



Report from the Field

October 16, 2007 / KHRG #2007-F8

Forced labour, extortion and the state of education in Dooplaya District

As world attention focused last month on the large-scale public demonstrations in Rangoon and other major urban centres around Burma, the magnitude of domestic frustration over the military's systematic impoverishment of the civilian population became evident to the international community. This frustration is keenly felt by the people of Dooplaya District in southern Karen State and found expression last month in local anti-regime gatherings. Amongst other abuses, forced labour and extortion in their many guises have been leading causes in the economic collapse and resultant frustration with militarisation in Dooplaya District. A crucial factor making these abuses even more oppressive in Dooplaya and other areas of Karen State as compared with central Burma is the multiplicity of armed groups which compete with each other and with the region's civilian administration for the spoils of village-level exploitation. Across Dooplaya District the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Army; the regime's district and township-level civilian administration; the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA); and the Karen Peace Force (KPF) all continue to fatten themselves off of the toil of village labour. Amongst other detrimental consequences, this persistent predation has undermined opportunities for educational advancement and the application of such education beyond traditional village livelihoods or subservience within the local system of militarisation.

Situated in southern Karen State, Dooplaya District has remained under heavy military control since the then State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) invaded the area in a 1997 offensive. As the mostly open terrain has little of the mountainous forests prevalent in northern Karen State the local community has been unable to maintain a sustained evasion of the occupying forces. The military regime, which changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) later in 1997, has been thus more able to enforce its political utopia – one where the military, as an elite social class, holds absolute power over a civilian population that must labour to support it. Programmes which the regime has pushed through under the rubric of 'development' have thus served primarily to expand and entrench military control and make more efficient the exploitation of the local civilian population. Abuses such as forced labour, extortion, forced cultivation, crop confiscation and restrictions on movement, to name just a few, have increased ever since. Although the regime regularly rotates troops deployed in Dooplaya, the direction and method of militarisation have continued unchanged.

In January 2007, the SPDC rotated out Military Operation Command (MOC)¹ #19 from Dooplaya District and deployed Light Infantry Division (LID)² #22 under the command of Htun Nay Lin in its place. At present LID #22, which is the primary SPDC military unit currently operating in Dooplaya, has 10 Battalions under its authority. A breakdown of these is included in the section on military deployment below. LID #22 has a long history of

¹ A Military Operations Command (MOC) consists of ten battalions for offensive operations, presently averaging 120-150 soldiers per battalion in the offensive area. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) of three battalions each.

² Light Infantry Divisions of the SPDC, consists of 10 Light Infantry Battalions. Light Infantry Battalion of the SPDC are supposed to be about 500 soldiers strong but at present most SPDC battalions number under 200.

military operations and civilian repression in Karen State. Due to the loyalty of this division, the junta called it out to Rangoon in 1988 to carry out the violent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations which led to the death of over 3,000 people.³ There were reports that the SPDC had again dispatched LID #22 to Rangoon on Monday, September 24th to crush the more recent pro-democracy protests.⁴ However, Pado Mahn Sha, Secretary General of the Karen National Union (KNU) claimed that these troops had not in fact been withdrawn from Karen State.⁵

With a heavy military presence and the rapid expansion of military-controlled 'civilian' organisations, the local population of Dooplaya District has had to stretch its time and resources to address exploitive demands and their own livelihood requirements. The single most pervasive type of abuse which local people from Dooplaya District have reported to KHRG has been forced labour in its various forms. These forms include portering of rations, ammunition and other military supplies; *set tha*⁶; the fabrication and delivery of building supplies such as thatch shingles, bamboo poles and wooden planks; travel to and attendance at monthly Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) meetings; forced cultivation of rice, rubber and castor beans; as well as *loh ah pay*⁷ building roads, constructing buildings and repairing structures at army camps and bases. On top of regular demands for forced labour which have continued despite the SPDC's apparent overtures to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), villagers in Dooplaya also confront relentless extortion and property theft by army personnel. Common forms of such violations include the forced provision of food supplies, outright theft, the forced purchase of agricultural supplies and equipment and arbitrary 'taxation' and 'fines'.

Pervasive forced labour and rampant extortion have been major factors in the impoverishment of Dooplaya, and indeed most areas of SPDC-controlled Karen State. These two types of abuses are moreover interwoven as knowingly-impossible forced labour demands are often issued for the very purpose of extracting cash payments in lieu of physical work. Villagers are quite aware that the primary cause of their impoverishment is military abuse and exploitation rather than any inherent backwardness or underdevelopment on their part. As such, much of their efforts to improve their economic and humanitarian situation have focused on undermining military orders, abuses and restrictions. Villagers in Dooplaya have long utilised subtle subversion and non-compliance in order to resist military abuse and systematic exploitation.

Anti-regime demonstrations and pro-regime rallies

As an expression of the long pursued current of resistance to militarisation and systematic exploitation in Karen State, civilians gathered in Kawkareik township, Dooplaya District last month to express solidarity with the country-wide anti-regime protest movement. The gathering, which took place on September 24th and at which at least 330 Buddhist and Christian civilians from 10 separate villages joined in, was necessarily limited in scale due to the heightened level of militarisation, the smaller size of individual communities and the greater impunity with which army personnel operate in Karen State. Nevertheless, it was

³ 'Understanding the Burma's SPDC Generals', *Mizzima News*, January 26th 2006. Accessed online at <http://mizzima.com/Solidarity/2006/January/26-Jan-06-02.htm> on October 12th 2007.

