Win Swe, Secretary of the Tamwe USDA.[102]

On 21 February 2007, Ko Aung Tin Win, a political prisoner, was severely beaten after he refused to sit in front of a jail officer in accordance with Insein prison rules. Ko Aung Tin Win, sentenced to 50 years for unfounded connections to an unlawful organisation, was repeatedly kicked and beaten by prison officer U Tin Maung Oo. Complaints of inhumane treatment by this prison officer have been made by several political prisoners, but no action has been taken against him.[103]

On 18 March 2007, SPDC authorities and USDA members arrested Ko Naing Oo, in North Okkalapa Township, for fighting with his wife. The following morning his dead body was discovered by his brother, Ko Min San, in the local Peace and Development Council office. SPDC authorities claimed he had died of a cold, however Ko Min San said his brother's body showed clear signs of beatings, with extensive bruising and cuts. According to Ko Min San: *"When the body was lifted to be moved, blood poured out of his mouth… The slash on his skull was obvious as well as the other wounds on his face."*[104] Subsequently the family of the victim were not informed of the post mortem report nor court hearings when they occurred, and the victim's father has been threatened by local police not to sue over the death.[105]

On 8 September 2007, AAPP expressed their concern for the fate of several 88 Generation Student leaders arrested following the pro-democracy demonstrations of 19 August 2007. It is believed that they were being held in Insein Prison, Rangoon, however no official information had been given at this time on the whereabouts or treatment of those arrested. Unconfirmed reports suggested that 88 Generation leader Kyaw Min Yu had been tortured to death by SPDC interrogators, and 2 other leaders, Kyaw Kyaw Htwe and Min Zeya, had been hospitalised due to severe torture.[106]

On 20 September 2007, it was reported by a released prisoner that 4 members of the 88 Generation Student group where in Insein prison hospital, following torture during interrogation. The four prominent activists had been arrested on 21 August 2007 following pro-democracy protests. The released prisoner reported that the 4 activists had been tortured under interrogation and subsequently placed in the prison hospital, with screens placed around their beds blocking them from view. The 4 individuals were reported to be:

1. Min Ko Naing;
2. Mya Aye;
3. Kyaw Min Yu (a) Jimmy; and
4. Kyaw Kyaw Htwe (a) Marki.[107]

On 26 September 2007, police in Rangoon responded violently to continuing demonstrations, beating several protestors. Police armed with shields and batons were seen beating monks, leaving several with their heads bleeding. It was also reported that on Bahan Road police beat monks, nuns and civilians with bamboo sticks as they attempted to flee.[108]

On 27 September 2007, monks where tortured and subject to degrading treatment, when SPDC soldiers raided monasteries in Rangoon in the early hours of the morning. SPDC soldiers reportedly fired shots inside the monasteries, beat monks and forced them to kneel down or walk like dogs. Many of the monks were then arrested and taken to unknown locations.[109]

On 28 September 2007, authorities at Kyaikkasan detention centre cut off electricity to a room of around 200 detainees and then began pumping water into the room. The police then beat the detainees, who had been arrested following earlier protests in September. They were then taken from the room one by one and interrogated.[110]

On 29 September 2007, two unidentified youths died in detention at Rangoon City Hall following severe beatings by soldiers there. The two men were arrested during the protests and were beaten by soldiers from SPDC IB #66. Following their deaths, the soldiers reportedly removed any valuables, before transporting the dead bodies away from Rangoon City Hall during the night.[111]

On 3 October 2007, Daw San San Myint, the Chairperson of the Burmese Housewives' Association, was released after over a month in detention since being arrested on 24 August 2007 during fuel price protests. She described being beaten both during her arrest and whilst in detention at Kyaikkasan interrogation centre and later in police brigade #3, Hmawbi township. Daw San San Myint sought medical treatment upon being released, but the authorities prevented her from receiving any treatment.[112]

On 13 October 2007, a released detainee reported that a 6-year-old child had been beaten by the authorities in Kyaikkasan interrogation centre. The child had been arrested along with his family near Kyaukhtutgyi Pagoda and then held in Kyaikkasan interrogation centre. Detainees who tried to protect the child were also beaten by the authorities.[113]

On 29 October 2007, Ko Than Naing was stabbed and beaten by officials from the WPDC in Dagon Township, Rangoon. His mother had made a complaint to ward #55 PDC, after having an argument with her son. However, the WPDC officials, along with Swan Arr Shin members, reacted more harshly than she expected, stabbing Ko Than Naing and beating him. He was then detained at the local police station for two weeks before being sent to Insein prison. He was charged with possession of the knife that had been used to stab him, and forced to sign a confession.[114]

On 13 December 2007, it was reported that Maung Ye Myat Hein, a 17-year-old mathematics student arrested on 10 October 2007 over pro-democracy demonstrations, was being tortured in detention. His mother, Daw San Aye, reported that her son had been beaten during interrogations and also forced to assume the stress position of riding a motorcycle.[115]

Kyauktan Township

On 21 September 2007, it was reported that 46 activists were subject to torture while in detention at police battalion #7, near Kyauktan Township, Rangoon. The activists, who were arrested on 19 August 2007 following demonstrations against the fuel price rises, had been beaten whilst in detention and faced extreme physical and mental torture during interrogation. The detainees are being held in appalling conditions: in addition to inadequate water and food supply, they have received no healthcare or medicine, no ventilation, and no mosquito nets. Several of the detainees reportedly suffered from severe pain due to beatings received during their arrest. Those detained by police battalion #7 at the time of the report where:

1. Myo Khin;
2. Tun Myint;
3. Kyaw San;
4. Tin Myint;
5. Zaw Zaw Aung;
6. Kyi Phyu;
7. Aung Min Naing (a) Mi Thwe;
8. Myo Min Maung;
9. Tin Maung Kyi;
10. Aung Htoo;
11. Thein Myint Tun;
12. Ngwe Soe;
13. Min Hein Htet;
14. Tun Nay Aung;
15. Zaw Win;
16. Zar Ni Maung;
17. Thite Min;
18. Soe Kywe;
19. Aung Kyaw Oo;
20. Sai Min Thein;
21. Win Zaw (a) Tu Pi;
22. Thant Zin Myo;
23. Thant Zin Myint;
24. Myint Aye;
25. Ye Pe Kyin;
26. Phyo Min Kyin;
27. Tin Maung Oo;
28. Min Aung;
29. Tin Zaw Oo;
30. Win Sai;
31. Thant Zin Oo;
32. Kyaw Soe Win;
33. Sann Win;
34. Thein Htay;
35. Nyont Win;
36. Min Min Oo;
37. Saw Lwin;

38. Aung Zaw Oo;
39. Lu Aye;
40. Kyaw Thu Yein;
41. Tun Tun Win;
42. Myint Hlaing;
43. Saw Way Moe;
44. Than Naing;
45. Tin Maung Naing; and
46. Zaw Nyunt.[116]

South Okkalapa Township

In the early hours of 26 September 2007, SPDC forces led by a 2-star general raided Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa Township. Witnesses reported how 3 trucks filled with SPDC soldiers arrived at the monastery at about 12:15 am. After being refused entry they forced their way into the monastery, crashing through the gate with a truck. They then beat monks, laymen, women and children using bamboo sticks whilst verbally abusing them. They forced monks to sit on the floor and then kicked them in the head. Some monks were also subject to degrading treatment, by being forced to imitate dogs. Following the attack, which lasted around 90 minutes, 60 monks and 40 laymen were forced into the trucks and taken to an unknown location.[117]

On 3 November 2007, Ko Ko Win died of serious wounds inflicted by SPDC authorities and their civilian thugs. During the protests on 27 September 2007, police and Swan Arr Shin beat his head and back, causing him to be hospitalised with severe headaches and vomiting. He was sent to Thingangyun hospital on 5 October 2007, where he died a month later.[118]

Thingangyun Township

On 27 September 2007, SPDC forces entered Maggin monastery in the middle of the night, beating several monks. The monastery had previously been raided and the abbot and 4 senior monks arrested for taking part in demonstrations over the sharp rises in fuel prices. On this occasion the SPDC forces entered the monastery at midnight, uniformed and armed with batons and guns, beating novices and mishandling HIV/AIDS patients being cared for at the monastery.[119]

Sagaing Division

On 8 August 2007, Ko Maung Htun died after being tortured in police custody in Indaw Township. He had been arrested on 7 August 2007 at Nabar train station where he worked, accused of stealing instant noodles and a soft drink. When his father U Htun Ya visited him on the morning of 8 August 2007 he reported that his son looked well, yet by the evening he was informed of his death. U Htun Ya was shown his son's dead body before it was cremated on 10 August 2007, and saw severe bruising across his back. Doctors at the local hospital confirmed that Ko Maung Htun had been brought in for treatment shortly before his death; they revealed that he arrived at hospital at about 3:15pm but started to lose consciousness and died at about 4:45pm. The doctors however refused to comment on the nature of his injuries.[120]

Shan State

In early 2007, 5 villagers from Zizawya Khe village in Naa Poi village tract, Laikha Township, were arrested and beaten. The victims were:

1. Naang zing Wa, female, age 36;
2. Zaai Zit-Ta, male, age 43;
3. Zaai Kalaa, male, age 39;
4. Zaai Su, male, age 45; and
5. Zaai Zaw Phae, male, age 37.[121]

Naang Zing Wa was tied up, interrogated and severely beaten until she lost consciousness. Zaai Zit-Ta was tied up but managed to escape unharmed despite the SPDC troops shooting after him. Zaai Kalaa was interrogated and beaten in the village, and then later beaten to death near Zalaai Khum village. Zaai Su and Zaai Zaw Phae, the village headman and deputy, were interrogated and then forced to work as porters.[122]

In June 2007, a young Lahu woman (18) from Ho Naa village, Murng-Paeng Township, was gang raped by troops from SPDC LIB #360. The woman was returning from collecting bamboo with her brother when they were stopped by LIB #360. After a few questions the soldiers then held the woman, stripped her, and took turns to rape her repeatedly, causing her to faint several times. The brother recalled the commander being called 'Kyi Aung,' and they were threatened not to tell anyone about the incident or they would be killed.[123]

Endnotes

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 3

EXTRA-JUDICIAL, SUMMARY OR ARBITRARY EXECUTIONS

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

- Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

3.1 Introduction

Under international human rights and humanitarian law, all persons possess the right to life and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of that life. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) clearly states that *"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".* Burma, as a member of the United Nations (UN) and also having reaffirmed its position to uphold the values of the UDHR in 1994 thus has a responsibility to its citizens to ensure that this right is protected. Similarly, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, to which Burma acceded in 1992, prohibits *"at any time and in any place whatsoever … violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds"*.

As Burma is a State Party to both of these documents, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), as the military junta currently ruling Burma, must abide by the principles laid out therein, and besides which, both of these tenets are widely recognised as being customary international law, and as such are binding on all States, regardless of whether they have ratified the law or not. In light of this, all extra-judicial killings and summary or arbitrary executions perpetrated in Burma (or anywhere else for that matter) are conducted in direct contravention of several fundamental principles of international law.

When the SPDC, its agents, or any of its allied ceasefire armies arbitrarily or extra-judicially kills any members of the civilian population, they terrorize and subjugate that population to the rule of fear and intimidation. The right to live free from fear of such arbitrary terror is an inalienable right to be enjoyed by all persons irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The SPDC has continued to consistently disregard these international standards, with a high number of incidents of violence against civilians resulting in death throughout 2007. The extra-judicial killing of unarmed civilians continued to occur under the ruse of counter-insurgency campaigns against many of Burma's varied ethnic minorities, against individuals accused of a crime, and with near-unanimous international condemnation, against unarmed and peaceful protesters. The manner in which violence was employed throughout these different settings strongly suggests not a mere lapse of judgement, but rather a deliberate and calculated strategy to cow and subjugate the population.

As noted in the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2006*, the SPDC, through its pervasive military force continued to pursue large-scale military assaults against the civilian population of Northern Karen State throughout 2007, most notably, though not exclusively, in the three northern Karen districts of Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, and Papun. This offensive, having commenced in November 2005, has differed from many previous annual dry season offensives in that the attacks on undefended civilian villages have also continued throughout the two rainy seasons since the offensive began. The typical pattern followed by the SPDC has been to mount assaults on villages in the hills of Karen State as soon as the weather permits it following the end of the rainy season. This is done so as to depopulate those areas where the SPDC cannot effectively exert control over the local population and forcibly relocate the villagers living there into SPDC-controlled areas.[1] Such attacks persisted, largely unknown, just as they have for years, even as the international community was condemning the violence being visited upon protestors in Rangoon and other parts of the country. The harassment and murder of local civilians is a key component of these attacks.

Since the commencement of the offensive, many different theories have been proffered by various commentators regarding the underlying reasons behind the offensive. *"Why now?"* is a question that has often been asked. At first, some groups were claiming that the offensive was being conducted in order to *"pacify"* a safe zone around the new capital at Naypyidaw, 100 kilometres to the north. This theory was originally supported primarily

because the offensive began soon after the capital was suddenly relocated, however, this logic seems unlikely in that Shan and Karenni States, which are both closer to Naypyidaw, and which both also experience armed conflict were not subjected to similar attacks as those being witnessed in Karen State. Furthermore, as the offensive progressed, the attacks moved southwards down into Papun and Nyaunglebin Districts away from Naypyidaw, rather than northwards as would be otherwise expected. As this started to happen, some groups then suggested that the impetus for the attacks must be to secure the area around the sites of the proposed hydroelectric dams to be built on the Salween River. However, this theory is also flawed in that the most intensive attacks ever since the attacks began have not been in the areas surrounding the proposed dam sites, but rather further to the northwest.

A third and far more plausible theory would be that the SPDC is looking to extend its control over the area by expanding its road networks. This serves numerous purposes. Firstly, it allows for the rapid mobilization of large numbers of troops along those roads; secondly, it permits an increased military presence in the area as new army camps are invariably set up along the length of those roads; and thirdly, roads create barriers that bisect the area into smaller and more easily-manageable sections through which SPDC army units can mount their patrols in search of the internally displaced and across which those displaced persons typically dare not cross for fear of being seen as they step out into the open and be fired upon. Further supporting this theory are the geographic distribution of attacks and how these coincide with a number of road projects that the SPDC has planned to complete for years. The most intensive and unrelenting attacks have been in southeastern Toungoo District and northern Papun and northern Nyaunglebin Districts where the three districts meet. For the past several years, the SPDC has been attempting to depopulate these areas and construct a network of roads that would crisscross this area and link all three districts together. Concurrent to the attacks in these areas, the SPDC has continued to work on these roads throughout 2007, both through the use of heavy machinery as well as the forced and unpaid labour of local villagers (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription), and at year's end, reports emerged of the completion of the road linking Bu Hsa Kee in Toungoo District with Ma La Daw in Nyaunglebin District as well as a second road linking Bu Hsa Kee with Pwa Ghaw in Papun District.[2]

In Burma's ethnic states, where the SPDC incessantly wages its war of attrition against the communities living there in order to dominate and intimidate them, extra-judicial killing and murder is a complementary tactic to a range of methods employed to control and oppress the population, including forced displacement, destruction of food supplies, and restriction of movement. (For more information see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). Villagers living in these areas are frequently reminded that they will be *"shot on sight"* if seen outside their villages, or if they attempt to remain behind after their village has been forcibly relocated by the military. Similarly, villagers living in areas under SPDC control are often told that they will be shot for failing to meet the regular demands of forced labour and extortion exacted upon them by the military. Meanwhile, the internally displaced who choose to live beyond SPDC control and exploitation must be ever vigilant and prepared to flee whenever an SPDC army (or any of their allied ceasefire armies) patrol approaches their hiding site in the forest. Such hiding sites, when discovered, are typically shelled with mortars before the troops advance into them, shooting and destroying everything in sight. (For more information see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation). Many other civilians are killed under the pretext of having affiliations with opposition groups. In most cases, little or no evidence is presented to support such a claim, and in those instances when it is, that which used is typically very dubious.

Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the intentional targeting of civilians in this manner represents a crime against humanity in that it is being carried out *"as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against [the] civilian population"*.[3] Moreover, on 28 April 2006, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted UNSC Resolution 1674 (2006), stating that the deliberate targeting of non-combatants and the systematic perpetration of human rights violations *"may constitute a threat to international peace and security"* and as such clearly falls within the UNSC's mandate which is required *"where necessary, to adopt appropriate steps"* for action. Furthermore, the Resolution also *"reaffirms the provisions of paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document regarding the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity"*, and in having adopted this Resolution, the UNSC is thus obliged to act to prevent such mass atrocities.[4] However, in January 2007, both Russia and China, two of Burma's most ardent supporters, voted against the adoption of a new Resolution which, if passed would have lead to UN Security Council action on the situation in Burma.[5]

The SPDC's campaign of military expansionism in rural and ethnic areas draws heavily upon the use of forced labour. SPDC army units regularly force convicted prisoners and captured villagers alike to porter loads for the soldiers in frontline areas where many of them are killed by landmines or in crossfire during skirmishes between the SPDC and armed opposition groups. Many more are also killed by the soldiers when they become too weak to continue to carry a load and are no longer able to serve a purpose for the unit (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). At the end of January 2007, one such porter was found beaten to death near the border of Nyaunglebin and Papun Districts in Karen State.[6] In a report released in May 2007, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) maintained that since the beginning of the offensive in northern Karen State, as many as 265 convict porters out of the estimated 1,700 employed had been executed, died after stepping on a landmine or died of illness. While many had been shot, many more were beaten to death or had their throats slashed to save on bullets. Many of those who became too weak to continue were simply left to die where they fell.[7] Realising that they will likely die, either at the hands of the soldiers, by stepping on a landmine, or through illness and disease, many convict porters attempt to flee and take their chances in the jungle. Those captured while trying to do so are generally brutally executed to serve as an example to the others, while those who do get away then have to contend with the thousands of landmines that contaminate frontline areas (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines).

In addition to the extra-judicial executions being carried out in Burma's rural areas, a large number of killings were also committed in the urban centres during 2007. Most notably, in September 2007, the SPDC enacted a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests that were being staged across the country, in which dozens of demonstrators were reported to have been killed. The bloody crackdown on Buddhist monks and unarmed civilian protesters once again brought the SPDC's repressive and heavy-handed tactics under international scrutiny as armed police and military personnel fired into crowds with live ammunition. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

Initially sparked over a sudden and dramatic rise in fuel prices, which in turn drove commodity prices up, the protests rapidly grew in both size and number as well as becoming more overtly political in nature. By mid-September, dozens of demonstrations were being held daily across the country and the Buddhist Sangha (monastic community) had boycotted the military and called for excommunication of the SPDC, yet it was not until 18 September 2007 that the junta responded with force:

> *"In the isolated northern western city of Sittwe in Arakan State, far from the eyes of not only the international community but also the rest of the Burmese population, protests were broken up by authorities with the first display of the use of force on 18 September. Security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowds, and monks and civilians alike were beaten".*[8]

It remains unclear if anyone was killed in this initial crackdown in Sittwe, although no reports have emerged to that effect. Meanwhile, protests elsewhere in the country continued unabated, seemingly unaware of the crackdown in Arakan State. In Rangoon, demonstrations continued to grow with an estimated 100,000 people on the streets in protest against the SPDC. In a rare and uncharacteristic display of self-control, and with the world now watching, the military waited one more week before they countered. It was not until the morning of 26 September 2007 that the junta responded; and respond they did with a predictable and disproportionate level of force, despite repeated calls from the international community to exercise restraint. Live ammunition was fired directly into crowds of unarmed protestors, killing dozens and wounding many more. Riot police and paramilitary forces baton charged columns of demonstrators, beating monks, men, women and children with batons, resulting with a number of protestors being beaten to death. The protests and crackdowns continued in this vein over the next three days until the violence being visited upon them, coupled with the large numbers of arrests (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances), effectively put the demonstrations down.

When the violence had come to an end and in the face of near-universal international condemnation for its actions, with even China publicly denouncing them for their excessive use of force, the SPDC announced that 15 persons had been killed during the protests. Reliable evidence, however, exists to suggest that the death toll was in fact far higher. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro asserted that he had evidence of more than 30 dying in Rangoon alone.[9] Furthermore, by the end of January 2008, four months after the protests, at least 84 persons who had been involved in the demonstrations still remained missing. Similar to what had happened following the mass protests of 1988; we may never know how many people were killed, although it is, without a doubt, far higher than the number provided by the regime. (For more information on the protests, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

The heavy-handed suppression of the September protests, although the most internationally notorious of 2007, are but a single instance of a routine and institutionalised approach of aggression towards the civilian population. International efforts to punish and isolate the regime were renewed in response to these events, which are reminiscent of the violent suppression of demonstrations in 1988, although it remains to be seen as to how effective these efforts will be. Inconsistent action by the international community and a general lack of accountability among the SPDC has seen extra-judicial, arbitrary and summary executions further embedded as a standard tactic of control of civil disorder. The excessive use of violence during the crackdown on protestors is less startling when viewed in the context of the strategy of suppression of ethnic minorities. The same tactics often practiced in rural ethnic minority areas, as described above, were in this case merely employed in an urban setting.

Just as hostile activity against the population carries on in the absence of clear signals from the international community, so do subordinate soldiers in the SPDC army murder civilians without any signal to desist from superiors in the chain of command.

The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigations of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions demand that all investigations into extra-judicial killings receive the full cooperation of the State, pronouncing that:

> *"States are obliged to carry out impartial and exhaustive investigations into all allegations of arbitrary executions, with a view to clarifying the circumstances, identifying those responsible, bringing them to justice, compensating the victims or their families, and taking all necessary action to prevent the recurrence of similar acts in the future. The result of such investigations must be made public."*

However, such principles continued to remain alien to the SPDC for the duration of 2007, with attempts by victims' families seeking compensation and justice typically resulting in harassment, intimidation, bribery or denial. Civilians seeking redress from the authorities for human rights violations perpetrated against them are often harassed and intimidated into silence. Meanwhile the offending parties go unpunished and often emboldened to continue commit similar abuses, knowing that they can do so without fear of reprisal. Citizens from Matupi Township in Southern Chin State discovered just this after a member of their community, U Tin Ceu, 33, was killed by SPDC army soldiers in February 2007. According to reports, U Tin Ceu was killed on 26 February 2007 by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #140 (Major Ye Myint Oo commanding) under allegations that he had established contact with the opposition Chin National Army (CNA). Following his death, local villagers wrote a letter of complaint addressed to Senior General Than Shwe, however, *"Instead of redressal [sic.], the authorities arrested [the] six complainants for reporting the murder to the army brass"*. Commenting on the impunity under which the military operates in Burma, a relative of U Tin Ceu later stated that *"There were lot of injures on the body of U Tin Ceu. Though it has been quite a few months since the killing, we haven't heard of any action being taken for the murder which was committed without any reason"*.[10] This example illustrates the standard SPDC approach to anyone daring to attempt to call the security forces to account for deaths at their hands, and as can be seen in the incidents listed below, this strategy was employed on numerous occasions during 2007.

Ultimately, in the context of Burma, extra-judicial killings are a logical extension of a State which firmly positions itself against a civil society that is perceived as a threat to its own continued rule and as such, is viewed as an enemy to be defeated. The junta seeks to intimidate and subjugate the population, thus frustrating the development of independent civil society while at the same time exploiting them for the military's own expansion and enrichment.

3.2 Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions - Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 5 January 2007, Htwee Maung, 30, died in hospital following his arrest the previous evening by Police Corporals Kyaw Myint and Soe Nain. The examining doctor noted that excessive force had been used against Htwee Maung and, according to a report by Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC); his family was warned not to report the matter or make any complaints regarding his death.[11]

On 2 February 2007, an SPDC army deserter was killed in a clash between a group of deserters and soldiers from LIB #537, from which they deserted in Rathidaung Township.[12]

On 29 March 2007, the NaSaKa tortured, gang raped, and killed Amena, 42, from Sindiphrang in Buthidaung Township. After forcibly entering her home they accused her son of having affiliations with Rohingya opposition groups and proceeded to assault her. The doctor refused to carry out a post-mortem on her body.[13]

On 4 April 2007, 33-year-old Abdu Rahim was shot and killed by NaSaKa (Border Security Force) soldiers in Buthidaung Township. He had been fishing when a patrol boat called out to him. He ran in fear and was shot down by personnel from Camp #20 of Taung Bazar under NaSaKa Area #9, commanded by Major Kyai Hline.[14]

On 18 May 2007, 28-year-old U Maung Thein Aung from Akyab Township died in Kauk Kouk labour camp, Mrauk U Township.[15]

On 21 May 2007, 15-year-old Mohammed Rafique from Pa Dinn village in Maungdaw Township was tortured to death by NaSaKa personnel for possession of a mobile phone.[16]

On 9 July 2007, Nabi Hussain from Bawli Bazaar village tract in Maungdaw Township was arrested and tortured by the SaRaPa (Military Intelligence). He was admitted to hospital the following day where he died. Hussain had been arrested for ferrying cattle between Burma and Bangladesh without informing the proper authorities, and in failing to do so, avoided paying the bribes and extortion that is typically demanded of cattle traders.[17]

On 2 October 2007, the body of an unidentified male was found on the banks of the Naff River. The NaSaKa sent the body to Rathidaung hospital for an autopsy but the cause of death remains unknown. The bodies of two unidentified monks had been found by villagers the previous week in Min Chaung Creek near Sittwe. Their causes of death also remain unknown as the bodies were taken away by the authorities.[18]

On 17 October 2007, the body of Ko Nyi Pu Lay was found decomposing in the Gwa River in Taungup Township. He had earlier fled his home on 1 October 2007 for fear of arrest and had been missing for four days. He was an NLD member and had been involved in the September pro-democracy protests. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The September 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement). Arakan NLD Joint-Secretary U Thain Hlaing later reported that although Ko Nyi Pu Lay's body was sent for an autopsy, the police report had stated that they found no significant injury to his body. His family were not informed of his death until they had filed a missing person's report. His wife was later interrogated and threatened by the police on 3 November 2007 who subsequently became too frightened to speak about her ordeal.[19]

On 20 October 2007, NaSaKa member Aung Kyaw Htwe was stabbed and killed by another NaSaKa member in Maungdaw Township. The assailant was detained at the NaSaKa Headquarters after Aung Kyaw Htwe's body was cremated on the 22 October 2007.[20]

At approximately 1:00 pm on 26 October 2007, 15-year-old Ziabul Haque from Padaga Ywathit village in Maungdaw Township was sodomised and strangled to death. He had been crossing a NaSaKa outpost in NaSaKa Area #4 when two NaSaKa personnel accosted and raped him before strangling him to prevent him from reporting the incident. Relatives of Ziabul Haque sent his body for an autopsy on 27 October 2007 which reported him to have been sodomised and strangled to death. Police inquiries about his death were made, although no further reports emerged as to the outcome of these.[21]

On 1 November 2007, 22-year-old Maulvi Yasmin, from Bassora village (a.k.a Tha Win Chaung) in Maungdaw Township, was shot and killed by the authorities while bathing in a stream. He and his brothers were on the run after killing two villagers and burning their homes in a land dispute. Despite being guilty of murder, Maulvi Yasmin had the right to a fair trial and should not have been killed extra-judicially.[22]

On 17 November 2007, Taslim Ara, 11, from Nazi Para village was abducted, raped and killed by a NaSaKa member in NaSaKa Area #1, Maungdaw Township. The accused was arrested by a NaSaKa captain and the girl's body was sent to an SPDC-run morgue for an autopsy.[23] Following this, the perpetrator, known only as Myint, was tortured by his NaSaKa colleagues, subsequently dying of his wounds on 25 November 2007.[24] A report from the *Narinjara News* reports the same incident, but gives the date as 20 November 2007 and the name of the girl as Tasafinar Begun.[25]

On 26 November 2007, Mohammed Sayed, 22, from Bakka Ghona village, Maung Thanu, 25, and an unidentified youth, both from Thaya Goon Rakhine village were shot and killed by NaSaKa personnel based in Bakka Ghona camp in Maungdaw Township as they were collecting firewood. Reports maintained that they believed them to have been illegally cutting teak trees, which had been prohibited in the area. No action was taken against the NaSaKa personnel responsible for the shootings.[26]

On 27 November 2007, an unidentified Muslim, illegally cutting teak in Maungdaw Township, was shot and killed by NaSaKa personnel from the Three-Mile outpost.[27] The Arakan Women's Association (AWA) reported that another villager, Maung Sein Nu, who was cutting wood alongside the first victim, was also shot at and subsequently died of his wounds on 28 November 2007.[28]

In November 2007, 17-year-old Johora Begum, from Maung Nama Alay Rwa village, reportedly died of a heart attack while being forcibly abducted and assaulted in her home in Maungdaw Township. Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) Chairman Zubair was accused of the crime by the victim's relatives. Johora's family reported the assault to the UNHCR, the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) Chairman, the District PDC Chairman and the NaSaKa Headquarters, but no action was taken against the suspect.[29]

Chin State

In February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #140 arrested seven civilians from Matupi Township for reportedly paying taxes to the Chin National Front (CNF), killing three of them. The bodies of the three victims were later found by local villagers. The victims were:

1. Mum Hte;
2. Khun Ling; and
3. Tin Cung.[30]

In April 2007, 25-year-old Hung Ling, VPDC chairperson for Cun Nam village in Mindat Township, 32-year-old Maung Khe, VPDC chairperson for Lung Phunu village in Rezua Township, and Ting Co, VPDC chairman for Sangseh village Rezua Township were all executed by SPDC army soldiers under allegations of supporting the CNF. The men were killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #104 and LIB #304, operating under Colonel San Aung, commanding officer of Tactical Operation Command (TOC) #2 based in Matupi.[31]

On 3 October 2007, 31-year-old Bawi Ceu from Hrangpi village in Thangtlang Township was shot and killed by SPDC police officers. He was shot while running away from the officers to avoid paying a penalty for failing to report his presence in Thangtlang Township. All visitors are required to report their presence to the local council office. After his death the police spread the rumour that he had been shot while attempting to buy alcohol for the Chin National Army (CNA; the armed wing of the CNF).[32]

Irrawaddy Division

On 11 January 2007, 20-year-old Myint Thein from Maubin, died while under interrogation by the police. His wife was later told by police that he had died of malaria, despite his body displaying clear evident signs of torture.[33]

On 11 January 2007, Maung Chan Kun, 20, was beaten to death by police while in detention in Pantanaw. Deputy Police Superintendent Soe Moe, who led the investigation, blamed his death on malaria; however, his family reported that they had been intimidated by the police into refraining from complaint, suggesting that he had died at the hands of the police officers.[34]

Kachin State

On 30 July 2007, 22-year-old Maran Seng Awng was beaten to death by Special Anti-Drug Squad police officers under Khin Zaw, Deputy Anti-Drug Squad Chief for Myitkina Township. According to the report, the assault took place in the home of a known drug dealer, though failed to mention what Maran Seng Aung was doing there or why the police beat him. His parents were refused access to his body to perform even the minimum funerary rites and were warned not to discuss the case with anyone. The police paid his parents 300,000 kyat in 'compensation' to encourage them to keep their silence.[35]

In September 2007, and as in other parts of the country, SPDC army soldiers raided a number of monasteries in Kachin State, in an attempt to quell the nationwide mass pro-democracy protests by removing the monastic community from the demonstrations through a series of mass arrests. Unconfirmed reports spoke of at least four monks being killed during these raids. On 25 September, the soldiers raided the Yuzana Kyaunghtai Monastery, and in doing so, severely beat the Deputy Abbot U Thillavantha about the head.

He, along with many of the other resident monks was taken into custody where the beatings continued. The following day, he was reported dead as a result of the injuries that he had sustained from the beatings, however, the pathologist was forced to declare the cause of death as a pre-existing heart condition.[36]

On 17 October 2007, it was reported that at least four monks had been killed in Kachin State during the crackdown on the anti-regime pro-democracy protests in September. According to reports, Major General Ohn Myint, commanding officer of the Northern Regional Command was responsible for overseeing the repression of protests in Kachin State.[37]

Karen State

On 2 January 2007, village headman Ti Reh from Phukra village in Northern Karen State was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #250 at their nearby army camp. According to reports, KNLA soldiers had recently ambushed the SPDC unit and his torture and murder was conducted as retaliation for this. SPDC army soldiers often lash out and attack the nearest village following any attacks that they come under from the KNLA, typically accusing the villagers of providing information to the resistance and thus being complicit in the attack. The soldiers also reportedly razed nine paddy storage barns to further make their point.[38]

On 3 January 2007, Karen villager Saw Po Hla was killed by SPDC army soldiers led by Htway Aye in Kyauk Tan village of Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District.[39]

On 19 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #75, led by Battalion Commander Thaung Sih, killed 47-year-old Saw Boh Sha from Yay Shan village in Toungoo District.[40]

On 19 January 2007, Saw Aah Loo, 46, a Karen villager from Toungoo District, was killed by SPDC army soldiers.[41]

On 19 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers killed 45-year-old Saw Kyaw Neh Win from Zee Pyu Gone village in Toungoo District.[42]

On 19 January 2007, Saw Maung Sha, 48, was killed by SPDC army soldiers in Toungoo District.[43]

On 19 January 2007, unidentified SPDC army soldiers shot and killed 15-year-old Saw Hta Kyah in Toungoo District.[44]

On 19 January 2007, Saw Hta Roo Roh, 30, from Toungoo District was killed by SPDC army soldiers.[45]

On 20 January 2007, 26-year-old Saw Taw Loo Koo from Tu Mu Der village, Toungoo District was killed by SPDC army soldiers.[46]

On 29 January 2007, Saw Taw Luku, 26, was shot and killed by the SPDC army troops near Hu Mu Der in Toungoo District. According to reports, the soldiers responsible were operating in a combined column comprised of soldiers from MOC #16 based at Klaw Me Der.[47]

On 21 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #590 shot and killed villagers Saw Tun Win Nay and Sheh Myint in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District.[48]

On 21 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #576 shot and killed Saw Echo Win Naing from Paw Pi Der village and Saw San Myint from Ktee Htau Loh village near the Shweygin River in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District.[49]

On 24 February 2007, 22-year-old Saw Moh Shu Htoo from Nyaunglebin District was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 as he was returning home from a nearby market where he was buying rice.[50]

Photograph of an unidentified convict porter who had been beaten to death by SPDC army soldiers from the unit that he had been attached to. This photo was taken on 17 January 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

According to a report released on 23 February 2007, three civilian buffalo traders from Dooplaya District were shot and killed by an SPDC army soldiers from IB #36 on 28 December 2006. The three victims were reportedly dressed in KNLA soldiers' uniforms before they were shot to mask the fact that they had knowingly killed civilians simply so that they could steal their money. The soldiers reportedly made off with 15 million kyat. The names and ages of the three victims were:

1. A Lupoe, 41, from Lo Shan village;
2. Neing Htaw Ko, 43, from Htee Hto Kaut village; and
3. Pah Pae, 34, from Mae K'wa village.[51]

On 26 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers opened fire on a group of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, killing 22-year-old Saw Ma Shar Htoo.[52]

On 1 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #589, led by Soe Aung, shot and killed a porter who had been badly injured when he had walked into a tripwire, detonating the landmine that it was attached to. It is common practice for frontline SPDC army units to either kill porters who are no longer able to carry their loads or to simply leave them where they fall to die. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines).[53]

On 8 March 2007, a thirty-something Karen Catholic priest was killed by crossfire during a clash between the KNU and the DKBA in Vallay village, Dooplaya District. Attention of his death was raised on 18 March 2007 in a demonstration staged by more than 600 Karen villagers from the area who protested against the ongoing conflict and human rights abuses by various different armed factions operating in the area.[54]

On 15 March 2007, Saw Say Nu from Ler Kay Doe village in Papun District was shot dead in a sniping attack by SPDC army troops from Dweh Loh SPDC army camp.[55]

On 21 March 2007, SPDC army troops from LIB #501 operating under MOC #1 in Lu Thaw Township of Papun District shot and killed three villagers near Th'Dah Der village. The three victims were travelling to the market in Th'Dah Der village to buy rice at the same time the SPDC army unit was advancing to attack it. The three men were all shot at point blank range where it would have been obvious that they were non-combatants. The names, ages and home villages of the victims were:

1. Saw Ta Ro Hsaw, 40, from Ku Day village;
2. Saw Pa Hta Lu, 47, from Tay Soe Der village; and
3. Saw Ta Yeh Gay, 40, from Thay Thu Der village.[56]

On 4 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers shot and killed Saw Wee Ti, 28, during an attack on Kheh Der village in Kyauk Kyi Township of Nyaunglebin District.[57]

On 5 April 2007, Saw Ah Po, 29, from Yay Shan village in Toungoo District, lost his two-year-old daughter when SPDC army soldiers from IB #75 fired *"heavy weapons"* – most likely mortar fire – into their village without warning. He also was wounded in the attack.[58]

On 5 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers killed 19-year-old Saw Eh Doh from Shan See Bo village in Toungoo District.[59]

On 9 April 2007, Saw Pa Wee, 30, from Kheh Der village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #541 operating under MOC #9.[60]

On 10 April 2007, 82-year-old Saw Thar Char from Mi Pa Ler village in T'Nay Hsah Township of Pa'an District was shot and killed by DKBA soldiers.[61]

On 15 April 2007, 18-year-old Saw Bleh Kloh Htoo was arrested and executed by a column of SPDC army soldiers comprised of soldiers from LIB #371 and LIB #372, operating under MOC #5 near the Yaw Tho Ber IDP site in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District. Prior to beating him to death, the soldiers had tortured him by putting out his eyes and slicing his mouth open with a knife.[62]

On 15 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers tortured and executed 24-year-old Saw Da Lalu. According to reports, he was killed by the same column of SPDC army soldiers comprised of soldiers from LIB #371 and LIB #372 who had tortured and killed Saw Bleh Koh Htoo described above.[63]

On 15 April 2007, Saw Bpya Klor Mu, 19, was executed by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #371 and LIB #372.[64]

On 18 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #346 killed 28-year-old Saw Dtay Dtay from Peh Kaw Der village, Toungoo District.[65]

On 27 April 2007, 17-year-old Saw Aye Say Mu from the Ta Lay Klo area of Papun District was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from LID #88 based at Ta Maw Kyo.[66]

On 28 April 2007, an SPDC army column comprised of soldiers from LIBs #103, #301, and #416, along with IB #13 operating under the MOC #1 killed 61-year-old Saw Aw Hkar from Htee Bwee Khee village in Papun District during a sustained offensive to depopulate the region.[67]

In April 2007, DKBA soldiers tortured and beat Saw Tha Chin before shooting him in Gaw Khaw Law Kho village in Dooplaya District. This attack reportedly took place in the context of a larger series of attacks on suspected KNU locations in the region that had begun on 30 March 2007. The photograph shown below displays Saw Tha Chin's body as it was found under his house. See the photograph below.[68]

The body of Saw Tha Chin who had been beaten, tortured and then killed by DKBA soldiers in Dooplaya District of Karen State. *[Photo: FBR]*

Beginning on 11 May 2007, SPDC army troops renewed attacks on numerous civilian villages in the Ler Wah area of Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, displacing an estimated further 540 persons. According to reports, an unnamed a 61-year-old man was shot and killed during similar attacks in April.[69]

On 1 May 2007, 35-year-old Saw Htoo Ray (a.k.a Saw Tu Tu) from Klaw Mee Der village in Toungoo District was shot and killed while in his betelnut plantation near Pwee Kee village by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #542 under Battalion Commander Thaung Htain Soe. This incident was also reported by the KNU, who agreed with all details, but maintained that the soldiers hailed from LIB #539 Column #1. Saw Kya Soe, 51, Saw Ka Lay, 50, and Saw Kin Rin, 43, were also arrested. Saw Kya Soe and Saw Ka Lay were later reported as having been executed on 4 May 2007, although no further reports have emerged as to the fate of Saw Kin Rin.[70]

On 1 May 2007, Saw Kay Kay, 24, from Beh Lah Lay Koh village in Toungoo District was killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #542 and LIB# 544, led by Battalion Commander Thaung Htaik Soe and Battalion, Commander Hla Htay respectively.[71]

On 9 May 2007, DKBA and SPDC army soldiers attacked KNLA soldiers of KNLA Battalion #103 in Dooplaya District, killing two villagers and injuring a further three in nearby Maw Hto Lay village.[72]

On 11 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #542 (Thaung Htain Soe commanding) and #544 (Hla Htay commanding) attacked Oo Per village in Toungoo District, killing a number of villagers who lived there. The names and ages of those confirmed killed are shown below:

1. Saw Hta Nay Nah, 29;
2. Saw Koo May, 40; and
3. Saw Hta Kwah, 48.[73]

On 11 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers mounted an assault on Wa Soe village, Toungoo District, killing Saw Der Hler Moh and 27-year-old Saw Blu Peh.[74]

On 12 May 2007, an SPDC army column comprised of soldiers from LIB #542 (Thaung Htain Soe commanding) and #544 (Hla Htay commanding) continued their attacks on villages throughout eastern Toungoo District, killing a number of villagers. Other attacks by this column are listed above and below. During their attacks on this day, 34-year-old Saw Hta Wah from Beh Kah Lay Koh village and 40-year-old Saw Pu Doh were confirmed killed.[75]

On 12 May 2007, the following civilian villagers from Toungoo District were killed by SPDC army soldiers. Though not stated in the original report, it is quite likely that the following four villagers were killed by an SPDC army column comprised of soldiers from LIB #542 (Thaung Htain Soe commanding) and #544 (Hla Htay commanding) who were active in the region at the time and who were responsible for several other deaths that same day. (See other incidents listed above and below for details).

1. Saw Maw Pu, 60;
2. Saw Ka Ma Taw, 55;
3. Saw Mee Maw, 34; and
4. Saw Ah Day, 28.[76]

On 12 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating under LIB #542 and LIB #544 captured an unidentified 28-year-old woman from Ber Ka Lay Ko village in Toungoo District before raping and murdering her.[77]

On 13 May 2007, 18-year-old Saw Ra Say was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers in Yaw Ki village, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District.[78]

On 15 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #542 led by Battalion Commander Thaung Htain Soe shot and killed three Karen villagers near Pwee Kee village in Toungoo District. Upon stumbling on the three villagers as they were resting in a field hut, the soldiers opened fire, killing Saw Hsa Min, 55, and Saw Moo Di, 36. Saw Kwah Kwah, 20, who was also resting in the hut, was taken by the soldiers back to the camp. Along the way, the unit was ambushed by a KNLA patrol to which the soldiers responded by killing Saw Kwah Kwah.[79]

On 17 May 2007, 27-year-old Naw Bu Ru was killed by SPDC army soldiers while cutting grass in her field in the Pana Eh Per Ko area of Papun District. The soldiers dumped her body in her field hut and burned it along with the hut.[80]

In May 2007, SPDC army soldiers shot and killed 19-year-old Naw Ku Lue before burning her body in her field hut in Papun District. Those responsible for the shooting were believed to have been operating under either LID #88 or MOC #1, both of whom were operating in the area at the time.[81]

On 25 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #488 and LIB #78 operating under LID #88, shot and killed three Karen villagers, including a seven-year-old boy, in Si Daw Koh village, Toungoo District. Then names and ages of the victims were:

1. Saw Ray Raih, 18;
2. Saw Law Kwauh, 36; and his son,
3. Saw Tar Noo Htoo, 7.[82]

On 25 May 2007, 25-year-old Saw Koh Koh from Mwee Loh village in Toungoo District was killed by SPDC army soldiers operating under MOC #9.[83]

On 25 May 2007, Saw Mah Heh, 38, from Shan See Bo village, Toungoo District was killed by SPDC army soldiers. Though not stated in the original report, it is quite likely that Saw Mah Heh was shot by SPDC army soldiers from MOC #9 who were operating in the area at the time and who were reported as having killed other villagers from the region that same day.[84]

On 23 June 2007, SPDC army soldiers killed an entire family of five in Htee K'Bler village. Among those killed were four-year-old Kyaw Eh Wah and his brother 13-year-old Saw Pa Heh Soe. The children's 65-year-old grandmother, Naw Pler Poe, was also killed in the attack.[85]

In June 2007, two young women whose names were not released, aged 18 and 22 from Takehder village in Luthaw Township, Papun District, were captured by SPDC army soldiers while gathering vegetables. Before being killed, both women were raped and mutilated by having their breasts and ears cut off.[86]

On 2 July 2007, and according to the DKBA, two civilians, one of whom was only ten years old, were killed by stray bullets during a clash between DKBA and KNLA soldiers in Myanyanigone village, Dooplaya District. According to a statement made by the DKBA, the *"two villagers were killed when the KNU fired rounds into a grocery [store]"*. Though the KNU did not deny that there were civilian casualties, they claimed that the fighting had produced only one victim, however, failed to state if it was the adult or the child who had been killed.[87]

On 5 July 2007, soldiers from LIB #30, based at the Htee Loh SPDC army camp in Toungoo District fired on a group of IDPs in the Mu Khi Pau Hga Loe area as they were returning from the market with food for their families. Saw Po Tay, 60, from Mwee Loh village was killed in the shooting.[88]

On 7 July 2007, four villagers from Blut Doh village were stopped by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 and LIB #388 who demanded to be shown the way to Wah Do Ko village in Nyaunglebin District. Three of the villagers refused the order and were summarily executed by the soldiers. The sole surviving villager accompanied the soldiers as a guide and was ordered to walk ahead of the column as a human minesweeper. Five days later, one of the soldiers was killed by a landmine, and in the confusion created by the blast the villager was able to escape. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines). The names of the three villagers who were killed were:

1. Saw Htoo Htoo;
2. Saw Mya Doh Moo; and
3. Saw Po Eh Do.[89]

It was reported on 12 July 2007 that 60-year-old Saw Pho Thee from Kyauk Sin Taung was shot and killed as SPDC army soldiers from LIB #30 were patrolling through Tantabin Township of Toungoo District in search of villagers to capture and use as forced porters.[90]

On 19 July 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #88 shot and killed three villagers in Yaw Ni See Zu Ko village in the Si Kheh Der area of Toungoo District. The victims' names were:

1. Saw Leh Nay Po, 27;
2. Saw De Ku Lu, 25; and
3. Saw Wa Wa, 35.[91]

On 25 July 2007, LIB #589 troops shot and killed Saw Thakler, 27, as he was tending his durian crop near Ma La Daw village in Nyaunglebin District. The same report that had reported this incident had also stated that this same unit had also killed an unnamed porter on the same day.[92]

On 27 July 207, Karen villager, Saw Henry, 29, from Htee Koh village in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District was shot and killed by SPDC army troops operating under MOC #9 as he was returning to his village with rice for his family. The photograph shown below displays Saw Henry's body being mourned over by his wife and daughter.[93]

The body of 29-year-old Saw Henry, who was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from MOC #9 on 27 July 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

On 27 August 2007, Saw Ko Tee Nor, 38, was shot and killed during an intensive SPDC army offensive against civilian villages, spearheaded by troops from LID #88 and MOC #1 in the Ler Mu Plaw and Yeh Mu Plaw areas of Papun District. According to the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) who reported the shooting, SPDC army soldiers had killed over 370 men, women, and children in northern Karen State since February 2006 when they had intensified their attacks in their region.[94]

On 20 September 2007, 31-year-old Saw Na Htoo from Kheh Der village in Toungoo District was killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #375.[95]

In September 2007, Colonel Kyi Min, Commanding Officer of KNLA Battalion #18 was killed in an ambush after returning from a discussion with SPDC army officers at their army camp. The SPDC denied responsibility for the ambush and instead blamed the attack on the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who the SPDC ironically often accuse of conspiring with the KNU and a number of other opposition militias.[96]

On 6 November 2007, SPDC army troops from Military Operations Command (MOC) #1 and Light Infantry Division (LID) #88 renewed their attacks on the Yeh Mu Plaw area of Papun District, killing two villagers.[97]

On 15 November 2007, 28-year-old Saw Ler Ghay, from Ler Wah village in Kyauk Kyi Township of Nyaunglebin District was shot and killed by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219.[98]

On 19 November 2007, 18-year-old Saw Bo Wah from Ta Baw Ko Der village in Papun District was shot and killed by SPDC army troops.[99]

On 19 November 2007, Naw Nya Htoo from Ler Wah village of Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District was shot and killed by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219. She was killed by the same column of soldiers as Saw Ler Ghay described above.[100]

On 1 December 2007, Saw Blu Nay Moo, 23, was shot and killed by SPDC army troops in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District.[101]

On 16 December 2007, five DKBA soldiers from DKBA Battalion #901 were reported to have been shot dead by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #203 after they refused to attack an unnamed KNLA base.[102]

Karenni State

On 22 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #250 killed the village headman of Ktu Hkya Ku village.[103]

On 2 April 2007, 34-year-old Nan Nu was shot in the stomach by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #509. The incident, which took place in Suphelaw village, Shadaw Township, left Nan Nu in a critical condition in Loikaw hospital 2 months later on 12 June 2007 when the report was made. Since that time, however, no further information as to her fate emerged. Her husband, who reported the incident to a local organization, was reported to have said that *"No recompense was made by the SPDC during [her] treatment in the hospital. [T]he wound had not healed yet and [the] treatment cost has already climbed to three to four hundred thousand [kyat], but she is still in serious condition"*.[104]

An unidentified Karen villager, killed by SPDC army troops in Karen State during 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

On 10 April 2007, Saw Lee Reh Kyaw, an FBR team member, was shot in the leg and captured by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #427 while attempting to aid Karenni villagers. He was tortured under interrogation by the SPDC before being executed two days later.[105]

On 22 July 2007, a joint column of LIB #427 and Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) soldiers shot and killed a Karenni villager from Pruso Township under allegations that he had contact with the Karenni resistance movement. Nye Reh Po Htya, 42, was apprehended in his home in Htee Byah Nye village and beaten by the soldiers. The village and village tract chairpersons tried to petition the soldiers for his release, who attempted to plead his innocence, stating that he was just a villager and had no affiliations

with the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). All such attempts, however, failed and he was executed in the village cemetery later that same day. He is survived by his wife and four children.[106]

Mandalay Division

On 27 July 2007, U Ohn Kyaing, 58, from Pan-aing village died while being transferred to prison as a result of the injuries he sustained during an earlier interrogation at Meiktila Police Station #1. It was reported that he was denied medical attention, despite the serious injuries he suffered.[107]

On 29 July 2007, 36-year-old Ko Kyaw Htay died in custody while detained at Meiktila Police Station #1 after being tortured during his interrogation.[108]

In September 2007, 42-year-old NLD member, Win Shwe, died under interrogation at a police interrogation centre in Palate, Kyaukpadaung Township. He had been arrested along with four other activists for joining the mass pro-democracy anti-SPDC protests on 26 September 2007. The authorities informed his family about his death on 9 October 2007, although the actual date of his death remains unknown. His family was denied the right to see his body, which was reported to have already been cremated.[109]

Mon State

On 2 April 2007, it was reported that 50-year-old Nai Pha Dort from Khaw-Zar sub-Township in Ye Township was believed to have been executed after being arrested and tortured in December 2006. His family was not permitted to visit him while in detention and have since been told by SPDC army officers to stop sending food for him.[110]

On 26 June 2007, Nai Maw, 35, from Bayoun-ngae village in Ye Township was killed by SPDC army soldiers from MOC #19 following his arrest for allegedly selling pork to *"Mon insurgents"*, although it is unclear which group they were referring to.[111]

Pegu Division

On 9 February 2007, 18-year-old Maung Lin Lin Naing died in custody, according to a report by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). He had been arrested the day before in Phadoe, Pegu (Bago) Division after being accused of theft by a storekeeper. He was later found hanging in his cell and his family were afterwards warned not to complain about his death.[112]

On 19 July 2007, Ko Htun Min Soe, a civilian motorcycle taxi driver was shot after escorting a soldier to Min Hla Sake village near Shwegyin in Eastern Pegu (Bago) Division. Witnesses reported that the soldier had shot Ko Htun Min Soe so that he could rob him. The soldier was reportedly from LIB #11, and all attempts to bring him to justice were reportedly frustrated by the battalion commander.[113]

Rangoon Division

On 18 March 2007, Ko Naing Oo, 36, was beaten to death by council officials following a dispute with his in-laws, although it remains unclear exactly which council the report was referring to. The post-mortem report was not released to the family and Naing Oo's father's job was threatened following the incident. A report in a local news journal stated that he had *"died from natural causes while 'sleeping soundly' at the council office where he had been brought for being drunk and disorderly".* The report *"underlined that nobody [was] responsible for his death other than himself"*.[114]

In September 2007, public dissatisfaction with the continued rule of the SPDC manifested itself in the largest outward display of free speech in two decades as hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children from all walks of life took to the streets in protest in what quickly became known as the "Saffron Revolution", so named for the thousands of monks who joined and lead the protests. More than 227 separate demonstrations were staged in 66 locations across Burma during August and September, some of which had amassed crowds of up to a hundred thousand protestors. The largest and best documented protests were those that were staged in Rangoon. The following incidents are all of those who were killed by the SPDC and their agents for their part in the protests. The SPDC maintains that only 15 persons were killed during the protests, while the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro has stated that evidence has emerged that more than double this number died in Rangoon alone. As many as 84 persons remained unaccounted for at the end of January 2008, many of whom who were feared to have also been killed. This number represents only those who could be identified and as such this figure should be considered conservative. With protests staged in no fewer than 66 towns and cities across the country, many of which lack reliable information, coupled with the systematic removal of the dead and wounded from the site of each crackdown, and the disposal of the bodies during secret night time cremations, the number of fatalities may well be as high as a hundred. Sadly, though, just as had happened following the 1988 protests, we may never know the true human toll. (For more information on the protests, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

On 26 September 2007, the SPDC confirmed the death of a 30-year-old man who they claimed was accidentally killed when hit by a ricocheting bullet fired by soldiers from LID #77 who were attempting to put the protests down. However, the SPDC's explanation was almost universally rejected.[115]

At approximately 11:45 am on 26 September 2007, a lone monk approached the violent crackdown on protestors outside Shwedagon Pagoda along Old Yae Tar Shae Road when he was set upon by security forces and beaten to death. Eyewitnesses to the scene testified to HRDU that three members of the riot police attacked the monk, beating him about the legs with their batons until he fell to the ground. He attempted to stand, using the Buddhist flag that he was carrying as a support, but the soldiers *"bashed the monk on his head and he collapsed onto his back. He vomited blood and died after the policeman … hit him hard on his neck with a baton. They dumped his body in a truck like a piece of trash".*[116]

On 26 September 2007, an unidentified monk, believed to be in his forties, was beaten to death by riot police during protests at Kyethun Pagoda in Rangoon at approximately 11:30 am. An eyewitness described the scene to HRDU:

> *"The riot police fired tear gas into the compound, and moved towards the crowd in formation. They heavily beat everyone that they caught. I saw many monks with bloody heads running away. One monk continued to sit in his spot. I think he was in his forties. He was facing Shwedagon [Pagoda] and praying, with the Buddhist flag held up in one hand. He was heavily beaten twice on his head. After that, he did not move, he just lay on the ground lifeless. About ten minutes later, they [security forces] removed his robes and redressed him in a t-shirt and longyi [sarong]. Two members of the riot police then picked up his body; one took the legs and the other the arms and they threw him onto their truck".*[117]

According to the AFP news agency, three unnamed monks were killed during demonstrations in the vicinity of Shwedagon Pagoda on 26 September 2007. According to the report, SPDC officials had confirmed the deaths, stating that two were beaten to death while the third was shot by an SPDC army soldier.[118]

On 26 September 2007, an eyewitness to the bloody crackdown on protestors at Thakin Mya Park in Rangoon told HRDU of how he had watched as an unidentified 20-year-old man who had also joined the protest was shot in the back by SPDC army soldiers. Though he was unable to state conclusively if the man had been killed, he did say that *"he fell down covered in blood".*[119]

Late in the evening of 26 September 2007, SPDC army units raided Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon. Dozens of shots were fired and an estimated 100 persons were arrested, the majority of whom were resident monks, were arrested and beaten by security forces. According to reports, one of the monks, U Sandima, died the following morning as a result of the injuries that he had sustained during the raid. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Maung Kyaw Kyaw, a 33-year-old layperson who got caught up in the raids, was also killed.[120]

On 27 September 2007, an eyewitness reported seeing at least five protestors shot by security forces in South Okkalapa Township, four of which he knew to be dead. Four of the victims were men, although he believed the fifth to only have been around 14 years old. Three of the men had been shot in the head, leaving *"big holes in the back of their heads"*, while the fourth man had been shot in the hip and it was unclear if he had been killed or not. The fifth victim, a high school student of around 14 years of age, was shot in the chest. It is quite possible that some of these victims are in fact the same individuals as those identified by Human Rights Watch (see those listed below), although without knowing there names and ages it is extremely difficult to say so conclusively.[121]

On 27 September 2007, and according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), at least eight persons were confirmed as having been killed by security forces during protests in South Okkalapa Township alone. The names and ages of those identified were:

1. Myo Min Htun, 22, shot in the head;
2. Aung San Oo, 18, shot in the head;
3. Yan Lynn Aung, 17, shot in the head;
4. Tun Tun Lwin, 31, severely beaten and later died in custody;
5. Ko Soe Than, 42, shot in the chest;
6. Zyar Naing, 16, shot in the chest;
7. Naing Myo Aung, 20; and
8. Than Aung, 43, beaten to death as he was trying to pick up his children from school.[122]

On 27 September 2007, 50-year-old Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai was shot and killed by an SPDC army soldier during protests in the vicinity of Sule Pagoda. Photographic and video footage taken at the time clearly shows Nagai being shot in the back from point blank range. The soldier then stood over his body and fired again as he lay helpless on the ground. It appears as though he was deliberately targeted because he was a member of the international media in a vain attempt to suppress the flow of information. His body was later returned to Japan, although his camera, which he had been carrying at the time, was not.[123]

Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai shot dead at point blank range by an SPDC army soldier during protests near Sule Pagoda in Rangoon, on 27 September 2007. *[Photo: Reuters]*

On 27 September 2007, one eyewitness reported seeing a young girl of around 15 years of age being severely beaten by *Swan Arr Shin* members: "*She was struck heavily three times by different soldiers [with bamboo staves], and was punched by Swan Arr Shin members. I saw her fall to the ground. She lay there completely still. Lots of blood was pouring from her head and body. I am sure she was dead".*[124]

On 27 September 2007, during protests outside Sule Pagoda, eyewitnesses have reported that they saw a number of people lying motionless on the street after security forces had opened fire into the crowd with live ammunition: *"When I looked back I saw two boys and one girl lying still on the ground. I do not know if they were alive or dead".*[125]

On 27 September 2007, another violent crackdown on protestors took place at the Pansodan Road Bridge near the Traders Hotel in Rangoon. Reports have emerged that a student leading the group and carrying a fighting peacock flag (a symbol of the Burmese democracy movement) was shot in the head at approximately 2:00 pm. The victim was identified as Ko Thet Naing, an NLD supporter from an unspecified location in Upper Burma, who had travelled to Rangoon specifically to participate in the protests. Following the shooting, SPDC army soldiers removed his body from the scene. Another eyewitness reported seeing a young unidentified woman shot during the same crackdown. According to the testimony, *"[t]he woman … fell to the ground after being shot and lay motionless. The eyewitness was unsure of whether she was unconscious or dead"*.[126]

On 27 September 2007, quite a violent crackdown took place just outside Tamwe Township State High School No.3. Several eyewitnesses have reported numerous deaths to have taken place at this time: *"A lot of people died on the spot. When we were hiding, the dead bodies and injured people were dragged by their legs and thrown onto the trucks and driven away".* Similarly, another eyewitness testified that, *"a lot of people died as a result of these shootings. A lot of people tried to climb the walls at the side of the road, but they were very high".* Some of those who tried to escape the carnage by climbing over the high walls

surrounding the school were also shot. Yet another witness to the massacre told HRDU that, *"Many people climbed over the wall to hide in the buildings [in the school]. … People were climbing the wall to escape. I watched a young man get shot in the back. He did not move or make any sound after he fell. He was bleeding a lot".* During the shootings, Maung Tun Lynn Kyaw, a student from the high school was shot in the head and killed in front of his mother, while 16-year-old Maung Thet Paing Soe, another student at the school, was also shot in the head at close range, killing him instantly.[127]

On 27 September 2007, at Tamwe Township State High School No.3 in Rangoon, it has been reported that at least two pro-democracy protestors were run over and killed when an SPDC army truck drove directly into a crowd of protestors.[128]

On 27 September 2007, unidentified security forces shot and wounded Tayok Kyi ('Big Chinese') during protests outside Tamwe Township State High School No.3 in Rangoon. He was carried home by his friends where he later died as a result of his injuries. The eyewitness who reported this also told HRDU that he saw at least five or six others die at the site of the crackdown outside Tamwe Township State High School No.3.[129]

On 27 September 2007, SPDC army soldiers were reported to have even killed those who had tried to escape the violence of the crackdown at Tamwe Township State High School No.3: *"I saw a soldier shoot a person hiding in the drain. The soldier just stood above the drain, and fired down into it".* The same witness also testified to seeing soldiers shoot one protestor who had surrendered to them:

> *"One man was hiding inside a small round water tank. The soldiers could find him easily, because he was shivering so much that the tank made a rhythmic noise. They told him to climb out, and told him that if he didn't they would shoot. He didn't dare to go out. 'Bang!' The soldier shot him and the bullet went through the tank. No sound came out of the tank after that"*.[130]

On 27 September 2007, 48-year-old U Than Aung was badly wounded in the protests, and though despite the severity of his injuries, he was denied medical attention. He subsequently died in detention at the GTI facility.[131]

On 27 September 2007, 16-year-old Maung Thet Paing Soe was shot and killed while participating in the protests. He was an NLD Youth member. His family was prohibited from performing the traditional funerary rites over his body, and were even refused permission to view a copy of his death certificate.[132] Family members had to bribe the Chairman of the Dawbon Township Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), U Win Naing Oo, 8,000 kyat for permission to see his body. According to reports, alongside Maung Thet Paing Soe were 11 other bodies of citizens killed that day.[133] An Amnesty International (AI) report on the suppression reported the names of another of those killed as Maung Tun Lynn Kyaw, another student at Tamwe Township State High School No. 3.[134]

On 27 September 2007, two young unidentified men were taken to the Rangoon City Hall following their arrest where they were beaten to death by a civil official. According to the report, the two young had already been severely beaten and were covered in blood even as they arrived at the City Hall. *"Ko Kyaw Thein, a staff member with the Budget Department, took a bamboo stick from the police. … He beat them again so that the blood came out from those boys' mouths. Both of them died on the scene"*.[135]

In September 2007 security officials killed 52-year-old U Hla Myint during the anti-regime protests despite the fact that he was not involved. According to reports, he was killed as he was attempting to collect his son from the State Middle School No.4.[136]

On 28 September 2007, two more young unidentified men were beaten to death at Rangoon City Hall. They had been arrested by SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #66 who had also reportedly robbed them of all of their valuables after they died.[137]

On 28 September 2007, three protestors were reported to have been shot and killed at the corner of Anawratha and Pansodan Roads in Rangoon at 2:00 pm.[138]

On 28 September 2007, Nay Lin Tun, 28, from South Okkalapa Township was reportedly killed during protests in Rangoon. No further information regarding his death has been made available.[139]

On 28 September 2007, Ko Htun Htun Linn, from South Okkalapa Township and Maung Kyaw Zeya Naing, a high school student, were killed during protests in Rangoon as SPDC security personnel fired their weapons into crowds and beat protesters. The Ministry of Home Affairs organised the funerals, limiting the number of family members allowed to attend and, as with many others who were killed, refused the families their right to conduct traditional ceremonies.[140]

On 28 September 2007, Corporal Aung Kyaw Soe from Transport Battalion #1 killed two schoolgirls when he ran over them with the Toyota truck he was driving. The two schoolgirl's names were Ma Phyu Thant Ko and Ma Aye Amm. Their families were assured that the case would be dealt with fairly by the Chairperson of the District Peace and Development Council (DPDC) while UN Special Representative to the Secretary General, Ibrahim Gambari was in the country, however, on Gambari's departure the family was informed that no action would be taken and were threatened against filing any further complaints.[141]

On 29 September 2007, U Toke Lone Gyi (a.k.a U Han Tint Lin) from Shwe Pyi Thar Township, was arrested during protests near Sule Pagoda and later died in detention as a result of the heavy beatings that he received in custody.[142]

On 29 September 2007, 40-year-old Pho Zaw was reportedly killed in the crackdown on protests on the streets of Rangoon.[143]

On 29 September 2007, 18-year-old Sunny (a.k.a. Kala Malay) was reported as having been killed in the crackdown on protests on the streets of Rangoon. No further information regarding his death has been made available.[144]

On the evening of 29 September 2007, SPDC army forces raided numerous monasteries in Thaketa Township, Rangoon, reportedly resulting in approximately 100 monks being arrested. One unnamed layperson was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers while standing guard to warn and protect the monks at Zaetawon Monastery. According to an eyewitness interviewed by HRDU, the soldiers had silently approached the monastery compound via Pazundaung Creek which ran behind the monastery. Upon raising the alarm, the soldiers shot and killed the man for doing so. His body was taken away by the soldiers as they left. Other reports maintained that at least three monks were also killed during the monastery raids in Thaketa Township.[145]

On 30 September 2007, Than Aung, 48, died of injuries received during detention at an interrogation centre in Rangoon following his arrest on 27 September 2007 for his involvement in the protests.[146]

During the mass protests in September, the regime established a number of temporary detention facilities around Rangoon where they could imprison and process those they arrested on the streets (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced

or Involuntary Detention). Arrests quickly climbed into the thousands and existing facilities were soon swamped. One such facility was set up at the Government Technology Institute (GTI). A number of persons who had been detained at the GTI later reported the brutality they had endured and witnessed. Three separate detainees released from the GTI on 5 October 2007 had all reported witnessing the deaths of a number of fellow detainees. One civilian arrested for his part in the protests reported seeing over a dozen people die in detention due to lack of medical care: *"I could do nothing for a young novice who was dying beside me. We asked for help from the security guards, but they didn't do anything until they came to take away his dead body".* A monk released that same day also reported witnessing 14 people die in detention, eight of whom were fellow monks while one was a young boy who had died on 27 September 2007. He attributed all of these deaths to the deplorable conditions in detention. Yet another detainee maintained that he had seen three people die in the GTI facility.[147]

Two student activists shot dead by SPDC army soldiers during protests in Rangoon on 27 September 2007. *[Photo: Reuters]*

On 30 September 2007, 42-year-old Aung Kyaw Oo died while detained at the GTI detention facility in Rangoon.[148]

On 30 September 2007, 30-year-old That Naing Oo (aka) Naing Oo died in custody while being interned at the Kyaikkasan interrogation centre in Rangoon.[149]

On 7 October 2007, in a sick twist of irony, 29-year-old Special Anti-Drug Squad police officer Sergeant Hkangda La Tawng died of a methamphetamine overdose after eating food reported to have been prepared by a group referred to only as *"the authorities"*. He was in

Rangoon at the time, supporting the military in the suppression of the September popular protests. It is believed that the food had been spiked with the drug, although the report offered no theories as to why.[150]

On 9 October 2007, two Rangoon University zoology students were reported to have been killed during detention at the Kyaikkasan interrogation centre. According to reports, they were drowned while under interrogation regarding their involvement in the September protests.[151]

On 24 October 2007, U Soe Myint from Taikkyi Township in Rangoon died in detention from the injuries that he had sustained during the September protests. He had been arrested for his involvement in the demonstrations and sentenced to Thayet Prison where he had died in the infirmary.[152]

On 3 November 2007, NLD member Ko Ko Win, 22, died of head injuries a month after being beaten by security personnel during protests on 27 September 2007. Lawyer and NLD spokesperson Nyan Win called on the police to open files on Ko Ko Win and other demonstrators killed or missing during the protests, though little action has been taken.[153]

Shan State

On 14 February 2007, SPDC army troops from LIB #518 shot and killed a villager from Mai Hai village in Mong Nai Township. The man, who was mentally handicapped, and known locally as 'mad man Wan Na', ran on seeing the troops who responded by shooting him in the chest.[154]

In March 2007, Tao Jaw, a middle-aged woman from Southern Shan State, lost her husband in an attack by an unidentified SPDC army unit, who also later killed her father.[155]

On 9 April 2007, Nan Ti Ya, 35, from Kunhing Township, and Naan In Keo, 27, from Kengtung Township, were shot and killed in Tachilek Township by SPDC army troops from LIB #526 while attempting to cross the border into Thailand.[156]

On 30 April 2007, Zaai Thun, 30, from Nawng Ung village in Mong Kung Township, was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #259. Though the SPDC army soldiers denied any responsibility for his death, one of the officers attended Zaai Thun's funeral and paid his fellow villagers 15,000 kyat in compensation, urging them to cease any discussion of his death.[157]

In the beginning of August 2007, 38-year-old Ko Maung Myint died in detention in Muse after being arrested for attempting to cross the border into China. His wife reported seeing significant bruising and injuries on his body at the hospital on 4 August 2007. The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), who reported this case, maintained that:

> *"The increasingly frequent accounts of bloody assaults by the police and other local security forces in Burma speak to the fearlessness with which these personnel operate. Although the military regime pretends to invite complaints against state officers, in reality there are no avenues through they can be entertained properly – least of all where they involve allegations of murder – as all parts of the state apparatus are compromised and controlled".* [158]

On 18 April 2007, 38-year-old Naang Gam from Waeng Kao village, Mong Nai Township was gang raped and killed by five SPDC soldiers from #3 Regional Training School. Naang Gam's naked body displayed signs strongly suggestive of her having been violently raped by several persons: *"Her neck was badly bruised and her blouse was lying close to her mouth. … She appeared to have been gagged and strangled to death"*.

Although they knew that Naang Gam had been raped and killed, her husband and two children, along with other local villagers chose not to seek redress or take the issue any further, for fear of further abuses.[159]

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 4

LANDMINES

"The Burma Army is making extensive use of landmines in villages, homes and trails in order to make the area unlivable for the population."

- A Campaign for Brutality, FBR, May 2007

4.1 Introduction

Antipersonnel landmines continued to be deployed in significant numbers in Burma during 2007, despite a growing international consensus that the use of landmines is unacceptable and that their use should be unconditionally ceased. As of mid-August 2007, 155 countries, or 80 percent of the world's nations were State Parties to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (also known as and henceforth referred to as the 'Mine Ban Treaty'), leaving only 40 countries outside the treaty.[1] Such widespread support of the Mine Ban Treaty recognises that landmines often kill indiscriminately, and in doing so, pose an unacceptable level of risk to civilian and non-combatant populations. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the *"Mine Ban Treaty has made the new use of antipersonnel mines, especially by governments, a rare phenomenon"*. However, the ICBL concedes that Burma is one of only two countries (along with Russia) which represents the exception to the *"near-universal stigmatization of the use of antipersonnel mines"*, and that the most extensive deployment of antipersonnel landmines by *"government forces"* during 2007 occurred in Burma.[2] A report released in September 2007 speculated that as many as two million landmines were buried in Burma, with the vast majority of these deployed in the ethnic minority territories bordering neighbouring countries.[3]

Landmines often remain a threat long after hostilities have come to an end or moved out of the area, inflicting injuries even in situations that outwardly appear peaceful. The continued use of these devices constitutes a violation of several key tenets of international law, and a lack of respect for the human rights obligations incumbent on all parties in the Burmese armed conflict.

The armed forces of Burma's current ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), are responsible for the vast majority of landmines deployed throughout the country. Patterns discerned from the deployment of landmines by SPDC armed forces strongly suggest that, at the very least, there is a failure on the part of the State to ensure that care is taken to prevent or even minimise any harm coming to civilians. Indeed, it seems apparent that the use of landmines in Burma by the SPDC and their allies is typically carried out in a manner that strongly suggests that civilian populations are the primary targets of deployed mines.

Landmines are frequently deployed in areas where a high risk of civilian contact exists, such as along trails and paths, in and around civilian villages and in their fields and plantations. Compounding the problem is that mined areas are rarely signposted, causing disproportionate and indiscriminate damage to the civilian population in these areas.

Landmines are frequently deployed within villages and fields, often to force the villagers out of the area as well as to intimidate those villagers who have fled from returning. The deliberate targeting of civilians in such a way violates several human rights obligations long established as customary international law. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are particularly vulnerable to landmines in that they must regularly move from place to place and in doing so increase the probability of stepping on a hidden mine. SPDC army units have heavily mined border areas, targeting the thousands of IDPs hiding in the forests as well as those seeking to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees. The ICBL reported that mine use during 2007 occurred throughout eastern Burma in Karen, Karenni (Kayah), and Shan States as well as in Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division.[4]

Landmines are also deployed by many of Burma's Non-State Actors (NSAs), both those in opposition to the SPDC as well as those who have signed ceasefire deals with the regime and are now allied with them. Many of these groups still continue to operate in the ethnic

minority territories. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). Those groups identified by the ICBL as deploying landmines in Burma during 2007 include the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karenni Army (KA), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and remnants of the defunct Mong Tai Army (MTA). According to the ICBL, it is *"likely"* that the KNLA deployed more landmines than any other NSA operating in Burma during this period.[5]

Not all NSAs operating in Burma, however, continued to use landmines in 2007. On 16 April 2007, the Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) and the Pa'O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO) all signed the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment renouncing the use of antipersonnel landmines. All three of these groups have areas of operation in Shan State and all three are members of the anti-regime alliance, the National Democratic Front (NDF). Four of the eight organizations which comprise the NDF are now signatories to the Deed.[6]

In signing the Deed of Commitment, signatory organizations declare that they will not only refrain from any further deployment of antipersonnel landmines, but also agree to destroy their stockpile of mines as well as to *"cooperate in the clearance of mines which they or others may have laid previously in their areas of operation"*. The commitment of these latest three groups brings the total number of signatory organizations from Burma to six, along with the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), the Chin National Front (CNF), and the National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), all of whom signed the Deed in 2006.[7] Shortly after his organization signed the document, Mai Aik Phone, the General Secretary of the PSLF, stated the following:

> *"I know all too well the effect of landmines on the civilian population. My own grandmother lost her life after stepping on a mine laid in a tea plantation. Although opposition groups are using mines to target the military and for defence, all too often the victims are civilians and animals"*.[8]

In a country so plagued by landmine contamination, precious little is done towards reducing the casualty rate by way of demining programs or through educating the public on the risks associated with landmines. The SPDC has no humanitarian mine clearance programs in Burma whatsoever. Various NSAs are reported to occasionally clear areas of mines when they pose too great a risk to civilian populations or when those mines that they have deployed in ambushes are deemed no longer necessary. In either case, all mine clearing activities are conducted on a sporadic or ad hoc basis, and, given the substantial continuing levels of deployment, ultimately make little impact on the net annual increase of landmine contamination. (For more information, see Section 4.3: De-mining Activities below).

Similarly, the SPDC offers no provision for Mine Risk Education (MRE), which has proven to be an invaluable tool in reducing the risk that landmine contamination poses to civilian populations. Various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have made some efforts to implement MRE programs, but these have inevitably been hampered by a lack of available resources, lack of access to the most prone areas, and for those organizations attempting to work through official channels, a complete lack of political will on the part of the SPDC to combat what represents one of the county's greatest scourges. (For more information, see Section 4.5: Mine Risk Education below).

4.2 Landmine Devices

According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), Burma is one of only 13 countries known to still produce antipersonnel landmines. The mines are manufactured in purpose-built factories which are overseen by the state-run enterprise, Myanmar Defence Products Industries. These factories are known to produce the MM-1 Stake Fragmentation Mine (SFM) and the MM-2 Blast Mine (BM). These mines are copies of the Chinese Type 58 SFM and the Chinese Type 58 BM, respectively. It is also widely believed that these factories are capable of producing a Directional Fragmentation Mine (DFM) similar to the U.S.-manufactured M-18 'Claymore' DFM.[9]

In addition to those mines that they are capable of producing domestically, the SPDC also deploys antipersonnel landmines of foreign manufacture. Such mines have, in the past, been shown to have been of Chinese, Soviet, Indian, Italian, and U.S.-manufacture. Reports emerged during 2007 that the SPDC has also been deploying a Type 69 Bounding Fragmentation Mine (BFM), believed to be of Chinese origin.[10]

A number of other mines of unknown origin have also been extensively deployed in Burma. For instance, over the past few years, SPDC army units have been deploying a copy of the diminutive U.S.-made M-14 blast mine in northern Karen State under its continuing military offensive being waged against the civilian villagers in the region. Thousands of these mines have reportedly been laid in Karen State alone since 2005. Though this mine resembles the M-14 mine, its origin of manufacture is unknown. HRDU has been unable to ascertain whether the SPDC has begun to produce these mines or if they have been acquiring them on the international arms market.[11]

In August 2007, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reported that they had identified at least three different victim-activated antipersonnel landmines and a further three command-activated landmines being deployed in Karen State.[12] The report, however, failed to mention the names and models of these mines and it is quite likely that a number of other mines are also being deployed in addition to the six that they have identified.

Landmines, once deployed, can remain an indiscriminate threat to combatants and civilians alike for many years. Commercially-manufactured mines such as those being deployed by SPDC army forces can carry a lifespan of several years, or in some cases even decades, after they are laid. The danger is exacerbated by the general refusal of SPDC army soldiers to inform the local civilian population or even other SPDC army units about the locations of landmines that they have deployed. Moreover, landmines are commonly deployed by SPDC army units in areas frequented by civilians in a manner which strongly suggests that the civilians are the intended targets.[13]

Numerous Non-State Actors (NSAs) in Burma also continued to deploy antipersonnel landmines during 2007, with a number of these groups being capable of producing their own landmines. In contrast to the domestically-produced or imported factory-manufactured models employed by the SPDC, those used by NSAs are usually homemade Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). These are typically constructed from readily-available local materials such as bamboo tubes, PVC plastic piping, or glass bottles and packed with gunpowder, a small amount of explosive (which may include TNT, ANFO or urea nitrate), and ball bearings or other similar fragmentation.[14] Such mines typically utilize cheap commercially-available alkaline batteries to charge the fusing mechanism and detonate the mine once an electrical current is established. These makeshift devices possess a much shorter lifespan than commercially-manufactured models and tend to fail within six months of deployment as the battery expires or the natural materials used in their construction degrade.[15]

According to the *Landmine Monitor*, published annually by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, those armed NSAs identified as being able to manufacture their own landmines, and who continued to do so during 2007, include the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and the Karenni Army (KA). Some of these groups are also capable of producing more sophisticated mines. For instance, the UWSA produces their own MM-2 type blast mines in a munitions factory formerly operated by the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) near their capital at Pahsang in eastern Shan State. Meanwhile, groups such as the KNLA and the DKBA are known to produce Claymore-type directional fragmentation mines and mines incorporating anti-handling devices.[16] It is also quite likely that the newly formed KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC), which broke away from the Karen National Union (KNU; of which the KNLA is the armed wing) in January 2007 are also capable of producing such mines as many of the soldiers who defected would certainly possess the skills to do so having long employed them for the KNLA.

In addition to laying landmines of their own manufacture, many non-state groups on occasion also use factory-produced mines by redeploying SPDC-laid mines lifted from the ground, capturing mines in raids on SPDC arsenals, or acquiring them on the black market.[17]

A Type 69 Bounding Fragmentation Mine believed to be of Chinese origin. This mine was originally deployed by SPDC army soldiers in Toungoo District, Karen State, but had been lifted from the ground by KNLA soldiers prior to this photo being taken. *[Photo: KHRG]*

4.3 De-mining Activities

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) has reported that no official or systematic humanitarian de-mining programs were conducted in Burma during 2007, in spite of some sporadic mine clearances that were reported to have taken place in previous years. Independent reports have suggested that some non-state actors (NSAs) will occasionally remove landmines they have deployed if they were not detonated during the ambush that they were planted for, or if it appears that SPDC army troops are leaving the area.[18] Although, none of the NSAs operating in Burma have been reported to conduct any systematic or rigorous mine clearance programs. Whatever de-mining that has been carried out could perhaps more accurately be described as military "minefield breaching" in which mines are lifted to allow a military unit to pass, as opposed to humanitarian "minefield clearing" where landmines are permanently removed for the safety of the civilian population. Ultimately, the extensive deployment of further mines compared to the ad hoc nature of de-mining activities in Burma strongly suggests that there is a significant year-on-year net increase in the number of landmines deployed in Burma.

There is little evidence available to suggest that any of the armed groups responsible for deploying landmines in Burma have devised an effective strategy to systematically map the placement of their mines, or to mark the presence of live minefields. Several armed resistance groups have claimed to make efforts to inform local villagers of any landmines that they may deploy in their area. However, in most cases, the villagers may only be told which paths or areas have been mined, but more specific information on the actual locations of the mines are typically withheld.

Such widespread and haphazard deployment of landmines, coupled with the near total failure of armed actors to mark minefields, mean that landmines, once placed, are largely lost or forgotten until such time that they are trodden on, or unearthed by chance, typically resulting in severe injury, permanent disfigurement, or death.

SPDC army soldiers photographed planting an antipersonnel landmine on a road in Mone Township of Nyaunglebin District, Karen State in March 2007. Despite such overwhelming evidence, SPDC army units typically deny deploying landmines in areas frequented by civilians, stating that resistance groups are responsible for deploying mines in these areas and are thus responsible for any injuries or deaths sustained. *[Photo: FBR]*

4.4 Human Minesweeping

Much as is previous years, 2007 saw the continued use of human minesweepers by SPDC army units. This serious contravention of international human rights standards, also referred to as "atrocity de-mining", entails forcing civilians to walk in front of army patrols in areas suspected of landmine contamination, placing the civilians at considerable risk of being wounded, maimed, or killed, while the soldiers follow at a safe distance beyond the blast radius. The SPDC typically refuses to provide medical attention or compensation to civilians injured in this manner. They instead are instructed to seek compensation or assistance from resistance forces, blaming them for setting the mines.

There have also been consistent reliable reports stating that SPDC army soldiers also continued to force civilian villagers to act as human shields in areas of armed conflict during 2007. Such reports speak of forcing villagers to stand beside or sit on SPDC army machinery or infrastructure to deter armed opposition groups from attacking or deploying landmines for fear of wounding the civilians. However, this strategy does not always work and many civilians are injured in this manner.

On 1 January 2007, Light Infantry Division (LID) #66 commander Maung Maung Aye forced ten Karen villagers from the Kler Lah relocation site in Toungoo District, Karen State to serve as human shields for the SPDC army bulldozer repairing the road between Maw Pah Der and Kaw Soe Koh villages. The following day, on 2 January 2007, an unnamed officer with Military Operations Command (MOC) #16, based in nearby Play Hsa Loh village ordered seven villagers from Ye Loh, and five from Plaw Baw Der to report to Bon Ma Tee village also to act as human shields for a bulldozer operating on the Kler Lah – Bu Hsa Kee motor road.[19]

On 5 January 2007, two villagers were killed and a bullock cart destroyed after SPDC army soldiers forced villagers from Tha Pan Chaung and Htee Loh villages in Toungoo District of Karen State to clear landmines from the area. In such instances, villagers are not provided with the correct tools, safety equipment, proper training or any form of compensation for this dangerous work. Similarly, families are rarely compensated for the deaths of their loved ones while performing this work.[20]

On 16 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Infantry Battalions (IB) #68 and #69 forced villagers from Play Hsa Loh, Yeh Loh and Plaw Baw Der in Toungoo District, Karen State to walk in front of their bulldozers as human minesweepers.[21]

On 15 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers forced an unspecified number of villagers from Kler Lah village in Toungoo District, Karen State to *"take security"* for four bulldozers being used to construct a new road in the area. To *"take security"* in this instance means that these villagers were forced to walk along the road in front of the bulldozer as human minesweepers so that any mines deployed in their path would be detonated by the villagers and not the bulldozer.[22]

On 17 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers under MOC #5 forced 300 villagers from Kler Lah to walk in front of SPDC army soldiers as human minesweepers as they portered military rations to the Tha Aye Hta SPDC army camp clear the area of landmines.[23]

On 18 February 2007, an unspecified number of civilian villagers from Kler Lah village in Toungoo District of Karen State were ordered by SPDC army soldiers under MOC #5 to porter supplies to the SPDC army camp in nearby Tha Aye while walking in front of the SPDC army soldiers who accompanied them.[24]

On 20 February 2007, the Camp Commander of Bawgali Gyi SPDC army camp adjacent to the Kler Lah relocation site in Toungoo District, Karen State forced an unspecified number of villagers from Kler Lah, Kaw Thay Der, Klay Soe Kee, Ler Ko, and Kaw Soe Koh villages to ride motorcycles ahead of SPDC army soldiers along the Kler Lah – Bu Hsa Kee road. The road is believed to be mined so the villagers are forced to do this so that they would detonate the mines rather than the soldiers.[25]

On 3 March 2007, a number of villages in the vicinity of the SPDC army camp at Play Hsa Loh in Toungoo District, Karen State were each ordered to provide one person to perform forced labour for the construction of a new road in the area. At all times, at least two of these villagers were forced to sit on the bulldozer being used to build the road as human shields to dissuade resistance forces operating in the area from planting landmines on the road or from attacking the machinery.[26]

On 17 March, SPDC army soldiers forced 300 people from Kler Lah village in Toungoo District, Karen State to porter supplies while walking in front of the soldiers as human minesweepers.[27]

Five villagers were wounded near Kwee De Kaw in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State on 9 April 2007 when being forced to act as human minesweepers for the SPDC. The villagers were ordered to load their bullock cart with supplies and push it along the road by SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #590 when it ran over a landmine. None of the wounded villagers were compensated for the injuries that they sustained.[28]

On 20 June 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #566 ordered 46 villagers to carry rations to their camp at Paw Bpaw Soe. The villagers were ordered to walk ahead of the soldiers as human minesweepers, and as a result, Saw Bo Mya, 36, and Saw Oh Htoo, 35, both of Kaw Day Ther village in Toungoo District, Karen State, were severely injured after one of them stepped on a landmine.[29]

A landmine victim receiving a below-the-knee amputation from Karen medics in February 2007. Such procedures are often conducted in the absence of anaesthetic owing to a lack of available resources. *[Photo: FBR]*

4.5 Mine Risk Education

There remains no systematic State-run provision of education on the risks associated with landmines in Burma. Though the ICBL describes Mine Risk Education (MRE) as playing a crucial role in reducing casualty rates by *"seek[ing] to reduce the risk of injury from mines by raising awareness and promoting behavioural change"*,[30] no such trainings were implemented by the SPDC during 2007.

The few MRE programs that are conducted in Burma are run by NGOs and local CBOs, and exist on an ad hoc basis. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), had previously conducted MRE in Burma, but suspended their programs in 2005. During 2007 these programs were reported to remain "*on hold*".[31] The Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP) along with the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) conducted a "Dangerous Areas Survey" in 2006 in contested regions of Karen State in which they mapped out 81 dangerous areas, the majority of which were labelled as such due to mine contamination, collected data on 464 mine casualties and provided MRE to a reported 8,200 people living within the survey area.[32] The local NGO, Shanti Sena, also continued to provide MRE in 2007. Similarly, the KDHW ran an MRE program in areas of Karen State nominally controlled by the KNU, and erected warning signs identifying a number of known mined areas.

As in previous years, MRE programs continued to be conducted in the numerous refugee camps located along the Thai-Burma border. These programs were implemented by various NGOs such as Handicap International (HI) and the Jesuit Refuge Service (JRS). However, a survey conducted in these camps has strongly suggested that further work is required in this field with only 40 percent of those surveyed stating prior knowledge of landmines in Burma.[33] However, as some of these camps have been in existence for over 20 years, it is possible that many of those interviewed were either born in the camps or had arrived many years ago and thus possessed limited direct knowledge of the situation inside Burma.

This Burmese-language sign, photographed posted on a tree on the boundary of the LID #66 SPDC army camp at Htee Hta Bu in Toungoo District, Karen State in February 2007, reads *"Beware mines"*. The soldiers based in this camp were also reported to have been responsible for deploying landmines in a number of nearby civilian villages. Signs such as this are rare in Burma, where most mined areas are unmarked. *[Photo: KHRG]*

4.6 Situation in the Ethnic Minority Territories

According to the *Landmine Monitor*, nine of Burma's 14 states and divisions suffer from landmine contamination. Of these, the worst affected are those states situated in the east of the country adjacent to Thailand. It is within these states, particularly in Karen, Karenni and Shan States that the regime continues to wage its war against the ethnic minorities living in those areas. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

Sustained armed conflict in these areas during 2007 only served to exacerbate the problem. The SPDC and their allied ceasefire groups continued to use landmines as a leading means to target the armed resistance forces, to divide civilian populations from those groups, and to directly target the civilian population themselves. Meanwhile, resistance forces continued to deploy landmines in ambushes against SPDC army units and their allies and to protect villagers and internally displaced communities. In some areas, armed resistance forces have even distributed mines among IDP communities so that they could defend themselves from advancing SPDC army columns and to secure the path of their retreat.[34]

Regrettably, civilians tend to bear the brunt of the damage caused by landmine deployment in Burma. Not only do civilians frequently step on landmines, but so do their livestock. Moreover, civilians often lose access to their fields and their livelihoods along with it for fear of unearthing or stepping on a mine that may have been laid there. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). A statement by Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, criticized the SPDC regime for its ongoing military campaigns in ethnic minority territories, describing the damage inflicted on civilians as going beyond that associated with the heightened risk of living in a conflict zone, but that it was a deliberate strategy on the part of the SPDC to intimidate the people of the region, and to disrupt their lives and any relationship they may share with armed opposition groups. SPDC army soldiers have frequently deployed landmines in civilian villages and fields in an apparent attempt to dissuade displaced communities from ever returning to their homes for fear they may tread on a concealed mine. This, according to Pinheiro, is "*a concerted policy aimed at denying people their livelihoods and food or forcing them to risk their lives when they attempt to return to their villages after having been forcibly evicted*".[35]

The ethnic minority territories are also particularly heavily mined along the frontiers in the regions adjacent to the national borders with Bangladesh, India and Thailand. The SPDC, like the regimes before them, have extensively deployed landmines along the nation's borders as part of a strategy to prevent the outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries, as well as to prevent those who have already fled from returning safely to their homes. (For more information, see the following sections on the border regions). Burma also shares a border with China, however, this region is not covered in this report as limited information is available on this region.

On 3 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers planted 15 landmines on the Toungoo-Mawchi road in Southern Karenni State.[36]

On 9 January 2007, Saw Cho Cho, of Zee Pyu Gone village, was wounded after stepping on a landmine in the vicinity of Ler Kla Der village in Toungoo District of Karen State, in which he lost one of his legs.[37]

On 11 January 2007, Saw Htay Ler Win was killed when he stepped on an SPDC landmine in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District of Northern Karen State.[38]

On 12 January 2008, an unidentified man was reported killed after stepping on an *"insurgent-planted"* landmine in Kyauk Kyi Township of Pegu (Bago) Division. Official reports, upon which the Xinhua News Agency bases their reports, typically lay the blame on resistance groups even though the SPDC's mine laying program is by far the most extensive, is carried out in the absence of any form of mapping system, and is often conducted in areas frequented by civilians. Realistically, it is far more likely that the mine had been laid by SPDC army soldiers.[39]

On 24 January 2007, official reports maintained that four people were injured in four separate landmine explosions on consecutive days in Pegu (Bago) Division. The state-run English-language newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar*, blamed the *"destructive acts of terrorists"*, but refused to name who they believed to be responsible. Given the location of these mines, this was probably an allusion to the KNU whose soldiers maintain a presence in the area.[40]

On 25 January 2007, 35-year-old U Kyaw Lwin, of Myaung U village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Karen State, lost his leg to a landmine placed near his village as he was returning home from working in his fields. Without his leg, he will find it extremely difficult to continue to provide for his family.[41]

On 30 January 2007, SPDC forces planted landmines around Htee Hsaw Meh village of Papun District, Karen State, preventing villagers from being able to go to their fields.[42]

Just before 10:00 am on 2 February 2007, 20-year-old Saw Say Plo Wah from Ter Mu Kee village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State lost his right foot when he stepped on an SPDC army landmine. The landmine had reportedly been planted near his village by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #567 in October 2006 as part of the ongoing offensive in the region.[43]

On 13 February 2007, Saw Htay Ler, a villager from Kaw Pope village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, was killed by a landmine planted by SPDC army forces in the vicinity of Mu Ka Day village.[44]

On 15 February 2007, Naw Tin Lay and Saw Maung Pwe, both from Kaw Thay Der village in Toungoo District, Karen State were wounded after detonating a landmine while performing forced labour for the SPDC.[45]

On 15 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers forced the owners of nine trucks to transport their rations and supplies from Mawchi in Karenni State to the SPDC army camp at Bu Hsa Kee in northern Karen State. Two of these trucks, owned by Naw Day L'Yar and Saw Sa Baw were badly damaged when they drove over landmines near Tha Aye Hta. Kaw Thay Der villagers Naw Tay Lay and Saw Maw Pweh were reportedly wounded in one of the blasts. Two days later, on 17 February, over 200 villagers from 12 separate villages in the vicinity of Kler Lah in Toungoo District, Karen State were ordered to porter the supplies by foot as these two trucks were no longer fit to use. Neither of the truck owners were compensated for the damage done to their vehicles.[46]

On 25 February 2007, the Military Operations Command (MOC) #9 Commander based in the Tha Pyay Nyunt SPDC army camp in Toungoo District, Karen State issued a warning to the village heads of all ten villages of Play Hsa Loh village tract that they would be forcibly relocated and used as forced labour should any of his soldiers step on any KNLA-deployed landmines. The villagers, however, have very little, if any, control over the activities of the KNLA and are in no position to instruct them not to ambush the SPDC.[47]

On 16 March 2007, 44-year-old U Than Sein, of Kaung Mon village in Mergui-Tavoy District of southern Karen State lost his left foot after stepping on a landmine while portering supplies for the SPDC. Though not stated in the report, it is unlikely that he would have received any form of compensation for his loss. It is quite rare for the SPDC to provide compensation to landmine victims, even when it is clear that the mine had been laid by SPDC army soldiers.[48]

On 14 March 2007, the Karenni Development Research Group (KDRG) released a statement which maintained that 12 civilian villagers had been killed by landmines during 2006 and 2007 near the site of the proposed Wei Gyi dam on the Salween River.[49]

On 30 March 2007, troops of the SPDC-aligned DKBA attacked villagers in northern Dooplaya District, Karen State. During the attacks one unnamed man died after stepping on a DKBA-laid landmine.[50]

On 8 April 2007, eight DKBA soldiers were killed in an ambush by a KNLA-deployed landmine in Pa'an District of Karen State.[51]

On 11 April, 2007, five Karen villagers were wounded when one of their group stepped on an SPDC army landmine near Kwee De Kaw in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State while portering supplies for LIB #375.[52]

On 16 April 2007, Saw Mu Kyaw Wa, Saw Dadoh Wa and Saw Kyaw Ri were injured while portering for the SPDC after one of the other porters in their group stepped on a landmine near the LIB #599 army camp at Kwee Dee Koh in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State.[53]

On 18 April 2007, a villager from Ler Kla Der in Toungoo District of Karen State stepped on a landmine reportedly planted by SPDC army soldiers.[54]

On 29 April 2007, two villagers from Keh Law Mah Kee village were wounded after one of them stepped on a DKBA-laid landmine in Dooplaya District of Karen State. Saw Hai Bluh, 30, was killed in the blast, while his unnamed companion survived, albeit with severe injuries.[55]

In April 2007, it was reported that an unnamed hospital in Mae Sot of Tak Province in Thailand were at that time treating ten landmine victims from Burma. According to the report, the victims were:

1. Four DKBA soldiers from #999 Special Battalion based in Shwe Ko Ko near Myawaddy in Karen State;
2. Three KNLA 6th Brigade soldiers from Dooplaya District of Karen State;
3. Two villagers, presumably Karen; and
4. One porter (possibly a convict porter).[56]

On 4 May 2007, Ko Tin Myint from Ywathaya village in eastern Pegu (Bago) Division reportedly lost his left foot in a landmine explosion. According to the report, originally made in the state-run media, the victim received treatment in Toungoo hospital. The report accused an unnamed insurgent group for laying the mine, which, given the location of the mine, was most likely an allusion to the KNLA.[57]

On 5 May 2007, Maung Lin Htaik, stepped on a landmine while collecting vegetables in the forest near his home in Kawpyin village of Pegu (Bago) Division. The state-run report maintained that his left foot was blown off in the blast and that he later received treatment in Mone hospital. As with the case listed above, blame for deployment of the mine was levelled at an unnamed insurgent group, which again, was most likely a reference to the KNLA.[58]

On 16 May 2007, 28-year-old Saw Beh Ka Hlay from Klaw Mee Der village in Toungoo District of Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine planted by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #539.[59]

On 4 June 2007, IB #60 battalion commander, Zaw Lin, ordered the villagers from Shwe Chan, Th' Beh Gone, Aung Soe Moe, and Thay Boh villages in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State to confine themselves to their villages. In issuing this order, he had also warned them that his soldiers had recently laid 250 landmines around the villages.[60]

On June 11 2007, 27-year-old Saw Wah Hsay Hler was wounded after stepping on a landmine deployed by SPDC army soldiers operating in Toungoo District, Karen State. Although he survived the blast, his left leg had to be amputated below the knee. The photograph shown below was taken as Karen medics were performing the amputation on what remained of his mangled left leg.[61]

Karen medics perform a below-the-knee amputation on 27-year-old Karen villager Saw Wah Hsay Hler from Ha Htoh Per village in Toungoo District, Karen State. Saw Wah Hsay Hler's left foot was blown off after he stepped on an SPDC-deployed landmine on 11 June 2007. *[Photo: KHRG]*

According to a document released by the KNU on 30 June 2007, during the 12 months spanning 1 June 2006 and 31 May 2007, KNLA soldiers had *"captured"* a total of 61 landmines from the SPDC and the DKBA. Of this number, 51 mines were reported as being captured from the SPDC, while 10 were captured from the DKBA. The vast majority of these mines, regardless of who they were captured from, were seized in Dooplaya District of Karen State. The report failed to state if these mines had been lifted from the ground, seized during raids on SPDC and DKBA armouries, or taken from the bodies of the dead and wounded.[62]

On 4 July 2007, a married couple, U Pho Htin and Daw La Pyait, of Maw Htoo Tha Lae village near Myawaddy in Karen State, were seriously injured after stepping on a landmine. Saw Eh Thamwe, coordinator of the Mine Victim Department of the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) just across the border in Mae Sot, Thailand reported that *"[t]he wife lost both of her legs and her husband has gone blind. Because their wounds were quite serious we have sent them to the Mae Sot [H]ospital with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC]"*.[63]

On 12 July, a SPDC army soldier moving in an offensive column composed of soldiers from LIB #378 and LIB #388 stepped on a landmine in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State. Five days earlier, the soldiers had captured four villagers from Blut Doh village and forced them to walk in front and guide them to Wah Do Ko village. Three of these villagers will shot and killed when they refused, while the fourth only managed to escape in the confusion following the landmine explosion.[64]

On 27 July 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #530 had been deploying a large number of landmines throughout Loikemlay village tract in Loikaw Township, Karenni State. According to the report, the mines had *"seriously obstructed the farmers with their hill farming"* and that at least 15 cattle had been killed after they had stepped on the mines.[65]

On 30 July 2007, two villagers, Ma Soe, 30 and Maung Soe Win, 12, from Kyauk Kyi Township in Karen State were wounded while collecting bamboo shoots from the forest when one of them stepped on a landmine planted by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #351 close to the village of Sa Le. Both of the villagers were then fined 10,000 kyat each for destruction of state property.[66]

It was reported on 5 July 2007 that mine casualties in Karen State had *"increased dramatically"* during 2007 due to *"increased tensions between the Karen National Union and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army"*. The report, citing Saw Eh Thamwe, coordinator of the Mine Victim Department of the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), stated that as many as 30 persons had been treated for mine-related injuries in the first half of 2007 with 16 persons being treated in June 2007 alone.[67]

According to a report released on 7 August 2007, farmers in Loikaw Township, Karenni State are facing many difficulties maintaining their livelihoods due to landmine contamination. It was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #530 had been deploying numerous types of landmines along the banks of rivers and streams near Nam Mahuu village since 27 July 2007. Local villagers reportedly pleaded with the battalion commander to remove the mines, but their calls were said to have been ignored. Meanwhile, the farmers are afraid to travel to their fields for fear of stepping on one of the mines or losing any more of their livestock to them: *"Villagers are afraid of going to [their] farms because they have planted [landmines] around [the] farms. After arriving in the farms we have to release the buffaloes and cows. Buffalo[es] and cows are known to step on [landmines] and have been killed. About 15 buffaloes and cows were killed"*.[68]

It was also reported on 7 August 2007 that four unnamed men from Shadaw Township, Karenni State, and one unnamed woman from Dimawhso Township, also in Karenni State, had been killed by landmines between March and May 2007.[69]

On 17 August 2007, 23-year-old Saw Maw Htoo Say, from Blah Kee village in Toungoo District, Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine placed by SPDC army troops operating under MOC #5 near Koh Haw Der village.[70]

On 11 August 2007, a Karen villager from Mone Township in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, whose name was withheld to protect his identity, had one of his feet blown off by a landmine as he was returning home from his rice storage barn. The mine was believed to have been laid by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #379 who had been operating in the area.[71]

On 21 August 2007, an unnamed 25-year-old man in western Karenni State was maimed after stepping on a landmine that had been laid several weeks earlier by an SPDC army patrol. According to the report, local Karenni resistance soldiers (presumably the KNPP) were aware that the SPDC had planted two mines in the area, one of which had already

been detonated by one of the SPDC army soldiers during their patrol. The exact location of the second device was unknown until stepped on by this villager.[72]

On 10 September 2007, 18-year-old Saw Po Dee from Klay Soe Kee village in northern Karen State hung himself as a result of having lost his leg to a landmine. Earlier in the year, Saw Po Dee was forced to serve as a porter and human minesweeper for Military Operations Command (MOC) #5 of the SPDC army when he stepped on the mine. Saw Po Dee then committed suicide after returning home from hospital to find that his wife had no more rice left to cook and that he would not be able to adequately provide for his family.[73]

On 27 September 2007, several villagers from the Myekanbaw village tract in Mergui-Tavoy District, Karen State suffered landmine injuries as they were travelling between their villages and their plantations. With the exception of Naw Paw, who was killed on the spot, all of the victims required below the knee amputations. The victims were:

1. Saw Maung Htet, 40, from Nyaungdon village;
2. Saw Ti Thiek, 55, from Kyay Than village;
3. Saw Yin Ba, 38, from Thapya Chaung village;
4. Saw Hae Hi, 59, from Nin Ga Yok village;
5. Saw Kawla, 35, from Kami village;
6. Naw Ly Dia, 45, from Pyin Tha Taw village, and
7. Naw Pay, 45, from Pyin Tha Taw village.[74]

On 10 October, the Monland Restoration Army (MRA) denied accusations made by the SPDC that they had placed landmines that killed two villagers and injured two more on a hillside in near Bayoun Ngae village in Ye Township, Mon State. The MRA admitted they were using landmines in their campaign against the SPDC army, but claimed they did not know who had laid these particular mines.[75]

On 13 October 2007, SPDC army troops attacked Yaw Kee village in Mon Township of western Karen State, burning down 10 houses and the church. When villagers fled into the surrounding jungle, the SPDC army entered the village, looting homes and laying several landmines. The villagers were unable to re-enter the village for fear of treading on landmines.[76]

On 27 October 2007, 21-year-old Ko Tit Phyo stepped on a landmine in the town of Three Pagodas Pass, Karen State, which had been placed near to the house of DKBA officer, Lieutenant Tan Win. Ko Tit Phyo's right leg was badly injured, and he was subsequently taken to a hospital in Thailand for treatment.[77]

On 14 November 2007, Saw P--- stepped on an SPDC-deployed landmine near the site of a new SPDC army camp in Mone Township, Karen State. Saw P--- survived the mine blast but sustained severe injuries. The following day, local SPDC army officers ordered five nearby villages engaged in the construction of the new camp to each pay 50,000 kyat in compensation to Saw P---, despite the fact that the mine had been laid by SPDC army soldiers.[78]

On 19 November 2007, 13-year-old Saw K'Tray Soe, accidentally detonated a landmine near Lay Kee village in Toungoo District of northern Karen State while gathering bamboo leaves to repair the roof for his family's home. Shrapnel from the blast struck him in the face, leaving him blinded and severely wounding his face, throat and chest. His 8-year-old sister also received shrapnel wounds to her face. The mine was believed to have been laid on 16 August 2007 by SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #88 who attacked Lay Kee village on that day and burned down one of the homes. The photographs shown on the following page show the wounds that he had sustained from the blast.[79]

These photos show 13-year-old Saw K'Tray Soe, after an SPDC army landmine blew up in his face on 19 November 2007, sending shrapnel into his face, throat and chest and leaving him blinded. *[Photos: FBR]*

On 19 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219 operating under Tactical Operation Command (TOC) #1 of LID #11 were reported to have deployed a number of landmines in and around the fields of Ler Wah village in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State.[80]

On 30 November 2007, 55-year-old Saw Maw Gkya from Ha Htoh Per village in Toungoo District of northern Karen State was killed after stepping on a landmine deployed by SPDC army soldiers operating under MOC #4.[81]

On 18 December 2007, the junta-controlled *New Light of Myanmar* reported that members of the KNLA ambushed a passenger bus as it travelled between Kawkareik and Myawaddy in Karen State by detonating a landmine under it before opening fire on those aboard. Eight passengers were reportedly killed with a further six injured. The state-run media criticized the KNU for *"constantly committing all destructive acts such as undermining [the] stability of the State, community peace and tranquility [sic.] and prevalence of law and order, killing and bullying innocent people, detonating bombs, armed robberies, collecting extortion money, and burning public property"*. Though the KNLA claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was conducted in retaliation to an earlier DKBA attack on Tah Oh Kee village, they denied targeting civilians, but rather DKBA members who were on board.[82]

4.7 Burma-Thailand Border

The Kingdom of Thailand became a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 1999, but is still yet to enact comprehensive domestic legislation to fully implement the terms of the treaty. According to the ICBL, the consultative process intended to incorporate the treaty's requirements into Thai policy remains ongoing. In April 2003, however, Thailand did complete its requirements to destroy its stockpile of mines under Article 4 of the treaty, and according to the ICBL, retains only 4,713 mines for training purposes.[83]

As noted above, landmine contamination on the Burmese side of the Burma-Thailand border is extensive, although, many communities on the Thai side of the border are also affected. A 2001 Landmine Impact Survey, which remains the foundation for all mine action in Thailand, found that 139 communities located on the Thai side of the Burma-Thailand border were adversely affected by their proximity to landmines. According to the 2007 edition of the *Landmine Monitor*, 500 km^2 of Thai soil remains contaminated by landmines, and though not explicitly stated in the report, it is highly likely that much of this area is situated along the 2,500 km long border that Thailand shares with Burma. Under the terms elucidated in Article 5 of the Mine Ban Treaty, Thailand is obliged to complete the clearance of all mined areas within its territories by 1 May 2009; however, the ICBL stated in 2007 that the prospect of this deadline being met was *"low"*.[84]

Over the past few decades, hundreds of thousands of refugees, displaced by the junta's continual military campaigns in the ethnic minority territories in eastern Burma, have fled to Thailand seeking refuge. This has prompted successive Burmese military regimes to heavily mine the border, both to prevent the exodus of refugees, and also to discourage those who have successfully fled from attempting to return home. Attempts at mine clearance in this area are not only hampered by the ongoing conflict in the region, but also by the lack of political will on the part of the SPDC.

Landmine contamination has also impeded a number of bilateral economic and development projects in the region. On 3 March 2007, Pradit Hongto, 50, a Thai businessman, was killed in Karenni State when the vehicle he was travelling in drove over a landmine near the border with Thailand. According to reports, the victim was visiting his brother, Sanoh Hongto, who is the co-owner of an antimony mine located in territory controlled by the SPDC-allied Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF). His colleague, Somboon Hongnimit, was also injured and taken to a hospital in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, before being transferred to Chiang Mai. Various armed groups had been operating in the area, and it is not known who was responsible for placing the landmine.[85]

Moreover, three employees of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) were also killed by landmines in Burma during 2007 in separate incidents. The first of these, an unnamed geologist, was killed in January 2007, while another died in May 2007. Then, on 2 September 2007, Saman Kantameun, a 53-year-old engineer, was killed on 2 September 2007, after accidentally detonating a landmine while surveying the proposed site of the Hat Gyi hydroelectric dam to be built jointly by the SPDC and the Thai engineering firm MDX. Soon after the incident, Kraisi Karnasuta, the director of EGAT, said that he was withdrawing his workers until their safety could be guaranteed, stating that they would only *"return to the site when the Burmese junta reinforced security"*. SPDC mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar*, predictably laid blame for the attack on the KNU, although KNU General Secretary P'Doh Mahn Sha was quick to deny this claim, countering that both DKBA and SPDC army troops were active in the area.[86]

4.8 Burma-Bangladesh Border

Bangladesh became a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty in 2001, and on 28 February 2005 completed the destruction of its landmine stockpile. However, since that time, Bangladesh's progress to fulfil its obligations under the treaty has slowed to the point of inactivity. Amendments to domestic policy, as in previous years, remain "*in progress*"; progress which has been described by the ICBL as being *"inadequate"*.[87]

Similar to the Burma-Thailand border, the Burma-Bangladesh border is heavily contaminated by landmines. SPDC army units have extensively mined the region in order to prevent the exodus of refugees, particularly the egress of the ethnic Rohingya who inhabit the area, as well as to discourage those who do manage to cross the border into Bangladesh from attempting to risk the hazardous journey back to their homes.

Bangladesh has, in previous years, claimed that their border with Burma has been mined by the NaSaKa (Burmese border security force), and that survivors of mine incidents can be found in villages located along the border. However, according to the *Landmine Monitor*, interviews conducted with persons in areas earlier thought to be contaminated, have suggested that contamination is less prevalent in the region than was previously imagined.[88]

In previous years, Bangladeshi authorities have announced the capture of landmines from armed opposition groups on the Bangladesh side of the border, and this trend continued in 2007. On 20 March, military officers with the Bangladeshi Rifles (BDR) announced that they had recovered 26 live antipersonnel landmines following a raid on the headquarters of an unnamed insurgent group in Nakhongsari Township, opposite Burma's Maungdaw Township in Arakan State.[89] Other reports maintained that Bangladeshi Border Security Forces (BSF) had recovered an undeclared number of mines from an undisclosed location along the Burma-Bangladesh border in March 2007. Two different armed opposition groups active in the area later stated that the mines may have been theirs; however, in the absence of proper mapping procedures, they could not be certain.[90]

A Karen resident of Bpoh Loh Hta village in Papun District of Karen State displaying a homemade landmine planted in his fields by DKBA soldiers. According to reports, this mine, and many others like it, was laid by DKBA #333 Brigade soldiers operating under Commander Mo Kyo, but later lifted by KNLA soldiers. Fearing that more mines had been laid in the area, villagers in this area dared not return to their fields to harvest their rice. *[Photo: KHRG]*

4.9 Burma-India Border

Unlike Thailand and Bangladesh, India has not yet acceded to the Mine Ban Treaty, and appears to have no immediate plans to do so, citing "*legitimate security concerns*" over the "*humanitarian concerns*" for their continued failure to do so. India is estimated to possess a stockpile of between four to five million landmines, though its actual size remains unknown.[91]

The Burmese side of the border in Chin State is particularly heavily contaminated with landmines, with the vast majority of these being deployed by SPDC army soldiers. Following similar patterns of deployment as those observed along Burma's eastern frontier (see above), landmines are often deployed against opposition forces as well as against civilians who are thereby displaced from their homes, and face danger in fleeing across heavily mined territories as they look for a safe haven. Tonzang, Thangtlang and Paletwa Townships remain among some of the most extensively mined regions along the border.[92] Unfortunately, limited information exists on the extent of landmine contamination in Sagaing Division and Kachin State.

The Indian side of the border also suffers from landmine contamination owing to the continuing armed conflict being conducted there, particularly involving the Kuki ethnic group whose geographic distribution straddles the border. It has been alleged by both the Indian government and armed opposition groups that the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a non-state armed group operating in Manipur, had deployed landmines in the border region during 2007. In March 2007, Burmese Kuki living in the border region protested against the use of landmines in Manipur. Following this, UNLF soldiers had allegedly forced the Burmese Kuki villagers back across the border into Burma, with the support of SPDC troops.[93]

This photograph shows civilian Karen villager Aung Kyaw Soe, from Than Daung Township in Toungoo District, Karen State receiving a below-the-knee amputation from Karen medics after he stepped on an SPDC army landmine in February 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

Endnotes

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 5

FORCED LABOUR AND FORCED CONSCRIPTION

"No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

- Article 4, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

5.1 Introduction

Forced labour and forced conscription remains a pervasive problem in Burma. Unpaid civilian and prison labour is still being widely used by the SPDC in military operations, construction of infrastructure and military facilities or cultivation of subsistence and cash crops. In recent years the SPDC has also used forced labour in its so-called "development projects", such as the construction of gas pipelines and hydroelectric dams carried out in collaboration with multinational corporations. Those unable or unwilling to comply with demands for forced labour are fined or must send replacements. The primary victims of forced labour are (innocent) villagers in rural areas and increasingly also prisoners from the Burma penal system. In theory, the law provides for the punishment of people who impose forced labour on others, but in practice SPDC military use of forced labour remained a widespread and serious problem throughout 2007.[1]

The SPDC's expansion of troop deployment has been a major factor for the continued use of forced labour in 2007. The ongoing military offensives against ethnic minorities and ethnic resistance groups have increased the militarization of many areas. The widespread practice of forced labour was reported throughout the year especially in Karen, Rakhine, Mon and Kachin states as well as Bago Division. In eastern Karen State and neighbouring districts, SPDC military operations against the Karen National Union (KNU) saw a further increase in 2007. The SPDC military offensive which was launched in 2005 is still ongoing and has contributed to an increase in the use of Karen civilians as forced labour. There were also reports of an increase of the use of land mines by both the armed wing of the Karen National Union and the SPDC army, which further exacerbated the dangerous situation of forced labourers in these areas, especially those portering for the army and those used as human shields.[2]

The "*development agenda*" of the SPDC regime has increased military control over civilian lives. In Karen State, for example, the SPDC implemented diverse infrastructure and regimentation projects that restrict travel and trade and facilitate increased extortion of funds, food and labour from the civilian population. This exacerbates poverty, malnutrition and the overall humanitarian crisis.[3] Continual demands for forced labour place a huge strain on villagers' daily lives and livelihoods. Forced labour often means that villagers are unable to work on their own agricultural plots for days or even weeks on end. Thus, in rural areas where most people depend on agriculture to survive, regular forced labour has been a primary factor leading to increased food insecurity.[4]

The establishment of internationally sponsored projects such as hydro electric dam sites, gas and oil pipelines and the construction of new roads, ports and railroads are concomitant with an increase in SPDC military presence around these areas. Throughout 2007, the SPDC junta conducted negotiations with a number of neighbouring countries and multinational corporations concerning future development and energy projects in the region, and several new projects began during the year. It has been well reported in the past that these development projects usually mean an increase in militarization in surrounding areas, and an increase in the prevalence of human rights abuses, particularly forced labour and portering.

When the peaceful demonstrations led by Buddhist monks were brutally crushed by the military in September 2007, internationally sponsored projects did not withdraw despite the international outrage. Instructive of the "business as usual" approach was Indian Oil Minister Murli Deora's visit to Burma's country's capital Rangoon, where he signed oil and gas exploration contracts between India's state-controlled ONGC Videsh Ltd and the SPDC during the crackdown.[5] Thailand's largest oil and gas conglomerate PTT PUBLIC CO. LTD. also continued procuring natural gas from Burma[6] and in late October, France's foreign

minister said that the people of Burma would suffer if French oil group Total would withdraw from the country.[7] Numerous reports collected by HRDU however have documented an increase in human rights abuses such as forced labour, as a result of these joint ventures.

Forced military conscriptions continued to increase alongside the high rate of desertions throughout 2007, as the army is facing an acute shortage of trained soldiers. Recruitment of children into the government armed forces continued as a result of this and children as young as 10 were recruited into the army. Human Rights Watch estimated that there may be more than 70,000 child soldiers in the SPDC Army.[8] Furthermore, there has been an increase of prisoners being used as porters for the military. They are often subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. A number of prisoner porters attempting to escape were reportedly killed.[9] In Toungoo District, for example, 95 of the over 600 prisoner porters were killed or died as a consequence of the hard labour.[10]

In recent years the ILO and other international agencies have reported changes in the SPDC's approach to conscripting forced labour. The ILO has reported that military units no longer tend to issue written orders to village heads to provide forced labour but instead give verbal instructions. The ILO also reported that in some cases the SPDC has substituted demands for forced labour with demands for forced contributions of materials, provisions, or money.[11] Moreover, there continued to be issued numerous reports of villagers being forcibly conscripted into the military or forced to form local militia groups. Some of these groups were used during the crackdown on the peaceful demonstrators.

In 2007 the ILO continued to express grave concern at the SPDC's lack of progress on the issue of forced labour. In February, Nyunt Maung Shein, SPDC ambassador and permanent representative to the ILO, signed a '*Supplemental Understanding*' with the ILO, according to which the regime agreed not to retaliate against complainants of forced labour.[12] The ILO agreement allows in theory for citizens to freely submit complaints to the ILO office in Rangoon without fear of retaliatory legal action.[13] Shortly after the implementation of the agreement, its shortcomings, however, became clear: the ILO remained unable to guarantee the safety of complainants; it maintained no offices outside of Rangoon and ILO Officials remained highly restricted in their travels to rural areas. The requirement that the cases be initially vetted by the ILO and then handed over to the SPDC where it is then investigated "*by the most competent civilian or military authority concerned as appropriate*"[14] is restrictive and has been subject to criticism. An ILO Committee report presented to the International Labour Conference in June echoed ICRC findings that forced labour is still widely used in Burma. Shortly after the ILO Committee issued its findings, U Kra Aung, a 40-year-old carpenter from Thaungtalann village, died while performing forced labour at an SPDC Army camp in Paletwa Township, Chin State.[15] By the end of the year, in response to specific requests by the ILO, the SPDC authorities had released two people imprisoned in connection with the legal filing of reports of forced labour and dropped prosecutions of others.[16]

Forced Portering

Reports of civilians and prisoners being forced to carry goods and supplies for the SPDC army continued throughout 2007. Forced portering has dramatically increased since the rapid expansion of the *Tatmadaw,* following the 1988 pro-democracy uprisings. It has occurred since then on a regular basis throughout the country, especially in counter-insurgency areas.[17] Forced portering is very dangerous, as victims are often overloaded and are required to march long distances without rest. Moreover, porters are particularly vulnerable as they are often used as 'human shields', forced to walk at the front of military patrols to protect the soldiers from landmines. When porters slow down or collapse, they are often beaten, killed, or simply left by the side of the road to die. The baskets that the porters are forced to carry can contain anything from food and clothing to mortar shells and ammunition, with an average load weighing between 16 and 33 kg. Moreover, porters are seldom supplied with food and have to carry their own rations in addition to their heavy loads.[18]

The use of forced porters has changed to some extent over the past three years. Whereas previously civilian porters were forced to work by a battalion for several weeks on end, it is now more likely that a column of soldiers will pass through a village and demand "*emergency porters*" to carry goods to the next village where they will be released if other porters can be secured.[19] SPDC soldiers typically show up in a given village and demand porters to carry rations and ammunition. Alternatively, they send order documents to the village head, who must then take responsibility to arrange the stated number of labourers.[20] As a consequence of abuse, harassment and lack of compensation, many villagers, especially those who are weak or sick, choose to hire others to porter in their place. It has been reported that villagers may, for example, provide the stand-in porters with one big tin (12.5 kg) of rice. However, as many villagers have no surplus of rice or money, they are left with no choice than to porter themselves.[21]

When portering military supplies, villagers are required to leave their homes for days or even weeks on end. For example, in May 2007 villagers in Toungoo District reported being forced to work for ten-day stretches before they were allowed to return to their homes and families. Forced portering takes villagers away from their fields and livelihoods and therefore directly affects whole families and communities. Furthermore, porters are frequently used as human minesweepers and must walk ahead of military patrols so that they, and not the soldiers, will detonate any landmines in the way.[22] As a result many porterers are heavily injured upon their return; or in the worst cases never return home.

Military camps are usually supplied with monthly or bi-monthly rations. These are often brought by truck to a central point from where villagers are recruited to transport the rations to the individual camps. There have been reports of hundreds of civilians being used for these operations. For example, on 4 and 9 April 2007, SPDC Army LIB #599 in Nyaunglebin district forced 250 villagers from Ko Nee and Ta Kaw Pwa (Tak-gon) village tracts to carry food for the Kaw La Wah Lu army camp. The SPDC battalion required 250 villagers to report to LIB #599 battalion headquarters each day, and threatened to capture villagers if less than the required number of villagers showed up.[23]

There have also been reports that armed opposition groups such as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) are using porters. However, in contrast to the SPDC's brutal treatment of porters, reports suggest that KNLA porters are at least provided with a minimum of food and medical treatment. In addition there are no reports of them being tortured, mistreated or used as human minesweepers.[24]

Forced Labour

> *"The villagers who are building the road are girls, boys, men and women. …. The oldest villagers who are building the road are more than 50 years old and the youngest are 14 years old. My 14-year-old daughter has gone to build the road now as well. The villagers have to carry stones, lay mud to fill the holes and level the road with mattocks."*
>
> - Villager, Bilin Township, January 2007[25]

Forced labour continues to be among the most pervasive of human rights abuses in Burma. Despite numerous reports by human rights groups, the SPDC continues to deny the existence of forced labour and attempts to present itself as cooperating with the ILO to eradicate such abuses.[26] In fact, the SPDC's army, *the Tatmadaw,* routinely forces civilians to work on state infrastructure projects, such as the building of roads, bridges, military bases or even towns, and 2007 was no exception. Throughout the year SPDC authorities continued to use forced labour countrywide to maintain existing civil infrastructures, including transportation and irrigation facilities.[27] On 7 May, for example, approximately 1,000 villagers from more than six villages in Toungoo district were forced to clear a new road between the SPDC army camp at Toe Daw and the camp at Yin O Sein. The new road was built right across villagers' rice fields, destroying about 500 acres of crops.[28]

Villagers performing forced labour constructing the Daw Na Mountain motor road. Scenes such as this are common throughout Burma. *[Photo: FTUB]*

One particularly brutal form of forced labour is the SPDC's use of villagers as human shields to protect bulldozers engaged in road construction. It has been reported that civilians are forced to sit atop the chassis or walk in front, behind and alongside the vehicle. SPDC forces thus hope to decrease the likelihood of ambushes by liberation armies. Those marching ahead of the vehicle serve as minesweepers, a practice that has long been used to protect SPDC troop patrols and has recently also become an increasingly common tactic employed to safeguard the military's road building equipment.[29]

The military will typically demand labour from local villages, with the threat of fines if households are unable to supply the required amount of people. The demand for labour is made easier by the existence of registration documents with details of the exact number of inhabitants, property and livestock within a village. Inhabitants have no choice but to apply for national identity cards and register their details or risk fines or arrest.[30] The military is furthermore increasingly relying on SPDC-appointed village chairpersons as intermediaries through whom to disseminate demands for forced labour. In some SPDC-controlled areas of Toungoo for example, villagers have reported that the fine for not meeting the stated quota

was 2,500 kyat per person. As is the case with portering, those few who can afford it can choose to hire a stand-in to work on their behalf.[31]

Projects vary in length and intensity, but they always mean that people are taken away from their land and livelihoods without any remuneration in return. The SPDC typically demands that forced labourers serve from early morning until evening.[32] Compliance with forced labour places civilians in dangerous situations, as they must travel away from their villages and communities, frequently under the supervision of low level officers and soldiers. Military personnel operate under blanket impunity, knowing that they will not be held accountable for any mistreatment of civilians. Furthermore, the low level officers and soldiers in charge of forced labour projects are under pressure to meet demands, quotas and schedules ordered by their superiors. Threats, harassment, beatings and even killings are not uncommon, and women further risk rape and other sexual abuses.[33] (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions). Forced labour often means that villagers are unable to work on their own agricultural work for days or even weeks on end. Regular forced labour in Thaton District, for example, has been a primary factor leading to increased food insecurity.[34]

Villagers are often ordered to work on large-scale plantations and military-owned paddy fields. In Karen State, for example, such plantations include vast forests of rubber, sugar cane, fruit, or cashew trees. [35] Furthermore, villagers are often also required to provide the building materials, money and information alongside the actual project. Materials, such as thatch shingles, bricks or bamboo poles all require labour-intensive preparation. Bricks must be formed from clay and baked, and thatch must be collected from the forest and woven into two meter long shingles.[36] This situation is not solely prevalent in areas under direct or partial SPDC control. Villagers living in ceasefire areas controlled by SPDC-allied military groups, such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) are subject to similar demands for forced labour.[37]

As well as forced labour being widespread inside the country, Burma is a source country for women, children, and men trafficked for the purposes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Burmese women and children are trafficked to Thailand, Bangladesh, The People's Republic of China, Malaysia, and South Korea for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and other forms of forced labour.[38] (For more information, see Chapter 8: The Situation of Migrant Workers).

Karen villagers performing forced labour for the SPDC providing roofing thatch. *[Photo: FBR]*

Forced Convict Labour

Human rights organisations have reported the continuous use of forced prison labour in Burma during 2007. It is estimated that as many as 20 percent of prisoners sentenced to 'prison with hard labour' die as a consequence of the conditions of their detention. At least 91 labour camps operate across the country and the thousands of prisoners in these camps are used to build highways, dams, irrigation canals, and to work on special agricultural projects. Prisoners are reportedly being forced to work from 6 am to 6 pm, without rest and the sick and weak are not exempted from work.[39] Inmates that cannot afford bribes are condemned to the harshest labour.[40]

Prisoners sent to labour camps are not always informed at their trial that they will be required to perform hard labour as part of their sentence. KHRG has reported that thousands of prisoners have been brought from prisons around Burma to carry supplies and act as minesweepers as part of the large scale offensive in the northern Karen areas since late 2005.[41] In Papun district, FBR News reported that of 1,700 prisoners that had been forced to porter loads, 265 had died. (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions). Among the porters in Papun District alone, there were over 20 child porters under the age of 16.[42] In Toungoo District, 95 of the over 600 prisoner porters were killed or died as a consequence of the hard labour.[43]

Convict porter carrying water at an SPDC army camp in Karen State. *[Photo: FBR]*

The living conditions and general treatment of forced prison labourers are widely reported to be far worse than for civilian forced labourers. The work is more dangerous, they have to work even longer hours and health provisions are non-existent. The prisoners are viewed as expendable labour and there are countless reports of their torture, beatings and killings.[44] (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions). It is common for convict porters to carry loads of between 33 and 44 kg, considerably heavier than their civilian counterparts. As a consequence of overwork and poor living conditions, prison labourers frequently fall ill, suffer injury or die. Neither illness nor injuries are treated by the army medics, who state explicitly that medical care and medicine is only available for soldiers.[45] Moreover, the International Committee of the Red Cross has not been allowed to visit prisons and labour camps in Burma since 2005, and conditions for prisoners are reportedly worsening.[46]

A constant supply of prison labour is assured by the continuing arbitrary arrests, as well as the imposition of lengthy sentences for minor misdemeanours. Those arrested are frequently denied legal process and are often told they will be released on payment of a bribe. If unable to bribe the police or the judiciary they are automatically sent to prison,

whether there is evidence against them or not. Escaped porters have reported that police officers had demanded between 10,000 and 500,000 kyat for their release.[47]

Forced Military Conscription

> "*The high ranking officers realized that recruitment by recruiting offices alone was insufficient, so they issued orders that recruitment should also be done as part of each battalion's operations. We had a quota system: we recruit for our battalion and also for other units like the Regional Command. Our battalion was ordered to recruit 12 people every four months. We couldn't meet this quota, so at every meeting they scolded the battalion officers. To solve the problem, battalion officers pressured their junior officers to recruit.… We set a rule that soldiers who wanted their 30 days' annual leave must guarantee that they will return with at least one recruit. Any soldier who wanted a discharge after 10 years of service had to get four new recruits for the battalion before we would approve his discharge. That's why there is a problem of child soldiers*".
>
> - A former battalion commander[48]

Following the suppression in 1988 of the nationwide pro-democracy demonstrations, the ruling military council initiated a dramatic effort to modernize and expand the armed forces. To tighten its control over the population, the SPDC army instituted a dramatic expansion of armed forces personnel throughout the country. Infantry and light infantry battalions tripled in number from 168 to 504. In 1988 the Tatmadaw comprised fewer than 200,000 soldiers, while today's 504 infantry battalions require over 410,000 soldiers. In reality, however, the SPDC Army has been challenged to meet the rising demands for new staff. At the second tri-annual meeting in 2005, Lt-Gen Thein Sein admitted that 220 of the battalions had only between 200 and 300 soldiers instead of the required 400-500, while the remaining 284 battalions had less than 200 men each. [49] Service in the armed forces is (for many) a dangerous and gruelling experience and soldiers are often subjected to mistreatment by superior officers. Former Tatmadaw soldiers told Human Rights Watch that many infantry battalions were extremely "*top-heavy*," with more officers and non-commissioned officers than privates, and some reported that there were sometimes 20 to 50 amputees held in their battalion to keep up the numbers. They also stated that discharges were only rarely granted even after 10 or 20 years of service unless the applicant would bring in three to five new recruits to replace himself.[50] Military salaries have been adjusted three times since 1988 but double-digit inflation has increasingly eroded the purchasing power of army salaries. [51] One major reason of the dwindling numbers of soldiers however is the high rate of desertions.[52]

According to SPDC military meeting minutes, there were about 9,000 desertions during 2006, whereas the army was only able to recruit 6,000. This trend continued in 2007 and the army is thus facing an acute shortage of trained soldiers. In Arakan State for example, the rate of army desertions is still on the increase although the SPDC has raised the monthly salaries of soldiers. According to an SPDC report, 110 private soldiers from ten army battalions under Regional Military Control Command based in Sittwe, deserted just within the month of December 2006.[53] Hundreds of soldiers who participated in the Armed Forces Day parade in Naypyidaw in April 2007 had also deserted. Of 300 men from Monghpyak-based MOC #18 in eastern Shan State, who were sent to the new capital for the occasion, only some 140 returned to their command post.[54]

In response to the increased rate of desertions, Adjutant General Thein Sein has called for the army to recruit 7,000 soldiers per month, four times the (actual) monthly recruitment rate reported for mid-2005 and double the rate reported for mid-2006.[55] Moreover, an SPDC army officer said (during an interview) that regiments were expected to actively recruit in

appointed areas and were fined when they failed to meet quotas: "*Regional and provision commanders sometimes take recruitment into their own hands and conscript local young men into their battalions. Rural towns and villages are targeted rather than Rangoon*".[56] Between December 2006 and January 2007, DKBA forces in Thaton District began implementing orders from their authorities at Myaing Gyi Ngu to expand the number of soldiers in their ranks. KHRG field researchers reported that villages with more than 200 households were ordered to gather six men each to be soldiers. Smaller villages with 60 households or less were ordered to collect two to three men each. Village heads were fined 600,000 kyat for each soldier short of the quota.[57]

As well as ordering civilians to join the military, SPDC officials continued to order villagers to set up militia groups to help protect the state's interests, and in particular, to assist the SPDC forces in controlling dissidents and dealing with external security threats.[58] Commonly, civilians are first forcibly recruited into one of the SPDC's numerous GONGOs, and then later required, as members of these GONGOS, to attend military trainings and serve in militias. Members of GONGOs are also utilized in the recruitment of non-members into such militias.[59] Regional SPDC officials direct these groups to carry out sentry duty at the village, monitor for and report on the approach of 'enemies' such as armed opposition groups, cross-border medical teams, or human rights researchers. These paramilitary groups must furthermore be available for military support service should the need arise. Villages are ordered to support the members of the various militias with funds and food and occasionally to construct barracks to house group members.[60] In February, for example, military authorities in Arakan State set up people's militias in an attempt to overcome low recruitment levels. The SPDC Army planned to form a 1,000 member strong militia by recruiting 30 villagers in all village tracts in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships.

The forced recruitment process has taken various forms, including random signature campaigns, poster campaigns, bribes and kidnappings. For example, from the beginning of February, the SPDC Army in Arakan State had been conducting a new recruitment drive for the armed forces with the help of a poster campaign in all townships.[61] These posters depict colourful pictures of soldiers holding weapons along with text in Burmese reading "*You are wanted to serve for the Burmese army*."[62] Previously, the SPDC army had forcibly recruited Arakanese youth with a quota system which was abandoned following international pressure. In addition to the poster campaign, the SPDC army tried to lure Arakanese youth with bonus money and 'donations' if they joined up.[63] In August, the SPDC military in Kachin State also launched fresh recruitment drives in a number of townships, forcing civilians to sign up at random. People had reportedly been told that they would be exempt from the military service if they could pay the military the money required to hire mercenaries to substitute them. However, they were warned that anyone seen outside after 8 pm would be considered "fair game" by military officials. Locals from Inn Gon, Madane Gon and Ten Mile in Moe Nyin Township reported that since the authorities ordered military leaders to find new recruits, a number of people had been snatched off the street.[64]

Burma continues to have one of the highest numbers of child soldiers in the world.[65] The official age of enlistment in the army is 18 years and the SPDC army has denied allegations that it forcibly conscripts and recruits children. According to Lt. Gen. Thein Sein, Chairman of the Committee for Prevention against Recruitment of Minors: "*No forced recruitment is carried out and all the soldiers have joined the army of their own accord*".[66] On 22 August, he told the committee that minors themselves were to blame for the problem because they lied about their true age or did not inform their parents that they had enlisted in the armed forces. Chairman Thein Sein further claimed that when parents came to military camps to take back their underage sons, the children often were returned after the cases were investigated. In a tacit admission that there remained underage soldiers in the armed forces, Thein Sein stated that soldiers with stunted growth were not sent to forward areas but were

instead given light work duties at military bases, and that illiterate youth were sent to army schools to be educated.[67]

However, human rights groups continue to charge the military regime with recruiting large numbers of children into its army, sending boys as young as 12 to fight against ethnic minority rebels.[68] Human Rights Watch estimated that there may be more than 70,000 child soldiers in the SPDC Army. The children are often kidnapped on their way home from school, without their parents' knowledge. They are then brutalised and physically abused during their induction and basic training before being shipped off to fight in the country's ethnic states. HRW states: "*Child soldiers are sometimes forced to participate in human rights abuses, such as burning villages and using civilians for forced labour*. *Those who attempt to escape or desert are beaten, forcibly re-recruited or imprisoned.*"[69] Non-state armed groups also recruit child soldiers, and some impose quotas on villages or households requiring them to supply a certain number of recruits, but the numbers are far smaller and some groups have taken steps to tackle child recruitment[70].

These two photos, taken in sequence, show SPDC army soldiers from LID #88 based at the Naw Soe military camp in Toungoo District Karen State, using convict porters to retrieve supplies and rations from Kaw Thay Der village on 14 February 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

5.2 ILO Activities in Burma

Burma became a State Party to the 1930 Forced Labour Convention in March 1955. From the 1960s the International Labour Organisation (ILO) began pressing Burmese authorities, then the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP), for legislative reform and to meet its international obligations. At the time, the BSPP not only refused to rescind these laws, but even strengthened their wording to allow the military greater liberty in the recruitment of forced labour. Since the early 1990s, the increased documentation and advocacy on human rights abuses in Burma led to greater international awareness as well as calls for an end to this form of abuse. In 1996, a letter was submitted to the 83rd Session of the International Labour Conference outlining a complaint "*against the SPDC of Burma for non-observance and the Forced Labour Convention.*"[71] This letter initiated a more involved engagement and in March 1997, a Commission of Inquiry to investigate claims of forced labour was established by the ILO Governing Body. In July 1998, the ILO reported that forced labour was practiced in Burma in "*a widespread and systematic manner*",[72] and since then the ILO has attempted to engage with the Burmese regime to bring about an end to this practice.

In response to ILO pressure, in May 1999 the SPDC issued Order 1/99, which banned most forms of forced labour. In the following year, two subsequent decrees were issued which broadened the scope to include penalties for anyone requisitioning forced labour, including members of the armed forces, police and public servants[73]. In addition, the ILO opened a regional office in Rangoon and a Liaison Officer to Burma was appointed in March 2002. Recognising the limits of giving tangible protection to appellants, the ILO pushed for the establishment of a complaint mechanism. This first mechanism implemented was however short-lived, and after the internal SPDC purge in October 2004 the military blocked all subsequent civil cases and retaliated against complainants.[74]

In April 2005 the relationship between the SPDC and the ILO became further strained following the SPDC's announcement that "false" allegations of forced labour were detrimental to the dignity of the State and, as such, legal action would be taken against the complainants. This lead to the conviction of Su Su Nway on 13 October 2005, who was counter-sued after she had successfully secured the prosecution of local officials in Htan Minaing and Mya Sinnai villages in Rangoon Division for perpetrating forced labour. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison.[75]

At the meeting of its Governing Body in November 2005, the ILO expressed grave concern at the deteriorating situation in Burma and was also severely critical of the regime's attempts to pressurise and intimidate the ILO by using state sponsored organisations to hold protest rallies against their involvement in Burma.[76] As the SPDC continuously backtracked on its earlier agreements, the ILO reiterated in November 2006 that it "*deplored the fact that forced labour continued to be widespread, particularly by the army*"[77] and suggested that it would seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the subject of Burma's continued non-compliance with the 1930 Forced Labour Convention.

With this, the ILO managed to pressure the SPDC to back down on many earlier points of contention, and in 2007, the ILO and the SPDC reached an agreement on a mechanism to tackle forced labour.[78] On 26 February, Nyunt Maung Shein, permanent representative to the ILO and SPDC ambassador, signed a '*Supplemental Understanding*' with the ILO according to which the regime agreed not to retaliate against complainants of forced labour. Initially the deal, on a trial run for a period of 12 months, was lauded as a "*historic Deal*"[79] and Richard Horsey the Liaison Officer described it as a "*very positive development*."[80] This ILO agreement allows in theory for citizens to freely submit complaints to the ILO office in Rangoon without fear of retaliatory legal action.[81] The ILO office will then make a confidential preliminary assessment as to whether a case involves forced labour, and the

Liaison Officer will then make an order that the cases be investigated by the SPDC authorities.[82] The ILO Governing Body's decision also included more freedom for the Liaison Officer to travel around the country,[83] and the provision of more staff members to assist him at the office.[84]

Shortly after the implementation of this agreement, its shortcomings became clear. The ILO remained unable to guarantee the safety of complainants, it maintains no offices outside of Rangoon, and ILO Officials are still highly restricted in their travels to rural areas. The requirement that the cases be initially vetted by the ILO and then handed over to the SPDC where it is then investigated by "*by the most competent civilian or military authority concerned as appropriate*"[85] is restrictive and has received a number of complaints. On 21 May it was reported that a facilitator for a complaint by a victim of forced labour in Pegu Division was harassed by local authorities. The facilitator, a 51-year-old villager of Nyaung Wine village, had helped a family whose son had been missing for more than one year after he was forced to serve as a porter for the army. After helping the family lodge a complaint, the facilitator was threatened by township level authorities led by the head of the general administrative department and the local police chief.[86] On 12 June, a junta "workers' representative" was expelled from the ILO Workers Group on the ground that the Burmese delegate did not represent workers in Burma.[87] The ILO stated that Khin Maung Oo, who was sent by the Burmese regime to Geneva as the representative of 'workers of Burma', was found to be a supervisor in the Burma Mayson Industrial Co. Ltd of Hlaing Tharyar Industrial zone in Rangoon and not from a democratically elected workers body.[88]

An ILO Committee report presented to the International Labour Conference in June echoed ICRC findings that forced labour is still widely used in Burma. Shortly after the ILO Committee issued its findings, U Kra Aung, a 40-year-old carpenter from Thaungtalann village, died while performing forced labour at an SPDC Army camp in Paletwa Township, Chin State.[89]

Throughout 2007 there were several cases of persons being harassed, arrested and even sentenced after making complaints about forced labour. On 31 June, a group of 20 villagers from Pwint Phyu Township in Magwe division filed a forced labour complaint with the ILO claiming that local authorities had forced them to work on a five acre castor crop owned by the SPDC military.[90] After sending the letters, the villagers were questioned five times by local officials. However, officials at Pwint Phyu Township Peace and Development Council denied the claims.[91] Moreover, on 18 July, Thein Shwe Maung, a man from Kanaung Village, Rambree Township, Arakan State, was arrested by local police forces after he had led a group of villagers in complaining to the ILO regarding the authorities' use of local villagers as forced labour.[92] He was released on bail on 10 August on the order of the Rambree court.[93] His case however was not completely dropped, and his movements were restricted for further 12 months.[94] On 27 July, it was reported that SPDC military authorities in Rambree Township had summoned 25 villagers from Kanaung Village to the township administration office. The 25 villagers were summoned as their names matched those on the letter to the ILO testifying to the use of forced labour in the area. The authorities tried to pressure them into signing a statement saying that they were not involved in filing the complaint and that the claims made to the ILO were untrue.[95] Furthermore, in September, six Burmese labour activists were convicted of crimes against the state and subsequently sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The accusations against four of the labour activists stem from their intent to hold a meeting to discuss labour issues at the American Centre in Rangoon following May Day celebrations.[96]

5.3 Forced Labour Resulting from International Joint Ventures

Throughout 2007 the Burmese junta conducted negotiations with a number of neighbouring countries and multinational corporations concerning future development and energy projects in the region. Several new projects began during the year, primarily hydroelectric dam projects and gas pipelines, as well as rail, road and port projects. Development projects in Burma are as a rule accompanied by an increase in militarization in surrounding areas, which again usually means higher levels of human rights abuses, particularly forced labour and portering. International joint ventures and the significant human rights abuses that follow have been extensively reported and include the use of troops and landmines to secure large development projects. Considering this, the following projects give reason for great concern regarding potential use of forced labour and other forms of human rights violations.

Hydropower in Burma

According to official statistics, hydroelectric power accounts for approximately 30-35 percent of the generated capacity of electric power. A recent article in the industry magazine *Hydropower and Dams* listed 29 projects that are currently under implementation and planning in Burma (excluding any projects planned in Kachin State).[97] "*The ever expanding list together with the recent announcements indicates a veritable frenzy on the part of the regime to realize its hydropower potential and the foreign dollars it can generate. An official from the Ministry of Electric Power told a local newspaper that the government intends to shift the country's reliance on gas to hydropower, making it the sole source of electricity by 2030*".[98] In 2007 the main projects launched were on the Irrawaddy river, the Salween river and the Shweli river. Most of the dam projects are carried out in cooperation with Chinese (or Thai) companies.

The negative consequences of large dams on fisheries, flood plain farming and river bank cultivation have been well-documented. Similarly, the displacement of large populations living on and near dammed rivers have led to severe problems linked to destroyed livelihoods, such as unemployment, as well as exacerbating social and health problems like the spread of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. There is no doubt that the series of proposed dams will have a similar impact on the millions that rely on the (Irrawaddy and Salween) rivers. The SPDC does not allow for any community participation regarding the dams, and while the communities affected will bear the negative impacts they are denied access to the benefits.[99]

Irrawaddy Dams

The Irrawaddy is Burma's largest river, and the main commercial waterway. It runs through the whole country, starting in Kachin State and finally emptying into the Indian Ocean. As part of a larger SPDC government plan of exporting hydroelectric power to neighbouring countries, the SPDC have a series of dams planned for the Irrawaddy, primarily in cooperation with Chinese companies. In late 2006 the state-owned China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) and Burma's Ministry of Electric Power No 1, signed an agreement to implement seven hydropower projects on the Irrawaddy River.[100] In May 2007, the Irrawaddy Myitsone dam, a 152 meter high hydropower dam, was launched. The dam is located on a stretch of the Irrawaddy River in Kachin State, which borders China in northern Burma. The Irrawaddy Myitsone dam is the first in a series of seven large Chinese dams to be built along this waterway. The SPDC has allowed Chinese companies to build this dam and transmit the energy back to China. The dam will generate an estimated 3,600 MW of electricity and the power will be worth an estimated US$500 million per year.[101] Locals in the

area strongly oppose the construction of the hydroelectric power plant at Myitsone for several reasons: as well as well-founded fears that the project will cause flooding, displacement and an increase in human rights abuses, the dam is being built on a site of invaluable natural heritage to Kachin State.[102] The Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG), a network of Kachin civil society groups, warned against the consequences of the dam in a detailed report published in 2007.[103]

The KDNG has estimated that 47 villages will be inundated and approximately 100,000 people will be displaced by the Myitsone dam. Moreover, it will have a major impact on the existing problems of unemployment, HIV/Aids and drug abuse.[104] Roads that link major towns in the remote state will be drowned and the floods will thus have an impact on trade, transportation and communication. The dam will furthermore have a negative impact on fisheries, river bank cultivation and flood plain farming. The healthcare system, which is already ranked one of the worst in the world, will be further burdened by an increase in Malaria and the release of toxic methyl mercury from the dam's reservoir.[105] Another real threat is the prospect of dam break as. Northern Burma is earthquake prone and the Irrawaddy Myitsone site is less than 100km from the major Sagaing fault line. Dam breakage or unnatural flood surges would be disastrous for the capital of Kachin State, Myitkyina, 40 km downstream. Recent dam breaks in nearby rivers in 2006 destroyed houses and bridges, as well as the power stations and dam structures beyond repair.

Salween Dams

The Salween river is one of Asia's main waterways. The governments of the Salween countries, Burma, China and Thailand, have been pushing for the damming of the river. Plans include the exploitation of hydropower potential and diversion of water from Burma to Thailand. In 2005 the SPDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to build a series of hydroelectric dams along the Salween River. As Thailand has exhausted almost all of its domestic hydroelectric capability and is hugely dependent on foreign oil, the country is eager to secure energy deals with its neighbouring countries. In fact, estimates show that Thailand will receive as much as 85-90 percent of the energy produced by the Burmese Salween dams.[106] Of the five proposed dam sites the two that have the most developed plans are the Hat Gyi Dam in Karen State and the Tasang Dam in Shan State.[107] In addition, the Upper Thanlwin Dam is being developed in cooperation with Chinese companies. The dams will have a major impact on the local people who will suffer displacement and dispossessions.[108]

It is believed that if the proposed dam projects along Burma's Salween River are to go ahead, over half a million people living at the mouth of the river will lose their major source of drinking water, agricultural productivity and fish stocks. A report, "*In the Balance*", released by MYPO, states that "*if the water flow in the Salween changes even slightly and the water becomes too salty, it will disrupt a delicate natural ecosystem of water, plants, and fish that Mon people have depended on for generations*".[109] The report also states that crop yields will decrease as annual sediment are trapped upstream and fertile farm fields laid to waste and that the flow of the water will become unpredictable causing accidents as the dams lie on active earthquake fault lines.[110]

Along with land confiscation and forced labour, increased militarisation has created human rights abuses. In areas of Toungoo and Papun Districts where hydroelectric projects are planned the SPDC has perpetrated attacks on villages, destroyed homes, forced relocation, deployed landmines in civilian areas and has at times applied a shoot-on-sight policy.[54] Continued development of the Salween dams is certain to lead to the forced displacement of thousands more villagers as they escape not only inundation by the reservoirs, but forced labour, rape and other abuses by SPDC forces sent to 'secure' the dams.[111]

As well as drawing criticism from human rights groups, the plan to dam the Salween river has been strongly criticised by environmental groups who claim that doing so would degrade one of the region's most biologically diverse areas, one that has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[112]

Hat Gyi Dam

The Hat Gyi dam in Karen State is the project to be completed first and construction started in early 2007. The construction of the hydropower dam is scheduled to run for five to six years.[113] In December 2005 the SPDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) for joint investment and implementation of the Hat Gyi dam construction, stating that the construction would commence in late 2007.[114] In June 2006, China's largest hydropower company, state owned Sino-Hydro, announced an MoU with EGAT to jointly finance and construct the Hat Gyi dam along with the Burmese junta. Following this, Thailand's quota in the investment will be 50%, China's 40% and Burma's 10%.[115]

The dam will be located 33 km downstream from the Salween-Moei River confluence near the DKBA headquarters in Myaingyingu. The area has been largely depopulated as a result of forced relocations.[116]

In 2007 the number of military government troops safeguarding the site increased. In July ethnic rebel groups reported that the number of SPDC troops would increase by 800 at the Hat Gyi dam construction site and along the main route to the dam. It was reported that SPDC LIB #549, led by Hlaing Kyi, had replaced the LIB 548 in the vicinity of the dam. They are responsible for the security of the construction site, alongside battalion 555 of the DKBA.[117]

On 4 September 2007, a Thai engineer employed by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) was killed in a grenade attack by an unidentified group on a construction site at the controversial Hat Gyi dam. The state-run newspaper, The New Light of Burma, claimed the Karen National Union fired heavy artillery shells into the camp near Hlaingbwe Township, located about 180 kilometres (110 miles) east of Yangon. The KNU denied the accusation.[118]

Local Karen groups, environmentalists and human rights organizations heavily oppose the project, and argue that building dams under the current military junta will effect the survival of more than 10 million people from 13 ethnic groups who depend on the Salween river for survival.[119]

Ta Sang Dam

The 7,110-megawatt Ta Sang dam in eastern Shan State is set to be the largest of the Salween dams, and with a height of 228 meters it would also be the highest in Asia. In April 2006 the Burmese junta signed a US$ 6 billion agreement with Thailand's MDX Group to build the Ta Sang.[120] In March 2007, the construction of the dam began. Over 400 villagers were forced by the SPDC military to attend the official celebration ceremony to launch the construction of the Ta Sang dam.[121]

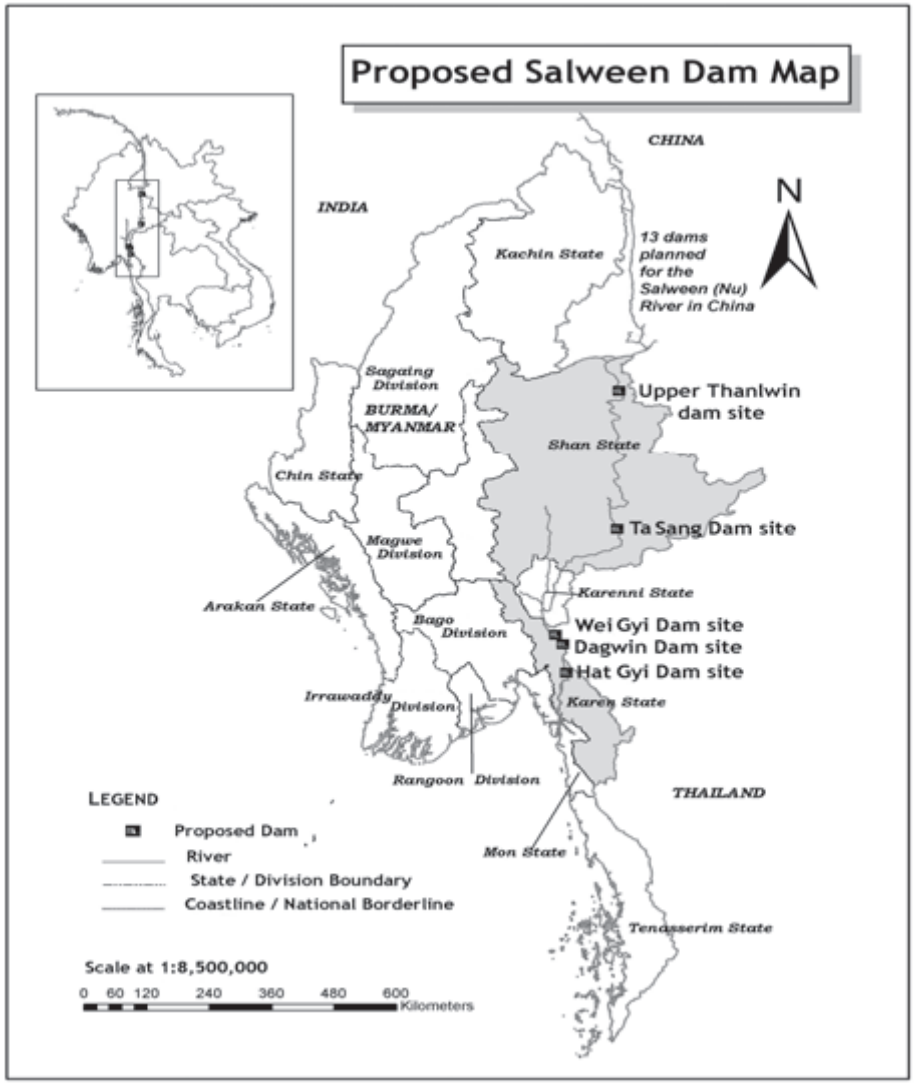
The dam is expected to flood an area of 700 square kilometres, which will have negative consequences on the environment as well as leading to displacement of a large population.

Sapawa, a Shan environmental group, has estimated that over 60,000 villagers near the proposed Ta Sang dam site have already been forcibly evicted from their homes.[122]

Approximately 35,000 people have been displaced from areas surrounding the proposed Tasang dam site and the livelihoods of those remaining continues to be undermined by forced labour for the construction of roads. They furthermore suffer of the high rates of deforestation caused by large scale logging.[123]

Upper Thanlwin Site

In April 2007, two Chinese companies, Farsighted Investment Group and Gold Water Resources announced plans to finance the upper Thanlwin Dam in northeastern Burma.[124] The project has generated widespread criticism from environmental and human rights groups who claim that the dams will force thousands from their homes, depriving people of their livelihoods and that forced labour will be used on the construction sites. However, so far little information has come out about the plans for constructing the dam.



A map showing the locations of the proposed Salween Dams. *[Map: Salween Watch]*

Shweli River

> *"The river is like our factory because she produces fertile soil each year. Every villager plants gardens on the river bank and these are necessary for our family income. If we can sell these crops it supports our children's school fees"*.[125]

In addition to dam projects on the Irrawaddy and Salween rivers, the Shweli river is the site of three proposed dams; Shweli 1, 2 and 3. The Shweli runs from China into Shan State, and is a main tributary of the Irrawaddy, which it merges into north of Mandalay.[126] According to a project document, the aim of Shweli 1 dam project is to construct a dam across the Shweli and divert the water along a conduit tunnel through the hills to feed a power station. In April 2007 General Than Shwe visited the site when the project was 51 percent complete. The area is mostly inhabited by the Palaung ethnic group, whose livelihoods traditionally depend on growing tea in the fertile lands near the river. In a report released in December 2007, the Palaung Youth Network Group (PYNG) document how the local residents near the dam site have had their land destroyed and or confiscated for the clearing and construction of not only the dam site and the roads leading to it, but also for the military battalions that have moved into the area.[127]

> "*In the seven years since the arrival of the soldiers to Man Tat and the beginning of the project (Shweli 1), the people of Man Tat haven't had any means to protect their own property or participate in decision making in what is happening in their village and to their surroundings. The military soldiers control the village and take what they want without agreement. Farms, forests products and domestic livestock have been seized by the military. Now there is no easy access to forest produce as before and people are jobless. Formerly villagers sold their extra farm produce to the towns and now they have to buy rice at a high price".*[128]

The villagers have been forced to work on the dam site and roads leading to it, in most cases without receiving payment. In February for example 100 villagers from two villages alone were forced to pave the road for five days by the order of the regional military commander. The forced labourers did not receive any money for their work.[129] Moreover, although workers were forced to work on road construction, they were denied jobs at the project construction site which were reserved for Chinese workers.[130]

> *"They treated us like slaves; we had to do what they ordered. Some people hadn't even finished their breakfast but had to go. We worried for our family members' evening meal, as we have to fend for our living from hand to mouth. If we were helping fellow villagers build something, we could ask for some rice for our family. But this work was for the military; our wives back home had to borrow rice from other people for cooking. The village headman could only breathe easily when the villagers complied with the orders, otherwise he would be punched and beaten"*[131]

According to an article in the state run *Light of Myanmar* in April 2007, "*arrangements are being made to implement the Shweli 2 and Shweli 3 hydropower projects*".[132] However, little information has so far come out about these projects. (For more information on displacement caused by hydroelectric dam projects: see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation)

Burma's Oil and Gas Sector

Burma has an abundance of natural gas resources especially in offshore areas. Burma's energy sector provides the country with the largest recipient of foreign direct investment. According to newly-released government statistics, foreign investment in Burma's oil and gas sector accounts for more than 60 percent with a record high of more than US$ 470 million in the fiscal year 2006-07. [133]

During 2007, companies from Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, China, South Korea, Russia and Thailand secured new licenses to explore for hydrocarbons off the coast of Burma.[134] In March, Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production Co Ltd announced two successful natural gas exploration wells off the Burmese coast, about 300 km south of Rangoon. The PTTEP stated the two wells in the M9 concession in the Gulf of Martaban each has natural gas flows of up to 15 million standard cubic feet of gas per day.[135] In August, new large gas deposits in three offshore natural gas fields in the Bay of Bengal near the border with Bangladesh were discovered.[136]

The role of petroleum companies which invest in and indirectly support Burma's military regime came under renewed spotlight as the world watched the pro-democracy protests and repression unfold on the country's streets (For more information, see Chapter 11: "The Saffron Revolution" – The 2007 pro-democracy movement). The companies' response to the crisis varied - "*from apparent anguish to complete indifference or total silence*" - according to the policy of the governments of the countries where the oil companies are based.[137] The apparent anguish was however short-lived. Total, for example, justified its continued involvement with the regime by declaring that a withdrawal meant "*others would take our place and could treat local staff not as well as we do*".[138]

Shwe Gas Development

The largest gas project currently being developed in Burma is the Shwe project, in the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of Arakan State. In August 2000, the Burma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) signed a deal with the South Korean multinational Daewoo International to explore and develop natural gas fields in the Bay of Bengal. In 2004 they announced the discovery of a large off-shore gas field containing several blocks of gas. The largest block, the A-1, is estimated to contain upwards of 3 trillion cubic feet of gas. The subsequent development project was named "Shwe" which means gold in Burmese.[139] The estimated market value of the A-1 block alone is US$80 billion. The Shwe Gas Consortium was set up to oversee the development of the project. Consortium members include Daewoo International with a 60 percent share, the Korean Gas Corporation with 10 percent, India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation with 10 percent and the Gas Authority of India (GAIL) with a 20 percent share.

The gas field is thought to have a lifetime of around 20 years and it has been estimated that the project will increase the junta's income by 150 percent, bringing in between US$580 and US$824 million each year, or up to US$17 billion over the life of the project.[140] The Shwe Gas Movement, a coalition of grassroots NGOs, is calling on the Consortium members to cease cooperation with the Burmese regime as the gas revenues from the project will only strengthen the junta's oppressive control of the country and allow for further development of the military. *"The hopes of many people in Burma for democratic change will be dealt a serious blow by the Shwe gas project if it goes ahead,"* said Wong Aung, coordinator of the Shwe Gas Movement in Thailand.[141]

The Gas from the A-1 field was initially earmarked for Indian consumption which would mean building a pipeline overland through Arakan and Chin States, then through Bangladesh to India. However during bilateral negotiations between India and Bangladesh, the latter imposed conditions on any pipeline agreement including access for commodities and energy from Bangladesh to Nepal and Bhutan through Indian territory. India could not agree to the conditions so the project stalled. In late 2005, the Burmese junta and the Consortium unexpectedly signed a MoU with PetroChina, a private oil and gas company from Beijing, to supply gas from the A-1 field, including an overland pipeline to China.

In 2007, Burma picked PetroChina to sell gas to China, shattering India's hope of bringing the gas to India.[142] Despite India's efforts at pampering the ruling junta with increased military aid, Yangon chose Beijing over New Delhi for selling the gas to come out of the two undersea fields. In return, China will pay Rangoon an annual transit fee of US$150 million for 30 years for the pipeline's 990-km stretch in Burma.[143] One analyst calculated that the total rent over 30 years to the SPDC from China for building oil and gas pipelines would amount to US$9 billion – or $300 million annually.[144]

South Korea's Daewoo industrial conglomerate has objected to Burma's decision to sell 200 billion cubic meters of gas from two Shwe blocks in the Arakan offshore gas fields to China at US$4 per million British thermal units (mBtu). Daewoo, the main shareholder of the Shwe gas fields, contends the price of gas should be at least US$4.41 per mBtu.[145]

Human rights campaigners sharply criticized the light sentences handed out in a South Korean court to former Daewoo International executives and other employees convicted of involvement in an illegal weapons factory project in Burma. The project involved shipping parts and equipment to Burma in 2002 to build a weapons factory in Pyay—in violation of South Korean law. Former Daewoo International President Lee Tae-yong was fined about US$50,000 and a former managing director of the company was given a one-year suspended prison sentence. The other convicted ex-Daewoo employees received shorter sentences. In all, 14 people stood trial.[146]

Human Rights Watch claimed that the proposed pipeline construction from gas fields off the coast of Burma is expected to exacerbate serious human rights abuses in Burma. The proposed construction of overland pipelines to transport the gas will involve the use of forced labour, and result in illegal land confiscation, forced displacement, and unnecessary use of force against villagers.[147]

Road, Rail and Port Projects

The SPDC is a partner in 'The Asian Highway', a project which aims to connect 32 countries throughout Asia and has been organised in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). On 10 May 2007 it was reported that a ground survey was underway to continue building another section of the Asian highway in Burma to stretch from Thingan Nyinaung to Kawkareik in south-eastern Karen State. A prior section which extends from Myawaddy to Thingan Nyinaung was completed with the assistance of Thailand in 2006. The Asian Highway Burma section stretches from Myawaddy-Thingan Nyinaung-Kawkareik-Mawlamyine with a total length of about 1,400 km. The 40 km Thingan Nyinaung-Kawkareik section will be built by Thailand through the low-lying areas of the Dawna mountain range following the 18 km section of Myawaddy-Thingan Nyinaung. The Burma section of the Highway is based on the existing roads that are upgraded from single lanes to two or four lanes and they are expected to be durable to withstand 60 tons of load.[148]

Proposed Asian Highway Routes in Burma. *[Map: KHRG]*

On 22 March 2007, Indian Railways proposed links to Burma. Under the agreement, India is expected to provide the missing rail link to Burma and China. Of the 215 kilometre proposed link between India and Burma, about 100 kilometres have already been sanctioned. Initially, the rail links will only be used for freight transportation, but at a later stage passenger movement may be started.[149] While the total proposed investment is yet to be worked out, India and Burma have agreed on a rail link between Jiribam and Tamu. The cost of the proposed linkage would be around Rs 2,741 crore. This includes the cost of linking Imphal in Manipur to Tupul, a distance of 97 kilometres.[150]

On July 27 2007, an agreement for the construction of a friendship road that connects Bangladesh and Burma was signed. Initiative for the construction of a road between Bangladesh and Burma was taken in 2003, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to this effect during the visit of Burmese Prime Minister to Dhaka in 2004. The construction of a 153 kilometres long cross-border highway is expected to boost border trade between the two countries.[151] During the first phase, 43 kilometres of the road will be constructed, with 23 kilometres from Ramu to Gundom in Bangladesh and 20 kilometres from Taungbro to Bawli Bazar bordering Maungdaw Township in Burma. Bangladesh has agreed to bear the cost of construction, expected to be about US$ 25 million in the first phase. The remaining 110 kilometres of highway will be constructed at a cost of US$ 116 million in the second phase.[152] At a meeting, the Western Command Commander told the border township administrators to evacuate all the villages which are near the road, especially in Boli Bazar (Kyein Chaung) where more than 1,000 families are living. The Commander also mentioned that the village tracks of Meetike and Taungpru are to be evacuated.[153]

In August, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with Bangladesh Foreign Advisor Iftekhar Chowdhury in Manila where he reiterated Beijing's support for Dhaka's proposed trilateral road link project, to connect Bangladesh, Burma, and China.[154]

In November it was reported that the Rangoon-based Yuzana Company, was granted a contract by the SPDC military junta to rebuild the Burma section of the World War II Indo-Burma-China Road called the Ledo Road in Northern Burma,. The Yuzana Company, chaired by U Htay Myint, was granted over 200,000 acres including areas in the world's largest tiger reserve and land belonging to native people in Hukawng Valley. The reconstruction of over 50 mile stretch from Myitkyina to Kambaiti, another part of the Indo-Burma-Sino Road in Burma, was completed on 26 April 2007. It was rebuilt by the Chinese government. The Ledo Road is 1,079 miles long and stretches from Ledo village in Assam State in India to Kunming in Yunnan Province in China. The Ledo Road, also called the Stilwell Road, was constructed between 1942 and 1945. The double-track and all-weather Stilwell Road construction was estimated to cost 137 million US dollars.[155]

India has also started rebuilding a stretch of the historic road linking its remote northeast to southwest China amid hopes the route could be reopened to boost trade. The 1,726-km (1,079-mile) Stilwell Road (also called The Ledo Road) connects India's north-eastern state of Assam to Kunming, the capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province, after cutting through Burma. The Stilwell Road on the Indian side is 61 kilometres (28 miles) long. The major stretch of 1,033 kilometres (646 miles) lies within Burma, while 632 kilometres (395 miles) of the road are in China.[156]

In June, it was confirmed that a port capable of handling the largest cargo ships will be built on the Burmese island of Rambree specifically to service China's shipping needs. The port at Kyauk Phyu will be connected to the new 1,950 km highway to be built through Burma directly to Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan Province.[157]

Route of the planned trilateral road project. *[Map: Narinjara News]*

Meanwhile, India increased its offer to develop a port at Sittwe, after Burma expressed reservations over New Delhi's earlier proposal. The revised offer overcomes Burma's sensitivities on developing the seaport, which could serve as an alternative gateway to India's north-eastern states. The new package calls for the immediate transfer of the port to Burma after it is made suitable for larger vessels. Earlier, India wanted to operate the port for an extended period. The US$120 million project would upgrade the port and a linked waterway into upper Burma. From there, a roadway would be used to transport cargo to the Mizoram border.[158]

5.4 Forced Portering – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

From 29 January until 4 February 2007, Major Kyaw San, deputy commander of LIB #233 ordered village headmen of three villages to supply 12 villagers each for portering. The villagers were told to bring their own food for 7 days. Each villager had to carry military supplies and haversacks of about 20 Kg and had to march along soldiers for 7 days. They also had to construct makeshift huts for the commander and soldiers and had to cook food for soldiers on the trip. Although the commander told them that porter fees would be given, no one received any money for their labour.[159]

On 29 March 2007, it was reported that during an SPDC army operation civilians from several villages including Letpanwa, Tookpi, Sitaung, and Pyin Zaw were used as military porters by army personnel. At least five army battalions were participating in the operation: IB #20, IB #34, LIB #289, LIB #354, and LIB #376.[160]

Chin State

During the last week of January 2007, 18 porters were summoned by the SPDC army to carry rations from Sawti village to Zuamang village. Most of the porters were women.[161]

On 8 February 2007, it was reported that soldiers of LIB #50, positioned at Rezua town in southern Chin state were using more women as porters than at the beginning of the year.[162]

Matupi Township:

On 14 January 2007, the 2nd Lieutenant of LIB #140, stationed in Satu village in Matupi Township summoned villagers as porters. The porters were forced to carry armaments to Lailente village, 20 miles away from Satu village.[163]

Paletwa Township

From 26 January until 28 January 2007, Captain Kyaw Tun commander of IB #55 temporarily based at Myeit Wa ordered Kyaw Maung, Chairman of Pakar-wa village tract, to provide porters to carry military supplies for his troops. Chairman Kyaw Maung sent a letter to the respective village headmen of Sadin-wa, Ngwe-let-wa, Pa-kar-wa and Phway Lite-wa to supply civilian porters. One person from each household in the villages listed below had to report to the army base in Myeit Was. Villagers were made to carry food, supplies and ammunition weighing about 20 Kilograms. The following villages were affected:

1. Sadin-wa, 20 households;
2. Ngwe Let-wa, 40 households;
3. Pa-kar-wa, 25 households; and
4. Phway Lite-wa, 50 households.[164]

From 6 February until 10 February 2007, about 40 villagers from Xxxxxx village were forced to carry packs weighing about 20kg each for five days. The orders were given by Captain Myint Lwin of IB #289 based at Paletwa Myothit. The porters were not given wages for their labour. One of the villagers, U Tun Oo was shot and killed when he tried to escape.[165]

Thangtlang Township

On 8 October 2007, 14 soldiers led by Major Myo Zaw Tant forced 11 villagers from Sabawngte village to carry army backpacks, rations and bullets.[166]

On 19 November 2007, troops of LIB #266 stationed in Lunglei village patrolling the border used villagers not only as guides but also as porters for army rucksacks full of ammunition and food.[167]

Kachin State

In February 2007, the SPDC junta used civilian porters to carry hardware materials to a new bridge construction. All the civilian porters were from Machyang Baw Township and had to carry cement for Ri Dam Bridge construction in Khawng Lang Hpu. By the order of Putao-based Military Command Commander Khai Soe, at least one person from each family of Machyang Baw, N'Pu Baw, N'Wai Baw, Htang Ga, Ah Lang Ga, Nam Hkam and Tarang Dam villages were forced to work. Without any wages and rations from the authorities, the villagers had to deliver cement from Machyang Baw to Khawng Lang Hpu (42 miles) on foot.[168]

Karen State

Dooplaya District

On 14 January 2007, Major Min Htut of LIB #36 ordered the village headman of Ah Nan Kwin village to send 10 villagers to his army unit in Ah Nan Kwin. The village headman sent 10 villagers on the same day. On the following day Major Min Htu made them carry military supplies from Ah Na Kwin village to Ye Ta Khun village, about 23 kilometres away. Each villager had to carry a 35 Kilogram load.[169]

Between 5 and 26 May 2007, by the order of Lt. Col Soe Mann, one person from every household of 12 villages was forced to carry military supplies from Thit Thae Htu to an army base in Ah-lae village. The following villages were ordered to provide labour:

1. Thar-lae;
2. Kar-htar;
3. Thit Kar-htar;
4. Thit-maw Ku;
5. Waw Kyaw;
6. Htee Ka-maw;
7. Wah Mee Ka-lar;
8. Mae-la Arh;
9. Mae-la Arh Sie;
10. Sie Phoe Khee;
11. Mae Kae; and
12. Nae Phoe Khee.[170]

Nyaunglebin District

On 1 March 2007, SPDC army commander Tin Soe forced 40 Maladaw villagers to carry loads from Maladaw village to the new SPDC army camp at Saw Tay Der. Villagers were forced to carry loads everyday to support the construction of this new camp. Supplies carried included engines, chain-saws and other tools, as well as food. The construction of the road was largely being carried out by troops from LIB #377, while LIB #376 was in charge of security for the road construction and LIB #375 was in charge of acquiring forced labour to support the construction project.[171]

On 1 March 2007, Sergeant Kyaw Nyut Oo, from SPDCs army camp at Maladaw, forced 30 Maladaw villagers to carry loads from Maladaw village to Saw Tay Der, where they have set up a new camp after they attacked the village on 16 February.[172]

On 2 March 2007, SPDC troops based in Tha-bye-nyunt camp commanded 82 bullock carts of the villagers and forced them to carry army rations from Tha-bye-nyunt to Mar-la-daw military camp.[173]

On 6 March 2007, five bull carts from Mar La Daw village were forced to carry fuel to Hsaw Tay Der military camp by SPDC troops from Mar La Daw.[174]

SPDC army soldiers in Karen State employing forced labour by forcing villagers to carry their supplies. *[Photo: FBR]*

During the first week of March 2007, 90 villagers from Mar La Daw and 50 villagers from Ko Ni village were forced by commander Tin Soe to carry an electric generator and sawmill to Hsaw Tay Der military camp.[175] Starting from 7 March 2007, tactical commander Tin Soe of SPDC MOC #9 forced about 50 Mar-lar-daw villagers daily to carry military rations and items, from Mar-lar-daw to Saw-thay-doe camp. On 8 March 2007, operation commander Tin Soe of MOC #9 forced between 40 to 50 Mar-la-taw villagers to carry electrical generators, saw mills, and army rations from Mar-la-daw to Saw-thay-doe.[176]

On 10 March 2007, Bo Thet Khaing of IB #394, under the SPDC Northern Command, forced villagers of Ma-u-bin, Ma-wi and Pa-deh-gaw villagers to clear a 4-acre area of football ground, situated between Mya-tha-ya Kon-gwin and Toh-day-poe. He also extorted 1,000 Kyat per household form villagers for buying tools to use in clearing the ground.[177]

On 14 March 2007, 50 villagers from Mar La Daw were forced by SPDC troops to carry rice and cooking oil from Mar La Daw to Hsaw Tay Der.[178]

On 18 March 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #357, 376 and 377, under MOC #7 forced villagers from Saw-thay-doe, Kheh-poe-doe, Theh-baw-doe and Kyauk-pyar villages, in Theh-baw-doe village tract to work on the construction of a motor road. Furthermore, at least 50 Mar-la-taw villagers were forced to carry food supplies and engine oil for the motor road construction.[179]

On 23 March 2007, SPDC MOC #9, based in Mone Township, forced 25 Maw-keh-tha-ber-ko villagers to carry army rations to Saw-tay-doe on a daily basis.[180]

On 26 March 2007, Ma-lar-daw villagers were forced to carry army rations to Saw-thay-doe camp.[181]

On 26 March 2007, troops from LIB #357, 376 and 377 under the command of MOC #7 forced 50 villagers from Ma-lar-daw village to carry army supplies from Mone town to Zor-tae-dha village.[182]

On 4 and 9 April 2007, troops of SPDC LIB #599 forced 250 villagers from Ko Nee and Ta Kaw Pwa (Tak-gon) village tracts to carry food for the Kaw La Wah Lu army camp. Each day 250 villagers were required to report to LIB #599 battalion headquarters. The SPDC troops threatened to capture villagers if at least 250 villagers did not come to carry loads.[183]

On 9 April 2007, troops from LIB #599 based at Mone Township forced 250 villagers of Ko Ne and Ta Khaw Bwar villages to carry army rations from their village to Gaw Law Wah Lu mountain.[184]

On 10 April 2007, LIB #599 officer Bo Tin Aung forced Kwee De Kaw villagers to carry army rations to Kwee-de-ko army camp.[185]
On 10 April 2007, LIB #599 forced villagers from Ta Kaw Pwa village-tract to provide 25 bullock carts to carry their loads from battalion head-quarters to Kwee De kaw camp. The villagers were also required to bring 150 bamboo pieces and other wood to build the camp.[186]

On 11 April 2007, SPDC LIB #599 with 35 soldiers forced villagers to carry food for LIB #375 of MOC #9 at Kwee De Kaw camp. One of these villagers stepped on a landmine that had been placed by the SPDC army near their camp. Five villagers were injured in the explosion. LIB #599 is under the command of Major Tin Bo Aung, Captain Aung Ko Oo, Myint Tun, and Lieutenant Myint San Oo.[187]

On 16 April 2007, the SPDC troops from LIB #599 summoned 25 bullock carts and their owners from Ta Khaw Bwar villagers and forced them to transport to bamboo to LIB #599. Each bullock cart had to be loaded with 150 bamboo poles to the camp of LIB #599. After delivery of bamboo they were made to transport army supplies to Kwee De Kho camp.[188]

On 19 April 2007, SPDC IB #599 troops commanded 25 carts from Leh-chaung and Ta-kawt-bwa villagers and forced them to carry army rations to Kwee De Kaw military camp. Moreover, IB #599 troops forced the villagers to cut 150 bamboo poles for them.[189]

On 19 April 2007, troops from LIB #599 based at Mone Township forced villagers from Kwee De Kho to carry army rations from Ko Ne to Kwee De Kho army camp. Army officers were Lieutenant Tin Aung, company commander Aung Ko Oo and Mya Tun, Company second in command Mya San Oo.[190]

Also on 19 April 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #270, under LID #44, and LIB #29, under LID #11, seized 44 villagers from Lay-kaw-ti village tract, including 3 women for portage, and 140 villagers from Mae-waing-Mae-thu village tract and used them as forced labourers.[191]

On 20 April 2007, troops from LIB #590, 599 and IB #20 demanded 150 bull carts from villagers to send food supplies from Kyauk Pya to Htee Ler Baw Hta. Major Myo Win Aung from MOC/ OCH #9 instructed villagers of 7 villages that they had to transport 3,000 baskets of rice and other food such as bean, salt, canned food, and cooking oil from Ta Kaw to Play Hsar Loe camp. The following villages were affected by this order:

1. Yo Loe;
2. Ka Mu Loe;
3. Lay Gaw Loe;
4. Lay Pau Pa;
5. Plaw Baw Der;
6. Play Hsar Loe; and
7. Yaw Loe.[192]

On 4 May 2007, 60 SPDC troops from Tha Pye Nyunt ordered 80 villagers to carry food supplies to Hsaw Tay Der.[193]

On 14 May 2007, it was reported that SPDC troops forced 250 villagers from Ko Nee and Ta Kaw Pwa (Tak-gon) village tracts to carry food for the Kaw La Wah Lu army camp. Each day 250 villagers were required to report to LIB #599 battalion headquarters.[194]

Papun District

On 20 January 2007, SPDC military ordered villagers to carry their supplies for 10 days. The following villages were forced to provide labour:

1. Dain Law Por;
2. Htee Ber Kah Hta;
3. Noh Law Soon;
4. Haw Hta;
5. Kas Sit;
6. Nat Koo Nar;
7. T'Dwee Koh; and
8. Poh Baw Koh.[195]

Also on 20 January 2007, DKBA commander Hla Maung ordered 7 villages to provide labour to carry their supplies. Each person had to work for 10 days carrying supplies. The following villages were affected:

1. Tei Mwee Du;
2. Win Shat;
3. Day Law Soon;
4. Koo Sit village;
5. Nat Koo Nar;
6. T'Dwee Koh ; and
7. Poh Baw Koh. [196]

On 7 March 2007, DKBA's Hla Maung, ordered one person from each of 7 villages to serve as porters for the military. The following villages were affected:

1. Kler-wah;
2. Wa-mee-day;
3. Klaw-hta;
4. To-lwee-kyo;
5. Day-baw-kaw;
6. To-thaypu; and
7. The-gaw-kyo.[197]

On 8 March 2007, DKBA ordered 8 persons from Hto Po Par Der to carry food supplies from Papun to Kaw Pu.[198]

On 11 March 2007, SPDC LIB #270, under LID #44, and LIB #216 and 219, under LID #11, forced 100 villagers of Lay-kaw-ti village tract and 15 villagers of Kay-ko village tract to carry military rations from Ku-thu-ta to Kay-ko.[199]

On 16 March 2007, U Than Sein (44) of Kaung-mon village stepped on a landmine while carrying army ration to Koe-theh-lu camp. He lost his left foot in the explosion.[200]

On 17 March 2007, troops from SPDC LID #44 and LID #44's subordinate units, LIB #207, 219 and 216, based in Dweh-lo Township, seized 200 villagers of Maewine village and forced them to carry army rations. Furthermore, 41 villagers of Mae-thu village tract and 28 villagers of Lay-kaw-ti village tract were forced to carry army rations.[201] Troops from (the same) SPDC LID #44, based in Dweh-lo Township, seized 7 villagers for portering in De-po-doe and Poe-mu-doe village.[202]

On 18 March 2007, combined troops from LIB #207, under SPDC LID #44, and LIB #219, under SPDC LID #22, seized 189 villagers, including 9 women, from Mae-wine, Mae-thu and Lay-kaw-ti village tracts and forced them to carry army rations and other items.[203]

On 18 March 2007, SPDC troops from LIB #207 under LID #44, and LIB #219 under LID #11 forced 80 Mae-thu villagers and 44 Lay-kor-ti villagers (including 6 women), to carry army rations and other items.[204]

On 20 March 2007, SPDC troops forced 150 villagers of Lay-kor-ti, Mae-way and Mae-thu to carry military rations.[205]

From the third week of March 2007, SPDC LIB #207, from LID #44 and LIB #216, 229 from LID #11, forced villagers to carry military food supplies from Ku Thu Hta to Kay Ko. Labour was ordered from the following villages:

1. Doh Kho Wah, 30 persons;
2. Hsaw Pwi Hta, 40 persons;
3. Hgaw Kwee, 30 persons;
4. Pway Bwa, 40 persons;
5. Kay Ko, 50 persons;
6. Mae Cho village tract, 100 persons.[206]

Toungoo District

On 1 January 2007, Div. #66 commander Maung Maung Aye forced 10 villagers from Bawgali Gyi (Kler La) to act as human shields for the SPDC army bulldozer clearing the road between Maw Pah Der and Kaw Soe Kho.[207]

On 2 January 2007, the MOC #16 officer based in the Play Hsa Lo area forced 7 people from Ye Lo village and five people from Plaw Baw Der to go to Bon Ma Tee and act as human shields for the bulldozer operating along the Bawgali Gyi-busakee road.[208]

On 3 January 2007, people from 5 villages were forced to carry supplies for the SPDC army. These villages were:

1. Ku Thay Der;
2. Kaw Law Kar;
3. Sa Bar Law Kee;
4. Htee Ta Pu; and

5. Thu Ger Der.[209]

On 11 January 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #108, led by battalion commander Kyaw Oo, under Tac 661, LID #66, forced 47 persons from 3 villages to carry army rations from Than-daung town to Day-lor Bridge camp. The affected villages were:
1. Ler-hgee-doe (15 persons);
2. Sbar-law-khee (12 persons); and
3. Ka-zer-bu (20 persons).[210]

On 6 February 2007, troops of SPDC MOC #5 headquarters based in Baw-ga-lee-gyi, forced 20 persons from Deh-doh village to carry military supplies from Baw-ga-lee-gyi to Maw-ko-deh military camp.[211]

On 17 February 2007, SPDC troops forced 300 villagers to carry military supplies to Tha-aye-hta military camp.[212]

On 18 February 2007, SPDC troops from MOC #5 headquarters, based in K'ler-la camp, forced villagers in the K'ler-la area to carry military supplies and clear landmines from K'ler-la to Tha-aye-hta.[213]

On 28 February 2007, LIB #375, under MOC #9, forced the villages of Paw Pe Der, Aung Chan Tha and Myaung Oo to provide 12 bullock carts as well as villagers to move supplies for them.[214]

On 1 March 2007, troops of SPDC LIB #373, led by Column Commander Aung Myo Thein, under MOC #5 Headquarters, based at Thu-kheh-doe, forced 9 Htee-ta-pu villagers and 10 Thu-kheh-doe villagers to carry army rations from Ku-thay-doe to Thu-kheh-doe village.[215]

On 3 March 2007, troops of SPDC LIB # 373 based at Thu-kheh-doe led by Column Commander Aung Myo Thein, under MOC #5 Headquarters, based at Thu-kheh-doe, forced 7 Htee-ta-pu villagers and 9 Thu-kheh-doe villagers to carry army rations from Khu-thay-doe to Thu-kheh-doe.[216]

Also on 3 March 2007, the strategic commanders of SPDC MOC #5 headquarter based at Kheh-weh village in Than-daung Township, forced 15 Ler-khee-ko villagers to carry army rations from Than-daung to Kheh-weh.[217]

Between 3 and 17 March 2007, 439 persons from 11 villages east of Thandaung town were forced to carry military supplies by MOC #5 to Ku Thay Der/Ker Der Kar and Maw Ko Der military camps. The villages were:
1. Ker Der Kar;
2. Ku Thay Der;
3. Kaw Law Kar;
4. Sa Bar Law Khi;
5. Ler Gi Kho Der;
6. Ler Gi Kho Der Kho;
7. Ka Thaw Bwe;
8. Kar Weh;
9. Htee Pu Khi Der;
10. Htee Pu Khi Der Kho; and
11. K'sheh Khi.[218]

On 8 March 2007, operation commander Tin Soe of SPDC MOC #9 forced 40 to 50 Mar-la-taw villagers to carry electrical generators, saw mills, and army rations from Mar-la-taw to Saw-thay-doe.[219]

On 10 March 2007, troops of SPDC IB #566 based at Kher-doe, forced 50 villagers from Thaug-yee-ka-chaung village to carry rice and army rations from Than-daung-gyi to Kher-weh army camp.[220]

On 12 March 2007, SPDC soldiers from LIB #373 of MOC #5 TOC #1, based at Ker Weh, ordered 175 villagers from 7 villages to porter military rations from Ker Weh to Khoo Thay Der army camp. The villages that had to provide porters were:

1. Khoo Thay Der (30 persons);
2. Kaw Law Gkah (20persons);
3. S'Ba Law Kee (30 persons);
4. Ler Ghee Koh Der Gkay (15 persons);
5. Ler Ghee Koh Der Ko (30 persons);
6. Gk'Thaw Bpweh (20 persons); and
7. Ker Weh (30 persons).[221]

From 13 until 27 March 2007, Commander Kaung Myat of MOC #5 forced three truck owners from Baw-ga-leak-gyi (Kler La) to transport army supplies to Bu-hsa-kee army camp. The three truck owners had to transport army supplies for 14 days. Neither fuel nor money was given to the owners of the trucks.[222]

On 14 March 2007, Battalion Commander Htun Kyaing of SPDC LIB #539 forced 9 persons of the following 4 villages to carry army rations from Thay-pler-doe to Play-hsa-lo camp:

1. Play-hsa-lo;
2. Yeh-lo;
3. Pah-pha;
4. Plaw-baw-doe; and
5. Yu-lo. [223]

On 14 March 2007, MOC #9, TOC #2, LIB #539 Battalion Commander Htun Thein Gyi based at Play Hsa Loh army camp forced 9 villagers from 5 villages to travel to Pler Day to collect rations and other military supplies, and then return with these loads to Play Hsa Loh army camp. The affected villagers were:

1. Play Hsa Loh;
2. Yuh Loh;
3. Bpaw Pa;
4. Bplaw Blaw Der; and
5. Ghu Loh. [224]

On 14 March 2007, Commander Kaung Mya dispatched a convoy of military rations to Naw Soh army camp. For this purpose, he employed 14 army trucks and commanded a further 3 trucks from local villagers. The three civilian trucks were forced to travel at the head of the convoy to shield the SPDC army trucks from potential ambush and trigger any landmines. While transporting these supplies, one of the SPDC trucks overturned near Kaw Thay Der village, killing one soldier and wounding one convict porter.[225]

Also on 14 March 2007, LIB #364 commander Myo Htun based at Maw Koh Der forced 40 villagers from Pa Gkaw Der village to take military rations from Kler La to Maw Koh Der army camp.[226]

On 16 March 2007, Bo Hla Htay of SPDC LIB #544 forced 84 villagers from 3 villages to carry army rations from Kher-weh to Ku-thay-doe military camp. The villages were:

1. Khu-thay-doe (25 persons);
2. Sba-law-khee (32 persons);
3. Kaw-law-gar (27 persons).[227]

On 17 March 2007, Bo Hla Htay of SPDC IB #544 forced 10 Ler-khee-kho-doe-kho villagers to carry army rations from Kher-weh camp to Ku-thay-doe camp.[228]

On 26 March 2007, SPDC LIB #374 and LIB #377, based in Tan-da-bin Township, forced villagers with bullock carts in Za-yat-kyi area to transport army rations to an army camp in Tha-byay Nyunt, and drive behind the bulldozers.[229]

Also on 26 March 2007, Commander Than Htay from LIB #544, under the command of MOC #5, forced 60 villagers from 4 villages to carry army supplies from Pawe Doka to Ku-thay-der village about 12 miles away. The villages were:

1. Khaw-law-ka;
2. Baw-kee;
3. Ku-thay-der; and
4. Pawe Doka.[230]

From 31 March until 31 April 2007, MOC #5 commander Khaung Mya forced eight Kaw Thay Der villagers to move SPDC army rations and supplies with their own cars, everyday without rest.[231]

On 5 April 2007, LIB #346, under MOC #5, based in Tan-da-bin town, forced villagers to build a motorcycle road from Wa-tho-ko to Ler-ko village. Households which could not send a person had to pay 1,000 Kyat a day.[232]

On 11 April 2007, LIB #375 forced 70 villagers to carry rations to Ba Ya Nay Thi camp and then return to Play Hsa Lo army camp. The villagers were from Play Hsa Lo, Yaw Lo, Paung Plaw Baw Der, and Paung Pai villages. LIB 375 is from TOC 2, under MOC 9; its Battalion Commander is Tun Aung Sar, Second Battalion Commander is Tun Tun Win and Company Commander is Soe Myiet Naing.[233]

On 16 April 2007, LIB #375 Battalion Commander, Htun Aung Kyaw, and Company Commander, Soe Myint Naing, forced 100 villagers from Play Hsa Loh village to carry army rations to the military base at Tha Kaung, and then carry supplies back to Play Hsa Loh army camp.[234]

On 16 April 2007, by the order of Battalion Commander Tun Aung Zaw and company commander Soe Myint Naing of LIB #75 under the command of Military Command MOC #9, 100 villagers of Plae-hsa-lo village had to carry army supplies from Ta-khaw-dohbaw village to an army base in Play-hsa-lo which was about two-hour walk.[235]

On 17 April 2007, SPDC Tac-2 commander, Tin Soe under MOC #9, forced 20 Play-hsa-lo villagers to carry military rations.[236]

On 18 April 2007, SPDC Tac-2 commander, Tin Soe under MOC-9, forced 35 villagers to carry military rations from Tharc-kaw to Play-hsa-lo.[237]

Also on 18 April 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #566 under MOC #5, forced villagers from 3 villages to carry 200 sacks of rice from Keh-wah to Keh-doe-ka camp. The following villages were affected:

1. Keh-wah (100 sacks);
2. Ler-khe-kho (50 sacks); and
3. Ler-khekho-ka-ko (50 sacks)[238]

On 1 May 2007, troops from LIB #373, led by Bo Yeh Thu, forced 20 persons from Pa-hi-kee village, Than-daung-gyi Township, to carry army rations, including rice, from Keh-doe-ka village to Htee-bu-kee village.[239]

On 2 May 2007, Tac-2 commander, Tin Soe, of SPDC MOC #9, forced villagers of Play-hsa-lo, Tan-da-bin Township, to cut 350 bamboo poles for him. The villagers had to cut the bamboo in the forest and then carry them to the army camp which was about 6 miles (10 kilometres) away. [240]

On 3 May 2007, Bo Yeh Aung of SPDC LIB #373, under MOC #5, forced 20 Ka-shee-khee villagers to carry military rations from Keh-doekar to Htee-pu-khee camp. Bo Yeh Aung also forced a villager from each of the Upper and Lower Htee-pu-khee villages, to serve as a runner and sentinel at the military camp.[241]

On 4 May 2007, 60 SPDC troops from Tha byay-nyunt camp in Mone Township came into Ma-la-daw village and seized 80 villagers and forced them to carry army rations to Hsaw-day-doe Camp.[242]

On 5 May 2007, LIB #375 under MOC #9 from Play Hsar Loe ordered 20 villagers from Play Hsar Loe to carry food supplies from Pau Pa to Play Hsar Loe camp.[243]

On 7 May 2007, SPDC LIB 375 troops, based at Play-hsa-lo camp, forced the villagers of Play-hsa-lo, a village of 60 households, to cut 55 bamboo poles and demanded a piece of thatch roofing from each household.[244]

On 15 May 2007, SPDC army MOC #5 commander Khaung Mya, ordered people from the following villages to carry SPDC Army rations from Bawgali Gyi to their camp at Maung Koe Der.

