

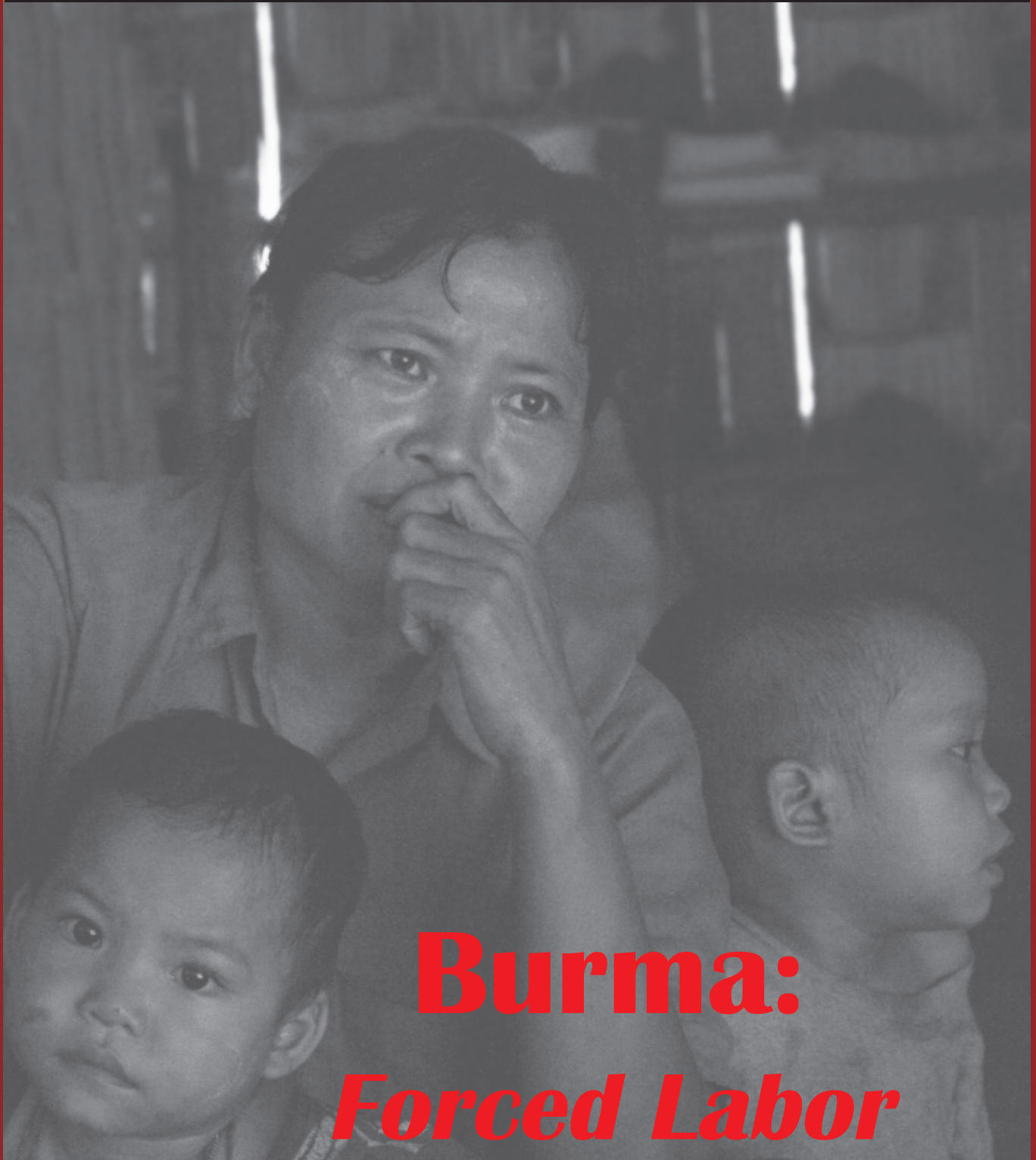
Inside News

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Burma: *Forced Labor*

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



*Saw Ba Oo Gyi, father
of Karen resistance*

CIDKP

P.O Box 22
Maesot 63110
Tak, Thailand

Central

Phone: (66) 055 531330
(66) 0815328433
Fax: (66) 055531330

Email: kidpc@cscoms.com
hlahenry@hotmail.com

Northern

Phone: (66) 053681854
Fax: (66) 053 681854

Southern

P.O. Box 11
Kanchanaburi 71000
Thailand

Phone: (66) 034517213
Fax: (66) 034 517213
Email: scidkp@ksc.th.com

Writing, editing and
photos: BLEEDIN' HEART
MEDIA and CIDKP
Reporters.

