

SHRF MONTHLY REPORT - JULY 2008

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COMMENTARY

Rape by the Burmese junta's troops is still common in many places in Shan State and the perpetrators still enjoy the culture of impunity.

People seem to have become more reluctant, especially the victims themselves, to talk about rape for fear of further abuses and shame. But there have still been some who could not hide their plight and confided in their relatives and friends, and SHRF has still been receiving more or less frequent reports of rape over the last 2-3 years.

However, it could be assumed that there have been even many more cases that have gone unreported due to various reasons as stated above and other difficulties in collecting information. One most sad thing is that rape has proved to be an effective weapon of war in subjugating people, especially the rural Shan communities.

Patrols of SPDC junta's troops still randomly arrest and torture people, force them to serve as guides and porters, and extort money and possessions from them as they roam the rural areas in many parts of Shan State, always making their arrival and presence painfully felt by the local people.

Various systems of forcible rice procurement are still practised by the military authorities to support the numerous battalions based in all parts of Shan State. In many places rice is procured not only for the soldiers, but also for members of their families.

Extortion is so widespread that it reaches every nook and cranny, even serving prisoners and bereaved families of the deceased are not spared.

A PETTY PEDDLER RAPED, ROBBED OF HER MONEY, IN MURNG-PAENG

In January 2008, a petty trader was raped and robbed of her money by a patrol of SPDC troops from LIB528, near Nawng Zum village in Ta Kaw village tract, **Murng-Paeng** township.

Naang Kham Wa (not her real name), aged 18, was a villager of Nawng Zum who made a living peddling petty goods in neighbouring villages and farms in Ta Kaw village tract. Each day, she left her village in the morning to peddle her goods carrying them in 2 baskets on her shoulder yoke and returned in the evening.

On 13 January 2008, after selling all her goods, Naang Kham Wa returned with empty baskets and ran into a patrol of SPDC troops near a stream called Nam Ya on her way to her village. The soldiers stopped her and said they wanted to buy some cigarettes and cheroots from her.

When Naang Kham Wa said she did not have any cigarettes or cheroots because she had already sold off all her goods, the SPDC troops became angry and accused her of not wanting to help them despite their being tired from having to patrol the area for the security of the people.

In fact, the said patrol, comprising 12 SPDC troops, led by Sgt. Tin Aye, from

LIB528, had been searching for opium farms and collecting taxes from opium farmers in the area when they found Naang Kham Wa walking alone at a remote spot.

Sgt. Tin Aye told his troops to stop complaining and called Naang Kham Wa to go and sit near him and after asking her some questions, he ordered all his troops to go and stand guard at some distance and raped her to his satisfaction.

After raping her, Tin Aye then said to Naang Kham Wa that selling goods to opium farmers, which she said she had done during the day, was a criminal offence and she needed to pay a fine if she did not want to be arrested and robbed her of all the money she got from selling her goods, 40,000 kyat in all.

After returning home with empty hands and empty baskets, Naang Kham Wa related her plight to her parents and relatives, and they reported the incident to the village leaders and elders. But they said that the SPDC troops of LIB528 were very brutal and no one dared to do anything about it.

A WOMAN GANG-RAPED IN MURNG-PAENG

In December 2007, a petty trader who was returning from buying goods was gang-raped by SPDC soldiers from LIB360 in a rice field outside her village, Naa Khaw, in Yaang Mai village tract, **Murng-Paeng** township.

On 4 December 2007, Naang Suay Lu (not her real name), aged 17, a villager of Naa Khaw village who earned a living selling petty goods at her house in the village, was returning from buying goods, which she carried in 2 baskets on a shoulder pole, when she saw 3 SPDC soldiers collecting wild vegetables in a field some distance from her village.

Naang Suay Lu walked across the field and passed near the SPDC soldiers, thinking that they would not harm her because they were in an open field and could be seen from afar, as it was a shortcut route to her village which she had been using every time she went to buy her goods.

However, when Naang Suay Lu got near them, one of the SPDC troops jumped at her, grabbed her arms and pulled her down into a shallow dried-up irrigation ditch, and called out to the other SPDC soldiers to come and help him rape her.

The SPDC soldiers pressed Naang Suay Lu against the bank of the ditch, pulled up her sarong and took turns raping her. The commander, a Sergeant named Myint thein, first raped her to his satisfaction and let another soldier take his turn until he also finished.