1. Kaw Thay Der
2. Kaw Soe Ko
3. Bawgali Gyi
4. Ler Gaw
5. Maung Pah Der.[245]

Also on 15 May 2007, people from the following villages were forced to carry rations from Maung Pai Der to Koe Wa Der camps.

1. Pai Kaw Der
2. Ku Plaw Der
3. Maung Koe Der
4. Der Doh
5. Ba Hai Der
6. Naw Tay Der
7. Ger Mu Der.[246]

On 16 May 2007, more than 2,000 people from the same villages were forced to carry rations from Bawgali Gyi to the camps at Ber Ka Lay Ko and Wah Soe.[247]

On 17 May 2007, troops from SPDC MOC #5 had established a new camp to which they had ordered more than 2,000 civilians to porter rations. The villages and towns from which they demanded porters included:

1. Kler La
2. Maw Pa Der
3. Khoo Bplay Der
4. Kheh Bplaw Der
5. Khaw Gkoh Der
6. Gh'Muh Der
7. Der Doh
8. Gklay Soh Kee
9. Gkaw Thay Der

10. Gkaw Soh Koh
11. Wa Soh Koh
12. Ler Koh.[248]

Mon State

On 19 July 2007, a hired porter, Ko San Win (37), was severely beaten by an army officer while carrying supplies for IB #18.[249]

Sagaing Division

From 27 December 2006 for a period of 12 days, troops from LIB #229 commanded by Lieutenant Col. Thet Yun Oo came to Chamsar village and seized 1458 persons from 15 villages as military porters. The following villages were affected:

1. Chuyo (300 persons);
2. Chomkor (100 persons):
3. Longpa (70 persons);
4. Chamsa (70 persons);
5. Shayep (84 persons);
6. Golang (84 persons);
7. Logkai (61 persons);
8. Hakon (63 persons);
9. Rukho (78 persons);
10. Tingpa (47 persons);
11. Chanlam (91 persons);
12. Longket (170 persons);
13. Nahen (150 persons);
14. Yangno (34 persons); and
15. Lngoi (56 persons) [250]

Shan State

Kae-See Township

Since early 2005, people of Paang Kaad village in Wan Khem village tract, Kae-See Township, have been forced by the SPDC troops LIB #131 to serve as unpaid porters during their patrols in the area. The SPDC troops frequently demanded 3 villagers from the village headman to go with them on each of their frequent patrols during which they forced the villagers to serve as guides and porters, sometimes for many days and nights.[251]

Lai-Kha Township

Sometime during the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, 5 villagers of Zizawya Khe village in Naa Poi village tract, Lai-Kha township, were arrested and beaten, one of them killed and two of them forced to serve as porters, by the SPDC troops from LIB #247 based in Nam-Zarng. The 5 villagers were:

1. Naang Zing Wa (f), aged 36;
2. Zaai Zit-Ta (m), aged 43;
3. Zaai Kalaa (m), aged 39;
4. Zaai Su (m), aged 45; and
5. Zaai Zaw Phae (m), aged 37. [252]

Murng- Kerng Township

Since mid 2006, people in Murng Khun village tract in Murng-Kerng township have been forced to serve as guides and porters by the SPDC troops from Kae-See-based LIB # 131 and Murng-Kerng-based LIB # 514.[253]

5.5 Forced Labour – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

Buthidaung Township

In November 2007, the NaSaKa, Burma's Western border security force was coercing villagers to work for state-owned brick fields in Buthidaung Township. On 5 November, the commander of Phone Nyo Hlake village NaSaKa camp, ordered each family to provide 5 poles (three inches in diameter and eight feet in length) for NaSaKa's kiln for baking bricks. If a villager failed to supply such posts in time he was fined Kyat 500 per post, totalling a fine of Kyat 2,500 for 5 poles per family.[254]

Kyauk Taw Township

On 24 July 2007, Kyauk Taw based army authorities forced villagers to cultivate seized farm land. The Kyauk Taw based MOC #9 had earlier seized 282 acres of farm land from villagers near the cantonment. The junta ordered all military units to follow the modern system of paddy cultivation and produce 100 Tins (I Tin =32 Kg) of paddy from one acre. The army did not provide any infrastructural support to the villagers to fulfil the SPDC's order to produce this amount. The villages which the army cantonment ordered to carry out the project were:

1. Mahamatmuni;
2. Tharakthapran;
3. Kyaukway Taungnyo; and
4. Kyawsuma.[255]

Maungdaw Township

On 12 February 2007, it was reported that Sarapa accompanied by police were forcing villagers to build modern villages for new settlers. Since 1 February, Sarapa had forced people from 11 nearby villages to contribute their labour. About 550 villagers had been engaged in forced labour. Every day the villagers had to provide 50 villagers from each village to cut the hillside to build model villages. Sarapa provided 500 kyat a day per head as wages to avoid complaints, although, the daily labour rate is 1,000 to 1,500 kyat per day in the open market.[256]

On 26 March 2007, around 300 carpenters were forced by NaSaKa authorities to construct 120 houses in a model village located in the north of Maungdaw Township for new settlers from Burma proper.[257]

On 24 May 2007, villagers residing in Inn Din village tract were ordered to purchase and plant physic nut and rubber seedlings at plantation sites by the Commander of NaSaKa area #8 Major Zaw Zaw.[258]

In November 2007, it was reported that a road in Maungdaw Township had been constructed using forced labour. The NaSaKa officer of area #4 ordered villagers from nearby villages to work in the road construction. Non compliance meant a fine of 5,000 kyat. Each family had to provide one member at the construction site every day starting on 1 October.[259]

On 11 December 2007, the Maungdaw Township agriculture manager ordered farmers of Maungdaw Township to grow sunflowers and extra crops in their farmlands.[260]

On 27 December 2007, the Maungdaw Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) Chairman ordered villagers in Maungdaw town and in wards to provide logs for baking bricks. The authorities ordered each household to provide a log measuring 7 ft long and 10 inches in diameter. The families which could not provide the log, had to pay 800 kyat per household. Logs were collected from the following villages:

1. Shwe Zarr;
2. Myoma Ka Nyin Tan (Shikdar Para);
3. Myo Thu Gyi (Khainda Par);
4. Pan Daw Pyin (Nal Boniya);
5. Nyaung Chaung (Khadir Bill);
6. Maung Ni Para; and
7. Hlet Tha Ywa (Naitor Dil)[261]

On 29 December 2007, local authorities forced villagers in Maungdaw Township to work on constructing a model village seven miles outside downtown Maungdaw. The Maungdaw district authority was constructing a model village near Du Shara Gon Village, between Maungdaw and Ale Than Kyaw motor road. The village was constructed for new settlers from Burma proper. The authorities ordered the village chairman to send 15 people daily from each village tract in downtown Maungdaw to work on the construction site.[262]

Mrauk U Township

On 16 January 2007, it was reported that due to a shortage of funding at the Mrauk U municipal office, the authorities were unable to hire sweepers to clean the streets, and had subsequently ordered the townspeople to undertake sweeping the roads on a daily basis.[263]

Chin State

Cikha Township

On 29 January 2007, persons from 16 villages were forced to repair a road connecting Cikha and Tonzang town. The order to call for road repair came directly from SPDC Tactical 1 Commander Colonel Tin Hla based in Hakha. From each of the 16 villages one person from each family was forced to work on the road with their own food and tools. It was reported that several underage girls and boys were among the forced labourers. The following villages had to provide labour for the road construction:

1. Khuaivum
2. Tuivelzaang
3. Tualkhaing
4. Haicin
5. Sekpi
6. Selbung
7. Tuimai
8. Lingthu
9. Vaivet
10. Tuimang
11. Mauvom
12. Kansau
13. Khuadam

14. Suangzaang
15. Khenman village.[264]

Falam Township

On 5 February 2007, captain Win Zaw and his troops from LIB #268 based in Falam town, summoned several villagers from the Indo-Burma border area to serve as guides and ensure the security of tactical commander Colonel Tin Hla and his column.[265]

On 30 July 2007, employees of the SPDC civilian administration were forced to replant over 7,000 acres with Jatropha trees destroyed in a forest fire in 2005. The order to involve SPDC employees from various departments came from the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) authorities.[266]

On 16 October 2007, it was reported that the army authorities of the LIB #268 stationed in northern Chin state were forcibly engaging locals in timber logging for the army fund. Captain Aung Min, Camp Commander of LIB #268 outpost stationed in Falam Township had forced villagers to log timber in the forests surrounding Ram Hlo village in Falam for the army welfare fund since the first week of June. The military junta had in May 2007 officially prohibited logging in the forests of Chin state to prevent ecological damage.[267]

Haka Township

On 24 January 2007, residents of about 12 villages in Hakha Township were forced by local authorities to help build a road connecting the township with Marndaw.[268]

On 22 May 2007, it was reported that residents from Hakha and Marndaw townships continued to be forced to work on a road being built between the areas. Moreover, several residents were ordered to contribute large amounts of money to fund the construction, which has already taken three years.[269]

On 11 December 2007, it was reported that government officials in Hakha Township were collecting money from local residents to fund a highway project and forced those who could not pay to work on the highway. According to residents, Village and Ward Peace and Development Council officers in Hakha Township were demanding the money or labour. Residents had been ordered to pay between 5,000 and 10,000, kyat depending on their means, and those who were unable to pay were forced to contribute their labour. Those who contributed labour were given no assistance with travel or expenses. Most villagers had to travel on foot for two days to get to the highway construction site where they were forced to work for 7 days at a time. The authorities did not provide any food, transportation, accommodation or health insurance for the workers, who carried their own food and camping materials with them to the site.[270]

Matupi Township

On 11 January 2007, Colonel San Aung, Commander of tactical #2, forced 140 civilians from 7 villages to work without pay on a road construction between Matupi town and Lailenpi military camp (which is 70 miles long). Colonel San Aung instructed the 7 village headmen to contribute 20 persons per village. The villages were the following:

1. Tangku;
2. Rengkheng;
3. Amlai;
4. Pakheng;
5. Sumseng (A);
6. Sumseng (B); and
7. Tinnam.[271]

On 28 January 2007, Colonel Win Hlaing of LIB #50, based at Kanhkaw, Magwe Division, positioned in Lailenpi Village, Matupi Town, forcibly conscripted 25 labourers to construct an army camp. Starting on 28 January, they were told to complete the construction of a large male boarding house within two days. Major Ye Myint had reportedly stated that if the camp was not completed in two days, the villagers would be forced to continue the construction until completion. The villagers were forced to work from 7:00 am in the morning to 6:00 pm in the evening without breaks for rest. During the construction process, Major Ye Myint ordered five people from Mala Village to cut 100 pieces of bamboo and 50 pieces of wood in a day. They were ordered to cut and carry bamboo and wood to a forest two miles away from the village. In addition, the villagers had to arrange for themselves all the necessary tools for the construction project as well as their own food rations. According to the local village chairman, they never received any compensation for their labour.[272]

On 9 February 2007, Major Zaw Myint Htat, 2nd battalion commander LIB #50 (based in Gangh-Gaw town), stationed at Dar-Lin village, ordered villagers in the region to fence the army camp's barricade by carrying their own rations. The Pintia village chairman Pu Pai Hmo was ordered to assign the villagers, who were forced to work without payment for 4 days from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm without rest. The villagers were:

1. U Ngun Thot;
2. U Khain Be;
3. U Ta Lay Che;
4. Myo Naw Khain; and
5. Mg Nyo Mo.[273]

During the second week of January 2007, Lieutenant Colonel San Aung, Commander of tactical command 2 stationed at Matupi Town, ordered villagers to construct a Buddhist monastery. The monastery was to be built on a hill-track situated to the west-south side of Matupi Town. In January, Lt. Col. San Aung ordered the surrounding 7 villages to each send 2 people in order to construct the monastery with their own supplies and labour. The villages were:

1. Valangte;
2. Valangpi;
3. Koe-La;
4. Vapung;
5. Leisin;
6. Thi Boei; and
7. Vangkai.[274]

On 17 April 2007, it was reported that since March civilians had been forced by the authorities to transport planks for the construction of an army camp, a pagoda and a monastery.[275]

Paletwa Township

From 1 until 31 January 2007, by order of Captain Aung Thein Win of IB #55 one person from each household of the villages in xxxxxxxx village tract were forced to labour to make a football ground in Chin Let Wa village. The villagers had to dig earth and carry soil for 29 days, working each day from 7 am to 4 pm.[276]

From 18 January until 1 February 2007, a Commander of the army troops of LIB #289, based at xxxxx village ordered villagers of every household from this village to work for his camp. The villagers had to build barracks for the soldiers, make fences for the army camp and dig trenches. They were forced to work for 15 days, and received no remuneration for their labour.[277]

On 21 February 2007, Company Commander Ye Kyaw Soe, from LIB #50 Gan-Kaw based battalion, presently posted at Sabawngte army camp, forced civilians from 3 villages to repair the road between Sumsem and Lailenpi. Starting from 28 December 2006, villagers were ordered to finish the job within 10 days. The number of villagers who were engaged in the road repair were:

1. Hlungmang (15 persons);
2. Sabawngpi (25 persons); and
3. Sabawngte (25 persons).[278]

On 26 February 2007, it was reported that Company Commander from LIB #55, posted in Shinletwah village, forced 100 villagers, from 10 villages under his military control, to cut bamboo and wood and build a fence for the camp. They were forced to work from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, and had to bring their own foods and equipment.[279]

On 11 May 2007, it was reported that 4 persons had been forced to guard the military camp of LIB #34 based in Mait Wa village. They had to guard the camp every night, and those who were unable to perform this duty had to pay Kyat 80,000 or 50 tins of rice a year.[280]

On 14 July 2007, it was reported that since June 2007 SPDC army had been forcing villagers into construction work and compelled them to provide the army with tins of rice and chickens. Persons from 8 villages were forced to provide labour for the construction of army posts and barracks in Pathiantlang village. Captain Win Tin Nyeing from LIB #233 issued the order for the construction. The affected villages were:

1. Ma O;
2. Saiha;
3. Shwelaipi;
4. Pathiantlang;
5. Paite;
6. Sia O;
7. Hemapi; and
8. Hemate [281]

Thangtlang Township

On 15 February 2007, several villagers were forced to work on the widening of the Thangtlang –Farkawn Road that links Burma to the northeastern part of India. Villages in Vang Zang track were ordered to provide persons to work on the widening of the border road that is 30 miles long. Laito, Chairman of Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC), from Thangtlang Township, had ordered 5 villages in his township to provide labour for the road construction. The villagers were told to extend the nine feet wide Thangtlang – Rih Road to 12 feet. The construction work was concluded by 27 March. The villages were:

1. Tlanglo;
2. Tlangpi;
3. Farrawn;
4. Vang Zang; and
5. Sopum.[282]

On 2 March 2007, a member of the Thangtlang Township Solidarity and Development Team responsible for the Hydro-Electric Power Plant planning in Northern Chin State ordered Mualkai villagers to provide their labour. For the construction of the Hydro-Electric Power Plant, the Mualkai villagers were ordered to carry a five-megawatt electric motor and construct a tank for storing water. The villagers were forced to work from December 2006 to 10 February 2007. The Mualkai power plant project reportedly spent 25 lakhs, which is three times more than the amount authorized by the State Solidarity and Peace Team.[283]

On 8 May 2007, Lai To, Chairman of the Township Peace and Development Council, Thangtlang, ordered each family of 85 villages to provide kyat 1,000 for construction of the Mantaw-Hakha road. Those unable to contribute money had to work on the construction site instead.[284]

On 7 April 2007, villagers from Hnaring Village in Thangtlang Township, were forced to begin the construction of a road. The construction of the road started on 8 March and a group of 200 villagers worked alternately for one week.[285]

Kachin State

Bhamo Township

On 23 August 2007, it was reported that villagers since June had been forced to work in paddy fields confiscated by a battalion of the SPDC army. The paddy fields were confiscated by the LIB #438, led by military police Captain Zaw Min Lay, as the farmers were unable to meet the battalion's demand of 15 sacks of rice per acre every year. Every day, between 7 am and 12 pm five villagers from 4 villages were forced to work in the army-owned paddy fields between Daw Hpum Yang town and Myothit village. The villages were:

1. Numlang;
2. Hkatawng;
3. Pa;
4. Dali; and
5. Tawpe.[286]

Myitkyina Township

On 19 March 2007, passenger line cars were forced to transport Lt-Gen Ye Myint of the Ministry of Defence along with his companions to areas around Myitkyina. The cars were ordered without payment, and the cars had to be on standby ready to transport Lt-Gen Ye Myint and his companions to the places they wished to visit from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm that day.[287]

On 24 August 2007, it was reported that residents were forced to guard their villages and quarters at night on the orders of SPDC army Commander Maj-Gen Ohn Myint. Every night 30 to 40 residents were ordered to sleep on guard duty in the Administrative Offices (Ya-Ya-Ka) of the ruling junta. According to local residents, they were being forced to guard government infrastructure such as schools, the Myitkyina University, colleges and Quarters and Villages Administrative Offices at night.[288]

On 23 October 2007, local residents were forced to beautify Myitkyina at their own cost. Residents of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, were forced to clean their house compounds and paint fences, all at their own cost in just one day. A local resident reported: "We have to clear the bushes around our house. To paint the fences we have to buy calcium hydroxide, one small packet of which costs 3,000 kyat. For those of us who have big fences, one small packet is not enough. We have to buy it ourselves."[289]

Karen State

Dooplaya District

On 11 May 2007, SPDC army division 22 came to Waw Loo (Win Lon) village with LIB #210, #2 columns to build a camp using forced labour.[290]

Nyaunglebin District

From 2 February until 6 April 2007, Major Khin Soe of the SPDC troops of TOC #2, and Battalion Commander Tin Po Aung of LIB #599, forced around 2,500 villagers to build a road between Tai Tu village and Thae Goan. The villagers were from 850 households of 22 villages in 4 village tracts in Kyauk Kyi Township. The villagers, including women and children aged between 10 and 12, had to work on the road for more than 60 days. They had to clear the land, dig soil, carry and pile it up to make higher ground for the road. The villagers also had to use their bullock carts to carry sand from a place which is about 5 kilometre from the road construction site. They had to supply their own food and bring their own implements. No one received payment for their labour. The 22 villages affected were from the following village tracts:

1. Pa-ta-lar;
2. Noh Gaw;
3. Aye Net; and
4. Thoo Ka Bee.[291]

In the last week of February 2007, by the order of Battalion Commander Tin Po Aung Light of LIB #599 under the command of MOC #2, Southern Operation Command, villagers from Pa Ta Lar village had to supply 750 bamboo and 1,500 wooden poles to the army unit which was based nearby their village.[292]

Again, in the last week of March 2007, about 100 villagers from Pa Ta Lar village were forced to supply sand to the LIB #599 military camp. The villagers had to collect sand from a place about 20 kilometres from the camp. The sand was to be used for the building of bunkers. The villagers worked from 6 am to 3 pm. In addition, the battalion commander ordered the villagers supply 300 pieces of leaf roofs. Each household in the village was also forced to supply a bundle of firewood (of about 16 Kilograms) to the camp every month. No one was given any payment.[293]

On 3 April 2007, SPDC LIB #590 based in Mone Township forced villagers of Weh-gyi and Lu-art to build a military camp in Weh-gyi.[294]

On 7 May 2007, approximately 1,000 villagers from more than 6 villages were forced to clear a new road between the SPDC military camp at Toe Daw and the camp at Yin O Sein. This new road was built right across villagers' rice fields, destroying about 500 acres of crops. In addition, villagers of Myaung Oo, Aung Chan Tha and Paw Pi Der were forced to pay 30,000 Kyat to LIB #590 every month. LIB #599 and LIB #590 were posted at these two camps and were overseeing the construction of this road. The three villages were:

1. Myaung Oo;
2. Aung Chan Tha;
3. Paw Pi Der;
4. Myaw Oo;
5. Mee Te Taw;
6. Tee To Lo; and
7. Kyauk Tan.[295]

Pa'an District

In January 2007, DKBA Brigade #333 officer Kyaw Min told Gk'Ma Moh villagers that the monk U Thuzana, head of the DKBA and based at Myaing Gyi Ngu in Pa'an District, had sent 4,000 bricks to Htee Lay Kaw village for the construction of a new pagoda at Gkyah Htee Yoh Koh Poh. This pagoda was to be constructed upon the summit of the Htee Lay Koh village mountain in Bilin Township. Along with the construction of the pagoda itself, the DKBA also organised the construction of a road which ran from a pagoda at Meh Say to the Htee Lay Kaw pagoda. Construction of the pagoda and road began in January 2007. DKBA Brigade #333 soldiers gave village heads written orders in which DKBA Brigade #333 ordered them to provide villagers for labour, and threatened to 'take action' if the villagers failed to comply. As part of the construction work, the villagers were forced to carry lime, water, sand, bricks and cement from the base of the mountain to the summit. The forced labourers reported that it was extremely difficult to climb up the side of the mountain as it was a very steep slope and they feared slipping and falling down along the way. Moreover, those who worked on the road construction had to bring their own tools and were told to clear every last tree stump in the construction area.[296]

Papun District

On 21 January 2007, DKBA troops forced 307 persons from Meh-k'law village to construct a motor road from Ku-sit to P'yeh-lo.[297]

On 5 February 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #219 under LID #11, based in Maeh-lay area Wa-thoe-ko camp, forced residents of 9 villages to cut bamboo and pleat roofing thatch. The villages were:

1. Hto-kaw-sor-kee;
2. Kaw-war;
3. Mae-kaw-law;
4. Leh-wa-ko;
5. To-meh-kee;
6. Klo-kee;
7. Wa-tho-lo;
8. Mae-way-thaw-doe; and
9. Upper Maeway.[298]

On 3 April 2007, SPDC IB #282 troops came to A-lar-sa-kan village, situated on the Ye-Tavoy motor road, and demanded one person from each household for use as forced labour. A-ler-sa-kan village has about 100 households. Each person had to labour for 3 days and those unable to work had to hire a labourer for kyat 3,000. Moreover, the villagers were forced to grow castor trees, and had to provide two persons each day to work on the castor plantation. A committee was formed to organize for the castor plantation, to which each household had to contribute kyat 3,000.[299]

On 28 October 2007, SPDC IB #216 Commander Kyaw Kyaw Aung, of Military Operations Command MOC #11, ordered each of the 400 households in Meh village to cut two bamboo poles. Villagers were then required to deliver the 800 bamboo poles to Kyaw Kyaw Aung for the repair of his army camp.[300]

On 9 November 2007, SPDC Battalion Commander Aung Htun Lin of LIB #434 ordered one villager from every household in Htee Ber Ka Hta and Gklaw Loh Gkloh Hta villages to cut down bamboo poles and deliver them to drop off points at all bridges between Way Hsah and Papun town. At each of these locations villagers had to weave split bamboo to construct walls along the sides of the bridges.[301]

On 11 November 2007, Battalion Commander Aung Htun Lin ordered 12 villages to provide one person from each household to cut back the forest growth from the side of the vehicle road all the way from Way Hsah village to Gkoo Hsay village. The villages were:

1. Htee Ber Ka Hta;
2. Gklaw Loh Gkloh Hta;
3. Way Moh;
4. Way Hsah;
5. T'Gkoh The;
6. Kler Koh;
7. Gkyaw Klee Loh;
8. Bpoh Baw Koh;
9. T'Dwee Koh;
10. Nah Gkoo Nah;
11. Gkoo Hsay; and
12. Noh Law Hsoo.

As of 12 November 2007, residents of Way Moh, Way Hsah, T'Gkoh Teh, Gklaw Loh Gkloh Hta, Noh Law Hsoo and Htee Ber Ka Hta villages had already complied with the forced labour demand, however the remaining villages had yet to carry out the order. The forced labourers were ordered to cut back the forest growth to a depth of 5 arm spans (9.1 m/52.5 ft) along a three furlong (603 m/660 yards) length of the road, although in some areas the required length was two furlongs (402 m/440 yards).[302]

Women and children performing forced labour cutting back forest growth alongside a vehicle road in the Gkoo Hsay area of Karen State on 12 November 2007 as ordered by SPDC army LIB #434 Battalion Commander Aung Htun Lin. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Thaton District

On 10 January 2007, it was reported that troops from SPDC IB #96, based in Kyaikto Township, had forced 3 villages to provide 10 persons each day to carry sand and rock for Shwe-t'kaw-oh-chaung Bridge construction. In addition, each village had to provide more than 3 tons of timber and send it to Nat-sin. The affected villages were:

1. Hsaw-thu-khee;
2. Htee-wa-klu-khee; and
3. Maw-paw-lo.[303]

On 14 January 2007, DKBA troops led by Saw Lay Htoo forced 50 Lay-kay villagers to build the road to Mying-gyi-ngu abbot's pagoda.[304]

On 22 January 2007, the DKBA #333 Battalion Commander, Maung Kyin, forced 25 Hteesie-baw villagers, 40 Shwe-oak and Kaw-heh villagers to construct a pagoda.[305]

On 10 February 2007, DKBA troops led by Than Tun Oo ordered a person from each household in Shwe-oak village and Taw-heh village tract to carry sand for building a pagoda.[306]

On 12 March 2007, Bo Htoo Lu from DKBA Ka-saw-wa Column, forced Htot-klaw-khee villagers to pleat 1,600 pieces of roofing thatch to be used for the DKBA Paw-htee-ku camp.[307]

On 20 March 2007, SPDC LIB #9 Headquarters, under SPDC LID #44, based at Pa-wah, forced each of the villages of Htee-nya-per, Ma-eisa, Klaw-yan and Mi-chaung-aing villages to pleat 500 pieces of roofing thatch.[308]

On 5 April 2007, a patrol of soldiers from Company #4, SPDC IB #3, under company commander Lan Htun arrived at Dta Gkaw Poh village ward. Lan Htun ordered the residents of 16 different villages in the ward to construct a vehicle road from Dta Gkaw Poh village to Meh Bpoo village. The villagers were expected to labour for two days, and required to provide their own tools as well as food.[309]

On 13 April 2007, Commander Hla Shwe Thaung from LIB #9 demanded 400 bamboos from Pa Ya Yaw village to be sent to Lay Kay camp.[310]

In April 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #2 under the command of Zaw Min Htun arrived at Htee Hsee Baw village and set themselves up at the local Buddhist monastery for three nights. While staying there, Zaw Min Htun ordered one villager to accompany his patrol as a guide.[311]

On 15 May 2007, LIB #102, under the command of Min Zaw Oo and camp commander Hain Zaw Oo, ordered 400 thatch shingles and 300 bamboo poles from T--- village. Some of these were used to rebuild the camp and the rest sold off for profit. Camp commander Hain Zaw Oo further ordered the villagers to cut down a stand of the trees in a nearby wood which they then sold off in town.[312]

On 4 June 2007, battalion commander Min Naing Oo, of LIB #9, LID #44, with a camp at Yoh Gklah monastery, ordered Htee Pa Doh Hta village to provide 5 persons to cut down trees from the monastery grounds. The monks were intending to use these trees for the construction of a new building for the monastery and requested that the trees should not be cut down. However, Min Naing Oo ignored this and continued with the work. He also demanded 300 bamboo poles and 200 thatch shingles from each of the following villages:

1. Eastern Htee Pa Doh Hta;
2. Western Yoh Gklah;
3. Eastern Yoh Gklah;
4. Kaw Poh Koh;
5. Lay Kaw Htee;
6. Htee Pa Doh Kee;
7. Htaw Gklaw Hta;
8. Noh Ber Baw;
9. Wa Kheh Hta;
10. Htaw Gklaw Kee;
11. Nya Poh Kee;
12. Dta Uh Kee; and
13. Dta Uh Nee.[313]

Toungoo District

In January 2007, LID #66 commander Maung Maung Aye ordered villages to provide a quota of workers for forced labour along sections of the Kler La – Mawchi road. Maung Maung Aye forced the villagers to do this work twice in December 2006 and once again in January 2007. After having cleared the specified areas, he forced these villagers to twice porter army loads further down the road. The village names, number of villagers forced to labour and the area of the road on which they had to work:

1. Maw Pah Der (20 villagers, Ser Lu Chaw area, 3rd mile);
2. Gkaw Soh Koh (30 villagers, Ser Lu Chaw area, 3rd mile)
3. Der Doh (20 villagers, Ser Lu Chaw area, 3rd mile)
4. Kler La (30 villagers, Ser Lu Chaw to P'Na Koh Soh, 6th mile)
5. Der Doh (20 villagers, Ser Lu Chaw to P'Na Koh Soh,6th mile)
6. Gkaw Thay Der (35 villagers, P'Na Koh Soh to Aung Myin camp, 8th mile)
7. Gk'Lay Soh Kee (25 villagers, P'Na Koh Soh to Aung Myin camp, 8th mile)
8. Ghah Muh Der (10 villagers, P'Na Koh Soh to Aung Myin camp, 8th mile)
9. Bpeh Gkaw Der (30 villagers, Th'Aye Hta village area, 12th mile)
10. Maw Gkoh Der (15 villagers, Th'Aye Hta village area, 12th mile)
11. Ler Koh (14 villagers, Th'Aye Hta village area,12th mile)
12. Koo Bpler Der (15 villagers, Th'Aye Hta village area, 12th mile)
13. Wah Thoh Der (20 villagers, Th'Aye Hta village area, 12th mile)[314]

On 1 January 2007, the Commander of LID #66 ordered 10 people from Kler Lar (Bawgali Gyi) village to guard a bulldozer at Maw Pah Der and Kaw Soe Kho. Moreover, on 2 January MOC #16 ordered seven people from Yer Loe and five people from Plaw Baw Der to go to Bon Ma Tee and follow the bulldozer for security.[315]

On 3 January 2007, troops of LIB #1 column, under SPDC TAC #661, set up camp in upper Kaw-law-ka village and forced 200 villagers from 5 villages on the west side of Thauk-ye-kat stream, to carry military supplies from Ku-thay-doe to Kaw-law-ka military camp. The following villagers had to provide labour:

1. Ku-thay-doe;
2. Kaw-lawka;
3. Sa-ba-law-kee;
4. Thu-hge-doe; and
5. Htee-ta-pu. [316]

On 5 January 2007, SPDC troops forced villagers to clear landmines between Thapan-chaung and Htee-lo with their bullock carts. At about 1 pm, one of the carts was blown up by a landmine and 2 persons on the cart were killed.[317]

On 10 January 2007, troops from SPDC IB #75, under TAC Command 2 of MOC Headquarters 16, arrived with bulldozers at Htee-lo and Tha-pan-chaung areas, and forced the villagers from Play-hsa-lo, Yeh-lo, Plaw-baw-doe and Ta-par-khee to work on road construction.[318]

On 16 January 2007, Bo Aung Kyaw Oo of SPDC LIB #108, under TAC #661 LID #66, in Than-daung Township, forced Ler-kho villagers to split 3,000 bamboos for fencing the army camp.[319]

On 5 March 2007, MOC #5 Commander Kaung Mya ordered local villagers in the Kler La area to cut down and deliver large bamboo poles six cubits (2.74 m/9 ft) in length. He also ordered each household to pay kyat 1000 for the construction of a football ground. On 12 March, Commander Kaung Mya again ordered villagers in the Kler La area to provide large bamboo poles. This time he demanded a total of 2,000 poles to fence in his army camp.[320]

On 17 March 2007, troops from LIB #54 under the command of MOC #5 based at Maw-koe-der village forced villagers from Der-doh village to supply 500 bamboo sticks in order to fence off the army camp.[321]

Also on 17 March 2007, troops from MOC #5, LIB #364 based in Maw Koh Der forced villagers to cut down and deliver 300 bamboo poles and ordered them to use these to construct a fence around his army camp.[322]

On 2 April 2007, SPDC army MOC #5 Commander Khaung Mya based in Bawgali Gyi (Kler La) forced the Bawgali Gyi villagers to cut 400 pieces of bamboo for use at the army camp.[323]

On 5 April 2007, LIB #346, under MOC #5, based in Tan-da-bin Town, forced villagers to build a motorcycle road from Wa-tho-ko to Ler-ko village. Households which were not able to send a person to labour had to pay kyat 1,000 a day.[324]

On 7 May 2007, LIB #346 troops ordered Play Hsar Loe villagers to cut 550 bamboos, and demanded 5 pieces of roofing leaf per house from 60 houses.[325]

On 12 July 2007, SPDC army battalions under the second command's headquarters had reportedly forced villagers to build more than five new military camps in Toungoo District.[326] Between 23 and 31 July 2007, MOC #9 LIB #375 and LIB #539 stayed in Play Hsar Loe and forced the villagers to cut down hundreds of bamboo poles. The villagers had to comply as they were unable to flee due to flooding in the area.[327]

From 14 until the 20 November 2007, troops of LIB #73, commanded by Aung Kah, forced 54 villagers to work on a new SPDC army camp in Ta Pah Kee area. Villagers from the following villages were forced to work:

1. Shar Shee Bo;
2. Shee Pyu Gone;
3. Toun Boo; and
4. Ye Shar.[328]

Karenni State

Dimawhso Township

On 27 July 2007, about 80 villagers from 3 villages were forced to reconstruct an SPDC army camp in Daw Ta Ma Gyi village. The orders relating to the forced labour were issued by Thet Pai, Second Commander of the LIB #509. The villagers forced to work were from the following villages:

1. Daw Ta Ma Gyi;
2. Daw Nyaw Khu; and
3. Daw Saw Phya villages.[329]

Maw Chi Township

On 9 June 2007, it was reported that since 20 May, Karenni people had been forced by the KSO to build an army camp in Ba Ba Gyi hill located between Maw Chi and Lokhar village. The KSO was led by Tel Nel, a former Battalion Commander of the Karenni Progressive Party (KNPP).[330]

Mon State

Kyaikto Township

On 10 January 2007, it was reported that troops of SPDC IB #96 based in Kyaikto Township forced villagers from 3 villages to carry materials for a bridge. Each day 10 villagers were forced to carry sand and rock for the Shwe-t'kaw-oh-chaw bridge construction. The following villages had to provide labour:

1. Chaw-thu-khee;
2. Htee-wa-klu-khee; and
3. Maw-paw-lo. [331]

On 28 May 2007, it was reported that villagers were forced to guard the gas pipeline running along villages in Mon State. One person from each household of 4 villages had to undertake patrol duty every month from evening to midnight. The villages were:

1. Kalort-tort;
2. Kawn-ka-bue;
3. Doe-mar; and
4. Set-thawe.[332]

Bilin Township

On 19 January 2007, locals were forced to work in Kyauk Taw road renovation by the order of the Military Strategy Chief Major General Yar Pyae from the Military Tactics Control Commission #9 based in Kyauk Taw. Soldiers from the LIB #374, 375, 376 under the above Commission forced 300 villagers a day to work on the road construction. They had to bring their own food and work until 5 o'clock each day. The groups alternated, working one week each.[333]

Khaw Zar Sub Township

From the first week of January 2007 until May 2007, local residents were forced by the SPDC army to provide timber/wood for a local military's brick kiln, operated by Major Kyaw Ze Ya from IB #31.[334]

From the end of January until April 2007, residents of Khaw Zar Sub Township were forced to work as unpaid labourers on bridge constructions along the Ye-Tavoy highway. Troops from IB #31, based near Khaw Zar Sub Town, forced villagers in Ye Township to work on the construction. With the cooperation of the local township administrative authorities, the commander of the local IB coordinated two groups of unpaid villager labourers and demanded each group be made up of 15 people, and had to include some local carpenters from villages in the Khaw Zar Sub Township.[335]

On 12 January 2007, the SPDC military battalion based in Khaw Zar Sub Township forced villagers to uproot bushes and roots of trees. The IB #31, under the command of MOC #19, ordered 18 village headmen to find villagers to clear bushes, roots and bamboos and then burn them. The battalion officers initially said they would pay the villagers, but went back on their promise.[336]

On 25 January 2007, LIB #31 under the command of MOC #9 ordered farmers to provide farming equipment to cultivate fields for the army. All the labourers were forced to work in the fields for the battalion from 7 am to 11 am and from 1 pm to 5 pm each day.[337]

On 13 February 2007, it was reported that local SPDC army officers continued to force people in Yin-ye and Toe Thet Ywar Thit villages to build bridges and roads for which they had to pay for themselves. About 140 villagers, including 80 from Yin-ye and 60 from Toe Thet Ywar Thit village had been forced to build a bridge in northern and southern Toe Thet Ywar Thit village since February 2. They also collected sand, stones or rock, and concrete for the bridge. According to a Yin-ye villager, the local administration collected about kyat 15,000 from each house in Toe Thet Ywar Thit, and between kyat 2,000-8,000 per house in Yin-ye village. Toe Thet Ywar Thit has over 200 households and Yin-ye about 400. The villager reported that those who were unable to provide labour for construction of the bridge, had to pay for cement for the bridge.[338]

On 13 February 2007, local army officers of LIB #31 forced 140 local Mon villagers from Ye Township to build two bridges for the development project in the area. Civilians from two villages, Yin-ye and Toe Thet Ywar Thit, in Khaw Zar Sub Township were forced to construct two bridges in southern and northern Toe Thet Ywar Thit village. The construction started on 2 February 2007.[339]

On 30 June 2007, according to Yin-Ye villagers, about 140 people, including 80 from Yin-Ye and 60 from Toe Tat Ywa Thit village, were forced to build a bridge in northern and southern Toe Tat Ywa Thit village which is located on the new 35 mile long Ye-Danikyar highway, which connects Ye Town and a village called Danikyar, on the border of Mon State and Tenasserim Division.[340]

Mon women performing forced village sentry duties guarding the entrance of the village under orders of the local SPDC army camp. *[Photo: HURFOM]*

On 5 March 2007, residents of Khaw Zar Sub Township, were forced by the SPDC Army to provide timber for a local military brick factory. Since the Commander of IB #31 directed local residents to arrange for timber for the brick factory at the end of 2006, the factory had produced 10,000 bricks. In March, the deputy commander, Major Kyaw Zay Ya ordered 4 villages in the area to collect the same amount of wood for his personal brick factory in Yin-ye village. The villages have a total of 1,000 households. The villages are:

1. Yin-ye;
2. Singu;
3. Toe Thet Ywa Thit; and
4. Tae Khun (Sai Khun).[341]

On 4 April 2007, IB #31 based in Khaw-za sub town forced local villagers to cut wood for army brick factories which are part of the army's business ventures. Most military officers forced local people to patrol the village, the motor road, railway tracks, and the gas pipeline. But they did not pay the villagers who worked on these sites. They also fined villagers who were absent from the workforce.[342]

Mon villagers doing forced labour constructing a bridge in Ye Township, Mon State. *[Photo: HURFOM]*

On 11 April 2007, villagers were ordered to cut and dispatch timber for the second time for an army brick kiln, by a commander of the SPDC Army. Moreover, 4 families had to collect a four feet square piece of wood and pile it beside the main road for easy carriage to the factories. This has been going on since the first week of last month. About 15 villagers were being forced to work every alternate day in the brick kilns.[343]

In the first week of April 2007, Commander of IB #61 based at Ye Town ordered villagers of Kawt Hlaing (about 800 households) to repair a road between Kawt Hlaing village and Han Gan village. The chairman told the villagers that a fine of kyat 5,000 (US$ 5) would be imposed on those persons who failed to work.[344]

Also, during first week of April 2007, commander of IB #31, ordered villagers from Chaung-wa village (40 households) to take sentry duty. Both men and women had to take the duty. Men were assigned for night and women were assigned for day time duty.[345] Commander of IB #31 also ordered villagers from Khaw Zar to work for the construction of a bridge on a road between Khaw Zar and Kwan Hler village.[346] Moreover, the Commander of IB #31, ordered village Chairman Nai Ah Soon, to provide villagers to construct housing for the staff of the Sub-Township Hospital. A total of about 50 villagers, including 10 persons from ward #4, had to work for the construction. A fine of kyat 5,000 would be imposed on any person who failed to fulfil to work. The villagers had to carry brick and sand, make a fence for the hospital compound and clear undergrowth.[347] The Commander of IB #31, also ordered the Chairman of Mee Htaw Lar Gyi village, ordered the owners of motorbikes in the village to transport soldiers to undertake delivery services for the army. Each motorbike owner had to take turns every 5 days, and both the motorbike and its owner had to be on standby at the Chairman's residence from 6am to 6pm on each day of the duty.[348]

In the last week of April 2007, the Commander of IB #31, through Maung Tin Nyunt chairman of Mann Gyi village, ordered villagers of Mann Gyi village (170 household) to clear both side of the road and as well to repair the road itself.[349] Moreover, the Commander of IB #31, ordered Mann Gyi village chairman Maung Tin Nyunt to force villagers to take sentry duty, in order to protect the battalion against possible attack from a group of Mon insurgents.

A group of 12 persons a day had to take turns in carrying out the duty. There were four gates in Mann Gyi village and 3 people were assigned to each gate.[350]

Also in the last week of April 2007, the Commander of IB #61 based at Ye Town, ordered Kawt Hlaing village Chairman Nai Pan Nyunt, to provide villagers of Kawt Hlaing (about 800 households) to repair a road between Kawt Hlaing village and Han Gan village. The chairman told the villagers that a fine of kyat 5,000 (US$ 5) would be imposed on persons who failed to work.[351]

On 7 May 2007, about 25 people had to take turns to work on the road repairing. They were ordered to work from 9 am to 5 pm, with a break between 11 am and 1 pm. However, they had to bring their own food and their own equipment. No one was given any food or wages for their work.[352]

On 7 May 2007, Commander of IB #61, ordered Chairman of Khaw Zar village Nai Pan Nyunt, to demand villagers from Khaw Zar village to contribute labour for repairing a motor road. Each household in the village had to pay kyat 3,000 (about US$ 3) for rent of a truck needed to transport soil from Ka Laut. The villagers were also told that a fine of kyat 5,000 (US$ 5) would be imposed on persons who failed to fulfil work as ordered.[353]

On 4 June 2007, IB #31 stationed in Khaw-zar town forced over 600 villagers to repair a road and also other areas to welcome Lt. Gen Maung Bo. The villagers were forced to work for the army from May 23 to 25 and from May 30 to until June 2.[354]

Moulmein Township

On 5 July 2007, it was reported that the Southeast Military Command head Major General Thet Naing Win had ordered Moulmein University students to cultivate physic nuts[355].

Mudon Township

On 19 May 2007, it was reported that the Mudon Township Peace and Development Council had forced about 40 people to beautify a physic nut plant nursery all along the road and clean bushes along the highway belonging to the SPDC in Mudon, because a senior SPDC army officer was going to pass along the road.[356]

A group of villagers from Yin Ye village forced to repair roads in Khaw Zar Sub-Township, Mon State. *[Source: HURFOM]*

Ye Township

On 15 January 2007, Col Kyaw Zay Ya of IB #31 had forced villagers to make bricks to be sold in Southern Ye Township. Starting in December 2006, IB #31 under MOC #19, each day forced 4 villages to make bricks.[357]

On 7 February 2007, residents of southern Ye Township were forced to work both night day on the orders of the battalion stationed in the area. They worked in brick kilns by day and were forced to do sentry duty at night.[358]

Shan State

Kae See Township

At the end of 2006 and early 2007, SPDC troops of LIB #131 forced villagers of Paang Kaad village, in Wan Khem village tract, to rebuild dilapidated army housing and dig new trenches in and around the military camp. The trenches were required to be 4-elbow-lengths deep and 2-elbow-lengths wide. In addition to providing free labour for the construction work, the 30-40 households of Paang Kaad also had to provide building materials, which included 3 hardwood pillars per household.[359]

Kengtung Township

Since around January 2007, people in Kaad Pha village tract had been forced by the SPDC authorities to grow dry season rice for the military. People were also forced to provide sacks of sand and build a dam to divert water.[360]

Kunhing Township

From June to November 2007, farmers in Kun-Hing Township were forced by SPDC military authorities of LIB #524 to cultivate a different strain of rice than those grown traditionally, and to buy the seeds from the authorities. At least around 50 plots of rice paddies were to convert to the new strain of rice, know as 'Shwe Pyi Aye'. These plots belonged to the farmers of Wan Paang and Nam Khaam villages, based along the road between Kun-Hing and Kaali village tract in Kung-Hing Township. Moreover, the farmers were forced to buy the rice seeds from the authorities at the price of kyat 20,000 per basket.[361]

Laikha Township

In late 2006 and early 2007, villagers in Naa Poi village tract in Lai-Kha Township were forced by SPDC troops IB #287 to construct a new military camp, as well as prepare land for cultivation of coffee and other crops. Furthermore, at least 2 villagers were required to be on standby at the camp every day, ready to serve immediately when they were needed as guides or porters, or to run errands.[362]

From April to September 2007, SPDC troops of IB #64 and a Shan ceasefire group forced villagers of at least 9-10 villages in Lai-Kha Township were to build a new road. The projected road started from the east of Lai-Kha town up to a point further to the east in Kun-Hing Township where it met a road that joined Kun-Hing and Kae-See townships, covering a

total distance of about 30 miles. The following are some of the villages that were forced to build the road:

1. Nawng Wo;
2. Wan Paang;
3. Nam Hoo Nur;
4. Maak Laang;
5. Zalaai Khum;
6. Naa Loi;
7. Paang Saang; and
8. Maak Kawk.[363]

For several months since March 2007, SPDC troops of IB #64 and a Shan ceasefire group forced villagers in Naa Poi village tract in Lai-Kha Township to provide free labour building a new military base. Villagers of at least 5 villages were required to regularly work at a place called Nam Hoo Phya Tham in Naa Poi village tract in Lai-Kha Township. Although the authorities said they were building a new town, local villagers believed it was a military base because they were also forced to build trenches, barracks and offices. At least 5 villagers from each village had to work for 3 days at a time, providing their own food and tools and even mini-tractors. The said 5 villages were:

1. Mai Hai (40 households);
2. Kung Sim (30 households);
3. Haang Lin (27 households);
4. Maak Laang Neo (10 households);
5. Nawng Wo (50 households).[364]

Since June 2007 until at least December 2007, SPDC troops of LIB #516 have been forcing villagers in Naa Poi and Wan Saang village tract to serve as their vigilantes and guides, and threatening to relocate those who failed to provide free labour.[365]

Murng-Nai Township

In early June 2007, military authorities of IB #248 issued an order requiring villagers of Naa Khaan village tract to grow sesame and corn among physic nut plants in physic nut plantations along the road leading to the frontier between Murng-Nai and Nam-Zarng townships. The road goes through Naa Khaan village tract, spanning a length of not less than 7-8 miles up to the frontier of Nam-Zarng Township.[366]

Since June 2007 up to at least December, SPDC troops of IB #248 forced villagers in Naa Khaan village tract in Murng-Nai Township to grow sesame and corn for the military.[367]

Murng-Pan Township

From May until at least December 2007, farmers at Tong Teb Village in Wo Laai village tract, Murng-Pan Township, had been forced by SPDC troops of LIB #332 to cultivate rice for them. The villagers did not get paid for their labour, and were required to provide their own food and fuel for their tractors while working for the military.[368]

Murng-Sart Township

In March 2007, it was reported that at least since late November 2006 people in Murng-Sart Township had been forced by the SPDC authorities to work in expanding an airfield, fixing a football field and expanding physic nut plantations.[369]

Murng-Ton Township

For at least the last two years, members of UWSA, a ceasefire group, have been using villagers as forced labour at their rubber plantation in Me Ken village tract in Murng-Ton Township.[370]

In May 2007, it was reported that villagers were forced to build a water pipeline to divert water to a military camp in Mungton.[371]

Also, in May 2007, SPDC troops of IB #65 ordered people with houses on main roads in Wan Mai Huay Saai village tract in Murng-Ton Township to build new houses. Those who could not build their houses according to the required standard were forced to move away from the main roads.[372]

From mid November 2006 up to February 2007, SPDC troops of IB #65 and LIB #524 forced people from at least 6 villages to split rocks and pave the road between Naa Kawng Mu and Pung Pa Khem villages. In addition to not being paid for their time and labour, the villagers had to provide their own food and use their own tools while working on the road. The forced labourers had to work on a rotation basis to fill up the required quotas of workers each day. Each of the following villages was required to provide a certain number of forced labourers every day:

1. Naa Kawng Mu (30 persons);
2. Huay Aw (30 persons);
3. Pung Pa Khem (40 persons);
4. Ton Pherng (10 persons);
5. Pung Aan (10 persons);
6. Ta Kwaang (10 labourers).[373]

In December 2007, it was reported that SPDC troops from LIB #360 had forced villagers of Pung Pa Khem and Son Kuay villages in Pung Pa Khem village tract to keep watch and patrol their villages, often for several days at a time.[374]

Muse Township

On 17 August 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities had forced residents into night sentry duty on the plea that rebels were in operation. Each night, 4 residents from each village of Muse town and surrounding villages were doing sentry duty on rotation in their respective areas or wards. The order came from Muse Township Peace and Development Council Chairman, U Nyunt Han, during a meeting with village and ward chairmen on 10 August, following information that a rebel group of the Shan State Army was operating in the towns.[375]

Nam-Zarng Township

From about March until May 2007, villagers of several villages in Ton Hung Haai Laai village tract were forced by SPDC troops of LIB #543 and a Shan ceasefire group to build a road. The following villages were affected:

1. Ton Hung Haai Laai (50 houses);
2. Maak Laang (40 houses);
3. Wan Mai (23 houses);
4. Kung Yom (30 houses);
5. Maak Khi Nu (18 houses).[376]

Irrawaddy Division

On 19 February 2007, residents of Ein Meh Township, Irrawaddy Division, were forced by local authorities to build a road between Phyin Thalet village in Mayanpin and Shan Su village. According to the residents, they were not only being forced to build roads but were also conscripted for work on canal development projects.[377]

Mandalay Division

In December 2007, it was reported that Chairman U Myo Thand had ordered farmers in his territory to grow rice paddy in fields which are only suitable for growing cotton, corn and beans. He said those who disobeyed the orders would be arrested and imprisoned. The farmers followed his orders to grow paddy rice, but the crop failed because the land was unsuitable.[378]

On 25 December 2007, it was reported that a large number of construction workers in the new capital Naypyidaw, had not received wages from their employers for months. Construction workers were supposed to be paid at least the minimum wage of kyat 1,500 kyat a day to work 10 hours a day with no overtime. An estimated 80,000 workers are involved in construction projects in the city.[379]

Pegu Division

On 6 December 2007, local authorities ordered farmers in Waw and Nyaunglebin townships, Pegu Division, to grow sunflowers, in the belief that the flowers symbolize long life for the regime. The farmers were instructed to buy one pyi (2 kg) of sunflower seeds at a cost of kyat 1,500 (US$ 1.10). The authorities made no commitment to buy seed from the resulting sunflower crop, and no reason was given for the order.[380]

Sagaing Division

From 24 February until 2 March 2007, by the order Chairman of Homalin Township Soe Win, through Moung Khan village chairman Thar Aye, ordered villagers from each household of 4 villages in Moung Khan village tract, Homalin Township, Sagaing Division, to work for the construction of Htaman-thi hydro power plant project. A total of 473 persons from these villages had to work for the construction of housing in Htaman-thi power plant project. The villages were:

1. Ohn Bin Kwin;
2. Htwet Wa;
3. Mhan Maw;
4. Chaung Sone. [381]

Tenasserim Division

From 5 January until 10 May 2007, troops from IB #25 based at Tavoy, which was providing security for a dam project near Dah Thway Kyaut village, ordered residents of 5 villages to work for them. Starting from 5 January, a group of 11 villagers a day had to chop down trees and bamboo, clear the land to construct tents and construct tents for the troops from IB #25. The villagers had to supply their food and bring their own tools and implements. The villages were:

1. Dah Thway Kyaut (30 households);
2. Seit Chaung (40 households);
3. Nyaung Chaung (30 households);
4. Nyar phyar Chaung (100 households); and
5. Oo-yin Gyi (40 households)[382]

From 20 April until the 30 April 2007, Chairman of Gant-gaw Taung village Peace and Development Council (PDC), Tin Myint, ordered villagers to work for fire prevention on the SPDC rubber plantation near their village. A group of 50 villagers a day were ordered to clear undergrowth in an adjacent area of the rubber plantation, as well as extinguish fires, and make firebreak for the plantation. The villagers had to work for 11 days, 8am to 5 pm a day.[383]

Yebyu Township

On 8 April 2007, preparing for the repair of Ye-Tavoy railway tracks, the SPDC army IB #282, based at Nat-kyi-zin village of Yepyu Township, forced Nat-kyi-zin villagers to find timber and cut out one wooden tie (sleeper) and dig 100 cubit feet of gravels, per household. Those who could not provide the items had to pay 500 Kyat for a tie and 2,500 Kyat for 100 cubit feet of gravels.[384]

From the first week of June 2006 until the end of 2007, LIB #409 led by Lt. Col. Aung Naing Myint, ordered Mon and Karen residents from every village between Alesakan and Mayan-chaung villages in Yebyu Township, to provide security along the Ye-Tavoy motor road. Village headmen from 5 villages were ordered to send 8 villagers per day to guard the highway. The village headmen demanded that the villagers take knives, sticks and weapons from their homes in order to protect themselves while they were on duty. The following villages were affected:

1. Alesakan;
2. Kyauk-ka-din;
3. Kywe-ta-lin;
4. Yapu; and
5. Mayan-chaung.[385]

5.6 Forced Prison Labour – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 27 April 2007, prisoners from Buthidaung prison were forced to provide cheap labour at several private work sites in the township. The prisoners had to work daily at several work sites outside of the prison, in places such as brick-fields, shrimp farms, rubber plantations, and seasonal crop farms. The authorities forced the prisoners to work two shifts a day. The first shift ran from 8:00 to 11:30 am, and the second shift ran from 2:00 to 5:30 pm.[386]

On 15 June 2007, it was reported that since the last week of May about 200 prisoners from Sittwe prison had been forced by prison authorities to work on the reconstruction of shrimp farms on the island of Ngamanray Kyunt in Maybon Township.[387]

On 26 July 2007, it was reported that prisoners in Sittwe Jail had been forced by the SPDC army to perform hard labour since July 22. The army forced 80 prisoners to work daily on the repair of the Kyauktaw-Mrauk U road. They had to lay earth and pave stones on the road. The prisoners lived in a shed which had been built by the army near MOC #9 headquarters.[388]

In August 2007, more than 88 prisoners released from Layant Taung Prison Labour Camp of Maruk-U were forced to work on the Sittwe-Rangoon highway. The released prisoners completed their jail terms in July but the camp authorities did not release them. Instead they were forced to work on the Sittwe-Rangoon highway in plain clothes.[389]

On 20 December 2007, it was reported that prisoners from different jails in Arakan State were used as workforce on the Sittwe-Rangoon highway in Myebon Township. Fifty of the prisoners from Sittwe jail were brought out to work on 15 December, while 50 others from Kyaukpru jail were brought out on 16 December, and a further 50 from Buthidaung jail brought out to work on 17 December. All the prisoners were under the control of the Western Command, and were kept in a temporary camp made by prisoners at pillar No. 52 and 53 of the Sittwe-Rangoon highway. The prisoners were also forced to work in brick kilns, and collected wood for the brick field as well as digging rock and earth for the road. It was reported that upon completion of these tasks, the prisoners would be made to work on bridges leading to the road.[390]

Mon State

On 21 January 2007, it was reported that 100 prison labourers were forced to produce stones with the help of machines to repair the Delular road in Nawtayar. 4605 feet tarred road was already paved in recent work. They produced 12 kyins (a pile of stones measuring 10 foot square by 1 foot high) a day from 13 December 2006 to 2 March 2007 in order to repair the road and pave it with stones. According to Lieutenant Nay Linn from the LIB #399, the road was paved with 155 feet of stones a day from 3 March to 1 April.[391]

On 23 January 2007, 576 prisoners were forced to work for Wallay-Kyaikson road construction together with IB #22 during an operational take over.[392]

Bilin Township

On 1 January 2007, 200 prison labourers were carried through Maw Lamyaing and Kyar Inn Seik Kyee by trucks. They were distributed to front line regiments and troops and forced to carry loads. It was reported that they were also forced to clear bamboos, and walk in front of the army in the mine areas.[393]

On 16 January 2007, when IB #24 took over the duty for occupation of camps and region in Kyal Pyaung Kone, 5 prison porters accompanied the column (2) of the IB. The prison porters had to renovate the camps, fetch water and cook rice for the soldiers as a routine. The porters were reportedly also subject to verbal abuse in the form of daily scolding by the army officers.[394]

Magwe Division

On 4 April 2007, it was reported that inmates of Thayat prison were forced by prison officials to work in local factories for meagre salaries. Inmates were forced to work at a soy bean juice factory in the Thayat area. While the prisoners were supposed to receive half of the money they earned, they were only receiving 20 percent with the other 80 percent going to prison officials. The prisoners were also reportedly forced to work as wood cutters for 1,000 kyat a day, however, sources close to the prison said officials were only declaring 500 kyat of their wages.[395]

Mandalay Division

On 30 January 2007, prisoners from Myinchan prison were being contracted as cheap labour for local businesses by prison authorities. Prisoners who had served most of their prison terms were forced to work outside the prison in chains and without pay. Prison staff confirmed they had received orders from the military to use inmates as a means of creating income.[396]

Pegu Division

From 21 January until 9 April 2007, after serving one year in Tharyarwaddy prison about 100 prisoners were taken to the war zone in Kyaut Kyi Township in Pegu Division. One of the prisoners, who managed to escape on the 9 April, reported that he had been forced to carry ammunition and food supplies for company (4) of IB (416) for about 70 days. Moreover, he reported to frequently have been beaten by the soldiers as he could walk at the same pace as them.[397]

5.7 Forced Conscription and Forced Military Training – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 14 February 2007, it was reported that since 5 February the SPDC army had been forming people's militias along the border area in western Burma. These efforts reportedly carried out in order to defend against foreign invaders and to attack insurgents if they intrude into Burmese territory. An SPDC army team led by Lt. Colonel Maung Maung Lwin formed people's militias in all village tracts in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships. The army team had reportedly formed militia units of 30 villagers in each village tract.[398].

Maungdaw Township

On 30 August 2007, it was reported that the army had formed a people's militia in Maungdaw, where 11 people had been recruited from each ward.[399]

In October 2007, it was reported that the SPDC military authority in Arakan State had conducted workshops for training youth as fire brigade personnel in Taungbro Sub-town, Maungdaw Township. According to a village elder, most youth had not been interested in the training, and only went as the authorities had forced them to attend.[400]

Chin State

On 22 March 2007, more than 35 students were picked up and forced to join the army by the Commander of Tactical #2, Colonel San Aung. The students included over 20 who had just finished their examinations, as well as 15 students from Tui Moe boarding school.[401]

On 17 May 2007, several villages in Matupi were ordered to provide a member of each family to undergo militia training. Attendance at the training session was made mandatory by Colonel San Aung, Commander of Tactical #2 stationed in Matupi. The villages who received the order, included:

1. Lui Vang;
2. An Thaw;
3. Lei Sin;
4. Dai Hnan; and
5. La Lui.[402]

Kachin State

Hopin Township

On 3 August 2007, it was reported that three SPDC battalions based near Hopin Township had apprehended youths on the streets late at night and forcibly conscripted them for military service. The forced recruitment was reportedly part of a joint operation of Hopin based IB # 40 led by Maj. Tin Maung Maung (temporary), the LIB #388 led by Lt-Col. Tin Win Aung, the LIB # 389 led by Lt-Col. Khin Maung Lwin, and Col Khin Maung Cho, a tactical commander based in Hpakant. Local authorities had reportedly been informed of the army's recruitment activities, which targeted youths, orphans and drug users who were out on the streets after 10 pm. Residents in the area said the army had also forcibly conscripted new recruits on

trains running through Mohnyin, Hopin and Mogaung in Kachin State. According to a local resident the military ask for identity cards and if the person does not have it with them, they are arrested and told they have a choice between joining the military or going to prison. It was reported that an unspecified number of young people in Zetkone Quarter had been forcibly recruited before dawn on 29 July with the help of the local militia. The army continued their conscription throughout August with the goal of recruiting at least 100 youths from Hopin Township.[403]

Mohnyin Township

On 1 August 2007, over 10 quarters of Mohnyin Town such as Aungthapye, Ashaysu, Narka, Myotma, Thasy, Natkyigon, Namisu, Ohnkyin, and Sekgon were ordered to recruit 4 people each to join the army. In addition, the Mohnyin Township Peace and Development Council ordered youths for recruitment from every house in nearby villages. According to locals, youths aged 18-25 who were found on the roads at night were detained and forced to join in army. For instance, it was reported that one named youth, Poe Khwa had been detained on the return way from the farm. According to a local resident, TPDC, VPDC and SPDC troops had been forcibly recruiting new soldiers in Namma, Hobin and Enntawkyi areas, Mohnyin Division, since the middle of July.[404]

Myitkyina Township

On 24 August 2007, it was reported that residents were being forced to guard their villages and quarters at night, on the orders of SPDC Army Commander Maj-Gen Ohn Myint.[405]

On 28 August 2007, a mass recruitment of firefighters was reported. A week earlier, the SPDC Kachin State Commander Maj-Gen Ohn Myint, had given the Myitkyina Township Administrative Office (Ma-Ya-Ka) the task of recruiting locals to the firefighter reserves. According to residents of Tatkone, Jan Mai Kawng, Du Mare and Shatapru Quarters, there were over 500 families in those quarters, and the Ma-Ya-Ka had ordered 2 persons from every 10 houses in each quarter to join as firefighters.[406]

Putao Township

On 6 August 2007, it was reported that nearly 600 people from Kachin tribes had been recruited over the past month. On the orders of the army, Rawang and Lisu youths had been recruited by Rakhwi Hpung, a local Rawang leader who was a former central committee member and representative of Putao under BSPP. The Hkawng Lang Hpu based Rawang armed group and the RRF led by Tanggu Dang also had a hand in the recruitment. Moreover, in early August, hundreds of military recruits were reportedly sent from Putao airport to Naypyidaw in military aircrafts. The recruits were from Jinghpaw, Rawang and Lisu tribes from Putao District. They were reportedly sent together with 200 troops of the local pro-junta Rawang militia group called Ta-Sa-Pha (Rebellion Resistance Force, RRF) led by a businessman Ahdang (Tanggu Dang).[407]

On 18 September 2007, a secret meeting on recruitment for the militia was held between members of the SPDC village administration (Ya-Ya-Ka) and SPDC army officials in the village's Baptist Church. According to village headmen, over 150 villagers were ordered to attend militia training. The militia training started on 20 September, however only 90 villagers attended this training. The village headmen then and SPDC soldiers started forcibly recruiting villagers through a house to house inspection. According to residents of Putao District, two villagers from Machyangbaw Town were recruited by No. 137 Infantry

Battalion of the local Burma military base in Machyangbaw. They were reportedly sent to Naypyidaw in a military aircraft. The two forcibly recrtuited villagers were Tsap La Raw (21) of Nambuyang village and Nanghkri Zin (39) of Machyangbaw town. Furthermore, in fear of being recruited, 122 high school students went into hiding in the forests and paddy farms. [408]

Waingmaw Township

On 16 August 2007, it was reported that the army had entered a fresh recruitment drive around the gold mining fields along upper N'mai River (Maykha) in eastern Kachin State, over the last month.[409]

Convict porters guarded by SPDC army troops on 17 April 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

Karen State

Thaton District

On 10 January 2007, DKBA troops led by Than Ma Na based in Pan-an township, Ta-way village tract, forced the village heads of 8 villages to recruit new soldiers for the SPDC. If the village head could not recruit, they had to pay kyat 550,000 as this was the gun purchasing price for each new recruit. The following villages had to provide recruits:

1. K'ru-she (10 persons);
2. Pwa-gaw (10 persons);
3. No-aw-la (10 persons);
4. Doh-law-plaw (10 persons);
5. Ha-ta-yeh (2 persons);
6. Hta-thu-khee (2 persons);
7. Kyaw-kay-khee (2 persons); and
8. Po (5 persons).[410]

Mon State

From November 2006 until January 2007, following the SPDC's militarization policy the local army battalion had ordered every village headman in Mon State to send villagers for militia (*Pyithusit)* training. Most villages had to send 35 persons, however larger villages like Khaw-za sub-town were ordered to send 40 persons. Many villagers were forced to abandon their work at farms or plantations to attend this training. The training was conducted by the local military based in their areas. Civilians in southern Ye Township were forced to participate in the training. To avoid joining the People's Militia Force (Pyithusit) in southern Ye Township, residents had to bribe the IB #31 with kyat 400,000 per family.[411]

Pegu Division

On 24 December 2007, it was reported that government troops had forced villagers in Pegu Division to sign up new recruits to the army or pay money to the military to hire mercenaries Local troops from government brigade #66 in Nattalin, Zeegone, and Kyopin Kout townships were demanding that local villagers contribute one recruit from each village group or 1500 kyat per household to hire mercenaries. According to a villager from Chaung Gwa village in Nattalin Township, his village group, consisting of four villages, had to pay 900,000 kyat to the military to hire a mercenary.[412]

Shan State

On 24 December 2007, it was reported that government troops had forced villagers in northern Shan State to sign up new recruits to the army or pay money to the military to hire mercenaries. Locals in Sibaw and Kyauk Mae townships in northern Shan state had made complaints about local military troops forcing locals to join the army. According to a villager from Kyauk Mae, the military demanded a recruit from each household that had a male family member, or pay kyat 100,000 to the military.[413]

Mong Ping Village

On 29 August 2007, five Kachin teenaged schoolboys were forcibly recruited to join the military. According to villagers the recruitment drive was conducted by a local SPDC military post controlled by No. 322 Light Infantry Battalion (Kha Ma Ya) based in Laukkaing under the Northeast Military Command (Ya Ma Kha) with the help of Mong Baw militia leader Du Doi. The recruited boys were:

1. Mangshang La Awng, (16);
2. Hpauje Ma Yaw (14);
3. Lamu La Doi (15);
4. Mwihpu Ma Naw (15); and
5. Ma La (15).[414]

Rangoon Division

On 14 December 2007, it was reported that the SPDC junta was providing riot control training to state-backed organisations. Members of the Ward Peace and Development Councils (WPDC), the USDA and Swan Arr Shin were instructed to attend the training. Firemen, municipal employees and members of the newly formed state-backed youth organization were also told to take part. According to a member of Swan Arr Shin, they were instructed by military personnel in how to systematically crack down on crowds, and shown how to beat crowds in the event of mass protests. The forced trainees were not paid to attend instruction sessions, which were held daily from 2 pm. until 4 pm over a period of two months, and were to resume in 2008.[415]

On 21 December 2007, it was reported that police forces in Rangoon and Pakokku were undergoing anti-riot and crowd control training to crack down on future uprisings. The riot police battalion from Syriam were given anti-riot training in the football field near Rangoon Eastern University Thihadipa stadium located in Tarwa, in the Rangoon suburbs. Pegu Division Zigone based LID #66 conscripted the new recruits through the local Ward and Village Peace and Development Committees. The LID #66 ordered the local authorities to conscript a new recruit per village tract.[416]

Dagon Township

On 16 October 2007, it was reported that high school students had been forcibly recruited into USDA. Dr Aung Ko Ko, headmaster of High school (1) Dagon Township, requested students' photos from class teachers without giving any reason. The pictures were put on USDA cards for the students.[417]

Okkalapa Township

On 23 April 2007, a young boy aged between 14 and 15 was forcibly recruited into the SPDC military after leaving his home to visit his aunt. The boy was captured off the street by a soldier from the IB # 435.[418]

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 6

DEPRIVATION OF LIVELIHOOD

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

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

6.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.2 Inflation

The budget deficit of the SPDC has risen from five percent of GDP in 1998 to seven percent in 2007.[22] With SPDC spending, year upon year, consistently outstripping its capacity for revenue generation, financing is instead largely procured through loans from the Central Bank. However, these loans are only fundable through the 'running of the printing presses,' (i.e. the printing of more money). In 1988, there was 20 billion kyat circulating inside Burma. While the SPDC has not released any statistics on the matter since 1997, economists, using sources such as the consumer price index, have been able to estimate that the total amount of money in circulation stood at 1.3 trillion kyat by 2007.[23] Such monetary expansion has inevitably been accompanied by high levels of inflation. Widely accepted estimates claimed the rate of inflation in Burma to have reached chronic levels of between 50-60 percent by early 2007.[24]

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

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

Meanwhile, salaries, particularly for those in the private sector, remain miserably low, averaging about 1,000 kyat a day in urban areas and as low as 300 kyat per day in rural areas. Research, published by Save the Children UK in 2007, found that while the average household income in Burma was an equivalent of approximately US$1.10 per day, the average cost of just feeding a household stood at US$1.15.[32] While the SPDC's own fiscal mismanagement has been the leading factor in inflation, the regime's limited attempts to control prices have ignored the root causes and have instead been aimed at regulating prices; fining and punishing those traders who charge more than the set price for certain goods, in spite of the fact that the SPDC often sets such prices far below the prevailing market rates. In July 2007, the SPDC responded to the dramatic increase in rice prices over the previous two months by ordering the sale price of the commodity to be frozen at markets in Rangoon. One trader working out of the Bayinnaung Rice Market in Rangoon reported that;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.3 Additional Factors Affecting Persons Livelihoods

Electricity Supply

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Corruption

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moribund Financial Sector

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

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

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

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

Divergent Exchange Rates

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

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

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

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

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

6.4 Economic Sanctions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.5 Labour Rights

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.6 Interference and Abuse in the Agricultural Sector

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

Right to Own Land

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

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

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

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

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

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

Land Confiscation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Land Confiscation – partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 10 January 2007, NaSaKa (border security force) members stationed in Taung Bazaar, Buthidaung Township, confiscated five acres of farmland from Abdul Amin of Darbine Sara village. His land was subsequently returned to him, after paying a bribe of 350,000 kyat to the commander of NaSaKa Area #9.[116]

On 21 January 2007, approximately 55 Buddhist families from southern Arakan were resettled on land previously belonging to Muslim Rohingya residents of Longa Daung (Ywetnyo Daung) village in Buthidaung Township. Longa Daung village had been scheduled to become a model village and those resettled were reportedly impoverished families who had agreed to move after been given promises of new facilities by the authorities. The NaSaKa personnel confiscated approximately 37 acres of arable farmland from Abu Ahamed, 40, Ahamed, 60, and Mostafa, 60.[117]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chin State

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

Kachin State

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

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

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

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

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

Karen State

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

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

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

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

Magwe Division

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

Mandalay Division

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

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

Mon State

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pegu Division

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

Rangoon Division

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

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

Sagaing Division

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

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

Shan State

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

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

Tenasserim Division

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

Forced Sale of Crops

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

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

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

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

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

Forced Sale of Crops - partial list of incidents 2007

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enforced Cultivation and Dry Season Paddy Crops

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arakan State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chin State

In the first week of January 2007, the chairman of the Tiddim Township TPDC convened a meeting with all VPDC chairmen in the township. At the meeting, village chairmen were instructed to provide funds for the planting of jatropha seeds in the area. Tuisenphai village and Thinglei village, for instance, subsequently submitted 35,000 kyat in accordance with the quota they were set. The planting was required to be completed by the end of March 2007.[184]

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kachin State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Karen State

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

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

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

Karenni State

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

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

Magwe Division

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

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

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

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

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

Mandalay Division

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

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

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

Mon State

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

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

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

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

Pegu Division

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

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

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

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

Shan State

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

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

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

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

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

Tenasserim Division

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

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

6.7 Self-Reliance, Development, and Counter-Insurgency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Forced Labour

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

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

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

Arbitrary Fees, Taxes and Extortion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arakan State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chin State

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

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

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

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

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

Kachin State

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

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

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

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

Karen State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mon State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rangoon Division

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

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

Sagaing Division

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

Shan State

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

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

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

Tenasserim Division

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

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

Looting and Expropriation of Food and Possessions

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

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

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

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

Arakan State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chin State

In January 2007, Mr Robem, the chairman of Koe-La village, Matupi Township, was issued orders by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #140 to collect six chickens, as well as two cups of rice from every family in his village. The supplies were to be delivered to the army camp near Leisen village. Such demands by LIB #140 were reportedly common in the area during 2007.[310]

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

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

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

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

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

Karen State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On11 May 2007, SPDC army units had launched renewed attacks against civilian villages in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District, where it was reported that any livestock or foodstuffs they came across was plundered.[337]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Karenni State

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

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

Shan State

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

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

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

Tenasserim Division

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

Destruction of Property

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

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

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

Destruction of Property – partial list of incidents for 2007

Karen State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 9 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to LID #44 burned 15 plantation fields to the ground in Dweh Loh Township, Papun District. Another report, clearly discussing the same event maintained that the incident had occurred on 13 March 2007.[356]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Kaw-ku-mu-doe, on 4 April 2007;
2. Bo-na-doe, on 7 April 2007;
3. Htee-bway-kee, on 22 April 2007; and
4. Htee-si-khee, on 22 April 2007.[367]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Restrictions on Trade, Travel and Cultivation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arakan State

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

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

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

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

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

Karen State

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mon State

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

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

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

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

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

Pegu Division

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

Rangoon Division

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

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 7

RIGHT TO HEALTH

"[States Parties recognise] the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

- Article 11 (1), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

7.1 Introduction

The people of Burma continued to suffer very poor health in 2007. Although current and reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, reports from United Nations (UN) agencies, international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) indicate that the health of the Burmese population is among the worst in world. In February 2007, Charles Petrie, the UN Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Burma warned of *"an impending humanitarian crisis"*. His April 2007 report cited the *"growing inability of the social service provision structures to meet the essential needs of the population"*, and cautioned that the *"growing inability of existing health structures to confront the increasing rates of new and recurrent cases of HIV/AIDS, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis and drug resistant malaria will result in an inability to contain their progression within the general population".* His report also pointed out the *"alarmingly high"* mortality rates for infants, children under five, and mothers.[1]

The most recent official UN health statistics, which date from 2005, maintain that the mortality rate for infants is 75 (per 1,000 live births), while for children under five it rises to 106 (per 1,000 live births).[2] The maternal mortality rate is 3.8 (per 1,000 births) and the average life expectancy at birth is 59.9 years.[3] Furthermore, the probability at birth of dying before the age of 40 is 21 percent, while the probability of surviving to the age of 65 is 64.1 percent for women and 50.7 for men.[4]

Underlying much of this poor health is economic deprivation and instability (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). While the 2007/8 UN Human Development Report optimistically maintains that 21 percent of the Burmese population live below the poverty line; U Sein Htay, a leading Burmese economist has argued that this number is actually closer to 50 percent.[5]

According to Save the Children UK (SCUK), the average daily cost of a healthy diet exceeded the average daily income of the poorest people during 2007, while UN surveys have estimated that 90 percent of the population spends 60-70 percent of household income on food, allowing precious little for other household expenses, and leaving little margin of safety in case of sickness or loss of income.[6]

The situation is exacerbated by rampant inflation, for which estimates for 2007 ranged between 50 and 60 percent.[7] Meanwhile, the value of the kyat declined even further during 2007 as a result of high foreign debt, which sequentially raised firstly energy costs and consequently food and commodity prices.

According to UN data, malnutrition represents a very serious problem in Burma, with an estimated five percent of the population undernourished.[8] Child malnutrition is endemic with 15 percent of infants are born underweight, 32 percent of children under five are underweight for age, and 41 percent are under height for age.[9] However, the actual rate of malnutrition is in all likelihood far higher than that suggested by the UN. Credible reports from rural areas where UN agencies are not permitted access have maintained that child malnutrition in such areas is over 15 percent.[10] Moreover, Burma is reportedly the only country on the planet where the vitamin deficiency disease beriberi, caused by a deficiency of thiamine (vitamin B1), is a major contributing factor for infant mortality.[11]

Conditions are especially grave in the ethnic border states. Remote areas typically pose challenges to the delivery of healthcare in any country, but in Burma, a large percentage of the border areas are zones of continuing armed conflict, and the regime's Four Cuts Policy deliberately denies a standard of living adequate for health and obstructs civilians' access to medical care. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). In June 2007,

the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Jakob Kellenberger, made a statement that was uncharacteristically critical of the regime, maintaining that the SPDC was directly responsible for the *"immense suffering of thousands of people in conflict-affected areas"*, through the enactment of *"large-scale destruction of food supplies and of means of production"*, coupled with the imposition of movement restrictions that made it *"impossible for many villagers to work in their fields".*[12]

In Chin State, it has been estimated that as many as 40 percent of the population do not get enough food to live on.[13] Meanwhile, in parts of Karen State, it has been reported that only 25 percent of the population are able to acquire enough food to feed themselves and their families.[14] Many people in ethnic border areas choose not to live under the oppressive control of the SPDC and thus seek to avoid all contact with them. To accomplish this, thousands of people live as internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom reside in improvised dwellings in the forests, effectively evading military patrols but exposing themselves to malaria-bearing mosquitoes, a lack of food security, poor sanitation and a shortage of clean drinking water.[15] Human rights violations are widespread in these areas and are associated with increased levels of sickness and death. Data gathered by the Back Pack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT) has shown strong correlations between displacement and increases in rates of child mortality, child malnutrition, and landmine injury. Furthermore, extortion, theft and the wilful destruction of food supplies and livelihoods, all of which occur with alarming frequency in border areas, has also been shown to be associated with increased crude mortality, child malnutrition, landmine injury, and the presence of malaria parasites in the blood.[16] The SPDC provides little to no healthcare in these regions and local aid organizations such as the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW), the Back Pack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT), the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and others attempt to make up the shortfall. It was reported that in Karen State in June 2007, seven adults and two children had died during the forced relocation of their village for lack of medical care after they became ill when exposed to the mosquitoes and heavy monsoon rains.[17] Moreover, the military systematically confiscates medical supplies; having prohibited the possession of medicines in some areas for fear that they could be given to armed opposition forces, regardless of whether or not the intention or means of doing so ever existed. Meanwhile, all access for humanitarian aid workers to conflict areas is denied.[18]

Uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources by the SPDC and by companies the SPDC has given resource concessions to has impoverished local people and put the quality and security of food and water at considerable risk.[19] In Hukawng Valley of Kachin State, local residents reported during 2007 that buffalo, cattle, and wild pigs had been killed by unidentified chemical agents used to protect crops by the Yuzana Company and by an unnamed Yunnan-based Chinese company.[20] Similarly, reports have emerged stating that unregulated pesticide, fungicide, and fertilizer use in the water gardens of Inle Lake further threatens the health of people who rely on the lake for drinking water and fish. An unnamed Burmese researcher familiar with the area reported that diseases of the throat and kidneys were common in the communities around the lake.[21] Meanwhile, in Minhlah village of Kale Township, Sagaing Division, the reliable reports have asserted that the military applied insecticide to rice in local villagers' fields, causing stomach problems in villagers who consumed it.[22]

In urban areas across the country, the regime's crackdown on protestors in September 2007 further served to exacerbate the already grave health conditions. Renewed restrictions on the movement of food interfered with the World Food Program's (WFP) feeding of 500,000 people, which included many children and HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (TB) patients. Local authorities prohibited all movement of food out of Mandalay, impeding WFP operations in central Burma and northern Shan State. Disturbances in the port of Sittwe also limited food delivery to northern Arakan State.[23]

During and immediately following the protests, the SPDC actively restricted medical treatment in a variety of different ways as hospitals were ordered to deny treatment to those who had been injured in the protests. Moreover, patients were cleared out of hospital wards to make room for casualties, and some of those in desperate need of medical attention avoided hospitals for fear of being arrested.[24] Further compounding the issue, some medical personnel, and those responsible for the care of sick family members, were detained or forced into hiding.[25]

80-year-old *"Grandmother"* Ma Aye Noh displays a severe abscess which has formed on the side of her neck. Although her children have recognised the severity of the ailment, they say they have not so far been able to care for her or provide any treatment. *[Caption and photo: KHRG]*

The regime's absolute control over all State institutions, its considerable control of civil society actors, and position as chief economic policy maker, leave little room for individuals or organizations to escape the consequences of its policies, the majority of which are designed to benefit the military, at the expense of the civilian population.[26] A report by UN Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Burma, Charles Petrie, characterised Burma's suffering as the result of the regime's *"ill-informed and outdated policies, … lack of public expenditure"*, and *"uncompromising attitude to civil society groups"*.[27] In clear contrast to this, in the aftermath of the September protests, Senior General Than Shwe claimed that Burma's social and economic standards had improved, and that life expectancy had miraculously increased due to improvements in the State healthcare system, although just what these improvements were was not mentioned and remain to be seen.[28]

7.2 Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare in Burma is limited by a range of factors. The first of these is the prohibitively small budgetary allocation for healthcare, which itself reflects the SPDC's general lack of political will to assist the general population. Such low levels of funding have created the dismally poor conditions in public hospitals. Meanwhile, the costs related to private healthcare in Burma are beyond the means of the majority of the population. The general lack of resources and the low pay provided to healthcare practitioners has also lead to widespread corruption, which has made access to medical care even more expensive and difficult.

The SPDC's constraints on, and active obstruction of humanitarian operations (For more information, see section 7.6: International Aid and Humanitarian Operations, below), and its regular detention and harassment of those seeking care have also all had their role in limiting access medical care in Burma. For the 2004 fiscal year, the UN reported that public health expenditure was a paltry 0.3 percent of GDP, while private health expenditure as considerably more at 1.9 percent of GDP, and that overall health expenditure was a trifling US$38 per capita. Though scarcely believable, the following year, in 2005, funding of public hospitals and dispensaries actually dropped to 0.2 percent of GDP, a figure much lower than the average for developing nations globally.[29]

Owing in part to Burma's grossly inadequate education system, in 2007 it was reported that there were a shortage of physicians and other trained health professionals, and most hospitals lacked staff, equipment, and medical supplies.[30] According to the UN Human Development Report, there were only 36 physicians per 100,000 members of the population, in which only 57 percent of births attended by skilled health personnel.[31] While the SPDC Ministry of Health's "Health Vision 2030" policy proposed the expansion and upgrading of Burma's public hospitals, in February 2007, Kandawgyi hospital and Kantharyar hospital, both of which are public hospitals, in Tamwe Township, Rangoon were closed suddenly with employees given no advance warning, no explanation, no compensation, and no assistance finding new employment.[32]

Some reports have maintained that, in some areas, such as in Shan State, patients are expected to provide the bandages, alcohol swabs, and medications needed for their operations.[33] Similarly, Myitkyina Government Hospital in Kachin State faced electrical shortages for at least a month during 2007, and charged surgery patients an additional 7,500 kyat (US$6) per hour to run a diesel generator during their procedures. Equally, pregnant women were also reportedly expected to supply candles and torches for use during their deliveries, and all patients receiving treatment at the hospital were required to pay extra money on top of their medical costs to keep the hospital supplied with medicine, equipment, and electricity.[34] In Arakan State, a pregnant woman died, allegedly because her treatment was delayed by doctors at the Buthidaung Government Hospital who were demanding more money than her husband could pay. No compensation was paid for her death.[35]

The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), which, according to the SPDC is a popular social organization, but which in reality represents little more than the civilian face of the military and has been widely implicated for its involvement in political violence, supposedly administers a number of free clinics. However, in December 2007 there were reports that patients at the USDA clinic in Thanlyin (Syriam) Township, Rangoon were being charged 300 kyat for appointments.[36]

Local deficiencies in healthcare, which are especially acute in rural and ethnic areas, typically must be overcome by travelling long distances to larger centres for care. However, this often attracts many difficulties and should under no circumstances be considered an

acceptable solution. In areas experiencing continuing armed conflict, travel is often difficult, expensive and dangerous. In some cases, such as in many parts of Karen State, travel outside one's village is prohibited. Before travel is permitted in many of these areas, travel permits must be secured, typically through the payment of bribes, which when considered in combination with the cost of healthcare and the costs of travel can make such a prospect untenable.

On 1 March 2007, Daw Nu Nu Way suffered complications giving birth in her home village of Pa La Na in Kachin State. Her family and health workers from her village tried to take her to Myitkyina Township Hospital, but SPDC army soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #29 who stopped her for two hours at a checkpoint along the way, preventing her from getting the immediate medical attention she required, which ultimately contributed to her death upon arrival at the hospital.[37]

A variety of healthcare providers exist alongside the woefully inadequate public system. In Rangoon, there are approximately 20 small private hospitals serve the very wealthy, who are the only ones able to afford the exorbitant fees they charge. In April 2007, the SPDC passed a new law creating a private health care policy body, and another one making overcharging by doctors punishable by five years' imprisonment, although, the effectiveness of these laws remains to be seen.[38] The enactment of these new laws suggests that private hospitals may be exploiting rather than alleviating the weaknesses of the public system. There are private clinics in other cities outside Rangoon, which during 2007; the poor and middle classes began to attend in increasing numbers for lack of trust in the public hospitals, or for where there are no public services available.

Meanwhile, a number of high-ranking SPDC officials and their families, apparently fully aware of the inadequacies of the Burmese healthcare system and its inability to do what it is supposed to do, travel all the way to Singapore to seek treatment in private hospitals. In January 2007, Senior General Than Shwe was hospitalized in one such facility in Singapore for a week, as was Prime Minister Soe Win in March 2007.[39] Indeed, the question begs to be asked: if Burma's healthcare system is as good as the SPDC would like to have us believe it is, why do they and their families seek treatment abroad?

It has been reported that in spite of the deplorable state of the public health system, the military has its own independent medical system. Though little information is available about this parallel system, it is known that there are well equipped hospitals in Naypyidaw that are exclusively for the use of military officers.[40]

In border and conflict areas public healthcare is virtually non-existent. The majority of villagers in these areas must rely on traditional herbal remedies, many of which prove ineffective in treating the problem, or services provided by armed opposition groups, independent relief organizations who from time to time are able to travel into conflict areas, or on clinics in neighbouring countries.[41]

The regime prohibits all international humanitarian access to all such conflict-affected areas. In April 2007, U Soe Tha, the Minister for National Planning and Economic Development reportedly gave assurances to the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs that access would soon be given to these areas, however, no such admission has yet been permitted.[42] Karen, Karenni, and Shan States where armed conflict continues and the greatest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in hiding, are among the worst affected by these restrictions. Local independent humanitarian aid organizations such as the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and the Backpack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT) send medics and supply caravans into remote areas to provide care, and though these groups are among some of the most effective groups on the ground, the demand is too great for their limited resources and areas which are heavily militarized cannot be reached.[43]

Those living in Karen State and who are able to travel also have the option to cross the border into Thailand where they can get treatment at the public hospital in Mae Sot, Tak Province or at the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) which is also in Mae Sot.[44] On the opposite border in July 2007, Indian traders from Manipur in India's northeast sponsored a number of medical clinics that provided free health check-ups to Burmese communities in villages situated along the Burma-India border, while the Shija Hospital and Research Institute near Imphal, the state capital of Manipur, offered free cleft palate surgery to Burmese citizens.[45]

The limited availability and poor quality of medicines available in Burma further limits the healthcare available. The chairman of the Myanmar Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment Entrepreneurs Association (MPMEEA), Dr Maung Maung Lay, has estimated that between 10 and 15 percent of medicines available in Burma are fake.[46] Inferior quality, the wrong medicines, or tablets containing less medicine than advertised can actually be worse than useless. In addition to diverting scarce financial resources, diseases such as malaria or tuberculosis can develop immunity to drugs if they are exposed to lower or less potent medications.[47] According to the *New Light of Myanmar*, Burma has five pharmaceutical factories within its borders, which provide 40 percent of domestic drug supply. In 2007, a sixth drug factory was built at Pyin Oo Lwin in Mandalay Division, though limited information is available on the products created at this, or any of the five other factories, their quality, and their anti-counterfeiting measures.[48]

A Free Burma Rangers humanitarian relief team proving medical aid to IDPs at Papun District, Karen State in December 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

7.3 HIV/AIDS

More than 20,000 people die of AIDS in Burma every year. HIV prevalence trends in Burma suggest that the epidemic peaked in 2000 and in 2007 was believed to be in decline, although the disease burden remains very high and prevalence among children is still on the rise.[49] The WHO has estimated that HIV prevalence in Burma during 2007 stood at 0.67 percent, based on data from previous surveys and projections from past trends, however, in the absence of recent data, it remains unclear just how accurate this estimate is.[50] Researchers at the 8th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in August 2007 estimated that in 2007 there were 230,000 adults and 6,000 children living with AIDS in Burma alone, of which 13,000 cases have been classified as new infections. HIV prevalence among pregnant women was estimated at 1.5 percent in 2007, down from 2.5 percent in 2000.[51] Among intravenous drug users, HIV prevalence is believed to have stabilised at approximately 40 percent, after fluctuating from 62.8 percent in 1992, 34.4 percent in 2004, and 43.2 percent in 2005.[52] In 2005, the year of the most recent UN survey data, an estimated 1.3 percent of the Burmese adult population, or 339,000 people, were reported as living with HIV, making Burma the third-highest HIV burden in the South-East Asia region.[53] Also in 2005, HIV prevalence among commercial sex workers in Rangoon was 29.6 percent, and in Mandalay 34.3 percent.[54]

While the UN has praised the regime's progress in controlling HIV/AIDS,[55] at the beginning of 2007 the WHO warned of the risk of a massive spread of disease amongst intravenous drug users, sex workers and the gay community in Burma and in neighbouring countries.[56] Usage of and addiction to heroin is an increasing problem for neighbouring Thailand, India, and Yunnan Province in China.[57] Burma's poor cooperation with its neighbours impairs effective control of drug smuggling, addiction, and HIV transmission. However, frequent reports of the SPDC's complicity in the production and trafficking of drugs may offer an explanation for their lack of enthusiasm on this matter.

HIV education projects among local communities have increased in recent years, but the regime's budget allocation for these efforts remains appallingly low, and cultural barriers, along with draconian and discriminatory laws that declare the possession of condoms to be evidence of prostitution, make the teaching safe sex extremely difficult.[58]

Access to treatment programs is also very limited with as many as 60,000 AIDS sufferers in need of antiretroviral drugs (ARV) unable to access them.[59] The reasons for this are numerous. Many people living with HIV in Burma are simply not aware of that important fact. Burma suffers from an acute shortage of laboratory facilities where the necessary diagnostic blood tests can be conducted. Besides which, the average Burmese citizen, the vast majority of who live below the poverty line, cannot afford the costs of such tests anyway. Many of those living in rural areas often don't know that treatment exists, and even if they did, and were able to afford them (however unlikely a supposition that this may be), they would still have to travel to one of the larger urban centres to receive the treatment, which requires no only money, but also travel permits. Moreover, in such urban centres ARVs are only administered by a small handful of public hospitals, by the Artsen zonder Grenzen (AzG; the Dutch branch of MSF), and by HIV/AIDS support services offered by the NLD.

In January 2007, hospitals in Rangoon ran out of ARV, and shortfalls in public hospitals were such that they began referring patients to the services offered by the NLD.[60] Such activities are mistrusted by the SPDC, who apparently fear that the NLD may be using these services to develop political clout by rising to the challenge where the regime is failing.[61]

In addition to the expense of travel and medical care, patients must pay for the ARV treatment. However, the August 2007 fuel price rise, which in turn drove food and commodity prices up (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood), similarly forced an increase of over 20 percent in ARV prices, pushing the cost of a one month's treatment course up to 37,000 kyat from the 30,000 kyat it had been previously.[62] In Burma many HIV sufferers die simply because they cannot afford the high costs of treatment.[63]

Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, right, at work with HIV/AIDS patients in Rangoon. *[Photo: Irrawaddy]*

SPDC army soldiers with HIV/AIDS are typically denied treatment because, according to an SPDC army medical officer, the army refuses to acknowledge the disease as a major problem, in spite of soldiers being at a high risk of contracting the disease because blood transfusions in the army are not tested for HIV.[64]

According to the *Myanmar Times*, the Myanmar Medical Association (MMA) announced plans in December 2007, to hold HIV/AIDS education fairs in Rangoon and in Pegu (Bago), in collaboration with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and with the participation of the SPDC Department of Health's National Aids Program, and NGOs, including UK-based Marie Stopes International (MSI).[65] Meanwhile, the military, the police, and civil officials, all of whom are subordinate to the SPDC, have continued to actively obstruct individuals and local NGOs distributing educational materials and giving care and counselling to people living with AIDS. Self-help groups, which in other more liberal countries are ale to organize patients for mutual support and practical assistance, are rare in Burma, because of SPDC repression the social stigma still attached to AIDS, perpetuated by that repression.[66]

As noted above, the NLD was active in conducting HIV/AIDS education and support services during 2007, which it has combined with its campaigns on human rights education and political advocacy.[67] Phyu Phyu Thin is a leading Burmese HIV/AIDS activist, who, since 2002, had coordinated the NLD's HIV/AIDS support program, and run a centre in Rangoon providing antiretroviral treatment, counselling, and made arrangements for housing and referrals to international aid agencies.[68] However, she was arrested and imprisoned from 21 May 2007 until 2 July 2007 after she and more than 40 others met to pray for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Following her arrest, 11 HIV-positive supporters staged protest vigils demanding her release, for which they were also arrested and detained for three days at the Waybargi Infectious Diseases Hospital on the outskirts of Rangoon.[69]

The regime has also obstructed other attempts at HIV/AIDS education and treatment. A Burmese NGO worker who had met with local residents in Mon State in early 2007 to discuss an HIV/AIDS education and prevention project was ordered to appear at the local police station and accused by the TPDC chairperson of failing to first consult them about the project, despite the project having already been under implementation for two years.[70]

In another case, Ko Tin Ko, who is HIV-positive himself, was arrested and detained by police in Rangoon in April 2007, for distributing educational leaflets that he had written about HIV/AIDS and the difficulties AIDS sufferers face in travelling to Rangoon for antiretroviral treatment.[71] In February 2007, he had attempted to form an HIV/AIDS awareness centre in Pakokku, Magwe Division, but his efforts were frustrated by the police who ordered him to shut the program down.[72]

7.4 Other Infectious and Communicable Diseases

Tuberculosis

According to the World Health Organization, Burma holds the unenviable position of being on the list of 22 "High TB Burden Countries", with an estimated 40 percent of the population being infected.[73] During 2007, the SPDC Ministry of Health estimated that 100,000 new tuberculosis (TB) patients develop each year, with approximately half of this number being infectious.[74] The UN, meanwhile, is less conservative in its estimates, who maintain that there are closer to 130,000 new infections each year.[75]

Tuberculosis in its inactive form does not cause illness; however, a weakened immune system brought on by other diseases or through poor nutrition can bring about active tuberculosis, which can turn deadly.[76] According to the UN Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), between 60 and 80 percent of people with HIV also suffer from TB. Tuberculosis is one of the biggest infectious disease killers of AIDS sufferers, and as such proper treatment of TB can be considered a life-saving treatment for those in this position.[77]

Correct treatment for TB is known as "Directly Observed Therapy" (DOTS) in that prescribed antibiotic pills are taken under direct observation by health workers, to ensure that the antibiotics are not sold for profit, or misused to treat other afflictions. According to the United Nations Human Development report, 95 percent of all detected cases of active tuberculosis are under DOTS treatment, where 84 percent of this number (80 percent of the total) are successfully cured under DOTS.[78] Ineffective or incomplete treatment, as can occur among poorly monitored and impoverished populations, such the internally displaced, can lead to the rise of drug-resistant strains of TB. Such strains are difficult and expensive to treat, and unfortunately are reportedly becoming an increasing problem in Burma.

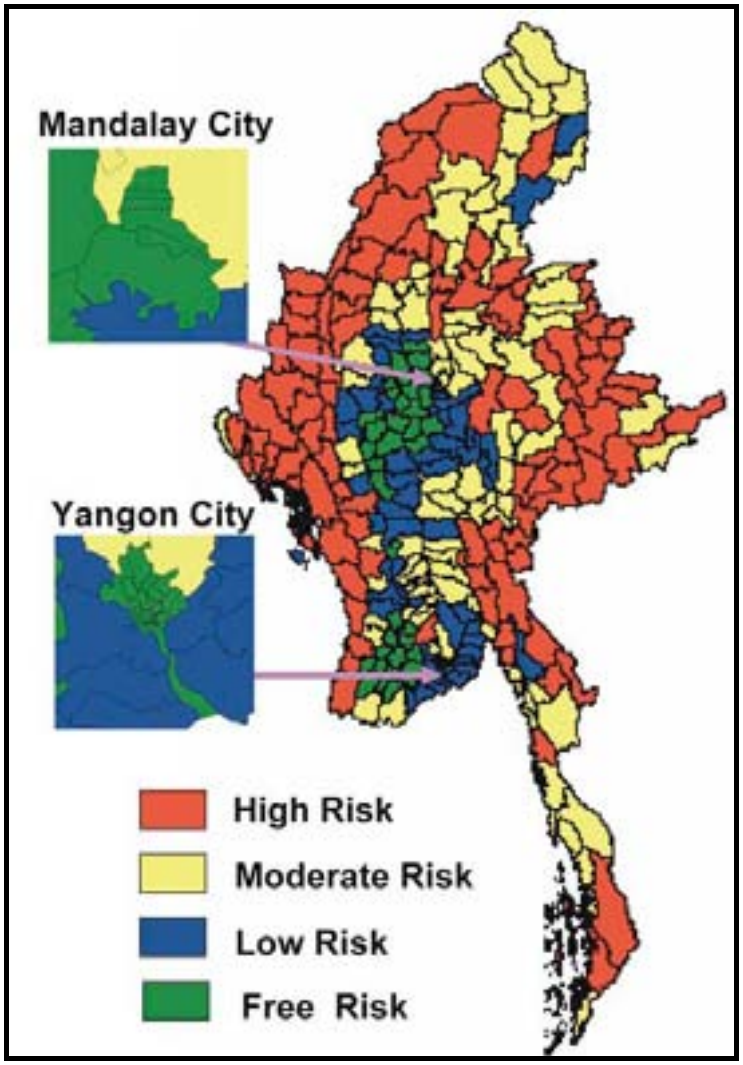
In May 2007, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reported treating 15 cases of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis in an unnamed refugee camp in Thailand along with two further cases of *"extensively-drug-resistant"*, one of which was reported in a refugee camp, while the other was observed in a Burmese migrant worker in Thailand. It was suspected that other refugees and migrant workers may b unknowingly carrying this highly resistant strain.[79]

Malaria

Malaria is the leading cause of death and sickness in Burma. The UN has estimated that 700,000 people each year suffer from malaria, not only because the disease is endemic to many parts of the country, but also owing to inadequate protection against the disease. The simplest form of protection against malaria is obtained through the use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets (ITNs); however, many do not have access to such a simple yet vital line of defence, which, according to the UN results in 700,000 new cases each year.[80] Total nation-wide prevalence of the disease is difficult to determine, but recorded deaths from malaria in Burma are higher than in any other country in all of Asia. In March 2007, the SPDC Ministry of Health reported that malaria morbidity dramatically declined from 24.5 per 1,000 in 1989 to 9.3 per 1,000 in 2006, with mortality declining from 10.4 to 3.1 (per 1,000) over the same period.[81] Official statistics should always be considered to be questionable, with these figures being no exception. In 2003, the WHO, working along official channels, recorded 2,016 cases of malaria in Karen State. Meanwhile, the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) just across the border in Mae Sot of Tak Province, Thailand reported 5,000 confirmed cases, while the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) and the Backpack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT) had reported treating 27,000 cases among internally displaced populations in the

state.[82] An independent study published in September 2007, estimated the prevalence of malaria in contested regions of eastern Burma to be approximately 10 percent.[83]

The Thai Ministry of Public Health, which maintains 800 malaria treatment units along its border with Burma, reported 2,995 malaria cases among Burmese migrant workers in the first half of 2007, which had resulted in 12 deaths.[84]



Malaria Risk Areas in Burma. *[Source: WHO]*

Dengue

Dengue is a flu-like illness caused by a virus transmitted by the bite of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. The disease can be fatal in children, especially in the haemorrhagic fever strain that is caused by repeated infection.

No vaccine exists to treat dengue, so control of mosquito populations forms the basis of prevention. Unplanned and unregulated urban development, poor water storage, and unsatisfactory sanitary conditions increase the breeding habitats of the mosquito, which has led the WHO to describe dengue as a *"man-made problem related to human behavior"*.[85]

In the first half of 2007, warmer weather and unseasonable heavy rainfalls brought a steep rise in dengue infections throughout South East Asia, chiefly in Indonesia, Thailand, and Burma, though reported totals for the region at year-end were less than in 2006.

In August 2007, the SPDC Ministry of Health reported the deaths of *"about 100 children"* resulting from dengue thus far for 2007. In July 2007 alone, 32 children had reportedly died of the disease, the majority of who were under five. This number represents a worsening situation when compared to the 130 fatalities from dengue for the whole of 2006.[86] Furthermore, in August 2007, the WHO reported 98 deaths from 8,445 cases to July 2007, compared with 6,711 cases in the same period the year before. The major cities of Rangoon, Mandalay, and Moulmein, all of which *"have undergone rapid urbanization in the last few years"*, reported the highest number of cases, however, this statistic may also reflect the lack of access that international organizations have to most parts of the country.[87]

In June 2007, at the beginning of the rainy season, the emergency ward of Rangoon General Hospital was *"filled by children"* suffering from dengue.[88] The following month, in July 2007, doctors at Rangoon Children's Hospital reported that each day, 150 to 200 children had presented with dengue, and that the hospital didn't have the resources to treat them, ultimately resulting in as many as five deaths a day.[89] Dr Than Win, from North Okkalapa Township in Rangoon told reporters that *"the strain of the disease prevalent in patients this rainy season appeared to be stronger than those in previous years and that the numbers of children dying were unprecedented"*.[90]

Private clinics were also reported to have been crowded with dengue cases, with a Rangoon resident reporting that patients were queuing outside hospitals for treatment, and that due to overcrowding, SPDC-administered hospitals were admitting only the most serious cases.[91] However, in a country where over a hundred die from dengue each year; largely due to a lack of adequate and affordable healthcare, all cases should be treated as serious. Similarly, an unidentified doctor at a private clinic in Minhla Township of Pegu (Bago) Division reported in July that his clinic was receiving 10 cases of dengue a day.[92] Private clinics and hospitals in Mon State had also reported being full of patients with dengue in May 2007, and that some patients had been asked to leave before they had fully recovered in order to make room for new patients.[93] Reports emerged that one or two people had died of dengue each day at Moulmein Hospital. Local villagers in Ye Township, Mon State said that fatalities were under-reported because health workers go to lengths to conceal them, for fear of being blamed by higher authorities.[94]

Following the outbreak, Daw Myint Myint Soe, the Mon State Chairperson of the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), an SPDC-organized and controlled women's rights organization, visited Than Ka Lond village in Kyaik Mayaw Township, Mon State in June 2007 to ostensibly check on the status of malaria cases, in what was little more than an overt photo opportunity and public relations stunt. It was reported that the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) had extorted a sum of approximately one million kyat from local villagers to cover the cost of her visit.[95] The report failed to mention why they were checking on cases of malaria following an outbreak of dengue, or what they could have done should they have found any.

In the first half of 2007, the SPDC Ministry of Health reportedly launched a dengue education campaign in Rangoon, but some residents claimed that authorities had failed to educate the community about the dangers of dengue. Daw Thet Nwe, whose three-year-old daughter, Ma Thazin Wai, had died from dengue in late July 2007, organized a community outreach program with a group of neighbours who distributed educational pamphlets published by UNICEF about the risks of dengue. The group maintained that they felt they had to do this to make up for the failure of the authorities to do so. Daw Thet Nwe was quoting as having

said, *"We didn't know the right way to deal with the fever and ended up losing our baby girl … if we had seen the leaflets earlier we could have prevented her death"*.[96]

Avian Influenza

In November 2007, Burma announced its first reported human carrier of avian influenza in a seven-year-old girl in a village in Kengtung Township, Shan State.[97] Separate outbreaks of avian influenza, which is also known as bird flu or H5N1, occurred in poultry farms around Rangoon in February, March, June, and July, and in Mon State in July, in eastern Pegu in October, and in eastern Shan State in November and December.[98]

In response to the earlier outbreaks the regime claimed that it had sealed off disease areas, tested birds for disease, disinfected areas, closed fowl meat depots, prohibited transport of fowl and sale of birds or their eggs, culled birds, and urged farmers to use new farm equipment and to prevent crows from entering their farms,[99] and pet-owners to keep their animals from eating birds.[100]

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) praised the regime's response to the March outbreaks as *"quick and effective"*, as did the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), although conceded that the SPDC would require further help on the issue.[101] The regime maintained that it had actively surveyed for disease outbreaks, sought and accepted assistance from other countries,[102] and cooperated with international organisations such as the WHO, the FAO, and USAID[103] in controlling the outbreaks, and with neighbouring countries in preventing movement of fowl across borders. In March 2007, the U.S. Government, which gives virtually no aid to the regime and has been one of its most ardent critics, supplied $600,000 worth of laboratory testing equipment.[104] According to some reports, the regime reported bird flu cases to the international community, a departure from its usual secretiveness,[105] although other reports emerged of some concealing of outbreaks.[106]

The health infrastructure of Burma is so weak that, in the words of one unidentified UN official, an outbreak of avian influenza *"would be close to impossible to contain"*.[107] In spite of this, the regime has done little to nothing to correct this basic vulnerability. The response to outbreaks has been restricted primarily by the limited capacity and lack of political will of the SPDC's veterinary and public health apparatus. In March 2007, the FAO noted that the source of the February outbreaks that had occurred in four townships around Rangoon remained unknown, and that the regime needed stronger surveillance, laboratory capabilities, animal health services, and public education, and to assist develop these, gave US$1.4 million to aid the regime's effort in these areas.[108]

In many cases, especially in rural areas, local residents reported that word of the dangers of avian influenza had not reached their area or that the junta had simply not made any public announcements, and that chickens were still being sold alive in markets and in restaurants.[109] Likewise in the June outbreaks, the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) failed to inform poultry farmers for ten days after the initial reports, probably out of fear of international condemnation for their failure to control the situation.[110] Again, in October 2007, the regime censored news of yet another outbreak in Thanatpin Township in Pegu Division.[111] In many areas, as expected, the outbreaks caused a decline in demand, and rather than stopping trade in chickens, the lower market prices simply shifted consumption of chicken to the poor who previously were unable to afford the high costs of meat.[112] In other areas, merchants sold chicken clandestinely at inflated prices.[113]

Reports also emerged of members of the junta-affiliated Myanmar Red Cross and auxiliary fire brigades accepting bribes from poultry farmers to avoid having to cull their birds, or to enforce the culling only at small farms and leaving larger farms, who would have been able to pay much larger bribes, alone.[114] A veterinarian involved in the response had said on condition of anonymity that the measures taken were grossly inadequate and that because the authorities had offered no form of compensation to the owners of the destroyed birds, people either evaded the culling or were impoverished as a result of it[115]

Diarrhoea

Waterborne diseases causing gastrointestinal symptoms, diarrhoea, dehydration, and then death are responsible for 50 percent of infant morbidity in Burma, and in a shocking statistic that is unforgivable in the 21st century; diarrhoea itself is the second most significant cause of death in children under the age of five.[116]

According to the *UN Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 78 percent of the Burmese population uses an *"improved"* water source (defined as being safe to drink) and 77 percent use improved sanitation. When children become sick, only 48 percent of them receive the appropriate medical care of rehydration and continued feeding.[117] These statistics provided by the UNDP, however, seem highly optimistic. In reality, these figures are likely to be far lower. The UNDP reportedly has works to improve sanitation and water supply, but diarrhoea remains widespread, and many of the most vulnerable populations live in areas beyond the reach of UN agencies such as UNDP.[118]

On 1 November 2007, there was reportedly an outbreak of diarrhoea in Bawli Bazaar of Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, believed to have been brought on by a sudden change in weather conditions. Many persons afflicted with the illness were admitted to the medical clinic in Bawli Bazar, however there was little that could be done for them, owing to the *"scarcity of oral saline and other much needed medicines"*. Between 6 and 8 November 2007, four patients died as a result of the diarrhoea that they suffered from. The names and ages of the deceased were:

1. Robiya, 7;
2. Salma Khatun, 25;
3. Hasina, 20; and
4. Sokina, 26.[119]

Typhoid

Typhoid is another potentially fatal waterborne disease with a high prevalence in Burma, owing largely to poor sanitation. On 8 April 2007, a 12-year-old Ahmed Khobir from Aley Than Kyaw village in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State died after contracting typhoid. The boy reportedly suffered with the disease at home in the absence of any medical care for two weeks before being taken to Maungdaw Hospital where he died a week later. Following the boy's death, his village doctor had told journalists that, *"There is not good practice of personal hygiene among our people. In open food serving places, we share same glasses and cups for drinking water and tea, which are readily contaminated. We mostly drink un-boiled water"*.[120]

Responding to the crisis of an enduring lack of safe drinking water in Arakan State, the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) reportedly dug a number of wells in affected areas throughout Maungdaw Township in June 2007, however, as with many issues in Burma, demand far outweighs the supply and these wells are able to only reach a fraction of the population in these areas.[121]

Rabies

Rabies is a disease that while eradicated in many parts of the world, still endures in Burma. An outbreak of rabies was reported in both Dimawhso and Loikaw Townships of Karenni State, in January 2007, and again in Dimawhso Township in April 2007. In a knee-jerk response to the first outbreak in January, local authorities in both townships had ordered all domestic dogs killed, regardless of whether they were rabid or not. Three children were reportedly in critical condition after contracting the disease after being bitten by a dog during the April outbreak in Dimawhso Township.[122]

Polio

Since 2005, UNICEF and WHO personnel have reportedly worked in conjunction with the regime and Bangladeshi authorities on a large-scale polio immunization program, and as a result of this program, the SPDC maintained in 2007 that at least 95 percent of children under the age of five have now been vaccinated.[123] However, these statistics, like all official figures provided by the regime, should be viewed with some scepticism.

In spite of these highly optimistic claims by the SPDC, in April and May 2007, wild polio virus was detected in three toddlers all aged between 15 and 23 months in Maungdaw Township of northern Arakan State. In response, the District Civil Surgeon of neighbouring Bangladesh to organized door-to-door surveys and immunizations at five points along the Naff River, where it forms the border between Bangladesh and Burma, to prevent the outbreak crossing the river and spreading into Bangladesh. Meanwhile, one village elder in Maungdaw *"confirmed that there is a polio diagnosed child in Maungdaw town but no action against polio [had] been taken on the Burma side"*.[124]

As a result of the SPDC's failure to act, in May 2007, a further seven children in Maungdaw Township were confirmed as suffering from the disease.[125] Following this, the WHO launched a renewed immunisation campaign for Bangladesh and Burma, with the stated goal of vaccinating some 2.5 million children in three rounds of immunisations in May, June, and July 2007.[126] Some of the children affected by the May outbreak had reportedly been taken across the border into Bangladesh in search of better medical treatment than was available to them in Burma, however such travel can be dangerous, owing both to the prevalence of landmines deployed along the border as well as strict movement restrictions imposed against the Rohingya who inhabit northern Arakan State.[127] Additional vaccinations were reported to have been conducted in northern Arakan State in November 2007 to counter this continuing prevalence of this disease, but little information on these additional programs has been made available.[128]

7.5 Natural Disasters

The SPDC has also failed to take measures to mitigate the adverse health effects of extreme weather. Unchecked deforestation has contributed to flooding and according to the UNDP; Burma has lost approximately 70,000 square km of forest every year from 1990 to 2005.[129] The regime's advance warning and emergency response to flooding is consistently poor, which often has resulted in epidemic and death. In May 2007, unseasonably early torrential rainfall caused flooding in several townships in Rangoon Division, and polluted water from latrines overflowed into the water supply, which made safe drinking water scarce.[130] Residents reported that advance warnings given by the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology were only published in the SPDC-controlled newspaper and besides which, arrived too late to be at all effective. Others claimed that municipal authorities failed to unblock drainage canals choked with garbage, and that the official response was uncoordinated, with local people in some areas left to organize their own rescue and recovery efforts. This was reported to have taken place in Thingangyun Township, where one housewife had reported that *"It [the water] is still up to the calf level. You can't live on ground level yet. … We are trying to salvage and repair the damages done by the floods. Rice and clothing shops are all ruined"*. One Rangoon resident reported that the SPDC had actually prevented people from carrying out rescue efforts.[131]

Also in May 2007, Tropical Cyclone Akash destroyed most of the homes in the fishing village of Ngapyegyaung in Pauk Taw Township, Arakan State, leaving 300 people without clean drinking water or adequate shelter. Relief supplies of blankets, mosquito nets, clothing and medicine were only supplied three months later, after the local Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) alerted higher authorities to the diarrhoea outbreak afflicting the village. One teacher from the village later complained about the delay in the delivery of relief supplies, saying that, *"There is immediate distribution of relief to people affected by natural disasters all over the world, but we received relief goods after nearly three months. Here the government simply neglects the people"*.[132] However, the supplies delivered were inadequate. The cyclone also damaged rice stores and animal husbandry projects in villages in northern Rathedaung Township, resulting in food and rice shortages. Authorities not only delivered no aid to the area, but also maintained the policy that prohibits the transport of rice from one village to another throughout the region. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).[133]

In late June 2007, Rangoon was hit by a tornado, with official reports of three deaths, five injured, and roofs ripped off 500 homes, however, as has been stated elsewhere, all such official reports are typically gross underestimations of the reality and as such should be treated with some degree of cynicism. South Dagon Township in Rangoon was reportedly one of the worst affected areas. Local authorities reportedly distributed supplies such as mosquito netting, cooking utensils, clothing, tarpaulins and four *pyi* (6 kgs / 14 lbs) of rice. However, this aid was not distributed evenly with many items reportedly being distributed by lottery, thus leaving hundreds without assistance. Those whose homes were destroyed were also given 4,000 kyat (approximately US$3) in compensation, although how this miserably small amount of remuneration was supposed to benefit those who just lost everything they owned is anyone's guess.[134]

In July 2007, heavy monsoon rains again caused flooding in Rangoon and throughout central Burma, leaving at least two dead and thousands homeless.[135] Residents had reported that local authorities had demanded an unspecified amount of money from them under the pretence that this money was to be used to *"tackle the issue"*, although little was done and the money extorted from the residents went straight into the pockets of local authorities. A week later drains were still blocked, water in homes was at knee-level, and mosquitoes were a severe problem, bringing with them a heightened risk of potentially life-

threatening diseases such as malaria and dengue.[136] One resident claimed that officials of the Yangon (Rangoon) City Development Council (YCDC) refused to open a water passage door in front of the Mya Yamone Housing Development, which would have reduced flood waters in nearby homes, because the council-members reportedly had *"close ties with the owners"* of the property.[137] Meanwhile, UNICEF responded to the disaster by distributing medicine, clothing, cooking utensils, and water purification tablets.[138]

Heavy rains also lashed southern Arakan State in early July 2007, which on 6 July 2007, brought with it a record rainfall of 34.5 cm (13.6 inches), which, according to official statistics represents the highest recorded rainfall in Burma in a single day. The Arakan townships of Thandwe, Taungup, and Gwa were reported as being among the worst affected by the rains, with some inhabited areas reportedly submerged under six feet (180 cm) of water. Residents reported drastic food and water shortages, to which the authorities responded by opening a few emergency shelters but provided no emergency supplies.[139] A resident of Gwa, where one man was killed and more than 20 were injured when homes were washed away, said that ten days after the flooding, the authorities still had not visited the area to assess the damage and make plans for recovery efforts.[140] Meanwhile, in Thandwe Township, where at least three people were killed, UNICEF reportedly responded with the distribution of water-purification kits, oral rehydration salts, clothes, soap, cooking utensils, mosquito netting, and tarpaulins for shelter.[141]

Buildings in South Dagon Township, Rangoon Division, damaged by a tornado which swept through the area in June 2007. *[Photo: Irrawaddy]*

7.6 International Aid and Humanitarian Operations

The grave health situation in Burma has over the years prompted other countries, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to contribute funding for healthcare, or to run educational programs, immunisation campaigns, clinics, and relief operations themselves. Aid contributions have, however, been limited by concerns about such funds being misappropriated by the military rather than received by the people in need, and concerns that the regime will spend more on the military if it can rely on international donations to meet its medical expenses.[142]

The United States (US), for instance, has long had a policy of giving minimal aid to Burma. The European Union (EU) has a similarly sanctions-oriented policy, and the United Kingdom (UK) has in recent years given less to Burma than it has to any other developing nation on a per capita basis. Meanwhile, the neighbouring ASEAN countries have provided Burma with little aid.[143] Japan, however, is Burma's largest humanitarian aid donor and has a long history of involvement with Burma, which until 1988, also provided Burma with loans for infrastructure projects.[144] China gives significant economic and political support to the SPDC, but owing to the lack of transparency of from both parties, the actual amount and nature of the support is difficult to discern.[145] In 2005, total amount of development aid given to Burma from the international community was reported to have been valued at US$144.7 million.[146]

In 2007, the pattern of international aid provided to Burma changed somewhat. The US Government, breaking from their usually firm stance of non-engagement, provided technical assistance in response to repeated outbreaks of avian influenza outbreaks (for more information, see the section dealing with Avian Influenza above), and after the bloody suppression of protests in September 2007, announced plans to help facilitate the work of humanitarian agencies (while at the same time strengthening existing sanctions against the regime).[147] The British House of Commons International Development Committee visited the Burma-Thailand border in April 2007 after which they called for a quadrupling of aid, all of which was to be directed through local NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) operating on the Burma-Thailand border to avoid enriching or otherwise supporting the regime.[148] The British Department for International Development (DFID) initially took no action on the recommendations, but late in the year announced plans to double aid to Burma from £8.8 million in 2007 to £18 million by 2010.[149] The European Union also announced plans to increase the level of aid that they sent into Burma, with the proposal of US$15.5 million in humanitarian aid for vulnerable populations in border areas, and a further US$2 million for health and livestock projects across the country.[150] Similarly, in January 2007, an ASEAN briefing paper declared that:

> *"If the government of Myanmar would let us, we are willing to play a role in alleviating the humanitarian problems faced by Myanmar, such as HIV/Aids, tuberculosis and malaria, internal displacement due to conflict between government forces and insurgents, and poverty".*[151]

In 2006, a group of six international donors founded the Three Diseases Fund (3D Fund) in response to the withdrawal of the UN-initiated Global Fund.[152] The Fund was devised to target HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (TB); the three diseases which lend themselves to the name of the Fund, and in April 2007, the 3D Fund began projects in Burma, reportedly under the *"guidance"* of the Work Coordination Committee, headed by SPDC Health Minister Dr. Kyaw Myint.[153] In the 2007/8 fiscal year the 3D Fund reportedly gave US$4 million towards healthcare projects in Burma, which is expected to increase to US$5.7 million in 2008/9 fiscal year.[154]

Meanwhile, in February 2007, the United Nations allocated US$1.35 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) towards humanitarian programs in Burma and to programs for Burmese refugees living in Bangladesh (For more information, see Chapter 17: The Situation of Refugees).[155]

The violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrations in September 2007 renewed the international reluctance of continuing to provide aid to the regime with many donors once again restricting aid to the junta (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement). In response to the intentional killing of Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai, who was shot in the back at point blank range, the Japanese Government announced that it would stop all aid to Burma except that on purely humanitarian grounds that directly helps the Burmese public, thus cancelling US$4.7 million in aid.[156] For the 2006/7 financial year, Japanese aid was valued at US$11.5 million (1.35 billion yen). Japan also provided technical assistance to the SPDC, which, when considered alongside the humanitarian aid, brought the value of the total aid package to US$25.5 million (three billion yen).[157] In 2007, Japanese aid included US$1.1 million to WFP operations, with a specific focus on vulnerable populations in Shan and Arakan States and Magwe Division, and a further US$179,000 for malaria education, prevention and control.[158] The aid cuts in 2007 echoed previous responses to the SPDC's excesses. In 1988, Japan reduced aid in protest of the SPDC's violent crackdown that year, and again in 2003 in response to the renewed house arrest of Aung Sun Suu Kyi and the attack on her convoy near Depayin in Sagaing Division on 30 May 2003.

The United Nations, which has generally pursued a strategy of engagement with the regime, openly spoke out in opposition to the human rights situation inside the country, condemning the SPDC for its actions. In October 2007, Charles Petrie, the UN Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Burma criticised the junta for its deplorable human rights record, in response to which the SPDC stated that he was no longer desirable in the country, and refused to renew his visa in November, which in effect forced him from the country.[159]

While the regime allows UN agencies to operate in the country, albeit under extreme limitations and with very limited access, in general the SPDC has proven unwilling or unable to cooperate with UN agencies and international NGOs, and has created a *"a difficult and complex environment"* for them to attempt to work within. Numerous UN agencies, including the FAO, WFP, WHO, UNICEF and others, have been reported to have faced restricted access to populations in need and interference with the delivery of food, healthcare, and development assistance. Furthermore, the regime coerced these organizations into working with SPDC-affiliated groups such as the USDA, denied UNHCR access to border areas, deliberately provided inaccurate socio-economic surveys and prevented INGOS from collecting their own data. The regime has further prevented humanitarian staff from travelling freely and has repeatedly obstructed the timely provision of goods and services.[160] (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

The ICRC, which by long historical tradition attempts to maintain dialogue, found the constraints imposed upon them by the regime impossible to work under, and in June 2007 issued a rare and uncharacteristic public denunciation of the regime. The statement, made by the ICRC president, Jakob Kellenberger, levelled accusations of *"numerous acts of violence … including murder"* against the SPDC which *"violate many provisions of international humanitarian law"*, and asserted that the ICRC *"uses confidential and bilateral dialogue … however this presupposes the parties to a conflict are willing to enter a serious discussion"*.[161] The ICRC further accused the military of repeated and routine human rights violations in conflict and ethnic areas, allegations which the regime immediately denied without investigation, and in turn then accused the ICRC of *"clandestine relations with insurgent groups"*.[162]

Moreover, between 1999 and 2005, representatives of the ICRC had visited hundreds of detainees, made recommendations that resulted in important improvements in water supply, accommodation, and healthcare, and supplied nearly half the medical supplies received by those detained within Burma's appalling prison system. Soon after Prime Minister Khin Nyunt being removed from office in 2005, the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) imposed the condition that a member of the USDA accompany the ICRC during all of its interviews with detainees. The ICRC deemed the principle of confidentiality to be fundamental to its mandate, thus rejecting the SPDC's suggestion, and since that time has not conducted any further prison visits inside Burma. Still facing a stalemate in March 2007, the ICRC closed its two field offices in Mon and Shan States.[163] The SPDC refused to budge on the issue and kept up its restrictions despite the protests of the EU, and in June 2007, the ICRC closed its Taunggyi office, leaving only two offices in the entire country.[164] In November 2007, an ICRC spokesperson said that despite these difficulties the ICRC had no intention of leaving Burma, and appealed to the regime to allow them to visit the thousands detained for their part in the September 2007 protests.[165] Unsurprisingly, this appeal fell on deaf ears.

Following the September crackdown on peaceful and unarmed protestors, the UN country team operating inside Burma issued a statement urging all parties to address the underlying causes of the September crisis. The statement read that *"while acknowledging the efforts made by the government of Myanmar [Burma] to build schools, clinics, hospitals and roads, the UN system in Myanmar [Burma] nevertheless sees every day that in this potentially prosperous country basic human needs are not being met"*.[166]

A relief worker from the Free Burma Rangers treating villager in Papun District, Karen State. *[Photo: FBR]*

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 8

FREEDOM OF BELIEF AND RELIGION

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change ones religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest ones religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

- Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

8.1 Introduction

Burma has been listed as one of 11 nations designated as *"countries of particular concern"* by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and has been on the list since the Commission was set up in 1998. Although Burma has no official state religion; the military authorities have since their inception promoted Theravada Buddhism, and marginalised other religions.

According to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) almost 90 percent of the Burmese population practice Buddhism, with Christians comprising six percent of the population and four percent practicing Islam. However, the U.S. Department of State believes that these statistics underestimate the proportion of non-Buddhist people in Burma, which they claim could be as high as 30 percent of the population. Moreover, Muslim leaders have estimated that approximately 20 percent of the population is in fact Muslim. Other religions practiced in Burma include Hinduism, Animism and Judaism.[1]

In Burma, there is some association between religion and ethnicity. Buddhism is the main religion of the majority Burman ethnic group and of the Shan, Arakanese and Mon ethnic minorities. Christianity is the principal religion among the Kachin, Chin and Naga ethnic groups. Christianity is also practiced widely among the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups although many Karen and Karenni practice Buddhism. Islam is widely practiced mainly in Southern parts of Burma, and particularly in Arakan State, where it is the main religion of the Rohingya ethnic minority.[2]

Throughout 2007, the SPDC continued to monitor the meetings and activities of all religious organizations subjecting them to extensive restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. In theory, all religious organizations are required to register with the SPDC. However whilst 'genuine' religious organizations are nominally exempt from the requirement to register with the SPDC, in practice only registered organizations can buy or sell property or open bank accounts. Throughout the year, the SPDC refused several requests for religious meeting or festivals, and subjected all religious publications, including sermons, to control and censorship. The SPDC also prohibited religious minority groups from constructing new places of worship and in some cases destroyed existing paces of worship.[3]

Buddhism has long been synonymous with Burman nationalism. Successive military regimes have used Buddhism as a political weapon and as a tool to suppress its non-Buddhist opponents. The ancient expression "Buddha Bata, Myanmar Lumyo" which means, "To be Myanmar is to be Buddhist" is a concept that is at the heart of SPDC philosophy. The SPDC has embarked on a policy of creating a single national identity based on the policy of 'one race, one language, one religion' assimilating all ethnic minority groups into mainstream Burman society. The SPDC has actively promoted Buddhism over other religions. To this end, the Ministry of Religious Affairs includes the Department for the Protection and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching). Buddhist doctrine remains part of the state mandated curriculum in all SPDC run elementary schools. Furthermore, the SPDC continued to fund two state Sangha universities in Rangoon and Mandalay to train Buddhist monks under the control of the state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee. Although there were no reports of forced conversion of non-Buddhists, the SPDC did apply pressure on students and poor youth to convert to Buddhism. Advancement in the military and public sector remained largely dependent upon being a Buddhist throughout 2007. Religious affiliation remained a requirement on identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times.[4]

In 2007, Christians and Muslims continued to face difficulties in gaining permission to construct or repair religious buildings. There were also reports of Christian symbols being destroyed. Whilst, in most parts of Burma, Christian and Muslim groups are permitted to build small churches or mosques with informal approval from local authorities, when local authorities or conditions change, these approvals are often retracted. In some cases, authorities have even demolished existing buildings. The Ministry of Religious Affairs Ministry has stated that permission to construct new religious buildings "depends upon the population of the location." Nevertheless, the SPDC sponsored the construction of Buddhist pagodas, often on the past site of destroyed Christian or Muslim buildings, in areas where the Buddhist population was nominal. Moreover, the SPDC authorities often forced local Christians and Muslims to make donations of food, money and labour towards the construction of these pagodas.[5]

A Buddhist monk passes a 106-year-old Christian Church in downtown Rangoon, 7 February 2007. *[Photo: AP]*

The SPDC not only promotes Buddhism at the expense of minority religions, but also seeks to control and restrict the activities and expression of the Buddhist clergy itself. Whilst there are over 400,000 Buddhist monks, including novices, within Burma, only nine state endorsed monastic orders are permitted to function. These nine legal orders are placed under the central control of the SPDC sponsored Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SMNC). The 1990 Sangha Organization Law criminalized all independent monastic orders. Violation of this law is punishable by immediate public defrocking, an action which is considered highly disrespectful and contrary to Buddhist belief.[6]

In 2007, the junta attempted to utilise its influence over the monkhood to tightly control the activities of monks within the country. The SPDC subjected the Sangha to restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of association. Members of the Sangha were not allowed to preach sermons relating to politics and were prohibited from being members of political parties.[7] However, in September 2007, for the first time since 1988, Buddhist monks throughout Burma participated in countrywide pro-democracy protests. Activists started protesting in mid-August, after the SPDC increased fuel prices by about 500 percent. Buddhist monks soon joined the protests due to harsh living conditions imposed on the people of Burma, and therefore the monks, who rely upon donations for survival. On 5

September 2007, violence was used by the SPDC to quell peacefully protesting monks in Pakokku. When the SPDC refused to issue an apology for its violent crackdown in Pakokku, the (newly established) All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA), called on all monks to boycott the regime by refusing to accept alms from persons associated with the SPDC. Under the monks' code of discipline, the Vinaya Pitaka, the boycott was formally agreed upon and announced in assemblies. This was the third time in Burma's history that such action was taken by Buddhist monks, since only under the most compelling moral circumstances will a monk refuse alms that have been offered. The act precluded the military leadership and members of their families from making merit - a very important part of Buddhist spiritual and religious life. Protests continued until late September, when the SPDC used "excessive and disproportionate lethal force" in its crackdown on the protestors, including monks.[8] Several protesting monks endured beatings and shooting by SPDC personnel and some died as a result of the violence. Moreover, the violence/crackdown continued with several monasteries raided and monks disrobed, arrested and tortured for their involvement in the pro democracy protests.

In September 2007, a National Convention of SPDC appointed delegates completed 14 years of talks laying out principles to be enshrined in a new constitution. According to the basic principles laid down for the new constitution, citizens have the right to worship and practice their religions subject to "law and order, public health and the Constitution". The constitution recognises the unique position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the majority of the citizens of Burma, and restrictions are placed on any economic, financial, political or other secular activities associated with religious practice. The state also reserves the right to initiate action against any religion that "misuses" their position to "monopolise" the political system and "create hatred between religious organizations and divide them", if such behaviour is deemed a "threat".[9] These provisions clearly provide ample room for the continued restraint of religious freedom, surveillance and oppression of religious minorities, as well as continued state interference in the practice of Buddhism.

8.2 Religious Discrimination against Christians

In 2007, Christians continued to face serious abuses of religious freedom by the SPDC. In January, the UK based human rights organisation Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), released a report which cited a document entitled "Programme to destroy the Christian religion in Burma." The document opened with the line "*There shall be no home where the Christian religion is practised,*" and laid the foundation for eradicating Christianity, including arresting and imprisoning anyone caught evangelizing the Christian faith in Burma. However, the SPDC denied authorship of the document.[10]

In 2007, it remained illegal to import translations of the Bible in indigenous languages, and the SPDC restricted imports of Burmese Bibles to 2,000 per year.[11] In addition, the SPDC prohibited certain Christian terms because they were similar to Buddhist Pali terms. Further, passages of the Old Testament have sometimes been objected to, as it is believed that they approve the use of violence against non-believers.[12]

Public proselytizing remained prohibited in many areas, and the authorities sometimes denied applications for residency permits of known Christian ministers attempting to move into a new township. In May 2007, a Christian preacher and his disciple were sentenced to two years imprisonment for crossing the India Burma border, after returning from a Christian evangelical trip without permission from the Immigration Department.[13] There were also reports of local authorities confiscating National Identify Cards of new converts to Christianity.[14] Promotions within the military were generally contingent upon the candidates being Buddhist. Christian military officers who sought to rise to a rank above that of Major were encouraged to convert to Buddhism.[15] Furthermore, Buddhist soldiers were offered promotion if they married Christian women, as this would likely lead them to converting to Buddhism.[16]

In most areas, Christian groups continued to have trouble obtaining permission to buy land and build new churches. The SPDC sometimes refused permission on the basis that the churches did not possess proper property deeds. In February 2007, the SPDC ordered villagers in Mong Yawng Township, Shan State, to pull out concrete posts that had been erected to build a new church in place of an old one.[17] Whilst access to official land title is extremely difficult due to the country's complex land laws and government title to most land, similar Buddhist projects did not experience these difficulties. In Rangoon and Mandalay, authorities allowed constructions of new community centres by various Christian groups only if they agreed not to hold services there or erect Christian signs.[18]

Christian Churches continued to be pressured into displacement under the SPDC township extended construction program. A Baptist Church in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State, was confiscated, along with the pastor's home on the order of the Northern Commander Major General Ohn Myint on this basis.[19] Authorities in Rangoon also closed several house churches, as they did not have proper permission to hold religious meetings. Other house churches remained operational only after paying bribes to local officials.[20] SPDC authorities also demolished churches. In February 2007, a church in Monghpyak, Shan State, was demolished by the SPDC,[21] and in March, the Prison Charity Foundation office in Rangoon, which provided support and preached the Christian religion to prisoners in Burma, was raided and shut down by SPDC forces after refusing to remove the word 'Prison' from its title.[22]

In all areas, the SPDC continued to demand written permission for any gathering of more than five persons outside of a Sunday service, forcing many churches, Bible schools and Christian-operated orphanages underground. Permission was regularly denied or received only through bribes.[23]

The most overt and violent persecution against Christians in Burma occurred in ethnic states, where Christians make up a majority proportion of the population; Chin State, Kachin State, Karen State and Karenni State.[24]

A Christian pastor examines the post-fire remains of his church after it was attacked and burnt down by SPDC forces in Karen State. *[Photo: Dang Ngo]*

Chin Christians

Christianity is a central element of Chin identity, with about 80 per cent of Chins subscribing to the Christian faith. Thus, they have been central targets of the SPDC's 'Burmanisation' policy. Whilst there were no reports of forced conversions in 2007, the SPDC continued to institute policies designed to engineer conversions to Buddhism. Chin families were offered incentives, both monetary and material, as well as exemption from forced labour, if they converted to Buddhism. There were also continued reports that SPDC authorities offered financial and career incentives to Buddhist soldiers who marry Chin Christian women. Local human rights organisations also continued to report that under the guise of offering free education to children, SPDC authorities attempted to convert children to Buddhism without their parents' permission or knowledge.[25]

Throughout the year, the SPDC continued to deny permission for the construction of new churches, with Chin Christians reporting that they have been denied this right since 1997 in certain parts of the state. However some newly built churches were evident in several parts of the state.[26] In May 2007, the construction of a memorial church in Matupi Township was ordered to cease by SPDC forces despite building permission previously given.[27]

The SPDC continued to construct Buddhist pagodas throughout Chin State, often forcing Chin Christians to contribute money or labour to their construction. In January 2007, a group of Christians from Matupi Township were forced to construct a Buddhist pagoda with their own supplies and labour and were even forced to work on Sundays.[28] Also, in February 2007, the SPDC collected money from Chin Christian churches in order to buy land for a graveyard half of which was reserved for the burial of Christians and the other half reserved for the burial of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and others.[29]

In 2007, the SPDC also began to openly monitor and inspect the activities of churches and Christians in Chin State, by recording names of church leaders and all items used in the church. It was reported that this was an attempt to find out whether people were going abroad without permission.[30]

On 25 January 2007, representatives from Chin and Kachin ethnic groups met for the first time with a U.K. Foreign Office Minister, namely the Minister of Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ian McCartney, and were able to raise concerns about violations of religious freedom in Burma.[31]

Kachin Christians

As with the Chin population, the vast majority, an estimated 90 per cent, of ethnic Kachin are Christians.[32] In 2007, Kachin state saw a two-fold increase in the presence of the SPDC army, which led to more human rights violations including land confiscations, forced labour and sexual violence.[33] CSW reported that the SPDC continued to oppress the Kachin through widespread use of forced labour, forced relocation, rape and religious persecution.[34]

Since the Northern commander Major General Ohn Myint arrived in Kachin State in 2005, the SPDC has been increasingly prohibiting Christian religious movements and construction. This continued in 2007.[35] Major General Ohn Myint ordered heads of village administrators to remove all Christian crosses at the entrance to villages.[36] In May 2007, a Kachin Christian Cross was demolished in Sumpra Bum Township by SPDC forces, despite previously being given permission from the Township Administrator to build the cross.[37] In January 2007, the construction of a women's vocational school building by the Kachin Baptist Church, in Kachin Zu village of Myitkyina Township, was banned by the SPDC Myitkyina Municipal Office, due to lack of permission from the SPDC Ministry of Religious Affairs.[38] Furthermore, approval for church meetings and events has to be obtained from the SPDC, however, such permission was frequently denied or delayed.[39]

A Christian church at Nam Lam, Kachin State. *[Photo: R.W. Hughes]*

Kachin Christians continued to be subjected to conversion activities and discriminatory treatment by SPDC authorities, such as rewards for conversion to Buddhism, exemption from forced labour, lower prices for basic foodstuffs, and greater educational opportunities including free schooling for children at Buddhist monasteries.[40] Christian students from Kachin tribes; the Jinghpaw, Lisu and Rawang, were forced to convert to Buddhism when the SPDC opened a Na-Ta-Hla (Border Region Ethnic Nationalities Development) School in Putao Township, offering free education and accommodation to locals. To attend the school, students had to worship and bow before Buddhist Pagodas, and mention Buddhism as their original faith on their application form.[41]

Authorities also continued to construct Buddhist shrines in Christian communities, where few or no Buddhists reside, as well as coerce Christians into forced labour to carry bricks and other supplies for the construction of the shrines.[42]

Karen Christians

The SPDC increased attacks on villagers in Karen state in an attempt to drive then from their traditional land and relocate them to areas controlled by the junta aligned Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).[43] In areas of Karen State under the control of the DKBA, Christians continued to be persecuted for their beliefs with unverified reports that DKBA authorities continued to expel villagers who converted to Christianity.[44]

Persecution of Christians - Partial list of incidents for 2007

In January 2007, Lieutenant Colonel San Aung, commander of SPDC tactical command #2 stationed at Matupi Township in Chin State, ordered 14 villagers from 7 surrounding villages to construct a Buddhist monastery in the south-west of Matupi Township with their own supplies and labour. According to a report by the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC), all villagers were Christians and were not given a day of rest to practice their faith. The villages were:

1. Valangte;
2. Valangpi;
3. Koe-La;
4. Vapung;
5. Leisin;
6. Thi Boei; and
7. Vangkai.[45]

In January 2007, construction of a women's vocational school building by the Kachin Baptist Church in Kachin Zu village of Myitkyina Township in Kachin State, was banned by the SPDC Myitkyina Municipal Office, due to lack of permission from the SPDC Religion and Home Ministries.[46]

In January 2007, the SPDC called on all pastors in Gangaw Township, Magwe Division, to sign a pledge stating they would stop worshipping in churches in Gangaw Township. It was reported that the authorities were forcing people to sign a blank piece of paper, after which it was speculated that the authorities would write a statement about stopping Christian worshipping.[47]

In February 2007, the SPDC openly began monitoring and inspecting the activities of churches and Christians in Chin State, in order to find information about pastors and whether people were going abroad. The SPDC recorded the names of church leaders and all the items in use in the church. The Baptist Church, the largest Christian church in Burma, was particularly targeted.[48]

In February 2007, the chief of Mongyn Sub-Township of Mong Yawng Township in Shan State, ordered villagers to pull out concrete posts that had been erected to build a new church in place of the old one.[49]

In February 2007, SPDC forces collected 9 million kyat from all 50 Chin Christian churches of Kalay in Sagaing Division, in order to buy 30 acres of land for a graveyard, purchased from 6 civilian landowners. The total amount of money collected from the churches was not

officially announced to the church members. Of the 30 acres, half was reserved for the burial of Christians and the other half was reserved for the burial of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and others.[50]

In February 2007, a Christian pastor was arrested after writing a letter to Senior General Than Shwe urging an end to the persecution of Christians.[51]

On 16 February 2007, SPDC forces collected lists of all Christian, Muslim and Buddhist leaders and teachers in Myitkyina Township in Kachin State.[52]

On 23 February 2007, a Christian church in Monghpyak, between Kengtung Township and Tachilek Township in Shan State, was demolished by the SPDC.[53]

On 4 March 2007, Dr. Joseph's Prison Charity Foundation office in Rangoon was raided and shut down by local SPDC forces. According to Dr Joseph, they ordered the Prison Charity Foundation to remove the word "Prison" from its title and call the foundation "Charity Foundation". The Prison Charity Foundation refused to erase the word Prison from its title and was therefore closed. The foundation, formed in 1992 in Hakha Township, Chin State, had provided support to about 25,000 prisoners, in 21 out of Burma's 115 prisons, since its creation. Assistance provided by the foundation included visits to prisons and labour camps and donating clothes, religious books, medicine and food to inmates. Prison Charity Foundation members also prayed for and preached the Christian religion to prisoners. When the office was closed down, the Rev. Dr. Joseph was away travelling; however his wife and children were taken into custody. After his wife and children were released, his arrest was ordered by the SPDC. As a result Dr Joseph and his family fled to Malaysia. Remaining members of the Prison Charity Foundation were forced to sign agreements that they would not participate in Christian worship or gatherings.[54]

In April 2007, SPDC forces refused to allow Akha Christians from Thailand, attending a 4 day festival at Zion village in Mongkoe Tract, Tachilek Township in Shan State, to stay at the festival overnight. The festival was organised by the Akha Baptist League in Kengtung Township, Shan State, to celebrate the centennial of the Akha ethnic groups' conversion to Christianity.[55]

On 30 April 2007, after continued pressure for displacement of the church since 2005, leaders of the "25th Anniversary Bumsan Baptist Church", a Kachin Baptist Christian Church in Muse Township, Shan State, sent a letter to SPDC border authorities. The SPDC has ordered the removal of their church, as it is situated in the 105th mile Trade Zone, officially opened by the SPDC in 2006. However, in 2006 the SPDC built a Buddhist pagoda, costing kyat 70 million, within the Trade Zone near the church. The church leaders stated that they would not remove the Church as long as the Buddhist pagoda remained in the Trade Zone.[56]

In May 2007, a Baptist Church compound in Pang Mati Quarter in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State, was confiscated by the order of Northern Commander Major General Ohn Myint, as part of the SPDC's township extended construction program. On 13 May, the house of the church pastor was demolished during the church's regular worship service.[57] The church was promised land in another area, however, as of 28 May 2007 the church had not received any official response from the SPDC.[58]

On 3 May 2007, the construction of a memorial church by the Thatdun Baptist Church, in Matupi Township, Chin State, was ordered to cease. The order was given by Mr. Ngahour, Secretary of the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC), despite the Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs, Brigadier General Thura Aung Ko, previously having given clearance for the construction proposal.[59]

On 4 May 2007, it was reported that a Christian preacher Mr. Tu Rin Tun (40) from Kawthaung Township, Tenasserim Division, and his disciple, Mr Min Phyo (18), from Monywa Township, Sagaing Division, had been sentenced to 2 years in prison. They were charged with crossing the India Burma border without permission from the Burmese Immigration Department. It was reported that they were coming back from a Christian evangelical trip to Mizoram State. Prison authorities demanded kyat 400,000 (US$ 320) from the prisoners' relatives to prevent shifting them to concentration camps. The relatives had already paid kyat 100,000 (US$ 80) in bribes to the prison authorities..[60]

On 15 May 2007, a concrete Kachin Christian Cross, situated on Htoi San Mountain, near Sumpra Bum Township, Kachin State, was forcibly demolished by SPDC forces, following a public new cross ceremony. The Township Administrator, U Soe Myint Thein, had ordered the Roman Catholic residents of Sumpra Bum Township to pull down the cross, which measured 4 feet wide and 18 feet high, despite having given them permission to build the cross earlier in 2007. The construction cost of the cross was over 4 million kyat (US$ 3.252). According to a local resident, the Catholics had been under pressure by the township authorities to sign a cross re-destruction agreement. However the Catholics had refused and stated that they would not demolish the Mountain Cross whatever pressure was put on them. [61]

On 18 June 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had threatened a Christian publisher with 12 years' imprisonment unless he stopped publishing books on Christian theology. He had previously been detained three times, but reportedly intended to defy the warning.[62]

Also, on 18 June 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had restricted imports of Burmese Bibles to 2,000 a year.[63]

On 3 October 2007, it was reported that the junta had closed Christian schools in Rangoon indefinitely, in an attempt to prevent students joining anti junta demonstrations led by monks. The Myanmar Institute of Theology, a Protestant Christian Seminary in Insein Township, Rangoon Division, was closed on 1 October 2007.[64]

On 27 November 2007, it was reported that junta intelligence agents prohibited regular development programmes of Christian churches under the Kachin Baptist Convention in early November 2007. Further, Myitkyina District Baptist Convention and Sanpya Baptist Church in Tatkone quarter in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State were regularly checked by the Military Affairs Security Unit, the SaYaPa.[65]

8.3 Religious Discrimination against Muslims

Burma's Muslims, most of whom follow the Sunni sect of Islam, comprise 4 per cent of the Burmese population and live mostly in northern Arakan State. The majority of Muslims in Arakan State are known as 'Rohingya', and speak a Bengali dialect. (For more information on the Rohingya see sub section below). A second group of Muslims in Arakan State are known as ethnic Burman Muslims.[66] Unlike the Rohingya who are not recognized as legal citizens by the SPDC, Burman Muslims are generally recognised as legal citizens, although they are often forced to pay large bribes to the authorities to receive National Registration Cards and passports.[67] Citizens are required to indicate their religion on official documents such as passports and identity cards, and it has been reported that being categorised "Muslim" on such cards often lead to harassment by the authorities.[68]

In 2007 Muslims continued to experience difficulties obtaining birth certificates. A local official in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, reportedly issued a verbal order in 2005 prohibiting the issuance of birth certificates to Muslim babies born in the area. In Rangoon, Muslims can usually obtain birth certificates for newborns, but local authorities have refused them to place the names of the babies on their household registers.[69]

The SPDC continued to discourage Muslims from enlisting in the military, and Muslim military officers who sought promotion beyond the rank of major were encouraged to convert to Buddhism. Some Muslims who wished to join the military reportedly had to list "Buddhist" as their religion on their application, though they were not required to convert.[70]

Muslim men applying for Temporary Residence Cards (TRCs – granted instead of citizenship) were required to submit photos without beards. Moreover, the SPDC did not allow Muslim government employees, including village headmen, to grow beards, and dismissed some who already had beards during 2007.[71]

In 2007, Muslims continued to be required to obtain advance permission from township authorities before leaving their hometowns. Muslims residing in Rangoon were allowed to visit beach resort areas in Thandwe Township, Arakan State, but could not return without permission from the Regional Military Commander. Muslims residing outside of Arakan State were often barred from return travel to their homes if they visit other parts of Arakan State.[72] In February 2007 U.N. Special Rapporteur Paula Sergio Pinheiro, expressed concerns about the strict restrictions on freedom of movement that prevails in Burma and in particular those imposed on the Muslim minority.[73] In March 2007, the responsibility for handling travel permits was transferred from the local PDC to the Department of Immigration.[74] There were reports of Muslims being required to pay bribes in order for permission to be granted. In March, 20 Muslims from Arakan State were ordered to pay bribes to the Department of Immigration in return for permission to travel to Rangoon for medical treatment.[75]

Forced relocations of Muslim communities continued throughout 2007. Relocations were accompanied with demands for forced labour. Those forced to move were poorly compensated if at all with authorities forcing contribution of money, food, labour and building materials from those relocated.[76] In June 2007 NaSaKa authorities confiscated over 100 acres of farmland from Muslims in Arakan State in order to build a pagoda. The farmers depended on the crops produced from the land for their income.[77] Moreover, Muslim newcomers to Thandwe Township, Arakan State were not allowed to reside or buy property in the township. Further, Muslims are not permitted to reside in Gwa or Taungup Townships in Arakan State.[78] These townships have since 1983 been declared "Muslim free zones," effectively barring those arriving after this date from residing in the area.[79]

Throughout the year, there were reports of the SPDC preventing Muslims from building new mosques, renovating existing mosques or re-building ones previously destroyed.[80] Historical mosques in areas including Moulmein Township, Mon State and Sittwe Township, Arakan State, continued to deteriorate because authorities would not allow routine maintenance. In early 2007, Muslims in Arakan State repaired a mosque that had been severely damaged in a storm. When the authorities discovered this, they destroyed the repairs that had been made to the mosque.[81] Moreover, since August 2006, ten members of a committee from five mosques continued to be detained in police custody in Buthidaung Township in Arakan State, without being formally charged. It was alleged by the NaSaKa that five mosques had been built illegally with the approval of the committee.[82] Furthermore, on 28 March 2007, the DKNR ordered the demolition of a mosque in Kawpraw village in Karen State.[83]

Buddhist doctrine remains part of the state mandated curriculum in all SPDC run elementary schools, although they can opt out of instruction in Buddhism and sometimes did. However, all students of SPDC run schools are required to recite a Buddhist prayer daily. Some schools allowed Muslim students to leave the room during this recitation, while others forced them to recite the prayer.[84]

Muslims were frequently refused permission to hold gatherings to celebrate traditional Islamic holidays. In 2007 many Muslim families in Arakan State could not celebrate the religious festival *Eid al-Adha* due to the high price of sacrificial animals. This was due to an order by the SPDC that cattle for the festival could only be purchased from Maungdaw Township. Those who sacrificed cattle during the festival were forced to pay 1,000 kyat to the SPDC as contribution to their welfare fund.[85] Moreover, in some parts of Arakan State, authorities cordoned off mosques, effectively prohibiting Muslims from worshipping. The SPDC also restricted the number of Muslims allowed to gather in one place. For example, in satellite towns surrounding Rangoon, Muslims are only allowed to gather for worship and religious training during the major Muslim holidays.[86] There were also reports of SPDC authorities ordering Muslims in Rangoon Division to write pledges promising they would not hold public gatherings or preach in homes.[87]

A damaged mosque after the junta instigated an anti Muslim riot. *[Photo: unknown]*

Discrimination against the Rohingya

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group residing in the northwestern part of Arakan State in Burma. They number approximately 800,000. During 2007, the Rohingya ethnic minority group continued to experience the harshest forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. The SPDC continued to deny citizenship status to the Rohingya because their ancestors supposedly did not reside in Burma at the start of British colonial rule, as required by the country's 1982-citizenship law. The Rohingya themselves and several historians, on the other hand, argue that their presence in the area since 1824 predates the British arrival by a number of centuries. As the Rohingya are not recognised as a national minority group, they are treated as illegal foreigners and not even issued Foreign Resident Cards (FRCs), effectively rendered stateless. In March 2007 the SPDC gave Temporary Resident Cards (TRCs) to approximately 35,000 Rohingyas in Arakan State. The UNHCR estimated that only 650,000 of the approximately 800,000 Rohingyas possessed TRCs.[88]

On 2 April 2007, the UNHCR issued a statement from five U.N. Special Rapporteurs and an Independent Expert, calling on Burma to address discrimination against members of the Rohingya. They urged the SPDC to repeal or amend the 1982 Citizenship Law to ensure compliance of its legislation with the country's international human rights obligations. The statement said that the denial of citizenship *"has seriously curtailed the full exercise of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and has led to various discriminatory practise … As a consequence, thousands have fled to neighbouring countries, in turn creating complex humanitarian situations in the region".*[89]

The SPDC has been systematically reducing the Rohingya population, and engaging in ethnic cleansing in predominantly Muslim Arakan State, by resettling hundreds of ethnic Burmans there through the creation of "model villages".[90] This has led to the displacement of thousands of Muslim Rohingyas. NaTaLa villagers have been relocated to and resettled in northern Arakan by confiscating farms from Rohingyas.[91] In Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung Townships of Arakan State, over 50 model villages have been built since 1990.[92] It was reported that many model villagers have been unable to obtain regular income generating employment in their model villages and therefore struggling for daily survival.[93] It has been reported that a total of 2,692 families have relocated to Northern Arakan State from Burma proper. According to a government report, the new settlers consist of 6,211 males and 6,128 females.[94]

As a general rule the SPDC did not grant permission to Rohingya to travel from their hometowns for any purpose; however, permission was sometimes granted when a bribe was paid.[95]

Restrictions regarding marriage have also been imposed on the Rohingyas, who are required to submit an application to the SPDC to get permission before marrying.[96] Since 1988 the SPDC has continued to permit only three marriages per year per village in the Rohingya townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships in northern Arakan State, which requires the approval of the Regional Military Commander. [97] During 2007 there were reports of military officials from NaSaKa demanding bribes from between 10,000 to 100,000 kyat from Muslim communities in rural areas to issue permission for wedding ceremonies. They also demanded the provision of food, including cows, goats, chickens and ducks in order for a ceremony to proceed without interruption from the NaSaKa.[98]

In 2007 Rohingyas continued to be denied access to state run schools beyond primary education, as the SPDC reserved secondary schools for citizens. As a result, Rohingyas were unable to obtain employment in any civil service positions. Instead of a diploma,

Rohingya high school graduates were given a sheet of paper that stated they would be granted a diploma upon presentation of a citizenship card, that which they can never obtain. Furthermore, Muslim students from Arakan State who finished high school were not given permits to travel outside the state to attend college or university. [99]

Persecution of Muslims - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 1 January 2007, the Islamic festival *Eid al-Adha* was held, however many Muslim families from Arakan State could not celebrate the festival, due to the high price of sacrificial animals. It was reported that the NaSaKa authorities ordered the Muslim community in Maungdaw Township to celebrate the festival with cattle purchased from Maungdaw Township only and not from other townships. This caused the price of cattle in Maungdaw Township to rise significantly during the festival season.[100] Further, the TPDC Chairman of Maungdaw Township ordered the township residents to give the skins of sacrificial cattle to SPDC authorities for 400 kyat per skin, while it was being sold at 25,000 kyat on the open market. It was also reported that people who sacrificed cattle during the festival were forced to pay 1,000 kyat to the SPDC as a contribution to their social welfare fund.[101]

On 21 January 2007, NaSaKa authorities resettled about 55 Buddhist families on land belonging to 3 Rohingyas of Longa Daung village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State. NaSaKa authorities confiscated about 37 acres of arable farmland from the three Rohingyas, who were:

1. Abu Ahamed, son of Noor Hussain;
2. Ahamed, son of Sayed Noor; and
3. Mostafa, son of Khasim Ali.[102]

On 25 January 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities were ordering Muslim residents in the Dagon Myothit South Township, Rangoon Division, to sign statements agreeing not to hold public gatherings or preach in homes. The statement said that discussions on Islam could "*harm the stability of the township*".[103]

Also on 25 January 2007, police detained and tortured for 3 days, and later fined a Rohingya man because he refused to give over his cattle he used to plough land previously confiscated from him by the authorities. The man, Nural Ullah, son of Jafor Ahammed, of Saykan Para village in Buthidaung Township, in Arakan State, was reportedly set free after he paid a bribe of 30,000 kyat to the police.[104]

On 29 January 2007, it was reported that SPDC forces had forced several Muslim households in the village of Taungbro in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to relocate to make way for the construction of new houses for model villagers from Burma proper. NaSaKa authorities demolished 22 houses in the Muslim village and constructed 120 new houses for the model villagers. No compensation was paid to the owners of the houses. As a result, several of the families fled to Bangladesh for refuge.[105] Moreover, 300 carpenters from Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships in Arakan State were forced to construct the 120 houses in the model village. This resulted in the carpenters having to cancel contracts with local people, leaving the construction of local houses incomplete.[106]

On 1 February 2007, SaRaPa forces accompanied by police destroyed about 30 houses belonging to Rohingya villagers of Ward No. 3 and 4 in Taungbru Left in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State in order to build a model village for settlers from central Burma. Also on 1 February, SaRaPa forces began forcing villagers from 11 nearby villages to build the model villages for new settlers. Each village had to provide 50 villagers to cut the hillside to build the model villages. About 550 villagers were engaged in the forced labour. The

villagers were provided 500 kyat a day per person as wages despite the daily labour rate being between 1,000 and 1,500 kyat per day in the open market. On 10 February, the Tactical Operational Commander of Buthidaung Township visited the area and ordered the concerned authorities to stop the building of the model village. On 14 February, the Western Command Commander ordered the villagers whose homes had been destroyed to rebuild their homes again and indicated that some compensation would be paid to them for their lost property.[107]

On 2 February 2007, it was reported that NaSaKa authorities photographed families in Arakan State claiming to be keeping a check on the Rohingya ethnic group population. Rohingya families were made to pay 1,500 kyat per family to have their photo taken. Further, the NaSaKa authorities, accompanied by Immigration officials went door to door checking Rohingya families. If a family member was absent it was reported that the NaSaKa would delete that person from their list, making them a permanent foreigner. Villagers were forced to pay 500 kyat for each new born to be included on the family list and to delete names of those persons who had died.[108]

On 8 February 2007, a man was killed in Kyauktaga Township, Pegu Division, when a bomb exploded inside the compound of the Jamil Mosque. The *New Light of Myanmar* claimed that he died when the time bomb he was planting inside the Mosque's brick wall exploded.[109]

On 8 March 2007, Immigration officials ordered 20 Muslims from Thandwe Township in Arakan State to pay bribes of up to 20,000 kyat for permission to travel. The Muslims sought permission to travel to Rangoon for medical treatment.[110]

On 24 March 2007, a clash broke out between NaTaLa villagers from Shwe Yin Aye, near Maungdaw Township in Arakan State, and the local Muslim community in Nyaung Chaung. The model villagers were said to have been looting chickens and vegetables from a house in the Muslim village. Both sides attacked each other with swords, sticks and slingshots. At least 50 persons were injured in the clash, including a Muslim religious leader, with 32 persons, 24 NaTaLa villagers and 8 Muslim villagers, hospitalised in critical condition. Many local Muslim villagers fled their homes after the incident due to fear of action by the NaSaKa authorities.[111]

On 26 March 2007, NaTaLa villagers and Muslim villagers involved in the clash on 24 March attended the Maungdaw police station to file separate complaints concerning the incident. Colonel Thein Htay, commander of the Buthidaung based Military Operation Bureau visited the village the same day to conduct investigations into the incident. The police reportedly arrested two persons over the incident. [112]

On 27 March 2007, the military held a meeting with villagers from six Rohingya villages in Buthiduang Township in Arakan State, concerning new model villages that would be built for new settlers on paddy fields. SPDC forces confiscated paddy fields belonging to the villagers. No compensation was paid to the Rohingya for their farmland. The following villages were affected:

1. Maung Nama;
2. Magh Bill;
3. Kwan Daine;
4. Yet Nyo Daung;
5. They Kin Manu; and
6. Washille Para.[113]

On 28 March 2007, the DKBA ordered the demolition of a mosque in Kawpraw village, a small fishing village in Karen State. Reportedly, the leader of the DKBA, Sayadaw of Myain Gyi Ngu had a dream that there was a pagoda buried under the mosque and therefore ordered the mosque to be destroyed.[114]

On 29 March 2007, Amena (42), a Rohingya woman from Nyaung Chaung village tract, south of Buthidaung Township in Arakan State, was gang raped, tortured and killed by personnel of the NaSaKa.[115]

On 4 April 2007, settlers from Burma proper were brought into the sub-town of Taungbro, in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. According to various reports, there were 120 families comprising between 447-663 persons. Rohingya villagers were forced to build 120 houses for the settlers. Tin sheets and wood for the construction of the houses were provided by SPDC authorities. It was also reported that the settlers would receive a number of possessions including three cattle and two acres of farmland from the junta authority. In addition, nearby villagers were forced by the NaSaKa to provide 3,000 kyat per family for food for the settlers.[116]

On 7 April 2007, police from Nyaung Chaung station forced Liala Begum (18) from Nyaung Chaung village in Buthidaung Township in Arakan State, to walk around 3 villages without clothes, save for a '*Tami*' covering her privates, for marrying without the authorities' permission. Liala Begum and Mohamed Island (23) had earlier applied to the NaSaKa for a wedding permit, however they were not granted permission because they were unable to pay the necessary bribe. As a result, they married secretly with the permission of their parents. When the VPDC Chairman complained about the punishment given to the girl he was reportedly threatened by the authorities.[117]

On 15 April 2007, a drunken SPDC army official shot and killed Gisu Hoke, a 21 year old Muslim in Aung Tha Bray village in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State.[118]

On 15 April 2007, a 22 year old Rohingya man, Osman, son of Abu Soban from Thapy Taw village in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State, was detained and tortured by the NaSaKa for 8 days on the accusation that he was in love with a girl. The VPDC Chairman intervened attesting to the boys' good moral character. He was subsequently released on 22 April 2007.[119]

On 26 April 2007, Zahid Hussein (24), son of Habi Hussain, and Shonjida Begum (19), daughter of Mohamed Saltan, from Kwan Daine village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, received permission to marry after a bribe was paid to the authorities.[120]

On 5 May 2007, it was reported that a 10 day Rohingya wedding ceremony, of bridegroom Zaw Naing, son of Shom Shu, and bride Hla Hla Aye, daughter of Abdul Hoque, was held in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State without disturbance or obstacles from the junta. The parents of the couple are said to be close aides of the authorities.[121]

In June 2007, VPDC Chairman U Nay Naing seized 1.6 acres of arable farmland from Mostafa Khatun, wife of Mohamed Ullah, from Maung Nama village of Buthidaung Township, Arakan State. Mostafa Khatun had inherited the land from her father Fazal Karim, and was ordered by the village chairman to abandon the land or pay 20,000 kyat to the chairman. The land was seized as she was not able to pay. Mostafa Khatun and her four children depended on the land for their survival.[122]

On 20 June 2007, NaSaKa seized 210 acres of arable farmland from Rohingya farmers of Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, in order to resettle NaTaLa model villagers brought in from Burma proper. Most of the land, 140 acres, was seized from Shwe Zarr Village tracts,

while 70 acres of land was seized from Ashika Para, Maungdaw Township. The owners of the farms were forbidden from ploughing the fields for paddy.[123]

On 25 June 2007, personnel from NaSaKa area #9 of Buthidaung Township confiscated over 100 acres of paddy fields owned by Arakanese Muslims in Tinmay Village, Arakan State, in order to build a pagoda. The villagers depended on crops produced from the fields for their income.[124]

In July 2007, the NaSaKa destroyed a newly renovated mosque in Bawli Bazaar village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. Although the authorities had refused permission for the mosque to be renovated, the villagers had carried out the renovations in June 2007. Chairman of the Mosque Committee, Mohamed Yahaya and the Imam, Maulana Kafayet Ullah, were both arrested but were released after paying 450,000 kyat to NaSaKa.[125]

On 3 July 2007, Md. Jamil, son of Jubir from Mostabis Para village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, was arrested by SaRaPa for marrying Noor Bahar, daughter of Abdul Zabar, without permission two years earlier. Jamil was released the following day after paying 40,000 kyat to a SaRaPa officer.[126]

On 26 July 2007, a Rohingya couple, Maung Maung Tin, son of U Hla Tin, and his pregnant wife Ma Khin Khin Aye, daughter of Shamshu, from Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, fled to Bangladesh for fear of arrest, torture, extortion and imprisonment. The couple had married two years prior, although they had been denied permission to marry as they could not fulfil the demand of the authorities.[127]

On 29 July 2007, another recently married Rohingya couple, Nural Islam, son of Rashid, and his pregnant wife Majuma Khatun, daughter of Shamshu Baser, from Taung Bazar, Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, fled to Bangladesh for fear of arrest, torture, extortion and imprisonment. The couple married in July 2006, without having received permission from the authorities. The couple had applied, but the authorities had been a delay in giving the permission.[128]

On 12 August 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities had allocated 5 million kyat for the construction of a new model village in Shwe Yin Aye, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to house settlers from Burma proper. The model village was to include 120 houses, 15 water tanks and 120 toilets, [129]

On 15 August 2007, 30 model villagers with sticks and swords attacked a local Muslim community working on paddy farms in Taungbro, a sub-township of Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. The model villagers had reportedly attacked after being refused permission to fish on the farm. Seven persons sustained injuries in the attack and were treated at Maungdaw hospital. The next day, Colonel Aung Gyi the commander in charge of NaSaKa headquarters visited the village and spoke with leaders of the two communities to seek a peaceful resolution to the problem.[130]

On 22 August 2007, further conflict arose between NaTaLa and Rohingya villagers in the Taungbro Sub-town Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. NaTaLa villagers had reportedly asked Rohingya villagers to plough their fields, which the Rohingya villagers had refused. The NaSaKa had given the fields to the NaTaLa model villagers, after confiscating this land from the local Rohingya community. It was reported that NaTaLa villagers beat some Rohingya villagers when they refused to plough the land. Moreover, the NaTaLa villagers made a complaint to the Western Command Commander Brigadier General Maung Shien regarding the incident.[131]

In September 2007, Muslims in Rangoon and Mandalay claimed to have been banned from praying at their local mosques in large groups. On 17 September 2007, it was reported that local mosques were banned from airing the daily call to prayer on loudspeakers during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan. The authorities were also said to require Muslims to seek permission to worship in private houses during Ramadan.[132]

On 21 September 2007, NaSaKa arrested Nurul Naque (70), son of Bodiur Rahaman and Nurul Islam, (65), son of Gulal, from Taungbro Right village of Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. The two men were arrested in front of a mosque after Esha prayer, on the allegation that they were preparing to go to Bangladesh. They were later released, but asked to provide 135 litres of diesel to the NaSaKa who threatened with further arrest if they did not comply. To avoid arrest they complied with the demands and provided diesel for the NaSaKa.[133]

On 23 September 2007, Hasina (22) daughter of Mohammad Salam of Migalagyi (Fran Pru) village in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, jumped into a lake with her son, whilst NaSaKa were checking family members who did not have permission for marriage. She was pulled out of the lake and taken into custody overnight. She was released the following day on the payment of 50,000 *kyat*.[134]

On 25 September 2007, the Muslim community joined in a peaceful anti junta protest by monks in Sittwe Township, Arakan State. It was reported that over 1,000 Muslim persons, both male and female, marched the streets of Sittwe Township together with monks and other demonstrators.[135]

On 13 October 2007, it was reported that the junta had ordered at least 1 person in each family from Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to attend a government backed rally on 14 October or face punishment. *Eid Mubarak*, a Muslim religious festival was also to be celebrated on 14 October 2007.[136]

On 20 October 2007, NaSaKa extorted money from the mosque committee in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, because the committee had refused to demolish 3 mosques and an orphanage as ordered by NaSaKa on 1 October. The commander of the Shab Bazaar NaSaKa camp in Maungdaw Township had ordered Zaydan village, Sapara village and Panirsara village to demolish their mosques, and Shab Bazaar village to demolish their orphanage. The NaSaKa commander received a total of 410,000 kyat from the heads of each mosque and orphanage:

1. Nur Bosher, son of Omar Meah of Zaydan Para (90,000 kyat);
2. Md. Ayub of Sapara (50,000 kyat);
3. Molvi Hamid, son of Abul Kasim of Shab Bazaar (200,000 kyat); and
4. Abdur Rashid of Panirsara (50,000 kyat).[137]

On 12 November 2007, it was reported that security forces beat Muslims who supported and participated in the anti junta demonstrations in September 2007. There were reports of USDA soldiers beating a young Muslim man with batons and kicking him. It was also reported that at least 30 Muslims had been hospitalised after being assaulted during the protests, and more than 100 had been detained. According to the 88 Generation Students group, at least 7 Muslims in Rangoon were charged with inciting state unrest by supporting the anti junta protests.[138]

On 1 December 2007, it was reported that Johora Begum, daughter of the late Abul Hashim, from Maung Nama Alay Rwa village in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State died of a heart attack while being abducted from her home by VPDC Chairman Zubair, son of Moulvi Siddique of Maung Nama village. The victim's relatives complained to the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the TPDC Chairman, the District Peace and

Development Council (DPDC) Chairman and the headquarters of NaSaKa. No action was taken against the VPDC Chairman. One of the complainants was Amina Khatoon, wife of Mohamed Amin, from Maung Nama village in Maungdaw Township. In retaliation the VPDC Chairman Zubair went to the home of Amina Khatoon, and planted a mobile phone inside her house. Amina Khatoon was then arrested for possession of a mobile phone, and detained at NaSaKa Headquarters in Gyikan Pyin, Maungdaw Township, where she was tortured by NaSaKa officers.[139]

On 6 December 2007, SaRaPa officers in Bawli Bazaar village tract, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, forcibly collected 1,000 kyat from each household for the renovation of the Wet Kyan Pagoda, which was to be used for a 3-day Buddhist festival. Money was extorted from Rohingya and Arakan villagers who were also forced to participate in the festival.[140]

On 10 December 2007, NaSaKa officers opened fire on a smugglers boat in the Bay of Bengal, which was carrying more than 46 head of cattle, killing 6 cows and wounding others. The cattle were being taken from Burma to Bangladesh for the annual Muslim festival *Eid-ul-Azha*.[141]

On 20 December 2007, it was reported that a joint local and foreign NGO distributed sacrificial meat to Burmese refugee camps in Teknaf, including the Nayapara camp and the Kutupalong camp, for the Muslim festival *Eid- ul-Azha*.[142]

On 21 December 2007, the Muslim festival *Eid-ul-Azha* was celebrated peacefully in Arakan State. NaSaKa in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships initially prohibited the Rohingya community from sacrificing animals during the festival, but later gave permission for animals to be sacrificed in exchange for money and meat from the animals.[143]

On 28 December 2007, U Hla Myo Kyaw, the Deputy District Chairman of Maungdaw Township District Council, Arakan State, issued an order to all village chairmen in Maungdaw Township that sacrificing cows during the Eid religious festival would attach a tax of 2,000 kyat per cow and was not allowed without permission.[144]

8.4 SPDC Promotion of and Control over Buddhism

In 2007, the junta continued to show a preference for Buddhism through its official publications and state-sponsored activities, including donations to monasteries and support for Buddhist missionary activities. State-controlled media often portray SPDC officials paying homage to Buddhist monks, offering alms at pagodas, officiating at ceremonies to open new pagodas or restore existing ones, and apparently organizing voluntary "people's donations" of money, food, and unpaid labour to build or renovate Buddhist religious places of worship. State-owned newspapers consistently feature Buddhist scriptures on the cover page.[145]

While the SPDC promotes Buddhism above other religious, it also tightly controls the religion and curbs any opposition among the Buddhist population. Although the number of Buddhist monks, including novices, in Burma number more than 400,000, the SPDC continued to prohibit any organisation of the Buddhist clergy other than the nine state recognised monastic orders under the authority of the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SMNC). The 1990 Sangha Organisation Law criminalised all independent monastic orders, following the boycott of alms for soldiers by monks in Mandalay;[146] In 2007, the regime continued to monitor monasteries, and subject clergy to special restrictions on speech and association.[147]

The Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana are responsible for administering the SPDC's relations with Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools. The SPDC continues to fund two state Buddhist Sangha universities in Rangoon and Mandalay, which train Buddhist monks under the control of the SMNC. The SPDC also funds the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Rangoon, which opened in 1998. The purpose of the university is "*to share the country's knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world,*" and the main language of instruction is English. The SPDC also funds another university which is intended to teach non-Burmese citizens about Theravada Buddhism.[148]

Throughout 2007, the SPDC continued its attempt to restrict the activities and expression of the Buddhist clergy. Monks were prohibited from preaching political sermons or making public statements critical of SPDC policies. Monks were eligible to be tried in military courts for "activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism".[149] Monks were also not permitted to join political parties. The SPDC maintains that it is contrary to the ethical code of Theravada Buddhism for a monk to be involved in politics. Moreover, since 1995 the SPDC has prohibited any member of a political opposition party from being ordained as a monk or religious leader. On 22 March 2007, authorities detained Htin Kyaw, and activist who staged a solo protest in front of a busy market in Rangoon, calling for freedom of religion. He had earlier been denied to serve as a monk at a monastery in the North Okkalapa, and consequently protested the denial of his religious freedom to become a monk. Htin Kyaw had also taken part in earlier demonstrations against deteriorating economic and social conditions. Rangoon authorities enforced the 1995 prohibition and forbade the abbot of a monastery in North Okkalapa in Rangoon to ordain Htin Kyaw.[150]

The SPDC has on several occasions used criminals dressed as monks to infiltrate the opposition. The SPDC is said to have used criminals dressed in monks' robes in the Depayin incident in 2003, and is also said to have made similar efforts during the 2007 September protests.