Design: Blacktown and
Margie Min

Front cover photo:
Phil Thornton

Back cover photo:
Eray P. John

Take them to court

Throughout Burma the use of force labor is common. Every military camp forces villagers to work as their unpaid slaves. Villagers have to build, clean, cook and grow food for the army. They don't have a choice. Resistance is met with beatings, torture and in some cases death.

Every new road, bridge or government building uses force labor. Children and women are not exempt. In a new move to avoid international scrutiny villagers are often arrested and then used as 'prison labor'. If villagers want to avoid being forcibly conscripted they have to pay a 'fine' to the Burmese army or to one of the armed militia gangs sponsored to the military regime.

The International Labor Organisation (ILO) has written numerous reports blasting the use of force labor in Burma, but the regime does not care about reports, sanctions or what the United Nations has to say.

If the generals had to face the threat of appearing in front of the International Criminal Court,..... the regime might be more willing to listen to its people.

Following the recent international outcry at the regime's brutal attacks on monks and citizens protesting over escalating food and bus prices, the international community demanded the regime stop arresting demonstrators.

But once more the Generals showed their disdain for outside interference by continuing to arrest hundreds of people and to harass their families.

For the last 18 years the regime has shown their disregard for the UN and its envoys by disregarding any of its suggested reforms.

Maybe if the generals had to face the threat of appearing in front of the International Criminal Court, as have many of the war criminals from the Baltics, the regime might be more willing to listen to its people.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

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



Our future is bleak

Being a village headman in Karen State is not easy. Under constant threat from the Burmese army, the village head is caught in a hard place. Saw Ler Ler is the second village headman of Ko Ne village in Nyawlinbing district and says.

“As village headman when the Burmese army come to our village they order me to get food from the villagers to feed them. If I have nothing to give them we are not allowed to leave the village. I worry they will jail me so I do the best I can.”

Saw Ler Ler says villagers have to carry the army’s food supplies.

“We carry their rice, milk, fish paste and other supplies for them. I have carried these things from Htee Toe Lo to their Kaw Lar Wah Lu outpost - a one-day walk.”

Saw Lee Kyi says the soldiers take it out on the villagers if they think the villagers are against them.”

“They checked every household in the village making all the people stay in their homes.”

Saw Ler Ler says his brother was trapped outside the village.

“My brother could not come back because he worked with the Karen community. The military was angry with him and blamed me because they could not find him. They arrested me for one night and beat me with stick.”

The senior headman rescued Saw Ler Ler, but he was made to pay 50,000 kyats.

Following his arrest Saw Ler Ler and his family fled to Mae La refugee camp in Thailand.

“My grandmother is 70 but we had to take her with us. By leaving my village I escaped from forced labor. I think it will worse in Burma and I worry that in the future there will be more problems for my village.”



Rights groups slam junta

A number of international human rights watchdogs have slammed the Burmese regime for its use of forced labor.

Despite the international outcry the regime continues to ignore the groups and use force labor. The military regime's abuses against the Burmese people are well documented. According to reports published by the International Trade Union Confederation, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch Burmese people are at risk of being used as forced labor. And those subject to forced labor practices are often the victims of torture or summary execution. Villagers are jailed, beaten, fined, forced to serve as military

porters, act as human mine detectors, and work on the construction of roads, dams, railroads, and military barracks with little or no pay.

Concerned citizens and activists who file a report against forced labor have persecuted, and arrested.

In November 2000 the International Labor Organisation reported on forced labor in Burma. But once again the regime plays games, making small concessions when the spotlight is on, but as soon as its shone elsewhere its back to abuse as normal. Its eight years since the ILO report but still forced labor is common in Burma. Once more in spite of international pressure villagers pay the price.

No way home

Like many Karen villagers Saw Maw Koro was forced to leave his village. He left to avoid being forced to work for the Burmese army.

‘I didn’t want to move but I had no choice. Our farm in Shay Gon is fertile and we grew enough food for our family.

Saw Maw Koro says most villagers are farmers, but because of the Burmese army had trouble tending their lands.

“The Burmese army forced us to work for them and imposed on us high taxes. We didn’t have time to work for ourselves. We couldn’t continue living like this so we decided to move.”

After he left his village, Saw Maw Koro moved to Kwee Law Plo, a three day walk from Shay Gon.

“We moved a mountainous area to keep safe from the Burmese army. But it was worst. Soldiers from Division 44 operated in the area and forced villagers from Kwee Law Plo to carry their supplies from village to village.”