⁴ 'Moment of truth for Myanmar's military,' Asia Times Online, September 27th 2007. Accessed at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/II27Ae05.html on October 3rd 2007.

⁵ "Flood of refugees expected," *The Nation*, September 27th, 2007. Accessed at http://nationmultimedia.com/2007/09/27/headlines/headlines_30050402.php on October 2nd, 2007.

⁶ '*Set tha*' is a Burmese term for forced labour as a messenger at army camps, but also involving other tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.

⁷ '*Loh ah pay*' is a Burmese term originally meaning voluntary service in the construction of temples and other community buildings. The SPDC uses the term when demanding uncompensated labour. For villagers the term has come to mean most forms of forced labour.

significant as an expression of frustration with and resistance to widespread abuse and systematic impoverishment; all of which continue unabated.⁸

In the face of a glaring loss of legitimacy for the junta due to the sheer scale of last month's protests and public rebuke of its military rule, the SPDC organised pro-regime rallies in major cities across Burma. In Karen State this rally was held at Pa'an town, Pa'an District, capital of SPDC-defined Karen State. Villagers in Kawkareik township, Dooplaya District reported that local SPDC authorities ordered households to provide one individual to attend the rally or otherwise provide an explanation and pay a 5,000 kyat fine for non-attendance. *Kwe Ka Lu*, a Karen language newspaper, reported that for some households the amount of the fine was 10,000 kyat.⁹ This demand was backed up with the threat that those who were unwilling or unable to either attend or pay the fine would be imprisoned. In some cases SPDC authorities further warned that children of such households would not be allowed to sit their school exams. Some families, unable to cover the entire 5,000 kyat fine in a single payment, were allowed to pay an initial instalment on condition that the remainder would be handed over at a later date. Those who attended the one-day rally had to cover their own travel costs to and from Pa'an town as well as food for the day. According to *Kwe Ka Lu* the date of the rally at Pa'an town was October 8th, 2007.

Military deployment

The largest single SPDC military unit currently operating in Dooplaya is LID #22 under the command of Htun Nay Lin and Major Sein Khin Maung. LID #22 has operated primarily out of Kya-In township, but also in Kyaikdon and Kawkareik, since its deployment in January 2007 following the withdrawal of MOC #19. Among the smaller units which the SPDC rotated out at this time were LIBs #230 and 231 and IB #588, three units referred to in the report below. The SPDC regularly rotates military units based throughout Karen State. One possible factor motivating this perpetual rotation is the regime's wariness of military officers developing close ties with the local community and becoming reluctant to enforce abusive army policies. Nevertheless, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #283, LIB #284 and Infantry Battalion (IB) #32 have been operating for a more prolonged duration than LID #22 in Dooplaya. A breakdown of the battalions operating under SPDC LID #22 is as follows:

Battalion	Officer(s) in charge	Base or camp location	Area where active
LIB #81	Nyunt Lin	N/A	N/A
LIB #201	Kyaw Zaw Hain	N/A	Kyaikdon area
LIB #202	Maung Naing	Gka Lih Kee	P'ya Taung, Wak Do, Woh Loo, Naw T'koh, Ka Mauk Theh, Htee Kee, Dt'bpoh Poh Hta, Khaw Kwa, T'khay, M'K'Taw villages; Kya-In township
LIB #203	Aung Gyi, Aung That Htaik	Baya Ngoh To	Baya Ngoh To, Hsih Shoh, Kyo Sein, Paw Ner Moo, Mayan Taung, Shwe Poe Taung, Shwe Poe Ha, Htee Wa Doh, Mee Ser Kee, Htee Hay, Koh Doo Gkweh, Kyo Chaung, Zon villages
LIB #204	Lt. Col Zaw Win Naing	N/A	Eastern Akyaik, Western Akyaik, Haung Tha Yaw villages; Kawkareik township; Kyaikdon area
LIB #205	Lt. Col Soe Myint (column #1), Myo Thain (column #2)	Htee Ghuh Thaw	Dt'ree Dt'gkaw village; Kya-In township Column #1: Gkwee Leh Dteh, Htee Hta Baw, Tha Bpoo villages; Kyaikdon area Column #2: Azin, Htaw Wah Law villages; Kyaikdon area
LIB #206	Khaing Min	Kyo Dt'ree	Column #1: Who Loo, Meh Gk'tha, Gka Neh Lay,

⁸ For more information about the civilian demonstrations in Kawkareik township see 'Protests Spread in Rural Karen State,' (KHRG, September 2007). Available online at <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2007/khrg07b3.html>.

⁹ 'Military gathers rural people to support them in opposition to monks,' *Kwe Ka Lu*, October 8th 2007.

	(column #1), Zaw Oo (column #2)		Saw Kee villages; Kyaikdon area Column #2: Bayin Naung Kohn, Leh Gkaw, Gka Neh Lay villages
LIB # 208	Lt. Col Myint Way	N/A	Column #1: From Kyaikdon to Shu K'lee village; Column #2: From Kyaikdon to Dt'gkay village
LIB #209	Tin Maung Maung	N/A	N/A
LIB #210	Thint Aung	Baya Ngoh To	Kyaikdon area

The battalions of LID #22 are further grouped under one of three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) designated as follows:

Unit	Officer(s) in charge	Base or camp location	Area where active
TOC #22/1	Zani On, Major Tha Htoo Lin	Azin	Kyaikdon
TOC #22/2	Aung Kyaw Nyein	Htee Poh Nya Lih Kee	N/A
TOC #22/3	Colonel Than Oo, Major Thain Soe Thaik	Waw Lay	Kyaikdon

On top of LID #22 are the following three battalions which the SPDC has kept stationed in Dooplaya District despite the January 2007 rotation.

