SHRF MONTHLY REPORT - AUGUST 2008

by admin — last modified 2008-08-25 09:20

COMMENTARY
Forced Labour

For a military regime who regards the people under their control as slave labour, it is 'normal' for their troops to force people to do one thing or another for them, in the name of the state, all the time without any consideration for the well being of the people, as has long been the case with the Burmese military juntas' troops in Shan State for decades.

However, the cruelty and the callousness with which they have been treating the people might not have been as clear to the international community, although there were numerous reports by NGOs and human rights groups, until the recent treatment of the victims of cyclone Nargis in the Irrawaddy delta in lower Burma by the Burmese regime.

They not only prevented the suffering people from receiving appropriate help from the international community, but forced them to provide free labour in many activities, including setting up of military checkpoints and 'showcase' refugee camps or relief centres, etc., that were supposed to be provided by the State.

These were done to the people while they were still suffering deeply from the devastating effect of the killer cyclone, and while the international community were watching closely.

Therefore, it is not hard to visualize how the troops of a regime of this sort would have been treating the people of Shan State, especially the rural communities, who they regard as being no more than a pool of slave labour.

VILLAGERS FORCED TO SERVE AS PORTERS, KEEP WATCH, BUILD FENCES, WAIT AT CAMP, IN KAE-SEE

In February 2008, 5 villagers of Naa Paang village in Wan Paang village tract, **Kae-See** township, were forced to serve as unpaid guides and porters by a patrol of SPDC troops from IB131 for 6 whole days and 5 nights.

On 6 February 2008, a patrol of about 50 SPDC troops from IB131, led by commander Aung Sein, came and surrounded Naa Paang village at about 5 o'clock early in the morning and forcibly made 5 villagers to go with them. The 5 villagers were:

1. Lung Thun (m), aged 49
2. Lung Awng (m), aged 53
3. Lung Long (m), aged 55
4. Lung Zaam (m), aged 48
5. Lung Aw (m), aged 52

The SPDC troops said they needed some guides to extensively search the area of Wan Paang village tract and forced the villagers to lead them to many places they

wanted to go, stopping only at night.

The villagers were released after patrolling the area for 6 days and 5 nights, during which they not only had to serve as guides but were also forced by the SPDC troops to carry their things and food stuff every day along the way.

Since February 2008, villagers of Luk Lur village in Nawng Ae village tract, **Kae-See** township, were forced by SPDC troops from IB286 to keep watch and report to them any unusual incidents on a daily basis. To fulfill the task, 2 villagers had to stay at the village headman's house and keep watch every day.

Villagers were required to work in rotation and any one who missed his turn would have to pay a fine of 3,000 kyat. However, the SPDC troops told the village headman that if villagers only paid the fine and did not keep watch, his village would be held responsible if they were to be attacked by the Shan soldiers in the village area on such day.

For several weeks in early 2008, villagers of Murng Naang village in Murng Naang village tract, **Kae-See** township, were forced to build fences by SPDC troops of IB287 around their base at Murng Naang village.

The fences had to be built on all 4 sides around the base, of which each side was between 900 and 1,000 yards long, and had to be not only one layer but 3 layers of fences with some spaces between them.

The villagers were also required to gather wood and bamboo in the jungle and transport them to the military base, using their own means of transport, i.e., mini-tractors and ox-carts, and providing their own fuel and food.

The SPDC troops of IB287 have also been requiring villagers of Murng Naang to wait on standby at their base on a daily basis up to the present.

Every day, 5 villagers have to be at the military base on standby to run errands or serve as guides and porters, or, when there are not such things, do other menial work such as clearing grass in the base compound and in trenches around the base, etc..

VILLAGERS FORCED TO CLEAR GROUND FOR PHYSIC NUT PLANTATION, BUILD FENCES AND CLEAN TRENCHES, IN NAM-ZARNG

For more than 2 months, from March to May 2008, villagers of several village tracts in **Nam-Zarng** township were forced by SPDC troops of LIB516 to work for the military in preparing ground for physic nut plantation, building fences around a military camp and clearing trenches around the camp.