In 2007 the SPDC continued to harass Buddhist worshippers who prayed for Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. On 15 May 2007, authorities in Rangoon detained more than 30 Buddhist worshippers when they attempted to pray at pagodas for Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. The U.S. Department of State reported that as of 31 July 2007, the worshippers remained in prison. Furthermore, the SPDC harassed a group of

Buddhist worshippers who visited the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon every Tuesday, the day of the week that Aung San Suu Kyi was born. They prayed at the Tuesday pillar for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the release of all political prisoners in Burma. USDA members frequently tried stop the group from entering the pagoda's grounds and forced them to pray outside the entrance. Local authorities again allowed the group access to the pagoda after Naw Ohn Hla, the worshippers' spokesperson, protested to pagoda authorities and wrote letters to SPDC leaders. However, authorities ordered the pagoda janitors to throw buckets of water on the platform around the Tuesday pillar so that the worshippers would have to kneel in water when praying. They also played music full volume through loudspeakers in an attempt to drown out the sound of the group's prayers. Despite this harassment, the worshippers continued to pray every Tuesday. In May 2007, more groups began holding Tuesday prayers at different pagodas calling for Aung San Suu Kyi's release upon expiration of her detention order on 27 May 2007.[151] On 17 May 2007, the 88 Generation Students group called on the SPDC to take action to stop using so called civilians to threaten and attack peaceful Buddhist worshippers.[152]

The decreasing standard of living in Burma is affecting the livelihoods of monks, who are dependent on food donations from the public for their survival. Moreover, the monasteries, traditionally seen as support bases for the poor and destitute, are increasingly unable to cater for the poor seeking shelter and provision of food. As contributions from laypersons are not sufficient to provide for both the monks and the poor, monasteries have increasingly had to turn monks away.[153] In August 2007, this situation further deteriorated, when the SPDC removed subsidies of fuel and natural gas prices, causing the retail price of fuel to increase by up to 500 per cent. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, Paula Sergio Pinheiro reported that during the first days of the monks' protests in Rangoon the lay population of Burma was requested to keep separate from the demonstrations and not to chant political slogans, reinforcing that the monks' actions were a response to social and religious grievances.[154] (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

On 28 August 2007, military authorities summoned senior monks in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, to a meeting at the Arakan State administration office. Major General Than Tun Aung who was in charge of the regional military headquarters in Sittwe Township, called on the senior monks to prevent monks from protesting soaring fuel prices, in accordance with religious law.[155]

Riot police block a Buddhist monk's path to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon in September 2007 at the height of the Saffron Revolution protests. *[Photo: Stringer/Reuters]*

On 30 August 2007, it was reported that the junta issued warnings to Buddhist monks involved in the protests over fuel and essential commodity prices. In Rangoon and Mandalay, the junta told abbots to control their monks and novices in the temple and stop their involvement in the protests.[156]

On 5 September 2007, continuing protests reached a turning point when the junta fired gunshots over the heads of protesting monks and beat monks in Pakokku Township, Pegu Division. There were reports that up to 10 monks were tied to electricity poles and beaten with rifle buts and bamboo sticks. At least 3 monks were injured. There were unconfirmed reports that one monk died.[157] In response to the violence used against monks the newly formed the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) demanded an apology from the SPDC, a reduction in commodity and fuel prices, the release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi and a dialogue between the SPDC and the NLD. The ABMA sought this apology by 17 September 2007 otherwise it warned that monks would hold *"patam nikkujjana kamma"*, a boycott of alms offered by members of the junta. The deadline was politically symbolic as 18 September is the anniversary of the 1988 coup that brought the junta to power.[158]

No apology was forthcoming from the SPDC and on 18 September 2007 the ABMA issued a statement calling on monks to "*desist in accepting alms from persons associated with the government*". Under the monks' code of discipline, the Vinaya Pitaka, the boycott was formally agreed upon and announced in assemblies.[159] This was only the third time in Burma's history that the Sangha has taken such drastic action.[160] This is a very strong act, as it excludes the military leadership and members of their families from making merit - a very important part of Buddhist spiritual and religious life. Only under the most compelling moral circumstances will a monk refuse alms that have been offered. That same day Rangoon's "barefoot rebellion" began. Protests throughout Burma marked the start of a nation-wide boycott and campaign against the junta in response to it's unwillingness to apologise for the crackdown by soldiers on protestors in Pakokku Township and accede to the demands of the ABMA.[161]

This was not the first time that Buddhist monks have participated in demonstrations in Burma. Monks were actively involved in the pro democracy uprising in 1988 of which the then State Law and Order Restoration Council launched a crackdown in which monasteries were raided and about 300 monks were disrobed and imprisoned.[162]

On 24 September 2007, the SPDC issued its first warning after a month of demonstrations, saying that it was prepared to crack down on the Buddhist monks at the heart of the protests. The Minister of Religious Affairs, Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung, appeared in a televised segment on the SPDC-operated MRTV channel, denouncing the protests as the work of "international and external destructionists." He told senior Buddhist clerics to rein in the tens of thousands of monks who had participated in the protests and warning monks not to break Buddhist "rules and regulations", indicating that otherwise action would be taken against the monks according to law.[163]

On 26/27 September, security forces began raiding monasteries and arresting monks in Rangoon and throughout Burma. The most violent raid took place at Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery, were up to 200 monks were arrested and there were reports that one monk was killed during the raid.[164] On 28 September 2007, the SPDC declared "no-go zones" around 5 Buddhist monasteries, including the Shwedagon and Sule Pagodas.[165] As the crackdown continued, security forces raided monasteries, detaining thousands of monks. UN Special Rapporteur Sergio Pinheiro reported that from 26 September to 6 October 2007, security forces raided 52 monasteries across the country, looting the possessions of monks and beating and arresting them in large numbers.[166] Detained monks were taken to detention centres, de-robed and ordered to leave their monasteries and return to their hometowns.

Monks who managed to escape detention were also forced to return to their hometowns as their monasteries were either occupied by SPDC forces or locked up.[167] In addition, many monks fled to the Bangladesh and Thai borders to escape arrest. (For more information, see Chapter 14: The Situation of Refugees).

The involvement of monks in the protests is of deep significance as monks have a unique moral standing in Burma and have, since colonial times, been at the core of political uprisings. Further, the decision of the monks to invoke a boycott of alms from members of the SPDC and their families was a powerful signal to the primarily Buddhist leadership. Buddhist life in Burma revolves around gaining "merit" through ones actions. The giving and receiving of alms is considered one of the most meritorious of acts and is a fundamental expression of religious piety. The monks' alms boycott denied the SPDC the ability to gain merit from those participating in it. The boycott was a challenge to the SPDC's image as protectors of the Buddhist clergy and their right to rule a Buddhist nation. It was an open act of defiance rarely seen in Burma.[168]

The aftermath of the raid on Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery in South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon *[Photo: AFP]*

Control and Oppression of Buddhists - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 2 January 2007, officials at Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon detained activist Ko Tun Tun of Nyaungdon in Maubin Township, Irrawaddy Division, after he attended a prayer meeting for political prisoners. At the meeting he had worn a t-shirt bearing the image of general Aung San and shouted politically sensitive prayers. He was released by the SPDC from a psychiatric institution on 5 January 2007.[169]

On 16 January 2007, according to various reports, between 200 and 400 USDA members and special police clashed with pro-democracy supporters during weekly prayers for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. Those praying, who were led by Naw Ohn Hla, former member of the NLD, were driven out of the pagoda precincts. According to one of those praying, authorities had summoned 10 members of USDA from each township in Rangoon division in order to drive them out of the pagoda. The USDA group was reportedly led by Nyein Wai, the head of North Okkalapa township branch and Htut Wai, head of Thingyankyun branch. One of those praying, Than Zaw Myint, who was injured during the incident, attempted to file a report at Bahan police station but the police refused to register a case.[170]

On 23 January 2007, about 30 pro-democracy activists were soaked with water by about 700 pro-regime supporters and special police during a weekly prayer meeting at Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. The volume of the loud speakers from a nearby donation centre was also turned up in an attempt to disturb the campaigners.[171]

In February 2007, a Buddhist monk, aged about 35, was arrested at Noonbu outpost on the Indian Burma border with nine bronze Buddha statues. The monk was said to have brought the statues from Mandalay in order to sell them to Buddhist communities in Bangladesh. It was reported that he was forced by SPDC troops to de-robe outside of a monastery and without the presence of elder monks, in contravention of Buddhist principles, so that he could be interrogated about his involvement in the smuggling of the statues.[172]

On 6 February 2007, a group of politicians and pro-democracy activists were again doused with water by pagoda officials while attending a regular prayer meeting for political prisoners at Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. It was reported that for the previous 3 weeks the activists had been harassed by pagoda security guards and officials.[173]

On 20 February 2007, USDA members and pagoda security personnel surrounded and threatened to beat pro-democracy prayer goers at Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. The situation ended without violence as prayer goers left the pagoda.[174]

On 26 February 2007, local authorities imposed travel restrictions on Buddhist monk U Tha Ganda, from Taungup Township, Arakan State, because he was distributing booklets on the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights to local villagers in Kha Rai village in Taungup Township. The authorities restricted him from travelling anywhere outside of his residence at the monastery.[175]

On 17 March 2007, authorities cancelled a religious ceremony near Theingyi Market in Rangoon. The ceremony was to be held in honour of Htin Kyaw, an anti-regime protestor, becoming a monk. It was cancelled on the same day as it was to be held. [176]

On 22 March 2007, activist Htin Kyaw (44) was detained by police after he staged a solo protest in front of a market in Rangoon, calling for freedom of religion. Htin Kyaw protested as a result of not being permitted to serve as a monk at a monastery in Rangoon. This was the fourth time in a month that Htin Kyaw was detained for protesting.[177]

In May 2007, it was reported that the TPDC Chairman of Khawzar Township, Southern Mon State, U Kyaw Moe, had ordered a reading session of Buddhist teachings (Damma Jark) in Mon language to be changed into Burmese.[178]

On 1 May 2007, a group of pro-democracy activists were ordered to leave the Maha Muni Pagoda in Mandalay by about 4 monks for fear that they would disturb other people.[179]

On 9 May 2007, a two day assembly of Shan monks was held at the Shan State Army (SSA) main base of Loi Taileng. SSA South leader Colonel Yawd Serk told the assembly that Shan monkhood "*should remain refuge for different sections of the Shan society and stay above politics*."[180]

On 15 May 2007, police and USDA members arrested 39 pro-democracy activists on their way to Buddhist temples to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. About 28 activists led by labour rights activist Su Su Nway, were arrested on their way to Kyauk Daw Gyi Pagoda in Insein Township, Rangoon Division. During the arrest, law student Kyaw Kyaw was beaten by police and USDA members.[181] On 13 July 2007, families of prayer campaigners still under detention called for their release. The U.S. Department of State reported that as of 30 June 2007, the following prayer campaigners remained in custody:

1. Ko Aye Naing;
2. Ko Thant Zin Myo;
3. Ko Saw Kyaw Min; and
4. Ko Phyo Wai Lynn.[182]

On 15 May 2007, by a group of people calling themselves "the people" seized Ye Myat Hein, a Buddhist bachelor student from West Rangoon University, Hta Tapin Township, for conducting prayers at Kyaukdawgyi Pagoda, Insein Township, Rangoon Division. Ye Myat Hein was still missing in June 2007, when 23 fellow university students sent a letter of appeal to the head of the junta demanding that the immediate revelation of the whereabouts of the missing student.[183]

On 16 May 2007, at least 15 more activists, including youth members of the NLD were arrested on their way to the Kyaikalo Pagoda in Mingaladon Township, Rangoon Division, to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Around 30 men in civilian dress, believed to be members of the local authority, forcibly removed the prayer goers from the site. They were taken to Kyaik Ka San interrogation camp to join those arrested on 15 May 2007, but were later released due to insufficient room in the interrogation centre.[184]

On 16 May 2007, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order that denied the license extension of 24 civil organizations, including various Buddhist groups.[185]

On 19 May 2007, 3 activists were arrested on their way to a temple in central Rangoon to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[186]

On 20 May 2007, about 100 activists were prevented from entering a pagoda in Rangoon to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. The activists were forced to pray outside the pagoda, where they were trailed and photographed by plain clothed police.[187]

On 21 May 2007, authorities arrested HIV activist Phyu Phyu Thinn following her involvement in the prayer campaign for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[188]

On 25 May 2007, military authorities arrested 6 NLD members of Rangoon Division after they went to pagodas in Rangoon to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. The arrestees included Ma Yin Yin Mya from Bahan Township, and Ko Htin Win from Dagon Myothit South Township. [189]

On 25 May 2007, 30 members of the NLD praying for the release of Aung San Suu Ski at the Kyaukhtutgyi Pagoda in Rangoon were interrupted by a group of about 15 members of USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*, shouting anti-Suu Kyi slogans. As the NLD members attempted to leave the pagoda, they were met by a second group of USDA and Swan Arr Shin members. It was reported that Lae Lae Win Swe, Secretary of Tamwe USDA led the military team of attackers.[190]

On 27 May 2007, more than 500 pro-democracy activists, led by 88 generation student leaders, were blocked by about 100 supporters of the junta and police as they marched to Shwedagon Pagoda from the Rangoon NLD office to hold a prayer vigil for Aung San Suu Kyi's release. The activists, marking the 17th anniversary of the NLD's 1990 election victory,

gathered at the NLD headquarters to call for national reconciliation and the release of all political prisoners in Burma. The junta supporters are said to have shouted abuse at the activists for about 15 minutes with one NLD member being dragged away by them. The rally ended peacefully and the activists returned to the NLD headquarters to hold a mass prayer vigil there instead. After the protest ended it was reported that military authorities arrested at least 7 pro-democracy NLD activists in Rangoon and that 3 NLD members were abducted from Maggin monastery.[191]

On 29 May 2007, political activist Ko Tun Tun was arrested by officials after attending a regular prayer meeting at Shwedagon pagoda. Ko Tun Tun was interrogated for two days before he was released.[192]

On 11 June 2007, pagoda management personnel stopped more than 20 female activists from conducting a prayer vigil for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at the Thanlyin-Kyaikgaug Pagoda in Rangoon.[193]

On 11 June 2007, 5 women members of Zeegone Township NLD in Pegu Division were attacked with catapults by 3 unidentified males, on the Rangoon-Pyay highway, upon returning from Mya Thein Than Pagoda after praying for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. The incident was witnessed by a special branch police officer who did nothing to prevent the attack. Daw Khin Wyne approached the local authorities after the incident to seek protection but was denied assistance and told to stop going to pagodas to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[194]

On 13 June 2007, it was reported that the number of pilgrims visiting the largest temple in Sittwe Township, Arakan State has decreased due to questioning from 5 police at the temple as to why they come to the temple. They had been maintaining a presence at the temple to prevent prayer campaigns for Aung Dan Suu Kyi's release.[195]

On 1 July 2007, Buddhist monk U Dhamma Tharmi (42) from Yaykha monastery in Madaya Township, Mandalay Division, was arrested by SPDC authorities and detained in Mandalay Prison for publicly criticizing the National Convention and protesting against the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi.[196] The monk had allegedly travelled to three different locations in Mandalay carrying placards calling for Suu Kyi's release.[197]

On 13 August 2007, it was reported that a Buddhist monk, U Indaka, aged about 30, from Zaydi Daung monastery in Rathidaung, 20 miles north of the Arakan state capital Akyab, was arrested by NaSaKa while illegally visiting Bangladesh without a passport. The authorities took the monk to Myomo monastery in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State in handcuffs; where he was de-robed by the abbot in accordance with Buddhist principles.[198]

On 19 August 2007, an order was issued by Mayaka, the Thanlyin Township administrator, to monasteries in Thanlyin, Rangoon "*not to allow monks to venture outside at night*".[199]

On 28 August 2007, following demonstrations, monks at Gandayone and Alodawpyi Monasteries in Sittwe Township, Arakan State received a letter from the State Mahanayaka Committee (the official council of monks in Rangoon), ordering monks not to leave their monasteries between the hours of 9pm and 4am.[200]

On 5 September 2007, up to 600 monks in Pakokku Township, Pegu Division marched in a peaceful demonstration over high fuel and commodity prices. The monks marched from a monastery on the west side of Pakokku Township and were supported by more than 10,000 civilian bystanders. It was reported that uniformed soldiers, police, USDA members and *Swan Arr Shine* broke up the protest. Several monks were bashed and warning shots were fired at the protestors. It was reported that up to 10 monks were tied to electricity poles and

beaten with rifle buts and bamboo sticks. At least 3 monks are said to have been injured with one monk, U Sandima, sustaining head injuries. A number of monks were arrested.[201]

On 6 September 2007, head monks of several monasteries in Pegu Division were warned by the junta against staging protests and ordered to pass information on demonstrations to the military.[202]

On 9 September 2007, a meeting was held between junta officials and senior monks in Pakokku Township, Magwe Division, where reportedly 30,000 kyat per monk was offered by the junta as compensation for monks who were beaten and disrobed in recent protests. However, no apology was offered. In attendance at the meeting were SPDC Military Affairs Security Chief Lieutenant General Ty Myint and Minister of Religious Affairs Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung.[203]

On 12 September 2007, it was reported that the junta limited the monks' alms rounds to one hour, and ordered a curfew at some monasteries due to the increased tension between monks and authorities. Further security was also set up around several monasteries.[204]

On 15 September 2007, more than 100 monks from 5 monasteries Henzada Township, Irrawaddy Division fell ill with food poisoning after eating fish offered to them from a wealthy devotee. More than 20 of the monks had to be hospitalised. Rumours spread that the monks had been deliberately poisoned, however a monk from the Moe Kaung monastery confirmed that food poisoning was "the most likely suspect."[205]

On 18 September 2007, authorities closed all entrances to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, minutes before about 400 monks arrived to launch the campaign to refuse alms to the military.[206]

On 24 September 2007, the junta issued its first warning after a month of anti junta demonstrations, saying that it was prepared to crack down on the Buddhist monks at the heart of the protests. The junta's Minister of Religious Affairs, Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung, told senior Buddhist clerics to rein in the tens of thousands of monks who had participated in the protests indicating that otherwise action would be taken against the monks according to law.[207] The Minister warned Burma's monks not to break Buddhist "rules and regulations" in a televised segment on the SPDC-operated MRTV channel.[208]

On 24 September 2007, it was reported that almost 200 monks were dismissed from their monasteries for taking part in the protest marches against.[209] It was also reported that 30 monks from Wun Tho monastery were sent back to their home towns by abbot U Wuntha for taking part in the protests.[210]

On 25 September 2007, 300 monks from Kachin State were arrested when local authorities raided monasteries in Myitkyina, Bamaw and Moenhyin Townships in Arakan State.[211]

On 25 September 2007, abbot U Thilavantha of Yuzana Kyaunghtai monastery in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State was arrested for his involvement in anti junta protests. He died in Myitkyina hospital on 26 September 2007 from injuries he received when he was beaten by junta soldiers and security forces. It was reported that junta authorities forced the pathologist to record the cause of death as heart disease.[212]

On 26 September 2007, police and soldiers at barricades at the east gate of Shwedagon Pagoda used tear gas to disperse crowds and beat at least 30 monks and 50 civilians who were taken away in military vehicles.[213] DVB, an exiled radio station, reported that 1 monk was killed and several others injured.[214] It was reported by Human Rights Watch that

National Police chief Major General Khin Ye personally supervised the brutal arrests, beatings and killings of monks at the Shwedagon Pagoda on 26 September..[215]

On 26 September 2007, authorities arrested 4 monks and 4 laypersons at the Maggin Monastery in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division. They were held at the Government Technology Institute in Insein Township. Two of the 4 monks, Sayadaw U Indaka and U Nandiya and 2 of the laypersons were released on 8 October 2007.[216]

On 26 September 2007, monk U Sandar Vaya was arrested at midnight for participating in an anti junta demonstration in Rangoon that day. He was incarcerated with 500 other monks and 200 civilians in a single room of the Government Technology Institute in Insein Township, Rangoon Division, measuring 9 metres by 21 metres. Each person was given 1 bowl of drinking water in the first 2 days of incarceration, where not allowed to wash and had to go to the toilet in a plastic bag. They were provided with 1 meal per day at 2pm, even though the monks' Buddhist vow only permits them to eat before noon. Moreover, the monks were forced to disrobe and put on civilian clothing. It was reported that more than a dozen monks died. The authorities began to release the prisoners from 4 October 2007 on the written undertaking that they would never participate, encourage or watch any future anti junta protests. U Sandar Vaya was released on 5 October 2007.[217]

Buddhist monks march through Burma's former capital Rangoon in September 2007. *[Photo: AFP]*

On 26 September 2007, at least 200 monks were arrested at Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery in South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon Division, when junta forces from LIB #77 raided the monastery. It was reported that 1 monk died. The Pyanya Dana School run by the monastery for children from poor families was forced to close because of the raid. In November 2007, UN Human Rights Rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro visited the monastery during his November 2007 trip to Burma and reported that he found it empty of monks. The monastery's deputy abbot, U Ottama, was released from detention on 14 December 2007 and returned to the monastery. A further 90 monks were released from detention on 15 and 16 December 2007 and allowed to return to the monastery, including abbot U Yaywata.[218] On 18 December 2007, it was reported that junta authorities continued to maintain tight security around the monastery despite the release of the monks. People going into the monastery for prayer were only allowed to enter the monastery after strict security check by members of the SAS and USDA.[219]

On 27 September 2007, monasteries were raided, tear gas was released, guns were fired and monks and civilian protestors were beaten by junta authorities in Rangoon.[220]

On 27 September 2007, junta troops raided Buddhist monasteries in Rangoon. Dozens of monks were beaten and arrested. One monk was said to have been killed.[221] The raids included:

1. Up to 200 monks and 40 civilians were arrested after an attack by the military at Ngway Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon Division. The incident started after 3 trucks with soldiers were refused entry to the monastery by monks. A fight broke out with both sides throwing bricks at each other for about 20 minutes. The soldiers crashed through the gate of the monastery and subsequently used bamboo sticks to beat monks, civilians, women and children inside the monastery. Shots were also said to be fired by the soldiers;
2. About 500 monks were also arrested at Moe Gaung Monastery in Yankin Township, Rangoon Division after security forces forced themselves into the monastery;[222] and
3. At the Maggin monastery in Rangoon, where HIV patients are cared for, 4 monks were beaten and arrested by junta soldiers.[223]
4. The Pinnya Ramika monastery in Botataung Township, Rangoon Division was raided. More than 100 Shan monks were instructed to assemble at the mess hall after which they were piled onto trucks and taken to the Mingaladon military prison outside Rangoon. The monks were interrogated and some were beaten. About 70 of the monks were released on 4 October 2007.[224]

On 27 September 2007, security forces at Shwedagon Pagoda beat Ashin Gawthita, a 28-year-old monk from Maggin Monastery.[225]

On 27 September 2007, 4 people, including a Buddhist monk were shot and wounded during the junta's crackdown on anti junta protestors near the Sule pagoda. They were taken to the Rangoon General Hospital. On 2 October 2007, it was reported that government officials moved the monk to an unknown location.[226]

On 28 September 2007, in an attempt to stop anti-regime demonstrations led by monks, the junta declared "no-go zones" around 5 Buddhist monasteries, including the Shwedagon and Sule Pagodas.[227]

On 28 September 2007, 4 donation boxes were stolen form the Sakyamuni Buddha image located in the Lawkanada pagoda compound in Sittwe, Township, Arakan State. The donation boxes were said to contain an estimated 200,000 kyat donated by pilgrims to support the maintenance of the pagoda.[228]

On 29 September 2007, military troops attempted to raid Shwe Nyaung Pin Monastery in Insein Township, Rangoon Division. It was reported that residents of the area surrounded the monastery in an attempt to protect it.[229]

On 29 September 2007, 4 monks from Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, 2 from Aungbala monastery and 2 from Myoma monastery, were arrested for taking part in the anti junta demonstration in Sittwe Township, Arakan State on 18 September 2007. It was reported that they had planned to flee to Bangladesh through Sittwe and Maungdaw townships, Arakan State. One of the monks, U Indri Ya (23), from Myoma monastery, was forced to disrobe and was produced before the Maungdaw District Court on 8 October 2007. He was prosecuted under a section of Act 6, 143 and 505 for creating instability and organising the people in assembling against the junta.[230]

On 30 September 2007, at least 3 monks from monasteries in Thaketa Township, Rangoon Division were killed when junta authorities raided their monasteries.[231]

On 30 September 2007, DVB released footage of a dead monk floating face down in a pool of water in Pazundaung Township, Rangoon Division. It was believed that the monk died as a result of the anti junta protests.[232]

On 1 October 2007, it was reported that the junta banned the annual ritual of the donation of commodities to monks in Mudon Township, Mon State, due to the monks involvement in the anti junta protests in Rangoon in September 2007. The festival was to begin on 4 October 2007. The authorities allowed the festival to be held in Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State just 2 weeks prior.[233]

On 1 October 2007, Arakanese monk and former president of the Arakan Young Monks Union, abbot U Kawwidda from Thatka Thila Zaya Thidi Pati Pahtan monastery in North Okkalapa Township, Rangoon Division, was arrested by the junta for leading the anti junta protests in Rangoon in September 2007.[234]

On 1 October 2007, junta soldiers from IB # 225 in Mong Ton Township, Shan State arrested Reverend Sorinda of the Tripitaka monastery for criticising the junta's violent crackdown of the anti junta protests in September 2007.[235]

On 1 October 2007, U Kowida, former president of the Arakan Young Monk Union, was arrested by the authorities at Thaka Thilar Zaya Thidi Padi Padan monastery in North Dagon Township, Rangoon Division. He was reportedly kicked from the third floor of the monastery and fell to the ground floor sustaining severe injuries. Property worth 30 million kyat was also stolen from the monastery by the authorities. As of 6 November 2007, U Kowida's family had not received any information about his whereabouts or his condition.[236]

On 2 October 2007, a plan by novice monks to protest in Taung Dwingyi Township, Mandalay Division, was foiled by senior monks and authorities. The monks had gathered at Phayagyi pagoda but where pressured by members of the Swan Arr Shin and USDA not to protest.[237]

On 2 October 2007, it was reported that in Myitkyina and Bhamo Townships, Kachin State, 4 monks were killed and more than 200 monks were arrested in midnight raids by the authorities. It was reported that monks who did not participate in the anti junta protests were released.[238]

On 2 October 2007, it was reported that authorities released 90 of the 400 monks detained in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State since 25 September 2007 after a midnight raid on monasteries. The monks were released at Wuntho monastery, the Abbot of which is elected by the junta, and were refused permission to return to their own monasteries.[239]

On 3 October 2007, 5 monasteries in Rangoon Division were raided and 36 monks were beaten and arrested by junta soldiers. The soldiers were looking for monks said to have participated in the anti junta protests in September 2007. The monasteries raided included Shwetaungpaw, Dhammazaya and Sandilayama monasteries in South Okkalapa Township and Zayawaddy and Pannitayama monasteries in North Okkalapa Township.[240]

On 3 October 2007, junta security forces raided the Maggin monastery in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division, and arrested 8 monks, including U Nandiya the 80-year-old acting head monk of the monastery, and civilians. The monastery was left empty after the raid but reopened the following week after the release of some of the monks and civilians who had been arrested in the raid.[241]

On 4 October 2007, it was reported that monks across Burma were continuing to refuse alms from members of the junta and their families. The authorities also banned the public from donating food to monks.[242]

On 5 October 2007, police raided La Raung Win Kyung monastery at midnight in an attempt to arrest Abbot U Thone Dara, who had led anti junta demonstrations in Sittwe Township, Arakan State in September 2007. The monk escaped arrest.[243]

On 5 October 2007, it was reported that 4 monks studying in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, had returned to Bangladesh. The monks had been studying religious literature in Burma, but were forced to return to their homeland after the authorities ordered the closure of all Buddhist religious schools at monasteries in Sittwe Township, following the anti junta demonstrations in September 2007.[244]

On 5 October 2007, monasteries in Rangoon were ordered not to accommodate monks, apart from abbots, old monks and young novices, due to the anti junta protests in September 2007.[245]

On 5 October 2007, it was reported that USDA members and senior monks in Meiktila Township, Mandalay Division, had ordered student monks and novices to return to their homes immediately in a bid to prevent them from organising further anti junta protests.[246]

On 6 October 2007, at least 2 unnamed monasteries in Rangoon were raided by the junta.[247]

On 6 October 2007, a monk was arrested in Dagon Myothit South Township, Rangoon Division for reading a cartoon.[248]

On 7 October 2007, the dead bodies of 3 monks were found under a bridge near Thaketa Township, Rangoon Division.[249]

On 8 October 2007, it was reported that the bodies of 2 unidentified monks were found by villagers in Min Chaung Creek near Sittwe Township, Arakan State.[250]

On 8 October 2007, the junta run newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* published an account of raids on monasteries by the junta in Rangoon. It alleged that weapons including knives, an axe, slight shots and a bullet were found along with alcohol, pornographic material and anti junta literature. The ABMA rejected the allegations.[251]

On 8 October 2007, it was reported that the junta banned traditional festival donations to monks on Full Moon Day at Three Pagodas Pass. Checkpoints were also closed to prevent people travelling to Three Pagodas Pass for the festival.[252]

On 8 October 2007, it was reported that junta authorities disrobed 8 monks from Sittwe Township, Arakan State for their involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007.[253]

On 8 October 2007, it was reported that after the crackdown on anti junta protestors, junta authorities collected the names of young monks studying in monasteries in Arakan State. Young monks from urban areas of Arakan State were also sent back to their hometowns.[254]

On 8 October 2007, SPDC soldiers raided Maggin monastery in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division, for the fourth time since the anti junta protests began in September 2007. A computer, some unidentified documents and a small amount of money was taken.[255]

On 9 October 2007, junta authorities ordered all monasteries in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, to return student monks to their homes and not allow more than 10 monks to stay in any one monastery. Myoma Kyung and Laraung Won Kyung monasteries refused to follow the order.[256]

On 10 October 2007, SPDC soldiers imposed restrictions on worship at the Hla Rwa Win monastery in Sittwe Township, Arakan State. Riot police had been watching the monastery from 4 October 2007. The second senior monk of the monastery, Sayadaw U Thun Tara (45), was accused of playing a leading role in the anti junta protests in September 2007. He fled the monastery on 1 October 2007 to avoid arrest. On 4 October 2007, 5 other monks from the monastery were driven away from the monastery on the accusation that they participated in the anti junta protests in September 2007.[257]

On 10 October 2007, U Ithiriya a 28-year-old monk from Sittatukha monastery in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, was sentenced to 7 ½ years imprisonment for his role as a leader in the anti junta demonstrations in Sittwe Township. On 26 December 2007, it was reported that his health had deteriorated since he was moved from Sittwe prison to Buthidaung prison. According to reports from his family, prior to being moved he was severely tortured by junta intelligence officers in an interrogation cell in Sittwe prison. He was also refused the right to meet with family members since his incarceration.[258]

On 11 October 2007, it was reported that local junta authorities collected a list of all monks from every village and township in Kachin State for the Kachin SPDC office.[259]

On 14 October 2007, about 200 monks studying at Ought Bago monastery in Moulmein Township, Mon State, left the monastery after learning that soldiers from IB # 22 intended to arrest them for their involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007.[260]

On 14 October 2007, it was reported that monks and NLD members from Mohnyin Township, Kachin State involved in the September 2007 anti junta protests were held in detention centres in Hobin Township. Prisoners already detained at Hobin detention centre were transferred to a detention centre in Mohnyin Township to make room for the political prisoners.[261]

On 16 October 2007, a local police team from Kachin State began a search of monasteries; interrogation of monks and collection of guest lists, at monasteries in Bhamo Township, Kachin State. This was the third time the monasteries had been raided since the junta's crackdown on anti junta protestors.[262]

On 16 October 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities refused monks permission to travel from Kawthaung Township, Tenasserim Division to Ranong town in Thailand.[263]

On 16 October 2007, it was reported that according to the *New Light of Myanmar*, raids on 18 monasteries resulted in the arrests of more than 2,000 anti junta protestors, including 513 monks, 1 novice, 167 men and 30 women.[264]

On 17 October 2007, it was reported that U Indriya (26), a monk from Sait Ta Thula monastery was sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment for his involvement in anti junta protests in Sittwe Township, Arakan State. He was arrested in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State. He was reportedly going to be sent to a forced labour camp.[265]

On 17 October 2007, it was reported that after the anti junta demonstrations in Myitkyina and Bhamo Townships, Kachin State, the junta restricted the movement of monks, by checking travel documents and asking for reasons for travel.[266]

On 17 October 2007, NaSaKa raided Fet Wai Chaung Wra Ma and Taw Kung monasteries in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, in search of 2 monks, including Painya Thami. The monks' had reportedly come from Rangoon en-route to Bangladesh to escape arrest for their involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007.[267]

On 18 October 2007, it was reported that 4 monks, including Sayadaw Thihlasara of Yuzana monastery in Yuzana quarter, died of serious head injuries after being beaten by junta personnel during night raids upon monasteries in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State.[268]

On 18 October 2007, it was reported that Kachin State Commander Major General Ohn Myint offered bribes of millions of kyat to several monasteries in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State in order to prevent further anti junta demonstrations by monks.[269]

On 23 October 2007, it was reported that about 200 monks from Shin Phuu and Ye monasteries in Moulmein Township, Mon State, were arrested in Thaton Township, Mon State, after they were ordered to return to their homes following the anti junta protests in September 2007.

On 25 October 2007, 12 Bangladeshi monks were deported by NaSaKa to Bangladesh, making the total number of Bangladeshi monks deported from Burma after the crackdown on pro democracy protestors, 27. The monks arrived safely at their homes in the Chittagong Hill Tract area.[270]

On 29 October 2007, authorities in Moulmein Township, Mon State, assisted by the USDA, started investigations into monks and protestors involved in anti junta protests in September 2007, based on photographs taken of the protests. They also invaded monasteries and searched monks they believed could be identified through the photographs. No monks were arrested. [271]

On 29 October 2007, U Indra Panya and U Magindar from the Alodawpyih Dama Sariya monastery, fled to Bangladesh after authorities pursued them for their participation in anti junta protests in September 2007.[272]

On 30 October 2007, it was reported that 4 monks from Ye monastery in Mudon Township, Mon State, were interrogated, beaten and arrested by authorities for their involvement in the anti junta protests in Moulmein Township in September 2007.[273]

On 31 October 2007, it was reported that Daw Khin Waing, chairperson of the NLD in Zigon Township, was interrogated for 21 days in Tharyarwaddy Jail. She became a nun on 26 October 2007, was threatened by the junta on 27 October 2007 and forcibly dressed into civilian clothing on 28 October 2007.[274]

On 1 November 2007, township authorities in Pakokku Township, Magwe Division met with monastery administrations from 5 monasteries and ordered them to urge monks not to participate in any further anti junta protests.[275]

On 2 November 2007, it was reported that police, TPDC and USDA members had been monitoring the Myoma monastery in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State since 27 October 2007. The junta alleged that monks from other towns were residing in the monastery and that monks from the monastery had assisted monks involved in anti junta protests in September 2007 to cross the Burma Bangladesh border.[276]

On 2 November 2007, 3 monks, U Nadiya, U Painya Thiha and U Nada Ka were arrested by Bangladesh border security at Teknaf, when returning home to Bangladesh from Burma. They were charged with illegally entering Burma. The monks had earlier been arrested by NaSaKa in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.[277]

On 4 November 2007, junta authorities arrested Abbot U Gambira, leader of the ABMA, in Singaing Township, Mandalay Division, for his participation in anti junta protests in September 2007. He was accused of masterminding the protests and charged with treason. He was arrested after a month in hiding and on the same day that an article he wrote about the protests appeared as an editorial in the Washington Post. U Gambira's father U Min Lwin was also arrested at the same time. His brother Kyaw Kyaw, secretary of the NLD in Pauk Township, Magwe Division, had been arrested in Rangoon on 17 October, as an exchange while U Gambira was in hiding; however he was not released when the abbot was arrested. U Gambira's mother, sister and 2 brothers were also detained and interrogated before he was arrested. U Min Lwin was released from New Mandalay prison on 3 December 2007.[278]

On 5 November 2007, it was reported that police officers were ordered to open fire on monks participating in anti junta protests in Moulmein Township, Mon State in September 2007.[279]

On 5 November 2007, U Khaymarwuntha a monk from Zantila Kamahtan monastery in Dagon Myothit South Township, Rangoon Division was arrested for his involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007, despite the junta's claims to United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari on 6 November 2007 that arrests in relation to the protests had ceased.[280]

On 7 November 2007, Ashin Sein Tita a monk from Arr Kaung monastery in Kawkareik Township, Karen State arrived at the Thai Burma border town of Mae Sot after escaping arrest by the junta and the DKBA. He fled Kawkareik Township 2 weeks earlier for fear of arrest over his involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007.[281]

On 7 November 2007, U Seindiya, a senior monk from Aung Kaung monastery in Kawkareik Township, Karen State, arrived at the Thai Burma border after an attempt to escape arrest by junta authorities. He was wanted for leading monks in anti junta protests in September 2007. He fled when his monastery was raided by troops from the SPDC and DKBA.[282]

On 15 November 2007, U Sanda Wara, an ethnic Arakanese monk from Aung Dhamma Pala monastery in Dagon Township, Rangoon State was beaten and taken from his monastery when USDA members, township PDC officials and police officers raided the monastery. U Sanda Wara was responsible for looking after 700,000 kyat intended for Full Moon Day festivals. He was taken to Kaythara Rama monastery in Lay Daung Kan village while the officials returned to Aung Dhamma Pala monastery to search for the money. The officials reported that they had only located 200,000 kyat. When U Sanda Wara accused the officials of stealing the money he was taken away by the authorities.[283]

On 15 November 2007, U Than Rama, a monk from Tayzar Rama Kaman Htan monastery in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, was arrested for his involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007, during a raid on his monastery. He was assaulted by police during the arrest.[284]

On 16 November 2007, it was reported that junta authorities had banned Dhamma VCD's by two senior Burmese monks, U Nyanithara and U Kawvida, as they were interpreted as being critical of the junta's crackdown on the monk led anti junta demonstrations in September 2007.[285]

On 18 November 2007, Burmese rapper G-Tone was arrested by police after showing a religious tattoo, 2 hands clasped in a prayer position holding prayer beads, to the crowd he was performing for at the Mya Yeik Hotel in Bahan Township, Rangoon Division. Police assaulted audience members when the reacted angrily to the rapper's arrest.[286]

On 19 November 2007, it was reported that monks from rural areas in Burma were banned from entering Rangoon unless they possessed recommendations from their doctor for medical treatment. About 50 monks from Arakan State were refused entry into Rangoon upon the authorities checking their recommendations.[287]

On 23 November 2007, it was reported that an annual Buddhist ceremony scheduled to be held from 22 to 26 November 2007 in Dagon Myothit South Township, Rangoon Division was postponed after organisers refused to pay 40,000 kyat to junta authorities for troops to be mobilised for the event.[288]

On 24 November 2007, about 800 people, including NLD members, veteran politicians, political activists and members of the public attended Full Moon Day celebrations at Maggin monastery in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division. Solders from IB #66, who were involved in the crackdown on anti junta protestors in September 2007, were placed around Kyaik Kasan pagoda near the monastery during the celebrations.[289]

On 27 November 2007, the junta ordered the closure of Maggin monastery in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division, which housed HIV/AIDS patients for treatment. Those living in the monastery including monks, novices and HIV patients were ordered to leave the precincts. The order was signed by the TPDC, who said they were acting on orders from senior administration. An appeal against the decision of the junta to close the monastery, was sought by 2 monks from the monastery, however their appeals were refused, with senior monks saying they were helpless against the decision of the state authorities.[290] The monastery was officially closed on 29 November 2007, forcing the 2 senior monks, 6 novices and 2 laymen who lived in the monastery to take shelter at the Kaba Aye pagoda. Authorities transferred 6 HIV patients to Wai Ba Gyi infectious hospital in North Okkalapa Township, Rangoon Division. Maggin monastery had been raided by junta soldiers 4 times since the anti junta demonstrations in September 2007.[291] On 2 December 2007 the authorities arrested a lay person, Aung Zaw Win, when he inquired about the fate of the evicted monks.[292]

Maggin Monastery in Rangoon. This monastery was the site of one of the many SPDC army raids on Buddhist monasteries throughout the country during September 2007. *[Photo: The Irrawaddy]*

On 28 November 2007, it was reported that junta authorities in Thandwe Township, Arakan State, conducted riot control training inside the compound of the Lay Myat Hnar pagoda. The exercise was conducted by police who trained junta employees and civilians in riot control. The training began on 19 November 2007 and was scheduled to run for 30 days.[293]

On 28 November 2007, monks refused to perform a funeral blessing for the late Maung Maung, a senior Swan Arr Shin leader from Phaw Kan ward in Insein Township, Rangoon Division. Maung Maung was said to have passed on orders to assault monks involved in anti junta protest in September 2007.[294]

On 30 November 2007, junta troops blocked the Thati Phatan monastery in Mogok Township, Mandalay Division, fearing that the 400 monks who had gathered to accept alms by residents would assemble to pray or march in protest to Chanthar Gyi pagoda. Roadblocks were also set up en route to the monastery. Local junta officials had visited the monastery several times on 29 November 2007 in attempts to persuade the head monk U Thu Nanda not to hold the offering.[295]

On 3 December 2007, it was reported that U Nandiya, the 80 year old acting head monk of Maggin monastery, was under pressure to return to his home town Myothit Township, Magwe Division. U Nandiya had been the temporary head monk at the monastery since the arrest of his son, the previous abbot. Since the closure of the monastery on 27 November 2007, he was staying at an agricultural monastery in Yankin Township, Rangoon Division.[296]

On 3 December 2007, it was reported that in the first press conference since the junta staged a crackdown on protests in September 2007, Burma's Information Minister, Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, described the protests as the work of "bogus" monks organised by exiled dissidents and the United States, saying they were "trivial" for the country. He said "*It is found with sound evidence that ex-convicted bogus monks got joined with anti-government groups inside and outside the country*." He said the junta would stick to its own self-styled "road map" to democracy.[297]

On 3 December 2007, Burmese Police Chief Khin Yi defended the closure of the Maggin monastery at a press conference in Naypyidaw. Khin Yi said the monastery had been shut down on both law enforcement and religious grounds. Khin Yi said that Maggin monastery had played an important role in the monk-led demonstrations in September 2007. He also said that the monastery continued to pose a threat to national stability and order.[298]

On 3 December 2007, it was reported that 12 Bangladeshi monks, all aged around 25, fled from Rangoon and Sittwe Township to Maungdaw Township, Arakan State during the first week of November 2007, in an attempt to return to Bangladesh after being forced out of their monasteries. They sought permission from NaSaKa, namely commander Colonel Aung Gyi, to cross the border and return home to Bangladesh but as at 3 December 2007 they had not received a response from NaSaKa.[299]

On 4 December 2007, the Minister for Industry Aung Thaung attempted to offer alms to monks at Seittabala monastery in Kyauk Padaung Township, Mandalay Division but his alms offer was rejected.[300]

On 7 December 2007, it was reported that four monasteries in Pakokku Township, Magwe Division, east, west, central and Bawde Mandi, which received government food donations, passed the offerings onto the poor, and refused to give blessings to junta officials, in continuation of the boycott against the junta.[301]

On 7 December 2007, it was reported that the pagoda authorities increased staffing levels at Shwedagon Pagoda, from just under 80 officers to more than 200 officers.[302]

On 7 December 2007, it was reported that 90 per cent of monks in Arakan State did not enrol in the government exam, in support of the ABMA boycott, despite pressure being paced by the junta on abbots for monks to participate in the exam.[303]

On 9 December 2007, it was reported that the junta continued to raid monasteries and arrest civilians in relation to the anti junta protests in September 2007.[304]

On 11 December 2007, 12 young Bangladeshi Buddhist monks from Arakan State were arrested by NaSaKa crossing the Burma Bangladesh border in Teknaf. NaSaKa handed the monks to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) who in turn handed them to police in Teknaf. Police then handed them to Bandarban Whybrang Ufandita Mohateru U Shanda Banda Fayer after a meeting between police and U Shanda. Those who were handed over were:

1. Inda Kyasa (24), son of Maung Ko U;
2. Aga wang Deb (21), son of U Theing Tha;
3. Suyan Tha Hla (24), son of Mataya U;
4. U Chu Wang Na (25), son of Chocha Pra;
5. Saw Bala (16), son of Sein Nyu Zin;
6. Naidha Chara (15), son of U Cha Ba;
7. Pra Manik (13), son of Thushy Aungay;
8. Abasha (16), son of Aung Tha Bu;
9. Phyi Dita (19), son of Shwe Hla Pru;
10. Pratibala (20), son of Du Aung Pru;
11. Nai Diya (20), son of Ruli; and
12. Ba Tha Hla (18), son of Shyga Pru.

The monks were allowed to cross the border after senior monks made a statement to the authorities that they were not involved in the recent monk led anti junta demonstrations.[305]

On 11 December 2007, it was reported that Ashin Panyathami, an ethnic Arakan monk from the Zathilaryama monastery in Rangoon, fled to Bangladesh with 20 fellow monks following the junta's crackdown on anti junta protestors. Earlier, after being interrogated by the authorities in relation to the protests, Ashin Panyathami had returned to Arakan State, but was again forced to flee, this time to Bangladesh, upon learning that the authorities were searching for him.[306]

On 11 December 2007, it was reported that the abbot of Zathilaryama monastery in Rangoon, U Zarthila, had been arrested at the end of September 2007 for his involvement in the anti junta protests.[307]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that the abbot of Zantila Rama monastery in South Okkalapa Township, Rangoon Division, was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment for the offence of defaming the junta. He had reportedly defamed the junta by complaining in writing to the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Religious Affairs and the SPDC Chairman, about the seizure of 4.2 million kyat from his monastery during a raid by junta personnel in early October 2007.[308]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that Abbot U Gambira, was charged with treason and sentenced to life imprisonment for his involvement in anti junta protests in September 2007.[309]

On 17 December 2007, film director Zin Yaw Maung Maung and his crew visited the Maha Gandhayon monastery in Amarapura Township, Mandalay Division, to shoot a USDA funded video intended to be broadcast on State television showing monks accepting alms. The monks refused to come out of the monastery or accept alms.[310]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that 25 monks from Kaba Aye Sangha University, a Buddhist university in Rangoon, were expelled from the campus and told to return to their home monasteries as a result of their participation in anti junta protests in September 2007.[311]

On 21 December 2007, it was reported that Abbot Sayadaw U Tay Zaw Bartha, a 76 year old monk from Kalyarnithein monastery in Pegu Township, Pegu Division, was released from Ywar Thar Gyi psychiatric hospital in Hlegu Township, Rangoon Division. The monk had been arrested on 26 September 2007 and detained in Insein prison for a month for his involvement in anti junta protests in September. He was first released on 25 October, but rearrested by the military affairs security officers at Shwedagon pagoda 10 days later and held in Ywar Thar Gyi psychiatric hospital near Rangoon for 25 days. He was then sent to a monastery in Sakhan Gyi village, Hlegu Township, Rangoon Division, where he was detained for a further 20 days before being released. He was prohibited from returning to his monastery in Pegu Division.[312]

On 19 December 2007, it was reported that the junta ordered monk leaders not to accept more than 350 monks per university at two universities in Rangoon and Mandalay. Prior to this order about 450 monks were living at each University.[313]

On 22 December 2007, NaSaKa handed over 4 Bangladeshi monks to Bangladesh border security forces at the Maungdaw-Teknaf border point in Arakan State. The monks, originally from the Chittagong Hill Tract area of Bangladesh, had gone to Burma to study Buddhist scriptures without valid travel documents. The Bangladesh border authority sent the monks back to their native villages.[314]

On 23 December 2007, an annual donation ceremony held at New Masoeyein monastery in Mandalay Division, usually organised and attended by senior junta officials, took place with no input or attendance from the junta. The ceremony was attended by about 1,500 monks and 4,000 lay donors, who donated 4,000 robes and about 40 million kyat to the 3,200 monks in the monastery. The monastery was among those calling for a boycott of donations by the junta following the crackdown on anti junta protestors in September 2007.[315]

On 27 December 2007, it was reported that junta official Regional Commander of Rangoon Division, had ordered a ban on Buddhist *dhamma* (the Buddha's teachings) talks and seminars in Rangoon. *Dhamma* talks by the following well-known monks were cancelled:

1. U Kawthala, also known as *Dhamma* Sedi Sayadaw;
2. U Kawvida, also known as Mizzima Gon Yi Sayadaw;
3. U Nadapadi, also known as Pyu Sayadaw; and
4. U Sadila, also known as Lu Yay Chun Sayadaw.[316]

On 27 December 2007, it was reported that the junta ordered the closure of the Buddhist University in Rangoon.[317]

On 27 December 2007, it was reported that junta officials in North Okkalapa Township, Rangoon Division, cancelled at short notice sermons due to be given by 5 abbots including U Kawthala. About 4,000 people had gathered to hear the sermons.[318]

On 29 December 2007, it was reported that monks from Arakan State who were involved in the anti junta protests in September 2007 remained missing:

1. Sittwe Township, 22 monks, including 6 from Pathin monastery, 4 from Maniratanar monastery, 4 from Myoma monastery, 2 from La Raung Win monastery, 1 from Mo Koke Wipassana monastery, 3 from Dakkhinarama monastery, and 2 from Sitta Thuka monastery;
2. Minbya Township, 10 monks;
3. Mrauk U Township, 13 monks;
4. Kyauk Taw Township, 8 monks; and
5. Ponna Kyunt Township (6 monks).[319]

Endnotes

[1] Source: *International Religious Freedom Report 2007: Burma*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 14 September 2007.
[2] Source: *Ibid.*
[3] Sources: *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom- 2007*, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, May 2007; *International Religious Freedom Report 2007: Burma*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 14 September 2007.
[4] Sources: *International Religious Freedom Report 2007: Burma*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 14 September 2007; *Carrying The Cross: The Military Regime's Campaign of Restriction, Discrimination and Persecution against Christians in Burma*, CSW, 2006.
[5] Sources: *International Religious Freedom Report 2007: Burma*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 14 September 2007; *Carrying The Cross: The Military Regime's Campaign of Restriction, Discrimination and Persecution against Christians in Burma*, CSW, 2006; *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
[6] Sources: *International Religious Freedom Report 2007: Burma*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 14 September 2007; *Carrying The Cross: The Military Regime's Campaign of Restriction, Discrimination and Persecution against Christians in Burma*, CSW, 2006.
[7] Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
[8] Source: "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Paul Sergio Pinheiro, mandated by resolution S-5/1 adopted by the Human Rights Council at its fifth Special Session," Human Rights Council Sixth Session, Agenda item 4, 7 December 2007.
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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 9

FREEDOM OF OPINION, EXPRESSION AND THE PRESS

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

- Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

9.1 Introduction

Despite the centrality of freedom of opinion and expression in international law, these fundamental human rights continue to be severely repressed in Burma by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to such degree that these freedoms remain virtually non-existent for the civilian population. The freedom of expression is a fundamental right of every human being in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Freedom of expression represents the right of every individual to both hold and express opinions and to seek, impart and receive information, through any media, regardless of frontiers.

Throughout 2007, as in previous years, censorship was imposed by the SPDC in the name of national security and the maintenance of Burmese nationalism. In place of a plurality of media and news providers, the State-controlled media runs various pro-regime articles and programs.[1] Through these forums the regime is able to effectively control the dissemination of information, such as when it limited information regarding the extent of anti-junta protests being staged around the country during August and September, or to directly impose and communicate its agenda, such as the warnings given to potential demonstrators or political groups regarding the legality of their actions.[2] Typically at all times, but especially during the mass protests of August and September 2007, with Internet access blocked, State-controlled newspapers such as *The New Light of Myanmar* published the regime's version of the country's crisis and printed full pages filled with propaganda slogans.[3]

During 2007, there were no independent radio or television stations, and according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Burma's media environment remains one of the most repressive in the world.[4] Furthermore, many writers and poets, editors and publishers have been imprisoned with or without pretext, but typically for what they have written or published

One of the early actions of the junta following their rise to power was the nationalisation of all newspapers. Moreover, it established a Press Scrutiny Board (PSB) to enforce strict censorship on all forms of printed matter.[5] The Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), a division of the Ministry of Information, examines every publication and can reject any document considered to be detrimental or anti-SPDC. There exists a host of similar censorship boards that control the freedoms of opinion and expression in other spheres including but not limited to music, art, film and television, performance and the visual arts. All writers, publishers, journalists and poets must submit a personal biography to the literary censorship board. Upon examination of personal associations, those suspected of having connections with opposition political groups, western influences or other such undesirable traits face restrictions and blanket bans on their publications.

The report on the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) from 1996 to 2007 produced by the World Bank provided Burma with a rank of zero for the degree of freedom that citizens have to voice opinions and select their government, and thus listed the country as "*the worst government in the world*". The WGI research project, covering 212 countries and territories, measured six areas of governance between 1996 and 2007 in calculating its rankings.[6] Meanwhile, in its 2007 annual report on press freedom in Asia, Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), asserted that the privately-owned press in Burma is subjected to tight censorship and that all news regarding Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's prevailing socio-economic crisis, and important national and international events routinely go unreported. It also reported that the SPDC's Internet policies were even more repressive than China's and Vietnam's with the junta filtering opposition websites, monitoring Internet cafés and prohibiting popular Internet communication tools such as Google's Gmail and Gtalk. It was also reported that the SPDC

have increased surveillance of the press and its capacity for telephone tapping in addition to having trained civilians to identify informants to the international media.[7] Moreover, the RSF included SPDC leader Senior General Than Shwe on a list of 34 individuals and organizations which stand as direct threats to the freedom of the press.[8]

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported similar findings in its report: *Attacks on the Press in 2006*, including that Burma's media environment is one of the most repressive in the world, second only to North Korea.[9] In May 2007, Freedom House released the 2007 edition of its annual *Freedom of the Press*, in which Burma was ranked as being second only to North Korea for the lowest levels of pres freedom on the planet.[10] Also, in May 2007, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) echoed these findings in stating that Burma is among the worst-rated countries for press freedom.[11]

Burma's Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan keeps a tight grip on the media and the flow of information. *[Photo: AFP]*.

9.2 Laws Restricting Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press

The laws most commonly used by the SPDC to control the freedoms of opinion, expression and the press are the Emergency Provisions Act 1950, the Unlawful Associations Act 1957, Printers and Publishers Registration Law 1962, and State Protection Law 1975. By the operation of these and other legal instruments, the regime has a range of powers and control mechanisms to restrict the flow of information, ideas and opinions to the Burmese people.[12] Specific sections of these legal instruments that are particularly important regarding the restrictions of the freedoms of opinion, expression and the press include the Law Protecting the State from Destructive Elements or Section 505(b) of the Penal Code, which is usually invoked to suppress elements considered to be dissident; Section 143 of the Penal Code which prohibits unlawful assembly and can lead to up to six months' imprisonment, and; Section 124 of Penal Code which prohibits and punishes failure to disclose to the authorities concerned either an act or a conspiracy that amounts to high treason.[13]

The Official Secrets Act (1923)

Pursuant to Section 5, this law makes it an offence to possess, control, receive or communicate any information that is likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of the State or relations with foreign nations or is otherwise prejudicial to the safety of the State. There is no exception for the disclosure of classified information on public interest grounds. Anyone convicted under this law is liable to be punished with imprisonment for up to two years or a fine or both.

The Burma Wireless Telegraphy Act (1933)

This Act makes it an offence to possess, without official permission, any "*wireless telegraphy apparatus."* This law was amended in 1995 and again in 1996 to expand coverage to unlicensed fax machines and computer modems. Anyone found in possession of these devices without official permission is liable to imprisonment for up to three years or a fine of up to 30,000 kyat.

Emergency Provisions Act (1950)

This Act confers sweeping powers on the authorities to silence and punish any real or perceived dissent, even in the absence of a proclaimed state of emergency. Article 2 provides that *"collecting and divulging, or intending to divulge, information to people involved in treason against the State, on the movements, the strength, the location, the guidelines and regional defence strategies of the State military organizations and criminal investigative organizations who are engaged in preserving the stability of the State"* is punishable by death or life imprisonment. A similar punishment is prescribed under Article 3 for any act that is *"intended to cause, or causes, sabotage or hinders the successful functioning of the State military organizations and criminal investigative organizations"*. Similarly, Article 5(a) outlaws actions that violate or infringe upon *"the integrity, health, conduct and respect of State military organizations and government employees."* Causing or intending to *"spread false news about the Government"* is correspondingly outlawed under Article 5(e) as is causing or intending to "*disrupt the morality or the behaviour of a group of people or the general public*" under Article 5(j).

Section 122, Penal Code of Burma (1957)

This Section of the Penal Code defines and outlaws treason, which is punishable with death or life imprisonment. This law was cited in late 1990 against several NLD functionaries who attended meetings in Mandalay with the intent of forming a provisional government-in-exile. The functionaries were arrested and sentenced between 10 to 25 years imprisonment under Section 122. Similarly, in 2003, nine individuals were arrested under Section 122 and sentenced to death for high treason for having contacted the International Labour Organization (ILO) with information regarding the use of forced labour. The sentence was later commuted to three years imprisonment following international condemnation for the move.

The Printers and Publishers Registration Law (1962)

This law has historically been the main instrument of official censorship, requiring all books, magazines, other periodicals, song lyrics and motion picture scripts to be submitted for review to the regime prior to publication or, in some cases, prior to distribution. According to the censorship guidelines, material that is not tolerated includes anything *"detrimental to the ideology of the State; anything which might be harmful to security, the rule of law, peace, public order, national solidarity and unity; and any incorrect ideas and opinions which do not accord with the times."* The provisions of this law have been used by the regime to preclude criticism and opposition of the regime. Transgressors could face imprisonment up to seven years and a fine of up to 30,000 kyat.

State Protection Law (1975)

The State Protection Law, a.k.a. the "Law to Safeguard the State from the Dangers of Destructive Elements", under Article 4, provides the power to declare a state of emergency in part or the whole of Burma and to restrict any rights of the citizens in specified regions or in the entire country. This law also allows the junta to restrict the movement of citizens pursuant to Section 11, which provides that anyone can be confined to a specified area or have their freedom of movement otherwise restrained. The junta can also prohibit citizens from possessing or using specified material under Section 11. Appeals of orders passed in accordance with this law are not permitted in any court. Only the Union Cabinet is authorized to hear appeals of such orders. Under the amendment to Article 14 on 9 August 1991, an executive order can sentence anyone charged with suspicion of committing, committing, or about to commit any act that *"endangers the sovereignty and security of the State or public peace and tranquillity"* to imprisonment for up to five years without trial.

The Law Protecting the Peaceful and Systematic Transfer of State Responsibility and the Successful Performance of the Functions of the National Convention against Disturbances and Oppositions (1996)

This law makes it an offence to incite, demonstrate, deliver speeches, write statements or disseminate material that would *"disrupt and deteriorate the stability of the state, community peace and tranquillity and prevalence of law and order,"* or *"affect and destroy national reconsolidation".* It also forbids *"disturbing, destroying, obstructing, inciting, delivering speeches, making oral or written statements and disseminating in order to undermine, belittle and make people misunderstand the functions being carried out by the National*

Convention for the emergence of a firm and enduring Constitution". It also forbids anyone from drafting or distributing the Constitution of the State without legal authorization. Collaboration in any of the abovementioned acts is also considered an offence under this law. Punishment ranges between three months to 20 years imprisonment along with a possible fine. Organizations convicted under these provisions risk being banned and confiscation of their properties.

The Television and Video Law (1996)

This law provides for the compulsory licensing of television sets, video recorders and satellite televisions by the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs and of the registration of video businesses by the newly-constituted State or Divisional Video Business Supervisory Committees. The latter is responsible for deciding on the grant of video business licenses and for inspecting and supervising video businesses within their territorial jurisdictions. The law also provides for mandatory censorship of all videotapes, whether locally produced or imported, by the Video Censor Board (VCB). The requirement of obtaining censorship certificates has been extended to videotapes imported by foreign diplomatic missions or agencies of the United Nations for public exhibition. Operation of a television transmission business without permission from the authorities is punishable by imprisonment for up to five years or a fine.

The Motion Picture Law (1996)

This law applies to the censorship of conventional cinematography films. A license from the Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise (MMPE), a state agency, must be obtained to produce any kind of film. Any violation of the terms and conditions of a license is punishable by a fine ranging from 5,000 to 50,000 kyat and revocation of the license. The law also provides for the establishment of a Motion Picture Censor Board (MPCB). Foreign diplomatic missions and the UN have been made subject to the censorship regime under this law. Appeals against decisions by both entities can only be made to the Ministry of Information, whose decisions are final.

The Computer Science Development Law (1996)

This law requires that anyone who wishes to import, possess or use computer equipment, notably those with networking or communication facilities, to obtain a license from the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs, now the Myanma Post and Telecommunications (MPT). The Ministry is granted absolute power to consider license applications and determine the license conditions. Failure to obtain a license is punishable by imprisonment for a term between seven and 15 years and a fine under Sections 31 and 32. Those who wish to set up a computer network or connect a link inside the computer network are also required to apply to the Ministry pursuant to Section 28. Furthermore, the Ministry is responsible for approving the activities of computer-related associations. Pursuant to the Ministry's policy, only three such associations may be formed in Burma: computer enthusiasts, entrepreneurs and scientists associations. All others are deemed illegal. Anyone operating or belonging to an illegal association is subject to punishment up to three years, a fine, or both.[14]

Internet Law (2000)

In 2000, the SPDC issued new regulations through the Myanma Post and Telecommunications (MPT) regarding the prohibition of the posting of any writings on the Internet that may be deemed detrimental to the interests of the Union, its policies or security affairs. Violations of these guidelines are punishable under Burmese law.

9.3 Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression

The SPDC continued to repress the freedoms of expression and speech throughout Burma during 2007. The range of expression that was severely curtailed ranged from religious expression, to political protest, and the year was punctuated by official attempts to repress those forms deemed harmful to the regime.

While the year started promisingly with the "The Open Heart" campaign, a letter writing campaign urging SPDC leaders to progressively reform politics, the economy and social affairs,[15] and also saw the release of five 88 Generation Student Leaders,[16] the year was marked by the bloody repression of the right of expression highlighted during the September 'Saffron Revolution' protests. However, there were many cases of repression during the year well before the dramatic rise in prices caused the dramatic scenes of civil unrest. On 7 March 2007, 65-year-old U Thein Zan was arrested after posting a satirical article about the SPDC on his fence. The poster reportedly said that *"Prices have shot through the roof and people are hit"*.[17] Later, on 22 April 2007, Htin Kyaw, along with seven others chanted slogans and waved placards in protest against the price rise, electricity shortages, and the rising levels of unemployment. All eight demonstrators were arrested and Htin Kyaw was still awaiting trial in December 2007 as the official date of his hearing was postponed and moved to a special court after the scheduled hearing attracted a high level of public interest.[18]

However, the repression of the freedoms of expression is not limited to the political sphere alone. In September 2007, the SPDC reportedly stepped up its restrictions against the Muslim population, with several Rangoon and Mandalay residents claiming they had been banned from assembling to pray in large groups. Muslims in both cities also said that their local mosques had been banned from airing the daily call to prayer over loudspeakers during the holy month of Ramadan.[19]

Throughout 2007 there were also numerous reports of the SPDC using the USDA as a supposed popular-based political party to improve its standing in the community. However, the USDA has repeatedly been reported as being one of the regime's chief weapons in its ongoing campaign to crush all democratic opposition, particularly that of the NLD. Throughout 2007, the USDA attacked opposition rallies and anti-SPDC protests, including the NLD anniversary celebrations of their 1990 election victory.[20] In a similar vein, a member of the *Pyitthu Swan Arr Shin*, who spoke to the DVB on condition of anonymity, confirmed that they were responsible for the arrests of a group of 29 Burmese activists in May 2007, including well-known labour rights activist Daw Su Su Nway. The *Swan Arr Shin* ('masters of physical force'), like the USDA, is another purported pro-SPDC social organization. The inclusion of the word *"Pyitthu"* ('People's') is an attempt to give the impression that the organization is a popular people's movement. (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly Association and Movement). The source maintained that he, along with approximately 50 others, had been *"rounded up"* on 14 May 2007, by the Insein Township TPDC and recruited into the *Swan Arr Shin* the day before the activists were due to hold a prayer campaign. He further claimed that the TPDC officials had told them not to refer to themselves as *Swan Arr Shin*, but rather as *"political/general informers"* and also that the activists were preparing to stage a riot and it was their duty to stop them. However, upon arriving at the venue, they found that the activists *"weren't like that in reality. They were peaceful people"*. These 50 men were not paid, but were instead *"treated at a teashop when the job was done"*.[21]

In other instances however, the SPDC used far less clandestine and more overt methods to repress expression. For example in July 2007, officials from the Taungdwingyi Township TPDC in Magwe Division warned local NLD leaders against celebrate Martyr's Day on 19

July 2007 to commemorate the anniversary of the assassination of independence hero (and father to opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi), General Aung San. NLD members in some townships were reportedly forced to sign statements agreeing that they would not publicly mark the event.[22]

Though there were a handful of cases of unhindered peaceful protests against the regime and its policies, 2007 was marked by the brutal repression of the freedoms of expression. The most prominent display of this was the bloody suppression of the anti-regime 'Saffron Revolution' protests across the country in September 2007. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-democracy Movement, Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion and subsequent Section 9.11: The Saffron Revolution below).

On 16 January 2007, an estimated 200 pagoda police, USDA members, and Special Branch police officers physically assaulted a group of ten activists who were holding a prayer vigil for political prisoners at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda. According to reports, the activists were set upon and forced from the pagoda grounds. Ko Than Zaw Myint, who was attending the vigil reported that *"Two [men] grabbed my shoulders and said, 'Don't hang around. Leave here'. I told them I was there not to leave but to pray on the pagoda. They said, 'You want to die?' and gave me a punch across my face"*. Six days later, on 22 January 2007, the ten activists filed a complaint over the incident with the local religious authorities.[23]

On 6 February 2007, a group of activists attending a regular Tuesday prayer campaign for political prisoners at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda were doused with water by pagoda security personnel, while loudspeakers were used to disrupt the group's prayers.[24]

On 20 February 2007, activists attending the Tuesday prayer campaign at the Shwedagon Pagoda were again surrounded and threatened with violence by dozens of USDA members and pagoda security personnel who demanded that the group cease their vigil or face violence.[25]

On 12 February 2007, which in Burma marks Union Day, SPDC authorities prevented a demonstration from being held at the Shwedagon Pagoda when well-known activist Tun Tun, had tried to display a picture of General Aung San. The SPDC prohibits most activities related to Aung San not only because he was pivotal in and has thus come to represent Burma's independence, but also because he was father to opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[26]

Also on 12 February 2007, local SPDC authorities had banned a dinner hosted by the pro-democracy United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) at the NLD headquarters in Rangoon to commemorate Union Day.[27]

On 22 February 2007, well-known political activist Ko Htin Kyaw led approximately 25 protesters on a 30 minute march to Sule Pagoda in Rangoon, carrying placards and distributing leaflets calling on the SPDC to lower food and commodity prices and improve social welfare services; including improved public healthcare, education and pension benefits. At least nine of the protestors were arrested by the authorities during the demonstration but were later released on 27 February 2007. Three journalists who were covering the event were also reportedly detained.[28]

In late February 2007, it was reported that a number of individuals had been organized a pubic literacy seminar in a Buddhist monastery in Paungde Township, Pegu Division had been sentenced to three months imprisonment for having done so. While reports disagreed on the number of individuals jailed, with estimates between three and eight, it appears as though they had been arrested by military intelligence officers under Article 5(j) of the

Emergency Provision Act of 1950, accusing them of attempting to *"disrupt the morality or the behaviour of a group of people or the general public"*.[29]

On 4 April 2007, SPDC authorities arrested Tin Ko, a HIV patient from Kanma Township, Magwe Division, for staging a brief protest in Rangoon calling for easier access to antiretroviral medications.[30]

On 5 April 2007, residents of Chauk in Magwe Division petitioned the Chauk Township TPDC office in protest of the recent increases in municipal sales tax. One resident stated that *"The tax rate has doubled. … The tax we previously paid was 5,000 kyat and now [its] 10,000 kyat. We can not accept this decree and cannot pay that much"*. Approximately 500 persons had reportedly signed the petition, while an estimated 400 had demonstrated in front of the TPDC office. No further reports emerged of the TPDC rolling back its new tax policy.[31]

On 18 April 2007, human rights activists Maung Maung Lay and Myint Naing were beaten so severely that they were both hospitalized and had reportedly required surgery. The two activists were set upon by the mob, estimated to number approximately 100, many of whom were reportedly wielding sticks, as they attempted to leave Oakpon village in Henzada Township, Irrawaddy Division where they had been conducting a human rights awareness raising campaign. It was alleged that the chairperson of the Henzada Township TPDC had orchestrated the attack, although the original articles which had reported the incident had offered little evidence to support this allegation.[32]

On 22 April 2007, seven demonstrators calling for a reduction in basic commodity prices, and improvements in public healthcare and utility services were assaulted and arrested by Special Branch Police officers and members of the USDA. Eyewitnesses estimated that approximately 200 Special Branch Police officers had intercepted the protest at the Thingangyun Sanpyat Market in Rangoon son after it had begun.[33]

On 25 April 2007, plainclothes security personnel arrested 61-year-old former political prisoner U Ohn Than for protesting *"to escape from the world's poorest country, demanding establishment of a people's elected government, to get rid of dictators and to invite the United Nation Commission"*. U Ohn Than had earlier staged a similar solo protest in front of the United Nations Development Program office in Rangoon in 2004, after which he was arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code for causing public mischief.[34]

U Ohn Than solo demonstration in Rangoon on Union Day 2007. *[Photo: PDC]*

Also on 25 April 2007, Ko Tin Htay and Ko Than Htun were sentenced to two and four-and-a-half year's imprisonment respectively by the Nyaungdon Township court in Irrawaddy Division simply for possessing copies of the video of the opulent wedding of Senior General Than Shwe's daughter, Thandar Shwe.[35]

On 16 May 2007, 62-year-old Daw Tin Tin Maw, a member of the Hlaing Township NLD chapter, was arrested after staging a solo protest before the steps of Rangoon's city hall demanding the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[36]

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB), the SPDC and its agents had arrested 99 pro-democracy and human rights activists in May 2007 alone.[37]

On 20 June 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities arrested 49-year-old Daw Thaung and 23-year-old Ma Khin Aye, the mother and daughter of 25-year-old Maung Kyaw Naing who had earlier been arrested for protesting against spiraling rates of inflation and high levels of unemployment in Taungup, Arakan State. It appears that the arrest of the two women was directly linked to the solo protest made by Maung Kyaw Naing.[38]

On 19 June 2007, celebrations at NLD offices around the country marking the 62nd birthday of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi were disrupted by members of the SPDC-affiliated USDA. Those attending the celebrations were reportedly pelted with sling shots.[39]

On 24 June 2007, Ko Maung Oo was arrested by members of the auxiliary fire brigade, all of whom also automatically become members of the USDA, for staging a demonstration against the SPDC's misguided economic policies in Rangoon.[40]

On 10 July 2007, Ko Min Min from Prome in Pegu Division was arrested by local police officers for providing human rights workshops to local residents. The police officers denied this and had insisted that Ko Min Min, a former tutor, had been arrested for *"operating as a private tutor without a license"*. It was later reported that he had been sentenced to three years imprisonment and fined 30,000 kyat.[41]

On 24 July 2007, six members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP) were given prison sentences by a court in Henzada Township, Irrawaddy Division. Well-known activist Ko Myint Naing, who was among the group sentenced, was given eight years imprisonment, while his five colleagues had each received four-year prison terms under the charge of inciting public unrest.[42]

On 9 November 2007, U Ne Win and Ba Myint, both NLD members from Kachin State, were sentenced to two years imprisonment in secret closed session courts without proper judicial procedure or access to legal council in Myitkyina and Bhamo Prisons respectively. Both men were charged under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code.[43]

On 11 November 2007, it was reported that NLD member Maung Khaing Win (a.k.a Salar Vee) was arrested and sentenced under Sections 505(b) and 143 of the Penal Code for having offered water to monks during the September protests. Similarly, U Htay Naing Lin, Ko Pain, U Myint Kyi, Ko Zaw Lin, Ko Chan Aung were all sentenced under Section 505(b) for providing information to the media. Section 505(b) is also known as the Law Protecting the State from Destructive Elements, while Section 143 is in regard to unlawful assembly.[44]

On 13 November 2007, well-known labour rights activist Daw Su Su Nway and one of her colleagues, Bo Bo Win Maung, were arrested after being caught posting anti-SPDC posters in Bahan Township, Rangoon. The posters, hung up beneath a pro-regime billboard which

stated: *"Oppose those relying on Americans, acting as stooges, holding negative views"*, served as a parody to the propaganda that they outlined, read: *"Oppose those relying on China, acting as thieves, holding murderous views"*.[45]

In mid November 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had released four women and one elderly man who had earlier been arrested for campaigning against the proposed damming of the Irrawaddy River at Myitsone in Kachin State. It has been estimated that the construction of the dam will inundate at least 47 villages in the immediate vicinity of Myitsone and displace over 10,000 villagers.[46]

On 29 November 2007, Manaung Village Secretary, Ko Win Maung from Manaung Island in Arakan State was arrested for his involvement in the September protests. He was later sentenced on 5 December 2007 to two and a half years imprisonment for *"betraying the state for his actions during the protests"*.[47]

On 2 December 2007, police officers arrested 52-year-old Hajee Amir Hakim from Tha Yet Pyin village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, for writing a letter to the BBC detailing SPDC human rights abuses against the Rohingya. He was released the following day after his relatives paid a bribe of an unspecified amount to the Buthidaung Police Station.[48]

Resorting to silent protest: 20 kyat notes in Sittwe denounce the junta. *[Photo: Narinjara News]*

9.4 The National Convention

The junta continued to control and restrict the freedom of opinion, expression and the press during the National Convention (NC). The Law Protecting the Peaceful and Systematic Transfer of State Responsibility and the Successful Performance of the Functions of the National Convention against Disturbances and Oppositions, a.k.a Order 5/96, continued as the regulatory and operational mechanism for the National Convention. This law was designed to punish, through lengthy imprisonment, those who would criticize the NC. Moreover, all delegates to the NC were forced to agree to the SPDC's ready-made chapters and basic principles, which grant the military's Commander in Chief the supreme power.[49] Order 5/96, *inter alia*, forbids *"disturbing, destroying, obstructing, inciting, delivering speeches, making oral or written statements and disseminating in order to undermine, belittle and make people misunderstand the functions being carried out by the National Convention for the emergence of a firm and enduring Constitution"*. Punishment ranges between three months to 20 years along with a possible fine. Organizations convicted under these provisions risk being banned as well as having their property confiscated. This Order, in conjunction with other laws, has enabled the SPDC to control the expression of those participating in the National Convention.

Through these limitations the National Convention was able to make significant inroads during 2007 in establishing guidelines for what the chairman of the NC, Lieutenant General Thein Sein, reiterated was the goal of establishing *"a discipline flourishing democracy"*.[50] The State-controlled newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar*, reported that the final National Convention document, released at the closing ceremony of the National Convention on 3 September 2007, designated the national flag, state seal, national anthem and the location of the capital, although, like so much of the NC, very little input or debate was permitted from the participants.[51] Following completion of the National Convention the drafting of a new constitution was reported to be the next step on the SPDC's much-touted *"Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy"* announced in 2003.[52] Lieutenant General Thein Sein, NC Chairperson, promised to review previous chapters and make amendments as necessary to their flaws and weaknesses during the session. Many parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), who were not permitted to attend the NC, reported late in the year that they were looking for a chance to participate in the final discussions. However, despite comments professing a desire for democracy and an official statement from Senior General Than Shwe in the *New Light of Myanmar* declaring that the process of building a new nation is a process involving the entire nation, the development of the Burmese constitution, it seems, will be anything but democratic.[53] Meanwhile on 3 December 2007, Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan dismissed the possibility of opposition groups contributing directly to the drafting of the constitution, and rejected the idea of outside assistance in the country's political development, stating that it's hand-picked 54-member constitutional drafting committee had begun work and did not need any outside help.[54]

The new guidelines drawn up by the National Convention accomplish little more than providing a thin democratic façade to the continued military rule of the SPDC, under the guise of what the regime regards as *"disciplined democracy"*. Under the guidelines, a quarter of the seats in parliament will be reserved for military appointees. The national president will be a military officer, and the army will control important ministries, including defence and home affairs. The army would set its own budget, and would retain the right to declare a state of emergency and seize power whenever deemed necessary.[55] The guidelines for the new constitution indicate that the military will be entrenched in every state institution including the union presidency, the union government, the union assembly as well as regional and state assemblies. The military, known in Burmese as the *Tatmadaw*, will essentially be established as an ultra-constitutional organization. The constitutional guidelines state that the *Tatmadaw* is the sole existing army and that it must be strong and

modern. Under the new constitution, the commander of the army will be (as he presently is) the single most powerful person in the country. Burma's parliament, which is called the *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* (Union Assembly), comprises two assemblies: the *People's Assembly*, which is composed of representatives elected on the basis of population, and the *National Assembly*, composed of representatives from different states and divisions. Nonetheless, the commander of the army will have the authority to pick up to one quarter of the total number of members in each assembly. In other words, the military will hold a quota of 110 out of 440 seats in the People's Assembly and 56 out of 224 seats in the National Assembly.[56]

Hand-picked delegates to the junta's National Convention. *[Photo: AFP]*

However, as in previous sessions, the overwhelming majority of the delegates attending the convention were carefully handpicked by the regime. According to Khun Myint Tun of the NLD, *"Only 12 of the convention representatives are elected members of parliament. The rest were hand-picked by the SPDC"*.[57] As many as 28 ceasefire groups also sent over 100 delegates to the National Convention - although most realised that this process was designed to perpetuate and institutionalise military rule. The New Mon State Party (NMSP), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and several other ceasefire groups issued demands regarding the type of (broadly federal) constitution they would like to see emerging from the convention. In doing so they sketched the outlines of what a future political settlement to *"the ethnic question"* in Burma might look like.[58]

Critics have labelled the proceedings as a sham because the junta hand-picked most of the delegates and because pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest and cannot attend. The charter would ban Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from ever holding elected office, as having been married to a foreigner. The invitation of only hand-picked delegates by the SPDC to the National Convention totally ignored the frequent calls from the UN, US, EU and the wider international community for the inclusion of all parties concerned, including candidates elected in the 1990 election, the NLD and ethnic minority parties.[59] The US State Department joined the many critics of the National Convention, labelling it as a *"total sham"*, and stating that any political process without the participation of the NLD and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was *"not legitimate"*.[60]

It has also disappointed the hopes of the country's various ethnic opposition groups for greater autonomy. Many ethnic ceasefire groups have also reportedly been so dissatisfied with the charter that they have begun to rearm and are threatening to break their ceasefire pact with the regime and resume fighting.[61] According to the Burma Campaign UK, *"There appears to be a real possibility that many ceasefire organizations could return to arms, or split, with factions once again taking up their guns"*.[62]

Despite its strict control over who was permitted to attend the National Convention, the SPDC also exercised complete control over media coverage of the process throughout 2007. At the last minute during the July 2007 session, the SPDC reneged on its promise to grant visas to Bangkok-based foreign journalists to report on the convention.[63] Only local Burmese journalists were granted limited access to the convention's opening day, presumably so that the SPDC could control what was published. Journalists were forbidden to carry tape recorders or mobile phones, they were not allowed to spend more than a few minutes in the convention room, and they were prevented from interviewing any of the delegates.[64] As with the four previous sessions, delegates convened at the heavily guarded Nyaunghnapin military base and were rarely allowed to leave the compound or have any contact with the outside world throughout the duration of the entire session.[65]

According to local sources, and despite the concerns of the international community, a large proportion of its own people, and many members of the Convention itself, the Burmese authorities continued to coerce residents of Myitkyina in Mandalay Division to join mass pro-government rallies to show their support for the newly-completed National Convention in late September 2007.[66] At the same time the *New Light of Myanmar* accused the 88 Generation Students Group of plotting to sabotage the National Convention and claimed that 15 people had been taken into custody on these grounds.[67]

9.5 Freedom of the Press

According to the Southeast Asia Press Alliance (SEAPA), press freedom deteriorated in many Southeast Asian States in 2007 and Burma was no exception to this trend.[68] As reported by various organizations, including Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the World Bank and Freedom House, the Burmese press has remained one of the most repressed throughout in the world.[69] Throughout 2007, the Burmese authorities detained at least 11 journalists, seven of whom were sentenced to serve jail terms. The Press Scrutiny Board of the Ministry of Information continued to examine publications and prohibits *"any incorrect ideas and opinions which do not accord with the times."* Among the topics that have been forbidden from publication are human rights situation in Burma, the continued house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, AIDS education,[70] and the activities of the armed forces, especially their continuing offensives against civilian villagers in Eastern Burma. In October 2007, RSF released the *World Press Freedom Index 2007*, in which Burma was ranked 164th out of the 169 countries listed in the survey. RSF maintained that journalists in Burma continue to work under heavy censorship and that many writers and journalists continue to be jailed for doing their jobs. It further reported that private broadcasting is not permitted and most websites carrying news about the country are blocked.[71]

However, despite these censures, 2007 also witnessed some apparent developments. Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, the current SPDC Information Minister held regular press conferences with the local media and international news agencies during 2007 and has allowed preferred journals to report on previously sensitive issues including HIV/AIDS and the new capital at Naypyidaw. However, given that all local media faces heavy censorship by the various established censorship committees and scrutiny boards, it is difficult to say just how much of a concession this really is.[72]

It was reported in September 2007 that the SPDC would, for the first time permit the introduction of a journalism degree course sometime in the near future. While the SPDC maintains that this will be to encourage the country's young generation to systematically master the skills of journalism, it is far more likely an attempt to further control and suppress press freedom. A journalism diploma course was only offered in Burma once in the early 1980's. Students have been unable to study journalism in Burma since that time.[73]

Operating under the Ministry of Information, is the News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE), which all news services in Burma must be registered with and conform to the rules of. Under the NPE is the Myanmar News Agency (MNA) and the three official daily newspapers: the Burmese language *Mirror*, the Burmese language *Myanma Alin* and its English language counterpart, the *New Light of Myanmar*. According to the NPE, the *Myanma Alin* is reportedly circulated to over 100,000, while the *Mirror* to over 150,000 and the *New Light of Myanmar* over 10,000. Meanwhile, the authorities have been granting more private publications for circulation in recent years which, according to official figures, has brought the total number of private news journals and magazines being sold in the domestic markets to about 200 and 250 respectively as of the beginning of 2007. According to a report by the Chinese Xinhua news agency, the number of private journals covering domestic news in Burma has grown over the past eight years due to market demand. Among these private news journals are the *Yangon Times*, *Flower News*, *Kumudra*, *Weekly Eleven News*, *Myanmar Times*, *Newsweek*, *Pyi Myanmar*, *Snap Shot*, *Popular*, *7-Day News*, *International Eleven*, *Voice*, *24/7 News*, *Zaygwet* and *Internet*. During 2007, there were also as many as 20 foreign news services stationed in Burma including a number of the world's leading ones with Associated Press (AP), Agence France-Presse (AFP), and Reuters.[74]

However, other developments belied this semblance of opening up of the Burmese press. Firstly, in February 2007, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) reportedly told Rangoon-based editors that all stories about bird flu were still off limits, despite the apparent containment of an outbreak of the disease during 2006.[75] Residents reported that only some people knew about the outbreak and the virus, and chicken was still widely available for sale throughout the country. News of the outbreak first appeared in the international press in mid June 2007, with the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) reporting that approximately 1,000 birds from a poultry farm in Pegu (Bago) Division had been culled as a precaution. The LBVD later conceded that the outbreak was more widespread with four new cases identified on farms in three townships in Rangoon and Pegu Divisions, after which, nearly 2,000 chickens were culled.[76] Despite the seriousness of the outbreaks and the threat to public health, dissemination of such information was strictly curtailed.

Furthermore, the security services, reorganized under the Military Security Force (MSF), increased their surveillance of the media during 2007. According to reports, civilians were also trained to identify informants to the international media.[77] On 7 September 2007, four residents of Pakokku in Magwe Division were arrested and detained for allegedly providing foreign media with information on the protests.[78] At the time of and following the September 2007 'Saffron Revolution' demonstrations, journalists were monitored, harassed and detained by the Police Special Branch officers, military intelligence personnel and also by members of the SPDC-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).[79]

The September 2007 protests also saw increased and direct repression of the press. The SPDC first failed to inform its citizens about the country's largest anti-regime demonstrations in almost two decades and only when reports began to be published in the international and opposition media, and transmitted back into Burma via shortwave radio did they permit local news agencies to carry stories on the protests.[80] However, all such reports were still subject to heavy censorship where the monks involved in the protests were described as *"bogus"*, *"violent"* and *"disrespectful"* in the State-controlled media.[81] The SPDC also started forcing privately owned magazines and newspapers to run statements denouncing the recent wave of public protests, in a move that the Burma Media Association (BMA) called a *"severe violation of personal and media freedom"*.[82] (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-democracy Movement, Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion and subsequent Section 9.11: The Saffron Revolution below).

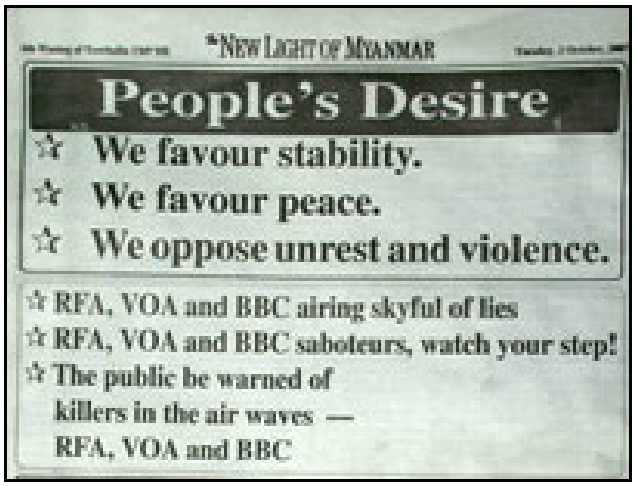
The BMA and RSF both reported widespread accounts of the use of violence and censorship against Burmese journalists who tried to cover the September protests in a deliberate strategy directly aimed at preventing them from doing their jobs.[83] In September 2007, Myat Thura of the *Kyodo News Agency* and two other journalists, Sint Sint Aung of *Nippon TV* and May Thingyan Hein, a freelance journalist, were detained while they covered a demonstration in downtown Rangoon.[84] Similarly, Aung Khine Nyunt, a reporter at *The Myanmar Nation* was assaulted by two unidentified men, believed to have been members of the USDA, as he was taking photographs at Hledan Market in Rangoon's Kamayut Township. Likewise, Moe Kyaw, a reporter for the weekly news journal *The Voice*, was set upon by six plainclothes men who beat him and stole the digital memory card from his camera as he was covering the march of the monks in front of the La Pyae Won Plaza in Rangoon. Moreover, Aung Hla Tun, a reporter with the Reuters news agency, was pushed by unknown assailants as he also was attempting to cove the protests in downtown Rangoon in September 2007. Authorities also reportedly seized the digital memory card from *TV Asahi* journalist Han Htway Aung as he was taking photographs of the protests, which was only returned to him after he had deleted all of the photographs that he had taken. Similarly, the *Mizzima News* reported that unidentified men grabbed the camera of *Kyodo News Agency* journalist Myat Thu Ya and attempted to push him into a car. He was later released although his camera was not returned.[85]

Perhaps the most widely publicized attack on press freedom during 2007 was the deliberate slaying of 50-year-old Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai who was shot and killed as he was photographing the protests in Rangoon on 27 September 2007. His body was later returned to Japan following a formal protest by the Japanese government, although his camera was not.[86] The SPDC-controlled media initially reported that the Japanese journalist was to blame for his own death because he put himself in harm's way, although footage of his killing clearly shows that he was approached by an SPDC army soldier who shot him in the back at point blank range.[87] (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions).

During the protests many privately-owned weekly news journals in Burma opted to stop publication rather than publish statements in favour of the SPDC and condemning the protestors. All such publications had been given orders by the SPDC to print articles written by the State media blaming the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the National League for Democracy (NLD) for the protests. *Kumudra*, *Seven Days*, *Pyi Myanmar* and a number of other news journals decided to stop or suspend publication, and informed the censor board accordingly.[88]

Still, unlike the mass pro-democracy protests of 1988, the information continued to flow out of Burma during the September 2007 protests despite the SPDC's efforts to suppress it. Scores of 'citizen journalists' sent information out to friends working in the international and opposition media via email, mobile phone and SMS messaging. Numerous media groups operating in exile were quick to set up 'blog' sites (web logs) which featured many photos and videos depicting the protests as they unfolded that had been sent to them electronically by people inside.

A lot of this information also made its way back into the country via shortwave radio through services provided by groups such as the BBC Burmese Service, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Radio Free Asia (RFA) and the Voice of America (VOA), all of which are broadcast in Burmese.[89]



*NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

People's Desire

☆ We favour stability.
☆ We favour peace.
☆ We oppose unrest and violence.

☆ RFA, VOA and BBC airing skyful of lies
☆ RFA, VOA and BBC saboteurs, watch your step!
☆ The public be warned of killers in the air waves — RFA, VOA and BBC

The State-controlled English-language newspaper, the *New Light of Myanmar* condemns foreign news services. *[Photo: unknown]*

9.6 The State of Publications

Though official figures have alleged that more privately-owned and operated news and media publications are being sold in Burma, all publications suffer from ongoing restrictions and the threat of cancellation. *Khit Myanmar*, a publication by popular monthly magazine *Living Color*, was reportedly shut down in March 2007, while *The Myanmar Nation*, a weekly publication, was periodically pulled from Burma's newsstands throughout the year.[90] Similarly, the February 2007 issue of the Burmese language magazine, *Padauk Pwint Thit* ('The New Padauk Flower'; the Burma Padauk is also known as Burmese rosewood), was suspended by Burma's Press Censorship Board without citing any reason.[91]

All Burmese journals and magazines have to follow a number of steps in keeping with the censorship board's regulations. The first step in the process is to seek clearance from the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB) for the content of the cover. The second step is to submit the cover along with the journal or magazine's first draft, and finally submission of the finalized version before asking for a distribution permit from the board.[92]

Declining readership also hit several news journals following the rise in basic commodity prices in August 2007 which followed the sudden increase in fuel prices on 15 August 2007. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). The increase in fuel prices, in turn, drove printing and transport costs up – costs which were then passed on to the consumer. Prior to the price increases, most journals sold for between 300 and 500 kyat, however, since the increases, most readers could no longer afford to buy such publications.

Previously, those wishing to publish a journal in Burma had to pay 20,000 to 30,000 kyat per month for a publishing license, depending on the number of copies that were to be produced. However, as of November 2007, those wishing to publish a journal were obliged to pay approximately three million kyat to obtain a publishing licence.[93]

However, in spite of such strict censorship regulations religiously enforced by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), a number of privately owned journals and magazines continued to publish throughout 2007. One example is the *Myanmar Than Daw Sint,* or 'Burma Herald,' which was allowed to continue publication because its content is often highly critical of the international community and opposition groups operating both inside and outside the country.[94] Moreover, the Central Chin Literature and Culture Committee (CLCC), which comprises a number of Chin student leaders from different Burmese universities, was permitted to publish its first magazine in 2007.[95]

However, while there has been a net increase in the number of new publications sold in Burma many of these new publications are controlled by the junta to report favourably on its actions. Those who fail to toe the SPDC line are refused permission to publish or have their publishing licences revoked. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Ministry of Information was reported to have attempted to force a number of private journals to run propaganda straight out of the State-run *New Light of Myanmar*.[96] One journal was even suspended because of its editor's personal conflict with the pro-junta journalists of the *Snap Shot Journal*. Due to this conflict the *Middle Line Journal* was told by the Press Scrutiny Board that the journal must cease publication for the time being.[97] Similarly, the newly-created *East Village* journal initially recorded a very low readership because most of people in Burma considered it to be little more than pro-SPDC propaganda.[98] In addition to this, the SPDC also used many of the State-run publications to communicate what was and what was not permitted to be expressed and opinioned in the press. For example, in February 2007 *The New Light of Myanmar* reported that SPDC Police Chief Brigadier General Khin Yi warned leaders of one of the country's major opposition alliance, the Committee

Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP), against making any political statements. Meanwhile, the issuance of such warnings and restrictions against pro-democracy opposition groups provided pro-regime groups and government-backed associations, such as the USDA greater room to manoeuvre and even allowing them to demonstrate against the United States and the recently adopted UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Burma, despite the existence of laws prohibiting gatherings of more than five persons.[99] (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

Further illustrating the SPDC's control over the press, in January 2007, approximately 30 weekly journals in Rangoon ran an identical article written under the pseudonym "Yan Yan", which attacked well-known pro-democracy activist, Naw Ohn Hla, by linking her to a widely known pimp from an area in Rangoon where she lived. In response, Naw Ohn Hla filed a defamation case against 123 editors and publishers of those journals.[100]

Later in the year, during the September 2007 'Saffron Revolution' protests, the SPDC sought to maintain rigid control of all media sources and attempted to limit the press to only running stories which presented the SPDC's version of what was happening at the time, grossly misrepresenting the reality of the ongoing civil unrest throughout the country. The junta even issued an order to all Rangoon-based journals and periodicals to publish a statement denouncing the ongoing protests. According to the BMA, PSRD Director, Major Tint Swe, instructed all journals and periodicals to publish a declaration stating that they were *"not a part of the association and not interested in taking part in the protest"*.[101] The State-run papers then ran a swath of questionable stories allegedly reporting on the protests. In early September 2007, SPDC-mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar* reported that *"Internal and external destructive elements are inciting a period of civil unrest like the one in 1988"*.[102] Similarly, the *New Light of Myanmar* published another article which had maintained that SPDC security forces had fired three rounds into the air to disperse a crowd of approximately 100 monks who had gathered outside the Bawdi Mandine Monastery in Pakokku, Magwe Division, because they believed that the abbot, Tay Zaw Batha (known as U Tejobhasa), and "local bystanders" were in danger.[103] Unsurprisingly, the article mad no mention of the underlying socio-political causes of the protest.

Following the 'Saffron Revolution' protests, the SPDC prohibited the sale of all foreign publications which featured stories of the protests or the subsequent crackdowns visited upon them. According to an article published in the *Irrawaddy*, book stores throughout Rangoon could no longer sell news publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Reader's Digest* and the Thai English-language newspapers including *The Bangkok Post* or *The Nation*.[104] Moreover, in November 2007, the *7 Days News* journal was forced by the Press Scrutiny Board to cover over its front page news story with silver ink because about the recent visit to the country by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro – the first of its kind in almost four years. The story had to be covered with silver ink because the issue had already been printed. Myo Tha Htet, editor of the journal, believed that *"[m]aybe they think the news is a bit sensitive to be featured on the front page"*, while U Zin Linn, Deputy Director of the Burma Media Association (BMA), said *"Maybe the [SPDC] is trying to prevent Mr. Pinheiro from becoming familiar to the Burmese people. Also, I think they do not want people to hear Mr. Pinheiro's opinions on Burma"*.[105]

The restrictions on the press in Burma during 2007 were not strictly limited to news services, but also related to the publication of historical material. The biography of Burma's late Prime Minister U Nu was to be published on his 100th anniversary of his birth on 25 May 2007, but the book's distribution was blocked by the PSRD, who had simply said that it was *"not the right time to distribute it"*.[106]

9.7 Continuing Detention of Journalists

As of February 2007, Burma remained one of the most repressive places on Earth for journalists, trailing only North Korea on the *10 Most Censored Countries* list in the global survey conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).[107] According to a report released in February 2007, Burma was also listed as having the world's fifth highest number of journalists in detention. According to this report, at least seven journalists remained in prison across the country as of 1 December 2006, including U Win Tin and Maung Maung Lay Ngwe; writer and activist Aung Htun; editor, filmmaker and poet Thaung Tun; lawyer and former BBC stringer Ne Min; photojournalist Thaung Sein; and columnist Kyaw Thwin.[108] Thaung Tun and Than Win Hlaing (not named in the report) were both released on 3 January 2007.[109] Due to the difficulties in obtaining reliable data regarding the incarceration of prisoners, it is quite likely that considerably more journalists than this remained in detention throughout Burma.

In February 2007, Vincent Brossel, the Asia Pacific director of Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), had stated that the SPDC continued with its policy to arbitrarily arrest and detain journalists.[110] In August 2007, the editors of *Eleven Media* were summoned to a meeting by the Special Branch of the Police in Rangoon where they were interrogated for being deemed to be too pro-National League for Democracy.[111]

The detention of journalists in Burma is not limited to Burmese-based publications alone. On 22 February 2007, 34-year-old journalist, Myat Thura, with the Japanese *Kyodo News Agency* was arrested for interviewing demonstrators protesting against the regime in downtown Rangoon.[112] Then on 21 May 2007, SPDC authorities took into custody Aung Shwe Oo and Sint Sint Aung, two journalists on assignment for the Japanese television news agency *Nippon News Network* (NNN) in Rangoon. The reporters were believed to have been detained for covering the arrival of a North Korean ship supposedly carrying armaments to Burma. Both journalists were later released.[113] Myat Thura and Sint Sint Aung, had earlier been detained for five hours, along with May Thagyan Hein of *Dhana Economic Magazine*, at the Aung Tha Pyay police guest house in Rangoon after being arrested while covering a peaceful demonstration in Rangoon.[114]

The SPDC further increased its repression of journalists during the September 2007 popular protests, which brought with it a marked increase in the incarceration of journalists. On 30 September 2007, Min Zaw of the *Tokyo Shimbun* newspaper was taken from his home by plainclothes security personnel.[115] The 56-year-old journalist was taken in for questioning after he had reported on the ongoing demonstrations against the military regime. At least three other Burmese journalists disappeared in late September and were believed to have been arrested for having reported on the protests. According to one Rangoon-based editor, Kyaw Zeya Tun, 23, from *The Voice* journal; Nay Lin Aung, 20, from the *7 Day News* journal; and one unnamed female journalist from *Weekly Eleven News* journal all disappeared in late September 2007.[116]

The SPDC continued to exert its strict controls over the media right throughout October 2007. In late October, Aung Khine Nyunt, a reporter at *The Myanmar Nation*, was taking photographs at Rangoon's Hledan Market when he was set upon by two plainclothes men, believed to both have been members of the USDA. An eyewitness to the scene reported that *"The two men beat up Aung Khine Nyunt. One grabbed him and held him while the other man punched him. He was then called to the police station and questioned for about three hours"*. Similarly, an unidentified journalist who tried to take photographs of Buddhist pilgrims at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda was immediately surrounded by a crowd of approximately a dozen riot police, one of whom reportedly confiscated the digital memory card from his camera.[117]

U Win Tin, who has remained behind bars for the past 18 years, remains Burma's longest serving political prisoner.[118] The 77-year-old suffers from diabetes and a serious heart condition and while incarcerated has suffered two heart attacks, prostate inflammation, a degenerative spine condition and heart disease.[119] Yet, in spite of his apparent frailty, the Rangoon General Hospital, where he is interned, keeps him confined to a 15 square metre room.[120] In July 2007, the BMA called on the Burmese military junta to release U Win Tin unconditionally after the end of his 18th year in prison, but all calls to this effect went unanswered.[121]

U Win Tin, Burma's longest serving political prisoner. *[Photo: Narinjara News]*

On 3 January 2007, 48-year-old Than Win Hlaing was released from Tharrawady Prison after having served a seven year jail term for writing a reference to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi an her father Aung San.[122]

9.8 Academic Freedom

The lack of freedom of the press and freedom of expression greatly hinders the academic and student community in Burma. Any new academic programs, like publications, must be approved by the regime which allows for ruling authorities to control all levels of education within the State. All academic journals and other publications from various education institutes have been banned in Burma since the military coup of 1962. It is only State-sponsored educational material that is available to students.

On 7 September 2007, six labour activists were sentenced to lengthy prison terms of up to 28 years for hosting a seminar about labour rights at the American Center in the US Embassy in Rangoon. According to their lawyer Aung Thein, the six activists, all in the 20s were found guilty of showing *"hatred or contempt"* to the regime. According to the report, which was originally published in the *Irrawaddy*, a number of the group were also charged with *"being members of illegal associations and violating immigration laws".* The names of the six activists and the durations of the sentences handed down are as follows:

1. Thurein Aung, 28 years;
2. Wai Lin, 28 years;
3. Myo Min, 28 years;
4. Kyaw Win28 years;
5. Nyi Nyi Zaw, 20 years; and
6. Kyaw Kyaw, 20 years.[123]

In 2007, 84 students were barred from appearing for their matriculation examinations at the Tha Ohn Computer University in Mandalay, ultimately meaning that they could not graduate. The reason given for their omission was that they did not have the mandatory 75 percent attendance; however, the majority of the 84 students had all earlier been accused of political activity by inciting and assembling people to demonstrate.[124] In the aftermath of the September protests, the military issued orders to abbots not to accept more than 350 novice monks per university in the two Buddhist monastic universities in Rangoon and Mandalay. Prior to this, there had been approximately 450 novices living in each of these two universities. The junta also maintained the right to investigate all monks staying in the universities.[125] Furthermore, university students who wore black clothing to their exams as a mark of respect for those killed during the September protests were ordered to discontinue their campaign.[126] (For more information, see Chapter 12: Right to Education).

The junta has also been highly restrictive of other educational and academic mediums. A video documentary team, led by Zin Yaw Maung Maung, was denied permission to take footage of SPDC Minister for Industry Colonel Aung Thaung making an offering to monks in a monastery in Mandalay soon after the September protests.[127] Moreover, the authorities banned the distribution of a VCD (video compact disc) showing two highly respected senior Buddhist monks, U Nyanithara and U Kawvida, giving *Dhamma* (Buddhist scripture) teachings because they were deemed to have been critical of the junta's crackdown on the monk-led demonstrations.[128] The SPDC also prohibited certain leading Buddhist monks in Rangoon from giving *Dhamma* talks and seminars for the same reasons. Those monks who had been banned from speaking were U Kawthala (a.k.a *Dhamma* Sedi Sayadaw), U Kawvida (a.k.a Mizzima Gon Yi Sayadaw), U Nadapadi (a.k.a Pyu Sayadaw), and U Sadila (a.k.a Lu Yay Chun Sayadaw).[129]

9.9 Control of Computer Technology and Communications

The Internet

Burma maintains some of the world's most restrictive Internet controls, including State-administered blocks on foreign news sites and the use of popular email services. Certain Internet email servers and search engines, including Google and Yahoo, are also banned. Regulations issued to Internet café owners prohibit customers from downloading websites and visiting politically affiliated sites. Every two weeks Internet cafés are required to submit the personal details of their customers and records of their internet use, along with periodic screenshots taken during their usage sessions.[130]

In August 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had plans to implement the rather ambitious 'Cyber Village Project' which would enable every village in the country, in both urban and rural areas, access to the Internet. According to the same report, the SPDC also plans to introduce 400 public Internet service centres in 324 townships throughout the country within the next three years.[131]

According to the Myanma Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), the number of Internet users in Burma reached nearly 300,000 during 2007.[132] This claim was supported by the Open Net Initiative (ONI) Bulletin, which found that Burma is one of 30 counties that has less than one percent Internet penetration, with an estimate of just under 300,000 Internet users nationwide.[133] However, many of the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Burma are controlled by the SPDC. Bagan Cybertech, a *"semi-State enterprise"* is only the second ISP in Burma. It was established by Dr. Ye Nai Win, son of former military intelligence chief, General Khin Nyunt.[134] Therefore, in order for the SPDC to create their envisioned 'cyber villages', outside investment and technologies were required. A number of companies from Thailand, China, Malaysia and Russia reportedly invested in the planned Yadanabon Cyber City being built on almost 10,000 acres of land in Maymyo Township, Mandalay Division.[135] In spite of this apparent opening up of the Internet in Burma, control of access to the Internet remains firmly with the junta. On 14 December 2007, the Yadanabon Cyber City, also known as the Burma Yadanabon Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Park, was officially opened by the SPDC. It was also reported that two days prior to the opening, on 12 December 2007, the SPDC had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian Government to establish an *"IT enhancement centre"* in Rangoon.[136]

Despite the seeming growth in Internet usage in Burma, Internet censorship Burma in 2005 was considered to be among the *"most extensive"* in the world according to the OpenNet Initiative (ONI), a joint research project on Internet censorship issues headed by Harvard University. A survey of websites containing material known to be sensitive to the regime found that 84 percent of pages tested by ONI were blocked in 2005. These sites included nearly all political opposition and pro-democracy sites.[137] The regime also reportedly maintained an 85 percent filtration rate of well-known email service providers. Meanwhile, RSF reported the SPDC's Internet policies to be even more repressive than those of China and Vietnam. In the beginning of the year the junta banned a number of proxy sites such as www.polysolve.com, www.glite.sayni.net, www.3proxy.com, www.unipeak.com. However, in spite of this, some Burmese Internet users have still been able to use facilities such as G-talk, Skype and VZO chat. They use such messengers via a proxy site or use 'Freedom' software which has been banned by the SPDC.[138] According to the India-based administrator of www.glite.sayni.net, popularly known as Glite, the Glite program has been downloaded by tens of thousands of Internet surfers and resides on hundreds of private and public servers in Burma, allowing its users to access Gmail accounts that the regime has tried to block. Other popular proxy servers in Rangoon's Internet cafés are Your-freedom.net and Yeehart.com, both of which similarly maintain new, updated versions to

bypass SPDC firewalls.[139] In November 2007, RSF conducted a new study of *"Internet Enemies"* in which surveyed levels of Internet censorship, in which it placed Burma as the world's forth most repressive regime, behind Iran, China, and Tunisia.[140]

Many of the junta's capacities to restrict access and control information on the Internet were revealed during the September protests. During this time, the regime, in an attempt to try and stem the flow of information leaving the country turned off all access to the Internet. According to the OpenNet Initiative (ONI) report, "*Pulling the Plug: A Technical Review of the Internet Shutdown in Burma*", the junta became only the second State power to ever completely turn off the Internet (the other occurrence coming in Nepal in 2005). The report identified a two-week period, from the evening of 29 September 2007 to the afternoon of 13 October 2007, during which the Internet was either completely or largely switched off. SPDC authorities blocked numerous websites and blogs in an attempt to block the flow of information. Prior to this, on 3 September 2007, SPDC authorities blocked access to YouTube, which featured videos of the ongoing anti-junta demonstrations sweeping Burma. On 26 September 2007, SPDC authorities closed Internet cafés in Rangoon and on 28 September, the regime went so far as to shut off the country's only two Internet service providers.[141]

In spite of the implementation of such drastic measures, the SPDC was described as being *"ill-prepared"* for the flood of outgoing information resulting from the protests as its focus before the recent uprising was on the prevention of incoming information.[142] While the Police Force had formed a special information technology (IT) unit to combat probable cyber crime and had many powers relating to the censorship and control of information on the Internet,[143] SPDC censors proved ineffectual at stopping the outflow of information and images over the Internet to the outside world during the September protests. The authorities initially ordered a blackout on all local media coverage of the protests but despite such bans, journalists and dissidents continued to send information and video clips of the protests over the Internet to foreign-based news organizations.[144] Most of the images and stories that made international headlines came from one of more than 100 students, activists and ordinary citizens who fed reports, images and video of the violent events onto the Internet and other media sources. Information technology played a critical role in helping news organizations and international groups follow Burma's biggest protests in nearly two decades.[145] During the protests, Kyaw Zwa Moe, the managing editor of the *Irrawaddy* news magazine stated that his office had received numerous emailed pictures taken on mobile phones and digital cameras.[146]

However, the SPDC was able to limit certain aspects of the information flow on the Internet, particularly in late September. SPDC authorities blocked some domestic blog sites to restrict and stop free flow of information out of the country, including the popular blogs at http://www.kohtike.blogspot.com and http://niknayman.blogspot.com.[147] "Moezak's Web Blog" disappeared after just one day of posting images of the monks' protests[148] and another blogger, Thar Phyu, in Mogok Township, Mandalay Division was reportedly issued a warning by local authorities to desist.[149] The SPDC also closed Internet cafés in Rangoon while the junta-controlled ISP, Bagan Cybertech, reduced its bandwidth, dramatically effecting Internet traffic speed.[150] This state-affiliated ISP was apparently acting on government orders to slow down the speed of its Internet connections so that Internet users could not upload photos and videos.[151] This order remained active through to early October when Myanmar Teleport, one of Burma's two ISPs was terminated. The Burmese junta reportedly terminated all services from Myanmar Teleport to check the flow of information because it had chiefly provided services for civilian use, including commercial activities such as public Internet cafés. Meanwhile, all services provided by Myanma Post and Telecommunications (MPT) were maintained as it mainly provides services to a few select civil servants. The Internet lines not reconnected until around 10 October 2007.[152]

Even with this crackdown on Internet services, some technologies were employed to pursue the goal of press freedom. It was reported that approximately 200 Internet cafés in Rangoon continued to operate during the protests, drawing tech-savvy university students who transmitted photographs and video clips taken on mobile phones and digital cameras to friends and contacts outside Burma.[153]

On 6 October 2007, the SPDC partially restored Internet connection across the country. The Internet was initially available only during hours when residents were under curfew, with the connection being slow and irregular, while most Internet shops in Rangoon remained closed. At the start of November, Internet access throughout Burma was once again cut off, but was later restored on 3 November 2007, although connection was still reportedly very slow.[154] During this time, RSF had determined that Burmese Internet users had only three or four hours of access a day. Even then, SPDC censors continued to block most websites, sift through emails, and even take frequent screen shots of users' computers in public Internet cafés.[155]

Telecommunications

During 2007, the Myanma Post and Telecommunications (MPT) decided to install Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) phone lines in Arakan State along with other coastal areas in Burma. The stated intention was to build better communication links with other parts of Burma, particularly to improve the flow of information about weather conditions. According to the MPT, by July 2007, approximately 30,000 CDMA phones had been installed in Rangoon, Mandalay, and Mogok.[156] In the beginning of the year, the SPDC had extended its telephone network in Kannan village in Tamu Township, Sagaing Division, and provided telephone connections at appropriate rates compared to the previous year.[157] The SPDC also reportedly planned to introduce 140,000 GSM phones - double the 2006 number - to facilitate communication links across the country. The SPDC reportedly plans to have 81,000 GSM phones in Rangoon alone in the near future. This figure amounts to approximately one phone per 40 people, as compared to one GSM phone per 74 people as it stood in mid 2007.[158] Though still lagging far behind other countries, the estimated number of people inside Burma using cell phones has mushroomed from 3,000 users in 2000 to some 200,000 users in 2006.[159] However, just how the SPDC intends to implement this ambitious project and how the civilian population is expected to afford it remains to be seen.

Yet, despite this planned growth in telecommunications within Burma, the junta also reportedly stepped up its telephone tapping capacity in 2007. According to Aung Naing, chief editor of the Thailand-based Network Media Group, *"People are too afraid to talk on the phone as the lines are tapped. We can still call some numbers but these are very limited calls. Many people can still use email but they are careful because these too are being monitored"*.[160]

Corruption has also had a dire effect on telecommunications in Burma. The Ministry of Telecommunications, Posts and Telegraphs is reputed to be one of the most corrupt of all of Burma's ministries. According to a report in the *Irrawaddy*, staff are known to accept bribes to install phone lines and approve mobile phone purchases. While the official rate for the purchase and installation of a new telephone line in Burma is 500,000 kyat, businesspeople and individuals can reportedly obtain one for 3.2 million kyat should they wish to avoid the official channels.[161]

There were also restrictions enforced on the use of satellite phones and foreign-registered phones during 2007. On 20 October 2007, 45-year-old Nai Aung Khin from Khaw Zar sub-township in Mon State was arrested for possession of a satellite phone. On 22 October 2007, he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for possessing the phone and for having listened to BBC, VOA, and RFA radio broadcasts.[162] Meanwhile, throughout mid November 2007, the homes of SPDC-allied Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) officials were raided by local SPDC authorities who seized Chinese-registered mobile phones. Authorities first seized only the telephones held by officials of the KIO and their armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), but this was soon followed by seizures of phones held by ordinary citizens who had reported the initial confiscations to exiled media. Although the phones are technically illegal in Burma, it was believed that the confiscations were conducted in retaliation to the KIO's failure to release a statement condemning the recent statement read out by UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari on behalf of the detained Aung San Suu Kyi.[163] It was later reported on 14 December 2008 that the Falam Township TPDC in Chin State was selling Chinese-registered mobile phones which had been seized by the authorities for 1.8 million kyat each. It was speculated that these may well have been the very same phones which had been seized from civilians in raids the previous month.[164]

During the September 2007 'Saffron Revolution' protests the SPDC had also used its capacity to cut off phones services and landlines to many areas in Burma in an attempt to stem the flow of information. According to U Myint Thein, a spokesman for the NLD, several pro-democracy activists' mobile phones were cut off during this time. The SPDC suspended service to many prominent pro-democracy activists' mobile phones, including NLD spokespersons U Myint Thein, U Soe Myint, and U Nyan Win, labour rights activist Su Su Nway, HIV campaigner Phyu Phyu Thin and Amyotharye U Win Naing.[165] The mobile phones of other activists who had gone into hiding, including Htun Myint Aung, Hla Myo Naung and Toe Kyaw Hlaing of the 88 Generation Students' Group, were also cut. Moreover, the mobile phone of leading activist U Soe Myint Htain of the Myanmar Development Committee (MDC) was also reportedly cut.[166] According to a report in the *Irrawaddy*, more than 50 phone services, most of which were mobile phones used by activists and other members of the opposition movement, were cut.[167] On 12 September 2007, the SPDC also cut mobile and landlines to the NLD headquarters in Rangoon.[168] At the same time, phone lines were also cut and mobile phones and computers reportedly seized in raids on dozens of monasteries across the country.[169]

Phone services to journalists and news services were also suspended during the September protests.[170] At approximately 3:00 pm on 27 September 2007, at the height of the bloody crackdown on the protestors, the SPDC disconnected almost all of the country's mobile phone lines, preventing journalists and demonstrators from reporting on the events that were unfolding right before their eyes. The mobile phones and landlines of several Rangoon-based foreign correspondents were also disconnected.[171] Taken in combination with the closing of many Internet cafés in Rangoon and the shutting down of many blog sites and websites, the SPDC had tried to shut the country off from the outside world.[172] Some lines, however, were kept open and, unlike the protests of 1988, the information was still able to get out.

9.10 Freedom of Expression in the Arts

The Burmese military continued to place heavy censorship and other restrictions on all mediums of artistic expression, including but not limited to writers, poets, photographers, filmmakers, actors, musicians, painters and other artists. Only certain subject material is approved by censorship authorities and anything that can be interpreted as pro-Western or as influenced by Western ideas, or, alternatively, is considered negative to the regime is strictly prohibited. Many artists and writers have been imprisoned because of the content of their expression.

Film and Television

All film projects in Burma are strictly regulated and censored by the censorship board. Every film is required to be first approved for production and then, upon endorsement, the film producer must also submit its storyboard for review. Upon completion the movie is again submitted for approval and any changes demanded by authorities must be adhered to. Yet, Burma's film industry has also been under constant pressure by authorities to produce material that is sympathetic of the junta's actions. A clear example of such overt demands being made on the film industry was when the Burmese military demanded that the film association come out openly in support of the China/Russia veto in the UN Security Council resolution on Burma in January 2007. However, Burma's leading film association refused to countenance these demands. Sources in Burma's film industry told DVB that despite Burma's literature and media associations issuing forced statements denouncing the United States, Myanmar Cinematic Association chairman U Kyi Soe Tun, refused to follow suit.[173]

The SPDC also caused major disruptions to Burma's Academy Awards. This important event for the Burmese film industry was originally to be held in December 2006 but was cancelled due to a junta decision to relocate the ceremony to Naypyidaw.[174] The awards ceremony was then rescheduled for 5 March 2007 reportedly due to the lengthy delays in the construction of the new capital. Though the event eventually went ahead, the duration and content of the awards ceremony was dictated by the military. During a speech on the night, Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan said that it were foreign movies, VCDs and CDs that posed a threat to the local film industry as well as to national culture. Moreover, it was speculated by numerous observers that a high degree of corruption exists among awards nominees and that the regime played a major role in deciding the winners in the annual event.[175]

To be in possession of certain film and television material can also result in lengthy jail terms. For example, in April 2007, Ko Tin Htay and Ko Than Tun from Nyaungdon were sentenced to four and half years imprisonment simply for possessing a VCD copy of *The Night of Diamonds* – a documentary film which compared the lavish and extravagant wedding reception of Thandar Shwe, the daughter of Senior General Than Shwe, with the miserable daily life of the common Burmese people living in abject poverty.[176] Similarly, the public viewing of any film deemed inappropriate by the regime can result in arrest and detention. For example, three owners of small video theatres in Sittwe of Arakan State were arrested on 14 November 2007, after monks had gathered in the theatres to watch videos. It was believed that this restriction was imposed for fear that the monks may attempt to organize and resume the anti-regime protests such as those witnessed across the country in September.[177] Following the nationwide September protests, SPDC authorities sought to requisition all video footage taken during the demonstrations from video shop owners in Mon State. According to owner of one video rental store in Moulmein, local police personnel entered his store in late November 2007 demanding a list of names of anyone who had rented any CDs or videos of anything related with the September protests.[178] Moreover, on

12 November 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had recently shot a propaganda film in Prome, Pegu Division with members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* which depicted the September protests, but in a way which represented the monks and civilian protests as being responsible for the violence. One source who witnessed the filmed reported that:

> *"The film looks like it's about the monk protests, but it shows the township police trying to suppress the violence initiated by monks. Then they have to call in the military when they can't overpower the monks. … So the military arrive, and first they fire rubber bullets into the crowd and some people get hit, but they made it look as though they had not choice but to fire as the monks were really getting out of hand"*.[179]

Visual and Performance

Visual and performance artists remained highly scrutinised by SPDC military authorities throughout 2007 and were frequently arrested for their expression. Any work that is considered detrimental to the regime is typically banned and this prohibition extends even after the death of the performer. For example, U Tin Moe, who is widely regarded as Burma's most outstanding contemporary poet and whose works are considered milestones in Burmese literature, died on 22 January 2007. However, even after his death, all of his works continued to be banned in Burma.[180] Similarly, in November 2007, another poet, Kyaw Thu Moe Myint, was forced to flee Burma for fear of being arrested for *"illegally"* publishing poetry.[181]

During 2007, as in past years, comedians were among those most persecuted performers in Burma for their artistic expression. For example, celebrations to mark the completion of renovations to a monastery in Mandalay were largely undermined when the SPDC stepped in to stop more than a dozen of Burma's leading comedians from performing at the ceremony. The comedy acts had reportedly been organised by Par Pay Lay of the well-known Moustache Brothers who live next to the monastery. Par Par Lay and his brothers who form the comedy troupe are no strangers to repression, all of whom have been jailed for their comedy acts and now cannot tour with their act but must perform from their home.[182] Sixty-year old Par Par Lay, who has been arrested three times, was arrested on 25 September 2007 and imprisoned for over a month for providing food to the demonstrating monks.

In November 2007, Ko La Raung, a well-known Arakanese comedian from Mrauk U was arrested following a performance in which he depicted the shooting of a monk, which was clearly considered by the authorities to be too close to the reality of what had occurred on the streets in September. Ko La Raung was released from police custody after three days, only after the troupe owner had given assurances to the authorities that the act would be stricken from the bill and that they would never perform that particular skit anywhere again.[183]

However, it was primarily during the 'Saffron Revolution' protests in September 2007 that both the potential and the limit of expression of performance artists in Burma was best displayed. A number of celebrities, including well-known comedian Zarganar, actor Kyaw Thu, writer Than Myint Aung, poet Aung Way and others formed a group to regularly and publically offer alms and basic assistance to the demonstrating monks.[184] Several high-profile members of Burma's entertainment industry expressed their support for the wave of protests against the military regime and called on other artists to follow suit. Zarganar publically stated that it was time that actors and musicians spoke out against SPDC oppression.[185] However, a group of writers and poets from Kyaukse in Mandalay Division

who staged a protest against high fuel prices were not so lucky.[186] According to eyewitnesses many of these artists and poets were arrested and detained by authorities. Among those arrested was the high-profile activist and poet who goes by the pseudonym Min Ko Naing ('Conqueror of Kings') and who had only just been released from prison in 2006 after serving a 15-year sentence.[187]

On 18 November 2007, Burmese rapper G-Tone was arrested following a performance in Rangoon in which he removed his shirt to display a large tattoo on his back depicting *"two hands clasped in prayer holding prayer beads"*. The scuffle with the security officials sparked an angry response from the crowd, which led to the outbreak of a riot in the concert hall. The Myanmar Music Association (MMA) then handed down a one-year ban on all performances by the rapper, and his band, *Cyclone*. The MMA also announced a new edict which required all performers to submit details of their original names, any pseudonyms or performance names that they may use, their national identity card number, and their full address before they would be granted permission to perform.[188]

Amyotharyar U Win Naing, comedian Zarganar, and actor Kyaw Thu, offering alms to monks at Shwedagon Pagoda in a public display of defiance against the regime during the September 2007 Saffron Revolution . *[Photo: The Irrawaddy]*

9.11 The Saffron Revolution

In August and September 2007, the people of Burma took to the streets in protest against the continued rule of the military regime in what quickly became the largest display of discontent against the junta in almost two decades. That which follows is a brief overview of the 'Saffron Revolution' protests from the perspective of the freedoms of opinion, expression and the press. The protests are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement. For further information, readers should also view the highly acclaimed HRDU report entitled, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl; An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*. This 180-page report provides arguably the most complete picture of events leading up to, during, and following the protests that swept Burma during August and September 2007.

On 15 August 2008, the SPDC suddenly and without any prior warning, slashed fuel subsidies. Almost immediately, fuel prices shot up dramatically. The price of diesel doubled, while the cost of petrol rose by 60 percent. However, the greatest increase was observed in the price of compressed natural gas (CNG), which witnessed a five-fold increase. It was largely the increase in the price of CNG which affected the population the most acutely in that the majority of Burma's public buses are fuelled by it. Correspondingly, bus fares doubled overnight, leaving many commuters unable to afford to the fares, and thus unable to travel to work.

On 19 August 2007, a procession of approximately 500 people, led by members of the 88 Generation Students' Group, marched in Rangoon against the price-rises, which by this time had already begun affecting basic commodity prices. Two days later, on 21 August, well-known activist Min Ko Naing, was arrested along with six other activists for their involvement in the demonstration. According to Amnesty International (AI), in the days that followed, an estimated 150 people were arrested, also for their part in the protest.[189] While some of the student leaders, including Ko Hla Myo Naung managed to escape arrest, by the end of the day the SPDC had detained 17 leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group.[190] Those arrested were reported by the State-controlled media to have been responsible for *"terrorist and subversive acts"* under the Law Protecting the Peaceful and Systematic Transfer of State Responsibility and the Successful Performance of the Functions of the National Convention against Disturbances and Oppositions (a.k.a Order 5/96), for which they could face up to 20 years imprisonment.[191]

A number of further protests were staged in Rangoon over the following days, several of which were comprised of hundreds of protestors. While many of these were permitted to pass without incident, a number of protestors were set upon by members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*.[192]

Then, on 28 August 2007, approximately 200 Buddhist monks marched in protest through the streets of Sittwe in Arakan State, marking the first entry of the monastic community into the protest movement.[193] The entrance of the monastic community into the protests was soon to prove crucial, providing legitimacy to the movement.

Undeterred by the large numbers of arrests, and seemingly encouraged by the introduction of the monastic community, the protests increased in number and participation over the next days and weeks as they moved into September. On 3 September 2007, crowds estimated to have been in excess of 1,000 took to the streets of Lawputta in Irrawaddy Division, with the stated intent to march the 270 kilometres (170 miles) to Rangoon. However, the procession was stopped by members of the USDA who arrested three of the organizers. A source in Lawputta described what happened: *"The march was stopped by the authorities outside the town … and at least three leading activists, including Aung Moe Win, were*

arrested".[194] Seven others activists involved in the so-called 'long march' were also later arrested.[195]

Despite witnessing the protests over the fuel price hikes and having been presented with numerous photographs of events, producers of Rangoon-based journals and newspapers reported that any articles on these matters were rejected by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division of Ministry of Information. At the same time that the censors were ensuring that the local media did not report on the continuing protests, the SPDC-controlled media ran fabricated stories accusing and condemning members of the 88 Generation Students' Group and the NLD for instigating public unrest and riots.[196] The SPDC ordered Rangoon-based journals and periodicals to denounce the demonstrations and to print articles accusing pro-democracy activists of orchestrating the protests. However, several privately-owned publications decided to cease publication rather than printing complete falsification of events which were little more than pro-regime propaganda.[197]

Meanwhile, a number of solo protestors were arrested for expressing their views. On 31 August 2007, two protestors, Ko Than Lwin and Ko Si Thu, were arrested for staging a protest in Taungup, Arakan State, but were later released after a crowd, estimated to have been 2,000 – 3,000 strong, demanded their release.[198] Also in Taungup, on 4 September 2007, a lone protestor identified as Soe Aung was sentenced to four years imprisonment after calling on the excommunication of Senior General Than Shwe.[199]

In a pivotal event, on 5 September 2007, SPDC army soldiers attacked a group of approximately 500 monks protesting in Pakokku, Magwe Division. According to reports, the soldiers fired warning shots over the heads of the monks and the soldiers, alongside members of the USDA and Swan Arr Shin, set upon the monks and bystanders with bamboo staves. One monk was tied to a lamppost and severely beaten by the soldiers with the butts of their rifles, while another monk was reportedly killed.[200]

Outraged over the treatment of their fellow monks, the following day, a group of monks in Pakokku took between 10 and 20 SPDC officials hostage for six hours when they had visited Maha Visutarama Monastery. The monks then set fire to four of the vehicles that the officials had arrived in.[201] Three days later, on 9 September 2007, a newly-formed group of monks referring to themselves as the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) issued a list of demands unto the SPDC with the ultimatum that should these demands not be met by 17 September 2007, they would call for a nationwide boycott and excommunication of the SPDC. The demands included an immediate public apology for the treatment of monks in Pakokku; an unconditional reduction in fuel and commodity prices; the release of all political prisoners in Burma; and the commencement of dialogue with the opposition movement for positive change in Burma.

With the arrival of Monday, 17 September 2007, and with the SPDC not having made any attempts to meet any of the demands, the boycott and excommunication orders were enacted. The ABMA also called for the resumption of protests.

The next day, on 18 September 2007, the protests resumed in earnest across the country with thousands of monks marching through the streets of Rangoon and other towns around the country chanting the *Metta Sutta* (the Buddha's words of loving kindness).[202] Hundreds of Buddhist monks staged protests in Kyauk Padaung in Mandalay Division and Aunglan and Pakokku in Magwe Division also as the wave of demonstrations gathered momentum.[203] According to reports, nearly 1,000 monks were joined by thousands of laypersons who walked alongside them in the greatest sign of public participation since the protests began a month earlier. SPDC army personnel and police mostly stood back as the columns of monks paraded through the streets, however, members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* continually monitored the monks, filming and photographing them, presumably so that they

knew who to target for future arrests.[204] Meanwhile, in Sittwe, Arakan State, far from the prying eyes of not only the outside world, but also the rest of Burma, security forces physically disrupted demonstrations by firing rubber bullets and tear gas directly into the crowds in the first real display of force.[205]

Despite the growing security presence on the streets, protests not only continued around the country, but grew in size significantly. On 22 September 2007, a crowd of approximately 2,000 protestors, approximately half of whom were monks, were permitted past security barriers to assemble outside the home of detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi emerged from her home, reportedly on the verge of tears to pray with the monks. Why the security officials allowed this meeting to take place remains unknown. Either way one looks at it, it was a serious tactical blunder on the part of the SPDC.

By 24 September 2007, just two days after the audience with Suu Kyi, and with some of the monk leaders now calling on civilians to join the demonstrations, the crowds of protestors on the streets of Rangoon and other parts of the country, had swelled to an estimated 100,000 people. The processions of monks, nuns were joined by ordinary citizens, MP-elects, representatives of the NLD, prominent activists and a number of Burmese celebrities. In a statement which indicated the collective solidarity of all those involved in the protests, well-known Burmese actor, Kyaw Thu, publicly stated *"If they try to arrest the monks they will have to face us [the laypeople] first. This time, there is no need for us to be scared"*.[206] Even In the face of so much open public dissidence, SPDC security official continued to hang back, though, as in previous days, paramilitary forces, some of whom were reportedly armed with shotguns, followed the processions.[207] However, that night, SPDC Minister for Religious Affairs, Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung, announced on State-controlled television that action would be taken against the monks and protestors if they continued to demonstrate against the regime. Meanwhile, trucks toured the streets announcing over loudspeakers that any gatherings of more than five people were illegal under Order #2/88 and that those continuing to demonstrate would be arrested under Section #144 of the Burmese Penal Code. Regardless of these threats, the protests continued.

It was not until Wednesday, 26 September 2007, that the SPDC fulfilled its promises and enacted the crackdown on protestors that everyone had been expecting. Many Burma watchers remain mystified why the SPDC had waited so long to respond in seemingly the only way that they know how – violently. Riot police, soldiers, and members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* beat monks and civilians with sticks and batons, sometimes to death. Reports also emerged of live rounds being fired directly into crowds. According to some reports, in the initial attack on the morning of 26 September outside the Shwedagon Pagoda, at least five people were killed.[208] Following the first crackdown, the crowd dispersed but soon reassembled a short distance away to continue their protest.

Over the next two days, a deadly game of 'cat and mouse' was acted out between the protestors and the security officials, who would break up every demonstration only to have the crowd disperse and reassemble elsewhere. According to Shari Villarosa, the U.S. C*harge d'Affaires* in Burma, *"These were peaceful demonstrators, very well behaved … The military was out in force before they even gathered and moved quickly as small groups appeared breaking them up with gunfire, tear gas and clubs"*.[209] it was reported that, in all, there were at least 227 separate protests staged in at least 66 towns and cities across the country during August and September 2007.[210]

Credible reports also emerged of the intentional targeting of journalists and anyone carrying a camera, video camera or mobile phone.[211] Perhaps the most widely publicized fatality from the protests was the apparent deliberate shooting of Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai near Sule Pagoda on 27 September 2007. Photo and video footage of the incident clearly shows that he was shot in the back at point blank range by an SPDC army soldier

who then stood over him and shot him again after he had fallen to the ground. Armed with nothing more than his camera and from the range that he was shot, it would have been near impossible to mistake him for anything other than a member of the media.[212]

Starting on the night of 26 September 2007, SPDC security personnel also began raiding monasteries around the country in an apparent attempt to remove the monastic community and the legitimacy that they provided to the protests. According to the AAPPB, at least 52 monasteries throughout the country were raided between 25 September and 6 October 2007.[213]

By the end of September 2007, the protest movement had diminished dramatically. As HRDU stated in its report on the protests, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*:

> *"[T]he large number of arrests both on the streets and during night time raids, particularly on monasteries, coupled with a more established security presence in strategic areas throughout Rangoon, assured that protestors were not taking to the streets in the same numbers as they had in the days prior"*.[214]

Although there were no further mass protests during October, security forces pursued those who had been involved, with the assistance of the *Swan Arr Shin* and USDA who had taken many photos and video of those participating in and supporting the demonstrations. By the end of the first week of October 2007, an estimated 6,000 individuals, of whom an estimated 1,400 were monks, had been arrested since the onset of the protests.[215]

Yet, in spite of the brutality visited upon the protestors during the crackdowns, and the many ways in which the SPDC attempted to abrogate the freedoms of expression and opinion of the Burmese population, *"This time, Burma received the full attention of the international media, world leaders and people around the world. The media, the Internet, digital cameras, blogs, cell phones and email invigorated the demonstrators who knew the world was watching, listening and reading about what they did and said"*.[216]

Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai was shot in the back from point blank range by an SPDC army soldier as he was taking photographs of the protests near Sule Pagoda in Rangoon on 27 September. *[Photo: Reuters]*

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 10

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION AND MOVEMENT

"Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state."

- Article 13, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

10.1 Introduction

In 2007 the freedom of movement, assembly and association remained highly restricted in Burma. The right to freedom of movement is set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 13, which states that: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country."* Article 20 states that: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association."* Despite being a signatory to the UDHR, the Burmese military junta blatantly contravened Articles 13 and 20.

Throughout the year, the ruling junta continued to tightly restrict, monitor and interfere with the movement of the Burmese population. Residents in ethnic areas along the country's Eastern and Western borders were particularly affected by the movement restrictions. In the East, villagers of Karen and Mon State were under particular restrictions, while in the West the Muslim Rohingya in Arakan State were unjustly targeted. In addition, other ethnic minorities, generally South Asians and Chinese, were limited in their travel, and had to obtain prior permission to travel domestically. Moreover, the movement of the country's political dissidents and human rights activists was closely monitored and controlled. Following the Saffron Revolution in September 2007, monks also faced limitations on their movement. The SPDC went to great lengths to limit and regulate domestic as well as international travel, through restrictions on the freedom of movement, including unaffordable costs of travel documents, the threat of punitive action, and the regular closure of official border crossings. Nevertheless, significant undocumented migration as well as commercial travel occurred through the country's borders with China, Thailand, Bangladesh, and India.

Furthermore, the movement of foreigners, including humanitarian agencies attempting to deliver much needed aid supplies, was restricted. Humanitarian organisations were increasingly restricted in their access to those in need of assistance. The ethnic border areas of the country continued to remain out of reach, whilst aid workers operating in central areas faced restrictions on their ability to operate according to humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality. For many aid agencies the freedom of movement was restricted to the point where they were unable to operate effectively. In 2007, both the UN and the ICRC issued unprecedented statements about the junta's responsibility for the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country and the suffering of the people. This led the junta to take measures such as expelling the UN country chief and further limiting the work of the ICRC.

The right to assembly was also significantly curtailed by the regime in 2007. The authorities routinely prevented pro-democracy and human rights activists from organizing events or meetings. Those who did risked lengthy prison sentences. During the monk led September protests, the largest uprising since 1988, the junta enforced the prohibition on outdoor assemblies of more than five persons. The authorities used force to break up the peaceful demonstrations and arrested, tortured and imprisoned many participants, including monks.

The right to association continued to be severely limited in 2007. Trade unions and labour organisations were not tolerated by the junta, despite obligations under domestic law and international treaties to recognize and respect the rights of workers. Also political parties, social organisations and human rights groups were outlawed by the regime. Even legal organisations faced severe difficulties in operating freely and securely. The regime was particularly intolerant of the main opposition party, the NLD, as well as the 88 Generation Students Group. Prominent members of these groups continue to face arrest and long prison sentences for their political opinion and association.

Only SPDC approved organisations and Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs) such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), were granted the freedom of association. These groups rely on coercion for their membership, and routinely force people to attend mass rallies supporting SPDC policies, as well as taking active part in the regime's continued oppression of the country's population.

Villagers in northern Karen State being forced to construct a fence around their village by SPDC army soldiers. *[Photo: FBR]*

10.2 Restrictions on Villagers in Border Conflict Areas

> *"If they see villagers out side a village they kill everyone. So the villagers were afraid to go out side. SPDC soldiers shot at me twice. The first time I was with two of my friends. I got hurt seriously; it was a big wound on my right hand elbow and my chest. The second time I was escape but one of my friends was died."*
>
> - Villager from Thaton District, Karen State[1]

In 2007, the freedom of movement became ever more limited for villagers in Burma's border conflict areas. SPDC forces, and its allied groups such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), severely restricted the movement of villagers in conflict areas of Karen State, Pegu Division and Mon State. The restrictions on movement had serious consequences for villagers' livelihoods, as access to food and work has become almost impossible for some villagers in conflict zones.[2] Moreover, since the SPDC banned poppy-growing in northern Burma, poverty has exacerbated as ex-poppy farmers have received limited assistance in growing alternative crops and been barred from leaving their areas in search of work.[3]

In border areas, the SPDC has put restrictions on the movement of both people and food. As a result of restrictions and taxes on transporting rice, prices in border areas are up to 30 per cent higher than in central Burma, making basic commodities out of reach for many villagers.[4] In Arakan State, the SPDC has prohibited the transportation of rice from one township to another. As farmers were unable to sell their paddy at open markets in townships where the price is higher, the price of paddy was pushed down, leaving farmers with even less income.[5] In January, further restrictions were introduced on the transport of rice to Rangoon. According to farmers, new requirements included a letter of permission from local authorities to transport rice and other goods, such as bran and what is called *"broken rice."*[6] (For more information see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood)

Northern Karen State

The SPDC launched a large scale offensive in the Districts of Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Papun, northern Karen State in November 2005, and increased their operations even further in 2006.[7] In 2007 SPDC forces continued with more small scale attacks against villages in northern Karen State, further restricting the movement of thousands of villagers. Violations of movement restrictions arose as part of civilian efforts to access agricultural fields at abandoned villages and conduct trade between communities.[8] As well as obstructing villagers' access to agricultural fields, restrictions on travel hinder access to external health and education facilities and undermine trade and other economic opportunities.[9] (For more information see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights, Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation, and Chapter 17: The Situation of Refugees).

In 2007, the SPDC continued its expansion of roads and camps throughout northern Karen State. Instead of increasing movement and travel, road construction in Karen State is infringing heavily on people's movement. The roads are garrisoned, patrolled and mined by the SPDC military, making it more difficult and dangerous for people to move freely. Villagers who attempt to cross or move along the roads are doing so at great risk. The growing road network enables increased SPDC control of the area and the rural communities living there. The army attacks villagers and patrols areas where it plans to construct new roads and improve pre-existing roads. These roads are then used to supply the SPDC camps, to provide a springboard from which they launch attacks against civilians, and to exert greater control over the movement of civilians.[10] Controlling the roads, the military is effectively in control of villagers' access to food and other commodities. In some

cases roadblocks effectively bar all civilian travel and thereby obstruct access to medicine, food and other trade items.[11] The SPDC also increased efforts to block all movement of people and supplies between the plains and the mountains.[12] According to one villager from Toungoo District:

> *"The current biggest problem is food, because the SPDC soldiers have closed the road and we are not allowed to buy food from the town or to go outside the village. If the situation remains the same we will have problems with food in the coming year."*[13]

Villagers in hiding faced increased difficulties as a result of the expanding network of roads and SPDC army camps throughout northern Karen State.[14] Along the expanding network of roads, the SPDC has established satellite army camps, from which soldiers can easily locate civilians attempting to flee, attack their hiding sites and force them into military-controlled relocation sites along the roads.[15] The relocation sites are fenced by fences that villagers themselves were forced to construct. Villagers need to purchase travel passes from SPDC or DKBA soldiers in order to travel outside the relocation sites.[16]

Papun District

The SPDC has aggressively pushed to extend and strengthen its rule over all areas of Papun District, using a combination of road and camp construction to sustain its military presence. Like in other areas of Karen State, local military authorities have in Papun District imposed comprehensive movement restrictions, including a shoot-on-sight policy.[17]

The movement of villagers was further threatened as the SPDC military continued road construction operations in northern Papun District. In April 2007 the military started clearing a new road in T'ler Ker in the area of Ta Kwee Jo, which is intended to connect the current Toungoo - Buh Hsa Kee road to the Kyauk Kyi-Ler Mu Plaw road.[18] In the autumn of 2007, the SPDC completed the initial construction of a vehicle road west of the Yunzalin River linking the army camp at Pwa Ghaw, Lu Thaw Township, to smaller army camps in the mountains further north. Pwa Ghaw is also the planned location of a new large-scale relocation site. While this means the SPDC has completed the initial road construction up to the northern district border of Toungoo, it has yet to complete the stretch to Buh Hsa Kee, an SPDC camp in southern Toungoo which appears to be the intended end point of the road. If the road to Buh Hsa Kee is completed, it will effectively block off a large section of mountainous land spread across southern Toungoo, western Lu Thaw Township and northeast Nyaunglebin District. This road network will create a considerable barrier to IDPs attempting to flee from SPDC forces. In order to spot those attempting to cross, the SPDC has a policy of clearing large swaths of land on either side of roadways, and then deploying landmines alongside these roads. Thus, villagers who attempt to cross the roads are at risk of being killed or injured by exploding landmines or shot by SPDC soldiers.[19]

Toungoo District

In 2007, the SPDC continued attacking villages in Toungoo District, extending their military control further into the district.[20] Increased SPDC presence means constant demands for forced labour and resources from the local population. As SPDC does not have total control in this area, villagers have been able to escape into the forested mountains in order to avoid these demands. To prevent villagers from escaping, the SPDC has imposed rigid movement restrictions. Movement restrictions in Toungoo District included regular military checkpoints, prohibitions on road travel, restrictions on trade in staple goods and limited permission to work at agricultural fields.[21] As well as increased control of villagers in SPDC-controlled areas, displaced communities in hiding risk potential arrest and execution by venturing out into the relatively open area of their hill side agricultural fields where they are more easily spotted by SPDC troops who regularly patrol the area.[22] (For more information see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription, Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood, Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights and Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

The comprehensive movement restrictions in Toungoo District were both a threat to the food security and the physical security of local residents. Villagers were forced to violate the restrictions on movement in an attempt to tend to their fields and crops and secure food supplies. The combination of the SPDC's shoot-on-sight policy and its strategic placement of landmines, threatened the physical security of villagers who violated the movement restrictions. In August, a Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) report documented 38 known murders of Karen villagers since the start of 2007, which were often a result of violations on the restriction of movement. Villagers live under the threat of being shot on sight if caught travelling outside military designated areas, be it to tend a nearby field or trade produce with neighbouring communities. Landmines have been planted by the SPDC on forest trails used by villagers and throughout farmers' fruit plantations.[23] (For more information see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions and Chapter 4: Landmines)

As a means of maintaining military control, the movement of villagers in SPDC-controlled areas of Toungoo District, in particular the Kler La area, was rigidly restricted and monitored. The strict movement policy was implemented by soldiers of the Southern Regional Command, who arbitrarily arrested and killed villagers found outside their home villages. In order to travel outside of their village to tend their nearby fields, villagers were required to purchase permission documents from local SDPC officials. Travel documents valid for one week cost 500 kyat. However, even holders of these documents were prohibited from staying in their fields overnight; farmers were only allowed to stay outside their villages from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm. Moreover, villagers caught travelling beyond their fields to visit neighbouring villages, have been interrogated, threatened and tortured regarding their movements and forced to serve as military porters for SPDC forces.[24]

In a move to entrench further control on the whereabouts of villagers, SPDC forces based in Kaw Thay Der village began forcibly registering local residents at the beginning of March. The soldiers ordered each household to post their household register with names of all residents, on the front of their homes clearly visible to passing soldiers. In addition, MOC #5 ordered all car owners, as well as anyone wishing to travel by car in the Kler La area, to submit a photo and register their names with local SPDC officials. The MOC #5 prohibited anyone who was not a family member of the car owner from travelling in the vehicle, searching all cars at P'Leh Wa checkpoint, between Kler La and Toungoo town. Upon arrival at Toungoo town, all visitors were required to register with local SPDC authorities, who could then monitor them for the duration of their stay.[25]

Furthermore, SPDC military forced prohibited overnight stays for non-residents. The forced household registration enabled the SPDC to effectively monitor and control visitors in the villages. In some cases of non-compliance with the visitor restrictions, SPDC threatened with arrest for the visitor and execution and house demolition for the host. On 11 February 2007, Commander Yeh Man Aung of LIB #346, Column #2, summoned the village leaders of Pa Gkaw Der to Moh Kaw Der village and told them:

> "*We have to systematise our control. So the villagers are not allowed to invite other people into the village. If anyone invites a guest into the village and if we see them, the village head will be in trouble and furthermore the house owner will also be killed and their house burnt down.*"[26]

In a similar fashion, on 12 April 2007, soldiers from MOC #5, LIB #436 based at Kler La, summoned village heads from Pa Gkaw Der, Moh Koh Der, Der Doh, Pa Heh Der and Kler La to a meeting at Kler La town where the SPDC commander prohibited all villages from welcoming guests into their village. The commander then threatened that anyone seen outside of their village between 6:00 pm and 6:00 am would be shot on sight.[27] (For more information see Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions)

In order to further restrict their movement SPDC forces ordered communities to fence in their villages. They threatened that village heads would be severely punished should the fence fall into disrepair. Since March 2007, MOC #5 Commander Kaung Mya has prohibited villagers in the Kler La area from travelling outside of their home villages.[28]

Since August 2007, SPDC Military Operations Command (MOC) #5, based in Kler La and under the command of Kaung Mya, restricted all trade and transport of rice from Toungoo town to Kler La and Gkaw Thay Der. Up to that time, residents could travel by car to buy rice and other supplies at Toungoo town to be sold to rural communities. Kaung Mya's restrictions appeared to be an effort to further entrench SPDC's control and prevent non-military controlled rural communities in Toungoo from accessing such supplies. This has further pressured communities in hiding to tend small hill fields in order to address the increasing military-induced food insecurity. On top of the trade and transport restrictions on food supplies from Toungoo town, Kaung Mya ordered soldiers to search SPDC-controlled villages where he has barred residents from keeping more than 2 big tins (12.5 kg) of rice, as excess supplies could potentially be sold off to those communities living outside of SPDC-controlled areas. Any rice in excess of the permitted amount which soldiers discover is being confiscated and taken back to the SPDC army camp.[29] (For more information see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood)

Nyaunglebin District

Villagers in Nyanglebin District also faced further difficulties as a result of the SPDC military's relocation policy. Residents of several villages close to Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) town in western Karen State have been forced to move multiple times, and once relocated, most have not been provided with sufficient resources to make a living. Villagers have complained that because their movement is so restricted, and because they are often not allowed to work in their farms or gardens, they are unable to grow enough food or make enough money to feed their families. Villagers stated: *"If there is no work, then there is no money. If there is no money, there is no food."*[30]

Southern Karen State

For decades, the SPDC has justified travel restrictions in ethnic areas as part of their 'four cuts' strategy to limit villagers' support of, and communication with, armed resistance groups.[31] In areas of Mon State and northern Karen State movement restrictions were inarguably linked to the ongoing SPDC offensives in these areas.

The continuing harassment of villagers in Thaton District has limited their movement, time and freedom to tend to their crops. To grow paddy and vegetables, villagers require access to open space outside of the village proper. They also need the freedom to travel to, and remain for long durations at their farms and plantations. When the monsoon begins around May-June, farmers begin the cultivation period which means they need to spend most of their time working in their fields. As the village is often a distance away, farmers live and sleep in farm field huts in order not to waste time travelling back and forth to their villages. Movement restrictions placed on villagers can have severe consequences for their harvest; daily losses of labour time and being unable to access their fields for drawn out periods can result in limited or wholly failed crops.[32] Movement restrictions established across much of SPDC- and DKBA-controlled areas of Karen State, have resulted in farmers harvests yielding only a fraction of their potential.[33] (For more information see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

According to a detailed report published by KHRG in mid-2007, the DKBA forces operating in Thaton District imposed severe movement restrictions on villagers. In blatant disregard of the labour-intensive requirements of the cultivation cycle, the DKBA implemented strict control over all movement in and out of the villages, and a total ban on staying at farms over night. As one villager in Bilin Township stated:

> "*When DKBA soldiers came to operate they did not allow villagers to go to their hill fields, so many of the villagers' fields were overgrown with shrubbery. So the paddies were ruined. This year many of the villagers' hill fields were ruined. The hill fields that should have yielded 100 baskets of rice yielded only 20 baskets of rice. And this year there were about ten hill fields, in Khaw Poh Bpleh village, that should have yielded 100 baskets but yielded only 20 baskets of rice from the harvest. This happened because of the DKBA.*"[34]

DKBA forces has purportedly enforced such measures as they believe it will help eradicate the KNU/KNLA presence in Thaton and prevent civilians from fleeing forced labour and other demands. The DKBA Brigade #333 soldiers applied a shoot-on-sight policy, threatening that anyone caught violating the movement regulations would be deemed KNLA informants and shot on sight. (For more information see Chapter 2: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Chapter 3: Extra-judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions). As one villager in Bilin Township stated:

> *"The owners of [farm field] huts were sleeping in the village because the DKBA did not allow them to sleep outside the villages in their huts. And they [DKBA] said that if they saw anybody sleeping outside the village they would shoot them all*."[35]

Villagers carrying food and other essential commodities on the roads are subject to arbitrary and excessive taxation at checkpoints run by SPDC and DKBA troops. Civilians are subject to these checkpoints every couple of kilometres, where they are checked for movement passes, expected to pay bribes, and sometimes detained for *ad hoc* forced labour.[36] As one villager from Thaton District stated:

> *"Along the way [to Yoh Klah village], there are some toll gates that we must pass through. They are at Hta Bpaw, Bp'Nweh Klah, Lay Gkay and Yoh Klah. They [the SPDC soldiers] don't collect the taxes from the passengers, they collect them from the truck drivers. If any of the passengers don't have travel passes, they will be in trouble. To get a travel pass we must pay 200 kyat. We don't have freedom to do our work and we must travel in fear of them [the soldiers]."*[37]

Mon State

In 2007, SPDC forces continued fighting an armed Mon splinter group in southern Mon State. Since 2005 the SPDC has imposed movement restrictions on villagers in areas where ethnic rebel soldiers are active, and the fighting takes place. The SPDC annually launches operations against Mon rebel groups during the monsoons, and imposes restrictions on villagers, barring them from going to work outside the village.[38] The southern part of Ye Township has been particularly affected by the fighting, and the subsequent movement restrictions. Residents of Kaw-Zar, Han-gan and Toe-tat-ywa-thit villages have faced increased restrictions after fighting started in late 2006.[39] Some villages were also forced to relocate as a result of SPDC military expanding its activities in the area. In late June and early July hundreds of villagers were forced to relocate after Military Operation Management Command (MOMC) #19 set up a base in Ye Township.[40] Most villagers depend on their farms, rubber plantations, betel nut plantations and fruit plantations, for their livelihoods. Movement restrictions and forced relocation limit their ability to work on their farms and plantations, which directly affects their livelihoods.[41] (For more information see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights, and Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

As part of the movement regulations, local authorities and army commanders forced villagers to pay tax whenever they wanted to leave the village. Local farmers had to obtain permission from the SPDC authorities to be able to go to their plantations.[42] In order to leave the village, they were required to apply for travel documents, which cost 500 kyat and were only valid for 15 days. The villagers had to show this document to the army at the village entrance checkpoint, as well as to SPDC soldiers patrolling near their farms. This affected the farmers' livelihoods adversely, as many could not afford the travel document. Villagers who attempted to cross the checkpoint without the document risked being beaten and fined by soldiers. According to a 50 year old woman from Toe-tat-ywa-thit village:

> *"When we went to the farm we should take travelling document with us to pass the village checkpoint, otherwise the soldiers will beat the villagers and let the villagers to pay one bag of sand as a punishment."*[43] Moreover, a villager from Kaw-Zar stated: *"If we do not have any document to pass the village checkpoint set SPDC soldiers, they will beat you and punish to give 1 pitta (633 kgs) of chicken to the commander."*[44]

In yet another bid to control the movement of villagers and extract their money, the Three Pagoda Pass (TPP) based battalion #18 in March 2007 set up a new SPDC army checkpoint on the road to TPP town. The battalion set up the checkpoint at the entry of Tom–dot-poit (Kwan Gyi Pyai) village on 23 March, purportedly to stop people

migrating to Thailand and to control the drug trade in the town. Villagers reported being made to pay tax for anything they carried through the gate, whether it is consumer goods coming from the town, vegetables to be sold in the town or paddy being transported to rice processors. The villagers reported being taxed 5 to 20 baht for every pack, and 100 baht for every vehicle with grocery to be sold in the village. In addition to extorting tax, the soldiers reportedly ask for vegetables for their own consumption. As a result of the time-consuming checkpoint procedures, villagers reported arriving late to the town market. Moreover, even though one of the reasons for the check point was ostensibly to stop Burmese from going to Thailand, the soldiers demand 100 baht per person from the human traffickers.[45]

Villagers in the southern Ye Township area were regularly ordered to live under curfew, which restricted them from properly tending to their farms and plantations.[46] The curfews restricted villagers to go to their farms or plantations from 4 or 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 in the evening. Before the curfew, farmers typically stayed at their farms for many days at a time in order to carry out their work such as planting seedling and harvesting paddy grains or fruits. However, as the curfew prevents them from staying at their farms at night, they cannot carry out their work efficiently as they have to waste a lot of time walking back and forth between villages and farms on a daily basis.[47] Moreover, SPDC forces accuse Mon villagers of supporting armed rebel groups with food and shelter. Thus, even when SPDC soldiers allow villagers to go to their farms, they are not allowed to take extra rice, as the SPDC fear they will give it to the rebels.[48]

When local SPDC battalions suspect Mon armed rebels are resuming activities in an area, or they plan to fight them, they forbid villagers from going to their farms and plantations altogether. For example, near Armed Forces Day in March, SPDC did not allow residents of Kaw-Zar, Han-gan and Toe-tat-ywa-thit villages in Southern Ye to work on their farms, as they were planning to fight Mon rebels in the area. During the travel ban, women who worked in farms or plantations were particularly vulnerable as they risked sexual harassment and rape by soldiers.[49] According to a 50 year old woman from Toe-tat-ywa-thit village:

> *"On March 20th 2007, LIB #591 Kyone-ywa battalion didn't let us go to the farms. Because they said it is close to Armed Force Day (Tatmadaw Day) and they thought other armed groups will fight them. Normally they allowed us to go from 4:00 am to 6:00 pm in the evening. Except this time the battalion didn't allowed us to go out from the village. At the moment, the SPDC soldiers didn't allow the villagers to go out from the village."*[50]

From June to July 2007, hundreds of villagers were forced to relocate after Military Operation Management Command (MOMC) #19 set up a base in Ye Township. During the first week of July 2007, about 500 villagers from Bayoun-Ngae village were forcibly relocated by LIB #591, accused of supporting Mon insurgents. According to Nai Gai Khae, a 55 year old Mon villager who was ordered to relocate to Khaw-Zar Sub Township:

> *"We were ordered to move quickly. We begged the battalions not to move us from here. We have our gardens, farms and crops here. The main reason we were forced to move to Khaw Zar Sub Town was that we had been blamed of being rebel supporters. Some of our friends were even beaten by the Burmese soldiers during interrogation."*

Forced relocation is the most severe form of movement restriction as people are forced to leave their homes and farms altogether, and usually get no compensation or assistance from the authorities.[51] (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation)

Residents of Moulmein and surrounding villages faced increased travel restrictions following two bomb explosions in February. The first bomb went off in downtown Moulmein on 16 February and the second on 20 February in Zay-Joe quarter, highway express car gate. The new travel restrictions required people to inform the Immigration Office and pay Immigration officers whenever they needed to travel from one town to another. According to a member of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), over 100 people had been arrested and jailed for not informing the Immigration office when they arrived in Moulmein. Local trades were worst affected, as they pay more in taxes at the gates for travelling from one town to another. Everyone was being checked at the police gate, however by mid-March no one had yet been arrested over the bombings. In Moulmein town, movement became particularly restricted at night time, and in crowded areas such as markets. According to a Moulmein shop owner this had serious impact on local business: *"There was no problem before the bomb blasts. We could sell till late in the evening. Now we have to wind before 5:00 pm."* Moreover, to avoid crowds, authorities banned outside gatherings.[52]

Restrictions on Movement of Villagers - Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 29 October 2007, TOC in Buthidaung ordered the administration in Maungdaw, particularly the NaSaKa, to check family lists, tighten security on the border and watch the movement of monks. The NaSaKa were told to check anyone leaving their village or entering with or without permission. TOC also told the administration to check villages two or three times a month, stating that anyone who stays without permission or overstays with permission would be punished. The Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) was ordered not to permit anyone to stay in the villages for more than three days. According to a villager, anyone who stayed outside their village for more than three days would be fined by the authorities.[53] (For more incidents, please see Section 10.3: Restrictions on Movement of Rohingya).

Chin State

On 9 January 2007, it was reported that residents of every village in Tedim Township were in November 2006 told by the TPDC to cultivate Jatropha plant before the end of December 2006. Villagers were threatened with being expelled from the village if they failed to comply with the order.[54]

On 15 June 2007, it was reported that villagers in Meihwa, Paletwa Township, on the Indo-Burma border, were being subject to travel restrictions. According to new regulations, the villagers were not allowed to travel outside the village without the permission of the IB #34 based at Meihwa SPDC military camp. According to a villager,

> *"We have to reveal all the details about where we are going, the number of days and the purpose of our travel to the army, if we plan to go out of our village. We have no idea why we need to take permission. We feel that the army is afraid that we may lend support and contact underground outfits."*

Moreover, all traders arriving in the village were required to report to the SPDC army camp, where they were asked whether they had any contact with underground groups.[55]

Karen State

Dooplaya District

On 12 March 2007, it was reported that SPDC forces were attacking villages near the Thai border. More than 200 villagers fled from Wa Kwe Klo village on 8 March during a joint attack by the SPDC and its proxy army, the DKBA. Another 400 villagers fled from K'law Gaw village when SPDC and DKBA troops attacked KNLA bases close to the Thai Border. The attacking forces occupied the area for several days, blocking the border to prevent displaced villagers from fleeing to Thailand.[56]

Nyaunglebin District

On 7 January 2007, it was reported that villagers from Kho Pu, in Hsaw Mi Lu village tract (Kyauk Kyi Township), who had already been forced to relocate to Aung Soe Moe, were forced to destroy all of their homes and relocate to Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) Township. The order was given by IB #60, led by Saw Lin; LIB #351, led by Chittha Oo; and SOC #2, led by Khin Maung Oo.[57]

In early March 2007, it was reported that Battalion Commander Than Hteik demanded villagers in Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) Township, to pay 2,000 kyat for a 10 day travelling pass.[58]

On 21 May 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had increased restrictions on the movement of residents from 8 villages. The villagers were only allowed to go to their farms and orchards two times a week, making it impossible to sufficiently care for their crops. Villagers reported the loss of large amounts of plants such as durian, betel nut and cardamom. Villages that have reported this restriction are:

1. Maw Ke'tha per ko;
2. Yu lo;
3. Kamulo;
4. Ker Poh Der;
5. Saw Tay Der;
6. Kyauk Pyat;
7. Thay Baw Der; and
8. Yaw Kee.[59]

On 1 August 2007, the commander of LIB #351 ordered residents of Kyauk Pyat village to relocate, threatening with fines of 340,000 kyat as well as 8 tins of rice per house if they did not relocate. On 9 August, the villagers had not yet moved.[60]

On 22 August 2007, it was reported that residents of a number of villages in the Karen foothills close to Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) town in western Karen State were struggling as a result of the SPDC's relocation policy. Villagers in these areas have been forced to move multiple times, and once relocated, most have not been provided with sufficient resources to make a living. In early July, villagers from at least seven villages close to Kyauk Kyi were allowed to return to their old villages, after being forced to relocate earlier in 2007. However, to be able to return, each family had to agree to pay 7,000 kyat per month to the SPDC commander. On 8 August, these villages were again forced to return to the relocation site. As a result of restrictions on their freedom of movement, the villagers were unable to grow enough food or make enough money to feed their families.[61]

Papun District

On 15 March 2007, IB #379 and #380 attacked the Saw Ka Der area of southern Mon Township, and more than 600 villagers fled their homes and went into hiding in the jungle. As of 24 March the IDPs had not yet returned to their villages.[62]

On 20 March 2007, MOC #1 attacked the area of Tha Da Der and Hta Kaw To Baw villages, in northern Papun District. More than 400 villagers fled the attack and went into hiding. As of 24 March the IDPs had not yet returned to their villages.[63]

In April 2007, it was reported that more than one thousand villagers from Northern Papun District were forced to flee after four villages were attacked and burnt down by SPDC forces.[64]

On 22 April 2007, LIB #505 burned down Tee Bwey Kee village, forcing the entire village to flee. Unable to escape with the rest of the villagers, Saw Aung Tha (61) was killed by SPDC troops. Troops then continued to other nearby villages, burning down Tee See Kee, Taw Ku Mu Der, and Boe Na Der. LIB #505 is under the command of Major Aung Myo. Two other SPDC battalions were involved in the attack but were not yet known at the time of writing this report.[65]

On 29 October 2007, SPDC troops from Division #88 and MOC #1 attacked Ler Mu Plaw and Yeh Mu Plaw areas, forcing villagers to flee their homes and disrupting the villagers' harvest.[66]

Toungoo District

On 11 February 2007, Commander Yeh Man Aung of LIB #346, Column #2, summoned the village leaders of Pa Gkaw Der to Moh Kaw Der village and told them:

> "*We have to systematise our control. So the villagers are not allowed to invite other people into the village. If anyone invites a guest into the village and if we see them, the village head will be in trouble and furthermore the house owner will also be killed and their house burnt down.*"[67]

On 19 February 2007, SPDC troops of the MOC #5 headquarter in K'ler-la and MOC #9 headquarter ordered K'ler-la and P'lay-hsa-lo villagers not to go and work outside the village.[68]

On 17 March 2007, LIB #590 Commander Aung Tun Oo ordered residents of 7 villages to stay in their villages and not go to work in their fields. The SPDC subsequently placed landmines along the eastern edges of these villages to block villagers from travelling to the hills. The affected villages were:

1. Tai Pin;
2. Myet Ye;
3. Po Thaung Su;
4. Nye Loud The;
5. U Chit Kin;
6. Thit Chat Zeik; and
7. Kyaung Bya.[69]

On 21 March 2007, it was reported that MOC Operations Commander Win Myint had given a list of new orders for residents of Bawgali Gyi (Kler La) village. The orders severely restricted villagers' freedom of movement: villagers were not permitted to leave their village between 6:00 pm and 6:00 am; villagers who wished to go to their gardens or fields had to ask for a permit; any villager found in the village who was not on the village list would be punished. The villagers' were threatened that non-compliance with these orders would result in punishment.[70]

On 12 April 2007, soldiers from MOC #5, LIB #436 based at Kler La summoned village heads from 5 villages to a meeting at Kler La town where the SPDC commander prohibited all villages from welcoming guests. The commander also stated that villagers may not leave their villages to work until 6:00 am and must arrive back at their own village by 6:00 pm. He threatened that anyone seen outside of their village between 6:00 pm and 6:00 am would be shot on sight. The village heads were from the following villages:

1. Pa Gkaw Der;
2. Moh Koh Der;
3. Der Doh;
4. Pa Heh Der; and
5. Kler La.[71]

On 29 April 2007, the Commander of SPDC MOC #5 banned Baw-ga-li-gyi (Kler La) villagers from leaving their village between 6:00pm and 6:00am, and from wearing traditional Karen dress and bags.[72]

On 12 May 2007, Commander Thaung Htaik Soe of LIB #542, MOC #5 and Battalion Commander Hla Htay of LIB #544 along with over 400 soldiers arrived at the area of Klay Wah in Than Daung Township. Upon seeing villagers tending their rice fields, the troops arrested two residents of Maw Ku Daw village and six others from Bper Kha Lay Koh village, accusing them of violating movement restrictions.[73]

On 4 December 2007, it was reported that SPDC forces had increased movement restrictions in Toungoo District, backed up by a shoot on sight policy, meaning villagers risked execution if they were found working on farms and plantations outside of the village.[74]

Karenni State

On 15 November 2007, it was reported that SPDC forces had imposed a curfew on villagers in the Pasaung and Bawlake areas in Southwestern Karenni State. SPDC army units, such as IB #134 and #135, and LIB #530, were providing security for the construction of the Mawchi—Pasaung Road and the Mawchi goldmines, as well as patrolling north from Pasaung and Bawlake in Karenni State. The curfew was part of the increased security measures, and restricted villagers from being outdoors at night or staying overnight at their farms and plantations.[75]

Kachin State

On 1 March 2007, Daw Nu Nu Way, the wife of the village chairman of Pa La Na village, died after the SPDC military blocked her from receiving emergency hospitalization. Nu Nu Way (37) died from bleedings after giving birth to a baby without placenta at her house in Pa La Na village, seven miles north of Myitkyina Township. Family members and village health workers were carrying Nu Nu Way to Myitkyina Hospital when they were stopped at the village-based Burmese military gate of IB #29 for security reasons and held for about two hours. Nu Nu Way died upon arrival at the hospital.[76]

On 10 May 2007, Commander Major General Ohn Myint of the SPDC military's Northern Command, ordered military curfew in Myitkyina Township and surrounding villages. All residents were banned from leaving their homes after 11:00 pm, and shops were also to close at this time. During the curfew, civilians were ordered to report their home-made guns as well as lists of new guests, to SPDC authorities. Civilians who failed to follow the curfew would be punished with prison. The military curfew was released three days after the Kachin Anti-Dam Committee (KADC) was formed on 7 May 2007 by Kachin organizations on the China-Burma border.[77]

On 30 May 2007, it was reported that military curfews had been imposed in two more townships in Kachin State; the Bhamo and Man Si townships. The curfew was imposed the day after Commander Major General Ohn Myint and other officials visited Bhamo Township. Under the curfew, villagers were prohibited from being outside after 11:00 pm. Civilians were also prohibited from carrying knives when going out into the teak forests in the two townships. Those who committed such acts would be punished by a 3 year prison sentence.[78]

In November 2007, the SPDC disabled two key bridges in N'mai Hka River in Kachin State, after Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the main ceasefire group, refused to issue a statement opposing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's November 8 statement. The two metal-string bridges - 59-Mile Jubilee (Jubili) and Chipwe (Chahpwi) on Waingmaw-Pang Wah - were partly dismantled by SPDC troops on the orders of Commander Maj-Gen Ohn Myint. The bridges connect gold mining areas and logging fields under the KIO's 1st Brigade on the western side of N'mai Hka River and the SPDC and the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) controlled areas on the eastern side of the river. Merchants and truck owners were also denied permission to cross the bridge. The bridges were recovered on 14 December.[79]

On 20 November 2007, the SPDC imposed a ban on the movement of pedestrian and vehicular traffic along the Myitkyina-Bamaw highway to Laiza. The ban on movement was imposed by the IB #312, based in Laja Yang village, about three miles from Kachin Independence Army (KIA) headquarters in Laiza.[80]

Mon State

On 7 March 2007, it was reported that increased travel restrictions were imposed on residents of Moulmein and nearby towns following two bomb explosions. The new travel restrictions required people to inform the Immigration Office and pay Immigration officers whenever they needed to travel from one town to another. According to a member of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), over 100 people had been arrested and jailed for not informing the Immigration office when they arrived in Moulmein. Local trades were worst hit by the restrictions, as they pay more in taxes at the gates for travelling from one town to another. All travellers were reportedly stopped and checked at the police gate. In Moulmein, movement was particularly restricted at night time, which had serious impact on local business.[81]

On 20 March 2007, the LIB #591 Kyone-ywa battalion banned villagers from Toe-tat-ywa-thit village, southern part of Ye, from going to their farms. The SPDC troops were reportedly concerned that armed rebel groups would fight them, as it was close to Armed Forces Day.[82]

On 25-26 March 2007, LIB #299 prohibited villagers from Han-gan village, southern part Ye, from going to work on their farms. This was reportedly because the troops were concerned about ethnic armed rebels on occasion of Armed Forces Day. According to villagers, women who worked on farms or plantations faced sexual harassment by soldiers during the

movement restriction: *"When the soldiers moved around in one area, if they [found] women or girls working, they raped them."*[83]

On 23 March 2007, LIB #31 Commander Ye Lwin Oo ordered villagers from Kaw-zar Sub-Town, southern part of Ye, not to go to their farms and rubber plantations. SPDC troops planning to fight Mon rebels in the area, reportedly banned villagers from access to the area, as they feared they would give the Mon rebels food and other support.[84]

During the first week of July 2007, hundreds of villagers were forced to relocate after Military Operation Management Command (MOMC) #19 set up a base in Ye Township. Around 500 villagers from Bayoun-Ngae village were forcibly relocated by LIB #591, who accused them of supporting Mon rebels. Almost all families from Bayoun-Ngae went to Han-gan village, but local military authorities made no efforts to help the villagers resettle.[85]

On 2 July 2007, SPDC forces ordered over 300 villagers, comprising 100 households, to relocate from Bayoun-ngae village. The relocation order came after Burmese troops from LIB #583 fought Mon rebels outside the village. Moreover, on the suspicion of supporting the Mon rebels, more than 60 villagers were beaten by SPDC forces. The villagers abandoned their farms and plantations and went to Han-gan village, however military authorities made no effort to resettle them. Furthermore, the military imposed a curfew and told villagers to inform the SPDC soldiers about the movement of Mon rebels.[86]

On 9 July 2007, LIB #583 imposed a travel ban in Bayoung-ngae village, Khaw-zar Sub Township, following the relocation of its residents. Following the travel ban, the battalion was replaced by LIB #343, based in Aru-taung village. The villagers were prohibited from going to the plantations during the travel ban. Moreover, the travel ban required villagers, including those living on plantations, to inform the battalion immediately if they had information about Mon rebels. The villagers were threatened with punishment and expulsion from the township, if failing to provide the information. The travel ban was imposed not only in Khaw-zar Sub Township, but also in Han-gan and Ka-lort villages in Ye Township.[87]

On 7 August 2007, it was reported that villagers in Khaw-zar Sub Township in Ye, Mon State and north of Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division, were barred by authorities from leaving their villages to work in the plantations and farms. This was a result of the SPDC army's offensive against Mon rebel groups in southern Mon State and northern Tenasserim Division. The SPDC confined people to their villages in order to prevent them from contacting Mon rebels.[88]

Shan State

Since late November 2006 to April 2007, persons in Kaeng-Tung Township who applied for travel permits, guarantee and supporting papers were required by the authorities to provide a 500-sheet packet of good quality Thailand-made paper, worth 4500 kyat, in exchange for each item.[89]

On 17 August 2007, it was reported that authorities in Muse District, Eastern Shan State, had ordered the destruction of huts in the paddy fields, in order to prevent people from staying in the fields. Authorities also ordered villagers to report about guests staying overnight and to immediately inform authorities in case of spotting any suspicious persons. Villagers were threatened with severe punishment if they failed to follow these orders.[90]

Tenasserim Division

On 1 January 2007, village heads of Hin-teing, in subdivision of Myin-ta Township, commanded the villagers not to leave the village. The villagers were warned that if they were away from the village for more than three months they would no longer be recognized as villagers. They were only allowed to leave the village for a day upon payment of 500 kyat for a pass.[91]

10.3 Restrictions on the Movement of the Rohingya

> "*The Rohingyas are being forced to live as if in a concentration camp … The SPDC's philosophy is to make life so difficult for the Rohingyas that they will flee to Bangladesh."*[92]
>
> - Nurul Islam, president of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)

The Rohingya ethnic minority continued to face particularly severe restrictions on their movements in 2007. The Rohingyas are a Muslim minority group, mainly residing in northern Arakan State, who for decades have suffered discrimination and persecution by the Burmese military junta. (For more information see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion, and Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). According to UNHCR, although Muslims make up 76 percent of the population of northern Arakan state, the government does not consider them as "citizens," preferring to call them merely "residents of Arakan State," because it does not want to imply they have the right to live anywhere in the country.[93] SPDC's denial of citizenship to the Rohingya is at the root of an array of discriminatory practices and harassment towards the minority group. Without citizenship they cannot obtain national identity cards, and without identity cards they are not able to travel freely within the country. Thus, the freedom of movement is a fundamental right which is systematically denied the Rohingya.

