

SHRF MONTHLY REPORT - FEBRUARY 2008

by [admin](#) — last modified 2008-02-24 04:58

COMMENTARY

Early in the month, the Burmese military junta have again made what they appear to assume to be a clever move to evade mounting pressures from all sides that have been pushing them to move forward towards democratizing the country, which has been their stated aim since coming to power nearly 2 decades ago.

On 9 February 2008, the SPDC junta announced that a referendum to ratify the currently being drafted constitution had been scheduled for May this year, and an election to form a democratic civilian government would be held in 2010.

By doing this, the junta hope to be able to block any intervention by the international community and at the same time ease the ire of the people of Burma who are desperate for a change to civilian rule.

Judging by the way the constitution drafting process has been conducted, the junta do not appear to be steering towards what they have been claiming, but towards legitimizing their rule by integrating it in the constitution that will be ratified by the referendum, and they know how to make it happen no matter what people vote, "yes" or "no". They had successfully done virtually the same thing in 1974.

Even though the government that is the outcome of the following election will be wearing civilian apparel, the military will still be pulling the strings, and all sorts of human rights violations, that have been mostly committed by members of the military, will still be major problems for the people.

4 RETURNEES ROBBED OF THEIR MONEY AND SHOT DEAD IN MURNG-SART

In November 2007, 4 men, aged between 30 and 39, who were returning from working in Thailand, were shot dead by SPDC troops manning a checkpoint about 4 miles north of Murng-Sart town, in **Murng-Sart** township.

The checkpoint was situated at a bridge called Kho Nam Ten near Son Oi village between Murng-Sart town and Murng Poo village tract in Murng-Paeng township, on a smaller and less used road than the Murng-Sart - Murng-Paeng main road, and manned by SPDC troops from Murng-Sart.

On 4 November 2007, a car carrying 4 passengers from Ta-Khi-Laek, a town on the Shan-Thai border, and heading for Murng-Paeng through Murng-Sart was stopped by the SPDC troops manning the said checkpoint.

The SPDC troops first questioned the driver of the car and ordered the 4 passengers to get down, and then searched and interrogated them. After a while, the SPDC troops told the driver to continue his journey alone and detained the 4 passengers.

The driver was worried not only for his passengers but also for those who would be coming the same way and telephoned his fellow drivers in Ta-Khi-Laek telling them about the incident and warned them to stop transporting passengers through the said route for a while.

It was later learned from villagers from Murng-Sart, who visited Ta-Khi-Laek about 10 days after the incident, that the 4 passengers had been shot dead by the SPDC troops on the same day as they were detained.

The SPDC troops said they shot the men because they suspected them to be Shan soldiers because they tried to run away during interrogation, and they conscripted villagers of Son Oi village as forced labour to cremate the bodies of the dead.

The identities of the 4 passengers were not known because villagers of Son Oi who cremated them found no documents on their bodies and dared not ask the SPDC troops. The driver who had transported them knew only that they were returning from Thailand to visit their relatives in Murng-Paeng township and seemed to be carrying some amount of money.

FOREST GATHERERS RAPED IN LAI-KHA

In October 2007, 3 forest gatherers were raped by SPDC troops from Nam-Zarng-based LIB 516 in the forest near Khur Nim village in Naa Poi village tract, **Lai-Kha** township.

On 8 October 2007, Naang Laa (f), aged 18, Naang Kham Nawng (f), aged 17 and Naang Ae Khawng (f), aged 20, (not their real names) of Khur Nim village went together to gather firewood and some wild edible nuts in a forest some distance from their village.

At one point in the forest, the 3 villagers ran into a group of 3 SPDC soldiers who seemed to be coming towards their village. As they saw the 3 women, the soldiers stopped and pointed their guns towards them and ordered them to come to them, threatening to shoot if they ran away.

The SPDC troops asked the villagers about Shan soldiers and accused them of being wives of Shan soldiers. When the women denied the accusation and said they did not know anything about Shan soldiers, the troops winked at one another and said that the women should be interrogated separately so that they could not hear each other's voice.

The troops then roughly dragged the women one by one to different places about 30 yards away from one another. The troops did not interrogate the women, but forced them to lie down and raped them until they were satisfied, all the while threatening to shoot if the women refused to do as told.