Battalion	Officers in charge	Base or camp location
LIB #283	Khin Maung On, Aung Kyaw Kyaw	Thone Taing
LIB #284	Khin Maung Ay, Soe Hlaing	Wa Boe Gkoh
IB #32	Win Zin Htun, Kyaw ZinYa	Kya-In Seik Gyi

Along with SPDC forces, Dooplaya District also plays host to large numbers of troops from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Karen Peace Force (KPF).¹⁰ All three groups requisition forced labour, extort funds and otherwise exploit the local civilian population. While most of these troops are active in Dooplaya District, the SPDC has provided an urban residence for the group's military leaders in the Mon State capital of Moulmein, where KPF Chairperson Saw Thuh Muh Heh currently resides. A list of KPF officers and their base of operations is included below:

#	Name	Rank/title	Base or camp location
1	Saw Thuh Muh Heh	Chairperson	Moulmein
2	Saw Daw Daw	Second Chairperson	Kyaikdon
3	Saw Eh Htoo	Major	Myo Thint
4	Saw Eh Say	Major	Aung Chan Tha army camp
5	Saw Lay Wah	Captain	Bpan Kha Hlaing army camp
6	Par Tha Dah	Captain	Bpan Kha Hlaing army camp
7	Saw Eh Mywee	Captain	Akyaik
8	Kyaw Mee	Captain	Azin army camp
9	Kler Paw	Captain	Khaw Kwa army camp
10	Kaw Peh	Captain	Shwe Doe army camp
11	Kyo Khay	Captain	Myo Thint
12	Saw Naw Hsee Poh	Lieutenant	Myo Thint
13	Yin Hset	Lieutenant	Myo Thint
14	Saw Yin Cho	Lieutenant	Myo Thint

¹⁰ The Karen Peace Force (*Nyein Chan Yay* in Burmese) comprises the ex-Karen National Liberation Army 16th Battalion which agreed to a ceasefire with the military regime in 1997 and has since been allied with the SPDC.

Forced labour

"On February 12th 2007, they sent an order letter which said that we had to give them bamboo poles and thatch shingles. The village head collected 10 thatch shingles from each household. At that time we had to give them 400 thatch shingles. There were 64 households in the village. We made those thatch shingles by ourselves. 100 thatch shingles should cost 3,500 kyat but they didn't pay us. They'll [use the shingles to] build their military camp. Every time when they demand things from us we have to fulfil their order. We never refuse them. We dare not report them to their leaders."

- Saw M--- (male, 35), K--- village (March 2007)

Despite the widespread and systematic perpetration of forced labour by SPDC personnel, the regime continues to deny the practice and attempts to present itself as cooperating with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to eradicate such abuse. On March 19th 2007, for example, the SPDC Township Administration Department based at Kawkareik town in Kawkareik township, Dooplaya District dispatched an order to all Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) chairpersons which stated that officials from every district, township, village and ward were no longer permitted to demand certain forms of forced labour from the civilian population. In some cases the authorities stated that those perpetrating this abuse would face punitive legal measures in accordance with Act #374. As evidence of the military's confused approach to the forced labour issue, the document (of which a translation is included below) required village heads to send a *set tha* (forced labourer as a messenger) to deliver a written reply stating that they would refrain from utilising forced labour.

Stamp: Township Administration Department Kawkareik Township	Township Administration Department Kawkareik Township / Karen State Letter No: ### / ### / ### Date: 2007 March (19th)
To	Chairperson Ward / Village Peace and Development Council, Kawkareik
Subject: Declaration and warning to stop forcing <i>loh ah pay</i>	
<p>1. Nowadays, some township and region inside Burma still force civilians to <i>loh ah pay</i>; we have been accused by the ILO because of this news and also some civilians have sent news to the media.</p> <p>2. Therefore, every district, ward, township and village must stop forcing <i>loh ah pay</i>. So, [we] declare and warn you to realise the condition that has happened in the country. Every district, township, ward, village and authority must promise that they realise this serious issue which has happened in Myanmar. The promise letter must be collected on 19-3-2007 and sent with a <i>set tha</i>. Karen State General Governing Department, letter ### / ### / ### / ### has informed you.</p> <p>3. All village wards have to come to the office to sign a document about your promise and bring along your stamp on 21-3-2007. If you fail, this is your responsibility. You are informed.</p>	
<i>Sd.</i> Township Administrator (<i>for</i>) Maung Maung Aye	
Copies - State Administrator - State Administration Department - Karen State- Pa'an Town	

This decree follows earlier similar orders issued intermittently since 1999 in response to external pressure, especially from the ILO. Nevertheless, forced labour, frequently involving road construction, portering, agricultural work, messenger duty, fabrication and delivery of building supplies and the reparation of army camps among other tasks, has in no way declined over this period.

"The military camp situated in Southern Kya-In belongs to IB #230. The camp commander's name is U Htun Lin and the battalion commander of IB #231 is Soe Naing. In January 2007, Soe Naing ordered the villagers to send [wooden] planks and 1,000 thatch shingles to his camp. They didn't pay us the cost. I dared not report it to their leaders. They usually send order letters when they need our help. They always order us to do things for them. If we don't want to do these [things] we have to pay them money."