In April 2007 six UN Special Rapporteurs issued a joint press statement addressing discrimination against the Rohingya.[94] The statement said that under the 1982 Citizenship Law, the members of the Muslim minority in North Arakan State, generally known as the Rohingyas, have been denied Burmese (Myanmar) citizenship, which has seriously curtailed the full exercise of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and led to various discriminatory practices. This includes severe restrictions on freedom of movement; various forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation; land confiscation and forced evictions; restricted access to medical care, food and adequate housing; forced labour; and restrictions on marriages. As a consequence, thousands have fled to neighbouring countries, in turn creating a complex humanitarian situation in the region.[95]

In 2007 Rohingya Muslims continued to be denied citizenship and national identity cards. Neither were they issued Foreigner Registration Cards, despite effectively being treated as illegal foreigners. The authorities have instead issued "Temporary Registration Cards" (TRCs), to some Rohingyas. However, there were several obstacles to obtaining these cards. For example SPDC authorities have insisted that Muslim men applying for TRCs submit photos without beards.[96] Also the cards have been costly and difficult to obtain; in Buthidaung, a Rohingya had to pay at least 7,000-10,000 kyat for a card, whilst Rohingyas in Maungdaw had to pay 25,000 to 40,000 kyat. Observing the discrimination and difficulties faced by Rohingyas in obtaining the cards, the UNHCR and UNOPS negotiated with the Burmese authorities to accept some help from them on proceeding with TRCs to the Rohingyas. The two UN organisations would bear all expenses in giving TRCs free of charge to Rohingyas in Arakan State.[97]

In March 2007 the UNHCR started cooperating with the SPDC authorities on issuing the first TRCs to the Rohingya minority in Burma's northern Arakan State. According to Jean-Francois Durieux, the UNHCR's representative in Rangoon, more than 30,000 people registered for a TRC between March and June. Among Arakan's estimated 800,000 Rohingyas, about 200,000 persons in the area were estimated to need identity cards.[98] However, it remained unclear what actual rights were given to the holders of these cards. The UNHCR recognised that despite being issued resident cards, the question of the legal status of Rohingyas is still unclear: *"They are not citizens by law. We do not say this document exists in law. Under international law, it is a temporary document, proving*

residence not citizenship." Nevertheless, the refugee agency considered the issuance of TRCs to be an important first step towards a clear legal identity and eventually acquiring full citizenship. The UNHCR recognised the biggest challenge ahead was to discuss with the authorities rights relating to the TRCs and in the long term citizenship status for the Rohingyas.[99]

On the pretext of keeping a check on the Rohingya population, the NaSaKa, Burma's border security force, reportedly takes photographs of all Rohingya families at least once each year. However, they keep the photos and never make them public. In February 2007 it was reported that families in northern Arakan were being photographed by NaSaKa, who demanded 1,500 kyat from each family to take the photographs. Moreover, villagers have to provide food and other essential commodities for officers who come to take the photographs. The NaSaKa accompanied by Immigration officials reportedly check group photographs of Rohingya families by going from door to door and deleting from the list the names of whoever is absent. As a result the absentee becomes a permanent foreigner, and has to pay a large bribe in order to be put back on the list. Villagers also reported having to pay 500 kyat for each new born to be included in the family list, as well as to delete names of each of those who have died. This is yet another way for the authorities to harass Rohingya people and earn money illegally.[100]

According to Nurul Islam, president of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, not only are the current travel restrictions "more oppressive" than before, they are also "far worse" than what the SPDC has imposed across other parts of Burma: "Now you cannot move from one village to another, even a five-mile distance, without getting a pass. Rohingyas even need passes to go on day trips to health clinics."[101]

The strict travel restrictions applied not only to Rohingya but also non-Rohingya Muslims. The authorities generally did not grant permission to Rohingya or Muslim Arakanese to travel from their hometowns for any purpose; although some obtained permission through bribery. Even when travelling locally within Arakan State, Muslims had to go through endless paperwork and perpetual inspections. Non-Arakanese Muslims were given more freedom to travel, but they were also required to seek permission, which was usually dependent on a bribe. Most attribute these restrictions to the government's belief that Rakhine is plagued by illegal immigrants from India and Bangladesh who do not deserve citizenship or the right to travel. Muslims residing in Rangoon could visit beach resort areas in Thandwe, Rakhine State, but could not return to Rangoon without the signature of the Regional Military Commander, unless they were able to bribe local officials to return. If they visited other parts of Arakan State than the beach resorts, Muslims residing outside of Arakan State were often barred from return travel to their homes.[102]

As a result of the travel restrictions they face, an increasing number of Muslim youth in Arakan State go to Bangladesh looking for work and a better life. Buddhist youth in Arakan State are able to travel anywhere, so they often leave for Burma proper first and later move on to Thailand and Malaysia. Many youths in Arakan have been leaving for neighbouring countries, as there are few job opportunities for youth in Arakan besides joining the army.[103]

During the Eid-ul-Azha religious festival held in December, some Rohingyas from Arakan State and other Burmese Muslims obtained permission to travel to Mekka to perform Hajj (pilgrimage). However, the junta gave travel permission only to a small number of Muslims. In 2007 Burma's Minister for Religious Affairs Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung allowed 325 Hajji (pilgrims) across the country to perform Hajj. According to government mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar*, he asked the pilgrims to refrain from political activities while in Mekka.[104]

Due to the repressive policies and poor economic management of the SPDC the majority of Rohingyas live in poverty. Movement restrictions have a direct impact on the Rohingya's ability to obtain basic commodities such as food and firewood. In February 2007 it was reported that the Burmese Army had increased harassment of firewood collectors who go to the hill to collect firewood.[105] In January, a group of Rohingya were arrested and beaten by SPDC soldiers when they went to collect firewood without having obtained permission from the military. They were released after they paid the soldiers bribes of 1,500 kyat. The army threatened the villagers in Dabru Chaung that anyone found in the hills or on the way home after collecting firewood, will be *"punished severely"*. A firewood collector said, *"We are poor people. If we have to pay 500 to 1,000 kyat to the army for collecting firewood how will we maintain our families. Every thing is very expensive."*[106]

Moreover, Burmese military forcibly collected taxes on the use of rickshaws transporting firewood, kitchen ware and passengers in Sarki Para of Sittwe, Arakan State, Burma. As the gate manned by the military is located at the villages' entry and exit points, villagers have no option but to cross the gate if they need to go to markets, farms, paddy fields, the river and the sea front. Rickshaws and bull-carts, which are the main means of transport for villagers, have been forced to pay taxes to the military since 2006. Each rickshaw or bull-cart had to pay the military at least 100 kyat during the day and 150 kyat at night.[107]

The Rohingya are also frequently subject to other types of random taxation and fines. For example, in January 2007 a man was fined 50,000 kyat by NaSaKa because he took his mother for treatment to Bangladesh.[108] As stated by a Rohingya, Ziaur Rahaman (25), from Zadi Parang village of Sittwe: *"Strangely the army collects tax from only Rohingyas exempting other communities such as Rakhines [Arakanese]."*[109]

Moreover, authorities have limited the Rohingya community from accessing assistance obtainable from international aid organisations. According to coordinator of the Arakan Project, Chris Lewa, poverty-stricken villagers have been forced by local authorities to pay for travel passes to collect food aid distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP).[110]

Restrictions on Assembly

The Rohingya's are also particularly restricted in their freedom of assembly, often experiencing limitations on and harassment during religious celebrations. For example, when Rohingyas in Arakan State celebrated Eid-ul-Azha in December 2007, the authorities in some parts of Maungdaw Township first prohibited them from sacrificing animals, a traditional ritual carried out during the Muslim festival. However, later the authorities gave permission, demanding money and meat of the sacrificed animals in return. In Bawli Bazaar, NaSaKa officers collected 1,500 to 2,000 kyat per head while it took 2,000 kyat in Maungdaw's southern side. In NaSaKa area No. 3, the authorities took three kilograms of meat per head from sacrificed animals.[111]

Restrictions on the Movement of the Rohingya - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 11 January 2007, Mohamed Fayas, a Rohingya man was fined 50,000 kyat by NaSaKa after he took his mother to Bangladesh for treatment of a *"peptic ulcer"*. Arakan State had no facilities for the treatment. They crossed the Burma-Bangladesh border on 5 January after acquiring passports from the concerned authorities in Maungdaw town. Upon return home on 10 January, the Chairman of the village wrongly informed the NaSaKa that the mother and son had gone to Bangladesh without permission. The next day, Mohamed Fayas was arrested by NaSaKa and later taken to the NaSaKa camp in Buthidaung town and detained for a day. NaSaKa did not accept their passports, reportedly stating, *"We need money, we don't understand passports."* Fayas was released on 11 January after paying a bribe of 50,000 kyat to the NaSaKa.[112]

As of 15 January 2007, families in northern Arakan State were reportedly being photographed by NaSaKa, and made to pay for it. The NaSaKa had been collecting 1,500 kyat per family to take the photographs. In addition to being forced to pay for the photographs, villagers had to provide food and other essential commodities for the NaSaKa officers. Villagers were also forced to pay 500 kyat for each new born to be included in the family list and to delete names of family members who had passed away.[113]

On 21 January 2007, NaSaKa authorities resettled about 55 Buddhist families on land belonging to 3 Rohingyas of Longa Daung village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State. NaSaKa authorities confiscated about 37 acres of arable farmland from the three Rohingyas, who were:

1. Abu Ahamed, son of Noor Hussain;
2. Ahamed, son of Sayed Noor; and
3. Mostafa, son of Khasim Ali.[114]

On 25 January 2007, it was reported that SPDC authorities ordered Muslim residents in the Dagon Myothit South Township, Rangoon Division, to sign statements agreeing not to hold public gatherings or preach in homes. The statement said that discussions on Islam could *"harm the stability of the township".*[115]

On 25 January 2007, a group of Rohingya were arrested and beaten by SPDC soldiers when they went to collect firewood without having obtained permission from the military. They were released after they paid the soldiers bribes of 1,500 kyat. The harassed firewood collectors were Abul Kasim (35), son of Rusan Ali, and Kamal Hossain (25), son of Hossain Ahammed, both from Dabru Chaung village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State. The army threatened the villagers in Dabru Chaung that anyone found in the hills or on the way home after collecting firewood, would be *"punished severely"*.[116]

On 29 January 2007, it was reported that SPDC forces had forced several Muslim households in the village of Taungbro in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to relocate to make way for the construction of new houses for model villagers from Burma proper. NaSaKa authorities demolished 22 houses in the Muslim village and constructed 120 new houses for the model villagers. No compensation was paid to the owners of the houses. As a result, several of the families fled to Bangladesh for refuge.[117]

On 1 February 2007, SaYaPa forces accompanied by police destroyed about 30 houses belonging to Rohingya villagers of Ward No. 3 and 4 in Taungbru Left in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State in order to build a model village for settlers from central Burma.

On 7 March 2007, a Rohingya man was falsely detained accused of crossing the Burma-Bangladesh border. The detainee was Mohammed Islam (30), son of Nurul Alam, from Seail Khli village tract, Rathedaung Township in Arakan State, Burma. On 27 February 2007, Mohammed Islam obtained permission from the authorities to visit his sick aunt in Poung Zar (Ashikkah Para) in Maungdaw Township for one week. He stayed at his aunt's in Maungdaw for a week, and returned to his village on 7 March where he was summoned to NaSaKa camp #25, and asked why he was late by a day. The NaSaKa did not accept his explanation about his aunt being ill. He was physically tortured in detention and also kept standing in the water through the whole night. Mohammed Islam was released on 8 March after paying the NaSaKa a bribe of 50,000 kyat.[118]

On 8 March 2007, Immigration officials ordered 20 Muslims from Thandwe Township in Arakan State to pay bribes of up to 20,000 kyat for permission to travel to Rangoon for medical treatment.[119]

On 26 March 2007 it was reported that the Burmese military's infantry battalion #20 was forcibly collecting taxes on the use of rickshaws transporting firewood, kitchen ware and passengers in Sarki Para of Sittwe, Arakan State. The gate manned by the military is located at the entry and exit points of the village, hence villagers need to cross the gate if they wish to go to markets, farms, paddy fields, the river and the sea front. According to villagers, each rickshaw or bull-cart has to pay at least 100 kyat to the army during the day and 150 kyat at night.[120]

On 24 April 2007, NaSaKa fined a family in northern Arakan State 2.5 million kyat for having sent a family member abroad. The family members are Hussain Ahamed (55), son of Mohamed Ali, his wife Somuda Khatun (47), and his son Hamid Hussain (22), from Ywet Nhyo Daung, in Maungdaw Township, Arakan state. On 24 April a NaSaKa captain from Ywet Nhyo Daung camp went to the family's house to arrest them on the allegations that they were involved in human trafficking. However, the family had already fled their home to avoid arrest. On 12 May, the NaSaKa captain again went to their house to arrest them. The NaSaKa captain demanded 2.5 million kyat from the family to absolve them of the accusation, a demand the family are unable to fulfil.[121]

On 23 September 2007, a Rohingya woman, Fatama (20), daughter of Abdul Salam, from Gozibil (Dahgyi Zarr) village, Maungdaw Township, was fined 30,000 kyat after travelling to Mingalagyi village to visit her relatives without carrying any documents.[122]

On 25 December 2007 it was reported that NaSaKa authorities in some areas of Maungdaw Township had prohibited the Rohingya community from sacrificing animals during the Muslim Eid-ul-Azha festival. The authorities later gave permission, demanding money and meat of sacrificed animals in return. NaSaKa collected 1,500 to 2,000 kyat per head in Bawli Bazaar, and 2,000 kyat per head in Maungdaw's southern side. In NaSaKa area #3, the authorities took three kilograms of meat per head from sacrificed animals. In Buthidaung Township, the NaSaKa gave permits after taking either 3 kilograms of meat per head or 2,000 kyat per head. The skins of sacrificed animals were reportedly collected by NaSaKa agent Maung Maung Sein, who paid merely 500 kyat per piece.[123]

10.4 Restrictions on International Travel and Migration

The SPDC made it increasingly difficult for its citizens to travel within and outside the country in 2007. Passports became harder to obtain, there was greater border and check point security, and civilians fell victim to extortion and corruption when trying to cross international boundaries to make a living.

In Burma it is necessary to obtain a national ID card before applying for a passport to cross international borders. As well as making the holder eligible to apply for a passport, the national ID card allows the holder to travel within the country without applying for permission to do so. However, the issuance of these cards, by the Minister of Immigration and Population, has turned into a source of extortion and corruption among local officials. According to local residents of Ye and Mudon townships in Mon State, minister officials have charged 4,500 to 6,000 kyat upon applying for the ID card and another 3,000 when picking it up. Ethnic discrimination also took place in the issuance of these ID cards. For example, people of Mon ethnicity were charged between 20,000 and 70,000 kyat since they are seen by the regime as a more likely to emigrate for jobs.[124]

For those who were able to obtain an ID card in 2007, there were still obstacles when applying for a passport. This was partly due to the increase in passport applications due to the relocation of the passport office from Rangoon to the Naypyidaw, the new capital. Due to well-founded fears that ordinary citizens would face restricted access to the passport application process in the isolated location of Naypyidaw, there was an influx in applications, and the bureaucratic procedure could take several months to complete. The usual rate was 50,000 Kyat per application, however many resorted to pay a broker 100,000 kyat for a passport, which they then would receive in a matter of a few days.[125] Many people, however, did not have access to a broker, mostly due to the high cost but also other reasons. There were reports of religious discrimination in the passport application procedure, with many Muslims reporting the lengthy process to be too troublesome for them to take part in the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mekka). Moreover, many officials used the Hajj as an excuse to extort bribes from the Muslims who wished to speed up the application process. Reportedly, only 3,000 Muslims were able to obtain their passports in time, while many more were left waiting.[126]

Still, being in possession of a passport did not automatically mean being able to travel freely. Political dissidents and activists are at constant risk of having their passports denied or confiscated. For example, on 5 March 2007, Ko Thwin Lin Aung was arrested at Rangoon's Mingaladon airport before his departure to study abroad in the United States. Ko Thwin Lin Aung, a current volunteer English teacher and former political prisoner, was arrested under the suspicion of teaching politics in his classes. The authorities confiscated Ko Thwin Lin Aung's passport upon his release in April 2007, in an effort to make sure he did not attempt to leave the country again.[127]

Heightened security at airports is just one example how the junta tried to control the movement of the population. The regime also increased the number of military check points and border security officers. Furthermore, proper documentation was often not sufficient to travel past these barriers. For example, Sura Khatoon had permission to travel to Bangladesh from 28 February to 7 March 2007, however when she returned, she was immediately confronted by the local NaSaKa (border security), who demanded that she surrendered her passport. When she reused, the NaSaKa detained her for three days and extorted 125,000 kyat upon her release.[128] Members of the Rohingya ethnic group have faced particular discrimination by the NaSaKa, who in order to extort bribes have accused Rohingyas of crossing the Burma-Bangladesh border illegally. After visiting his aunt in a near by town, Mohammed Islam was on 7 March 2007 detained by the local NaSaKa on the

accusation of illegal border crossing. As punishment, Mohammed Islam was detained and tortured for one night, and made to pay a fine of 50,000 kyat to be released the next day.[129]

At the beginning of 2007 it was reported that Burmese authorities had reinstated the seven day visa for visitors to Bangladesh. The visa had previously been available to people travelling via the Maungdaw border point, since Burma opened a trade border with Bangladesh 17 years ago. However, halfway through 2006 the policy was changed and travellers were obliged to apply for permission from the State administration in Sittwe Township. Processing times were slow and many applications were rejected. Once it became known that applications were again being accepted via the Maungdaw district office, many traders resumed travelling and trying to do business.[130]

Throughout 2007, border closures proved to be an effective means of prohibiting international travel. Sporadic border closures left many Burmese nationals vulnerable to foreign arrest when they exited Burma on a short term visa. For example, on 6 July 2007, 20 Burmese citizens were stranded in Teknaf, Bangladesh, and were not allowed to enter their own country for over a month until the NaSaKa decided to reopen the Burmese side of the border crossing.[131] In addition, these border closures affected the livelihoods of those who depend on them to access work in neighbouring countries. When the military shut down a crossing at Three Pagodas Pass in March 2007, many Burmese labourers lost their jobs in Thailand as they could not cross from Burma. Moreover, farmers and traders who were reliant on exporting their goods struggled to turn a profit because they were forced to bribe border officials in order to access Thai markets.[132]

The tight control of international borders is also a strategy by the SPDC to prevent any form of illegal emigration. In 2007, one could be arrested for leaving Burma illegally, or even for being suspected of attempting to leave the country. A case in point was evident on 17 July 2007, when over 70 Chins were arrested by police at the Five Star sea port in Rangoon's Thaketa Township. The police made the arrest under the suspicion that these people were trying to flee to Malaysia or Thailand to seek jobs. However, the police preferred to classify this case as a *"rescue mission"* in its campaign to crack down on human trafficking. The detained were held in a local monastery for several weeks before being sent back to the Chin State.[133]

Severe punishments were often given to those who were caught by the NaSaKa at the Bangladesh border. In December 2006, the NaSaKa arrested 55 people on a boat, 48 of which were Burmese Muslims on their way to Malaysia. The migrants were captured by border security forces when their boat engine failed near Sittwe, off the coast of the Arakan State. Three months later, in February 2007, a court in Maungdaw sentenced all 48 Burmese Muslims to five years of prison for trying to leave the country illegally.[134] Similarly, on 28 November 2007, a further 54 Burmese Muslims were arrested on Manaung Island when, again, their boat engine failed in their attempt to migrate to Malaysia. The civilians were in December sent to Sittwe prison to serve sentences.[135] These are two examples of how the increase in NaSaKa officers along the Burma-Bangladesh border has prevented an anticipated Muslim exodus from Arakan State.[136] Still, this is just one of many methods the SPDC used in 2007 to restrict Burma's citizens from their right to international travel and migration.

Population Registration

In preparation for the announced 2008 constitutional referendum, the SPDC conducted various censuses throughout Burma in 2007 to register the population eligible for voting. Moreover, the SPDC stepped up efforts of issuing national identification cards to increase the number of eligible voters.

The immigration department distributed the ID cards in three categories: for those aged 10-18, 18-30, and to those over the age of 30. While the ID cards were necessary to vote in the upcoming referendum, their issuance was also used by the military as a means to control the movement of the country's residents. The SPDC continued to use population registration to distinguish civilians from rebel groups, to extort and discriminate against ethnic minorities, to control family households of local communities, and to limit domestic travel by implementing guest registration laws.[137]

Issuing identity cards provided the regime ample opportunity to exploit different groups of people by charging arbitrary registration fees. In July, villagers of Paletwa Township, Chin State, were charged 6,000 to 8,000 kyat for an ID card, while the official rate within the town was only 3,500 kyat.[138] (For more information see Section 12.4 Restrictions on International Travel and Migration) Unregistered citizens were forced into paying these high fees, as there were grave consequences for refusal of payment or for being confronted by a military officer without an ID card. One consequence that children may fall victim to is forced recruitment into the military. Officers routinely give children the option of joining the military or going to jail for not having proper identification.[139]

Some were unable to register for the national identity card due to discrimination against their ethnicity. Rohingyas continued to be denied national ID cards as they are not recognised as citizens by the military junta. However, in 2007 they were given limited recognition as residents, by being issued temporary registration cards. (For more information see Section 10.3: Restrictions on the Movement of the Rohingya). Moreover, some mixed ethnicity citizens were denied a national ID card. Ko Nyi Nyi Htun, a Pegu college student, paid the 4,000 kyat fee when he applied for an ID card in May 2007. However, a few weeks later, upon returning to the immigration office to pick it up, he found his application was rejected due to his mixed blood ethnicity. When the officer refused to give him his entire refund, Ko Nyi Nyi proceeded to file an official complaint, at which point he was fined an additional 70,000 kyat.[140] Muslims, Chinese and Indians experienced similar discrimination. Aside from additional registration fees, the cards issued to these groups, with their ethnicities and religious affiliations labelled, often prohibited them from leaving their local community without prior official consent.[141]

At the same time as issuing personal national identity cards in 2007, immigration officials also documented family lists. In July, state officials in Myitkyina collected "Family Members List Book" from the entire population.[142] While acquiring family lists the junta found yet another avenue to extort arbitrary fees. Throughout Shan State, immigration officers regularly charged over 10,000 kyat for each mandatory household registration.[143] In addition to family lists and household registration, NaSaKa officials also took pictures of each family in northern Arakan State as part of an ongoing campaign to control the Rohingya population. In January 2007, the NaSaKa would visit each household and take a picture of its members, charging 1,500 kyat. If a family member was not present at the time of the NaSaKa's arrival, the particular family member would be crossed off the family list, and considered as a permanent foreigner. Only a large bribe could get the absent family member back on the family list. Furthermore, the NaSaKa charged a family 500 kyat for a new born to be added

death.[144] (For more information see Section 10.3: Restrictions on the Movement of the Rohingya)

Similar campaigns were conducted by the Township Peace and Development Council in Karen and Mon states throughout the spring. In some cases, families had to place their family lists and photographs on the outside of their front door in order to ease the investigation process for the authorities. However, it is important to note that these family lists are not just used to follow the community's residents; they are also used to keep track of travelling guests. Limiting the movement of overnight guests is an important priority for the SPDC when controlling local populations. In some places, local authorities charge 1,000 - 2,000 kyat to stay as a guest overnight with another family.[145] In accordance with SPDC Order 1/90, failure for a household to register a guest with local authorities can result in heavy fines or even imprisonment.[146]

Inspection of overnight guests was used by the junta as a means to punish, abuse, and exploit political opponents and civilians throughout 2007.[147] On 2 May 2007, three human rights activists, Ko Aung Kyaw Soe, Ko Aye Lwin and Ko Yin Kyi, were arrested for not properly registering as guests. Authorities reportedly raided a Rangoon residency at 3:00 am to check if the human rights activists had registered correctly. According to reports, the three activists had earlier been told by one of the arresting police officers that they would not have to register until the next evening. This suggests that the officers deliberately deceived the activists in order to legitimize the arrest.[148] Similarly, on 27 August, 14 NLD members were arrested in Magwe division's Saku Township at 2:00 am for not possessing guest registration forms. However, the NLD members claimed they tried to register at the local ward the day before where the officials had refused to approve their request.[149] Moreover, guest list inspections were used as a pretext to raid the home of anyone suspected of being a political dissident. During such raids, officials often seized private property and imposed arbitrary fines.[150]

There seems to be an almost endless list of arbitrary ways in the junta has harassed and extorted the country's residents with regard to guest registration forms. In some places, women were not allowed to register guests by Ward Peace and Development officials unless the women join the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF). In order for a woman to register an overnight guest, she was then forced to purchase an application to join the MWAF, at a cost of 200 kyat. Reports indicate that the USDA was responsible for making these demands.[151] Moreover, on 8 February, passengers at a Mandalay train station were fined 50 kyat for not having guest registration forms when their train was delayed by over 10 hours, because the delay extended the departure time to past 2:00 am.[152] Moreover, in January 2007 a man was arrested at the home of his newly eloped wife, on the grounds that he was not on the family list and without proper registration forms, regardless of the fact that it was at his wife's residency. The family later found the man dead custody, told that the cause of death was malaria.[153]

10.5 Restrictions on the Movement of Women

The SPDC has continued to involve itself in internal human trafficking. For the sixth consecutive year, Burma has been ranked as a Tier 3 Country (the worst possible ranking) by the US Department of State's annual report on human trafficking.[154] On the other hand, the SPDC has made great efforts to portray itself as a leader at ending trafficking among women in Burma and its surrounding countries. In order to do this the regime places movement restrictions on women and places large fees on all travel documentation. Although the junta claims this legislation is intended to protect women from trafficking its effect is quite the opposite as it makes it very difficult for them to leave the country legitimately.[155] This means that many young women seeking to migrate abroad require the assistance of "travel facilitators" who, aside from being expensive, can often be connected to traffickers.[156] Thus, the restrictions on women's ability to travel legally can actually make them even more vulnerable to the risks of trafficking.

In its campaign to eliminate human trafficking at the grassroots level, the junta in August 2007 established more anti-trafficking border liaison offices along the country's southeastern border in August 2007. This act is in accordance with the Law on Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, which was passed in 2005. Since then, in 2006 the state's police have claimed to arrest over 400 people involved in 191 trafficking cases, in which another 1,370 people were claimed to have been rescued.[157] However, it is important to note that there has not been an independent body to confirm these claims, there is no distinction made between smuggling and trafficking, and the regime has continuously failed to hold their own officers accountable for their involvement in trafficking. Many Burmese officers guarding these check points have been accused of corruption. For example, in April 2007, officers at battalion #18, near Three Pagodas Pass were accepting payments of 100 Baht per person being trafficked into Thailand.[158]

Another strategy employed by the junta to crack down on human trafficking, is movement restrictions around villages to control who enters and exits the village. This forces many people, including women, to purchase travel documents at a price of 500 kyat for a fifteen day allowance in order to access the farms in which the civilians work at. However, when the SPDC suspects any type of armed conflict with the rebel groups, the SPDC will permanently enforce the movement restrictions. In March 2007, three women from the southern part of Ye were not allowed out of their village to work at their farms. As a result, these women were left without a source of income, which would make it nearly impossible for them to pay the fees for the travel documents required to go outside of the village when the junta would allow. Therefore, these women are forced to bribery in order to gain access to their farms, while subjecting themselves to rape and other forms of violence from the military guards.[159]

On 3 August 2007, twelve people were caught trying to cross the Thai-Burma border illegally. Of the twelve people, three were women from the Chin Province. The Burmese authorities then held the detainees for sixteen days in a Rangoon monastery. Once released, the authorities urged the women to obtain passports in order to travel legally across international borders. However, a passport for a woman costs 250,000 kyat, a fee that can seem burdensome to women that is trying to escape deprived economic conditions.[160]

Local authorities in Kawthaung arrested five people on charges of human trafficking on 19 July 2007. Of the five arrested, two were corporal police officers and another was Kyaw Win, who had been arrested in June 2007 in suspicion of trying to illegally transport over 200 Burmese civilians into Thailand and Malaysia. Sources also indicate that recently over 100 people a day are being trafficked from Kawthaung to its bordering countries.[161]

These examples show how trafficking inside of Burma has done anything but cease. The SPDC's measures to eliminate female trafficking have failed to address the causes of trafficking in the first place. Applying movement restrictions on women, which are directly responsible for depriving women of their livelihood will only perpetuate the cycle that allows trafficking to exist. Since many women cannot obtain permission, the fees to travel legitimately, or opportunity, they become increasing vulnerable to the dangers and exploitations of criminal trafficking.

10.6 Restrictions on the Movement of Monks

In the aftermath of the Saffron Revolution in September 2007, Burma's Buddhist monks became subject to increased movement restrictions. In an attempt to crush the monks' uprising, the SPDC authorities carried out strict measures in order to limit their movement. As a consequence it became more difficult for monks to travel around the country, and to gather with other monks. The travel restrictions on monks resulted in many monks being forced to break Buddhist lent, and were unable to continue their studies. Thousands of monks broke the Buddhist lent as they were sent back home from the monasteries and were unable to return to the monasteries within seven days after they took the lent.[162]

In order to prevent student monks and novices from organizing further protests, the junta's first step of movement restrictions was taken in September and October 2007, when thousands of monks all over the country were forced to leave their monasteries and return to their home towns and villages. For example, on 3 October, junta authorities and senior monks in Meikhtila town of Mandalay division in central Burma told student monks and novices to return home immediately. According to a local resident close to the monasteries:

> *"The USDA members came to the monasteries and told Sayadaw (abbot) to tell the parents of the student monks to take them back home. They forcibly made them go home. The idea is to pre-empt fresh protests because the younger monks have said that if there is any one to lead them they are willing to hit the roads again in protest. But because the Sayadaw ordered them to go home, none has dared to start demonstrations again".*[163]

Many young monks faced severe difficulties in travelling back home as most had no money for transportation fares, and their parents were unable to pick them up. USDA members threatened to arrest monks who did not follow orders to return home.[164] Moreover, in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, monks from all monasteries were ordered to go home after they protested against the military regime for four days in September. Almost all the monasteries in the town were investigated by the authorities for their involvement in the protest. According to travellers many monks who were travelling by bus and train were dragged down and arrested in Thaton.[165]

Since being forced to return to their hometowns, many monks found it difficult to travel freely, as they were subject to police searches and thorough interrogations at every check point. According to October reports, monks from Mon state and Pa'an Township of Karen State found it near impossible to travel outside their hometowns. According to one monk from Lamine Township, Mon State, *"After the monks finished their studies in Moulmein they obtained travelling documents from their abbots. However, when they crossed the Thanbyu Zayat checkpoint, police questioned them, threatened them and forced them to go back to their home town."* The heavy questioning and interrogation of travelling monks led to complaints by bus and train vendors, as it caused conflict and delayed other travellers. Furthermore, the delay and questioning at checkpoints made car drivers reluctant to transport monks. According to the same monk:

> *"Last week when I came to Moulmein, I was asked a lot of questions by checkpoint police, so I think now that car drivers are not willing to take the monks in their vehicles. Whenever a monk travels in their car, they have to clarify questions and are investigated by checkpoint police."*

Another monk reported that:

> *"After the monk led demonstration, the SPDC marked us all as their enemies so when monks travelling by car now the police are looking at us as their enemies. They can threaten us and make things very difficult, but they cannot ask for money from us."*[166]

As well as facing difficulties while travelling, monks also faced restricted access to shelter. Several monasteries were ordered by the SPDC to turn down guest monks in need of accommodation. In Ye Township, Mon State, government authorities ordered every monastery to cease any guest monk accommodation. According to one monk who fled to Ye Township and was denied shelter, *"Most of the Mon monasteries in Ye Township dare not allow monks to sleep in their monasteries now, so when night falls monks have to go to their donor's house and sleep there"*.[167]

Travelling Monks

As a result of the increased travel limitations, monks travelling in border areas had difficulties as the authorities feared they were attempting to flee the country. In October 2007 it was widely reported that monks travelling near the southern part of the Thailand-Burma border were particularly restricted in their movements. The SPDC prohibited monks from Kawthaung Township, Tenasserim Division in Southern Burma to travel to Yanaung/Ranong Town in Thailand.[168] However, authorities failed to inform the monks of the reason for the prohibition on travelling. According to one monk, *"They did not mention why they have banned. However, we [monks] thought they [authorities] want to check out if local monks crossing to outside country or monks in exile entry in the local country."* In normal circumstances, monks in Kawthaung were required to obtain a recommendation letter from Sanghanayaka and Immigration to cross the border legally.[169]

In Arakan State SPDC authorities on 29 October 2007 ordered the administration of northern Arakan to check family lists, tighten security on the Burma-Bangladesh border, and watch the movement of monks. According to reports, the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) and Head Quarters (HQS) of Burma's border security forces (NaSaKa) ordered the administration to watch the movement of monks and to arrest monks if they saw new faces in northern Arakan. The authorities suspected monks involved in the recent uprising were trying to cross the Burma-Bangladesh border and were coming from outside northern Arakan.[170]

Also in Kachin State in northern Burma the movement of monks was kept under intense scrutiny following the protests. According to a teacher travelling from Khat Cho to Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, *"They also checked us but they didn't conduct a search. The monks, however, were treated differently. They checked everything and asked for the monks travel documents and their reason for travelling."*[171]

In November 2007 it was reported that monks from the rural areas in Burma had been banned from entering Rangoon unless they were going there for medical treatment and could show recommendation from a hospital. According to one monk, authorities only allowed monks to enter Rangoon if they had recommendations from doctors, as well as the name of the monastery where they intended to stay and credentials from monks of that monastery. According to one monk who had recently returned from Rangoon, about 50 Monks from Arakan State were turned back after the authorities had checked their recommendations at Rangoon station and found them incomplete. The same monk reported that many monks did not dare to go to Rangoon as they were apprehensive about not

getting permission from the authorities. As a result monks from Mon State stopped going to Rangoon for religious education.[172]

Fearing further protests, the authorities severely restricted large gatherings of monks in the months following the Saffron Revolution. In Rangoon monks faced difficulties when attempting to enter Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the main sites of the September protests. In November 2007 security around Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon was again tightened, with guards demanding identification documents from anyone wishing to enter the pagoda grounds, including monks. According to local worshippers, while this rule was not enforced for all visitors, monks' documents were thoroughly checked by the guards: *"They didn't really check everyone for [ID cards], although they were checking on monks. Monks who were unable to show any identification were not allowed to enter the pagoda."*[173] In Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State, authorities ordered three small video theatres to shut down in November 2007 after groups of monks gathered in the theatres to watch videos. As well as shutting down the theatres, the authorities seized the material and arrested the owners. A local resident said authorities did not want large groups of monks to gather in one place because *"they are worried that the monks will launch protests"*.[174]

10.7 Restrictions on Foreigners in Burma

Humanitarian and Aid Agencies

> *"Humanitarian assistance should not be made hostage of politics, rather it must only be guided by the best interests of the affected communities."*
> - Paolo Sergio Pinheiro, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma[175]

The military government further increased its restrictions on the movement and operations of international aid agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in 2007.[176] The restrictions imposed on humanitarian organisations operating in the country have limited their ability to reach those in need, while the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. As a result, both the UN and the ICRC in 2007 issued unprecedented statements about the junta's responsibility for the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country and the suffering of the people.[177] The separate statements led the junta to take severe measures, expelling the UN country chief and further limiting the work of the ICRC.[178] In November 2007, thirteen international humanitarian organizations working in Burma called for a more open working environment for local and international humanitarian organizations and a significant build-up of humanitarian assistance to directly address the needs of the poor.[179]

To work with UN agencies operating in the country, the junta formed a Central Coordination Committee (CCC) in 2006. Besides the UN agencies, other international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and domestic NGOs are also governed by regulations of the CCC. The CCC designates that all NGOs assisting Myanmar are to be registered with the government for their operations and the travelling in the country of their project staff is so limited that they must be accompanied by at least one responsible official of the government.[180]

In April 2007 the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled *Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma* which outlined the effects of the restrictions imposed on international relief groups operating in Burma. The report identified limitations on the movement of international staff within Burma and on their freedom to *"gather data needed to understand the scope and nature of Burma's problems."*[181] The SPDC requirement of aid agencies to be accompanied by a representative of the authorities, effectively inhibits local people from voicing their concerns and speaking out about human rights abuses. The report stated that the junta had prevented international staff of humanitarian agencies from moving freely within the country, obstructing the timely provision of assistance. It also stated that UN, FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO staff had been restricted by the SPDC in providing assistance to populations living in conflict areas.[182]

In 2007 a report jointly produced by the University of California, Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University, entitled 'The Gathering Storm', focused on the deteriorating health situation in Burma, and showed ICRC, MSF and the Global Fund have been affected by SPDC policies inhibiting the implementation of work necessary to combat the occurrence and threat of infectious diseases.[183] The report found that *"while the health situation deteriorates, the junta continues to limit the ability of international humanitarian organisations to reach those most in need."*[184]

Global Fund 'Out' - 3D Fund 'In'

The Global Fund to Fight Malaria, Tuberculosis and AIDS terminated its US$ 37.5 million program in August 2005, stating that it could not carry out its programs because of restrictions by the junta, including travel restrictions on staff members that prevented the effective implementation of their projects.[185] To fill the gap left when the Global Fund pulled out, a group of six donor countries in 2006 initiated a five-year Three-Disease (3-D) Fund project to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria. The project was in operation by April 2007. The entire 3-D fund project is worth about US$ 100 million, and funded by the European Commission, Sweden's Sida, the Netherlands, UK's DFID, Norway and Australia's Aus AID. It is to be implemented under the guidance of the Work Coordination Committee headed by Health Minister Dr. Kyaw Myint.[186]

Regulations and Restrictions

In February 2006 the regime issued new regulations, imposing further restrictions to independent functioning of the humanitarian groups.[187] The regulations require foreign aid workers to notify the authorities at least two weeks in advance of any plans to travel outside Rangoon. As well as further limiting the movement of NGOs, the 2006 regulations required that the authorities investigate all Burmese staff hired by international organizations, that foreign aid workers be escorted by SPDC officials on any trips outside Rangoon, and that aid agencies work with the junta-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Association on projects.[188] According to UN humanitarian coordinator in Burma, Petrie, while the travel controls are generally enforced, the UN insisted on its independence in hiring staff, and also made it clear that it could not work in the manner indicated with the USDA. Since the new regulations, international agencies have reported more administrative harassment, such as delays or denials of passport renewals for Burmese UN staff, and denials or revocation of permission to hold meetings.[189]

Anyone who works for the UN or an NGO in Burma has to submit a detailed schedule of all projected travel, complete with permissions from associated government ministries and state, division and township-level administrative bodies, in advance of any trip. Such restrictions affect the quality of the project monitoring system, particularly for performance-based and time-sensitive projects. In some cases, a sound monitoring system requires spontaneous trips to project areas in order to get reliable qualitative and quantitative data about the real situation on the ground. Such trips are impossible to make under the current restrictions imposed by Burma's military government.[190]

As a result of increased pressure from the junta, many international medical charities have ceased their operations in Burma in recent years. For example Médecins Sans Frontières pulled out of Karen and Mon states in 2006, stating that government restrictions on its movements that made it nearly impossible to carry out their work.[191]

In March 2007 it was reported that Burma's ruling junta aimed to control the movement and operations of international humanitarian organisation further, through the creation of State-run *"coordination committees".* While such committees have previously been initiated principally on division and state levels, some of the coordinating committees were now formed at the township level, where many of the country's humanitarian projects are implemented. The committee plan was developed after the 3D Fund signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN Office for Project Services and Burma's Ministry of Health in October 2006. According to NGO guidelines issued by the government in February 2006, members of the new coordination committees would be drawn from junta-backed social organisations such as the USDA, the Myanmar National Working Committee for Women Affairs and, on the township level, the Auxiliary Fire Brigades and the Veteran's Association.

NGO officials in Rangoon have expressed concern for the viability of their projects under tightening governmental controls. The Burmese version of the NGO guidelines, which were not distributed to UN agencies and INGOs, stated that the township coordination committees are to monitor project teams and insure that their activities do not go beyond the stated scope of their mission.[192]

Humanitarian Access

International relief organisations continued to report mixed access to areas in need of relief throughout 2007.

In Chin State, a few international relief organisations have been allowed to operate, including UNDP, UNICEF and Merlin, a UK based international health NGO. UNDP and UNICEF function in health, education, agricultural sector and breeding of domestic animals. Merlin started their work in Thangtlang Township in the beginning of July 2007, providing heath care and health education awareness to local villagers. Moreover, the organisation set up an office in Thangtlang town to monitor civilian health problems effectively and is undertaking field checks on the health condition of the people from villages.[193] However the three organisations are limited to operating in specific areas, mostly near the towns. As a result of the limited access to large areas, particularly near the Indian border, relief work in these regions have to be carried out by organisations operating from the Indian side of the border, such as Chin Backpack, Chin Health Programme and other health related organizations.[194]

In early August 2007, it was reported that the UNDP had been given permission to assist villages facing a water crisis in Padaung village tract, south of Maungdaw, in Arakan State. The UNDP constructed two concrete wells for drinking water in Kayandan village of Padaung village tract.[195] The UNDP also assisted with the constructing of wells in villages of Rathedaung Township.[196] However, on 15 October the NaSaKa, Burma's border security force, arrested four villagers in Razar Bill village, Rathedaung Township, on the allegation that they had cooperated with the UNDP in digging three wells in their village.[197]
According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), about 5 million people in Burma are chronically short of food. The WFP tries to provide aid to 500,000 people each month, but because of movement constraints can help only 200,000.[198] In 2007 the WFP upgraded its food assistance to ex-poppy farmers in Shan State from emergency operations to protracted relief and recovery operations. The operations targeted 726,000 people whose livelihoods have been affected by the poppy ban. However, the UN agency was not allowed access to Wa territory, where farmers face many of the same problems.

'In-Country' Versus 'Cross-Border' Aid

A result of the ever increasing restrictions on the movement and operations of humanitarian agencies operating officially inside Burma, is the inability to reach some of the country's most vulnerable populations. In 2007, Asia and Pacific spokesperson of ICRC, Carla Haddad stated that the ICRC *"is concerned about the lack of provision of basic services to civilians living along the Thai-Myanmar border where no humanitarian organisation has access today".*[199] There is an estimated 1 million internally displaced people (IDP) in rural areas. Since the SPDC does not authorize independent monitoring of the displaced it is difficult to get reliable statistics and implement proper relief programmes. In Burma, aid agencies and donors struggle to deliver assistance in ways that are consistent with humanitarian principles. Reluctant to channel aid through state structures, some work through non-state structures, such as religious groups, and national staff.[200]

In 2007 there was increased recognition from the international community that aid to hard-to-reach areas in western and eastern Burma, was more effectively provided across the borders rather than from NGOs operating inside. In February 2007, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, Pinheiro, expressed concern for the humanitarian situation for civilians affected by conflict in Karen State. Pinheiro urged the junta to grant aid agencies immediate access to these civilians, and guarantee the safety and freedom of movement to the UN and other aid workers.[201] In July, the UK House of Commons International Development Committee published the report *DFID Assistance to Burmese Internally Displaced People and Refugees on the Thai-Burma Border.* The Committee urged the British Government to quadruple aid to Burma by 2013, and called for specific funding for cross-border assistance in Burma, arguing that *"it is the only way to reach very vulnerable IDPs"*. As well as providing aid to the IDPs across the Thai border, the Committee called on the British government to *"look at the options for starting to fund assistance over the Indian border"* to the Chin people, and *"scale up"* support for aid on the China border.[202]

The ICRC in Burma

> *"Since 2005, the government of Myanmar has imposed increasingly severe restrictions on ICRC activities, making it impossible for the organisation to continue visits to thousands of detainees in line with its usual working procedures, which include carrying out private interviews with detainees. This has also prevented the ICRC from conducting independent field visits to conflict affected areas and from delivering aid to civilians according to strictly humanitarian, neutral, and apolitical criteria."*
>
> - Carla Haddad, Asia and Pacific spokesperson for the ICRC[203]

The ICRC has been operating in Burma since 1986, when the organisation opened an office in Rangoon and started a limb-fitting and rehabilitation project. Since 1999 it has carried out assistance and protection work in places of detention and in sensitive border areas. Between 1999 and 2005, the ICRC visited hundreds of detainees in more than 70 prisons and labour camps to assess their living conditions, as well as providing assistance and treatment. On the basis of the ICRC's recommendations, and with its support, the detaining authorities made efforts to improve the water supply, accommodation, and provision of health care available to detainees. The organisation had also opened up new offices around the country and for some time made important interventions, in accordance with its humanitarian mandate.

As well as visiting various prisons in Burma, the ICRC was also one of the few organisations able to provide protection to the people in war zones in areas like Shan State, Karen State and Mon State. However, in the last few years their ability to work in these areas has become severely hampered as a result of the ever-increasing restrictions imposed by the SPDC.[204] In late 2005 the organisation had to stop visiting detainees, after Burmese authorities refused to comply with the organisation's standard procedures, such as being able to talk with prisoners in private.[205]

The organisation announced in March 2007 that that *"the ICRC's humanitarian work in Burma has now reached near-paralysis"*.[206] It stated that over the past year, the ICRC had reduced the number of its expatriate staff from 56 to 16 because of the restrictions imposed by the Government of Myanmar.[207] The ICRC is ardently committed to uphold its principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, which became almost impossible under the new restrictions. However, The ICRC stated that it remained open to high-level discussions with the SPDC to break the persisting deadlock and ready to act immediately to address the most pressing humanitarian issues provided that it may operate independently and with regular and direct access to persons in need.[208]

In March 2007 the ICRC resorted to closing down two of their main field offices; in Moulmein and in Keng Tung. These were important offices for the ICRC to be able to give assistance and protection to the people who suffered from armed conflict in Mon State, Karen State and Shan State.[209] At the end of June, the organisation was also compelled to close its office in Taunggyi, leaving only two offices open outside Rangoon - in Pa-an and Mandalay - both of which continue to face heavy restrictions on their movements.[210]

At the end of June 2007, the ICRC took a rare departure from its normally neutral stance, by publicly denouncing the junta for the first time, accusing it of carrying out human rights violations causing immense suffering to thousands of civilians and detainees all over the country. As a matter of principle the ICRC normally favours confidential and bilateral dialogue. However, the continued deadlock with the SPDC forced the organisation to make its concerns public.[211] The statement came at a time when the ICRC was downsizing its operations in Burma, as a result of lacking the freedom it needs to work according to its mandate.[212] The organisation accused SPDC armed forces of violating international law by committing repeated abuses against people living in areas affected by armed conflict along the Thai-Burma border including murder, violence, and destruction of food supplies or means of production.[213] After speaking out against the SPDC's gross violations of human rights and disregard for international humanitarian law, the ICRC's movements inside Burma became even more restricted.[214]

'Post-Saffron' Situation

According to UN country chief, Charles Petrie, levels of mistrust increased after the September 2007 protests, and engaging with the regime remained difficult.[215] During the protests the junta restricted the movement of food, effectively hampering efforts by the UN's WFP to feed some 500,000 people living in poverty. As the UN agency's operations depend on the government facilitating the movement of food and personnel, it made an appeal to the authorities for access to all parts of the country. According to the WFP, local authorities in Mandalay stopped all movement of food out of the area, which affected WFP operations in northern Shan state and central zones which depends on food deliveries from Mandalay. The movement of food to WFP operational areas in northern Arakan state was similarly limited by the junta's reactions to protests in Sittwe.[216]

In November 2007 the ICRC appealed to Burmese authorities for permission to visit people detained during and after the September demonstrations. The organisation reported to have been contacted by worried families asking for help to locate their relatives who had been detained or were missing.[217] The ICRC said it was *"ready to resume all its activities at very short notice, provided it was given the necessary guarantees that it will be able to act as a neutral and independent humanitarian organization."*[218]

The United Nations

The UN's resident coordinator Charles Petrie was expelled from the country at the end of 2007, after he was told by the ruling junta that he had acted *"beyond his capacity."* Petrie however, insisted the UN had a *"moral obligation"* to state what it saw as an inescapable truth about the country's worsening socio-economic situation.[219] Petrie's effective expulsion was reportedly prompted by a statement issued by the UN Country Team in October, which said that the September protests *"clearly demonstrated the everyday struggle to meet basic needs and the urgent necessity to address the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country."*[220]

UN envoys and officials visiting Burma

In 2007 an increasing number of senior U.N. officials visited Burma. In the first week of April 2007, UN deputy chief for humanitarian affairs Margareta Wahlstrom visited Burma to discuss cooperation with the regime.[221] In late June, UN special representative for children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, visited Burma. In the first four months of 2007 however, the UN had yet to appoint a new special envoy to Burma, despite requests from Burmese opposition groups.[222]

UN envoys were subject to limitations on movement during their visits in 2007, both in terms of which areas they have access to and who they are allowed to meet. Several UN envoys who have been invited to the country in the past have turned down invitations if denied access to the opposition, in particular Aung San Suu Kyi. To date, six UN special envoys to Burma have quit their jobs in frustration with the lack of cooperation by the junta.[223]

UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

In the last week of June 2007, UN special representative for children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, visited Burma for five days. The UN envoy met several senior junta officials including Prime Minister Thein Sein.[224] Coomaraswamy also met in Rangoon with leaders of the Wa National Group from special region (2) in northern Shan State.[225] In line with a UN Security Council resolution in 2005, Coomaraswamy aimed to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations committed against children. According to the 2005 UNSC resolution, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict was due to examine the Secretary General's report on the situation of children in Burma in November 2007.[226] According to the UN children's expert, the SPDC agreed to appoint a high level "focal point" from the Ministry of Social Welfare to engage with the UN Country Team, especially UNICEF, on all issues related to children and armed conflict. However, the child rights expert was cautious, stating the agreement needed a comprehensive follow-up in order to effectively control abuse of children in Burma.[227]

UN Secretary General's Special Envoy

In May 2007 Ibrahim Gambari was appointed as the seventh UN Secretary-General's special envoy to Burma, and as such the third UN special envoy to Myanmar in eight years.[228] Gambari visited Burma twice in 2006 in his capacity as undersecretary-general for political affairs, and was appointed as special envoy to continue the UN's efforts to pursue political reforms in Burma. Gambari's first visit in 2006 was seen as a first step to re-establish contact with the regime, since the previous special envoy Razali had become persona non grata with the junta and effectively banned from visiting Burma after his last visit in March 2004. During his visit in May 2006 Gambari was given a rare opportunity to meet detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which generated optimism and speculations that the junta would release the detained leader. However, the junta had once again planted false expectations with the UN and the international community, and renewed Suu Kyi's house arrest by yet another year. Also his second visit in November 2006 ended in meeting Burmese generals, with no follow up action.[229] When Gambari was invited to visit Burma in April 2007, he said he would not accept the invitation unless the junta showed a commitment to meaningful reforms.[230]

Following the junta's brutal crackdown on the September protesters, Gambari went to Burma at the end of September 2007 to hold talks with the junta's leaders. Gambari was also granted a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi.[231] At the end of his trip Gambari met with Senior General Than Shwe, as well as other top officials in Naypyidaw. The UN Special Envoy also

had a second round of talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, however he was not allowed access to other NLD members.[232] According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, his special envoy delivered *"the strongest possible message"* to Burma's military leaders about their bloody crackdown on democracy activists, but added that he couldn't call the trip *"a success."*[233]

A month later, in the first week of November, Gambari was back in Burma. However, a souring of UN-junta relations was seen the day before his arrival, when the ruling generals announced that they would not renew the mandate of UN Country Chief Charles Petrie. During the visit the UN envoy met Prime Minister Lt-Gen Thein Sein as well as two other junta ministers. He also met with civil society groups and senior members of the NLD, as well as the UN country team and Suu Kyi. However, he was not invited to meet Senior General Than Shwe. The junta rejected Gambari's proposal of a three-way meeting between Suu Kyi, a junta member and himself to promote political reform and reconciliation.[234] It seems apparent that the junta invites the Special Envoy merely to give the impression it is operating with the UN, while in practice showing little willingness to change.

Gambari has been criticized by the Burmese opposition for being too lenient towards the military junta, having stated that it is important *"to recognize progress where it has been made and encourage them to move further along the lines of democratization and respect for human rights."* As a reaction to Gambari's statement, Myint Thein of Burma's main opposition party, the NLD, stated: *"I want to ask what progress [made by the regime] means… I have to say there is no progress politically."*[235]

UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari shaking hands with Burmese democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi during their meeting at her home in Rangoon on 8 November 2007. *[Photo: UNIC]*

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma

After being barred from the country since 2003, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Brazilian lawyer and academic Professor, Paolo Sergio Pinheiro visited Burma in November 2007. The invitation came after the UN Human Rights Council condemned the Burmese military junta for its violent crackdown on the September protests and demanded it be allowed to send a Special Rapporteur to immediately investigate the situation.[236] Pinheiro spent five days in Burma to investigate allegations of widespread abuse during the violent September crackdown on pro-democracy protests, with an aim of determining the numbers of people detained and killed by the regime.[237]

During his 2007 visit Pinheiro held discussions with senior SPDC officials, including from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Rangoon Peace and Development Council, Rangoon general hospital and law enforcement agencies. He also met with the UN resident coordinator, Charles Petrie. Pinheiro visited several detention facilities where protesters were held after being arrested in September and October. He spoke to staff and security forces in charge of detainees at Insein prison, and two other detention centres. Pinheiro was also granted a visit to Kya Khat Waing monastery in Bago, where he spoke with the chief abbot, and also met the board of trustees of Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon. He visited two more Rangoon monasteries which were involved in the protests, and met the senior abbots of the state governing body of the Buddhist clergy.[238]

While, Pinheiro's visit was mostly dominated by meetings with junta officials, he also had one-to-one meetings with five prominent political prisoners in Insein Prison, including members of the 88 Generation Students group, and labour activist Su Su Nway, arrested two days earlier as she tried to place a leaflet near a hotel where Pinheiro was staying.[239] He also met with Win Tin, a 77-year-old journalist who has been detained since 1989, and as such the country's longest-serving political prisoner. Reporters who followed the UN envoy saw Pinheiro enter the prison compound but were not allowed to accompany him further. Pinheiro had requested a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, but it was not granted by the government. Despite worldwide criticism, the junta shamelessly continued its crackdown on suspected protesters during Pinheiro's visit.[240] Upon returning from his mission, Pinheiro acknowledged that it had not been *"a full-fledged fact-finding mission,"* as he was denied free access and movement, his agenda dictated to him by the military authorities.[241]

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. *[Photo: AP]*

Foreign Diplomats

Diplomats and foreign missions were in 2007 given mixed welcomes by the SPDC. Diplomats welcomed by the SPDC were mostly representatives of countries which are engaged in trade and infrastructure projects with the regime. For example, the Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Advisor, Ifhekhar Ahmed Chowdury, was invited on a four-day official tour of Burma in April.[242] In April, Yeo, a high level Singapore official visited Burma, and met the junta's First Secretary Lt-Gen Thein Sein.[243] However, former South Korean president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Kim Dae-jung was denied a visa in early January. The former president reportedly hoped to visit the country to join an international campaign calling for the release of fellow Nobel laureate and pro-democracy icon Aung San Kyi.[244] In an attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations with North Korea, a three-member delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Kim Young II, was invited to Burma in late April.[245]

Foreign Journalists

Foreign journalists continued to be denied visas to Burma in 2007. Thus most foreign journalists were forced to enter the country undercover on tourist visas. On two occasions, however, foreign journalists were granted visas to enter the country, both times to attend SPDC press conferences.

In March 2007, the junta invited foreign journalists to the first major press conference in its new capital Naypyidaw. In a bid to stem international criticism, SPDC Information minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan used the occasion to tell foreign reporters that, *"Myanmar has no ethnic cleansing, racial conflicts, or severe human rights violations."* Foreign journalists were also invited to observe a military parade to mark Armed Forces Day.[246]

In July 2007, the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok suspended a plan to invite Bangkok-based foreign journalists to attend a press conference on the final session of the National Convention. The embassy had previously been directed by the regime to issue visas for the journalists, and had already accepted some applications. According to one foreign journalist, the embassy refunded all visa fees for journalists who had applied. The regime had previously planned to invite foreign journalists from about 20 countries to attend the press conference of the National Convention. They were to receive a one-week visa from July 12-18, which was later changed to July 21-27. According to a Bangkok-based journalist, the visa schedule included a two-day state-sponsored trip to Mon and Karen states to show development projects in these areas.[247] Rangoon-based foreign correspondents who had been invited to attend the National Convention press conference were told not to carry tape recorders and mobile phones.[248]

Foreign Tourists

Many Western tourists have been avoiding trips to Burma as they do not wish to support the military junta by providing revenue. Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly urged foreigners not to travel to Burma.[249] However, the debate on whether tourists should visit the country continues, with the pro-tourism side claiming that sensible tourism has the potential to support the local economy and can help improve people's livelihoods.

According to official figures, 654,602 tourists visited Burma in the fiscal year 2006-07, representing an increase of 11.4 percent since the previous year. In the first four months of 2007 there were over 47,000 tourist arrivals through Rangoon entry checkpoint, representing an increase in 20 per cent from the same period in 2006. The regime gained US$ 198 million from tourism in 2006-07, up from US$ 164 million dollars the previous year.[250]

The regime only began allowing tourists to visit in the last 20 years, and movement outside the main cities and tourist sites are still restricted.[251] Tourists are limited mostly to travel in central areas of the country. Moreover, several destinations are only reachable for tourists by air, as overland travel in many areas is not permitted for foreigners. The authorities keep a close watch on the movement of foreigners, who are required to register with name and passport everywhere they travel. Moreover, there are limitations on where foreigners can stay overnight, as the guesthouse or hotel has to be authorised to receive foreigners.[252]

Economic protests in Rangoon in February 2007. *[Photo: Irrawaddy]*

10.8 Restrictions on the Freedom of Assembly

The law in Burma allows for almost total control at state level of the assembly of the people, and thus stands in direct contravention of Article 20 of the UDHR. Thus, anti-government rallies are rare in Burma. Any show of public protest is firmly suppressed by the SPDC authorities, fearing a wider outbreak of unrest. In 1988 a nationwide pro-democracy uprising took place, upon which the authorities cracked down brutally, killing an estimated 3,000 demonstrators and imprisoning even more. Following the demonstrations of 1988, order 2/88 was enacted, prohibiting the *"gathering, walking or marching in procession by a group of five or more people regardless of whether the act is with the intention of creating a disturbance or of committing a crime."*[253] Fearing another uprising, the regime has effectively upheld this act since 1988. In 2007 the authorities continued violating fundamental rights of assembly and association by harassing and arresting people for organising or taking part in peaceful gatherings.

The ban on demonstrations, however, only seems to apply to demonstrators critical of the regime. In 2007, the SPDC encouraged pro-government rallies organised by its proxy organisations, such as the government-backed USDA. By not attempting to prevent these protests, the SPDC put their own protestors above the law.[254] In the aftermath of the September protests, the SPDC forced thousands to attend pro-government rallies all over the country, condemning the September uprising and supporting the national convention.

Throughout 2007, political gatherings were frequent targets of bans and crackdowns, celebrations of historical and religious events were constrained, and peaceful demonstrations were disrupted and participants penalised:

On 12 February 2007, a dinner organised by the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) to celebrate the 60th Union Day at a Rangoon restaurant had to be cancelled, when the restaurant was ordered to close temporarily by the authorities. The Burmese authorities allowed the Union Day celebrations organized by NLD and the Committee Representing the People's Parliament at the NLD headquarters in Rangoon, but banned the dinner party organized by the UNA.[255]

Burmese authorities routinely refuse to issue permits for public gatherings for some literary events, fearing that discussion will also involve politics. On 22 February 2007, it was reported that three people were charged with *"creating unrest"* and sentenced to three months' imprisonment after organizing a traditional literary event in Paung Tale in western Pegu Division.[256]

May Day events were clamped down on by authorities. On 30 April 2007, authorities in Chauk Township in Magwe Division ordered employers not to allow their workers to attend a May Day celebration organized by the local NLD. Local authorities informed they would monitor the ceremony and take photographs. Employees were warned that if they attended the ceremony, or had any interaction with 88 Generation Students group, they would be fired and face legal action, according to Ye Thein Naing. Employees were ordered to sign documents stating that they would not attend the May Day ceremony.[257] In Rangoon, the organizers of a planned May Day workshop at the American Center were arrested on 1 May by local authorities. About 30 people who were planning to attend the workshop were arrested and detained by Military Security Forces (SaYaPa). Most were later released from Kyaikkasan interrogation centre, however six of the organizers were given long prison sentences.[258]

Celebrations of Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday in June 2007, were as usual disrupted. A celebration held at the NLD township organizing committee chairman U Than Nyunt's house,

Shwe Bo Township, Sagaing division, was disrupted by violent attackers. According to U Than Nyunt, *"They tossed marbles using catapults from a distance. When we were returning iron-rivets and tin-rivets were put on the entrance. Our motorbikes, bicycles and vehicles were win-hatched."*[259] (For more information, see Section 10.11: Restrictions and harassment of the NLD)

On Martyr's Day in July 2007, local authorities prevented residents in Pegu from giving donations to monks as they were worried it would lead to overcrowding. *"Personal donation is not related to Martyr's Day, but all the same the authorities were scared,"* said an abbot in the State Sangha Maha Nayaka. Security was also tightened in the town, and local authorities imposed curfew which barred people from gathering. As a result of the SPDC's restrictions on observing Martyr's Day, many schools have stopped commemorating the day.[260]

The regime also frequently interfered with the assembly of religious groups during 2007. Buddhist celebrations and monk gatherings faced new restrictions in the aftermath of the September protests. (For more information see Chapter 10: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

Suppression of Prayer Vigils

People in Rangoon attending prayer vigils for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners were subject to severe harassment by SPDC authorities and their proxy groups USDA and SAS. In January 2007, a group of around 40 activists started visiting Shwedagon Pagoda every Tuesday (the day of the week that Aung San Suu Kyi was born), to pray at the Tuesday pillar for her release and the release of all political prisoners in the country. On several occasions, SPDC authorities used the USDA to harass the group. The USDA combined several tactics of harassment, including physically blocking the group from entering the pagoda grounds and making them pray outside the entrance; shouting and clapping loudly or playing music through loudspeakers at full volume to drown out their prayers; and pouring water on the floor in front of the Tuesday pillar so that the worshippers would have to kneel in water. On some occasions praying activists were even beaten by special police. Despite the harassment the worshippers continued to pray every Tuesday. In May 2007 many more groups began praying at different pagodas for Aung San Suu Kyi's release upon expiration of her detention order on May 27.[261] It was reported that in April and May 2007, more than 60 activists and politicians had been abducted or arrested by unidentified people after attending prayer campaigns or protests for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The military has denied any responsibility for the arrests, claiming they were the work of "the people".[262]

On 16 January 2007, a group of around 10 activists attending the Tuesday prayer vigil for political prisoners at Shwedagon pagoda were beaten by special police. An estimated 200-400 pagoda police, USDA members and special police drove the activists out of the pagoda compound. Ko Than Zaw Myint who had attended the prayer vigil said: *"Two grabbed my shoulders and said, 'Don't hang around. Leave here'. I told them I was there not to leave but to pray on the pagoda. They said, 'You want to die?' and gave me a punch across my face."*[263] A resident of Hlaingtharyar, Than Zaw Myint who was injured went to file a case in Bahan police station but the police refused to register the case. According to one of the praying activists, Ko Tun Tun, the SPDC group was lead by Nyein Wai, the head of North Okkalapa township branch and Thingyankyun branch head Htut Wai. Military intelligence, the Special Branch, police and security personnel of the Shwedagon pagoda were closely monitoring the situation.[264]

On the three next Tuesdays; 23 January, 30 January and 6 February 2007, activists attending the regular Tuesday prayer meeting for political prisoners at Shwedagon pagoda were doused with soapy water by pagoda officials and security guards. One member of the prayer group said: *"They are soaking the place with soapy water, sweeping it with brooms . . . they are making it impossible to sit down and pray. The place is also being blasted with a loudspeaker."* According to another prayer activist, the group was also doused with water while they were trying to eat their lunch: *"While we were having our meals, six uniformed security staff from the gazebo asked the cleaning girls to give them water buckets. Then they poured water onto us and ruined our meals. We said nothing in response."*[265]

On 20 February 2007, Tuesday prayer goers at Shwedagon pagoda were surrounded by several USDA members and pagoda security personnel, who threatened to beat them. A participant in the prayer campaign, said: *"I was shocked to see the big mob wearing the pagoda's security uniform who surrounded us. A man with a walkie-talkie shouted that we be beaten up saying that they won't tolerate prayers. Then he shouted that we be driven out of the pagoda compound."* According to the activist, orders were given by Captain Thein Htike Oo in civilian dress. One of the oldest activists, Hla Kyi (77), said: *"I was sitting inside the compound near a bamboo fence. They threatened us saying 'You old granny get out of here. If you do not go out, we will beat you.'"*[266]

On 15 May 2007, 39 activists were arrested on their way to Buddhist temples in Rangoon to pray for the release of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi. One group of 28 activists led by Su Su Nway were arrested on their way to Kyauktawgyi pagoda whilst another 11 activists were arrested as they prepared to march to Shwedagon pagoda.[267]

On 16 May 2007, 15 pro-democracy activists were arrested by civilian dressed mobs after praying for the release of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi at Kyaik Ka Lo pagoda in Mingaladon Township. Khin Myat Thu, an NLD youth member leader, said the activists were taken into custody by about 30 people in plain clothes, who failed to identify themselves. She said she later learned that some of those who took part in the arrests had earlier been forcefully recruited by authorities near the pagoda. They were taken to the Kyaik Ka San interrogation camp to join prayer goers arrested the day before, but the group was later released as there was no space in the interrogation centre, according to Than Naing, one of the arrested activists.[268]

On 25 May 2007, 30 NLD members were praying for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at Kyaukhtutgyi pagoda in Bahan Township, when they were attacked and beaten by military personnel and members of the USDA and pro-government militia. The NLD members who were praying wore T-shirts with pictures of Aung San Suu Kyi and her late husband Michael Aris, and it was reported that the attackers had shouted slogans like 'destructive elements' and 'stooges'. According to an eyewitness, the attackers had weapons hidden under their jackets. According to an eye-witness: *"Those who were praying were calm and patient but four or five of them were first assaulted just after they finished praying. Buddhist monks helped to free them from the attackers."* It was reported that the group of attackers was led by the Secretary of Tamwe USDA, Lae Lae Win Swe, together with military personnel.[269]

On 27 May 2007, SPDC hired thugs and police blocked hundreds of activists as they were marching to Shwedagon Pagoda from the NLD headquarters to hold a prayer vigil for Daw Suu Kyi's release. The estimated 500 democracy activists were led by leaders of the 88 Generation Student Group. According to witnesses, the group of around 100 USDA and plainclothes police shouted abuse at the prayer goers for about 15 minutes, and dragged one NLD elected member away. The brief confrontation ended as the marchers returned to NLD headquarters, where they prayed and shouted slogans such as *"Free Aung San Suu Kyi"* and *"Release her now"*. Prominent 88 Generation Student leader, Min Ko Naing, was quoted as telling junta supporters from outside the NLD head office: *"Please understand that*

we are not frightened by your threats ... we will proceed with peaceful gatherings…We can pray for her from here."[270] The prayer march to Shwedagon was staged to mark the 17th anniversary of the NLD's election victory.[271]

On 11 June 2007, over 20 women NLD members who were praying for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Thanlyin-Kyaikgauk pagoda, were driven out by pagoda management committee officials.[272]

A Year of Economic Protests

As a result of the ever deteriorating economic situation in the country, the year 2007 saw an increase in economic protests, starting subtly in February and continuing throughout the year, with a peak in August/September, when protests escalated and spread throughout the country. In September, activists were joined in the streets by large numbers of the Buddhist clergy, who took leadership in the protests, hence in the aftermath aptly named the "Saffron Revolution". Like the 1988 uprising, the 2007 Saffron Revolution was preceded by a series of smaller public protests over rising commodity prices, inflation and other economic hardships. As public protests escalated, so did the SPDC's reactions to the protests, responding with a brutal crackdown and arrest campaign. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution, and Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances)

The year's first protest in February came after almost a decade without major public demonstrations against the military government well-known for not tolerating dissent. The three first major economic protests of the year took place in Rangoon on 22 February, 22 April, and 22 May, and were largely organised and attended by a small group of activists. In the following months, there were smaller, sporadic protests throughout the country. In June, it was reported that a protester in Arakan state was held for two days after he staged a one-person demonstration against inflation that drew crowds of onlookers.[273] A wave of protests took place in late August as a result of a sudden hike in the price of gas which again led to increased commodity prices. The Myanmar Development Committee called for a nationwide protest against the sudden hikes, demanding the reduction of prices on fuel and basic commodities.[274]

On 22 February 2007, the first protests were held in downtown Rangoon by a group of around 15 activists calling themselves the Myanmar Development Committee. The group called on the SPDC to check on soaring inflation leading to abnormal rise in prices of food and essential commodities, as well as improvements in education and health care. The demonstrators were encouraged by onlookers, some joining the protests. The protest ended peacefully. At least 5 of the protesters were arrested by police.[275] Several more protestors were later arrested from their homes. The state run newspaper *New Light of Myanmar* accused demonstrators of inciting a riot and said the protest panicked nearby vendors, shoppers and passers-by and *"violated the existing law."*[276] In the next few days at least 16 more people were arrested in connection with the demonstration.[277] According to Myint Shwe the authorities announced that the Myanmar Development Committee (MDC) was banned and any activity conducted with it would be penalized under the existing law. *"The authorities briefed us about the penalties that would befall us for illegally associating, disturbing peace and tranquility, and causing the public to disrespect the government,"* said Myint Shwe.[278]

On 22 April 2007, around 10 activists held a demonstration near Sanpya Market in Rangoon's Thingangyun Township, calling for lower commodity prices, better healthcare and improved utility services. Eight of the protesters were arrested by plainclothes police,

members of the pro-junta USDA and the paramilitary *Swan Arr Shin*. According to witnesses, two of the protest leaders, Htin Kyaw and Phoe Thoke, were beaten by a mob led by police sergeant Zaw Khin before being taken away. Again, the junta denounced the protest as an attempt to mislead the public and cause unrest, while praising the actions taken by the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* as *"preventative measures for ensuring community peace and tranquillity."*[279]

On 22 May 2007, a demonstration was held against Myanmar's rising inflation and other economic woes, such as electricity shortages. Htin Kyaw and four others were jailed. *"All of his colleagues who were detained on May 22 were released early July,"* said Win Naing, the self-confessed mastermind behind the unique form of protest in Myanmar, where no public demonstrations are permitted without government approval.[280]

Activists in Rangoon protest against the fuel price hikes in August 2007. *[Photo: FDB]*

The autumn's first series of protests started on 19 August, after a sudden and unannounced hike in fuel prices on 15 August. At least 100 people were detained in the first week of protests in August. Most of the arrests were made in Rangoon from August 21 to 25, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).[281]

On 19 August the 88 Generation Students' Group led more than 400 people in a protest march through Yangon after the SPDC raised fuel prices by 500 percent.[282] In an attempt to quell the protests, the authorities on 21 August arrested 13 leaders of the 88 Generation Students Group and several other activists. Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Pyone Cho, Min Zeya, Mya Aye, Ko Jimmy, Ko Zeya, Kyaw Kyaw Htwe, Arnt Bwe Kyaw, Panneik Tun, Zaw Zaw Min, Thet Zaw and Nyan Lin Tun were detained, and still not released by the end of 2007.[283] In addition to the 88 Generation Student leaders, three members of Myanmar Development Committee (MDC), a group that called for nationwide protest the next day, were arrested, including MDC leader Ko Htin Kyaw.[284] Following these arrests protests were led by four prominent women activists: Naw Ohn Hla from the NLD, Nilar Thein, Mie Mie from the '88 Generation Students Group, and NLD Youth Member and prominent HIV activist Phyu Phyu Thin.[285]

Protests escalated when monks took the lead in mid-September in what was to be the largest uprising since 1988. As a response to the uprising the military junta on 26 September enforced the ban on gathering of more than five people in public places, and declared a curfew in two major cities Rangoon and Mandalay. The peaceful September 2007 protests were brutally suppressed by SPDC military forces, police, and junta-backed USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* mobs. (For more information about the protests and the crackdown see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement and the HRDU report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*)

As a result of the violent crackdown and massive arrest campaign following the September protests, not many took to the streets in October. In Sittwe, people tried to protest on 28 October, but the demonstration did not take place because of heightened security. On 31 October, more than 100 monks chanted prayers while marching in Pakokku.[286] In November there were a few more sporadic protests, but they never had the chance to gain real momentum. On 3 November, about 50 Buddhist monks marched peacefully in Mogok. And on the 25 November, around 30 women activists staged a small anti-government protest in Rangoon - the first to take place there since the authorities crushed demonstrations in September.[287] The women marched from Sule Pagoda to the Bothahtaung pagoda, where they prayed for the monks and other protesters who had died in the September demonstrations and for the release of detainees. The group was shadowed by members of the junta-backed USDA and the *Swan Arr Shin*, but they did not intervene.[288]

Pro-Junta Rallies

However, not everyone in Burma is restricted in their freedom of assembly. Pro-regime "demonstrations" and rallies organised by the SPDC's proxy organisations are allowed and encouraged by the authorities. It is clear that the regime applies double standards in regard to assembly. In February 2007, while condemning the activists who staged a demonstration calling for improvement in the economy, education and healthcare, the state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar praised a group of USDA members who held demonstrations in front of the US and British embassies, denouncing the two countries' efforts to get a resolution condemning the military junta adopted by the UN Security Council.[289]

In blatant contradiction to its usual policy of prohibiting assembly, the regime organised forced gatherings to serve and support their own political ends. SPDC controlled press regularly reports on mass rallies in which participants have been forced to attend. Such efforts are made to demonstrate that the junta rules with the mandate of the people.

On 4 January 2007, villagers in southern Mon State were forced by SPDC troops to stop their work and attend celebrations of the 59th Independence Day of Burma.[290]

On 18 February 2007, townspeople in Sittwe, Arakan State, were forced by military authorities to attend the reopening ceremony of Sittwe seaport jetty. They were made to wear colourful dress, including Arakanese traditional dress.[291]

On 29 March 2007, over 400 villagers were forced by military authorities to attend a celebration for the launch of construction on the Tasang Dam in Shan State in northeastern Burma. According to Sapawa, an ethnic Shan environmental group, local six-wheel trucks were commandeered, and villagers, including schoolchildren, from Mong Ton and Mong Pan were trucked to the dam-site. The villagers were threatened with imprisonment if they failed to obey orders to attend the ceremony.[292]

A series of pro-junta rallies were organised by authorities and its proxies in an attempt to show the people's support for the National Convention and the proposed draft constitution which was concluded on 3 September 2007. The countrywide rallies were initially planned for the last week of September but were postponed after the monk-led demonstrations broke out.[293] After violently suppressing the peaceful September demonstrations, the junta became even more intent on cleaning up its image. The rallies thus became an avenue for the regime to praise the national convention, as well as denouncing the monk-led protests, foreign governments and exiled Burmese media.

Local authorities and USDA typically ordered every household in the town or village to send at least one person to the rally, and threatened to punish any family that did not comply with the orders. Government servants and members of government backed organisations were ordered to attend the rallies along with family members.

Punishment for not attending the rallies ranged from fines of 1,000-10,000 kyat to imprisonment. Type of punishment varied from place to place. It was reported that villagers who failed to attend a rally in Kalay, Sagaing division, were fined 5,000 kyat per household.[294] In Myawaddy, Karen State, residents who did not attend the rally were fined 8,000 kyat and a sack of cement.[295] In Kawkareik Township, also in Karen State, each household had to provide one individual to attend the rally or otherwise provide an explanation and pay a 5,000-10,000 kyat fine for non-attendance. This demand was backed up with the threat that those who were unwilling or unable to either attend or pay the fine would be imprisoned. In some cases SPDC authorities further warned that children of such households would not be allowed to sit their exams.[296]

Most people attended the rallies in fear of potential repercussions from the government, not because they supported the government or the national convention. *"People gathered in fear of military threats, not for what they believe. It is not their real will, and they are not interested in it. It is regime propaganda,"* said a Rangoon resident.[297] Angered with the authorities' behaviour, some used the opportunity of forced rallies to oppose the junta, by shouting anti-government messages, and mocking the authorities.

At the rallies people were typically forced to shout slogans supporting the outcome of the National Convention and to condemn the Burmese media and opposition groups in exile as destructive elements who had encouraged the recent protests in Burma.[298] However, according to several reports, most people refused to shout pro-junta slogans. According to a resident of Myitkyina, *"During the ceremony, people didn't care what the organizers were talking about. They were just going around and talking with each other."*[299] Some even used the opportunity to oppose the military junta by shouting anti-junta messages. According to a resident in Sittwe, during the ceremony there, when organizers asked people to shout *"Oppose,"* some in the crowd shouted, *"Release the detainees."*[300] It was similarly reported how the majority of people attending a rally in Mansi Township, Kachin State, demanded their wishes instead of denouncing the recent demonstration.[301]

People Forced to Attend Pro-Junta Rallies – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 12 October 2007, a rally was held in Danyawaddy playground in Sittwe, with over 100,000 people attending. Most of the attendees were USDA members and army families of 60 battalions stationed around Arakan State. Around 300 SPDC soldiers attending the rally were dressed in fire service uniforms, in an effort to present themselves as firemen. Tens of thousands of people were summoned for the rally from rural townships like Rathidaung, Pauktaw, Ponna Kyunt, Buthidaung, and Maungdaw. The night before the rally, authorities ordered over the loudspeakers that all families in Sittwe send at least one person to the rally, and threatened to punish any family that did not comply with the orders.[302]

On 14 October 2007, 100 people were forced to attend rallies held in Maungdaw and Buthidaung.[303]

On 15 October 2007, 300 people were forced to attend a rally in Rathedaung.[304]

On 16 October 2007, rallies in Pauktaw, Mrauk-U and Kyauktaw were staged for less than an hour.[305]

Chin State

On 9 October 2007, over 20,000 were forced to attend a rally at 'Vumtu Maung' sport ground in Hakha. Each household in Hakha Township were ordered to send at least two members.[306]

On 24 October 2007, over 4,000 forced to attend rally in Rih town in Falam district. Authorities ordered each household to send at least three persons.[307]

On 9 November 2007, over 6000 were forced to attend a rally in Thangtlang Township, while around 100 refused to attend.[308]

School children forced to attend a pro-SPDC rally at the Thuwunna Sports Ground in Rangoon, on 13 October 2007. *[Photo: AFP]*

Karen State

On 8 October 2007, authorities ordered each household in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya, to provide one individual to attend the rally or otherwise provide an explanation and pay a 5,000 kyat fine for non-attendance.[309]

On 25 October, residents were ordered to attend rally in Myawaddy Sport complex, or be fined 8,000 kyat and a sack of cement.[310]

Karenni State

On 30 September 2007, villagers were forced to attend a rally at the Kantarawaddy sports stadium in Loi Kaw. Thirteen wards from downtown Loi Kaw and 133 villages from 13 village groups attended the rally. The 13 village groups are Pan Kan, Htee Sakhar, Loi Lin Lay, Noe Koe, Kon Thar, Daw Pawkalae, Nwerlabo, Checal, Marhtawkhu, Par Laung, Tee Lone, Law Pi Ta and Htee Tangar.[311]

Kachin State

On 15 September 2007, a rally was held in Myitkyina to support the national convention. One person from each household were forced to participate, those failing to attend would be severely punished.[312]

On 29 September 2007, around 1,200 high-school students, 250 teachers and 30,000 civilians were forced to join mass pro-government rally at Myitkyina stadium to show support for the National Convention. The rally was reportedly organised by the USDA under the direction of General Ohn Mya, commander of the northern states' military headquarters, who demanded two people from each household join the rally or else face punishment.[313]

On 25 October 2007, 10,000 forced to attend a rally at a football playground in Mansi Township. Each household had to send one person, threatened with punishment if they failed to attend. Villagers from rural areas in Mansi Township were forced to gather at 4:00 am and come to the rally by trucks which were forced to carry people to the rally. [314]

Mandalay Division

On 1 and 2 October 2007, around 200 people were forced to attend a rally at the football ground in Myingyan town, Mandalay Division, in support of the National Convention. The authorities ordered the attendance of at least four people from each village, and in some villages up to 10 people. [315]

On 2 October 2007, around 20,000 people were forced to attend a rally at Meikhtila football ground Meikhtila town. The rally was reportedly organized by members of USDA U Than Toe and U Hla Myint, who lured people by saying that those who attend will be given 1500 kyat an lunch, however nothing was given. They also threatened to fine those failing to attend 10,000 kyat.[316]

Mon State

On 10 October 2007, thousands of people were forced to attend a rally in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State to support National Convention and the newly drafted constitution. Teachers and students from about 16 high schools in Moulmein were told to wear plainclothes instead of uniforms. Also, the students were not allowed to wear watches, warm clothes or bring umbrellas to the rally. Each school had to send around 490 persons. Authorities ordered one person from each family to attend. Each village had to provide about eight USDA members, three members of other pro-regime organizations, and six people in traditional dress.[317]

On 22 October 2007, authorities organised a rally at the football playground in Mudon Town to denounce the September uprising. Authorities ordered 42 villages in Mudon Township to attend the rally, threatening with fines of at least 1000 Kyat if failure to attend. Although each family were ordered to send a person to the rally, the majority of the villagers refused to attend. On average each village were to provide around 250 persons, however only about 50-100 villagers from each village attended. It was announced that those absent had to pay a fine of up to 3000 to 5000 kyat.[318]

On 24 October 2007, around 20,000 were forced to attend an SPDC rally held at the precincts of a pagoda at the centre of Ye Town to denounce the monk-led September protests. Authorities demanded four bags of cement from each household in the villages of

Ye Township that failed to attend the rally, while threatening others with fines of up to 4,000 kyat.[319]

Pegu Division

On 17 September 2007, a rally was to be held in Tharawaddy in support of the national convention. The rally was organised by the Tharawaddy USDA, who told village leaders from Pegu District to organise 100 people each to attend a USDA rally at the local football field on September 17. Tharawaddy Township and the surrounding villages had to contribute 5000 people while other townships had to send another 5000.[320]

Rangoon Division

On 26 November 2007, it was announced that the USDA was organising mass rallies in Khayan Township, Rangoon division, to show opposition to a statement by democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. As an incentive to join the rallies, USDA members told local residents that they would issue national identity cards to everyone who attended the rallies.[321]

Sagaing Division

On 19 November 2007, a rally was held in Monywa town. Every village was forced to send 400 to 500 residents to the pro-junta rally, and threatened with fines or imprisonment. Authorities forced some ethnic minority members to wear traditional clothing identifying their ethnicity in order to show that these groups "supported" the government.[322]

Shan State

On 1 October 2007, around 10,000 people in eastern Shan State were ordered to attend a pro-junta rally in Kengtung, to support the National Convention. Another rally was to be held in Lashio, in Shan State North.[323]

On 4 October 2007, a rally was to be held in Langkher, in Shan State South in support of the National Convention. One of its townships, Mongpan, was ordered to provide 1,500 attendees, required to bring with them 3 sticks of firewood, 3 milk cans of rice and 500 kyat (US$ 0.4) each for food.[324]

On 12 November 2007, more than 10,000 people were forced to attend a rally in Hnam Kham Town of northern Shan State in protest against the US' condemnations of the SPDC. During the rally, plainclothes policemen set fire to a portrait of US President George Bush, presumably in an attempt to show that the people in Burma are opposed to the United States. The rally was organised by USDA officials, who ordered each village in the township and quarters in the towns to send at least 500 people each. According to a local resident, *"Authorities are taking the lead but they did not wear uniforms. Everyone came in plainclothes. They shouted slogans but nobody followed suit."*[325]

10.9 Restrictions on the Freedom of Association

In blatant violation of Article 20 of the UDHR; the Burmese junta has enacted and applied a number of legislative texts in order to suppress the right to freedom of association. Article 15 (2) of the Unlawful Associations Act, 1908 (1957) declares an unlawful association to be any association:

> *a) which encourages or aids persons to commit acts of violence or intimidation or of which the members habitually commit such acts, or*
> *b) which has been declared to be unlawful by the President of the Union-under the powers hereby conferred.*

Those groups criminalised under this act include political parties, trade unions, student unions, religious associations, as well as armed opposition groups. The act allows for the imprisonment, for up to five years, of anyone who is a member of, or is deemed to have assisted, any organisation deemed illegal under this act. Through this mechanism the SPDC has been able to disrupt the operations of any group deemed undesirable to its own ends, with Article 15 (2) (b) conferring upon it the unlimited right to do so.

An official system of registration was put in place for all organisations wishing to legally operate within Burma, in 1988. With the establishment of military rule following the pro-democracy uprisings, Order 6/88, the Law of Formation of Associations and Organisations, was created on 30 September 1988 and defines an organisation or association as *"an organisation, union, party, committee, headquarters, syndicate, front... or similar association and organisation that may not have a name but is composed of a group of people for a purpose or program."* All organisations fitting this description must be granted official permission to function, without which they have no right to operate. If denied permission, members of such an organisation may be subject to up to three years imprisonment.[326]

There were 10 legally registered political parties in 2007; however most were crumbling due to the restrictions imposed on them. During the year, authorities harassed and intimidated the three legal parties that challenged military rule. The seven other legal parties supported regime policies in return for more favourable treatment.[327] (For more information see Section 10.10 Restrictions on Political Parties). State employees continued to be prohibited from joining or supporting political parties, as did monks. At the same time, civil servants were forcibly conscripted into the increasingly politicised SPDC controlled USDA. (For more information see Section 10.17: The Union Solidarity and Development Association). Few independent NGOs existed in Burma in 2007, and those that did took special care to act in accordance with SPDC policy, as the SPDC's security apparatus continued to closely monitor the activities of virtually all organisations, whether legal or not.[328]

Several associations were banned or given warnings against carrying out political activities. The Myanmar Development Committee (MDC), led by Ko Htin Kyaw, which organised peaceful economic protests in February, April, May and August, was banned by authorities in March. The SPDC announced that any activity conducted with it would be penalized under the existing law.[329] The Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP), the country's major opposition alliance, was in February warned by police chief Brig-Gen Khin Yi that the organisation is illegal and would be punished if making political statements. The warning came as a reaction to CRPP's leading role in the celebration of "Union Day," during which the group released a statement that called on the military government to immediately release political prisoners, to allow political parties free movement, to promote political reform in the country and to respect the human rights of Burmese citizens.[330]

A range of new activist groups emerged in 2007, however most were not recognised or legalised by the regime, and thus had to operate undercover. Following the September Saffron Revolution and the junta's brutal crackdown, pro-democracy groups mushroomed, mostly in the form of undercover groups such as "Generation Wave', 'Peoples Union', 'Civilian Community' and the 'Freedom Fighters'. In addition, new alliances and coalition groups emerged from the Saffron Revolution, such as the People's Movement Leader Committee and the Mass Movement Supervising Committee (Rangoon Division). Their activities included distribution of pamphlets and posters calling for political change. As they have so far kept a relatively low profile, only limited information has been obtainable about these groups.[331]

10.10 Restrictions on Political Parties

All political parties and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were banned from 1964 to 1988, when the introduction of the Political Parties Registration Act again made it possible for parties to form.[332] After over twenty years without official political parties, this sparked an overwhelming response and resulted in over two hundred parties being formed. Two years later free elections were held, in which the NLD won an overwhelming majority of the votes. However, determined to stay in power, the military refused to honour the election results. Instead the military junta embarked on a suppressive campaign against their political opponents which continued up to and throughout 2007.

The regime frequently utilizes the Unlawful Associations Act 1908 (1957) to rule political parties illegal and punish their members. The first parties to be de-registered were those which represented ethnic minorities and those which had collectively called for a federal constitution in their party manifestos. However, upon signing ceasefire agreements with the SLORC (former name of SPDC), some ethnic minority parties later attained a quasi legal status, whereby they were not officially declared as legal entities but still welcomed into the National Convention process.

In 2007, there were 10 legally registered political parties, most of which were either directly or indirectly affiliated to the regime. One old group which re-emerged in 2007 was the "Red Flag" Communists, who reportedly were forming a political organization to marginalize the main opposition groups - the NLD and the 88 Generation Students group. The regime seemingly tolerates the resurgence of old enemies as long as they are ready to support the junta's cause.[333] Only three legally recognised parties continued in their attempts to operate independently; the NLD, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and the small Shan State Kokang Democratic Party. As these parties refused to be co-opted by the regime, their legal status did not protect them from intense pressure and interference at the hands of the junta.[334] Likewise, ethnic ceasefire groups, such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP), who chose to abstain from the National Convention process, were subject to scrutiny and harassment.

In 2007, the National Convention continued without the participation of the following political parties: the NLD, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Chin National League for Democracy, Kachin State National Congress for Democracy, Karen National Congress for Democracy, Kayah State all Nationalities League for Democracy, Mon National Democratic Front, and Zomi National Congress. These nine parties accounted for 90.9 % of the elected representatives in the 1990 election.[335]

The SPDC maintained firm restrictions on the assembly of legal political parties. Prior to holding meetings, political parties were required to request permission from the SPDC. Moreover, all meetings of political parties were to be attended by a member of the local Peace and Development Council responsible for taking notes and photographs.

As in previous years, the SPDC maintained constant surveillance on the activities of all prominent pro-democracy advocates, often including detailed listings of their movements and activities in state run press, alongside assertions that citizens viewed these activities as attempts to destabilise the country.

Throughout the year, political parties, coalitions and its members were subject to harassment and increased restrictions by the regime.

The Committee Representing People's Parliament (CRPP) and its members continued to face harassment in 2007. The CRPP is a 10-party coalition of ethnic minority parties, established to serve as a proxy parliament after the military government refused to convene the real parliament following the 1990 elections.[336] After calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, and for the 1990 elections to be honoured at a CRPP meeting in February 2007, its leader U Aung Shwe was warned by the country's police chief not to make pro-democracy demands in the future. The state newspaper, New Light of Myanmar stated that *"The CRPP's demands are unlikely to bring good results to the nation and the people. Moreover, it is not a legally formed organization, so it has no rights to make such a demand."*[337] In response, Fu Cin Sian Thang, an ethnic member of CRPP, stated that *"It is nonsense to say the CRPP is illegal. The CRPP is indeed an organization formed in 1998 by people including elected representatives. These people are the ones who were elected in the government's election."*[338]

Fu Cin Sian Thang, an outspoken member of the CRPP, who is also chairman of the Zomi National Congress, has been particularly targeted by the SPDC authorities. In April 2007 the local authorities ordered the demolishment of his home in Kalay, Sagaing division, on the pretext that it was *"encroaching on the road and a squatter's house"*.[339] Another politician facing harassment from the SPDC in 2007 was Ban Chan Pru, the Rangoon Division organizer of the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) and a member of the United National Alliance (UNA). Ban Chan Pru was arrested on 22 January 2007 accused of having connections with an Arakanese political group outside the country, and in August, Ban Chan Pru was sentenced to 20 years in Insein prison, without access to a lawyer. The Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) is a political organization banned by the military junta. The party won 11 seats from Arakan State in the 1990 elections, and was thus the third winning party.[340]

Several NLD members faced pressure and harassment by the authorities throughout 2007. Members of the NLD were particularly pressured by authorities to resign their party membership. (For more information see Section 10.11: Restrictions on and Harassment of the NLD)

Moreover, political activists received particularly lengthy prison sentences. The regime continued to detain 13 MPs who were democratically elected in the 1990 election. Out of 13 MPs in prison, 11 belong to the NLD.[341] (For more information see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances)

The junta continues to marginalize political activists by limiting their economic and social rights. Members of legal political parties, as well as human rights defenders and social activists, experience being deprived of professional licensing and freely running their businesses. Some activists have even experienced the termination of their business registration as a result of their involvement in politics.[342] The SPDC has closed down businesses, revoked business licenses or refused to issue permits to people engaged in political activities. (For more information see Section 10.12: Restrictions on and Harassment of the 88 Generation Students' Group).

In 2007 the SPDC continued its propaganda campaign against political opposition groups, branding several of them as terrorist organisations. The regime's ungrounded use of "war on terror" rhetoric is a sign of its desperate attempt to legitimise its harassment of opposition groups.

The SPDC accused the political opposition of carrying out *"terrorist attacks"* following a number of bomb explosions throughout 2007, as in recent years. The responsibility for these bombs was seldom claimed by any group or individual, and there has so far been no evidence put forward that suggests who was responsible. The only group that has claimed

responsibility for bomb blasts is the underground group Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors (VBSW), which in a written statement claimed responsibility for a letter bomb which exploded at a post office in Rangoon on 15 January 2007. The VBSW remain outside Burma's mainstream pro-democracy movement, which favours peaceful opposition activities.[343] Despite this, the SPDC routinely blamed bombs on *"internal and external destructive elements"* - a common SPDC term for opposition groups inside and outside the country. However, most cases remain officially unsolved, and the responsibility of the majority of bombs remains subject of much speculation.[344] While the military government routinely blames ethnic insurgent groups and pro-democracy activists for bombings, the opposition blames SPDC of being behind the bombs.

Despite bombs never having been linked to any of the pro-democracy political parties, the SPDC has continued accusing them of terrorist activity. Ko Maung San, an NLD member from Kawthaung in Tenasserim Division, was arrested after a letter addressed to 'Ko Maung San' was found along with gunpowder on a boat on 6 March. The authorities arrested as many men in the area called Maung San as they could find, including the NLD's Kawthaung secretary. While the other men were released, the NLD member continued to be held in detention. According to NLD spokesperson U Myint Thein:

> *"Gunpowder is widely used in the fishing industry, but the authorities are treating these materials as criminal explosives … Town residents are worried because they know that Ko Maung San has nothing to do with the case, but that he may be charged because he is a member of the NLD."*[345]

Following the veto on a Burma resolution draft in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the SPDC alleged that internal and external anti-government organizations were planning terrorist attacks in the country. The state sponsored newspaper accused two opposition groups in exile; the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) and All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), of being behind the plans.[346] In July 2007, the SPDC again accused ABSDF of planning terrorist attacks, this time with the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB). All groups denied the junta's claims, and the SPDC failed to back up the allegations with any concrete evidence.[347] In August, the regime accused the CRPP, the NLD, 88 generation students, and veteran politicians, of instigating unrest by forming a Central Mass Struggle Committee in league with groups branded by the SPDC as *"terrorists"*; insurgents in exile, the NCUB and remnants of the banned Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The charges were denied by all groups and the junta failed to provide any concrete evidence to substantiate its claims.[348]

While making political activities increasingly difficult for opposition parties, the regime has been preparing their main proxy civilian organisation, the USDA, to become a political party. This is largely seen as an attempt to ensure the regime is represented by a civilian party in the announced upcoming elections in 2010. (For more information see Section 10.17: The Union Solidarity and Development Association).

10.11 Restrictions on and Harassment of the NLD

Burma's military regime frowns upon all displays of dissent, and is especially harsh on members of the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), who continues to face constant harassment and pressure from the authorities. The NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 election, which was annulled by the SPDC refusing to let go of its power. The SPDC has for the last 18 years ignored that the electorate provided the NLD, not the SPDC, with the mandate and political power to improve their lives. The regime has acted as if they could easily discard the results of the 1990 election without having to compromise with the NLD.[349]

In an attempt to undermine the opposition party and discourage its activities, the SPDC has detained NLD leaders; pressured thousands of party members and officials to resign, closed party offices, harassed members' families, and periodically detained hundreds of NLD supporters at a time to block planned party meetings.[350] The NLD has written numerous letters to the head of the SPDC, senior general Than Shwe, urging an end to these abuses, but their appeals have been routinely ignored.[351]

The SPDC has ensured that the NLD's two top officials and several elected MPs are not able to engage in politics, by detaining them and denying them the right to communicate with fellow party members. Party leader Aung San Suu Kyi and deputy U Tin Oo have been under house arrest since the 2003 Depayin massacre, when an NLD motorcade was attacked by a junta-backed mob.[352] In 2007, the SPDC extended the detention of the two top NLD officials by another year, as well as elected NLD MPs Dr Than Nyein and Daw May Win Myint.[353] In 2007, 13 MPs were still detained in prison, 11 of whom members of the NLD.[354]

The NLD's Rangoon headquarters have been allowed opened since 2004, however most of its branch offices remain closed.[355] Moreover, several local NLD groups were banned from holding meetings.

In an attempt to weaken and demoralize the opposition, the SPDC in 2007 continued to coerce NLD members into resigning from the party. According to the state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar, at least 1,077 NLD members across Burma had resigned from the party in the first six months of 2007.[356] What the state-run paper failed to mention was how the SPDC uses threats of arrest and other forms of intimidation, like economic incentives, to persuade NLD members to resign.[357] In January 2007, it was reported that the SPDC offered financial assistance in an attempt to persuade members of NLD in Falam, Chin State, to withdraw from the party.[358] And in June, SPDC authorities, local police, members of the USDA and the paramilitary group *Swan Arr Shin* in Thar Yar Kone village, Maymyo Township, Mandalay Division, forced NLD youth member Nay Myo Aung to resign from the party.[359]

NLD members continued to be subject to surveillance and movement restrictions in 2007. Authorities often denied permission for members travelling to Rangoon to register as overnight guests, consequentially criminalising their stay. The SPDC also barred Arakan NLD members from travelling to Sittwe to attend the party's meetings, effectively hindering the reorganization of Arakan State's NLD.[360] Elected Arakan NLD members have not been allowed to travel from one township to another without the government authority's permission since the 1990 election.[361] Following protests in mid-August 2007, the authorities stepped up surveillance on NLD members all over the country. In Pwinbyu, Magwe Division, the movement of pro-democracy supporters, including NLD members, were reportedly closely monitored by authorities. And NLD members in Chauk, also Magwe Division, were warned not to leave their headquarters after 10 pm.[362]

In 2007 NLD members continued to face arbitrary arrest, and were routinely the first to be rounded up following anti-junta activities. Following the arbitrary arrest of several local party members, the deputy chairman of Taungup Township NLD, U Than Pe, in December 2007 accused local authorities of victimizing party members, blaming them for all anti-regime activities in the township. According to Than Pe, *"The [Taungup] township authorities are treating our NLD members like criminals. Whenever there is a problem in town, we are the first ones to be questioned."*[363]

Since economic protests started in August 2007, NLD members faced heightened surveillance, intimidation, and arrest as they attempted to engage in peaceful political activities. Following the August and September 2007 protests, the SPDC cut the telephone lines of NLD members and other key opposition leaders in an attempt to limit communication, and thus hampering the planning of further protests.[364] As part of the continuing crackdown on the September uprising and as a preventive measure against further unrest, the SPDC detained and interrogated members and leaders of the NLD all over the country. More than 200 NLD members were arrested nationwide during and in the aftermath of the August and September protests. Of the 200 arrested, 15 were elected representatives from the 1990 election.[365]

However, prison is only one form of sanction the junta has imposed against the opposition. NLD members were in 2007 also subject to social and economic discrimination by having their businesses closed down and being denied access to public transport or roads. Moreover, in a move to isolate members of the opposition from their communities, the SPDC has gone so far as subjecting family members and friends of its political opponents to such social and economic exclusions.[366]

Family members of detained opposition members have also been subject to mental and emotional abuse by authorities. When NLD members are arrested family members are often kept in the dark about their whereabouts. Not only do authorities fail to inform families; even when contacting the relevant authorities they are frequently denied information about their relatives. Another form of psychological abuse used against families of imprisoned politicians, is giving them conflicting information about their release. For example, in January 2007 Daw Khin Aye, wife of imprisoned NLD member Dr Than Nyein, was told that her husband would be freed, only to be informed the next day that his imprisonment has been extended by another year.[367]

Throughout 2007 the SPDC launched frequent allegations against the NLD in the state-run media, in an attempt to give the population a tainted perception of the opposition party. Despite the NLD's peaceful approach, calling for dialogue and national reconciliation, the SPDC accused the opposition party of *"fostering unrest and causing instability."* In March Information Minister Kyaw Hsan accused the NLD of hindering the arrival of democracy in the country, saying: *"We tried for cooperation with the NLD in the past, as we have the same intention to implement democracy and an open market economy…We will take action against whoever harms the nation and the implementation of democracy."*[368]

One frequent allegation made by the SPDC is that the NLD are stooges of 'two foreign powers,' referring to the US and the UK, and trying to make the country and its people become 'followers of colonial powers'.[369] These allegations have been repeatedly denied as groundless by the NLD, which considers the SPDC allegations as pure propaganda. On 7 February 2007, the SPDC issued a threat to the NLD in the *New Light of Myanmar*, which suggested the party's contacts with Western governments could lead to its demise.[370] Again, on 16 March, the New Light of Myanmar accused the NLD of not having the support of the people, because of its 'misguided views'. The party was also accused of undermining the country and the Burmese people by receiving funding from foreign countries.[371]

On 11 January 2007, the NLD appealed to the UN Security Council to support a US draft resolution calling for democratic reform in Burma. There were no punitive actions in the proposed draft resolution, which focused mainly on the establishment of national reconciliation through dialogue. The NLD appeal was printed in the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper, together with SPDC propaganda articles condemning the US for interfering in the country's internal affairs. While this was an apparent attempt by the regime to taint the image of the NLD, the opposition party instead thanked the regime for printing the statement as they considered it good publicity. According to NLD spokesperson U Myint Thein, the coverage was very helpful; since the military was criticising the NLD's policies, it was clear they were opposed to national reconciliation. *"What we've always been asking for, and the UN's Security Council's looking for, is national reconciliation and the dialogue. So their [condemning the UN] can be interpreted as a refusal of this,"* he said.[372]

Another allegation made against the NLD, as well as other opposition parties, is that they are 'terrorist organisations.' In April 2006 the government designated four exiled political groups as terrorist organizations. Among the groups listed was the National League for Democracy–Liberated Area, which was loosely affiliated with the NLD. The junta also adopted an increasingly threatening stance toward the NLD itself, stating in April 2006 that it had enough evidence tying the NLD to terrorist groups to justify dissolving the party.[373] Despite bombs never having been linked to any of the pro-democracy political parties, the SPDC has continued accusing them of terrorist activity.[374]

Following religious ceremonies and prayers held by the NLD, the SPDC has accused the party of using religion as a political tool. When the NLD in May carried out their month long prayer campaign for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar accused the party of trying to *"stir up unrest under the pretext of religion."*[375] On 30 May 2007, the NLD organised a memorial service at the Masoeyein monastery in Mandalay to commemorate the victims of the 2003 Depayin massacre. However, the authorities tried to stop this from going ahead. According to NLD member Ko Shwe Maung, *"A senior general sent in one of his officers to tell the head monk that the NLD was using religion as a political tool. The chief monk explained that the food offering was in accordance with Buddhist traditions and that the monks would not refuse it."*[376]

In yet an attempt to disgrace the opposition, the Burmese Ministry of Information pressured private periodicals to publish opinion pieces denouncing the opposition. One victim of such newspaper commentaries was NLD member Naw Ohn Hla (45), who has regularly been attending the Tuesday prayers for Aung San Suu Kyi at Shwedagon Pagoda. In January she filed defamation cases against 123 editors and publishers from 30 weekly journals. The journals had printed articles portraying her as a prostitute and linking her to a widely known but deceased pimp from the area in Rangoon where she lives. According to publishers of private journals in Burma, they are called for meetings at the Ministry of Information fortnightly, where they are instructed on what news to include or exclude, and given articles to publish attacking democracy activists, foreign governments and exiled political groups.[377]

NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi had in 2007 been under house arrest for 12 out of the last 18 years, and continuously since May 2003.[378] Despite being effectively barred from political activity under house arrest, the junta continues to accuse her of being a threat to national unity, claiming that she is trying to undermine the government by collaborating with foreign powers. On 18 January 2007, state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar launched a new attack on Suu Kyi, accusing the detained NLD leader of evading taxes by spending her money from the 1991 Nobel Peace prize and other awards overseas.[379]

At a press conference in March, Information Minister Kyaw Hsan accused Aung San Suu Kyi of planning to *"devastate"* the country, adding that there was no impending date for her release. Kyaw Hsan accused Aung San Suu Kyi of *"turning back to confrontation"* each time the government had released her.[380] On 25 May 2007, the authorities extended her detention by yet another year. In an attempt to defend and normalise the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and others, the *New Light of Myanmar* stated that: *"Those including Daw [Aung San] Suu Kyi who were under restrictions were detained for attempting to disrupt peace and tranquility and cause unrest in the country … Arrest and detention like this are nothing unusual."*[381]

Whilst under house arrest, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is denied visitors and meetings, even with party colleagues. However, in conjunction with a visit by UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari, on 9 November 2007 the party leader was allowed a brief meeting with four other NLD top officials; Chairman Aung Shwe, Secretary U Lwin, Nyunt Wai and spokesperson Nyan Win. It was the first time she has been allowed to meet with any of her colleagues in three years.[382] On the same day, Suu Kyi also met minister for relations Aung Kyi for the second time. Suu Kyi met with Gambari for an hour on 8 November 2007, who released a statement on her behalf after leaving the country. In her first public message since 2003, the NLD leader called for constructive dialogue: *"In the interest of the nation, I stand ready to cooperate with the government in order to make this process of dialogue a success."*[383]

Despite facing systematic harassment by the authorities, the NLD has repeatedly called for dialogue and national reconciliation. On 19 July 2007, the NLD marked Martyr's Day by calling for dialogue with the junta, and a more inclusive National Convention process.[384] On 23 August 2007, NLD called for dialogue over the hike in fuel prices.[385] However, the SPDC continued to ignore the NLD's requests for dialogue, and instead stepped up persecution of the party and its members.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meets with NLD colleagues at her home in Rangoon. *[Photo: AFP]*

Restrictions on and Harassment of the NLD - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 4 January 2007, the Shwebo Township NLD was banned from holding regular monthly meetings by the township election commission. The group was in March again warned by local election commission officials not to hold any party meetings unless they asked permission from local authorities seven days in advance. Despite the ban, the group held a meeting on 1 March, and told the authorities that since the meeting had been instructed by the NLD headquarters, the officials should discuss with them instead.[386]

On 16 January 2007, a group of 10 pro-democracy activists holding a weekly prayer at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda were attacked and forced out by around 200-400 pagoda police, Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members, and special police. According to one of the prayer goers, 10 members of the USDA from each township in Rangoon division had been summoned by the SPDC authorities to carry out the raid. The USDA group was lead by Nyein Wai, the head of North Okkalapa township branch and Htut Wai, head of Thingyangyun branch. The Military Intelligence, Special Branch, police and Shwedagon pagoda security personnel were closely monitoring the situation. Than Zaw Myint who was injured in the attack went to file a case in Bahan police station but the police refused to register a case. On 22 January, the ten activists filed a complaint over the incident with the local religious authorities.[387]

On 17 January 2007, imprisoned NLD member Dr Than Nyein had his prison sentence extended by one year under Burma's legal Act 10/A. Dr Than Nyein was arrested for political reasons in 1997, and due to be released in 2004. Since then his period of detention has been extended several times. After first being led to believe he would be released, his wife Daw Khin Aye, was notified by intelligence agents of the extended detention.[388]

On 22 January 2007, it was reported that the SPDC offered financial assistance in an attempt to persuade members of NLD in Falam, Chin State, to withdraw from the party.[389]

On 23 January 2007, an appeal filed by imprisoned NLD member U Myint Tun was dismissed by the Insein northern-district court, without any reason being given. U Myint Tun was in July 2006 charged with manslaughter after a man stepped on a live electrical cable that had been illegally attached to mains supplies near U Myint Tun's apartment. U Myint Tun was charged after the man died of his injuries. However, according to U Myint Thaung the electrical cable did not belong to him, and the reason for his arrest was that he was a member of NLD.[390]

On 26 January 2007, NLD member Naw Ohn Hla (45) from Hmawbi, Rangoon, filed defamation cases against 123 editors and publishers from 30 weekly journals for portraying her as a prostitute. The journals had in January printed articles personally attacking her and falsely linking her to a widely known but now deceased pimp from the area in Rangoon where *she lives. According to one journalist against whom a case had been filed by Naw Ohn Hla: "We are being told to publish this kind of articles in our journal by the Ministry of Information"*. Naw Ohn Hla lodged the complaint with the Sanchaung Township Court where she was to appear on 13 February. However, the case was postponed three times by Judge Khin San Myint and finally dismissed by the court on 9 March 2007.[391]

On 9 February 2007, it was reported that NLD members in Pulaw Township, Tenasserim Division, were put under increased pressure by authorities, who had repeatedly attempted to coerce them into quitting the party.[392]

On 13 February 2007, the SPDC extended the house arrest of NLD party deputy U Tin Oo by one year. U Tin Oo has been incarcerated since May 2003 when an NLD motorcade was attacked by a junta-backed mob in northern Burma. However it is still unknown to the NLD which under which law he was imprisoned.[393]

On 15 February 2007, NLD Chairman and head of CRPP U Aung Shwe and CRPP secretary Aye Tha Aung were summoned by SPDC police chief Brig-Gen Khin Yi at the Police Force office in Rangoon and warned against releasing political statements.[394]

On 19 February 2007, the SPDC refused the reformation of Arakan State's NLD and Sittwe Township's NLD. U Nyi Pu, a high ranking member of the Arakan NLD and elected representative from the 1990 election in Gwa Township had come to Sittwe, the Arakan capital, to reform the NLD there. However, the Arakan State NLD president U Thein Maung and secretary U Maung Krunt Aung were prohibited to travel to Sittwe during the party's reformation meeting. As the two were unable to attend the meeting, the plan for the NLD's reformation failed to materialize.[395]

On 21 February 2007, NLD member and MP Daw May Win Myint (57) had her 10-year prison sentence extended by another 12 months. Daw May Win Myint was initially sentenced to seven years in prison in 1997 for arranging a meeting between detained NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and a group of young people from Mayangone Township. Although her sentence expired in 2004, she continued to be detained in 2007.[396]

On 22 February 2007, NLD member Ko Myint Shwe and Ko Htin Kyaw were arrested after leading a demonstration outside Rangoon's Theingyi market calling for 24 hour electricity and an end to high inflation.[397]

On 24 February 2007, it was reported that Arakan NLD Chairman and elected MP U Thein Maung, was interrogated by police along with another NLD member for reportedly distributing around 200 party booklets to townspeople in Manaung. Days earlier a police team led by SI Inspector Kyaw Moe Yin raided NLD member U Maung Maung's house and seized all the remaining booklets. U Thein Maung and U Maung Maung were on 24 February yet to be arrested.[398]

On 7 March 2007, Ko Maung San, an NLD member from Kawthaung, Tenasserim Division, was arrested accused of gunpowder smuggling after a letter bearing his name was found along with gunpowder on a boat. After a letter addressed to 'Ko Maung San' was found stored in a boat docked at Kawthaung Port, authorities reportedly arrested as many men in the area called Maung San as they could find. Ko Maung San of the NLD was sent to Rangoon to be interrogated along with six other people. However, while the others were soon released, Maung San continued to be held by the authorities.[399]

On 29 April 2007, SPDC authorities in Chauk Township, Magwe Division, checked guest lists at the homes of NLD members and supporters in the run up to a May Day celebration organized by the NLD. Authorities also ordered employers not to let their employees attend the NLD organized celebration.[400]

On 15 May 2007, over 30 activists going to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, were forcefully stopped and arrested by a group of around 100 special branch police and USDA members at different locations in Rangoon. One group of about 11 activists, led by NLD youth members were stopped and arrested on their way from Mee Gwet market in Hlaing Thar Yar Township to Shwedagon Pagoda. Another group of more than 20 activists led by Su Su Nway, was stopped on their way to Kyauk Daw Gyi Pagoda in Insein Township. Kyaw Kyaw Min, a law student, was beaten by police and USDA members. They also

confiscated a camera from the demonstrators. Other activists taking part in a similar campaign were arrested in Hlaing Thar Yar Township earlier the same day.[401]

On 16 May 2007, a group of over 15 NLD youth members were arrested while praying for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at the Kyaik Ka Lo pagoda in Mingaladon township. The group was forcibly removed by around 30 men in civilian clothing who failed to identify themselves. The 15 NLD members were released later the same day. According to one of the arrested, Khin Myat Thu, some of the men who took part in the arrests had earlier been forcibly recruited by SPDC authorities near the pagoda.[402]

On 16 May 2007, Daw Tin Tin Maw (62), an NLD woman, was arrested after staging a solo protest for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in front of Rangoon's City Hall.[403]

On 19 May 2007, 3 activists were arrested as they headed to a pagoda in central Rangoon to pray for the release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[404]

On 21 May, HIV activist and NLD member Phyu Phyu Thinn (35) was arrested by special police from her home in Rangoon for interrogation and detained in Kyaik Ka San interrogation camp. On 19 June 2007, she staged a seven-day hunger strike demanding a fair trial or be released. Phyu Phyu Thin was released on 2 July after signing a statement confirming her release.[405]

On 21 May 2007, NLD youth member Khin Htun was arrested after he visited Su Su Nway at the Muslim Free Hospital in Rangoon.[406]

On 23 May 2007, authorities arrested 2 NLD members in Rangoon for no apparent reason. One woman was arrested as she led a prayer vigil for Aung San Suu Kyi, and a man was arrested at a different location in the city. The arrests were seen as part of the SPDC's arrest campaign of pro-democracy activists in the lead up to 27 May, the date for the review of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest. At least 60 pro-democracy activists were detained in the same week as they went to pagodas to pray for Aung San Suu Kyi's release.[407]

On 24 May 2007, former political prisoner U Htun Lwin was arrested by SPDC authorities in Myitkyina, Kachin State, for staging a protest calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[408]

On 25 May 2007, SPDC military personnel, USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* attacked a group of around 30 NLD members who were praying for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at the Kyaukhtutgyi pagoda (Six Story Pagoda) in Bahan Township. Secretary of Tamwe USDA, Lae Lae Win Swe, along with military personnel, led the team of attackers. According to witnesses, Buddhist monks helped to free the prayer goers from the attackers.[409]

On 25 May 2007, SPDC authorities arrested six NLD members after they went to pagodas in Rangoon to pray for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.[410]

On 27 May, the junta extended the detention of the NLD's General Secretary Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for another year.[411]

On 27 May 2007, a mob consisting mainly of SPDC officials and USDA members confronted Aung San Suu Kyi supporters marching to a prayer vigil for the detained leader at a pagoda in downtown Rangoon. The around 500 activists, mainly NLD members were blocked by about 100 SPDC supporters who shouted abuse, and dragged away at least one NLD elected member. The situation reportedly became extremely tense. In the end, the activist group decided to return to the NLD headquarters to hold the mass prayer vigil there. It was

reported that officials from across Rangoon had arrested some protestors after the group dispersed, including at least 12 NLD members.[412]

On 29 May 2007, SPDC authorities arrested activist Ko Tun Tun after attending a prayer meeting at the Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon.[413]

On 5 June 2007, 11 HIV patients in Rangoon were arrested by police after participating in prayers at pagodas for the release of prominent HIV/AIDS activist and NLD member Phyu Phyu Thin. The patients were released on 8 June.[414]

On 6 June 2007, SPDC authorities in Mandalay closed down the garment shop of U Ba Soe, brother of Daw Win Mya Mya, a member of the NLD Organizing Committee in Mandalay Division.[415]

On 11 June 2007, a group of SPDC officials, police, USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* in Thar Yar Kone village in Pyin Oo Lwin Township, forced NLD youth member Nay Myo Aung to resign from the party.[416]

On 11 June 2007, pagoda management committee members forced more than 20 women NLD members to leave Rangoon's Thanlyin-Kyaikgaug pagoda while holding a prayer vigil for the release of their leader Aung San Suu Kyi.[417]

On 13 June 2007, 5 women NLD members of Zeegone Township, Pegu division, were attacked with catapults by an unidentified group of people when returning from Mya Thein Than pagoda after praying for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. One of the women, Daw Khin Wyne, chairperson of Zeegone NLD, stated that they were attacked by catapults and stones by three men who were lying in wait for them on the Rangoon-Pyay highway. A special branch police officer witnessed the incident but did nothing to stop the attack.[418]

On 15 June 2007, NLD MP U Than Lwin (70) was attacked by a mob of USDA members and other thugs, after he and some colleagues had led around 35 people in prayers for the release of all political prisoners in Burma. The prayers were held at pagodas in his town of Mettaya, as part of a nationwide campaign in recent months. Than Lwin was hit in the face with a knuckle-duster, before the attacker escaped into a local USDA office. When police came to the USDA office to investigate, staff refused to allow them inside. As a result of the assault, Than Lwin had a broken nose and left cheek, and serious facial injuries, and was sent to the Mandalay General Hospital for an operation. On 20 June, USDA members reportedly harassed him while he was undergoing surgery at a Mandalay hospital.[419]

On 17 June 2007, Ko Win Bo, an NLD member of Naung Kham village, was summoned by local authorities, who threatened to close down his shop if he did not agree to work as their informer. The SPDC village council told Ko Win Bo to provide information about NLD activities, which he refused.[420]

On 19 June 2007, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 62nd birthday celebrations held at various locations across Burma were disrupted by thugs from junta-sponsored groups USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*. In Rangoon, NLD headquarters were kept under surveillance by plain-clothed security police, who took photographs of the birthday celebration from across the road. A dozen trucks filled with USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* members were also stationed outside the NLD headquarters. In Shwebo Township, Sagaing Division, USDA members threw stones at the local NLD office and placed sharp nails to puncture tires on a road near the building. And in Aunglan Township, Magwe Division, USDA thugs threw sharp objects at NLD members.[421]

On 24 June 2007, the Maddaya USDA Secretary, U Kyaw Min, filed a lawsuit against 5 Mandalay NLD members and 4 family members of U Than Lwin, an NLD member and elected MP, who on 15 June 2007 was attacked by a man wearing a knuckle duster. While the attacker remained unidentified, he was reportedly seen fleeing into a Mandalay USDA office after attacking U Than Lwin. Maddaya NLD members U Nyo Gyi, Ko Kyaw Swe, Ko Thaung Naing, U Nyo Lay and Ko Nyi Nyi, along with 4 of U Than Lwin's family members were later accused of 'intimidation' after threatening to attack the USDA offices if the assailant was not handed over. The court stated they would drop charges against anyone who could prove they were not involved or if they could give a reasonable explanation for what happened. According to U Than Lwin, it would have been impossible for the group to have tried to intimidate the USDA since their only contact with the pro-government organisation over the incident had been in the presence of a number of police officers.[422]

On 7 August 2007, human rights activist and NLD member Su Su Nway was harassed by security police and a photographer while praying at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda. She was first scrutinized by the pagoda's security police at the eastern gate when entering the pagoda, and then while praying an unknown photographer repeatedly took her photo without asking for permission. When she requested pagoda officials to arrest the photographer, she was ignored.[423]

On 21 August 2007, members of pro-junta organisation USDA and paramilitary *Pyitthu Swan Arr Shin* made threats against 6 NLD members in Rangoon. Myo Khin, the chairman of the Yankin Township NLD branch and five other NLD members were confronted on their way to their township headquarters by a group of around 60 USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* carrying catapults and sharpened bamboo sticks. The mob followed the NLD members as they walked to their office and later stopped to question them at a bus queue near Tamwe Plaza. The mob called the NLD members terrorists and threatened them to leave the area or they would be beaten to death. When the NLD members tried to explain that they were walking to work as they could not afford fuel, the pro-junta mob forced them onto a bus.[424]

On 27 August 2007, 14 NLD youth members were arrested in Saku Township, Magwe Division alleged with failing to register as overnight guests. The 14 NLD members were reportedly staying overnight at the home of another party member when the house was raided at around 2 am by township officials led by Than Naing Linn and Kyaw Kyaw. However, the NLD youth members said they had tried to register, but the officials had refused to approve it.[425]

In the last week of September and first week of October, several NLD members were arrested as a result of the countrywide demonstrations. NLD members from Pegu, Patheingyi, Mattaya, Tharsi, Myingyan, Kyauk Padaung and Pakhokku towns were summoned in a series of midnight raids and interrogated by police and SPDC township officials. Chairman of the Pegu NLD, U Myat Hla, was summoned and interrogated on 28 September 2007, and released the same day. General Secretary of the Patheingyi NLD, U Zaw Hein, was summoned by about 10 policemen in plainclothes on 1 October 2007, and was two days later yet to be released. U Than Lwin, NLD representative in Mattaya town, Mandalay division was arrested at midnight on 2 October 2007 by about 25 policemen and township officials headed by police commander Khin Maung Thein and Township chairman Khin Maung Soe. Central committee member of NLD in Tharsi town, U Myint Htay, was arrested by police on 2 October, and a day later his whereabouts remained unknown. U Hlaing Aye, an NLD representative in Pakhokku town, was arrested by police and township officials after midnight on 2 October 2007. The next day his whereabouts remained unknown. Another NLD member of Pakhokku Township, U San Pwint, an NLD member from Kamma village was also arrested. Authorities also arrested U Sein Kyaw Hlaing, U Kyat Soe, U Win Shwe, U Than Lwin, U Paw Aye, and Ko Ye Tun, who are all members of the NLD Kyauk Padaung town in Mandalay division. Secretary of the Myingyan NLD Ko Paw

Thein, and member Ko Win Naing and U Bo Win were also arrested by authorities the last week of September.[426]

On 17 October 2007, it was reported that U Aung Thein (77) an NLD member from Rangoon serving a 20-year prison sentence in Insein jail was denied permission to attend his late wife's funeral. U Aung Thein was imprisoned for illegally possessing a satellite phone and making contact with democracy activists in exile.[427]

On 3 November 2007, authorities reportedly interrogated the wife of NLD member Nyi Pu Lay, whose body was recovered from the Gwa River on October 17.[428]

On 4 November 2007, it was reported that NLD members from Taungup town of Arakan State were openly threatened by SPDC authorities. The NLD members, who had just been released after being arrested in connection with the September protests, were warned to stay calm or face harsh punishment.[429]

On 18 December 2007, Win Myint, an NLD member of Rangoon's Hlaing Tharyar Township was sentenced to three years imprisonment charged with possession of a weapon. However, his arrest came shortly after he refused SPDC authorities demands on him to leave the political party. On 2 December, soon after turning down the order, U Win Myint picked up a passenger in his trishaw and took him to a bus stop, where Win Myint found police and ward authorities waiting for him. They searched his trishaw and found a nine-inch knife. Although Win Myint insisted it must have belonged to his passenger, the police refused to believe his story and arrested him.[430]

On 17 and 18 December 2007, SPDC authorities detained and interrogated five NLD members in Taunggok, Arakan State, accusing them of organizing anti-junta poster and graffiti campaigns.[431]

Aung San Suu Kyi supporters praying at the NLD headquarters in Rangoon in April 2007. *[Photo: AFP]*

10.12 Restrictions on and Harassment of the 88 Generation Students' Group

> *"We [88 Generation Students] will continue our struggle for the country, even if we face arrest and torture. We will not turn back—whatever happens; whatever difficulties or pressures we face."*
>
> - Htun Myint Aung, a member of the 88 Generation Students movement[432]

The student movement was revitalised during the last couple of years, following the release in 2005 of several key student leaders who had spent more than a decade in prison over the 1988 uprising and other protests.[433] In August 2006, the 88 Generation informal network was established. The group's five most prominent leaders were arrested in September 2006, however in October other members launched a nationwide petition calling for the release of the estimated 1,100 political prisoners and a genuine national-reconciliation process.[434] On 10 January 2007, 88 Generation Student leaders Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Min Zeya, Pyone Cho and Htay Kywe were released after spending over three months in prison.[435] Together, the five represent the core of the network's leadership.[436] On 21 August 2007, four of the leaders were again arrested, with only Htay Kywe left in hiding.[437]

Political analysts have stated that the junta now regards the 88 Generation Students group as its greatest threat. Estimated to have thousands of supporters, the 88 Generation is gaining great leverage in the population.[438] As long time Burma observer, Bertil Lintner, has stated, *"Whilst the NLD has become weakened in recent years, the 88 Generation, on the other hand, has suddenly become a force to be reckoned with, although at the moment it has no proper leadership or organizational structure."*[439]

Unlike the NLD, the 88 Generation Student Group is not a political party but a movement uniting former students who were active in the mass uprising of 1988.[440] Despite having been harassed, imprisoned, tortured and denied a return to their studies, the 88 Generation Students' commitment to creating a free and democratic society remains as strong as ever.[441]

In 2007, the 88 Generation Students Group managed to gather activists and ordinary citizens across the country for peaceful activities, showing that a civil society still exists in Burma.[442] The 88 Generation Student Group spearheaded several public protests in 2007 with petition campaigns, prayer vigils and other actions to free political prisoners and promote a return to democracy.[443] The 88 Generation Students repeatedly urged the SPDC to create a political environment which would *"allow free, frank and friendly discussions among all political stake holders in order to restore democracy in the country."*[444]

On 4 January 2007, Burma's Independence Day, the 88 Generation Students launched the "Open Heart" campaign, with the aim to encourage Burmese citizens to write letters to senior general Than Shwe and other members of the State Peace and Development Council, listing their grievances with the deteriorating economic, political, and social situation. People from around the country were invited to send the letters via the 88 Students Group, in an attempt to prevent the authorities from punishing participants.[445] The group received more than 20,000 letters.[446]

On 11 March 2007, the 88 Generation Students launched the "White Sunday" campaign, with the aim to visit the families of political prisoners every Sunday, wearing white, to offer moral support and advice. The group continued the campaign despite facing harassment and threats by local authorities, who had reportedly been ordered to hinder the campaign. *"Since we began visiting political prisoners' families, local authorities have hindered or*

blocked our routes and monitored the houses we visit. Some authorities have even attempted to physically prevent members from making visits," said Pyone Cho, a leading member of the 88 Generation Students group.[447] Two members of the activist group faced intimidation by junta officials; one was briefly held for questioning, while the other was threatened during a visit to a political prisoner's house in North Okkalapa Township. The campaign ended on 20 May, when a group of about 150 activists visited the home of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's cousins, while several plainclothes security personnel videotaped and photographed the group.[448]

In the months leading up to the September 2007 demonstrations, the 88 Generation Students Group organized several popular civil rights campaigns that directly challenged military rule. The September demonstrations grew from August protests by activists, including members of the 88 Generation Students Group and their supporters. Following the first protests in August, fourteen activists including 88 Generation leaders Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi and Min Zeya, were arrested. It was later reported that they had suffered brutal interrogation in prison. Some 88 Generation Students, including Htay Kywe, Nilar Thein, Mie Mie and Tun Myint Aung, managed to escape and carried on the struggle from their hiding places, encouraging the protesters through reports and interviews carried by international media. After the authorities launched a massive arrest campaign in October, Htay Kywe and Mie Mie were also arrested.[449]

88 Generation Students' Leaders, Ko Ko Gyi, Min Ko Naing and Htay Kywe *[Photo: AFP]*

The SPDC frequently used state-run media to attack and threaten the 88 Generation Student Group. On 11 June 2007, an article in *The New Light of Myanmar* threatened leaders of the 88 Generation Students group with *"punitive punishment […] more severe than legal action"* if they continued their political activities.[450] On 5 July 2007, *The New Light of Myanmar*, launched another tirade against the 88 Generation Students Group, accusing them of manipulating Rangoon University students in an attempt to instigate unrest. The newspaper further stated that the 88 Generation Students were jobless and relied on funds from abroad in the name of political activity, which they spent in their own interest. The students flatly rejected the junta's accusations and urged the Information Ministry to stop the false accusations and start an all inclusive dialogue for national reconciliation in Burma.[451]

The junta in 2007 increasingly used civilians to harass 88 Generation Student leaders and monitor their activities. Beginning on 27 May 2007, unidentified men gathered around the houses of the student leaders, disturbing and threatening them, and followed them with motorbikes wherever they went.[452] While returning from the Martyr's Day ceremony at the

NLD headquarters on 19 July, student leader Pyone Cho reported being followed by nine motorbikes. Moreover, two women members, Ma Thin Thin Aye and Ma Lay Lay Mon, were followed by five men on motorbikes who circled them at slow speeds and taunted them. According to one unnamed student leader, *"One group comprised around 20 people. I can't understand their duties. They are there all day and night…Only authorities have permission to drive that kind of motorbike."* The bikers were in civilian clothes, and did not disclose which organization they belong to. However, they revealed that they had been ordered to keep a watch on the students.[453] *"This situation was not created by us. It has gotten to the point where it is difficult for us to even visit our families because they drive back and forth past our houses making loud noises,"* Ko Ko Gyi said.[454] On 31 July 2007, the 88 Generation Students Group made a public announcement saying they would get hold of the people who were pestering them, confront them on the spot and call a public gathering to expose them.[455]

The SPDC has also discriminated business ventures of families and friends of political activists. For example, on 30 March 2007, authorities ordered the closure of the Rangoon-Mandalay Thamadi Carrier Service run by the family of former political prisoner and 88 generation student, Mya Aye. The authorities informed that *"action would be taken"* in the case of non-compliance with the order, but gave no reason for the closure. Following this, Myint Aye, a human rights defender stated: *"Mya Aye is a political activist, so in order to break him the authorities have closed down his brother's business which may be a support base for him."* Myint Aye said because of the junta's action on political dissidents, they are abandoned socially and economically by their family and even by society. In April 2007, the 88 Generation Students Group released a statement demanding an end to discrimination against lawyers, doctors and small businesses with perceived links to the pro-democracy movement. The 88 Generation Students Group stated: *"… those who are trying to restore democracy are marginalized from others as political activists, and have consequently become victims of oppression against the free practice of their economic and social rights."*[456]

Restrictions on and Harassment of the 88 Generation Students' Group - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 11 January 2007, 88 Generation Student leaders Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Kyi, Htay Kywe, Min Zaya and Pyone Cho were released by authorities from an unidentified location. Their release coincided with the introduction of a draft resolution on the situation in Burma at the UN Security Council.[457]

On 5 March 2007, Thwin Lin Aung, a member of the 88 Generation Student Group, was arrested at Mingaladon airport in Rangoon about to leave for the United States on a scholarship. No reason was given for his detention.[458]

On 18 March 2007, SPDC township officials tried to block a group of around 60 activists of the 88 Generation Students Group, as they approached the home of the family of political prisoner Myo Myint Zaw in Bahan Township. The visit to the political prisoner was part of the *White Sunday* campaign launched by the 88 Generation Students to show solidarity with families of political prisoners. Local authorities in Rangoon had reportedly been ordered to hinder the group's campaign. Two members of the activist group faced intimidation by junta officials; one was briefly held for questioning, while the other was threatened during a visit to a political prisoner's house in North Okkalapa Township.[459]

On 2 April 2007, it was reported that the authorities had closed a family business owned by Maung Maung Aung, the brother of Mya Aye, one of the leaders of the 88 Generation Student group, without explanation. On 30 March Maung Maung Aung had been ordered to report to the Rangoon Botataung Township City Development Office, where he was ordered to close the Tamardi Transportation Service, located at 55 Roads in Botataung Township, which transports goods between Rangoon and Mandalay. The local authorities gave no reason for the closure, other than that they were following orders from the top. However, Mya Aye said that when his brother went to the township development office in Rangoon, authorities had asked him if he gave financial support to the 88 Generation Student group or to his brother.[460]

On 22 April 2007, the family of political prisoner Ko Ba Nyar was interrogated by the police, after the 88 Generation Student group visited their home as part of their ongoing White Sunday campaign. Officials from Rangoon's Kamayut Township questioned the family over their ties with the 88 student leaders and asked if they had given the family money. According to Ko Banyar's sister Ma Aye Mi San: *"Fifteen minutes after Ko Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi left, the deputy police chief . . . Hla Thaung and local commander Hla Win came to question us. They asked details about my brother."*[461]

From 27 May until the end of July 2007, prominent members of the 88 Generation Student Group faced heightened harassment and surveillance; being constantly watched by unidentified people on motor cycles who were stalking them and hanging about outside their residents. When one of the student leaders, Mya Aye, asked the stalkers who they were and what they were doing, they failed to reveal which organization they belonged to, but told him that they had been ordered to keep a watch on the students against their wishes.[462]

On 11 June 2007, an article in junta-run newspaper *New Light of Myanmar* threatened leaders of the 88 Generation Students group with *"punitive punishment […] more severe than legal action"* if they continued their political activities.[463]

On 18 July 2007, it was reported that mobs backed by the regime had gathered around the houses of the 88 generation student leaders, behaving in a threatening manner and following them wherever they went. Mufti clad military security forces, special branch police, and members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* had been in 24-hour stand-by position since 27 May, the anniversary of the 1990 general elections. The 88 Generation Students affected by the harassment included:

1. Ko Ko Gyi;
2. Min Ko Naing;
3. Htay Kywe;
4. Pyone Cho; and
5. Mya Aye.[464]

On 31 July 2007, the 88 Generation Students Group reported about increased harassment, claiming that members of their group were regularly followed by intelligence officials on motorbikes. The harassed members included two women; Ma Thin Thin Aye and Ma Lay Lay Mon.[465] Motorbikes without registration are driving around the building of Ko Ko Gyi. *"Only authorities have permission to drive that kind of motorbike",* a student leader said.

On 21 August 2007, following the first August demonstrations, prominent leaders of the 88 Generation Students Group were arrested overnight, accused of attempting to disturb national security stability, implementation of the national convention and the roadmap process. The arrested leaders included:

1. Min Ko Naing;
2. Min Zeya;
3. Ko Ko Gyi;
4. Kyaw Min Yu (aka) Jimmy;
5. Mya Aye;
6. Htay Win Aung (aka) Pyone Cho; and
7. Ant Bwe Kyaw.[466]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that imprisoned leaders of the 88 Generation Students Group were in poor health and forced to share cells with criminals. Mya Aye, who suffers from heart failure, was reportedly kept in the same cell as a criminal who received the death penalty for murder; Min Ko Naing was also sharing a cell with a criminal.[467]

On 21 December 2007, it was reported that at least six members of the 88 Generation Students Group were arrested in one week. The arrested members included:

1. Khin Moe Aye;
2. Kyaw Soe;
3. Zaw Min;
4. Htun Htun Win;
5. Min Min Soe; and
6. Myo Yan Naung Thein.[468]

Leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group in Rangoon in August 2007. *[Photo: Irrawaddy]*

10.13 Restrictions on and Harassment of Human Rights Defenders and Activists

> *"We are being targeted and members of our group have been arrested on various charges. I am really worried about the human rights situation in our country as those promoting human rights are subject to abuses."*
>
> - U Myint Aye, leader of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP)[469]

Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP) network was formed in 2002 to raise awareness about human rights and help people to defend their rights. It is an independent organisation, and does not operate in *"the interest or disadvantages of any government or political party".* The HRDP's principal activities are distribution of the UDHR within Burmese society and providing assistance to disclose human rights violations. HRDP members operate in Rangoon, Mandalay, Pegu and Irrawaddy divisions, as well as in Shan and Arakan states.[470]

HRDP members and other human rights activists faced pressure and harassment by the authorities throughout 2007. Despite Burma being party to several human rights conventions, including the UDHR, the CRC and CEDAW, as well as a range of ILO conventions, the military junta actively suppresses efforts to promote and educate citizens about the rights enshrined in these conventions. Ko Ko Gyi, an 88 Generation Students Leader has stated, *"The government, which has signed international human rights charters, is responsible for educating its people about human rights … It's totally improper that human rights activists and educators must clandestinely work like underground movements."*[471]

As a result of the continuous harassment of human rights activists by the junta, human rights activists have been forced underground and cannot operate in public. As a result, events and trainings were confined to the homes of prominent activists. However, not even in the private sphere of their own homes could they escape the surveillance by authorities. On 10 December 2007, while a ceremony to mark International Human Rights Day was held at the house of HRDP leader U Myint Aye, two trucks of junta officials observed the ceremony from across the road.[472] Ceremonies and celebrations were also frequently infiltrated by USDA members and plainclothes SPDC officials taking notes and photos.

In 2007 the SPDC continued to regard the distribution of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as undesirable, despite being party to the UN declaration. As a consequence, anyone attempting to distribute the document, risked arrest and harassment. On 20 March 2007, two HRDP members in Pegu Division were arrested for allegedly distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[473] On 26 February 2007, U Thu Ganda, a monk from Taungup Township, southern Arakan State, was arrested after distributing booklets of the UN Declaration of Human Rights to villagers in Kha Rai Village. The police confiscated the monk's ID card, and imposed travel restrictions on the monk, prohibiting him from leaving his monastery.[474] In the past, booklets on the UDHR could be distributed among the people everywhere in Burma without the permission of the authority.[475]

The HRDP has stated that arrests of and attacks on human rights activists reveals the junta's systematic plan to hinder increased awareness and understanding of human rights among the public and to prevent locals from welcoming human rights activists. In August 2006, Daw May Thi Han, was dismissed from her job as a primary school teacher after her grandmother Daw Thein Thein hosted a group of human rights defenders in Kun Hein Township, Southern Shan State. In July 2007, Ko Min Min (a.k.a Ko La Min Htun) was arrested after hosting a human rights workshop in Pyay Township, Pegu Division. He was

later sentenced to three years imprisonment and 30,000 kyat fine, the highest punishment he could receive for the verdict.[476]

The SPDC has denounced the efforts of activists as attempts to mislead the public and cause unrest, while characterizing the actions taken by groups such as the USDA and other government-backed organizations as *"preventative measures for ensuring community peace and tranquillity."* On 23 April 2007, the state-run newspaper *New Light of Myanmar* stated the junta's intention to crack down on human rights activists operating in the country with the aim of *"fulfilling the wishes of the majority to live in peace."*[477]

Under the SPDC regime peaceful human rights promoters are turned into criminals, and accused of inciting unrest, whilst violent thugs attacking them are treated with impunity. On 18 April 2007, six HRDP members were attacked and beaten by a junta-backed mob of around 100 people while they were returning from a human rights training in Oatpone village in Henzada Township. The mob - armed with clubs, slingshots and sharpened bamboo sticks - was led by secretary of Henzada Township USDA, U Nyunt Oo. The Taloke Htaw police chief was also present. Two of the activists, Ko Maung Maung Lay and Ko Myint Hlaing (aka) Ko Myint Naing, were severely injured and hospitalised, however doctors at the Rangoon General Hospital were reluctant to treat them, in fear of retaliation by the authorities. The six rights activists were arrested and detained on 2 May, charged with inciting a riot and creating unrest, as well as 'showing disrespect to the state'. While being detained in Henzada jail, they were denied medical treatment and meetings with their family members. Myint Naing suffered serious head injuries and abdominal pain but was in prison denied access to a doctor or medicines. On 24 July 2007, the Henzada township court sentenced the human rights activists to prison terms from four to eight years. The authorities failed to take action against those who perpetrated the brutal attack.[478]

Following the brutal incident in Oatpone on 18 April 2007, two high ranking UN officials on 25 April 2007 appealed to the military junta to respect and defend the work of human rights activists inside Burma. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN's Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, and Hina Jilani, the Secretary General's Special Representative on human rights defenders, issued a joint statement of *"deep concern"* over the current climate for human rights defenders. The UN officials said reports of the incident *"have highlighted the level of violence and the absence of intervention by the local police to protect the victims and remind us of the circumstances surrounding the tragic incident of Depayin in 2003."* The statement appealed to the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the incident.[479]

Reporting about the incident on 18 April, *The New Light of Myanmar* tried to taint the image of the human rights group, blaming them with incitement and urging the people of Burma to crush *"destructive elements".* The paper said that while HRDP leader Myint Aye had gathered some 20 villagers and explained how they could make a complaint to the HRDP if there was any violation of human rights, *"the villagers replied that there was no such complaint nor violation of human rights in the village".* The newspaper continued:

> *"As they were unable to create problems over human rights, Myint Aye and his group on 18 April left Ingapo village for Otpon [Oakpone] village where they incited the villagers to quarrel over possession of Theinkyaung Monastery… As they were inciting the villagers and interfering in religious affairs, villagers of Otpon [Oakpone] village drove them out of the village, shouting, 'The arrival of you all amounts to harming the village and sowing discord among villagers.'"*[480]

The HRDP dismissed the accusations as false.

As no laws exist in Burma banning the discussion or promotion of human rights, the authorities are increasingly creative in their charges against human rights defenders and promoters. In July 2007, after hosting human rights discussions at his home, Min Min was arrested and charged with illegally opening a tuition centre, and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 kyat (US$ 250). Aung Thein, a Rangoon lawyer said the charge was used as a "tool" to arrest Min Min because there was no law banning the discussion of human rights issues.[481] Also in July 2007, six labour rights were charged after holding discussions on international and domestic labour standards on May Day. As discussing labour rights is not illegal, they were instead charged with sedition and crimes relating to illegal associations and given jail sentences of up to 28 years. However, these were all unlawful sentences, as the court presented no evidence against them. In the above cases, Min Min and the labour rights activists were imprisoned ostensibly on grounds of giving illegal tutorials, and sedition and illegal association respectively, but were in fact jailed because of their similar efforts to promote human rights and labour rights instruments to which the government supposedly adheres. As such, human rights defenders were themselves targets of the human rights abuses of the junta.[482]

Two members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network who were attacked by pro-junta henchmen after having delivered human rights trainings in Irrawaddy Division on 18 April 2007. *[Photos: Yoma3]*

Not only human rights defenders themselves, but also their family members, have been subject to frequent harassment by authorities. On 13 August 2006, Daw May Thi Han, granddaughter of Daw Thein Thein, who hosted the HRDP in Kun Hein Township, Southern Shan State, was dismissed from her job as a primary school teacher without reason.[483] In August 2007, Daw Aye Myint Than, former political prisoner and mother of student activist Noble Aye, was arbitrarily arrested. Moreover, the authorities refused to return her identity card after she was released, severely restricting her freedom of movement. Daw Aye Myint Than stated:

> *"They told me that the Special Branch Police ordered them not to give my ID card back, I am worried now about visiting my daughter who is in Insein Prison, because by prison rules I cannot see her without an ID card. I cannot go outside of Rangoon since my release because I do not have ID card. If I go outside Rangoon without an ID card, I could be arrested. I feel I am losing citizenship in my native land."*[484]

Restrictions on and Harassment of the Human Rights Defenders and Activists - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 26 February 2007, U Thu Ganda, a monk from Taungup Township, southern Arakan State, was arrested after distributing booklets of the UN Declaration of Human Rights to villagers in Kha Rai Village. The police questioned the monk, and seized 60 copies of the UDHR booklet, as well as the monk's ID card. They also imposed travel restrictions on the monk, prohibiting him from leaving his monastery.[485]

On 20 March 2007, two HRDP activists in Pegu Division were arrested for allegedly distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Kyaw Kyaw Oo of Prome, Pegu Division was caught by local police while distributing pamphlets of the UDHR, while Kyaw Swe was arrested from his home later the same day. The two HRDP activists were interrogated at #2 Police Station in Prome.[486]

On 10 April 2007, Free Burma Rangers relief team member Saw Lee Reh Kyaw was interrogated, tortured and executed by SPDC troops. Lee Reh was captured by LIB #427 on 8 April, while providing humanitarian assistance to Karenni villagers. Troops of LIB #427 opened fire and attacked the village of Ha Lee Ku, and Lee Reh was shot in the leg and badly wounded.[487]

On 18 April 2007, 6 human rights defenders were attacked and beaten by a junta-backed mob of around 100 people while they were returning from a human rights training in Oatpone village in Henzada Township. The mob - armed with clubs, slingshots and sharpened bamboo sticks - was led by secretary of Henzada Township USDA, U Nyunt Oo. The Taloke Htaw police chief was also present. Two of the activists, Ko Maung Maung Lay and Ko Myint Hlaing (aka) Ko Myint Naing, were severely injured and hospitalised, however doctors at the Rangoon General Hospital were reluctant to treat them. On 2 May, the six rights activists were arrested and detained, charged with inciting a riot and creating unrest, as well as 'showing disrespect to the state'. While being detained in Henzada jail, they were denied medical treatment and meetings with their family members. Myint Naing suffered serious head injuries and abdominal pain but was in prison denied access to a doctor or medicines.

On 24 July 2007, the 6 human rights defenders were in Henzada Township Court sentenced to imprisonment of four to eight years on allegations of upsetting public tranquillity, discrediting the government, violating immigration laws and engaging with unlawful organisations. Ko Myint Hlaing (alias) Ko Myint Naing was sentenced to eight years in

prison under 505 (b) (c) while the other five were sentenced to four years each under 505 (b). The authorities failed to take action against those who perpetrated the brutal attack.[488] The human rights defenders were:

1. Ko Myint Naing (aka) Ko Myint Hlaing (40), HRDP member, resident of Henzada Township, Rangoon Division;
2. Ko Kyaw Lwin (40), farmer, married with three children, resident of Tamaing village, Taluttaw, Henzada Township;
3. U Hla Shein (62), farmer, married with two children, resident of Oatpone village, Kanyinngu Village Tract, Henzada Township;
4. U Mya Sein (50), farmer, married with six children, resident of Oatpone village;
5. U Win (50), farmer, married with five children, resident of Oatpone village; and
6. U Myint (59), farmer, married with four children, resident of Oatpone village.[489]

On 1 May 2007, 33 labour rights activists were arrested for organising a discussion about worker's rights at the American Centre in Rangoon. Most were released later the same day, except six organisers who were detained and charged with sedition, forming an illegal organisation and having contact with illegal organisations. Their arrest and detention comes around the same time as other human rights defenders in Burma have been given long jail terms. The six activists were detained at the central prison, where they were reportedly held in separate buildings, denied visits, and also subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment. They would be taken away for interrogations in the middle of the night, or during mealtimes; and were not given medical treatment for ailments. Their court case opened on 16 July at the central prison premises. On 4 August, the lawyers of the accused withdrew from the case in protest, due to constant harassment by prison authorities. On 7 September 2007, the labour activists were charged with sedition, as well as being members of illegal associations and violating immigration laws. All were given jail sentences of 28 years, except Nyi Nyi Zaw and Kyaw Kyaw who got 20 years. The six labour rights activists were:

1. Ko Thurein Aung (32), from Hlaingthayar Township, Rangoon;
2. Ko Way Lin (24), from Mangaleit village, Kunchankone Township, Rangoon Division;
3. Ko Kyaw Min (a.k.a) Ko Wanna;
4. Ko Myo Min;
5. Ko Nyi Nyi Zaw (25), from Thukhayeithar, Hlaing Township, Rangoon; and
6. Ko Kyaw Kyaw (29), from South Dagon Township, Rangoon.[490]

On 2 May 2007, three HRDP members were arrested for violating guest registration laws. Ko Aung Kyaw Soe and Ko Aye Lwin were arrested for failing to register as overnight guests in Rangoon, and Ko Yin Kyi, was arrested after going to the police station to check on the status of his two friends.[491]

On 10 July 2007, HRDP member and former teacher Ko Min Min (aka) Ko La Min Htun (31) was arrested for conducting a workshop for locals to discuss the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Prome Township, Pegu Division. On 30 July 2007, he was charged with teaching without a license and sentenced in Prome Court to three years imprisonment and a 30,000 kyat fine, which was the highest punishment for this violation. More than 100 of his former students and rights activists attended his sentence hearing to offer him moral support. Since the start of this year, Ko Min Min had stopped giving private tuition to high school students and had started holding rights awareness workshops.[492]

On 25 August 2007, Ko Htin Kyaw (44), the leader of the Myanmar Development Committee, was beaten and arrested by the SPDC sponsored thugs after staging a protest in front of Theingyi Market in downtown Rangoon. Authorities had offered a reward of 500,000 kyat (nearly US $400) for his arrest.[493]

On 25 September 2007, social and political activist Amyotheryei Win Naing (70) was arrested after offering food to monks before they set out to march. He was detained for one month.[494]

On 8 November 2007, three HRDP members in Bago division were each sentenced to two years in prison by district judge U Maung Maung at Prome prison court. They were charged under section 505 (b) of the penal code, which covers causing public alarm and inciting offences against public tranquillity. The three HRDP members had been detained since at least 17 September 2007. They were:

1. Thet Oo;
2. Zaw Htun; and
3. U Panita (aka) U Myint Aye, a monk who was disrobed and treated as a layman.[495]

On 26 November 2007, HRDP member Aung Zaw Oo, was arrested by plainclothes police from a teashop in Kyauktada Township, downtown Rangoon. Aung Zaw Oo had actively documented the junta's human rights violations and was involved in imparting awareness trainings, and played an active role in the planning of the International Human Rights Day which took place on 10 December 2007.[496]

10.14 Prohibition of Free and Independent Trade Unions

Burma ratified the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention 1948 (No. 87) in 1955, but has failed to ratify the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). However, as a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the junta is also bound by the ILO declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which includes the freedom of association and collective bargaining.[497] Domestically, the right to form trade unions is still a legally recognised right within Burma under the Trade Unions Act, 1926. However, the act legislates that trade unions may only be formed with the prior consent of the government. In 2007 no independent trade unions existed within the country.

Moreover, Burmese seafarers working on foreign ships were banned from making any contact with the International Transport Worker's Federation. The Unlawful Associations Act, 1908 (1957), as well as order Nos. 2/88 and 6/88 provided the legal machinery for the SPDC to maintain its prohibition on the formation and activity of free and independent trade unions. Thus the junta has branded the Thai-based Federation of Trade Unions Burma (FTUB) as a terrorist organisation, criminalising any person or organisation that has contact with it, and attempting to prevent its leader Maung Maung from attending the International Labour Conference and engaging in other international travel.[498]

Whilst the junta has claimed that forthcoming state constitution and its incumbent legislative machinery *"shall enact necessary laws to protect the rights of workers"* it has made no indication of any measures to repeal Order Nos. 2/88 and 6/88, nor the Unlawful Associations Act.[499]

As independent trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes are not tolerated by the junta, several labour activists are serving long prison terms for their political and labour activities. In 2007 six labour activists were sentenced to 20 and 28 years imprisonment, for organising a workshop at Rangoon's American Centre on May Day. Moreover, about 30 people who were planning to attend the workshop were arrested and detained by Military Security Forces (SaYaPa).[500] In connection with their arrest, junta head Than Shwe stated: *"Neo-colonialists are disguising the members of destructive groups under their control as workers, and forming organizations which exist only in name to interfere in the affairs of international organizations."*[501]

Others were also harassed by authorities in connection with May Day activities. In Ye Nan Taung village, Kyaukpyu Township, western Arakan State, 10 residents were questioned by authorities following a dispute over working conditions at a Chinese-run oil company.[502] In Chauk Township, Magwe Division, authorities ordered employers not to allow their workers to attend a May Day celebration organized by the local NLD, to visit the labour monument in Chauk or to contact the 88 Generation Student Group. Local authorities informed they would monitor the ceremony and take photographs. Employees were warned that if they attended the ceremony, or had any interaction with 88 Generation Students group, they would be fired and face legal action, according to Ye Thein Naing. Employees were ordered to sign documents stating that they would not attend the May Day ceremony.[503]

In 2007 the SPDC continued to use forced labour, despite formally banning the practice in October 2000. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other sources, soldiers routinely force civilians, including women and children, to work without pay under harsh conditions. The forced labourers are made to construct roads, clear minefields, porter

for the army, or work on military-backed commercial ventures. The government is also increasingly using prisoners as forced labourers for government projects.[504]

On 3-4 April 2007, the 4th International trade union conference on Burma was held in Kathmandu, Nepal, attended by representatives of Federation of Trade Unions Burma (FTUB), the Federation of Trade Unions Kawthoolei (FTUK), the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), Global Union Federations, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and union leaders from Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America. The conference noted that conditions for the trade union movement and labour activism in Burma remain critical, and urged the SPDC to stop repression of trade union rights, including the denial of freedom of association in law and in practice. The conference strongly supported the decisions of the ILO Governing Body and the Conclusions of the 2006 ILC Selection Committee to pursue a referral to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), relating to the violation of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (ILO Convention 29) by the Burmese military regime.[505]

In June 2007, the Worker's Group of the ILO dismissed a worker's representative from Burma to participate in an ongoing ILO conference as the Burmese delegate did not represent workers in Burma. The ILO stated that Khin Maung Oo, who was sent by the Burmese regime to Geneva as the representative of 'workers of Burma', was not from a democratically elected workers body, but a supervisor in the Myanmar Mayson Industrial Co. Ltd of Hlaing Tharyar Industrial zone in Rangoon. The conference stated that since the SPDC's *"worker's representative"* was not from a working level, he did not have the right to participate in the Worker's Group meeting. According to Maung Maung, General Secretary of FTUB:

> *"The incident proves that the Burmese military junta, despite its commitment to the ILO as a member state, is not ready to allow workers to independently form associations. This is because the junta does not want the real situation of workers in Burma to be revealed. Because they know that the actual situation will be exposed if they send someone from among the workers. And they do not want to loose face internationally."*[506]

The Worker's Group of ILO, which is a tripartite UN agency of governments, employers and workers, has rejected Burmese representative for three consecutive years.[507]

10.15 Social Organisations and GONGOs

In Burma there exists little space for civil society. Attempts to construct and maintain independent civil society organisations and institutions, and to create a culture of openness and independent action, have generally been thwarted by the SPDC. As minimal scope remains for independent civil society organisations, they have often faced elimination, or been co-opted by the SPDC and its proxies. Those social organisations that do exist, or wish to form, must be approved by the regime according to the 1908 (1957) Unlawful Associations Act, and Order 6/88.

According to official statistics, there are about 300 domestic NGOs in Burma.[508] However, many of these so-called NGOs are in fact under the control of the junta, and as such can hardly be considered non-governmental. Thus, they are here dealt with under the rather contradictory name, Government Operated Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs).

Restrictions on Independent Social Organisations

Not only civil society organisations with a political agenda face harsh restrictions in Burma. Also informal groupings with humanitarian mandates have come under pressure to discontinue their operations. While ordering independent social welfare organisations to cease their operations, the SPDC has encouraged its proxy organisation, the USDA, to set up new social organizations within the country.[509]

In February 2006, the SPDC imposed new restrictions on international and domestic humanitarian organizations, which hindered the groups from effectively addressing the needs of the country's economically poor.

In mid-May 2007, Burma's Ministry of Home Affairs ordered the closure of 24 Rangoon based non-political and non-profit social welfare associations, and threatened them with potential legal action. However, some social organizations reportedly defied the ban on their activities. [510]

One of the groups affected was the Free Funeral Services Society (FFSS), a non-profit organisation that provides free funeral services for people who can not afford burial or cremation of their family members. The FFSS had expanded its work by establishing a clinic in Rangoon in early March 2007, which provides free healthcare for the poor. According to the group it treats up to 100 patients each day.[511] Although the organisation is non-profit, non-governmental and apolitical in its operations, the SPDC does not approve of it. The organisation continues to suffer harassment from the junta as it is led by Win Naing, Kyaw Thu and Than Myint Aung, all of which are known for supporting the pro-democracy movement. According to an executive member of the FFSS, *"Since the Home Ministry denied the extension of our registration, we have continued to run the organization according to the nature of our work."* [512] U Win Naing, who founded the FFSS in 2001, said that while the government had not physically forced the organisation to close, they had forced it into a position of illegality. He said: *"For other organisations, it may be possible for them to put on hold of their work and discuss the matter. But our service society holds about 30 to 50 funerals every day. We are not in a position where we can stop these services and have a think."*[513]

However, after international criticism, the regime a week later instructed social organizations prohibited from renewing their registrations to submit a letter of appeal if they wished to extend their registration. Observers say the funeral service group would likely get an extension of its registration, but only if they removed some of their executive members who

are close to the pro-democracy movement. However, a senior member of the free funeral society said that the organization had never received any official announcement to close and would continue to operate as normal until they did.[514]

Throughout 2007 the junta and its proxies continued to harass persons and organisations providing social welfare. This is by many seen as a blatant attempt to discredit any non-governmental social efforts, as the government wants to take the credit for any well-doing in the country.

In late August 2007, a team led by veteran Burmese politician and social activist U Win Naing had to stop distributing rice to the hungry in Rangoon after frequently being harassed by junta-backed thugs. When returning from a rice donation trip on 19 August, U Win Naing and his team were twice attacked with catapults and chased by a group of about 12 people in vehicles. Moreover, the team was followed throughout their trip by at least two men believed to be intelligence agents. Despite reporting the attacks to police intelligence and requesting protection, the police only directed him to file a case at the nearby police station. According to U Win Naing there are at least 100,000 people in and around Rangoon who desperately need humanitarian aid. U Win Naing and his team recently started a rare campaign of donating rice and other essential commodities to the poor living in and around Burma's former capital and commercial city of Rangoon. As a result of the constant harassment, numerous poor people in the outskirts of Rangoon were denied U Win Naing's food support.[515]

HIV/AIDS Support Groups

Attempts of setting up supportive organisations for HIV/AIDS victims have been actively stopped by the authorities. Responding to the increase in HIV/AIDS sufferers in recent years, a number of supportive groups have emerged in the country. There are now reportedly more than 30 such groups, however their work is severely hampered by government restrictions.[516] According to Phyu Phyu Thin, the country's most well-known HIV/AIDS activist, *"We can't travel freely or hold workshops and discussions on HIV/AIDS education and counselling."* Since 2002, Phyu Phyu Thin and her group have provided anti-retroviral medicine, accommodation, as well as care and counselling services to over 1,000 HIV/AIDS patients.[517]

On 13 February 2007, a locally run HIV/AIDS awareness centre in Pakokku, Magwe Division, was forced to close by authorities. Ko Tin Ko, an AIDS sufferer from Kan Ma Township, had opened the centre on 10 February in an attempt to increase the community's understanding of the disease. He was detained and questioned by police three days after opening the centre.[518] Ko Tin Ko said the authorities did not realise that what he was doing could help the regime.[519] According to Ko Tin Ko:

> *"I started handing packs of condoms to young men who are over 18. I put out HIV/AIDS educational books and leaflets I collected from the UNAIDS office in Rangoon . . . I did what I thought I should do as an AIDS victim. This is not a form of political movement. But today they are asking me to stop."*[520]

Prisoner Support Groups

On 4 March 2007, the Prison Charity Foundation (PCF), run by Chin Christians to assist prison inmates, was raided and closed down by the military junta. The PCF, founded in 1992, worked for social needs in prisons, donating food, medicine and clothes to inmates in 21 of the country's prison camps. Over 450 PCF members also prayed and preached Christian religion in some prisons camps. In 1999 the SPDC ordered the PCF to remove the word "P" (Prison) and instead rename the foundation the "Charity Foundation" (CF). The PCF refused this order and was forced to close. A member of the PCF said the junta seemed to be uncomfortable with the word "prison" and worried that PCF members who preach in prisons were trying to convert inmates to Christianity.[521] Since the organisation's office was shut down, authorities forced members of the group to sign agreements promising not to participate in Christian worship or gatherings. However, several PCF members reportedly continued their mission despite the risks involved. Rev. Dr Joseph, the founder of PCF, fled the country after the SPDC ordered his arrest. At the time of the Rangoon office raid, Dr Joseph was outside the country, and his wife and daughter were arrested in his place.[522]

Government Operated Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs)

The scope for independent apolitical non-governmental organisations is increasingly limited as the SPDC consider any organised activity outside their control as a potential threat. As activities conducted by independent organisations will always have the potential to run counter to SPDC wants and policies, the junta is making every effort to bring the work of NGOs under the control and remit of so-called Government Operated Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs). This way, the SPDC gives the impression that they allow the existence of a civil society, when in reality they maintain total control. Through GONGOs claiming to address social issues, the regime can further its political agenda,

In the space created by the banning of the independent social welfare groups, junta-backed organizations, in particular the USDA, began providing similar services. The USDA started providing free funeral services, and opened free clinics, reportedly coercing local doctors to donate their services. *"I was urged to sit in their clinic, but I don't want to work under the signboard of the USDA,"* said a Rangoon doctor.[523] The group also launched a door-to-door campaign to draw local people to the clinics, as well as asking businesses and patients to make donations.[524] *"The USDA has pressured businessmen to donate at least 300,000 kyat (US$ 242) to be able to open the clinics,"* said a businessman in Insein Township.[525] (For more information see Section 10.16: The Union Solidarity and Development Association).

Moreover, by asserting control over the work of civil society, the SPDC is provided with an avenue through which it is able to secure international funding intended for humanitarian purposes. According to SPDC policy, international humanitarian aid should be channelled through GONGOs, and international aid agencies should operate in partnership with GONGOs.

The SPDC also use GONGOs to carry out extortions and so-called tax collection. In July 2007 it was reported that tax was being forcibly collected in Ponagyun Township, Arakan State, by Burma Army's Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #550 based in Ponagyun along with the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), Village Defence Force, the Fire Brigade, and Rakhine Women's Association.[526] In June 2007, around one million kyat was collected from villagers in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon state, for a visit by Daw Myint Myint Soe, chairperson of the MMCWA in Mon State. The collection was made by the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC).[527]

In addition, GONGOs are used to coordinate rapid mobilisation of the populace for attendance at mass rallies; designed to simulate support for the SPDC and to denounce its enemies. (For more information, see Section 10.8: Freedom of Assembly, and Section 10.16: The Union Solidarity and Development Association).

GONGOs operating in Burma in 2007 included: the USDA (for more information, see Section 10.16: The Union Solidarity and Development Association), The Myanmar Women's Affair Federation (MWAF), The Myanmar Medical Association (MMA), Myanmar Red Cross (MRC), Myanmar Anti-Narcotic Association (MANA), Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA), Auxiliary Fire Brigade, Parent Teacher Associations, and the Myanmar Nurses Association (MNA).

GONGOs are organized on the Township level and are largely under the control of the regime, with SPDC members and affiliates generally occupying top-level positions. Furthermore, most of the lower level members involved in these organisations have been coerced into joining. In 2007 it was reported that most of Karen State's Thaton, Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts, the SPDC has demanded that villages supply quotas of individuals for recruitment to government controlled associations. Villagers are forced to join GONGOs such as the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF), the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), the Auxiliary Fire Fighters, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and the local village militia, or *Pyi Thu Sit* ('People's Army'). Typically, village heads are given quotas for the number of villagers that must join each organisation and must pay membership fees for each villager. Using its proxy organisations, the SPDC can further expand their control over the villagers and extort money from them.[528]

Women's Affairs GONGOs

In 2007, no independent women's organisations existed in Burma, but there were a number of junta-backed women's groups. The two main groups were the Myanmar Women's Affair Federation (MWAF), and the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA). The wives of military personnel fill all positions of authority in both organisations. Until 2004 the MMCWA was headed by Daw Khin Win Shwe, wife of Intelligence Chief and SPDC Secretary-1 Khin Nyunt. In 2007, the head of the MMCWA is Kyu Kyu Shwe, wife of Colonel Pe Thein who is a senior officer in the Office of the Prime Minister and formerly commanded the SPDC's psychological warfare unit.[529] Similarly, MWAF was in 2007 headed by Daw Than Than Nwe, the wife of then Prime Minister Soe Win.

According to a village head in Dooplaya District who was interviewed by KHRG:

> *"The TPDC [Township Peace and Development Council] and VPDC [Village Peace and Development Council] forced the villagers to organise themselves as the Maternal and Child Welfare [MMCWA] and Myanmar Women's Affairs [Federation]. They forced the women in the villages to organise this. If her husband is village head, she must become the [MMCWA or MWAF] village head, and if her husband is village secretary then she must become the secretary. They don't care if they're literate or illiterate, even illiterate women were chosen to be the leaders and secretaries. Now we have 27 women in Myanmar Women's Affairs and 7 women in MMCWA. They didn't get any training about these organisations and they don't need to do anything, but each woman had to pay 500 kyat to join these organisations."*[530]

Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation

The Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) was established in 2003 by former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who stated that the role of the organisation was to "*take charge of the women sector comprehensively*". Current MWAF General Secretary Khin Mar Tun has declared "*the MWAF plays an important role not only in development of women but also in that of the State*." [531] MWAF claims to be a voluntary non-governmental organization working to encourage the welfare and advancement of women in Burma, in order to enable them to participate fully in national development. However, Burmese women inside and outside of the country have reportedly little faith in the organisation. According to Daw Zar from Mudon Township, *"We view MWAF is as pro-government organization and is only for show. It was founded by family members of government officials and we do not get see much of their activities."*[532] Women's League of Burma, a Burmese women's organisation based in exile, has stated that, *"MWAF does not implement what they preach. We do not see them empowering women, giving education to women and making women aware. They must do these basic things to usher in improvement in the life of women."*[533]

The MWAF is frequently used as a propaganda mouthpiece for the policies of the ruling junta, and the rhetoric of the MWAF echoes and mirrors that of the regime. The MWAF has frequently accused Burmese groups in exile of trying to create unrest among the people. It has also stated that women groups in exile do not represent women inside Burma.[534] For example, when the ICRC spoke out in June 2007, accusing the SPDC of human rights violations, the MWAF was used by the junta to reject the criticism by saying that claims of military abuse were unfounded and accusing the group of having connections with rebels.[535]

The MWAF has a presence in all 14 of Burma's states and divisions, and claims around 1.5 million members.[536] However, as with most GONGOs, much of the MWAF's membership base is the result of forced recruitment. Recent years have seen a recruitment drive, which can be a result of the junta wanting to show strength in the announced constitutional referendum.[537] In July 2007, it was reported that women in northern Shan State were coerced to become members of MWAF. In Muse Township, at least 100 women from each of three village groups in Muse Township had been ordered to join the MWAF. The order came from the Muse Township MWAF chairperson, Daw Khin Nyunt Yi, who happens to be the wife of U Nyunt Han, chairman of Muse TPDC. Not only were the women forced to join the organisation, they also had to pay 1,000 kyat each for membership. [538] In April 2007, MWAF coerced young women in Karen State to join their organization. Even if they refused to join, women were forced to pay 1,000 kyat to MWAF each month.[539]

Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association

The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) was established by the SPDC through the implementation of Order No. 21/90. MMCWA is controlled by the SPDC at all levels, reflected in its leadership structure. The chair of MMCWA at township level is automatically the wife of the local TPDC chairman, and at village level the chair is the wife of the SPDC appointed village headman and the secretary is the wife of the village secretary.

The MMCWA is heavily financed by international agencies, and in 2007 could boast funding from UN agencies and INGOs such as UNICEF, UNDP, UNAIDS, CARE and Médecins du Monde. MMCWA has claimed a membership base of 5.4 million people, or 10 percent of the total population of Burma. Although the organisation has stated that membership is voluntary, numerous reports have proved otherwise.[540] According to a village head in Dooplaya District, Karen State:

"Women that join their groups have to pay admission fees. They ordered the village head to select women to join Myanmar Women's Affairs [Federation]… Every person who joined had to pay 310 kyat. No villagers were interested in joining, so we had to force them to join. They gave 50 application forms to my village. Even though the villagers don't want to do the things they are forced or ordered to, they have to do it because we are under SPDC control. The SPDC doesn't sympathise with the difficulties of the villagers. For Maternity and Child Welfare [MMCWA], they gave 100 forms to our village, but we haven't done anything yet. I know that the villagers don't understand anything about these organisations, but when the SPDC demands money from them they are used to paying without knowing or understanding why."[541]

Although both the MWAF and MMCWA have grown extensively under the forced recruitment schemes, the main parastatal association through which the junta attempts to create an appearance of mass civilian support is the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA).[542]

10.16 The Union Solidarity and Development Association

Burma's largest and most significant GONGO is the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). The USDA was founded by the military junta on 15 September 1993, under Order No. 6/88 as a social welfare organisation with the Ministry of Home Affairs. Originally registered as a social organization devoted to addressing civil and religious issues within Burma, the group has since become little more than a civilian wing of the government frequently used to enforce obedience to the state through violence or intimidation.[543] At formal events USDA members appear dressed in white, long-sleeved Burmese-style shirts and dark green sarongs. However, at other times, they appear in civilian clothing and blend in with the public on missions which range from collecting intelligence for the SPDC, to attacking dissenters.[544]

The USDA was initially mandated to maintain the union, national solidarity, sovereignty; promote national pride, and support the emergence of a prosperous and peaceful nation. As an extension to such rhetoric, the USDA has also developed a 'Four-Point People's Desire,' to:

1. Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges or holding negative views;
2. Oppose those trying to jeopardize the stability of the State and progress of the nation;
3. Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State; and
4. Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.

This mandate mirrors the ideology and aims of the military government, and suggests that the USDA is in fact an extension of SPDC governance, including the violent oppression of all who oppose such a goal.[545]

The leadership of the USDA gives further indication of the organisation being a perpetuation of SPDC governance; the USDA is led by senior SPDC ministers under the supervision of junta chief Senior-General Than Shwe. The USDA Secretary-General is Major General U Htay Oo, who is also the SPDC Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation.[546] Minister of Industry-1 Aung Thaung is also a leading USDA member.[547] The USDA is expected to be converted into a pro-junta political party that will contest future elections, after the regime adopts a new constitution.[548]

Recruitment

The USDA boasts a membership of 22.8 million people, nearly half of the country's population. Although the USDA claims membership is voluntary, forced recruitment is widely reported. Coerced recruitment is carried out through a system of both threats and 'incentives'. Incentives are offered to join with the explicit threat that failing to do so could result in harassment and decreased educational and job opportunities. In order to obtain government jobs it is often a requirement to be a member of USDA.[549]

The USDA is roughly made up of two types of members; the security wing and the civilian wing. The security wing consists of poor, unemployed men who are paid by the authorities to harass and intimidate dissidents and activists. According to the exiled Burma Lawyer's Council, the USDA hired unemployed people for approximately 2,000-5,000 kyat (US$ 2-4) to intimidate and attack those taking part in the September 2007 uprising.[550] However, the bulk of the organisation's membership consists of those who have been forcibly recruited or who have joined to avoid confrontation with authorities. The majority are civil servants,

teachers and school children, who are automatically enrolled in the USDA. Moreover, in some districts, people have been added to membership lists without ever being consulted. These members are used to legitimate the organisation as representing "the people". As holding USDA membership enables Burmese citizens to avoid conflict with the military junta, the majority of USDA members have passively accepted their membership.[551]

In addition to making USDA membership compulsory for large groups, the organisation uses aggressive and often coercive means to recruit new members. In order to attract young people, the organisation offers English language and computer courses to its members. Student membership also comes with benefits, including access to sport leagues and other extra-curricular activities. Moreover, the USDA encourages student members to provide intelligence, by monitoring and reporting about the activities of their classmates. Some student USDA members have reported receiving passing marks regardless of merit.[552]

USDA membership has become a prerequisite to obtaining or keeping a civil service job (including teachers and medical staff), gaining admission to university, passing school exams, entering contests, performing at cultural festivals, and in some areas even receiving sporadic electricity or running water to one's house.[553]

In areas of Karen State under consolidated military control, the SPDC has pushed the USDA recruitment drive into villages, giving quotas for the membership numbers required. According to a villager in Dooplaya District:

> *"For the USDA [Union Solidarity Development Association], they also forced us to join them. They directed how many people from a village must join them. They told us that we could go to court if we have problems or if others did anything wrong to us. We were forced to join every organisation. For the USDA, we haven't organised our village to join it yet. They have ordered us to do this since May, but we haven't organised our villagers yet."*[554]

Despite the SPDC claims of the USDA's massive membership as a supposed civilian support base, most members have joined only to avoid persecution or to keep their jobs.[555] However, as members begin to comprehend the real nature of the organization, the USDA is faced with resignations. In June 2007, it was reported that for the first time in the USDA's history at least 18 of its members in Mon State had resigned since April.[556]

The USDA as an Approximation and Manipulation of Civil Society

The USDA has been presented to the public as a social organization that works for the welfare and development of all Burmese citizens. State-run television frequently shows USDA members voluntarily assisting development projects, donating blood or medicine to hospitals, and donating materials to schools.[557] Official SPDC statements declare that "*USDA members [are] urged to actively participate in development tasks*".[558] In the past two years, the regime has promoted the USDA as a local partner for international development agencies and the United Nations, requiring aid workers to be accompanied by USDA members.[559] The ability of international humanitarian organisations to follow their principles of transparency and accountability to local peoples and to conduct human rights impact assessments has been further restricted by this requirement.[560] (For more information see Section 10.7: Restrictions on Foreigners in Burma).