Saw Maw Koro, 43, and the father of two children.

Once more he moved his family, this time to Mae Ta Wah, closer to the border. He reflects on what it is like to be a forced porter.

“We were taken to the frontline to carry food supplies for the Burmese soldiers. The loads were heavy. We had no rest, but if they did, it was for a very short time, our sweat didn’t have time to dry. They fed us little and if we didn’t walk fast enough we were beaten.”

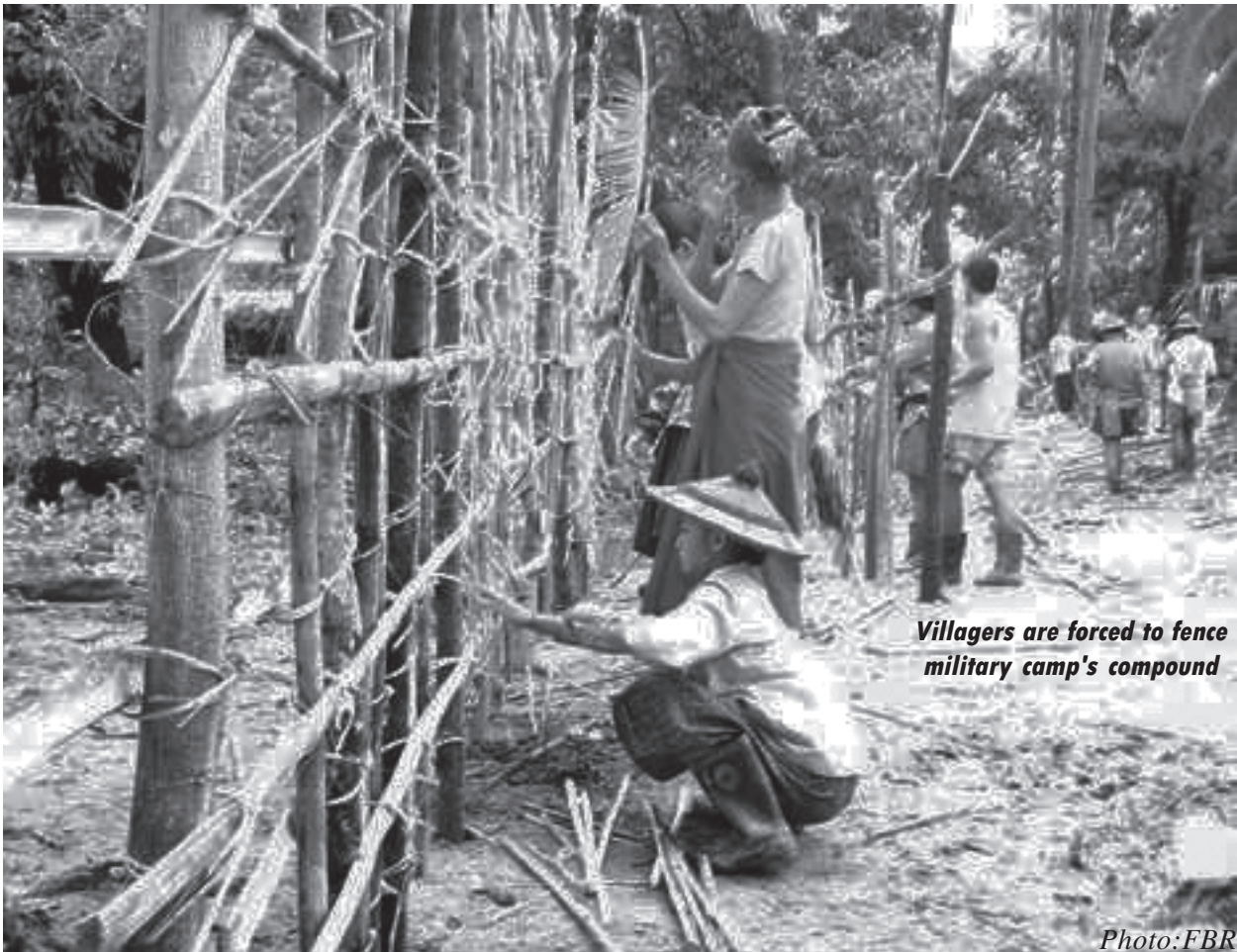
Saw Maw Koro says villagers run when they know soldiers are in the area. They know they will be beaten if they’re captured.

“The soldiers know we run so they come in the night and forced us to work for them. Those who refuse are beaten and in some cases are killed.”