Starting from around mid March 2008, every day around 60 to 80 villagers from Kaad Lur, Wan Pung and Nawng Hee village tracts had to go and work for the SPDC troops of LIB516 at their base and at a place designated for physic nut plantation.

At the military base, the villagers were required to build fences around the base and were made to gather all the wood and bamboo needed for building the fences on their own. The villagers also had to clear all the trenches and ditches around the base.

At the place for physic nut plantation, the villagers were required to clear hundreds of acres of forest land, cutting down all the trees and digging out their

roots and preparing the ground until it was ready for planting physic nut. It took more than 2 months of hard work for the villagers to complete the task, using their own tools and providing their own food.

Although the villagers were required to travel to the military base and the physic nut plantation to provide their free labour on a daily basis, they were not provided with any means of transport by the military. They had to use their own mini-tractors and provide their own fuels in transporting workers to the work places, as well as transporting wood and bamboo for building fences.

PEOPLE FORCED TO FIX ROADS, PLANT AND LOOK AFTER TREES, IN LAI-KHA

For several months in early 2008, people in **Lai-Kha** town were forced by the SPDC troops of IB64 to renovate all the roads in the town by spreading sand on them.

On every Saturday and Sunday, 3 mini-tractors from one of the town quarters were required to carry sand from the Nam Taeng river into Lai-Kha town and 70 people from the same quarter had to work spreading it on the roads and streets in the town.

All the town quarters had to take turns and work on Saturday and Sunday in rotation until all the roads and streets in the town were covered with sand, which had taken several weeks to complete, during which the townspeople had to use their own tools and provide their own food and fuel for their tractors.

Also in early 2008, people in **Lai-Kha** township who lived along the main roads that joined with other townships were required to plant trees on the sides of the main raods. Each household was required to plant 20 trees, 10 mango trees and 10 jackfruit trees.

The tree saplings were provided by the SPDC authorities, but the villagers were required to plant them at specified places on the sides of the roads and look after them until they were properly grown. If for some reasons a plant was ruined or destroyed, the villager who planted it was obliged to find a new sapling and replace it.

ROUTINE FORCED LABOUR OF VILLAGERS IN LAI-KHA

Since 2-3 years ago up to the present, SPDC troops from IB64 and LIB515 have been routinely using forced labour of the villagers of Wan Paang and Nawng Kaa villages in Wan Saang village tract, **Lai-Kha** township.

Since setting up their outpost camps 2-3 years ago in Wan Saang village tract, which were built by forced labour of the local villagers, SPDC troops of IB54 and LIB515 have continued to routinely use forced labour of the villagers.

Virtually every day, about 35 to 40 villagers from Wan Paang and Nawng Kaa villages were required to go and work for the military in one or another of the many types of forced labour, which could be roughly divided as follows:

1) Waiting at the military camps on standby to run errands or serve as guides and porters;

2) Building and fixing fences, of which building materials had to be provided by the villagers, clearing trenches and doing other menial work;

3) Clearing the sides of the roads and fixing the ruined parts of the roads between

villages;
4) Using their own mini-tractors and transporting military logistics, water, firewood and even sand to the military camps;
5) looking after physic nut and other crop plantations.

Working in rotation, in which 1 person per household had to go each time, each household was required to go at least 6 times per month, and each time was at least one whole day or sometimes more.

PEOPLE FORCED TO GROW GARLIC, BUILD FENCES AND WORK AT MILITARY CAMP, IN MURNG-PAN

During late 2007 and early 2008, villagers in Ho Phaai Long village tract in **Murng-Pan** township were forced by SPDC troops of LIB332 to grow garlic for the military, and fix fences, clear trenches and the military compound of grass and bushes.

In December 2007 and January 2008, villagers of Ho Phaai Long village tract were required to cultivate 30 acres of garlic for the military. Although the seedlings were provided by the SPDC troops, the villagers were required to grow them in their own rice fields.

At the same time the villagers were forced to fix fences around the military base using their own tools and building materials, and clear trenches and the base compound of grass and bushes. They were also required to tend the existing physic nut plantations regularly.

It took almost 2 whole months of hard work for the villagers to finish growing garlic and fixing fences, etc.. However, they were still required to look after the garlic and harvest them for the military when the time was due 2-3 months later.