Following the regime's announced closure of several independent social services, such as free clinics and a free funeral service, in May 2007 the USDA opened clinics in municipal buildings in Rangoon. USDA members reportedly launched a door-to-door campaign

together with WPDC officials, to draw local people to the clinics. However, in order to fund the "free" clinics, patients as well as businessmen were pressured into making donations. In December 2007, it was reported that patients visiting a free clinic run by the Union Solidarity and Development Association in Thanlyin Township, Rangoon, were forced to pay 300 kyat for an appointment.[561] And in May 2007, a businessman in Insein Township, Rangoon stated that, *"The USDA has pressured businessmen to donate at least 300,000 kyat (US$ 242) to be able to open the clinics."*[562] Moreover, some physicians in Rangoon were urged by the USDA to staff the clinics, against their will. As stated by one doctor, *"I was urged to sit in their clinic, but I don't want to work under the signboard of the USDA."*[563] The USDA also set up a funeral service, similar to the Free Funeral Services Society (FFSS). Although USDA officials claimed they were not trying to replace the FFSS, the USDA has routinely adopted their methods and activities.[564]

Contrary to its ostensible mandate as a social welfare organisation, the USDA has been involved in criminal activities such as arbitrary extortion, as well as corruption. It has been reported that the USDA collects "taxes" at checkpoints all over the country, often together with military troops (Tatmadaw), military police (MP), military intelligence (SaYaPa) and Township Administration Office (MaYaKa). In July 2007, a trader of Kachin State's capital Myitkyina reported that the USDA was among 18 government agencies forcibly collecting taxes at three major checkpoints.[565] Moreover, reports have stated that the USDA has demanded money from locals for managing development projects. In November 2007, it was reported that USDA officials had extorted money from locals while it managed a water supply and pipeline project in Dagon Myothit Township outside Rangoon. According to an unnamed source, *"The USDA forced Dagon Myothit residents to pay 170,000 kyat (US$ 130) per household to receive running water. The project has still not been finished"*.[566] Moreover, according to local residents, leading members of the USDA had bought cell-phones with the project funds. It was reported that Secretary Soe Win and Joint-Secretary Than Oo of the USDA in Dagon Myothit Township (North) were responsible for the corruption.[567] Moreover, in Mudon Township, Mon State, it was reported that the VPDC headmen had to pay about 50,000 to 70,000 kyat monthly to the TPDC for the support of USDA and other junta-backed organisations.[568]

In addition to corruption, USDA members have reportedly been involved in other criminal activities ranging from theft, running of brothels and drug trade, with explicit or implicit approval of the ruling junta. In July 2007 it was reported that two villagers were robbed by local USDA members at their house near Chaung Nat village in Taung Twin Gyi Township. A police investigation was started, but was stopped after USDA officers paid off the police. It was also reported that the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* chairman of Sat Thwar village U Thaung Myint, who is also the former chairman of the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC), had seized wood from illegal woodcutters and sold it off for his own profit. An investigation was started by the forestry department and police officials but ended when the Taung Twin Gyi Peace and Development Council chairman intervened and ordered the police station to stop pursuing the case.[569] Moreover, in Moulmein, Mudon and Thanbyuzayat townships, Mon State, massage parlours and brothels are reportedly owned by USDA members who were close to SPDC officers.[570] In northern Shan State, Panhsay Kyaw Myint, a well-known drug lord, was in 2007 appointed Chairman of Namkham USDA. Panhsay Kyaw Myint leads a militia of 300-400 armed men who give protection to local opium growers and traders, in exchange for hefty taxes. Kyaw Myint has also been attending the SPDC's National Convention as an *"ethnic representative."*[571]

The USDA has also been responsible for organising mass rallies held in support of SPDC policies or in denunciation of the opposition or international community.[572] In order to ensure mass attendance, the organisation has coerced people to join through threats and intimidation. In the autumn of 2007, several such rallies were held to show support for the National Convention and to denounce the September protests. (For more information, see Section 10.8: Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly)

The USDA as a Security Apparatus

Although presented as a social welfare organisation, since its beginning, the USDA has played a dual role. The organisation has been used by the military regime to organize and carry out attacks on political dissidents and human rights activists in the country, as well as persons caught up in ordinary criminal cases.[573] The brutal nature of the USDA became known after its members carried out attacks on Aung San Suu Kyi during her short periods of freedom, including the Depayin Massacre in May 2003, in which several NLD members were injured and killed. According to a 2006 report by the Network for Democracy and Development (NDD), the USDA is *"involved in most cases of political violence in the country, and their culture of thuggish behaviour is a key factor in the climate of fear pervasive in Burma today."*[574]

The USDA's mandate as civilian security apparatus is explicitly defined in the fourth objective of the group's 'People's Desires' which states; *Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.*[575] Moreover, the USDA's militant mandate was in 2000 laid out in the War Office's *Manual for Application of People's War Strategy*:

> *"We must make necessary preparations to crush any military invasion by deploying national defence measures based on the 'People's War Strategy' ... If such an offensive were to be launched, the Burmese Defense Services, guided by the political leadership of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), will safeguard and defend the nation with the support of national reserve forces".*[576]

In order to carry out this mandate, some USDA members have been provided with basic military training.[577] However, instead of being used against foreign military invasion, the USDA has been deployed to crush internal peaceful opposition.[578]

Furthermore, as the top generals realised they were facing a threat from a strong and independent military intelligence wing, this was reformed into the "Military Affairs Security" (MAS). The influence of the military intelligence wing became more restricted under MAS, as all civilian security matters were handed over to Special Branch Police and the USDA. As a result, the USDA was no longer limited to have authority over local officials but was granted indirect charge of security in the whole country. In this capacity, the USDA has played a crucial role in forcing NLD members to resign, closing down businesses of political opponents, and carrying out the dirty work for the Burmese generals.[579] (For more information see Section 10.11: Restrictions on and Harassment of the NLD; Section 10.12: Restrictions on and Harassment of the 88 Generation Students' Group; and Section 10.13: Restrictions on and Harassment of Human Rights Defenders).

The USDA as a Political Party

It is becoming increasingly evident that the regime is preparing the USDA to become a political party. When the USDA was established, the government declared that it was not a political party, however in 2006, the USDA secretary, Major General Htay Oo stated that the association may change to a political party depending on the circumstances.[580] The SPDC has been under growing international pressure to push through political reforms to create a functioning democracy.[581] The junta's response to this has been the creation of a seven point "roadmap to democracy," in which the USDA is being portrayed as an organisation which represents society and must make Burma a democratic country. It is widely believed that the SPDC is forming the USDA into a civilian political party to represent the military interest in future elections and thus secure continued military rule.[582] According to Brad Adams in Human Rights Watch, *"The routine use of violence by the USDA represents the true face of an organization being groomed to take power in Burma as a surrogate for the military."*[583]

The USDA has the same aims and political objectives as the military, and the organisation is increasing its administrative, economic and coercive power throughout Burma.[584] USDA officials are slowly taking over control of local government responsibilities from military officials, a key step in institutionalizing their nationwide control.[585] The USDA's reach and organizational structure covers villages, townships, divisions and cities countrywide, and the organisation is thus considered central in the junta's plan to have the organisation serve as the civilian side of the military regime.[586]

A further indication that the USDA is getting ready to become a political party was apparent at the USDA annual general meeting in Naypyidaw from 12-16 November 2007, when all members of the association were asked to hand in their CVs. They were also asked to resign from any position they might hold on the Township or Ward Peace and Development Council. According to an observer, *"They [the authorities] only called on respected people to join the USDA. It seems the generals would rather change the USDA into a political party."*[587]

NLD MP 70-year-old, U Than Lwin was seriously injured after being attacked by a mob of USDA members on 15 June 2007. *[Photo: AHRC]*

In an attempt to crush any opposition political parties, part of the USDA political campaign has been to discredit the largest opposition party, the NLD, and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi. These attempts have included forcing NLD members to resign and spreading rumours about Aung San Suu Kyi to distance her from the people. In November 2007, it was reported that the USDA were spreading false information about the detained NLD leader among villagers in different townships in Mon state. USDA officials had had briefed its members to tell the villagers that Daw Suu had never done anything for the cause of development for the people of Burma. The USDA campaign aimed to ensure that there was no support for Suu Kyi from the people should demonstrations take place again in the future.[588] (For more information see Section 10.11: Restrictions on and harassment of the NLD).

Burma's top generals have over the last couple of years been seeking to test the waters and see if their chances of electoral victory have improved since 1990. However, according to a senior military source, *"There is a growing realisation that any army-supported political party would not have the support of the people."*[589] It was reported that when asked outright at a Cabinet meeting if the USDA could win a future election, the Planning Minister, Soe Tha replied it stood no chance at all. Since then the military junta has stepped up plans to make the USDA a mass-based political party and improve its standing in the community.[590] In 2007, the USDA increased its attempts to gain support in the population.[591] However, part of the USDA's mandate has also been to crush the democratic opposition, which has given the organisation less credibility among the population. Since the crackdown on the September demonstrations, the true nature of the USDA was revealed to the country's citizens, who witnessed USDA members beat and arrest monks and other peaceful protesters. It could thus be harder for the USDA to gain support as a political party.[592] The USDA's involvement in the crackdown since mid-August may have undermined the official image that the SPDC has projected for this force for Burma's "public welfare." According to Zin Linn of the NCGUB, after the September crackdown the USDA's reputation was at its lowest.[593]

The *Swan Arr Shin*

In security operations, USDA routinely operates together with paramilitary forces such as the *Swan Arr Shin* and the fire brigade. These civilian militias were used repeatedly throughout 2007 to break up silent prayer vigils and similar peaceful actions by concerned citizens.[594] In the junta's crackdown on protesters in August and September 2007, the role of the *Swan Arr Shin* became increasingly evident. As stated by one diplomat who watched the *Swan Arr Shin* violently assaulting protesters on the streets of Rangoon, *"It's an underground organisation and I don't know who would admit to it existing, but it exists and it exists in force, and it has been evident over the last week."*[595]

Due to their unofficial and so-called civilian status, not much is known about the *Swan Arr Shin*. However, it is becoming clear that recruits are largely drawn from the unemployed underclass, and they are operating primarily in larger cities. Reports suggest that recruits consist of a mix of unemployed youth, former members of ward councils, ex-convicts, and some street vendors who are required to obtain permits for their livelihoods and thus obliged to comply with official demands.[596] These are routinely rounded up from teashops and other public areas by USDA officials or TPDC officials, typically offered between 2,000-3,000 kyat (US$ 1.50-2.30) per day and a meal.[597] According to diplomats, the regime directly recruits to the *Swan Arr Shin* among newly released criminals; at least 600 criminals were reportedly released from Rangoon's Insein jail and recruited as vigilantes to be used in the September 2007 crackdown.[598]

The *Swan Arr Shin*, roughly translated as *"Masters of Physical Force"*, attack and arrest activists under the guidance of local council officials, and plainclothes special branch police and military officials. Thus, although often described in the media as *"pro-government gangs,"* the *Swan Arr Shin* are in fact an unofficial arm of the state, systematically mobilised and controlled by the military junta.[599] According to a Western diplomat in Rangoon, *"The members of this group [the Swan Arr Shin] have been specially trained in crowd control and the violent suppression of protests. We have had reports of its foundation, to act as a security and intelligence wing, since the beginning of the year."*[600]

In a 2007 press conference, Brigadier General Khin Yi described the *Swan Arr Shin* as *"members of the fire brigade, Red Cross and Ward Peace and Development Councils."* According to Khin Yi, these groups provide *"a helping hand to the task of law enforcement community peace and tranquility without salaries and they are the strength who provide assistance voluntarily."*[601]

Attacks by the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* in 2007

In 2007 attacks by the USDA against the political opposition continued, with an increase in particularly brutal physical attacks. In April, May and June, USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* carried out several violent and intimidating assaults, which were widely reported and condemned. On 18 April 2007, six human rights defenders were attacked and beaten by a mob led by the secretary of Henzada Township USDA, U Nyunt Oo. The mob was armed with clubs, slingshots and sharpened bamboo sticks. Two of the activists, Ko Maung Maung Lay and Ko Myint Hlaing (aka) Ko Myint Naing, were severely injured and hospitalised.[602] During the month of May, the regime's crackdown against NLD members and other political activists intensified. Throughout the month, the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* carried out violent attacks and intimidation against activists holding a prayer campaign for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.[603]

According to a retired Sector Peace and Development Council official who took part in the arrests of a group of 29 activists, including Su Su Nway, in May 2007, the *Swan Arr Shin* was responsible. The retired official, who had been recruited by the Township Peace and Development Council the day before, stated:

> *"So on the next day at about 5:00 am, we gathered up . . . Then we went to a bus-stop in Insein Township in two trucks and waited there … Our duty was to stop them from coming to the pagoda and to advise them to go to some other pagodas and to arrange them transportation … There were about 50 of us in two trucks. We were given a new title, Swan Arr Shin . . . They told us not to mention ourselves as Swan Arr Shin but as just civilians. We have to say what we were told … They have titled us Political/General informers."*[604]

In June 2007, a particularly brutal attack was carried out by a combined mob of USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*, in which U Than Lwin, NLD elected representative of Madaya Township, suffered a broken nose and an eye injury after he was punched in the face with a knuckle-duster.[605] The assailant was said to have escaped into a USDA office.

Equipped with bamboo sticks and iron batons covered with plastic, members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* took part in the violently crack down on the peaceful August and September 2007 protests.[606] Before the regime resorted to using military forces to crack down on 2007's street protesters, it deployed the two civilian groups to carry out the harassment and arrest of protesters.[607] The USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* operated in conjunction with Special Police and troops in security efforts and arrests.[608]

In addition to being central in the crackdown on the streets, the USDA took part in raids and arrests of suspected protesters in homes and monasteries, as well as harassment of media outlets and journalists. According to the exiled Burma Media Association (BMA) and Reporters Sans Frontieres, members of the USDA were among those responsible for *"at least 24 serious violations of the freedom to report news and information since 19 August [2007]."*[609] (For more information about the September protests see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement; and the HRDU report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* Making Arrests

Although the USDA, SAS and fire brigade have no legal mandate to carry out arrest, the organisation has been increasingly involved in raids and "arrests". The manner in which persons have been arrested and detained by these groups is entirely outside of not only international legal standards but also domestic law.[610] However, although not granted an arrest mandate by law, they are given arrest powers in practice. These so-called "arrests" often involve abducting activists and dragging them to trucks or vans that stand ready to take them away to interrogation centres. The Asian Human Rights Commission has noted that these are blatant and lawless abductions, arranged by the SPDC to be carried out by USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*.[611]

A protestor is carried to a waiting van by unidentified men believed to be members of the *Swan Arr Shin*, in Hledan Township, Rangoon, on 28 August 2007 *[Photo: DVB]*

When carrying out arrests, the USDA and SAS are routinely dressed in civilian clothing, and often do not identify themselves. In this way, the regime can claim non-complicity in violent and unlawful actions, while at the same time say it is the work of "the people." On 15 May 2007, Ye Myat Hein, a Rangoon University student was arrested by a group calling themselves "the people", for conducting prayers at Kyaukdawgyi pagoda in Insein Township. He was later reported missing by fellow university students.[612] In response to the arrests of groups of activists praying for Aung San Suu Kyi in May, the NLD stated that the arrests were unlawful: *"[Pyitthu Swan Arr Shin] are not of any of the government's law-enforcement organisations such as Police Forces or the Military Intelligence, who have authority to arrest civilians . . . they are obviously breaking the law of the nation."*[613] However, the junta praised the unlawful arrests in the state-run newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* stating that *"These groups were stopped and handed over to the authorities by people who oppose*

unrest and love peace."[614] This shows how the military is avoiding accountability by using people appearing as civilians to carry out attacks and arrests of political dissenters.[615]

In the August and September crackdown, the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* were responsible for the brutal "arrest" of several protesters. The arrest of Ko Htin Kyaw and Ko Zaw Nyunt during a peaceful protest on August 25 2007 is illustrative. The two activists were dragged away to a waiting vehicle by a gang of unidentifiable abductors.[616] The authorities could have sent uniformed police officers to make an official arrest under section 54 of the country's Criminal Procedure Code, but instead, an unidentified gang appeared out of nowhere to grab and drag off the men in the manner of criminals.[617]

Impunity for members of USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*

It has become increasingly clear that the enforcers of "discipline" in the *"discipline-flourishing democracy*" envisaged by the SPDC generals will be the USDA and SAS.[618] This is particularly worrying as these groups are not uniformed or official law enforcers, but rather plainclothes mobs portrayed by the junta as *"people who oppose unrest and love peace."*[619] There is a big difference between the state's use of persons in uniform and those in plain clothes to assault and detain citizens. The former at least acknowledges the state's role, whilst the latter denies it.[620] As such, the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* are emblematic of the regime's attempt to avoid direct accountability for the violence carried out against those considered a threat to the regime.

Even the most brutal attacks at the hands of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* have been carried out with impunity. As the police force has become subservient to these groups, there is no one to enforce the law. The USDA members who attacked human rights defenders in the 18 April 2007 incident in Henzada Township, were treated with impunity. Despite the Taloke Htaw police chief witnessing the incident, the authorities failed to take action against those who perpetrated the brutal attack.[621] Furthermore, following the assault on NLD member U Than Lwin on 15 June 2007, the police were refused entry to the USDA office which witnesses said the attacker had escaped into.[622] These and many other cases are testimony that the groups enjoy virtual impunity as they represent an unofficial arm of the military junta. As the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has noted, the attacks organised by the USDA show how the military government is itself systematically undermining the law and order that it claims to uphold.[623]

Not only do USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* members enjoy virtual impunity. Victims who attempt to file a case against these assailants themselves risk facing countercharges. Following an attack by the plainclothes mobs, the police and local authorities typically step in and accuse the victims of being responsible for causing unrest and making trouble. The courts are then used by the regime to add insult to injury through the laying of charges against the victims.[624] This is particularly worrying, as it turns the victim into a perpetrator, and thus deters targets of violence from seeking redress in the legal system.

One of the most blatant cases of this was the 2003 Depayin incident, when an NLD motorcade was the victim of a deadly attack by a USDA led mob. However, instead of punishing the attackers, the junta put NLD leaders, Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo under house arrest, under the allegation of causing public unrest. Following the attack against six human rights defenders in Henzada Township on 18 April 2007, the USDA attackers were left unpunished while a countercase was made against the rights activists, who were arrested on the allegations of a range of charges, including; upsetting public tranquillity, discrediting the government, and later sentenced to up to eight years imprisonment.[625] Moreover, after the assault on NLD member U Than Lwin on 15 June 2007, the attackers were treated with impunity while four of U Than Lwin's family members faced

countercharges for accusing USDA members of being behind the attack. As the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has stated, this *"signifies a further diminishing and displacement of the police and courts, and a strengthening of arbitrary and extralegal institutions with no other agenda than to manipulate and brutalise."*[626]

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 11

THE SAFFRON REVOLUTION – THE 2007 PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

"Over the past year, we monks have been facing increasing dificulties when we went out to collect food. Only three families out of every 30 can afford to donate food because the civilians are also facing great difficulties for their livelihoods."

- Bullets in the Alms Bowl, HRDU, March 2008

11.1 Introduction

The months of August and September 2007 gave rise to the largest public display of opposition against the military regime in Burma in almost 20 years. Not since the mass popular protests of 1988 has there been such widespread public outcry opposed to the junta. Dubbed the "Saffron Revolution" for the thousands of Buddhist monks who lead the protests, hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life took to the streets in protest across the country in each of Burma's seven states and seven divisions. By the end of September 2007, at least 227 separate protests had been staged in no fewer than 66 different towns and cities across the country.[1]

In a country where any form of public discord draws swift and harsh punishment, demonstrations of this scale are rare. The fundamental freedoms of the rights to assembly, association, expression and opinion are strictly repressed through an extensive system of harsh laws designed to safeguard the regime from all forms of open dissent or criticism.

In March 2008, HRDU released the highly-detailed and widely acclaimed report, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl; An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, which focused on the events leading up to, during, and following the protests.[2] Considerable detail was employed in analyzing the underlying root causes which gave rise to the protests, the strategies and tactics utilized by the SPDC and its agents in putting down the protests, and the ongoing campaign of arrests following the protests. This chapter draws heavily from that 180-page document and is thus largely a summary of the findings of that report. The protests are also dealt with in Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press from the basis of those rights.

Thousands of monks joined the peaceful anti-junta protests, aptly named the Saffron Revolution. *[Photo*: *Mizzima*/*Myo Khin*]

11.2 Prologue to the Protests – A Summary of Causes

On 15 August 2007, the SPDC unexpectedly announced sharp increases in domestic fuel prices. The rise in fuel prices and its effects on basic commodity prices initially sparked the mass protests. The price of diesel was doubled overnight and the cost of petrol was increased by over 60 percent, while the price of compressed natural gas (CNG) was increased by a staggering 500 percent. Compressed Natural Gas, had been widely promoted by the SPDC for use in commercial vehicles, and the majority of public buses in the cities of Burma are powered by it. As a result bus fares increased sharply, severely impacting people's ability to travel to work and ultimately feed themselves and their families. Many Burmese workers, particularly those living in the poor suburbs and satellite towns of Rangoon, earning around 1,000 kyat a day, now had to pay anywhere up to 800 kyat for transport, leaving only 200 kyat a day for food.[3]

Furthermore, the increase in fuel costs created an associated increase in the price of this food. The agricultural industry depends on fuel for irrigation, processing, and transportation of crops, while shops and small businesses must use diesel to run generators amid the frequent electricity blackouts. By the end of August 2007, the price of food, clothing, and other basic commodities had increased significantly. The price of rice, for example, had jumped 10 percent, meat 15 percent, and a standard plate of noodles at a roadside food stall had tripled. Meanwhile other food and commodity prices continued to rise.[4]

On 17 August 2007, two days after the price of fuel was raised by the SPDC, U Htin Kyaw, of the Myanmar Development Committee (MDC), called for nationwide protests before disappearing into hiding. Political activists in Rangoon responded over the following days by organizing marches throughout the city, in the largest protests held in Burma for over a decade. Initially the demonstrations did not incorporate any overt demands; but rather consisted of groups of people walking across Rangoon in the symbolic act of the people's inability to afford the increased bus fares.[5]

Soon after, on 19 August 2007, over 500 activists, including various leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group who had led the mass protests two decades earlier, marched in Rangoon against the widespread price rises of fuel, food, clothing and other basic commodities.[6]

Over the next two weeks, hundreds of people marched in protest almost daily through the streets of Rangoon and other towns and cities across the country. Activists were reported as having been frequently beaten with sticks, fired upon with slingshots, and abducted and detained by the SPDC and its paramilitary agents. In an attempt to put down the ongoing demonstrations the SPDC had arrested over 150 activists and protest leaders by the end of August 2007, including almost all of the leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group.[7]

On 28 August 2007, members of Burma's monastic community joined the protests for the first time in the town of Sittwe (Akyab), in Arakan State.[8] The addition of the monks and nuns to the demonstrations proved pivotal, serving to legitimize and strengthen the protest movement. In Burma, as in all Buddhist countries, the monastic and lay communities are co-dependent on one another for their survival. The monastic community is reliant upon the general population for their material survival, provided to them on their daily alms rounds, while the lay community relies on the monks and nuns for spiritual guidance, in which the very act of giving alms is done to foster virtue through the deed of charity.[9] However, the sharp increase in food and commodity prices threatened to upset this important bond with many civilians no longer able to afford to support the monks in addition to their own families.

On 5 September 2007, a crowd estimated to number approximately 500 monks was dispersed by SPDC army soldiers who fired their weapons over the monks' heads and assaulted a number of the protestors in Pakokku, Magwe Division. At least one monk was confirmed killed, while reports emerged of another who had been tied to lamp post by the soldiers and beaten with the butts of their rifles.[10] The following day, a group of monks from the Maha Visutarama Monastery held almost 20 SPDC officials hostage and set fire to their vehicles in retaliation. The officials were released unharmed six hours later.[11]

Two days later, on 7 September 2007, an underground association of Buddhist monks calling themselves the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) issued a set of demands unto the SPDC in response to the events of the past few days. These demands included:

1. The issuance of a public apology for the crackdown on the peaceful demonstration of monks in Pakokku;
2. The immediate reduction of all basic food, fuel, and commodity prices;
3. The unconditional release all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all detainees arrested for their involvement in demonstrations over the fuel and commodity price increases; and
4. The immediate commencement of genuine and sincere dialogue with democratic opposition groups to resolve the crises and difficulties suffered by the populace.

Along with these demands, the ABMA issued an ultimatum to the SPDC stating that should these demands not be met by 17 September 2007, they would call upon the monastic community throughout the country to enact a *Patam nikkujjana kamma* ('overturning of the alms bowl') boycott of the regime and its associates. This boycott, which represents the harshest criticism that the monastic community can deliver, proscribes all religious activities involving the junta, including the acceptance of alms.

On 17 September 2007, when the SPDC had failed to even address any of the ABMA's demands, let alone make any genuine attempt to fulfil them, the excommunicative decree was read out in numerous locations around the country.[12] Following the declaration of the boycott, large-scale protests were resumed, although in numbers far greater than anything witnessed thus far.

A Buddhist monk in Rangoon holds his alms bowl aloft in the symbolic *Patam nikkujjana kamma* or the "overturning of the alms bowl", representing the boycott on all religious activities, including the acceptance of alms from the military junta and its associates. The boycott was enacted nationwide following a failure by the SPDC to respond to the monks' demands for reform. *[Photo: Reuters]*.

11.3 The Protests and their Suppression

On 18 September 2007, the day after the boycott had been issued, it was reported that a procession of approximately 1,000 monks marched to Sule Pagoda in downtown Rangoon where they gave political speeches to thousands of people who had followed the monks, walking alongside them in a human chain to protect them from any attacks that the omnipresent security personnel may launch upon them.[13] However, no such attacks came. The security personnel hung back, while members of the junta-affiliated Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) and *Swan Arr Shin* ('masters of physical force') shadowed their route and videotaped and photographed the monks, presumably so that they would know who to target for arrest later.[14] Hundreds of monks also staged protests in various locations around the country, such as in Kyauk Padaung, Aunglan and Pakokku as the wave of demonstrations continued to gather momentum.[15] Processions of up to 2,000 monks from Pegu also reportedly came out in support of the religious boycott.[16]

Also on 18 September 2007, crowds of protesting monks and civilians in the remote city of Sittwe in Arakan State were dispersed by SPDC security forces in the first use of direct force since the protests had commenced on 19 August 2007. According to reports, SPDC army soldiers fired directly into crowds with rubber bullets and canisters of tear gas and beat civilians and monks alike with batons. U Warathami, a monk who was captured by SPDC army soldiers during the protest attested that several soldiers tied his hands behind his back before repeatedly beating him. *"They restrained me and hit me in the face and also on my head which started to bleed. They also kicked me with their boots. I had cuts on my head and my ears and several of my teeth were knocked out of place,"* U Warathami said.[17] Similarly, another eyewitness testified to HRDU:

> *"On 18 September 2007, the authorities called Lon Htein [riot police] tried to stop the monks leading the protests by shooting them with rubber bullets. I witnessed them beating the monks and people and using teargas to split the protests group up. Many monks and people were injured. Four monks were arrested after they had been injured. The monks were released in the evening at 4:00 pm after they signed a vow not to protest again. On 19 September, the authorities continued to beat the monks and people, using tear gas to disperse the protests. Mostly it was the monks and people who led the protests who were among the worst wounded"*.[18]

Though violence was used against the protestors in Sittwe, where news of it would not likely reach the outside world, security personnel stationed elsewhere throughout the country showed a remarkable and uncharacteristic level of restraint towards the demonstrators, possibly under orders not to attack knowing that the world was now watching.

Over the coming days, the protests continued unabated, with monks leading large-scale demonstrations across the country. Demonstrations were reported to have taken place in at least 25 other cities and towns across the country, in Rangoon, Pegu, Mandalay, Sagaing and Magwe, and Tenasserim Divisions, as well as in Mon, Kachin and Arakan States, the majority of which were lead by a phalanx of saffron-robed monks chanting the *metta sutta* (the Buddha's words of loving kindness).

In an unexpected turn of events, on 22 September 2007, a crowd estimated to number 2,000 protestors, approximately half of whom were monks were allowed to pass security checkpoints and continue on to the home of detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who emerged from her home to pray with the monks.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi pays her respects to protesting monks at her gate on 22 September 2007. *[Photo: unknown]*

On 24 September, it was reported that an estimated 100,000 protestors took to the streets in Sittwe, Arakan State. According to reports, Buddhists and Muslims marched side-by-side, unified in their fight to see the end of military rule.[19] Similarly, crowds estimated to have numbered 100,000 people were also reported to be demonstrating in Rangoon. Among these crowds were well-known celebrities, MP-elects, members of the political opposition and students.[20] It was reported that thousands of members of Rangoon's Muslim community had also joined these protests, marching alongside the Buddhist monks. One Burmese Muslim later commented on the protests: *"For the first time in our lives we felt a sense of solidarity with the Buddhist Burmese"*.[21]

That evening, SPDC Minister for Religious Affairs Brigadier General Thura Maung, was quoted on State television as threatening that action would be taken against the monks and civilians should they continue with their protests. Trucks mounted with loudspeakers also toured Rangoon's streets, warning those who continued to participate in the protests would be dealt with under prevailing Burmese laws.

Heedless of this overt threat, the following day, on 25 September 2007, tens of thousands of people once again took to the streets of Rangoon in protest. That evening, the trucks bearing loudspeakers toured the streets again, announcing the imposition of a night time curfew and repeated the decree banning all assemblies of more than five people under Order #2/88. Meanwhile, monasteries across Rangoon and in other parts of the country were visited by security forces who threatened the monks with arrest if they continued to participate in the demonstrations. In Rangoon, eyewitnesses said that more than 100,000 people had again taken part in demonstrations despite heavy security presence on the streets.[22]

However, as was widely expected by those participating in the protests and by Burma commentators around the world, the patience and tolerance of the SPDC was sure to run out and when it did, the SPDC would inevitably revert to their tried and proven use of violence in suppressing public dissent.

Then, on 26 September 2007, tens of thousands of protestors once again took to the streets of Rangoon, although this time, hundreds of SPDC army soldiers, riot police, and members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* had been stationed throughout the city, and numerous

monasteries were cordoned off by security forces, trapping the monks inside. Approximately 1,000 monk and civilian protestors were trapped by security barricades set up behind them on the road leading down from the east gate of the Shwedagon Pagoda.[23] A large number of the monks who had been cornered were ordered into military trucks so that they could be returned to their monasteries. Wary that this was a trap, the monks agreed to disperse but only if they could find their own way back to their monasteries.[24] However, the standoff persisted after the security personnel refused to accept this compromise. Then, at approximately 11:30 am, an elderly senior monk, reported to have been over 80 years of age, approached the security personnel to negotiate a solution to the stalemate but was immediately pushed to the ground and beaten with the butt of one of the soldier's rifles. A number of youths attempted to intervene, but also became targets and were beaten about the head with bamboo staves. An eyewitness interviewed by HRDU reported that:

> *"People were getting angry. They had never witnessed a monk being beaten by the police before. The people took some bricks in their hands but the monks stopped them from using them. We really wanted to attack the authorities but one of the monks implored us to remain peaceful".*[25]

Civilians make human chain around protesting monks in Rangoon on 25 September. *[Photo: unknown]*

Soon after the attack on the elderly monk, the security forces then turned their attention to the trapped group. The riot police began their assault, beating and arresting whoever they could and they were joined in their attack by members of *Swan Arr Shin*. Those who were caught were loaded into military trucks and driven away from the scene.[26] At least 30 monks and a further 50 civilians were beaten and taken away to an unknown destination by the security personnel. A large crowd of onlookers separated from the scene by the security barriers, outraged by what they were witnessing, threw stones and projectiles at the security forces, who in turn returned fire with tear gas canisters. Credible reports also testified that gunshots soon followed.

Conflicting reports have put the number of dead from this initial crackdown at between three and five. Meanwhile, eyewitnesses have testified as having seen numerous demonstrators *"lying motionless on the ground after being beaten by security forces"*, although in all the chaos of the scene, it was difficult for them to ascertain if they were dead or merely unconscious.[27]

Although many protestors (possibly even hundreds) had been arrested during this crackdown, the vast majority managed to escape. Many of this number soon regrouped a

short distance away to continue their protest.

A few hours after the initial attacks outside the Shwedagon Pagoda, many of those who had fled had reassembled near the Sule Pagoda in downtown Rangoon where they were again met with violence at the hands of the security personnel. Security forces fired warning shots and tear gas canisters in an attempt to disperse the large crowd which had gathered along Sule Pagoda Road. As more columns of protestors began to arrive in the downtown area, the security forces stepped up their response. It was reported that shots were fired directly into the crowds at the Sule Pagoda, outside nearby Rangoon City Hall, on Maha Bandoola Road, and also at Thakin Mya Park.[28]

> *"We linked hands and made a human shield in front of the monks but we had no idea what to do next. We all just sat down on the ground. The troops advancing from the railway crossing approached us and fired four shots into the crowd. A 20-year-old man from our group took a hit on his back and he fell down covered in blood"*.[29]

Meanwhile, shots were reportedly fired over the heads of protestors and tear gas canisters were hurled at crowds of up to 10,000 in Mandalay. Also in Mandalay, members of the NLD, namely, Tin Aung, Khin Maung Thaung and Myo Naing, along with well-known comedian Par Par Lay, were arrested after they had publicly offered alms to the protesting monks. In other areas, more than 200 monks in Myitkyina and Bhamo in Kachin State were arrested in a midnight raid on their monastery.[30]

Overnight, numerous monasteries around the country were raided by SPDC army soldiers and security personnel to remove the monks and the legitimacy they gave to the demonstrations. A number of prominent monasteries around Rangoon, notably Ngwe Kyar Yan, Maggin, Pinnya Ramika, Shwetaungpaw, Dhammazaya, Sandilayama, Zayawaddy, Pannitayama, and Mingala Rama Pali University Monasteries were raided, during which hundreds of monks were reportedly arrested and detained. Some of these raids were particularly violent, with shots being fired inside the monasteries, and monks and those who tried to protect them, being severely beaten. At least five persons, four of whom were monks, were believed killed during these raids.[31]

A protester being arrested by members of the *Swan Arr Shin*. *[Photo: Reuters]*

Despite the heavy presence of security forces on the streets and the use of lethal force the previous day, the demonstrations continued in Rangoon on 27 September. The number of monks participating in the protests, however, was much smaller than on the previous day, largely due to the night time raids on a number of monasteries throughout Rangoon, and ongoing security presence at others.

On the morning of 27 September, residents of Rangoon's South Okkalapa Township began to gather in the streets outraged over the violent night time raids on local monasteries the night before. As the day progressed, the crowds gathered in the area grew to number several thousand. On Thit Sar Road, where the largest crowds had gathered, the SPDC army soldiers stationed there assembled a two-row defensive formation approximately 200 metres from the protesters. The first row of troops knelt in front of a second row of standing soldiers, all of whom trained their weapons on the crowd. An eyewitness from the crowd described to HRDU what happened next:

> *"A Hilux truck stopped at the junction and, through its loudspeaker, ordered the crowd to disperse immediately or be fired upon. There were approximately 20,000 people on the street at this time. The crowd did not disperse. We carried lamp posts and tree trunks into the street to make a barricade at the corner of Innwa Street and Thit Sar Road. When the soldiers saw what we were doing, they fired three tear gas bombs into the crowd. As soon as the final tears gas bomb exploded, the soldiers crossed our barriers and attacked the crowd. … I witnessed two people beaten to death near our barrier. They were both men, aged between 25 and 30. These men were beaten on their backs and their waists as they tried to escape the attack. When they fell to the ground, the soldiers beat them as a group. The soldiers dragged their bodies by the legs back to the junction where many people could see their dead bodies lying beside the military trucks".*[32]

Undeterred by the violence that had just been visited upon them, many of those who had fled quickly reassembled a short distance away where they were joined by a large group of high school students. This group was also assaulted by security forces, who fired tear gas canisters and live rounds directly into the crowd. The evidence obtained through eyewitness testimonies strongly suggests that a large number of people were killed during events in South Okkalapa Township on 27 September. A report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) confirmed the deaths of eight persons in South Okkalapa Township alone. (For more information see Chapter 1: Extra-Judicial, Summary, and Arbitrary Executions and the previously published HRDU report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

As in previous days, Sule Pagoda was one of the primary focal points of the protests with thousands of demonstrators converging on the site again on 27 September. By noon the crowds had swelled to have numbered tens of thousands of protestors, at which time a line of riot police armed with batons and riot shields began moving towards the crowd, but stopped just short of where they were seated on the ground. Soon afterwards, three truckloads of SPDC army soldiers and a smaller truck carrying *Swan Arr Shin* members approached the group from behind. Immediately and without warning the soldiers in these trucks opened fire into the protestors with live rounds. A young woman present at the protest described the scene to HRDU:

> *"All of the protesters were sitting on the road. Soon, about 10 riot police, armed with shields and rubber batons, came up Sule Pagoda Road. People shouted at the riot police, saying they were only staging a peaceful protest. Some protesters started to flee from the scene when they saw the policemen coming forward. The monks and students who were sitting in the front row told everyone to sit still and not to confront the police. They stopped advancing when they were only a short distance from the protesters. … Around one or two minutes after the army truck came they started to shoot continuously, firing more than ten times. I heard shouting from the crowd: 'the people are dying; they are killing the people, run away, run away'. Others were saying 'don't run, don't run', because when the people sit down they beat them and when they run they shoot. When I looked back I saw two boys and one girl lying still on the ground. I do not know if they were alive or dead"*.[33]

Some protestors began to reassemble outside the nearby Traders Hotel, prompting the arrival of additional SPDC army troops who issued a ten minute warning for the crowd to disperse or face *"extreme action"*. As soon as the ten minutes had elapsed, the soldiers opened fire directly into the crowd with live rounds and charged the protestors, beating and arresting anyone they could catch. At least one protestor was reported as having been beaten to death during this crackdown, while a number were believed to have been shot. The well-reported fatal shooting of Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai took place during this attack. He was shot once in the back from point blank range and then once more after he had fallen to the ground.[34] However, the actual number of deaths to have occurred during this particular attack remains unknown.

Immediately following this crackdown, the protestors once again attempted to reorganize on the Pansodan Road Bridge, only a few blocks away. Ko Thet Naing, a student who had travelled from upper Burma to join the protests was carrying the fighting peacock flag while leading the group, was shot in the head by a sniper and killed instantly. More shots were fired into the crowd, although it has been difficult to confirm if any other protestors were killed. A number of eyewitnesses to the event have testified to seeing fellow protestors falling to the ground after being shot.

Protesters in downtown Rangoon left their sandals behind when fleeing the army's violence. *[Photo: unknown]*

Concurrent to the events unfolding in downtown Rangoon, a number of other protests were being staged in other parts of the city. Tamwe Township State High School No.3 in northeastern Rangoon was the site of two additional crackdowns on 27 September. Ironically, the first attack came as one group of protestors were making a retreat so as to avoid confrontation with the authorities, who then set upon the crowd severely beating and arresting anyone they could catch. As in previous protests, the demonstrators fled the violence only to regroup a short distance away. Again, the security forces set upon this crowd and many were arrested, including many parents who were in the area to collect their children from a local primary school.

Meanwhile, another column of protestors, comprised by many who had fled the earlier crackdowns at the Sule Pagoda, marched into the area. Eyewitnesses reported that among the crowd, which by this point had swelled to number several thousand, were many students and adolescents. Almost immediately the crowd was ambushed by a number of SPDC army trucks from behind, one of which drove directly into the crowd, reportedly killing at least two people. The soldiers in the back of the trucks indiscriminately opened fire on the crowd of protestors, which, according to eyewitness reports, resulted in the deaths of many protestors. Many of those who had attempted to flee the carnage were shot in the back as they ran. Those who attempted to hide and even those who had surrendered were similarly gunned down. As soon as the shooting stopped riot police moved into the crowd beating and arresting those left behind and removing the bodies of the dead and wounded.

> *"Many people climbed over the wall to hide in the buildings [in the school]. Some people just hid behind the brick wall. The people were so scared. People even hid inside the open drains. We climbed the brick wall into Tamwe [Township] High School No.3. People were climbing the wall to escape. I watched a young man get shot in the back. He did not move or make any sound after he fell. He was bleeding a lot. … The crackdown went on for a long time. From where I was hiding I saw a soldier shoot a person hiding in the drain. The soldier just stood above the drain, and fired down into it. The soldiers then entered the building complex where I was hiding. They shouted 'Mother fuckers, come down from the building or else we will shoot to kill you all'. One man was hiding inside a small round water tank. The soldiers could find him easily, because he was shivering so much that the tank made a rhythmic noise. They told him to climb out, and told him that if he didn't they would shoot. He didn't dare to go out. 'Bang!' The soldier shot him and the bullet went through the tank. No sound came out of the tank after that".*[35]

As was said by HRDU in its report which focussed on the protests, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*:

> *"By 28 September 2007, the violence of the previous two days, the large number of arrests both on the streets and during night time raids, particularly on monasteries, coupled with a more established security presence in strategic areas throughout Rangoon, assured that protestors were not taking to the streets in the same numbers as they had in the days prior".*[36]

In the face of the increased security, a number of further protests were staged in various locations around Rangoon, although the majority of these were broken up soon after they commenced. A number of fatal shootings were also reported to have occurred on this day, though little information on the specific details has been made available. Bystanders on the streets, and even those persons remaining inside their homes, in downtown Rangoon also became target for arrest as the security forces asserted their control.

Likewise, the night time raids and arrests, especially on monasteries, continued unabated. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB), at least 52 monasteries across the country had been raided by security personnel between 25 September and 6 October 2007. On 4 October 2007, Shari Villarosa, the U.S. *Charge d'Affaires* in Burma, reported that her staff had visited 15 different monasteries throughout Rangoon, all of which had been emptied by that stage.[37]

Shan villagers protest against the junta on 25 September 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

After the protests had been put down, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro had been granted access to the country, the SPDC announced that a total of 15 people had been killed during the protests. Meanwhile, in his December 2007 report to the UN Human Rights Council, Pinheiro maintained that he could confirm the deaths of at least 31 persons in Rangoon alone.[38] Yet even this figure should be considered conservative as this includes the names of only those whose death the Special Rapporteur could confirm. Furthermore, in March 2008, six months after the protests, the AAPPB reported that at least 72 persons still remained unaccounted for. Also in March 2008, HRDU argued that given that the protests had been staged in no fewer than 66 towns and cities across the country, many of which at the time still lacked reliable information, coupled with the systematic removal of the dead and wounded from the site of each crackdown, and the disposal of the bodies during secret night time cremations, the number of fatalities arising from the protests may well be as high as a hundred.[39]

11.4 The Aftermath of the Protests

The Campaign of Arrests

Following the suppression of the nationwide demonstrations, the SPDC stepped up its search for those suspected of participating in or supporting the protests. In the same manner that the protestors and political opposition used the available technology to disseminate information related to the protests to the outside world, the SPDC and its agents, the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*, used the technology to track down and punish those who had been involved in the protests. Frequent reports emerged of protestors being followed by members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* who filmed and photographed them during the protests. These images were later used to more easily identify protest leaders and others taking active roles in the movement.

By the end of the first week of October it was widely estimated that up to 6,000 people, including at least 1,400 monks, had been arrested since the commencement of the protests on 19 August.[40] Meanwhile, on 19 October, the SPDC declared through its mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar*, that only 2,927 had been arrested, and that 2,550 of this number had already been released, leaving only 377 still in detention. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances).

Many of those arrested in relation to the protests were taken from their homes during midnight raids. These raids became increasingly systematic following the imposition of the curfew on the evening of 25 September, reaching a crescendo in the weeks after the suppression of the protests. The curfew not only restricted the movement of those targeted for arrest but also allowed the arrests to be conducted in secrecy under the cover of darkness.

While the majority of those persons arrested for their role in the protests were later released, a number of protest leaders had charges brought against them. A group of nine Muslims from Rangoon, for example, who were arrested after offering water to protesting monks, were later charged with inciting public unrest.[41] Similarly, Lieutenant Win Tun Aung of SPDC army Infantry Battalion (IB) #3 went into hiding after a warrant was issued for his arrest after he offered water to monks protesting in Mandalay.[42]

Riot police were deployed throughout Rangoon during the protests and were used alongside SPDC army soldiers to suppress all displays of dissent. *[Photo: unknown]*

On numerous occasions the SPDC detained the family members of those whom they were unable to apprehend. These hostages were then used as bait to lure the intended target out of hiding so they could be arrested. On 2 October 2007, the abbot of Thitsar Mandai Monastery in Mingaladon Township of Rangoon was arrested when the monastery was raided by SPDC army troops. Villagers who enquired about the abbot at the army camp where he was being held were informed that he would not be released until they had apprehended his younger brother, also a monk, who was wanted for his involvement in the protests.[43] Likewise, in a number of cases entire neighbourhoods were collectively punished in those areas where the protests received more local support. For example, entire streets in Bahan Township of Rangoon near the east gate of Shwedagon Pagoda were arrested and detained, leaving only young children and the elderly behind.[44]

On 7 November 2007, the SPDC maintained that only 91 persons arrested in connection with the demonstrations remained in detention, however, as of 30 January 2008, the AAPPB was able to confirm the continued detention 706 persons arrested for the role they had played in the protests.[45]

Judicial Procedure

Many people who had been arrested for their part in the protests were detained for days, weeks or in some instances even months without being charged. Prolonged detention without charge of this duration is conducted contrary to not only various key tenets of international law, but also Burma's own Criminal Code which prescribes that a court order is required to detain any person for a period of longer than 24 hours.[46]

In the first week of November 2007, the SPDC announced that at least 91 persons arrested in relation to the protests would be charged for having committed *"violent and terrorist acts"*.[47] Many of those who were tried, were held incommunicado, denied access to legal council, and summarily sentenced under closed proceedings.

Section 505(b) of the Burmese Criminal Code was cited repeatedly in the sentencing of those who had been involved in the protests. This law permits imprisonment of up to two years for causing *"public mischief"* or for making dissident statements deemed to run contrary of the interests of the SPDC. Similarly, many protestors were charged under Section 143 of the Criminal Code which prohibits the gathering of more than five people. (For more information, see Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press).

Conditions of Detention

With an estimated 6,000 persons taken into detention in relation to the protests, existing detention facilities soon became overcrowded far beyond their capacity. Thousands of detainees were reportedly kept in tremendously overcrowded and sub-standard conditions which resulted in at least 20 deaths in detention. A number of temporary facilities were set up by the regime to accommodate the thousands who had been apprehended. The Government Technical Institute (GTI) in Rangoon was one such facility and by the beginning of October 2007, was reported to hold approximately 2,000 protestors.[48]

In addition to the gross overcrowding, detention facilities also lacked adequate clean water, food, mosquito nets and blankets. Released detainees have testified that space was at such a premium that they were not even able to lie down to sleep and that their 'cells' lacked toilet and sanitation facilities, forcing them to urinate and defecate where they sat.[49]

Many of those detained were interrogated and tortured. According to released detainees, interrogations were typically conducted late at night and lasted many hours, presumably to deprive them of sleep. The detainees were typically beaten and tortured if the answers they provided during these sessions were not to the liking of their interrogators. Those who had endured these interrogations later testified that they were shown photographs and forced to identify the people that they depicted and to acknowledge that the protests had been organized by the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD). The questions and beatings continued until the interrogators were able to extract the confession that they were looking for.[50] No one was spared from the beatings. Men, women, children and monks were all treated equally – that is to say, badly. According to testimonies provided to HRDU, children as young as six were pitilessly beaten, as were the mentally handicapped. One report emerged that a woman who was seven month's pregnant was punched in the stomach during her interrogation, resulting in the loss of the baby.[51]

Many detainees had received severe injuries either during their arrest or the subsequent interrogations and the sub-standard conditions of detention in which they were held further exacerbated these injuries. However, in spite of the obvious suffering of many detainees, very few were provided with any form of medical care. The little treatment that was provided consisted of little more than the dispensing of Paracetamol and other painkillers.[52] Similarly, reports emerged from Insein Prison that multiple detainees were administered medication with the same hypodermic needle.[53]

According to the previously published HRDU report, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*, *"As a result of the grossly substandard conditions, the torture visited upon detainees during interrogation, and a severe lack of medical treatment, many reports have emerged of detainees dying while in detention"*.[54] The same report identified at least 20 persons arrested in relation to the protests as having died while in detention. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the HRDU report, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

Endnotes

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 12

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."

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

12.1 Introduction

In 1994, the SPDC reaffirmed its commitment to uphold the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and though the UDHR unequivocally states that *"Everyone has the right to education"* and that *"Education shall be free"*, education in Burma remains anything but free or equal. Sadly, within the current political climate of Burma, education is regarded more as a privilege than as an inherent right.

The Burmese education sector is plagued by a severe lack of resources, stemming from an extremely small allocation of the national budget, which according to the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Report, amounts to only 1.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[1] Meanwhile, the SPDC maintains that 8.9 percent of the national budget is earmarked for education, although this figure is little more that a gross misrepresentation of reality.[2]

However, such a small budget allocation is hardly surprising given the regime's stated belief that the sole purpose of education is to *"nurture children to develop their mind, vision and living styles in accord with the wishes of the State"*.[3] In other words, the aim of education is to indoctrinate the nation's children to develop a sense of obedience to the SPDC while crushing all views which may be deemed to run contrary to those of the State.

The education sector is also beset by widespread and rampant corruption from military officers, civil officials and even the teachers.

Compounding such an insufficient allocation of public funds to the sector are the misguided and egregious economic policies which have impoverished much of the population to the point where many must struggle just to acquire enough food, let alone pay for the rising costs of education.

The SPDC has attempted to control the minds of the Burmese population through its education system in two ways. The first of these has been by keeping that sector of the country so poor that teachers cannot afford to teach and that students cannot afford to learn. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). Secondly, the junta monitors all school activities closely, keeping the quality of education so low that those who do matriculate into the secondary and tertiary levels are not permitted to learn anything the junta deems *"dangerous"*. To this end, the junta routinely controls and limits young people's access to education. The regime actively discourages awareness of the outside world beyond Burma's frontiers, particularly targeting students preparing to study abroad by watching their activities closely and at times prohibiting them from leaving the country altogether.[4]

According to Burmese law, education is supposed to be provided free of charge to all students up to the end of secondary schooling. However, credible reports have stated that a tenth standard education can cost as much as 300,000 kyat per year. To place this in context, this amount is higher than the national average annual income.[5] School admissions fees have been reported to cost 2,500 kyat for primary school (first through fourth standard), 3,000 kyat for middle school (fifth through eighth standard) and 3,500 kyat for high school (ninth and tenth standard). Students are even charged 100 kyat for the admissions form. On top of this, students are also expected to pay for their own uniforms, books, and stationary, and for those students who must travel outside their home towns and villages to learn, they must also pay boarding fees at hostels near their schools.[6] Such costs are unsurprisingly far beyond the means of many families, especially those in the lower socio-economic brackets.

In spite of this, education remains important to the Burmese people. In rural areas, many villages will do their best to still provide an education to their youth, appointing one person from the village to serve as teacher to the children. The person selected is typically one of the villagers who has received some level of education themselves. However, education has been in such a dismal state for so long that even the teachers may only have received a primary level education themselves. Ultimately, in such areas, there is an overall year on year decline in the level of education being taught.

Meanwhile, even in urban areas where it is common that a higher proportion of the population has received formal schooling and resources are more generously allocated, schools remain grossly underfunded. The lion's share of Burma's public spending remains allocated to the military and to maintaining its pervasive security apparatus. Kyaw Ko Ko of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) believes that such a policy needs to be changed to bring about substantive change in the country:

> *"Now, the state of education in Burma is very different from the past. It [the current education system] is worse than during the era of the British colonial administration. It gives more favor [Sic.] to quantity then quality. … Students have lost their rights to freedoms of expression, such as freedom of thinking, writing and organizing students' unions. … They [the junta] should change the basic education system. They should allow students to think freely. And in terms of increasing the budget for military equipment, they should reduce that amount and increase it accordingly for education"*.[7]

The fundamental freedoms of opinion and expression are forbidden, particularly among university students and their teachers, resulting in schools which discourage critical thinking in classrooms, limit reading materials, punish students for expressing their thoughts in writing, and prohibit student unions and rallies.[8]

Education has the potential to be a very powerful force in Burma, and the involvement of thousands of students and teachers from all over the country during the September Saffron Revolution protests attested to this fact. The intense crackdown on educational institutions both prior, during and subsequent to the protests confirms the junta's keen awareness of this power.

School children in Mandalay. *[Photo: Phaung Daw Oo]*

12.2 Primary Education

As a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Burma is obliged to provide compulsory and free primary level education for all children in the country. In 1993, two years after becoming a state party to the CRC, Burma enacted the Child Law in which it was clearly stated that *"Every child shall have the right to free basic primary education in state schools and that the Ministry of Education shall implement a system of free and compulsory primary education".*[9] However, in spite of these legal obligations, many Burmese children do not receive a proper primary education and those who do, do not receive it for free.

According to statistics provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), approximately 50 percent of children drop out of school before the end of primary school at the completion of fourth standard. The principal reason given for dropping out is typically financial hardship. When parents cannot afford to feed their families, education quickly becomes viewed as a luxury when compared alongside the more pressing needs of food security. Approximately 84 percent of this number are from rural areas where financial difficulties are often far more acute.[10]

Quality of education is affected by a number of factors, including a scarcity of schools, lack of skilled teachers and classroom resources. It has been reported that during 2007 in one primary school in Arakan State, there were only two teachers to balance 700 children in five separate classes.[11] This extremely high student to teacher ratio makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to provide meaningful and effective instruction.

Continued armed conflict in some ethnic minority areas, particularly in eastern Burma along the border with Thailand, has resulted in a number of primary schools being closed down or rendered unable to continue. SPDC army attacks on civilian villages typically result in the displacement of thousands, and while hiding in the forest, their villages, and the schools within them are routinely burned to the ground or otherwise razed by the soldiers. For instance, on 13 October 2007, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that villagers from Mon State were forced to flee their homes in Yaw Kee village and close their primary school after SPDC army units attacked their village with mortars and machine gun fire.[12] As a result of frequent military attacks on undefended civilian villages, schools in these areas are unable to stay open for any reasonable period of time. Another report by FBR from Nyaunglebin District in northern Karen State described a primary school which had to open and close repeatedly due to recurring SPDC army attacks.[13] Similarly, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reported that in March 2007, ongoing SPDC army attacks on civilian villages across Papun District, Karen State prevented regular schooling from continuing as families and whole communities had to flee their homes and hide in the forest. Still, schooling did not stop completely. Teachers were still able to conduct classes with their students under trees, albeit without many of the supplies that they were forced to leave behind when they fled.[14]

It is also common practice that villagers pay for the construction of schools. In many cases the orders for such works comes directly from the military, and purely so that they can take photographs of the completed school building which they then promote on national State-controlled television. Many of these schools, once built are abandoned as no teachers are ever provided to staff such schools, nor any supplies to stock them. In June 2007, it was reported that an SPDC army officer from Infantry Battalion (IB) #282 ordered local villages in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division to pay up to 100,000 kyat each towards the construction of a school solely for the children of the SPDC army soldiers. According to the report, a local *"school teacher has been asking for a cupboard for the village school for a long time but he could not help him but he is being forced to pay a 100,000 Kyat to the army"*.[15]

12.3 Secondary Education

In Burma, secondary schooling begins at fifth standard is divided into middle school from fifth standard to eighth standard, and high school comprising ninth and tenth standard.

The SPDC-affiliated Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) plays a significant role in education at the secondary level. Its members work to persuade students and teachers of the relevance and authority of the SPDC. Schools provide easy access to large groups of people, and on numerous occasions the USDA has forced teachers and students to attend gatherings and pose in solidarity with the junta at both pro-SPDC and pro-USDA rallies. On 30 September 2007, for instance, the USDA was reported to have forced 1,200 high school students and 250 teachers to join an estimated 30,000 civilians in rallies intended to condemn the "Saffron Revolution" protests which had swept the country in August and September and to promote the SPDC's "Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy" and the work being done by the National Convention. Teachers stated that they had been threatened with punishment should they have refused to attend the rallies.[16] (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

Financing the costs of education at the secondary level is a huge difficulty for families across the country, with schools charging students for everything from admissions forms to notebooks and pens to actual tuition. In June 2007, villagers in Thangtlang Township, Chin State, experienced a sudden and significant increase in school fees and the cost of school supplies. The price hikes reportedly only took place only in Thangtlang Township, strongly suggesting that corrupt local officials were behind the fee increases.[17]

For the first time in history, in December 2007, free additional tuition lessons were provided to high school students by the Falam Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) in Chin State. Students in the area have reportedly had to typically hire private tutors to help them prepare for exams, although this option is only available for those who are able to afford it. Students from poorer families were therefore delighted to take advantage of this rare and seemingly generous offer from the junta. The private lessons were said to have been offered up until the completion of the nationwide board examinations.[18] Though these trainings outwardly seem generous, it is quite likely that they were only offered so that the students would rank highly in the examinations and so that the TPDC could secure additional funding from the department of Education as a reward for high performance. (For more information, see Section 12.5 Corruption and Extortion in the Education System below).

In Arakan State, students must pay almost 50,000 kyat to sit for their final exams, not only on account of monetary extortion that they must pay for admission to the examination room, but also because the tests are often held away from their villages and thus the students must also pay for food and accommodation during the exam period. According to an unidentified *"education worker"*, at least 363 students from Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung Townships who had enrolled for their matriculation exams in 2007 were not able to sit the exam due to the high costs associated with doing so.[19]

12.4 Tertiary Education

It is at the highest levels of the Burmese education system that the authorities are most suspicious of teachers, students and their activities. Traditionally, university students have been at the forefront of political opposition in Burma and so it is at this level of schooling that the junta's strict control of students and their activities becomes the most acute. Teachers and students alike are both subject to arrest, interrogation and detention even for mere suspicion that they may be involved in what the SPDC deems to be dissident political activity. All such political activity is firmly frowned upon by the junta, seemingly regardless if it is overtly political or not.

On 5 March 2007, Thwin Lin Aung, chairperson of the Myanmar Debate Society (MDS) and an English language teacher at the American Center in the US Embassy in Rangoon was arrested by the SPDC at Rangoon International Airport on the suspicion that he was travelling abroad to attend a political training program. He was transferred to the Aung Tha Pyay detention facility in Mayangone Township where he was detained for a month during which time he was interrogated repeatedly. This happened despite having told the soldiers that the trip was focussed on education – not politics and that he would only be visiting *"museums, schools, NGOs"* on the three-week trip to the United States and the Philippines.[20]

Like their teachers, the activities and movements of tertiary students are also closely watched, and authorities often require teachers and others in the school community to monitor and report on the activities of students. In July 2007, the proprietors of hostels in the vicinity of Moulmein University were ordered to keep biographical data and a photograph of every student staying in their hostel. The Moulmein Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) demanded that this data be sent to them and also warned hostel owners that if they would be arrested if they were discovered to be housing undocumented students during random inspections.[21]

Tertiary students can also face arrest should they fail to carry their student ID cards with them at all times or should they not obey the strictly imposed 10:00 pm curfew.[22] In August 2007, the Special Branch of the police instituted a new regulation at Moulmein University restricting student access to the university campus, decreeing that no student or other person was permitted to enter the campus outside of class times, from 4:00 pm onwards.[23]

Strict laws and regulations in school communities have led irritated, even exasperated students to acts of violence and rebellion. In July 2007, 15 students were expelled from Moulmein University after a clash with local residents. Similarly, in February of the previous year, a group of 200 students, frustrated at local traffic policemen who were seizing their unlicensed motorbikes, resorted to assault.[24] Meanwhile, at Myitkyina University in Mandalay Division, teachers have expressed annoyance at the haphazard rules and irregular meeting times enforced by the authorities, some saying they are so dissatisfied with their work that they actually want to resign.[25]

On 2 September 2007, 84 students from the Tha Ohn Computer University in Mandalay were prohibited from sitting for their matriculation exams. The father of one student who had been barred from the examinations told the *Mizzima News* that *"Since he has not been allowed to appear for the examinations, he will lose a year"*. The official reason provided for their omission from the examination room was that they had not satisfied the mandatory 75 percent class attendance, although many believe that the students were being punished for their alleged involvement in the demonstrations over the fuel price increases that had been staged in Mandalay during August.[26] Similarly, 200 students had been barred from sitting their examinations a month earlier, although, no further information on this case has been made available.[27]

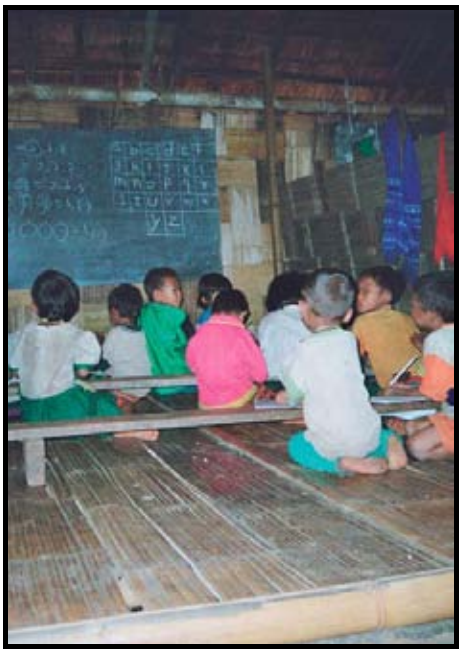
While programs in established universities are disrupted and inhibited at the will of the regime, there are SPDC-run programs which are so poorly designed that they reap no tangible benefits for the students. According to a report by the Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) published in October 2007, in one case the junta tried to create links between tertiary students and the work force by sending individuals abroad each year on scholarship, under the guise that they would return to Burma armed with their new skills to work for the SPDC for a period of not less than ten years. However, the IMNA argued that rather than stimulating new employment opportunities, the program actually created more unemployment. A number of returnees were reportedly not provided with work upon their return, while those who decided not to return, were reportedly obliged to repay a sum of five million kyat to the SPDC. Unsurprisingly, this amount of debt is a great deterrent to leaving the country and those who were not provided with work upon returning to Burma were thus forced to remain, jobless, in Burma.[28]

In September 2007, the Ministries of Information and of Education announced that they would offer a three-year Bachelor of Arts degree course in Journalism at the National Administration College (NAC) in Rangoon. Such a course had not been offered since the 1982-83 academic year.[29] However, it remains to be seen if the recommencement of this course will promote greater press freedom in Burma, although, given the proven inclination of the regime to suppress such freedoms, this would seem rather unlikely. (For more information, see Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Press).

12.5 Corruption and Extortion in the Education System

Corruption is rampant in all levels of the Burmese education system and well-intentioned efforts made to improve education are typically stifled by egregious SPDC policies. With the prohibition on the formation of all free and independent unions in Burma, all attempts at forming student unions have been prohibited.[30] Meanwhile, students of all ages are often forced to join junta-affiliated organizations such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). According to authorities at the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education, USDA membership and participation is a precondition for enrolling in all State-sponsored scholarship programs.[31] Hence any student wishing to study overseas must first have a record of active membership with the USDA. Some reports have maintained that students are not even permitted to sit their matriculation exams if they do not first join the USDA. (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

Other SPDC-affiliated organizations, claimed to be both working for and representative of the people, also have a role to play in Burma's education system. On 6 June 2007, representatives of the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) visited an unnamed middle school in Shwepyitha Township on outskirts of Rangoon and distributed books and school supplies to the children there. After posing for a series of photographs, they reclaimed the books and left, leaving nothing for the children.[32]



Primary school students studying in Karenni State *[Photo: KSWDC]*

In August 2007, the Ministry of Education reneged on its promise of funds for Basic Education High Schools (BEHS) in Moulmein, Mon State. As a result the people living in communities with BEHS were forced by their respective Township Peace and Development Councils (TPDC) to provide the funds themselves. The funds were only presented to schools which had pass percentages of more than 50 percent, as a reward for good performance, while denied to those schools whose pass percentages were lower than 50 percent as punishment. The Thanbyuzayat Township TPDC also provided this same system of rewards and punishments to students in Thanbyuzayat Township.[33] According to reports, many schools, desperately short of resources, and working with impoverished populations,

scramble for ways to achieve the minimum 50 percent pass rate required to secure this much needed funding. In some cases, schools stay open for six days a week, while in others, students are commonly held back for an extra year to ensure that they pass.[34]

Cheating in order to pass a grade is reportedly also common. According to students in Chin State, many cheat on final examinations using a small book of answers that has been in circulation since 2001, while invigilators for the exams are paid 200 kyat by each student to turn a blind eye.[35] Some students say the book is sold covertly throughout Burma, and can be bought for between 1,000 and 3,000 Kyat.[36] Students also claimed that in parts of Chin State especially, students had become dependent on using the book to pass exams, and that class attendance has fallen sharply because of the availability of the book.[37]

Furthermore, education officials operate with little to no accountability or transparency, routinely changing costs of school supplies and admissions fees, all without justification or explanation.

Teaching salaries are also arbitrarily revoked by the authorities, in some cases as punishment for noncompliance with official orders. In Thangtlang Township, Chin State, middle school teachers who refused to attend an obligatory training from 22 April and 18 May 2007 during their summer vacation had two months of their annual wages withheld as punishment. According to reports, many teachers in the area work as day labourers in neighbouring Mizoram in India during the summer months when they are no classes to supplement their meagre teacher's salaries. According to one teacher from the area:

> *"The market price is going up and one month's salary of 30,000 [kyat] is not enough to sustain us. Why do they have to have training sessions during vacations? They scheduled the training in summer because they know there will be absenteeism"*.[38]

12.6 Impediments to Education

While teachers can be victimized by education officials and military authorities, students equally may be mistreated by their teachers. There are many accounts of teachers demanding food, money and other supplies such as firewood. The wages offered to SPDC-appointed teachers are typically extremely low and to make ends meet many turn to extorting money and goods from their students.

According to the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN), one young Shan student was beaten and humiliated by his teacher for failing to provide her with curry as was expected of him. She had demanded that he recite all of the lessons taught throughout the year without referring to his book. When he was unable to do this, she ordered that he do 500 sit-ups and beat him repeatedly across the legs reportedly as many as 50 times, leaving many welts on his legs. According to the boy's parents, that night he wept and screamed in his sleep, saying, *"Teacher, I am afraid, don't beat and hurt me anymore, please"*. Soon after the incident the teacher, whose name was not given in the original report, had threatened to leave after being confronted by the village chairperson. Fearful that she may have carried out this threat, the community withdrew its complaint and instead expelled the student from school.[39] It is apparent that such incidents work to render students powerless in the face of the teacher's authority, and victimize both the community and the students. When such events occur, the teacher plays the role of intimidator rather than the nurturer that they should be, ultimately affecting student's participation in class. At the end of the day, students are often left feeling that they cannot approach their teacher with their questions which, in turn, serves as a barrier against their learning.

Burma's acute lack of press freedom and the population's general inability to access information from the outside world through the sweeping restrictions on foreign newspapers, periodicals, television and filtering of the internet, makes it extremely difficult for students to do research or any kind of self-learning outside what they are given at school. During 2007, less than one percent of Burma's population had regular access to internet.[40] This is due not only due to the country's woefully inadequate communications infrastructure, but also to the prohibitive costs of internet access as well as the strict controls and usage monitoring that the SPDC enacts over it.[41] (For more information, see Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression, and the Press).

The American Center, located in the US Embassy in Rangoon, with its library and internet access, is closely monitored by the authorities and treated by the State-controlled media with both suspicion and contempt. In April 2007, the SPDC-controlled *New Light of Myanmar* ran an article denouncing a journalism class being hosted at the centre, vaguely accusing the course of *"harming young Burma brains"*.[42] The following month, on 3 May 2007, over 20 people were arrested outside the centre, having for having attended a seminar on labour rights. The six organizers of the event were later sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years for *"bringing hatred and contempt"* against the regime.[43] (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances).

Persons attempting to educate the public about issues such as human rights are watched closely and find it exceedingly difficult to hold meetings which are not disrupted by the SPDC or its agents. On 10 December 2007, the movements of U Myint Aye of the Human Rights Defenders and Protectors (HRDP) were shadowed by members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* as he attempted to celebrate International Human Rights Day at his home.[44] The very presence of such groups has a tendency of discouraging activists from attending celebrations and trainings for fear of being targeted for arrest. (For more information, see Chapter 10: Assembly, Association, and Movement).

The population's thirst for knowledge is evidenced by its large, privatized publishing industry with approximately 250 privately-owned periodicals published throughout the country at the beginning of 2007.[45] Authorities permit literature so long as it conforms to the Ministry of Information's 'Seven-Point' policy for writers, which includes guidelines requiring that the writing *"shall be constructive and be in the interest of the nation"*; basically that it does not criticize the regime or any of its policies.[46] As a result, the news published is heavily constrained to light-hearted topics concerned with daily living: local crime, children, health, and sports. Thus students seeking information about world politics, opinion essays, or any kind of analytical reading typically have great difficulty obtaining it.

A severely neglected national infrastructure also impedes access to education in many cases. During heavy monsoon rains in late July 2007, the Irrawaddy River broke its banks, as it does every year, and classes in Yadanarpone University in Mandalay had to be suspended for five days due to water-saturated corridors. According to the *Irrawaddy*, this occurred only because the junta has taken no action whatsoever to prevent such flooding.[47] Similarly, residents of New Dagon Township in Rangoon complained that several schools had been shut down due to flooding. They blamed the Yangon City Development Council (YCDC) for collecting taxes but not using them to fix the city's urgent drainage problems.[48] On 15 October 2007, the NaSaKa (Border Security Force) arrested four villagers in Rathedaung Township, Arakan State for working with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) who helped them build a bridge and dig wells in their village. The villagers claimed they needed the bridge so their children could go to school during the monsoon months.[49]

Perhaps the greatest impediment to education, particularly in the ethnic minority states, is ongoing armed conflict. In such areas, villagers, who are more often than not the direct and intended targets of State-sponsored violence, are repeatedly forced to flee their homes for fear of being forcibly relocated or simply killed. In these areas, displacement is often a repeat event, where some communities have been forced to relocate on numerous occasions. Obviously, repeated displacements such as this cause havoc on student's education as they must cease their studies each time that they are forced to flee and only start again when the situation is deemed safe enough to do so. Furthermore, after they have fled their villages, the soldiers who hunt them typically steal anything left behind and destroy everything else. Schools, supplies and books are often destroyed, and the villagers, who lose a little more of what little they have left each time that they are forced to flee, are often without the means to replace such items. Sadly, education often must take a back seat to the more pressing demands of food security, and when a community is facing shortages of food, every member of that community, including its teachers and students, is called upon to band together to help acquire as much food as possible. As a result, the education further suffers. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

Further impediments to education include public rallies organized by the SPDC and their ostensible civil society agents. Students have not been immune to these rallies, on occasion even being forced to forego attending classes just to attend such events. In Mon State in October 2007, 490 members of the local Moulmein school community were ordered to attend a rally celebrating the National Convention in Moulmein. According to reports, the students were all further ordered to change out of their school uniforms and into plainclothes so as to make it appear that they were not in fact school students.[50] It was reported that the SPDC had ordered large numbers of school students to attend rallies in support of the National Convention all over the country. (For more information, see Chapter 10: Assembly, Association, and Movement).

12.7 Preferential Treatment in the Education System

Throughout Burma, the education system has a tendency to work in favour of those with wealth and status whose children reap a far richer educational experience. According to the *Education News Journal*, over 80 percent of Burma's highest scoring students all come from wealthy and well-connected families in Rangoon. An experienced teacher with over 20 years experience in Burma's education system reported on condition on anonymity that *"rich students were able to buy their way to success"*. Their parents could reportedly buy copies of exams papers in addition to paying tuition costs for more expensive and better equipped schools as well as for private tuition for their children. A father who paid an equivalent of US$600 for his daughter's last year of High School believed that *"children who go to expensive school can always be clever"*.[51]

Religious beliefs and affiliations also play an important role in the education system and what school students can and cannot attend. In July 2007, it was reported that students in the predominantly Christian Putao Township, Kachin State, were being forced to convert to Buddhism should they wish to further their education. According to the Kachin News Group (KNG), Christian students wishing to complete their secondary education up to tenth standard at the NaTaLa (Ministry of Border Affairs) school in Putao were obliged to convert to Buddhism and pay obeisance to Buddhist pagodas and register themselves as Buddhists on the school registration form.[52] (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

A typical crowded primary school classroom in central Burma. *[Photo: Asia Peace and Education Foundation]*

12.8 Educational Opportunities for Ethnic Minorities

In spite of the existence of a number of tenets in international law which provide ethnic minorities with not only equal access to education, but also the right to their own language and its use, ethnic minorities in Burma continue to be discriminated against and are granted fewer educational opportunities than those of the Burman majority. Moreover, in a number of cases, ethnic groups in Burma are even denied the right to learn and study their own language.

The Mon have come from a long tradition of culture and literacy and are particularly aware of their culture's suppression under the SPDC. The teaching of the Mon language, like many other ethnic minority languages, is not permitted in Burma. Instead, the SPDC enforces the teaching of only the Burmese language in Mon areas in a purported attempt to obliterate the Mon culture and replace it with a Burma-dominated culture. Mon scholars have cautioned that the language and culture could disappear in the future as a result of such policies.[53] However, in the face of such restrictions, the Mon still retain their long and proud tradition of education. To learn their own language, many students receive private tuition, most of which must be taught in secret so as to avoid repercussions, or attend schools that are not administered by the SPDC. The Mon National Education Department (MNEC) oversees approximately 1,000 teachers and over 50,000 students.[54]

The Mon Literature and Culture Committee (MLCC) report that while they believe the learning of Mon language to be on the rise throughout the state, there has been a perceptible decrease in student enrolment in a summer language course in the Mon San Pya town quarter. The language course, which aims to promote the learning of the Mon mother tongue in response to its oppression under the Burmese regime, was created in 2001 in a community of about 2,000 people. The committee reported that though they began with 600 children, they saw significant dropout rates each year due to financial hardship, the largest occurring in April 2007, when 100 students could not attend the course.[55]

A number of other ethnic minorities have faced similar restrictions against the education and use of their own languages. Such groups include, but are not limited to, the Karen, Karenni, Rohingya, Kachin, Shan, and others.

Displaced villagers study Karen and English at a temporary hiding site in the forests of Nyaunglebin District in February 2007. The teacher writes with chalk using the side of large rock outcropping as a blackboard. *[Caption and photo: KHRG]*

In Loi Talang, Shan State, schools and orphanages have been built by the opposition Shan State Army – South (SSA-S) in areas under their control which provide free food and education to over 1,000 children, 250 of whom are orphans. According to reports, prior to arriving at these schools most of these children had never before attended school or studied the Shan language.[56]

Many ethnic minority areas experience chronic levels of forced labour, which detracts from the amount of time that both students and teachers are available to attend school. Many families, faced with numerous demands of labour sometimes from several different sources are not able to meet all such demands while also working to provide for the family. In such instances, children must often forego school to help with the family's survival, either by working in the fields or by performing forced labour while their parents are tending to the family's livelihood.

Moreover, ongoing military offensives targeting civilian villagers in some parts of the country, most notably in Karen State, have significant impact on the educational opportunities of students in these areas. In such areas, military assaults on undefended civilian villagers force villagers to flee into the surrounding forests for fear of being killed or rounded up and interned at SPDC-garrisoned forced relocation sites. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation). Regular flight into the forest ahead of approaching SPDC army columns has obvious detrimental effects on students' ability to learn. It has been reported in some areas that students are only able to study for one week a month as a result.[57] However, when hiding in the forests, many communities still find a way to provide their children with an education by building small makeshift schools in the forests.[58]

As a result of the oppression that they face at home, many people living in the ethnic border states of Burma make the difficult decision to move to a neighbouring country where they hope life will be better. In the town of Mae Sot on the Thai-Burma border, the Migrant Teacher's Association (MTA) reported in July 2007 that at that time there were over 5,000 migrant and refugee children of the Karen ethnicity occupying over 50 unofficial migrant schools in the area. When questioned about her new life in Thailand, one child said, *"My mother came here to work as she couldn't make money in Burma. … I'm happy to stay here. When we were in Burma we had to borrow money to pay our tuition fees but here we have everything."*[59] (For more information, see Chapter 17: Situation of Refugees and Chapter 18: Situation of Migrants).

12.9 Effects of the Saffron Revolution Protests on the Education System

The power of education in Burma, and the regime's resultant fear of it, became especially evident during the Saffron Revolution protests throughout August and September 2007. The roles played by students and teachers in the protests, coupled with the systematic clamping down on educational institutions around the country at the onset of the protests illustrated how the SPDC's maintenance and manipulation of the State is highly dependent on its iron-fisted control over the school system and the minds of the people associated with it.

Much as had happened during the 1988 pro-democracy protests, university and high school students across the country played key roles in the protests, taking to the streets to join in solidarity with the monks and civilians demonstrating against the continuance of military rule.

The school year was disrupted by sweeping school closures, class cancellations, and the arrest and killing of many teachers and students. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention, and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, and Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

At noon on 28 August 2007, Akyab (Sittwe) University in Arakan State was ordered to close, instructing students to return to their homes. The closure coincided with the first day of protests.[60]

On 2 September 2007, high schools and middle schools in Sittwe which had earlier been closed following some of the initial monk-led protests in late August were reopened purely so that the authorities could record the names, ages, addresses, and photographs of the students. As soon as this had been accomplished, the schools were ordered to close again on 6 September 2007. Those students who did not attend school during the few days that the schools had resumed were visited at their homes by embers of the USDA who went from house to house to record the students' details.[61] Similarly, the names of young novice monks studying in monasteries in Sittwe were also recorded. This was done presumably so that the authorities would know who to arrest later should the students and novices become involved in the growing protest movement.

Meanwhile, monks from Bangladesh who were studying in Arakan State were ordered to return home after all centres of religious learning in Sittwe were ordered to close.[62]

On 23 September 2007, a school teacher who had been taking photographs of monks demonstrating against the SPDC in Myitkina was arrested by Special Branch police and taken away on the back of a motorcycle.[63]

On 27 September 2007, Myitkyina University in Kachin State was ordered to close its doors for fear that the students would join the nationwide pro-democracy protests. The order reportedly came directly from Northern Regional Commander Ohn Myint, who later ordered that all students were to return to their homes on 1 October 2007. The examinations had not yet been completed when the order was issued.[64]

Religious education was devastated by the protests, with monastic schools shut down and raided and monks having to flee the schools. During the time of the protests, an estimated 500 monks from neighbouring countries were studying Buddhism in Burma. Of this number, *"dozens"* were believed to have been arrested.[65]

By the end of September 2007, thousands of protestors had been arrested in relation to the protests. Such a high number of arrests over such a short period of time far exceeded the penal system's capacity. Many of the country's closed and empty universities and high schools were thus set up as temporary detention facilities, to house many detainees who could not fit in the jails.[66]

On 1 October 2007, the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) located in Insein Township, Rangoon was ordered closed *"for reasons related to the ongoing demonstrations"*. The students were reportedly dismissed before they could sit for their final examinations or hand in their papers. MIT is a Christian Protestant seminary offering a variety of courses in theology to a little over 1,000 students, the majority of whom were of the Karen or Chin ethnic minorities.[67]

On 1 October 2007, it was reported that numerous universities around the country had been closed down by the authorities. Universities, such as the Yangon University of Dental Medicine, Pa'an University, Nursery Training University in Moulmein, and the Government Technical College (GTC) in Mandalay were all ordered to suspend classes and close in late September 2007.[68]

By the beginning of October, schools in Rangoon had begun to reopen, although attendance remained low as parents feared further crackdowns and refused to allow their children to return to school.[69]

As a result of the September protests, students at the University of Distance Education (UDE) from Kachin State had their October-November examinations postponed until December, at which time they had to travel to the University of Myitkyina.[70]

An unknown number of students were arrested and detained for having joined the monks in the protests during August and September 2007. Four of those known to have been arrested were first-year mathematics students at West Rangoon University. The four were summarily tried and sentenced to lengthy jail terms for joining the protests. At least one of the group was reported to have been detained in a cell with adults despite the fact that he was a minor under the age of 18 and that such practices run contrary to Burmese law.[71] Two months later, this 17-year-old was still being held at Insein Prison in Rangoon and had maintained having been beaten repeatedly during his detention.[72]

On 17 December 2007, it was reported that 25 monks had been expelled from Kaba Aye Sangha University in Rangoon for having participated in the September protests.[73]

In December 2007, it was reported that any student wearing black to university as a sign of mourning for those killed in the protests were refused entry to sit their now much delayed final examinations. On 21 November 2007, approximately 100 students from East Rangoon University who had worn lack to their examinations were forced to sign an agreement stating that they would not wear black again. According to reports, *"Even those students who were not aware of the campaign but happened to be wearing black that day were forced to sign, but were not told why they had to do so"*.[74] Similarly, at Rangoon University, invigilators were instructed to record the names of all students seen wearing black. Students were warned that anyone wearing black in a show of mourning risked having their examination results nullified or possibly even being expelled from school.[75] Meanwhile, it was reported that any student wearing black to Prome University in Pegu Division were to be barred entry to the campus.[76]

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 13

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

"States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child."

- Article 6 (2), Convention on the Rights of the Child

13.1 Introduction

Children, as equal members of society, are entitled to all guaranties enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international human rights instruments, yet their age and their position within society often dictates that they represent one of the most vulnerable groups within society. As such, special protection is required for children to safeguard these rights. To this end, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1989 and in 1991; this document was acceded to by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).[1] In doing so, Burma became a State Party bound to the CRC and as such was obliged to recognize children's need for *"special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection*".[2]

Official statistics provided by the SPDC in 2005 estimated Burma's population to be approximately 55.4 million people. Those same statistics maintained that, of this number, 41.5 percent, or 22.9 million people, were below the age of 19. The following table reproduces this demographic information for the population below 19 years of age.[3]

Age (in years)	Population	% Total Population
0-4	6,513,168	11.8
5-9	6,012,581	10.9
10-14	5,515,051	10.0
15-19	4,884,067	8.8
Total population	**55,396,343**	**100**

As a country with approximately 40 percent of its entire population being underage, it must be noted that issues which adversely affect the general population also affect the lives of a great number children, and as one of the more vulnerable groups within the community, the ways in which children are affected are often to a greater extent than their adult counterparts.[4]

As can be seen in all of the chapters of this, the current, as well as in all previous editions of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook*, all human rights abuses committed in Burma which affect the general population have additional impacts upon the lives of children. For instance, children in Burma often become orphans when their parents are killed, and when they lose their parents, many children also lose their primary (if not only) benefactors, caregivers, and educators. Moreover, the family unit breaks down, causing often disastrous consequences on the development of the child. Similarly, whenever adults are subjected to arrest or exploited as forced labour, their children again suffer in much the same way as just described. Moreover, issues which have adverse affects upon the health and well being of the general population have further supplementary impacts upon the health of children. Furthermore, in many cases of economic hardship, children are often pulled out of school and sent to work in the informal market, on the streets or to beg so that they can help support the family, yet all of these environments increase their exposure to illicit drugs, petty crime, violence, the risk of arrest and detention, sexual abuse, and exploitation.[5]

One of the most pervasive features of contemporary Burma is the level to which its society has been militarized. It is within this context the usual mechanisms that normally protect children can be undermined or neglected due to prioritization of alternative goals.

Of all the areas in which Burmese children grow up, perhaps the political environment of greatest concern is that related to children in ethnic and armed conflict areas, for it are in these areas that children face the most severe and systematic abuses.

In July 2005, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted UNSC Resolution 1612, aimed at providing better monitoring and reporting of children in situations of armed conflict. A Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) consisting of the 15 Security Council member states was formed to assess the this reporting mechanism, which was mandated to specifically address the following six *"grave violations"* of children's rights:

1. Killing or maiming of children;
2. Recruitment or use of children as soldiers;
3. Rape and other grave sexual abuse of children;
4. Abduction of children;
5. Attacks against schools or hospitals; and
6. Denial of humanitarian access for children.[6]

It should be noted that while not all of Burma experiences armed conflict, the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) can be argued to still apply across Burma, owing to the heavy militarization throughout the country and by the manner in which SPDC army units and their allied ceasefire armies continue to oppress and directly target civilians in areas in which there is no overt armed resistance.

In many of Burma's ethnic areas, children grow up surrounded either by overt armed conflict or in an environment where undefended civilian villages are deemed legitimate military targets by SPDC army soldiers and are attacked and/or repressed accordingly. By and large, the nature of the armed conflict in Burma differs somewhat from armed conflict in the classical sense where the fighting is waged between two opposing armies; in Burma, civilians are the primary targets of military attacks – not the armed resistance groups. In many cases, SPDC army units have been shown to actively avoid opposition forces, and instead to focus their energies against the non-combatant civilian population. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

Burma's current ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has claimed to provide a protective environment to children, and in order to do it a number of measures have been taken such as its accession to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the creation of a child legal system and a number of mechanisms aimed at safeguarding children's rights, including, but not limited to the adoption of The Child Law in 1993. However, evidence has continued to mount in terms of how children are pushed towards increasingly vulnerable situations due to factors such as political instability, impoverishment and the decades-long armed conflict still occurring in various parts of the country.

13.2 Children and Armed Conflict

As so much of Burma continues to experience armed conflict, and with the entire country living under the shadow of militarization, the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) is particularly relevant in Burma. The CAAC mandate, created under UNSC Resolution 1261 in August 1999, aims to protect children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as condemning the denial of humanitarian aid to children and attacks on institutions protected under international law, including places such as schools and hospitals which typically have a significant presence of children, .[7]

Despite the overwhelming body of evidence to the contrary, the SPDC has continued to deny that Burma is in a state of armed conflict. In March 2007, Burma's representative to the UN Human Rights Council, U Wunna Maung Lwin, stated at its Fourth Session that:

> "*I wish to stress [that] Myanmar is not a nation in a situation of armed conflict. With the return to the legal fold of 17 out of 18 armed groups, the country is enjoying unprecedented peace and tranquility since independence in 1948. … We, therefore, reject the assertion that Myanmar is a country in armed conflict. Only the KNU [Karen National Union] and remnants of the former narco-trafficking armed groups are fighting the Government. In spite of this, the Government continues to extend the olive branch to the KNU. … We also reject the accusation that the armed forces targeted civilians in its counter-insurgency activities. … We will continue to do our utmost to achieve comprehensive peace in the entire country that will invariably contribute to regional peace and security*".[8]

However, evidence collected by local and international organizations tells a different story. In ethnic areas, SPDC army units deliberately mount military assaults on undefended civilian villages during which men, women, and children are shot on sight, entire villages are razed to the ground, and civilian crops and food supplies are systematically destroyed by the soldiers. Forced labour, extortion, and land confiscation is also widespread in such areas. As a result of such policies, an estimated 500,000 people have been forced from their homes and live as internally displaced persons (IDPs) along the eastern border with Thailand alone. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

The *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Myanmar* presented to the UNSC in November 2007 depicted how children in conflict areas have been killed and maimed during attacks on civilian villages by SPDC army units or due to the indiscriminate effects of landmine contamination. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines). The report further stated that owing to the lack of access to conflict-affected areas, the UN was unable to confirm these reports, or other allegations of attacks on schools and hospitals.

> *"According to information provided to the United Nations, the Government and several non-State actors manufacture and use landmines extensively. There are no mine-clearance programmes and only limited support for landmine victims. Thousands of displaced people have fled their homes as a result of landmines in or near villages and fields. … The United Nations has received credible reports indicating that during the period 2006-2007, Government armed forces in Kayin [Karen] State attacked villagers, as well as their homes, farms, areas of refuge and food stores. As a result of such reported attacks, children have died or sustained serious injuries. These reports, however, cannot be confirmed owing to lack of access to conflict-affected areas. … [A]s the United Nations has very limited access to conflict-affected areas, there have been no confirmed reports of attacks against schools and hospitals during the reporting period"*.[9]

Pushing parents and therefore children to live in such conditions clearly affects their chances to develop and to grow into healthy adults.

Children and Displacement

The armed conflict and the regime's repressive policies in ethnic areas have led thousands of people to flee their homes to destinations both inside and outside the country, which has resulted in making Burma the world's third major source of refugees after Afghanistan and Iraq with an estimated 700,000 Burmese people fleeing the country since the end of 2005.[10] Meanwhile, though no concrete evidence exists of it, it is widely accepted that there are as many as one million IDPs living across the country. Studies have shown that along the eastern border with Thailand alone, there were approximately 503,000 IDPs living in relocation sites, in hiding in the forests and in ceasefire areas during 2007.[11] (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

In ethnic areas, the SPDC divides the civilian population between those living directly under military control, and those who do not – who instead opt for a life of flight hiding in the forests and attempt to avoid al contact with the military. Those living in areas under SPDC control are subject to regular demands of forced labour and extortion, and are constrained by stringent movement and trade restrictions. According to Karen Human Rights Groups (KHRG) these demands *"have crippled village economies, undermined crop production, and inhibited community efforts to address their own educational, health and social needs"*.[12] Meanwhile, those living beyond SPDC control are hunted like animals, have their crops and food supplies routinely targeted for destruction, and are typically shot on sight.

A Free Burma Ranger (FBR) relief team member made the following statement after completing a humanitarian aid mission to IDP communities hiding in Karenni State, highlighting the way in which children are also affected by displacement:

> *"[T]hree Karenni families who were fleeing for their lives from the Burma Army joined us as we were on this relief mission. They had to flee with only what they could carry and, as many of the children were too small to walk, the fathers and mothers had to carry these children. The other children carried small bags and baskets, their life's possessions"*.[13]

At the same time, the SPDC has been implementing a policy of *Burmanization*¸ by resettling of large groups of ethnic Burmans into regions that have traditionally been inhabited by non-Burman ethnic minorities so as to dilute the ethnic composition of the area.[14] This policy has been employed most widely in northern Arakan State which is home to the ethnic Rohingya.

In all of the ways in which communities are impacted by displacement, children are also affected, but typically to a greater extent as a result of their vulnerability.

A young Karen IDP from Than Daung Township in Toungoo District of northern Karen State. This young boy fled his village along with the rest of his entire community after SPDC army soldiers attached to MOC #5 set up three new army camps near their home. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Violence against Children – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Please note that as not all of Burma suffers from armed conflict, not all of the following incidents of violence used against children during 2007 were conducted in the context of armed conflict. It should be further noted that this list, like many others reproduced elsewhere throughout this report, represents only a very small sample of all of the incidents which had occurred during 2007. Naturally, children are adversely affected by direct violence, such as can be seen in the incidents listed below, but owing to their impressionability and mental immaturity, children can also suffer greatly from witnessing acts of violence that are committed against others. However, almost all incidents of violence in Burma are either witnessed by children or have other impacts upon their lives. All such incidents are thus beyond the scope of this chapter and as such have not been included here. (For more information, see Chapter 2: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions and Chapter 4: Landmines).

On 20 March 2007, seven-year-old Dally Sui Hlei Par, an ethnic Chin refugee living in Malaysia with her family disappeared but was later found brutally murdered and her body mutilated in Kuala Lumpur. The family was preparing to resettle to the United States when the girl was taken. Her body was found soon after hidden among some bushes not far from her home. Both of her hands had been severed at the wrist and it appeared as though she had been left there to bleed to death. Her hands were never found. According to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), who had reported the incident, her murder was the fourth violent death to have occurred among the Chin community in Malaysia in the first three months of 2007. Two Chin youths had also reportedly been stabbed and killed on New Years Eve.[15]

Karen State

On the evening of 5 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to MOC #8 fired a volley of mortar shells into Thay Thoo Kee village in Papun District, wounding several villagers, including 15-year-old Saw P--- and 16-year-old Saw K--- (names withheld in original report). The two boys had been hit by shrapnel from the shells and were later treated at a KNU clinic.[16]

On 4 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers fired upon a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) unit in Htee-pha-doe-hta village in Bilin Township of Thaton District. Ma Mya Win, 16, and Naw Mu Ler, 15 were both wounded in the shooting.[17]

On 8 March 2007, a Karen farmer and his two adolescent sons from Nyaunglebin District were fired upon without warning or provocation by SPDC army soldiers from Military Operations Command (MOC) #10. All three victims received gunshot wounds. Saw Du Kaw and his 14-year-old amputee son, Saw Peh Lu were both killed in the shooting, while 16-year-old Saw Heh Nay Htoo was able to escape, albeit only after also having been shot. The bodies of Saw Du Kaw and Saw Peh Lu were later found partially buried close to the site of the shooting. The three villagers had all been unarmed and were working in their field at the time of the shooting.[18]

On 21 March 2007, three villagers were killed by SPDC army soldiers who had opened fire on their group at point-blank range near Tha Da Der village in Papun District. The group of villagers were from Hti Thu Der village and only the daughter of one of the three victims was able to escape. She was fortunate to have been walking at the back of the group when the shooting began at a range of reportedly less than five metres.[19]

On 5 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #346 fired a volley of mortars into Shan Si Boh village in Toungoo District, wounding five villagers and killing one two-year-old girl.[20]

On 27 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Light Infantry Division (LID) #88 shot and killed Saw Aye Say Mu, 17, from the Ta-lay-kyo area of Papun District.[21]

On 25 May 2007, a group of Karen villagers were fired upon by SPDC army soldiers from LID #88 as they were working in their fields near Si Daw Koh in Toungoo District. Saw Ray Raih, 18, Saw Law Kwauh, 36, and his seven-year-old son Saw Tar Noo Htoo were all killed outright. Three other villagers, including 13-year-old Naw Kree Kree, were also wounded but had managed to escape with their lives.[22]

On 23 June 2007, a family of five Htee K'bler villagers were killed by SPDC army soldiers. Among the dead were two children: four-year-old Kyaw Eh Wah and 13-year-old Saw Pa Heh Soe.[23]

On 2 July 2007, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) reported that two civilians, one of which was a 10-year-old child, had been killed by crossfire during a clash between KNLA and DKBA soldiers at Myanyanigone village, west of Myawaddy.[24]

On 9 July 2007, SPDC army troops attacked Htee Baw Kee village in Papun District. During the attack, two children, 14-year-old Saw Eh Christ Htoo and 4-year-old Naw Say Ler Paw, were shot and wounded.[25]

On 9 August 2007, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) released a report in which it was stated that SPDC army soldiers had killed three children in Toungoo District during the first half of 2007. The names, ages, and dates on which the victims were killed are as follows:

1. Saw Hta Yah, 15 years old, killed on 19 January 2007;
2. Yay Sha, 2 months old, killed on 5 April 2007; and
3. Saw Dtar Koo Noo, 7 years old, killed on 25 May 2007.[26]

On 19 November 2007, 13-year-old Saw K'Tray Soe from Lay Kee village on the border of Toungoo and Papun Districts in northern Karen State was severely wounded after he stepped on a landmine while collecting bamboo leaves near his home. The boy received shrapnel wounds to his face and throat, which have permanently blinded him. His 8-year-old sister was also reported to have been injured in the blast. The mine was believed to have been laid two months earlier by SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #88 [27]

On 20 December 2007, the SPDC-aligned *New Light of Myanmar* reported that eight people had been killed, including one infant, and a further six were wounded when soldiers from KNLA #18 Battalion attacked a passenger bus on the road between Kawkareik and Myawaddy. The KNU did not deny responsibility for the attack on the bus but maintained that the bus had been carrying DKBA soldiers at the time of the attack and that three DKBA soldiers, two SPDC army soldiers, and seven civilians had been killed. An unnamed KNLA spokesperson stated that *"Before launching this attack, the KNU urged civilians not to travel in DKBA vehicles. If something happens to them while travelling in the DKBA's cars, the KNU will not take any responsibility".*[28]

In December 2007, *The Irrawaddy* ran an article maintaining that sources from the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) in Mae Sot, Thailand, reported having treated as many as 35 persons from Karen State for landmine injuries throughout 2007. A number of these landmine victims were reported to have been children.[29]

Mon State

On 7 April 2007, FBR reported that during the year from February 2006 and May 2007, 25 villagers from Mon Township in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State had been killed and a further four wounded by SPDC army patrols. Of the 25 persons killed, 24 of them had been deliberately shot and one had stepped on a landmine. Among those killed were a number of children. A child was reportedly killed in Saw Ka Der village, as was another from Tee La Baw Hta village, although no further information about these deaths was provided. Of the four individuals wounded, one was reportedly a nine-year-old girl.[30]

In early July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #18 (Lieutenant Colonel Hla Min commanding) opened fire on a civilian home inhabited by an elderly couple and their two young children. According to the report by the Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA), the soldiers fired upon the hut with small arms fire and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) soon after they had been ambushed by a KNLA unit. Such retaliatory attacks on civilians are common, even when children are among the victims.[31]

Rangoon Division

On 27 September 2007, two adolescent students studying at Tamwe Township State High School No 3 in Rangoon were shot and killed by SPDC army personnel during the bloody crackdown on the Saffron Revolution protests. Maung Tun Lynn Kyaw was shot in the head in front of his mother, while 16-year-old Maung Thet Paing Soe was also shot in the head from close range. It was believed that he was targeted specifically because he had been wearing at t-shirt at the time emblazoned with the words: *"Free Aung San Suu Kyi"*. His parents were not permitted to conducted final Buddhist rites over their dead son's body and later told the media after seeing his body that, *"[t]here was a big hole on the back of his head and the brain was gone".*[32]

Tenasserim Division

On 2 March 2007, an SPDC army soldier from IB #299 fired his rifle at the feet of a 17-year-old boy from Yebyu Township to scare the boy into giving him his motorcycle. According to the report by the IMNA, the soldier fired at the boy's feet three times because he wanted the boy's motorcycle which was newer than the one he was riding.[33]

On 15 November 2007, SPDC soldiers moving in a combined column comprised of soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219 shot and killed 28-year-old Saw Ler Ghay from Kyauk Kyi Township, Karen State (top). Saw Ler Ghay's wife and three young children, aged between three months and six years old (bottom) must now survive without him, and attempt to balance caring for her young children with maintaining their livelihood. *[Photos: KHRG]*

13.3 Sexual Violence against Children

For the past several years, there have been numerous reported cases of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in Burma and 2007 witnessed a continuance of this trend. Many of those raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence have been below the age of 18.

Burma, as a State Party to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has a positive obligation to protect women and girls against all forms of sexual violence and is responsible for the investigation of all allegations of sexual abuse.

In September 2007, the SPDC representative to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women maintained that the SPDC had responded to and investigated allegations made by the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) and the Shan Woman's Action Network (SWAN) in the previously published report *License to Rape*, in which they accused SPDC army soldiers of 175 cases of rape of women and girls in Shan State.

> *"[T]horough investigations were made. Under the guidance of the Chairperson of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Working Committee, [the] Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs … conducted field investigations and found out that 38 cases were old cases, 135 cases were unreal and only two cases were true. The two perpetrators, an army officer and one other rank, in the two cases were prosecuted and given ten-year sentence each and dismissed from the Army"*.[34]

In contrast to such claims made by the SPDC, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation on Burma, stated in 2007 that he had not received any evidence of the SPDC having ever initiated any investigations into any allegations of sexual violence, nor attempting to identify the perpetrators or bring them to justice.

> "*The failure to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for rape and sexual violence has contributed to an environment conducive to the perpetuation of violence against women and girls in Myanmar. … [An] illustration of the consistent and continuing pattern of impunity is the high number of allegations of sexual violence against women and girls committed by members of the military that have been regularly documented since 2002. … This trend of sexual violence is particularly alarming, bearing in mind that the figures provided are likely to be far lower than the reality as many women do not report incidents of sexual violence because of the trauma attached to it"*.[35]

In apparent agreement with the reports submitted by the Special Rapporteur, the UN Secretary General stated in November 2007 in his report on the situation of Children and Armed Conflict that *"The United Nations has received credible but unverified reports of rape perpetrated by Government forces and armed groups"*.[36]

Widespread allegations of sexual assaults against ethnic women and girls have increased in recent years. This is most likely due to a number of factors. The first of these is the increased militarization of the country and with it, the attendant increase in human rights abuses. Added to this is the perpetuation of the climate of impunity in which such abuses are committed in which soldiers' actions go unpunished due to both the scare tactics employed by the military and the complete lack of any independent judiciary. Finally, the work of a number of committed organizations has fostered greater awareness of these

issues, which, in turn has resulted in the creation of more organizations and the increase in the amount of documentation of such abuses being carried out.

According to All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU), women and girls in Kachin State have become more vulnerable to sexual violence due to increased militarization and higher numbers of SPDC army soldiers being deployed in their areas. "*It's just a few cases that media groups have heard of because of communication problems. … Many, many women are raped [but] have nowhere to report abuses, because the area is largely controlled by the military*".[37] Meanwhile, also in Kachin State, the Kachin News Group (KNG) has maintained that thousands of girls have been raped by SPDC army personnel; however many cases have gone unreported due to heavy-handed military tactics and the fact that all such cases go unreported in the State-controlled media.[38]

In February 2007, a representative of the Women's League of Chinland (WLC) testified before the panel of the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women at which time she explained that, *"[o]ften, the rapes have been carried out with extreme brutality and in some cases resulting in the death of the victim"*. She also presented evidence to the commission which suggested that approximately half of all reported rape cases were gang-rapes; approximately a third of all reported cases had been committed by SPDC officers, sometimes in their own army camps; and that none of the perpetrators had been brought to justice.[39]

According to the Kaowao News Agency, Ye Township in Mon State is host to an estimated 50 beer gardens catering primarily to a male clientele who are attracted by the sexual services that are often on offer at such establishments. Many girls and young women have been lured into working in these beer gardens such as these in Ye Township, as well as in other areas of the country, by the possibility of making money for their families. A beer garden owner in Kwan Hlar village, in Mudon Township, Mon State said that he prefers to hire young girls to work in his bar to serve beer as this increases his profit margin One Moulmein University student who has frequented such bars told the Kaowao News Agency that, *"Some girls are very young around 15 to 20-years-old. … When you go to the bar she will sit with you and then you can negotiate for sex".*[40]

Sexual Violence against Children – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 27 March 2007, 40-year-old U Maung Win Naing, chairperson of the Pratha Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) in Maungdaw Township, was killed by an unidentified Rohingya woman that he had attempted to rape. The woman was arrested for the murder by NaSaKa (Border Security Force) personnel, despite the fact that she had acted in self defence.[41]

On 30 October 2007, 15-year-old Ziabul Haque from Padaga Ywathit village (Garatawbil) in Maungdaw Township was sodomized by two members of NaSaKa Area No.4 before they strangled him to death to prevent him from reporting the incident.[42]

On 14 November 2007, Salma Begum, 12, from to Ngaran Chaung village in Maungdaw Township was raped and killed by a local youth in Buthidaung Township. The perpetrator, identified as 25-year-old Mohamed Sha, had reportedly proposed marriage to Salma Begum, but his proposal had been rejected by her parents.[43]

On 17 November 2007, NaSaKa personnel raped and killed 11-year-old Taslim Ara from Ray Aung San Bwe village, Maungdaw Township. Taslim Ara had been fishing on the day of the incident with two other local girls when they were approached by a soldier from NaSaKa Area No.1. The two younger girls fled when they saw the soldier coming, who then raped and killed Taslim Ara. The two girls reported the incident and the perpetrator was arrested by a local NaSaKa officer who ordered that the girl's body be sent away for autopsy at an SPDC-run morgue. However, at the time that this incident had been reported, Taslim Ara's parents still had not received the autopsy report, and no further information regarding the fate of the perpetrator has emerged.[44]

On 20 November 2007, an 11-year-old girl was raped and killed by an SPDC police constable from the Marzi police outpost in Maungdaw Township. The victim was identified as Tasafinar Begun, from Marzi village in Maungdaw Township. The incident had reportedly occurred while the girl was tending her family's cows near Marzi Creek when she was accosted by the constable who dragged her into a thicket and raped her. Other farmers in the area who witnessed the incident ran to inform the girl's family, however, by the time they had returned, the girl had already been killed and her body lay on the creek bank. A local nurse later reported that she had heard that *"the constable had been executed by NaSaKa forces from Aungtha Bray station for raping and murdering the girl"*, although this statement remains unconfirmed.[45]

On 1 December 2007, it was reported that Johora Begum, 17, from Maung Nama Alay Rwa village in Maungdaw Township had died of a heart attack while VPDC Chairman Zubair was attempting to sexually assault her. Despite complaints being made on Johora Begum's behalf, to the NaSaKa, the Maungdaw Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) chairperson, the Arakan State PDC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), no action was taken against the perpetrator.[46]

Chin State

The following three incidents were reported by the Women's League of Chinland (WLC) in 2007, and though all of these incidents occurred in years prior to 2007, they had remained unreported and undocumented until the report was released in 2007.

In October 2002, a lance corporal and one other soldier from LIB #309 raped a ninth grade student in Paletwa. The girl had stayed back late at school to complete some assignments and was walking home after sunset when the two soldiers accosted her, held her down and raped her in turn. A number of villagers saw the incident occur but dared not come to her rescue fearing that the soldiers, who were armed at the time, would shoot them. The girl's body was found three days later displaying obvious signs of torture. Her arms and legs had been broken and she had clearly died as a result of the injuries that she ha sustained.[47]

In September 2004, two young girls, aged 16 and 18 were gang-raped by seven SPDC army soldiers from LIB #274 in Matupi Township. The two girls were both raped and severely beaten by all seven soldiers one evening as they were walking home from their studies.[48]

During the rainy season (June – September) of 2005, Captain Than Thet Soe of LIB #304 had attempted on numerous occasions to sexually assault 16-year-old S--- (name withheld in original report) from Matupi Township after drinking heavily. The girl was so frightened by his attempts to rape her that she fled the village. Despite her family's attempts to bring Thet Thet Soe to justice, they reported that they had never received any answer from the authorities on this matter.[49]

Kachin State

On 2 February 2007, four girls aged between 14 and 16 were reportedly gang-raped by three SPDC army officers and four soldiers from IB #138 (Lieutenant Soe Win commanding) at their military camp in Munglang Shidi village. The four girls, all from Rawang were identified as Lawan Nan, Chamtan Ninlan, Namkhee Khawdang, and Poe Lan. Meanwhile, the officers involved were identified as Major Zaw Min Thet, Captain Win Myint Oo, and Captain Kyaw Ze Ya, although the four rank and file soldiers could not be identified. The victims did not report the case to the police for fear of reprisal; however, the parents of one of the victims did report the incident to the local village chairperson. After the village chairperson spoke with the authorities, it was agreed that each victim would be paid 500,000 kyat in compensation, although each of the girls only received 300,000 kyat along with a warning "*not to spread [the] news*". However, two months later, as the story was picked up by the media, the victims were arrested on ten counts, including prostitution, and were arrested and sent to Putao prison on 9 March 2007.[50]

Karen State

On 1 May 2007, Sergeant Mya Aung of LIB #118 attempted to rape a 12-year-old girl in Thaton Township, Thaton District as she was sleeping in her bed. As soon as he touched her, she woke up, screamed and ran away.[51]

Shan State

On 6 March 2007, the US Department of State maintained that newly-arrived refugees in Thailand had reported that SPDC army soldiers operating in Shan, Karenni and Karen States have continued to rape ethnic women and girls. Although the incidents reported had taken place in years prior to 2007, they had remained unreported and undocumented until the reported in 2007.

From 15 to 16 May 2006, a 17-year-old Shan girl was detained in a military camp in Kunhing Township manned by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #527 where she was raped for the two days of her detention. [52]

In 2004, unidentified SPDC army soldiers raped an eight-year-old Shan girl from Mong Mai Township.[53]

In 2007, Sai Seng, a former child soldier in the SPDC army testified to Human Rights Watch (HRW) that while he was serving as a soldier in Shan State in 2006, he witnessed his corporal attempting to rape a young Shan woman. According to his testimony, the young woman managed to fight him off and run away, but was shot in the back and killed as she tried to flee. Sai Seng, an ethnic Shan himself, stated, "*I wanted to shoot that corporal but I couldn't, so I suffered a lot, because these were my people [the Shan]. But I was the only Shan there so I couldn't do anything"*. The corporal was not punished for his actions, aside from being ordered by his superior to bury the woman.[54]

In July 2007, 16-year-old Na Mi Jo, an ethnic Lahu girl from Mong Pan, was gang-raped by 10 SPDC army soldiers and their commanding officer, Captain Kyi Aung from LIB #360 in the presence of her 11-year-old brother Ja Si. The incident reportedly took place as she was collecting bamboo shoots with her brother in the forest. In spite of the fact that they were threatened with reprisals, the girl's younger brother informed his family and other villagers of the incident, although they were too afraid of the repercussion to lodge a formal complaint.[55]

In September 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #528 raped 16-year-old Nang Kham as she was returning home after shopping in a nearby village. She was accosted by the group of patrolling soldiers, five of whom, including their captain, raped her. After the soldiers had finished with her, she was released with the warning not to tell anyone, *"otherwise her family would be killed"*. Despite the threats, she told her family, but they were too afraid of what might happen to take the matter any further. In the word of the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN) who reported the case, *"No action was taken because they were afraid to prosecute the perpetrators. So, the case vanished*".[56]

On 19 November 2007, a 16-year-old Shan girl from Minkaung village was raped by Corporal Than Shwe and three of his soldiers from LIB #528. The incident occurred near the Nam Ohn Bridge as the girl was returning to her village with her 9-year-old brother. A local resident maintained that she was raped for an hour as the soldiers rested for lunch, while her brother was tied to a tree. SHAN further claimed that at least four girls had been raped by SPDC army soldiers in the two months prior to this incident, although, as villagers dare not report the cases for fear of retribution, many cases of sexual violence employed against girls go unreported.[57]

A young Karen IDP child from the Leh Per Her IDP site in Pa'an District, Karen State in August 2007. Despite the pressures of living under militarization and the struggle that they must face on a near-daily basis, children such as this young girl can still find time just to be 'kids'. *[Photo: KHRG]*

13.4 Child Soldiers

For more than a decade numerous organizations have denounced not only the existence but also the extent of child soldiering in Burma. In 2002, Burma was labelled as the world's leading user of child soldiers, stating that out of an estimated 300,000 child soldiers serving in armies around the globe, approximately one quarter of this number were enlisted in armed groups in Burma. At that time it was widely believed that approximately 70,000 children under the age of 18 were enlisted with the SPDC army and an estimated further 7,000 children were thought to be serving with various Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) around the country, both allied with and fighting in opposition to the military regime.[58]

These figures estimated that as many as 20 percent of all soldiers recruited into the SPDC army were under the age of 18.[59] Meanwhile, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers has estimated that children under the age of 18 account for up to 35~45 percent of all new SPDC army recruits, some of whom have been reported to be as young as only 11 years of age.[60]

Though extensive documentation and accumulating evidence has clearly demonstrated the systematic and widespread use of child soldiers in Burma, both the SPDC and several Non-State Actors (NSAs) have denied all such charges and have labelled these allegations as politically-motivated falsifications of the truth.

According to *Sold to be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in* Burma, an authorative report published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in October 2007, the SPDC has endeavoured to modernize and expand its armed forces, both in terms of its number of active soldiers, but also in its geographic range. To this end, the SPDC army has grown from 168 battalions in 1988 to 504 battalions in 2006.[61]

Such dramatic growth has required expansion in the number of soldiers enlisted in the armed forces. However, on the ground, the SPDC has struggled to attract new recruits into its ranks. This is most likely due to the dangerous nature of the job, mistreatment by superior officers, low pay, and poor living conditions experienced by rank and file soldiers. One way in which the regime has attempted to boost its number of soldiers is through forcible recruitment, and children as the most impressionable and vulnerable members of any community have been targeted especially for this purpose.[62]

In *Sold to be Soldiers*, HRW also warned that the events occurring between August and October 2007, in which SPDC army soldiers brutally suppressed peaceful demonstrations with violence, may have increased the anti-military sentiment among civilians in Burma, which in turn may result in the increased vulnerability of children SPDC army recruiting officers and brokers. (For more information, see Chapter 11: The Saffron Revolution – The 2007 Pro-Democracy Movement).

> *"[T]he present popular antipathy toward the armed forces is likely to make it even more difficult to obtain voluntary recruits, so recruitment units may resort to even more forced recruitment of children in order to meet their quotas"*.[63]

In November 2007, it was reported that Joe Becker, the director of HRW's Child Rights Division further denounced the junta's complete lack of will to end child recruitment and restated HRW's concern that the bloody crackdown on the Saffron Revolution protests may have actually increased the dangers children face in Burma in terms of child soldiering.

> *"The [SPDC's] senior generals tolerate the blatant recruitment of children and fail to punish perpetrators. In this environment, army recruiters traffic children at will. … After deploying its soldiers against Buddhist monks and other peaceful demonstrators, the government may find it even harder to find willing volunteers".*[64]

The recruitment and use of child soldiers in Burma continued throughout 2007 despite the existence of an extensive legal framework designed to protect to children from the risk of being recruited as soldiers.

Numerous international laws, to which Burma is bound, provide for the protection of children from military recruitment and/or service. Among these is Article 4, paragraph 3(c) of the 1977 Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, which unequivocally states that *"children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities"*. This article has long been considered part of international customary law and as such must be obeyed regardless whether the protocol has been acceded to by the SPDC or not.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) also clearly asserts under Article 8 that the act of *"[c]onscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities"* is a war crime. This law, like many aspects of Additional Protocol II, is considered a part of international customary law.

Moreover, as a States Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the SPDC is obliged to abide by the rules laid out in Article 38 of that Convention where it states that *"States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces"*.

Furthermore, in 2000, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (henceforth referred to as the Optional Protocol). This instrument raised the standards set in the CRC by establishing 18 years as the minimum age for military recruitment.

Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (henceforth ILO Convention 182) was adopted in 1999 and which obliges States Parties to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, among which it lists *"forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict"*, and for which the term 'child' applies to all persons under the age of 18.

The SPDC has neither signed nor acceded to either the Optional Protocol or Convention 182. Although they are still bound to the prohibitions on the recruitment and use of child soldiers as similar articles are contained within Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute for which the articles related to child soldiers in both conventions are part of international customary law and which the SPDC must obey.

Similarly, Burma has a number of domestic laws aimed at protecting children from situations of armed conflict. These include the Conscription Act of 1959, which states that enlistment for a period of six months to two years is permissible for men whose age is between 18 and 35 and for women from 18 to 27, but not for those under the age of 18 years. Likewise, the Defence Services Act, also promulgated in 1959, established 18 years as the minimum age for military recruitment.

However, in spite of all of these laws and regulations, children continued to serve as soldiers in Burma during 2007 in both the SPDC army, its allied ceasefire armies as well as in the armies of armed opposition groups. Yet meanwhile, the SPDC continues to deny all such allegations.

In February 2007, Burma was included in a UN blacklist of 12 countries guilty of the continued and extensive use of child soldiers.[65] Similarly, in March 2007, the SPDC representative to the UN Human Rights Council denied all charges related to the recruitment or use of child soldiers in Burma, stating that:

> *"No forced recruitment is carried out and all soldiers [have] joined the armed force[s] of their own accord. No one under the age of 18 [is] allowed to join the military service even out of their own willingness. Moreover, they have to pass the prescribed medical examination and must be clear of criminal records*".[66]

Responding to ongoing international criticism, in February 2007, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was permitted to visit SPDC army recruitment centres outside of Rangoon and Mandalay, and then in April 2007, the SPDC invited UNICEF to conduct a training session for recruitment officers that included issues such as child rights, child protection and international human rights and humanitarian law standards on children affected by armed conflict. In September 2007, UNICEF was asked to conduct additional trainings on humanitarian and child laws, child rights and child protection with recruitment officers. However, in spite of this apparent opening up and increase in cooperation, the UN reported that concrete action had remained limited.

In a similar manner, the Committee for Prevention against Recruitment of Minors was established by the SPDC in January 2004, although this has been labelled by some as ineffective and has *"served a cosmetic public relations function, making little progress in achieving its stated objectives and failing to substantively address the army's institutionalized and pervasive forcible recruitment of children"*.[67] According to HRW, the Committee has worked more towards denouncing and dismissing al independent allegations of child soldier use and less on actually attempting to address the issue. An article carried in the State-controlled *New Light of Myanmar* implied this very role: *"conspirators are framing the Tatmadaw for the alleged forced recruitment of juvenile soldiers for the front lines. … Thus, the committee will have to pay attention to refuting the matter"*.[68]

The US Department of State reported that on 22 August 2007, the then-acting Prime Minister, General Thein Sein, deviating from the standard SPDC policy of flatly denying the existence of child soldiers in Burma, maintained that "*minors themselves were to blame for the problem because they lied about their true age or did not inform their parents that they had enlisted in the armed forces*", and tacitly admitted the recruitment of child soldiers into the SPDC army, adding that *"soldiers with stunted growth were not sent to forward areas but were instead given light work duties at military bases, and that illiterate youth were sent to army schools to be educated"*.[69]

In February 2007, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, expressed his frustration over the fact that the Burmese authorities had chosen to simply reject all charges on child soldiering and denounce them as false, instead of investigating them. Pinheiro had reported having received numerous credible reports of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the SPDC army as well as in NSAGs.[70]

Then, in November 2007, the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) released his report related to the situation of children and armed conflict in Burma covering the period from 2005 to 2007, in which he stated that the SPDC and NSAGs in Burma had continued to recruit children despite official prohibitions.[71]

> *"[The UN] country task force has received numerous credible reports about violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law and Myanmar military directives, resulting in the recruitment and use of children by some Government military [SPDC army] units and several Non-State Actors, there are extensive reports of children sighted in uniform, sometimes armed, riding in trucks, and marching and participating in military trainings or parades, which corroborate individual reports and point to a worrisome trend"*.[72]

The recruitment and use of child soldiers in Burma, as noted by the Special Rapporteur and the Secretary General, has been widespread and systematic for at least the past decade, strongly suggesting that these crimes have not been committed as isolated acts of individual misconduct of middle and low-ranking officers, but as a consequence of a policy that has permitted individuals and groups to circumvent the existing international and domestic laws not only with almost complete impunity, but in many cases have been rewarded for doing so.

Recruitment and Training

The pressure that the junta has placed on army recruiters to fill recruitment quotas in order to reach the SPDC's stated goal of half-a-million soldiers in its armed forces has increased the exposure and the risk of children being recruited into the military. Recruiters have rounded up boys in markets, train and bus stations, pagodas and other public places and coerced or threatened to join the military.

> "*When battalions return from the frontline they change into mufti [military jargon for civilian clothing], go to the train and bus stations and catch young people to send to the recruiting center. If they recruit one soldier they can get 30,000 kyat and a sack of rice as reward from the battalion officers. Also, if you want to transfer to another battalion or leave the army you have to get three or four recruits"*.[73]

There have been numerous reports stating that officers and soldiers have been obliged to find recruits and have been rewarded with cash and food for each recruit that they obtained. SPDC army battalions have also been reported to issue orders to villages to provide them with new recruits: "*Now they have two ways of recruiting: they come to the village and demand a certain number of recruits, or they demand [forced labour] porters and later keep them as recruits. When children go as porters and don't come back, people know they've been forced into the army"*.[74]

Moreover, civilian brokers have become involved in the recruitment of child soldiers as a result of the economic incentives involved with the practice. According to HRW, in this context, children in Burma have become commodities that are bought and sold with impunity like any other merchandise in the market.[75] A former child soldier with the SPDC army explained that recruited boys are classified by height and weight, not by age, and that the standards had grown progressively lower, whereby the army has been accepting smaller and weaker boys. Some children recruits have been described as being *"so young that they cannot realistically be made into soldiers"*. A former SPDC army battalion commander has testified that *"[r]ecruits with glasses have their glasses taken off; if underweight their weight is increased on the form, if they're underage they're recorded as 18"*.[76]

Following their recruitment, most child soldiers undergo 18 weeks of basic military training. This training typically includes the same physical and combat instruction that is provided to all soldiers. According to credible reports, trainees are lectured on military subjects but most of the training focuses on drills, parading, and discipline. Child soldiers conduct basic weapons training, learn how to mount frontal assaults and how to engage in hand-to-hand combat. The physical aspects of training are particularly hard for the youngest that in many suffer exhaustion. An 11-year-old former SPDC army soldier had the following to say of his training:

> *"We had to do long and short runs with backpacks. We had to run [and] do long marches. … I was 11, so I couldn't keep up but had to do my best, otherwise they whipped me with the strings attached to their whistles. … I couldn't do all the training. Even lifting the gun was too hard for me. The G3 [assault rifle] came up to my shoulder. … In my platoon, about half were my age"*.[77]

Service and Active Duty

Child soldiers have testified as having being sent to conflict areas and to frontline areas, where they have been engaged in active combat against opposition groups. Many have also reported that they were forced to participate in the perpetration of human rights violations against the civilian population. Such abuses have included forcibly relocating and burning villages, using local civilians for forced labour, and shooting IDPs and villagers on sight.[78]

> *"[C]hild soldiers were sent into combat situations like anyone else, and in combat zones each child soldier was usually attached to an adult soldier. Others … although they were only 15 or 16 years old, they were sent into combat zones within a few days to a month after arriving at the battalion"*.[79]

A 14-year-old former child soldier testified being forced to participate in the destruction of Shan Si Boh village in northern Karen State after a number of SPDC army soldiers had fallen victim to a landmine deployed by the KNLA:

> *"I myself torched four or five houses, and many livestock died. … Three men villagers we saw there were shot by our battalion. … The battalion commander himself said 'Shoot everyone you see and burn the village.' He didn't exclude women and children, whomever we saw we were ordered to shoot. I felt that the villagers had no connection to the explosion, but as a soldier it is impossible to disobey orders. … Bu Sah Kee was [located in a] black area. We were ordered that if we see anyone, including women and children, then we must approach and catch them and take them to our officers for interrogation. If they try to run, shoot them"*.[80]

Meanwhile, other underage soldiers have been sent to work on military-run commercial money making ventures such as baking bricks, planting castor bean shrubs, as well as being assigned to menial duties such as cleaning toilets, gathering water and firewood, and catching and killing bugs: "*There were many bedbugs, so the officer said each of us must find 50 bedbugs each week or we'd be punished. I found enough, but two others who didn't were beaten with a stick. They were 14 or 15 years old*".[81]

Child Soldiers in the SPDC Army – Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 10 January 2007, Colonel San Aung, Tactical Operations Commander #2, based in Matupi in southern Chin State, called 30 villagers from 9 different village tracts in the area to report for military training. Local villagers reported that this was the second such training conducted in 2007. Most of the trainees who had attended the first training had since fled into neighbouring India for fear of being conscripted into the army or being forced to attend the second training. *"I was only 16 years old when they persuaded me to join the militias training. They said that when I join the training I'll be travelling to all the places and will see more things. So I joined the training, but things did not happen as they said. My family thought that I was dead. So as soon as I completed the training I fled"*, said one of the villagers who attended the training.[82]

At approximately 10:00 pm on 22 March 2007, more than 20 students were captured by SPDC army soldiers at the junction of Cangbawng block in Matupi Township, Chin State for military recruitment. The order was reportedly issued by Tactical Operations Commander #2, Colonel San Aung. The students, whose names and ages were not provided by the source, were apprehended immediately after completing an examination. Similarly, in a related incident, an additional 15 students from the Tui Moe boarding school in western Khoboi block were also forcibly recruited by SPDC army soldiers. According to one student who was able to escape, "*Some students ran away to Mizoram state, India crossing the border and some who have enough money went to Rangoon and Mandalay cities to avoid being recruited"*.[83]

On 27 March 2007, two child soldiers fled from the unit that they had been assigned to while attending an informational training in Shwegyin in Pegu Division. According to one of the boys, at least ten other boys, all aged around 15 years, had also attended the training. all of these boys had allegedly been recruited in early 2007 by Colonel Lwin Oo and Battalion Commander Soe Tin from LIB # 349 in Sagaing Division.[84]

On 30 March 2007, the *Narinjara News* reported that Aung Myint Thun was coerced into joining the SPDC army at age 12. According to his testimony, Aung Myint Thu was approached by two soldiers while waiting for a bus at the Da Nying Kone bus stop in Rangoon. He explained that the soldiers convinced him that joining the army would allow him to support his family and that he could *"have good stuff and food in the camp"*. Following his recruitment and training, he was sent far away from his family to Matupi in Chin State, where he spent the next six years as a soldier attached to Infantry Battalion (IB) #304. he finally deserted from his unit in 2007.[85]

On 30 March 2007, it was reported that 13-year-old Zin Oo, a seventh standard student from Myaungmya Township in Irrawaddy Division, was recruited into the SPDC army by soldiers from LIB #349. The source, however, failed to provide any further details of the boy, including his current status or when his conscription had taken place.[86]

On 3 August 2007, police in Meiktila in Mandalay Division reportedly arrested Than Naing Aye, Lin Lin, and Yan Lin Maung, all three of whom were 15 years old at the time on charges of theft. On 22 August 2007, police officer Min Aung Thein from Meiktila had reportedly sold the three boys to SPDC army recruiters at the Taung Thone Lone SPDC army recruitment centre in Mandalay for 65,000 kyat.[87]

On 16 August 2007, it was reported that a woman had filed a complaint to the SPDC after her 15-year-old son had been recruited into the SPDC army by soldiers from LIB #106 in Mingaladon on the outskirts of Rangoon in January 2006. After enlisting, the boy was sent far away from his family to attend training in Taungdwingyi in Magwe Division and was later

reunited with his mother when he had returned home on leave. After being reunited with his mother, the boy told DVB that:

> *"I told them when I was registering that I was only 15 but they forged all the necessary documents and enrolled me as a 19-year-old man. … Some of the boys attending training with me were even younger – about 13 or 14. They tried to escape but were caught and had their legs chained"*.[88]

On 20 August 2007, the Kachin News Group (KNG) reported that SPDC army soldiers had been recruiting adolescents in Daw Hpum Yang village in Bhamo District, Kachin State. According to a resident, *"local youth have been directly recruited by Burmese soldiers by holding them up on the roads at night, including those between ages of 14 and 18 years"*. According to the source, those who could pay a bribe of 20,000 kyat were released, while those who could not were *"sent to military training camps"*.[89]

Also on 20 August 2007, KNG reported that five underage Kachin boys from Man Ping village Shan State had been recruited into the SPDC army. According to the source, the boys had been taken from their home by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #322 stationed in Laukkaing. The five boys have been identified as:

1. Mangshang La Awng, 16;
2. Hpauje Ma Yaw, 14;
3. Lamu La Doi, 15 ;
4. Mwihpu Ma Naw, 15 ; and
5. Ma La, 15.

Speaking in reference to Ma La's parents, one of the boys' parents reportedly said that:

> *"[T]hey are extremely worried about their fifteen-year-old son Ma La. They have no idea whether he was killed or alive. They learnt that their son was with the Burma Army but is reportedly missing whereas the other four boys have been sent to the Northeast Command Headquarters for military training in Lashio Town*".[90]

On 24 August 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers in Myitkyina, Kachin State had been apprehending persons *"between the ages of 15 and 35 on the roads, in theatres, video shops and karaoke shops after 9 p.m. ten miles from Myitkyina Downtown and are despatching them to [Naypyidaw] for military training"*. As with forced recruitment programs in Bhamo (described above), those who *"do not want to join the military, … have to choose between 'Going to prison or paying 20,000 to 30,000 [kyat]'"*.[91]

On 25 August 2007, five young Kachin school boys all aged between 14 and 16, had reportedly been forcibly recruited by SPDC army soldiers near Muse in Shan State. *"What a brutal act of violation, taking children away from their families and homes, and to force child soldiers to use their weapons against their own people,"* said one local resident.[92]

On 14 September 2007, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) reported that SPDC army soldiers stationed in Palate Township, Mandalay Division had been plying local children with alcohol before abducting them and forcing them into the army. According to the source, a number of these abductions took place during a month-long pagoda festival being celebrated in the area which had attracted hundreds of children who had flocked to take part in the celebrations. *"Soldiers from [LIB #14] have come to the festival and gotten a number of children drunk before taking them back to their barracks on motorbikes*. … *Some other children have been snatched while going to the toilet during the shows at the festival by soldiers who were waiting for them nearby,"* said one local resident.[93]

On 14 September 2007, Thaung Aye and Aye Naing filed a missing persons report with their local police station in Dagon Myothit Seikkan Township in Rangoon after their son had failed to return home. According to the source, 14-year-old Maung Kyaw Min Thu had been forcibly recruited into the SPDC army as he was returning home from visiting his uncle in Insein on 14 August 2007. On 20 September 2007, the boy's parents visited the local army barracks but were turned away without being provided with any answers. Following the suppression of the Saffron Revolution protests, the boy's parents once again returned to the barracks on 9 November 2007 once they had deemed it safe to venture back out onto the streets, where they learned that he had since been transferred to No. 6 Training camp in Bassein in Irrawaddy Division and that he had joined of his own volition. Thaung Aye and Aye Naing pleaded with the soldiers that he was underage and had even produced his birth certificate and other documents, but the soldiers dismissed these as forgeries. The soldiers further threatened to prosecute Maung Kyaw Min Thu for having provided lied about his age and forced his parents to sign a document stating that he was over the age of 18 and that he had joined the army of his own free will.[94]

On 5 October 2007, it was reported that 122 adolescents, all of whom were students from fifth to tenth standard in Putao, Kachin State, did not attend school for fear of being recruited into the local SPDC militia. The students, the majority of whom were underage, were all students at the State High School in Lungshayang village. Over 150 villagers had been ordered to attend a militia training which had started on 20 September 2007, although only 90 recruits showed up. After which, SPDC army soldier conducted house-by-house inspections to forcibly recruit the remaining 60 trainees.[95]

On 12 November 2007, two 17-year-old child soldiers, identified as Hla Moe and Zaya Aung, deserted from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #564 stationed in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State after three years of enforced service. According to reports, the boys escaped by swimming across the Naff River into Bangladesh and were rescued by local Bangladeshis on the opposite riverbank. The incident was corroborated by a number of different sources, although one report maintained that the boys had been aged 18 and 19 respectively at the time of their flight.[96]

On 16 November 2007, the UNSG reported that seven cases of child recruitment of boys all aged between 12 and 16 had been reported to ILO. However, the UNSG asserted that the number of complaints made to the ILO did not reflect the scale of the problem, which can be explained by the lack of awareness on the right to complain, the difficulties in making complaints and fear of reprisal for doing so. The UNSG conceded that some of these boys had *"volunteered"* for the army, one of whom used a broker, but that most of the boys had been recruited by SPDC army soldiers or policemen.[97]

On 27 December 2007, the *Irrawaddy* reported that 15-year-old San Lin Aung was arrested by an SPDC army sergeant at the Pyinmana train station who had asked to see his ID card. Like many children in Burma, the boy did not possess an ID card, and so was taken by the sergeant to the Mingaladon army recruitment centre on the outskirts of Rangoon. According to the report, the recruiting officer at Mingaladon refused to enlist the boy, so he was then taken to another unit in Mandalay where he was accepted without question.[98]

On 27 December 2007, it was reported that two 14 year-old boys, Kyaw Min Thu from South Dagon, and another boy from North Okkalapa, had been forcibly recruited by SPDC army soldiers in Rangoon in April 2007. *"The children were threatened by army recruiters and told that if they didn't join the army they would be sent to prison,"* said a relative of one of the boys.[99]

Child Soldiers in Various Non-State Armed Groups – Partial list of incidents for 2007

Child soldiering in Burma is not exclusive to the SPDC army. Numerous Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) are also guilty of recruiting and using child soldiers. These NSAGs include SPDC–allied ceasefire groups as well as armed opposition groups. However, it must be noted that while some of the armed opposition groups have child soldiers within their ranks, the scale on which child soldiers are employed and the manner in which children are recruited, deployed and treated by their superiors is markedly different from the SPDC, and a such they should not be tarred with the same brush, so to speak.

> *"It is safe to say that most of Burma's non-state armed groups have at least some child soldiers in their ranks, but they differ greatly in how these children are recruited and treated, and in their willingness and efforts to stop using child soldiers"*.[100]

An important distinction between child soldiers in armed opposition groups and child soldiers in the SPDC army is the way in which many opposition groups tend to treat their underage soldiers in a far more humane manner with fewer beatings, less use of obligatory manual labour, and fewer and far less severe forms of punishment.

Another issue to be considered is the overall scale to which child soldiers are employed in armed opposition groups. Even if one were to combine the child soldiers serving in all opposition groups operating in Burma, their number would still be but a fraction of those recruited into the SPDC army.

The following are a number of Non-State groups, both those allied with and those opposing the regime, who have been accused of using and recruiting child soldiers in Burma. (For more information on the groups listed here, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)

Although there have been numerous repeated reports of child soldiers in the SPDC-allied DKBA, the group has not been include on the UNSG's list of child recruiting organizations, despite the fact that he has asserted having receiving credible reports on uniformed and armed underage boys near DKBA camps.[101] It is believed that approximately 10 percent of the several thousand DKBA soldiers are underage.

On 6 August 2007, it was reported that six fully-armed soldiers from DKBA #907 Battalion had defected to the KNLA. According to the source, the deserters, which included a 15-year-old boy, had approached the KNLA in Kawkareik Township, Karen State on 1 August 2007.[102]

Kachin Independence Army (KIA)

The KIA is the armed faction of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The KIO entered a ceasefire deal with the regime in 1993. Though the KIA claims to have a policy prohibiting the recruitment of children under the age of 18, reports by the UNSG on children and armed conflict have stated that his office had received reliable reports denouncing the KIA as a recruiter of child soldiers, including claims that the KIA operates a *"one-child-per-family"* policy on recruitment.[103]

In the UNSG's report on children and armed conflict in November 2007, it was reported that in early 2007, a 15-year-old girl was recruited as she returned home from school in Myitkyina. According to the report, it was believed that the girl had been recruited because *"The girl's family had not 'contributed' a child to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Her brother and sister were no longer living in the village, and the girl was targeted as the sole remaining child in the household"*. The UNSG's report also maintained that children recruited into the KIA are provided with an education, whereby *"girls are trained for teaching, nursing, midwifery, or administrative office functions, while boys are channelled into military training"*.[104]

It has been estimated that there are approximately 50 children under the age of 16 serving with the KIA, with an additional 250 between the ages of 16 and 17.[105]

Kachin Defense Army (KDA)

The KDA is a splinter faction which had initially broke away from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and formed a ceasefire pact with the junta in 1991. Reports have claimed that the KDA soldiers must meet recruitment quotas and that this has resulted in the forcible recruitment of children as young as 16 years of age.

The KDA is distinct from many other groups in that it recruits girls as well as boys. It has been reported that children have been recruited through a boarding school in Kaung Kha in Kachin State where children aged between ten and 17 study for fifth to tenth standard. Students at the school and those financially supported by the KDA are reportedly obliged to serve the armed group once they graduate in repayment of this debt. It has been estimated that between six and ten percent of all KDA soldiers are underage.[106]

Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)

The KNLA is the armed wing of the opposition Karen National Union (KNU) and was again included on the UNSG's list of child recruiters in 2007. While the US Department of State has maintained that at least 50 minors remained mobilized in the KNLA, the UN has reported that they received no new evidence of recruitment of use of child soldiers into the KNLA during 2007.[107] Since 2002, when the KNLA was accused of possessing significant numbers of child soldiers within its ranks, the organization has taken steps to create a more protective environment for children by issuing *"very clear instructions"* to soldiers in the field to prohibit the recruitment of children.

On 4 March 2007, the KNU signed the Deed of Commitment with UNICEF and UNHCR to cease child recruitment and to allow independent monitoring.

Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC)

The KNU/KNLA PC formed as a splinter faction from the KNU in January 2007 which, soon after its formation brokered a ceasefire deal with the SPDC. The newly-formed KNU/KNLA PC has also been reported as recruiting large numbers of child soldiers into its ranks. The following list of incidents all testify to incidents in which Karen children have either been coerced to join or have opted to join of their own volition into the Karen splinter faction during 2007.

On 21 February 2007, two Karen boys, identified only as *"Saw E---"* and *"Saw L--- "*, left their home in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand to volunteer to join the KNU/KNLA PC. According to the source, *"Saw E---"* was only 12 years old at the time, while *"Saw L---"* was only 14. Rather than being turned away because of their young age, the boys were welcomed into the fold and even threatened at attempting to return to their families. The following is an excerpt from the KHRG report which had originally documented the case:

> *"Saw E--- and Saw L--- left Mae La refugee camp and crossed the Moei river, which forms part of the Thai-Burma border … The two boys then arrived at Maj-Gen Htain Maung's base camp in T'Nay Hsah township, Pa'an District, across the river from Htee Nuh Hta village in Thailand. Saw E---, who was aged 12 at the time, volunteered to join the KNU-KNLA PC and then persuaded his friend, Saw L--- to join him. Once they had joined they were given uniforms, put on sentry duty and prevented from leaving. They were also threatened that if they went back to the refugee camp the other residents would kill them"*.[108]

The following is an excerpt from a recorded testimony made by 14-year-old *"Saw L---"* after he and *"Saw E---"* had managed to escape and return home to their parents in April 2007:

> *"They gave me a gun and a uniform and I stayed there about one month. They didn't order me to do anything but they didn't allow us to go outside. In the evening from 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm, I had to do sentry duty. … They gave us only [chilli] with rice and vegetables. … They divided the old and new soldiers. I saw about five or six new soldiers under 18 years and I saw two of the child soldiers who were the same age as me. I don't know their names, they are new soldiers and not from the camp. They are from Htee Nuh Hta [a Karen village in Thailand, just across the river from Htain Maung's base camp]. … Some soldiers didn't like to be there but didn't have any choice".*[109]

Numerous accounts of other young boys joining the KNU/KNLA PC emerged throughout 2007, although most of these, have testified that the boys were deceived into joining. A number of cases have been reported in which boys have been recruited out of the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand by section leaders and KNU-KNLA PC soldiers and officials who live there have some degree of influence over the camp residents. A number of these children and their parents were openly lied to, while others, unaware of the split from the KNU and the ceasefire agreement that the KNU/KNLA PC had signed with the SPDC, had their ignorance of the situation used against them.[110]

The following two related testimonies were made by a 17-year-old boy who was coerced into becoming a soldier with the KNU-KNLA PC in January 2007 and his father respectively:

> *"I myself wasn't willing to go [across the border to Htain Maung's base], but Pah Bp' Nah, who is a soldier but not a commander, and his friend persuaded me to go. … At first, they took me to Thoo Mweh Nee [Htain Maung's base on the Moei riverbank in Pa'an district]. When they first called me I didn't know that I might become a soldier"*.[111]

> *"Pah Bp'Nah [a section leader in Mae La camp zone C] and one other man came and called my son [to join the KNU/KNLA PC]. When they first came they told him to 'fill in the blanks' [enhance the soldiers' numbers] and after the celebration he could come back. They came and called him two times. I told the ones that came to call my son that, 'He, my son, is just a civilian so he won't know how to do the marching. It's not a job for civilians to do. … They came and said that any child that wanted to go could go. At first, I didn't allow my son to go and I told him not to go. But the next morning, he, Pah Bp' Nah came to my house again.*

> *… I summoned him and told him, 'My son, when the celebration finishes come back and stay at home', … but [after the celebration] they took our son [further] into Burma and we knew nothing about it. I was not happy with it because they came and lied to our child. … One boy from there [pointing to a nearby house] was also persuaded and he also went. That boy's name is Saw N---. When you go and talk to his mother about her child she starts to cry. She says she wants to see her child. He hasn't got a father anymore, he has only a mother. His mother is quite old, about over 40 to 50. She came from the same village … as me. Most of the people [children] that went were persuaded"*.[112]

Similarly, the following case describes how a 42-year-old woman from Mae La refugee camp was also tricked on 9 January 2007, into allowing her 16-year-old son attend the KNU/KNLA PC ceasefire ceremony. The boy was requested to attend the ceremony simply to make up the numbers so as to make it appear as though more soldiers had defected from the KNU, although five months later, she had still not seen nor heard any word of her son.

> *"The section leader and two section assistants came to me and asked if my child was free. … [T]he section leader, thought it was good so he said to me that it is no problem [for the boy to return after the ceremony] and if any problem occurred he would solve it himself, so I agreed. … [T]hey came to take my child, but my child didn't want to go. He told me, 'Mom, I don't want to go.' 'We can't do anything, my son,' I told him, '… After he went, I didn't hear any information from him. Thinking only about my child, I am getting sick"*.[113]

On 28 May 2007, KHRG also reported knowledge of at least five other boys who had been recruited into the KNU/KNLA PC in early 2007, although many of the specific details of these boys remain unclear. Four of these boys had reportedly deserted from the KNU/KNLA PC in April 2007 after the reality of what had been forced upon set had set in, while the fifth boy, believed to be 16 or 17 years old, remained missing at the time of the report.[114]

According to Bah Soh Gay, a commander attached to the KNU/KNLA PC, boys and girls under the age of 18 were welcome to join the KNU/KNLA PC as soldiers of their own will and likewise that they were free to leave to return to their families in the refugee camp whenever they wished. However, the testimonies reproduced above, along with other evidence not shown here strongly suggest that the opposite is true.[115] Refuting the claims of Bah Soh Gay, a 17-year-old former child soldier had the following to say about his desertion from the KNU/KNLA PC:

"We wanted to see our parents so we escaped back [to Thailand]. There were five boys who escaped with me. …. My other friends are about 16, 17, 18 years old. We left at around 8:00 or 9:00 pm. We walked all the night in the valley and mountains. The next morning, we asked people where the way was. … The other children also really wanted to come back, but they were not allowed. … One of my friends, Saw M-- was also persuaded to go back [to join the KNU-KNLA PC]. He still isn't back [in Mae La camp] yet".[116]

Karenni Army (KA)

The KA is the armed wing of the opposition Karenni Nationalities People's Party (KNPP) and has been listed by the UNSG as recruiter of child soldiers. However, HRW has recommended that they be removed from the list as no evidence of new child recruitment into the KA has been found and that child soldiers within the ranks of the KA have been demobilized. In April 2007, the KNPP signed a Deed of Commitment with UNICEF and the UNHCR to end underage recruitment, to demobilize any existing child soldiers, and allow external monitoring. According to a KNPP spokesperson:

> "*Our policy is that we don't recruit anyone under 18, and we don't conscript anyone. There are only volunteers in the KA. Even the child soldiers you found before were volunteers who joined because their families had suffered and they wanted to retaliate against the Tatmadaw [SPDC army]*."[117]

Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)

The KNPLF is an SPDC-allied ceasefire group known to hold a significant number of underage soldiers. The UNSG has reported the group to have employed children to search for and detonate landmines.[118] Although the KNPLF has not been formally been added to the UN list of child recruiters, some observers have recommended that it be included for consideration. The number of child soldiers within the ranks of the KNPLF is unknown.[119]

Six KNPLF soldiers defected to the KA in the first half of 2007, of whom some were children. *"Koo Reh"* (not his real name), a 15-year-old boy, had reported that he was approached by a KNPLF recruiter at a cinema in Shadaw in Karenni State when he was only 13 years old. According to his testimony, he was lured into military service along with five other children:

> *"I don't remember his name but he was from KNPLF. … He spoke to many people in the cinema, one by one, 20 or 25 people, adults, women, boys. About six people went with him. The older ones were 16 or 17, the younger ones 11, 12 or 13. … Four were kept at the KNPLF camp at Shadaw, and two of us went to Loikaw together with the recruiter, by car to the KNPLF office there. The other boy was 11 or 12. … They asked, 'Did your mother allow you to come here?' and I answered, 'You called me to come here'. They asked how old I was and I said 13 – they didn't say anything, just said, 'You have to stay here'. There was also another recruit there who was about 13"*.[120]

KNPLF Major Kyaw Soe ordered the boys to work at his mustard-seed farm near Loikaw, where they were supervised by another KNPLF soldier. *"Koo Reh"* reported having been deployed as a sentry at a KNPLF camp in Shadaw, as well as spending time at frontline camps at the Shan State border, where he, and two other KNPLF soldiers aged 16 and 18, were forced to join SPDC army patrols.[121]

Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA)

The MNLA is the armed wing of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), which signed a ceasefire agreement with the regime in 1995. Though the figures are not known, the MNLA is believed to possess a number of children within its ranks. However, the NMSP denies this and maintains that not only are there no children within the MNLA, but they also operate under a policy which prohibits the recruitment of child soldiers into its armed forces. One MNLA officer was reported to claim that while children have been seen in MNLA uniforms, this does not necessarily mean that they are soldiers:

> *"If you were to visit an MNLA base you would probably see children in MNLA uniforms. … [However] boys do this out of pride, but are not soldiers. … Boys borrow their fathers' uniforms. … It is easy to buy a military uniform in the market, and … some orphans being cared for by the NMSP are given military uniforms because no other clothing is available"*.[122]

Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)

The SPDC-aligned Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang) operating in northern Shan State has reportedly permitted young children to its ranks and as such has been mentioned in the UNSG's reports on children and armed conflict, but oddly omitted from his list of child recruiters.[123]

Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)

The opposition SSA-S has been labelled as a user and recruiter of child soldiers, with the UNSG stating in is November 2007 report on children and armed conflict that he had received *"frequent reports"* of child soldiers within their ranks, although, like the MNDAA, had oddly been left of his list of child soldier recruiting organizations.[124] Meanwhile, HRW has reported having seen a video footage, in which teenage girls and young women can be seen in SSA-S uniform and armed with assault rifles during ceremonies. However, SSA-S officials have dismissed this allegations, explained that this was a *"fashion"* worn by some of the youth in the area.[125] Although, what these girls were doing with assault weapons and how these serve as fashion accessories was not elaborated upon.

The SSA-S has reported that they had recruited boys as young as 16 in the past, but in February 2001 had set the minimum age for recruitment at 18 years. Despite these claims, however, the SSA-S was reported to have recruited child soldiers during 2007 as a part of its mandatory recruitment policy.[126]

In 2007 the SSA-S showed some interest towards cooperating with UN agencies and signing the Deed of Commitment in much the same way as the KNU and KNPP had done so, although, they are still yet to actually sign this document.

United Wa State Army (UWSA),

The SPDC-allied UWSA has been listed on the UNSG's list of child recruiters. According to some sources, the UWSA has a recruitment quota of one son per family. The UNSG has said that even if the amount of underage people related to the force is unknown, reliable reports have indicated the presence of children in uniform and bearing arms in the Wa State Army.

The UNSG has stated in his report on children and armed conflict that eyewitnesses have testified witnessing children as young as nine attending UWSA military training schools. UWSA primary school curriculum reportedly includes *"pre-military"* training, so that children are ready to join the UWSA at age 12 in non-combatant roles, and to serve as soldiers by age 15.[127]

These young boys are fleeing along with the rest of their community after it was attacked by SPDC army soldiers on 9 October 2007. SPDC army soldiers from LIB #217 launched an unprovoked attack on Htee Bla Kee village in Shwegyin Township of Nyaunglebin District, Karen State, although the villagers had already fled into the forest ahead of the attack. All of the villagers, including the children, fled taking whatever personal belongings they were able to carry. *[Photo: KHRG]*

13.5 Arrest and Detention of Children

As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the SPDC is legally obliged to protect children from abduction and arbitrary arrest. Article 37 of the CRC unequivocally states that States Parties must ensure that:

> *"No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time; …*
>
> *"Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances".*

However, throughout 2007, there were numerous cases of children being arrested arbitrarily, including in lieu of others and so that they could be held for ransom, being detained under the same conditions and alongside adults, and subjected to deplorable conditions of detention and torture.

In March 2007, the US Department of State accused the SPDC of lacking adequate child protection procedures and a working juvenile justice system. While the SPDC has claimed that efforts were made in this regard, the severely limited level of public funding has adversely affected the effectiveness of any such programs. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) provided limited social welfare services to children, although they were largely constrained by the almost complete lack of financial and material resources and were reportedly staffed by only a handful of officially-appointed social workers.[128]

The SPDC has further claimed that juvenile prisoners aged 16 years and younger have been held separately from adults in prisons for juveniles in Meiktila, Mandalay Division. Similarly, that juvenile courts rarely sentence children to prison, but instead have been sent to reformatories in Thayet, Magwe Division, or to Twante in Rangoon Division. These facilities, according to the SPDC, have been managed jointly by the Prisons Department and the Department of Social Welfare (DSW).[129] However, in spite of these assertions, evidence of children being detained with the general prison population continued to emerge across the country throughout 2007, as the partial list of incidents below will attest to.

Moreover, repeated cases have been reported of children being held under conditions which in themselves could be considered to be classified as cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Children are typically far more vulnerable to such conditions that their adult counterparts which can quickly escalate, resulting in disease, permanent injury, and even death in children.

Children in detention have reportedly been beaten by SPDC army soldiers, police officers and paramilitary forces, in some cases even to death. In one instance, a six-year-old boy was pitilessly beaten by authorities at the temporary detention facility at the Kyaikkassan Racecourse in Rangoon after he was arrested along with the rest of his family in relation to the Saffron Revolution protests.

> *"There was a family who stayed near the Pagoda. The whole family was arrested, including a little boy, about 6 years old. In the detention centre, when they started beating the small boy up, people tried to stop them, and shield him from the blows. So they kept on beating these people the whole night. The little boy is still there. He's bound to be traumatised by the experience. He's so young, only in kindergarten".*[130]

Children have also reportedly not been provided with adequate food, clean drinking water, blankets, mosquito nets, or sanitation facilities, all of which can, and in many cases have, resulted in disease.

Arrest and Detention of Children - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 2 March 2007, an 18-year-old Rohingya high school student was arrested at his home in Morisha Bill in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, by SPDC army personnel after he had argued with an Arakanese (Rakhine) student the previous day. According to the report, Hossain (not his real name) had been the subject of harassment by a number of Arakanese boys at school. On his way home on 1 March 2007, an argument broke out between Hossain and one of his Arakanese classmates, who reported the incident to the military the following day. Later that day, a group of soldiers abducted him from his home and detained him incommunicado at the Hlet Wat Dad SPDC army camp. When he was returned to his family three days later, he was in a *"critical condition"* after having been tortured by the soldiers.[131]

In April 2007, the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) reported that at least six children had been rounded up and detained by Malaysian authorities in February 2007. Two of those children were reportedly kept in the Semenyih detention centre despite having been reported sick. Meanwhile, in Jinjang, 12 year-old Ngun Za Tial, and her 10-year-old brother, Bawi Lian Thang, were arrested during a midnight raid by immigration authorities.[132]

On 5 May 2007, 15-year-old Mohammed Rafique from Pa Dinn village, Maungdaw Township of Arakan State was arrested, by NaSaKa personnel for allegedly possessing a Bangladesh-registered mobile phone. According to reports, the boy was taken to the NaSaKa camp where he was detained, interrogated and tortured. He was later released from custody on 15 May 2007 at which time he displayed numerous signs of torture on his person. Soon after arriving home he was taken for medical treatment, but died as a result of his injuries on 21 May 2007.[133]

On 16 May 2007, members of the junta-affiliated USDA arrested 15 activists, including a number of members of the NLD youth as they were leaving the regular Wednesday prayer vigils at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon.[134]

On 18 June 2007, Lieutenant Zaw Lwin from Myo Hla Police Station in Pegu (Bago) Division was reported to have arrested Ma Nyo Kyi together with her 8-month-old baby on no formal charges. According to the source, the following day, the baby was handed over to Ma Nyo Kyi's husband who was informed that his wife had died of a heart attack. The post-mortem report, however, had reportedly revealed that she had been severely beaten, which ultimately resulted in her death.[135]

On 5 July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #30 abducted four persons from the Tate Pu area of Toungoo District, Karen State, including two 17-year-old girls, one of whom was identified as Naw Ma Saw Saw.[136]

On 14 August 2007, five youths from Hnee-padaw village in Mudon Township of Mon State, aged between 14 and 18, were arrested by police while waiting to meet friends at a public rest-house. The five youths were charged with the possession of unlicensed motorcycles
On the evening of 23 August 2007, 13-year-old Abul Kalam from Taungbro in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, was arrested by NaSaKa personnel. The 13-year-old was taken from his bed as he slept and taken to the NaSaKa Area 4 camp. According to reports, the NaSaKa had attempted to arrest the boy's father, but arrested Abul Kalam instead when they were able to find him. The NaSaKa camp commander, Major Nay Myo told the boy's relatives that he would not be released unless his father surrendered to them. It was reported that Abul Kalam had been tortured by the soldiers while in their custody.[137]

On 10 October 2007, 17-year-old Maung Ye Myat Hein was arrested in relation to the Saffron Revolution protests and detained at Insein Prison in Rangoon for over two months without charge. According to reports, Maung Ye Myat Hein was held in a communal cell with 50 other detainees. *"My son said he was beaten up after he couldn't answer the questions the officials asked him about our family. … He is only 17 years old so he is still a minor. It's illegal to do that to a minor*", said his mother.[138]

In November 2007, a report by Christian solidarity Worldwide (CSW) highlighted a case in which a 16-year-old girl was abducted from her village in Shan State and forced to work as a domestic labourer for an SPDC army soldier's family in Rangoon. In the course of her testimony, she also reported having witnessed the abduction and sale of several other young children from her village.

> "*The soldiers took me and I had to work for one of their families, looking after their three children, cooking and washing clothes. I had to work very hard and I had to sleep outside, with only one blanket. This was in Rangoon. Two or three other children in the village were sold by the SPDC and the boys were taken by the Army to become soldiers. I also saw SPDC soldiers who wanted to adopt a five-month old baby. The parents did not want to agree to this, but the soldiers took the baby anyway. The mother cried so much that she became very ill and had to spend many months in hospital. She never saw her baby again"*.[139]

On 17 December 2007, *The Guardian* newspaper ran an article on the testimony of a young man arrested from his bed in Mandalay and interrogated for days over his involvement in the Saffron Revolution protests. According to his testimony, children had also been arrested detained where they were treated exactly the same as the adults. *"There were 85 others in my police cell, mostly young people. … Some were only 15 or 16 years old. One boy told me he was arrested for wearing an American flag on his head. Some of the students had broken bones and head wounds"*, he said.[140]

On 26 December 2007, Rashid Uddin, 13, from Sin Oo Khya village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, was arrested by NaSaKa personnel after they 'found' 500 taka (Bangladeshi currency) on his person. According to *Kaladan News*, NaSaKa personnel had been harassing Rohingya students on their way home from school by checking their schoolbags and planting contraband in them purely so that they could arrest them and demand large sums of money for their release. The boy was then taken to the NaSaKa camp and interrogated where he was accused of being an informant to an armed opposition group and *"having connections in Bangladesh"*. Rashid's family was unable to pay the extortionate amount demanded of them to secure his release, and so remained in detention at the time the original report was published. No subsequent reports emerged of him having been released.[141]

13.6 Child Trafficking

As a States Party to the CRC, Burma is legally obliged to protect children from trafficking. Article 35 of the Convention prescribes that *"States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form"*. Moreover, Burma is also a States Party to the Convention on Transnational Organized Crimes (CTOC) and the two Palermo Protocols: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (TIP) and the Protocol to Combat the Smuggling of Migrant by Land, Sea and Air (SOM). In October 2004, the SPDC also agreed to enter the six-member Greater Mekong Sub-region Memorandum of Understanding against trafficking in persons, joining Cambodia, China, Laos PDR, Thailand and Vietnam in their efforts to curb the practice.[142]

Intent on showing its commitment to combating the trafficking of persons, in 2005, the SPDC passed the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law, which criminalized the practice of sex and labour trafficking. According to this law, the trafficking of women, children and youth is punishable by a prison sentence of ten years to life; the trafficking of men is punishable by five to ten years imprisonment; the trafficking of persons for the purposes of pornography is punishable by five to ten years imprisonment; the trafficking of persons with an organized criminal group is punishable by ten years to life; and the penalty for *"serious crimes involving trafficking"* is ten years to life imprisonment, or death.[143]

In 1997, the regime also adopted the National Plan of Action to address the problem of human trafficking which they stated was implemented by recognizing child protection as one of the leading State interests.[144] To this end, the SPDC has maintained to have conducted child protection workshops at the township level in conjunction with UNICEF.[145] Meanwhile, the junta has maintained that State-sponsored organizations such as the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) has also been working with the UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) conducting trainings in various States and Divisions around the country on how best to prevent the trafficking of young women and girls. (For more information, see Chapter 14: Rights of Women).[146]

In addition to all of this work that the SPDC has maintained to have conducted to prevent the trafficking of persons, they have further maintained that they have also made considerable headway in terms of punishing those persons involved in the trafficking in persons. This, they assert is largely due to the cooperation of several State-sponsored organizations including the MWAF, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) and the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), in conjunction with the SPDC's own state/division, district and township level Peace and Development Councils. According to the junta, these organizations have conducted awareness-raising campaigns on trafficking at the local level, which had resulted in an estimated 830,000 people being educated on the risks of trafficking. In addition to all of this, the SPDC has further claimed that a number of organizations, including the MWAF, have initiated a micro-credit loan program for poor and vulnerable women as an added measure against trafficking.[147] As a consequence of all of this work that it purports to be doing, the SPDC has declared that for the period from 2000 to 2006, 354 Burmese women who were trafficked had been repatriated and reunited with their families.[148]

However, as with most areas in which the SPDC is failing the Burmese people in terms of human rights, what the regime states and what is reflected by the reality on the ground, are often two very different things.

In April 2007, the Office of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Burma remarked that, contrary to the claims of the SPDC, child trafficking was actually increasing with an estimated 10,000 girls being trafficked to brothels in Thailand alone each year.

> "*Internal migration of children as well as adults towards other centers of economic activity is increasing. These areas of vibrant economic activity are for the most part unregulated and involve in many cases illegal mining and logging and human trafficking, especially of women and children, both inside the country and across borders. Even though the numbers remain uncertain an estimated 10,000 girls are trafficked from Myanmar to Thai brothels alone every year.*"[149]

Then, in June 2007, the 2007 edition of the *Trafficking in Persons Report* by the US Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons claimed that the SPDC *"does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so"* and that *"Military and civilian officials are directly involved in trafficking for forced labour and unlawful conscription of child soldiers"*.[150]

Child trafficking is believed to have continued through Burma during 2007. Even though Burma's own domestic laws specifically prohibit all forms of child prostitution and child pornography, enforcement has fallen short at adequately combating these serious issues. Child prostitution and trafficking in girls has remained a major problem, especially in ethnic minority areas where, according to some organizations, girls are at particular risk where many have been trafficked both to other areas inside the country as well as across the international borders. Meanwhile in urban centres such as Rangoon and Mandalay, unnamed diplomatic representatives have reportedly attested to having observed a large number of female prostitutes who look to be no older than in their early teens; and brothels which offer young teenage virgins to their clients for additional fees.[151]

According to the US Department of State, several thousand Burmese children are believed to be trafficked internationally every year, with common destinations including Thailand, China, Bangladesh, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, and other countries in the Middle East.[152]

Child Trafficking – Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 7 February 2007, the Rangoon East District Court sentenced three brothers to lengthy prison for trafficking four women and two girls to one of Burma's neighbouring countries. According to the report, one of the brothers was sentenced to life imprisonment, while the other two each received sentences of ten years. The source failed to provide any further information on the three brothers or state which country the women and children had been trafficked to, although it is quite likely that their destination had been China given that the source was the official Chinese news agency, which has on a number of occasions used the euphemism *"unidentified neighbouring country*" when referring to China as a destination for trafficked young Burmese women and girls.[153]

On 18 February 2007, the Yamethin District Court in Mandalay Division sentenced 33 human traffickers to life imprisonment, for allegedly having trafficked 49 young women to China. He young women, whose ages were not stated, were lured by the traffickers with promises of high paying jobs, but were subsequently forced to marry Chinese men.[154]

On 23 February 2007, KHRG published the testimony of an unnamed villager in Dooplaya District, Karen State which highlighted the risks children from that area faced in terms of trafficking:

> *"Some of the villagers that didn't have enough food ... sent their son or daughter to Thailand to work. Some of them are in debt because they had to borrow money from other people to send their children to work in Thailand. ... Most of the youths went to Thailand to work. … In T--- village, at least one person from each family went to Thailand and some have two family members in Thailand"*.[155]

On 6 March 2007, the US Department of State reported having received credible reports of the trafficking of 85 Kachin women and girls from Kachin State into China. According to the original source, the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand (KWAT), the girls were lured by the prospect of obtaining jobs in China, however upon arrival they were forced either into prostitution or to wed Chinese men.[156]

On 9 December 2007, 35 Burmese migrants were arrested by Bangladeshi police in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh after they had crossed the border illegally with the intention of then proceeding to Malaysia. According to the report, the detainees, all of whom were from various parts of Arakan State, were to be taken to Malaysia by an organized trafficking ring. *"In Cox's Bazar, a syndicate exists which sends people to Malaysia. They charge between Taka 20,000 to 30,000 per person to send to Thailand"*. Of the group, at least seven were reported to be children; they included:

1. Sirazul Islam, 15;
2. Mohammad Ahwa, 17;
3. Rabiul Hassain, 13;
4. Abdul Bashar, 16;
5. Sayed Ahmed, 16;
6. Abul Hussain, 15; and
7. Elyas, 17.[157]

A young IDP child from the Leh Per Her IDP site in Pa'an District, Karen State in August 2007. *[Photo: KHRG]*

According to an article published in the *Irrawaddy* on 18 December 2007, the number of Burmese children trafficked to Thailand had increased, as a consequence of economic difficulties and social problems in Burma. The article highlighted that an organization called Burma ACT documented as many as 70 cases of child trafficking from Burma to Thailand during 2007. Meanwhile, Penpisut Jaisanit, a researcher with Thailand's Rajabhat University, found that the majority of Burmese child labourers working in Thailand were members of Burma's ethnic minorities.

> *"We found that the ethnic children were forced to beg by their parents, especially in Mae Sai. If they cannot collect enough money they are punished. Some girls under the age of 15 work in 'entertainment centers' and are sexually harassed at an age when they should be in school".*

Penpisut's research also uncovered that Burmese child labourers worked in six of Thailand's provinces, stretching from Chiang Rai in the north to Songkhla in the south. He also found that as many as 40 children worked collecting plastic and rubbish on the island under the Friendship Bridge which connects Thailand's Mae Sot and Burma's Myawaddy. *"They [migrant children] don't get pocket money if they attend school. If they collect plastic and sell it, they earn at least 20 baht per day. So, they prefer to keep working as street children"*.[158]

According to the report, *Caught Between Two Hells*, published in December 2007 by the Burma Women's Union (BWU), Burmese girls as young as 14 years of age have been sold to Chinese men as brides. "*Ma C was sold at the age of 14 to her purchaser, and he was very abusive to her so she wanted to escape"*.[159]

The following is the testimony of 20-year-old Ma Air who was trafficked to Thailand at the age of 17 under the guise that she was to be provided with work in a factory. However, upon arrival in Thailand, she was sold to a brothel in Chiang Mai where she was obliged to work as a prostitute:

> *"I was 17 years old and had never left my village before. One day this lady came and told us of how there was so much work in factories in Thailand and that the salvation to our family's financial [woes] would be solved by me working in Thailand. So with my parents blessing, I left. When I arrived here, I found out that the 'work' was not at a factory but at a brothel in Chiang Mai. I told them I didn't want to do it and tried to fight my way out of the house but they were stronger. I was locked in my room for a substantively long period of time. I spent days and days crying thinking my life was over. One night the 'big mother' came and said its time to 'break me' into work. She sent a strange man into my room. He raped me. This breaking period went on for about a week until finally I agreed to take my first client. She told me that if I resisted the client she would have to extend the breaking period so I stopped resisting"*.[160]

13.7 Child Labour

Despite the SPDC's assurances to the contrary, the use of child labour in Burma continued throughout 2007. This labour takes many forms, from children working in the fields alongside their parents or in teashops, through to prostitution, forced labour for the military or forced military service. Regardless of the nature of the labour being performed, child labour, and in particular, forced child labour, is committed in violation of numerous international conventions and other mechanisms.

There are a number of interrelated factors which first gave rise to child labour in Burma and which have also allowed the practice to perpetuate. The first of these is the pervasive militarization of the country which has brought with it an attendant rise in human rights violations. The perpetration of these human rights abuses, coupled with the egregious and self-serving economic policies of the junta, have resulted in widespread poverty of the general population. The general insolvency an hardship experienced by the majority of the population and the fact that the practice is culturally accepted in Burma has allowed child labour to continue largely unchecked.

To combat child labour, in June 1999, the ILO adopted the Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, also known as ILO Convention 182, in which ratifying States are obliged "*take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency*". Article 3a of the Convention defines worst forms of labour as *"all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict*".[161]

Burma has long been accused of employing forced labour, most notably by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Following years of sustained pressure by the ILO, in 1999, the SPDC issued Order #1/99 banning the use of forced labour, which was soon followed by a number of supplementary orders enshrining the prohibition of forced labour into domestic legislature.[162] Furthermore, in 1993, the SPDC passed the Child Law, which, among other things, declared that the minimum age of employment was set at 13 years of age. However, in spite of the existence of such laws, forced labour and child labour have continued. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription).

Although domestic laws have established the punishment of those that impose forced labour on others; in practice both State and military use of forced labour have remained a source of concern as evidence accumulates countrywide with reports of citizens and children being forced to work in numerous military, civil, and private venture projects both in urban and rural areas.[163]

In urban areas, child labour has increased notably, primarily because children can be hired at considerably lower cost than adults for the same jobs, in addition to the general economic pressures which have forced them into work to help support their families. This trend can be observed in the growing number of child street vendors and as waiters and waitresses in restaurants and teashops. According to local residents, children as young as between four and six work as waiters in teashops in Mandalay.[164] While in Rangoon, it has been estimated that as many as 100,000 children work in teashops.[165]

> "*[M]ore and more children aged between 6 and 7 were working in restaurants. When I asked these children why their parents had not sent them to school, they said that their parents could not afford to. They had to drop out at the 2nd or 3rd grade. They can't even calculate the price of 3 or 4 cups of coffee*".[166]

Numerous commercial mining operations have also reportedly employed children. In spite of the obvious dangers, in Kachin State, children were reported to labour alongside men and women for specks of gold and jade, doing backbreaking work that exposes them to toxic mercury. Similarly, in Mandalay, more than 100 factories cut and polish jade stones, where child labour constitutes an essential part of the production process. A *Los Angeles Times* newspaper article on this issue maintained that children were reported to:

> *"huddle on their haunches around glowing embers in metal braziers, melting doping wax on the end of dop sticks, plucking small pieces of jade from a cup, and carefully placing them on the wax blobs. They blow gently to harden the seals and then hand the sticks up the line to other children"*.[167]

In rural and conflict areas, consistent and credible reports have emerged of the military forcing civilian men, women and children to work on SPDC army projects, including the construction and maintenance of SPDC army camps, military access roads, bridges, Buddhist pagodas, and various money making ventures. Such labour is almost never paid, and villagers are required to provide their own food and tools to complete the work. Civilians have also been called on to serve military units as messengers, guides, sentries, and porters. In such instances, the villagers are typically ordered to walk in front of the soldiers who they are accompanying as both human minesweepers and human shields.[168] Reliable reports of children being forced to perform such tasks have also continued to surface.

In rural areas where demands for forced labour are an almost daily occurrence, many communities have responded by adopting strategies that allow them to keep the most productive members of their families working to maintain their livelihoods while less productive members have been sent to fulfil the forced labour quotas demanded by the military. In many cases, this has meant that families have sent their children to do the work in the place of adults. The following are excerpts from civilian villagers from Karen State explaining how they have had to send their children to perform forced labour for the SPDC.

> "*When SPDC soldiers force us to labour, everybody that can do the work goes. Women, old people and children also go. Counting only men there are not enough to do the work and sometimes it is the time when the men work in the field. The oldest men that go to work for the SPDC are about a little over 50 years old and the youngest children are 12 years old, but these civilians are not compensated. Instead of compensating us for working for them, we have to help by giving them the food and money that they demand from us*".[169]

> "*Sometimes those who have to go for 'loh ah pay' are sick and can't go, so ask their children to cancel their school and go instead of them. They have to bring whatever the SPDC or DKBA asks [them] to bring*".[170]

In areas adjacent to international borders with neighbouring countries, numerous organizations have continued to gather evidence of children crossing those borders on a daily basis in search of work only to return each evening taking their profits back to their families in Burma. While some children return to their homes at night, others remain as unregistered workers, exposing them to exploitation, arrest and deportation.[171] In spite of the considerable risks that children face doing this, as a response to the daily struggle that most families must face, many parents have forced their children to work and some children have even been sold by their parents.[172]

In August 2007, the *Irrawaddy* reported the story of 10-year-old Moe Moe who worked as a street vendor in the Thai border town of Mae Sot:

> *"Moe Moe shivers as she walks across the Thailand-Burma Friendship Bridge with a basket of tamarind and vegetables. … The bridge also represents a vital component in the livelihood of scores of school-aged Burmese children like Moe Moe. She walks daily from Myawaddy, a Burmese border town just across the Moei River, to sell seasonal produce in the Mae Sot market. 'I want to go to school, but my mother pulled me out because she can't afford [school fees].' … Just 10 years of age, Moe Moe is one of many child street vendors who cross the bridge early each morning to earn extra money for their families. … Moe Moe and the other children vendors from Myawaddy can earn better profits in Mae Sot. However, extra profits come with the risk of arrest by market authorities. 'Sometimes I have to run away when they come,' 11-year-old Maung Htwe, another of Mae Sot's many street vendors, told me. 'But luckily, I haven't ever been arrested so far.' … Maung Htwe attended primary school in Moulmein before his mother called him to live with her in Myawaddy. 'I left the school and followed my mother,' Maung Htwe told me with a soft smile.*[173]

On 18 December 2007, the Burmese Women's Union (BWU) released the report, *Caught Between Two Hells*, based on 149 interviews conducted with Burmese migrant women and girls in Thailand and China. According to the findings of the report, 19 percent of female migrant workers were adolescent and that the majority of these underage workers were employed in factories, construction sites and agricultural projects. Within its sample, BWU interviewed seven 13-year-old children who had all been working in their host countries for more than 3 years, indicating that children as young as 10 years of age have become migrant workers. Out of the 149 women and girls interviewed for the report, 24 percent were workers within the sex industry. Of this number, 22 percent were found to be under the age of 20.[174]

Despite the large amount of evidence indicating the continued use of child labour in Burma and the regular accusations levelled against the regime for being complicit in its use, the SPDC has continued to deny all such allegations and denounced them as false, labelling those making such charges as having a political agenda for doing so.[175]

Child Labour – Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 9 January 2007, the Kachin Development Network Group (KDNG) released a report in which they highlighted a case in which two young women, one of whom was only 16 years of age, were forced to work in the sex trade in Kachin State. Although, the incident occurred in 2005, it had gone unreported until the publication of the KDNG report. The two young women had originally been told that they would be sent to work in a restaurant, but were instead sent to a brothel where they were informed that their food would be withheld from them if they refused to work as prostitutes in the brothel. The two young women escaped from the brothel after an unspecified period of time but were apprehended by the local police who then sold them back to the brothel at the cost of 20,000 kyat. An unnamed representative of the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) who had been informed of the case intervened and secured their release after approaching the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) and the Regional Operations Command (ROC) who reportedly paid a sum of 100,000 kyat to the brothel owner to release the women. Soon after this had happened, officials from the ROC confiscated all documentation of the issue, presumably so as to cover up their involvement in the matter.[176]

On 29 January 2007, 16 villages from Cikha Township in Chin State were forced to repair the road connecting Cikha and Tonzang. The order reportedly came from SPDC army Tactical Operations Commander #1 Colonel Tin Hla. According to the source, one person from every household from each of the 16 villages had been compelled to participate in the maintenance works, all without pay and also while supplying their own food and tools. A number of under age boys and girls were reported to have been among the forced labourers.[177]

Burmese children performing forced labour on a drainage system in Myawaddy, Karen State. *[Photo: Irrawaddy]*

In February 2007, KHRG reported that in Toungoo District of northern Karen State, children aged only 15-16 years old were regularly obliged to perform forced labour for the SPDC. One female villager from the region had testified:

> *"We have to do 'loh ah pay' [forced labour] once a month. … All men, women, children, youth and old people have gone to do 'loh ah pay'. … The youngest people [who have had to work] are … 15 years"*.[178]

On 31 March 2007, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) reported that civilians from a number of villages located near the Kanbauk-Myaing Kalay gas pipeline in Mon State had been forced to stand sentry and patrol along the length of the pipeline. Many children, some as young as 13 years old, have been obliged to do this work. Many families, struggling to make ends meet and to provide enough food for their children, have been reluctantly forced to send their children to do such work for the SPDC, enabling them to continue working in their fields. Maung Min Aung, a 13-year-old boy from Yaung Daung village told HURFOM, *"I have to patrol the gas pipeline and the railway route the whole night (from 6 pm to 6 am) because my parents are too busy with their paddy farms"*.[179]

In May 2007, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that the SPDC had employed over 1,700 convict porters in its frontline operations in northern Karen State since late 2005, of which at least 265 were reported dead, many of whom had been executed by the soldiers. According to the report, there were more than 20 underage convict porters – boys under the age of 16 who had been brought to the region from Insein Prison in Rangoon – carrying loads for the military in Papun District alone.[180]

In August 2007, KHRG published excerpts from testimonies of Karen villagers from Papun District, Karen State, who had stated that the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) had also been employing children as forced labourers. The following is a selected excerpt from one such testimony.

> *"Children under 18 years had to go to cut bamboo for the DKBA as well. We went to cut bamboo near the DKBA camp. But from the place where we cut bamboo to the DKBA camp took one and half hours walking. Everybody had to do as the DKBA demanded 'without fail'".*[181]

In November 2007, it was reported that child labour in Mon State was on the rise due to the increasing insolvency of most families in the region. The report, entitled: called *Minor's Labour: Comprehensive report on the worst forms of child labour*, highlighted 44 cases of children working in rubber farms and orchards, rice-fields, charcoal burning factories, brick-making factories, tea and coffee shops, various types of stores, brothels, and other work places.[182]

On 28 December 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article about the situation facing Burmese children working in the gold and jade mines of Kachin State. The article had the following to say on the issue:

> *"Children barely big enough to swirl the heavy slurry toil alongside men and women, doing backbreaking work that exposes them to toxic mercury … On a recent day by the river, Ja Bu, 46, strained to lift shovel loads of slurry as a 10-year-old boy, ankle-deep in the cold, muddy water, worked a pan big enough for him to bathe in. Sixty miles west, Ja Bu's younger brother was searching for jade in the drainage ditch of a mine exhausted years ago by the junta".*[183]

13.8 Right to Education

According to Burma's own domestic laws, all children are required to receive a primary level education up to the completion of fourth standard. This education is supposed to be provided free of charge to all children irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status. However, in reality, education is not provided to Burma's youth equally or free of charge. That which is provided is expensive, substandard and discriminatory. (For more information, see Chapter 12: Right to Education).

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the SPDC allocated a paltry 1.3 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the education sector during 2007, as opposed to the 8.9 percent claimed by the SPDC.[184] The US Department of State has stated that during the 1999-2000 fiscal year, the SPDC spent only 100 kyat per child on education.[185]

In spite of such overwhelming evidence, the SPDC has continued to argue that they are adequately providing for the education of Burma's youth, with the SPDC Minister for Education stating that the Ministry of Education has:

> *"been carrying out development tasks of the basic education sector since 1998 and the higher education sector since 1996. In so doing, tasks of region-wide human resources development were undertaken in line with short-term and long-term plans. In the basic education sector, opening of new schools, upgrading of school buildings, enrolment of school going age children and opening of post-primary schools were included in the plans"*.[186]

Such a small allocation of public funds has resulted in a substandard education system incapable of providing an adequate education to Burma's youth. Teachers are underpaid, and during 2007 were reported to receive only 5,300 kyat per month in salary.[187] As a result, many teachers must work two or three jobs just to make ends meet, and time spent in the classroom or preparing for lessons diminishes proportionately. Many schools and individual teachers also demand admissions and tuition fees from the students to make up for the shortfall in public spending, despite the fact that education is supposed to be provided free of charge. In addition to this, students must also pay for their own uniforms, books and stationary. Far from being the free right that education is purported to be, commentators have estimated that "*annual fees, uniform and school materials at a typical government primary school add up to at least 60,000 kyat (US$50)*, *a financial burden that strains the household budgets of many Burmese parents"*.[188]

The introduction of *ad hoc* admissions fees opens the door to widespread corruption and extortion. In June 2007, it was reported that students in Thantlang Township, Chin State, were being charged admissions fees at higher rates than elsewhere and obliged to purchase school supplies from the authorities at prices higher than in local shops for similar goods.

> *"In places like Hakha and Falam Townships students pay 5,000 [kyat] for admission. But the admission fee in Thantlang Township is higher. People are confused about this disparity. Moreover, the District Educational Director has forced students to buy exercise books at 1,300 [kyat] per dozen and each village has to purchase 40 to 50 dozens. The same exercise books can be bought for 1,200 [kyat] per dozen in shops outside*".[189]

Further limiting children's access to education is the general impoverishment of the Burmese population. Runaway inflation and widespread extortion, among a number of other factors, has lead to falling family incomes, which has ultimately resulted in the inability of families to afford to send their children to school. As a result, many children are sent to work to help support the family. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

Many schools lack sufficient resources to provide their students with textbooks and other related school supplies. In the majority of cases, school infrastructure, is equally deficient, but especially so in rural and ethnic areas.

According to the SPDC, primary school enrolment during 2007 stood at 97.6 percent and the matriculation rate into secondary school was 78.3 percent.[190] In contrast of these figures, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) maintains that primary enrolments rates are far lower, with only 62 percent of children aged between five and nine entering school, while the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has reported that of those who do enrol, as many as 50 percent do not complete primary school.[191] According to these figures, only 31 percent of children in Burma complete their primary level education. Meanwhile, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, has stated that *"Only 40 [percent] of children complete five years of primary education (considerably fewer in conflict-affected border areas)"*.[192] Similarly, The Burma Fund (TBF) of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) has speculated that while 1.3 million children are eligible to enrol in kindergarten each year, some 300,000, or approximately 23 percent never do so.[193]

The cumulative effects of these issues as they relate to the education system have resulted in an education system that is in decline. The Resident UN Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator, Mr Charles Petrie, had the following to say about the state of education in Burma during 2007:

> "*A new generation is coming of age that is less well educated than their parents' generation they are replacing. The decline of a previously stronger education system not only deprives generations of children of a good start in life, but moreover seriously impedes the capacity of the people of Myanmar to overcome chronic poverty in the immediate term as well as the ability of the country to develop and sustain democratic practices in the future*. … *Increased impoverishment is also resulting in a greater number of children being unable to complete primary education. More than forty percent of the children enrolled are unable to do so*".[194]

In the face of such a deplorable education sector, many children go outside the State-sponsored system to receive their schooling. Such non-State schools are closely monitored and discouraged by the authorities as they work to undermine the SPDC's control over the sector.