Maw Koro says thinking about his life tires him.

“I have never known peace. Wherever I live, I face persecution by the Burmese army. I don’t feel good and I now hate them. I will stay away from them. I will not go back to my home village and I will settle here for the rest of my life.”





Villagers are forced to fence military camp's compound

Photo:FBR

They don't even like -

Naw Hsen and her six children are from Ko Ne village in Kler Lwee Htu district. Her village, like all the other villages, is under the control of the Burmese army. She says living under the army is hard.

"The closest army outpost is about 25 minutes walk from my village. Everyday soldiers enter the village and ask for food and money. They order villagers from every household to pay them 2000 Kyat every month."

Naw Hsen says they are forced to supply their animals for the soldiers' food.

"They take our goats and choose three to four people to feed and care for the animals. We have to be their security at night. They pay us nothing and they are always trying new ways accuse us of wrongdoing."

Naw Hsen says many army outposts are based in between the Karen villages and the soldiers force villagers to work for them.

"When they need work done, they force the villagers

to do it without payment.

Naw Hsen, 30, says,

"The situations is getting worst and worst. Villagers have no freedom to do their own work."

In 1999, the Burmese military forced Naw Hsen to relocate to another place.

"It was in the same area, not far but we had to rebuild our house. They charge us 3000 kyats to use the old wood, we had no choice, they pointed their guns at us."

Naw Hsen is angry.

"We paid 3000 kyats for nothing. They ordered us to kill every dog in our village, to stop the dogs barking and alerting us when the soldiers enter the village."

The soldiers used the villagers of Ko Ne to carry supplies.

"When the troops go somewhere they force us to carry rice, milk, sugar for them. Sometime we just carry to another village but sometime it's a long way."

Naw Hsen's village is located between two military camps, Joe Pay Sae and Toe Daw. Soldiers are from Light Infantry Brigade 599, led by commander Koe Baw. "They built their house with brick and cement, which we had to build. One month before I fled for Mae La refugee camp, we had to cut bamboo and carry it. If they don't like the design of the camp we had to build it again."

Naw Hsen says many villagers have fled to other villages and to refugee camps on the Thai Burma border.

Naw Hsen's husband, Saw Ta Wah Toe explains

why his family decided to leave their farm and move to the safety of a refugee camp.

"In our village we were not free to do our own jobs. We cannot bring things like pots or use torchlight on our farm. We were not allowed to stay out at night. We cannot light fires on our farms or in the forests. They don't even like dogs barking. We had enough. We followed other people from village to village till we reached the Salween River. It took us a week to reach Mae La camp. I'm sorry we had to leave but at least here I'm happy my children can go to school."

II

...They ordered us to kill every dog in our village, to stop the dogs barking and alerting us when the soldiers enter the village.

II

- the dogs barking!



Burma's economy one of the worst

A report by the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal ranks Burma's economy 29th out of 30 countries in the Asia Pacific region.

The report says, "Burma's economy is defined by severely low economic freedoms, with five of 10 areas at least 35 points below the world average."

The report points to the size of Burma's government as an indicator of its inefficiency, it says.

"Burma will not develop effectively without serious economic reform."

Burma's regime has strangled its economy. The report blames a lack of "...investment freedom, financial freedom, property rights, and freedom from corruption are weak."

The report found there is little legal protection for local or international businesses.

"The almost complete lack of a judicial system forces domestic and foreign companies to negotiate directly with the government to resolve disputes. Foreign investment is adjudicated in each instance with no clear guidelines for investors."

The regime interferes in the economy at all levels to

ensure it keeps control.

"The state controls such sectors as mining and power, and state-owned companies are prominent in transport, trade, and manufacturing."

Burma also comes top of countries regarded as corrupt.

"Burma ranks 160th out of 163 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2006. Burma is a major source of opium, and most Burmese view corruption as necessary for survival. Investors complain of official corruption in taxation, investment permission, import and export licenses, and land and real estate lease approvals."

The report indicates workers are no better off, they are subjected to abuse and wages are low while food prices are high, having a devastating effect on many families.

"The government sets public-sector wages and influences wage setting in the private sector. The state uses forced labor to construct military buildings and commercial enterprises."





No time to rest...

Farmer, Saw Pa Toe Hei is only 18, but already he has experienced being taken as a forced laborer.

“I was captured by the Burmese army and forced to be their porter. I had to carry loads up to 50 kilograms. I carried munitions and sacks of rice. We had to walk all day long and when we finished we were tired.”

Saw Pa Toe Hei says they were allowed to rest.