The soldiers were from an outpost camp about 3 miles from the village, manned by a contingent of SPDC troops from LIB 516 based in Nam-Zarng township. The troops from the camp often roamed the surrounding areas and stole villagers' livestock, and raped women when they had a chance. One of them had 2 stripes on his arms and was called Saya Aung Lwin by his 2 subordinates.

Villagers of Khur Nim village had once been forcibly relocated to Lai-Kha town in 1996 by the then SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) troops and those who wanted to return had just been allowed back about 3 years ago.

The 3 women had recounted their plight to their parents and village elders, despite having been warned by their attackers that they would be shot dead if they dared tell anyone about it, but no one could do anything for fear of further abuses because there was no one who would protect them.

BEATING OF VILLAGERS DURING FORCED LABOUR, AND EXTORTION, IN PHYSIC NUT CULTIVATION IN KUN-HING

Since 2-3 years ago, physic nut cultivation has become one of the state-run projects that has been routinely requiring unpaid forced labour of the people all over Shan State, and money has been extorted from those who could not provide their labour on their turns.

In many cases, people have had to pay for their own transport to go to and return from physic nut plantations, and provide their own food for several days when staying overnight at the work sites was required.

People have also been often scolded, beaten and otherwise abused while being forced to work at physic nut cultivation by the supervising SPDC troops. The following are 2 such incidents that took place in Kun-Hing township late last year:

In September 2007, 2 villagers were severely beaten up in 2 separate incidents while being forced to work in physic nut cultivation by SPDC troops from LIB 524 and IB 246, in **Kun-Hing** township.

On 27 September 2007, Aw-Ling (m), aged 21, was one of 25 villagers of Nam Khaam village in Wan Paang village tract in Kun-Hing township, who were forced to provide free labour in physic nut cultivation by SPDC troops from LIB 524.

At one point, Aw-Ling accidentally slipped down a steep hill slope where he was planting physic nut plants because it had been raining and the ground was slippery. One of the SPDC troops that were overseeing the forced labour site then rushed to him and beat him with a stick severely 3 times.

The beating sent Aw-Ling to the ground and he could not get up because the bone at the back of his left shoulder was broken by one of the blows and he had to lie on the ground for about 2 hours until the time the other forced labourers were released.

As they dismissed the villagers, one of the SPDC troops, Cpl Maung Maung Myint, who had beaten Aw-Ling, told them not to do like Aw-Ling who was beaten because of trying to shun work. "It is just an example for you to learn from. He got hurt because of his own fault. Don't blame us soldiers," he said.

The villagers were able to look at Aw-Ling only after they were released from their work and they had to carry him on a makeshift stretcher back to their village where he was then put on a mini-tractor and taken to Kun-Hing town hospital.

On the same day, but in a separate incident and at another location, Awng Zing (m), aged 30, one of the 40 or so villagers from No. 2 quarter of **Kun-Hing** town who were being forced to work in physic nut plantation north of the town, was severely beaten up by SPDC troops from IB 246 until he lost consciousness.

Awng Zing was accused of deliberately working too slow by the SPDC troops overseeing the work site and ordered to stand straight with his arms folded. One of the troops then beat him repeatedly on the back and buttock with a stick. At about the 15th stroke, Awng Zing fell to the ground and lost consciousness.

After beating Awng Zing, the SPDC troops forced the other villagers to work even harder and faster, and no one was able to come and look at their fellow villager who was lying unconscious on the ground. After about 20 minutes, Awng Zing regained consciousness by himself and was forced to continue with the work.

When the villagers were released in the evening, some of them who were

Awng Zing's friends came to him and helped treated the wounds on his back and buttock, and the SPDC troops said to them that Awng Zing was punished because of his laziness and warned them not to do like him.

However, according to his fellow villagers, Awng Zing had been working properly. But because of his "slow but sure" sort of personality, he was misunderstood by the SPDC troops who thought he was lazy and was working too slowly, they said.

A MONK ARRESTED AND DETAINED IN MURNG-TON

In October 2007, a Buddhist monk, who was a teacher at a monastery that was the main Buddhist learning centre in Murng-Ton town, **Murng-Ton** township, was arrested and detained by the SPDC authorities.

One day in October 2007, a patrol of about 10 SPDC troops, composed of troops from IB 225 and LIB 331, came to the said monastery where there were more than 50 resident monks who were studying the teaching of the Lord Buddha.