- Saw M--- (male, 44), L--- village (March 2007)

One of the primary obstacles to the eradication of this abuse in Burma has been the regime's unwillingness to acknowledge the primary role of military officers in perpetrating it. The March 19th order letter above, for example, was sent out to civilian village chairpersons. The intermediary role between the military authorities and the local community which village chairpersons must take on requires that they enforce military demands for forced labour, as well as those issued by TPDC authorities, on the village population. Failure to do so brings punitive measures inflicted by the relevant army personnel. As a consequence, forbidding village-level civilian authorities from demanding forced labour and threatening to punish them for its perpetration is not only ineffective at eliminating this abuse but moreover misplaces blame for its perpetration on local-level civilian administrators rather than the military officers, or other regional authorities, who order them to arrange it.¹¹

The regime's unwillingness to address military perpetration of forced labour is suggestive of a tacit agreement that despite such superficial gestures, SPDC authorities, especially army personnel, are in no way expected to comply with orders banning forced labour. This supposition is further supported by the fact that, although a handful of token cases have been brought against civilian officials of the SPDC, the regime has not allowed similar actions to be brought against military personnel who remain the primary perpetrators of forced labour in Burma.

"During this year [2007] they have ordered the villagers to send bamboo poles and thatch shingles. The villagers have had to send it [the materials] to the police station once and to the military camp twice. On February 23rd 2007, the villagers had to send [wooden] planks to the military camp along with 600 thatch shingles and 500 bamboo poles. They said that they would repair their camp."

- Saw M--- (male, 44), L--- village (March 2007)

While many villagers are aware of the failure of previous SPDC orders to in any way mitigate the pervasive demands for forced labour, some nevertheless thought that in the case of this most recent order things might be different. Some villagers were gladdened by the thought that they would no longer have to flee into the forest in order to evade military forces searching out civilians for forced labour. However, subsequent to the issuance of the March 19th order banning forced labour several villagers have attempted to raise the issue with local SPDC authorities at the monthly TPDC meetings but have complained to KHRG that despite such appeals, nothing has changed and forced labour has continued. Other VPDC chairpersons have told KHRG that they worry about reporting abuse to SPDC authorities as

¹¹ For a more in-depth analysis of forced labour, its role within the overall system of militarisation, the obstacles to its eradication and translated copies of forced labour order documents please see *Shouldering the Burden of Militarisation: SPDC, DKBA and KPF order documents and forced labour since September 2006* (KHRG, August 2007). Available online at <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2007/khrg0702.html>.

they suspect that local soldiers would take violent action against them before any punitive legal action is taken against the military personnel responsible for demanding the labour. Nevertheless, in one instance shortly following the forced labour decree, a village head in Dooplaya challenged an SPDC column commander who had demanded villagers to serve as porters. When the village head explained about the contents of the order and said that SPDC personnel were no longer legally permitted to demand it, the column commander replied that "It [the order banning forced labour] was applicable to people who were living in the city not in the jungle." The officer then proceeded to round up villagers although some were able to flee and thus evade serving as porters. One resident of L--- village describes his scepticism about the March 19th order as follows:

"We have a VPDC office in L---. The chairman's name is M---. He controls five villages. On March 21st 2007 we had to sign our names at the VPDC office. The people who had to sign their names at the VPDC office were the village heads, the VPDC chairpersons and the [SPDC] authorities. It was done in regards to the agreement to stop the forced labour of villagers. If the authorities continued demanding loh ah pay, the VPDC had to take responsibility. They said that they wouldn't order people to do loh ah pay. I didn't believe them at all. Now they still order us to plant Hsin Thway Lat.¹² I think that's a kind of loh ah pay [forced labour]."
- Saw M--- (male, 52), L--- village (March 2007)

As the SPDC has been unwilling to enforce the apparent ban on forced labour at the military level, this abuse has continued unabated following the March 19th decree. On April 3rd 2007 for instance, SPDC forces from IB #32 led by battalion commander Win Zin Htun and deputy battalion commander Kyaw Zin Ya demanded two metric tonnes of seven-cubit-long [3.2 m. / 10.5 ft.] wooden planks from the residents of Dt'May Leh village to be sent to Hsay Gyi, in Kya In township. The labour required to meet such demands includes the initial locating and felling of the specified number of trees, trimming, sawing logs, planing the planks and then delivering them to the stated location. At first the villagers were told that they would be reimbursed for the value of the wood demanded and four residents of Dt'May Leh therefore gathered the wood and made the delivery. However, rather than full financial compensation for the value of the delivered wood, soldiers from IB #32 merely gave the villagers a cup of tea and a bottle of alcohol and sent them on their way. On March 28th 2007, SPDC LIB #204 led by battalion commander Zaw Win Naing and deputy battalion commander Win Zaw ordered residents of Bpee Dt'Ka village to send 50 thatch shingles, 20 seven-cubit-long [3.2 m. / 10.5 ft.] wooden planks and 300 bamboo poles to their army camp at Htee Ghuh Thaw village.

Above and beyond the forced labour demands of SPDC military personnel, villagers in Dooplaya must furthermore deal with demands for such labour from DKBA and KPF forces. Since the start of 2007, for example, KPF battalion commander Saw Eh Say based at Meh Dt'Raw village, Kya In township, has ordered villagers from Kyaw Gkwa Koh village to arrange bullock carts to transport army rations to his base camp. Local KPF officers, such as Saw Eh Say most recently, have long issued these same demands on Kyaw Gkwa Koh village on an almost monthly basis. As a consequence, Kyaw Gkwa Koh villagers have established a rotational system whereby a different villager supplies a cart and serves as driver each month.