“The soldier told us to rest, we were glad. But it only lasted a few seconds. Our baskets barely touched the ground when they told us to continue. They do what they want and have no pity on us.” Saw Pa Toe Hei now lives in Maw Kwee village after the Burmese army burnt down his village, Mae Wa Hta.

“After the troops destroyed our homes we couldn’t live in the village, I am not going back.”

Saw Pa Toe Hei has three sisters, four brothers and he takes care of his parents, as they are now

old. He is the second oldest child.

“I never went to school because the Burmese soldiers gave us no chance to establish school. I cannot read or write.

“My older brother works in another village so I’m now the oldest and I have to feed my parents, younger brothers and sisters.”

The Burmese army also took Saw Pa Toe Hei’s uncle as a porter.

“Uncle Kaw was not a young man, he was over 40 and a father of three children. He had to carry ammunitions, military equipment and supplies. It was during raining season and he walked for three days.” His uncle was tortured because he got lost in the dark.

“Uncle Kaw carried a heavy load and when he misled the way, the soldier beat him with his gun. His neck swelled up and Uncle Kaw knew he had to escape.”

Burma investment:

Villagers are forced to build road for the army



Photo:KHRG

Human Rights Watch (HRW) warns that Burma's proposed pipeline construction from gas fields off the coast of Burma is expected to increase human rights abuses.

The human rights watchdog accuses the Burmese army of using violence and coercion to secure land marked for major investment projects.

It says the army "...commonly demands forced labor to build associated infrastructure.

Arvind Ganesan, director of Human Rights Watch business and human rights program said.

"The construction of more gas pipelines across Burma is likely to line the pockets of the country's leaders while causing suffering for thousands of people."

Human Rights Watch reports that the Burmese regime's past record on infrastructure projects has been one of abuses.

"... the proposed construction of overland pipelines to transport the gas will involve the use of forced labor, and result in illegal land confiscation, forced displacement, and unnecessary use of force against villagers."

It warns "...revenue from gas sales would also serve to entrench the brutal military rule in the country. Because of these well-founded concerns, Human Rights Watch urged companies with interests in Burma's oil and gas deposits to suspend activity until they can credibly demonstrate that their projects can

Army makes a killing

be carried out without abusing human rights.” Human Rights Watch is not the only people concerned.

The UN special rapporteur on Burma reports that the Burmese military continues to confiscate land, displace villagers, demand forced labor, and uses violence against those who protest such brutality.

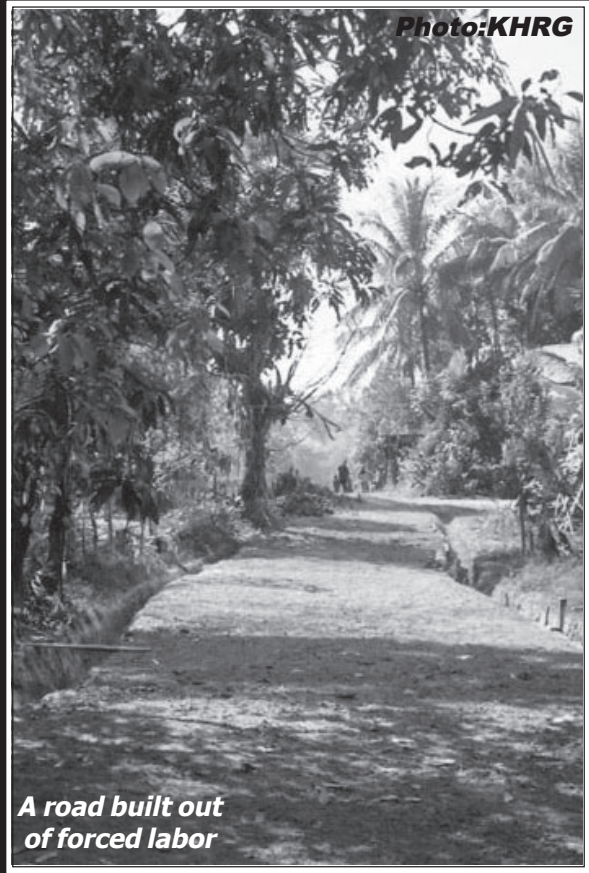
According to Human Rights Watch.

“The military’s use of forced labor is so widespread and persistent that the International Labor Organization has previously threatened to take the matter to the International Court of Justice. Areas of Burma that are subject to major development projects experience some of the most pervasive abuses.”

Human Rights Watch says independent monitoring in Burma is impossible.