The SPDC troops searched the monastery and interrogated some of the monks, and finally arrested a monk named Taw-Ling, aged 45, and 25 years in the monkhood. They accused him of being a spy of the Shan soldiers; of agitating communities of monks and lay people in Murng-Ton township to dislike the Burmese military; and of being politically minded and not following the teaching of the Buddha.

The monk was taken by the SPDC troops to the SPDC Murng-Ton township office, where he was put under a kind of house-arrest. On the next day, many community leaders, including some senior monks, in Murng-Ton town went to plead for the monk's release, guaranteeing his innocence and denying all the accusations filed against him, but the authorities did not release the monk.

According to the people of Murng-Ton, the monk was not as accused by the SPDC authorities, but was a good monk and also a teacher who regularly taught Buddha's teachings to other monks and lay people at the monastery.

After the mass protests led by Buddhist monks against the Burmese military junta in many cities in Burma during September 2007, the junta's troops had harassed, arrested, detained and tortured hundreds of monks all over the country.

The people feared that this could become one of such incidents in which innocent monks who had not taken any part in any of the mass protests and rallies were arrested, only to be finally released after being forced to endure inhuman treatment and torture for some time, they said.

However, in this case the monk was not tortured but simply detained and watched for one and a half months at the SPDC township office, and then sent to a monastery that was not the one from where he had been taken, where he was also kept under a kind of house-arrest.

The monastery where the monk was sent to was close to a military base and the SPDC troops could keep a close watch on him. The monk has not yet been allowed to return to his original monastery up to the time of this report.

COMMUNITY LEADER ARRESTED, DETAINED, MONEY EXTORTED, FOR LISTENING TO FOREIGN NEWS BROADCASTS ON RADIO, IN MURNG-NAI

In September 2007, the village tract leader of Kun Mong village tract in Kaeng Tawng sub-township of **Murng-Nai** township, was summoned to the base of LIB

569 and detained by the military authorities for regularly tuning to foreign news broadcasts on his shortwave radio.

On 19 September 2007, the commander of LIB 569, based about 1 mile northwest of Kun Mong village, sent his men to tell the village tract headman of Kun Mong, Wun Mawng, aged 50, to come and visit him at the military base on the next day.

The next morning, on 20 September 2007, the headman together with another villager named Lung Ta went to the military base on a motorcycle. They were greeted at the base by Maj. Thein Aung who ushered them into the main office building.

Maj. Thein Aung said to the villagers that although 2 of them had come, only one of them would have to return. He then explained that the headman would have to be detained because he was suspected of some wrongdoings by the military authorities, and told Lung Ta to take their motorcycle and return alone.

"He often listens to the news broadcasts in Burmese from foreign radio stations like BBC and RFA, and spreads the news to make people hate the Burmese military. He is also suspected of working as an informer and money collector for the Shan soldiers, so he will be detained for a while," said Maj. Thein Aung to Lung Ta.

Although the SPDC troops could find no evidence to support their accusations against him, the headman was detained for about one month, and was released only after his relatives paid a fine of 100,000 kyat to the military authorities.

THE PLIGHT OF MEMBERS OF JUNTA-SPONSORED WOMEN'S GROUPS IN KAENG-TUNG

For the last 5 years or so up to the present, members of SPDC-sponsored women's groups, e.g., Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation and Myanmar Maternity and Child Welfare Association, in **Kaeng-Tung** township have been forced to provide free labour so frequently on various occasions that they hardly have time to care for their own needs.

Since the formation of the said women's groups in Kaeng-Tung township 5 years or so ago, a number of women in every village have been required to join the groups. At least 10 women are required to join each group so that there are always 20 members of the 2 groups in every village at any given time.

To facilitate the recruitment process at the beginning the SPDC authorities announced that those who joined either of the 2 groups would be spared from having to pay various kinds of taxes and provide forced labour which all villagers were being subjected to.

However, according to members of the groups, although they have been spared from paying most taxes after joining, they have been required to provide free forced labour much more than before. In virtually all their activities concerning various sorts of ceremonies and celebrations, etc., the authorities have been demanding their full time participation.

Except for the money to buy food for themselves during forced labour, which was collected from the villagers of their respective villages each time, the members received nothing for their time and labour from the authorities.

They were also required to wear the uniforms of their organizations during such times to give the impression that they were voluntarily and willingly

participating in such events as representatives of their organizations in support of the junta.