As the third soldier was about to take his turn, an ox-cart suddenly appeared on the horizon and was coming towards them, and the commander gave an order to his troops and they all ran away, leaving Naang Suay Lu lying in the ditch.

It was an ox-cart of a fellow villager of Naa Khaw village, Pho Maa (m), who was returning from gathering firewood. After learning what had happened, Pho Maa took Naang Suay Lu and her goods onto his ox-cart and to her parents' house in the village.

Although Naang Suay Lu and her parents complained about the incident to their village leaders, with Pho Maa as a witness, the leaders were reluctant to file a complaint against the SPDC soldiers. They said it was very dangerous and it could bring great trouble to their village, and persuaded them to forget it as Naang Suay Lu lost none of her goods.

ARREST, TORTURE, FORCED LABOUR AND EXTORTION IN KUN-HING

In December 2007, several villagers in several village tracts in **Kun-Hing** township were robbed of their property, arrested, tortured and forced to provide free labour by a patrol of SPDC troops from IB287, based in Kae-See township.

On 14 December 2007, a patrol of SPDC troops from Kae-See-based IB287 came to Naa Mon village in Wan Lao village tract, Kun-Hing township, and ordered the villagers to provide them with 1-1/2 baskets of rice and 5 viss (1 viss = 1.6 kg) of chickens, and also a pistol and a walkie-talkie machine.

When the villagers said, after providing the demanded rice and chickens, that they could not provide the demanded pistol and walkie-talkie because there was none in the village and they did not know where to find them, the SPDC troops arrested the 4 villagers who had brought rice and chickens to them.

The SPDC troops interrogated the villagers and beat and tortured them, asking about Shan soldiers and the pistol and the walkie-talkie they believed to be somewhere in the village. The 4 villagers were beaten with sticks until there were bruises and sprains all over their bodies, as they denied knowing anything about what they were being asked, before being released.

The SPDC troops spent the night in the village, cooked and ate the rice and chickens provided by the villagers. The next morning, 15 December 2007, as they left the village, they arrested 2 other villagers of Naa Mon, Kaw-Lin (m) and Aw-Maa-Laa (m), and took them away to serve as guides and porters with their patrol.

When they reached Saai Khaao village in Saai Khaao village tract, Kun-Hing township, the SPDC troops ordered the 2 villager-guides to ask about Shan soldiers and a pistol and a walkie-talkie in the village. When the villagers could not get any answer, the troops tortured them, crushing their shins with bamboo sticks until they were bleeding.

As evening approached, the SPDC troops ordered villagers of Saai Khaao to give them 10 viss of chickens, which they cooked and ate immediately, and stayed in the village for the night. The next morning, 16 December 2007, they conscripted 3 more villagers from Saai Khaao village to serve as guides and porters as they left the village.

At a place about 15 km east of Saai Khaao village, the SPDC troops surrounded a farm and arrested 4 more villagers who they also interrogated and forced to serve as guides and porters as they continued their patrol until they reached Wan Lao village in Wan Lao village tract, Kun-Hing township, where they stopped for the night and released all the villagers.

The following day, 17 December 2007, the SPDC patrol continued to Paeng Khaan village where they arrested the village headman and interrogated him about Shan soldiers and also ordered him to provide a pistol and a walkie-talkie, as they had done with the other villagers previously.

The headman also denied having any knowledge about Shan soldiers and the said pistol and walkie-talkie, so the SPDC troops beat and tortured him. At one point an SPDC soldier grabbed the headman's hair, pulled him down towards him and struck him in the chest with his knee, causing the headman to fall down backward and lose consciousness.

After about 20 minutes, however, the headman suddenly got up and ran away before the SPDC troops, who were busy with other things, could do anything to him. This had somewhat frightened the SPDC troops who feared that the headman could

tell the Shan soldiers to come and attack them.

The SPDC troops then arrested 14 villagers in Paeng Khaan village and hurried back to Wan Lao village where they released the villagers after their innocence was guaranteed by the village tract headman of Wan Lao and spent one more night in the village.

The next morning, 18 December 2007, the SPDC troops conscripted an ox-cart in Wan Lao village and ordered one each from Saai Khaao, Naa Mon and Paeng Khaan villages to come to Wan Lao, and ordered villagers of Wan Lao to give them 15 viss of pork and 2 large bamboo baskets full of live chickens.