“There is virtually no fiscal transparency and accountability over the State Peace and Development Council’s (SPDC) use of funds, which enables widespread corruption by the military junta and deprives the population of the benefit of the country’s wealth.”

Photo:KHRG



A road built out of forced labor



Photo:KHRG

A commander checked the brick wall built by forced labor



Photo:KHRG

Regime delivers torture, beatings and killings

Amnesty International (AI) reports that the Burmese military used forced labor in Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Kachin states, and in Bago Division. The report found.

“Prisoners were reported to have increasingly been required to act as porters for the military, and to have been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. A number of prisoner porters attempting to escape were reportedly killed.”

Amnesty says the International Labor Organisation (ILO) were concern that the regime’s threats of legal action “...against people making “false” complaints of forced labor presented a significant obstacle.”

The ILO said in response to their specific request for information about forced labor the “authorities had released two people imprisoned in connection with the legal filing of reports of forced labour and dropped prosecutions of others.



Photo:KHRG



Photo:FBR



Photo:FBR

Future hopes

Burmese army attacks on Karen villagers forced as many as 70,000 people from their homes and many others were forcibly relocated.

Saw Shaw used to live in Sha Si Boe village with his wife and baby. He now lives in an internally displaced camp, Ei Tu Hta, with his family on the Burmese side of the Salween River.

“I don’t want to come here but what can I do. I lost my home and land. I escaped to here. I have one child and she is not healthy. I don’t want to this problem with my daughter.”

Worry about his daughter and wife’s safety forced Saw Shaw to head to the border between Thailand and Burma.

Saw Shaw says the Burmese army captain in charge of their village was called Sha Bue and he was tough on the villagers.

“He ordered us to carry supplies across flooded rivers. We we’re up to our necks in the water.”

“They ordered us to give them information about the Karen army. We were forced to stay under their order and their rules.”

Saw Shaw says the army used them as messengers to run errands between their camps.

“Even under the ceasefire the army stole our chickens, they beat us and killed people. I was scare. They wasted our time so we didn’t have time grow food and to feed ourselves.”

Saw Shaw says villagers had to work for the army.

“We didn’t have time for ourselves, we didn’t get enough food and we didn’t have time to earn an income to buy the food.”

Saw Shaw says his daughter’s ill-health and being used as forced labor were all factors why he fled to Ei Tu Hta.

“I choose this way to escape. I had to look out for my daughter and her health and her future education. I hope for a peaceful solution for my country.”





“We had to sweep for mines...”

Farmer, Saw Gyi Hai, says he's angry that soldiers have used him as forced laborer for 19 of his 39 years. He lives in Kler Day village with his family and says.

“I started when I was 20. I've been carrying their [Burmese army] food, guns, bullets and other military equipment since 1995.

Saw Gyi Hai says the weight he had to carry alone was often heavy enough for two men.

“One sack of rice, 56 kilograms, is big enough for two people. They asked us to work for them at least twice a week and if you didn't, they'd send us a bullet and a small piece of charcoal.”

Saw Gyi Hai, says it was at threat - “the bullet to kill you and the charcoal to burn your dead body.”

Saw Gyi Hai says even if he does their work he had to be afraid of them as they can do whatever they want to you.

“You could not rest when you are tired, they fed you very a little rice twice a day and you had to wait for their orders and thread very carefully.”

Saw Gyi Hai says.

“One of his friend didn't know any Burmese and was asked by one of the Burmese army commander to find him a bunch of fire wood, he didn't understand — the commander beat him and almost killed him.”

“Saw Gyi Hai says it's hard on the villagers and their families.

“You misunderstand their intentions and flee. They retaliate by restricting the villagers and fining the village headman.”

Saw Gyi Hai says he lives in constant fear.

“I do everything they ask even I don't want to do because if I don't they will come and get my wife. Sometimes they order us to work for one hour but often it's take two or three days.”

Saw Gyi Hai worked for free for regiment 99, Battalions 74 and 109 lead by battalion commander Myit Aung.

Once I carried rice for the troops and one of the sergeants forced me to go in front of them to clear landmines for them, I said I was afraid of mines and if I step on one who will look after my family?”

Continue.... on page (17)

Living in Burma is hell

Naw Ther lay Paw is scared. She's scared of being used by Burmese army soldiers forcing her to take supplies to the frontline fighting. She's scared of landmines. It was this fear that forced her to leave her village of Zee Phyu Gon and head for a refugee camp in Thailand.

She says living so close to the army camp was a nightmare.

