
ly 100, 000 Kyat per month to local Army battalions just in established cash fees, not including extra fees to avoid forced labour, *ad hoc* extortion demands or forced contribution of food and other material goods. 100, 000 Kyat is US\$15, 000 at official exchange rate or US\$350 at market rate, but for a subsistence farming village it is a very large amount of money. This amount continues to increase because of the constant expansion of the number of Army camps near every village. Just looking at this amount and considering the number of villages in Burma, it appears that at least one to two billion Kyat per month is being robbed from rural villagers by SPDC field military officers, and this does not even include other money which these officers make by selling rations and village goods, or by stealing the wages of their soldiers. These officers have no expenses while in the field. They remit a portion of their profits to higher-level officers and send the remainder to their families, most of whom live in Rangoon, Mandalay or other large towns. Their families can then use these billions of Kyat flowing into the towns as seed money to start businesses, and it is these businesses which lead to the false impression of "economic growth" in the cities. In fact, all of the "growth" in the cities is financed by this steady flow of money and goods robbed from rural villagers, combined with the laundered profits of the narcotics trade.

The SPDC is systematically stripping rural Burma of all it can produce in order to finance a

facade of economic improvement in the cities, while at the same time destroying the food production capabilities of most non-Burman ethnic areas. Even rural villages which have never been burned or forcibly relocated cannot sustain this system. Having to do so much forced labour that they no longer have enough time to farm, to hand over crop quotas which are often more than they can grow and cash which is more than they could ever obtain, and always facing the additional looting by SPDC soldiers, many villagers can only survive by selling off their livestock and valuables. When those are gone or when another Army camp comes to their area, they have no choice but to flee or face arrest. Many end up as beggars in the towns, internally displaced people living in the forests, or "economic migrants" and refugees in neighboring countries. Over 80% of Burma's population live in rural villages, but the SPDC is looting the countryside until the village is no longer viable as a social unit. This is the key factor causing Burma's current economic crisis. The SPDC apparently hopes to keep operating this unsustainable system, propping it up with money from foreign investment and aid. This explains their current attempts to attract investment and aid money. However, without political or policy changes, any outside support will only prop up an unsustainable system and ensure a greater disaster in the future.