Traditionally, education in Burma has been provided Buddhist monasteries and other religious institutions including Christian churches, and Muslim mosques. Most Buddhist families across the country send their young children to monasteries where they undertake their Buddhist novitiate. While many children only remain in the monastery for a few weeks, some stay much longer and obtain their full primary education there.[195] (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

According to an article published in the *Irrawaddy*, Burma is home to an estimated 1,300 monastery schools that offer free primary education up to fifth standard. These schools represent an important alternative for parents who cannot afford to send their children to State-run schools. It has been estimated that during 2007, some 190,000 children attended

such schools.[196] However, many children who complete their primary schooling in these institutions find it difficult to enter higher levels of education at State-run middle and high schools because their families are often unable to afford the high school fees demanded at such schools.

Young Karen IDPs continuing their studies in the forests of Papun District, Karen State in February 2007 despite having been forced from their homes by ongoing SPDC army attacks. *[Photo: KHRG]*

In spite of the fact that these schools not only provide an education to much of Burma's youth, especially to those in the lower socio-economic bracket, and also relieve some of the burden on the under-funded State-sponsored system, the SPDC works to impede the work of these schools, rather than assist them. In 1998, the junta issued a decree which banned monasteries from upgrading primary schools so as to permit them to provide secondary education.[197] The logic behind such a move is unclear, but may have something to do with the fact that the SPDC fears that the existence of such schools will threaten their iron grip over the education sector, in addition to educating children to actually think for themselves.

Education in Rural and Conflict Areas

Though the state of education in Burma as a whole is poor, the situation in rural and conflict areas is even more desperate. Statistics have suggested that as many as 84 percent of all children who drop out of primary school live in rural areas, where the increased levels of militarization, the widespread human rights abuses which invariably accompany it, the lack of physical security, the general insolvency of the population all hinder the chances for those children to access and finish even basic education.[198]

SPDC army attacks on civilian villages in rural and ethnic areas have resulted in large levels of displacement. Displacement, in turn affects children's ability to access education. When villagers are forced to flee into the forest to evade SPDC army patrols, their children are unable to regularly attend school. Moreover, the soldiers often destroy entire villages, burning homes, places of worship, and schools to the ground. Anything left behind is typically stolen or destroyed and school supplies have been no exception to this. Displacement also adds additional strains to an already burden subsistence existence. With regular demands of forced labour and extortion and food supplies deliberately targeted for destruction, education is often forced to adopt a position of secondary importance alongside

food security. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

However, in the face of these myriad problems, many displaced communities have still attempted the continuation of their children's education as a means of preserving a sense of community balance and dignity while in hiding, many times only with the minimal support they get from external sources. In relation to this, one displaced villager from Lu Thaw Township in northern Karen State told KHRG that *"Because the SPDC is active near my neighbours' village we have had to flee from our village. The school year is not finished yet so the children have had to continue their schooling under the trees in the jungle"*.[199] Similarly, in March 2007, KHRG reported how local villagers from Htee Moo Kee village in Papun District of Karen State had rebuilt their village school which had previously been destroyed by SPDC soldiers. According to the report, the reconstruction began soon after the soldiers withdrew from the village, though in spite of the reconstructive works, the newly built school supported only 70 students and 13 teachers, where previously it had over 100 students and 16 teachers.[200]

Displaced children living at a hiding site in Toungoo District study together in January 2007 despite the increasing SPDC military aggression in the area. The maintenance of education for local children serves to provide them with some continuity in their otherwise turbulent lives and also strengthens community bonds and upholds the dignity of local people in the face of the SPDC's efforts to eradicate such non-military-controlled communities. *[Photo and caption: KHRG]*

In rural areas there are typically three types of schools, which can be defined by how they are financed and who administers them. These are commonly referred to as community schools, State-run schools and missionary schools. Of these groups, the first if these are those schools which are initiated and supported by local communities. It are the villagers themselves who organise, build and support the school. The second type of schools are those located in SPDC-controlled areas which are ostensibly financed and organized by the SPDC. Despite having been labelled as "State schools", such schools typically receive minimal support from the SPDC. The third and final type of school to be discussed here are those which are funded by Christian or Muslim religious groups. However, such schools are often targeted by the military on the grounds of religious discrimination. In April 2007, KHRG explained the ways in which Christian schools "*have been anathema to the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] in particular, which is averse to Christian teachers in Karen areas"*.[201] (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

Likewise, the Muslim Rohingya have long denounced not having access to schools beyond the primary level, owing to the fact that the junta has reserved places in State-run secondary schools for citizens – a right which has been denied the Rohingya.[202] (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights).

Similarly, students from Kachin State who had studied at schools administered by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) were told in March 2007 that they would not be eligible to sit for their matriculation examinations in Sumpra Bum, Kachin State. This new order reportedly affected over 1,000 students attending KIO-administered schools, who were strongly advised to change schools if they wished to graduate. Children studying at KIO schools had previously been permitted to sit for their exams in Sumpra Bum since 1994 when the KIO entered into a ceasefire pact with the junta.[203]

In rural areas, most villages only offer education up to the completion of the primary level, so students wishing to continue their studies must travel to larger villages or towns where such facilities are available. However, many parents are unable or unwilling to send their children away to study, not only because of the extra cost of doing so, but also as a result of the added dangers that this option attracts. Depending on where they live, students may have to walk long distances, through forests that may be contaminated with landmines and through which SPDC army units regularly patrol in search of the internally displaced who are frequently shot-on-sight. The drop out rates of girls in rural areas is approximately double that of boys in rural areas, in part due to the increased risk of sexual assault during such travel to and from school. (For more information, see Section 6.3: Sexual Assault against Children and Chapter 14: Rights of Women).

In many cases, but particularly in eastern Burma adjacent to the border with Thailand, the dangers associated with sending their children to other towns or villages to further their studies has influenced the decision of many parents to send their children to study in refugee camps in Thailand, where education is provided free of charge and students stay at lower cost to the family and can live free from the threat of attack by SPDC army soldiers.[204]

However, this option is not free of dangers either, as the following case illustrates. On 15 December 2007, Ike Oo, a Karenni refugee student living in Karenni Camp 1 in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand was shot and killed by camp security personnel. The incident occurred after Thai border guards attached to the *Aw Sor* paramilitary force had interrupted a student celebration and arrested a number of students. A column of students marched on the soldiers' camp in protest to demand the release of their friends, but as they approached the encampment, the soldiers opened fire. Official reports maintained that the soldiers *"were forced to fire into the air to break up the demonstration"*, however this version of events seems unlikely given that the soldiers held the high ground and that Ike Oo was struck in the neck. If the soldiers had indeed fired into the air, none of the students would have been shot. One of the students present reported that *"They opened fire and a student named Ike Oo was shot in his neck and died soon afterwards … Another student was hit on the leg"*.[205]

Meanwhile, even in the face of all of this evidence to the contrary, the SPDC maintains that in all such rural areas, it, through the Ministry of Education and State-sponsored organizations such as the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) is *"protecting children through education programs and support"*. The SPDC has further maintained that *"children in remote areas are provided with mobile schools with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education"*. The SPDC has also claimed that the Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs had opened 27 *"training centres for youth development"* and 34 schools of *"home science"* in Burma's border regions.[206] However, where these schools are located and precisely what benefit they provide to the community remains to be seen.

13.9 Right to Health

One of the leading factors affecting children's access to healthcare in Burma is the trifling budgetary allocation awarded to the healthcare sector. Even according to official statistics, which are almost always embellished, the SPDC allocates less than 0.5 percent of Burma's GDP to the healthcare sector.[207] As with other sectors, the budgetary allocation to the healthcare sector has been but a fraction of the military and defence expenditure. In the 1998/99 fiscal year, public spending on healthcare was 22.22 percent of public spending on defence for the same period. While by the 2003/04 fiscal year, public healthcare expenditure had dropped dramatically to only three percent of that allocate to defence. According to the *Burma Economic Review*, UNICEF has denounced the *"dramatic decline"* in spending on healthcare since the early 1990's.[208] Meanwhile, the UNDP has accused the SPDC of having one of the worst budgetary allocations for healthcare of any country, and certainly the worst for the region.[209] (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health).

Further influencing children's access to healthcare is that as one of the more vulnerable groups of any given population, children are often feel the effects of the widespread human rights violations being committed in Burma to a greater degree than the adult population. As such, children are often more sensitive to the effects of these abuse, in particular those which can have an adverse impact on health.

Despite the claims of the regime that it is adequately providing for the health and well being of population in general, but in particular that of children, Burma's youth continued to suffer from poor rights and access to healthcare during 2007. According to UNICEF, who typical use official statistics provided to them by the SPDC, in 2005, the infant (under one year old) mortality rate was reported to stand at 75 per 1,000 live births, and the child (under five years old) mortality rate at 105 per 1,000 live births. These are shown to be extremely high when compared to neighbouring Bangladesh and Thailand which possess infant mortality rates of 52 and 7, respectively, and child mortality rates of 69 and 8, respectively for every 1,000 live births.[210]

During 2007, children continued to die from easily preventable and readily treatable illnesses such as diarrhoea and influenza. For example, at the end of March 2007, five persons from Dimawhso Township, Karenni State had died from diarrhoea, two of whom were children. According to a representative of the Karenni Central Social Development Department, *"Two persons from Dawnyeaku village, two from Dawtamagyi village and one from Dawsawphya village died"*. He added that although approximately 50 people were suffering from the affliction, children were among some of the more susceptible, adding that *"Mostly children, especially under 10 years of age, have been afflicted by [diarrhoea]. It causes loose motion at least three to 20 times a day. The excreta are white in colour and the smell is very bad"*.[211]

Similarly, on 10 November 2007, it was reported that many cases of persons suffering with severe bouts of diarrhoea had been recorded in northern Arakan State and that four persons from Maungdaw Township had died, including seven-year-old Robiya.[212]

Meanwhile, on 30 April 2007, it was reported that seven children from Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State, had recently died after having contracted influenza. According to the head doctor in Mudon General Hospital, many other children from Mudon and Kyaik Mayaw Townships under the age of ten had also contracted the disease.[213]

Malnutrition

According to estimates provided by UNICEF, 32 percent of children under the age of five suffered from moderate levels of malnutrition during 2005, while as many as nine percent suffered from severe malnutrition.[214] It has been estimated that as many as 100,000 malnourished children have died each year.[215]

Meanwhile, in May 2007, Save the Children UK (SCUK) has assessed that many poor families in Burma did not have enough money and resources to feed their children an adequate healthy and balanced diet, further stating that child malnutrition is endemic in the most marginal parts of the country. In such areas, it was reported that families were forced to live on between 20 cents and US$1 a day, at a time when it costs the equivalent of US$1.15 a day to feed a family of five.[216]

Child malnutrition rates in rural areas and areas experiencing armed conflict are considerably higher than the national average shown above. In these areas, civilian crops and food supplies are frequently targeted for destruction for SPDC army units to depopulate such areas by starving the villagers out and so that the villagers cannot provide food to resistance forces who operate in these areas. Independent studies have shown that children in these areas, whose family's food supply has been destroyed, are 4.4 times more likely to suffer from malnutrition than children in those households whose food supply had not been compromised.[217] (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

Malaria

With as much as 70 to 80 percent of the population living in areas in which malaria is endemic, and with approximately 75 percent of all reported cases being of the deadly *Plasmodium falciparum* strain, it is hardly surprising that malaria, accounting for approximately 42 percent of all deaths, is not only the leading killer in Burma, but also that Burma holds the unenviable position of having the highest rate of malaria-related deaths per capita in the world.[218] During the seventh ASEAN health ministers meeting in Penang, Malaysia during April 2007, the SPDC provided official figures which showed that Burma accounts for approximately 53 percent of all malaria-related deaths for the entire region.[219]

While the SPDC maintained in March 2007, that mortality and morbidity rates for malaria, the single largest killer of children in Burma, had declined in recent years, an independent report published in July 2007, has shown that there continues to be an average of 3,000 deaths per year due to the disease. Many of these deaths are children, whose bodies, often weakened by malnutrition, lack the strength to combat the disease. However, even these estimates were considered extremely conservative as only as many as 40 percent of all cases go reported to public health facilities.[220]

The situation in rural areas is even more acute. In Chin and Karenni States, for instance, the malaria rate is approximately four times higher than the national average, while in Kachin State, the rate jumps to almost five times that of the national average.[221] According to the Back Pack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT), malaria has been the cause of almost half of all deaths among internally displaced populations, with children being among the most vulnerable.[222]

HIV/AIDS

Children in Burma have struggled with one of the worst HIV/AIDS epidemics in Asia. According to statistics provided by the Policy Research and Development Institute in Thailand, as many as 230,000 Burmese people, including 6,000 children were living with HIV/AIDS in 2007.[223] However, in spite of such a large proportion of the population directly affected by the disease, the SPDC spent an average of only US$0.60 per person on its HIV/AIDS program during 2007.[224] The lion's share of spending on HIV/AIDS programs came from international donors, which in 2007 amounted to US$28 million – still a far cry short of the US$41.7 million desperately needed.[225]

According to the United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), western Burma is the most neglected in terms of support for HIV/AIDS sufferers where not a single AIDS patient received Anti Retroviral Treatment during 2007, including the estimated 8-10,000 children diagnosed with the disease.

> *"If the rule book is followed, all HIV-infected children should be given ART [anti-retroviral treatment]. But not one of the estimated 8,000 to 10,000 children in Sagaing division and Chin state have access to these vital medicines. It's a horrible example of indifference meted out to its HIV-positive children by a government"*.[226]

In May 2007, it was reported that the number of girls and young women in Mon State who had turned to prostitution had increased dramatically. According to the report, this was a result of rising economic hardship with young women under the age of 18 turning to prostitution to help support their families.[227] It has been estimated that over 30 percent of sex workers in Burma are afflicted with HIV/AIDS, and the commencement of this type of work also exposes these young women to contracting the disease.[228] It has been argued that young women and girls working in the sex industry face an even greater risk to contracting HIV/AIDS than their adult counterparts because they lack the knowledge and the experience to protect themselves, and are less likely to protest when their clients insist on not using condoms.[229]

As a result of the continuing SPDC army offensive in northern Karen State, children in Toungoo District face severe challenges to food, health and education. As can be seen in this photo, taken in December 2007, the child on the left suffers from malnutrition because his family's food supplies ran low as they were living as IDPs in the forest. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Dengue

In August 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that there had been a 29 percent increase in the number of cases of dengue fever in Burma since 2005. In 2006 alone, over 11,000 cases were reported for all age groups, from which there were 130 child deaths. In the period from January to July 2007, the SPDC Ministry of Health confirmed the deaths of approximately 100 children from dengue, 32 of who had died in July alone. During this same period, the Ministry of Health reported that there had been some 3,000 cases of dengue.[230]

In April and May 2007, there was an outbreak of dengue in Mon State which resulted in the deaths of a number of children. According to local residents, as many as 17 children died from dengue fever in the Kyaung-ywa village clinic in Ye Township. However, only seven deaths were reported to the authorities by the health workers, for fear of being blamed for the deaths.[231] (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health). In a separate article, it was reported that in August 2007, hospitals and clinics in Moulmein were still *"full of Dengue patients"* and that most of the patients were under 12 years of age.[232]

In June 2007, there were also fresh outbreaks of the disease due to the commencement of the rainy season with at least three or four people being admitted to hospital daily. Yet, even in the face of the obvious seriousness of the disease, Dr. Daw Tin Aye Myint, head of Insein Township General Hospital in Rangoon maintained that *"There are about three to four and sometimes about five to six patients being admitted daily. And there are a number of children as well. … Its more like[ly] recurring [cases] and there is nothing to be alarmed about"*. According to *Mizzima News*, who reported the outbreak, an estimated 10,000 children suffer from dengue each year resulting in 300 and 400 deaths.[233]

Meanwhile, an outbreak of dengue haemorrhagic fever, the deadliest strain of the virus, left doctors at Rangoon Children's Hospital lacking the optimism of Dr. Daw Tin Aye Myint. *"Between 150 and 200 children are arriving at the hospital with the disease every day. … We do not have enough doctors here to do check ups on all of them"*, reported one unnamed doctor.[234] Similarly, outbreaks were reported to have occurred in Pegu (Bago) Division around this time with one doctor reporting examining ten children a day presenting with dengue haemorrhagic fever.

> *"My clinic receives about 10 children with hemorrhagic dengue fever every day. … But there are a lot of clinics like mine in town so it's difficult to tell how many children have been suffering with the fever. Children from the villages suffer from the disease more than children in the cities because of the higher numbers of mosquitoes".*[235]

Other Specific Health Issues Affecting Children

Though it has been eradicated from most countries around the world, polio remains a problem in Burma and a number of cases were reported to have occurred during 2007.

It was reported on 28 April 2007, that the Bangladeshi border town of Teknaf was on high alert after a two year old boy was found to have contracted polio in Maungdaw, Arakan State.[236] Soon after, in May 2007, it was reported that the disease had spread with as many as seven children in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State identified as having contracted polio.[237] On 18 May 2007, it was reported that one of the children, identified as Maung Ni, had made a number of trips to neighbouring Bangladesh with his family seeking better treatment than what was available in Burma.[238]

In July 2007, the regime maintained that 2.5 million children under five have been inoculated against polio. Although this figure, like so many which originate from the SPDC, should be weighed with a liberal pinch of salt. The polio vaccination program, which has been implemented throughout the country by UNICEF and WHO, is still unable to access many rural areas, particularly those still experiencing armed conflict. As a result many children living in these areas have not been vaccinated, highlighting the fallibility of the junta's claims which have maintained that in 2003 at least 95 percent of the nation's children had already been immunized.[239]

Burma remains one of the only countries in the world where the vitamin deficiency affliction, Beriberi is a leading cause of infant mortality. According to the April 2007 report of the UN Resident Humanitarian Coordinator, beriberi is the fifth leading cause of death among infants.[240]

Moreover, measles is another of the leading causes of death of children under the age of five. In July 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had prevented the launch of UNICEF's national campaign for measles aimed at vaccinating 13 million Burmese children. According to a UN official, the junta had cancelled the vaccination program incongruously fearing *"potential political fallout"* from deaths caused by adverse reactions to the vaccine. The program was finally allowed to move ahead in early 2007.[241]

On 8 April 2007, a 12-year-old boy from Maungdaw Township, Arakan State died from typhoid. Ahmed Khobir, 12, an orphan from Aley Than Kyaw village died in Maungdaw hospital after a two week fight with the disease.[242]

On 27 November 2007, seven-year-old Ma Nan Kham Than from Kengtung Township in Shan State was diagnosed with Burma's first human case of avian influenza. The girl received treatment from WHO personnel and was later discharged from hospital with a clean bill of health on 12 December 2007.[243]

Child Health in Rural and Conflict Areas

In rural areas and especially in those areas experiencing armed conflict, the situation facing children and their access to healthcare is even more dire and their needs more immediate. Children in these areas are confronted with many of the same problems as those living in urban areas, but the political climate, nature of human rights abuses, and ongoing armed conflict magnifies what is an already desperate situation. The situation of health in rural areas of eastern Burma undergoing continuing armed conflict has been stated to be on a par with countries in the Horn of Africa.[244]

In November 2007, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) compared some of the basic health indicators in Burma to those in certain sub-Saharan African countries, to illustrate the deplorable state of healthcare in Burma in which children are more likely to be moderately or severely malnourished in Burma.

> *"Every year, as many children under five die in Burma (105,000) as do in [The] Sudan (106,000). A child is more likely to be moderately or severely underweight in Burma (32 percent) than in many Sub-Saharan African countries. The figures are roughly similar for Chad (28 percent), Nigeria (29 percent), Rwanda (29 percent), Democratic Republic of Congo (31 percent) and Mali (33 percent)"*.[245]

In such areas, direct causal relationships have been shown to exist between the perpetration of human rights violations and poor conditions of health.[246] SPDC army soldiers routinely destroy civilian villagers' crops and food supplies, raze entire villages, and force thousands into a life of uncertainty, fear and flight as internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in hiding in the forests. The areas along the eastern border with Thailand, where such abuses are arguably the most widespread and committed the most systematically, and where the highest numbers of internally displaced live in hiding, are typically very mountainous and temperatures can drop dramatically. Many of these areas are endemic with the often fatal *P. falciparum* strain of malaria, and when villagers flee they must often do so without blankets and mosquito nets, thus exposing them to the cold, the mosquitoes, and to disease. Internal displacement is also marked by a general lack of access to medicine in which the SPDC actively blocks villagers' access to such commodities and declaring it illegal to be in the possession of medicines for fear that they will provide it to armed opposition groups.[247] (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

Malaria is the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in rural Burma, accounting for 42 percent of all deaths. In these areas, as many as 20 percent of all children will die before their fifth birthday, almost half of whom die from malaria.[248]

According to a report published by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, internally displaced children under the age of five were 2.4 times to die than those who had not been displaced. Similarly, internally displaced children were shown to be 3.1 times more likely to suffer from malnutrition than those living under more stable conditions. Moreover, those families whose food had been destroyed or stolen were 50 percent more likely to have a death in the family, and children from these families were 4.4 times more likely to suffer from malnutrition than those families whose food supply had not been compromised.[249]

The following table summarizes the data published by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health regarding infant and child mortality for Burma. A simple comparison of official figures for all of Burma shown alongside figures for IDP communities in eastern Burma strongly suggest that the under five child mortality rate in conflict areas is more than double the national average. Basic health indicators for a number of other countries are also shown as comparison.[250]

	Mortality Rates Per 1,000 Live Births	
	Infants	Children Under 5
Thailand	18	21
Burma (official)	76	106
IDPs in conflict zones of eastern Burma	91	221
Congo, D. R.	129	205
Sierra Leone	165	283

According to some studies, such as one published in *Tropical Medicine and International Health* in July 2006, infant and child mortality rates in conflict zones of eastern Burma are even higher than those reproduced in the table above. According to the findings of this research, infant mortality in eastern Burma has been shown to be as high as 122-135 deaths per 1,000 live births while the under-five child mortality rate has reached levels of 276-291 per 1,000 live births.[251]

Endnotes

[1] The SLORC was the name of the military regime which ruled Burma from 1988 until 1997 when it was replaced by the SPDC.
[2] Source: Convention on the Rights of the Child, Preamble, adopted 20 November 1989.
[3] Source: Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Myanmar, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, United Nations, CEDAW/C/MMR/, 4 September 2007.
[4] Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices-2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
[5] Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices-2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
[6] Source: Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict to the UN General Assembly, A/61/275, UN General Assembly 61st Session, 17 August 2006.
[7] Source: *Burma Issues & Concerns: Vol 4; The Security Dimensions*, Altsean Burma. April 2007.
[8] Source: Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative U Nyunt Swe, the Union of Myanmar and Leader of the Myanmar Observer Delegation at the Fourth Session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 23 March 2007.
[9] Source: *Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar*, Security Council, 16 November 2007.
[10] Source: *Burma Issues & Concerns: Vol 4; The Security Dimensions*, Altsean Burma. April 2007.
[11] Source: *Internal Displacement in Eastern Burma: 2007*, TBBC, October 2007.
[12] Source: *Landmines, Killings and Food Destruction: Civilian life in Toungoo* District, KHRG, 9 August 2007.
[13] Source: *A Campaign of Brutality. Report and Analysis of Burma Army Offensive Against the People of Northern Karen State, Eastern Burma*, FBR, May 2007.
[14] Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices-2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
[15] Sources: "Murdered Refugee Girl Laid to Rest," *Rhododendron News*, Volume X, No. II, CHRO, April 2007; "Chin Community Mourns the Tragic Death of Dally Sui," *Rhododendron News*, Volume X, No. II, CHRO, April 2007.
[16] Source: *Road construction, attacks on displaced communities and the impact on education in northern Papun District*, KHRG, 26 March 2007.
[17] Source: "KNU Press Release No. 10/07," KNU, 2 April 2007.
[18] Source: *A Campaign of Brutality. Report and Analysis of Burma Army Offensive Against the People of Northern Karen State, Eastern Burma*, FBR, May 2007.
[19] Source: *Landmines, Killings and Food Destruction: Civilian life in Toungoo* District, KHRG, 9 August 2007.
[20] Source: "Deaf Villager Shot and Killed at Point Blank," FBR, 21 May 2007.
[21] Source: "KNU Press Release No. 16/07," KNU, 11 May 2007.
[22] Source: *Provoking Displacement in Toungoo District: Forced labour, restrictions and* attacks, KHRG, 30 May 2007.
[23] Source: "Burma Army Continues to Rape and Kill as National Convention Re-Convenes," CSW, 20 July 2007.
[24] Source: "DKBA Claim Civilian Deaths in Latest Clash," DVB, 2 July 2007.
[25] Source: "General Human Rights Violations during July 2007," CIDKP, July 2007.
[26] Source: *Landmines, Killings and Food Destruction: Civilian life in Toungoo* District, KHRG, 9 August 2007.
[27] Sources: "13-Year-Old Boy Blinded By Burma Army Landmine," FBR, 5 December 2007; "Burma Army Kills Three Villagers, Hundreds Flee New Attacks," FBR, 6 December 2007.
[28] Source: "Ethnic Rebels Kill 8, Wound 6 in Burma Highway Attack," *Irrawaddy*, 20 December 2007.
[29] Source: "Boy, Sister Injured by Land Mine Explosion in Pegu Division," *Irrawaddy*, 7 December 2007.
[30] Source: *A Campaign of Brutality. Report and Analysis of Burma Army Offensive Against the People of Northern Karen State, Eastern Burma*, FBR, May 2007.
[31] Source: "Jittery Burma Army Soldiers nearly Kill A Family," IMNA, 9 July 2007.
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[34] Source: Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Combined second and third periodic reports of States parties, Myanmar, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, United Nations, CEDAW/C/MMR/, 4 September 2007.

[35] Source: Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006 Entitled "Human Rights Council," Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro," Human Rights Council, A/HRC/4/14, Fourth session, Item 2 of the provisional agenda, 12 February 2007.
[36] Source: *Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar*, Security Council, 16 November 2007.
[37] Source: "Gang Rape by Soldiers Reported in Kachin State," *Irrawaddy*, 15 February 2007.
[38] Source: "Organized Protest against 7 SPDC Rapists," KNG, 2 April 2007.
[39] Source: *Rhododendron News*, Volume X, No. I, CHRO, February 2007.
[40] Source: "Prostitution Thrives as Young Girls Struggle in Mon State," *Kaowao News*, 27 May 2007.
[41] Source: "Village Chairman Killed While Attempting Rape in Maungdaw," *Kaladan News*, 9 April 2007.
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[44] Source: "Girl Raped and Killed in Maungdaw," *Kaladan News*, 18 November 2007.
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[48] Source: *Ibid*.
[49] Source: *Ibid*.
[50] Sources: "Kachin Girls Sent To Prison for Reporting Being Rape Victims," DVB News, 2 April 2007: "Four Burmese Military Rape Victims are Put in Jail," KNG, 2 March 2007.
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[53] Source: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices-2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
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[55] Source: "Let the International Criminal Court (ICC) Decide the Actions of the Burma Army," SHAN, 17 December 2007.
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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 14

RIGHTS OF WOMEN

"States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women."

- Article 2, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

14.1 Introduction

> *"Only if we end this bad system will the future of Burma's people, including my daughter's, be bright... I love my daughter. I had to leave her, but I believe she will later understand why."*
>
> - Nilar Thein (35) mother, wife, and democracy activist in hiding[1]

Representatives of Burma's State Peace and Development Council ('SPDC'), the ruling military junta, frequently begin any discussion about the rights of the country's women by relying upon what is described as Burma's strong history of formal equality for women.[2] This is perhaps one interpretation of the relative autonomy afforded to Burmese women traditionally.[3] However, it has limited value in assessing the rights of women in Burma today. Equally, patriarchal assumptions about the role of women have contributed to the development of social norms and political and economic structures that continue to hinder the advancement of women in the public sphere.[4] And perhaps more importantly, recent history has all but destroyed the collective capacity of Burmese women to attain real equality.

It has been recognised internationally that it is incumbent upon national governments to take steps to eradicate disadvantage and discrimination against women. Burma has formally accepted this: it is a signatory to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women ('CEDAW').[5] Both the 1947 and 1974 Burmese Constitutions reiterate the principle of sexual equality, and some legislative and policy measures of late have attempted to meet specific concerns such as maternity leave entitlements, anti-trafficking laws, and increased healthcare services for pregnant women.[6]

These are positive steps but they are insufficient to outweigh the extreme disadvantages occasioned by the regime's unwillingness to prioritise and protect the basic human rights of its people. To take the examples above: maternity leave is rarely granted or enforced in practice;[7] dire economic circumstances are fuelling increasing numbers of women prepared to leave Burma for work and falling prey to human trafficking rings procuring sex workers or forced marriages.[8] Moreover, a failure by the SPDC government to dedicate sufficient funding to the healthcare system[9] means that many medical services must be paid for privately, effectively excluding a growing number of impoverished women.[10] At the same time, the provision of free alternative care by non-government organisations ('NGOs') has been limited by increasingly onerous conditions placed upon their operations within the country.[11]

At odds with any realisation of gender equality, the military junta has concentrated all political power in male hands, women being barred from joining the military.[12] There is little actual recognition or promotion of gender equality at the basic government level. In the context of the pending referendum, only five percent of delegates to the constitution-making National Convention were women.[13] In April 2007, a representative for an alternative constitution-drawing committee, drawn from representatives of a number of opposition groups in exile, 30 percent of which are female, announced the committee's agreement upon a federal constitution which *inter alia* provides guarantees for the preservation and promotion of ethnic persons and women's rights.[14]

In August and September 2007, the world's eyes were opened to the desperation that prompted tens of thousands of Burmese people – including many women – to risk their lives and personal security by publicly protesting against the extraordinary economic pressures brought to bear upon them by the junta's economic mismanagement. Disproportionate spending on the military and inadequate expenditure on infrastructure, healthcare and education has had a marked impact upon women, especially the significant numbers from

poor, rural and ethnic communities.[15] Healthcare and health education for these communities are grossly inadequate or inaccessible, hence women are vulnerable to problems arising from sexual activity, pregnancy and childbirth: unwanted and unsafe pregnancies, unsafe abortions, maternal and child mortality, and sexually transmitted diseases. Opportunities for empowerment and advancement have been thwarted by lack of access to employment, education and healthcare, the pervasiveness of traditional gender constructs and the additional strains placed upon families by poverty and, in the border areas, constant military activity.[16]

A most troubling aspect of women's rights In Burma is the continuing reports of widespread gender-specific sexual violence and abuse committed by military forces in the border areas. A significant number of rape cases have been documented in recent years. Their systemic nature has led to concerns of specific targeting of some ethnic and religious groups. However, the junta denies this,[17] and the practices continue with the ostensible sanction of those higher up the command.[18]

It is the confluence of all these features of disadvantage and discrimination in the case of ethnic minority women in the border regions, which leaves them the most vulnerable of all. Recognising this, in January 2007 a draft resolution on Burma presented to the United Nations ('UN') Security Council urged *inter alia* as follows:[19]

> *"Calls on the Government of Myanmar to cease military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions and in particular to put an end to the associated human rights and humanitarian law violations against persons belonging to ethnic nationalities, including widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence carried out by members of the armed forces."*

The resolution was opposed by the SPDC representative and vetoed by China and Russia.[20]

In October 2007, the UN Security Council again 'expressed concern' over gender-based violence during conflict, with the U.S. and U.K. specifically naming Burma, Darfur and the Congo. The Council urged increased female participation in government and the taking of specific steps to protect women and girls from such violence. The SPDC representative refuted that rape was being used strategically by the State and instead sought to blame other opposition groups.[21]

The junta has previously failed to adopt measures aimed at protecting women in the border areas as part of the "Platform for Action" developed at the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, China by the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1995.[22] Aspects of the platform adopted by other countries such as poverty, health, women in armed conflict, power and decision-making and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women were not adopted by Burma.[23]

The SPDC stance is telling. It cannot merely be accused of failing to do enough. It has not undertaken basic steps to promote gender equality in the public sphere. But further, it fails to act to protect its citizens, including women, when made aware of human rights abuses, thereby further entrenching gender disadvantage and discrimination.

14.2 Women in Politics

> *"We are outraged at the use of gender-based violence and verbal abuse as weapons against women leading the protests. Women in Burma have a long history of active participation in the forefront of resistance movements during times of crisis, and again women are now taking a leading role to show their defiance against the regime's unlawful acts and injustice."*[24]
>
> - Women's League of Burma, September 2007

The militarization of Burmese society has had a weighted effect on the female population, who are precluded from entrance to the military, providing some support to traditional gender biases and preventing females from rising to positions of influence in the current government.[25]

However, women have been extremely active in the opposition democratic movement. Hundreds were killed when they took to the streets in the 1988 student movement, and some rose to prominent leadership positions in the largest opposition party, the National League for Democracy ('NLD') with 16 women elected to Parliament in 1990, including Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as leader. One female MP remains in exile and a number were imprisoned.[26] As has been widely publicised, Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest – where she has been on and off since 1989. One other female MP, Dr May Win Myint, is one of two MPs remaining in custody. Dr Myint finished serving a seven and a half year prison term in 2004, but each year since, the military has increased her sentence by a further year.[27]

In November 2007, it was reported by the Association for Assistance of Political Prisoners (AAPP) that during the 2007 military crackdowns upon the Saffron Revolution, at least 19 women disappeared and 131 women protestors, including six nuns, were arrested. Eye-witnesses described women being beaten, their hair pulled, their clothes being torn off and the use of demeaning verbal abuse by military officers.[28] At the end of 2007, 106 women, including the six nuns, remained in custody.[29] This is contrary to junta claims that everyone bar 90 of all those arrested in the crackdowns had been released.[30] In a number of cases, female family members – wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, or other relatives – of activists who participated in the protests were detained, to induce the activists' surrender.[31]

Women's Organisations

In 2007, there were no independent women's rights organizations permitted inside Burma.[32] Instead, there are a number of government-run women's organizations, which are said by the junta to provide women with a political voice.[33] The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) was established in 1996 and the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF) was formed in late 2003. The MNCWA is to provide policy advice and implementation, whilst the MWAF is a working body with branches in all states and divisions, focussing on *"education, health, economy, culture, [the] environment, violence against women, trafficking in persons, rehabilitation and reintegration of women, girl-child, national races affairs, and legal affairs."*[34] The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) is a similar government organization which is to operate in the health area. It runs 91 maternity homes throughout the country for ante-and post-natal care and deliveries. MMCWA has also operated 1,344 pre-schools and day care centres.[35]

These organizations are closely allied with the government. Their leaders are wives or other family members of SPDC officials, for example, MWAF is chaired by Daw Than Than New, the wife of Prime Minister General Soe Win. They frequently repeat the junta line on

women's issues.[36] For example, on Myanmar Women's Day (3 July 2007), Daw Than Than New issued a statement that the Burmese military never commits violations and that International Committee of the Red Cross ('ICRC') claims to the contrary were as a result of that organisation's "clandestine relations" with insurgent groups.[37] In 2006, there were said to be 2.6 million members of MWAF,[38] however as in previous years, there were reports of coerced membership.[39] In the ethnic areas, membership of MWAF and MMCWA has the additional benefit for the military in providing it with accurate population numbers for forced labour and taxation quotas as well as opportunities for revenue-raising from membership fees. Women's League of Burma (WLB), the leading opposition women's group, disputes that MWAF provides any benefit to women.[40] (For more information see Chapter 10: Freedom of movement, assembly and association)

Villages in Rural Areas

The impact of military presence in rural ethnic areas has had an unforeseen consequence in terms of political advancement of women. Due to the physical risks to village heads from military officers who deal directly with them to obtain labour, goods or money from their village, an increasing number of older women are being appointed to this role, as there is less a risk that military officers will commit physical assaults upon them. The benefit is limited, however, as this has been employed as a strategy for reducing risk rather than a viable alternative. Also, whilst the risk of violence is lessened, it is not eliminated.[41]

Women in Politics - Partial list of incidents for 2007

On 21 February 2007, NLD MP-elect Daw May Win Myint (57) had her prison sentence extended by another year. She is held at Insein prison and is suffering from eye, throat, blood and heart diseases.[42]

In February 2007, Daw Khin New, a woman from Rangoon, gave evidence against the Hlaingthayar Ward chairman U Maung Maung and member U Win Myint about their bullying and rape of two under-aged school girls in 2006. She was charged and jailed for 15 days. The local MWAF refused to assist.[43]

On 15 May 2007, plain-clothed special branch police officers and USDA members arrested 31 activists, including labour activist Su Su Nway, who were on their way to pray for Aung San Suu Kyi.[44]

On 16 May 2007, authorities arrested NLD member, Daw Tin Tin Maw (62) in front of Rangoon City Hall for protesting and calling for Aung San Suu Kyi's release.[45]

On 21 May 2007, a woman was arrested for leading a prayer vigil for Aung San Suu Kyi.[46]

On 27 May 2007, Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest was extended for another year.[47]

On 13 June 2007, 5 women from Zeegone Township NLD, Pegu Division, were attacked with catapults and stones by three civilian clothed men, whilst returning from praying for Aung San Suu Kyi's release at Mya Thein Than pagoda. A special branch police officer saw the incident but did not intervene. When the women complained to the local authorities about the incident, they were denied assistance and warned to desist from praying for Aung San Suu Kyi.[48]

On 19 August 2007, NLD member Phyu Phyu Thin (36) went into hiding after having

participated in the demonstrations that day. Phyu Phyu Thin is a well-known HIV/AIDS activist and had earlier been arrested in 2001 and May 2007.[49]

Between 20 and 23 August 2007, long-term activist Ni Mo Hlaing (38) was repeatedly beaten by USDA members during the protests. She then went into hiding.[50]

On 22 August 2007, 88' Generation Students group member Tin Moe Lwin (35) went into hiding after joining the protests on 18 August.[51]

On 23 August 2007, a group of women, including NLD member Ma Ohmar (39) were assaulted by USDA and *Swan Ah Shin* members. The attackers had pushed Ma Ohmar violently in the chest, as well as hitting her and the others in the face. Moreover, their sarongs were pulled off and their blouses torn apart. Later, on 19 September 2007, Ma Ohmar was arrested, charged with joining the protests. After an initial period at a police camp, where she was interrogated, she was imprisoned at Insein prison. She was released on 25 October 2007, but as of November 2007 remained under surveillance.[52]

On 24 August 2007, 20 Burmese Housewives Association (BHA) members were arrested protesting against the increase in fuel prices in front of Rangoon City Hall. The chairperson Daw San San Myint was beaten and interrogated at Kyaikkasan interrogation centre, before being transferred to Police Brigade 3 at Hmawbi Township on 2 September 2007. As a result of the poor sanitary conditions and lack of clean water in detention, she became ill and malnourished. She was released on 3 October 2007 and attempted to obtain medical treatment, but this was prevented by the junta. All but 3 of the BHA members had been released by mid-December 2007.[53]

In late August 2007, 88 Generation student member and activist Nilar Thein (35) went into hiding after fellow activist and husband, Kyaw Min Yu, was arrested. Nilar Thein was one of the leading women activists involved in the protest marches. Both she and her husband have previously been imprisoned. When she went into hiding she left her 4-month old baby, whom she was breastfeeding, behind.[54]

88 Generation Students' Group leaders and activists, Nilar Thein (left) and Mie Mie (right). *[Photos: The Irrawaddy, AFP]*

On 4 September 2007, Mya Mya San was arrested at Shwedagon Pagoda for holding a prayer vigil for Aung San Suu Kyi's release. She was taken to Kyaikkasan prison.[55]

On 5 September 2007, two female NLD members, Daw Khin Lay and Daw Mi Mi Sein were arrested in Bogalay market by female members of the government-supported Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA).[56]

In mid-September 2007, former head of the women's wing of the NLD, Naw Ohn Hla (46) was arrested. She had led protests in August, and had since July 2004 been organizing weekly prayer meetings at Shwedagon for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. She was released later the same evening. Since her release, she reported continual surveillance, harassment and besmirching of her in government media. In January 2007, she filed a defamation suit, but was in October 2007 charged under the Restriction and Bond Act 1961 for having no fixed address or occupation. She was not permitted to go to trial or have a lawyer appear. She was then restricted from travelling outside the township without a permit and subjected to weekly reporting to police.[57]

On 19 September 2007, Ma May Mi Oo of Saya San ward in Bahan Township, Rangoon was arrested following the protests, and detained in Insein prison. She was three months pregnant, and not released until 2 December 2007.[58]

On 13 October 2007, 88 Generation leader Mie Mie (a.k.a Thin Thin Aye) (35) was arrested whilst in hiding. Early reports were that she had been badly tortured and sent to the prison hospital. In November 2007, she remained in detention. She had been one of the leading women activists involved in the August protests. She had previously been imprisoned for four months in 1988 as part of the student movement (the All Burma Federation of Student Unions ('ABFSU')), and 7 years in 1996 for repeating student protests.[59]

On 13 November 2007, labour activist and NLD member Su Su Nway (35) was arrested whilst putting up anti-government posters in Rangoon and handing out leaflets where UN special envoy Pinheiro was staying. She had been active in the August 2007 protests, including on 28 August leading a demonstration at Hledan Market, Kamaryut Township. She had been dragged away by USDA but escaped and went into hiding. She was taken to Bahan Police Station. Su Su Nway was in 2006 imprisoned for complaining about forced labour practices, but released due to ILO and international pressure. She was also imprisoned for a month from 15 May 2007, after praying for Aung San Suu Kyi's release at Insein pagoda.[60]

14.3 Health of Women in Burma

> *"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning."*
>
> - Article 12, Paragraph 1, CEDAW

Healthcare continued to be considered a low priority by the SPDC in 2007. As a result there were serious deficiencies in the provision of services contrary to Burma's obligations under CEDAW. Burma has one of the lowest levels of government spending on healthcare in the world.[61] In 1998, this was less than 0.2 percent of the GDP[62] and mirrored by excessive military spending.[63] A World Health Organisation (WHO) study in 2000 ranked Burma 190 out of 191 countries in terms of the gap between its potential health services and its actual performance.[64] Lack of funding means that increasingly health has become privatised, either formally or informally, therefore out of reach for the poor, particularly those living in rural areas. Increased SPDC military offensives in border areas have had a direct impact upon the healthcare situation: human rights abuses and forced relocations have resulted in more internally displaced persons ('IDPs') susceptible to preventable diseases such as malnutrition, malaria, TB and tropical diseases.[65] (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health).

Pregnancy and Childbirth

Pregnancy and childbirth render women more likely to experience the gaps in Burma's healthcare system. Women frequently face health problems during pregnancy and childbirth, with those living in rural areas and conflict zones disproportionately affected. Those who live far from clinics, or IDPs in hiding from the military, are often forced to give birth in unsuitable, unhygienic conditions. The cost of contraceptives is high, and thus very difficult to obtain in Burma, especially outside urban areas. There have even been reports of smuggling of contraceptives from Bangladesh.[66] Also the costs of childbirth are unsustainable. In 2004, a hospital birth cost 200,000 *kyat*. As a result, women in villages generally have to rely on the assistance of midwives. Others must save money during their entire pregnancy.[67] In northern Arakan State, the increased pressure by SPDC imposing limits on children and marriage of the Rohingyas has led to more unsafe abortions. In addition, there is a scarcity of midwives.[68]

Several instances were reported of women dying during childbirth, as a result of lack of treatment. On 20 September 2007, a Rohingya woman from Buthidaung Township, Jalama Khatun (30), and her new born baby, died from lack of treatment. She had a caesarean section and her husband, Jalal, was required to purchase blood for a transfusion, but she died before the blood transfusion.[69] On 25 October 2007, another woman, Asiya Khatun (20), wife of Nur Hashim, died during childbirth on her way to Bangladesh for further treatment. She had been admitted to a clinic in Ngakura, Maungdaw Township on 21 October 2007.[70]

In 2007, the childbirth statistics were as follows:[71]

	Thailand	Burma	IDPs in Eastern Burma
Doctor attending birth	n.a.	57%	n.a.
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	18	76	91
Under 5 child mortality (per 1,000 live births)	21	106	221
Maternal mortality (per 100,000)	44	360	1000-1200
Lifetime risk of maternal death	1 in 900	1 in 75	1 in 12

Clearly, poverty wreaks havoc upon the mother's capacity to provide for her children. The statistics are stark: one in three children is chronically malnourished, 15 percent of the population is food-insecure and a quarter of Burmese live on less than US$ 1 a day.[72] The consequences are dire. Illegal abortions are frequently undertaken as many cannot afford to feed another child. Social Action for Women (SAW), an assistance group based on the Thai-Burma border, has reported of women fleeing the country and committing small crimes in Thailand to give birth in a Thai prison. Moreover, the Mae Tao clinic in Mae Sot, a Thai border town, continued to treat many women who have suffered complications arising from illegal abortions. There are also a number of children abandoned by migrant worker or refugee parents who can't afford to provide for them.[73] Statistics on these types of issues inside Burma are not accessible.

Naw P--- with her nine-month-old baby at a hiding site for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Hsaw Htee township, Nyaunglebin District in February 2007. Although her baby suffers from a severe rash covering his entire body, Naw P--- says that she has been unable to access adequate medical treatment. *[Caption and photo: KHRG]*

HIV/AIDS

It is difficult to ascertain the true status of HIV/AIDS within Burma as there is little capacity to second-guess official figures. Some have questioned the methods of data-collection,[74] and researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health put figures at over double that which was reported in 2005. Meanwhile, Chinese and Taiwanese health officials put the figures at between three and five times that which is reported.[75]

However, even taken the official figures, Burma is reported to have one of the most serious HIV epidemics in the region.[76] The figures seem to indicate that the epidemic peaked in 2000 – at 1.5 percent of the population – and has deceased since then to in 2005, affecting 1.3 percent.[77] However, a UN HIV/AIDS survey conducted in 2006 would seem to suggest these statistics only cover the population over 24 years of age. The figure for those aged from 15 to 24 years is at 2.2 percent, which the UN has described as "a cause for serious concern." Levels of HIV infection in high-risk groups – 43 percent of injecting drug users and 32 percent of sex workers – remained at similar levels to that in 2000.[78] (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health).

In Burma, sexual transmission accounts for the majority of HIV infections (67 percent), usually between female sex workers and their clients.[79] Although commercial sex work is illegal, and despite increased support from the military government to target the risks in this industry, it is difficult to access casual workers, not least because they do not want to be seen by the police who frequently seek to arrest them.[80]

There are concerns that whilst the overall HIV rate is declining, its impact on the low-risk population is increasing. This low-risk population consists of female partners and children of men who have engaged in unprotected sex and drug use, often during migration for work. Overall, less women than men are affected, but the proportion has increased from 15 percent in 1990 to 38 percent in 2005.[81]

Whilst there are now higher levels of condom use in the sex industry, rates remain low for casual sex: only 18 percent. Condom use is frequently linked with the stigma attached to commercial sex. As an attempt to subvert this, UNICEF and NLD initiatives frequently involve monks in their HIV awareness projects.[82]

Infection rates for women presenting for antenatal care had reportedly declined from 2.2 percent in 2000 to 1.5 percent in 2006, however recent seropositivity rates nationwide are reported as 1.8 percent in pregnant women.[83] HIV infections in pregnant women are also increasing in the Thai border town of Mae Sot: now 2.2 percent compared with 0.8 percent five years ago.[84]

UNICEF has been working to combat HIV/AIDS transmission from mother to child, but these services are only available in less than one third of the country's townships.[85] WHO reports that 89 of the 325 townships now provide testing, counselling and nevirapine dose clinics for pregnant women. However, most of the services are provided through the hospitals and this limits accessibility for poor women or those in remote areas. It is clear that the lack of healthcare funding generally, limited coverage and reach of education programs, and the expenses associated with treatment and medication severely hinder these efforts.[86] Recent behavioural surveillance surveys revealed that 91 percent of the population in Burma had heard about HIV/AIDS, however effective knowledge and understanding was low: only one third correctly naming methods of HIV prevention and the majority holding misconceived beliefs about HIV transmission.[87]

Rural areas – which hold 70 percent of the population[88] – are hit worst. HIV/AIDS rates are highest in the Shan and Kachin states of Northern Burma.[89] Expanded mining projects in these areas see increased numbers of men in mining camps, who are particularly susceptible to engaging in unsafe commercial sex and using injection drugs. Upon return to their villages and families, they spread the virus.[90] Also, the secondary viruses which most frequently lead to HIV death – tuberculosis and malaria – are highly prevalent in the northern and border regions. These are preventable diseases, but due to the lack of healthcare, as well as increased hindrances by the junta for NGO access to these areas, they contribute to increased numbers of deaths.[91]

It has proven difficult to give support and assistance to HIV/AIDS clients. A number of HIV/AIDS activists have been targeted as pro-democracy activists; with the result that some have been arrested and others have gone into hiding.[92] Maggin Monastery in Thingangyun Township of Rangoon is noted for the care and board it provides to those suffering with HIV/AIDS. In the absence of sufficient government provisions, the SPDC has long viewed the treatment of HIV/AIDS patients with suspicion, especially as much work is done in this field by the NLD. It is apparent that the regime is wary of political capital being built upon such welfare activities. In the crackdown following the September 2007 protests, Maggin monastery in Rangoon's Thingangyun Township was raided by military forces several times, evicting monks as well as HIV patients who were being housed there.[93]

Widespread human rights abuses by the junta fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS: sexual violence, forced displacement, and entrenched discrimination against those who have or are believed to be at risk of infection, remain important features of any discussion of HIV/AIDS in Burma.[94]

HIV/AIDS activist and NLD member Phyu Phyu Thin. *[Photo: The Irrawaddy]*

14.4 Women and Forced Labour

> *"Tha Lei Paw, 32, doesn't respond at first when asked if she would return to her village when peace returns to Myanmar. She just smiles. Is it an awkward smile? Or is she smiling out of fear or shame? She remains silent for a while, and then she says: "I have never seen peace. My life was an unending disaster, a life of torture and hunger. We were just slaves. Do you understand? We are damned.""*
>
> - Mae La Refugee camp, Thailand, September 2007. Tha Lei Paw is from Zi Phyu Gon, a small village in Karen State[95]

Burma is a signatory to the 1930 ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour, which explicitly prohibits the employment of women in forced labour. Burma is also a signatory to CEDAW, which requires States Parties to eradicate government policies that hinder the development and advancement of women. In spite of these obligations under international law, one of the most widespread violations of human rights in Burma is the sustained practice of the military government to utilise forced labour in meeting its infrastructure and military goals. In rural ethnic regions this frequently leads to internal and external displacement; with the regular demands for unpaid labour jeopardising family and village livelihoods and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.[96]

The types of forced labour reported includes: portering; land-clearing, road and military camp construction; participating in profit-making ventures for the SPDC e.g. tending rubber, sugar, coconut plantations; sentry duty around the military camp or the village; as well as obligatory recruitment into SPDC controlled organisations such as the USDA, MMCWA or MWAF. Portering is especially risky for women, as it often involves carrying heavy loads without adequate food, water, and sanitation for menstruating or pregnant women. In addition, women often have to cook for the troops at night, and sleep without shelter, at increased risk of sexual assault.[97]

The junta continues to deny its use of force labour, however the systematic nature of the demands: quotas required from villages and households, the requirement for troops to "live off the land", the number of public projects upon which forced labour is used; and the extent of the measures employed by villages in response to cope with these demands, belies the denials.[98] Village heads report that labour requirements are almost constant and one village may need to service a number of SPDC commands in the area.[99] Much international criticism has been made, particularly given the country's signature to the 1930 ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour.[100] However no prosecutions of the military have occurred in Burma. There have only been a limited amount of cases brought against civilian officials.[101] Whilst more prevalent in SPDC controlled-areas, villagers in ceasefire areas controlled by SPDC-allied military groups such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Karen Peace Force (KPF) report similar demands.[102] (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription).

The military's practices have led to increasing demands upon women. First, as discussed above, there are more women village heads appointed to the difficult position of meeting military demands for labour or taxes.[103] This made women more at risk of abuse by military officers demanding forced labour from their villages.

Second, either in order for male householders to continue earning the necessary income for the family, or because males have already been killed, or to meet competing demands from different troops, females and sometimes children are sent to meet the forced labour quota required, regardless of age and whether the woman is pregnant or a new mother.[104] This has led to the more physically demanding tasks traditionally imposed upon males – clearing

brush, portering, messaging, road-building – falling upon women. Sometimes children are brought with them, but otherwise are left to fend for themselves at home. Also, even if only men meet the forced labour requirements, women are required to carry the greater burdens of usual rural life e.g. tending fields in addition to keeping house and looking after children.[105]

The increased use of women for forced labour was reported throughout the country. In Arakan State it was reported that NaSaKa – the border military in the Arakan State – placed forced labour demands upon the ethnic minority Rohingya population, including women and children: for construction, plantation work and portering.[106]

In Chin State, it was in February 2007 reported that soldiers of LIB #50, positioned at Rezua town in southern Chin state were using more women as porters than at the beginning of the year.[107] In the last week of January 2007, LIB #50 from Gankaw, at Rezua Town in south Chin State, utilised 18 porters, mainly women, to carry rations from Sawti village to Zuamang village.[108]

In Karen State, SPDC military offensives heightened, and in northern parts the numbers of men and women taken as porters and guides also increased, it was thought, to prevent a rice harvest.[109] In 2007, Toungoo villagers reported that men, women, children as young as 16 and elderly people have had to perform unpaid forced labour, such as minesweeping, building roads for military access, constructing army camps, portering etc.[110] In January 2007, Naw Dt_ (female 55 years) from T_ village in Bilin Township reported that women (including nursing mothers), children and the elderly are building roads. Her own 14 year old daughter was required to do this.[111] In March 2007, Naw W_ (female, 48 years) from S_ village in Toungoo District explained that forced labour was formally required from each household once a month in large villages such as hers. However the tasks of going to the army camp and doing menial labour there was a daily requirement. All villagers, including women, children and elderly were required to labour.[112]

In Mon State, it was in May 2007 reported that the SPDC had ordered one person from each household in Kalawthur, Kawn-ka-bue, Doe-mar and Set-thawe villages to patrol the Kanbauk-Myaingkalay gas pipeline in the evenings. Women, elders and children ended up doing this guard duty because they were worried the military troops would treat the men worse. In addition, they could not afford to send the working members of the family.[113]

In Magwe Division, a complaint was filed on 31 June 2007 with the ILO in regard to 100 men and 75 women who had been forced to dig 800 cubic-foot holes in the ground from 7am to noon for 4 days without any water: with the alternative of paying 1200 *kyat*.[114]

Women on forced sentry duty guarding the entrance of the village in Mon State. *[Photo: HURFOM]*

Third, the long term and repeated requirements of forced labour lead to increased poverty levels. The loss of land in particular due to specific farming requirements and other economic pressures imposed by the military, has led to some villagers seeking alternative work: initially engaging in savaging work, e.g. firewood collection and charcoal production, but then needing to move into the towns to work menial day jobs. This has particularly affected women.[115]

In Mon State in early 2007, LIB #31, under the command of Major Kyaw Zay Ya, ordered all villagers including women to patrol the village boundaries in Yin-Yae, Singu and Toe-Tat-Ywa-Thit villages, Khaw Zar Sub Township, Southern Ye Township. Each household had to patrol at least one night per week and if there were no men who could, then women had to. Many women have to do this, as their men are working. Mi Aaye Nyein (48), a woman from Toe-Tat-Ywa-Thit village, patrols from 6pm to 6am, because her husband and son are busy with their betel nut plantation.[116]

Fourth, women face increased risk of sexual violence, especially when isolated from their communities during forced labour.[117] A report released by the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) in February 2007 contained details of human rights abuses committed by the military against Karen women, including rape and torture, in addition to other forced labour requirements.[118] (For more information, see Section 7.6: Violence against Women). For example, an anonymous villager from the above mentioned Yin-Yae village in Mon state reported that there had been many cases of rape committed by Burmese soldiers when women were ordered to patrol the village boundaries at night time.[119]

Labour rights activist Daw Su Su Nway. *[Photo: AFP]*

14.5 Trafficking and Prostitution

Trafficking

Under its legal obligations to the CEDAW, the SPDC is required to *"take all appropriate measures… to suppress all forms of traffic in women".* Nevertheless, trafficking of persons in Burma continues to be a serious problem. Persons are trafficked out of Burma and dispatched around the region for purposes of forced labour and/or sexual exploitation. In addition, internal trafficking within Burma, principally for forced labour, remains rife. In June 2007, the US Department of State placed Burma on Tier 3 – the worst category for human trafficking – due to the country not complying with minimum standards and efforts.[120]

In 2007 women and children continued to be trafficked from Burma for the commercial sex industry in surrounding countries such as: Thailand, China, Bangladesh, Malaysia, South Korea, Macau, Japan and countries in the Middle East.[121] Some victims of trafficking are economic migrants lured by false promises of good jobs and better opportunities. Other cases involve the forcible movement of persons across borders. As a result of poverty after years of economic mismanagement by the military junta, friends and family members of the victims can often be tempted by the 'agent's fees' offered by the traffickers.

In Burma, it is primarily Shan, Kachin and other ethnic minority women who are trafficked across the northern border, Karen and Mon women being trafficked across the south, and those from Arakan State who are being trafficked to Malaysia for labour by boat. The trip by boat is a dangerous one and families frequently experience not hearing from their loved ones ever again.[122]

Trafficking of Women to China

In 2005, the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand documented trafficking of Kachin women to China, ostensibly for work but instead being forced into prostitution. Half of the trafficked women were forced to marry Chinese men.[123]

In early January 2007, Mun Ja (23) of Kutkhai Township, who worked in a Chinese restaurant in a village near Rulli in Yunnan Province disappeared, along with the owners into China. In March 2007, it was reported that the Kachin Women's Association ('KWA'), together with Kachin Independence Organisation are attempting to rescue women who had disappeared in China.[124]

In November 2007, it was reported that four Kachin girls who escaped from a nightclub in Zhejiang province near Shanghai said there were over 30 Burmese women who are bonded to prostitution and waitressing, under guard, given one meal a day and no salary in a popular tourist resort on the East China Sea Coast.[125]

In March 2007, it was also reported that women were being openly requested on the streets of Mandalay, to travel to China/border towns for jobs. On 13 March 2007, a girl from Chan Aye Tharzan Ward, went to visit her aunt, and was accosted and urged to travel to work in a store in Lashio for wages of between 30,000 and 100,000 *kyat* per month. When she refused, the persons physically tried to drag her away. According to an NLD representative, these are regular incidents, and the women usually end up as prostitutes or as brides of poor Chinese farmers.[126]

China's 'one child policy' means that female children born to poor families within the country are frequently aborted. The population, particularly in poor rural areas, is therefore

dramatically skewed, with as many as seven men to every woman. A large number of men in these areas are looking for wives elsewhere. Thus, a business has developed whereby women are "imported" from Burma to be sold as wives to Chinese men. A burgeoning trafficking network has developed taking women from Burma to China for sale as brides.

On 18 February 2007, it was reported that 64 people (51 Burmese and 13 non-Burmese) were sentenced in Mandalay Yamethin District Special Court after having been arrested in 2006, for human trafficking. Thirty-three were sentenced to life imprisonment. They had taken 29 young women from townships in Rangoon and Mandalay for well-paid jobs, before their being forcefully married to Chinese. The operation was conducted in conjunction with Chinese police in the Yunnan Province.[127]

In April 2007, it was reported that hundreds of Kachin women from northern Burma had been sold to Chinese men as wives. A Kachin woman who had escaped, said she had been a wife for 4 years and had a child. In China, it costs 50,000 *Yuan* to marry a Chinese woman, so instead poor farmers pay up to 20,000 *Yuan* (US$ 2,500.00) for Burmese women. Alternatively, rich businessmen buy additional wives. Women from ages 16 to 30 in the areas of Putao, Huawng Valley, Myitkyina in Kachin and North Eastern Shan State are the most vulnerable. Economic problems and lack of jobs make the prospects offered (often false) tempting, despite increasing awareness of the issue.[128]

Anti-Trafficking Measures

The SPDC has taken some steps to counter external trafficking of persons, albeit largely inefficient. In 2005, an Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law was enacted by the regime and there have been a number of prosecutions under it since. Police reports from 2006 involved charges of 274 offenders: mainly small scale traffickers who were primarily but not exclusively non-Burmese. In August 2007, it was reported that the junta was setting up more border liaison officers to curb human trafficking in Tachilek, Myawaddy, Kawthaung and Muse. The junta also announced a national 5-year plan to eliminate trafficking.[129] Throughout 2007 the junta provided further training and increased its anti-trafficking officials and unit locations.

There was also increased co-operation with neighbouring countries and NGOs: in January 2007 with ASEAN, and in December 2007, with representatives of China, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam met in Beijing to take a co-operative approach.[130] These followed up on earlier attempts, in March 2004 joining the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish Trafficking in Persons and in October 2004 signing an MOU in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region.[131]

The SPDC has provided a limited number of vocational training centres and shelters for victims of external trafficking. MWAF provided some of the counselling services and training before handing victims over to their families or NGOs. A number of NGOs also offered poverty alleviation and education programs designed to counteract the impulses behind trafficking, with moderate success.[132]

Throughout 2007, people were arrested and sentenced on charges of trafficking. On 20 January 2007, the SPDC reported that life sentences were imposed on 34 persons, including organisers Kyaw Myint and Ye Myo of an extensive network who had trafficked 300 women to China in July 2006.[133] On 7 February 2007, Rangoon East District Court sentenced three brothers, one to life imprisonment, and the others to 10 years, for trafficking 4 women and 2 children to another country.[134] In mid-July 2007, 5 suspects of human trafficking, including 2 Burmese police officers were arrested in Kawthaung. Two escaped after being arrested, leaving Kyaw Win, Than Zaw and a woman Khin Lin Ngwe. Kyaw Win

had been arrested the month before reportedly in the process of attempting to transport 200 Burmese people into Thailand and Malaysia.[135]

However, the regime's counter-trafficking steps have been limited to external trafficking and non-official offenders, thus the internal trafficking industry, frequently involving the military, is not addressed. (For more information see Chapter 10: Freedom of Movement, Assembly and Association)

Prostitution

Economic pressures have led to internal trafficking from poor rural and urban areas to cities or other locations where prostitution thrives. In June 2007, it was reported that increasing numbers of Wa women in northern Shan State were migrating to work in the sex trade on the Wa-Chinese border. One of the factors leading to economic deprivation in this area was the loss of revenue from poppy field crops, which have been eradicated.[136]

Although prostitution is prohibited by law and punishable by three years in prison, its prevalence has grown in the restaurants, bars and massage parlours on the edges of the larger cities of Burma and the townships that have become established near mining, large infrastructure and forestry industry locations. It is financially lucrative but with grave physical safety and health risks. There are also a number of bonded prostitution rackets.[137]

In 2007 the sex industry saw particular expansion in mining areas of Kachin State in Northern Burma. The Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG) report *Valley of Darkness,* released in 2007, documents the deteriorating situation of human rights linked to the gold mining industry in Hugawng Valley. According to the report, factors contributing to the expansion of the sex industry in gold mining areas are economic desperation, hopelessness, and separation from families.[138] Most of the women working in prostitution in these areas did not intend to become involved in the sex trade. In fact, most women came to the area to work as shop assistants or cooks, and later got caught up in sex work.[139]

Moreover, the report stated that rape by SPDC soldiers has also had an impact on the sex industry. As the military has increased its presence in Kachin State, more women have been raped by soldiers. Several rape victims, who are ashamed to stay in their villages, go to gold mine areas to search for work. According to the report this seems to be contributing to recruitment to the sex industry. Moreover, once involved in the sex trade, many women face stigma in their home villages, and dare not return home, thus becoming trapped in the industry.[140]

14.6 Violence against Women

United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1674 (2006) assert a duty on all states to prevent sexual and other violence against women in situations of armed conflict.

Resolution 1325:

> *"Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict,"* and, *"Emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls, and in this regard, stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions."*

Through Resolution 1674 the Security Council:

> *"Recalls that deliberately targeting civilians and other protected persons as such in situations of armed conflict is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, reiterates its condemnation in the strongest terms of such practices, and demands that all parties immediately put an end to such practices,"* and *"Reaffirms also its condemnation in the strongest terms of all acts of violence or abuses committed against civilians in situations of armed conflict in violation of applicable international obligations with respect in particular to…"* abuses including torture and other prohibited treatment, and gender-based and sexual violence.

Throughout 2007 women from Burma remained highly vulnerable to violence at the hands of the State. The perpetuation of male dominated military rule has fostered a climate of impunity whereby acts of violence against women are allowed to go unchecked. As such rape, torture and killing of women by SPDC military officers has continued unabated. A number of women fleeing to the Thai-Burma border have reported the sexual violence as the reason they left Burma.[141]

Violence against Women in Ethnic Minority Areas

A large number of complaints of sexual violence upon women and girls of ethnic minority groups by members of the armed forces have been regularly documented since 2002. In that year, the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) and the Shan Woman's Action Network (SWAN) released a report *License to Rape*, which set out 175 rape cases in Shan State. The report documented that some were tortured over a period of months, 61% were gang raped, and one in four of the rapes ended in murder. Since then, several other reports followed documenting the violence against women in other ethnic areas. In March 2003, Refugees International published *No Safe Place*, a report confirming and supporting the evidence presented in Licence to Rape. The report detailed incidents of rape and sexual violence in other non-Shan ethnic areas including Karen, Karenni, Tavoy, and Mon areas. The report indicated that rape occurs in conjunction with increased militarization and other human rights abuses. In April 2004, the Karen Women's Organization (KWO) released *Shattering Silences*, documenting 125 cases of rape perpetrated by soldiers of the Burma Army over a period of 16 years from 1988 to 2004 in Karen areas. High-ranking officers committed half of the rape cases documented, 40% were gang rapes and in 28% of the cases the women were killed after being raped. In September 2004, the Women's League of

Burma (WLB) released *System of Impunity* documenting 26 cases of rape which transpired over a two year period from 2002 to 2004 in all seven ethnic states.

In March 2007, the Women's League of Chinland (WLC) released the report, *Unsafe State,* documenting 38 cases of rape at the hands of the Burmese military and close to army bases over a five-year period finishing in 2006.[142] Cheery Zahau, from the WLC spoke at the U.N. about the report, describing the circumstances of many rapes as being extremely brutal, sometimes leading to death; half being gang-rapes and one third being carried out in the military camps.[143] Women were mostly raped in the following circumstances:

1. At or near their homes or farms – alone in houses, or gathering firewood. Especially if troops are stationed nearby the village, they begin to know the movements;
2. While traveling – walking to school or traveling in between villages; or
3. During forced labour or in the military camps.

The report also included allegations of rape of girl children, and the consequences of these actions being transmission of STDs, pregnancy and social stigmatisation. No prosecutions were undertaken, and at times the officers involved were of senior rank. The report described a culture of impunity amongst SPDC troops.[144]

Reported incidents of gang-rape in 2007 reveal the patterns of sexual violence previously reported are still continuing across the country – in Shan, Karen, Mon, Chin and other ethnic areas – in disturbingly similar circumstances. These crimes are usually committed in tandem with other human rights abuses in militarized areas, such as forced labour; including portering or domestic duties, torture, beatings, extortion and denial of food, water and shelter.[145] In February 2007, the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) published its report, *State of Terror,* documenting human rights abuses perpetrated by SPDC troops upon Karen women between 1981 and 2006 (most cases occurring since 2002). It includes reports of more than 4000 cases of forcible relocation, forced portering of those who are heavily pregnant or breastfeeding, causing miscarriages, murders, rape and torture in over 190 villages by troops from over 40 battalions.

In the report, the break-up of human rights abuses reported by women were:

1. Forced labour/portering (90%),
2. Abduction/detention (46%),
3. Murder (44%),
4. Rape and sexual assault (32%),
5. Assault/torture (31%),
6. Looting/theft (29%),
7. Landmines (4%).

Also, 90 percent of the non-forced labour cases involved two human rights violations, 10 percent involved three or more.[146] The report noted more frequent attacks upon Karen women as the junta mounted its campaign against the KNU. It labeled the conditions of many women in the Karen State as "past critical".[147]

A high proportion of Karen, Kachin and Chin people are Christian. Rapes by SPDC forces in these communities have been coupled with the destruction of Christian places of worship and the taking of children to receive education in monasteries.[148]

The correlation between sexual assault upon women and military incursions have led some, such as the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Jackie Sanders, to describe rape as a weapon of war, a tactic to intimidate opposition groups. A significant number of acts of sexual violence, torture and rape against women have occurred against women who are themselves or

whose family members are said to be active in armed opposition groups. This feature to the violence has long been identified by representatives of the various Burmese opposition women's groups.[149]

However it must be said that military presence for any reason, for example, as part of government infrastructure works such as pipelines and dam projects, increases the risk of sexual and physical violence along with other human rights abuses such as dislocation, land confiscation, forced labour, extortion, torture, rape and killings. For example, in 2007, the move of SPDC LIB #144 to Man Tat village, a Palaung village, for the construction of three dams on the Shweli River in Shan State, led to reports of forced labour, land confiscations and other human rights abuses and fears of increased sexual abuse (For more information, see Section: 7.8 Discrimination against Women).

Furthermore, the announcement of a China-Burma oil and gas pipeline to cross from the Arakan Coast to China – through Kyaukphyu, central Burma and northern Shan State – caused fear of further abuses.[150] Also, the damming of the Irrawaddy at Myitsone is to displace 47 villages with an estimated 10,000 people. As a result of the large number of workers moving to these areas, the sex industry has expanded and there have been reports of more human trafficking – with Kachin women being sold as wives to Chinese men.[151]

However the junta has taken little initiative to investigate these complaints – which by their number alone command serious attention – to identify the perpetrators or bring them to justice.[152] The SPDC representative to the UN, Maung Wai, informed the UN that the junta was of the view that non-state actors were primarily responsible for the atrocities reported,[153] that the earlier reports from 2002 had been investigated and the vast majority of complaints found to be untrue.[154] In late March 2007, the SPDC Information Minister, Kyaw Hsan, described the reports of rape by SPDC troops, together with forced labour and forced resettlement at border areas, as "totally false".[155]

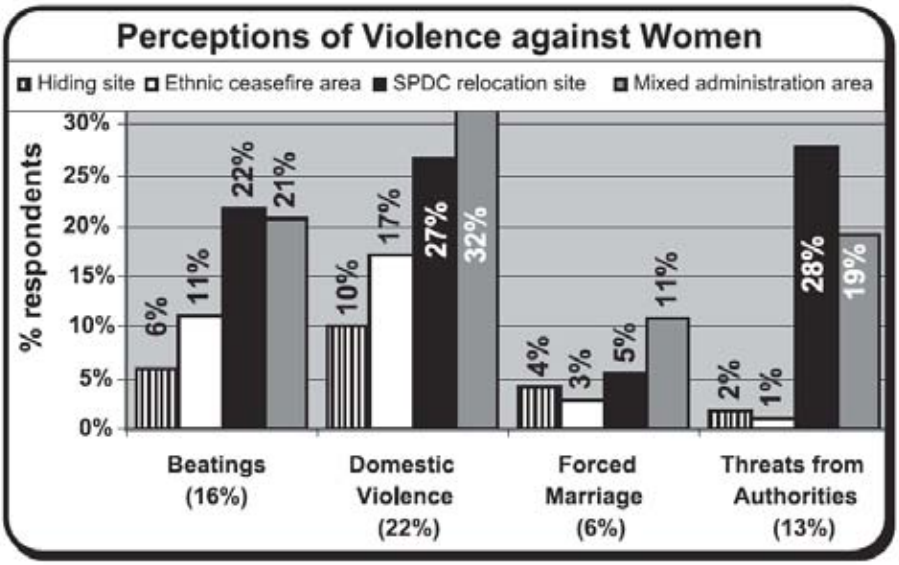
Violence against Women in General

Domestic violence is reportedly a growing concern in Burma. Whilst rape is illegal, spousal rape is not, unless the wife is under 14 years of age. There are no laws specific to domestic violence or spousal abuse and the government maintains no statistics of these crimes. In 2007, MWAF did lobby for some investigations into complaints of domestic violence and those calls were successful.[156]

Prostitutes remain at increased risk of rape both from civilian men and authorities. The junta does not release rape statistics.[157] However, credible reports from NGOs suggest that prostitutes taken into police custody are sometimes raped or robbed by police.[158]

Each of these aspects of violence against women is occurring in a climate where women's voices are not being heard or respected. No change in the junta's stance can be observed, despite urgent calls from the UN twice in 2007. As the UN considered the issue of gender-specific violence during conflict, a further report from four women activists in hiding – including Nilar Thein, a member of Generation 88 Students, and Phyu Phyu Thin, an NLD member and HIV/AIDS activist – provided some insight into the extent of women's disadvantage in Burma. The report detailed the fear they held for basic levels of physical security in an environment where the state fails to provide safety, let alone any sense of political, economic and social equality and freedom from sexual discrimination and harassment.[159]

A 2007 survey revealed that women in areas of eastern Burma considered domestic violence, physical assault, threats from the authorities and forced or early marriage as the most common types of violence. In Karenni State, domestic violence was most significant; whilst in Shan State forced marriage and physical assault of women was more prevalent. Threats of violence were however greatest in relocation sites and mixed administration areas where SPDC troops were close.[160]



Vulnerability of women to violence in IDP areas of Eastern Burma. *[Source: TBBC]*

Violence against Women - Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 23 July 2007, a Rohingya house was looted and the female resident, Minara, was beaten by Corporal Shwe Zaw, and 8 soldiers of LIB #551 based in the Atawing Nget Thay village tract of Buthidaung Township. Her husband Buzar Meah complained but was threatened with punishment.[161]

On 20 November 2007, Dorgoni (17), daughter of Bandiyta, from Bawli Bazaar village in Maungdaw Township, was severely beaten by a NaSaKa officer after leaving her home in the evening. The officer teased her and she scolded him, prompting the beating. Medical treatment was arranged by NaSaKa personnel, and a case was filed against the officer.[162]

On 27 November 2007, Amina Khatoon (25), wife of Mohamed Amin, from Maung Nama village in Maungdaw Township was detained for having a mobile phone and then tortured in the NaSaKa headquarters at Kowarbil. Her family made complaints to the UNHCR and NaSaKa. The village chairman demanded 400,000 *kyat* for her release.[163]

Karen State

Nyaunglebin District

On 19 November 2007, SPDC troops attacked Paw Ler Ko village. One woman, Naw Ywa Htoo (65) was shot at, chased into the jungle and lost for 2 days.[164]

Papun District

On 21 March 2007, three men and one girl, from Hti Thu Der village were walking to purchase rice from Tha Da Der. Only the girl escaped. The three men were shot by troops at close range. On that date, That Da Der village was attacked and the villagers scattered into the jungle. A female nurse was wounded but was escorted to the border.[165]

On 23 June 2007, SPDC troops murdered an entire family from Htee K'bler village, including two children, Kyaw Eh Wah (4), and Saw Pa Heh Soe (13), and their grandmother, Naw Pler Poe (65).[166]

Toungoo District

On 5 April 2007, SPDC LIB #346 mortared Sha Zi Bo village and killed Saw Gay Moon and the daughter of Saw Eh Poe, who was only 2 years old. Also injured in this attack were three men and a woman: Naw Dai Mu Poe (26), Saw Mu Dai, Saw Eah Doh (19), and Saw Eh Poe (24).[167]

On 12 May 2007, SPDC soldiers from LIB #542 (under the command of Hla Tun) and LIB #544 attacked the Ber Ka Lay Ko village area of northern Toungoo District. During the attack a woman was captured, raped and murdered. A relief team was reported as investigating this report.[168]

Mon State

In February 2007, it was reported that a soldier from Southern Ye threatened a 19 year-old woman from Ham-gam village that he would shoot her if she fetched food from her village, to her father working on the plantation. The threat included an accusation of links with rebel leader Nai San Shay. In the Mon State, skirmishes between small Mon rebel groups and SPDC troops mean that the locals are often prevailed upon by both.[169]

Rangoon Division

In October 2007, it was reported that a cemetery worker at Yayway cemetery Rangoon witnessed a pregnant woman being attacked and then burned alive at the cemetery.[170]

Shan State

On 29 March 2007, a woman, Naai E (65) of Tong Si village in the Loi Long village tract, Kaeng-Tung Township, was taxed twice when she went to the Kaeng-Tung town market to sell her onions. The second time she responded that she had already been taxed and the disagreement escalated when the official kicked her off her chair and whilst on the ground. When others intervened he ran away. Naai E was taken to the hospital for treatment.[171]

Rape and Sexual Violence - Partial list of incidents for 2007

Arakan State

On 27 March 2007, U Maung Win Naing, village chairman of Maungdaw Township, attempted to rape a girl from Narondaung Rohingya village. He was killed during the rape attempt, and the girl was arrested together with two other woman accused of causing his death. U Maung Win Naing was known for harassing villagers, particularly through money extortion.[172]

On 29 March 2007, Amena (42) a Rohingya woman, wife of Syaed Kasim from Nyaung Chaung village tract, south of Buthidaung was tortured, gang raped and killed by NaSaKa officers who had forcibly entered her house in order to question her about her son's activities. Her body was handed back to her family two hours later and the doctor in charge at Buthidaung hospital reportedly refused to conduct a post mortem.[173]

In April 2007, Ma Than Than Myint, from Narikan village in Sittwe Township, was propositioned for sex by Lieutenant Zaw Min whilst with family and friends. She is a first year university student of English at Rangoon University. When her brother, Tun Lin attempted to intervene, he was assaulted and arrested. A USDA chairman in the village signed a statement to the effect that Tun Lin had disturbed Zaw Min's official duties. This was reportedly a forced statement. A week after his arrest, it was reported that Tun Lin remained in detention and was tortured. Whilst the army has power under Burmese law to arrest for such an offence, they are required to hand the prisoner over to police within 24 hours of arrest, which was not done.[174]

On 4 July 2007, two young women from Kyauktaw Township were gang-raped by troops of LIB #374, led by Captain Ko Ko O, stationed at Nyochaung village. The assaulted women were Ma Kra San (21) from Katyaachaung village and Ma Pyu Pyu Khaine (19) from Pachey village. The women were forced labourers on an army-owned rubber plantation. The families complained about the rapes and each were paid 10,000 *kyat* (US$ 10) in compensation from MOC 9, on 12 August 2007. On 17 August, Ma Pyu Pyu died from an abortion which was forced upon her after she became pregnant from the assault.[175]

On 14 November 2007, a 12 year old girl, Salma Begum, daughter of Abbas Meah, from the Ngaran Chaung village in Maungdaw Township was raped and killed in Buthidaung Township. The rapist, Mohamed Sha (25) son of Liakat Ali, had proposed marriage but been rejected. He escaped, however his parents and younger brother were arrested by NaSaKa.[176]

On 17 November 2007, an 11 year old girl from Ray Aung San Bwe village tract, NaSaKa area No.1, Maungdaw Township, was raped and killed by NaSaKa troops. She had been grazing cattle on a hillside. Two other girls who were with her fled and raised the alarm. The family returned to find her naked dead body. The girls identified the officer and he was arrested by NaSaKa, however, the autopsy report was not made available until after she had been buried.[177]

On 20 November 2007, an 11 year old girl, Tasafinar Begun, daughter of Muhamad Ali from Marzi Village, in Rayaung Sanyta Bwe Village Tract, western side of Maungdaw Township was raped and killed by a constable in Maungdaw Township. The incident was by reported a nurse from Kyin Chaung hospital. Tasafinar had been tending cows near Marzi creek, when the police constable dragged her into the jungle. Other cattle herders saw what was happening, and alerted the family, but by the time they arrived, she was already dead. The

constable was reportedly executed by NaSaKa forces from Aungtha Bray station as punishment for the rape and murder.[178]

Kachin State

On 3 February 2007, 4 teenage girls aged 14 to 16 were gang raped by 3 army officers and 4 soldiers in Putao, northern Kachin State. The girls were Lawan Nan, Chamtan Ninlan, Namkhee Khawdang and Poe Lan, all students at Duk Dang State High. The soldiers were from LIB #138, led by Lt-Col. Soe Win, based in Maunglang Shidi village, 20 miles south of Putao. The rapists were Major Zaw Min Thet, Warrant Officer Win Myint Oo, Captain Kyaw Ze Ya and 4 other soldiers. The girls had been walking home from karaoke. After reporting the incident, on 9 March 2007, the girls were counter-charged and convicted of prostitution. They were sentenced to 12 months in prison, only to be released in April when the case caused international outcry and delegates from MWAF attended the jail. As a result the army paid 300,000 *kyat* (US$ 300) in compensation for each girl but the families demanded more. However, no information was at hand as to whether the soldiers were at all charged. Moreover, the headmistress of their school, Lu Mai, was sacked after indicating that the girls were welcome back to school.[179]

Karen State

Mergui/Tavoy District

On 21 February 2007, a private from SPDC LIB #282 led by Bo Kyaw Moe Lwin mounted the house of Saw Hto Ku, a Christian pastor in Lock-theing village, subdivision of Klein-aung Township, and attempted to rape his daughter Naw Saw Khee Base (22). She was able to defend herself from the attack.[180]

Papun District

In May/June 2007, two women, aged 18 and 22, from Takehder village in Luthaw Township, Papun District, were captured, raped, mutilated and then killed by SPDC troops. They had been gathering vegetables.[181]

Thaton District

In 2007, DKBA #333, led by Maung Kyi and Aung Naing, and involving officer Mo Kyo, have been reported to sexually harass women in Khaw Po Bpleh village.[182]

In May 2007, it was reported that a 12 year old girl, Naw K_, from K_ village, Thaton Township, was attacked in her bed by Sgt Mya Aung of SPDC Troop LIB #118 who attempted to rape her. He fled when she raised alarm.[183]

Toungoo District

On 12 May 2007, soldiers from LIB #542 and #544, under the command of Thaung Htaik Soe and Hla Htay, attacked the Ber Ka Lay Ko village area of northern Toungoo District. During the attack they captured a woman, then raped and murdered her.[184]

Shan State

On 18 April 2007, Naang Gam (38) was gang-raped and killed by 5 SPDC soldiers from the No. 3 Regional Training School, whilst grazing her cow in the forest near the Nam Teng River, in Nawng Hee village tract, Murng-Nai Township, west of Ho Ta village. Her husband Zaai Mawng later found her dead body, naked and gagged. She had been raped by several men and later strangled to death. Some meat had been cut off from the cow. No complaint was made.[185]

In mid-June/July 2007, a Lahu girl aged between 16 and 18 was gang-raped, including anally, by 10 soldiers of Mongpiang-based SPDC troop LIB #360 led by Captain Kyi Aung. She was gathering bamboo between Wan Zaan village and her home village Ho Naa village, in Hawng Kaang Za village tract, Murng-Paeng Township, with her 11 year old brother, who witnessed the events. She fainted during the ordeal but was able to walk back to her village with her brother. Whilst her parents lodged a complaint with the village headman, no one has dared to complain to the military battalion, given the potential for ramifications. The girl was threatened by the troops that if she complained, her family would be killed.[186]

In August 2007, a 50-year old woman from Mae Kaen was raped by a soldier, and then given 2 tins of condensed milk as compensation. Mae Kaen is located on the planned power transmission route from the Tasang Dam to Chiang Mai. The location of the dam is in the middle of a Shan conflict area, and since dam studies began in 1998 about 300,000 ethnic people have been relocated. Villagers in hiding near their old homes have been tortured, raped and killed.[187]

In September 2007, a 16-year old girl, Nang Kham, was 11 miles outside Mongpiang when she was gang-raped by 5 soldiers from LIB #528, including their captain. The girl was warned not to tell anyone, under threat that her family would be killed. She did tell her family, but no complaint was made.[188]

In October 2007, a Shan woman was arrested and then raped by troops from Mongpiang based LIB #43, 4 miles north of Mongpiang, while she was looking after her farm. Captain Aung Aung led the troops, together with 10 other soldiers.[189]

In November 2007, a teenage girl was raped by 3 soldiers on the southern outskirts of Mongpiang. When a witness arrived at the scene, the soldiers ran away.[190]

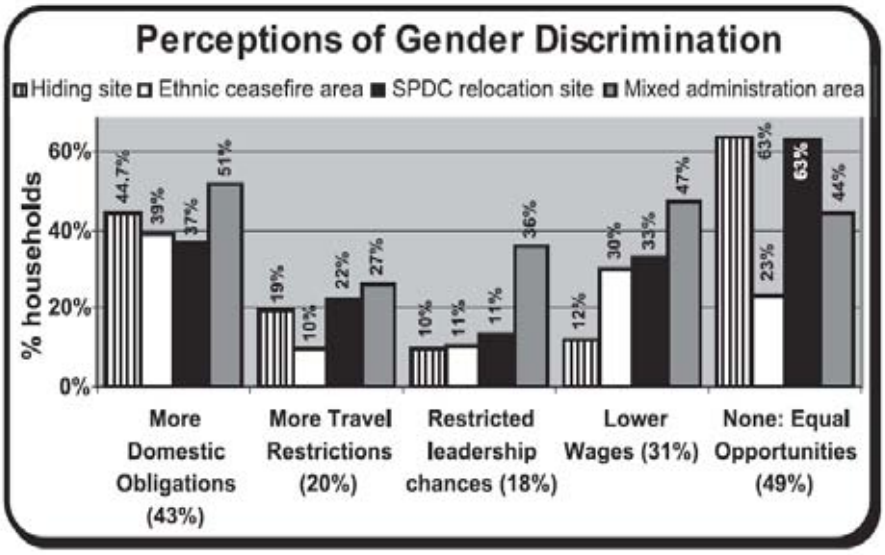
Also in November 2007, another young Shan woman, Nang Ing, was raped by the same troops – 10 soldiers from LIB #528 – on the northern outskirts of Mongpiang. She was threatened not to report the incident or her family would be killed. Nevertheless, her parents reported the matter to the village headman; however, no action was taken due to fear of the soldiers.[191]

On 19 November 2007, a 16 year old girl was gang-raped by SPDC soldiers near the Nam Ohn Bridge, Minkaung village on the Yammin village tract, Minepyinn Township. The men responsible were Corporal Than Shwe and 3 other soldiers from LIB #528. She was with her 9 year old brother, who was tied up. Whilst their parents reported the incident to the village head, but further reporting to the junta is unlikely, due to fear of reprisals.[192]

14.7 Discrimination against Women

Rural Areas

A survey of women in eastern Burma conducted by the TBBC in 2007 reported very little difference between gender in response to displacement and abuse by the military. However, a significant proportion of households recognised that females are more likely to assume domestic responsibilities at the expense of political or vocational opportunities whilst under pressures associated with the military's actions. There are a number of paternalistic attempts to prevent sexual violence occurring by limiting women's rights, such as travel restrictions. It is unclear from the survey whether this reflected a lack of the belief in gender equality, or a lack of awareness of women's rights at the community level. [193]



Perceptions of gender discrimination in IDP areas of Eastern Burma. *[Source: TBBC]*

Forced displacement usually affects the most vulnerable of populations; women, children and minorities.[194] Traditional women's work, such as weaving, is often location-specific. Moreover, compensation for land confiscation and movement is usually paid to men rather than women. Additional pressures from military activities and abuses give rural women limited capacity to advance past survival: the need to obtain food, find fuel, wood and water and other tasks become priorities. Also, service delivery in terms of health and education is interrupted, and negative aspects of impoverished and transient lifestyles, such as prostitution and trafficking, is abound.[195] This in turn contributes to further discrimination of women.

Education and Employment

There are no laws against sexual harassment in Burma[196] and traditional concepts of the woman's role thrive. Women remain underrepresented in most traditionally male occupations, including the civil service, and are effectively barred from some professions including the military.[197]

Women remain underpaid compared to men in the same occupations. For example, on 12 March 2007, a 50 year old woman from Kalawthut village Mudon Township, Mon State

reported that men get paid 2200 *kyat* per day on paddy fields, whereas women get 1600 *kyat*. In Taung-pa village, Mudon Township, the difference ranges between 1800 kyat and 2500 kyat per day. This also occurs on the rubber plantations near Abit village, Mudon Township.[198]

There are also cases of women being discriminated for not wearing traditional female dress. For example, on 3 January 2007, a Chin girl was banned by the National Working Committee for Women's Affairs from training for midwifery, because she was not wearing the Burmese longyi (sarong) but instead was wearing trousers.[199]

Marriage

Regarding marriage rights, Rohingya women face discrimination compared to other women in Burma. All Rohingyas require permits to get married, however permission is usually delayed by years. If a Rohingya is found to have gotten married and/or have had children in the meantime, they are arrested.[200] Several reports illustrate this. On 7 April 2007, police from Nyaung Chaung station forced Liala Begum (18) from Nyaung Chaung village in Buthidaung Township in Arakan State, to walk around 3 villages without clothes, save for a '*Tami*' covering her privates, for marrying without the authorities' permission. Liala Begum and Mohamed Island (23) had earlier applied to the NaSaKa for a wedding permit, however they were not granted permission because they were unable to pay the necessary bribe. As a result, they married secretly with the permission of their parents. When the VPDC Chairman complained about the punishment given to the girl he was reportedly threatened by the authorities.[201] On 23 September 2007, Hasina (22), daughter of Mohammad Salam of Migalagyi (Fran Pru) village in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, jumped into a lake with her son, whilst NaSaKa were checking family members who did not have permission for marriage. She was pulled out of the lake and taken into custody overnight. She was released the following day on the payment of 50,000 *kyat*.[202]

The report *Under the Boot,* released by Palaung (Ta'ang) Youth Network Group (PYNG) in 2007, documented several human rights abuses linked to the presence of the military. Amongst other abuses, it documented forced marriage of local women to SPDC soldiers, stating that *"when a soldier falls in love with a girl, she is too afraid to argue that she doesn't like him, and is therefore in reality forced to marry."* According to the report, since 2000, over 20 girls from Man Tat village had been forced to marry soldiers from LIB #144.[203] Dowries paid by soldiers are much less than the required amount – they would usually be in the 300,000 *kyat* vicinity, but families are lucky to get 30,000 kyat from officers. Consequentially, there was a concerted effort by families try to keep their daughters close to home.[204]

There have also been several reports of forced marriage between Chin women and Burman SPDC soldiers, resulting from what is seen as a Burmanisation scheme by the SPDC. In a report issued in 2007 by Women's League of Chinland (WLC), it was documented that SPDC troops are offered financial rewards of approximately 100,000 *kyat* (US$16,000) for marrying Christian Chin women as part of a strategy of "Burmanisation", to teach them Burmese and convert them to Buddhism.[205] For example, on 17 December 2007, Burmese warrant officer Zaw Hint from LIB #289 forced Ma Kra Zan May (21), a woman from Pauk Lauk Taw village, Peletwa, Chin State to marry him. He forcibly took her away from her relatives. Upon complaining to the officer-in-charge, the family was accused of assisting officers to escape by permitting them to marry. The woman's brother was arrested and 5000 *kyat* was demanded for his release.[206]

Endnotes

[1] Source: "No Soft Touch," *Irrawaddy*, 5 October 2007.
[2] Sources: "WLB demand an immediate end to war crimes in Burma," WLB, 26 October 2006; *Combined second and third periodic reports of States parties – Myanmar*, Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, 4 September 2007: 8.
[3] Sources: *Freedom in the World – Burma (Myanmar) 2007*, Freedom House, June 2007; *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices-2006*, Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007.
[4] Source: *Looking Through Gender Lenses*, WLB, September 2006.
[5] Signed 22 July 1997.
[6] Source: *Combined second and third periodic reports of States parties – Myanmar*, Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 4 September 2007: 9.
[7] Sources: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007; *Freedom in the World – Burma (Myanmar) 2007*, Freedom House, June 2007; *Looking Through Gender Lenses*, WLB, September 2007; "General Livelihood of Women in Southern Burma." WCRP, March 2007.
[8] Source: *Freedom in the World – Burma (Myanmar) 2007*, Freedom House, June 2007.
[9] Source: European Union Humanitarian Aid Department figures, cited in "Health care crisis facing displaced Mon," *The Mon Forum*, 28 February 2007.
[10] Source: "Poor health care in Rural Areas" *The Mon Forum*, 31 May 2007.
[11] Sources: *Burma Issues and Concerns, V4 The Security Dimensions*, Altsean Burma, April 2007: 18; *The Gathering Storm: Infectious Diseases and Human Rights in Burma*, Human Rights Center, UCA, Center for Public Health and Human Rights, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, July 2007: 2.
[12] Sources: *Burma Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2006*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 6 March 2007; *Freedom in the World – Burma (Myanmar) 2007*, Freedom House, June 2007; *Looking Through Gender Lenses*, WLB, September 2007; "General Livelihood of Women in Southern Burma." WCRP, March 2007.
[13] Source: *Looking Through the Gender Lens; Position Paper on Gender Equality*, WLB, September 2006.
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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 15

ETHNIC MINORITY RIGHTS

"States Parties condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races."

- Article 2 (1), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination

15.1 Introduction

Before the British occupation and annexation of the Burmese territories, the area we know as Burma today was a series of autonomous indigenous nations. Many ethnic groups were separated by geographical boundaries such as steep mountains and wide rivers, resulting in sharp linguistic divides and a large number of distinct ethnic groups in a small territory. Burma officially has over 134 different ethnic groups, speaking more than 100 distinct languages and dialects. (See Section 15.5: Official List of Ethnic Minority Groups in Burma). Approximately 68 percent of the population of Burma belongs to the predominantly Buddhist Burman ethnic group, while over 20 million people, or approximately 32 percent of the total population belong to an ethnic minority group. Although all together, they occupy approximately 55% of the land in Burma, this land is mainly located along the border regions. The geographical marginalization of the ethnic minorities of Burma is also paralleled in the country's politics and history.

For the purposes of Colonial administration, Burma was divided into two zones: the centrally located "Ministerial Burma", a predominantly Burman region, and the "Frontier Areas", located in the mountainous regions situated along Burma's present-day international borders where most of the ethnic minorities were based. On one hand, the local systems of governance in Ministerial Burma were destroyed. The British imposed their own administration and system of governance in the area. However, they also invested resources there. While the Frontier Areas retained their systems of governance and some autonomy, they were exploited by the British for their natural resources and given very little in return, particularly in terms of health, education, economic development, or political voice at the national level.[1] This legacy endures to this day.

Burma had some indication that independence would be forthcoming from Britain and a number of Burman leaders and leaders from various key ethnic groups made preparations for the new nation in advance. Perhaps the most important document to lay the foundations for the new nation was the Panglong Agreement; signed by General Aung San, a prominent Buman leader, and Chin, Kachin and Shan leaders. For General Aung San,

> *"The essential prerequisite is the building of one unified nation. In concrete terms it means we must now bridge all gulfs now existing through British machinations between the major Burmese race and the hill peoples, the Arakanese, the Shans and unite all these peoples into one nation with equal treatment unlike the present system which divides our people into 'backward' and 'administered' sections."*[2]

The Panglong Agreement was the key document in attempting to build this unified nation and in creating a federal Burma. The constitution which emerged after Britain granted Burma independence on 4 January 1948 fell short of the expectations of many. The territories of four ethnic groups, the Karen, Karenni, Shan and Kachin, were recognized and each was designated a separate state. Each recognized ethnic group was represented at the national level and two groups, the Shan and the Karenni, were allowed the choice to succeed after 10 years. Other groups, however, continued to feel marginalized. Perhaps these issues could have been resolved in the Chamber of Nationalities, had the Federal Union of Burma been given a fair chance. However, a military regime took power in 1962 and the new constitution in 1974 stripped all ethnic minority groups equally of any autonomy. (For more information, see the Historical and Political Background).

Fast-forward to the present: over the past decade, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has come under increasing international pressure, particularly due to its treatment of ethnic minorities, but also due to its non-democratic rule, the continued

detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, economic mismanagement and its effect on the region, particularly in regards to the spread of HIV/AIDS and illegal drugs.

In an apparent attempt to deflect some of this international criticism and regain some international credibility, in 2005 the SPDC resumed the National Convention and the constitution drafting process. The National Convention (NC) had been operating since 1993 but was often suspended until it finally adjourned in 1996, having accomplished very little and certainly nothing concretely democratic.[3] Only ethnic minorities who had signed ceasefire agreements with the SPDC were invited yet their concerns were not allowed on the agenda. Delegates were only permitted to discuss a pre-drafted agenda set by the SPDC. Discussion of topics not listed on the agenda was not tolerated and laws were enacted against criticism of the NC, the punishment for which attracted a 20 year jail term.

The National Convention concluded in July 2007 having (according to the SPDC at least) finally drafted the guidelines for the new constitution. At the final session of the NC, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) presented a 19-point statement calling on greater autonomy for ethnic groups. In response, the SPDC threatened to *"kick the KIO up to the mountains".* (For more information on the National Convention, see Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press).

In response to the resumption of the National Convention, an Ethnic Nationalities Conference was held in 2005 to commence work on drafting an alternative constitution – one which would protect the rights of the ethnic minorities and give them a voice at the table.

There have been a number of meetings to draft alternative constitutions over the years, particularly along the Thai-Burma Border. In 2006, the Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (FCDCC) put out a draft of a Federal Constitution. The FCDCC is made up of MPs, and other members of the Burmese democracy movement in exile, including representatives of women and youth groups. The seminar for the draft constitution was held in territory controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) in Karen State. The draft of the Federal Constitution contained 14 chapters and 197 articles and was designed to build democracy in Burma through a genuine federal system. In addition, the National Reconciliation Program (NRP) has been helping ethnic groups draft their own state constitutions in the event that federalism is realised in Burma. Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan groups have reportedly commenced work on the drafting process.[4]

A displaced family living in hiding in eastern Burma where they try to survive while trying to avoid contact with the SPDC and its allied ceasefire armies who oppress them. *[Photo: BBC]*

15.2 Ethnic Politics, Armed Resistance, and Ceasefires

The foundations for armed ethnic resistance in Burma were initially laid by the British during World War II. The British used various ethnic minority groups in their campaign against the Japanese in the region at the time, and thus providing many of these groups with their first formal military training. Certain ethnic minority groups were preferred for recruitment into the British armed forces, particularly the Karen, Kachin and the Chin and it could be said that some of these groups never fully disarmed following the War.

Following the end of the War when Burma was granted independence in 1948, many ethnic minorities were left bitterly disappointed at having shown such devout loyalty to the British during the War yet were never granted the right of secession that had long been promised them. The Karen in particular were one such group in this position. Then, just over a year after independence, in 1949, the Karen took up arms in what would later become the longest running civil war on the planet. Over time, numerous other ethnic groups also followed suit and similarly opposed the central Burman-dominated administration, although many of these groups did not take up arms until the military coup of 1962.

Over the long years that ethnic armed conflict has been waged in Burma, the central Burmese regime has employed a plethora of different strategies to contend with these groups. One such strategy, which is believed to have been originally conceived in the mid-1960's but not employed until the early-70's was dubbed the 'Four Cuts Policy' (*Pya Lay Pya* in Burmese).[5] The four 'cuts' are reported to cut off all food, funds, recruits, and information given to armed resistance groups by their purported civilian support base, without which, they would be unable to continue fighting. The upshot of a scorched earth policy such as this, however, is the intentional targeting of the civilian population as a legitimate military threat in flagrant contravention of numerous international laws, not least of which are the Geneva Conventions.

The Four Cuts Policy continued to be employed as one of the central tenets of the SPDC's counter-insurgency campaign throughout 2007. The SPDC has continued to make use of the Four Cuts Policy as its principle instrument in its ongoing fight against resistance groups. However, though the Four Cuts Policy was initially devised to undermine armed opposition groups, the exact same tactics were still employed in 2007, not to weaken insurgent groups, but rather to control and exploit the civilian population.

The Burmese military regime under its various guises has long employed a strategy of divide and rule among the ethnic minorities to great effect. The SPDC has been no exception to this and has persuaded some groups join them and even to assist them attack other groups still opposing the regime. Since 1989 and up until his arrest in October 2004, the former Prime Minister and former head of Burma's Military Intelligence apparatus, General Khin Nyunt, approached many armed ethnic groups with ceasefire pacts which would permit them peace and a degree of autonomy, along with economic concessions, and the right to retain their arms. This deal proved too sweet for many and as many as 17 ceasefire pacts were signed with the junta. However, none of these agreements have ever resulted in any sort of tangible solution to the existing political problems. Moreover, all such ceasefire agreements have been designed to prevent combatants from shooting at one another, but have failed to address the human rights violations and attacks committed against the civilian population. The unfortunate result has been that in many cases, the newly-formed ceasefire group, perhaps dazzled by their new-found freedoms and impunity, adopts many of the same practices and policies as the SPDC and also commits the same widespread human rights violations against the very people whom they claim to represent.

Listed over the pages which follow are the brief summaries of a number of the ethnic ceasefire and ethnic resistance armies which were operating in Burma during 2007. Please note that this does not represent an exhaustive list of all such groups, but rather is limited to only some of the stronger and more influential groups or those that were active and reported on during 2007.

Arakan State

Though there is no active combat taking place in Arakan State, a number of ethnic Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) persist in the region. The NSAGs represented are those allied with as well as opposing the regime.

On 29 May 2007, U Htun Aung Kyaw, commander of the Democratic Party of Arakan (DPA), was arrested by Bangladeshi authorities during a raid in Bodi Punking village in the Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.[6]

The Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) is the armed wing of the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), who together have been fighting against the regime since 1968. The ALP/ALA continued to oppose the SPDC during 2007. On 22 October 2007, two armed insurgents, believed to be affiliated with the ALP were arrested by NaSaKa (Border Security Force) personnel as they attempted to cross back into Burma from Bangladesh. The following day, on 23 October 2007, 20 ethnic Chakma families originally from Bangladesh, were deported from Horkadaung village in Maungdaw Township back to Bangladesh. The families were deported by the authorities on suspicion of providing information to Arakanese insurgent groups.[7]

On 9 November 2007, 17 former members of the now-defunct Arakan Army (AA), including 12 men and five women, reportedly surrendered to the SPDC at the Lat Pan Wa army outpost in Paletwa Township near the border with Bangladesh.[8]

Chin State

The opposition Chin National Front (CNF) was created in 1988 following the nation-wide pro-democracy uprising of that year with the stated intent of achieving self-determination for the Chin people. The CNF has expressed interest in negotiating a ceasefire with the regime and to this effect had originally attempted to open discussions with the SPDC in 1995. However, all such discussions have never resulted in any tangible results. Although, in March 2007, the very first peace talks were conducted between the CNF and the SPDC in the town of Rih on the Burma-India border. *"From my point of view, the talks were successful. … I regard it as heading towards a positive path,"* said Dr Sui Khar, the Joint General Secretary of the CNF, who led the ten-member delegation in the talks.[9]

A second round of talks was slated to take place after the National Convention was completed, but these were postponed by the SPDC which maintained that it was *"too busy"* for anyone to attend further discussions.[10]

In April 2007, it was reported that the CNF had been exacting a tax of 3,000 kyat from each family in Matupi Township. At the end of February 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #140 arrested seven people for having paid this tax following a clash with members of the Chin National Army (CNA; the armed wing of the CNF) which killed three SPDC army soldiers. Two weeks later, the bodies of three of those who were arrested were found dead by their families. The victims were identified as:

1. Mum The;
2. Khun Ling; and
3. Tin Cung.[11]

On 11 April 2007, it was reported that three Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) chairmen from Matupi and Mindat Townships were killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #50 in February 2007 for allegedly aiding the CNA. Two others were also reportedly arrested on the same charges but their fate was unknown. The three victims were:

1. Ting Co, VPDC chairman of Sanset village, Matupi Township;
2. Hung Ling, VPDC chairman of Ca Nam village, Matupi Township; and
3. Maung Khe, VPDC chairman of Lungphanu village, Mindat Township.[12]

In the last week of May 2007, Zun Cung Nung, the owner of a hotel in Falam Township was issued orders by U Ong Maung of the Falam Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) to close his hotel, dismantle the building, and relocate elsewhere following speculation that the hotel had been used to shelter members of the CNA. *"Zun Cung Nung will lose not only a hotel but also his estate and farmland,"* reported a local villager, suggesting that he would lose not only his business, but also his home and all other forms of livelihood on the strength of the accusation.[13]

On 11 July 2007, three young Chin men were arrested by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #233 under suspicion of having ties with the CNF. No further information was made

Kachin State

Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and their armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), was originally founded in 1961 with the stated goal of the creation of a *"Free Republic of Kachinland"* and was once considered to be one of the stronger ethnic opposition groups in Burma – that is until they signed a ceasefire pact with the regime in 1994.[14]

As part of their ceasefire agreement, the KIO was permitted to control significant areas of land in Kachin State including the areas bordering China, and was also granted considerable economic concessions, including certain mining and logging operations. The KIO was also authorized to lease large tracts of Burmese soil to Chinese businessmen for profit. Although, some commentators have argued that the Kachin people have benefited little since the KIO signed their ceasefire with the SPDC:

> *"In the more than 12 years since the truce between the KIA and the junta was signed, little has occurred to advance security or prosperity for the Kachin people. The ceasefire agreement has delivered its benefits only to the Kachin leaders and their friends. Many of them have become wealthy by selling off the valuable resources of Kachin State—timber, gold and jade—to Chinese entrepreneurs. … The Kachin people benefit little or nothing from this trade"*.[15]

Meanwhile, KIO Vice Chairman, Lieutenant General Nban La Awng, has clearly benefited from the ceasefire, who, on 2 June 2007, lavished an estimated 30 million kyat on a party to mark his own 60th birthday. Prior to this, it was reported that Nban La Awng had spent an outrageous 100 million kyat on his son's wedding, which had catered to approximately 4,000 guests. It has been speculated that these two ceremonies were the most expensive ever to have been held in Kachin State.[16]

At the final session of the junta's much touted National Convention on 18 July 2007, the KIO issued a 19-point statement which called for greater autonomy in ethnic states. This move infuriated the regime who prohibited any and all discussion off the pre-determined agenda which they had set themselves. In August 2007, it was reported that Major General Ohn Myint, commanding officer of the SPDC Northern Regional Command in Kachin State was so outraged at the KIO over this demand that he had begun stockpiling weapons in Myitkyina, presumably in preparation for the imminent resumption of hostilities. He was also quoted to have said that *"the KIO reiterating its demand [for] autonomy of Kachin State in the ongoing final session of the National Convention is totally unacceptable"*.[17] In July 2007, Major General Ohn Myint had also warned that the *"SPDC shall kick the KIO up to the mountains, if they persist in their demands for an autonomous Kachin State".*[18]

Potential for more splits from within the KIO emerged in October 2007 when a public statement critical of the KIO's support and praise of the outcomes of the SPDC's National Convention, entitled the *"Voice of the Kachin youth in Mai Ja Yang,"* was circulated through KIO-controlled territory. Some reports maintained that disagreement over the issue threatened to result in further fictionalization of the troubled Kachin organization:

> *"While elderly and senior leaders of the KIO are keen on taking part in the [general] elections [in 2010], the junior leaders and the youth are totally against it. They want the KIO to take on the junta … and continue to fight for autonomous status"*.[19]

In November 2007, the SPDC banned all vehicular traffic along the Myitkyina-Laiza highway and actively prevented people from entering the KIO-controlled town of Laiza. It was believed that the road closure was carried out as a form of punishment after the KIO refused to sign a pre-drafted declaration denouncing a recent statement made by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi regarding national reconciliation. An unnamed youth from the area said that *"The relationship between the KIA and the junta has always been like this. Whenever the junta is displeased with the KIA, they do something like this. The junta wants to show the KIA its power"*. A local businessman reported that road closures like this strike at the KIO where it hurts by hampering the lucrative border trade it enjoys with China. *"A day's ban will not have much impact. But if it continues it will impact not only local residents but also the KIA,"* he said.[20]

Earlier in the year, in January 2007, the SPDC had similarly pressured the KIO to issue a statement denouncing attempts by the United States to pass a resolution on Burma through the UN Security Council (UNSC). The resolution was put to a vote on 12 January 2007 but was vetoed by both China and Russia.[21]

Also in January 2007, it was reported that the KIO had increasingly turned to drug trafficking to raise funds after Major General Ohn Myint had officially banned them from conducting cross border trade with China. According to reports, the KIO's main sources of revenue prior to 2006 were timber (40%), jade (30%), and casinos (20%), with as much as 60 percent of their trade going across the border into China.[22]

New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K)

The KIO has suffered a number of damaging splits over the years. In 1989, the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) was created when the KIA 3rd Brigade, led by Zahkung Ting Ying and Layawk Zelum, broke away and immediately signed a permanent ceasefire pact with the junta. Since its inception, the NDA-K has shown no political aspirations, which has resulted in the organization being viewed more as a commercial group than a political one. The NDA-K is based in Pang Wah, on the Sino-Burma border, where they control the area known as Kachin State Special Region-1 and conduct numerous logging and jade and gold mining ventures. It is believed that there are approximately 800 soldiers in the NDA-K.

In 2005, NDA-K General Secretary Layawk Zelum and his supporters staged an unsuccessful coup against Zahkung Ting Ying, after which, the coup leaders returned to the KIA who continue to support them.

On 18 August 2007, fighting broke out between the NDA-K and the Rebellion Resistance Force (RRF), both of which are SPDC-aligned ceasefire groups, in Putao District. The firefight occurred when eight ethnic Rawang soldiers from the NDA-K's 4th Battalion attempted to defect to the RRF with their weapons. The RRF is reported to consist entirely of Rawang militiamen.[23]

Also in August 2007, the already strained relationship between the NDA-K and the SPDC experienced additional tension when NDA-K soldiers surrounded a newly-established SPDC army outpost near Changmaw Krung close to NDA-K-controlled territory. NDA-K spokespersons maintained that the move was a *"precautionary measure against possible security threat"* by the SPDC army who had recently trebled the number of its soldiers in the area. According to sources, this move by the NDA-K came at a time when the organization was under increased pressure from the SPDC to disarm and downgrade to a local militia.[24]

As in previous years, representatives of the NDA-K attended the National Convention (NC), and people living in areas under its control were similarly forced to attend rallies in support of the NC.[25]

In a transparent move to please the regime so that they would be permitted to *"enjoy an equal-profit economy"*; on 1 November 2007, the NDA-K delivered a letter to the SPDC stating that the NDA-K "*will protest against every matter which is harmful for peace and stability of the country"*.[26]

Karen State

Karen State is home to the world's longest continual ethnic conflict. The Karen resistance began in 1949 soon after Burma was granted independence from Britain and has continued near ceaselessly to this day, for almost 60 years. The main Karen opposition group is the Karen National Union (KNU), whose armed wing is known as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNU is widely regarded as one of the stronger resistance groups opposing the military regime, although over the years, they have suffered a number of damaging splits within the ranks. The most detrimental of these occurred in December 1994 when a large group of rank and file soldiers broke away to form the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).

Almost immediately, the DKBA formed an alliance with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC; as the regime was known prior to November 1997) and betrayed the KNU by showing the SLORC soldiers all of the weaknesses of key defensive positions and the

way through the extensive minefields protecting the KNU headquarters at Manerplaw. As a result, Manerplaw fell. This was followed in quick succession with the fall of a number of other KNU strongholds located along the border with Thailand, including nearby Kaw Moo Rah, less than a month later. Since that time, the KNU has lost most of its territory and been forced to adopt guerrilla tactics, for which the jungles of Karen State are ideally suited.

The DKBA was rewarded by the regime not only with numerous economic concessions, but also they also were awarded control over many areas that had formerly been controlled by the KNU, including a number of lucrative border checkpoints where they could make considerable revenue from taxing the traders who passed through those gates. Over the past 15 years, their sphere of influence has increased and DKBA units have a presence in six of the seven Karen districts. However, the DKBA has also embraced many of the same policies used by the junta and are guilty of committing widespread human rights abuses against the same people that they claim to represent. (For more information, see Section 8.4: Abuse of Ethnic Minorities by Ceasefire Groups below).

In January 2007, the KNU suffered its most recent split when a number of KNLA soldiers attached to the KNLA 7th Brigade, led by Brigadier General Htain Maung, broke away to create the Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC) and immediately signed a ceasefire pact with the SPDC.

Karen National Union (KNU)

In late-November 2005, the SPDC mounted an attack on He Daw Khaw village in Toungoo District, Karen State, which served as the beginning of an SPDC army offensive against civilian villagers living in northern Karen State. This offensive has differed from many previous annual dry season offensives in that attacks on civilian villages and KNU bases have continued throughout the rainy season when attacks have traditionally come to a standstill. As such, the attacks have continued year-round over the past two years with little time for respite. This offensive has been labelled as the biggest in ten years and has resulted in an estimated 30,000 villagers becoming newly displaced as a direct result of the attacks.[27] It must be noted that while SPDC army units have launched attacks against the KNLA, the primary target of the current offensive, like the vast majority of those before it, is not the armed resistance of the KNLA, but rather unarmed civilian villagers.[28]

KNLA soldiers celebrate the 58th anniversary of the Karen Revolution at a KNLA camp inside Burma near the Thai-Burma border. *[Photo: BBC]*

Under the offensive, SPDC army forces mounted regular patrols through the hills of northern Karen State in search of internally displaced persons (IDPs), their settlements and their food supplies. Any IDPs that they found have been either captured and forcibly relocated to SPDC-controlled relocation sites, or simply shot-on-sight. Meanwhile all IDP hiding sites or hidden food caches discovered by the soldiers have been ransacked and then destroyed. The soldiers eat what they can, carry off what they are able, and destroy the rest. As a result of such policies, precious few villagers have much left in the way of food and starvation has become a very real threat for many. Moreover, fields and plantations and IDP sites alike have been sown with landmines for the purpose of discouraging the villagers from returning lest they step on one.

Many villagers from the region have reported that aside from overt threats to their physical security, their greatest concern is the lack of food.[29] (For more information, see Chapter 5: Deprivation of Livelihood). Confronted with the very real likelihood of being shot if seen, many IDPs therefore do what they can to avoid all contact with SPDC army units. Many must regularly move from place to place whenever an SPDC army patrol draws near, fleeing deeper into the forest to avoid detection.[30]

Within this context, some groups have argued that, weakened by repeated splits over the years, the KNU has largely become a defensive force, whose primary occupation has been to slow the advance of SPDC army battalions as they move through the forests in search of the internally displaced, moving in small groups and employing strategies of guerrilla warfare to harass and stall the SPDC, thus giving IDPs time to escape. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

On 24 December 2006, former KNU president and commanding officer of the KNLA, General Bo Mya died at the age of 79 from complications arising from diabetes in a hospital in Mae Sot, Thailand.[31] Held in high regard by many, the former leader's funeral was attended by an estimated 5,000 people who came to pay their last respects, including members of the DKBA, the SPDC and the Royal Thai Army (RTA).[32] However, many high-ranking KNU officials were conspicuous by their absence, who refused to attend the service out of protest against the presence of SPDC Colonel Myat Htun Oo who had been invited by the late leader's son, Colonel Ner Dah Mya.

Within days of the funeral, commanding officer of the KNLA 7th Brigade, Brigadier General Htaing Maung led a number of KNLA officers in ceasefire negotiations with the SPDC without the prior consent from the KNU Central Committee. Htain Maung and his followers were warned repeatedly to cease all negotiations, and failing to comply were ultimately ejected from the KNU on 30 January 2007. The following day, on 31 January 2007, Htain Maung announced the creation of the newest Karen splinter faction, the rather unimaginatively named, Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC). Htain Maung declared himself the chairman of the new faction and on 11 February 2007, celebrated the signing of a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC in Kawkareik, Karen State.[33] A statement announced that Thramu Lar Poe, wife of the late Bo Mya, had been appointed as the vice chairperson of the KNU/KNLAPC, while her son, Colonel Ner Dah Mya, was appointed the position of Secretary 1, despite having not informed either of them of this. *"The fact that my name is put in the position of vice chairperson, and my children are included as members of this organization is an evil set up. … I absolutely do not accept it"*, said Lar Poe in an interview following the announcement. (For more information regarding the KNU/KNLAPC, see the subsequent section below).

In August 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had also approached Lieutenant Colonel Kyi Linn, commanding officer of the KNLA 18th Battalion with offers to broker a ceasefire pact in much the same way as Brigadier General Htain Maung had done. It remains unclear what the results of their meeting were as Kyi Linn was found dead on 20 August 2007, in the

Haungthayaw River near Kawkareik with a gunshot wound to the head. While speculation on who killed him arose, the actual motivation and culprit behind his dead remain unreported.[34]

In April 2007, the KNLA 101st Battalion headquarters was overrun and occupied by SPDC-allied DKBA soldiers.[35]

Also in April, residents of the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand were ordered by camp security officials not to turn on any lights after dark out of fear of an imminent attack by Karen ceasefire groups. *"We have to shut down all the lights at 8:00 pm, including all electric generators and even candle lights,"* said one resident. According to the source, P'Doh Mahn Sha, General Secretary of the KNU, had maintained that Karen ceasefire groups such as the DKBA and KNU/KNLAPC had *"turned against civilians who did not support their break from the KNU"*. Despite concerns, no attacks were reported.[36]

On 13 July 2007, KNU intelligence officer, Major Tashee, was shot and killed near the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand. Camp residents reported hearing *"five or six gun shots"*, which resulted in the death of Tashee and one other unidentified man.[37]

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)

The DKBA continued to work alongside and on behalf of the SPDC during 2007. During 2007, the DKBA also worked closely with other Karen ceasefire groups, including the newly-formed KNU/KNLAPC in mounting attacks against KNLA bases as well as undefended civilian villages.[38] (For more information, see Section 8.4: Abuse of Ethnic Minorities by Ceasefire Groups).

On 26 March 2007, two Thai Border Patrol Police were released from detention after having been detained by the DKBA for the past five days. The two officers, identified as Sub-Lieutenant Chavalit Rattanaphan and Lance Corporal Prayongyuth Panthang, had been invited to cross into Burma by DKBA officers before being kidnapped by them. According to an unidentified senior Karen official, *"the DKBA detained the two border policemen because it wanted to exchange them for three Karen National Liberation Army officers who work in the DKBA-controlled area"*.[39]

On 6 August 2007, it was reported that DKBA officers attached to the group's #907 Battalion was providing displaced Karen villagers with free land near Myawaddy. According to the report, displaced farmers were given 2,400 square foot plots of land near Mae Tawgale village on the proviso that they build their homes on it within a week of having received it. KNU representatives, however, believed that the DKBA had ulterior motives underlying their apparent kindness, fearing that the move would result in increased forced recruitment: *"the Mae Tawg[a]le area would now be turned into a fertile recruiting ground for the DKBA"*, said Major Saw Hla Ngwe of the KNU.[40]

Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC)

The KNU/KNLAPC is based in Htaw Kaw Koh, Kawkareik Township, at the site of the assassination of former Karen leader and Karen martyr Saw Ba U Gyi. The KNU/KNLAPC's fighting strength is unknown but has been estimated to range from 100 to 400 armed soldiers.[41]

On 11 February 2007, the KNU/KNLAPC celebrated their *"return to the legal fold"* in a much touted *"Victory of Peace Welcoming Ceremony"* at their new headquarters in Htaw Kaw Koh. According to reports, 320 soldiers had surrendered to the SPDC, although other, conflicting reports have maintained that many of this number were actually civilians who were forced to wear uniforms to boost the numbers so that it appeared as though many more soldiers had defected than those who actually did. Some reports have maintained that a number of children were including among this number.[42] (For more information, see Chapter 13: Rights of the Child).

Brigadier General Hain Maung, chairman of the KNU/KNLAPC, photographed before being expelled from the KNU where he was the commanding officer of the KNLA 7th Brigade. *[Photo: Nic Dunlop]*

The newly-created KNU/KNLAPC was quick to sign a ceasefire pact with the SPDC and soon sided with their long-time enemies in attacking their former comrades in the KNU. To this end, the KNU/KNLAPC has worked alongside both the SPDC and DKBA to mount attacks on KNU positions, fighting shoulder to shoulder with men, who only last year were their adversaries and not their allies.

Some sources have speculated that Htain Maung may not be the real leader behind the KNU/KNLAPC, *"but that he is following the lead of Pastor Timothy, a former member of the KNU Foreign Affairs Committee"*. Some observers have argued that Timothy, angered over his failure to secure any votes for a seat on the KNU Central Committee at the organization's 13th Congress in 2004 and then by his expulsion from the KNU in 2005 following the publication of a letter which was highly critical of the KNU leadership, sought to 'go it alone' and broker a ceasefire deal with the regime (with considerable economic concessions for himself).[43]

Reliable reports have also testified that the KNU/KNLAPC is recruiter and user of child soldiers.[44] (For more information, see Chapter 13: Rights of the Child).

Karenni State

Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)

Initially founded in 1957, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) continues to oppose the central Burmese military regime despite suffering a number of splits over the years. In March 1995, the KNPP reached a ceasefire agreement with the junta, although the truce was short lived, lasting only three months before fighting resumed. The two groups have remained in conflict every since, and though the KNPP has expressed an interest in engaging the regime in a ceasefire, all talks to date have produced little.

On 2 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #250 reportedly arrested and interrogated Phukhrakhu village chairman, Ti Reh before shooting him. The village secretary was also detained by the same unit. The incident took place following a clash with the KNPP which had occurred nearby. Local villages are often held accountable by the SPDC should they come under attack by opposition groups.[45]

On 6 April 2007, it was reported that SPDC army units continued to shell KNPP bases despite ongoing peace talks and that the number of clashes between the two groups had risen to as many as ten per month.[46]

On 8 April 2007, the village chairperson and village secretary from Halikhu village in Pruso Township were arrested and interrogated by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #427 after they had been involved in a clash with KNPP soldiers.[47]

On 11 June 2007, 30 ethnic Karenni arrived on the Burma-Thai border to seek entry into one of the Karenni refugee camps set up on the Thai side of the border after having fled a fresh round of SPDC army attacks against the KNPP located near to their homes. According to sources, over 200 Karenni refugees had arrived at Karenni Camp 1 since the beginning of the year.[48]

SPDC army units mounted unexpected attacks against KNPP bases in Shadaw Township in July at the height of the monsoon rains. It was believed that these attacks were an attempt to prevent a splinter faction of approximately 100 Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization (SSNPLO) soldiers from making contact with the KNPP. The SSNPLO defectors had recently abandoned their posts in SPDC-controlled areas of Shan State in mid-June fearing that the SPDC would attempt to disarm them at the conclusion of the National Convention.[49]

On 9 August 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #428 fired a volley of mortar shells into a crowd celebrating the 59th anniversary Karenni Resistance Day. According to reports, a number of the shells failed to explode and no one was injured. Following the incident, Khun Oo Reh, Secretary 2 of the KNPP stated that *"They have failed to meet us at the discussion table so we have no choice but to continue our armed revolution"*.[50]

A clash between the KNPP and SPDC army soldiers from LIB #530, which left four SPDC army soldiers dead and an additional five injured, served as a prelude to the arrest of over 50 local Karenni villagers. The villagers were arrested for allegedly supporting the Karenni soldiers and having prior knowledge of the attack, which took place in Chitkeh village. *"They [the SPDC army soldiers] regularly do this kind of thing. … They tell villagers that the Karenni soldiers cannot survive without the villagers' support. They also accuse the villagers of feeding Karenni soldiers,"* said Rimond Htoo, General Secretary of the KNPP. The arrested villagers all hailed from Loikaw, Chitkeh, Palong and Suplong villages.[51]

Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)

The Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) was created in 1978 when approximately 200 members of the KNPP broke away from the group. At its formation, the KNPLF was originally a communist resistance organization, but later signed a ceasefire with the regime in June 1994.52 Immediately after brokering this deal, the junta deployed the KNPLF against the KNPP with promises attaining a sizeable income through control of border-tax gates, the tin and wolfram mines in Mawchi, and taxes on logging, if it could take control of these operations away from the KNPP and act as a village security force in the name of the SPDC.

Similar in many ways to the DKBA in Karen State, the KNPLF has regularly served as a proxy army for the SPDC, searching for KNPP units and interrogating local villagers for information on their whereabouts and activities.

On 25 October 2007, a report in the *Kantarawaddy Times* speculated that while the KNPLF had banned the trafficking and sale of methamphetamine tablets in areas under its control, it has continued to permit the cultivation and sale of opium, which has resulted in a growing dependency to the drug in KNPLF areas. *"Opium is mixed with powder of banana leaf and dried in Myinn Khwar leaves to be smoked. Most drug addicts are young school boys and labourers, and only a few are poppy farmers"*, said a representative of the Karenni Anti-Drug Action Committee (KADAC).[53]

Mon State

New Mon State Party (NMSP)

The Mon resistance began very early soon after independence when the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and its armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) was founded. However, this opposition ended in 1995 when the NMSP brokered a ceasefire agreement with the regime in exchange the right to retain arms and a number of economic concessions.

According to reports by *Kaowao News*, the NMSP had once received monthly payments from the SPDC of 4.1 million kyat, although these payments ceased in July 2005 after the group spoke up in favour of federalism at National Convention proceedings.[54]

Shan State

As the largest ethnic minority state in Burma, and as one of the most ethnically diverse, it should come as no surprise that numerous groups operate in Shan State. Acutely aware that this may represent a threat to their control over the region, the regime has maintained a consistent and heavy military presence in the state. The majority of armed ethnic groups operating in Shan State have allied themselves with the regime and signed ceasefire deals. Some groups, however, such as the Shan State Army – South, continued to oppose the regime throughout 2007.

On 16 April 2007, the Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) and the Pa'O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO), all members of the opposition National Democratic Front (NDF), and all of whom operate in Shan State, announced their intention to ban the use of antipersonnel landmines by signing the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines). According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL):

"Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment requires signatory organizations not only to refrain from mine use, but to cooperate in a program to destroy any mine stocks they may hold. They will further be expected to cooperate in the clearance of mines which they or others may have laid previously in their areas of operation".

United Wa State Army (UWSA)

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) was formed in 1989 following the disintegration of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and brokered a ceasefire with the junta soon after its creation. Believed to have as many as many as 20,000 active soldiers, the UWSA operates out of Wa territory in the northern part of Shan State along the Chinese border from Kokang to Mongla and along the Thai border areas from Tachilek to Homong.[55]

Although the group profits greatly from its affiliation with the SPDC, villages in their sphere of operations reportedly remain largely undeveloped and lack basic healthcare and education facilities. In return for supporting SPDC army soldiers in their attacks against other ethnic minority groups, most notably the opposition Shan State Army – South (SSA-S), the SPDC has turned a blind eye to the prolific drug operations conducted in UWSA territory, which serve as the primary source of much of the group's wealth, arms and power.[56] There has been considerable speculation over the past several years regarding the SPDC's complicity in the drug trade and that they have received kickbacks from groups such as the UWSA for permitting such activities to continue unpunished. However, little concrete evidence has emerged to conclusively prove such accusations.

On 17 July 2007, the SPDC ordered the UWSA with an ultimatum to either disarm, attack the SSA-S, or to withdraw from their bases located along the border with Thailand and to return to the Wa Self-Administered Region further north adjacent to the Chinese border. They had been issued the deadline of 31 July by which to have completed the relocation, however, rather than comply with the orders, *"[t]he UWSA ignored the order and went ahead with reinforcing its presence in the border area"*.[57] Some reports maintained that the *"Wa leaders [said that] they [would] fight any effort to remove them"*.[58]

Further souring the already shaky relationship between the UWSA and the SPDC, in November 2007, the UWSA defied SPDC orders and refused to sign a pre-drafted declaration condemning a statement read out by UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari on behalf of Aung San Suu Kyi which had called for national reconciliation.[59]

Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)

The Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) was formed in 1996 following the agreement of the Mong Thai Army (MTA) to enter a ceasefire pact with the regime by MTA soldiers who were unhappy with the decision and who chose to continue opposing the regime. While the MTA was known more for its involvement in the drug industry than they were for representing the people, the SSA-S quickly became known as a legitimate representative of the Shan ethnic minority. Since the SPDC will only accept a complete surrender of arms from the SSA-S, no ceasefire negotiations have ever taken place between the two groups.[60] On 23 May 2007, fresh talks were slate to take place, but were cancelled when the SPDC delegation failed to show up for the meeting.[61]

Throughout 2007, numerous armed clashes occurred between the SSA-S and the SPDC who also ordered a number of its ceasefire groups, including the UWSA, to attack SSA-S positions.

On 21 January 2007, soldiers from SSA-S Battalion #34 were surprised when they were ambushed by an SPDC-allied Lahu militia group approximately 25 kilometres south of Kengtung, in which two SSA-S soldiers were killed. *"We were caught unawares because it has been a long time since we clashed with each other,"* said an SSA-S officer. Further clashes occurred the following morning with SPDC army soldiers who had arrived in the area to support the Lahu militia.[62]

On 7 April 2007, SSA-S soldiers clashed with SPDC army soldiers from IB #131 near Kye-thi village in central Shan State. SPDC Major Tun Oo was reported killed and four of his men wounded.[63]

On 13 April 2007, a firefight between the SPDC and SSA-S in Mongpiang, Lawkzawk Township left two SPDC army soldiers dead and a further ten wounded.[64]

In March 2007, it was reported that an SSA-S unit commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Awng Mya had joined forces with soldiers from the Wa National Army (WNA) and mounted patrols of the Loi Wa Her area opposite Muan District of Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand. According to reports, the two groups had been working together over the past year to strengthen the defences at the WNA base at Loi Wa Her.[65]

On 6 June 2007, the SSA-S held a drug burning ceremony at its Loi Kawwan base opposite Thailand's Chiang Rai Province. According to reports, the event marked the third such ceremony and had destroyed 1.1 million methamphetamine tablets reportedly valued at 38.5 million baht (US$1 million), which had been seized from the SPDC-allied … led by Ja Seu-bo.[66]

Shan Nationalities People Liberation Organization (SNPLO)

Formed in 1968, the Shan Nationalities People Liberation Organization (SNPLO) reached a ceasefire with the junta on 9 October 1994 and reportedly became closely allied with the UWSA.

In late-2005, the group suffered a major split. Hkun Chit Maung split away from the SNPLO with approximately 100 men and established their base at Nawnghtao in Hsihseng Township, to the west of the Pawn River. The new faction was renamed the Pa'O Regional Nationalities Unity Organization (PNUO). His 100 troops were reinforced by additional soldiers from a fellow ceasefire group, the Pa'O National Army (PNA) and also received support and protection from the SPDC. The second faction, led by Hso Pyan, retained the SNPLO name with an estimated 250 men. Hso Pyan's faction based themselves to the east of the Pawn River. No large-scale battles have occurred between the two groups although there have been a number of small skirmishes and ambushes.

Following the conclusion of the National Convention (NC) in July 2007, the SPDC increased pressure on its ceasefire groups to disarm and recognise the SPDC army as the sole army of the country, in accordance with the provisions spelled out in the NC.[67] While some members of the SNPLO agreed to this, including its chairman, U Chit Maung, others did not.

A breakaway faction of approximately 100 SNPLO soldiers who could not accept this demand fled into Karenni State into areas controlled by the opposition KNPP where they announced that they would resume fighting against the regime after a more than a decade of observing the ceasefire. According to SNPLO Vice President Ti Saung, *"They (SPDC) told us to surrender which we can't accept"*.[68] As a result of their refusal to disarm, on 10 August 2007, SPDC army soldiers attacked the group. Colonel Aung Kyaw who was also among the defectors said that, *"The government started pressuring them after they refused to*

disarm several times … and so the fight broke out in the area east of Ban Yin".[69] Meanwhile, Colonel Khun Thurein, General Secretary of the SNPLO said that *"We will fight back against the government for a chance to have democracy and real a federal union in Burma. … There is no way to win against the government except through armed revolution, … [s]o, we will fight using arms"*.[70] On 16 July 2007, it was reported that the breakaway SNPLO faction were engaged in talks with the SSA-S over a possible merger of their two forces.[71]

On 18 November 2007, the breakaway faction announced that they had given themselves a new name: the Pa'O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO) and that they would continue to fight against the central regime in the interests of the Pa'O people.[72]

Multilateral Resistance Organizations

Despite the frequent splits and factionalism in the various armed ethnic resistance groups, political affiliations between different ethnic groups have allowed for the creation of several multilateral resistance organizations which have attempted to coordinate between the various ethnic minority groups in order to achieve a degree of unity between them and advocate for their collective concerns.

The National Democratic Front (NDF) was the first such group to form in 1976. Created by an in the interests of a number of ethnic organizations, the NDF was originally comprised of members of the Karen National Union (KNU), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Karenni Nationalities Progressive Party (KNPP), Chin National Front (CNF), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), Palaung Liberation Front (PLF), Pa'O Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Wa National Organization (WNO). As with the majority of the multilateral resistance organisations, the efforts of the NDF were purely political and focused on the advocacy of a Federal Union of Burma and the equal rights and representation of ethnic minorities.[73]

In 1989, the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) joined the NDF in their advocacy efforts with a membership that also included members of a broader pro-democracy movement in Burma.[74]

Later, in August 2001, the United Nationalities League for Democracy – Liberated Area (UNLD-LA) and the NDF together founded the Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (ENSCC), which in 2004 was renamed the ENC. The stated goal of the ENSCC (and subsequently the ENC) was to facilitate tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, the Burman pro-democracy groups and the ethnic minority groups. In 2005, the ENC commenced work on drafting a constitution for a democratic Burma. Unlike the constitution being forced upon the delegates at the National Convention, the constitution that emerged from the Ethnic Nationalities Council was founded on principals of federalism and protected the rights and interests of Burma's ethnic minorities.[75]

15.3 SPDC Campaign of Abuses against Ethnic Minority Villagers

Throughout Burma, ethnic ceasefire agreements have rarely offered civilians any protection against violence and abuse. In many cases, the abuses have actually increased following the brokering of a ceasefire pact. Even when direct attacks and arbitrary killings are not occurring, the SPDC and their proxy ceasefire armies exploit ethnic villagers as forced labour, and also through the use of forced relocation, arbitrary arrest, extortion, land confiscation, destruction of property, targeting of food supplies, rapes, beatings and torture.

Control and manipulation of ethnic identity by the military regime can be loosely grouped into three main strategies: direct violence, economic deprivation and cultural assimilation. Of these three, direct violence is arguably the most obvious. SPDC army soldiers as well as ceasefire groups were guilty of performing extrajudicial executions, arbitrarily detaining villagers, and beating and torturing civilians in ethnic minority areas across the country. For example, in Karen State during 2007, as in previous years, SPDC army soldiers shelled villages with mortars and shot IDPs hiding in the forest on sight. (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions).

In November 2005, the SPDC launched an intensive military offensive against civilian villages in northern Karen State. Unlike most previous campaigns, which have typically been conducted only in the dry season when soldiers can more easily move up and down the steep hillsides, the attacks on unarmed civilian villages continued into the rainy season when travel becomes difficult and the roads impassable to vehicles. Rather than withdraw back to their bases at the onset of the monsoon, the SPDC army columns remained in the steep and densely forested hills, mounting military assaults on undefended villages and hunting the internally displaced who attempted to elude them. SPDC army units fired upon displaced Karen villagers on sight, forcibly relocated those they could catch and deployed thousands of landmines targeted against those that they could not, burned whole villages and destroyed villagers' food supplies. These attacks continued, largely unabated into 2007.

The sustained nature of the attacks quickly caused this to be the single largest offensive conducted in the area in a decade. No offensives of this magnitude or intensity had been waged in Burma since the massive Karen offensives of 1997, in which hundreds of villages were razed and tens of thousands displaced. The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) estimated that by December 2006, approximately 25,000 villagers had fled their homes to hide in the forest where they hoped to avoid detection by SPDC army patrols.[76] During 2007 this number had swelled to over 30,000.[77] However, these numbers must be considered to exist on top of the approximately 120,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) already living in hiding in Karen State.[78]

The ongoing offensive in northern Karen State represents a continuation of a pattern of State-directed violence committed against the civilian population which the SPDC has practised in ethnic minority areas of for decades. In its efforts to wipe out armed resistance and control ethnic minority groups, the SPDC typically targets ethnic minority villages, in direct contravention of not only the Geneva Conventions, but various other international conventions as well, many of which have come to be regarded as customary international law and which the SPDC is thus obliged to obey.

Economic deprivation was also employed widely by the SPDC and by its allied ceasefire armies throughout Burma during 2007. SPDC army soldiers and ceasefire armies alike deliberately and routinely razed villagers' crops and food supplies. Roads were blockaded and food deliveries were not permitted to reach their destinations, creating food shortages

for those who had come to depend on them for their survival. However, perhaps the most pervasive strategy was through the use of extortion and forced labour. Throughout 2007, villagers were regularly called upon to provide their uncompensated labour to assist the military, building new roads and army camps, portering supplies, serving as guides and running errands. Villagers were taken away from their farms and forced to work with little to no regard for the agricultural seasons or the importance of timeliness in farming. As a result, many villagers were unable to harvest enough food to feed their families because so much of their time was spent performing forced labour for the military. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). Similarly, whenever soldiers have burned villager's fields and plantations, mounted patrols in civilian farming areas or set up camps near villages or their fields and plantations, it has had a direct impact on the financial life of the villagers.

Furthermore, an elaborate (and at times ludicrous) system of unofficial taxation, tantamount to little more than blatant extortion, has been exacted upon the civilian population by the SPDC and its proxies. Such *"taxes"* or *"fees"* may range from levies paid in Arakan State before a marriage permit will be granted, through to fines payable in numerous areas of eastern Burma for the destruction of State property after a villager steps on an SPDC-deployed landmine, many of which are deployed in areas known to be frequented by non-combatants. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

The third strategy used in the campaign against Burma's ethnic minorities by the SPDC has been their cultural assimilation into the Buddhist Burman majority. Commonly referred to as *"Burmanization"*, one such tool used by the regime is the destruction of culturally important sites or buildings and the construction of more Burman-appropriate structures in their stead. For instance, in Chin State, Christian Chins are prevented from building churches or holding religious events. Many Christian sites in Chin State have been demolished and Buddhist pagodas and temples built on the site. Similarly, the Muslim Rohingya from Arakan State find it extremely difficult to secure official permission to repair existing mosques, let alone construct new ones. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

The regime has also enacted certain draconian laws which prevent the expression of culture among many of Burma's ethnic minorities, which among other things, have prohibited the wearing of traditional ethnic dress, performing traditional cultural ceremonies, or even learning native ethnic languages. The Muslim Rohingya of Arakan State, for example, are prevented from adhering to their marriage traditions and wearing traditional dress when performing wedding ceremonies. Many Rohingya are prevented from marrying at all and must first apply for marriage permits from the regime, the cost of which is prohibitively high, and which are often arbitrarily denied anyway. Moreover, the Rohingya have been targeted for, what some researchers have referred to as, *"cultural genocide"* in that they have frequently been forcibly relocated off their land and into SPDC-designated sites to make way for Buddhist Burman settlers from central Burma so as to dilute the ethnic composition of the region through the establishment of these incongruously-named *"model villages"*.

As shall be seen on the pages which follow, various strategies of direct violence, economic deprivation and cultural assimilation were employed by the SPDC and its allied ethnic ceasefire armies in the ethnic minority areas of Burma throughout 2007. By far the most extensively documented of these were those abuses which had been committed in Karen State, due not only to the large-scale military offensive which continues there, but also due to the extensive documentation network in place among the Karen. That said, the greater amount of evidence recorded for Karen State does not necessarily mean that the situation there is any worse than in any other part of the country. In other words, this should not be taken to mean that fewer documented incidences from other parts of the country equates to fewer human rights violations being committed in those areas.

Please note that the list of incidents shown below is far from complete and should not be assumed to represent an exhaustive catalogue of the campaign of abuses perpetrated against ethnic minority villagers in Burma. This chapter would be long indeed if all such incidents were to be listed here. Such a catalogue would be a substantial tome in itself and is beyond the scope of this present chapter. That which is included below has been to illustrate the deliberate and discriminatory nature of these abuses. Please refer to other relevant chapters of this report for further information on special abuses or sets of abuses.

Arakan State

There are approximately two million inhabitants of Arakan (Rakhine) State. The two predominant ethnic groups are the Buddhist Arakanese (Rakhine) and the Bengali-speaking Muslim Rohingya.

The Rohingya, for the most part, inhabit the northern region of Arakan State, near the border with Bangladesh. The Arakan Project, an independent NGO documenting abuses against the Rohingya, has characterised the area as one of acute poverty which is facing a *"chronic emergency"*, and the Rohingya as facing some of the highest levels of discrimination in Burma.[79] Burmese military campaigns against the Rohingya prompted large refugee flows into Bangladesh in 1978 and again in 1991-92. Approximately 20,000 Rohingya refugees remain in camps in Bangladesh.[80] (For more information, see Chapter 17: Situation of Refugees).

The Rohingya have no official status within Burma or in neighbouring Bangladesh. Bangladesh. Both countries refuse to claim them as their own, and as such, the Rohingya are a stateless people. As non-citizens, they are not allowed to travel out of Northern Arakan State and must request permission from SPDC authorities any time that they wish to leave their villages. (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement). Similarly, Fishermen in the town of Sittwe have to pay 500 kyat each to the immigration, military intelligence (*SaRaPa*) and the regional administration (*DaKaSa*) if they want to go out to sea to go fishing.[81]

Even at those times when Rohingya have purchased and are in possession of valid travel permits, they are not immune to extortion and arrest from SPDC army soldiers. Many Rohingya procure travel documents to move from the economically depressed Buthidaung Township to look for work in Maungdaw Township. However, they are vulnerable to exploitation as they return home, carrying the money they have saved. Troops at any number of checkpoints along the road often detain people and destroy their travel documents, thereafter demanding a fine from the person and stealing their money.[82] Restrictions on movement also apply to those seeking medical care for cases where treatment is not locally available due to the extremely low quality of healthcare services in the region. (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health).

The restrictions on movement, combined with the restrictions on business activity perpetuate a state of economic depression in the area, and as a result, the Rohingya have struggle over the past few years to grow or buy enough food.

For the past several years, the Ministry for the Development of Border Areas and National Races has forcibly relocated the Rohingya off the land to make way for settlers brought in from other areas, usually from around Rangoon, but sometimes even foreigners from Bangladesh. SPDC army soldiers are frequently used to enforce such evictions and to pressure Rohingya farm owners to sign over their land, on occasion utilising torture and imprisonment to secure their signatures on 'legal' documents, which is ironic in that land

ownership documents do not exist in Burma and that the state retains ownership of all agricultural land.[83] (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). Land confiscated from the Rohingya has typically been used to establish 'model villages', also known as *NaTaLa* (Ministry of Border Affairs) villages designed to dilute the ethnic composition of the areas by relocating Buddhist Burman settlers into areas traditionally inhabited by the Rohingya. According to one report, by August 2006, there were already 1,500 settlers placed in five model villages throughout Maungdaw Township.[84] Other sources have maintained that by the end of November 2006, over 40 Rohingya families had been displaced from their land and that more settlers were slated to arrive in the Taungbro area during 2007.[85]

On 27 March 2007, the NaTaLa called a meeting with villagers from Maung Nama, Magh Bill, Kwan Daine, Yet Nyo Daung, Thet Kin Manu, and Washilla Para villages in Buthidaung Township. At the meeting, the authorities announced that they would establish new model villages on their paddy fields.[86]

On 20 June 2007, the NaSaKa seized 140 acres of farmland from Rohingya villagers in Shwe Zarr village tract and a further 70 acres from Ashika Para of Maungdaw Township for use in the creation of a new model village.[87]

On 22 September 2007, 12 acres of farmland was confiscated from Rohingya farmers in Buthidaung Township without any form of compensation. The NaSaKa announced that yet another model village was to be established on the confiscated land in November 2007. One unidentified village elder from the area speculated that if *"The concerned authorities continue … this trend to confiscate land from Rohingya farmers, there will be no Rohingya farmers in Arakan within five years"*.[88]

During 2007, as in previous years, the Rohingya faced increasing levels of discrimination and cultural repression as the SPDC enforced regulations requiring Rohingya couples to apply for permission before they are allowed to marry.[89] A marriage permit can cost anywhere from 1,000 kyat to 150,000 kyat and involves extensive paperwork and lengthy delays of up to several months. In order to acquire a marriage permit, the couple must appear before the *NaSaKa* dressed in formal Burman attire.[90] They must either follow cultural traditions not their own, or else not be married.

On 3 July 2007, 27-year-old Mohammad Jamil was arrested by SaRaPa personnel and fined 40,000 kyat for having married without seeking official permission.[91] Similarly, on 29 July 2007, a Rohingya couple who had married in 2006 without official permission fled to Bangladesh fearing arrest. At the time Majuma Khatun was nine month's pregnant with the couple's first child and knowing that word of their marriage would get out, they fled to Bangladesh to have the baby there.[92]

Meanwhile on 5 November 2007, 23-year-old Abu Siddique was finally awarded permission to marry three years after having initially applied. It would seem that the only reason that permission was finally granted was the as a result of the payment of a 30,000 kyat bribe.[93]

On 20 August 2007, 30-year-old Abdu Radshid was fined 6,000 kyat and two gallons of kerosene by NaSaKa personnel after his wife gave birth to a still born baby. Purely looking to extort money from the couple, the NaSaKa accused Abdu Radshid of strangling the baby.[94]

Chin State

Chin State is situated in the western hills of Burma bordering the northeastern states of India and is home to a population of approximately 500,000 people, with a further 50,000 Chin refugees estimated to be living in Mizoram State, India. Approximately 90 percent of the Chin population is Christian, which has caused them to be targeted for harsh discrimination along religious lines by the predominantly-Buddhist regime. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion).

The region falls under the area of operations of the SPDC northwestern Regional Military Command which stations no fewer than six battalions in the State at any one time.

On 3 January 2007, it was reported that a young Chin woman was refused entry into a midwife training that she had already been accepted into for wearing pants. The young woman, whose name was not given, was among 20 woman chosen for the training in Haka which was implemented by the National Working Committee for Women's Affairs (NWCWA). According to the source, the young woman was turned away from the bus which was to take the trainees to the venue for failing to wear a traditional Burmese sarong.[95]

On 24 January 2007, it was reported that in late 2006 the chairman of the Thangtlang Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) had ordered all female civil servants to clean an decorate a Buddhist monastery in Thangtlang. As the vast majority of Chin are Christian, many of these women reported feeling *"insult[ed] and humiliated"*. One of the women who had been forced to perform this labour told the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) that *"I think calling [us] to clean the monastery [was] just to humiliate us, because … the Buddhists can clean this temple by themselves. But we are afraid of [having] our salar[ies cut] if we don't go"*.[96]

In January 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #140, based at Leisen village, Matupi Township demanded rations from local villagers. Every household within the LIB #140 cantonment area was ordered to provide six chickens and two cups of rice to the soldiers, which the villagers were also ordered to deliver to the camp. The villagers often have little choice other than comply with these demands as they are often accompanied with threats that non-compliance will result in the destruction of their village. *"Such kinds of rice and chickens confiscation have been committed every month that the surrounding villagers of Leisen areas are badly affected their livelihood as they never get the cost of their property from the military"*, said one local villager.[97]

On 5 February 2007, Captain Win Zaw from LIB #268 ordered several villagers to serve as guides and to *"take responsibility for the security"* of Chin State Peace and Development Council Chairman Colonel Tin Hla. The odd phraseology of civilian villagers "taking responsibility for the security" of armed soldiers means that should the column be attacked by the Chin resistance, the villagers will be punished. Guides are also often used as human minesweepers and human shields. During the second week of February 2007, Colonel Tin Hla travelled between Falam to Teddim, at which point, four villagers from Tuisen-Phai village were forced to serve as porters and guides for the Colonel and his men. One of these four villagers later reported that in addition to accompanying the soldiers and carrying their loads, they also had to provide them with food: *"We [had] to bring rations for them and [had] to carry their belongings up to their battalion. We spent 2 days [with the soldiers], but got nothing for our wages"*.[98]

On 21 February 2007, Lieutenant Colonel San Aung, Tactical Operations Commander #2 for Chin State ordered the arrest of nine village headmen from local villages in southern Chin State following a CNA ambush in which three SPDC army soldier, including one officer, were

killed. The village heads were arrested for failing to report the movement of the CNA soldiers to the SPDC. The clash took place near Cun-nam village on 19 February 2007. Seeking revenge for their losses, San Aung ordered the arrest of the village heads from the following villages. Though the report maintained that nine village heads were arrested, only eight were listed.

1. Cun-nam village;
2. San Pyah village;
3. Way Laung village;
4. Si Wa Nu village;
5. Lin Song village;
6. Khaw boi village;
7. Dar Chung village; and
8. Tingsi village.[99]

On 16 February 2007, the Matupi Golden Jubilee Memorial Pillar was destroyed under the orders of Lieutenant Colonel San Aung. According to his edict, all memorial pillars, with the singular exception of the Independence Pillar have been prohibited in Burma. *"The order said that Matupi … is in Burma, and in Burma no stone pillar is allowed to be built except the Independence stone pillar. So this stone pillar is illegal and must be destroyed at once"*, said a member of the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) who was ordered to participate in its destruction. Originally founded in 1949, Matupi celebrated its Golden Jubilee on 22 March 1999 and built the memorial to mark the event.[100]

In the first week of June, three people, two of whom were three-year-old children, died of diarrhoea in Pasin village of Matupi Township. Local healthcare workers reported that they had attempted to access the area to treat the sick and prevent any further deaths, but were blocked from doing so by the SPDC. Two other people from La Oo village in Thangtlang Township and a further two in Cakhang village near the Indian border also died *"because of their inability to access proper medical treatment"*.[101]

On 11 July 2007, three Chin youths were arrested and interrogated by SPDC army soldiers attached to LIB #233 under suspicion that they were members of the CNF. The three young men denied that they were presently affiliated with the group but had confessed that they had previously been CNA recruits but had fled the training camp "as they were suffering with pain and poverty there".[102]

On 19 November 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #266, based in Lunglei village, Thangtlang Township had been patrolling the border areas and using *"villagers not only as guides but also forc[ing] them to carry army rucksacks full of and ammunition and food. … Moreover, the soldiers [have] forcibly take[n] rice, chicken and vegetables from villagers residing along their patrol route"*. On 8 October 2007, a section of SPDC army soldiers, led by Major Myo Zaw Tant, forced 11 villagers from Sabawngte village in Matupi Township to carry rations and ammunition for them while on patrol.[103]

On 10 January 2007, prominent Chin activist and General Secretary of the UNLD, Dr. Lian Hmung Sakhong was awarded the prestigious Martin Luther King Prize in recognition of his struggle for peace and justice in Burma. The award was presented to Lian Hmung Sakhong at a ceremony on 15 January 2007 in Sweden.[104]

Kachin State

Kachin State, located in the far north of the country is believed to be home to approximately 1.2 million people. The majority of the Kachin population are Christian and thus the majority of the SPDC's persecution of the ethnic Kachin has mainly focused on their religion and on their conversion to Buddhism. (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion). To this end, the regime has set up several schools, referred to as *NaTaLa* (Ministry of Border Affairs) schools, which provide education free of charge, but have the ulterior motive of forcibly converting Christian students to Buddhism:

> *"The junta … opened a famous [NaTaLa] School in Putao Township and offers free education and accommodation to locals, … [b]ut, all Christians have to worship and bow before Buddhist Pagodas and mention Buddhism as their original faith in the [NaTaLa] School … application form"*.[105]

Added to the oppression handed out by the SPDC, a number of Kachin armed ceasefire groups are also guilty of committing human rights violations against local communities in Kachin State.

On 12 March 2007, it was reported that SPDC army soldiers issued an order for the destruction of a Lisu cultural building in Zibidi village of Putao Township after evidence of SPDC army battalions confiscating land from local villagers had been shared with the opposition media. Local villagers from Zibidi village were ordered to demolish the Naw Literature and Culture Building as punishment for leaking information of human rights violations to the press.[106]

On 19 July 2007, the Kachin News Group (KNG) reported that over the past year, several well-known Burmese business tycoons had set up businesses in Kachin State, forcing local villagers off their land and destroying their crops in the process. Kachin State's lucrative teak and jade reserves have been at the top of their lists. According to local residents, the Rangoon-based Max Myanmar Company had *"recently occupied about 500 acres of jade mining blocks in Lonkin, Phakant Township. … The occupied land includes paddy fields, agricultural fields and jade mining areas which were owned by local Kachin residents and business blocks"*. Moreover, the Yuzana Company, another Rangoon-based SPDC-allied crony company, had *"forcibly relocated local Kachin and Shan residents and destroyed their livestock and homes with the help of the Burmese military based in the area"*. Though the original report failed to mention it, those villagers who have been forced from their land have since been left without their primary, if not only source of livelihood and will face extreme hardships as they attempt to provide for their families.[107]

Under the junta's Paddy Procurement Policy, which they claimed had been terminated in 2004, local farmers in the Hukawng Valley were ordered to sell two and a half tins (26 kgs / 57 lbs) of paddy per acre to SPDC army units at half the prevailing market price. In October 2007, only weeks before their fields were due to be harvested, villagers were forced to sign documents promising to sell their allotted quota of *"dutiful rice"* to the SPDC for which they would receive only 2,500 kyat per tin at a time when the market rates in Myitkyina were 5,000 kyat for the same volume of paddy. One villager from Dumbang village who was forced to sign away his harvest to the SPDC told KNG that:

> *"We now have a big problem selling rice to the army called the "dutiful rice" which is counted on the basis of total [acreage] of paddy fields owned by the farmers but not based on how many acres of active paddy fields owned".*[108]

Those farmers whose crops had failed, or who had only sewn paddy on a small portion of the land that they owned faced extreme difficulties in providing their quota and having enough left for themselves. In some extreme cases, some farmers have been forced to borrow or buy additional rice to meet their quota when that which they harvested was not enough.[109]

In November 2007, the Kachin Development Network Group (KDNG) released a report on the dangers associated with the planned damming of the Irrawaddy River. The report, entitled, *Damming the Irrawaddy* argued that should the proposed Myitsone dam be built, 47 villages will be inundated and an estimated 10,000 people will become displaced, resulting in the los of livelihoods and *"exacerbating the existing problems of unemployment, drug addiction and HIV/AIDS in the area"*. Yaw Na of the KDNG and chairperson of the Kachin Environmental Organization (KEO) added that:

> *"The dam in Myitsone will not benefit [the] Kachin people. … Obviously, we can see what will happen once the dam is built. The Burmese government will sell the power generated to China while local people are deprived of electricity. … If the Burmese government was really concerned with environmental issues and wanted to go in for sustainable development of the country, there is no need for such a big dam to be constructed on the Irrawaddy River. It can build small dams to produce electricity".*[110]

Displaced villagers from northern Tenasserim Division gather at a temporary and covert 'jungle market' where they are able to trade goods without interference by the SPDC. Such markets provide displaced villagers with some of their only access to food and supplies which they are not able to grow themselves or otherwise acquire locally. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Karen State

In late-November 2005, the SPDC launched its largest military offensive against the Karen since the massive offensive in 1997. These attacks have remained somewhat sustained since they began and continued into 2007.

Despite claims made by the SPDC to the effect that the offensive is aimed at wiping out the armed resistance of the KNU, the vast majority of the violence has been directed at civilian villages. In many instances, SPDC army soldiers have actively avoided KNLA soldiers in favour of attacking undefended villages. During 2007, as in 2006, most of the attacks were concentrated in the three northern Karen districts of Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, and Papun Districts.

SPDC army soldiers have directly and deliberately attacked unarmed and undefended villages, firing upon civilians, shooting at farmers in their fields and shelling whole villages without warning from neighbouring hillsides with mortars and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). Most villagers flee their villages whenever SPDC army soldiers draw near and return only after the soldiers have moved on. After the troops leave, the villagers return to harvest their crops and reoccupy their homes if they have not been destroyed. When soldiers burn the village they leave no home for villagers to return to. Similarly, when soldiers burn the fields, they leave no crops to harvest.

Knowing that civilians typically return to their villages after the troops have left, SPDC army soldiers often leave landmines in the village to target those who come back to their homes. Patterns of mine use by the SPDC have indicated that the mines are being deployed to deliberately target the civilian population and not the armed combatants of the KNLA. Mines have been laid in villages, along paths to and from the villagers' fields, in their fields and in other areas such as along the banks of rivers where villagers are likely to frequent.

The presence of landmines in Karen State is a very real threat and fear of those mines dramatically restricts the movement of villagers, which can be particularly detrimental when farmers are afraid to travel to their fields or to local markets.[111] The Thai-Burma border is also reportedly extensively landmined to prevent or deter the flight of refugees. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines).

The SPDC has attempted to use this offensive to consolidate its control across northern Karen State where its grip has always been tenuous: All those living in areas beyond SPDC army control are to be forcibly relocated into areas where the military can maintain a presence. Meanwhile, all of those who refuse to comply are shot. During 2007, SPDC army units constructed several new army camps throughout the offensive area, many of which were built with the forced labour of local communities. Once these camps were established, the soldiers mounted patrols from them and fired upon anyone they encountered.

Since early 2006, many villages located in areas newly controlled by the SPDC have been forcibly relocated. Often troops arrive in a given village and give the residents a few days to pack their belongings and move to a designated site. At other times, no advance warning is given at all, and villages must relocate immediately, carrying only what they can carry on their backs. If they are seen in the area after the deadline to move, they are told they will be shot.[112] Once they have been herded into camps, villagers are constantly watched by SPDC army troops and all aspects of their lives are strictly controlled. Relocation sites are often fenced and villagers are not allowed to leave the area. Moreover, the sites are typically grossly overcrowded and very little, if any, arable land is left available to the new arrivals. (For more information, see Chapter 16: Internal Displacement and Forced Relocation).

Villagers are also often used as forced labour and are regularly the targets of extortion from soldiers.

Those who refuse to live under the SPDC and instead choose to live beyond State control in the forests of Karen State face considerable hardship as they attempt to remain hidden. Life in the jungle is especially difficult without permanent shelter during the monsoon season. Movement for the internally displaced, living in the forest, is often restricted by the movement of SPDC troops in the area, the location of SPDC camps, roadways, and landmines. However, most IDPs can manage to remain hidden from the SPDC army patrols that hunt them, either by moving regularly or by moving deeper into the forest further away from areas where the SPDC can maintain a presence. However these areas continued to decrease throughout 2007 as the SPDC expanded its sphere of control in the region.

Perhaps the most pervasive effect of the offensive in northern Karen State has been the decreasing availability of food. This can be said to be true both for those living in SPDC-controlled villages and relocation sites as well as for those living in hiding in the forests. Several elements of the military campaign contribute to the problem of food scarcity in Karen State and all of these elements combine to force people from their homes in hunger.

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, SPDC army units have burned large numbers of agricultural fields, plantations and farmlands, with the purpose of deliberately ruining that season's crop. The proliferation of new army camps, in addition to the deployment of landmines and the regular SPDC army patrols have prevented farmers from preparing, sowing or harvesting their fields. Secondly, SPDC soldiers have also looted and burned many villages and homes, along with all possessions and food that they had contained. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

On 1 January 2007, village heads in Hin-teing village in Mergui-Tavoy District issued directives to local residents that they were not permitted to leave their villages without purchasing a travel pass from the army, at a cost of 500 kyat each. Villagers were also informed that those who were absent from the village for more than 3 months would no longer be recognised or registered as residents of that village. Implicit in this order is that those who are no longer registered as living in a village will be deemed as being a member of the resistance and shot on sight.[113]

On 2 January 2007, village headman Ti Reh from Phukra village in northern Karen State was shot and killed by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #250 at their nearby army camp. According to reports, KNLA soldiers had recently ambushed the SPDC unit and his torture and murder was conducted as retaliation for this. It is common practice for SPDC army soldiers to retaliate and attack the nearest village following any attacks that they come under from the KNLA, typically accusing the villagers of providing information to the resistance and thus being complicit in the attack. The soldiers also reportedly razed nine paddy storage barns to further make their point.[114]

On 5 January 2007, SPDC troops forced villagers to clear landmines between Thapan-chaung and Htee-lo with their bullock carts. At about 1 pm, one of the carts was blown up by a landmine and 2 persons on the cart were killed.[115]

On 6 January 2007, Strategic Operations Commander (SOC), Kin Maung Oo, ordered IB #60 and LIB #351 to relocate residents of Ko Pu and Hsaw Mi Lu village tracts in Mone Township to Kyauk Kyi. The order followed a KNLA attack on an SPDC army unit in the area. The villagers were forced to destroy their own homes as part of the relocation.[116]

A displaced Karen woman from in Hsaw Htee township, Nyaunglebin District, pictured here with her children in February 2007. She is shown here with her baby slung over one shoulder and her husband's M79 40 mm grenade launcher slung over the other. Her husband, a KNLA soldier, went to tend to the family's fields, entrusting his wife with the weapon to protect their children from SPDC army patrols. *[Photo: KHRG]*

In February 2007, SPDC army Battalion Commander Than Hteik, operating in Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) Township, of Nyaunglebin District, introduced a charge of 2,000 kyat for passes that permitted villagers to travel outside their villages for a period of up to ten days.[117]
On 4 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #349 clashed with Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops in the Kyo Gyi area of Nyaunglebin District, in which several SPDC army soldiers were killed. In response, the battalion demanded each village in the immediate vicinity pay a 65,000 kyat fine. The villages forced to pay this fine were:

1. Po Pin Goe;
2. Kyaw Su;
3. Li Pi Wei;
4. Thi P'yaw Dah;
5. Pyi Su;
6. Wei Mu;
7. Hay Tha Wei;
8. Kyo Gyi;
9. Pyi Taung Tha;
10. Ywa Ka La; and
11. Htoe Wa Zet.

The following day, on 5 February 2007, the same SPDC army soldiers accused villagers from adjacent Kyo Gyi village of attacking his unit the previous day. He apprehended ten of the villagers, shot three pigs and smeared the blood on the detained villagers, before demanding 20,000 kyat from each of them. The villagers were then released, but threatened against spreading news of the incident. Battalion Commander Tha Tet also forced villagers from Li Pi Wei, Htoe Wa Zet and Hay Tha Wei to fund the purchase of a new motorbike, at a cost of 1,200,000 kyat. It was also reported that persons from these villages were being forced to pay 1,000 kyat for passes, allowing them to leave their village to work in their fields.

Moreover, Colonel Maung Gyi also demanded money from seven villages in this area on 5 February 2007 to cover the costs of roofing thatch to be used in the construction of a new SPDC army camp. The affected villages and the amounts that they were obliged to pay as are as follows:

1. Htoe Wa Zet, 120,000 kyat;
2. Kyauk Se Yik, 120,000 kyat;
3. Thu K'bee, 50,000 kyat;
4. Taw Kyaw Paut, 120,000 kyat;
5. Lei Wei Gyi, 50,000 kyat;
6. Aye Net, 200,000 kyat; and
7. Kyo Gyi, 120,000 kyat. [118]

According to a report released on 23 February 2007, three civilian buffalo traders from Dooplaya District were shot and killed by an SPDC army soldiers from IB #36 on 28 December 2006. The three victims were reportedly dressed in KNLA soldiers' uniforms before they were shot to mask the fact that they had knowingly killed civilians simply so that they could steal their money. The soldiers reportedly made off with 15 million kyat. The names and ages of the three victims were:

1. A Lupoe, 41, from Lo Shan village;
2. Neing Htaw Ko, 43, from Htee Hto Kaut village; and
3. Pah Pae, 34, from Mae K'wa village.[119]

On 15 April 2007, 18-year-old Saw Bleh Kloh Htoo was arrested and executed by a column of SPDC army soldiers comprised of soldiers from LIB #371 and LIB #372, operating under MOC #5 near the Yaw Tho Ber IDP site in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District. Prior to beating him to death, the soldiers had tortured him by putting out his eyes and slicing his mouth open with a knife.[120]

On 17 May 2007, 27-year-old Naw Bu Ru was killed by SPDC army soldiers while cutting grass in her field in the Pana Eh Per Ko area of Papun District. The soldiers dumped her body in her field hut and burned it along with the hut.[121]

On 7 July 2007, four villagers from Blut Doh village were stopped by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 and LIB #388 who demanded to be shown the way to Wah Do Ko village in Nyaunglebin District. Three of the villagers refused the order and were summarily executed by the soldiers. The sole surviving villager accompanied the soldiers as a guide and was ordered to walk ahead of the column as a human minesweeper. Five days later, one of the soldiers was killed by a landmine, and in the confusion created by the blast the villager was able to escape. (For more information, see Chapter 4: Landmines). The names of the three villagers who were killed were:

1. Saw Htoo Htoo;
2. Saw Mya Doh Moo; and
3. Saw Po Eh Do.[122]

On 12 July 2007, SPDC army battalions under the second command's headquarters had reportedly forced villagers to build more than five new military camps in Toungoo District.[123]

On 30 July 2007, two villagers, aged 30 and 12, were foraging for bamboo shoots close to the village of Sa Le in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District when one of them stepped on an SPDC landmine. In spite of the fact that the victim lost his foot, he was fined 10,000 kyat by the SPDC for the destruction of military property.[124]

On 13 August 2007, SPDC army soldiers with IB #83 and IB #77 attacked Ga Yu Der village in Papun District, burning down 14 homes and forcing more than 80 villagers to flee from this one village alone. The troops then continued moving north, burning down several homes in

Lay Po Der. After crossing into Toungoo District, the soldiers attacked Lay Kee village, burning down many homes and forcing hundreds of people into hiding.[125]

On 19 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and LIB #219, attacked Ler Wah village in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, strafing it with machinegun fire. As the villagers fled into the forest, the troops moved into the village, ransacking homes, stealing belongings, and destroying food and other property that they were not able to carry away with them. They then set up a temporary camp close the village for several days, and placed landmines in the village before returning to their camp.[126]

Karenni State

Karenni State, located in the east of the country, is home to a number of armed ethnic groups, both those allied with and those opposing the military regime, and has also been the site of some of the country's most intensive military offensives and human rights abuses. Unfortunately, little information regarding the human rights situation in Karenni State is made public, yet this by no means should be taken to indicate that Karenni State is free of such abuses. The lack of information, rather reflects both that relatively few organizations are actively working to document these abuses and also that the media has tended to shy away from this little-known-of area in favour of neighbouring Karen State where literally dozens of groups are working to document these abuses.

According to the *Kantarawaddy Times*, starting on 1 May 2007, the SPDC launched a fresh offensive in Karenni State in conjunction with ongoing road construction works to repair the old colonial road linking Mawchi with Toungoo in Karen State. According to the report, four SPDC army battalions operating under Military Operations Command (MOC) #7, along with two other unnamed battalions were involved in the operation.

> *"The Burmese Army has been using its battalions for the road construction even as its military operation in Karenni State continues. As a result, local people are facing severe difficulties which have always been the fallout of such onslaught. Forced labour, human rights abuses, rape and use of [landmines] are common in such operations. … Local people have been fleeing and hiding in the jungles because of the presence of the army and these internally displaced people are bereft of food and shelter"*.[127]

In June 2007, *Mizzima News* reported that a group of over 30 Karenni villagers had recently arrived at the Thai-Burma border where they sought entry into Karenni Camp 1 in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand. This latest group reportedly brought the number new arrivals to the refugee camp to more than 200 since the SPDC had begun a new offensive in the area at *"the beginning of summer"*. The new arrivals reported the fresh wave of attacks and fear of arrest under suspicion of being affiliated with the KNPP as their primary motivations for flight.[128]

In the month spanning 8 October to 9 November 2007, approximately 50 Karenni villagers were arrested by the SPDC under allegations of having assisted the KNPP. On 4 October 2007, SPDC army troops from LIB #530 were ambushed by KNPP soldiers near Chitkeh village, during which four SPDC army soldiers were killed and a further five injured. Two days after the clash the SPDC started arresting local villagers for *"aiding frontline Karenni soldiers during the skirmish as well as [for] failing to keep the Burmese troops informed"*. However, according to Khu Oo Reh, the Joint Secretary of the KNPP, *"those who have been arrested are civilians and have no connection with the KNPP"*, adding that *"They [the SPDC army soldiers] regularly do this kind of thing. … They tell [the] villagers that the Karenni*

soldiers cannot survive without the villagers' support. They also accuse the villagers of feeding Karenni soldiers".[129]

In November 2007, it was reported that there were an estimated 81,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living throughout Karenni State. According to reports, this number includes those in urban areas and an estimated 30,000 living in hiding in the forests, but the vast majority were those *"living in chronic poverty in ceasefire areas administered by Karenni ceasefire groups, including the KNPLF"*. Khu Oo Reh, Joint Secretary of the KNPP added that *"Those IDP[s] are from all over Karenni State, not only in the jungle, but also in the urban areas. They [the civilians] have been surviving as IDPs for years. Some are still hiding in the jungle and some have escaped to the Thai-Burmese border"*. Meanwhile, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported that there were as many as 28 SPDC army battalions operating in Karenni State at that time, accounting in part, for such high levels of displacement.[130]

Mon State

The New Mon State Party (NMSP), the strongest Mon opposition group, signed a ceasefire deal with the regime in 1995, after which the Mon people had expected peace and development from the military regime. However, the progress that many had anticipated never came. Instead, human rights violations have continued over the years since including the widespread confiscation of civilian land. As a result, many Mon farmers became so impoverished that they fled the country with starvation looming ominously overhead. The mass exodus of the Mon allowed for the broad resettlement of the area by ethnic Burmans, drawn to the area by economic opportunities and the availability of land, which over time has diluted the ethnic composition of the area so that the Mon are no longer the demographic majority in Mon State. The regime's strategy in the area has actively discriminated against the Mon, impoverishing them and causing them to flee the country, only to be replaced with more ethnic Burmans who the SPDC entices to the area with generous financial incentives. The population transfer has taken place quite rapidly and has many local community groups worried about the preservation of the traditional way of life for the Mon in the face of the increased Burmanization of their traditional homeland.[131]

In an apparent attempt to further weaken the Mon culture, the SPDC as decreed that the teaching of the native Mon language is forbidden in Mon State. During 2006, a senior SPDC official from Kyaik Mayaw Township said that *"Teaching the Mon language is a barrier to national development and solidarity. The SPDC will not achieve its objective of rural development in the area because of the Mon language teaching"*.[132]

To compensate for the gap in education which exists in Mon State, Buddhist monks in Mon communities have partnered with the Mon Literature and Culture Committees (MLCC) to provide self-funded summer schools for Mon students. The project allows many underprivileged Mon children who cannot afford the tuition fess charged at State schools with some basic primary-level education and literacy skills that they would otherwise be without.[133] Although, in April 2007, it was reported that while the number of students in Mon State learning the Mon language was on the rise, the number of Mon students in neighbouring Pegu Division studying the Mon language had *"dropped sharply"*.[134] (For more information, see Chapter 12: Right to Education).

On 6 June 2007, the Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) reported that five Mon cultural organizations would likely face closure after their permits were denied for renewal. Among the groups whose permits were terminated were the Moulmein Mon Literature and Culture Sub-Committee, the Kyaik Mayaw Mon Literature and Culture Committee and three other

unnamed local organizations. *"This is the military's suppression of ethnic rights which helps develop its own literature and culture. It is ethnic cleansing,"* said one of the founding members of the MLCC. Meanwhile, Nai Suthorn, Chairman of the Mon Unity League (MUL) added, *"It is wrong. I again say that the military government is repressive. It has banned community welfare organizations and developed its own organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA)"*.[135]

Similarly, in May 2007, it was reported that all Dhamma (Buddhist scripture) teachings provided in Khaw Zar Town were ordered to only be taught in Burmese from that point on. One monk explained that *"Almost everything was changed including the title. We were ordered to change it into Burmese. We have been reading Buddhist teachings for a couple of years, but this is the first time we were forced to change the signboard title [into Burmese script]".*[136]

On 7 June 2007, an unidentified SPDC army officer issued a curfew order to villages in southern Ye Township preventing them from travelling to their farms. Village headmen were under orders to prohibit all access to or egress from their respective villages after 6:00 pm. According to the source, Mon resistance forces had visited the village of Brong, prompting these new orders to be issued to prevent villagers from returning to their farms from where they could support the opposition movement.[137]

In the beginning of July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #31 ordered the approximately 100 households of Bayoun-ngae village in Khaw Zar Sub-Township to relocate. The villagers had been accused of supporting the opposition Monland Restoration Party (MRP), although, what evidence the SPDC had of this was not stated. All of the homes were ordered to be destroyed and according to one of the villagers, some of the homes had already been burned soon after the order was issued.[138]

Also in early July 2007, an SPDC army unit opened fire on a civilian family's home near Three Pagoda's Pass. On 2 July, soldiers from LIB #308 had been caught in an ambush by KNLA soldiers in which nine were killed and another ten wounded. Soon after, these soldiers had been replaced by IB #18, who, having learned of the attack were nervous and opened fire with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades on the hut situated in a rubber plantation near Chanug-zone village after reportedly mistaking its inhabitants for KNLA soldiers. The inhabitants, al of whom were civilian, were lucky to have escaped unscathed.[139]

On 28 November, the IMNA reported that villagers in the Thanbyuzayat and Three Pagodas Pass areas sold all of their food supplies *"at throwaway prices"* out of fear that they would have been looted by patrolling SPDC army soldiers. One villager reported that *"The current price of paddy is 200 [Thai] baht per basket, but they just sold it for 70-80 baht per basket"*. Another villager said that *"now they had money and could go anywhere and stay away from Burmese soldiers"*.[140]

Shan State

On 5 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to IB #99 (Sein Aung commanding) patrolled through the Wan Saang village tract in Laikha Township, apprehended approximately 20 villagers they encountered working in their farms along their way and forced them to porter loads for the unit. According to the report, the soldiers maintained that *"it was farmers like them that were providing Shan soldiers with rice and other food stuff, and forced the villagers to serve as porters and go with the patrol."* On the same day, the soldiers also encountered 37-year-old Naang Zing who they also detained, claiming that she

was the wife of an SSA-S soldier. The villagers were detained for the next two days and forced to porter supplies, while Naang Zing was gang raped repeatedly *"all night every night by several SPDC troops taking turns one after another"*. After a few days, the soldiers released the porters but shot Naang Zing dead and left her body in a deserted farm near Paang Nim village in Nam-Zarng Township.[141]

In February and March 2007, villagers of Naa Kawng Mu village in Murng-Ton Township were forced to carry bricks, sand and water to an SPDC army camp every day for several weeks by soldiers from IB #65 for use in the construction of new buildings.[142]

In March 2007, villagers from Naa Poi village tract in Laikha Township were ordered to construct an SPDC army camp adjacent to another camp that they had been forced to build at the end of 2006. According to the source, the order came from IB #64. The villagers were required to first clear the land, level the ground and cut all of the wood and bamboo was to be used in the construction before they were ordered to build several barracks and other buildings, along with the fences which encircled the camp. The work reportedly took several weeks to complete, with villagers from as many as eight different villages working on rotational shifts so as not to interfere too much with the maintenance of their own livelihoods.[143]

On 8 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #574 accused villagers Saai Khaao village in Kunhing Township of cultivating opium and presented them with the choice of either going to jail, being relocated to Kunhing or pay a fine. Unsurprisingly, and surely to the pleasure of the soldiers, the villagers opted to pay the fine. The villagers were thus forced to pay an exorbitant fine of two million kyat by the following day. However, the villagers were only able to come up with 1.5 million kyat, although the soldiers seemed to be satisfied with this amount and left, taking five villagers with them as porters to carry their loads.[144]

On 9 April 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #526 opened fire upon a group of Shan villagers on the banks of the Mae Sai River without prior warning or provocation. Of the four villagers, two of the group were killed, while the other two managed to escape.[145]

The terrain of Loi Taleng, Shan State. This photo shows the close proximity of an opposition SSA-S base one one mountain, and an SPDC-allied UWSA base ion the next. The camp locations are indicated by the bare patches of ground on the ridge tops. *[Photo: SHAN]*

15.4 Abuse of Ethnic Minorities by Armed Ethnic Groups

Many ceasefire groups in Burma are guilty of committing human rights abuses against, not only members of other ethnic minorities who live within their territories, but also against their own people; the same people that they claim to represent and protect. In signing a ceasefire pact with the regime, many groups have come to function as proxy armies of the SPDC. In return for "peace" and local autonomy, certain business concessions and material support, some ceasefire groups have aided the SPDC in their efforts to control the local population. Some of these groups have even fought alongside the SPDC during military offensives against resistance groups or local populations. However, this is not as one-sided as it would at first seem. By supporting the SPDC through militarization and oppression, ceasefire groups are able to expand their own zones of political and military control, and ultimately, villagers must fear not only the SPDC but the ceasefire groups as well.