"The army camp was only ten minutes away, the SPDC soldiers often entered the village at night and frightened villagers. They walked around our house and spied on us. They'd shoot their guns and scare us.

Naw Ther Lay Paw recalls one night.

"The soldiers came and walked around our house and secretly listened to what we were doing and or talk. I had to quiet, especially when my husband was away, I was very scared because I have four children but they are very little and they don't know anything. I could not sleep for the whole night."

Naw Ther Lay Paw explains the situation in her

village.

"Villagers are forced to work for the soldiers to build their military camp and they don't have time to work for themselves. Villagers had to work, but they are given no food."

Naw Ther Lay Paw continues.

"Villagers have to take their own food. If the villagers refuse to work, they are arrested, punished or fined and in some cases killed by soldiers.

"One of our villagers refused to work and he was fined 3,000 kyat and got a beating."

Naw Ther Lay Paw says forced labor, restriction of movement causes many problems in her village.

"The Burmese soldiers guard the way villagers go in and out. If the villagers want to go outside the village they must get travel documents from at a cost of 500 kyat. Villagers are not allowed to sleep outside the village and must return on time. If people did not come back on time they are arrested. They demand the village head to give them pigs and chickens and other livestock."

Continue.... on page (17)



“I’m just a farmer...”

Saw Eh Drew says he is just an ordinary villager and a farmer from Wah Tho Koh village, like many villagers in Karen State who have experienced the brute force of the Burmese army his story is common. “Everyday soldiers come into our village and forced villagers to work on building roads, military camps and to carry supplies. They demand 10 villagers at a time to go and work for them.”

Saw Eh Drew says they select one person from every household.

“If they don’t come the soldiers arrest all family members then they ask for money to release them. If the villager can’t pay money the army restricts them in many ways such as stopping them working their fields.”

Saw Eh Drew explains soldiers use villagers for portering at the frontline at least once a month, sometimes twice. Saw Eh Drew, 46, has done forced labor since he was fifteen.

“Sometimes it takes us a week to carry things for the troops. Sometimes we cannot go fast because we have to carry heavy loads, they kick our ass with their jungle boots. They order us to go to clear road so if there’s a landmine, it’s villagers who are

hurt. When a villager gets seriously hurt they kill them immediately because it delays them.”

Eh Drew talks about restriction placed on villagers. “We face a lot of problems. Villagers are not allowed to use torchlights, have batteries or electrical wire .The military suspect we might make landmines. They tell villagers ‘if we see torchlights, batteries and wire in someone’s house they will be arrested and punished’.”

The soldiers restrict the villagers going in and out of their village.

“If anyone wants to go out from their village they need to get permission and travel documents. They ask for pigs or some other animals that they can cook. If we do not give, they just kill as they want and cook it.”

Saw Eh Drew explains how he get out of his village. “I lied to the SPDC soldiers that I will come to celebrate Christmas in another village. My family and I arrived at Mae La Refugee camp safely. If I did not lie to them, I would still be under the SPDC order and control — working for them as aslave until I died.”





Photo:KHRG

Villagers are preparing to take thatch shingles, which is demanded by SPDC troop, to the army camp

.....Continue from page (15)

Naw Ther lay Paw says the reason she decided to leave her village was because of the killings.

“The SPDC soldiers arrested six villagers and forced them to work after that they killed these six villagers for no reason. The situation got worse and worse I was afraid to continue living there. My family sneaked out, together with the four other households while the SPDC soldiers were sleeping.”

The journey from Zee Phyu Gon to Mae La Refugee Camp took 11 days for Naw Ther Lay Paw’s family and the other four families. She feels relieved when she arrived at the camp.

“I feel like I am in heaven. We will stay here until the situation in Burma is better and then we will go back to our homeland again.”

.....Continue from page (14)

The Federation of Trade Unions-Burma (FTUB) reports that in Than Daung township, a farmer (45), with 6 children was forced to labor under the orders of captain Hein Htet Thein, to construct an army camp.

“Villagers from every household had to work to build barracks for the soldiers, make fences for the camp and dig trenches. The villagers also had to provide oxen carts and trucks to transport construction materials for the camp.”

Saw Gyi Hai has had enough of forced labor and says he wants to stay out of the army’s way

“I’ll move to Thay Bay Hta. Here, I can grow rice and work on the farm or do whatever I want.”

A Soldiers Tale



Saw Ywe Thaw, 33, from Paw Pu Der village, is one of six children.