In the afternoon of that day, after the 3 ox-carts from the other villages arrived in Wan Lao village, the SPDC troops left with 4 villagers' ox-carts carrying their things, heading towards Kae-See township from which they had come.

SITUATION OF FORCIBLE RICE PROCUREMENT

Like forced labour and other types of extortion, forcible rice procurement is also one of the diehard habits long practised by the successive Burmese military juntas.

Even though the current ruling junta, SPDC, has time and again declared that they had stopped the practice of forcing people to sell rice to the military at much lower than actual market prices, in reality that has so far not been the case.

In some places over the last few years, military authorities have tried different ways of procuring rice other than the long used quota system, but for the farmers the results that affected them have not been much different. They were still compelled to sell their rice at great loss.

At the beginning of this year, just after the last rice harvest, the military have again forced people in several townships in Shan State to sell them rice at low prices. Not only farmers, but non-farmers have also been required to sell the rice quota, albeit in lesser amounts than the farmers.

Furthermore, in some places, people have been forced to provide rice and money on a regular basis for the junta's troops to support their families.

The following are some instances of forcible rice procurement by the SPDC troops in Shan State:

PEOPLE FORCED TO SELL RICE TO THE MILITARY IN MURNG-PAENG

In January 2008, SPDC troops of LIB528 issued an order requiring people in Murng Pu Long village tract in **Murng-Paeng** township to sell rice to them on a regular basis and at a rate many times lower than the market price.

On 1 January 2008, all the village and village tract headmen in Murng Pu Long village tract were summoned to a meeting at Murng Pu Long village by the SPDC troops of LIB528 and told that all the villagers in Murng Pu Long village tract were required to sell husked rice for the consumption of their battalion on a regular basis.

The order said that every household in the village tract was required to sell 1/2 basket of husked rice to the SPDC troops once a month at the price of 2,200 kyat, many times lower than the market price which was 7,500 kyat per 1/2 basket at the time.

Village and village tract leaders have since then been made responsible to

collect the said rice from the villagers and transport it to the military camp at Murng Pu Long as well as to the base of LIB528 in Murng-Paeng on a monthly basis.

Since the order spares no one in the village tract, villagers who are not farmers and do not have rice of their own have to buy from the market and resell it to the military every month at a price many times lower than what they have had to pay for it.

In a separate incident, during December 2007 and January 2008, SPDC troops of IB43 and LIB360 forced people in Hawng Kaang village in **Murng-Paeng** village tract to sell unhusked rice to the military at a price half the market rate.

There were 10 villages with over 2,000 households in Hawng Kaang village tract, and among the households about 1,500 were farmers who worked their own plots of rice paddies. These farmers had to sell 6 baskets of unhusked rice for each plot of rice paddy they worked at the price of 10,000 kyat, while it was 20,000 kyat in the market.

The non-farmers or people who did not have any plot of rice paddy also had to sell the military 4 baskets of unhusked rice, also at a rate that amounted to half the market price. As a result, these people had had to buy the rice elsewhere and resell it to the military at half price.

PEOPLE FORCED TO SELL RICE, THREATENED WITH ARREST AND LAND CONFISCATION, IN MURNG-TON

In January 2008, people of Pung Pa Khem town in Pung Pa Khem sub-township, in **Murng-Ton** township, were ordered to sell rice to the military by the SPDC troops from LIB519 that were stationed at Pung Pa Khem.

There were 5 town quarters with over 1,200 houses in Pung Pa Khem town, of which only over 100 households were farmers who worked the rice paddies in the outskirts of the town's area. The area of these rice paddies collectively was about 1,576 acres, according to the authorities.

On 3 January 2008, all the community leaders of the town quarters were summoned to a meeting by the troops of LIB519 and issued an order requiring farmers in the town to sell their unhusked rice at the rate of 4 baskets per acre of land they worked, and at the price of 2,000 kyat per basket.

The market price at that time was, however, 5,000 kyat per basket or more, and the farmers were threatened with arrest and land confiscation by the order if they failed to sell the required quotas of rice by the end of January 2008.

In a separate incident, at around the same time, people in Mae Ken village tract in **Murng-Ton** township were also forced to sell rice to the military by another group of SPDC troops from LIB519 that were stationed at Mae Ken village.