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)

On 10 January 2007, DKBA troops led by Than Ma Na based in Pa'an township, Ta-way village tract, forced the village heads of 8 villages to recruit new soldiers for the SPDC. If the village head could not recruit, they had to pay kyat 550,000 as this was the gun purchasing price for each new recruit. The following villages had to provide recruits:

1. K'ru-she (10 persons);
2. Pwa-gaw (10 persons);
3. No-aw-la (10 persons);
4. Doh-law-plaw (10 persons);
5. Ha-ta-yeh (2 persons);
6. Hta-thu-khee (2 persons);
7. Kyaw-kay-khee (2 persons); and
8. Po (5 persons).[146]

On 14 January 2007, DKBA troops led by Saw Lay Htoo forced 50 Lay-kay villagers to build the road to Mying-gyi-ngu abbot's pagoda.[147]

On 20 January 2007, DKBA commander Hla Maung ordered 7 villages to provide labour to carry their supplies. Each person had to work for 10 days carrying supplies. The following villages were affected:

1. Tei Mwee Du;
2. Win Shat;
3. Day Law Soon;
4. Koo Sit village;
5. Nat Koo Nar;
6. T'Dwee Koh ; and
7. Poh Baw Koh. [148]

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

1. Day Law Pu, 14,500 kyat;
2. Wai Tha, 1,500 kyat;
3. Htee Ber Kar Hta, 1,500 kyat;
4. Klaw Day, 13,000 kyat;
5. Kler Kho, 17,000 kyat;
6. Nar Koo Nar, 15,000 kyat;
7. Ku Thay, 15,000 kyat;
8. Noh Law Su, 15,000 kyat;
9. Klaw Hta, 15,000 kyat; and
10. Loe Klo Hta, 12,500 kyat.[149]

In January 2007, DKBA Brigade #333 officer Kyaw Min told Gk'Ma Moh villagers that the monk U Thuzana, head of the DKBA and based at Myaing Gyi Ngu in Pa'an District, had sent 4,000 bricks to Htee Lay Kaw village for the construction of a new pagoda at Gkyah Htee Yoh Koh Poh. This pagoda was to be constructed upon the summit of the Htee Lay Koh village mountain in Bilin Township. Along with the construction of the pagoda itself, the DKBA also organised the construction of a road which ran from a pagoda at Meh Say to the Htee Lay Kaw pagoda. Construction of the pagoda and road began in January 2007. DKBA Brigade #333 soldiers gave village heads written orders in which DKBA Brigade #333 ordered them to provide villagers for labour, and threatened to 'take action' if the villagers failed to comply. As part of the construction work, the villagers were forced to carry lime, water, sand, bricks and cement from the base of the mountain to the summit. The forced labourers reported that it was extremely difficult to climb up the side of the mountain as it was a very steep slope and they feared slipping and falling down along the way. Moreover, those who worked on the road construction had to bring their own tools and were told to clear every last tree stump in the construction area.[150]

On 10 February 2007, DKBA troops led by Than Tun Oo ordered a person from each household in Shwe-oak village and Taw-heh village tract to carry sand for building a pagoda.[151]

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

1. Day-pal-pu, 14,500 kyat;
2. Wae-sar, 14,500 kyat;
3. Htee-per-kar-hta, 12,500 kyat;
4. Klaw-doe, 13,000 kyat;
5. Kler-kho, 17,000 kyat;
6. Na-ku-na, 15,000 kyat;
7. Ku-seik, 15,000 kyat;
8. Noe-sue, 15,000 kyat;
9. Klaw-hta, 15,000 kyat; and
10. Klaw-lo-klo-hta, 12,500 kyat.[152]

On 7 March 2007, DKBA's Hla Maung, ordered one person from each of 7 villages to serve as porters for the military. The following villages were affected:

1. Kler-wah;
2. Wa-mee-day;
3. Klaw-hta;
4. To-lwee-kyo;
5. Day-baw-kaw;
6. To-thaypu; and
7. The-gaw-kyo.[153]

On 30 March 2007, troops of the SPDC-aligned DKBA attacked villagers in northern Dooplaya District, Karen State. During the attacks one unnamed man died after stepping on a DKBA-laid landmine.[154]

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

1. Saw De Hgay, 80 baskets of paddy;
2. Saw Eh Kalu, 115 baskets of paddy;
3. Naw Lepoe, 50 baskets of paddy;
4. Kyaw Win Maung, 60 baskets of paddy;
5. Tee Taru, 120 baskets of paddy; and
6. Par Kay, 100 baskets of paddy.[155]

On 10 April 2007, 82-year-old Saw Thar Char from Mi Pa Ler village in T'Nay Hsah Township of Pa'an District was shot and killed by DKBA soldiers.[156]

In April 2007, DKBA soldiers tortured and beat Saw Tha Chin before shooting him in Gaw Khaw Law Kho village in Dooplaya District. This attack reportedly took place in the context of a larger series of attacks on suspected KNU locations in the region that had begun on 30 March 2007. The photograph shown below displays Saw Tha Chin's body as it was found under his house.[157]

On 29 April 2007, two villagers from Keh Law Mah Kee village were wounded after one of them stepped on a DKBA-laid landmine in Dooplaya District of Karen State. Saw Hai Bluh, 30, was killed in the blast, while his unnamed companion survived, albeit with severe injuries.[158]

On 24 November 2007, a combined column of DKBA soldiers from #333 Brigade, #999 Brigade and #907 Battalion entered K'Toe Hta village in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, where they burned down the home of Saw Pa Toe. According to reports, his home was worth at least 500,000 kyat. The soldiers then killed a goat belonging to Naw Mu Poe, worth 25,000 kyat, burned down a hut belonging to Naw La Bu Mo, worth 20,000 kyat and shot cows belonging to Naw Mo Kee before leaving the village. The cows did not die, but Naw Mo Kee then had to buy 30,000 kyat worth of medicine to care for her cows.[159]

Also on 24 November 2007, a column of DKBA soldiers entered Thaw Paw Oo Kee village in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. They burned down to the home of Naw Ma Kin La, and killed ten of her goats and one ox, leaving in their wake more than one million kyat in damage. In the same village, the soldiers burned down a hut belonging to Naw Ma Sa La, reportedly worth more than 20,000 kyat, and another hut which belonged to Naw Pay Gay worth 70,000 kyat. These soldiers then killed a pig belonging to Naw Ta Loe and an ox belonging to Saw Pa Mu Wa.[160]

Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)

On 22 July 2007, a joint column of LIB #427 and Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) soldiers shot and killed a Karenni villager from Pruso Township under allegations that he had contact with the Karenni resistance movement. Nye Reh Po Htya, 42, was apprehended in his home in Htee Byah Nye village and beaten by the soldiers. The village and village tract chairpersons tried to petition the soldiers for his release, who attempted to plead his innocence, stating that he was just a villager and had no affiliations with the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). All such attempts, however, failed and he was executed in the village cemetery later that same day. He is survived by his wife and four children.[161]

On 11 August 2007, Platoon Commander Nah Reh of the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), together with five SPDC army soldiers based in Shadaw Township, slaughtered and ate a pig owned by a local resident. They informed witnesses to the incident that anyone who claimed they owned the pig would be arrested, fined and detained. The pig was reported to have had a market value of approximately 200,000 kyat.[162]

Young children pounding rice for the family's meal in their village in Karenni State. *[Photo: Burma Issues]*

Karen National Union (KNU)

On 18 December 2007, the junta-controlled *New Light of Myanmar* reported that members of the KNLA ambushed a passenger bus as it travelled between Kawkareik and Myawaddy in Karen State by detonating a landmine under it before opening fire on those aboard. Eight passengers were reportedly killed with a further six injured. The state-run media criticized the KNU for *"constantly committing all destructive acts such as undermining [the] stability of the State, community peace and tranquility [sic.] and prevalence of law and order, killing and bullying innocent people, detonating bombs, armed robberies, collecting extortion money, and burning public property"*. Though the KNLA claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was conducted in retaliation to an earlier DKBA attack on Tah Oh Kee village, they denied targeting civilians, but rather DKBA members who were on board.[163]

Karenni Solidarity Organization (KnSO)

Starting on 20 May 2007 and continuing into June, Karenni villagers in Mawchi Township were forced to construct a new army camp for the SPDC-allied Karenni Solidarity Organization (KnSO). *"We have to go to work with our own food. We don't get any money. The real difficulty is that it is time to work in our farms in June and July"*, said one villager who had fled the area due to the forced labour demands and the problems they were causing for his livelihood, adding that, *"Two to ten people from all the villages near Maw Chi are called to work. Summoning the number of people depends on the size of the village. They are forced to dig bunkers and set up fences"*.[164]

Monland Restoration Party (MRP)

In October 2007, two civilian villagers from Bayoun-ngae village in Ye Township were killed and a further two injure following a landmine explosion near the village. The SPDC was quick to blame the deployment of these mines on the Monland Restoration Party (MRP), who admitted deploying landmines against the SPDC, but had denied that they were responsible for this particular explosion.[165]

United Wa State Army (UWSA)

For at least the last two years, members of UWSA, a ceasefire group, have been using villagers as forced labour at their rubber plantation in Me Ken village tract in Murng-Ton Township.[166]

15.5 Official List of Ethnic Minority Groups in Burma

The following list is the SPDC list of the 134 'officially' recognized ethnic minorities from the eight main ethnic families in Burma. Please note that while this is the official list, some ethnic minorities, such as the Rohingya and the Kuki, for instance, have been deliberately omitted from this list as they are not recognized by the junta as being native to Burma and are not provided with citizenship.

Burman

1. Bamar
2. Dawei
3. Beik
4. Yaw
5. Yabein
6. Kadu
7. Ganan
8. Salon
9. Hpon

Chin

10. Chin
11. Meithei (Kathe)
12. Saline
13. Ka Lin Kaw (Lushay)
14. Khami
15. Awa Khami
16. Khawno
17. Kaungso
18. Kaung Saing Chin
19. Kwelshin
20. Kwangli (Sim)
21. Gunte (Lyente)
22. Gwete
23. Ngorn
24. Zizan
25. Sentang
26. Saing Zan
27. Za How
28. Zotung
29. Zo Pe
30. Zo
31. Zahnyet (Zanniet)
32. Tapong
33. Tiddim (Hai Dim)
34. Tay Zan
35. Taishon
36. Thado
37. Torr
38. Dim
39. Dai (Yindu)
40. Naga

41. Tanghkul
42. Malin
43. Panun
44. Magun
45. Matu
46. Miram (Mara)
47. Mi-er
48. Mgan
49. Lushei (Lushay)
50. Laymyo
51. Lyente
52. Lawhtu
53. Lai
54. Laizao
55. Wakim (Mro)
56. Haulngo
57. Anu
58. Anun
59. Oo Pu
60. Lhinbu
61. Asho (Plain)
62. Rongtu

Kachin

63. Kachin
64. Trone
65. Dalaung
66. Jinghpaw
67. Guari
68. Hkahku
69. Duleng
70. Maru (Lawgore)
71. Rawang
72. Lashi (La Chit)
73. Atsi
74. Lisu

Karen (Kayin)

75. Kayin
76. Kayinpyu
77. Pa Le Chi
78. Mon Kayin (Sarpyu)
79. Sgaw
80. Ta Lay Pwa
81. Paku
82. Bwe
83. Monnepwa
84. Monpwa
85. Shu (Pwo)

Karenni (Kayah)

86. Kayah
87. Zayein
88. Kayan (Padaung)
89. Gheko
90. Kebar
91. Bre (Ka Yaw)
92. Manu Manaw
93. Yin Talai
94. Yin Baw

Mon

95. Mon

Arakanese (Rakhine)

96. Rakhine
97. Kamein
98. Kwe Myi
99. Daingnet
100. Maramagyi
101. Mro
102. Thet

Shan

103. Yun (Lao)
104. Kwi
105. Pyin
106. Yao
107. Danaw
108. Pale
109. En
110. Son
111. Khamu
112. Kaw (Akha E Kaw)
113. Kokang
114. Khamti Shan
115. Hkun
116. Taungyo
117. Danu
118. Palaung
119. Man Zi
120. Yin Kya
121. Yin Net
122. Shan Gale
123. Shan Gyi
124. Lahu
125. Intha
126. Eik Swair
127. Pa'O
128. Tai Loi
129. Tai Lem
130. Tai Lon
131. Tai Lay
132. Maingtha
133. Maw Shan
134. Wa

15.6 Ceasefire Status of Various Armed Ethnic Groups

Group	Ceasefire Status
Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)	---
Chin National Front (CNF)	---
Communist Party of Burma (CPB-Arakan State)	1997
Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)	21 December 1994
Kachin Defence Army (KDA)	13 January 1991
Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)	1 October 1993
Karen National Union (KNU)	---
Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC)	11 February 2007
Karen Peace Force (KPF)	24 February 1997
Karenni National Defence Army (KNDA)	1996
Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)	1994
Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	1995
Karenni Solidarity Organization (KnSO)	October 2002
Karenni State Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front (KNPLF)	9 May 1994
Kayan National Guard (KNG)	27 February 1992
Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)	26 July 1994
Lahu Democratic Front (LDF)	---
Lahu National Organization (LNO)	---
Myeik-Dawei United Front (MDUF)	---
Mon Armed Group (MAG)	---
Mon Army, Mergui District (MAMD)	1997
Mong Tai Army (MTA)	2 January 1996
Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army (MNDAA; 'Kokang')	21 March 1989
National Democratic Alliance Army – Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS; aka 'Mongla Group')	30 June 1989
National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)	---
National United Party of Arakan (NUPA)	---
New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA-K)	15 December 1989
New Mon State Party (NMSP)	29 June 1995
Nyein Chan Yay A'Pweh ('Peace Group')	8 November 1997
Palaung State Liberation Party (PSLP)	21 April 1991
Pa'O National Organization (PNO)	11 April 1991
Pa'O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO)	---
Rakhine State All National Races Solidarity Party	6 April 1997
Rohingya National Alliance (RNA)	---
Shan State Army - South (SSA-South)	---
Shan State National Army (SSNA; aka SSA-Central)	1995
Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization (SSNPLO)	9 October 1994
Shan State Progress Party (SSPP; aka SSA-North)	2 September 1989
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	9 May 1989
Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors (VBSW)	---
Wa National Organization (WNO)	---

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 16

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND FORCED RELOCATION

"National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction."

- Principle 3, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

16.1 Introduction

There is significant disparity in the nationwide figures of Burma's internally displaced persons (IDP) population. This is due in part to the difficulty in reliably cataloguing and recording IDP numbers and is further exacerbated by the nature of displacement throughout Burma, which tends to be cyclical; IDPs are continually being displaced, relocated, or forced to flee, until they settle in a relocation site, ceasefire area, or in hiding, only to be forced again to move due to conflict, land confiscation, or human rights abuses. Therefore, the concept of an IDP 'population' is a fluid one, as it continually swells and decreases dependant upon a range of factors. The most widely accepted approximation of IDPs in Burma is over one million persons.[1] More than half of those IDPs reportedly reside along the Thai-Burma border in eastern Burma.[2] Furthermore, reliable figures on IDP populations in various parts of the country are exceedingly difficult to come by. As may be seen elsewhere in this report, human rights abuses in certain states and divisions are far more widely documented than they are in others. This situation is further reflected throughout this chapter, where limited information on IDPs has been made available, particularly in Burma's central divisions. This should not necessarily be taken to indicate that there are considerably fewer IDPs or lower levels of displacement in these areas, but rather as an indication of a lack of dependable data from such areas.

The highest rate of displacement is believed to exist in eastern Burma, particularly in Karen and Shan States, where continued SPDC offensives are most concentrated. Ethnic minority areas, such as Karen, Karenni, Shan, and Mon States, have the highest rates of displacement, with conservative estimates putting the number of persons presently displaced in those states along with neighbouring Tenasserim and Pegu Divisions, at approximately 503,000.[3] These areas typically experience continuing armed conflict and it is also within these areas that the SPDC pursues its brutal 'counter-insurgency' program that targets civilians to ostensibly undermine armed resistance groups. Abuses such as forced labour, extortion, extrajudicial execution, torture, forced relocation and other such human rights abuses that lead to internal displacement are the most prevalent in ethnic border areas. Furthermore, the distinct lack of SPDC assistance provided to IDPs obstructs the development of sustainable livelihoods for those who are displaced.

Karen IDPs hiding from SPDC army forces in eastern Burma. *[Photo: US Campaign for Burma]*

Deliberate policies which lead to forced displacement, whether through urban relocation programs, national development projects or ostensible counter-insurgency campaigns, testify to the junta's disregard for its internationally mandated *"responsibility to protect"* its citizens and illuminate the high humanitarian cost of sustained military rule. The SPDC employs tactics of forced relocation of ethnic minorities to allow for the construction of

NaTaLa villages (NaTaLa is the Burmese acronym for the Ministry of Border Affairs, but is used in this context to describe 'model villages'), particularly targeting the Muslim Rohingya minority in northern Arakan State.

In December 2007, there was international recognition of the junta's record in violations of housing rights. The Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions named Burma as one of the worst violators of housing rights in the world, having evicted more than a million persons from their homes since 1962.[4] The Director of the Centre observed:

> *"More than one million people have been dispossessed and are internally displaced in Burma – not because of a natural disaster but due to their own government's calculated and brutal actions. The SPDC's brutal campaign against ethnic nationality communities – confiscating their lands, attacking and burning villages, killing thousands of civilians, raping women and looting property – is in clear breach of international law. … The military regime's 'Burmanisation' policy of ethnic cleansing and social engineering through forced relocation and land confiscation, which has led to the mass displacement of more than one million people from their lands and homes in Burma, is clear evidence of its complete disregard for human rights including the right to adequate housing"*.[5]

16.2 International Norms and Conventions

The standard definition of an internally displaced person (IDP), as codified by Article 2 of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and adopted internationally, is as follows:

> *"[P]ersons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border"*.[6]

According to the *Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, the distinctive feature of internal displacement is *"coerced or involuntary movement that takes place within national borders,"* with precursors to flight including *"armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, and natural or human-made disasters"*.[7]

Prohibitions against forced relocation and protections for internally displaced persons were first established under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 12 of the UDHR protects against arbitrary interference or attacks on the home, while Article 25(1) also accords the right to housing. These protections were reiterated in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 12(1) of the ICCPR states that, *"Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence."* Meanwhile, Article 17(1) asserts that *"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation."* Similarly, Article 11(1) of ICESCR recognizes *"the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."*

The rights of IDPs were most explicitly stated in the 1998 United Nations Guiding Principles on Forced Displacement. Though not a legally binding document, the Guiding Principles elucidated the rights of IDPs from existing international humanitarian and human rights law. According to Principle 5, States' authorities *"shall respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, in all circumstances, so as to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to displacement of persons."* Furthermore when displacement does occur, Principle 5 dictates that States *"have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction."* Enforced prohibitions against the forced displacement of persons and adequate provisions for their protection when such displacement does occur are necessary requisites for the fulfilment of the legal requirement of international human rights instruments.

There are a number of international instruments in existence which aim to protect individuals from displacement and in the event that displacement should occur, to be provided for and protected from further displacement. However, to date, the only concessions that Burma has made towards international laws have been its accession to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Pursuant to these two instruments Burma is obliged to take appropriate measures to ensure women and children have access to adequate housing under Article 14(2)(h) and 27(3) respectively.

Furthermore, Article 17 of the 1977 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol II), states that:

> *"The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition."*

Although Burma has neither ratified nor acceded to Additional Protocol II, the principles contained therein are now regarded as customary international law, thus making it binding on all States regardless of whether they have ratified the document or not.[8]

Unfortunately, despite the weight of international conventions, laws and norms favouring a prohibition against forced relocation, and the protection of the safety and security of IDPs, internal displacement and forced relocation continues to be commonplace throughout Burma.

16.3 Causes of Displacement in Burma

The definition of an IDP in the Guiding Principles suggests three district categories of displacement: displacement caused by armed conflict, displacement induced by State and private development, and displacement due to human rights abuses. These distinctions were explored in depth in a Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper, produced in February 2007, entitled *Burma: the Changing Nature of Displacement Crises*. The author of that report also describes three similar categories: armed-conflict-induced displacement, State/society-induced displacement, and livelihood/vulnerability-induced displacement.[9]

Conflict-Induced Displacement

Armed conflict has been a constant part of the Burmese landscape since independence in 1948. Though approximately two dozen ceasefires were struck between the regime and insurgency groups from 1989 to 1995, a number significant ethnic organizations still remained in conflict with the junta during 2007. In areas where such groups continue to operate, SPDC army units continue to mount military assaults on civilian villages. Thus, in eastern Burma armed conflict continues to be a considerable contributor to the displacement crises.

The term conflict-induced displacement can thus often be misleading, in that one automatically forms a mental image of conflict in a traditional sense and assumes that civilians with no active role in the fighting are being displaced when the conflict waged between two opposing armies spills over into their homes. However, this is typically not the case in Burma where the conflict is a low intensity war of attrition primarily targeting civilians, where displacement of civilian villagers is not a side effect of the conflict, but rather the intended outcome. Most skirmishes between the junta and resistance forces occur when the latter attempts to protect civilian villagers from attacks by SPDC army units to give them the chance to flee. In such cases, the villagers are not fleeing fighting between the SPDC and the resistance group, but rather it is that fighting which is giving them the opportunity to do so.

Generally, the consequence of armed attacks on civilian villages is that villagers are forced to relocate, either to take refuge in surrounding forest or other villages, move to a relocation site, or flee to neighbouring countries as refugees. They often continue to be endangered by armed conflict even after they flee.

Development-Induced Displacement

State and private development projects throughout Burma threaten to drastically increase the population of IDPs. The projects, part of the framework of the junta's rhetoric of post-conflict rehabilitation and economic enlargement, are almost always to the detriment of the poorest and most disenfranchised members of Burmese society. Poverty, which is most acute in the ethnic minority areas, is only exacerbated by the projects that are designed to provide military and financial stability to the regime. The projects are a means of the junta exercising power over the Burmese people and according to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), are *"synonymous with control"*.[10]

Small-scale infrastructure and amenity development, such as the establishment of military bases and constructions of roads, is linked to forced labour, extortion, and land confiscation. Larger projects of dam construction, mining and the establishment of hydroelectric power

facilities all lead again to land confiscation, forced labour, and environmental degradation, as well as posing the possibility of destruction and flooding of thousands of homes.

For example, the proposed construction of four dams along the Salween River, at Tasang in Shan State, and at Weigyi, Hatgyi and Dagwin in Karen State, along with 13 more in China, poses grave concerns for over 533,000 civilians living at the mouth of the river. The unique river, which is tidal for up to 75 kilometres inland from its mouth, nourishes hundreds of thousands of people, who use it as a source of drinking water, crop irrigation and fishing. The mixture of fresh and salt water at the mouth of the river is a delicate one, sustained by intricate canal systems designed by local villagers in order to protect crops from salt water and maintain supplies of fresh water.[11]

The potential dam developments threaten not only the ecological balance, but consequentially the livelihood of the thousands of people who depend upon the river as a source of life.[12] An estimated 35,000 persons have already been displaced as a result of the construction of the dams.[13] Salween Watch, a coalition of non-governmental organizations working to protect the river, estimates a further 83,000 persons will be uprooted from their homelands across Shan, Karenni and Karen states as the dams continue construction.[14]

Land confiscation is endemic throughout the country, and is linked both to the creation of 'model' villages and the forced relocation of ethnic minorities (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights), and large-scale development projects, such as the construction of the UN-sponsored Asia Highway, which involved widespread land confiscation and forced labour during its construction.[15]

The problem of land confiscation was recognised by the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheriro, in February 2007:

> *"[T]he Special Rapporteur has been very concerned about the 10 years of intensified military campaigns in ethnic areas of eastern Myanmar and its impact on the humanitarian and human rights situation, especially on civilians who have been targeted during the attacks. The situation should be considered in connection with the widespread practice of land confiscation throughout the country, which is seemingly aimed at anchoring military control, especially in ethnic areas. It has led to numerous forced evictions, relocations and resettlements, forced migration and internal displacement. Given the scale of the current military campaign, the situation may lead to a humanitarian crisis if it is not addressed immediately"*.[16]

Human Rights-Induced Displacement

The systematic and widespread violation of human rights is arguably one of the leading causes of displacement in Burma today. While many reports throughout 2007 continued to refer to *"civilians fleeing fighting"*, the reality remains that conflict in Burma is typically of a low intensity and what civilians are in fact fleeing from are the human rights abuses that invariably accompany increased militarization. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in areas of ethnic conflict. Furthermore, statements to this effect give the misleading impression that the villagers are fleeing from counter-insurgency measures taken by the SPDC against armed opposition groups and that the nature of the conflict has caused the violence to spill over into civilian villages, where the inhabitants, caught up in a conflict they have no part in are labelled as *"collateral damage"*.[17] However, the *"fighting"* that villagers are fleeing from has not been between two opposing armed forces, but rather direct and deliberate attacks on unarmed civilian villages. The villagers therefore, cannot be considered *"collateral damage"* in these attacks, but rather the intended targets of them.

It is correct that IDPs in this category are not necessarily ordered or physically compelled to move or relocate. However, due to arbitrary arrest, forced relocation, extortion, forced labour, torture, to rape and extrajudicial execution, villagers are effectively left with no choice but to leave as the conditions thrust upon them make it exceedingly difficult to survive. This type of movement is referred to as *"distress migration"* or *"migration for survival"*.[18]

One villager, from Bilin Townhsip in Thaton District, Karen State, described his relocation: *"I couldn't endure the continuous forced labour and highly demanding of SPDC any more so on 17 March 2007 I left my village and come to refugee camp"*.[19] Similarly, a villager from Ma Gyi village in Ye Township, Mon State, remarked that:

> *"We wanted to spend the rest of our lives in our native villages, but that is impossible. We had no money to feed our kids, we weren't allowed to go where we wanted and we could not refuse to do things we didn't want to do. That is why we decided to flee".*[20]

Once interned in an SPDC-controlled relocation site, IDPs are kept on the brink of starvation through an extensive system of extortion and demands for food, labour and other goods. Furthermore, the villagers' freedoms of movement are also strictly regimented; in some cases stripped entirely. This is done ostensibly to impoverish the villagers to such a point that they cannot provide material support to resistance forces even if they should want to. Ultimately, when the demands become too great and food too scarce, many villagers flee from relocation sites to live as IDPs in the forest.

Those living beyond SPDC-control as IDPs do not have to contend with forced labour or extortion, but must flee ahead of any advancing SPDC army units. If seen by SPDC army patrols, IDPs are often fired upon. By refusing to comply with SPDC demands and living beyond their control, IDPs in conflict areas are thus considered as enemies of the state which must be either rounded up and relocated to state-controlled relocation sites, or simply shot on sight. SPDC army patrols also systematically destroy any hidden settlements in the forests where IDPs have been living as well as any food supplies or crops that they discover in an attempt to starve them out of the hills.

16.4 Destinations of the Displaced and Forcibly Relocated

Relocation Sites

Central to the policy employed by the regime in ethnic border areas is the SPDC's forced relocation campaign. In areas suffering from ethnic conflict, territory may be divided into three coloured zones: 'black' areas that are controlled by resistance forces; 'brown' contested areas; and 'white' areas where all traces of armed resistance have been eliminated. The SPDC army's primary objective is to rid the country of all black and brown areas where resistance groups operate by turning them all into white areas wholly controlled by the SPDC. In areas where resistance groups operate, any village that is located in an area beyond direct military control is often forcibly relocated into areas that are controlled by the SPDC. Such 'relocation sites' are typically located along road corridors, adjacent to existing SPDC army camps so that the soldiers can regiment the freedoms of the villagers interned there, monitor their movements and exploit them as forced labour to porter military supplies along those roadways. Villages are typically only given a week, or in many cases even less, to dismantle their homes, gather all of their belongings and move all that they can to the relocation site. Villagers who remain behind after the appointed time has elapsed can be shot on sight.

Upon arriving at the site, villagers are typically not provided with anything by the SPDC. They are generally only assigned a small plot of land on which they must construct their home. Villagers must even provide their own building materials as the SPDC does not provide these either. It has been reported in some cases SPDC army soldiers have instructed villagers specifically not to take their belongings with them; that they will have the opportunity to return to collect their belongings later. However, as soon as the villagers have left, the soldiers have returned to the village and looted everything of value and eaten their fill of whatever food was left behind while the villagers are denied permission to ever return to their village to salvage what remained.[21] To ensure that the villagers do not attempt to secretly return to their homes, the soldiers often litter relocated villages with landmines or simply burn the whole site to the ground.

Most relocation sites are grossly overcrowded, lack any existing sanitation facilities, are typically located *"on barren land"* that does not lend itself well to agriculture, and often have poor access to fresh drinking water.[22] Furthermore, being as overcrowded as many relocation sites are, all available arable land in the region is already under cultivation, and the new arrivals, denied the right to return to their villages or fields, struggle to acquire enough food for their families. As such, SPDC-controlled relocation sites fail to meet the minimum requirements for villagers to establish and sustain a livelihood.

Once interned in a relocation site, villagers are seldom granted permission to leave to tend to crops, travel to markets in neighbouring villages or visit friends and relatives. SPDC authorities have ordered the residents of many relocation sites to fence the entire site, leaving only one or two gates allowing access or egress. These gates are often overseen by SPDC army soldiers and the names of everyone entering or exiting the site are recorded. For most relocation sites, the only way that a villager is allowed to travel outside is when he/she is in possession of an SPDC-issued travel permit; obtained only after payment of a fee. While some travel passes authorize travel of up to one week, many only permit villagers to be away from the relocation site during the hours of daylight, typically between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. However, possession of a valid travel permit does not guarantee safe passage. For example, Rohingya villagers in Buthidaung Township of Arakan State are regularly apprehended by SPDC authorities who destroy their travel passes and accuse them of travelling without proper documentation so that they can extort money from them.[23] In areas of ethnic conflict, villagers found travelling outside the relocation site are often

accused of having been in contact with resistance forces and are often fired upon on sight without so much as even checking their documentation.[24]

Furthermore, the increased proximity of villagers to SPDC army soldiers significantly increases the likelihood that they will be subjected to human rights abuses. Villagers interned in SPDC-controlled relocation sites are regularly called upon to provide forced labour for the military, constructing and maintaining roads and military camps (of both the SPDC and ceasefire armies), portering supplies along those roads to outlying camps, serving as guides and human minesweepers in military operations, and as servants, messengers and errand runners for the soldiers. (For more information, see Chapter 5: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription). The villagers also face countless other demands for money, food, building materials and other goods. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). Villagers have also been beaten and tortured by the soldiers when the endless stream of demands is not met. (For more information, see Chapter 2: Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment).[25]

According to the available figures, the total known population of relocation sites in eastern Burma during 2007 decreased by approximately 9,000 to 109,000 from 118,000 of the previous year. This is believed to be partly attributable to villagers' attempts to returning to their homes, or resettling elsewhere in Tenasserim Division and Shan State.[26]

States and Divisions	IDPs in Relocation Sites	
	2006	2007
Karen State	4,300	9,70
Karenni State	6,400	4,800
Mon State	500	7,200
Eastern Pegu Division	6,400	12,200
Southern Shan State	31,300	24,100
Tenasserim Division	69,100	51,000
Total	**118,000**	**109,000**

TBBC estimates of internally displaced persons living in relocation sites in eastern Burma during 2006 and 2007.[27]

IDP Hiding Sites

Many villagers in ethnic minority areas choose to live in hiding from the SPDC and their proxy ceasefire armies on account of the abuse they have suffered at the hands of such groups. Many villagers, knowing all too well how they will be treated if found; constantly flee in the face of SPDC army patrols. According to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) IDP survey, an estimated 99,000 civilians were hiding in the remote mountains and forests throughout eastern Burma during 2007.[28] However, some argue this estimate to be conservative and does not take the fluid and cyclical nature of repeated and short-term displacement into account. Those who adhere to this alternate view would place the number of internally displaced living in hiding in the forests considerably higher.

This particular group of IDPs maintain a strong affinity with their land and would rather remain in hiding and hardship within the vicinity of their destroyed or abandoned villages than relocate to SPDC-controlled relocation sites or flee to neighbouring countries.[29] By not only refusing to relocate when ordered but also by fleeing deeper into the forest where they hope to live beyond the reach of the SPDC, IDPs living in hiding are considered to support resistance groups and as such are looked upon the same as arms-bearing combatants.

Conditions facing IDPs in hiding differ from those in relocation sites in that by avoiding all contact with the military, they are not obliged to perform forced labour or comply with demands for extortion. However, IDPs in hiding must remain ever vigilant and prepared to flee from approaching SPDC army columns who mount sweeps through the forest in search of them. Their food supplies and hiding sites are systematically destroyed when discovered and if seen by the soldiers, they will be shot on sight. Necessity therefore dictates that IDP hiding sites must be small and well hidden deep in the forest where it will be hard for patrols to find them. However, this is not always the case and rapid military expansionism has meant that many IDP hiding sites are only an hour's walk away from the nearest army camp. Some are even closer.

Being temporary settlements that must be abandoned at a moment's notice should the need arise, IDP hiding sites typically lack all but the most basic of village infrastructure. Access to clean water and healthcare is often limited and as a result disease is rife. Incidences of IDPs dying from easily preventable and readily treatable diseases such as diarrhoea are high. (For more information, see Chapter 7: Right to Health).[30]

Displaced persons in hiding sites have repeatedly stated that their greatest concern is their lack of food security. The systematic destruction of their food supplies and their inability to freely travel to markets has made it extremely difficult for IDPs to obtain sufficient food supplies.[31] IDPs thus grow small cash crops of betelnut, dogfruit, cardamom, or other similar crops which they surreptitiously sell in markets despite the danger to themselves so they can buy rice for their families. Most IDPs in hiding will also conceal small food caches in the forest in preparation for the inevitability that they will need to flee again.

Eastern Burma records the highest number of IDPs living in hiding. This is due, in part, to continued armed conflict in the area and the heavily forested and mountainous terrain lying along the eastern border with Thailand where IDPs can more easily secrete themselves. However, reliable information for other parts of the country is not available, and this fact does not necessarily reflect that this issue is smaller in those other areas.

States and Divisions	IDPs in Hiding	
	2006	2007
Karen State	49,100	51,600
Karenni State	9,300	10,000
Mon State	300	600
Eastern Pegu Division	147,400	18,700
Southern Shan State	13,300	13,700
Tenasserim Division	5,600	4,400
Total	**95,000**	**99,000**

TBBC estimates of internally displaced persons living in hiding in eastern Burma during 2006 and 2007.[32]

Ceasefire Areas

While the estimates for the amount of IDPs living in relocation sites decreased in 2007, the numbers of those in areas controlled by ethnic ceasefire armies actually increased during 2007. Of the approximately 500,000 persons displaced in eastern Burma in 2007, more than half, or 295,000, were located in ceasefire areas. This represents an increase of 8,000 for the same area over the previous year.[33] According to the TBBC, the increase, the largest of which was observed in Karen State, was in part due to the expansion of the area of influence of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the newly-formed Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC), both of which operate in Karen State. (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). The TBBC maintains that, IDPs are relocating into these ceasefire areas by the relative degree of protection provided as compared to living under the control of the SPDC.[34] While in many cases, ceasefire areas may provide a temporary respite from human rights violations perpetrated by the SPDC, most ceasefire authorities are unable to adequately provide for IDPs who have taken refuge in areas under their administration. In their 2006 report on internal displacement in eastern Burma, the TBBC stated:

> *"[T]hese areas can not provide a sustainable solution for the internally displaced due to population density with limited access to sustainable agricultural land, SPDC restrictions on travel outside of ceasefire areas, and the inability of ethnic nationality authorities to support resettlement or compensate for livelihood assets lost"*.[35]

However, this is not the case in all ceasefire areas; in some areas, villagers have reported suffering equal, if not greater, human rights abuses from the DKBA as compared to the SPDC.[36]

States and Divisions	IDPs in Ceasefire Areas	
	2006	2007
Karen State	45,900	55,600
Karenni State	63,600	66,200
Mon State	41,000	41,600
Eastern Pegu Division	0	0
Southern Shan State	131,000	126,000
Tenasserim Division	5,500	5,600
Total	**287,000**	**295,000**

TBBC estimates of internally displaced persons living in ceasefire areas in eastern Burma during 2006 and 2007.[37]

16.5 Humanitarian Assistance

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement clearly state that the SPDC is under obligation to protect and provide aid to those who have been internally displaced. Principle 3(1) clearly states that *"National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction."* The adequacy of humanitarian assistance can be measured in its effectiveness to address the immediate difficulties faced by IDPs while supporting the longer recovery processes of those effected, while promoting positive change in the attitudes and structures that neglect human rights and contribute to such harm. Such principles, however, are inconsistent with the policies of the SPDC towards IDPs. The SPDC fails to provide any form of humanitarian assistance to IDPs, primarily because their displacement is the desired result of the conflict, not a consequence of it, coupled with a complete denial of the existence of the problem.

The SPDC has consistently restricted the access of humanitarian agencies into conflict-affected areas because of the political sensitivity of these regions. Clearly the regime does not wish for the international community to bear witness to the atrocities that are responsible for in these areas. International humanitarian assistance to IDPs in these areas has been repeatedly denied. Meanwhile, in many areas experiencing ethnic conflict the demand is being met, at least to a degree by local humanitarian organizations who clandestinely travel into these areas to deliver aid to those in need. While some of these organizations are affiliated with resistance groups, many of them remain independent.

While Burma has been the subject of much criticism by the international community, there has been a reluctance to intervene in the situation. The situation in Burma clearly represents the perpetration of severe human rights violations and crimes against humanity, the contravention of a variety of international laws and norms, a risk to international peace and security. Yet to this point, neither the United Nations nor any other international organisation has seen fit to intervene. This is despite the fact that a report released in 2005, commissioned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Vaclav Havel, which compared Burma with other countries where the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has intervened, including Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, revealed that Burma was the only country which met all five criteria to warrant intervention.[38]

The situation is exacerbated by the inability of certain States to support a stronger stance towards the military regime. Their ties to the regime in respect to arms supplies and investments in large scale oil and natural gas reserves severely impedes the impartiality of their decisions, and has led such states to argue that Burma poses no threat to international peace and security. This was evidenced on 12 January 2007, when a resolution calling for the restoration in democracy in Burma and an end to human rights violations came before the United Nations Security Council and was subsequently vetoed by Russia and China - their first joint veto since 1972.[39]

16.6 Situation in Arakan State

While there is little actual armed conflict in Arakan State, there has been an increased military presence there in recent years, which has brought with it an increase in forced labour, confiscation of farmlands and development. Arakan State is one of the most militarized regions of Burma, and as such forced labour is commonly used for tasks such as building and repairing transportation routes, maintaining army camps, sentry duty and portering loads for the military. Land is frequently confiscated without compensation for use as army camps, farms and commercial projects. According to a survey conducted by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC) published in May 2007, over 50 percent of respondents from Arakan State named *"land confiscation"* as a reason for their displacement.[40]

A second cause of displacement in Arakan State during 2007 was the completion and settlement of almost 60 'model villages' in northern Arakan State.[41] Also known as NaTaLa (NaTaLa is the Burmese acronym for the Ministry of Border Affairs, but is used in this context to describe 'model villages') village projects, these model villages are primarily constructed on land appropriated from the ethnic Rohingya. The formation of model villages is part of a program of *"demographic engineering"*, orchestrated in order to dilute the Islamic population in Northern Arakan State, which is comprised primarily of the Muslim Rohingya. The villages are built to house the Buddhist Arakanese, who are often forcibly relocated from their own homes in other parts of the country to take part in the program.[42]

The new settlers, commonly referred to as NaTaLa villagers, are often unhappy to have been resettled, and many of them, having been brought from urban areas in central Burma, are unfamiliar with land cultivation, consequently abandon their homes and land after only a number of years. In spite of this, the land is not returned to the original Rohingya owners.[43] (For more information, see Chapter 15: Ethnic Minority Rights). One NaTaLa villager remarked:

> *"We are provided farmlands which were seized from Rohingya villagers and we have no knowledge of how to grow paddy. We are also provided rickshaw, tractors, but, these are not useful to us. We are frequently afflicted by malaria and we have no other earnings. We were forced to come here. So, we want to flee from this place"*.[44]

In January 2007, SPDC army authorities forcibly relocated several Rohingya families from the newly-constructed Taungbro sub-town, for the construction of a new model village. The model village, which was being built to upgrade border trade with Bangladesh, involved the construction 120 houses, and had incurred the displacement of an estimated 1,000 persons by the time construction began in January 2007.[45]

On 1 February 2007, NaSaKa personnel and local police destroyed approximately 30 Rohingya homes located in Wards #3 and #4 of Taungbro to make way for the construction of a new model village, said to contain 120 homes. Villagers were given no compensation for their loss, nor were they provided with a resettlement site or even permission to construct new homes.[46]

In March 2007, 300 carpenters from Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships were ordered to cease work on their present construction works and relocate to a model village construction site in Taungbro, north of Maungdaw. According to one carpenter, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the carpenters *"postponed all construction work for the local people in the area as the government authority ordered us [carpenters] to come to the Taungbro model village for the construction of 120 houses"*. The carpenters were summonsed to complete the

construction of 120 houses in the model village in order to allow for the relocation of 120 Buddhist Burman families prior to the commencement of *Thingyan*, the Burmese New Year festival, in mid April. Though not explicitly stated in any of the original reports, it is highly likely that these carpenters were building the same NaTaLa village which had displaced dozens of Rohingya families in January and February 2007. See incident above.[47]

On 1 March 2007, 60 households in Nadine village, Mrauk U Township, were ordered by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #378 to relocate as their village fell within an army cantonment area, despite the fact that it had existed there *"since time immemorial"*, and that the cantonment area had only been set up *"in recent years"*.[48]

On 27 March 2007, the inhabitants of six villages in Buthidaung Township were called to a meeting and informed that their paddy fields would be confiscated for use in the construction of new model villages. Villagers were forbidden to grow any paddy on their fields and were not offered any compensation for their land. The confiscation began on 4 April 2007, as the army hoisted red flags around confiscated lands, declaring that new settlers would be relocated there as of 5 May 2007. The villages which received this order included:

1. Maung Nama village;
2. Magh Bill Nama village;
3. Kwan Daine Nama village;
4. Yet Nyo Daung Nama village;
5. Thet Kin Manu Nama village; and
6. Washilla Para village.[49]

On 4 March 2007, approximately 500 NaTaLa villagers arrived in Sittwe (Akyab), the capital of Arakan State, *en route* to the new model village in Taungbro where they were to be resettled. The people of Sittwe were reportedly forced to welcome the new settlers and to donate medicine and clothes to them. Such rallies are often filmed and shown in the State-controlled media as proof that the population supports the SPDC and its policies, though the truth is anything but. Although it was not stated in the original report, it is quite likely that these NaTaLa villagers were being resettled to a new site which had evicted several dozen Rohingya families in January and February 2007. See incident above.[50]

On 4 April 2007, a further 447 new settlers arrived at the Taungbro model village, via Sittwe and Maungdaw. This latest resettlement brought the total number of families who had relocated from central Burma to the 36 model villages in northern Arakan State to 2,692.[51]

In July 2007, Thandwe, Taungup and Gwa Townships, all in northern Arakan State suffered severe flooding due to unusually heavy rainfall. Much of these three townships were reportedly submerged under water. The residents of three wards of Buthidaung Township were also moved to higher ground and forced to reside in school buildings until the flooding subsided.[52] Approximately 5,000 persons in Thandwe Township were also displaced by the floods.[53] The majority of roads across Arakan State were completely submerged, bringing travel and communication to a halt.[54] The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) began distributing medicine, clothing, cooking utensils and water purification tablets to assist in the emergency relief efforts.[55]

Due to the heavy rains in July 2007, people throughout Rathedaung Township quickly experienced a severe shortage of rice. This resulted with many poorer families being forced to desert the area and move elsewhere in search of food. Persons from the following villages were affected:

1. Reboke village;
2. Resoe Chaung village;
3. Anyat Tuang village;
4. Tai Taboke village;
5. Kyauk Ran village;
6. Thatpi Kya village;
7. Pea Thadu village;
8. Maung Pru Wra village;
9. Kharu Chaung village;
10. Nga ran chaung village;
11. Re myat village;
12. Kyak Tan village;
13. Lai Gun village; and
14. Lamon Din village.[56]

16.7 Situation in Chin State

As in Arakan State, the increased militarization of Chin State, and with it forced labour, land confiscation and heavy taxation, has been the root cause of displacement and forced relocation in Chin State.[57] According to a report released in February 2007, an estimated 50,000 residents of Chin State had fled their homes throughout 2006, with many migrating to foreign countries or other states in Burma. An unidentified civil servant in Chin State stated that *"there are no other options for a career except farming in Chin State. Now, forced labour and recruitment of child solders is the main occupation of Chin people. In a condition like this nobody wants to stay in Chin State"*.[58]

In addition, religious discrimination is a problem, with land reportedly being confiscated from Chin Christians for use by Buddhists. Further, the people of Chin State, like many throughout Burma, are subjected to coercive agricultural policies, requiring them to cultivate tea and physic nut (jatropha and castor) plants, and these projects have lead to considerable relocation and migration throughout the state.[59] (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

In June 2007, it was reported that an order had been made for the demolition of seven houses on the corner of Thangtlang and Falam Roads in Haka, the capital of Chin State, in order to allow for the construction of a new college. Three of the homeowners were identified as Mr ZaPiang, Mr Liantum and Pastor Ngunkhar. The owners of the homes were not compensated for their loss.[60]

16.8 Situation in Irrawaddy Division

Data concerning the causes and effect of displacement in Irrawaddy Division is scarce with few groups working to document the situation in this area. Much of the displacement in Irrawaddy Division during 2007 was as a result of natural disaster and severe weather conditions. August 2007 saw numerous problems caused by extreme weather, including heavy rainfalls and cyclones. On 4 August 2007, a small cyclone struck Lawputta Township causing the widespread destruction of over 60 buildings, including a school, killing two children and leaving hundreds homeless.[61]

In mid August 2007, an unnamed dam near the Irrawaddy River broke, resulting in extensive flooding which submerged thousands of acres of farmland and numerous villages, leaving thousands of persons from Bassein, Henzada, Maubin, and Pantanaw Townships homeless.[62]

In August 2007, the area surrounding villages in Bassein, Maubin, Daw Wartawsal and Nat Swe was purposely flooded by the SPDC when they opened a floodgate in the Inn Chaung irrigation channel. A farmer from the area reported that *"Between 5,000 and 10,000 acres of farmland [had] been destroyed so far … I had about 60 acres of crops planted and about 40 of those are still under water"*.[63]

Heavy rains lashed the villages of South Pyapon, North Pyapon, Kyonpyaw, and Pantanaw Townships throughout August 2007, causing a number of serious landslides and forced hundreds of persons to evacuate. One resident of Pantanaw Township reported that, *"villagers from those places where landslides occurred are now dismantling their houses. There were about 500 to 600 families living in each village"*.[64]

In all about 10,000 homes were affected by the floods. Eight schools were closed, and an estimated 40,000 acres of irrigated rice paddies were destroyed. It was further reported that at least 18 villages were submerged underwater.[65]

16.9 Situation in Kachin State

The early 1990s saw the formation of a number of ceasefire agreements between the junta and local insurgent groups operating in Kachin State. This subsequently brought about an end to widespread armed conflict in Kachin State. Following the signing of their ceasefire agreement with the regime in 1994, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) orchestrated the resettlement of more than 60,000 displaced persons throughout Kachin State.[66] Since that time, the KIO has successfully implemented resettlement and development programs, and according to the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, the living conditions of the people of Kachin State have improved markedly under the ceasefire. However, forced displacement is still a common occurrence across the state, primarily due to land confiscation, natural resource extraction, and large-scale development projections, undertaken by the SPDC and local authorities.[67]

In May 2007, residents of Myitkyina Township reported the widespread unlawful confiscation of civilian-owned homes, plantations and lands by the SPDC, under what the Kachin News Group (KNG) called a *"fake land ownership grant"* scheme devised by SPDC lawyers and officials at the military base in Myitkyina. U Tin Aung from Shanzu (North) Quarter lost ownership of his home in 2004 when presented with a 'fake grant' by pro-junta lawyers Daw Khin Sein, wife of a military officer, and Daw Khin Hle Hle, a legal officer of the SPDC office in Myitkyina. U Tin Aung remained in his home but in May 2007, was facing pressure by the junta to vacate his home to allow for its sale to a Chinese drug businessman in Myitkyina, Kong Li (a.k.a. Kyaw Myint) for 80 million kyat. Although U Tin Aung was issued eviction orders from the junta, he continued to resist the confiscation.[68]

Myitkyina Township is the site of the Myitsone hydroelectric power project, which threatens to destroy 47 villages, and displace up to 10,000 persons as a result of flooding its construction would cause.[69] The project, which proposes to dam the Irrawaddy River near Myitsone, reportedly continued construction throughout November 2007. The project is conducted jointly between the junta and the Chinese government.[70]

In May 2007, the villages of Wai Khar and Kaung San in Pha Kant region were compelled to relocate due to mining activities of Myanmar-Taguang Company, jointly owned and controlled by the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and the junta-affiliated Htoo Trading Company. The villagers described their reasons for relocating: *"The soil [stockpiled from the mine] has piled up and is almost overrunning the area. The soil is being dug up in Hone Pan by the Myanmar-Taguang Company. Villagers have moved to the old mine site because they are afraid that the village will be overrun with soil"*. It was reported that U Tay Za of Htoo Trading Company paid an amount of compensation to the villagers of Kaung San after forcibly removing them, although the amount that was paid was not stated in the original report.[71]

In July 2007, Rangoon-based company, Max Myanmar, run by SPDC-affiliate U Zaw Zaw, began works in the profitable jade mining area of Lonkin, in Hpakant Township. The company occupied 500 acres of jade mining blocks, including paddy fields, agricultural fields and jade mining areas which had previously been owned by local Kachin residents and business blocks. This move followed the forcible relocation of Kachin and Shan residents in 2006 when the Yuzana Company, chaired by U Htay Myint purchased over 200,000 acres of land from the SPDC.[72] Yuzana Company was again credited in July 2007 with seizing agricultural tracts, and destroying homes, churches and orchards in the Hukawng Valley. The valley is especially vulnerable to the confiscation of land by corporations and the SPDC given the lack of official land ownership grants possessed by the local inhabitants. The absence of ownership rights has allowed the junta to sell large areas of land to mining and other corporations. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).[73]

In late July 2007, approximately 2,000 persons were displaced due to serious flooding in Bhamo Township, which had damaged approximately 200 homes. *"About 2,000 people living on the outskirts have moved and are now temporarily staying in a monastery and in school buildings,*" reported one Bhamo Township resident.[74]

In July and August 2007, heavy rains disrupted transport Hpakant and Seng Tawng Townships in western Kachin State, as the Uyu River broke its banks damaged the road linking Hpakant with nearby towns and villages. Local villagers relocated into the nearby mountains, where others residing in the area provided them with food. The area is well known for its jade and gold mines and, according to a local villager; the overflow of the Uyu River is a result of the mining companies disposing of sediments from the mines directly into the river. The sand and stones that are dumped into the river by the mines interfere with the flow of the river in the wet season.[75]

In November 2007, the Yuzana Company was granted a contract by the junta to rebuild a section of the historical World War II-era Stilwell Road (also called the Ledo Road) through northern Kachin State, linking Indo-Burma-China Road, which stretches throughout Kachin State. The effect on the residents of Kachin State is not yet known.[76]

16.10 Situation in Karen State

Longstanding conflict between the Karen National Union (KNU), the SPDC-allied Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), and the SPDC is the cause of much of the displacement throughout Karen State.[77] November 2005 saw the commencement of a continuous and intensive military offensive against the Karen of northern Karen State. Though the SPDC and numerous commentators have argued that the offensive is part of the SPDC's larger counter-insurgency campaign, the primary targets have been unarmed and non-combative civilian villagers. Conservative estimates put the number of newly displaced persons who have become so as a direct result of the offensive at between 27,000[78] and 30,000[79] civilians and civilian fatality figures at more than 24 persons in 2006 alone.[80] These numbers, however, fail to take into account the thousands of villagers suffering from long-term and cyclical displacement common to the region. Meanwhile, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) have placed the fatality rate between January 2006 and November 2007 at 370 persons,[81] while the TBBC has put the number of villages in eastern Burma that were destroyed, forcibly relocated or otherwise abandoned in 2006 at 232.[82]

During 2007 it was estimated that there were 116,900 displaced persons throughout Karen State, in addition to a further 30,900 in eastern Pegu Division which under the Karen system of demarcation represents Nyaunglebin District and was also subject to attacks under the offensive.[83]

According to a working paper released by the Refugee Studies Centre of Oxford University, between February 2006 and January 2007, approximately 25,000 persons were displaced following SPDC attacks in the northern districts of Karen State, namely Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Papun Districts.[84] The Free Burma Rangers (FBR), likewise, have estimated that approximately 11,000 persons were newly displaced in Nyaunglebin District, with 6,000 persons displaced across Shweygyn and Kyauk Kyi Townships and an additional 5,000 IDPs in Mone Township.[85]

The beginning of 2007 saw the increased and broadened presence of the SPDC in northern Karen State. The region was the site of increased military enlargement and infrastructure development by the SPDC, utilizing forced labour, extortion of food and supplies and restrictions on civilian movement and trade in order to strengthen its stronghold in the area. To carry this out, the SPDC had established an additional 33 new army camps in Papun, Nyaunglebin and Toungoo Districts.[86] Military activity in the region primarily targeted the civilian population and focused on areas where displaced communities were residing. Displacement has been a natural consequence of the military expansion as civilians flee to avoid all contact with the military for fear of being shot or sight or apprehended and forced to perform labour on army projects.[87]

Moreover, the proposed development of a series of hydroelectric dams on the Salween River where it passes through Karen State threatens to exacerbate the displacement problem in the area. According to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), the construction of the three dams which are proposed to be built along the Salween River would *"block the escape of refugees and cut off supplies of relief aid from Thailand to the internally displaced"*, in addition to cutting the supply lines of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) who often protect displaced villagers from SPDC and DKBA attacks, thus ultimately leading to increased levels of displacement in the region.[88]

In Toungoo District, many villagers, faced with SPDC restrictions on movement and labour, impediments to trade and travel, and forced labour, all the while under threat of injury or death from the SPDC for not strictly complying with SDPC demands have chosen to adopt a life of flight in the forests. In order to thwart the efforts of displaced villagers living in hiding

in the rural areas, the SPDC employed tactics such as controlling roadways to block access to food and medicine.[89]

In an effort to further improve and expand military infrastructure in the Toungoo District, the SPDC implemented frequent patrols of the forest trails in the area surrounding the Toungoo Kler Lah-Mawchi vehicle road. Local villagers were forbidden to travel along forest trails or to tend to their paddy fields and other crop plantations outside of the hours of 6:00am to 6:00pm.[90]

The TBBC have estimated that 30,800 civilians were living in hiding in Papun District alone during 2007. There, SPDC army units maintained a significant presence in order to prevent displaced villagers from attempting to return to their homes or fields. Furthermore, the military continued to patrol forest areas in order to seek out and attack displaced communities, employing a shoot-on-sight policy.[91] According one villager from Lu Thaw Township, Papun District:

> *"We have to run at least five times a year. The whole village faces a food shortage problem because we had to leave our place of work and our belongings when we fled to the hiding site. We were only concerned with escaping from the SDC troops".*[92]

A Karen IDP carrying his son and belongings after fleeing SPDC and DKBA attacks on 8 March 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

Another significant factor affecting displacement in Papun District is the ongoing construction of a new road that when completed will link Bu Sah Kee village in southeastern Toungoo District with Pwa Ghaw village in northern Papun District.[93] This road, similar to others like it throughout Karen State, will serve the SPDC at the detriment of local villagers by facilitating the rapid mobilization of troops along it as they hunt down the internally displaced who refuse to live under direct SPDC control.

In the first three months of 2007, displaced villagers living in the hills of Lu Thaw Township, Papun District, especially those in Kay Pu, Naw Yoh Htah, Ler Mu Plaw and Saw Mu Plaw village tracts, were subjected to attacks on their hidden cash crops, paddy storage barns and community infrastructure by SPDC troops. In the Saw Mu Plaw village tract, SPDC forces also deliberately burned villagers' paddy fields and plantations. The attacks devastated the villagers' means of survival and livelihood and forced them to gather limited supplies and continue to flee.[94]

Between January and June 2007, approximately 4,000 persons from Papun District fled their homes across the Yunzalin River, in an attempt to reach Thailand where they had hoped to enter one of the refugee camps.[95]

On 6 January 2007, villagers from Ko Pu and Hsaw Mi Lu village tracts in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, were forced to destroy their own homes and relocate to Kyauk Kyi. The orders were given by SPDC Tactical Operations Commander Khin Maung Oo and carried out by IB # 50 and LIB #351, in retaliation to an earlier KNLA attack on LIB #351.[96]

On 7 January 2007, SPDC army troops responded to an attack by the KNLA the previous day by entering the Aung Soe Moe village in Nyaunglebin District, and ordering 673 persons from 160 families leave the village by 12:00 pm that day.[97] The villagers lost 100 *viss* (160 kg / 352 lbs) of chicken and 10,000 coconuts.[98] Those displaced lived in the surrounding forest or with relatives until the third week of January, when they were forcibly relocated to Kyauk Kyi. Most of the residents of Aung Soe Moe village had been forcibly relocated there from Mone in 1974 and 1975. The troops responsible for the relocation were reportedly from IB #60 (Major Saw Lay commanding), and LIB #351 (Colonel Chit Htan commanding), both operating under Strategic Operations Command (SOC) #2 of Southern Regional Military Command.[99]

On 8 January 2007, an SPDC army column comprised of troops from LIB #307 and LIB #602 attacked the Baw Kwaw area in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District, resulting in the displacement of over 200 villagers from Baw Kwaw Thay Kho Der villages.[100]

On 10 January 2007, two displaced civilians, who had previously fled from the Yay Ghoh Kee area of Papun District, attempted to return to their abandoned village to recover their belongings, when they were fired on by an unidentified group of SPDC army soldiers. Both men escaped uninjured.[101]

On 30 January 2007, SPDC army soldiers attacked Hsaw Wah Der and Kaw Thay Der villages in Toungoo District, forcing the villagers from the area to flee from their homes.[102]

It was reported in January 2007, that almost 3,000 villagers had fled SPDC army attacks and were heading for the Ee Htu Htah IDP settlement located on the Burmese bank of the Salween River, where it marks the border with Thailand.[103]

According to a report released by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) on 3 February 2007, at least 21 civilian villages in Toungoo District had been completely abandoned as a result of continued SPDC army attacks. Those villages listed by FBR included:

1. Htee Loh (May They Thein) village;
2. K'Ser Doh (Taung Gyi) village;
3. P'Thar Day (Pla La Gone) village;
4. Mwee Loh (Sin Pweh Daw) village;
5. Kaw Po Lo village;
6. Tha Pa Kee (Tha Pa Tha La) village;
7. Kheh Der (Mya Ga Chaye) village;
8. Hu Mu Der (La Mein Bega) village;

9. Ler Kla Der (O Be Chaye) village;
10. Klaw Mi Der (Yay Ta Gone) village;
11. Yer Loh (Mya Chaung) village;
12. Klaw Baw Der (Ha Tho) village;
13. Plaw Mu Der (Ku Lo) village;
14. Bu Sah Kee village;
15. Ta Kwee Soe village;
16. Plaw Mu Der (Pia Ma Do) village;
17. Si Kheh Der village;
18. Ku Ler Der (Ku Law) village;
19. May Daw Ko (Mon Tha Gyi) village;
20. Ka Lay Htu village; and
21. Hsaw Wah Der village.[104]

In February 2007, FBR reported that there were 1,970 IDPs from the following villages living in hiding in the small wedge of land situated between the Toungoo-Mawchi and Kleh Lah-Bu Sah Kee roads in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District:

1. Hsaw Wah Der village, 360 persons;
2. Ha Toh Per village, 220 persons;
3. Tha Aye Kee village, 160 persons;
4. Ho Kee village, 200 persons;
5. Sho Ser village, 170 persons;
6. Hee Daw Khaw village, 200 persons;
7. Wa Soe village, 180 persons;
8. Klay Kee village, 70 persons;
9. Bu Kee and Bu Sah Kee villages, 140 persons;
10. Thay Ko Der village, 70 persons;
11. Si Kheh Der village, 130 persons; and
12. Ta Kwee So village, 70 persons.[105]

On 5 February 2007, SPDC army soldiers operating under MOC #8 attacked Thay Thoo Kee village in Kay Pu village tract, Papun District. Villagers were attacked with mortars as they left a Christian church service. A 43-year-old male received wounds to his liver, lungs and stomach, while two others, a 15-year-old and 16-year-old, were reported to have suffered minor injuries. Local villagers fled into the surrounding forest following the attack.[106]

On 8 February 2007, a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #387 and LIB #276, operating under Military Operations Command (MOC) #21 (Brigadier General Soe Nway commanding), entered Baw Kwaw area of Papun District, forcing villagers from Baw Kwaw, Thay Koh Mu Der, Ber Ghaw, Th'Lay Ghaw Der and Lay Poe Kaw Htee villages to flee into the surrounding forest. Civilians were reluctant to return to the village to retrieve their food supplies for fear of being shot on sight by the SPDC army soldiers.[107]

On 16 February 2007, an SPDC army attack on the Saw Tay Der area of Mone Township in Nyaunglebin District, resulted in the displacement of 121 persons from Saw Tay Der, Ker Po Doh and Play Kee villages. As soon as the shooting began, the villagers grabbed what they could carry and fled into the surrounding forest where they hid from the soldiers.[108]

On 20 February 2007, an IDP community hiding in the Hsaw Mu Plaw area of Lu Thaw Township, Papun District was shelled by SPDC army soldiers without provocation or warning. The soldiers attacked the hiding site by firing ten mortar shells into it, sending the villagers running for their lives.[109]

On 23 February 2007, 663 villagers from 119 households in Kho Pu village, and 629 villagers from 116 households in Saw Mi Lu village, were forcibly relocated to Kyauk Kyi, Nyaunglebin District. The relocation ordered by SPDC Tactical operation Command (TOC) #2 Commander Khin Maung Oo, and carried out by IB #60 (Major Saw Lay commanding) and LIB #351 (Colonel Chit Htan commanding).[110]

On 26 February 2007, 12 field huts and the farms that they were in were burned by SPDC army soldiers near Hsaw Law Hta, Lu Thaw Township, Papun District.[111]

Commencing on 5 March 2007, more than 1,000 persons, comprising over 200 families from Weiladaw, Noh Gaw and Patala village tracts in Nyaunglebin District, were forced to relocate to the Tetu relocation site. The site is administered by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #350 (Thet Kaing commanding), with Thet Naing Aung holding responsibility for the site. The site's conditions have been reported to be very poor, medicine expensive and residents are required to compensate the army with 15,000 kyat a year for the land which they occupy at the site.[112]

IDPs fleeing an attack on Th'Dah Der village, Papun District, Karen State. *[Photo: FBR]*

Also commencing 5 March 2007, civilians from the following villages in Nyaunglebin District were forced to relocate to Pa Deh Khaw forced relocation site, under the orders of Bo Thet Khaing, the commanding officer of LIB #350:

1. Kaw Tha Say village;
2. Shu Kin Tha Ya village; and
3. Gomyit Tha Ya village.

Meanwhile, the following villages were relocated to the Pa Aye forced relocation site, also located in Nyaunglebin District:

1. Ma U Bin village;
2. Tone Ta Dah village;
3. Leh Kau Wah village; and
4. Shwe Dan village.

Many of these villages were previously relocation sites, to which the villagers had been forcibly settled since 1997.[113]

Commencing on 7 March 2007, residents of Saw Thay Der, Theh Baw Der, Khe Bo Der and Kyauk Pyar village tracts in Nyaunglebin District, were forced by a column of SPDC army soldiers from LIB #375, #376 and #377 to work on the construction of a new motor road. As a result, 1,500 villages fled the area.[114]

On 8 March 2007, a joint column comprised of DKBA and SPDC army soldiers attacked Wa Kwe Klo and Kah Law Ghaw villages in Dooplaya District, resulting in the displacement of more than 600 villagers. The attacking forces included more than 300 SPDC army soldiers from IB #81, operating under Light Infantry Division (LID) #22, and were accompanied by a number of DKBA troops. Those who were displaced hid in the area for several days while the troops patrolled the area, and only began returning home on 11 March 2007 once the soldiers had moved on.[115]

On 8 March 2007, villagers of Ta Nay Pa village, Nyaunglebin District, were evicted from their homes due to the construction of the Kyauk Na Ga Dam. The villagers were reportedly relocated to the Than Byu Jaung relocation site.[116]

Also on 8 March 2007, 140 local villagers from Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District were displaced following an attack by SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #22 in conjunction with the DKBA Battalions #906 and #907. The soldiers shelled Kler Law Kyeh village with mortars and strafed it with machinegun fire in retaliation to an earlier KNLA ambush on a DKBA column in February 2007. It is common for both the SPDC and the DKBA to attack unarmed civilian villages in retaliation to attacks made against them by the KNLA. That same day, a further 200 villagers were displaced in Dooplaya District by fighting between soldiers from DKBA #907 Battalion and KNLA #201Battalion.[117]

On 10 March 2007, fighting between a joint column of DKBA and SPDC army soldiers and the KNLA in Dooplaya District, resulted in the death of 14 combatants and caused the displacement of at least 300 civilians who fled across the border into Thailand.[118]

Between 15 and 21 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers from IB #379 and IB #380, under MOC #1, attacked a number of undefended civilian villages in the Saw Ka Der area of southern Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. This resulted in an estimated 1,400 villagers fleeing their homes and taking refuge in the dense forests where they hoped to evade detection by the SPDC.[119]

On 21 March 2007, SPDC army soldiers attacked Th'Dah Der and Hta Kaw To Baw villages, Papun District, killing three male villagers and causing the displacement of over 400 villagers.[120]

On 26 March 2007, villagers from Kaw Thay Der (Yay Tho Gyi) village in Toungoo District were forcibly evicted from their homes by SPDC army troops operating under MOC #5. The original report failed to mention the number of villagers who were relocated, but had stated that they were taken away to an unknown destination in at least ten trucks. It was suspected that the villagers were taken to Bu Sah Kee, also in Toungoo District, where SPDC army soldiers were constructing a new forced relocation site. It is believed that this relocation site will be populated with villagers who will then be forced to work on the construction of a road linking Bu Sah Kee with Kay Pu and Pwa Ghaw villages in Papun District.[121]

According to a report released in March 2007, the SPDC was in the process of making arrangements for the construction of a new town at Pwa Ghaw in Lu Thaw Township, to allow for the mass relocation of villagers residing in the surrounding hills.[122]

Due to the development of Shwegyin Dam, which has flooded over 3,000 orchards, in March 2007 the military relocated the villages of Ta Nay Pah and Kyauk Naga, both in Nyaunglebin District, to Yin Aye Myaung and Thepyu Chaung, causing the displacement of between 400 and 500 persons.[123]

Destroyed homes in Aung Soe Moe village, Nyaunglebin District, Karen State. *[Photo: FBR]*

On 4 April 2007, more than 900 villagers were forced into hiding in the Kheh Der area of Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District following an increase in SPDC army activity in the area, and the killing of 28-year-old Saw Wee Ti.[124]

Between 4 and 29 April 2007, a number of homes were burned down in the following villages, causing the displacement of civilians from up to 16 villages in Papun District. Though the list below shows only eight villages in which homes were razed, other nearby villages, hearing this news, fled in advance of the SPDC army column for fear that their village may be next. Those villages that were razed include:

1. Taw Ku Mu Der village, on 4 April 2007;
2. Bo Na Der village, on 7 April 2007;
3. Htee Bway Kee village, on 22 April 2007;
4. Htee Si Khee village, on 22 April 2007;
5. Si Day village, on 24 April 2007;
6. Kay Pu village, on 28 April 2007;
7. Gleh Mu village, on 28 April 2007; and
8. Thu Ta village, on 29 April 2007.[125]

Between 6 and 8 April 2007, a joint task force of DKBA and SPDC army soldiers attacked a number of KNLA bases and IDP hiding sites in Pa'an District located along the Burma-Thai border. According to reports, eight columns of SPDC army soldiers from LIBs #355, #356 and #357, accompanied by two columns of DKBA soldiers from #999 Brigade, rained approximately 80 mortar shells down on the KNLA bases.[126] Estimates of the number of civilians living in nearby villages affected vary, with some reports stating that 400 were displaced,[127] while others have maintained that this number was closer to 500.[128] Whatever the total number was, at least 250, mostly women and children, crossed the border into Mae Ramat District, Thailand. The displaced persons constituted approximately 140 Karen families from the following villages:

1. Loh Di Tah village, 30 families;
2. Thay Kai Yah village, 50 families;
3. Tha Koh Klah village, 30 families; and
4. A further 30 families from areas near the fighting.[129]

On 15 April 2007, Yaw Tho Ber village, an IDP site in Toungoo District, was attacked by a column of SPDC army troops from LIB #371 and LIB #372. According to reports, two displaced villagers, 24-year-old Saw Da Lalu, and 18-year-old Saw Bweh Klotoo were killed. (For more information, see Chapter 3: Extra-Judicial, Summary or arbitrary Executions).[130]

A number of these newly displaced families were attacked once again on 20 April 2007. Villagers from Thay Kai Ya were able to return to their villages some two weeks after the initial attacks, while others continued to be subject to attacks by the SPDC and DKBA.[131]

One of the largest SPDC army operations in the first half of 2007 occurred on 28 April 2007. SPDC troops commenced successive attacks on villages in the Tha May Khi and Kay Pu areas of Lu Thaw Township, Papun District. The attacks began at approximately 7:10 am when two SPDC army battalions attached to MOC #1 fired a number of mortars into Plo Law Kloh village, injuring 55-year-old Saw Maw Tay Kay. Later that same morning, mortars were launched on Kay Pu Plaw village at approximately 10:00 am, after which the troops entered the area and burning down a number of buildings and 11 farm huts in Kay Pu village tract. Further attacks followed throughout the day, including an attack by SPDC army soldiers operating under LID #88 against Kleh Mu village, in which the entire village was razed to the ground. The offensive continued the following day at Kay Pu village, where five homes were burned down, and at an IDP hiding site in the Si Day area, which was also burned to the ground.[132] It was estimated that 26 houses were destroyed in the Si Day area.[133]

During the sustained SPDC army attacks on civilian villages in northern Papun District throughout April 2007, villagers Saw Aw Hkar, 61, was killed and Maung Tin Khay, 55, was injured. It is believed that SPDC army soldiers from LIB #103, #301, and #416, along with IB #13 were those responsible for these attacks. According to reports, the following villages were among those that were fired upon and shelled by SPDC army soldiers:

1. Bo Nar Der village;
2. Taw Khu Mu Del village;
3. Htee Bwee Kee village;
4. Htee Thay Khee village;
5. Kay Pu village;
6. Ka Lal Mu village; and
7. Sue Htar village.[134]

An unnamed spokesperson for the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP), speaking in relation to the above incident, reported that SPDC army soldiers had:

> *"[R]esorted to heavy artillery fire, firing about 65 shells in the area starting [on 28] April. They attacked villages. Their aim is to ensure that nobody lives in the area. [O]ver 4,300 villagers from 18 villages are now in hiding in the jungle and spreading out. [They are] used to hiding in the jungle they are now living under trees"*.[135]

SPDC army attacks on civilian villages in Mone Township throughout April 2007 caused an estimated 4,000 persons to flee their homes in fear of the attacks. On 28 April 2007, 150 villagers from Yaw Kee village fled into the forest following an attack on their homes by an SPDC army unit. The soldiers, suspecting that the villagers were still hiding in the surrounding forest, continued to patrol the area and periodically shelling the areas in which they believed the displaced persons were hiding.[136]

On 30 April 2007, an unidentified SPDC army unit fired 12 mortars into Kay Pu village, Papun District targeting displaced persons believed to be hiding there.[137]

On 11 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers attacked and razed five villages in the Ler Wah area of Nyaunglebin District, displacing 540 villagers in the process. One report maintained that, *"Nobody can go back to work. Villagers are hiding in jungles. They are living under trees and plastic sheets"*.[138]

In the same series of attacks in May 2007, SPDC army troops also burned villages in northern Papun District, resulting in thousands of villagers being displaced from their homes. According to KNU General Secretary, P'doh Mahn Sha, *"They burnt down villages in Khae Oo [Kay Pu], an area located on the edge of northern [Papun] District. About 4,200 villagers from 28 villages fled their homes"*.[139]

On 13 May 2007, 119 villagers from 16 families in Yaw Kee village, Mone Township of Nyaunglebin District, once again were forced to flee their homes to escape SPDC army patrols in the area and the sporadic mortar attacks fired upon their village by those soldiers.[140]

On 16 May 2007, SPDC army troops attacked Bler Ghaw village in Papun District, with mortars and automatic rifle fire, killing 18-year-old Naw Gkoo Roo. To evade the attacks, the villagers in the area fled to a safe location deeper in the forest.[141]

Confiscation of land remained a significant cause of displacement in Karen State. In May 2007 there were reports of the junta confiscating an unspecified quantity of land from villagers of Kawkareik Township for a development project in Naungbo village.[142]

On 3 June 2007, all 50 families from Tha Kaw Tha Kae village in Nyaunglebin District were forcibly relocated by SPDC army soldiers. Soon after settling in their new homes they were again uprooted on 7 August 2007, at which time they were forced to relocate to the Doo Dah relocation site.[143]

On 9 July 2007, the villages of Bar Htar and Bar Balu Khoki villages in Kawkareik Township were forced to relocate by the DKBA's #907 Battalion. Bar Htar village, comprised of 30 households, was forced to move to the Mae Kanel relocation site, although some villagers chose to remain in hiding in the jungle rather than relocate. A KNU spokesman drew a link between the forced relocation and an earlier skirmish between the DKBA and the KNU, which had resulted in a number of DKBA casualties, claiming that the relocation orders were issued in retaliation to this. However, the commander of #907 Battalion, utilizing a lngauge often employed by the SPDC, denied that the villagers were being forcibly displaced, but instead maintained that the DKBA was merely *"clearing the area of robbers and thieves (and) working for local development"*.[144]

On 10 July 2007, more than 100 homes in Kawkareik Township were ordered to relocate without compensation by the DKBA. The civilians hailed from Tha Blut Ko Kee, Tha Wor Poe and Palah Tah villages, each of with approximately 40 homes. The villagers of Tha Blut Ko Kee and Palah Tah were ordered to relocate to Mae Ka Nae within three days, while the villagers of Tha Wor Poe were to travel to Htee Mu Hta village. The villagers were told that once they arrived in Mae Ka Nae and Htee Mu Hta they were not to leave the relocation sites. DKBA soldiers indicated to the residents of the villages that their homes would be burned within three days of their relocation orders, and any villager who remained in their hometown would be shot. The forced relocation was reportedly linked to the construction of a new road from Thingannyinaung to Kawkareik.[145]

On 20 July 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #542 and LIB #346, both operating under MOC #9, attacked villages in the Hsaw Wah Der area of Toungoo District, causing many villagers from the region to flee into the forest.[146]

On 28 July 2007, SPDC army soldiers based at the Pwa Ghaw Lo army camp set out to patrol through the Wa Doh Hta, Pway Kee, and Saw Muh Blaw areas of Papun District in search IDPs who were in hiding in the area. The displaced villagers were forced to flee even deeper into the forest to avoid the troops who hunted them, although as they did, the soldiers looted all property that the villagers had left behind.[147]

Villagers from the area of Saw Kah Der village in Mone Township, Karen State, hiding in the forest in a temporary shelter after their village was attacked without provocation or warning by SPDC army soldiers. *[Photo: FBR]*

On 8 August 2007, villagers from seven villages in the Kyauk Kyi area of Nyaunglebin District were again forced to relocate to a relocation site. These same seven villages had only returned to their homes in early July after agreeing to pay 7,000 kyat per month to the local SPDC army battalion supposedly to safeguard them from being ordered to move.[148]

On 8 August 2007, 14 homes in Kheh Yu Der village in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District, were burned and destroyed by SPDC troops stationed at nearby Kay Pu village. As a result, persons from the following villages were forced to go into hiding:

1. Kay Pu village, 460 persons from 69 families;
2. T'May Kee village, 110 persons from 17 families;
3. Kheh Yu Der village, 79 persons from 14 families; and
4. Khu Lar Der village, 206 persons from 33 families.[149]

On 10 August 2007, an SPDC army unit shelled IDP hiding sites located near T'Kaw Toh Baw and Th'Dah Der villages in Papun District. The villagers were unable to remain in the area due to heightened SPDC army activity in the region, and subsequently fled deeper into the forest on 11 August 2007.[150]

On 12 August 2007, an SPDC army patrol came upon an IDP hiding site near Leh Bpeh Kyo village, Papun District and burned the entire site to the ground.[151]

Over a period of ten days during August 2007, an estimated 1,000 persons in northern Karen State were displaced as a result of continuing attacks by the IB #83 and IB #77, both of which were attached to LID #88. At least five villages in Papun District were burned in early August 2007, in attacks that included the shelling of villages with mortars. Two further villages situated along the border between Toungoo and Papun Districts were also burned to the ground in mid-August. On 13 August 2007, 14 homes were burned and more than 80 villagers fled from Ga Yu Der village. A further 700 persons fled three nearby villages in fear

of an impending attack. Later that same day, SPDC army troops attacked Lay Po Der and Lay Kee vilages, burning homes and forcing hundreds of persons to flee in fear.[152]

On 15 August 2007, displaced persons taking shelter near Leh Kee, on the border demarcating Karen and Karenni States, were attacked by SPDC army soldiers who burned the IDP site to the ground. It was estimated that approximately 200 villagers were forced to flee, including 28 displaced persons from Karenni State.[153]

In mid August 2007, civilian villagers living in the Mwee Loh and Maw Nay Pwa areas of Toungoo District were forced to flee their homes into the surrounding forest following attacks by SPDC army soldiers.[154]

A report released by KHRG on 21 August 2007 maintained that SPDC army units operating in Toungoo District were undertaking a systematic campaign of attacks on the food supplies of civilian villagers in the area, in an attempt to force villagers to relocate to *"peace villages"*. Far from being peaceful, the 'peace villages' of northern Karen State are those which lie under SPDC control and are subject to forced labour and other demands.[155]

On 7 September 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to MOC #5 ordered seven families from Saw Mu Der village, Toungoo District to move to the nearby Ba Ya Na Thi relocation site adjacent to the village of Tha Pyay Nyunt.[156]

On 22 September 2007, 147 persons from 24 households in Mergui-Tavoy District were issued orders to relocate and were provided with only six days in which to do so. The order, issued by LIB #555 (Major Myo Myint commanding), demanded that villagers from the following villages vacate their homes by 28 September 2007. The original report, however, failed to mention if the villagers were ordered to relocate to a specific site as directed by the SPDC, or if they were simply told to vacate the village. The villages which received this order were:

1. Baw T'Ka Ru Kee village;
2. Kah Hee Plaw village;
3. Tah Poh village; and
4. T'Mah Lay village.[157]

On 13 October 2007, the village of Yaw Kee, Toungoo District was burned to the ground by SPDC army soldiers, destroying ten homes and a church. Following this attack, and as a result of continuing SPDC army activity in the region, the majority of villagers living in the nearby Tha Aye Loh River and Klay Loh River valleys fled the area.[158]

On 6 November 2007, a joint column of SDPC army soldiers from MOC #1 and LID #88 shelled villages in the Yeh Mu Plaw area of Papun District with mortars, having a direct effect on the displacement of an estimated 1,000 villagers.[159]

On 15 November 2007, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #218 and #219, attached to LID #11, carried out several attacks on IDP communities in Kwee Lah and Kheh Der village tracts in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, causing the villagers from the area to flee deeper into the hills. Further south, one villager, 28-year-old Saw Lerk Gay, was killed in the attacks near his village of K'Dee Mu Der, while at least 300 persons, including at least 100 children, from Ler Wah and Ta Hoe Aung villages fled the assault.[160]

In November 2007, SPDC army units were reported to once again be attacking internally displaced communities in Ler Wah area of Nyaunglebin District.[161]

According to a report released by KHRG on 16 November 2007, at least 18 villages from Kay Pu village tract in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District had been displaced due to ongoing attacks by SPDC army units operating in the area. As a result, over 3,800 persons were displaced. The findings of that report are summarized in the following table.[162]

	Village name	Households	Males	Females	Total Population
1	Sho Bper Koh	55	133	237	370
2	Taw Kee Muh Der	14	141	128	269
3	Bo Na Der	17	52	62	117
4	Thay Thoo Kee	55	156	200	356
5	T'Yuh Kee	26	89	96	185
6	Kay Pu	61	208	262	470
7	T'May Kee	17	55	56	111
8	Gkaw Hter Der	17	52	48	100
9	Ploh Kee	26	117	94	211
10	Ta Keh Der	15	55	45	100
11	Baw Lay Der	47	159	154	313
12	Kheh Yuh Der	15	48	35	78
13	Beh Thaw Loh	26	106	108	214
14	Kuh Hla Der	33	107	99	206
15	Htee Bway Kee	17	53	51	104
16	Htee Hsee Kee	18	61	75	136
17	Si Day	22	78	81	159
18	Lay Kee	45	154	155	309
	Total	**526**	**1,824**	**1,986**	**3,808**

On 1 December 2007, SPDC army soldiers burned the rice storage barns and homes of displaced villagers in the Th'Aye Kee area of Toungoo District. Homes in Ka Lo Ta and E'Kar Ta villages were also reportedly burned, forcing their residents to flee for safety.[163]

Also on 1 December 2007, an SPDC army column from LIB #277, comprised of 180 soldiers, attacked Baw Gaw Kwee in Kwee Doh Kaw village tract in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, and mortaring several other nearby villages . Later that same day, SPDC army soldiers from LIB #450, moving in a column of 200 men, mortared a number of villages in the Law Day area, forcing villages in that region to also flee into the forest. Villagers from the following villages were forced to flee:

1. Kyauk Pya village;
2. Teh Nah Hta village;
3. Nya Mu Kee village;
4. Law Day village;
5. Thay Kay Lu village;
6. Nwa Hta village; and
7. Kaw Bee Lay Ko village.[164]

16.11 Situation in Karenni State

Conflict between the Karenni Army (the armed wing of the Karenni Nationalities People's Party; or KNPP) and the SPDC continued in 2007, with the SPDC employing a strategy of relocation as part of its counter insurgency campaign, following much the same tactics as those used in Karen State (see above). According to the TBBC, an estimated 79,300 persons were displaced in Karenni State as at the end of 2006.[165] That number swelled to approximately 81,000 by November 2007, with at least 30,000 of those persons hiding in the forests throughout Karenni State.[166] The TBBC further maintained that the number of displaced persons living in forced relocation sites had decreased slightly, from 6,400 in 2006 to 4,800 in 2007.[167] According to Khu Oo Reh, Joint Secretary of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP),

> *"Those IDP are from all over Karenni State, not only in the jungle, but also in the urban areas. They [the civilians] have been surviving as IDPs for years. Some are still hiding in the jungle and some have escaped to the Thai-Burmese border".*[168]

On 1 May 2007, the SPDC resumed work on the reconstruction of the Mawchi-Toungoo motor road. In conjunction with this, SPDC army units renewed attacks on Karenni villages lying along and adjacent to the road. Local villagers were forced to work on the reconstruction of the road and were subjected to a variety of human rights abuses, including rape and increased exposure to landmines. Many such persons subsequently fled the area for fear of their safety. *"Local people usually hide in the jungles when the SPDC's forces come to their area,"* said an officer of the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Committee (KSWDC).[169]

In May 2007 it was reported that over 1,300 displaced persons in the Mawchi region were suffering from severe malaria, without any access to sufficient medical treatment.[170]

Fresh attacks on Karenni villagers in June 2007, resulted in the displacement of at least 200 villagers. Many of these villagers, unable to hide from roving SPDC army patrols and survive in the forests of Karenni State fled their homes for the relative safety of one of the Karenni refugee camps in Mae Hong Song Province, Thailand.[171]

Much the same as in other states throughout Burma, state-sponsored development projects by private enterprises continued to lead to high levels of displacement in Karenni State. In October 2007, it was reported that over 3,000 acres of farmland had been confiscated from villagers in Karenni State to make room for an industrial estate.[172]

16.12 Situation in Magwe Division

In May 2007, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC) published a report which looked at displacement in SPDC-controlled areas, and according to the findings of that report, heavy taxation, food insecurity, land confiscation, forced labour and a range of other human rights violations continued to be the primary motivators for relocation in Magwe Division during 2007.[173]

Land confiscation without compensation occurred in a number of the townships comprising Magwe Division in 2007. According to the iDMC, much of the confiscated land has been utilized in the construction of *"Defence Equipment Factories"*, homes and farms for army personnel, pastureland of military-owned horses and mules, the construction of school buildings and sports grounds, extension of town housing, and for private military commercial gain.[174]

In mid February 2007, villagers from Sabai, Kha Mahn, Yinma and Khin Mon villages, all in Gangaw Township, were ordered to move to Myauk District by 31 March 2007. The eviction notices were issued by local police officers and SPDC army soldiers from IB #50 in order to allow for the confiscation of more than 3,500 acres of private land, and affecting approximately 120 families. The land was reportedly confiscated to make way for the Pyintha dam project. The Pyintha dam project is due for completion during 2008 and is expected to flood large areas of inhabited land upon its completion. The relocation sites designated for the villages were reported to be less than ideal, as one anonymous villager stated, *"The place we are going to be relocated to is … land which is not good for cultivation. We are still unable to get drinkable water from the wells there … we will surely die from starvation or thirst"*.[175]

Heavy monsoonal rains and storms along the Irrawaddy River in August 2007, damaged homes in Yenangyaung Township, leaving an estimated 5,000 persons who live on the banks of the river homeless. The SPDC offered no compensation or assistance to those affected.[176]

Karenni IDPs fleeing from SPDC army attacks during 2007. *[Photo: FBR]*

16.13 Situation in Mandalay Division

According to a report published by the iDMC in May 2007, land confiscation has been the leading cause of displacement in Mandalay Division in recent years, closely followed by food insecurity, forced labour, and th perpetration of *"other human rights violations"*. Coupled with this, was the recent move of the national capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw in November 2005, which also resulted in widespread land confiscation, and the resultant displacement of those who had once lived there.[177]

On 27 October 2007, SPDC army officials stationed at the military airbase in Meiktila, summoned 350 landowners from 16 villagers and presented them with an order which they were forced to sign, permitting the military to seize 1,300 acres of their farmlands, which were being rezoned to make way for the construction of an industrial estate. The farmers were reportedly to be compensated with 18 kyat per acre for their losses. On 31 December 2007, it was reported that the SPDC had already seized over 1,000 acres of farmland from the region.[178]

Karen IDPs from Ler Wah village in Nyaunglebin District of Karen State fleeing SPDC army attacks. Villagers from this area have been forced to flee numerous times over the past decade. *[Photo: FBR]*

16.14 Situation in Mon State

A ceasefire agreement between the military and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) signed in 1995 resulted in the forced migration of over 10,000 civilians within Mon State, many of whom crossed the border into Thailand seeking refuge. Since that time, ongoing military occupation and confiscation of farmland and widespread SPDC development initiatives have resulted in the continued flow of displaced persons through Mon State.[179] At the end of 2006 there were an estimated 41,800 displaced persons in Mon State, however, by October 2007; this number had increased to 49,400.[180]

According to the TBBC, the majority of displaced persons in Mon State reside in areas controlled by the NMSP. Although many Mon had fled to Thailand following the ceasefire pact between the regime and the NMSP in 1995, they were subsequently relocated to three resettlement sites located just across the border inside Burma in 1996. The three 'Mon Resettlement Sites' of Halochanee, Bee Ree, and Tavoy; as of February 2007 accommodated 11,966 displaced persons.[181] The vast majority of the remainder of persons displaced in Mon State reside in NMSP ceasefire areas in Ye township.[182]

According to a report by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), an estimated 5,000 villagers from the southern tracts of Ye Township and the northern part of Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division had fled their homes in the first half of 2007 alone.[183]

In Mon State, much as in the rest of Burma, forced labour is one of the leading causes of displacement. According to reports, villagers living in Khaw-Zar sub-Township have been forced to work on SPDC infrastructure projects by SPDC army soldiers from IB #31 since January 2007. The work that they were forced to do included road maintenance, bridge construction and the fencing of a gas pipeline located along the Ye-Tavoy motor road. Unable to do their own work, villagers began fleeing the area; with approximately 1,000 to 1,500 reported as having done so in the first half of 2007.[184]

On 28 May 2007, SPDC army soldiers from Artillery Battalion (AB) #315 (Lieutenant Colonel Myint commanding) seized over 160 acres of rubber plantations from Wakali village in Thanbyuzayat Township. This act effectively stripped the livelihoods of the 26 villagers who had owned and operated the rubber plantations, each boasting a yield of at least 50,000 rubber plants.[185]

In June 2007, SPDC army soldiers attached to MOC #19 established a new army camp in Ye Township. In the weeks that followed, over 300 civilians were forcibly relocated.[186]

On 26 June 2007, 50 villagers in Bayoun-ngae village, Ye Township, were arrested following allegations that they were supporting the opposition Monland Restoration Party (MRP).[187] More than ten of the villagers were severely tortured during the interrogation, and all of the arrested villagers had to pay more than 20,000 Kyat to be released. Consequently, many other villagers began fleeing the village on 30 June 2007, and by 2 July 2008 most had escaped to Han-gan village.[188] Two houses were burned in the village.[189] At least 300 villagers from 100 households were forcibly relocated, although the authorities provided no means of resettlement. The relocated villagers were forced to abandon their farms and plantations, were subject to a curfew and did not have access to their cow carts and other heavy belongings.[190]

16.15 Situation in Pegu Division

Please note that much of the information related to forced relocation and displacement in Pegu (Bago) Division has been included under Section 16.10: Situation in Karen State above. The demarcation of eastern Pegu Division is disputed. While the area is officially a part of Pegu Division, the KNU, and the Karen civilians who live in the area, refer to it as Nyaunglebin District of Karen State. (For more information on the disputed areas of demarcation of Karen State, please refer to the Notes on the Text in the appendices). For the purposes of this report, the HRDU has retained the names are systems of demarcation used by the villagers themselves.

Pegu Division remained a centre of ongoing militarization and development projects which caused significant human rights abuses, including forced relocation and displacement throughout 2007. A report released by EarthRights International (ERI) in February 2007 concluded that *"the heavy militarization of the region, the indiscriminate granting of mining and logging concessions and the construction of the Kyauk Naga Dam have led to forced labour, land confiscation, extortion, forced relocation and the destruction of the natural environment"*.[191]

Land belonging to U Than Lwin and Daw Nyunt Khin, confiscated by the SPDC in Pegu Division. *[Photo: The Burma Fund]*

16.16 Situation in Rangoon Division

Like many of the more heavily militarized areas of the country, and in particular within the Burman-dominated divisions, precious little reliable information exists about internal displacement. During 2007, this was also the case for displacement in Rangoon (Yangon) Division. What little information was available suggested that human rights abuses, food insecurity, and extortion were among the leading causes for displacement throughout Rangoon Division.[192]

Furthermore, in March 2007, the SPDC reportedly confiscated thousands of acres of rice paddies in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) project area near Rangoon, however, no further information has been made available regarding how many farmers were displaced as a result. According to reports, the land is being sold to Chinese, Indian and Japanese investors. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

Following the September 2007 'Saffron revolution' protests, a number of rumours began to circulate that particular areas of Rangoon where demonstrations were conducted would be forcibly relocated as punishment. An eyewitness to the protests in Rangoon testified to the Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) that the residents of Oak Street in Rangoon began to fear that they were to be forcibly evicted from their homes in October 2007:

> *"My wife told me that throughout October all the shops along Oak Street were ordered to close and the houses along the road were surveyed by municipal men. The people who lived along Oak Street were worried that they would be forced to move at any time. One rumour maintained that the block along Oak Street would be requisitioned and replaced with a park because the security forces were attacked on that street during the protests. Even though the Mayor of Rangoon announced on Myanmar Television that they have no plans to confiscate that block, the people who live there don't believe him".*[193]

Moreover, in December 2007, the Mizzima News Agency ran a story citing a monk who also maintained that residents living in the vicinity of the east gate of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, where a number of protests were staged, were to be relocated *"after aiding the monk-led protests on 26 September"*.[194]

16.17 Situation in Sagaing Division

The construction of the Tamanthi Dam on the Chindwin River posed concerns to the people of northern Sagaing Division in early 2007. The hydroelectric project, partly funded by India's National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), is reportedly intended to send as much as 80 percent of the energy generated by it to India. The construction of the dam led to the forcible confiscation of approximately 17,000 acres of agricultural land from villagers in the surrounding area.[195]

In the beginning of March 2007, 380 families in Leivomjang and Tazong villages, near the towns of Tamanthi and Homalin in the Chindwin River Basin, were forced to relocate due to the construction of the proposed Tamanthi Dam project. According to reports, SPDC army soldiers began destroying homes in these villages, forcing the residents to relocate to Laung Min village on the eastern bank of the Chindwin River. However, the SPDC-designated relocation site lacks both adequate housing and infrastructure for the new arrivals in addition to being extremely remote. One ethnic Kuki woman who was forced to relocate stated, in reference to the villagers' reluctance to move, *"Most of them refused to go to the new site and some when into the jungle to hide. Some are temporarily staying in farm huts. No one dares to remain in their village".*[196]

On 12 April 2007, four homes were confiscated and demolished in order to provide a training ground for SPDC army soldiers based in Kalay. The villagers were not compensated for their loss or, though the land was worth an estimated 140 million kyat, measuring 400 by 60 feet in size. Nor were they offered any alternative location in which to live. According to reports, the orders for seizure and demolition came from Captain Thain Phe of LIB #299. The following villagers lost their homes:

1. Mr Vum Ling;
2. Mr Hraing Kep,
3. Mr Zakam; and
4. Mr Than Cung.[197]

On 14 April 2007, a number of other villagers in Kalay Township were also informed that their land would be confiscated and demolished by the junta to make way for the extension of the Kalay Airport and Kalay-Tahan roads. Locals living in the proposed road corridor for the Kalay-Tahan road extension were informed that they would have to relocate so that their homes could be demolished. A further 300 households adjacent to the airport were also designated for demolishion. A Kalay local expressed concerns about the project, stating that "*the victims are under severe stress and pressure because they believe there is no way they will get compensation for their property".*[198]

16.18 Situation in Shan State

According to surveys conducted by the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), the most significant precursor to forced relocation and development in Shan State during 2007 was state-sponsored development and private enterprise. Coupled with conflict between the SPDC and ethnic ceasefire groups, such as the Shan State Army – South (SSA-S), continued abuses of human rights, and widespread militarization, it has been estimated that over 15,000 persons were displaced during 2007 in southern Shan State alone.[199] This number, however, is in addition to the estimated 175,600 internally displaced persons scattered throughout southern Shan State at the beginning of 2007.[200]

A further cause of displacement in Shan State has been arbitrary taxation and extortion. (For more information, see Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood). The military demands or simply steals vehicles, livestock, cash, rice, and household goods, and anyone who refuses to cooperate faces the confiscation of their land and livestock or large fines.

As of June 2007, there were over 5,500 displaced persons housed in five IDP camps along the northern Thai border, all located adjacent to SSA-S encampments. According to the TBBC, the majority of new arrivals to these camps during the first half of 2007 were from Lisu, Lahu and Palaung ethnic minority villages, who had fled from abuses perpetrated by the SPDC and United Wa State Army (UWSA), which has been expanding its influence in southern Shan State.[201]

In early 2007, SPDC army soldiers enforced a number of forced relocations of villages in Yaang Loi village tract, Mong Kung Township, which resulted in the following villages being displaced:

1. Kun Pan village, 50 households;
2. Nam Neb village, 40 households;
3. Yaang Loi village, 60 households;
4. Loi Saai village, 30 households;
5. Loi Mi village, 25 households; and
6. Haai Ngern village, 17 households.[202]

Since 1998, the proposed construction of the Tasang Dam and hydroelectric power plant in Shan State has been among one of the largest causes of widespread displacement in the state. Construction of the Tasang Dam is a joint venture between the junta and Thai engineering firm MDX. On 15 March 2007, Chinese company China Gezhouba Group was also contracted to partake in the initial construction phases. Over the past ten years, SPDC army forces have forcibly removed and relocated more than 60,000 villagers from areas surrounding the proposed dam site and projected flood zone. Those who chose to hide rather than face relocation faced torture, rape and murder as punishment.[203]

On 29 March 2007, the junta forced over 400 villagers, including school children, from Mong Ton and Mong Pan in Shan State to attend the celebration of the commencement of construction of the Tasang Dam. The villagers were transported in trucks, which had been commandeered from local villagers by SPDC army soldiers, and were forced to welcome high-ranking SPDC military officials arriving by helicopter at the dam site. According to Sai Sai, spokesperson of the Shan environmental organization, Sapawa, it was cruel punishment for the villagers, many of whom had been displaced by the impending construction of the dam, *"These villagers have already been driven at gunpoint from their homes and lands. Now they are being forced to clap and cheer while MDX joins hands with their oppressors to construct a dam that will flood their homes forever".*[204]

In April 2007, pre-construction surveys were conducted for the construction of a new dam on the Paung-Laung creek in Mong Pan Township. Local residents were informed that upon completion of the dam, 18 villages in the area would be inundated and that the residents of those villages would have to relocate.[205]

In mid-June, residents of Mong Yu village in Muse Township, were ordered to leave their homes by 20 June 2007, and were forced to sign a relocation agreement, without any offer of compensation or alternative accommodation.[206] The villagers were reportedly pressured into signing the relocation agreement by U Aung Naing Oo, the Mong Yu village chairperson. The village houses over 100 households of primarily ethnic Kachin and Shan families, of which at least 26 homes were issued orders to relocate.[207] According to a report published on 25 June 2007, most of the villagers were resisting the relocation order.[208]

16.19 Situation in Tenasserim Division

According to a survey conducted by the TBBC, the IDP population of Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division during 2007 was 61,000 persons, down from 80,200 from the previous year. The vast majority of, or 51,000 of these IDPs were interned in SPDC-controlled relocation sites spread throughout the division.[209]

The leading explanation given for the reduction in IDP numbers was that approximately 18,000 persons from over 20 relocation sites spread across Tavoy (Dawei), Thayetchaung, and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Townships had attempted to return to their original villages or resettle on nearby lands.[210]

The most notable reported large scale relocation to have taken place in Tenasserim Division during 2007 came about as a result of attacks on civilian villages in Tenasserim and Bokpyin Townships by SPDC army soldiers from LIB #342 and IB #265. Approximately 1,000 persons had their homes and food supplies destroyed by the soldiers and consequently were forced to move into SPDC-garrisoned relocation sites or to seek asylum in neighbouring Thailand.[211]

Karen IDPs from Ler Wah village in Nyaunglebin District, Karen State fleeing into the forest ahead of an approaching SPDC army column with all of the belongings that they can carry. *[Photo: FBR]*

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 17

THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES

"Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

- Article 14 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

17.1 Introduction

In 2007 Burma continued to be one of the largest sources of refugees in the world, with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the country as a result of persecution by the SPDC military junta. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) *World Refugee Survey*, during 2007 approximately 686,800 Burmese refugees and asylum seekers resided in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Thailand. Of this number, the vast majority – approximately 400,000 – sought refuge in Thailand. Bangladesh provided for 178,000, while Malaysia and India offered refuge to 58,800 and 50,000 refugees respectively.[1] In addition, over one million Burmese were estimated to live as migrant workers in those countries.[2]

During the year 2007 Burmese refugees continued to suffer a life in limbo, both within and outside of refugee camps. Efforts by aid organizations to improve the living conditions of refugees were offset by the continuing inflow of displaced Burmese nationals, and in some cases resistance from the governments of host countries. Continued escalation of military operations in eastern border areas by the junta's military, the *Tatmadaw*, forced thousands more Burmese across the Thai border, where camp systems were already saturated and overburdened by the massive influx of refugees from Burma over the past two and a half decades.

In all host countries, refugees in camps faced increased crowding, as well as a shortage of material resources, skilled personnel, and patience on the part of host governments. Refugees outside of camps remained susceptible to exploitation, trafficking, and disease, including tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and HIV/AIDS.[3]

Opportunities for third-country resettlement continued to increase for asylum seekers who had secured official refugee status. However, these inchoate resettlement programs brought with them a new set of challenges. As camp populations increased overall, a relative few of the well-educated camp residents left for third countries, thus many camp communities were stripped of their best management, education and health personnel. Resettlement continued to be an attractive option for some, but the question of how to help those left behind remained unanswered.

Most Burmese refugees fled their country as a result of the military junta's decades-long offensive against ethnic populations in rural areas of the country. The *Tatmadaw's* targeting of civilians and of infrastructure such as schools and hospitals compelled Burmese of many ethnicities to relocate permanently or semi-permanently to other countries in order to escape the systematic destruction of their communities. People of the Karen ethnic group have been particularly affected by the violence, although many others, including but not limited to the Chin, Mon, Shan, Karenni, and Rohingya ethnic groups, have also been forced out of their traditional lands by the military regime.

Over the past several years, *Tatmadaw* offensives have intensified as part of the junta's attempt to consolidate control over the area surrounding its new capital Naypidaw, as well as the areas projected to be flooded by the massive Salween damming project. The regime also continued a more general effort to destroy all ethnic resistance groups, including those with whom it held cease-fire agreements. Recent *Tatmadaw* offensives in Karen State, which began in 2006 and continued without pause into 2007, were the worst in over a decade.[4] The junta government launched another offensive against the KNU in December 2007, sending over 1,000 soldiers into KNU-controlled territory in Kawkareik District, Karen State. The ensuing attacks, initiated by both SPDC and DKBA forces, forced more Burmese to flee across the Thai-Burma border. [5]

In 2007, the SPDCs brutal crackdown on the September pro-democracy demonstrations forced a new wave of political refugees to flee to neighboring countries. Late 2007 arrivals to the Mae Sot area included monks, protestors, members of the 88 Generation dissident group, and reportedly an SPDC official who fled after refusing to attack protesting monks.[6] Initially, all new arrivals received UNHCR slips (explain this), however they were not recognised by Thai authorities hence by the end of 2007 their status in Thailand remained unclear and unsecure.

The Muslim Rohingya population, originating predominantly in Arakan State, continued to face discrimination both domestically from the military regime in Burma, and abroad from the governments of states in which they seek refuge. Rohingyas were still not recognized as a national ethnic group by the regime, and continued to be denied citizen status. Thus, they continued to face restrictions on their travel within Burma. As a result, many Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh, which borders Arakan State, where they live at the mercy of a hostile government with no national legal framework for asylum seekers and refugees.[7]

Under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention), states are prohibited from returning a refugee to any area *"where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."* Similarly, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) also prohibits the return of *"a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture."* This is often referred to as the principle of refoulement. When forcibly repatriating Burmese refugees and asylum seekers back to areas where they are vulnerable to persecution, the governments of Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Thailand have continued to violate the principle of refoulement. None of the governments hosting the majority of refugees from Burma have ratified either of these Conventions, with the only exception being India which is a state party to the CAT. However, the principle of *refoulement* is now considered universal under customary international law and must be obliged by all nations, regardless of whether they are signatory to the convention.

In recent years the international community has recognized that the internal situation in Burma makes it unlikely for voluntary repatriation to take place in the near future, and that an alternative to the long-term confinement in camps, or 'warehousing' of refugees, is beneficial to all parties. In Thailand, the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are the two organizations officially responsible, under the RTG's Ministry of Interior (MOI), for protecting and administering services to refugees. In May 2007, they issued a joint statement, advocating *"a comprehensive policy approach which would allow refugees more access to education and skills training and engage them in productive activities which would better equip them for the future, wherever that may be."*[8] This change in rhetoric is both welcome and necessary if refugees are to take a productive place in their present host countries or as part of third-party resettlement programs. However, this rhetoric must be accompanied by a substantive change in host government policies which, until now, have been uniformly restrictive of refugees' movement, employment, and education.

17.2 Burmese Refugees in Thailand

Demographics of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Thailand

Thailand is one of the main destinations for asylum seekers, political dissidents and others fleeing the oppressive policies and practices of the SPDC military regime. The Thai government estimates that 3 million Burmese have taken residence in Thailand since the junta came into power, although that number could be even higher due to the large numbers of unregistered immigrants.[9] Of the total Burmese population in Thailand, the vast majority reside outside of camps and, as such, are afforded no official protection or assistance. Around 200,000 refugees are believed to be residing outside of official camps, including large numbers of Shan refugees, who are not recognized by the Thai government and are therefore denied access to camps and aid services.[10]

According to statistics from the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), 156,560 refugees from Burma were living in nine border camps in Thailand as of June 2007. Refugees originating from Karen State represented the largest proportion of the registered population, accounting for 62 percent of the total. Those originating from Karenni State accounted for 13 percent, while Tenasserim Division accounted for 9 percent, and Pegu Division and Mon State each accounted for 5 percent. Refugees originating from other parts of the country were also represented in smaller numbers. The figure of 156,560 official camp residents, up from 153,882 recorded in December 2006, represented the arrival of 4,500 new refugees over the six-month period after factoring births, deaths, and departures through resettlement. This increase was attributed in part to heightened *Tatmadaw* offensives in eastern Burma, but also to a large number of urban refugees entering camps in the hope of gaining access to resettlement programmes.[11]

Refugees in Camps

2007 marked the 24th year that Thailand, with the help of the international donor community, provided refuge to refugees fleeing Burma.[12]

The new influx of refugees strained the already limited resources of many camps, and most of the recent arrivals remained unrecognized by Thai authorities.[13] Of the nine official camps in Thailand, three did not meet UNHCR standards for minimum space per person and two were listed as 'borderline.'[14] According to the *Comprehensive Report for 2007-2008* jointly released by the CCSDPT and UNHCR, camp residents reported protection from violence and the administration of justice as key concerns. The report found prevention and response systems to be insufficient and noted that camp-based justice systems *"do not systematically work for the protection of the victims and the prosecution of the perpetrators."*[15] The report further noted that protracted confinement in camps has lead to increased rates of violence, crime, and substance abuse among refugees. However, efforts were also made to improve the situation, as in Mae La camp, which on 26 June 2007 celebrated "Anti Drugs Day" in an attempt to spread awareness among the refugee community. [16]

A mid-December incident between refugees and Thai security forces in Karenni Camp 1 underscored the rising tensions in camp communities. On 15 December 2007 a Karenni refugee student was shot and killed by Thai border guards after a sports contest in the camp. The border guards arrested several students who were participating in the contest, and in response another group of students marched to their base to protest. The guards reportedly fired approximately 30 rounds into the crowd, killing one student and wounding

another.[17] On the following day several thousand camp residents protested the killing, and during the protest two vehicles and approximately 30 motorcycles belonging to the security forces were destroyed.[18] Protests continued two days after the initial violence as 4,000 refugees marched to the camp committee office, calling on Thai authorities to protect the rights of refugees and refrain from using violence against the camp community.[19] In the aftermath of the incident, the Thai forces responsible for camp security were replaced by regular Thai army troops, and the administration officer, a Thai national, submitted his resignation.[20]

Refugees in Thailand continued to exercise a higher level of ownership of camp administration than was typical of refugee camps worldwide. The CCSDPT/UNHCR report found that Community Based Organizations (CBOs), such as the Karen and Karenni Refugee Camp Committees were instrumental in administering the camps. However, a lack of resources and training hindered their ability to fully protect residents and implement programs.[21] The composition of refugee committees varied from camp to camp, but generally included around 15 active members, half of whom are appointed and the other half elected. The committees oversaw camp activities, coordinated NGO assistance, and interacted with the Royal Thai Government, the UNHCR, and security personnel. [22]

Over the past 24 years, the TBBC has administered the dietary needs of refugees. During that span, the TBBC increased its food basket for refugees in camps from 50 percent rice to a full food basket. Over the same period, increasing restrictions by the Thai government on the movement and activities of camp residents hindered the ability of refugees to forage and find food to supplement the rice baskets.[23] Efforts by some NGOs to teach small-scale agriculture were limited by space, and sometimes a lack of available water.[24] In 2007, refugees in camps were entirely dependent on donor-supplied food baskets. However, it was estimated that most registered refugees shared their rations with non-registered refugees, diminishing the effectiveness of food programmes. [25] As of 2007, the food basket provided to each adult refugee per month contained: 15 kg rice, 1 kg yellow beans (legumes), 1 kg AsiaMIX (a blended food mix designed to provide a nutritional supplement), 750 grams fish paste, 1 litre soybean oil, 125 grams dried chili, 300-500 grams iodized salt, and 250 grams sugar. The TBBC also supported additional programmes such as nursery school lunches, vitamin A distribution, and supplementary and therapeutic feeding. [26]

Distributing rations of chilli in one of the refugee camps located along the Burma-Thai border. *[Photo: TBBC]*

In late 2007, the TBBC faced funding cuts due to the falling strength of the U.S. dollar against the Thai baht. The organization anticipated a loss of 80 million baht, representing 7 percent of its total budget, for the year 2008.[27] This funding shortfall, which was compounded by increasing number of new arrivals and rising commodity prices, will force the group to cut rations unless new funding sources can be secured.[28] The impending reductions would include substantial cuts to fish paste and chili, both staple foods in Burmese cooking. This caused anxiety in camp communities, whose residents reported that rations were already not sufficient for families with school-aged children, and expressed concern that they may have to leave the camps illegally to find supplementary food sources.[29]

The CCSDPT had 20 member NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to refugees under agreement with the MOI's Operations Centre for Displaced People (OCDP).[30] In addition to their food ration, refugees in the camps also received an allocation of charcoal, as well as building materials for the construction and repair of houses. In November 2007, the organization Episcopal Relief and Development, working in conjunction with the TBBC, created a "New Arrivals Pack" to meet the needs of 2,275 recent camp arrivals. The pack contained blankets, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, cooking pots, utensils and food containers.[31]

After the formation in late 2006 of the CCSDPT "Environmental Health and Infrastructure" subcommittee, it was found that physical living conditions in camps had improved overall. Specific gains included the mitigation of risks associated with road consolidation and construction of drainage systems in Mae La Oon camp, improved solid waste treatment in Mae La and Tham Hin camps, and the consolidation of water security in Mae La camp. Nevertheless, much remained to be done. The CCSDPT noted that the improvement of roads and river crossings, the consolidation of hills and river banks, and the training of camp residents in maintaining roads and infrastructure all needed to be addressed in coming years. [32] Flooding and erosion remained a threat in some areas. The 2007 rainy season was particularly severe, with storms destroying some twenty houses and seriously injuring several people in two Karenni camps in Mae Hong Son province.[33] However, the Thai government continued its policy forbidding the use of permanent building materials in the refugee camps, as it deemed the refugee population to be only temporarily displaced. This effectively limited any efforts to improve the quality of infrastructure and housing in the camps.

Health conditions in camps remained a concern in 2007. The arrival of new refugees put further strain on the operational capacities of already crowded camps, in some cases leading to sanitation problems and water shortages.[34] Moreover, many camp medical personnel had either been resettled to third countries, or were actively seeking resettlement.

In July and August 2007, an outbreak of cholera killed one woman in Mae La camp, Tak Province.[35] In the same outbreak, 46 patients were hospitalized in the camp, including at least two children, and over 300 cases were reported across the province. According to the secretary for Public Health, the disease was brought by Burmese migrants. *"The public health officials could control the situation,"* he said, *"but the movement of migrants from the neighbouring country makes it reoccur in Thailand."*[36] It was also reported that pit latrines in Tham Hin camp, and possibly other camps, were full and that these conditions increased the threat of cholera and other diseases.[37]

In August 2007, a possible outbreak of bird flu killed over 200 poultry in the Karenni refugee camp in Mae Surin and may have infected two people.[38] Thai health officials expressed concern over the lack of knowledge about the disease among camp residents, and that some refugees may have continued to eat poultry even after the outbreak.[39]

HIV rates in camps were lower than in surrounding areas of Thailand and Burma. However, the CCSDPT/UNHCR Comprehensive Plan still identified a need to strengthen prevention in higher-risk sub-populations, particularly adult males who leave the camp for extended periods. [40]

Violence between ethnic resistance groups and the SPDC and its allies continued throughout 2007, reaching the Thai border and in some cases crossing into Thai soil. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Special Rapporteur to the UN on the situation of human rights in Burma, stated that he had *"received reports from reliable and independent sources alleging that the militarization of refugee camps at the border has put the safety of civilians at risk."*[41]

In July, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), an ethnic militia backed by the SPDC, was suspected of assassinating a military intelligence officer of the Karen National Union (KNU) and killing another KNU soldier near Mae La camp.[42] In response Thai authorities placed restrictions on movements entering and exiting the camp, and the Thai military increased security in the area.[43] Thai authorities also conducted weapons checks in Karenni camp II, following a Thai-Burma border committee (TBC) meeting during which Burmese authorities alleged that members of the Karenni National People's Party (KNPP), an ethnic resistance group, were residing in the camp. [44]

The Karen National Union-Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU-KNLA PC), a junta-allied group that splintered from the KNU in early 2007, was accused of recruiting members from refugee camps. According to interviews conducted by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), many young Karen refugees, including children under 15, were convinced to attend the ceremony commemorating the KNU-KLNA PC's signing of a peace treaty with the SPDC. After being told that they had only to 'fill in the blanks,' or stand in the ranks of KNU-KNLA soldiers to make the splinter group appear larger, many of the young Karen were coerced into joining the military group. Some children managed to escape and return to their homes in Mae La camp, while others remained missing for extended periods.[45]

The DKBA, which killed hundreds of civilians in cross-border clashes in the 1990s, caused alarm in April 2007 when they together with the *Tatmadaw* positioned machine guns and artillery overlooking Mae La camp. On 9 April 2007, in response to the threat, hundreds of Thai Border Patrol Police moved into the area around the camp.46 Camp officials at Mae La and Mae La Oon camps warned residents to keep lights out after dark, and reportedly threatened to confiscate ID cards, remove refugee status, or even expel from the camp those who disobeyed their warnings.[47]

Later in April, skirmishes between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the DKBA broke out near the Thai border, opposite Tak province. Refugees in Noh Poe camp feared for their safety after hearing that the DKBA may attack the camp.[48] Sophie Richardson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, observed that *"after years in refugee camps and combat zones, these civilians now live in fear of cross-border attacks. Burma's plans to attack civilians and jeopardize their access to food are deplorable, and the international community should condemn this in the strongest possible terms."*[49]

One of the few positive developments for the situation of camp refugees was the advent of a new approach by international agencies to prolonged encampment. Since 2005, the UNHCR and CCSDPT have advocated a comprehensive approach, including the training, education, and employment of refugees, to combat the ill effects of protracted confinement. In May 2007, the UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection told reporters in Bangkok that the Thai government should allow all refugees currently residing in camps to seek employment outside the camps, and that employment would, among other things, make the refugees less dependant on international aid organizations.[50] The CCSDPT/UNHCR report noted that *"such an approach would provide the refugees with a*

more hopeful future, lessen the stress for them, and potentially relieve the burden of assistance as they become more self-reliant."[51]

The CCSDPT/UNHCR report further noted that providing economic opportunities could benefit neighbouring Thai communities and increase national security in sensitive border areas. Moreover, employment opportunities would prepare refugees for resettlement to third countries and in the long term eventually, help them rebuild their own home countries. To this end, the UNHCR's Strengthening Protection Capacity Thailand Project, with the help of two former ILO consultants, in 2007 began developing a livelihoods strategy, with *"particular consideration to opportunities for youth and women."* Specific components of the strategy included micro-enterprise development (MED); support to existing skills development programs; agricultural activities inside and outside camps; research and application of appropriate technology; and the development of a waged employment service. [52]

Karen refugees in the Tham Hin refugee camp in Thailand. *[Photo: Reuters/Sukree Sukplang]*

Resettlement

In 2007, large numbers of Burmese refugees from Thai camps continued to be resettled to third countries. According to the UNHCR, from 2005 to the end of 2007 a total of 20,878 Burmese refugees were resettled to third countries from Thailand. As of December 2007, another 3,471 were accepted by host countries, and still waiting to relocate.[53] Moreover, an estimated 17,000 refugees were actively applying for resettlement as of June 2007.[54] Eleven countries accepted displaced Burmese nationals, with the United States taking in the largest number of refugees.[55]

The expansion of third-country resettlement programmes over recent years has led to increased discussion, and growing concern, over the effects of resettlement on the remaining camp population. In some regards, resettlement has been a boon to the refugee community. According to the CCSDPT's 2007 investigation of resettlement programmes' effects on the remaining camp population, 38 percent of the entire camp population expressed interest in resettlement. The report observed that remittances from abroad were already being received by remaining families and CBOs. Also, in some cases the resettling of long-serving individuals opened space for new camp leadership to emerge.[56] After visiting Tham Hin camp in Kanchanaburi, assistant UN High Commissioner for Refugees Erika Feller told reporters that resettlement *"has created more space and given people expectancy."*[57]

However, resettlement programmes also created a host of new problems and concerns. The RTG expressed concern that the option of resettlement is drawing increasing numbers of refugees to the camps. The governor of Tak province announced that new camp arrivals

would not receive food or accommodation. In addition, a void remained in some areas for the processing of new arrivals.[58] The CCSDPT cautioned that the costs of running camps, while theoretically falling in the long term as camp populations decrease, would rise in the short and intermediate term as NGOs and CBOs continue to administer to growing numbers of camp residents.[59]

Resettlement also affected camps adversely as it drained camp communities of their leaders and skilled camp personnel. The education sector suffered particularly as a result of resettlement. According to a 2007 UNHCR survey, 65.9 percent of adult refugees with experience in education expressed interest in resettlement, with 48.8 percent already submitted for consideration to third countries. As of early 2007, 11.2 percent of skilled education workers had already left camps for resettlement.[60] As a result, education standards in camps – already an area of concern – continued to decline. Camp education professionals cautioned that standards would continue to fall as long as the current resettlement program remained in force.[61]

The CCSDPT report noted that experienced personnel, such as school administrators, supervisors, and teacher trainers, as well as experienced teachers themselves, are particularly hard to replace. Low teacher salaries and the NGO community's empowerment of self-training in refugee communities were also expected to negatively affect the education sector in the future. The decline in educational standards are expected to have far-reaching effects, as fewer individuals will have sufficient education to fill high-level camp positions or assist in the writing and submission of grant proposals and donor requests. Furthermore, English teachers are expected to continue departing in large numbers as they are recognized by third countries as suitable candidates for integration into their new communities.[62]

The health sector was also vulnerable to the effects of resettlement. According to the UNHCR, 76.2 percent of adult refugees with experience in the health sector expressed interest in resettlement, with 56.2 percent already submitted for consideration to third countries. As of early 2007, 12.9 percent of skilled health workers had already left camps for resettlement.[63] The CCSDPT found the departure rates to be much higher in some communities, with some programs losing 50 percent or more of their staff in 2007. Of highest concern is the departure of highly skilled and specialized personnel, who are particularly difficult to replace. Skilled interpreters are extremely important to the health sector, which requires an estimated 75 percent of the approximately 250 technical English speakers needed to run the camps. The previously noted departure of English teachers only compounds the problem of replacing departed interpreters, whose skills are developed over long periods of time. [64]

In 2007 NGOs faced the increasing challenge of finding immediate solutions to the departures of camp-based health professionals. Training new health workers will require cross-camp collaboration, which can only be made possible by a loosening of the Thai Government's restrictions on refugee movement. Alternative solutions, such as an increase in Thai and expatriate staff and increased referrals to Thai hospitals, are prohibitively expensive in the long term.[65] The CCSDPT reported that actual and anticipated consequences of a lack of qualified staff include *"a general decline in the overall quality of health care, the risk of misdiagnosis, a reported loss of confidence by patients in medical services, … increasing under-nutrition, communicable disease outbreak, and potential problems in program coverage of preventative health."*[66]

Compared to the health and education sectors, camp administration was more resilient to the consequences of resettlement. The preexisting structure of camp committees lent itself to a smooth transition between staff, and committees had lost fewer members compared to the health and education sectors. However, the loss of key personnel left an increased work

load on some members. CBOs were also expected to eventually suffer from the overall loss of skilled workforce, and resultant recruitment from their ranks by NGOs.[67] International NGOS were projected to lose as many as 40 percent of their workers the end of 2007, and NGOs continue to find staff replacement to be a difficult process. In the words of one NGO worker, *"It is demoralizing for us to lose our best staff repeatedly. We are faced with the dilemma of very limited resources to train a new batch which may also opt for resettlement soon after the training is over."*[68] In fact, the very act of training replacements increased the likelihood that those same replacements would be accepted for resettlement.

The resettlement dilemma reflected both the desires of the camp population, and the 'integration potential' selection criteria applied by some host countries (the US, which accepts the highest number of refugees, did not apply selection criteria). According to the CCSDPT report, 38 percent of the entire camp population expressed interest in resettlement, while a disproportionate number of educated camp residents – 61 percent of the post-10 population – expressed interest. Furthermore, while 11.5 percent of the post-10 population had already departed for resettlement as of July 2007, only 2.4 percent of the non-educated population had departed. In the latter half of 2007, the post-10 population was projected to fall by 38 percent across all camps, while the overall population was only projected to fall by 10 percent. The report also projected that, by the end of 2008, the post-10 camp population would reach 'critical levels' unless a response was designed and implemented that could successfully compensate for the disproportionate loss of educated camp members.[69]

A young Karen boy at a teashop located within Tham Hin refugee camp, Thailand. *[Photo: Anna Husarska/IRC]*

Refugees outside Camps

Around 200,000 refugees are believed to be residing outside of official camps. This figure includes a large number of Shan refugees, who are not recognized by the Thai government and are therefore denied access to camps and aid services.[70] Refugees living outside the official camp system also include politicians, pro-democracy activists, journalists and others, who are working in exiled opposition groups. Under existing Thai laws, these groups are not officially recognised as refugees and are as such not accounted for in any official refugee population figures. There have been efforts by the UNHCR to register these refugees as Persons of Concern (POC), however this status is not recognised by Thai authorities.

Beginning in September 2007, an increasing number of refugees arrived at the Thai-Burma border fleeing the junta's violent crackdowns against participants in the monk-led 'Saffron Revolution' demonstrations. As noted, several dissidents took refuge in camps, while others arrived in border towns. NGOs in Mae Sot reported a total of 218 people arrived claiming to have taken part in the protests.[71] The refugees included several monk leaders and well-known Burmese artists. Buddhist monk Ashin Sein Tita, a prominent leader of several September protests, was forced to flee to Thailand after military personnel encircled his monastery and tried to arrest him.[72] Only five days later, U Seindiya, a senior monk from Aung Kaung monastery who was previously honored by the junta for political service, fled to Thailand after the SPDC raided his monastery.[73] The Burmese poet Kyaw Thu Moe Myint also fled to the Thai-Burma later that month. The poet is facing multiple charges of illegally circulating sensitive material after publishing a book of poetry that included references to Burmese independence hero Aung San, father of Nobel prize-winning political activist Aung San Suu Kyi.[74] Famous Burmese actor, Kyaw Thu, was sheltered at a monastery in Mae La camp after he and several other prominent artists and politicians gave offerings to monks protesting in Rangoon. Kyaw Thu was forced to flee after the junta arrested two of the other people who gave offerings. [75]

Following a visit to the Thai-Burma border, a Refugees International team expressed concern that this new wave of political refugees continued to face risks even after their arrival in Thailand. According to one member of the 12-person team, *"They are subject to constant harassment, bribery, exploitation. They are forced to live in limbo, lacking any status in Thailand."*[76] Some new refugees have been able to secure letters from the UNHCR certifying them as 'persons of concern' (POCs), but these cards are not always recognized by Thai authorities. According to the UNHCR, as of November 2007 an additional 89 Burmese political refugees had applied for refugee status since the beginning of junta crackdowns in September.[77]

While Thailand continued to prohibit refugees in the camps to take up employment outside, it did allow Burmese nationals outside the camps to register for work permits. However, as the identities of those registering as migrant workers in Thailand were shared with the SPDC, many refugees were deterred from applying.[78]

Thai Government Policy towards Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The policy of the Thai government, which hosts by far the largest number of Burmese refugees, continued to be marked by inconsistency. Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the subsequent 1967 Protocol, and did not determine refugee status according to the UN definition. Instead, Thai authorities primarily used the blanket term *"fleeing fighting"* to define who is eligible for protection in the camps. The Thai government did not refer to those in the camps as refugees as defined by the UNHCR, but rather as *"displaced persons."*[79] Refugees outside camps, lacking passports and visas, were classified as 'illegal immigrants,' and subject to arrest at the discretion of Thai police.[80] In contravention to its obligation of non-refoulement, the Thai government arrested and deported thousands of Burmese who feared persecution upon return.[81]

An ominous development for Burmese refugees in 2007 was the apparent tightening of ties between the Thai government and the SPDC regime, which caused a hardening of policies along the border, and hundreds of Burmese fleeing violence and repression were turned away or deported by Thai border police. In November 2007, amid a wave of crackdowns on undocumented workers by Thai police, Burmese pro-democracy activists in Mae Sot said that they feared for their lives. The crackdowns were allegedly at the behest of the military junta in Burma, whose foreign minister pressed Thai authorities to refuse entry to Burmese refugees fleeing political persecution.[82] It was reported that the Thai government planned to raid the offices of Burmese pro-democracy opposition groups later in September 2007, following claims by the junta that Thai-based organizations had instigated the wave of protests in Burma.[83] The Thai government's complicity in politically repressive activity comes in part from the RTG's concern over the economic toll of the protests in Burma. It was estimated that unrest in Rangoon cost Thai traders in Mae Sot around 300 million baht (US$ 8 million) in September 2007 alone, and caused a 50 percent drop in bookings from Thailand to Burma. In addition, all ports on the 300 km stretch of the Moei River in Tak province were for a period shut down by both Thai and Burmese authorities for security reasons.[84]

In February 2007, international organizations working with Burmese refugees expressed concern that the surge of refugees from northern Arakan State and North Korea would result in a tightening of Thai immigration policy.[85] Human Rights Watch called on the Thai government to grant asylum to new refugees, and protect all refugees from cross-border violence against fleeing civilians.[86] The US State Department's director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons also reiterated that it is the responsibility of neighboring countries to ensure that refugees and migrant laborers who flee Burma are not victimized by human traffickers.[87]

In October 2007, a border studies committee from the Thailand's National Legislative Assembly proposed the establishement of a new administrative office for the management of border affairs. Surapong Kongjantuek, human rights activist and member of the Thai Lawyers Council, expressed concern that *"The committee's report reflects the fact that they look at the minority peoples as problematic. With this attitude, the government cannot resolve their issues. Besides that, they did not mention peace-building, which is important in dealing with conflicts from ethnic diversity in any country."* [88]

Changes in the Thai Government

On 19 September 2006 Thaksin Sinawatra, the Prime Minister of Thailand from 2001 to 2006, was deposed by a military coup on charges of corruption and engaging in divisive politics. While Thaksin held power, the RTG approved the third-country resettlement of refugees in camps and began to implement policies allowing limited training, education and employment opportunities for migrant workers.[89] Signs of sympathetic policies from the interim government were seen in October 2006, when interim Prime Minister General Surayud Chulanont promised an improvement of standards in the nine official refugee camps run by the Royal Thai Government. Surayud's administration also announced that it was planning to issue refugees with identity cards, allowing them to move freely outside the camps and to work legally among the Thai labour force.[90] However, not all of these policies were fully implemented at the time of the national election in late 2007.[91] The newly-elected administration consisted of a broad coalition headed by the People's Power Party, a reconstituted version of Thaksin's previous Thai Rak Thai party. At the end of the year it remained to be seen what approach the new government would take in respect to Burmese refugees living in Thailand.

Policy for Refugees in the Camps

Most refugees have been living within the confines of the camps for long periods of time, some for up to 20 years. Conditions in Burma have not yet been conducive to repatriation, and the number of Burmese refugees in Thailand continues to rise as more refugees flee ongoing human rights abuses in eastern Burma.

In 2007, refugees living in camps had no right to employment and, if caught outside the camps, were subject to arrest and deportation. Over the years, enforcement of restrictions on the movement of refugees in camps has increased, resulting in most living their lives entirely within camp confines.[92] RTG policies restricting the travel of refugees to outside training facilities also made it difficult for NGOs to train replacements for staff lost to resettlement.[93]

As noted, the interim government instituted several important policy changes in late 2006 and 2007. Concurrent with the recommendations of the CCSDPT and UNHCR's joint 2005 letter to the Thai government, Thailand's MOI in 2006 relaxed restrictions on income generating activities, and the RTG made commitments to improve education in camps and experiment with employment outside the camps.[94] Another encouraging development was the implementation, beginning in May 2007, of the plan to issue individual ID cards to camp residents. The Thai Government also recognized the need for an inclusive approach to HIV, although in practice refugees did not enjoy any real benefits to their theoretical coverage under Thailand's national HIV/AIDS plan.[95] Thailand's ministry of justice also announced plans to launch a legal handbook for refugees in camps, so that they may gain a greater understanding of the Thai legal system and combat crime in their camp communities. [96]

While the RTG made several important concessions in its official policy towards registered refugees, members of the international community remained concerned for the future of refugees living in camps. The TBBC cautioned that the RTG's theoretical proposals are not necessarily put into practice: *"It has proven difficult to translate these new opportunities into substantive activities. Although there has been some expansion of NGO skills training activities and a few small income generation projects have been approved by MOI, life for most refugees has not changed… such initiatives will take time to develop and will require more substantive technical inputs and other resources."*[97] It was also feared that violence

near the Thai-Burma border, and the recent influx of refugees, would cause the RTG to tighten restrictions and suspend the newly proposed employment and training policies.[98]

Some refugees, particularly new arrivals who were not registered with the UNHCR, continued to face pressure from Thai authorities to return to Burma. In August 2007, Thai authorities told 5,000 unregistered refugees in Mae La camp that they would be provided neither food nor housing. Unregistered refugees found in the camp were subject to arrest and deportation, and the chairman of the Karen Refugee Committee anticipated that all 5,000 would have to return to Burma.[99] Again, it remains to be seen how the newly elected government will approach the situation of refugees in camps.

Detained, Arrested and Deported Refugees

Unregistered refugees, and registered refugees who lived in camps but worked or traveled outside the camp confines, continued to be subject to arrest, detention and deportation. According to the *2007 World Refugee Survey,* the Thai government informally deported as many as 10,000 Burmese nationals per month.[100] Many deported refugees were democracy activists and members of persecuted ethnic minorities, who faced unsafe conditions upon their return. Abuse, extortion and detention of deportees upon return to Burma were reported on numerous occasions, raising concerns for the fate of forcibly repatriated asylum seekers and refugees.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), between October 2006 and April 2007 over 2,000 Rohingya refugees arrived in Thailand from Bangladesh in boats and were subsequently repatriated to areas of Burma under DKBA control.[101] Separate reports confirmed that in March only was 123 Rohingyas forcibly returned to Burma from Thailand. On 10 March 2007, the Thai military forced 67 Rohingya men to return to Burma, to an area controlled by the junta-backed DKBA. On 23 March 2007, Thai authorities arrested another 56 Rohingya men and on 24 March 2007 forcibly repatriated them into the same area.[102] Human Rights Watch noted that the refugees faced *'a well-founded fear of persecution'* in Burma, and therefore the deportations constituted refoulement.[103] The Thai government conducted most deportations outside of official channels and as such it remained difficult to document the number of cases accurately.

Karen refugees queue for the distribution of their food rations in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand. *[Photo: AFP]*

The UNHCR and the Refugee Status Determination Process

The Provincial Admission Boards (PABs) and Registration

Provincial Admission Boards (PABs) were originally set up by the Royal Thai Government in 1999 to handle the admission process of refugees from Burma seeking entry into the refugee camps. The PABs were in the subsequent years closed down and then resurrected according to Thai immigration policies. For many years the role of the UNHCR was limited to observer status, until 2004/2005 when the PABs were used in a joint MOI/UNHCR re-registration drive. Throughout 2006, the UNHCR continued to accept statements, but was unable to register asylum seekers to be processed by the PABs. In 2007 the PABs, having processed the vast majority of 2004/2005 re-registration applicants, essentially ceased to function altogether. However, Burmese refugees continued to cross the border into Thailand, with many entering camps illegally. The UNHCR continued negotiations with the RTG to ensure that PABs could continue to function, and thereby permit the official registration of new refugees,[104] however at the end of the year the PABs remained closed.

The 2004-2005 MOI/UNHCR re-registration of the entire border camp population recognized 101,992 persons from the original 1999 registration plus 35,867 others, for a total of 137,859. The MOI initially agreed only to consider refugees from its own records for processing and registration, along with any children born since August 2003. These 18,592 refugees would be presented to PABs for consideration on a group basis, with the remainder to be considered by the PABs separately. These included 16,275 persons in Tak and Mae Hong Son provinces, and 1,037 persons in Tham Hin camp who had been subsequently registered by the authorities in Ratchaburi province. As of the end of June 2007, the PABs had already approved a total of 33,512 of those arriving after the 1999 registration, including 471 in Kanchanaburi, 1,097 in Ratchaburi, 27,610 in Tak, and 4,334 in Mae Hong Son, leaving an estimated 4,500 still to be considered in Mae Hong Son province.[105]

In May 2007, Thailand's Department of Provisional Administration began the distribution of ID cards to refugees in all nine official camps. The ID card project, which was funded by a US$ I million grant from the UNHCR, was the culmination of three years of planning by the UN refugee agency.[106] An estimated 88,000 refugees received the cards, which are seen as a first step in securing further rights and opportunities for camp residents. One camp leader noted that refugees holding cards would be less likely to be deported if caught outside, and more likely to be returned to the camp.[107] The ID cards could also potentially lessen the strains of resettlement, if the RTG agrees to open employment opportunities. According to a teacher in Mae La camp, *"some people have said that if they can use their [ID] card to work outside the camps, they would not seek resettlement."*[108]

The UNHCR characterized the recent distribution of IDs as 'very positive.'[109] However, gaps remained in the protection of refugees in camps. Not all refugees in camps received cards, and the actual rights of card holders remains unclear.[110] As of April 2007, the refugees holding cards were still not allowed to go outside camps. A UNHCR representative noted that *"the ID cards are an important way of improving protection of refugees because the most basic element of protection is being able to prove your identity. At the same time, we hope the ID cards will be only the first step in a series of measures that will open up the closed camps where refugees have been living for almost two decades."*[111]

Situation of Women in Refugee Camps

In October 2007, a group of female activists in Burma sent a letter to the UN Security Council calling on them to protect the safety of all women living in fear and hiding. On the same day, the Security Council urged all member nations, and its own offices, to include more women in decision-making processes, and to take specific steps to protect women from gender-based violence.[112] According to a number of border-based NGOs, this should also apply to resettlement. UNHCR criteria for resettlement state that refugees who face particular risks if they are repatriated to Burma should be given priority in resettlement programs. However, the acceptance policies of many host countries continued to discriminate indirectly against women, who face risks of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) if they return to Burma. [113]

Domestic violence continued to be a concern in refugee camps throughout 2007. Camp committees had been working with the GVB, a branch of the IRC, to create awareness on domestic violence.[114] The CCSDPT/UNHCR Protection Working Group also worked with the Thai government to improve protective services, but noted that women were still at elevated risk for violence, and that many gaps in protection remained. Targets included the improvement of complaint mechanisms in SGBV, better coordination with all stakeholders to improve responses to claims, provision of physical protection to SGBV survivors and their children in camps, and expansion of NGO programs to all nine camps with a focus on supporting CBOs already working on SGBV issues.[115]

NGO programs did sometimes conflict with the reported needs of refugee communities. In 2007, both the Karen Women's Organization and the Karenni Women's Organization criticized the IRC for instituting a program to combat sexual abuse by NGO staff against women living in camps. The women's groups called for NGOs to consult with CBOs before implementing programs, so that those programs may best meet the actual needs of camp communities. In response, the IRC pointed out that abuse by NGO staff is a global problem, and noted that victims may not understand the nature of exploitation. According to the deputy director of the IRC, *"In [cases involving exploitation], it's quite difficult because the community isn't aware of abuse and exploitation and so the project itself is trying to define and find out the prevalence of abuse and exploitation."* The chairperson of the Karenni Women's Organization contended that this particular issue should not be a priority because other problems, such as high rates of depression among young and older women, domestic violence issues, and harsh living conditions were in more urgent need of address.[116]

In 2007, most positions in camp committees continued to be held by men, although the ratio has developed towards equality in recent years. Furthermore, many young women continued to face obstacles to continuing their education, including strong social pressure to drop out of school once they marry or become pregnant.[117] In order to ensure more women in key positions, the CCSDPT/UNHCR recommended that leadership training programmes for women be strengthened in order to empower more women to take key roles in camp management and justice systems. [118]

Situation of Children in Refugee Camps

According to TBBC's 2007 report, acute malnutrition (thin) for children in camps fell within acceptable limits as per WHO criteria (<5 percent for children under 5), and was lower than in Burma or Thailand. However, chronic malnutrition (stunted) was "*moderate to very high*" and more prevalent in camps than in either Burma or Thailand. Supplementary feeding programmes, intended to serve as short-term treatment of acute malnutrition, did not include chronically malnourished children. Beriberi continued to be reported, although rates had declined following a revision of the case-definition and medic training. Angular Stomatitis (AS), an indicator of micronutrient deficiency in children, was also found in most camps. [119]

Protection mechanisms for children in camps remain an area of concern. The CCSDPT/UNHCR in 2007 found that these mechanisms, including camp juvenile justice systems, must be strengthened and must cooperate with the Thai government, particularly the Ministry of Justice. There was also a need for programmes to combat drug and alcohol abuse in youths, who are often idle as a result of a lack of educational and employment opportunities. A number of unaccompanied minors remained living in camps. The CCSDPT recommended the enhancement of the Best Interest Determination (BID) procedure in regard to separated and unaccompanied children, the facilitation of the disarmament of child soldiers, and the improvement of conditions and monitoring of boarding houses in camps. The CCSDPT also noted the continuing efforts, in cooperation with other UN agencies and NGOs, to adopt an official birth registration system for children who are born in camps.[120]

Karen children attending school in one of the refugee camps located along the Burma-Thai border. *[Photo: BBC]*

Official enrollment rates in camp schools were high. A 2007 report by ZOA, an NGO that sponsors the Karen Education Project, found that enrollment rates within the registered 5-17 camp population reached 97.5 percent as of June 2006. However, the report noted that enrollment figures were difficult to verify, as the camp population is constantly changing, and enrollment did not necessarily translate to full attendance. It further noted that barriers remained for some groups, including special needs students, married and pregnant adolescents, ethnic groups who are minorities within their respective camps, and unregistered and unaccompanied children.[121] In particular, students of non-Karen descent living in Karen camps had trouble accessing schools, which are taught in the Karen language predominantly at the primary and secondary levels and exclusively at higher level schools. Even Karen children could not always demonstrate proficiency at the written level,

owing to the junta government's policy forbidding the instruction of ethnic languages in Burmese schools.[122]

In 2007, there was widespread shortage in funding for camp-based education. Education services in all seven Karen camps were under-funded, including school libraries, supplies, nursery schools, and special education. While funding needs for primary and secondary education in the two Karenni camps were being addressed by private donors, gaps remained in nursery education, and there was a widespread need for lighting so that students may study in the evenings.[123] The TBBC provided school lunches at the nursery level in most camps. [124]

As noted, resettlement programs have caused a serious drain on camp education in recent years. Low stipends paid to teachers, compared to other NGO workers, also served as a disincentive for prospective teachers.[125] In 2007, only 2,467 of the 34,000 primary and secondary school students in camps (13.8 percent) passed the annual examination, known as the "border test." After including high school students, the figure was 72 percent, in contrast to the combined rate of 80 percent in 2006.[126] Students currently have little access to post-10 education, and there remains no funding in place for higher education.[127]

Situation of Specific Ethnic Groups of the Refugee Population

Situation of "Burmese Muslim" Refugees

Burma's military regime does not recognize the Muslim Rohingya population as a national ethnic group, and thus denies citizenship to all members of this ethnic group. This renders Rohingyas effectively stateless, and subject to systemic discrimination. As a consequence, Rohingyas continued to flee to Bangladesh and some also to Thailand and Malaysia.

In 2007, many Rohingya journeyed to Thailand by boat from Bangladesh in the hopes of securing access to refugee services denied them by the Bangladesh government. Once they reached Thailand, however, Rohingya were subject to arrest and deportation by Thai authorities. In March, the RTG deported two groups of 67 and 58 Rohingya from Mae Sot into areas of Burma controlled by the DKBA, a pro-junta military group.[128] According to HRW, between October 2006 and April 2007 the RTG forcibly repatriated over 2,000 Rohingya despite their well-founded fears of persecution, a practice that violated Thailand's obligation of non-refoulement.[129] On 20 July 2007, Thai Army General Boonsang announced that Thailand was willing to assist in the resettlement of Rohingya refugees. The same day, Thai authorities urged a group of approximately 100 Rohingya camping out on a Mae Sot football pitch to return to Burma.[130]

On 14-15 August 2007, the Thai National Human Rights Commission held a seminar with the purpose of discussing issues concerning the Rohingya refugee population. The meeting included officials from Thai immigration, police, and the National Security Council, students and professors from Thai universities, members of the International Jurist Committee, members of the stateless watch, and members of the exiled National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). Representatives of the Burmese Rohingya Association in Thailand (BRAT) detailed the problems faced by Burmese ethnic Rohingya, both in Burma and abroad, and urged the Thai government to provide temporary shelter to refugees. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for March 2008.[131]

Situation of Karen Refugees

Thousands of Burma's ethnic Karen were forced over the Thai border in 2007 as a result of *Tatmadaw* offensives. Although the Karen National Union (KNU) signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC in 2003, repeated violations by the regime, including a major offensive campaign beginning in 2006 that targeted civilian populations, have effectively nullified the agreement.[132] Throughout 2007 the military regime continued its attempt to consolidate control over parts of Karen State, with Toungoo, Papun and Nyaunglebin Districts particularly affected by the violence. Unlike previous years, the *Tatmadaw* did not withdraw during the rainy season but continued attacks in what was estimated to be the most intense offensive in over a decade.[133] Human Rights Watch condemned the violence and called for an end to the attacks by the *Tatmadaw* and junta-aligned armed ethnic militias, both within Burma and across the Thai-Burma border into the predominantly Karen refugee camps.[134]

Situation of Karenni Refugees

According to reports, over 20,000 refugees lived in Karenni camps on the Thai-Burma border in 2007.[135] In the summer of 2007, a new wave of Karennis crossed into Thailand fleeing fresh *Tatmadaw* offensives against the Karenni National People's Party (KNPP). However, as of June 2007, more than 200 of the new camp arrivals remained unrecognized by the RTG.[136] On 2 June 2007, Thai authorities prevented 400 Karennis, who were fleeing forced relocation, from crossing into Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province.[137]

In July 2007, the military regime in Burma called for the repatriation of Burmese long-necked Karennis, or Padaung, living in Thailand. During a Thai-Burma Township Border Committee meeting, SPDC authorities asked the Thai government to assist in the repatriation process. The Padaung community refused the appeal, as continuing violence between the *Tatmadaw* and the KNPP, of which the Padaung are members, threatened their security.[138] The Padaung have become a lucrative tourist attraction, and groups on both sides of the border coveted the revenues they represent. Long-necked Karenni refugees have been granted official refugee status by the UNHCR, and in the past resided in three separate holding centres in Mae Hong Son Province. Citing security reasons, the Thai government announced plans to consolidate the Padaung in one centre, the Ban Huay Pukang holding centre in Muang district, by September 2007.[139] However, some parties allege that the RTG is forcibly relocating the Padaung from the other two sites to allow tourists easier access.

Situation of Mon Refugees

Burmese ethnic Mon continue to flee Burma to escape abuses, land confiscation, and forced recruitment by the military regime. In 2007, abuses continued despite an active ceasefire agreement between Mon and *Tatmadaw* forces.[140] On 1 August 2007, Thai authorities forced 89 Mon refugees, including women and children, to leave Umpium camp. The group included former members of Honsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP), an ethnic resistance group that recently split from the New Mon State Party (NMSP). Refugees were concerned about their security as other refugee camps are located near areas controlled by the NMSP, which has signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC and do not support the HRP. The UNHCR worked with the Thai government on behalf of the Mon refugees in an attempt to secure access to the camps. [141]

Situation of Shan Refugees

According to the *2007 World Refugee Survey* approximately 200,000 Burma's ethnic Shan reside in Thailand. Although the Shan, as Burma's other ethnic minority groups, flee forced relocation and ethnic persecution by the SPDC, the Thai government has never recognized them as refugees.[142] As such they have been denied the rights afforded to asylum seekers of other ethnicities. In April 2007, the *Tatmadaw* intensified its counter-insurgency efforts in Shan State,[143] however those fleeing as a result were still not recognised as eligible for protection in Thailand.

The Shan State Army – South (SSA-S) maintained four informal refugee camps in areas under their control along the Thai-Burma border. These camps were believed to provide refuge to some 5,000 individuals.[144] The TBBC provided support to 600 refugees in one small camp in Wieng Heng District of Chiang Mai Province. The residents of this camp, for the most part, fled fighting and the associated human rights violations near their homes in 2002.[145] An "unofficial" Shan refugee camp located at Doi Tailang. This camp is estimated to house as many as 15,000 Shan refugees, including an estimated 230 orphans.[146]

17.3 Burmese Refugees in Bangladesh

The vast majority of the estimated 178,100 Burmese refugees in Bangladesh are Rohingya, a Muslim minority group predominantly residing in Burma's Arakan State.[147] In 2007, approximately 26,000 officially recognized Rohingya refugees lived in Nayapara and Kutupalong camps, located in the Cox's Bazaar area. Most of the remaining refugees lived along the border illegally, some in unofficial makeshift camps.[148] More than a quarter million Rohingyas fled Burma in 1992 to escape a campaign of ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Arakan State by the Burmese military. Since that time, tens of thousands have been forcibly repatriated to Burma, with most eventually returning to Bangladesh.[149] Although formal repatriation was halted on 1 March 2007, there were continued reports of Bangladeshi authorities engaging in the forced repatriation of refugees.[150] In addition to the Rohingya, there were also smaller numbers of Buddhist Arakanese (Rakhine) refugees recognized as POCs by the UNHCR residing mostly in Dhaka, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and in Cox's Bazaar District.

In late 2006-2007 the military regime forced Rohingyas out of their homes to make way for a 'Muslim free' model town, the thirteenth of its kind. After the villagers learned that they had to relocate, many attempted to cross the Bangladesh border. In January 2007 it was reported that over 1,000 Rohingyas were camping on the banks of the Naff River preparing to enter Bangladesh illegally.[151] These model villages, which were built to stimulate trade on the Burma-Bangladesh border, resulted in two outflows of refugees: the displaced Rohingyas, whose homes were destroyed to make way or the new settlement; and the Buddhist Burmese who were brought from urban areas against their will and forced to live and work in the jungles of western Burma. Unable to return to their homes without permission from the regime, model villagers occasionally crossed into Bangladesh in order to return to 'Burma proper' extra-legally.[152]

In addition to inflicting violence and imposing forced labor, the military regime in Burma continued its refusal to recognize Rohingyas as a national ethnic group and denied Rohingyas the rights of citizenship and the freedom of movement, religion, and marriage.[153] Arakan State held few economic prospects, with the Army serving as the only employment option for most young people. Buddhists in Arakan State were able to move freely to other areas in Burma, and often continued on to Thailand and Malaysia to find employment. However, the regime continued to restrict the Muslim Rohingya population from travel within Burma, so they were able only flee northwest to the Burma-Bangladesh border. [154] (For more information, see Chapter 8: Freedom of Belief and Religion, and Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh faced a set of challenges unique from the greater population of Burmese refugees and asylum-seekers. Rohingyas living in Bangladesh were subject to hostile or indifferent policies, varied forms of abuse, and forced repatriation by the government. Refugees caught outside of camps were subject to arrest, detention, beatings, withholding of rations, and extortion by Bangladeshi security forces.[155] Unrecognised Rohingyas residing outside of camps were denied the right to citizenship, documentation, employment, and marriage by the Bangladesh government. In addition, the authorities limited the UNHCR and other aid groups' access to refugee populations.[156] In the words of Brad Adams, Asia director of Human Rights Watch, *"the Rohingya have been caught between a hammer and an anvil for over a decade in desperate circumstance, with Bangladesh making it difficult for them to seek refuge and Burma continuing to abuse the rights of the Muslim minority in Arakan state."* [157]

Rohingya Refugees in Nayapara and Kutupalong Refugee Camps

According to the 2007 *World Refugees Survey*, 26,200 Rohingya refugees were confined at Nayapara and Kutupalong, the only two officially recognized refugee camps for Burmese refugees.[158] Official policies prohibited the construction of permanent structures, restricted movement and employment outside of camps, and limited education and health services. The Bangladeshi government reported that its restrictive policies were designed to serve as a deterrent to the permanent resettlement of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.[159] However, in 2007 Bangladeshi authorities did respond to pressure from international organizations and relaxed some restrictions on refugees in camps. These included the agreement to allow limited vocational training facilities set up by NGOs, the construction of a new official camp, and the continued facilitation of resettlement, albeit in very limited numbers.

The needs of refugees in camps were administered by international aid groups, such as UNHCR and Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF). However, the Bangladeshi government only allowed these groups to retain low levels of staff and administer limited services.[160] In 2007 the UN allocated an additional US$ 1 million to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh through the UN Refugee Agency.[161] In November, the UNHCR distributed 25,000 mosquito nets to families in Nayapara camp, after distributing nets to families in Kutupalong in October. The project was facilitated by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRS).[162] In July 2007, the BDRS distributed utensils, also provided by the UNHCR, to families in both camps.[163] On 9 December 2007, the UNHCR floated a tender for Bangladeshi citizens to provide food items and fuel to Burmese refugees throughout 2008. The food items included eggs, biscuits, and peanuts – items not previously included in camp rations – while the non-food items included compressed rice husks and kerosene for fuel.[164] On 19 December 2007, a joint local-international NGO provided sacrificial meat to residents in both camps for the start of the Holy Eid- ul-Azha holiday.[165]

Rohingya refugees in a camp in Bangladesh. *[Photo: BBC]*

As a result of the Bangladeshi government's policy against permanent structures in camps, flooding remained a constant concern. In April 2007, heavy winds and rain destroyed most of the housing in Nayapara camp, blowing off the plastic sheeting that served for roofing on the structures and leaving most refugees unprotected. According to a refugee in the camp, no immediate steps had been taken by NGOs or the government. [166]

The Bangladeshi government continued to limit educational opportunities for camp residents. Authorities allowed informal education up to primary level, but there existed no opportunities for secondary or higher level education.[167] At the beginning of 2007, it was estimated that only 12 percent of the camp population was literate.[168] On 9 May 2007, the Technical Assistance Institute (TAI) held a meeting in Nayapara camp to discuss the development of camp-based education. Attendees included TAI staff, WFP staff, teacher trainers, and over 30 teachers from refugee schools. Teachers stressed the need for adequate textbooks and teaching materials, as well as an increase in teacher salaries, and teacher trainers and TAI staff discussed ways to develop education for refugee children. In 2007 Nayapara camp housed eight schools, with 45 teachers administering to over 2,500 students. Kutupalong camp also had eight schools, with 40 teachers and over 2,000 students. Subjects included Burmese, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, and Science. [169]

In 2007 the Bangladeshi government also continued to limit access to healthcare for refugees living in camps. It was reported that children in camps had high rates of chronic and acute malnutrition, and all camp residents found securing treatment to be difficult.[170] Moreover, in early December 2007, several children caught pneumonia as a result of colder weather. The children were treated at the MSF clinic, and the UNHCR distributed blankets to all children under ten years of age in both Nayapara and Kutupalong camps.[171]

On 20 November 2007, a workshop on HIV prevention and family planning was organized by the Family Planning Association Bangladesh (FPAB), supported by the UNHCR. During the workshop, an FPAB doctor warned that only 17 percent of the most-at-risk groups have correct knowledge about prevention of the disease and most people have misconceptions about it. Furthermore, nearly 50 per cent of the married women and 42 percent of men in the age group 15-54 years had no idea about how to avoid HIV.[172] On World AIDS Day, 1 December 2007, a workshop was held in Nayapara camp to address AIDS-related issues. The event, which was jointly organized by the UNHCR, TAI, and the government of Bangladesh, focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and encouraged de-stigmatization of the disease. According to WHO/UNAIDS estimates, there were over 13,000 total cases of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh, although less than 1,000 were reported.[173]

In July 2007, a pregnant woman from Nayapara died due to lack of proper treatment. She was taken to the Ministry of Health (MOH) clinic, run jointly by the UNHCR and the government, but waited for four hours before being treated. By the time she was seen by a doctor, her condition had become critical, and she was referred to the MSF clinic, where she died while being treated. An MSF doctor told her husband that she could have been saved, had she been admitted two hours sooner.[174] Following the incident, camp residents decried the Bangladesh government's policy regarding access to medical care. According to one refugee: *"If we go to MOH centre with serious patients, the doctors don't provide proper check ups and keep patients waiting for a long time without treatment*. *Neither do they refer serious patients to the MSF on a priority basis."* The MSF was only allowed to admit serious patients with the consent of the MOH. Both the MSF facilities and the MOH facilities remained under the control of Bangladeshi authorities.[175]

Refugees living in Nayapara and Kutupalong camps were restricted from leaving the camps or securing employment, often forcing them to sell their rations to corrupt camp officials or outside merchants.[176] In January 2007, 13 refugees from Nayapara camp were arrested by Bangladeshi forest department personnel for bringing firewood back to the camp. While the World Food Programme (WFP) normally distributes monthly 40 kilograms of treated rice chaff for fuel, refugees in Nayapara had not received rice chaff for the preceding two months, prompting them to gather firewood from a nearby forest. After they were caught, the 13 refugees were detained and allegedly tortured at the forest department office.[177]

In 2007 camp populations continued to be denied the administration of justice. Refugees living in camps continued to be subject to violence, extortion, and detention, both within and outside of the camp setting. Victims were routinely denied protection by camp officials and Bangladeshi police, and alleged perpetrators were frequently released without trial or punishment. The following case gives an idea of the dire situation. On 5 January 2007, a 23 year old refugee was beaten by camp police as he was on his way to a friend's wedding. The young man, named Noor Alam, had caught two boys throwing stones at the ceremony, and confronted them. As a patrol of camp police arrived at the scene, another youth accused the young man of being a terrorist and of traveling outside the camp. The police beat him and brought him back to their barracks, where he was tortured further. A few hours after he was released, Noor Alam lost consciousness, and died that night as a result of his injuries. The camp police involved were arrested in Teknaf that night, but reportedly 'disappeared' the next day.[178]

In August 2007, the UNHCR held a law and order meeting in both official camps, following a request by the Bangladeshi government. The training was attended by over fifty refugees and included the Camp-in-Charge of both camps, several Nayapara camp imams, staff of UNHCR, MSF, and TAI, as well as the judge and Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) from Cox's Bazaar. The judge lectured on Bangladeshi law as it related to a wide range of offenses, including rape, murder, and narcotics offenses. The ASP talked about the role of the police, criteria for arrests, and requirements for those arrested. One participant told the ASF that police responding to incidents often failed to investigate properly. Officers instead arrested people at random, then asked others to confirm the guilt of the detainees. If anyone accused the detainees of engaging in criminal activity, the police arrested, tortured and initiated legal proceedings against the accused. In response, the ASP pledged to end arbitrary arrest by police forces.[179]

A Rohingya refugee boy living at the Kutapalong refugee camp in Bangladesh washes himself before attending prayer. *[Photo: AFP Photo/Jewel Samad]*

Another law and order meeting was held by the UNHCR on 30 October 2007 in Nayapara camp. Members of the camp community listened as the ASP of Ukhiya police station, the Union Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Teknaf, and the UNHCR protection officer discussed Bangladesh rules and regulations. Attendees also discussed issues concerning law and order in the camp itself.[180] The UNHCR organized another week-long meeting in early December in Nayapara camp on the subject of "peace education."[181] The discussion of law and order in camp communities, and the dialogue between camp residents and Bangladesh officials, represented an important step in the improvement of legal protection for the camp community. However, if actual conditions are to improve, such discussion must be followed by substantive changes in the actual practices of both camp and Bangladeshi law officers.

Other camp projects included the opening of a vocational training center in Nayapara camp on 16 May 2007. The center was founded by the UNHCR to provide training in tailoring to male refugees. A similar center for women was opened by the UNHCR in 1999.[182]

Resettlement programmes, which began in late 2006, continued in 2007, however still on a small scale. In April, nine Rohingya refugees were resettled to Canada as part of the 23 Rohingyas that had been accepted for resettlement in 2006.[183] In November, 44 Roghingyas arrived in Canada for resettlement.[184] It was reported that the main reason refugees opted for resettlement, was the hope of securing further education for their children, an opportunity not available in the camps.[185]

The Situation of Women in Camps

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remained a major problem for the camp population, and was often accompanied by glaring failures in the administration of justice. HRW also cited the abuse of refugees by Bangladeshi law enforcement personnel, including reports of sexual violence against women.[186] The following cases are instructive of the widespread abuse and apparent lack of justice.

On 19 February 2007, a group of Bangladeshi men tried to kill Rohingya girl after she testified in an outstanding rape case. The men attacked the girl and her family while they were on a bus leaving the court house, and were arrested by police. However, the attackers were released the next day after reportedly bribing the police, and no case was filed against them.[187] On 19 April 2007, a Rohingya girl from Kutupalong was gang-raped by three local Bangladeshi men, with the aide of a local woman. The woman was taken into custody by Bangladesh police, but the three men absconded.[188] On 19 June 2007, a woman from Nayapara camp was severely beaten by four male camp residents. She reported the incident to camp authorities, but no action was taken. The woman was admitted to the MOH clinic, but died in November after being transferred to the MSF clinic for further treatment. It was unclear if her death was directly related to the incident, however no autopsy was to be scheduled unless a case was filed.[189]

The situation of impunity for sexual abusers was often linked with corruption. On 8 August 2007, a Rohingya woman from Kutupalong camp was raped by a a Bangladeshi villager. The perpetrator owned a market near the camp, and often secured contracts for construction of camp infrastructure. As a result he had influence over both refugees and local authorities, and reportedly assaulted many other women in the camp without punishment. In this case, camp residents coming to the aid of the woman caught the man and handed him over to camp authorities, who refused to take action against him. The refugees finally appealed to the UNHCR, which moved the victim from the camp for protection and took action against the perpetrator.[190] On 18 August 2007, a Rohingya girl from Nayapara camp went missing, and the girl's parents involved the Camp-in-Charge and the UNHCR. The Camp-in-Charge

transferred the case to the camp police officer, who detained two local villagers believed to be involved, only to release them hours later after allegedly accepting bribes.[191]

Women in camps were also subject to domestic violence. In May 2007, the Bangladesh Women's Parishad (Union) denounced the torture of a Rohngya woman in Kutupalong camp as a result of a '*fatawa*' (religious edict) issued against her. After the woman was caught in an adulterous situation, a group of Rohingyas allegedly issued a *fatawa* ordering a punishment of 100 lashes. However, the camp elders who dealt with the case maintained that they had not issued the order.[192] In August 2007, a UNHCR training session on law and order dealt with the issue of domestic violence. Camp officials called on husbands and wives "not to quarrel" and for a general cessation of domestic violence.[193]

Unofficial Rohingya Refugees

According to the *World Refugee Survey* as many as 300,000 unofficial refugees live in Bangladesh.[194] Since the mass repatriation of Rohingyas in 1994, access to the two official camps has been denied to new arrivals. Despite the fact that they fled Burma in order to escape a multitude of human rights abuses, the Bangladeshi government regards Rohingya from Burma as *"economic migrants,"* meaning they are effectively categorised as illegal immigrants in Bangladesh. As a result of their status as illegal immigrants, they are not entitled to any humanitarian assistance. Most have settled in the Cox's Bazaar and Teknaf areas of southern Bangladesh. More than 10,000 members of the unofficial Rohingya population live in the makeshift Dum Dum Meah camp near Ukhiya, approximately six kilometres north of Teknaf.

A new wave of refugees began entering Bangladesh from Burma in October 2007. Many of these refugees were Burmese nationals fleeing persecution by the military regime following pro-democracy demonstrations in Burma. In addition, an estimated 2,000 Bangladeshi monks who had been studying in Burma were forced to return after the military regime pressured monasteries not to allow monks in residence, in retribution for the demonstrations in Burma. According to reports, NaSaKa, the SPDC border security forces, refused to assist the Bangladeshi monks reentering Bangladesh, forcing many to cross the border illegally by way of the Naff River.[195] It was reported that most new Burmese refugees faced difficulties finding food and accommodation on their arrival in Bangladesh. No NGOs were able or permitted to provide support to the recent arrivals, most of whom were fleeing persecution by the military regime in Burma. Moreover, the UNHCR in Dhaka had no program in place to provide assistance to new asylum seekers before they were recognized as refugees. [196]

Rohingyas attempting to cross into Bangladesh by land were frequently arrested by Bangladesh border security forces and deported back to Burma. In 2007, the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), a paramilitary group that operates along the border, increased its patrols in order to prevent refugees from entering the country. On 29 and 30 January 2007, BDR and police patrols arrested 25 Rohingyas trying to cross in the border areas of Teknaf.[197] On 2 February 2007, police arrested 16 Rohingyas in Teknaf, after they had successfully crossed the border.[198] On 31 July 2007, police arrested five Burmese Rohingya youths who were attempting to cross the border in Cox's Bazaar district. [199]

Arrests of refugees by BDR and police often involved corruption and extortion. On 13 January 2007, Teknaf police arrested an unofficial Rohingya from Dum Dum Meah camp and extorted 20,000 taka from him after accusing him of being a human trafficker.[200]

At the time of the monk led protests in Burma, several monks were arresting while attempting to cross to Bangladesh: they were either Burmese monks fleeing to Bangladesh

out of fear of persecution, or Bangladeshi monks returning from study in Burmese monasteries. On 3-4 September 2007, *NaSaKa* forces arrested 15 student monks attempting to cross the border from Burma and handed them over to Bangladeshi security forces. The monks insisted they were Bangladeshi citizens who had been studying at a monastery in Burma.[201] Furthermore, on 2 October 2007, Bangladeshi authorities arrested 11 monks who were crossing the Burma-Bangladesh border to escape crackdowns by the junta.[202] On 30 October 2007, it was reported that 2 student monks successfully reached Bangladesh soil after fleeing arrest by junta authorities.[203]

In order to escape poor conditions in Bangladesh, many Burmese Rohingyas undertake the difficult journey to Thailand or Malaysia. In March 2007 it was estimated that over 2,000 Rohingyas had arrived in southern Thailand, many of them having journeyed from Bangladesh.[204] In February, Bangladeshi police arrested 12 undocumented Rohingyas as they prepared to depart by boat for Malaysia, each of whom had reportedly paid 10,000 taka to a broker in Bangladesh.[205] On 8 December 2007, more than 85 Rohingya bound for Malaysia left the Teknaf area on two boats. On 9 December 2007, Cox's Bazaar police arrested 35 Burmese nationals who entered Bangladesh illegally, also with the intent to continue on to Malaysia. Traffickers in Cox's Bazaar reportedly charge between 20,000 and 30,000 taka per person for transport.[206]

Rohingya Refugees in Dum Dum Meah

In 2007 over 10,000 Rohingya refugees resided in the "Tal," also known as Dum Dum Meah, an unofficial camp north of Teknaf, near the Burmese border. Over half of these, around 6,000 refugees, settled in Dum Dum Meah after the government evicted them from their rented homes in October 2004.[207] Conditions in the camp are harsh, and the Bangladesh government neither offered nor allowed regular aid to the refugees living there. In the words of Jaap Broersma, the MSF head of mission, *"I have visited many refugee camps across the world, and most recently in Darfur, Sudan. But the situation here [in Dum Dum Meah] is worse than that."*[208] In 2007 Bangladesh authorities regularly raided the camp as part of its nationwide anti-crime campaign, and the Dhaka-based Daily Star reported that *Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh*, the group responsible for 500 simultaneous bombings throughout Bangladesh in 2005, had recruited and trained Rohingyas in the past. [209]

Dum Dum Meah remained subject to frequent flooding from the Naff river in times of high tides and heavy rains. According to *Medicine Sans Fronteires* (MSF), 79 percent of the shelters in Dum Dum Meah flood during the rainy season each year, while 10 percent are affected by the tides throughout the year.[210] On 11 April 2007, heavy winds and rain left the camp in knee-deep water and destroyed most of the huts.[211] The MSF project coordinator noted: "*Most of the houses are made of polythene sheets and sacks. It is not sufficient to protect against rain so cold-related diseases are very common*."[212]

The dire conditions caused diarrhea, respiratory infections, and malnutrition in the camp population, as well as other health problems.[213] MSF estimated that 30 to 40 percent of children in the camp suffered from respiratory infections.[214] In the first week of December 2007, outbreaks of pneumonia and skin diseases were reported among children in Dum Dum Meah, due to unclean water and unhygienic surroundings.[215] In early 2007, MSF, which already ran a clinic near Dum Dum Meah, set up an emergency feeding centre in the camp to respond to malnutrition. In the following months, rates of child deaths in the camp fell from 30 to approximately 7 per month.[216] The president of Solfino, a French NGO active in the refugee community, noted that in the several years since MSF had been allowed to provide limited health services conditions in the camp had improved.[217]

Accidents along the highway claim many lives at Dum Dum Meah, particularly among children. It is estimated that around 25 refugees have been killed in roadside accidents over the past two years. According to one father: *"If we get hit by a vehicle and suffer serious injuries or even if someone dies, the drivers just speed off. They don't care – there's no question of a court case or compensation."* [218] On 21 April 2007, a five year old boy was killed by a speeding truck while trying to cross the road. The boy died on the way back to camp after he was allegedly refused service at the MSF clinic.[219] MSF routinely refers serious cases to official hospitals, as it does not have the capacity to treat critical injuries. On 7 July 2007, an adult refugee was critically injured on the same road. He was taken to the MSF clinic, which then referred him to the Cox's Bazaar hospital due to the seriousness of his condition.[220] On 5 December 2007, a three year old girl was critically injured by a minibus *en route* to Cox's Bazaar. The girl was sent to the MSF clinic, which referred her to Teknaf, and she was finally referred to the Cox's Bazaar hospital, where she was treated and reported to be in critical condition. According to the girl's father, MSF had pledged to cover the cost of medical treatment.[221]

Despite the obstacles related to assisting unofficial refugees, some NGOs found ways to provide limited services to refugees living in Dum Dum Meah camp. On 4 July 2007, Solfino distributed clothes to refugees living at Dum Dum Meah. In November 2007, Solfino also pledged an attempt to establish a school for refugee children in Dum Dum Meah.[222] A range of organisations, including the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY),,the Internationale Humanitare Hilfsorganisation (IHH), the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and Hekmutul Insania distributed rations among the families of Dum Dum meah. The rations varied according to each organisation, but included largely a combination of rice, pulses, vegetables, salt, sugar and edible oil.[223] In December 2007, the European Commission (EC) announced that it had approved 1.5 million euro in a humanitarian aid package for the unregistered Rohingyas living in Dum Dum Meah camp. The EC Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid noted that: *"The situation of Rohingya refugees is continuing to deteriorate. These vulnerable people rely on international solidarity. There is an urgent need to create adequate living conditions for them."*[224]

In early March 2007, the Bangladeshi government ordered the destruction of a large section of Dum Dum Meah camp in order to make room for a new highway. In compliance with the official order, the refugees demolished around 200 huts, but were given no alternative site to construct shelters. Citing the potential destruction of plantations, Bangladesh authorities refused to let them use nearby land, and instead suggested that they camp on the bank of the river. MSF sent the displaced refugees plastic sheets, water jugs, and some children's materials.[225] The UNHCR has not been allowed to assist refugees at Dum Dum Meah, except for the distribution of some plastic sheets in 2006. A UNHCR official suggested that the easiest solution *"would be to allow the Teknaf refugees just to go back to the villages where they were living peacefully with local people before 2004."*[226] UNHCR's representative in Bangladesh condemned the government for ordering the refugees to abandon their homes without any advance warning, and called on authorities to assist in the search for new homes.[227] The Bangladesh government eventually postponed the move, but gave no official news to camp residents regarding its decision.[228]

In August 2007, it was announced that the Bangladeshi authorities would begin construction of a new camp to accommodate refugees living in Dum Dum Meah. The new site was located on 13 acres of land near Nila village in Teknaf Township, slightly elevated from the surrounding area and therefore at a lesser risk of flooding than Dum Dum Meah.[229] The move came after the UNHCR and EU had put pressure on Bangladesh to provide alternative shelter for the displaced refugees. Several foreign envoys who visited Bangladesh in 2007 had also expressed concern over the critical living situation of unofficial refugees, women and children in particular, and urged Bangladeshi authorities to relocate the refugees to a safer location.[230]

The European Union provided 2 million euros to fund construction of the new camp, which was planned to begin in September 2007 and be completed by the end of the year. The camp was intended to house 2,500 residents, but would reportedly have the capacity to accommodate at least 10,000 refugees.[231] Refugees at Dum Dum Meah expressed hope that the new camp might alleviate some of their physical constraints. However, as of December 2007 they had yet to be relocated to the new camp. Some also feared that the remote location of the new camp, and their continuing unofficial status, would leave them vulnerable and without protection from Bangladeshi security forces.[232]

Arakanese Refugees in Bangladesh

According to the *World Refugee Survey,* approximately 200 Buddhist Arakanese refugees were included in the UNHCR's urban caseload. Refugees in Dhaka recognized by the UNHCR as POCs were provided subsistence allowance, education and vocational training, and basic medical services. In addition, refugee children in urban settings had access to primary education.[233] Beginning on 1 July 2007, the UNHCR increased its subsistence allowance to accommodate the rising cost of living. Daily allowances were increased from 90 to 120 taka per day, with head dependants receiving 15 additional taka per day. Subsistence allowances were given to refugees for six months after being granted POC status, after which time they were given a lump sum to start a small business. Urban refugees welcomed the increase, but noted that new asylum seekers had problems securing accommodation when they first arrived in Dhaka to apply for status determination. It was suggested that the UNHCR could set up shelters for new applicants.[234]

Rohingya refugee mother with her child in one of the refugee camps in Bangladesh. *[Photo: BBC]*

Policy of the Bangladeshi Government

Bangladesh government policy remained unfavourable to refugees in general, and to Rohingya refugees in particular. Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not have a legal framework through which refugees can seek and be granted protection. Moreover, there is no public funding available to refugees, and the government limits UNHCR and other international assistance to refugees residing in the two official refugee camps and to individual Arakanese refugees who have received POC status. According to Brad Adams, the Asia director of Human Rights Watch: *"The Bangladeshi government is ignoring its obligations to protect Rohingya refugees and permit international relief agencies to assist with the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees. This shameful situation has dragged on for many years and is now causing secondary flows to countries as far away as Thailand and Malaysia."*[235]

After the government's mid-January declaration of a state of emergency, the army was given an expanded mandate to *"cleanse society of unwanted elements"* as part of the national law and order campaign.[236] In the month of January alone, Bangladesh joint forces arrested over 10,000 people across the country as part of the crackdown, including a number of registered Burmese refugees. According to a Rohingya teacher from Cox's Bazaar, a number of false accusations had been made against innocent refugees.[237]

In January 2007, the Bangladeshi authorities tightened border security following a report that 1,000 Rohingyas, who had camped on the eastern shore of the Naff River since December 2006, were planning to cross the border into Bangladesh.[238] Authorities denied that the border was sealed entirely, but confirmed that patrols by the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) had increased to prevent intrusion.[239] The junta government in Burma also increased border security on the Burmese side, fearing that increased restrictions by the Bangladesh government would force Rohingyas back into Burma.[240]

On 29 March 2007, following a marriage between a Burmese Rohingya and a Bangladesh national, Cox's Bazaar authorities held a meeting with government and security officials to discuss the issue of Rohingya refugees. Participants at the meeting characterized Rohingyas as *"being involved in robbery, theft, murder… uneducated, and of loose character"* and stressed the need to repatriate Rohingyas. It was agreed that Rohingyas caught trying to cross the border would be arrested and immediately sent back to Burma.[241] It was also decided not to issue national identity cards, provide shelter, pay Rohingyas for labour, or allow marriages between Rohingyas and Bangladeshis.[242] On 20 April 2007, Bangladeshi authorities announced that house owners were expected to evict all Rohingya tenants and that immigrants should not be employed as labourers. Also, rickshaw owners were prohibited from renting out rickshaws to any Burmese.[243] Any Bangladeshi who failed to comply with the order was to be punished to the full extent of the law.

Throughout 2007, the Bangladeshi government worked to strengthen its relationship with the military junta in Burma. In the beginning of January 2007, the president of the Bangladesh caretaker government expressed hope that the two countries would work together to resolve the issue of repatriation of Rohingya refugees, as well as a number of trade issues.[244] In the past, voluntary repatriation has been inhibited by the SPDC's refusal to recognize Rohingyas as Burmese citizens, as well as the unwillingness of the Rohingya population to return under the regime's restrictive policies.

UNHCR Disengagement and Forced Repatriation

In 2004, the UNHCR announced plans to withdraw from its role as caretaker to the refugee population in Bangladesh. However the Bangladeshi government, citing a lack of resources and capability to accommodate refugees, rejected the UNHCR's appeal for 'temporary self-reliance.' In 2007 the Bangladesh government continued to insist that the only solution to the protracted refugee situation was through voluntary repatriation to Burma. [245] Since 2004, the number of refugees forcibly repatriated to Burma has decreased precipitously, and in 2007 there were no reports of forced repatriation of Burmese refugees already settled in Bangladesh. During a meeting with refugees in Nayapara camp in April 2007, an officer from the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission claimed that repatriation of Burmese refugees had been stopped for two years.[246] However, in April 2007 local Bangladeshi authorities reiterated their commitment to deport refugees caught entering the country illegally.[247]

In its 2007 Global Appeal, the UNHCR stated that it would *"work towards the voluntary repatriation of refugees in Bangladesh and assist returnees with their initial establishment in Northern Rakhine State."*[248] The UNHCR continued joint programmes with Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ) in Maungdaw, Burma, to assist refugees returning to Burma from Bangladesh. Projects included the construction of tube wells, bridges, and education and vocational training centres.[249] In April 2007, a UNHCR representative met with the Bangladeshi Foreign Advisor to discuss the bilateral resolution of the refugee situation. The Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry announced plans to hold a meeting in May 2007 with all concerned stakeholders, to discuss issues surrounding Burmese refugees. [250]

During a meeting with Cox's Bazaar officials and UNHCR personell at Nayapara camp in March 2007, Bangladesh's Food and Disaster Management Advisor stressed the need to resolve voluntary repatriation issues using bilateral talks with SPDC authorities at the top levels.[251] Following an April 2007 visit to Burma, the Bangladeshi Foreign Advisor called on the junta to launch programs, such as micro-credit lending, to encourage Rohingya refugees to return to Burma. He also stressed the importance of joint efforts by the Bangladeshi government, the military regime in Burma, and the UNHCR to facilitate voluntary repatriation.[252] The Foreign Advisor reiterated the need for a tripartite approach during a discussion with the visiting Burmese trade delegation in November 2007.[253] Rohingya returnees to Burma continued to face junta-imposed restrictions on movement, denial of citizenship, land confiscation and forced labour.[254] Although talks between Bangladesh and the junta regime continue, most Rohingyas in Bangladesh refuse to return to Burma voluntarily until their situation in the country improves.

Burmese Refugees in Bangladeshi Prisons

By some estimates, over 500 Burmese refugees remained in Bangladeshi prisons, many of whom had served out the entirety of their sentences.[255] Some refugees remained in prison without any official trial or sentence. Many of the prisoners were in Cox's Bazaar and Bandarban prisons, and were denied reentry into Burma by the junta government. The Bangladesh government reportedly spends 10 million taka every year to accommodate prisoners from Burma, and other countries, who are refused repatriation.[256] In August 2007, During a meeting on law and order, the UNHCR protection officer discussed earlier cases of arrest with Bangladesh authorities. However, the UN refugee agency continued its attempts to secure the release of Burmese prisoners, with little success.[257]

For some Burmese detainees, extended confinement in Bangladesh prisons proved fatal. In February 2007, an Arakanese man died in Cox's Bazaar jail. He had been arrested in January 2007 while trying to cross the Bangladesh border.[258] In August 2007, a 70 year-old man from Dum Dum Meah died in Cox's Bazaar jail. He was arrested for smuggling and carrying a fake passport in January 2005, but did not receive an official trial or sentence. According to relatives, he frequently suffered from malaria, typhoid, and jaundice while in prison, but did not receive adequate medical treatment.[259]

Moreover, several Burmese prisoners refused offers of repatriation from junta officials. One Burmese man of Mon ethnicity, who remained imprisoned even though his jail tern ended in December 2005, refused an offer for repatriation because he feared religious persecution by the military regime in Burma. [260]

Some refugees faced continuing harassment and imprisonment as a result of political activity in Bangladesh. In July 2007, Bangladesh police arrested a refugee from Kutupalong camp in an outstanding arms case. The man had been accused of arms-related charges in 1992, when many camp residents were involved in protests against the practice of forced repatriation. Two other men were arrested for their involvement with the man, and they were imprisoned in Cox's Bazaar jail.[261] Furthermore, a Nayapara camp resident has reportedly faced harassment since 2001, when the Bangladesh government tried to forcibly repatriate him. After he refused, an anti-repatriation case was filed against him, along with 27 other camp residents who had been on a hunger strike to protest the policy. He was arrested in March 2003, released after seven months, and then arrested again in June 2006. He was released on bail on 5 April 2007, however 9 male refugees involved in the case remained in Cox's Bazaar jail.[262] Another Burmese man, who was arrested in December 2005, continued being imprisoned into 2007 without an official trial or verdict, despite reportedly poor health. He was arrested in 2005 for distributing a Burmese opposition newspaper, after having submitted a letter of appeal for asylum to the UNHCR.[263]

17.4 Burmese Refugees in India

India is home to a large number of refugee populations, including around 100,000 Burmese refugees.[264] In 2007, Burmese refugees in India continued to encounter a perennial struggle for survival and sustenance. With very little limited help available to them from UNHCR office, an indifferent Government and minimum participation and assistance from civil society groups, the Burmese community is faced with problems of livelihood, ill health, poverty, illiteracy etc.