To make the uniforms, money was collected from villagers of their respective villages. At least 2 sets of uniform were needed for each member because they could be required to go at any time, day or night, and so frequently that there was often no time to wash and dry them in between.

The members also were not allowed to quit. Those who tried were reprimanded and warned, "You must understand that you have now become government servants, and as such you should not complain and must work hard for the government. Don't think you will be better off if you quit," by the authorities.

EXTORTION AND FORCED LABOUR IN DAM BUILDING IN MURNG-TON

Since July 2007 up to the present, SPDC authorities in Murng-Ton township have been extorting money and using forced labour of the people in building dams at 2 locations in **Murng-Ton** township, one near Murng-Ton town and another near Naa Kawng Mu village in Murng Haang village tract.

For the dam near Murng-Ton town, SPDC authorities have since July 2007 collected money several times from the people who have registered for the right to receive electricity once the dam was completed and started to supply power.

Forced labour of the people and mini-tractors are also being used in the construction of the dam. Every day, around 50 people and 2 mini-tractors are required to go and work at the dam building site, using their own tools and providing their own food, whether or not they have applied for the electricity.

By December last year, large amounts of money had been collected from the people but the construction of the dam was nowhere near completion. The money was collected according to people's economic status which was divided into 4 classes.

The following are the amounts of money that have already been collected so far from the said 4 economic classes, and the authorities have said that more would be collected when necessary.

1. Rich people such as company owners, etc., = 3,000,000 kyat each
2. Traders = 1,500,000 kyat each
3. Small traders = 1,000,000 kyat each
4. Others = 400,000 kyat each

At first it was projected that the overall cost of the dam construction was 100,000,000 kyat. But more than 70,000,000 kyat had already been spent and the dam was not yet half finished, complained Murng-Ton townspeople.

For the dam near Naa Kawng Mu village in Murng Haang village tract, large amounts of money have been extorted and mass forced labour of the people has been used in building the dam, which has just been completed last month, January 2008.

SPDC troops from IB 65, stationed at Naa Kawng Mu, started to collect money in July 2007 for building a dam and a small power plant in the area from people who wanted electricity. About 220 households in Naa Kawng Mu had applied for the electricity.

After money had been collected a few times from those people, the SPDC troops said that money alone was not enough, labour of the people was also needed, and in October 2007 started to requisition forced labour of the people.

Every day about 60 people had to provide free labour in building the dam starting from 8:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m., while having to provide their own food. All villagers had to take turns and provide the demanded forced labour whether or not they had applied for electricity, until the construction was completed in January 2008.

Money was continued to be collected from the 220 households even during the period in which mass forced labour of the people was being used. In the end, large amounts of money had been collected of which some considerable amounts were believed to have gone into the pockets of the SPDC authorities.

Of the 220 households, 20 that were believed to be much better off than the others had been required to contribute 2,000,000 kyat each, and each of the other 200 households had been required to provide not less than 300,000 kyat.

ROUTINE FORCED LABOUR OF MINI-TRACTORS IN NAM-ZARNG

During 2007 and up to the present, SPDC troops of LIB 543 at Kho Lam village in **Nam-Zarng** township have been routinely using mini-tractors from surrounding villages to transport their troops and things, and to standby at their base.

For instance, villagers of Kung Sim and Wan Hai villages in Naa Poi village tract, in Lai-Kha township, have been required to provide their mini-tractors to serve the SPDC troops of LIB 543 at Kho Lam village several times a month.

In addition to having to transport SPDC troops and their things to different places during patrols, mini-tractors from Kung Sim and Wan Hai were also often required to standby at the base, often 2 tractors for 2 days and 2 nights at a time.

There were about 20 mini-tractors in Kung Sim and Wan Hai villages, which needed to work on rotation to fulfill their forced labour duties. Fuel for the tractors to be used during forced labour was bought with money collected from the villagers who did not have tractors, usually about 100 kyat per household at a time.

There were about 80 households in Kung Sim and Wan Hai villages. These 2 villages had once been forcibly relocated to Kho Lam village relocation site 10 years ago and were allowed to return to their villages 2-3 years ago.

Since they have not yet been properly resettled and still have to struggle for daily survival, it has been very difficult for them to also have to provide forced labour for the SPDC troops. Although they have returned for 2-3 years, they have not yet been able to do much to improve their villages that had been deserted for some years, complained the villagers.