On top of the regular delivery of rations to the KPF camp, Saw Eh Say demanded on March 3rd 2007 that three bullock carts from Kyaw Gkwa Koh village go and deliver wood to be used to make charcoal. The villagers had to gather the wood themselves from beside the

¹² *Hsin Thway Lat* is a species of dry-season paddy which the SPDC has forced villagers throughout military-controlled areas of Karen State to purchase and plant. Villagers have resisted planting this crop on the grounds that they must not only purchase the seeds and fertiliser but that the insufficiency of water during the dry season almost guarantees that the crop will fail.

village and then deliver it to the army camp at Meh Dt'Raw village. The villages situated near to the army camp similarly had to transport wood for the same army unit. The soldiers kept the charcoal which they produced for use by army personnel and none was redistributed back to local communities. The KPF provided no compensation to the villagers for their time spent preparing and transporting the wood.

On March 7th 2007, KPF soldiers based at Gkwee Gkwa Law army camp led by company commander Saw Gkler Paw and 2nd company commander Saw Dah Gay ordered Bpee Dt'Ka villagers to go and clearcut a nearby hill field for them. More than ten villagers went and laboured for the whole day. They were provided no remuneration in return and were furthermore required to bring their own food with them for the duration of the labour.

Extortion

The perpetration of systematic human rights abuses such as forced labour, forced cultivation, crop confiscation, restrictions on movement and extortion functions primarily to strengthen the power disparity and relationship of control-subservience between the military authorities and the civilian population. Were it not for systematic exploitive abuses, such as extortion, the local military hierarchy would be unable to sustain itself. Such extortion serves an important role in redistributing wealth from the mainly agrarian villagers to the military elite. In some cases of outright theft by low ranking soldiers village heads have confronted local SPDC officials and secured compensation for their stolen goods. With regard to most forms of extortion, however, especially where decreed by military officers, such outcomes are unlikely. Some especially common forms of extortion in Dooplaya District are the forced provision of pork, rice, chicken and other food supplies; the outright theft of these same types of food supplies; arbitrary 'taxation'; arbitrary 'fines'; and the forced purchase of hand tractors¹³ – specifically a defunct local model known simply as #16, or sometimes Farm Number 16 and sold by a Pa'an-based company. With regard to the latter, villagers have been ordered to pay varying amounts from 1,250,000 kyat to over 2 million kyat.

"We have to buy a hand tractor every year. Individual villages have to buy one tractor. Those hand tractors are Farm Number 16. For one tractor we have to pay over 2 million kyat. Each time we've attended the [TPDC] meeting we've reported about the hand tractors, such as how they're not useful for us as they must be repaired before we can use them. They [the TPDC authorities] have responded that it [the forced purchase of the tractors] was an order from the district [authorities] and the district authorities have explained that the order was from the headquarters."

- Saw M--- (male, 44), L--- village (March 2007)

The forced purchase of hand tractors has so far been limited to single (though often yearly) high-cost purchases. Other forms of extortion, however, are much more frequent. Demands for building supplies such as thatch shingles, wooden boards and bamboo poles, which qualify as forced labour due to the labour-intensive fabrication and delivery required, can become forms of extortion where SPDC authorities suggest that cash equivalents can be provided in their stead. A selection of incidents of extortion in Dooplaya District by SPDC military personnel follows below.

In January 2007, SPDC soldiers operating under LIB #205 led by battalion commander Soe Myint and deputy battalion commander Myo Than set up camp at Ht--- village. Shortly after their arrival they dispatched an order letter to T--- village summoning the village head for a meeting at their camp. At the meeting, LIB #205 officers demanded that the village head arrange the fabrication and delivery of 400 thatch shingles. However, the village head

¹³ These are long-handled self-propelled (petrol-fuelled) ploughing machines used mainly to plough irrigated rice fields; the operator walks behind the machine.

responded that due to the economic difficulties and time constraints already faced by the villagers in his community he could not possibly comply with such a demand. Their initial demand having been frustrated, the officers changed tact and demanded instead 20,000 kyat in cash, a lesser value than the 400 shingles. Not being able to completely evade the demand, the village head collected the sum from amongst the community of T---. On top of this amount, the SPDC LIB #205 officers ordered the owners of the five saw mills in T--- village to each pay a 'tax' of 20,000 kyat. Being a shrewd negotiator the village head was able to whittle down the sum to a total of 80,000 kyat for all five saw mill owners, rather than the 100,000 initially demanded. Upon receipt of the funds, one of the officers wrote out a note and claimed that this would exempt the saw mill owners from paying any more sawmill 'taxes' to other parties. Despite this claim, duplicate taxation has become increasingly common with military units on the one hand and district and township administrative bodies on the other, overlapping their demands on villagers and townspeople across Karen State. In the area around Three-Pagoda Pass in southeastern Dooplaya, the Independent Mon News Agency reported that TPDC officials went so far as to submit complaints to central military authorities over the local SPDC Army's seizing of an increasingly larger portion of local avenues for taxation.¹⁴

On January 16th 2007, SPDC IB #588 led by battalion commander Zaw Win Aung and deputy battalion commander Hla Lwin Thaw who were camped at Gkwee Ler Dter village ordered one Gkwee Ler Dter villager to act as a guide and take one of their soldiers to Maw village. Upon arrival at Maw village the soldier demanded that the village head provide him with one pig. The soldier gave no remuneration for the 10 viss [16 kg. / 35 lb.] pig and immediately returned to his camp at Gkwee Ler Dter with the animal.

In February, a column of soldiers from LIB #205 arrived at Bp'Aw Kee village and demanded 45,000 kyat from P---, a local teacher, as 'tax' for a saw mill which he operated. Due to the threat of force, P--- handed over the sum demanded.