On 5 January 2008, a meeting of all the village and village tract leaders of Mae Ken village tract was called by the SPDC troops at the house of the village tract headman at Mae Ken village. The order requiring farmers in the area to sell their rice to the military was then issued in the meeting.

Farmers were to sell their unhusked rice at the rate of 4 baskets per acre of their rice paddies and at the price of 2,000 kyat per basket, while the market price was 5,000 kyat per basket at the time. All the rice quotas were to be completed gathering by the end of January 2008, when the price money would also be given to

the farmers.

There were 4 villages in Mae Ken village tract and the acreage of rice paddies each village had at the time was as follows:

1. Mae Ken village had 672 acres
2. Mawkzali village had 314 acres
3. Wan Mai village had 238 acres
4. Naa Pakaa village had 366 acres

Altogether there were 1,590 acres of rice paddies in Mae Ken village tract, according to the authorities. The villagers were also threatened with imprisonment and land confiscation if they failed to provide the demanded rice quotas before the given deadline.

PEOPLE FORCED TO PROVIDE RICE AND MONEY ON REGULAR BASIS IN MURNG-NAI

In January 2008, people in Kaeng Tawng sub-township area in **Murng-Nai** township were forced by the SPDC authorities to provide the military with rice and money once every 2 months to support the families of the soldiers.

On 20 January 2008, all the village and village tract headmen and community leaders from all the 7 village tracts in Kaeng Tawng area were called by the SPDC authorities to a meeting held at the sub-township office at the main village, Ton Hung.

In the meeting, the SPDC authorities explained that for various reasons the military was in a difficult situation economically and needed help from the people to support the military battalions, especially the families of the troops, in the Kaeng Tawng area.

"We would like the people to help provide the military with some rice and money on a regular basis to help support the soldiers' families who have many children with basic daily necessities," said the authorities. It was decided in the meeting that the 'help' was to be provided once every 2 months.

People were divided into two categories - those who had rice paddies and relatively more money, and those who did not have rice fields and had less money. Each household that belonged to the first category was to provide 16 pyi of husked rice and 8,000 kyat of money each time.

Those in the second category were to give the military 4 pyi of husked rice and 1,000 kyat of money per household at the same as those in the first category. The rice and the money were to be gathered every 2 months at the houses of the leaders of their respective village tracts. There were 7 village tracts or quarters in the area of Kaeng Tawng sub-township and altogether more than 1,000 households, of which many were farmers.

EXTORTION FROM PRISONERS AND FAMILIES OF THE DECEASED, IN KAENG-TUNG

Extortion has been so rampant in Shan State for years that even prisoners and bereaved families of the deceased are not spared. However, the situation has been getting worse and worse over the years. The following incidents are the situations of extortion by the authorities from the prisoners and from the families conducting

funerals for their dead, in **Kaeng-Tung** town.

According to a recently released former political prisoner (name withheld for security reasons) who has served some years in Kaeng-Tung prison, the prison authorities have been extorting money from the prisoners in various ways they could think of.

During his time in prison, although as a political prisoner he was supposed to be provided with a place to sleep and a mat to sleep on, he did not get them until his family paid money to the prison authorities. They had to pay 40,000 kyat for his sleeping place and 4,000 kyat for a mat.

He also had to pay 2,000 kyat on a monthly basis for the bathing water and another 2,000 kyat for the food, which were supposed to be provided by the prison free of charge. Furthermore, he also had to pay 4,000 kyat, also on a monthly basis, for not having to work, although as a rule political prisoners are not obliged to.

In another case, money extorted by the authorities for burying the dead has so increased that it has become virtually unaffordable for many families who have to struggle even for their daily survival. The following are the various fees bereaved families have had to pay during funeral services for their dead.

Registration fees at the village or town quarter level office	-	1,000 kyat
Registration fees at the township municipal office	- -	45,000 kyat
Fees for burial place	- - - - -	5,000 kyat
Fees for municipal workers	- - - - -	5,000 kyat
Fees for vehicle transporting the coffin	- -	20,000 kyat
Fees for each of other transporting vehicles	- -	15,000 kyat
Fees for burial service	- - - - -	10,000 kyat

The fees increased to almost double during the rainy season and people had been praying that no one in their relatives died during the rains, complained a trader from Kaeng-Tung who had come to trade at the Shan-Thai border.