PEOPLE FORCED TO BEAUTIFY THEIR HOUSES, BUILD DAM, IN MURNG-TON

In early 2008, villagers in Mae Ken village tract in **Murng-Ton** township were required to build fences in accordance with the given model and dig ditches in front of their houses by the SPDC troops of LIB519.

In February 2008, SPDC troops of LIB519 issued an order requiring villagers in Mae Ken village who lived near the main roads to rebuild their fences facing the roads in accordance with the model specified by the commander of the Triangle Regional Command based in Kaeng-Tung.

The fences needed to be built with sawed hardwood lumber pickets, each piece of which was to be 2 inches wide (thick) and 2 yards long (high). All the fences were to be painted white with lime, which would be provided by the Regional Command from Kaeng-Tung, so that they all looked the same and beautiful on the sides of the main roads, said the order.

A month or so later, however, after many villagers had already replaced their fences according to the requirements but left them unpainted because the lime that was supposed to be provided by the Regional Command had yet to materialized, the commander of LIB519 issued new orders.

He told the villagers not to wait for the lime from the Regional Command but to buy it themselves and paint their fences as soon as possible. He also told the villagers to dig ditches, 1-1/2 feet wide and deep, along the front of their houses. So that they could take cover when there were ‘problems’, he said.

For several months, from January to April-May 2008, villagers of Pung Pa Khem village in Pung Pa Khem sub-township, **Murng-Ton** township, were forced by SPDC troops of IB226 to provide free labour in a dam construction project at Nam Khem stream in Pung Pa Khem area.

On 20 January 2008, the commander of IB226 issued an order requiring villagers of Pung Pa Khem to help build a dam that would be used in producing electricity. The dam would be built on Nam Khem stream about 5 miles west of Pung Pa Khem and would be supervised by 4-5 engineers said to have come from Kachin State.

On a daily basis, 20 villagers from Pung Pa Khem had to go and work at the dam building site from morning to evening, splitting rocks, digging earth, clearing ground and mixing cement, etc.. They not only received nothing for their labour but were also required to bring their own food and drinking water with them.

All the 5 residential quarters in Pung Pa Khem sub-town had to provide labourers in rotation, and those who could not for some reasons go on their turns were obliged to find others to replace them or pay a fine of 3,000 kyats.

PEOPLE FORCED TO GATHER PHYSIC NUTS IN KUN-HING

For several weeks, during March and April 2008, people of No. 3 quarter in Kun-Hing town, **Kun-Hing** township, were forced by SPDC troops of IB246 to collect dry physic nut seeds from the physic nut plantations under their supervision.

About 80 people each day had to get ready, complete with their day meals and drinking water, at 6 o'clock in the morning, and go by military trucks to some of the many physic nut plantations to collect dry physic nut seeds.

Each labourer had to gather the seeds in a sack until it was full and carry it on his/her shoulders back to the truck that was parked waiting at the main road, and go out again to collect another sack of the seeds.

The labourers were released only after the trucks were fully loaded with physic nuts or when it had gone too late into the evening to continue working. Working in rotation, each household had to provide one worker every 2 days for the duration of the harvest and those who failed to show up on their turns were fined 15,000 kyat per person per time.

VILLAGERS FORCED TO CULTIVATE TEA AND PHYSIC NUT IN MURNG-PAENG

From late 2007 up to March-April 2008, for several months, villagers of Hawng Kaang and Wan Phit village tracts in **Murng-Paeng** township were forced by SPDC troops of IB43 to cultivate tea and physic nut for the military extensively.

The villagers were required to first clear the jungles on the sides of a number of roads to prepare the ground for growing tea and physic nuts. Each plot of land had to be 50 yards wide and stretched along either or both sides of the road. Altogether the cultivated lands were more than 6 miles long.

There were about 11 villages with over 600 households in the said 2 village tracts, and about 40-50 villagers had to go and work for the military on a daily basis. It took much more time than necessary to complete the work because the seedlings provided by the military were not sufficient and the villagers were forced to find more seedlings by themselves.