Like Thailand and Bangladesh, the two other main destinations for Burmese refugees, India is not party to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In addition, India has no national law for refugees, but instead deals with the refugee question under the Registration of Foreigners Act 1946 and the Citizenship Act 1955, both of which are meant to apply to foreigners who voluntarily leave their home in regular circumstances. The Foreigners Act contains broad powers of detention and makes illegal entry into the country a crime punishable by up to five years in prison, with no exception for refugees or asylum seekers. Under the Act, it gave the Government the power to force all foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers, to "reside in a particular place" and "[impose] any restriction on [their] movements" and to persecute criminally anyone aiding or abetting their escape.[265]

However, the Indian Supreme Court has held that refugees and asylum seekers cannot be sent back to their country of origin where their life and liberty is at risk. In addition, there are few provisions in the Indian Constitution that provide protection for refugees. Article 7 provides refugees the same treatment as all aliens; Article 3 applies a policy of non-discrimination; Article 16, free access to the courts is provided; Article 21 protects life and liberty for all, including non-citizens; and according to Article 27 and 28, identity and travel cards are to be issued to refugees.[266]

In 2007, India continued dealing with refugees and asylum seekers in an adhoc manner. While the two largest groups of refugees, the Sri Lankan Tamils and Tibetans are protected directly by the Government of India (GOI), refugees from Burma were under UNHCR mandate in Delhi.

Demographics of Burmese Refugees and Asylum Seekers in India

India's four northeastern states - Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, share more than 1,643 km border with Burma. [267] There is a large presence of Burmese refugees in these north-eastern states and a sizeable population in Delhi. It is estimated that 70,000 – 80,000 Burmese refugees live in Mizoram, [268] 10,000 in Manipur, 6000 in Nagaland and the Naga areas of Manipur and Aruncahal Pradesh, and about 100 in Arunachal Pradesh.[269] In Delhi, there are more than 2,200 Burmese refugees belonging to Arakan, Burman, Chin, Kachin, Kuki, Lushai and other ethnic groups. The Chin constitute about 80% of the Burmese refugee population in Dehli.[270]

In 2007, the Indian Government continued prohibiting the UNHCR to operate in the north-eastern region. Thus, the Burmese in this region are not covered under the UHNCR mandate, and since India has no refugee law, they are left at the mercy of the state governments and local people in the region.

In Delhi, out of the total Burmese population, 1,779 are recognized under UNHCR mandate. The UNHCR document has to be renewed every year at the Socio-Legal Information Centre (SLIC), one of the Implementing Partners of UNHCR.[271] Once recognized by the UNHCR,

the refugee must apply for Residential Permit (RP) at the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) New Delhi. This RP is renewed every six months.

The UNHCR and the Refugee Status Determination Process

Only 1,779 of the around 100,000 Burmese refugees in India are recognized under UNHCR, mandate while the remaining are either in the process of applying or rejected cases.

Since 2006, newcomers have faced several problems registering at the UNHCR office. Once registered, they have to wait for 6 months to 1 year, or even 1½ year to fill in the forms. It usually takes a further 1 to 1½ year before an interview takes place, followed by a year of waiting to know whether they have been recognized for protection or rejected. Thus, the process of securing refugee status can take up to 3 years.

In 2007, the UNHCR New Delhi office closed the registration of new asylum seekers for the months of October and November, announcing that the reason behind this measure was to clear all the pending cases. The result of the pending cases were to be declared by November. However, this did not happen. In December 2007, the UNHCR open up for registration of new arrivals since the September protests inside Burma. However, these new arrivals still had to wait 2-3 months for an interview.

Conditions of Burmese Refugees in Delhi

In 2007 the UNHCR provided 2,600 rupees (US$ 75)[272] a month to newly recognized refugees, who numbered about 100 and an additional of 600 rupees for each dependant, allowing up to three dependants for the first six months. This amount is reduced to half at the end of six months and completely phased out at the end of another six months. Thus after a year of recognition, a refugee does not receive any monetary assistance from the UNHCR. Moreover, asylum seekers do not receive any monetary assistance nor could they avail any facilities from the UNHCR. Considering the amount and time-frame of the assistance, the Burmese refugees were largely left to fend for themselves in Delhi to find shelter, food and clothing.[273]

As the Residential Permit (RP) does not include a work permit, refugees have no option but to take up work in the informal sector, where the majority of the Indian population is employed. The informal sector is very low paid and dangerous, with competitive, exploitative and abusive work environments. (For more information, see Chapter 18: The Situtation of Migrant Workers).

In 2007 UNHCR recognized refugees continued to have access to a top–up salary scheme implemented by UNHCR in 2005 as an attempt to promote self-reliance of refugees. The top-up salary scheme is supposed to assure a minimum wage of Rs 3,166 per month (US $ 90) in accordance with the Indian Minimum Wages Act. However, this scheme is limited to UNHCR recognized refugees and only available to one member of each family. This scheme did not improve the living condition of Burmese refugees in general, since less than 5 % of the refugee population were not recognised by the UNHCR and hence could benefit from the scheme.

A new policy for the top-up salary scheme was introduced in November 2007. Under the new policy, a refugee was limited to benefit from this scheme for only a year. This meant that most of the refugees benefiting from this scheme would stop getting the top-up amount from Don Bosco Ashalayam (DBA), one of the Implementing partners of UNHCR. Most of

the refugees were receiving only about 1,000 rupees a month from their employer, and received an additional amount of around 2,166 from DBA, to make up the minimum wage. Thus, when these refugees are no longer covered by the scheme they will have to survive in Dehli on as little as 1,000 rupees a month.

In 2007, as they could not afford living in better places, many of Dehli's refugees moved to the Sitapuri area, a crowded slum-like housing locality. The refugees moved there in spite of knowing that there was no clean drinking water available and bad road connections.

About 25 % of the refugee population could not afford two meals a day, with the result that children often went to bed without food.[274] The thrown away vegetables by vendors at the night bazaar continued to serve as a source of food for Burmese refugees. However, sometimes this food would not even be accessible; reportedly local people would urinate on the food making it impossible for the Burmese to pick it up. .

Lack of proper food and shelter has made common diseases like jaundice, diarrhea, liver and kidney problem, malnutrition, vitamin and calcium deficiencies, highly prevalent among the Burmese refugee population. In 2007, it was reported that 3 people died of diarrhea. The very basic health care services provided by the Voluntary health Association of Delhi, one of UNHCRs implementing partners) were closed down in mid 2006. As a consequence, for any health problems the refugees had to use the government hospitals – the Deen Dayal Upadyay (DDU) Hospital or All Indian Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), which are not easily accessible as they are located far outside. The refugees, therefore, had to resort to medical treatment from the expensive private hospitals and clinics located closer to the area where they lived. However, most of them would simply stay at home as they could not afford the cost.

Children constitute about 20 % of the UNHCR recognised refugee population. In 2007, around 10 % of these children, around 40 children, attended school. The difficult financial conditions faced by refugees, have led many of the children to drop out of school.[275] UNHCR's policy on education is to send the refugee children to Government school, however this has proved impossible as the government schools require certain documents which the refugees could not produce. The UNHCR provides UNHCR recognised children with 2500 rupees (US$ 71.5) per annum for primary level to class IV, and 3100 rupees (US$ 88.5) for class VI to X, distributed through New Delhi YMCA - one of UNHCR's implementing partners. However, this amount is not enough to cover educational expenses like admission and monthly fees, books, uniforms and transportation, as private schools are expensive. It is estimated that a child needs to spend a minimum of 20,000 rupees (US $ 572) a year on education (excluding transportation). This is a matter of deep concern as it creates problems at two levels; firstly, the children are deprived of learning, and secondly, the time spent at school is in a small, crowded room which creates a negative learning environment for the children.

In 2007, Burmese refugees in Dehli continued to face the ordeal of discrimination, molestation and harassment. Lack of preferred qualifications, skills and knowledge of local language, as well as a different physical appearance and food habits, made the Burmese more susceptible to any form of discrimination. The year 2007 recorded the highest number of cases of legal problems. Cases were either with the employer for non-payment of salary, long working hours, no leave benefits and similar; or with house owners for being thrown out of the house for not paying house rent; or sometimes just from being beaten up by local people for no apparent reasons.[276]

Since the implementation in 2006 of resettlement as a durable solution for the Burmese refugees, more than 300 Burmese refugees from Delhi have been resettled to third countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Crackdown on Burmese Opposition Groups

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by India and Burma's junta in October 2004, concerned with maintaining peace along the border, as well as economic development of the border areas. However, the year 2007 witnessed tensions at the Indo-Burma border. The Indian Government has used meetings between the Foreign Minister, Union Home Secretary or Prime Minister, and the Burmese Prime Minister, to pressure the SPDC to provide "all possible assistance" to flush out Indian insurgent groups operating from its territory.[277] In January 2007, the SPDC armed forces led a crackdown on Indian rebel groups operating in northwestern Burma, while the Government of India took similar action against resistance fighters from Burma based in India.[278]

In March 2007, India proposed fencing of the India-Burma border.[279] This proposal came after a series of abductions, bomb blasts and killings in the border area, particularly at the Moreh-Tamu border. In March, around 400 Kukis were arrested and taken to Namunta village in Tamu Township in Burma by a group consisting of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Manipuri militants and Burmese soldiers.[280] On 25 May 2007, a bomb blast at Namphalong market killed one person. This led the SPDC to sealing the Burma side of the border. Again, on 9 June 2007 in Moreh, 11 people were killed, triggering fear and sending people fleeing the border town for refuge in Burma.[281]

Legal Cases Involving Burmese in India

In 2007, there were several legal cases involving Burmese in India. Some cases dated as far back as the late 1990s, and were still without a result. One such case dates back to 1999, when 9 Burmese asylum seekers were rejected by the UNHCR New Delhi office. In protest against the rejection, they staged a peaceful protest in front of the UNHCR office on 25 March 1999. They were arrested by Lodi Police and charged under section 313 of the Foreigner Section of the Indian Penal Code. They were released on bail after spending a few months in jail. However the case is still going on at the Patiala High Court, New Delhi, though presently all nine have been recognized as refugees at UHNCR New Delhi Office.[282]

A similar case dates back to 2003, when around 200 Burmese asylum seekers were arrested and imprisoned for protesting in front of the UNHCR office in Dehli. At the backdrop of the UNHCR's mass rejection of Burmese asylum seekers, a peaceful sit-in protest was undertaken by the asylum seekers in front of the UNHCR office on 20 October 2003. On 12 November 2003, the Indian police, responding to the UNHCR's call to disperse the protestors at any cost, resorted to the use of water cannons and lathi charge. About 200 protestors were arrested and detained at the Lodhi Road Police Station. While most of them were eventually released, 24 were charged under sections 147, 148, 149, 186, 332 and 353 of the Indian Penal Code (FIR No. 264 of 2003). They have been released on bail after spending few months in jail but the case is still going on at the Patiala High Court, New Delhi.[283]

Another critical ongoing case is that of 34 Burmese Freedom Fighters who were arrested in the Andaman Islands on 11 February 1998, and charged under the Foreigners Act, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act of the Indian Penal Code. They had in 2007 been imprisoned for nearly ten years. At the time of writing, they were lodged at the Kolkata Presidency Jail. The case is very critical, as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) did not file a charge sheet for over six years. The trial only began in September 2006, and after examining 6 witnesses, the presiding Judge was transferred. In September 2007, the trial came to a halt, and at the time of writing it had yet to be reopened.[284]

In March 2007, two Burmese were arrested after FRRO officials made a complaint to the police accusing the Burmese of opening a Home Ministry envelope and rewritten on the letter inside. They were charged under section 420, 468, 471 and 201 of IPC and imprisoned. Their case was acquitted with the timely intervention of Indian NGOs and Human Rights advocate. They were released in August after spending four months in jail.[285]

Due to the ongoing raids conducted by Malaysian authorities against illegal immigrants, thousands of Chin refugees discretely sequestered inside deep jungles to hide from authority detection, 2007. *[Caption and photo: hmanthlak/CRC]*

17.5 Burmese Refugees in Malaysia

According to the 2007 *World Refugee Survey,* Malaysia hosted 58,800 refugees from Burma.[286] Of this number, approximately 27,000 were registered with the UNHCR.[287] Among the registered population, approximately 12,600 were Rohingyas from northern Rakhine State, while various other ethnic minorities accounted for roughly 11,300 of the remaining registered refugees.[288] Malaysia is not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol protecting the rights of refugees. The Malaysian government had no law or other mechanism for the registration or protection of refugees, and refugees were denied access to all public funds and services.[289] Refugee children from Burma continued to be denied access to Malaysian schools.

Most Burmese refugees reached Malaysia overland through Thailand, although some attempted to travel by boat directly from Burma.[290] Under the Malaysian Immigration Act, refugees are not permitted to rent or own property, hence they are compelled to live illegally, either in urban areas or in one of the hundreds of small, informal camps set up in the periphery of Malaysian society.[291] Large numbers of Burmese refugees worked illegally in restaurants, on construction sites, in rubber plantations and in factories. While Burmese workers filled an important gap in the Malaysian economy, which is often subject to labour shortages, they were not afforded job security, insurance, or protection against arrest and deportation.[292] (For more information, see Chapter 18: The situation of Migrant Workers). Throughout 2007 Burmese refugees, including women, children, and those holding official documentation from the UNHCR, were subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, and physical abuse at the hands of Malaysia's informal security patrols.

In early October 2007, thousands of Burmese nationals demonstrated in solidarity with the protests taking place within Burma. On 2 October 2007 nearly 2,000 Burmese in Kuala Lumpur, including Kayin, Karenni, Chin, Kachin, Mon, Shan and Arakan ethnicities, protested against the military regime in Burma.[293] The demonstrators moved from the Burmese embassy in Kuala Lumpur to the Chinese and Russian diplomatic missions, handing over protest notes calling on the junta to cease its crackdown on pro-democracy protesters.[294] On 4 October 2007, over 2,600 Burmese again protested in front of the Burmese, Chinese, and Russian embassies, calling for an end to the violence against monks, the release of detained students and political prisoners, and a move towards national reconciliation. Although the Malaysia authorities did not disrupt the protests, they allowed no more than 20 minutes for the demonstrations.[295]

Makeshift homes of Chin refugees in Malaysia. *[Photo: Chato Olivas-Gallo/CSW]*

Detention and Arrest of Burmese refugees in Malaysia

Throughout 2007, international organizations urged the Malaysian government to disband the *Ikatan Relawan Rakyat* (RELA). The organization, originally formed in 1972 to promote law and order, is used primarily to arrest illegal immigrants throughout Malaysia. Members of the group, who number nearly 500,000, have been granted license to search without warrant, carry firearms, and are essentially exempt from prosecution. In May 2007, Human Rights Watch condemned the Malaysian government's encouragement of the RELA, citing numerous reports that its members *"brutalize inhabitants, extort money, and confiscate cell phones, clothing, jewelry, and household goods, before handcuffing migrants and transporting them to detention camps for 'illegal immigrants.'"*[296]

The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) and SUARAM, a Malaysia-based human rights organization, also called repeatedly for the dissolution of the RELA. The groups criticized the RELA's practices, which include theft, extortion, destruction of property, and assault, as well as the Malaysian government's policy of providing 80 ringgit (US$ 25) for each undocumented migrant arrested.[297] In March 2007, the Malaysian Bar Association also called for the government to abolish the RELA and to provide refugees and migrants the equal protection afforded them under the Malaysian Federal Constitution.[298]

Throughout 2007, the Malaysian government increased its efforts to detain irregular immigrants, often through the RELA. Thus, refugees continued to live under the constant threat of arrest, abuse and deportation by Malaysan authorities and the RELA.[299] In late January 2007, Malaysian authorities arrested and detained approximately 45 Burmese nationals who were holding official UNHCR documentation. The UNHCR expressed concern that the arrest of documented refugees was becoming a trend, citing the detention of over 70 UNHCR card-holders during the month of January.[300] On 28 January 2007, it was reported that Malaysian authorities had arrested 176 Burmese refugees, many holding fabricated refugee cards, who had been living in an unofficial settlement on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.[301] By March 2007, over 2,000 Burmese had been arrested as part of the widespread crackdown. The increased number of arrests led to overcrowding in detention centers and an overall deterioration of conditions for the detained.[302]

The Malaysian government continued to detain Burmese women and children despite the country being a signatory to both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. According to the CHRO, Malaysian authorities kept children under one month of age in detention centres, as well as pregnant women.[303] Burmese women taking their infants to be registered with the local registration department were often arrested, and then detained with their children, for not having proper documentation.[304] On 9 November 2007, 8 women and 13 children of Chin ethnicity were arrested on their way to meet relatives in Kuala Lumpur. The refugees were hoping to be resettled to third countries along with their UNHCR-registered family. The CHRO condemned these arrests, as well as the Malaysian government's continuing detention of over 70 Chin women and children. The group called for the immediate release of all women and children held by Malaysian authorities, citing the arrests as further proof of *"Malaysia's consistent disregard for the rights and protections of Chin women and children living in Malaysia."*[305]

According to a member of the Chin Refugee Committee in Malaysia, authorities regularly confiscated UNHCR cards from officially documented refugees. The cards were rarely returned, even if the detainees were eventually released.[306] According to the Alliance of Chin Refugees, over 120 Burmese Chin were arrested in the first half of May 2007, including at least 30 UNHCR card-holders.[307] On 7 May 2007, 19 Mon refugees were arrested, including an executive from the Mon Refugee Organization.[308]

Between 25 and 27 June 2007 immigration officials and the RELA arrested over 200 Burmese refugees and asylum-seekers from Chin State, including UNHCR card-holders, two pregnant women, and 36 children. Malaysian authorities released 15 refugees who were accepted in resettlement programmes, but did not announce plans to release any of the remaining detainees, many of whom were attempting to procure UNHCR refugee cards at the time of their arrest.[309] The refugees were imprisoned at Semenyih detention centre in Kuala Lumpur, where they were allegedly kept without adequate food, clothing or accommodation, and subject to verbal and physical abuse by the guards.[310]

A Chin refugee bound for detention gazes out of the immigration truck after being arrested during an raid by RELA on 25 June 2007. *[Photo: Marcus Yam/AP]*

On 30 July 2007, approximately 60 Burmese refugees from Chin State were arrested by the RELA. The detainees included around 20 women and children and 25 UNHCR recognized refugees. These refugees lived in a neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur that had also been raided in June, resulting in the arrests of mostly women and young children. [311]

In the beginning of August, approximately 150 Burmese refugees were arrested as part of widespread crackdowns. All of the arrested refugees, who included pregnant women and children, were certified by the UNHCR.[312] On 8 August 2007, Malaysian authorities arrested 77 of the 97 Burmese Chin that had been living at an unofficial camp in the Cameron Highlands. The refugees had earlier been forcibly relocated to the Cameron Highlands camp after the government closed down their previous camp, located near Kuala Lumpur.[313] On 17 August 2007, 33 Mon, Chin, and ethnic Burmese asylum-seekers were arrested, including a woman who was eight months pregnant and reportedly in poor health.[314]

Malaysian Government Policy towards Refugees and Asylum Seekers

By its own admission, the government of Malaysia did not recognize refugees or asylum-seekers from Burma, or offer them assistance in any way. Undocumented refugees were subject to imprisonment and caning as part of official Malaysian policy. In February 2007, Malaysia's Minister for Home Affairs said his country was not a signatory to any agreement concerning refugees *"which means that we do not recognise UNHCR refugees."* The Minister went on to state that *"Even if the UNHCR says (most) are under their care, how can we let them all go? They (the Myanmar nationals) are still being detained and we are conducting our investigations."*[315] On 9 May 2007, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar cited economic reasons for his country's outright refusal to offer assistance to refugees, claiming that *"If we recognize refugees, we could open the floodgates and encourage them to come here just to escape economic hardship in their own country."*[316]

In 2004, the Malaysian government announced it would recognize Rohingyas as refugees and grant temporary stay permits. However, Rohingyas continued to be rounded up in large numbers during raids against illegal immigrants.[317] Undocumented Burmese were routinely brought to the Thai-Malaysian border for deportation to Thailand, leaving them vulnerable to traffickers and corrupt officials. Moreover, it was reported that some immigration officials sold deported refugees as workers to traffickers at the Thai-Malaysian border.[318]

The UNHCR and Refugee Status Determination

In 2007, the UNHCR was solely responsible for the administration of refugees in Malaysia. The organization continued to handle all refugee status determinations, including the issuance of plastic cards to all recognized refugees. Still, as noted above, the Malaysian government and the RELA incarcerated large numbers of card-holding refugees and reportedly confiscated UNHCR cards.

The UNHCR recognized Burmese Rohingyas as a group, and performed individual status determination for all other ethnicities. However, the UNHCR's limited presence in Malaysia created difficulties in the registration process, with most asylum-seekers required to travel to Kuala Lumpur for determinations. Although the UN refugee agency conducted mobile registration exercises in some areas with high refugee concentration outside of Kuala Lumpur, these were not sufficient to meet the needs of the refugee population.[319]

The UNHCR received no support from the Malaysian government, and the UN organization was frequently subject to criticism from Malaysian authorities. The Minister of Home Affairs stated in February 2007 that *"I have spoken to the Cabinet about UNHCR because they really get in our way… Malaysia, like other United Nations member countries, accepts UNHCR's presence but not their powers."*[320] However, in a turnaround from previous government policy, the Malaysian Home Minister in March 2007 called on the UNHCR to set up its own camps for refugees and begin resettling them to third countries.[321] In April 2007, in response to increased crackdowns on undocumented migrants, the UNHCR office in Kuala Lumpur called on the government of Malaysia to refrain from treating refugees and asylum-seekers as criminals.[322] However, the Malaysian government refuted the UNHCR's criticism and continued mass arrests of undocumented refugees throughout the year.

The UNHCR was also criticized by some Burmese ethnic groups for a perceived lack of equal treatment in the status determination process. On 8 March 2007, Burmese activists gathered outside a UN refugee office in Kuala Lumpur, calling for fair treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers. The activists accused the UNHCR of discrimination, human rights abuses, bribery and extortion. They expressed frustration at the lack of progress being made by the organization, and alleged that Chin refugees received preferential treatment in the recognition process.[323]

According to data collected by the Mon Refugee Organization (MRO), 5,683 Mon asylum-seekers had registered with the MRO as of April 2007. However, only 151 had been able to gain status determination interviews with the UNHCR, only 38 held UNHCR recognition cards, and only 11 had been able to resettle to third countries.[324] According to one MRO social worker, *"It is unfortunate that our plight is forgotten. We have no Mon interpreters and the UNHCR office favours other groups (Muslim and Christian) who have good connections with the officers here."*[325] The UNHCR office denied the charges, claiming the agency does not deal exclusively with any particular ethnic community.[326]

17.6 Burmese Refugees in Other Locations

Australia

Australia has accepted more refugees for resettlement in the past few years. From 2005 to the end of 2007, Australia received 2,154 Burmese refugees from camps in Thailand.[327] However, much of the news in 2007 concerned Australia's 'Pacific Solution' policy, under which migrants and refugees attempting to enter by boat are detained on outlying islands. Amnesty International Australia alleged that the policy severely restricts and in some cases prohibits asylum seekers from accessing basic needs and rights, including legal representation, education, translators, refugee advocates, adequate health care, the media, community groups, and Australian organizations.[328]

A group of eight Burmese, abandoned on Ashmore Reef by Indonesian traffickers in August 2006, were refused entry to Australia and detained on the island nation of Nauru. The refugees refused the Australian government's offer of a return to Malaysia, citing a fear of persecution by Malaysian authorities.[329] On 18 July 2007, the Australian government agreed for the first time to consider visa applications from the asylum seekers.[330] Then on 27 July 2007, in a ground-breaking decision, the government dropped its opposition to the Rohingyas' case, recognizing them as asylum seekers. [331]

However, the Australian government again drew fire for an April 2007 agreement with the United States to trade refugees housed at Guantanamo Bay for those held on Nauru. Human Rights Watch criticized both governments, saying that *"Refugees are human beings, not products that countries can broker and trade. The United States and Australia have signed a deal that bargains with lives and flouts international law."* Under the deal, which was announced on 18 April 2007, 90 Sri Lankan and Burmese refugees held on Nauru would be sent to the United States, and up to an additional 200 refugees could be sent each year. In return Australia agreed to take up to 200 Cuban and Haitian refugees held at the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.[332]

Canada

Between 2005 and December 2007, Canada received 2,132 Burmese refugees from camps in Thailand.[333] In 2006 Canada also began accepting groups of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. A group of 9 Rohingya refugees, who were part of the 23 originally accepted for resettlement in 2006, arrived in Canada in late April 2007.[334] On 13 November 2007, 20 more Rohingya men, women and children arrived in Canada for resettlement.[335] The fourth batch of 24 Rohingya refugees reached Canada on 24 November 2007, bringing to 66 the total number of Rohingya accepted by Canada. The newly arrived families were given training on Canadian culture by the International Organization of Migration (IOM).[336]

In 2006 the Canadian government resettled the first group of approximately 800 Karen refugees from camps in Thailand.[337] On 9 February 2007, the Canadian Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced plans to resettle an additional 2,000 Karen refugees over the next two years.[338] Canada also hosted a number of Burmese Mon, who founded the Mon Canadian Society (MCS) to assist the Mon community in Canada and provide humanitarian assistance to needy persons in Burma. The first Mon Association in Canada was founded in Toronto during Christmas of 1995, and followed by similar groups in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta as more Mon refugees arrived in Canada. The majority of the Mon resettled in Canada lived in Calgary, Alberta due to the province's booming economy. A Mon Buddhist Temple and Mon Women's Organization were also formed to administer community services.[339]

Japan

Japan admitted few refugees, and government policy was generally unfavourable towards refugees and asylum seekers. During 2006 Japan accepted only 34 foreigners as political refugees out of 954 applications, although more than 80 percent of those accepted were from Burma.[340] Typically, those seeking official recognition in Japan were refugees who illegally overstayed in an attempt to avoid the Japanese government's status determination process, until they were finally arrested. In support of detained refugees, local immigrant rights groups complained about overcrowding and inadequate access to healthcare at holding facilities. There were also serious concerns about the heavy-handedness of staff at the detention centres. In a UNHCR-commissioned report, Professor Meryll Dean of Britain's Oxford Brookes University, noted that the general lack of transparency in the appeals process extends to the selection of counsellors, who are appointed by the Ministry of Justice and therefore likely to be *"sympathetic to the bureaucracy and restrained in their criticism of the Ministry of Justice refugee determination procedure."*[341] However, in 2007 some gains were seen in the protection of certain political refugees, particularly through court rulings:

On 18 January 2007, a Japanese high court upheld a ruling striking down a deportation order against a Burmese Rohingya political refugee. The Nagoya High Court backed an earlier ruling against deportation that had been challenged by the state. The man, who was involved in the pro-democracy movement, fled to Japan on a fake passport in June 1992 fearing reprisals by the military regime in Burma.[342] The ruling was finalised on 2 February 2007, when the Justice Ministry decided not to file an appeal. However, the Japanese government did not initially grant refugee status or give assurances that he and his family would be allowed to remain in Japan permanently.[343] On 9 February 2007, the Nagoya Regional Immigration Bureau granted the refugee and his wife, a Philippine national, special permission to remain in Japan.[344] Moreover, on 1 September 2007, it was reported that the Tokyo District Court had revoked the deportation order of a 63 year-old Burmese woman. The court confirmed her refugee status, with the presiding judge noting that the woman was at high risk for political persecution by SPDC authorities on account of her pro-democracy activities.[345]

On 17 Oct 2007 eight Burmese nationals applied for refugee status in Japan, citing fear of persecution after the junta's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. The applicants included four men working and living in Kagoya illegally, as well as three trainees dispatched by Myanmar firms, while the last was in Japan on a tourist visa. The trainees were dispatched from a firm associated with the junta, but expressed fear of persecution on their return as a result of their participation in pro-democracy demonstrations. According to a Japanese official, *"Because they are new applicants for refugee status — not family members of refugee-status holders — it will probably take a certain period of time for us to complete the investigation… Months or a year, I don't know, it depends on each case."*[346]

One Burmese national, a former resident of Nagoya, arrested in March 2006 and currently awaiting a decision at the West Japan Immigration Detention Centre, estimated that 200 to 300 Burmese lived in and around Nagoya's Aichi Prefecture, most of them illegally. [347]

The United Kingdom

Smaller numbers of Burmese refugees reside in the UK, which has accepted 136 Burmese refugees over the past three years.[348] In September 2007, it was announced that Ireland would accept 50 Burmese refugees for resettlement from camps in Thailand. The group was to arrive in Co Mayo, Ireland, in mid-November 2007, where they would initially be housed in an orientation centre and given training to prepare them for permanent resettlement in Castlebar, Co Mayo.[349]

In November 2007, a Burmese political refugee facing deportation was granted asylum by the British Prime Minister after three previous appeals were rejected. The refugee, who lives with his family in Wakefield, West Yorks, and works as a volunteer for the Refugee Council in Leeds, responded *"I felt a lot of relief, after two years of waiting. But at the same time I felt very sad. There are still so many people in my country who fear for their lives. What about their human rights? I really thank Gordon Brown for giving me humanitarian protection, but I wish he could do more for them."*[350]

The United States

The United States resettles more Burmese refugees than any other country, and does not apply selection criteria based on level of education, professional training, or 'integration potential.'[351] From the time of its 2005 announcement of an open-ended offer to accept Burmese refugees, to December 2007, the U.S. had reportedly accepted a total of 11,737 Burmese refugees from camps in Thailand.[352] During the first three months of 2007, the U.S. resettled 2,681 refugees from Thailand, the vast majority of them Burmese nationals. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was reportedly poised to resettle over 10,000 Burmese refugees from Mae La camp in the three months from June to September.[353]

On 28 April 2006, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that it would waive the restrictions under the Patriot Act that barred entry to foreign nationals who had provided 'material support' to armed resistance groups. This policy shift removed a major barrier to the resettlement of Burmese refugees, and since the waiver thousands of Burmese were accepted to the U.S. On 23 May 2007, the first group of 31 Karen refugees to be resettled from Mae La camp left for the U.S.[354] However, not all Burmese refugees are eligible for resettlement in the United States. Restrictions still apply to KNU combatants who have received military training, despite the U.S. Department of State's characterization of the KNU as *"the de facto civilian government of the Karen people in the areas it controlled, resisting the repression of and seeking autonomy from the Burmese regime."*[355]

In May 2007, it was reported that the U.S. government signed a waiver to exempt Chin refugees from India, Thailand and Malaysia from the provisions of the Patriot Act that had restricted resettlement in the U.S. The move was expected to increase the number of Chin refugees moving to the U.S., which already hosts over 1,000 Chin refugees.[356] The U.S. had previously exempted members of several ethnic resistance groups in Burma, including the Karen National Union and its military arm the Karen National Liberation Army; the Chin National Front and the armed group the Chin National Army; the Chin National League for Democracy; Kayan New Land Party; Arakan Liberation Party; and the Narenni National Progressive Party. [357]

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BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007

CHAPTER 18

THE SITUATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

"Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return tohis country."

- Article 13 (2), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

18.1 Introduction

> *"The tragedy of the situation of migrant workers from Burma is that many leave Burma to escape human rights abuses only to experience the denial of basic human rights and human dignity all over again. We dream that things will be better here so we come but we didn't know that here we will face other types of problems and have little more value than a dog in another person's country."*
>
> - Ma Nam Mo Kham (37) construction worker[1]

Migration is usually a response to a combination of push and pull factors. In Burma the push factors have been economic deterioration and human rights abuses, while the pull factors have centred around the strong economies of neighbouring countries and their demands for labour. A significant proportion of Burma's middle class continues to be attracted by the higher salaries and better standard of living on offer in countries like Singapore. However, for the large part of Burma's population already living in poverty, the push factor becomes stronger every year and many now see migration as a question of survival.[2]

The level and extent of migration in Burma has now reached a point where it has become partially self-perpetuating. In a report for the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC), Andrew Bosson, explains the cycle of cause and effect behind displacement in Burma. In rural areas of Burma, people survive largely on subsistence agriculture. The initial push factors of forced labour, extortion, agricultural restrictions, land confiscation, economic sabotage and ongoing violence are often exacerbated by a reduction in numbers of farmers, which pushes more people to leave and reduces the numbers yet again. When SPDC forces or ethnic militias make demands on villages for food, money or labour the villagers have little choice and the fewer there are to share the burden the heavier it is. If a large number of people have been taken to work as porters, for example, and not enough are left to tend the farms, then the village faces starvation. The poorest often have little choice but to leave.[3] (For more information, see Chapter 1: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription and Chapter 6: Deprivation of Livelihood).

For this group migration is about finding whatever work is available. This generally means taking jobs in what is described as the "3D" category i.e. dirty, demeaning and dangerous. It also means working in sectors where national laws are ignored and international standards are considered irrelevant. Legal registration is often both difficult and expensive. It is also of limited benefit given the number of employers who confiscate their employees' documents. Many migrants therefore live in a state of legal limbo and the constant fear of arrest and deportation. On top of all this, they also have to deal with largely negative attitudes from their host countries where migrant workers are often the scapegoat for myriad social problems.

> *"Never did I imagine that one day, my identity and my homeland would be held against me. Belonging to a country or one's nationality is supposed to be a source of pride but here I am so scared that people here will discover it … I keep to myself, I have no personal life outside the factory and no local friends. I just stay in the factory most of the time and it does get very lonely. But then I go out and it's even lonelier because the locals hate us and the danger of being arrested is so great. When I do go out I must pretend that I am mute so that they won't know who I am and where I come from."*
>
> - Ma Myo Myo (29) factory worker[4]

Not content with causing the situation that pushes so many Burmese people into leaving, the junta finds ways to take advantage of them even after they have left. In recent years, the regime has attempted to collect tax from an increasingly wide range of activities. One

initiative has involved forcing families to register the number of family members working abroad so that these people can also be taxed. In Mon State it has been reported that there is a fee for registering migrant workers from the family, set at 200 kyat per family. Mon migrant workers returning from Thailand have also reported being taxed at the military check-points and face jail if they refuse to pay. The amounts charged are completely arbitrary and are additional to a 700 baht fee charged by the Burmese Immigration Department at the point of re-entry into Burma. In Pangone Village there were reports that the local police were imposing a tax of 10,000 kyat on all returning migrant workers, regardless of how much, if any, money they had been able to send or bring back with them from Thailand.[5]

It is unlikely that the situation facing migrant workers will improve without drastic changes within Burma itself. At present the level of migration actually looks set to increase as plans to dam the Salween river threaten economic and environmental consequences for some half a million people living downstream of the proposed site. The Salween is South East Asia's longest free flowing river and one of the most important waterways in Burma. If the dam is built, the work is likely to alter river flows, resulting in higher concentrations of salt water travelling further inland. The changes in water quality and salinity will affect both drinking water supplies and the growth of agricultural crops. [6] *In the Balance*, a report from the Mon Youth Progressive Organisation, describes the further consequences that damming could have:

> *"Sudden and unnatural water surges increase erosion, destroy islands, and make the river dangerous to local communities. In addition, the decreased amount of sediment reaching downstream damages agriculture. A decline in fish catches due to interrupted migrations will impact the protein source of the local diet. Any one of these changes to the river would tip the balance fine-tuned over generations between self-reliant communities and their environment. Lastly, the proposed dams like on active earthquake fault lines; dam breaks would be a disaster."* [7]

The project is a joint initiative involving the Thai and Chinese governments as well as the junta. Supporters say it will bring huge economic benefits and provide a reliable, and much needed, source of electricity. However, the communities facing potential destruction once the work begins will have little choice but to leave and join the steady stream of migrant workers leaving Burma.

18.2 Situation of Burmese Migrants in Thailand

Thailand lies to the south-east of Burma, bordering Shan State, Karenni State and Karen State. There is also a thin strip of Burmese territory which runs north to south along the coast of the Andaman Sea, almost the full length of Thailand's western border. The northern part of this strip is comprised of Mon State on the western, coastal side and Karen State on the eastern side. Mon State extends slightly further south than Karen State and borders Thailand briefly. Below Mon State, Tenasserim Division extends to the south, separating half of Thailand's southern strip from the Andaman Sea.

This means that the border between Burma and Thailand is a long meandering territory encompassing many different States, Divisions and Provinces. In his recently published book, *Frontier Mosaic*, author Richard Humphries refers to this border territory as the *"land in between"*, somewhere that is neither Burma nor Thailand. He describes it as a *"volatile sanctuary for the homeless and impoverished"*, a place where *"hopes and dreams are often dashed"*.[8]

The total number of migrant workers in Thailand is estimated at close to two million. Of this number, 80 percent are estimated to be from Burma, of which the vast majority is illegal. Despite a concerted effort to register migrant workers in 2004, re-registration numbers have dropped annually in the subsequent years; from the initial total of 1,284,920 to just 532,305 in 2007. Of this last number, 485,925 were from Burma. The main obstacles to registration are costs and bureaucracy. Moreover, the common practice of employers retaining their employees' registration documents leaves a significant number of those who do register in legal limbo. Consequently, some workers simply do not see the point of registration. The complexities of changing jobs also leave many workers with the stark choice of remaining legally employed in abusive conditions or quitting their job to become illegal immigrants and running the risk of arrest and deportation.[9]

Burmese migrant workers typically take the lowest paying and most dangerous jobs in Thailand. *[Pphoto: The Irrawaddy]*

In recent years, questions have been raised over whether factories located on the border which employ Burmese migrants are actually assisting the junta in providing a route around the sanctions. U.S. and European sanctions currently prevent most Western companies from doing business in Burma but many get around this barrier by locating their factories along the border where they are technically in Thailand but able to take advantage of cheap Burmese labour. Much of the money earned then flows back into Burma as the main goal of most migrant workers is to support their families back home. [10]

Labour activists have denounced the systematic exploitation of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, and have even had some success. In May 2007 a Thai labour tribunal awarded the equivalent of US$ 36,000 to 134 unregistered workers who had been fired when they complained about their low wages. Unfortunately, not all attempts to improve conditions are that successful. In 2003 the Burma Labour Solidarity Organisation (BLSO), supported by a Norwegian NGO, built a case against a Mae Sot factory producing goods bearing the Tommy Hilfiger brand. In response, the U.S. company washed their hands of the factory, claiming it was either unauthorized or producing counterfeit goods. The factory subsequently closed and all 800 workers lost their jobs.[11]

Most campaign groups are now careful not to encourage action which would lead to the closure of factories. Closures help no-one as they leave hundreds of Burmese workers unemployed while the exploitation simply moves elsewhere. Meanwhile, economic sanctions pose their own conundrum as the well intentioned refusal to put money in the hands of the regime contributes to the economic deterioration that pushes so many Burmese workers over the border into the arms of foreign companies which are all too willing to take advantage of their desperation.[12]

Patterns of Migration and Trafficking

Official SPDC figures published in February 2007 suggested that there were 300,000 Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, of whom only 80,000 held official labour permits. Sources in Thailand, however, believe the number of migrant workers is closer to one million. *The New Light of Myanmar*, the SPDC-run newspaper which published the story, placed the blame for the high number of illegal workers on human traffickers. The same traffickers were also blamed for the mistreatment that many Burmese workers are subjected to in their host countries.

The junta claims it has played its part in solving the problem by commissioning 70 agencies to find legal jobs for Burmese people abroad and by agreeing to issue *"temporary passports for Burmese workers, who in the past worked illegally in Thailand, so that they will become legal guest workers"*. This last statement was made on 6 November 2006.

Legal foreign travel requires three documents: a passport from the Ministry of Home Affairs, a revenue clearance from the Ministry of Finance and Revenue and departure form from the Ministry of Immigration and Population. For some, such as the Rohingya, this is physically impossible as the junta does not recognise them as Burmese citizens. For others, the documentation is financially impossible. The bribes necessary to move an application through the multiple layers of bureaucracy can be as high as 300,000 kyat, which is equivalent to the average annual salary.[13] (For more information see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

Although a lack of national identity papers is one of the reasons why so many migrant workers are illegal, the junta-run newspaper failed to mention any of the reasons why so many Burmese feel compelled to seek work abroad despite their illegal status.[14] In addition

to the economic deterioration and human rights abuses which drive people out of the country, there are claims that both military and civil officials in Burma are directly involved in trafficking and selling people into forced labour.[15] There are also restrictions on emigration which target specific ethnic groups and women more generally.

Young women in Burma are traditionally viewed as providers for their families, and many feel an obligation to support their parents and younger siblings in any way they can. Migration is therefore encouraged although some young women feel pressured. One girl interviewed for a report written by the Burmese Women's Union (BWU) was told by her parents that they could no longer afford her education and that it would not help her to get a job anyway. They strongly suggested she went to Thailand in search of work. She told the interviewer she was very upset at the time but that it was unfortunately true that getting a decent job in Burma depended more upon connections with the SPDC than education or merit.

The restrictions on the travel of ethnic minorities are most stringent on the Rohingya from Arakan State. Consequently many of them access third countries by sea via Bangladesh as this is perceived as less risky than travelling across Burma by land which would entail passing through numerous SPDC checkpoints. Unfortunately, few seem to realise that the risk of arrest for those who travel by sea is almost as high. Following the arrest of 92 Rohingya in Thailand on 2 February 2007, Annawa of the Rohingya Human Rights Association in Thailand was quoted as saying, *"Maybe people do not know about the fate of previous groups who came here. Otherwise, they would not have come. If possible, I want to tell Rohingya inside the country not to come out here."*[16] (For more information, see Chapter 10: Freedom of Assembly, Association and Movement).

In June 2007 the U.S. Department of State released a report criticising Burma's failure to combat human trafficking. The report placed Burma in Tier 3, the worst category, saying the country had neither complied with minimum standards nor made significant efforts to do so. The Burmese junta claims the report is *"politically motivated, unfair and biased"*. Burma adopted a National Plan of Action in 1997 and passed an anti-human trafficking law in September 2005 which provides for victims of trafficking to be protected and aided as well as setting a maximum penalty of death for traffickers. Col Sit Aye, head of the department of transnational crime, issued a statement expressing his disappointment that the U.S. had deliberately turned a blind eye to Burma's achievements and determination in the fight against human trafficking. He went on to say the report belittled the country's efforts and undermined the activities of agencies working in Burma to tackle the problem. Sit Aye also claimed that in the period of September 2005 to April 2007, 270 people had been arrested and prosecuted for involvement in human trafficking and that 428 victims had been rescued.[17]

However, the report itself asserts that Burma's anti-trafficking legislation is weakened by the lack of an independent judiciary and the junta's failure to take any action against officials who are complicit in trafficking. It is also unclear whether the numbers provided by the junta actually refer to trafficking statistics or whether they also include incidences of people smuggling. Police who have undergone anti-trafficking training provide separate statistics for trafficking and smuggling but other officials are known to combine the two and data previously provided by the junta was found to be based on combined figures.[18]

According to Thai military sources, two of the most popular routes into Thailand for migrants from Burma are the Huey Pheung Checkpoint in Mae Hong Son Province and the Nong Ook village in the Chiangdao District of Chiang Mai Province.[19] Many of the illegal migrant workers in Thailand do in fact opt to enter the country legally with a one day pass and then simply stay on to find work. The migrants become illegal once their pass expires.[20] When crossing the border migrants are at risk of arrest, as the authorities from both countries maintain regular border patrols. On 21 April 2007, a group of 30 migrants were arrested

while attempting to trek around the Sangkalia gate near the town of Sangkhalaburi in Kanchanburi Province.[21]

In April 2007 it was also reported that a new military check point had been set up at Three Pagoda Pass. Although the purpose of the checkpoint is to prevent illegal border crossings, local villagers claim the soldiers have struck a deal with the traffickers and the going rate for migrants is 100 baht per person. The soldiers are also using the checkpoint to tax local villagers for any goods they carry across the gate.[22]

In the same month, a group of 18 migrant workers were caught by Thai police when the vehicle they were travelling in hit an electric pole. They were imprisoned for one week in Takuapa, southern Thailand, and then returned to Burma. The group was comprised of 13 women, three men and two children, all of whom were from Karen State. They had made arrangements with touts in Chaungzon Township, Mon State, and their vehicle was reportedly driven by a Thai policeman. This, however, did not prevent the Thai police from attempting to stop the vehicle or from firing their guns to frighten the driver when he failed to stop. It was the gunfire which caused the driver to hit the electric pole. One woman jumped from the vehicle as it hit the pole and later died. Three others were injured and then treated at Takuapa hospital before being imprisoned. Local sources say such incidents are usually avoided by touts bribing the local police.[23]

Crossing the border can prove extremely expensive. Residents of villages around Three Pagoda Pass say around 2000 migrant workers crossed the border following the water festival in spring 2007, and most of them had paid bribes to the police, immigration officers, cease-fire groups and the military as well as paying fees to the touts.[24] Although the Ministry of Home Affairs maintains that there are no instances of complicity in trafficking, NGOs have reported widespread corruption among officials in local and regional offices. The majority of cases are limited to officials turning a blind eye to proceedings but there are reports of individual police officers being more actively involved.[25]

Nonetheless, May 2007 saw an increase in the number of migrant workers crossing into Thailand, despite heavy rains and tightened border controls. Approximately 2000 arrived at the Chaungzon check point at Three Pagoda Pass between 18 April and 6 May 2007. Shortly afterwards, during 8 and 9 May, around 800 migrant workers were arrested by the Thai army, police and immigration officials in Mae Sot. Later in the month a further 160 were arrested in Sangkhlaburi.[26] A headman from one of the border villages near Three Pagodas Pass told reporters that two hundred people had been arrested in the space of a week. [27]

Lt Col Hla Min, military commander in Three Pagodas Pass, has earned the nickname Bo Mike Khae (meaning devil) because of his control over corruption practices in the area. He is even reported to have extorted 7000 kyat from one migrant worker seeking passage into Thailand. The border closure in place at the time was extended because it generated income from goods traders. Although there is some disapproval within the military, there is also widespread competition for a share in the money to be made at Three Pagodas Pass. Lt Col Hla Min's commanding officer is Major Gen Myint Aung who allegedly maintains his own position by paying 60m kyat to Senior Gen Than Shwe.[28]

In addition to the expense and the risk of arrest, there are various physical hazards associated with trying to cross the border unofficially. Many migrants have reported travelling through the jungle at night or in the booths of cars and numerous accidents have occurred when drivers transporting illegal migrants have used unsafe routes or crashed while trying to escape police. Women are also vulnerable to sexual abuse. On 5 November 2007, it was reported that three women from Burma had been repeatedly raped while trying to secure passage into Thailand to find work. Together with another six people, they had paid 9000 baht to a broker who promised to take them to Bangkok. The broker took them as

far as Kam Paeng gate, near Mae Sot, where he raped the three women and then left them in the hands of a Thai businessman who also tried to rape them. On this occasion they managed to escape but did so by making their way into the jungle where they claimed they were raped again by a group of Thai robbers.[29]

Burmese migrant workers without proper documentation are frequently arrested and deported by Thai authorities. *[Photo: Reuters]*

Migrant labour in Thailand includes workers who cross the border daily in order to go to work and return home to Burma in the evening. Top Form Brassiere (Mae Sot) Co., which is part of Hong Kong based company Top Form International Ltd, is located on the bank of the Moei River. The scores of women who cross the river to get there everyday are part of this group of day migrants. The majority of them live in the Burmese border town of Myawaddy, which is right across the river.[30]

On 2 June 2007, Thai authorities at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border crossing starting taking finger prints and photographs as part of a more rigorous checking system. The move was ostensibly made in order to help the authorities trace any Burmese people who commit crimes whilst in Thailand. The border bridge is one of the main entry points for businessmen and traders from both countries as well as for labourers in search of a daily wage. It is reportedly crossed by over 2,000 Burmese every day.[31]

The Mae Sot market, on the Thai side of the national border, has long attracted Burmese traders who are able to make a significantly higher profit than they can at their local markets. This profit does not come without risk, though. Vendors require a temporary border pass, which costs them 1,000 kyat, and also have to pay 500 kyat for each bag of goods they hope to sell. None of this, however, legally entitles them to sell goods at the market. Instead, they must apply for permission from the market authorities and also pay tax on goods sold. Vendors caught selling goods without permission are often arrested and their goods confiscated by the authorities. Nevertheless, many vendors take the risk as they are unable to afford the market fees after paying the border fees.

Many of the vendors are school age children whose families cannot afford to keep them in school. Moe Moe (10) is one of many who travels to Mae Sot daily. Her day begins at 4:00 am with a trip to the local Myawaddy market where she and her mother buy produce. She then walks to the border crossing, which she usually reaches around 6:00 am. From there she takes a bus to the market. She and her fellow vendors are always on the lookout for market authorities and sometimes have to run away to avoid arrest. However, Moe Moe believes it is worth the risk because she can make up to 4,000 kyat a day in profit.[32]

Thai Migration Policy and Legal Registration of Migrant Workers

In 2003 Thailand and Burma signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Employment Cooperation which formalised joint efforts to verify the nationality of illegal immigrants and get them registered as legal migrant workers. Thailand has a similar agreement with Cambodia and Laos. Vasant Sathorn, director of the Labour Ministry's Bureau of Illegal Migrant Worker Management, said that Cambodia and Laos had been very cooperative and that the registration of illegal migrants from these two countries should be completed by June 2008. Burma, however, has not cooperated and all efforts came to a halt in September 2006. The problems lie in disagreement on how to register the migrant workers. The Thai government has requested that SPDC sends officials to Thailand in order to carry out the verification process. However, the junta has insisted that all migrants must return to Burma in order to have their nationality assessed.[33] For migrants however, many of whom have left Burma illegally, being registered by SPDC officials can in itself be a risky affair.

Representatives of various NGOs voiced concerns over the nationality verification process. Satien Thanprom, of The Prevention of HIV/AIDS among Migrant Workers in Thailand Project, claimed that migrants who were required to return to Burma to obtain documentation might face difficulties and that their safety could not be guaranteed.[34] The Thai government made arrangements to discuss the matter further with the junta but as yet no outcome has been reported.

Early in the year there were fears that a recent surge in the number of asylum seekers from Burma and North Korea would prompt the Thai government to adopt a harder stance towards migrant workers. Officials at the National Security Council were reportedly alarmed by the recent influx of Rohingya from Arakan State and asylum seekers from North Korea. There was a risk the situation would put an end to, or at best delay, proposals for job creation around refugee camps and policy changes allowing refugees to work outside of their camps. There are, however, still plans for the justice ministry to launch a legal handbook for refugees which explains the Thai legal system.[35]

Despite these efforts, opinion on Thailand's policy towards migrant workers is not entirely positive. Thai policy towards migrant workers has been inconsistent over the years and there is no clear or comprehensive strategy.[36] According to feedback from an ILO seminar on the rights of migrant workers in South East Asia, Thailand *"is taking steps to reform migrant worker laws and regulations but still falls short"*. The seminar was a follow-up to the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers which was signed by ASEAN nations in January 2007. The declaration calls on member countries to improve migrant worker rights and welfare and to make efforts to combat human smuggling and trafficking.[37]

One of the specific issues that has been criticised is the fact that since 2005 migrant workers from Burma have not been allowed to bring their families or dependents into Thailand with them. Pranom Somwong of the Chiang Mai based Migrant Assistant Programme (MAP) says the decree is impractical and ignores the fact that many migrant workers have left Burma because of violence or starvation.[38]

Another contentious issue is the restrictive law which has been in force in a number of Thai provinces since December 2006. Commonly known as 'martial law', the legislation prohibits migrant workers from gathering in groups of more than five, using mobile phones, riding motorcycles or going outside after 8:00 pm. The law has been implemented in the southern provinces of Phuket, Ranaung and Suratthani as well as the eastern province of Rayong. There are reportedly plans to implement it in the northern province of Chiang Mai and

consideration is also being given to Chumpon Province. Some are concerned that the law will eventually be applied across the country.

According to Action Network for Migrants – Thailand, the decree will make it very difficult for migrants to access education and healthcare, as well as having an impact on cultural activities and religious observance. The law also encourages negative attitudes towards migrants and reinforces negative stereotypes. The official reasoning behind the law is that it protects national security and helps prevent drug trafficking. There are indeed problems with drug trafficking in northern Thailand and civil unrest linked to Muslim separatists in southern Thailand but no data has been presented which links migrant workers to either of these problems.[39]

A lot of opposition to this law was mobilised to in 2007 among activists, both by Burmese migrant organisation and Thai human rights activists. On 30 April 2007, it was reported that a combination of labour rights groups had planned a joint demonstration against the new law and that they had sent letters to the ILO, the Human Rights Commission of Thailand and the Thai Lawyer Council requesting their support.[40] On May Day Burmese migrant workers gathered with the Workers' Union of Thailand and many Thai workers to protest against the restrictions.[41] On 11 May 2007, NGOs and Burmese migrants held an emergency meeting in Chiang Mai district to discuss the proposed introduction of the law. A press conference was held after the meeting and Pranom Somwong of MAP spoke against the law, saying it was not appropriate in a democratic country. The group subsequently submitted letters to the Chiang Mai district governor.[42] A group of Thai students from Mahidol University in Bangkok also set up an online petition which was submitted to the National Legislative Assembly at the end of August.[43]

A further petition was organised by a group comprised of both Thai and international labour and human rights activists. Suthhida Malikaew, one of the group's coordinators, said that copies of a petition had been delivered to the prime minister and to the ILO office in Bangkok. A statement was released by the Hong Kong based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) supporting the group's efforts and condemning the law as *"an affront to basic human dignity and a flagrant breach of Thailand's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination."*[44]

Concerns that the law will reinforce negative stereotypes are rooted in the often expressed belief that immigrants are to blame for a wide variety of social problems. It is likely that this situation is fuelled by the way that news about immigrants is reported. NGOs have described it as misleading and divisive. According to Adisorn Kerdmongkol, advocacy and research officer at the International Rescue Committee - Thailand, Thai media tends to focus on national security and ignored issues such as human rights or the importance of migrant labour to the Thai economy. Media reporting obviously influences social attitudes, and if migrant workers are routinely portrayed in a negative light then it is not surprising that social attitudes towards them will tend to be negative.

Sompong Sakaew, of the Labour Rights Promotion Network in Samut Sakhon, also voiced criticism of the Thai press, saying that negative reporting was leading to an increasingly restrictive policy towards migrant workers and more frequent immigration raids. His warning came as Thailand's Deputy Minister of National Security, Gen Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, who is also chairman of Thailand's National Foreign Workers Administrative Committee, publicly claimed that illegal migrant workers were a social problem and presented a threat that needed to be addressed.[45]

Sakaew's fears were realised when the Samut Sakhon shrimp market was raided early on the morning of 31 October 2007, resulting in the arrest of over 1,000 migrant workers, most of whom were ethnic Mon from Burma. It was reported that around 700 police were

deployed and that raids also took place on various places within a five kilometre radius of the market, including nearby communities, seafood processing companies and a workers' encampment. Police Major-General Suchart Muenkaew confirmed the raid had been prompted by a report in a local newspaper about an influx of migrant workers into the area.[46]

In November 2007, Gen Boonyaratkalin caused further anxiety by arguing that tighter security measures were needed to stop migrant women from giving birth in Thailand and ensure that they were sent back to their home country if they fell pregnant. This proposal, which does not sit comfortably with the Thai prohibition on dismissing pregnant women from work, was also prompted by media reports which claimed that 2,000 babies were being born to migrant workers every month. According to Sakaew, this was another example of facts being distorted by sensationalist reporting and the number of possible births was a maximum of 350.[47]

The governor of Samut Sakhon Province later in the year suggested further restrictions on migrant workers. Governor Veerayuth Leam-ampar released a statement on 26 October 2007 banning irrigation workers from celebrating their traditional cultural festivals. Moreover, the governor made negative and ungrounded comments about Burmese migrant workers, claiming that they *"create health problems, stateless children, commit sinful crimes and violations of laws."* He claimed that allowing migrants to observe traditional cultural celebrations could affect the peace of the country, and was quoted as saying that cultural performances by migrants *"should not be supported because it will make the community feel that these people are the owners of the community and could create security problems"*.[48]

The governor was strongly criticised in a number of open letters published in the wake of his statement. Over 70 percent of the Burmese migrants in the province are believed to be Mon and a significant proportion of the province's native Thai population is also of Mon ethnicity. The governor's efforts to suppress the Mon culture were therefore not well received.[49]

Earlier in the year there was a more official tightening of the rules regarding migrants. The deadline for migrant worker registration in 2007 was 1 July and surveillance and immigration raids on worksites increased in the period after the deadline passed. Reports put the number of registrations at 500,000 which was a decrease of 200,000 from the 2006 figures. The estimated total number of migrant workers in Thailand, however, is between one and two million.[50]

Moe Swe, secretary-general of the Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association, has suggested that the conditions for migrant workers would be improved if Thai authorities allowed them to register on their own behalf, instead of through their employers. He claimed this would prevent employers and factory owners from using their employees' work permits to effectively hold them hostage or keeping them in a state of vulnerability by refusing to obtain permits for them. [51]

According to Thai policy, employers who hire illegal migrants can be fined 30,000 baht per worker. As a result migrant workers are at risk of losing their jobs. In July, over 200 migrant workers at Pathumthani Bakery in Bangkok were dismissed because their employer was worried about being fined. The bakery owner had previously paid the police 500 baht per worker each month but the police were no longer accepting this.[52]

Moreover, registered migrants often face problems caused by employers retaining their work permits. On 31 October 2007, it was reported that 1200 migrant workers had been rounded up and arrested in the Gulf of Thailand. Many of them were legally registered but did not have the original documents in their possession and the police were not willing to accept

photocopies. The police released those whose employers were willing to stand guarantee for them, while the rest were scheduled to be deported within three days. [53]

However, all the arrests and immigration raids during 2007 took place in the context of Thailand's overwhelming need for migrant labour. In January 2007, the Thai Labour Minister, Apai Chanthanajulaka, acknowledged the country's labour shortage and stated that another 10,000 migrant workers from Burma were needed.[54] Migrant workers arriving through official channels would be accepted in groups of between 100 and 200. [55] Moreover, in October 2007 the Department of Employment announced that Thailand needed 400,000 more migrant workers to alleviate the country's labour shortage. The department planned to create a Migrant Worker Administration Committee which would be tasked with reopening registration for illegal migrants and finding ways to attract more legal migrant workers. The industries in particular need were agriculture, farming, fishing and seafood processing.[56]

Working Conditions and Labour Law

An ILO report published in May under the title, *"Equality at work: Tackling the challenges"*, criticised the lack of progress that South Asian countries had made in combating discrimination. The report highlighted the emergence of new forms of discrimination regarding age, disability, sexual orientation and people living with HIV/AIDS. Traditional forms of discrimination, particularly gender based, remained problematic and it was noted that South Asia was one of the worst areas in the Asia Pacific region for women. The report also commented on the growing discrimination against migrant workers which was manifested in racial discrimination and intolerance as well as exploitative working conditions.[57]

According to the Thai government, Mae Sot is an "export processing zone". More critical observers have described the town as effectively one large sweatshop or labour camp. Conditions in the factories are harsh and Thai labour law is routinely flouted. On average, migrants work twelve hour days, get one day off a month and are paid approximately half the minimum wage. Many of the factories are owned by Chinese or Taiwanese businesses and the clothes are exported mainly to the United States and Japan. The workers often do not know which brand they are making clothes for. However, as a result of labour activists putting pressure on the brands directly, many factories now send their clothes elsewhere to have the labels attached in order to disguise the link with the brand.

Aumnat Nanthahan, chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries in Mae Sot, claimed that the wages only appear low because employers make legitimate deductions to cover the food and accommodation they provide for their workers. However, according to workers themselves, the accommodation is often in cramped dormitory conditions and the food sometimes so poor it is inedible. Workers who complain risk having their work permits confiscated, leaving them effectively without bargaining power. Despite these conditions, the majority of migrant workers attest they are better off in Thailand than they were in Burma.[58]

Unfortunately many employers are aware of this, and it serves to fuel the levels of exploitation to which Burmese migrant workers are subjected. The numerous media reports on the conditions facing migrant workers build a depressing picture of working life in Thailand. The working week is often seven days long with the days themselves regularly 12 hours or more. Overtime is often paid at a lower rate than standard hours or not paid at all. Wages are paid at well below the minimum rate and subject to a number of deductions. These deductions can include the cost of registration, fees paid to traffickers, or bribes paid to keep the police and immigration authorities at bay. Employers who do obtain work

permits for their employees tend to keep the documentation in order to prevent the employees from leaving.

The total cost of legal registration, including administrative fees, work permit fees, health check-ups and insurance, comes to 3,800 baht. Considering that some migrant workers are paid as little as 50 baht a day, the registration fees represent an extremely high sum for them to pay. There are also administrative barriers to workers registering themselves so it is common practice for employers to carry out the registration and deduct the fee from the employees' salary in instalments.[59]

Officially, the Thai Labour Protection Act of 1998 provides for a standard working day of eight hours, one day off in every seven days worked, paid annual leave after one year of service, paid sick leave, restrictions on hazardous work for females, maternity leave, employee grievance procedures in establishments with more than ten workers and severance pay in cases of termination. The Act prohibits forced or unpaid overtime, forced work on public holidays and dismissing female employees because of pregnancy. There is also a national minimum wage. Thai policy clearly states that, so long as they are legally registered, the Labour Protection Act, and all other relevant law, applies equally to migrant workers as to Thai citizens.[60]

However, enforcement is lax, partly because the Ministry of Labour is under-resourced. Another factor is the proliferation of small enterprises which are run from domestic premises or otherwise hidden. There are also language barriers to investigative work, given that few Ministry staff speak Burmese and migrant workers generally speak little Thai. Consequently, employers are free to flout the law with impunity in most cases.[61]

In December 2007 the specific plight of Burmese migrant women in Thailand was highlighted in a Burma Women's Union (BWU) report *Caught Between Two Hells*, based on interviews with 149 Burmese migrant women living and working in Thailand and China. The report stated that many women had left Burma in order to escape abuse and violence and that some had been raped by Burmese soldiers. But instead of finding protection in Thailand, some had been raped by brokers and officials while many faced sexual abuse in their work places, particularly those working as maids.[62] The report found that female migrant workers routinely faced sexual harassment from their male colleagues as well as from their employers and the various officials they encountered. This ranged from verbal harassment to physical abuse and rape. Women workers were found to be doubly marginalised by the combined factors of their gender and their legal status. They generally found themselves with very limited work opportunities and obliged to take work in the 3D category. Women are also paid less than men and in the construction industry their wages are regularly half those of their male colleagues.[63]

The vulnerability of women migrant workers was further documented in independent reports throughout the year. On 8 August 2007 a Burmese woman was killed in Mahachai, an area of Samut Sakhon Province. Hay Mar Oo worked night shifts at a local fish factory and was asleep in her room when the attack took place. It was suspected that the attacker first attempted to rape her and killed her when she fought back. Myo Htut, the victim's husband, said she had been stabbed around 18 times with a pair of scissors. Another migrant worker in the same area said that violence against migrant workers was common. The Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB) has raised the issue on violence against migrant workers. They said workers in the fishing industry had been targeted by extortion gangs in June 2006 and at least 20 people had been hospitalised as a result of the attacks.[64]

If employers complain about working conditions or stage a strike, employers often turn to the police to have the workers arrested. In November 2007 over 100 illegal migrant workers were arrested at their factory after the owner called in the police. The workers had

complained to the factory owner after not being paid. Instead of paying the workers, his response was to have them all taken away by police.[65] This has been a frequent tactic utilised by employers to prevent migrant workers from making complaints or staging strikes.

However, some employers have been known to take more drastic action and even go as far as having workers killed. On 30 October 2007 it was reported that at least three Burmese migrant workers had died after being poisoned by their employer. The workers had been on a shipping boat in the Indonesian archipelago for three to four years and were due to be paid between 100,000 and 300,000 baht on their return.[66] Moreover, following the murder of two migrant workers from Arakan State, an Arakanese journal claimed that Burmese migrant workers were often killed or attacked when employers wanted to avoid paying their wages.[67]

On a more positive note, the Labour Court came to a landmark judgement in August 2007 when it awarded compensation of 389,878 baht to four migrant women who had taken their employer to court. The women had been dismissed from Sein Hein Textile Factory because they were part of a group of 200 workers who demanded a salary increase. The judgement found they had been dismissed without due cause and that their employer had failed to pay their salaries in full and failed to pay them at all for overtime. The women were assisted in their case by the Joint Action Committee for Burmese Affair and the Thai Lawyer Council.[68]

Meanwhile, controversy has increased regarding the manner in which ethnic Padaung are employed in Thailand. On 22 November 2007, six Padaung women were arrested in a hotel in northern Thailand for working without permits. The police subsequently began an investigation into whether the women had been abducted.[69] The Padaung are a sub-tribe of Karenni ethnicity, also known as “long-necks” because of the neck rings which Padaung women wear.

Padaung women start to wear the rings around the age of six and add more as they get older, with adult women wearing up to 23 rings. This tradition has led to the Padaung being turned into a living tourist attraction and tourists are charged 250 baht to enter designated Padaung villages in Mae Hong Son Province where many of the tribe live. The women can also earn money from selling traditional clothing, jewellery and handcrafts. The governor of the province is keen to exploit the Padaung attraction and gather as many as possible into the villages. On 14 September 2007 it was reported that 47 Padaung had been forcibly relocated to Huay Pu Keng, one of three designated villages in Mae Hong Son, which critics have referred to as “human zoos”. In 1998 a Padaung village in Chiang Mai Province was raided by police and the businessmen who ran the village charged with holding the villagers against their will.[70]

Migrant Health

The health status of migrants in Thailand is to a large extent reflected by the health situation Burmese face in their home country. Burma’s military junta spends a very limited amount of the country’s GDP on health services. The AIDS epidemic in Burma and the lack of information about methods of prevention for this and other diseases within the country is a major contributing factor to their prevalence within migrant communities. (For more information see Chapter 7: Right to Health). Health professionals working along the Thai-Burma border are worried that the conditions in Burma are creating the perfect breeding ground for drug-resistant strains of killer diseases such as malaria and TB. The inadequacy of Burma’s healthcare system and the poverty in which most people live mean many cannot afford to complete the necessary course of medication while others rely on the prolific trade in sub-standard counterfeit drugs which ultimately contribute to diseases becoming drug resistant. [71]

International health experts met in Bangkok in January 2007 for the conference "Responding to Infectious Diseases in the Border Regions of South and Southeast Asia" which was organised by The Human Rights Centre at the University of California Berkeley, the Centre for Health and Human Rights at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Global Health Access Program. One of the main areas of concern was the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Burma and the implications for its neighbours. Voravit Suwanvanichkij, one of the researchers from John Hopkins University, noted that ten percent of the ethnic minorities living on the border between Karen State in Burma and Tak Province in Thailand were suffering from malaria due to having been forced into the forest by military operations. [72] Calls were made for greater efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other prevalent diseases in the border areas and the junta was urged to offer more cooperation to aid agencies and researchers. It was also stated that the situation was serious enough to be of concern to ASEAN and the UN Security Council.[73]

The Gathering Storm, the recent report from the Human Rights Centre at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Centre for Public Health and Human Rights at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, also addresses the topic of Infectious Diseases and Human Rights in Burma. The report blames host country governments for the high prevalence of disease amongst migrant workers. It notes that discriminatory policies and practices, as well as more blatant forms of harassment and violence, serve to push migrants further underground and prevent them from seeking medical attention, even for serious conditions.[74] However, the report put most responsibility on Burma's junta for having created the situation in the first place.[75] (more information see Chapter 7: Right to Health).

The Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU) staff conducting a malariometric survey among Burmese migrants on the Burma-Thai border. *[Photo: SMRU]*

Malaria

At present the most powerful weapon available in the fight against malaria is a Chinese drug known as artemisinin. This drug is most effective when used in combination with complementary treatments known as artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs). Doctors have identified that incorrect or sub-standard ACTs can generate immunity in the mosquito-borne parasite which causes malaria. This is common in Burma where health education is negligible and costs often prohibitively high.[76]

Francois Nosten, a French malaria expert heading the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU) based in Mae Sot, is highly concerned about the increasing incidences of drug resistant malaria. Drugs in the artemisinin family are currently the only ones that remain 100 percent effective but if an artemisinin-resistant strain were to develop the consequences would be devastating, especially if it travelled to Africa as previous drug-resistant strains have done. Following survey findings that 90 percent of malaria cases in Thailand occurred along the Burmese border, the Public Health Ministry announced in August the establishment of 300 extra treatment units in border areas.

During the first half of 2007, there were 18,000 cases of malaria and 32 deaths. Although Burmese migrants accounted for only 2,995 of the cases (16½ percent) they accounted for 12 of the deaths (37½ percent). Both government and public health officials are worried that the movement of migrant workers could spread the disease to other areas. They are particularly concerned about the multi-drug resistant strains.[77]

Tuberculosis

The situation regarding tuberculosis (TB) among migrants is critical. Mae Sot general hospital admitted more TB patients in the first half of 2007 than it did in the whole of 2006. Five of them were multi-drug resistant, a condition requiring a two year course of treatment with only a 50 percent chance of survival. At the same time, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) was treating 15 cases in a refugee camp and was extremely concerned about the lack of health awareness and education amongst Burmese refugees. A spokesperson explained that many patients do not understand the need to complete a course of medication and stop taking their pills as soon as they start to feel better, often only half way through the course. MSF also commented on the difficulty of monitoring the healthcare of migrant workers who move regularly and have no phone or fixed address.

Mae Sot is consequently struggling to deal with the healthcare needs of an estimated 150,000 migrants from Burma. The hospital is committed to treating every patient who arrives, but is concerned about the increasing numbers of Burmese who arrive and also the severity of their conditions. One doctor noted that Burmese often make the trip across the border only when local remedies have failed and their condition has become critical.[78]

On 11 June 2007, it was reported that aid workers from MSF in Mae Sot had discovered the first cases of “extensively drug resistant” (XDR) TB. One patient was a refugee and the other a migrant worker, both from Burma. This latest incident has fuelled fears that untreatable infectious diseases may be developing in Burma.

MSF has been treating multi-drug resistant patients since 2005. Mae La, one of the refugee camps has a special “TB village” where patients are carefully monitored during their treatment to make sure that they take their drugs as prescribed and complete their treatment course in full. Experts say that when patients miss doses, take lower doses or take sub-standard ‘fake’ pills they create an environment where the bacterium can mutate and start to build immunity.

Cholera

A resurgence of cholera in Tak Province on the Burma-Thai border has also been largely blamed on Burmese migrants. Forty-six patients were hospitalized in Mae La between June and August 2007, a further 30 cases emerged in Mae Sot and the hospital in Mae La refugee camp had ten cases. Cholera cases were reported across several villages in the province despite the efforts of public health officials. Dr Patjuban Hemhongsa, a public health doctor in Tak Province, said officials had found over 300 cases of cholera in five border districts within two months. Almost all of them were migrant workers from Burma.[79] On 9 August 2007, it was reported that one female patient had died from cholera in Mae La refugee camp.[80]

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Health issues of an entirely different nature result from the increasing number of migrant workers moving into Thailand's ever buoyant sex trade. In Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, it is estimated that half of all male sex workers are now foreign and of this group 64 percent are ethnic Shan from Burma. With Shan state bordering northern Thailand it is not surprising that large numbers of migrant workers end up in towns like Chiang Mai. The fact that they enter the sex trade is perhaps not so surprising either. The average daily wage for a migrant worker is between 80 and 180 baht. According to a Shan male prostitute the average fee from a single client is 1,000-2,000 baht and some clients, usually westerners, will pay up to 5,000 or even 10,000 baht.[81]

All of the male sex workers interviewed by *Irrawaddy* were heterosexual men who found their work distinctly unpleasant but could see no other options. Migrant workers are generally employed in the jobs that Thais are unwilling to do and the fact that so many of them are illegal leaves them with little scope to object to the abysmal wages and conditions. By contrast, a male sex worker said he had been able to send home 150,000 baht in three years and that this had been enough for his parents to build a new house.[82]

Prostitution is officially illegal in Thailand, so support for sex workers generally only comes from NGOs. All sex workers face a certain stigma but male prostitutes are considered to be the most stigmatized and, therefore, the least likely to get the support they need. At present there are only two organizations working specifically with male sex workers, Swing in Bangkok and Mplus in Chiang Mai. Male sex workers from Burma are particularly vulnerable as sexual health education is negligible in Burma and discussion of the topic is strictly taboo. Although the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is lower in Thailand than in neighbouring countries, a recent study found that the number of male sex workers in Chiang Mai who were confirmed as HIV positive was as high as 11.4 percent. A final barrier to Shan men getting the help they need is language as very few speak any Thai upon their arrival. *Irrawaddy's* report noted concern that young, male Shans are likely to encounter social, emotional and health problems with increasing regularity.[83]

Health professionals working with Burmese migrant workers in Thailand have noticed that efforts to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in the general community, particularly HIV/AIDS, are often frustrated by traditional attitudes which persist even in the face of improved healthcare and health education. Married women are unable to broach the topic of condoms because they are traditionally associated with promiscuity and therefore considered inappropriate in a marriage or stable relationship. This is compounded by the double standard which allows a man to visit a brothel with relative impunity but calls his wife's sexual morality into question when she then asks him to use a condom. Unmarried women are equally reluctant to discuss condom use with their boyfriends because it suggests a level of sexual experience which Burmese men can find objectionable.[84]

Although specific HIV prevalence statistics are not available for migrant workers, as distinct from the general Thai population, the Prevention of HIV/AIDS Among Migrants Workers Project (PHAMIT) does have a number of sample reports. The latest figures, from 2004, showed a prevalence rate of 9.6 percent among fishermen in Chumpon Province and 5.6 among those in Phuket Province. Fishermen in these areas are primarily from Burma. Statistics for sex workers in the border town of Ranong are also primarily Burmese and infection rates there were recorded at 28 percent.

A Burmese migrant worker suffering from AIDS, shortly before her death in a clinic on the Burma-Thai border. *[Photo: Nic Dunlop]*

PHAMIT is funded by the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and works with the Ministry of Health to try and improve understanding and awareness amongst migrant workers. Their efforts have included initiatives aimed at behaviour change and the development of educational material in Burmese as well as a number of ethnic minority languages. Unfortunately, knowledge (or the lack of) is simply one of many hurdles which need to be overcome. As many migrant workers are undocumented, they avoid even incidental contact with any authorities. World Vision, one of the aid agencies working in Mae Sot, found that the women they were seeking to get involved in training sessions were generally working very long hours, and had no free time for training sessions or workshops. Some charities tried persuading factory owners to allow their employees time off for health training but with very little success. The women were also reluctant to leave the factory compounds, where they lived as well as worked, due to the risk of arrest or deportation should they come into contact with any police or government officials. These fears were fuelled by recent restrictions in some provinces which included a prohibition on migrant workers using mobile phones or being outside the workplace after 8:00 pm.[85]

Health and Safety in the Workplace

Injuries and accidents can be expensive for a migrant worker because, in addition to the hospital fees, the worker will lose money as any time off is unpaid. They may also have to pay bribes if stopped by the police, as very few are allowed the original copies of their registration documents and others do not have any in the first place. Workers in factory, construction and agriculture settings reported more health problems than those in other industries. Many reported accidents resulting from poorly maintained equipment or a failure to implement safety measures. Despite the fact that Thai Labour Law applies to all workers, the Social Security Office argues that the Workmen's Compensation Fund, which provides compensation and benefits in relation to industrial injuries, is only available to Thai nationals.[86]

In addition to injuries resulting from accidents, many migrant workers suffer from exhaustion, sleep deprivation and varying degrees of malnutrition. In some cases this last condition results from workers living in factory compounds where food is provided by the employer in insufficient quantity and/or quality. In other cases it results from workers prioritising the need to send money back home to Burma at the expense of their own health and welfare.[87] In addition, hygiene in most factory accommodation is minimal with some workers lacking access to running water or drainage. The workplaces themselves are often cramped and poorly ventilated. Respiratory diseases, skin conditions and water related diseases are common in such environments.[88]

Access to Healthcare

Migrant workers face various barriers to accessing healthcare in Thailand. Although registered workers officially have access to health schemes and insurance, the situation is quite different in practice because most employers retain their workers' ID cards, leaving them unable to prove the legal status that entitles them to health services. Unregistered workers run the risk of being arrested when they come into contact with the authorities at the hospital or if stopped by police on the way there. Most registered workers effectively run the same risk as they rarely have anything better than a photocopy to prove their status and photocopied documents are not considered valid.

The restrictive laws which have been in place in a number of provinces since December 2006 make it even more difficult for migrant workers living in those areas to access healthcare. The legislation includes an 8:00 pm curfew and combined with the long hours which most migrants work this leaves them very little time to do anything at all. The legislation has already led to an increase in the number of women giving birth in hiding, sometimes in the jungle, because they are afraid of being arrested in they go to hospital or engage a midwife.[89]

The healthcare provided by Cynthia Maung and her co-workers at Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot is of vital importance to the migrant community as most are unable to afford Thai hospital fees, afraid of being detained by the authorities or both. On 22 November 2007, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy announced that the 2007 recipient of its annual Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award was Dr Cynthia Maung, founder of the Mae Tao Clinic, on the basis of her long-term dedication to giving healthcare to Burmese refugees. Wang Jin-pyng, chairman of the foundation, stated that *"Dr Cynthia is going beyond her mandate as a physician by turning a refugee population into a community based on shared values and respect for human rights"*.[90]

Burmese refugees being treated at the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, Thailand. *[Photo: BBC]*

Situation for Migrant Children

Since 2005 there have been some positive developments in Thai policy relating to the children of migrant workers. Prapan Vongsarochana, a senior official from the Education Ministry, spoke at an ILO sponsored seminar in July 2007 and supported the right to education for the children of all migrant workers, even those who are illegal. She stated that in cases where children lack identification or registration documentation, it should be sufficient for the parents to bring the children to school and simply testify to their identity. However, she also voiced concerns over the length of time that migrant children are likely to spend in education.[91]

This last issue is a concern for many of the NGOs working with children's issues. On 12 December 2007, Burma Anti-Child Trafficking and the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC) came together to mark the fourth International Day Against Child Trafficking. The two groups organised a campaign in the border town of Mae Sot to highlight the negative impacts of child labour. Their main event was attended by almost 2,000 people.

Many children are sent or trafficked to Thailand on their own and there are no official statistics for these migrant "street children". NGOs working in the area generally assume the number to be in the region of 20,000. Despite the efforts of various NGOs to run schools for migrant children, many are forced into hard labour, sweatshops, begging and even the sex trade. They have little time or energy for education.

According to Paw Ray, director of Hsa Htoo Lei School in Mae Sot, many families face such hardship that the parents not only encourage their children to work but force them, and there are even reports of children having been sold by their parents. The situation has become so endemic that Thailand's Minister of Labour, Somsak Thepsutin, acknowledged it would take another ten years for the worst forms of child labour to be eradicated.

The BMWEC often tries to explain to parents the value of education and the fact that children who work instead of going to school have no hope of anything better in the future. However it can be hard to persuade a family to give up a source of income when they are already struggling to put food on the table and keep a roof of any sort over their heads.[92]

In 2007 there were over 50 schools along the Thailand-Burma border catering for the children of refugees and migrant workers alike. These schools also cater for children who are forced out of their schools in Burma and travel to the border in the hope of continuing their education. In July 2007 over 5000 children were forced to flee from Karen State following clashes between rival rebel groups which forced the closure of their schools. Many of them found places at the migrant schools along the border. Mahn Shwe Hnin, chairman of the Migrant Teachers' Association in Mae Sot, reportedly stated that the number of children seeking an education in Thailand had doubled in 2007 since the previous year.[93]

Another issue affecting migrant children is statelessness. This especially affects the children of undocumented migrants born in exile, as they are not given the right to either Thai or Burmese citizenship. According to sources at the Mae Tao clinic in Mae Sot the problem is increasing. A programme run by the UNHCR provides birth certificates for children who are born to illegal migrant workers or in refugee camps but there are many that the programme fails to reach, including children of internally displaced people (IDPs).[94]

Sometimes migrant children are simply abandoned by desperate parents who are unable to look after them. Poverty is generally the main factor; either the fact that they simply cannot afford to feed another child or the fact that neither parent can afford to take any time off work to look after an infant. Some of these are taken in by orphanages along the border, one of which is run by Mae Tao Clinic. According to Dr Cynthia Maung some migrant women will deliberately get themselves arrested around the time their baby is due because they cannot afford hospital fees and know that they will receive at least basic healthcare in prison.

Young Burmese refugee at the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, Thailand. *[Photo: The Irrawaddy*]

Social Action for Women (SAW), a local assistance group in Mae Sot, runs a safehouse for abandoned children. San Thaw Dar, one resident of the SAW safehouse, ended up there after incurring a debt of 5,000 baht which neither she nor her family were able to pay. She arrived in Thailand at the age of 11 and immediately started work as a domestic helper. The payment of 5,000 baht was demanded when she accidentally broke a doll belonging to her employers. Not knowing what else to do, her mother dropped her off at the SAW safehouse and then disappeared. Four year old Su Su Aung, who has cerebral palsy, was taken to the SAW house by his father following the death of his mother. The hours and working conditions faced by migrant workers do not allow them to provide the kind of care that a disabled child requires. Disabled children are therefore often abandoned.[95]

Conditions for Child Workers

Thailand is home to child workers from all parts of Burma. The fact that many of them are ethnic Burmans and travel from areas that are far from the Thai border is considered to be reflection of how badly the economy has deteriorated in Burma.

Many children cross the border legally with a one-day pass and then become illegal once they stay beyond the permitted 24 hours. The cost of crossing the border varies enormously although a study conducted in Mae Sot found that almost 50 percent paid less than 100 baht in border crossing fees while a further 20 percent paid less than 500 baht. One third crossed the border illegally, without assistance, and consequently paid nothing. There are, however, reports of people paying over 2000 baht and human smugglers will charge between 4,500 and 10,000 baht. The costs of moving within Thailand are far higher and travel from a border area into central Thailand is reported to cost between 8,000 and 15,000 baht per person.[96]

The same study also found that less than 20 percent of the child workers in Mae Sot lived with their parents. A significant number of parents, almost 70 percent, remained in Burma although some had moved to other parts of Thailand, disappeared or died. Nonetheless, around two thirds claimed to have relatives or friends in Mae Sot. A significant number lived on the factory premises and the majority of these did so because it was compulsory. Factory accommodation is generally overcrowded and unhygienic. The majority of the children were legally documented migrant workers, although some were officially underage and their employers had falsified their documents.[97]

The question of age can be somewhat complicated in Burma. Internationally a child is defined as a person below the age of 18 years. This definition is used by the ILO and is contained within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the international principle for calculating age, a person becomes 18 and celebrates their 18th birthday on the day their 18th year of life is completed. According to Burmese traditions, however, a person celebrates their 18th birthday the day their 17th year of life is completed because this is when they cross into their 18th year. In addition to this, a person's age is considered to date from conception rather than the moment of birth. Consequently, many migrant workers are far younger by international standards than by their own calculation.[98]

The legal minimum age for employment in Thailand is 15. This is set out in the Labour Protection Act 1998 and is consistent with ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age for Employment. However, because of the difference in the Burmese concept of age, many children claiming to be 15 are likely to be closer to 13. It is also common for migrant workers to lack birth certificates or similar documents, particularly if they are from ethnic groups and/or remote areas of Burma. These difficulties aside, there is no shortage of employers who are happy to ignore the fact that many of their employees are underage.[99]

The province of Samut Sakhon has around 450,000 residents and is one of the wealthiest areas of Thailand. Around 40 percent of the seafood processing industry, worth US$ 2 billion a year, is based there. The Labour Rights Promotion Network estimates that 70 percent of the province's residents are migrant workers from Burma, of whom only 74,000 are legally registered. Conditions in the seafood factories are harsh with many reports of physical abuse as well as forced overtime and pay that is well below the legal minimum wage. According to Thetis Mangahas, an ILO programme manager, some of the factory conditions in Samut Sakhon constitute the worst forms of child labour and forced labour. A 14 year old girl worked an average of 14 hours per day in a seafood factory where she peeled shrimps. She earned about 100 baht a day.

Despite national Thai law stipulating that all children are entitled to an education regardless of their legal status, only two schools in Samut Sakhon accept children from Burma and even then they are kept separate from Thai children. However, as most families depend on the wages their children bring in, the question of which schools will accept them becomes irrelevant as education is a luxury few migrants from Burma can afford.[100]

In 2006, the Migrants Section of the Federation of Trade Unions-Burma published a report under the auspices of the ILO about the plight of migrant child workers in Mae Sot. The study, which focussed on the garment and textile industry, found that almost every single factory where child migrant workers were interviewed was in violation of Thailand's core labour law, the Labour Protection Act 1998. The children interviewed were working such excessive hours in such poor conditions that the study judged the situation to equate to *"the worst forms of child labour".* Such conditions are categorised and prohibited by ILO Convention No. 1982, which Thailand ratified in February 2001.

The study found that over 70 percent of the children were legally registered, but that in the majority of cases the employer retained their identification cards. This meant they were unable to access medical care if they required it and were at risk of arrest if stopped by the police. A further 30 percent also reported that their employers required them to live on the factory premises as a condition of their employment. Working hours in the factories were routinely excessive and almost 90 percent of interviewees reported working an average of 11 to 12 hours a day and seven days a week. Almost half added that they were not entitled to any paid days off, despite the Labour Protection Act stipulating a minimum of one day off in every seven days worked, or four days off in a month.[101]

The salaries the children receive are well below the legal minimum and some reported having received no payment at all at the time they were interviewed. The largest group, around 65 percent, received between 300 and 500 baht per week. The second group, 16½ percent, received between 200 and 300 baht while the third group, 14½ percent, received over 500 baht per week. The fourth, and fortunately smallest, group, at 3½ percent, received less than 200 baht per week.[102]

The study put these figures into perspective by calculating how much a 'regular' Thai worker would receive for the same hours that the migrant children usually worked. Starting from the assumption that a regular worker would receive the legal minimum of 135 baht for an eight hour day, the basic salary would be 945 baht for a seven day week. On top of this, overtime would be paid at 25.33 baht per hour and the worker would receive double pay on the Sunday. Thus, a seven day week comprised of 11 hour days should bring in a total of 1,586 baht. This is far in excess of what even the highest earning migrant children receive.[103]

The children's salaries are also subject to a number of deductions which can include rent, food, registration fees and uniforms. In addition, employers make deductions for mistakes which, depending on the severity, can be as high as full day's wages. Many will also fine workers between 100 and 500 baht each time they refuse to do overtime. Nonetheless, many of the children were actually able to save money and send some back to family members in Burma. This was easier for those who lived with their parents, relatives or other adult guardians as compared to those who lived alone or in their factory.[104]

Although only seven of the interviewed children described themselves as "bonded labourers", 178 stated they were unable to change their job because their employer was holding their work permit and registration documents. When this complaint is put to factory owners, they usually explain that they hold the documents as security for the registration fee which they pay in advance and which the employee has to pay back in instalments.[105] The ILO reportedly considers such practices to constitute a form of modern slavery.[106]

Deportation of Migrants

According to the U.S. Country Report on Burma, the junta still does not have legal mechanisms in place to manage Burmese citizens deported from other countries. [107] However, the SPDC receives 250 deported migrant workers from Thailand every week through official channels. The deportees are escorted across the bridge which connects Mae Sot to Myawaddy and processed at the formal detention centre. However, this only takes place on Fridays and represents only a fraction of the number who are scheduled for deportation by the Thai authorities. [108]

The remainder are dealt with by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which has led to many deported Burmese migrants ending up in the hands of traffickers. The DKBA were once part of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the struggle for Karen independence. The DKBA split from the KNU in 1994 and have since enjoyed increasing SPDC support, particularly in their conflict with the remaining KNU. The regime is happy to support this conflict because it means they do not have to expend any resources of their own in suppressing the rebels. The junta now allows the DKBA to control certain areas, including Myawaddy and a number of piers along the Moei River. They also control the public transport system. [109]

The deportees are brought by truck to Pier No.10 on the Thai side of the Moei River, not far from Mae Sot. They are then ferried across the river and ushered into a bamboo stockade on the other side. They are kept there under DKBA control until the fee of 1,000 baht is paid. This fee secures their release but puts them in the hands of brokers and traffickers, working in conjunction with the DKBA, who take them back into Thailand. While returning to Thailand is the preferred option for the vast majority, some unlucky migrants end up back under arrest in as little as 48 hours and are obliged to go through the whole process again. It is estimated that nearly 500 Burmese are deposited at Pier No.10 on a daily basis.[110] According to Moe Swe, the secretary general of Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association (YCOWA), a group working for the rights of Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot, the DKBA camp near Myawaddy has been operating since 1999 and they have been processing illegally transferred deportees since 2002. [111]

However, aside from the huge expense involved, many members of ethnic minorities are more afraid of being deported into the hands of the junta. Rohingyas in particular worry about the conditions and treatment awaiting them in SPDC jails. One Rohingya who ended up in a Thai jail on charges of illegal immigration said he would prefer to be executed than deported. He was convinced he would be tortured if returned to Burma.[112]

Despite their usual reluctance to deal with deportees, the junta put pressure on the Thai government following the September 2007 protests to deport all Burmese migrants, particularly those with connections to dissident political movements. A number of raids were carried out by Thai authorities, some resulting in over 1000 arrests, however it was not clear whether the arrests were in response to pressure from the SPDC or not. It was also reported that Burmese police had offered to pay Thai police 80 baht for each migrant worker handed into their custody.[113] The motivation behind the last request may have been purely financial, as corruption is rife and police on both sides are known to be involved in bribery and extortion. Following the arrest of 120 migrant workers in Phuket in July 2007, it was reported that detainees could secure their release with a bribe of 5,000 baht. Those who were unable to pay were deported although it is believed that most re-entered Thailand afterwards as they were released at the border.[114]

Police and immigration officials in Thailand have also been accused of using children to catch migrant workers trying to avoid arrest. Network Media Group reported on a raid which took place in Mae Sot in May 2007 resulting in approximately 800 arrests. According to one source, during such raids it is not uncommon for immigration officers to arrest children if the parents have gone into hiding. The idea is that the parents will come out of hiding if they hear the children start to cry.[115]

Burma's Rohingyas in search of a new life end up behind bars. *[Caption and photo: The Irrawaddy]*

Responses to the Saffron Revolution

During September 2007 Burmese monks led a wave of pro-democracy protests across the country. Although they failed to oust the junta, they did succeed in focusing the world's attention on the situation in Burma, at least briefly. Due to the lead role which the monks played, the movement has been dubbed the "Saffron Revolution".

When the news of the junta's violent response to the pro-democracy rallies started to spread, people all over the world reacted and joined demonstrations to show their solidarity. On 6 October 2007 protests took place in cities across Asia, Europe and North America. Thailand was no exception and over 600 protesters took to the streets in Chiang Mai. In addition to hundreds of Thai monks, the crowd also included Burmese migrants, international NGO staff members and representatives from other religious faiths.[116] A number of separate demonstrations had previously been held outside the Chinese and Indian consulates. These were held on 2 October 2007, which is the International Day of Non-Violence, and 4 October. Burmese migrants demonstrated outside the consulates together with staff from international NGOs and Thai supporters.[117]

In addition to showing their support through their physical presence at demonstrations, it was reported that over 2,000 Burmese migrant workers from Surat Thani in southern Thailand donated a total of 2 million kyat (equivalent to US$1,504) to the All-Burmese Monks Alliance at the beginning of October. The donation was intended as a gesture of solidarity for monks involved in the pro-democracy struggle.[118]

The following months a group of Burmese monks resident in Thailand gathered outside the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok to demand the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and show their solidarity for monks involved in protests back in Burma. They were joined by monks from Bangladesh and Nepal as well as members from youth associations. The

demonstration, which took place on 1 November 2007, was conducted peacefully and without any interference from the authorities.[119]

As the violence in Burma continued, so did the international response. On the morning of 2 December 2007, an agitated crowd gathered outside the Burmese embassy in Bangkok to protest against the sealing of Maggin monastery in Rangoon. The demonstration was organized by the Global Alliance of Burmese Students who told reporters that the monastery was famous for providing shelter to HIV/AIDS patients who came to Rangoon for treatment. The monastery was raided in November and the abbot, Sayadaw U Indaka, was arrested on the grounds that he had been involved in the September protests. He was put in incommunicado detention.[120]

On 3 December 2007 it was reported that a number of students who had been involved in protests outside the Burmese embassy had had their applications rejected when they needed to extend their passports.[121]

Later the same month, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon celebrated International Human Rights Day in Thailand during his three day visit to the region. Burmese activists took advantage of his presence to stage a rally calling for concrete action on Burma and an end to what they described as *"wasting time".* They described the junta as *"indifferent"* and said it *"has been turning a deaf ear to all kind of appeals and pressure".* The rally took place outside the UN office in Bangkok and was attended by political activists, labour rights groups, women's groups and students.[122]

Protesters in Bangkok on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2007. *[Photo: YCOWA]*

Timeline of Events Relating to Migrant Workers in Thailand

January

In January 2007, a group of ten Burmese migrants were deported after going on trial in Chiang Rai provincial court on charges of illegal entry. They were arrested when their van was stopped by police in Wiangpapao district. Pol Sgt Pichai Muangma, a member of the Thai police, was under suspicion of assisting the migrants to enter the country illegally. The van was thought to be associated with another nine vans, each containing ten passengers, which were eventually stopped in Muang District from where the migrants were deported.[123] Suspicions that the migrants were victims of a human trafficking ring involving Thai officials were raised after a Thai newspaper reported they had each paid 4,000 baht for the trip. They had crossed the border at Mae Sai-Tachilek and were believed to be heading for the south of the country in search of work.[124]

February

On 2 February 2007, it was reported that a boatload of 92 Rohingya men were arrested in Thai coastal waters and charged with trying to enter the country illegally.[125]

On 7 February 2007, three brothers were sentenced following convictions for trafficking offences involving four women and two children. The first was sentenced to life imprisonment and the other two to a period of ten years.[126]

On 15 February 2007, a number of raids on illegal immigrants took place, mainly targeting garment factories in Mae Sot. In total, over 500 people were arrested. Those found without papers were charged with illegal entry and scheduled for deportation.[127] The arrests were made at four garment factories located around the outskirts of the city. Many of those detained did actually have valid work permits but did not have the original documents in their possession. Moe Swe, head of the Yaung Chi Oo Burmese Workers Association, said the raids might have been aimed at pressuring employers into registering their workers.[128]

On 21 and 22 February 2007, Thai police rounded up dozens of migrant workers in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. They targeted an area where migrants usually gather and wait for employers who have day work to offer. The authorities had reportedly noticed an increase in the number of Burmese workers gathering in the area and this had led to the raid.[129]

March

On 3 March 2007, a total of 160 Rohingya were arrested after two boatloads landed on Thai soil. They came from Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Myebon Townships in Arakan State, and had each paid 20,000 taka for the trip which was arranged by an agent in Bangladesh.[130]

On 10 March 2007, it was reported that 67 Rohingya were forcibly deported from the Mae Sot area, and it was believed that they subsequently returned to Thailand. On 23 March 2007 another group of 56 Rohingya were arrested and deported the following day. Both groups were deported into DKBA custody. Human Rights Watch asked the Thai authorities to let the men be assessed by the UNHCR.[131]

Also in March 2007, three Burmese migrant workers were shot dead by suspected Islamic militants in Pattani, one of Thailand southern provinces along the Malaysian border. One of the deceased was beheaded and a further four were seriously injured in the attack.[132]

April

On 3 April 2007, Thai Marine police apprehended more than 150 Rohingya men and boys from Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships in Arakan State. When the Rohingyas were seized off the western coast of Southern Thailand, they were in two small boats and had been without food for about five days. They had each paid between 10,000 and 15,000 kyat for the trip. According to Grassroots Human Rights Education (GHRE), an NGO working for migrant workers in Southern Thailand, the men were aware of the risk of arrest but decided to travel anyway because they were so desperate to escape Burma.[133]

Also in April 2007, a group of 18 migrant workers were arrested by Thai police when the vehicle they were travelling in hit an electric pole. They were imprisoned for one week in Takuapa, southern Thailand, before being deported to Burma. The group was comprised of 13 women, three men and two children, all from Karen State. They had made arrangements with touts in Chaungzon Township in Mon State and their vehicle was reportedly driven by a Thai policeman. This, however, did not prevent the Thai police from attempting to stop the vehicle or from firing their guns to frighten the driver when he failed to stop. It was the gunfire which caused the driver to hit the electric pole. One woman jumped from the vehicle as it hit the pole and later died. Three others were injured and were treated at Takuapa hospital before being imprisoned. Local sources say such incidents are usually avoided by touts bribing the local police.[134]

May

On 1 May 2007, a demonstration was held in front of the Thai parliament hall in Bangkok to protest against new restrictions placed on migrant workers. Fifty Burmese migrants were joined by thousands of people from the Workers' Union of Thailand. The protest was sparked by reports that the restrictions in force in Phuket, Ranong and Suratthani were to be extended to Chiang Mai. The restrictions include a night time curfew as well as prohibitions on the use of cell phones and motorcycles.[135]

On 5 May 2007, heavy rains caused a car crash which left four dead and seven injured. The crash involved Burmese migrants in two small vehicles trying to cross the border. The tout responsible is known as Mi Mone.[136]

Also in May 2007, four migrants were killed in a car crash whilst travelling to Kanchanaburi in Thailand. The Federation of Trade Unions Burma has been searching for the bodies of the dead migrants. It has also called on the border touts who arranged the journey to provide compensation for the families of the deceased.[137]

On 8 and 9 May 2007, around 800 migrant workers were arrested in Mae Sot in a joint effort involving the Thai army, police and immigration officers.[138] According to a local source, around 500 of the arrests were made on 8 May in Ban Hton Htaung and Kant Be Ban wards. Another 200 were made the following day in Naung Bua and the final 100 in Mae Tha Law village.[139]

On 10 May 2007, some 800 migrant workers were arrested by border police and immigration officers in Tak Province. Around 70 of the arrests were made in Ban Po Thong, an area just outside Mae Sot, the others were made at various locations across the province. Those who were found to have registration papers were later released and the rest were detained at the Immigration Detention Centre in Mae Sot.[140]

On 24 May 2007, over 160 Burmese migrants were arrested by border police in Sangkhlaburi in Kanchanburi Province.

June

In June 2007, around 200 migrant workers of Chin ethnicity were arrested in Kawthaung as part of an anti-human trafficking programme. They were believed to be en route to Malaysia. Local sources estimate that around 500 people cross the border at Kawthaung every day.[141]

On 11 June 2007, it was reported that aid workers from MSF in Mae Sot had discovered the first two cases of "extensively drug resistant" (XDR) TB, both in Burmese migrants.[142]

July

On 1 July 2007, the deadline for the registration of migrant workers passed. The number of workers registered was down to 500,000 from around 700,000 the previous year.[143]

On 11 July 2007, it was reported that a young Burmese man had jumped into the Moei River in order to avoid Thai police and was presumed to have drowned. The police were rounding up illegal workers and had already raided a number of factories and made over 50 arrests. According to Min Oo from YCOWA, a number of people were released once the police discovered they had work permits, but the rest were scheduled for deportation.[144]

On 14 July 2007, Over 30 migrant workers were arrested at a labour barrack in Mahar Chai, near Bangkok, early in the morning of 14 July 2007. Police arrived at 4:00 am and forced the workers out of their bedrooms, and any potential hiding places, by injecting gas into the rooms. Once people were out of their rooms the police checked their registration documents and those without documentation were arrested. It was not known what kind of gas was used but witnesses reported a bad smell and a burning sensation caused in the eyes and throat. There were pregnant women on the premises who were subjected to the same treatment.[145]

On 17 July 2007, police rounded up approximately 70 people from Chin state who were waiting to board a ship at the port in Thaketa Township. Thirty of them were arrested on suspicion of planning to cross the Burma-Thailand border illegally although the police referred to the operation as rescue rather than arrest, on the basis that they were the victims of human trafficking. The group of detainees were kept at Natmauk Pariyatti monastery pending return to Chin state. There were no plans for any of them to stand trial or remain in police custody.[146]

On 18 July 2007 the Thai authorities arrested 120 undocumented migrant workers in Phuket. Most of the migrants were Tanoan from Tenessarim Division in Burma but some of the others were Mon. The arrests occurred during working hours at around 4:00 pm. A number of migrants in other factories escaped after hearing about the raid.[147]

On 26 July a group of 40 Rohingya were deported from Mae Sot after being found without registration papers.[148]

On 30 July 2007, a small boat with 23 passengers travelling from Burma to Thailand overturned after being hit by high waves. Ten people were washed overboard, presumed dead. The boat was travelling from Kawthoung in Burma to Ranaung in Thailand. The trip usually does not take much more than an hour but the boat's engine stalled. The survivors were eventually rescued by a fishing boat but none of the missing bodies were found. Most of the travellers were ethnic Mon resident in Thailand at the time, working on a rubber plantation in Hat Yin city in Songkhla province, and had been to Burma to visit their families.[149]

August

In August 2007, Thai police raided a number of seafood factories in the Mahachai district of Samut Sakhon, and arrested more than 500 illegal migrant workers. Some of the migrants did have registration documents, but they were for specific areas and did not include the area they were working in.[150]

Burmese migrant workers in Mahachai in southern Thailand. *[Photo: NMG]*

September

In September 2007, 19 ports on the Moei River were closed in a joint effort by Thai and Burmese officials to decrease the number of illegal crossings. The officials also claimed the move would help to boost economic activity in the area. The Friendship Bridge between Myawaddy and Mae Sot remained open for both people and goods.[151]

October

On 31 October 2007, over 1000 Burmese migrant workers were rounded up during dawn raids in Samut Sakhorn Province. Those without work permits were arrested and those with permits were interrogated. According to one migrant worker, the Thai authorities were worried about reports that 100,000 Burmese had entered the country during the past three to four months. One aim of the operation was reportedly to find out why so many were suddenly arriving and what they were doing in Thailand.[152]

November

On 12 November 2007, Thai police arrested over 100 migrants in Samut Sakhorn Province.[153]

On 18 November 2007, a Thai corn plantation owner was arrested on suspicion of having murdered five of his employees.[154]

Between 23 and 25 November 2007, over 100 workers were arrested at a factory in Pathum Thani Province.[155]

On 25 November 2007, 7 Burmese migrants and a Thai driver was killed when the vehicle they were travelling in plunged into a canal while trying to escape police in Petchaburi province. The migrants, 4 adults and 3 children, were part of a group of 21 migrants who were being smuggled across the border in a pick-up truck. In addition to the 7 fatalities, a further 6 required hospital treatment for their injuries.[156]

Also on 25 November, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister, Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, announced that pregnant migrant workers would have to return to their country of origin to give birth.[157]

December

On the evening of 20 December 2007, SCD Textile Factory in Mae Sot was raided, resulting in the arrest of 350 unregistered migrant workers. The detainees included 49 children, some as young as 12 and 13 years old. Following the raid the factory had to close as the number of workers arrested represented half of the entire workforce. The suspected presence of underage workers was reportedly the reason behind the raid[158].

On 22 December 2007, Thai police found 22 bodies off the coast of Ranong. The deceased were believed to be migrant workers whose boat sank due to overcrowding while on the way to Thailand.[159]

On 26 December 2007, over 200 Burmese factory workers in Thailand took part in a walk-out. The workers had not been paid for the first half of the month and staged the walk-out in protest.[160]

In late December 2007, it was reported that a crack down on migrant workers had affected language classes in Bangkok. The classes were held by the Thai-Mon Literature Promotion Club and offered instruction in Thai, Mon and English to the migrant community. According to one of the teachers, Nai Tun Wei, classes had declined from several a day to one a week because people were too afraid of being stopped by Thai security forces. A Mon social worker added that the security forces were known to confiscate migrant workers' ID cards as a way of extorting money from them.[161]

18.3 Situation of Burmese Migrants in Malaysia

Malaysia lies in the South China Sea, south of Thailand and north of Indonesia. The country is geographically divided and the capital, Kuala Lumpur, is located in the area known as Peninsular Malaysia, which borders the southern peninsula of Thailand and lies just north-east of the coast of the Indonesian island Sumatra. The Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah are located to the east of Peninsular Malaysia, along the northern border of Borneo.

Migrants travelling from Burma to Malaysia must either pass through the length of Thailand or arrive by sea. Most of those travelling to Malaysia from Burma do so by land via Thailand, usually with the help of smugglers or traffickers. Some take the sea route, either directly from Burma or via Bangladesh. The majority are undocumented immigrants although some do arrive legally with pre-arranged contracts. These, however, are often far from secure. [162]

With its booming economy, Malaysia has been an attractive destination for immigrant workers since the early 1990s. It currently attracts more workers than any other country in South-east Asia besides Thailand. Over half a million Burmese have made the journey in search of work and an escape from poverty and hardship in Burma. The FTUB estimates that around 300,000 of them remain undocumented. Burmese migrants represent almost half of the undocumented migrant worker community in Malaysia, which is estimated to number around 700,000. A further 1.8 million workers from various South and South-east Asian countries are employed legally. [163]

The Rohingya, who share their Muslim religion with the majority of the Malaysian population, was one of the first groups from Burma to start arriving in significant numbers after the suppression of the 1988 uprising. However, the largest Burmese ethnic group in Malaysia is currently the Chins, although there is also a significant number of Mon, as well as groups of various other ethnicities.[164]

The turn of the century saw the beginning of a construction boom and migrant labour has been central to the achievement of a number of notable projects including the Petronas Twin Towers and the construction of new cities. Migrants work on the construction of luxury hotels and apartments, while forced to live in overcrowded slums or jungle shanties. However, the vital contribution that migrant workers have made to Malaysia's development has been neither recognised nor appreciated. Instead public opinion holds migrant workers responsible for much of the country's crime and the government has increased efforts to remove undocumented migrants. [165]

Migrant workers continue to fill a gap in the Malaysian labour market and are generally employed in restaurants and factories as well as on construction sites and rubber plantations. The work is hard and the days are long but the pay, despite being low by local standards, is far in excess of what many could hope to earn at home in Burma. Kyaw Min, a migrant worker, was able to earn 20 times more than he had earned in Burma and could send much needed money home to support his family.

Not all migrants do so well for themselves, though. Some are enticed into the trip by a good contract, only to have the employer renege on the agreement when they arrive and offer them a much lower wage than they were expecting. There is also a complete lack of job security and the constant fear of being returned to Burma. Zay Yar Min had a three year contract but found himself back home after only a few months. His employer had cancelled the contract after Zay Yar Min complained that the terms were not being fulfilled. Moreover, most contracts fail to make any provision for illness or accident. According to the FTUB, industrial accidents involving Burmese workers averaged ten a month at the beginning of 2007, and those who were unable to work simply lost their jobs.[166]

Efforts to crack down on undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia have been ongoing since March 2005. This has been particularly harsh on the Burmese as the Malay government considers most to be economic migrants and does not recognize any of them as refugees or asylum seekers. A number of official statements made in early 2006 supporting the arrest of undocumented migrant workers contributed to the worsening situation and arrestees now commonly face caning as well as imprisonment. [167] Between January and May 2007, over 700 Burmese migrants of Chin ethnicity had been arrested as part of the Malaysian government's raids on undocumented workers.[168]

Illegal immigrants are usually deported to Malaysia's borders rather than back to their own country. This means that many Burmese end up in Thailand where they quickly fall prey to traffickers and corrupt border officials. There are even reports of immigrants being sold to traffickers by immigration officials. Some deportees are sold to Indonesian fishing boats, whose owners will generally pay around US$ 286 per person.[169]

Blantik Camp - Malaysia's immigration detention centre near the Thai-Malay border, where Burmese migrants are detained before deportation. *[Photo: RFA/Kyaw Min Htun]*

The majority of Burmese in Malaysia live in and around Kuala Lumpur. Those who opt for urban living often find themselves sharing a single room apartment with up to 20 others. The rest try to survive in jungle shelters although these are more easily subject to raids from police or RELA forces. [170]

Project Maje, a U.S based information project, has called upon Malaysia to recognise the contribution that migrant workers have made to its burgeoning economy. In a report released on 10 August 2007, Project Maje stated that Burmese refugees and migrants remain unrecognized, unwelcome and vulnerable to immigration raids by RELA.

The report calls for RELA to be disbanded and also makes reference to Malaysia's 2007 tourism slogan, "Malaysia: Truly Asia". It claims that Malaysia cannot be "truly Asia" until it accepts the contribution that workers from other Asian countries have made to its infrastructure and economy.[171]

Other observers have backed the call for acknowledgement of the contribution that migrant workers have made to Malaysia's development. It has also been noted that many of the UNHCR recognised refugees being resettled to third countries from Malaysia will arrive as highly skilled construction workers despite lacking any formal training or qualifications. It has

been suggested that refugee aid groups look into the possibility of providing skills certification.[172]

In February 2007 a serious deterioration in conditions was avoided when the government declined to implement a proposal to confine foreign workers to their living quarters. Foreign labourers and human rights groups mounted protests after the proposal from Home Minister Radzi Sheikh Ahamad was announced. The intention of the proposal was to prohibit unregistered workers from leaving their residence and to make their employers responsible for their movements.

The proposal was supported by Malaysia's chief of police who voiced concerns over the number of crimes committed by foreign workers although Amnesty International put the number at only two percent. The number of crimes cited by the chief of police was 5,000 out of 230,000 which does in fact equate to just over two percent. Despite these low numbers, migrant workers continue to be blamed for various social problems. Human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch say the new proposals will be counter-productive and more likely to entrench the attitudes causing the problem than bring about any improvement.[173]

RELA

RELA is an abbreviation for Ikatan Relawan Rakyat, meaning People's Volunteer Corps. It was founded in 1972 under the 1964 Emergency (Essential Powers) Act and was intended to help maintain national security. Until recently, RELA's role was confined to natural disasters such as flooding. Now, however, they are responsible for rounding up illegal immigrants and possess powers beyond those of the regular police force, such as arrest without warrant and search and seizure. They are also armed despite receiving no training nor being subject to any background checks. The group is often described as an unregulated vigilante force.

RELA was subject to increasing levels of criticism during 2007 for its reckless conduct and abusive actions during raids. Calls for the organization to be disbanded came not only from international human rights groups but from organizations within Malaysian society including human rights group SUARAM and the Malaysian Bar.[174] According to SUARAM, RELA members are arresting and torturing Burmese refugees who have been recognized by the UNHCR as well as migrants holding valid work permits. In March 2007, the Malaysian Bar called on the government to abolish RELA and to ratify the International Convention of the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.[175]

In May 2007, Human Rights Watch again called for the complete disbandment of RELA. Human Rights Watch also have reports that RELA members are known to have detained legal immigrants including refugees, asylum seekers and registered workers and to have subsequently destroyed their identification. RELA members have also been accused of extortion and of confiscating goods and property belonging to foreign workers. In March 2007 a team of eight RELA members were detained on robbery charges after removing belongings worth 1800 ringgit from a house.[176]

On 2 July 2007, Malaysia stepped up a crackdown on undocumented Burmese immigrants which had begun on 28 June 2007. RELA detained 200 Burmese nationals of Chin ethnicity during the operation, 15 of whom were UNHCR card holders. Although the group of 15 was later released, the rest remained in prison. Detention periods for undocumented immigrants range from two to six months, while some are caned instead.[177]

Although NGOs and lawyers have regularly voiced concerns over RELA's activities, criticism is now also coming from government sources, including the Tourism Minister. This came after an Indian television producer and an African-American U.S. Navy lawyer were mistakenly arrested by RELA in separate incidents. Datuk Zaidon Asmuni, director-general of RELA, attempted to explain away the incidents by saying that non-Caucasians are not obviously tourists and therefore it is necessary to detain them and check their status.

This attitude is troubling to many of Malaysia's citizens who see no role for such an organisation within a democracy. However, for the moment RELA continues to enjoy government support, although the bounty which was previously paid out for each illegal immigrant arrested has now been cancelled. Unfortunately, this has led RELA members to treat the immigrants themselves as a source of income, including registered refugees and those on resettlement programmes.

RELA is now considered to be damaging the economy through the impact they have on employers, landlords and others who benefit from the presence of migrant workers. There is still a need for foreign labour, particularly in the capital, but a sizeable proportion of the potential workforce has either been detained by RELA or frightened away. On top of this, many Malaysian citizens report having been caught up in raids through mistaken identity or harassed for voicing opposition to RELA. More still are fed up with the disruption caused by constant identity checks.

Officers of the Malaysia People's Volunteer Group (RELA) guide refugees that were detained before dawn during an immigration raid on to a detention bound truck at the district office in Kuala Lumpur on 25 June 2007. *[Caption and photo: Marcus Yam/AP]*

Conditions for Unregistered Migrant Workers and Refugees

Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol and is known for taking a somewhat arbitrary approach to the recognition of refugees or asylum seekers. Thus, most refugees and asylum seekers are classified as migrant workers, and not given any protection. In 2004 the government did agree to issue IMM13 work permits for some 12,000 Rohingya who had applied for refugee status, but by May 2007 no permits had yet been issued.[178] Many Rohingya still get rounded up in raids targeting illegal immigrants.[179]

In March 2007, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar stated that Malaysia's reluctance to recognize refugees from Burma is a precautionary measure aimed at preventing an onslaught of economic migrants. Although many immigrants end up in menial jobs spurned by locals and therefore fill an obvious gap in the labour market, they are generally unwelcome and perceived as a nuisance to society. Malaysia's Home Affairs Ministry has previously stated that it does not recognize the authority of the UNHCR and claims that the presence of the refugee agency gets in the way of officials attempting to crack down on illegal immigration.[180]

Still, in 2007 UNHCR continued to register Burmese refugees. Hence it was possible for Burmese migrants in Malaysia to apply to the UNHCR for status as political refugees. So far approximately 20,000 have done so and most have been successful. Six thousand of these, mostly ethnic Chin, have been able to resettle in third countries. Around half of all those who apply for refugee status in Malaysia are Rohingya from Burma's Arakan State.[181] (For more information, see Chapter 17: The Situation of Refugees).

Following a statement from the Malaysian government agreeing with other members of ASEAN that Burma's failure to implement democratic reform should not be defended, human rights organizations called upon the government to back up its foreign policy with protection for Burmese refugees and asylum seekers. The Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) claims the Burmese community in Malaysia is regularly subjected to security abuses and immigration raids. CHRO further claims that there are pregnant women and children less than a month old currently being held in Malaysian detention centres, despite Malaysia being a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and a sitting member of the UN Human Rights Council.[182]

CHRO has appealed to the Malaysian government to stop the crackdown on Burmese migrants and cooperate with the UNHCR. It claims the government is violating basic human rights by relentlessly targeting the migrant community. It also cites reports of torture and abuse in detention camps as well as cases of forcible deportation. CHRO is particularly concerned about two pregnant women and 36 children who are among over 200 Burmese refugees of Chin ethnicity who were arrested during RELA raids on 25 and 27 June 2007. [183] CHRO's letter of appeal calls upon the international community to join them in pressuring the Malaysian government for the release of Burmese refugees currently held in immigration detention centres.[184]

Burmese migrants living in Malaysia have limited access, if any, to basic services such as health care. Many are afraid to go to hospital because they can be arrested there if they do not have the right documentation. There are even cases of pregnant women being arrested when they have gone to hospital to give birth. On top of this, foreigners are required to pay twice as much in medical fees as local Malaysians. A UNHCR registration letter entitles the bearer to a fifty percent discount but, given the low wages that migrant workers generally receive, medical fees remain prohibitively high in all but the most desperate cases. Outside

of Kuala Lumpur, most hospitals do not even recognise the UNHCR letters. A number of NGOs offer free medical assistance to refugees and undocumented migrants, but both staff and funding are in short supply.

The Journey

Burmese migrants often pay large sums of money to smugglers or traffickers promise to take them to Malaysia, and sometimes also to find work for them. However, this poses great risks to migrants, as the journey is often dangerous and the smugglers cannot guarantee for their safety. Moreover, in the hands of traffickers many are forced to take on jobs which mostly benefit the traffickers. In June 2007, the U.S. Department of State added Malaysia to Tier 3 in its Trafficking in Persons Report. The government's failure to protect foreign workers was one of the main contributing factors. [185] Conditions for those who arrive by boat are particularly perilous as the vessels are invariably overcrowded despite often being not seaworthy and the trips are poorly organised. The following incidents confirm some of the hardships and dangers faced by Burmese migrants on their journeys to Malaysia in 2007:

In January 2007, a boat of illegal Burmese immigrants bound for Malaysia beached in Southern Thailand where the 114 men on board were arrested and locked up in the local jail. The men had set off from a number of villages along the Burma-Bangladesh border in search of a better life. Two weeks into their voyage the food ran out, the compass proved unreliable and finally the engine died. Each of the men on board had paid between 12,000 and 15,000 kyat for the journey. One of the men claimed he would prefer to be executed in Malaysia than returned to Burma where he feared death at the hands of torturers.[186]

On 5 March 2007, Malaysian authorities detained 108 Burmese nationals who had been found on a fishing boat meant for 10 people with no food or water. The boat was intercepted after being sighted by fishermen. The passengers were all male Rohingya, aged between 12 and 52. They were charged with entering the country illegally. One of the migrants, Mohamed Alias (37) was quoted as saying that they had come to Malaysia illegally in search of work in order to escape the poverty back home in Burma. However, Zafar Ahmed, president of the Rohingya Human Rights Organisation in Malaysia, stated that the men were refugees seeking protection in Malaysia and should not be considered as illegal immigrants. Malaysian authorities categorised the men as economic migrants and refused to recognise them as political refugees.[187]

In June 2007, Refugees International documented the case of a 37 year old Karen woman who had attempted to start a new life in Thailand with her husband but found herself in Malaysia after her husband was sold by traffickers. They gave money to an agent who promised to find work in Thailand for them but then sold her husband into forced labour. She waited for two months hoping to hear of her husband's whereabouts and also tried to find work for herself in Thailand but to no avail. Eventually she borrowed some money and paid a smuggler for passage to Malaysia. Despite being pregnant at the time, she was too frightened to visit a doctor in Malaysia as some refugee women had ended up in detention after going to hospital or being arrested when trying to register the birth of their babies.[188]

During June and July 2007, a total of forty illegal immigrants, including six women, were arrested near the Thai border. It was believed they were destined for Kuala Lumpur to look for work. They were detained at various locations in Bukit Kayu Hitma in Kedah.[189]

On 21 December 2007, it was reported that 45 Burmese of Chin ethnicity went missing after the ferry they were on hit a fishing boat. There were almost 100 Chins on board the ferry heading for Malaysia. They collided with a fishing boat whilst still in Burma's territorial waters and, according to the Chin Refugee Committee in Malaysia, the missing passengers were believed to have drowned. A number of survivors reportedly managed to climb into the fishing boat but their condition was unknown and there were no reports of any rescue attempt by the Burmese authorities.[190]

This small vessel transported more than 100 Rohingya refugees across the Andaman Sea to Malaysia. *[Photo: Grassroots HRE]*

Working Conditions

Working conditions for Burmese migrants in Malaysia, in particular undocumented migrants, are often harsh, and making complaints can have grave consequences for workers. According to Ye Min Htun of the Burma Workers Rights Protective Committee, migrant workers in Malaysia are frequently threatened with deportation if they complain. The committee receives regular complaints about abuse and punishment of workers.[191]

On 8 November 2007, it was reported that a female Burmese migrant worker was recovering in hospital after having jumped from a second-floor window. Ma Win Win Maw (38) had been in Malaysia since 2004, when she arrived with a group of 70 other women who had been hired by a Malaysian agent to work in garment factories in Jaho province, an industrial zone in southern Malaysia. According to her friends, Ma Win Win Maw had been abducted and imprisoned by gangsters after she made complaints about her working conditions and unpaid overtime. She had jumped from the window in order to escape the building where she was being held prisoner. She was blindfolded at the time.[192]

According to refugee advocates in Malaysia hundreds of slum-like camps have been set up by migrants around cities and towns across the country. In the camps people typically live in crowded conditions in huts made from sheets of zinc, cardboard and plastic.[193] Conditions like these make it easy for RELA to carry out their immigration raids as the groups are readily identifiable as immigrants and they can round up large numbers of people in one go.

In addition to poor living and working conditions, there are also concerns about the significant increase reported in use of a drug known as Boi among migrant workers of the Mon ethnic group. Nai Ramonnya, secretary of the Mon Organisation in Penang, is among those concerned about the drug's prevalence. In 2007 he estimated around 50 percent of Mon construction workers were regular users, however he was unsure whether migrant workers from other Burmese ethnic groups had similar levels of dependency. The drug is sold in tablet form and one dose, which comprises three tablets, costs 2.50 ringgit. Many migrants use up to three doses while some regularly use up to ten doses, which costs the same as their daily income. Boi is often sold by Mon women who obtain it from pharmacies and then sell it on the construction sites. The drug is popular because its effects include the ability to work harder as well as generally feeling good.[194]

Responses to the Saffron Revolution

Burma's various ethnic groups came together in Kuala Lumpur on 2 October 2007 to show solidarity for pro-democracy protesters affected by the violent crackdown on the September protests in Burma. Over 1,500 people gathered to demonstrate outside the Burmese embassy before marching to the Chinese and Russian diplomatic missions to hand over letters calling for their support in the struggle for democracy.[195]

A second protest on 4 October 2007 attracted over 2,600 people from the Burmese community in Malaysia. The protest, led by the General Strike Committee, was restricted to one hour by the Malaysian authorities, although there was no attempt to disrupt the event or prevent it from taking place. It was also reported that a prayer and candle lighting ceremony had been organized by a group of Malaysians to commemorate the monks and civilians who had been killed during the protests in Burma.[196]

This was reportedly the first time that the various ethnic groups had gathered together in such a show of solidarity. Sai Saing, a Shan ethnic leader, stated that there had been agreement amongst the ethnic groups to support all protesters in Burma and that this had been extended to the community in exile.[197]

A Burmese worker who returned after deportation from a Thai-Malay human trafficking syndicate by paying 2500 Malaysian Ringgit to come back to Malaysia. *[Caption and photo: RFA/Kyaw Min Htun]*

18.4 Situation of Burmese Migrants in India

Burmese continued to migrate to India throughout 2007. India's four northeastern states - Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, share more than 1463 km border with Burma, and are thus the major destinations for Burmese migrants.[198] There is a large presence of Burmese migrants in these north-eastern states and also a sizeable population in Delhi.

Most of the Burmese migrants in India were Chins, while smaller numbers were of Naga, Arakan, Burman and other ethnicities. Fearing religious, cultural and political persecution, as well as economic destitution, many Chin Christians continued to flee across the border into Mizoram and Manipur States. However, India has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor does India allow the UNHCR access to either of these states. Therefore, Chins seeking refugee status and the protection of the UNHCR are labelled illegal immigrants by the Government of India and fall within the jurisdiction of India's Foreigners Act of 1946, which grants the Government the right to expel them at any time. India has also failed to ratify the 2003 Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Thus, migrants from Burma are afforded little legal protection in India.

Conditions of Burmese Migrants in the Northeastern States of India

As India is not a signatory to the refugee convention, lacks a national refugee law, and does not allow the UNHCR access to refugees in the northeastern areas, asylum seekers there are categorized as illegal migrant workers, and as such depend on the attitude of the state governments and local people. Although the situation of Burmese migrants differs slightly from state to state, most suffer from poor living conditions, instability and the threat of deportation.[199]

In the state of Mizoram, the 70,000 – 80,000 Burmese migrants, mainly Chin, live with the negative stigma of being called *'Ramdangmi'* meaning *'Foreigner'. Before 2003 the Mizos called* people from Burma *'Burmami'* meaning *'People from Burma'*.[200] However, in 2003 a campaign against the Chins started, spearheaded by the Young Mizo Association (YMA). In spite of the accepted ethnical and linguistical affinities between the Chin and Mizos, the campaign against the Chins still continues. Chin migrants are typically treated as scapegoats and often blamed for existing social problems, including drug trafficking and rape. Thus they are easy targets of eviction campaigns, crackdowns by the authorities, and general suspicion.[201]

Most of the Burmese refugees in Mizoram work as domestic workers, daily-waged labourers, vegetable sellers, or run small businesses like selling clothes or handicraft. Most of the Chin women work as domestic workers, but the murder of one Chin housemaid in June 2007 instilled fear among Burmese women, and many are now apprehensive of working as housemaids.[202]

The situation of the Naga people from Burma is slightly different from that of the Chins in Mizoram. As there are many Naga tribes which live both in India & Burma, the Nagas in India do not see the Nagas from Burma as refugees when they cross the border. They are instead seen as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In addition, some mechanisms do exist that provide assistance to the Nagas from Burma. This also holds true to some extent for the Singpho people from Burma, as they live both in Burma and India.

The generally poor living conditions have made access to education difficult for the children of Burmese refugees. Common disease like malaria, jaundice and diarrhea continues to take its toll on Burmese people.

As the distinction between migrant workers and refugees in India is particularly blurred, much of the information can not be separated. HRDU has attempted to separate the categories to a certain extent, however to obtain a most comprehensive picture of the situation for all Burmese migrants in India, also see Chapter 17: The Situation of Refugees.

18.5 Situation of Burmese Migrants in Bangladesh

Bangladesh lies to the west of Burma and borders the north-western edge of Arakan State as well as the lower western border of Chin State. It has traditionally been a popular destination for the Arakanese Rohingya, presumably as much because of the high proportion of Muslims of Bangladesh as because of its geographical proximity. However, over the past few years conditions have become increasingly difficult and the Rohingya now appear to be quite unwelcome.

According to reports from a meeting held in Teknaf by Zila Law and Order Committee on 29 March 2007, it was generally believed that Burmese Rohingya migrants are poorly educated and lacking in morals as well as prone to be involved in robbery, theft and murder. The meeting was attended by, amongst others, the District Commissioner, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, police officers, Upazilla Nirbahi officers, National Security Intelligence officers and local journalists. At the meeting it was agreed that Rohingya should be arrested and repatriated whenever possible. It was further decided that Rohingya should not be issued with national identity cards or any other documents, provided with paid work or shelter, or allowed to marry locals. It was further agreed that non-compliance should result in legal sanctions or other punishment.[203]

The same day that the meeting was held, newspapers in Cox's Bazar published an announcement from the authorities prohibiting local residents from renting houses to Rohingya. The announcement warned that those found in breach of the order would face severe punishment. Border security was heightened following the announcement and many patrols were on the lookout for Muslims attempting to return to Burma as well as those on their way in to Bangladesh.[204]

The policy was reinforced the following month when an official announcement was made on loudspeakers in Teknaf on 20 April 2007, warning people not to engage illegal Burmese immigrants as labourers. The authorities further announced that all house owners should drive out Burmese refugee tenants as quickly as possible and that rickshaw owners should not hire out rickshaws to any Burmese. [205] Nevertheless, as the situation in Burma remains much worse, the Rohingya continue to cross into Bangladesh in significant numbers.

Unfortunately, political instability early in the year prompted the Bangladesh government to proclaim a state of emergency which, in turn, led to much tighter border controls. The Bangladesh Rifles had the border area under surveillance and no boats from Burma were allowed to harbour on the Bangladesh side of the Naff River. The import of Burmese goods was also prohibited and sources said goods were piling up along the border.[206]

On 25 January 2007 it was reported that the Bangladesh-Burma border had been sealed off by Bangladeshi authorities to prevent a possible influx of Burmese Muslims following rumours of a communal riot in Arakan State. The report stated that Bangladeshi authorities had received information that 1000 Rohingya were camping on the eastern bank of the Naff River waiting to cross the border.[207] Border security forces and the local administration in Cox's Bazar were obliged to deny reports that the international border with Burma had been sealed off. However, following the declaration of a state of emergency two weeks previously, security was heightened and the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles intensified patrols. Reports of a Rohingya influx were also denied, although intelligence officials were aware of the steady flow of small groups of migrants attempting to cross the border. The increased patrols resulted in more of these groups being detained.[208]

In a two-day crackdown at the end of January 2007, Bangladesh border authorities arrested 25 illegal Burmese immigrants in border areas of Teknaf Township in Cox's Bazar district. Five were arrested while trying to enter Bangladesh via the Naff River; another five were stopped at the Damdamiya check post and the remaining 15 were arrested in the town of Teknaf.[209] On 2 February, a further 16 people, including two women, were arrested while trying to travel on to Chittagong after entering the country at Teknaf.[210]

In addition to people attempting to cross the border independently, a number are brought across by people smugglers and traffickers. One such group was detained in January 2007, and it was reported that eight Burmese citizens had been caught during a night-time police raid on the Al Hera hotel in Cox's Bazar. According to police, they had come from Maungdaw Township with the intention of working in a salt field in Cox's Bazar. They had been taken there by a trafficking syndicate on the promise of better jobs. One Rohingya and two Bangladeshis were also detained at the hotel and arrested on trafficking charges.[211]

On 25 June 2007, when three officials from a Danish NGO were abducted by a group of armed men, a number of people were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the incident, including both local Bangladeshi and Burmese nationals. The border was subsequently subject to another wave of heightened security. Five days later it was reported that 11 Burmese citizens had been arrested by Bangladeshi Army personnel in Bandaban, an area in the south of the Chittagong Hill Tract which is close to the border with Arakan state. At the time of their arrest, the men were holding a meeting under a passenger shade in the local bazaar. During questioning, the men told the police they had come to Bangladesh in search of work and had crossed at the Teknaf border point a few days previously. They were sent to jail later the same day.[212]

In July 2007 it was reported that five Burmese youths were arrested while trying to enter Bangladesh illegally. They were picked up by local police at the Palong Kali border point in Okia Township, Cox's Bazar District. They were reported to be from Sittwe Township and Buthidaung Township in Arakan State. Like so many before them, they had crossed into Bangladesh in the search for work and a better life.[213]

Tight border control persisted throughout 2007 and reports from the latter months of the year include one of five Burmese nationals from the Thet tribe in Arakan State who were arrested by the Bangladesh Rifles on 19 November 2007 while trying to cross the border in the Bandarban hill district.[214] The following month a group of 14 Rohingya were returned to Burma after being caught trying to cross the border illegally. They were arrested on 26 December 2007 while trying to cross the Naff River in a rowing boat.[215]

Trafficking and Migration of Burmese from Bangladesh to Malaysia

Deteriorating conditions in Bangladesh and continued repression in Burma have led increasing numbers of Rohingya to travel on to third countries. On 21 March 2007 it was reported that around 40 percent of Arakanese youth had left for neighbouring countries, including Malaysia and Thailand, in the past five years.[216] Police claim Rohingya are being encouraged to make the trip to Malaysia by a trafficking syndicate, comprised of both Bengalis and Rohingya, which charges between taka 10,000 and 50,000 per person. They also say most of those who attempt the journey are arrested.[217]

The vast majority of Rohingya caught in transit by Bangladeshi forces during 2007 were bound for Malaysia. According to sources in Maungdaw Township, the winter season is a popular time for migrants to travel by boat to Malaysia as the seas are generally calm.[218]

Trafficking is prolific and the police often receive tip offs regarding hotels where migrants are being kept or boats which are likely to be used for transporting them. Given the preference for winter travel, most arrests are made towards the beginning and end of the year.

On 14 January 2007, nine Burmese nationals were arrested during a raid on the Alhair hotel in Cox's Bazar. A police source confirmed they were being trafficked to Malaysia by sea.[219]

Also in January, A police raid in the border town of Teknaf resulted in the arrest of six Rohingya although a further 33 people escaped. The raid was based on information that a number of Rohingya had entered Bangladesh for the purpose of securing sea travel to Malaysia.[220]

In February 2007, 48 Rohingya and seven Bangladeshi nationals were sentenced to five year prison terms after being caught attempting to illegally enter Malaysia in December 2006. The group were arrested on 20 December 2006 by NaSaKa, the Burmese border security force. The boat they were travelling in had originally left from Teknaf in Bangladesh but the engine failed just one day into the journey. After floating at sea for five days the boat was spotted by two fishing boats from Sittwe Township and towed to the coastal area of Maungdaw where it was seized by the NaSaKa patrol team.[221] A very similar story was published separately which gave the same facts but reported the numbers as 41 Rohingya and 15 Bangladeshis.[222] It was not entirely clear whether this referred to the same incident.

On 14 February 2007, a group of 12 Rohingya were arrested in Cox's Bazar while discussing their plans for travel to Malaysia at a mosque in Shaha Tali village. A further 38 escaped arrest.[223] Another 12 Rohingya were arrested on the same day at a hotel in Cox's Bazar where they were preparing for passage to Malaysia. They had each paid 10,000 taka to a broker.[224] On 18 March 2007, a group of 10 Rohingya were arrested during a raid on hotel Zelarni. They had been brought to Bangladesh by a trafficking syndicate and were waiting for passage to Malaysia.[225]

These incidents were followed by a quieter period, presumably due to the preference for winter sea travel, before reports of arrests and raids resumed again in November:

On 22 November 2007, police in Cox's Bazar were tipped about a group of Burmese nationals who were intending to travel to Malaysia in a cargo boat. A group of around 30 were preparing to board when the police arrived and all jumped into the river in an attempt to escape. Seven were caught and arrested, including two touts. According to the statements from those detained, the touts had taken 300,000 to 400,000 kyat per person in payment for the transport. One of the detainees asserted he would prefer to die in the Bay of Bengal than continue living under military rule in Burma.[226]

On 23 November 2007, police made seven arrests in the Fisherrighat area of Cox's Bazar, after an incident in the Bay of Bengal which left at least one person dead and several missing. Two boats sank while ferrying 240 people out to a trawler which was to take them to Malaysia. As the boats went down the passengers swam to the trawler and caused it to tip over as it became overloaded. A significant number are believed to have swum to shore and gone into hiding but many remained unaccounted for. Only one body was recovered, found by villagers on Shapuri Dip Island. According to local sources a ten-member syndicate with members from Cox's Bazar, Teknaf and Burma is responsible for the trafficking in the area.[227]

On 25 November 2007, another overloaded ferry carrying 250 passengers went down near St Martin's island after encountering bad weather. Some survivors were able to swim to St Martin's island but it was unknown how many casualties or fatalities there were as the

incident was not officially reported. It was reported, however, that many of the passengers were Rohingya whose illegal status was the reason for the lack of information.[228]

On 27 November 2007, the bodies of 11 migrant workers were found after three ferry boats sank in the Bay of Bengal the previous Friday. The deceased were mostly Burmese nationals and were part of a group of approximately 260 who were being ferried out to a trawler which would carry them to Malaysia. The ferries sank quickly after being hit by a heavy wave. Around 60 people were rescued from the water and many more managed to swim to an island in the bay. It was reported that the Bangladeshi government was looking into action that could be taken against the agents involved in the attempted trafficking.[229]

A boat which was estimated to be carrying around 100 people sank in calm waters off the coast of southern Bangladesh at the end of November. Only one body was recovered, leading police to suspect that the survivors may have been illegal migrants who had gone into hiding after the accident. The authorities had no information regarding the nationalities of the passengers and no survivors were found, despite the search continuing until nightfall. The boat was a wooden fishing boat and it capsized near Saint Martin's island which is around 120 kilometres (75 miles) south of Cox's Bazar, where there are two heavily populated refugee camps. Local police reported that weather conditions had been good at the time but that ferry accidents are common in Bangladesh, often as a result of poor navigation, boats being in an unfit condition and safety regulations not being properly enforced. Although details of the cases are similar, it was unclear whether this was the same boat that went down on 25 November 2007. [230]

On 30 November 2007, it was reported that 69 Bangladeshi fishermen had to be rescued after their boat was driven into the Arakan coast of Burma during a storm. The following day a follow-up story stated that 56 of the men were actually Rohingya from Arakan State who had been bound for Malaysia. The other 13 men rescued were Bangladeshi and a further two had drowned before help arrived. The group had originally left Bangladesh on 23 November.[231]

On 8 December 2007, a group of 85 left Bangladesh around midnight in two boats bound for Malaysia. The group comprised a mix of Rohingya and Bangladeshis. Another group of 35 Burmese nationals were arrested from various hotels the following day. The detainees named Ahmed Salim (40) from Moshkhali area as the principal organizer of illegal travel to Malaysia.[232] A further 11 were arrested in Teknaf on 10 December 2007.[233]

In a subsequent operation, a group of 32 Burmese citizens from Maungdaw Township in Arakan State were arrested in Cox's Bazar in early December while preparing to leave for Malaysia. On this occasion a Bangladeshi citizen was arrested on human trafficking charges.[234]

Responses to the Saffron Revolution

Twelve Burmese organizations in Bangladesh got together on 2 October 2007 to stage an hour long protest outside the Burmese Embassy in Dhaka. Over 60 people turned up to voice their objection to the *"brutal killings"* of monks, nuns and pro-democracy activists in Burma's September 2007 uprising.[235]

A second demonstration was held by Burmese monks on 6 October 2007. They were joined by members of the Burmese community in Bangladesh, resulting in a group of over 100 people. Bangladesh police prevented the demonstration from taking place directly in front of the embassy but allowed the group to protest nearby. The monks subsequently marched to the Chinese embassy to hand over a letter of appeal asking the Chinese government to stop supporting the military junta in Burma.[236]

Arakanese monks staging a protest against the SPDC in front of the Burmese and Chinese embassies in Bangladesh on 6 October 2007. *[Photo: Narinjara News]*

In December, a separate demonstration was held outside the Indian embassy in Dhaka on International Human Rights Day. This demonstration involved a group of around 50 exiled Burmese citizens from Arakan State and Chin State. Their intention was to highlight the continued detention of 34 freedom fighters that India has held in custody since 1998. Protests are not normally allowed in diplomatic areas of Dhaka. In addition, Bangladesh was under state of emergency at the time and there was a nationwide ban on all protests or demonstrations. Despite this, none of the Burmese protesters were arrested.[237]

18.6 Situation of Burmese Migrants in Other Places

China

China is located to the north-east of Burma, bordering Kachin State and Shan State. Tibet, which is currently under Chinese control, lies to the north and borders Kachin State. The road running from Mandalay in central Burma to the Chinese border town Ruili was once part of the ancient Silk Route and continues to be of both economic and political importance. China remains Burma's principal trading partner and arms supplier. It is also the largest foreign investor; a significant proportion of the business in Burma is now Chinese owned.[238]

There are many border crossings between the two countries, with movement in both directions. The Shan and Kachin ethnic populations of Burma are related to the Dai and Jingpo ethnic groups in Yunnan Province of China, so people cross the border for marriage and social reasons as well as for work and trade. Drugs and diseases also cross the border and this region has one of the worst HIV/AIDS problems in Asia. The high incidence of malaria, TB and cholera brought on by the conditions in Burma is also of concern.[239]

One major issue of concern relating to Burmese migrants in China is the number of women who are trafficked into the sex trade. In November 2007 Kachin News Group interviewed four girls from Shan State who had escaped from a night club in Hangzhou where Burmese women were held as sex slaves. They said that nearly half of the women in the club were from Burma and that the club employed over 50 security guards to prevent them from leaving. They were forced to work from 5:30 pm to 5:00 am, received only one meal per day and most of the money they received from clients was confiscated.[240]

The issues facing sex workers were highlighted in *Caught Between Two Hells*, a report by the Burmese Women's Union published in December 2007. The report found that some of the women who ended up in the sex trade in China had worked in the same industry back in Burma, but for considerably less money. Others were tricked into it; they thought they were engaging the services of people smugglers only to find themselves in the hands of traffickers who sold them to businessmen or direct to brothels. Some made the decision after finding themselves being worked to death by exploitative employers. In addition to being disposed to the unpleasant and dangerous nature of sex-work, these women faced many of the same problems as other migrant workers: their employers exploited their illegal status, they could lose up to half their salary in deductions, they were subject to verbal and physical abuse and many were in a situation of debt-bondage based on the cost of bringing them into China. [241]

Women in Asia are generally powerless when it comes to negotiating condom use and sex workers are no different. Their work therefore puts them at a very high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases as well as being unwitting carriers of disease. The estimated HIV/AIDS prevalence rate amongst sex workers in China is 30 percent, although the Burmese Women's Union believes it could well be higher because so few women get tested. The report also noted that some women were reluctant to get tested or even hid the fact that they had contracted the disease because they were afraid of losing their livelihood.[242]

Besides the obvious risks involved in sex work, one of the biggest differences between sex workers and other migrant workers is that most of them would be ostracized by their communities if the nature of their employment became known. Some of the women interviewed for the report worked in Ruili, a Chinese town on the China-Burma border. Those who were employed as "streetwalkers" on public roads were constantly afraid of being spotted by former neighbours or acquaintances who might be crossing the border. [243]

> *"These so-called 'good' people have called me a lot of names! It is easy for them to go home and talk about how I have sold my body and how I am no longer pure but did they ever think about the fact that without my earnings, my family will not be able to eat…"*
>
> - Anonymous sex worker[244]

According to the report, many young girls get involved in sex work because it is the only way they can make enough money to pay for university. Unfortunately, if news of their employment in China gets back to Burma then they may find it impossible to return home and, consequently, their chances of going to university also disappear. [245]

Another situation which the report discusses is that of women who are sold as "brides" in China. Although some of the women were allowed to choose their "groom", they were purchased nonetheless. Once bought, their obligations were similar to those of a normal wife and included housework and assisting their purchaser with his work, often farming or agriculture, as well as providing sex. According to the report, some women were lucky and even ended up in legitimate marriages. Those who were less lucky could face various kinds of abuse or end up being sold on to a third party. [246]

Japan

Japan has a significant Burmese migrant community. Japan is not known for being particularly accommodating towards refugees or illegal migrants. During the last week of November 2007, Japanese authorities arrested five Burmese money transfer agents who were operating illegally. As the news spread, other agents temporarily suspended their work and left many of the Burmese migrant community unable to send money home. One migrant quoted in *Mizzima News* said most people could not afford to use government transfer agents because the official exchange rate was so unfavourable. There are reportedly over 7,000 Burmese migrants in Japan who depend on the illegal transfer system.[247]

In November 2007, a group of Burmese migrants were involved in a piracy incident whilst working on a Japanese tanker. On 2 November 2007 it was confirmed that all crew members were safe after the *Golden Nori* was seized by pirates off the coast of Somalia. The crew of 23 included 12 Burmese citizens.[248] Ko Thura, head of Seafarers Union of Burma, stated that this was not the first time Burmese crewmen had fallen prey to pirates and that the SPDC rarely made any effort to help them. The Seafarers Union of Burma is based in Bangkok and works on behalf of Burmese seamen, estimated at 20,000 to 30,000, who are employed on ships of various nationalities, usually under fairly poor conditions.[249]

On Sunday 9 December 2007, Burmese pro-democracy supporters gathered together in Tokyo for an early celebration of Human Rights Day and to protest against human rights abuses in Burma, including the recent suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution. They were joined by Japanese, Filipinos, Cambodians and other nationalities.[250]

South Korea

On 14 August 2007 it was reported that the text for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Burma and South Korea had been agreed and would shortly be signed. The agreement would admit Burmese workers into South Korea under a programme known as the Employment Permit System. This programme places greater emphasis on government approval than previous arrangements did.

Applicants must be aged between 18 and 39 and pass a Korean language test. Those who score over 60 points will be eligible for work in the service and manufacturing sectors. Those who score between 30 and 60 will be restricted to agriculture, livestock and fisheries. Other requirements include a medical examination and a criminal background check. Applicants previously deported from South Korea are automatically ineligible.

Migrant workers were previously recruited to South Korea by private employment agencies using a scheme known as the Industrial Training System. Approximately 4,000 Burmese migrants travelled to South Korea under this scheme including 1,296 during 2006 alone. The new system cuts out the role of the private agencies and requires official involvement instead. It also abolishes the quota system for foreign workers. Although the eligibility requirements are tougher under the new system, officially there are also benefits. There are 46 labour inspection offices across the country where migrant workers can complain if their employers violate the terms of their employment contract. [251]

However, the practice of employers confiscating the registration documents of their employees is as common in South Korea as it is in countries like Thailand and Malaysia. On 17 August 2007 it was reported that a Burmese woman of Chin ethnicity had been in Hwaseong Immigration Detention Centre in Seoul for the past year. She had left her initial job because of the abusive working conditions, but sacrificed her legal status in doing so because her employer retained her passport and travel documents. According to the Burma Association in South Korea there are over 2,000 Burmese migrant workers in the country and more than half of them are not in possession of their legal documents.[252]

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has previously had a track record of issuing work permits to Rohingya on the grounds that they face religious persecution at home and cannot return to Burma. However, they are now seeking to deport 267 individuals who have been arrested on criminal charges and have asked Bangladesh to accept them. The Bangladesh authorities do not normally accept migrants without valid travel documents that prove their citizenship but are also keen to maintain a good relationship with the Saudi government as there are currently 1.6 million Bangladeshi nationals working in Saudi Arabia.[253]

Singapore

Although Thailand and Malaysia are the top destinations for Burmese migrants seeking manual or unskilled work, Singapore is the destination of choice for most skilled workers and young professionals. The majority arrive as legal migrants and earn good salaries. They also have access to education and development opportunities. Migrants who are willing to work for the government for three years after graduation can take advantage of an 80 percent loan for education fees.[254]

A group of 40 Burmese protesters gathered on the evening of 20 November 2007, close to the venue of the ASEAN annual summit. Their intention was to draw attention to the ongoing human rights abuses in Burma and the *"very passive stance"* which ASEAN had taken to date. The group was also protesting that the planned address from Ibrahim Gambari, UN special envoy to Burma, had been cancelled.[255] The protesters left peacefully when police arrived to disperse them. [256]

Singapore has very strict rules governing demonstrations, and public gatherings of more than five people require a police permit.[257] On 3 September 2007 it was reported that 23 Burmese activists had been summoned to interviews with the Singapore Immigration Department following their involvement in a separate protest against the fuel and commodity price increase in Burma.[258]

The working conditions for migrants in Singapore are generally above average. Unfortunately, the benefits available to Burma's young professionals in exile do not extend to the inevitable number of workers who arrive in Singapore illegally. On 29 November 2007, two Burmese nationals were arrested trying to smuggle themselves out of Singapore in a truck bound for Malaysia. They had paid the equivalent of US$ 600 each, of which the driver received US$ 450 per person. The migrants risked up to six months in jail plus a minimum of three strokes of the cane if found guilty, while the truck driver could face two to five years in jail, in addition to caning.[259]

The main issue facing Burmese migrants in Singapore, however, is taxation. Migrant workers face double taxation which directly contravenes the Double Taxation Agreement signed by Burma and Singapore in 2000. Despite paying income tax in accordance with Singapore law, migrant workers are charged an additional tax when renewing their work permits at the Burmese consulate.[260] On 22 January 2007 it was reported that a group of Burmese workers had started a campaign called "Double Taxation Avoidance Movement" and planned to collect information on workers who were paying double tax. They claim the situation violates Article 26 of the 2004 agreement, "Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income", and plan to turn the information over to the Singapore authorities once they have enough evidence. Naing Moe Aung, one of the campaign organisers, estimates that of the around 50,000 Burmese migrants living in Singapore,, 10,000 have paid double tax.[261] The leaders of the campaign also sent a registered letter to the Burmese ambassador urging him to take action in accordance with the tax agreement. They had previously attempted to deliver the letter by hand but officials at the embassy refused to accept it.[262]

The United States

The Diversity Immigrant Visa programme, also known as the "green card lottery," admits 50,000 people each year from countries that traditionally have a low rate of immigration to the U.S. Figures from 2007 showed 651 Burmese "lottery winners" out of a total of 5.5 million entries internationally.

The application process is difficult for those in Burma. To start with, the application must be submitted electronically and internet access is still not widespread, particularly in the more rural areas. Many applicants also struggle with the format of the application and the level of English required. Consequently there is an army of middle men, mostly based in Internet cafés, who offer much needed assistance at exorbitant rates which can be as high as 80,000 kyat per person. Some agents also convince applicants that they need a sponsor and offer to provide this too for a fee which can be as high as 700,000 kyat. Sponsors can be helpful but they are not an official requirement. All of the agent's fees are exclusive of the application fees which total US$ 435. Applicants are also responsible for the cost of their own airfare although credit facilities are available.

Once they arrive in the United States, winners of the "freedom jackpot" can find it difficult to adjust. For those with no friends or sponsors it can be difficult to find work, at least initially, and integration can be a slow process. They also find themselves struggling to pay off the huge burden of debt that most incur to cover the application process and travel costs.[263]

Unfortunately, those who do well financially still face problems sending money back home to relatives in Burma as U.S. trade restrictions block the transfer of funds. Myint Wai, a 30 year old graduate who had been legally resident in the U.S. for 11 years, succeeded in transferring US$ 4 million between November 2004 and February 2006 but is now facing federal charges of operating an unlicensed money-transfer business and a possible five years in prison.[264]

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APPENDICES

Acronyms

3D	Three Diseases Fund
AAPP	Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
AASYC	All Arakan Students and Youth Congress
AB	Artillery Battalion
ABFSU	All Burma Federation of Student Unions
ABFSU-FAC	All Burma Federation of Student Unions – Foreign Affairs Committee
ABMA	All Burma Monks Alliance
ABMU	All Burma Muslim Union
ABRC	All Burma Refugees Committee
ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ACT	Artemisinin-based Combination Therapies
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADPC	Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
ADSL	Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line
AFP	Agence France Presse
AFPLF	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AHRC	Asian Human Rights Commission
AI	Amnesty International
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIIMS	All Indian Institute of Medical Science
AIR	All India Radio
ALA	Arakan Liberation Army
ALD	Arakan League for Democracy
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party
ALRC	Asian Legal Resource Centre
ANC	Arakan National Council
AP	Associated Press
APFWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
APG	Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering
ARAC	Arakanese Refugees Affairs Committee
ARNO	Arakan Rohingya National Organisation
ARV	Anti-Retroviral Treatment
AS	Angular Stomatitis
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASP	Assistant Superintednant of Police
AWA	Arakan's Women Association
AzG	Artsen zonder Grenzen (MSF-Holland)
BAD	Border Area Development
BAJ	Bridge Asia Japan

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BC	Bagan Cybertech
BCN	Burma Centrum Nederlands
BDR	Bangladesh Rifles
BDRS	Bangladesh Red Crescent Society
BERG	Burma Ethnic Research Group
BESU	Basic Education Student Union
BEW	Burma Economic Watch
BFM	Bounding Fragmentation Mine
BHA	Burma Housewives Association
BI	Burma Issues
BID	Best Interest Determination
BLC	Burma Lawyers' Council
BLSO	Burma Labour Solidarity Organisation
BM	Blast Mine
BMA	Burma Media Alliance
BMA	Burmese Media Association
BMWEC	Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee
BNA	Burma News Association
BP	Bangkok Post
BPHWT	Back Pack Health Workers Team
BRAT	Burmese Rohingya Association in Thailand
BSF	Border Security Forces
BSI	Bureau of Special Investigation
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Program Party
BWU	Burmese Women's Union
CAAC	UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict
CAPS	Continuous Assessment and Progression System
CATW	Coalition against Trafficking in Women
CAT	Convention Against Torture and Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CBC	Calvary Baptist Church
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CBMT	Chin Back Pack Medical Team
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCC	Central Coordination Committee
CCSDPT	Committee for the Coordination of Services for Displaced Persons in Thailand
CCTV	China Central Television
CCW	Convention on Conventional Weapons
CD	Compact Disk
CDMA	Code Division Multiple Access
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CHRO	Chin Human Rights Organisation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CIA	Chin Integrated Army
CICC	Center for the International Cooperation for Computerisation
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
CIDKP	Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons
CLCC	Central Chin Literature and Culture Committee
CAN	Chin National Army
CNC	Chin National Confederation
CNF	Chin National Front
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
CNN	Cable News Network
COMMIT	Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPCC	Commodity Price Control Committees
CPI	China Power Investment Corporation
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CPRCS	Committee for the Prevention of the Recruitment of Child Soldiers
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPP	Committee Representing People's Parliament
CSW	Christian Solidarity Worldwide
CU	Cultural University
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DaKaSa	Regional Administration Headquarters
DBA	Don Bosco Ashalayam
DDSI	Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence
DDU	Deen Dayal Upadyay
DFID	British Department for International Development
DFM	Directional Fragmentation Mine
DHF	Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DOTS	Directly Observed Treatment Short Course
DPA	Deutsche Presse Agence
DPDC	District Peace and Development Council
DPNS	Democratic Party for a New Society
DSA	Defense Services Academy
DSI	Defence Service Intelligence
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma

EC	European Commission
ECS	Economic Cooperation Strategy
EGAT	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
ENC	Ethnic Nationalities Council
ENSCC	Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee
EP	Employee Pass
EPDC	Electric Power Development Company
ERI	Earth Rights International
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
E-visa	Electronic Visa
EWEC	East-West Economic Corridor
EYNG	Ethnic Youth Network Group
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FBR	Free Burma Rangers
FCDCC	Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FEC	Foreign Exchange Certificate
FFSS	Free Funeral Services Society
FOT	Field Observation Team
FPAB	Family Planning Association Bangladesh
FRC	Foreign Resident Card
FRRO	Foreigners Regional Registration Officer
FTI	Federation of Thai Industries
FTUB	Federation of Trade Unions – Burma
FTUK	Federation of Trade Unions-Kawthoolei
GAIL	Gas Authority India Ltd.
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GBA	Gankaw Baptist Association
GBSV	Gender-Based and Sexual Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHQ	General Headquarters
GHRE	Grassroots Human Rights Education
GOI	Government of India
GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organisation
GTI	Government Technical Institute
HI	Handicap International
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HQ	Headquarters
HRDP	Human Rights Defenders and Promoters
HRDU	Human Rights Documentation Unit

HREIB	Human Rights Education Institute of Burma
HRP	Hongsowatoi Restoration Party
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HURFOM	Human Rights Foundation of Monland
IAUP	International Association of University Presidents
IB	Infantry Battalion
ICBL	International Campaign to Ban Landmines
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ID	Identity
IDC	Immigration Detention Centre
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IHH	Internationale Humanitare Hilfsorganisation
IIRO	International Islamic Relief Organisation
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMNA	Independent Mon News Agency
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
INO	Inntha National Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRAC	Islamic Religious Affairs Council
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRD	Internal Revenue Department
ISG	Interim Shan Government
ISP	Internet Service Provider
IT	Information Technology
ITBMU	International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University
ITN	Insecticide-Treated Mosquito Net
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JRS	Jesuit Refuge Service
KA	Karenni Army
KADC	Kachin Anti-Dam Committee
KB	Kanbawza Bank
KCBA	Kuki Chin Baptist Association

KDA	Kachin Defence Army
KDHW	Karen Department of Health and Welfare
KDNG	Kachin Development Networking Group
KDP	Kokang Democratic Party
KDRG	Karenni Development Research Group
KhaMaYa	Light Infantry Battalion
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIC	Karen Information Committee
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KNA	Karen National Association
KNAHR	Karenni News Agency for Human Rights
KNDA	Karenni National Defence Army
KNG	Kayan National Guard
KNG	Kachin News Group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
KNO	Kachin National Organisation
KNPLF	Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front
KNPP	Karenni National People's Party
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KnRC	Karenni Refugee Committee
KnSO	Karenni National Solidarity Organisation
KNU	Karen National Union
KNU/KNLA PC	Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council
KORD	Karen Office for Relief and Development
KPF	Karen Peace Force
KRC	Karen Relief Committee
KSC	Kachin Solidarity Council
KSDF	Kuki Students Democratic Front
KSDP	Karenni Student Development Program
KSWC	Karenni Social Welfare Committee
KSWDC	Karenni Social Welfare and Development Committee
KTO	Ko Than Oo
KVTBA	Kabaw Valley Thadou Baptist Association
KWA	Kachin Women's Association
KWAT	Kachin Women's Association – Thailand
KWO	Karen Women's Organisation
LBVD	Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department
LDC	Least Developed Country
LDF	Lahu Democratic Front
LIB	Light Infantry Battalion
LID	Light Infantry Division

LNDO	Lahu National Development Organisation
LNO	Lahu National Organisation
LPO	Labour Protection Office (Thailand)
LTAC	La-mine Township Administrative Championship
MAA	Myanmar Accounting Academy
MAG	Mon Armed Group
MAMD	Mon Army, Mergui District
MAN	Muslim Agency for News
MANA	Myanmar Anti-Narcotic Association
MAP	Migrant Assistance Program Foundation
MAPT	Myanmar Agricultural Produce Trade
MART	Myanmar Agricultural Produce Trade
MAS	Military Affairs Security
MaYaKa	Myitkyina Township Administrative Office
MBT	Mine Ban Treaty
MBTU	Million British Thermal Units
MCS	Mon Canadian Society
MDC	Myanmar Development Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MDUF	Myeik-Dawei United Front
MED	Micro-Enterprise Development
MHD	Malteser Hilfdienst Deutschland
MI	Malteser International
MI	Military Intelligence
MICTDC	Myanmar Information Communications and Technology Development Corporation
MIS	Military Intelligence
MLCC	Mon Literature and Culture Committee
MMA	Myanmar Medical Association
MMA	Myanmar Music Association
MMCWA	Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association
MMPE	Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise
MNA	Myanmar Nurses Association
MNC	Mon National Council
MNCWA	Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army (a.k.a Kokang)
MNDF	Mon National Democratic Front
MNED	Mon National Education Department
MNF	Mon National Front
MNLA	Mon National Liberation Army
MNWA	Mon National Warrior Army
MOB	Myanmar Oriental Bank
MOC	Military Operations Command

MOGE	Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
MOMC	Military Operation Management Command
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MPCB	Motion Picture Censor Board
MPF	Myanmar Pharmaceutical Factory
MPMEEA	Myanmar Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment Entrepreneurs Association
MPT	Myanma Post and Telecommunications
MRA	Monland Restoration Army
MRC	Myanmar Red Cross
MRDC	Mon Relief and Development Committee
MRE	Mine Risk Education
MRO	Mon Refugee Organisation
MRP	Mon Restoration Party
MRTLC	Myanmar Rice Trading Leading Committee
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
MSF	Military Security Force
MSG	Monosodium Glutamate
MSI	Marie Stopes International
MT	Myanma Teleport
MTA	Mong Thai Army
MTC	Mae Tao Clinic
MTP	Mara Thyutliapy
MTUF	Mergui-Tavoy United Front
MUB	Myanmar Universal Bank
MWAC	Myanmar Women Affairs Committee
MWAF	Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation
MWEA	Myanmar Women's Entrepreneurs Association
MWO	Mon Women's Organisation
NaSaKa	Border Security Force (Western border)
NaTaLa	Ministry of Border Affairs
NC	National Convention
NCCM	National Catholic Mission on Migration
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NCRC	National Committee on the Rights of the Child
NCSN	Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland
NCUB	National Council of the Union of Burma
NDAA-ESS	National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (a.k.a 'Mongla Group')
NDA-K	New Democratic Army – Kachin

NDD	Network for Democracy and Development
NDF	National Democratic Front
NDPHR	National Democratic Party for Human Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NG-SS	New Generation - Shan State
NHEC	National Health Education Council
NHK	Japanese Broadcasting Corporation
NHPC	National Hydroelectric Power Corporation
NIB	National Intelligence Bureau
NIM	Nanyang Institute of Management
NLD	National League for Democracy
NLD-LA	National League for Democracy – Liberated Area
NLM	New Light Myanmar
NMG	Network Media Group
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NNN	Nippon News Network
NPE	News and Periodicals Enterprise
NPED	Myanmar Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development
NRP	National Reconciliation Program
NSA	Non-State Actor
NSC	National Security Council
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NTF	National Task Force
NUPA	National United Party of Arakan
NWCWA	National Working Committee for Women's Affairs
NYP	Nanyang Polytechnic
OBE	Office for Basic Education
OCDP	Operations Centre for Displaced People
OCMI	Office of the Chief of Military Intelligence
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
OMAS	Office of the Military Affairs Security
ONGC	Oil and Natural Gas Corporation
ONI	Open Net Initiative
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSI	Open Society Institute
OSS	Office of Strategic Studies
PABs	Provincial Admissions Boards
PCF	Prison Charity Foundation
PDC	Peace and Development Council
PDF	People's Defence Front
PHAMIT	Prevention of HIV/AIDS Among Migrant Workers Project

PHR	Physicians for Human Rights
PLF	Palaung Liberation Front
PLO	Pa-O Liberation Organisation
PNA	Pa'O National Army
PNO	Pa'O National Organisation
PNUO	Pa'O Regional Nationalities Unity Organisation
POC	Person of Concern
PPLO	Pa-O People's Liberation Organisation
PR	Permanent Resident
PR	Public Relations
PSB	Press Scrutiny Board
PSI	Population Services International
PSLF	Palaung State Liberation Front
PSLP	Palaung State Liberation Party
PSO	People's Strength Organisation
PSRD	Press Scrutiny and Registration Department
PTT-EP	Petroleum Authority of Thailand Exploration and Production Public Co. Ltd.
PYAN	Palaung Youth Action Network.
PYNG	Palaung Youth Networking Group
PWO	Palaung Women's Organisation
RA	Rohingya Army
RELA	Malaysian Volunteer Corp (Ikatan Relawa Rakyat)
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RI	Refugees International
RI	Rotary International
RM	Malaysian Ringgit
RNA	Rohingya National Alliance
RP	Residential Permit
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RRF	Rebellion Resistance Force
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission
RSANFSP	Rakhine State All National Races Solidarity Party
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontieres
RTA	Royal Thai Army
RWA	Rakhine Women's Association
RWU	Rakhaing Women's Union
SAS	*Swan Arr Shin*
SaRaPa	Military Intelligence
SAW	Social Action for Women
SaYaPa	Military Security Force
SB	Special Branch (of Police)
SCUK	Save the Children UK

SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SDC	Special Detention Centre
SEAPA	Southeast Asian Press Alliance
SEARC	Southeast Asia Research Centre
SEARIN	South East Asia Rivers Network
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SFM	Stake Fragmentation Mine
SHAN	Shan Herald Agency for News
SHRF	Shan Human Rights Foundation
SID	Special Investigations Department
SLIC	Socio-Legal Information Centre
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SLRD	Settlement and Land Records Department
SMNC	Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee
SNGY	Shan New Generation Youth
SNLD	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
SNPLO	Shan Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation
SOC	Strategic Operations Command
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SPIF	Special Police Information Force
SRDC	Shan Relief and Development Committee
SSA	Shan State Army
SSA-C	Shan State Army – Central
SSA-N	Shan State Army – North (a.k.a SSPP)
SSA-S	Shan State Army- South
SSKDP	Shan State Kokang Democratic Party
SSNA	Shan State National Army
SSNPLO	Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization
SSPC	Shan State Peace Council
SSPP	Shan State Progress Party (a.k.a SSA-N)
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
SUARAM	Suara Rakyat Malaysia
SWAN	Shan Women's Action Network
SYCB	Student Youth Congress of Burma
SYNG	Shan Youth Network Group
SYUF	Student and Youth Union Front
TACDB	Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma
TAI	Technical Assistance Institute
TB	Tuberculosis
TBBC	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
TBC	Tahi-Burma Border Committee
TCBEC	Technology, Culture and Business Education Centre

THPP	Tamanthi Hydroelectric Power Project
TOC	Tactical Operations Command
TPDC	Township Peace and Development Council
TPP	Three Pagoda Pass
TRC	Temporary Residence Card
TWU	Tavoy Women's Union
U.S.	United States
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UMFCCI	Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry
UN	United Nations
UNA	United Nationalities Alliance
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNLD	United Nationalities League for Democracy
UNLD-LA	United Nationalities League for Democracy – Liberated Area
UNLF	United National Liberation Front
UNO	Union Nirbahi Officer
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
UPE	Universalization of Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCRI	U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
USIS	United States Information Service
UWSA	United Wa State Army
UWSP	United Wa State Party
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance
VAO	Village Administrative Office
VBSW	Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors
VCB	Video Censorship Board
vHLT	very High Level Team
VOA	Voice of America
VPDC	Village Peace and Development Council
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth

WCDRB	Working Committee for Demonstration Restoration in Burma
WFP	World Food Program
WGI	Worldwide Governance Indicators
WHO	World Health Organisation
WLB	Women's League of Burma
WLC	Women's League of Chinland
WNA	Wa National Army
WNO	Wa National Organisation
WPDC	Ward Peace and Development Council
XDR	Extensively Drug Resistant
YaMaKha	Northeast Military Command
YaYaKa	Administrative Offices
YCDC	Yangon City Development Council
YCOWA	Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association
YMA	Young Mizo Association
ZNC	Zomi National Congress

Glossary of Terms and Units of Measurement

acre	1 acre = 4,840 sq. yards = 0.407 hectare. 640 acres = 1 sq. mile = 2.590 km^2
baht	Monetary unit of Thailand. 1 baht = 100 satang. 1 baht = US$0.03
basket	Unit of measurement equivalent to two tins or roughly 25 kg of rice.
Bo	Military officer
crore	Indian term meaning ten million. Equal to one hundred lakh
Daw	An honorific used to address an adult female
FEC	1 FEC = US$1 = 6.4 kyat (official)
	1 FEC = 1,240 kyat (unofficial)
furlong	1 furlong = 220 yards (1/8) mile = 201 metres
kani	Roughly 3 acres
Kawthoolei	Karen name for the Karen nation
Khun	An honorific used to address a Karenni, Shan or Thai male
Ko	Burmese form of address to a young male
kyat	Monetary unit of Burma. US$1 = 6 kyat (official) US$1 = 1,240 kyat (unofficial).
kyin	Unit of measurement equivalent to 2.7m^3
lakh	Indian term meaning 100,000
loh ah pay	'volunteer labourer'; often synonymous for forced labour
longyi	Burmese sarong
Ma	Burmese form of address to a young female
Mahn	Burmese form of address to a Karen male
Maung	Burmese form of address to a young male
Mehm/Min	Form of address to a young Mon male
Mi	Form of address to a Mon female
Milk tin	Base unit of volume measurement in Burma. One (condensed) milk tin holds around 585 grams of rice
Nai	Burmese form of address to an adult Mon male
Naw	Form of address for a Sgaw Karen female
plah	Karen measurement of distance, from elbow to fingertip (cubit)
pya	100 pya = 1 kyat
pyi	Burmese unit of volume measurement commonly used for rice and paddy as well as other crops. One *pyi* is equal to eight milk tins, or about 2 kg of rice.
Pyithu Hluttaw	People's Assembly. The Legislative branch of government which was never actually allowed to convene following elections in 1990.
(rice) sack	Unit of Measurement. One sack is equivalent to 2 baskets or 50 kg of rice within Burma.
Sai	Burmese form of address to a young Shan male
Sangha	Buddhist order of monks
Sao	Male of Shan royal descent
Saw	Form of address to a Sgaw Karen male
Sayadaw	Presiding monk of a Buddhist monastery
Tatmadaw	Burmese Armed Forces
taun	Unit of weight equivalent to 13 kg
Thakin	Master; lord (used to address the British colonial rulers; later politicized by the Burmese independence movement in the 1930s)
(big) tin	One tin is equivalent to 8 *pyi* or roughly 12.5 kg of rice
U	An honorific used to address an adult male in Burma
viss	1 *viss* = 3.6 lbs / 1.63 kg

Abbreviations

a.k.a	also known as
approx.	approximately
Brig.	Brigadier
Capt.	Captain
Comdr.	Commander
Col.	Colonel
Cpl.	Corporal
ft	foot/feet
Gen.	General
Lt.	Lieutenant
kg	kilogram
km	kilometre
Maj.	Major
m	metre
mm	millimetre
n.a.	not available
Sen.	Senior
Sgt.	Sergeant
sq.	square

Spelling Conventions

The Burma Human Rights Yearbook employs British (UK) English throughout.

Since there are no standardised transliteration from Burmese or many of the other languages spoken in Burma into in the Roman alphabet, words are spelt in a variety of ways, according to different spelling conventions or by how they sound. In addition, spellings have further been confused by the ruling junta's official alteration in of well-known English terminology (e.g. Myanmar for Burma). Whilst the SPDC purports that Myanmar is more inclusive of minorities than Burma, opposition parties and human rights groups contend that "Myanmar" is actually disrespectful of the minorities of the country. Minorities, many of whom do not speak Burmese, had become accustomed to the English name "Burma" over the years, and they perceive the new name "Myanmar" as a purely Burman name reflecting the policy of domination of the ethnic Burman majority over the minorities. Criticism also concentrates on the fact that the military regime, not democratically elected, has no legitimacy to change the name of the country. Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has opposed the new name "Myanmar", pointing out at the hypocritical justification of inclusiveness put forward by the military regime. Whilst the name "Myanmar" has been recognised by the United Nations, several countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, generally refer to it as Burma, and the U.S. State Department assert that *"Due to consistent, unyielding support for the democratically elected leaders, the U.S. government likewise uses 'Burma.'"*

However, it should be remembered that the military regime did not change the official name of the country in Burmese, but merely changed the name of the country in English. In the Burmese language, *Myanma* is written literary name of the country whilst *Bama* is the oral colloqiual alternative. While the opposition parties oppose the English name "Myanmar", they do not oppose the official Burmese name *Myanma*, and no opposition party is proposing to use the colloquial name *Bama* as the official name of the country.

Aside from the political connotations attached to the name changes, the new names adopted by the junta actually make it more difficult for foreigners to pronounce Burmese place names closer to actual Burmese pronunciation. Even if only for this reason, this report will restrict its use of language to the anglicised spellings. A list of place names used in the Yearbook followed by their alternatives are shown in the table on the following page.

At the village level, there is again the difficulty that there is no standardised format for transliteration from Burmese or any of the ethnic languages used within Burma into English. In addition, many villages have, for example, both a Karen and a Burmese name. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many villages have very similar names to each other but are in fact distinct. In compiling the Burma Human Rights Yearbook, HRDU have made every attempt to standardise the spelling of villages, but, given the dangers associated with making assumptions about similar sounding place names, village names have generally been reported as they were in the original source.

Historical name	SPDC name
Arakan	Rakhine
Bassein	Pathein
Burma	Myanmar
Burman	Bamar
Irrawaddy	Ayeyarwady
Karen	Kayin
Karenni	Kayah
Magwe	Magway
Mergui	Myeit
Moei River	Taungyin
Moulmein	Mawlamyine
Pa'an	Hpa-an
Pagan	Bagan
Pegu	Bago
Prome	Pyay
Rangoon	Yangon
Salween River	Thanlwin
Sandoway	Thandwai
Sittaung	Sittoung
Sittwe	Akyab
Tavoy	Dawei
Tenasserim	Tanintharyi

Karen State Disputed Areas of Demarcation

Thaton District

Thaton District is demarcated by the KNU as part of Karen territory and under the patrol of the 1st Brigade of the KNLA. Thaton District falls mostly in the SPDC demarcated area of Mon State, while the area to the east of the Donthami River lies within SPDC demarcated Karen State.

Toungoo District

Toungoo District is demarcated by the KNU as Karen territory and is under the patrol of the 2nd Brigade of the KNLA. The SPDC, however, does not officially recognise Toungoo District. Toungoo District falls partially in SPDC demarcated Pegu Division and partially in Karen State.

Nyaunglebin District

Nyaunglebin District is demarcated by the KNU as Karen territory and under the patrol of the 3rd Brigade of the KNLA. The SPDC, however, does not officially recognise Nyaunglebin District. Rather the area of Nyaunglebin District falls in SPDC demarcated Pegu Division.

Mergui-Tavoy District

Mergui-Tavoy District is an area demarcated by the KNU as part of Karen territory and is under the patrol of the 4th Brigade of the KNLA. The SPDC does not recognize Mergui-Tavoy as an official district. Rather, the area falls into SPDC demarcated Tenasserim Division.

Papun District

Papun District is under the patrol of the KNLA 5th Brigade. The SPDC, however, does not officially recognize this district. Papun District corresponds roughly with Papun Township under the SPDC system.

Dooplaya District

Dooplaya District is entirely demarcated by the KNU as Karen territory and patrolled by the 6th Brigade of the KNLA. The SPDC, however, designates Dooplaya District as falling mostly in Karen State with some portions in Mon State.

Pa'an District

Pa'an District is patrolled by the KNLA 7th Brigade and corresponds roughly with Pa'an Township under the SPDC-demarcated system. The SPDC does not officially recognize Pa'an District

Burma at a Glance: Facts and Figures

Country name	Union of Burma (1948), Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma (1974), Union of Myanmar (1989)[1]
Land area	678,500 sq km
Coastline	1,930 km
Population	47,758,181 (2008 est.)
Population growth	0.8% (2008 est.)
Birth rate	17.23 births/1,000 population (2008 est.)
Death rate	9.23 deaths/1,000 population (2008 est.)
Infant mortality rate	Total: 49.12 deaths/1,000 live births. Male: 55.53 deaths/1,000 live births. Female: 42.33 deaths/1,000 live births (2008 est.)
Life expectancy at birth	Total population: 62.94 years. Male: 60.73 years. Female: 65.28 years (2008 est.)
Languages	Arakanese, Burmese, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Shan, Wa, English and more than 100 minority dialects
Religions	Buddhist (89%), Christian (4%), (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%), Muslim (4%), Animist (1%), other (2%)[2]
Last election	27 May 1990. NLD won 392 of the 485 seats contested. The assembly (*Pyithu Hluttaw*) was never allowed to convene.
System of Government	Military Dictatorship
Government	State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)
Head of State	Chairman of SPDC, Senior General Than Shwe
Administrative areas	Seven States (Arakan, Chin, Mon, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Shan), Seven Divisions (Irrawaddy, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, Rangoon, Sagaing, Tenasserim)
LDC status	Since 1987
GDP (purchasing power parity)	$91.13 billion (2007 est.)
GDP (official exchange rate)	$13.7 billion (2007 est.)
GDP real growth rate	5.5% (2007 est.)
GDP - per capita	$1,900 (2007 est.)[3]
Unemployment rate	5.2% (2007 est.)
Population below poverty line	32.7% (2007 est.)
Inflation rate	39.5% (2007 est.)
Human Development Index	0.583 (2005), ranks Burma 132 worse out of 177 countries[4]
Natural resources	Timber, tin, antimony, zinc, copper, tungsten, lead, coal, limestone, precious stones, natural gas, hydropower, some petroleum
Agriculture products	Rice, pulses, beans, sesame, groundnuts, sugarcane; hardwood, fish and fish products
Opium production	380 metric tons; remains the worlds second largest producer of illicit opium (2005 est.)
Refugees	Approximately 396,700 in Thailand, 177,500 in Bangladesh, 75,000 refugees in India, 69,700 refugees in Malaysia, and an unknown number of refugees in China.[5]

IDPs	Approximately 1 million persons
Adult HIV prevalence rate (15+ years)	1.3% (2005 est.)[6]
Number of people living with HIV/AIDS	360,000 (2006 est.)[7]
Deaths due to AIDS	37,000 (2006 est.)[8]
Adult literacy rate	89.9% (2005 est.)[9]
Net primary enrolment rate	90% (2005 est.)[10]
Net secondary enrolment rate	37% (2005 est.)[11]
Children completing primary education	70% (2004 est.)[12]
Probability of not surviving past age 40	21% (2004 est.)[13]
People without access to improved water source	22% (2004 est.)[14]
People without access to improved sanitation	23% (2004 est.)[15]
Malnourished children (ages 0-5)	32% (2004 est.)[16]
Landmine casualties	20 (2 civilians, 2 children, 6 military, 10 unknown)[17]
Landmine injuries	223 (4 civilians, 2 children, 16 military, 201 unknown)[18]
Landmine survivors	10,605[19]
Prison population	60,000 (2007 est.)[20]

Endnotes

[1] Please note that the facts and figures listed here are only estimates and that accurate data is not readily available. Unless otherwise stated, facts and figures are cited from: *Background Note: Burma*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, September 2006; *CIA World Factbook: Burma*, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 15 May 2008.
[2] Source: Official SPDC figures.
[3] Source: Official SPDC figures.
[4] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[5] Source: *World Refugee Survey 2007*, USCRI.
[6] Source: UNICEF.
[7] Source: Global report on the AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS.
[8] Source: Global report on the AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS.
[9] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[10] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[11] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[12] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[13] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[14] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[15] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[16] Source: HDI, UNDP.
[17] Source: *Landmine Monitor 2007*, ICBL (conservative estimate).
[18] Source: *Landmine Monitor 2007*, ICBL.
[19] Source: *Landmine Monitor 2007*, ICBL.
[20] Source: HDI, UNDP.

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