On February 15th 2007 SPDC LIB #203 led by battalion commander Aung Gyi, deputy battalion commander Aung Than Htaik and company commander Min Naing of column #2 arrived at Gk'Kya village and demanded one pig from the Gk'Kya village head. The village head obtained a 20 viss [32 kg. / 70 lb.] pig from the a local resident which he then handed over. Although the contemporary market value of pigs in Karen State was 2,000 kyat per viss [1.63 kg. / 3.6 lb.], the soldiers repaid a total of only 10,000 kyat, a quarter of the pigs actual value, and subsequently departed.

In some cases of extortion, local SPDC forces have used the language of 'counter insurgency' to press monetary demands upon villagers. By holding villagers responsible for any KNU/KNLA operations in Dooplaya SPDC authorities have 'fined' villagers for not reporting, or not sufficiently reporting on the activities of KNLA patrols of which they may have no knowledge whatsoever. Rather than an isolated component of some anti-insurgency campaign targeting the KNLA, local officers have used the 'counter-insurgency' argument in an attempt to justify the systematic extortion which has nevertheless continued in areas without a heavy KNU/KNLA presence.

"The military soldiers were staying in their camp. We always have to send them messages about the KNU[KNLA]. Now we're afraid of them when they encounter KNU[KNLA] soldiers outside the village. If they fight with each other, then when the SPDC soldiers are hurt they always scold us."

- Naw M--- (female, 34), Ht--- village (March 2007)

¹⁴ "Tactical Commander in TPP to tackle feuding army and local administration," *Independent Mon News Agency*, April 17th 2007. Accessed online at <http://www.monnews-imna.com/2007/aprupdate.php?ID=584> on October 5th 2007.

On February 25th 2007, 80 soldiers from SPDC LIB #205 column #1 arrived at Law Bper village in Kawkareik Township. Soe Myint, who commanded the column, immediately dispatched an order for the village headwoman to meet with him. On the following day he also sent an order letter to the villages of Akyoo, Koo Doo, Taik Bpan and Ta Shi among others. The heads of all the relevant villages were ordered to come to Law Bper village monastery and meet with him. According to one villager, on February 27th when all of the village heads had arrived, Soe Myint told them to

“Tell the KNU commanders who hadn’t yet made peace with them that now they [SPDC] were constructing a vehicle road for them [the villagers]. They told the village heads that the KNU wasn’t able to build vehicle roads for them. They [KNU] were still alive only because the villagers had provided food for them. If the villagers didn’t provide them with food they wouldn’t be able to stay in the jungle and would starve.”

On February 26th 2007, troops from SPDC LIB #203 based at Baya Ngoh To village encountered KNLA forces near a rubber plantation belonging to residents of Gk--- village, Kya In township where they exchanged gunfire. Two SPDC soldiers were killed during the fighting. In anger over the death of the soldiers the LIB #203 officers ordered the heads of Gk--- and G--- villages to present themselves for questioning at Baya Ngoh To camp. Upon arrival the SPDC soldiers at Baya Ngoh To placed the two village heads in stocks and tortured them. One of the village heads reported that the SPDC officer stated

“This problem that has happened to us is a result of your failure to report to us [about the presence of KNLA troops]. Because the trouble occurred next to your rubber plantation, the rubber plantation owner must pay us 50,000 kyat. If the owner doesn’t hand over the money, you must tell him to come and see us.”

Fearing violent retaliation should he take the option of meeting the officers in person the plantation owner collected the required amount and requested that the village head make the payment to the SPDC officers in his stead. Upon receiving the funds, battalion commander Aung Gyi reiterated that *“If KNU soldiers enter into the village, you must inform us. If you don’t, then you’ll suffer more than [you did] this time.”* Following the meeting, the officers released the village head who was able to return to his village. However, due to the officer’s orders, the village head had to organise a rotation of individual villagers to report to the SPDC camp on a daily basis and inform them about any KNLA activity that they might be aware of.

On the same day, column #2 of SPDC LIB #203 arrived at Dt’May Leh village. The SPDC officers met with the village head and asked about all local saw mills that were in operation for the purpose of extracting ‘taxation’ from their owners. Maung Hsan Htain, owner of a mill in the upper village area had to give one pig of 15 viss [24.5 kg. / 54 lb.], a value of 30,000 kyat. The owner of the village’s second saw mill had to cover the ‘taxation’ in kind, with the following payments of wooden planks:

# of planks	Size [inches]	Length [feet]
4	3x3	3
3	3x2	6
7	5x3	6

The pig and the wooden planks all had to be sent to Baya Ngoh To army camp. On top of this extortion from saw mill owners, other villagers reported that, while the soldiers were present in the village they stole three chickens.

On March 3rd 2007, SPDC battalion commander Soe Myint of LIB #205 summoned all saw mill owners from L--- village and demanded a combined saw mill ‘tax’ of 250,000 kyat. Although the villagers initially paid the sum demanded, the local village headwoman was not

satisfied with the situation. She travelled herself to the army camp where she demanded that Soe Myint return the money. Initially, the battalion commander would not give back the funds. However, undeterred by the officer's unwillingness the village headwoman continued to harangue him, further threatening to take the matter to his superiors. Upon hearing this threat, Soe Myint partially conceded his position, keeping only 80,000 kyat and returning the rest of the money (170,000 kyat) in exchange for one viss of chicken, a value of 3,000 kyat. This last demand appears a feeble attempt to save face following the village headwoman's scolding of him and the loss of most of the extorted money.