The villagers were also required to continue to regularly look after the tea and the physic nut plants even after they had been planted, which had taken several months to complete. Furthermore, this duty was imposed upon the villagers without relieving any other previously existing forced labour duties.

FARMERS FORCED TO CULTIVATE DRY SEASON RICE FOR MILITARY IN MURNG-NAI

In early 2008, farmers in Kaeng Tawng area in **Murng-Nai** township were forced to cultivate dry season rice for the military in their own rice fields, causing them to have to start their own rainy season crop rather late.

In February 2008, SPDC military authorities of No. 3 Regional Training School, based in Kaeng Tawng area, issued an order requiring farmers in Kaeng Tawng to cultivate 60 acres of dry season rice for them.

The existing rice fields of about 15 local farmers that could be fed with irrigation water all year round were chosen for the purpose. Mini-tractors of the local farmers were used to plough the fields on a daily basis until all the 60 acres were ready for planting.

The numbers of mini-tractors forced to be provided by some local villages were as follows:

1. Pa Saa village in Nawng Hee village tract had to provide 6 tractors
2. Nam Tum Tai village in Nawng Hee village tract had to provide 6 tractors
3. Waeng Kao village in Nawng Hee village tract had to provide 4 tractors
4. Ton Hung village in Ton Hung village tract had to provide 10 tractors

Villagers from the same 4 villages, who had not provided tractors for the ploughing, were then forced to take responsibility planting rice in the fields every day until it was completed. All the local farmers were also required to look after the rice fields until the time was due and harvested the rice for the military, before they could start cultivating their own rainy season rice crop.

The farmers whose fields had been used for the dry season crop complained that they had to start their rainy season crop more than half a month later than usual and that would badly affect the yields of the coming harvest, because the military dry season crop started late and finished late.

PEOPLE FORCED TO BUY SEEDLINGS AND GROW SESAME AND PHYSIC NUT FOR MILITARY IN KAENG-TUNG

During late 2007 and early 2008, people in the whole township of **Kaeng-Tung** were forced by the SPDC authorities to buy seedlings of Japanese sesame and physic nut from the military and cultivate them for the military in their respective localities.

Sometime near the end of 2007, a meeting of leaders of all the 10 village tracts in Kaeng-Tung township was held by the authorities at the SPDC township office in Kaeng-Tung town. At the meeting, the commander of the Golden Triangle Regional Command, Min Aung Hlaing, himself gave a speech to the leaders.

“All the people”, he said, “have responsibility to help the country in any way they can, including economic development. Right now, what you people can do to help the state economically is to grow physic nut and Japanese sesame. Therefore, I would like you to grow them at all the villages in the whole township”.

It was decided that each village tract was to grow at least 2 baskets of physic

nut seeds and 2 baskets of sesame seeds, and all the seeds were to be bought from the military authorities without fail at the following rates:

1. Physic nut seeds = 45,000 kyat per basket
2. Japanese sesame seeds = 25,000 kyat basket

In addition to having to provide free forced labour, people also had to provide money for the seeds which they said they could get elsewhere at much lower prices. However, they were not allowed to find the seeds by themselves, but to buy them from the military.

VILLAGERS FORCED TO FIND DRY PHYSIC NUT SEEDS FOR MILITARY TO PRODUCE OIL IN LAI-KHA

Sometime at the end of 2007, villagers of Wan Saang and Haai Seng village tracts in **Lai-Kha** township were forced to provide dry physic nut seeds by SPDC authorities of LIB515 for them to produce oil.

A meeting of village leaders from the said 2 village tracts was called by the authorities at the SPDC township office in Lai-Kha town and told to make their villagers collect dry physic nut seeds for the military to produce oil.

Every one, aged between 18 and 60, in the 2 village tracts were required to collect 2-3 pyi of dry physic nut seeds and gather them at their respective village headmen's houses within 20 days. The villagers were to collect the seeds from elsewhere rather than the state-run plantations because they had not yet produced any.

Those who could not find enough seeds in the given time would have to pay a fine of 5,000 kyat, said the order. There were not less than 400 people in the required age group in the 2 village tracts, and many of them could not find enough seeds and had to pay the fine. Some of them who could not even afford to pay the fine had fled to the Thai border.