“I joined Karen National Liberation Army in 1997. I now work at HQ in Brigade 7. I work as a security commander. Nobody forced me or asked me to join the army. I did so because I love my nation and I dream about freedom for my people. I think it is the least I could do to work for my nation. We need equipments; weapons, medicine, hammocks and uniforms.”

Saw Doh Htoo 24, is from Brigade 5.

“I wanted to be a soldier so I joined army in 2001. My parents didn’t ask me to join the army. I am attending a two-month at the KNLA HQ. After the course I will go back Brigade 5. I work in special forces in 102 battalion. My rank is Sergeant and we need to get better equipment such as weapons, medicine and uniforms.”





Old soldiers never die...

Saw K' Paw Moo 38, is prepared to die for democratic change in Burma. He thought his fighting days were over when he retired in 1996. But the continued attacks on Karen villages changed his mind.

"I've been back for almost a year. I'm a sergeant in the KNLA General Headquarter battalion in Brigade 7. I fought in Manerplaw and survived to live as a civilian until I rejoined the army for a second time in early 2007."

K' Paw Moo was 19 the first time he joined the army. "I joined to escape the Burmese army. I was always being captured to be a guide for the patrolling troops when I worked our farm. At that time, we could rarely work farm for a whole day. I was frustrated with the situation so I joined the Karen army."

Sergeant K' Paw Moo is from Minelon village in Southern Taungoo district. After a few years he was sent to Manerplaw in Pa-an District. He recalled his time on the Manerplaw battlefields.

"At Htwe Pha Wee Kyoe (one of the most intensive fighting spots), we fought for two months; day and night. There were no regular meals, sleep or shower. We saw our comrades die in front of us. We didn't care whether we are dead or alive. Our friends died fighting and we were going to die fighting."

Maneplaw was lost but K' Paw Moo survived the battle. He stopped being a soldier and went back to his home village. He lived for almost 10 years as ordinary civilian. When the Burmese army started their offensive in 2006 in the Taungoo areas they also watched people more closely. K' Paw Moo said the Burmese army accused him of having connections with the KNLA and was looking for him.

"Since I'm a former soldier, I do have friends who visit me or want to meet me. Because of that, the Burmese army accused me and tried to arrest me. I had to flee to the border."

K' Paw Moo worries for his family, his wife and three children are in a refugee camp.

"I'm concerned for their food, health and the education of my children. They are new to the camp."

He says his wife also worries for him and warns him to be careful.

"My wife prays to God for my safety."

Sergeant K' Paw Moo hopes there will be change in Burma and the oppressive regime will not last much longer. He said he believe in his revolution.

"If our revolution is not true, I wouldn't have come back. We want justice for our people. If I die for three of my peoples' freedom, I will be satisfied."



We have no choice

Naw Paw Thoo Lei, 23, knew she would not be paid but still wanted to be a medic. She says her sacrifice will be worth it if it helps her people.

“My sacrifice compare to many is nothing.”

Naw Paw Thoo Lei is married but lives apart from her husband. She works as a medic at Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Battalion 24.

“I miss my husband and family.”

One of 12 children Naw Paw Thoo Lei decided to leave home and become a medic.

“I trained in Bridgade 5 at Khaw Htee Hta. I saw many people in our village used as forced labor. One of my older brothers was arrested by Burmese troops and forced him to join the army. But mother paid them one cow to free him.”

Naw Paw Thoo Lei says the army ordered villagers to build roads.

“Even our children had to carry sand and pound rocks.”

Army attacks were common says Naw Paw Thoo Lei.

“The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) came with the Burmese troops and forced us to work. The DKBA ordered us to build the road at Myaing Gyi Ngu. They also taxed villagers who had a tractor,

generator or motorbike every month.”

Naw Paw Thoo Lei says villages don’t have a choice to avoid forced labor.

“The Burmese army or the DKBA stop us working our lands we can’t be farmers. It makes it hard growing enough for our needs. We also have to contend with floods and wild animals attacking our crops.”

Naw Paw Thoo Lei says she always wanted to become a nurse.

“I left home and went for training it wasn’t easy, but I don’t want to give up.”

Naw Paw Thoo Lei says villagers have to travel far for treatment and to get medicine. “I feel so good in my heart. If I can help, but I don’t know how long I will take my duty here.”

The medics often don’t get enough to eat, have poor sleep and it’s not exactly home comforts.

“We should be an example for others. Sometime I miss my home and my family very much.”

In October 2007 Naw Paw Thoo Lei got married but her husband left to work in Bangkok.

“My husband sends me some money to help me as I don’t get a salary. I don’t want to give up. I will continue as I can to see peace in our country.”