On March 13th 2007 a column of soldiers from LIB #204 led by battalion commander Zaw Win Naing arrived at Law Dtaw Hta village and asked the village head about any saw mills owned by members of the community. The SPDC personnel then demanded a payment of 50,000 kyat from each saw mill owner. Three individuals who owned the only saw mills in the village paid the amount demanded. LIB #204 personnel then went on to demand 45 wooden planks, seven cubits [3.2 m. / 10.5 ft.] in length, as well as 100 thatch shingles. These items were to be delivered to the LIB #204 camp by March 28th 2007. The entire community of Law Dtaw Hta cooperated in gathering together the wood and thatch which had been demanded. Two villagers then transported the materials to the army camp at Htee Ghuh Thaw village. On March 19th 2007 the LIB #204 soldiers demanded 300 thatch shingles and 18,000 kyat from Tha Der Koh village and 1 goat, 1 viss of chicken, 5 bottles of alcohol, 1 duck, 150 shingles and 150 bamboo poles from Bpan Khalindo village. The value of the goods demanded from Bpan Khalindo village totalled roughly 40,000 kyat.

On April 2nd 2007, KPF 2nd company commander Saw Dah Gay along with two other KPF soldiers from Gkwee Gkwa Law camp arrived at M--- village where they met with the village head. At this time, they ordered the village head to begin making regular payments of charcoal to the local KPF base. However, as no one in M--- village regularly made charcoal the village was not able to meet the demand. Saw Dah Gay told the village head that *"If you can't find [people to make charcoal] now, give me 100,000 kyat of your own money instead."* The village head replied saying *"I don't have that kind of money but I'll find it later and send it to you."* However, Saw Dah Gay rejected this proposal, fell into a rage, pulled out a grenade and threatened to crush the village head's skull. The village head appealed to the officer who then suggested that he would be happy to take a pig in lieu of the money. The village head was able to procure a pig valued at 35,000 kyat. The officer ordered the villagers to slaughter the pig and then deliver it to his army camp. Despite this payment, the officer rejected the village head's claim that no charcoal makers lived in the village and reiterated that the sum of 100,000 kyat still had to be paid by the end of April.

Education

Most villages in Dooplaya District now have some form of schooling. Those which still lack schools are mostly the smaller and relatively poorer communities located in the more heavily forested areas. Lack of funds and teachers, as well as security concerns for displaced communities in hiding, are the primary factors inhibiting the establishment of schools in such locales. Where a teacher from amongst the resident community is unavailable, external teachers from towns or larger villages have often been unwilling to hold a position at smaller and more remote communities. While external educational organisations such as the Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG) or the Karen Education Department of the KNU provide crucial assistance to schools across Karen State they nevertheless confront financial, security or other logistical obstacles in accessing these and other communities. KTWG reports that in 2006 – 2007 they have provided assistance to 315 out of 316 schools operating in Dooplaya District.¹⁵

¹⁵ "Karen State School Statistics 2006-07," Karen Teachers Working Group. Accessed at <http://www.ktwg.org/schoolinfo.html> on October 5th 2007.

Even where communities can access education, local perceptions of its value are diverse. Military led impoverishment of the local population and restricted opportunities for most civilians beyond traditional village occupations or subservience within local military control structures has led some families to doubt the benefits of education. As some villagers have told KHRG researchers operating in Dooplaya, *"We attend school and we can eat rice, but even if we don't attend school, we'll still eat rice."* With pressure on young people to assist with their family's livelihood, dropout rates are high and few students complete the full ten years of primary and secondary education. Nevertheless, some parents have gone to great lengths to provide their children with education; in some cases sending them for school in neighbouring villages, towns or even Thailand-based refugee camps.

"Some children aren't able to attend school because their parents can't support them. So they have to stay in their home and help their parents. After the children in the village graduate from grade five some of them continue studying in cities such as Kawkareik and other places, but some students who graduate from grade five whose parents couldn't support them to continue studying have had to leave school and stay at home."

- Saw M--- (male, 35), K--- village (March 2007)

While the SPDC has backed the construction and maintenance of schools in Dooplaya, these tend to be those within, or located close to, the larger towns. In many cases villagers have reported that actual SPDC support for the initial construction of schools has been minimal, if anything, with villagers expected to provide funds, building supplies and labour. The regime nevertheless boasts of its educational credentials citing large numbers of schools allegedly built and supported by the regime. The number of teachers provided through the Myanmar Ministry of Education is typically insufficient to cover for the number of students. Teachers' salaries and school operation costs are not fully covered by the Ministry. Students' parents must therefore make payments for school salaries and upkeep on top of personal uniforms, notebooks and pencils. State-supplied teachers, furthermore, typically come from the more urban areas and cannot speak local Karen languages which are anyways banned from being taught in school.

"They [SPDC] have provided two teachers for us. That's not enough for us so we've found six more teachers and we have to support them. The school goes until grade eight. The students have to buy the materials by themselves. Mostly the children in the village attend school, but some children can't afford their school fees. We've tried to help the children who really want to attend school but whose parents can't support them."

- Naw --- (female, 34), Ht--- Village (March 2007)

Most rural schools in Dooplaya don't go beyond the middle-school level which finishes at grade seven. In some cases rural communities lack education even past the elementary-school level which covers grades one to four. Students who have completed middle school find it difficult to continue their education in the larger towns to which opportunities for further study are generally limited. These difficulties centre primarily on the high cost of school fees and complaints that as urban teachers are also underpaid, they are unmotivated to ensure their pupils' success leading to a dependence on additional paid tuition outside of official class hours which further adds to the financial barriers for the relatively poorer students coming from rural areas. Many village youth who manage to complete middle school therefore stop their formal education at this point and instead work to support their families. Other students stop their education even earlier at varying points in the educational system.

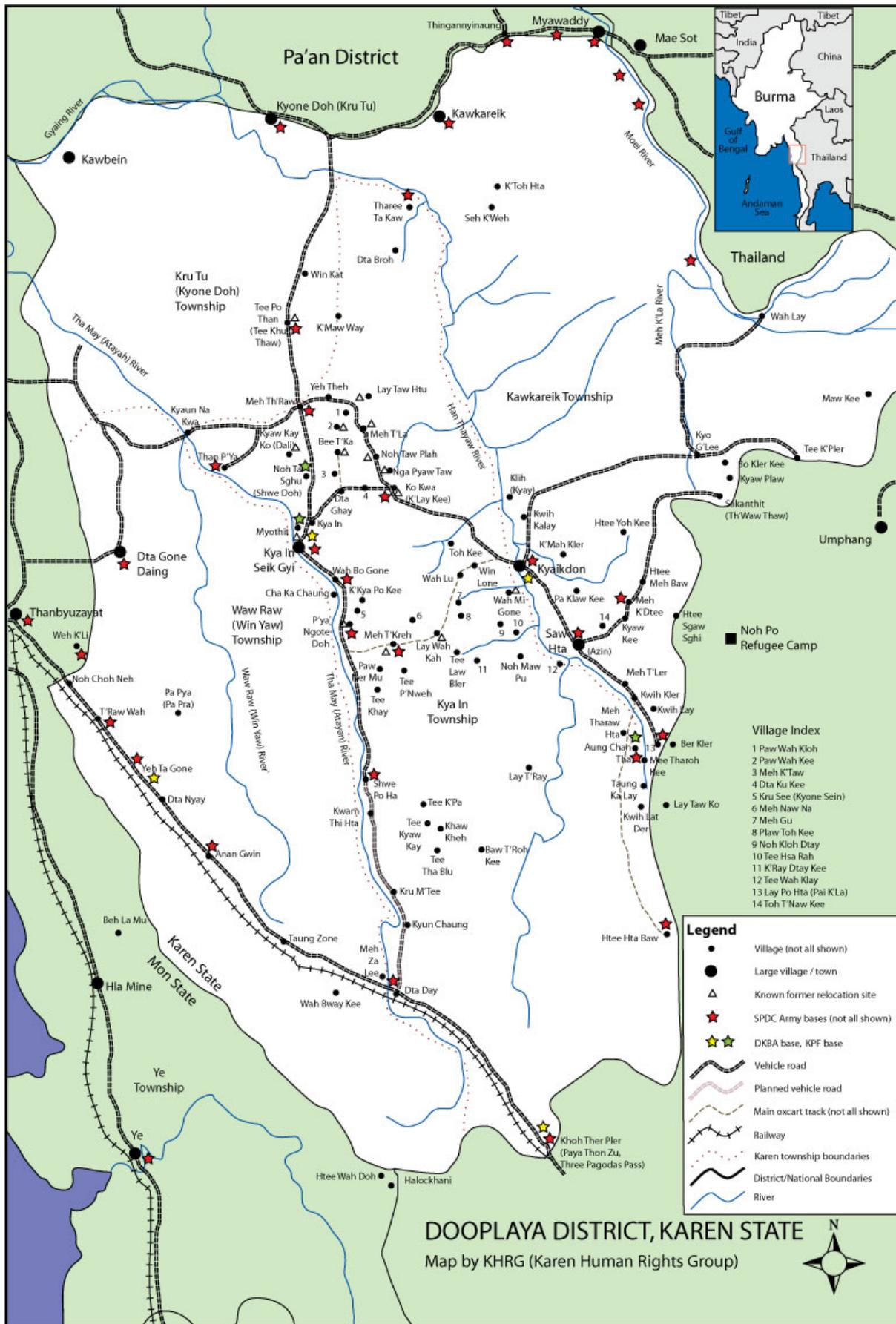
Conclusion

The large-scale protests in Rangoon and other major urban centres in Burma brought into sharp relief for the international community the extent of civilian frustration with the military's predation and systematic impoverishment of the country. As a hierarchical system whereby the civilian population must labour to support the military elite as a class, militarisation necessitates for its very existence widespread and systematic abuse and exploitation. Human rights violations such as forced labour and extortion not only ensure the pauperisation of the people of Dooplaya and indeed all those living in military-controlled Karen State but are furthermore crucial to SPDC militarisation as a political system. As such, the contradictions between exploitation and prosperity thwart any possibility of development that might prove beneficial to the civilian population of Dooplaya and merely fuel frustration, tension and resistance.

Further background on the situation in Dooplaya can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *State repression and the creation of poverty in southern Karen State* (KHRG, February 2007)
- *Setting Up the Systems of Repression: The progressive regimentation of civilian life in Dooplaya District* (KHRG, September 2006)
- *Continued militarisation, killings and fear in Dooplaya District* (KHRG, June 2005)
- *Dooplaya District: Fighting and Human Rights Abuses Still Continue After Ceasefire* (KHRG, February 2005)
- *SPDC Violates the Ceasefire During Karen New Year Celebrations: The Attack on Kah Law Ghaw Village, Dooplaya District* (KHRG, February 2005)

Photos from Dooplaya can be seen in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2006*, *Photo Gallery 2005*, and *KHRG Photo Set 2005A*, available on the KHRG web site (www.khrg.org).



Karen Districts



© Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 2005

Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles