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## Under the Iron Thumb: Forced Labor in Myanmar

### Abstract

The fight for human rights in Myanmar goes back to its independence in 1948. The Myanmar military (*tatmadaw*) has engaged in shocking violations of almost every right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The issue of forced labor, however, is of particular concern. Forced labor is employed primarily in development projects, agricultural enterprises, and the military. It is used to impose collective punishment on civilians, to build highly profitable development that strengthens military rule, and to allow the military access and logistical support in the most remote regions of insurgent-occupied territories. Forced labor is a central means by which the *tatmadaw* attempts to control all facets of Burmese society.

### Keywords

Human rights, Slavery, Contemporary slavery, Forced labor, Myanmar

## Under the Iron Thumb: Forced Labor in Myanmar

By Anil Raj

### Introduction

The fight for human rights in Myanmar goes back to its independence in 1948. The Myanmar military (*tatmadaw*) has engaged in shocking violations of almost every right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The issue of forced labor, however, is of particular concern. Forced labor is employed primarily in development projects, agricultural enterprises, and the military. It is used to impose collective punishment on civilians, to build highly profitable development that strengthens military rule, and to allow the military access and logistical support in the most remote regions of insurgent-occupied territories. Forced labor is a central means by which the *tatmadaw* attempts to control all facets of Burmese society.

### Background

Prior to Myanmar's independence, the British had full administrative control over the regions around Yangon (Myanmar's present capital city). The Northern hill tribes, as well as other parts of the border regions, contained ethnic minorities to whom the British Raj granted autonomous rule. At the time of independence, it was a formidable task to unite the two Burmas, and as a response to this problem, authoritarian roots took hold. Some ethnic minorities in the border regions of Burma still continue their insurgency. The country has made fifteen cease-fire agreements with ethnic minority insurgency groups, but by no means have they eliminated the insurgency.

After independence, Burma pursued the "Burmese way to Socialism," which was essentially a failed attempt to create a socialist economic policy platform. The discontent that resulted from these socialist endeavors culminated in the slaughter of some three thousand individuals, when mass demonstrations engulfed the nation on August 8, 1988. Consequentially, Burma opened up the economy to foreign investment, most notably in tourism, the exploitation of natural gas, and other foreign-backed development initiatives.

Politically, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, now renamed as the State Peace and Development Council, SPDC) held elections in 1990, where the National League for Democracy (NLD) won over eighty percent of the votes. However, SLORC has refused to turn over power to the NLD. Instead, it has stated that the National Convention would first need to draft a constitution before the newly elected parliament could convene. Myanmar has been politically stagnant at this point ever since.

### Forced Labor in Development Projects

International bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have documented forced labor in development projects dealing with a wide array of development initiatives. Arguably, the most unreported use of forced labor has been on the Asian Highway, sponsored by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The Highway is an

ambitious venture that is intended to promote the development of international road transport within the region by linking 32 Asian nations via a 141,000-kilometer network of roads.

In a grave breach of international law, the Myanmar government, along with its proxy armies, has forcibly conscripted local villagers to build part of the highway that crosses into Myanmar's Karen state, as well to dig drainage ditches that run alongside the road. During construction, agricultural land has been confiscated or severely damaged, forcing entire villages into poverty. Many people have been forced to relocate and to seek refuge from future atrocities, frequently in Burma's dense jungles. Not only is the construction of roads conducive to fostering trade and providing income for military rule; it also allows the military to retain control of civilian populations.

The highway project has been funded by a combination of international donors and member states, in addition to receiving implicit funding from the Asia Development Bank (ADB). NGOs such as Earth Rights International have called upon the ADB to cease all forms of funding or logistical support of projects that are fueling human rights violations across Myanmar; yet such calls have failed to stop the funding. To date, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Burma, along with ESCAP's transport and tourism director, have continued to deny any allegations of forced labor along the Asian Highway.

The most notorious case of forced labor has taken place during the construction of the Yadana gas pipeline, via a joint venture between France's Total and the United States' Unocal (now Chevron). Because the \$1.2 billion pipeline stretches through insurgent-occupied territory, the government of Myanmar agreed to provide security for Unocal officials. In 1990, the *tatmadaw* began to force the civilian population to provide the preliminary preparation for the pipeline's construction, and marked civilians to provide the labor for the project. Thousands of villagers were forced to cut down trees, dig out stumps, and build barracks and helipads, or risk fatal consequences. Those villagers who refused, attempted to escape, or could not physically manage to sustain the brutal conditions, were subject to beatings, rape, torture, and extra-judicial killings. Even more alarming has been the detailed documentation by several NGOs that entire villages have been razed and/or its inhabitants forcibly relocated in order to make way for construction along the thirty-nine mile stretch of the pipeline.

### **Military Portering**

Another prevalent source of forced labor has been in the form of military porters, as government troops have continued to use members of the civilian population as porters for the military. Men, women, children, and the physically disabled continue to carry large loads of equipment, serve as messengers and guides into hostile enemy territory, assist in setting up military camps, participate in de-mining operations, crop cultivation on military-owned land, and provide food and supplies, with no form of compensation.

There is a positive correlation between development zones and the militarization of these regions. Oftentimes, the SPDC will erect new camps or military outposts along development zones, claiming that such zones must be "protected" from sabotage by ethnic insurgents. Flowing from these policies, villagers residing in development zones become easy targets for forced labor policies.

Such policies also serve as collective punishment and intimidation in ethnic minority regions, which are oftentimes thought to be hotbeds for anti-government activity.

Consequentially, the increased militarization of these zones substantially increases the reach of the military into areas that were once off-limits to government forces. Additionally, the sustained presence of the military often means that civilians will be forcibly conscripted to act as military porters with no compensation, giving them little to no time to take part in paid work, or to tend to their crops. What often ensues, then, are food shortages, sharp declines in health, and humanitarian catastrophes. Such gross and systematic violations arguably amount to crimes against humanity.

### **Agriculture and Forced Labor**

In recent years, Thailand has been pushing for greater trade relations amongst its neighbors. In the process, it has established export-minded special economic zones (SEZ) along the Thai-Burma border. In May of 2007, the two states finalized agreements that would allow Thai agribusinesses to engage in large-scale, tax-free cultivation of Myanmar's ethnically inhabited border regions via investments from China, Thailand, and behind-the-scenes backing from the ADB.

NGOs like the Karen Human Rights Group have documented the human costs of such agri-development projects, most notably forced evictions from targeted cultivation sites, forced labor to construct access roads and harvesting crops, and the use of extortion to force villagers to hand over money which is then used to subsidize the projects themselves. In 2006, the Karen Human Rights Group reported that ethnic Shan farmers along the China-Myanmar border had protested an increase in land confiscations, most notably a 15,000-hectare region for a contract rubber cultivation zone.

Ethnic farmers have also been forced to purchase hybrid rice seeds (*sinn shewli*) from the SPDC and its proxy armies, and from Chinese businesses, in yet another *tatmawdaw* backed initiative, to convert opium fields into rice. This Chinese-funded project has set the stage for Chinese corporations to command the rice production in the Shan ethnic state, which now accounts for over forty percent of rice cultivation within the state. The rice arguably has a better yield, but requires substantially more water, fertilizers, pesticides, and mechanized farming equipment, all of which are nearly non-existent amongst these populations. While the SPDC has maintained that the seeds are free to farmers, human rights monitors argue that farmers are forced to pay for the seeds, which must be bought annually (unlike traditional rice seeds). With the costs for fertilizers and related costs, it has pushed many into debt, where the only means of financial freedom is to sell off the land, or watch it be confiscated forcibly.

### **Conclusion**

The use of forced labor in development zones, military, and agriculture serves only to empower the rule of the *tatmadaw*, economically and politically. Due to the courageous initiatives of human rights activists, accountability for forced labor has been met with some success. Earth Rights International, on behalf of Burmese villagers, filed suit against Unocal for its complicity in the use of

forced labor under the U.S. Alien Tort Claims Act. Unocal eventually settled out of court, but the lawsuit nevertheless set a precedent for future violators. However, formidable challenges remain.

The developing economies of China and India stimulate great appetites for Myanmar's raw resources, most importantly its gas. China has often blocked any meaningful United Nations Security Council resolutions against the tyrannical regime, in order to defend its own economic interests. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has been actively seeking to engage Myanmar, but progress is questionable. In early 2007, the ILO and Myanmar signed an agreement that would have provided victims of forced labor with a mechanism to file complaints. Yet instead of victims' grievances being investigated, they have been met with intimidation and threats by the authorities.

Combating forced labor in Myanmar will require altering the elements by which it is fueled, namely the economic underpinnings that support military rule. It will also require the international community to force Myanmar to remove its veil, and to become transparent as justice is brought to victims. Lastly, strengthening the prosecution of those foreign companies operating in Myanmar and those violating international human rights can, and has, proven to be a deterrent. Finding a way to fund development without exacerbating the human rights situation will be an initiative that major U.N. bodies and affiliated agencies will have to recalculate if current human rights violations are to subside.

### **Selected Bibliography**

Alamgir, Jalal. 1997. "Against the Current: The Survival of Authoritarianism in Burma." *Pacific Affairs, University of British Columbia* 70 (3): 333-350.

Annotation: Alamgir looks at the structural and strategic means by which authoritarianism has survived in Burma. He analyzes various theories that explain the endurance of military rule—modernization, socialism, and nationalism. He attributes military rule to the fact that the military had to hold onto power in order to see the country through the turbulent times that were brought upon by Burma's differing historical eras. The article provides clear insight into the historical and cultural contexts of Burma's authoritarian rule.

ALTSEAN - BURMA. 2006. Forced Labor in Burma: Time For Action.  
<http://www.altsean.org/Reports/ForcedLabor.php>.

Annotation: The forced labor situation in Burma has not improved in the six years since the International Labor Organization (ILO) first addressed the issue in November 2000. While the regime has responded to ILO pressure with positive measures, any gains have been lost as soon as pressure has been eased. Most recently, the SPDC failed to comply with the ILO recommendations on forced labor issues made in June 2006.

Amnesty International. 2007. The State of the World's Human Rights 2007.

<http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Asia-Pacific/Myanmar>.

Annotation: Amnesty International continues to report that forced labor is continuing, most notably in the Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, and Kachin states. The vast majority of the reported forced labor in 2007 was in the form of military portering. Despite pressure from the ILO, Myanmar authorities have failed to cooperate with ILO authorities in prosecuting violators; however authorities did promise a six-month moratorium on the prosecution of those making complaints about forced labor.

Chamber, Rachael. 2005. The Unocal Settlement. *Labor Rights*,

[http://www.laborrights.org/press/Unocal/settlement\\_humanrightsbrief\\_0106.pdf](http://www.laborrights.org/press/Unocal/settlement_humanrightsbrief_0106.pdf).

Annotation: This report provides a comparative analysis of the legal settlements between Unocal and Khulumani. Both were cases brought against multi-national corporations (MNCs) for their complicity in gross human rights violations. However, the understandings of what complicity means before the court in these two cases were very different. The report ultimately bases the differing interpretations on the political alignment, either liberal or conservative, of the judges serving the Supreme Court at the time of these cases. In the long run, the Unocal settlement has served as a landmark decision, and has set a precedent for holding MNCs responsible for human rights violations abroad. However, the differences between the cases have made the accountability of MNCs relatively unclear, and still in need of clarification.

CIA World Factbook. CIA World Factbook - Burma.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html#Econ>.

Annotation: The CIA World Factbook provides key statistics on a host of areas including foreign direct investment, gross domestic product, natural resources, trade/export outputs, life expectancy, infant mortality, and others. These are all key indicators of economic, social, and political life in Burma.

Clapp, Prascilla A., ed. 2007. Burma: Poster Child for Entrenched Repression. Edited by R. I. Rotberg, *Worst of the Worst*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Annotation: In this edited volume, the author's chapter on Burma provides a succinct overview of history, policy, and the nature of authoritarian rule in Burma. The author traces authoritarian rule in Burma to its colonial past, the military's domination over its economy, and the sheer power and penetration by the state into Burmese society. It also documents dire human rights conditions in Burma, most notably the restrictions on freedom of speech, religion, forced labor, and censorship.

Earth Rights International. 2005. "Another Snake in the Jungle? Shwe Gas development in Western Burma." *Earth Rights International*,  
[http://www.earthrights.org/files/Reports/another\\_snake\\_in\\_the\\_jungle.pdf](http://www.earthrights.org/files/Reports/another_snake_in_the_jungle.pdf).

Annotation: Earth Rights International presents the case of the Shwe gas development, potentially the largest natural gas development in the country, and the one with the largest return on its investment. The report is detailed and comprehensive, providing maps, photography, and other "hard" evidence to support the claims of gross human rights violations. The main concern is that such projects have all the indicators of human rights and environmental disaster, similar to the projects by which they have been preceded, most notably the Unocal Yadana pipeline. Energy hungry China and India are fighting for development rights, but ignoring the consequences that may arise will force all parties involved to bare the cost of destruction.

Earth Rights International. 2006. "Gas Politics: Shwe Gas Development in Burma." *Earth Rights International*,  
[http://www.earthrights.org/files/Reports/gas\\_politics\\_shwe\\_gas\\_development\\_in\\_burma.pdf](http://www.earthrights.org/files/Reports/gas_politics_shwe_gas_development_in_burma.pdf).

Annotation: Earth Rights International analyzes the politics, economics, and human rights concerns behind what could possibly be Burma's large gas line. With China, India, South Korea, and Thailand all as possible investors, there is no lack in resources or will to develop the project, which would potentially bring in \$18 billion over the life of the Shwe gas deposit. Needless to say, the profits would be stuffed into the pockets of the ruling military, while thousands would be plagued by forced displacement, murder, forced labor, land confiscation, and environmental degradation.

Earth Rights International. 2007. The ADB's Legitimization of Burma's Military Junta.  
[http://www.earthrights.org/images/stories/adb\\_legitimization-4.30.07.pdf](http://www.earthrights.org/images/stories/adb_legitimization-4.30.07.pdf).

Annotation: Earth Rights International presents the background and substance behind the finances that drive development projects in Myanmar, which oftentimes end up as violations of forced labor and other gross human rights. Earth Rights International presents the role of the Asia Development Bank in providing the funds that are intended for projects such as the Asian Highway and the Ta Sang Dam. The report calls on the ADB to cease providing any assistance, and not to resume relations until democracy is restored.

Eviatar, Daphne. 2003. "Unocal's Pipeline in Burma Becomes a Test Case in Corporate Accountability." *The Nation Magazine*,  
[http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil\\_watch/ProfitGunpoint\\_UnocalBurma.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil_watch/ProfitGunpoint_UnocalBurma.html).

Annotation: This article delves into the issue of forced labor and murder in the case of Unocal and Total's Yadana gas pipeline project. More specifically, the author examines the legal battle that Unocal now faces in California courts, having been sued by Burmese victims of the project, who are backed by several NGOs under the U.S. Alien Tort Claims Act. Former Attorney



General John Ashcroft has expressed dissent over the court battle and the use of the Alien Tort Claims Act because it supposedly undermines U.S. foreign policy and its war on terror initiative. He has even argued that previous use of the legislation has been “wrong.” Unocal has asked the State Department to intervene and dismiss the case, as was previously done by a suit brought against Exxon Mobil.

Federation of Trade Unions - Burma. 2007. Forced Labor in Union of Burma.

<http://www.ftub.org/files/ForcedLabour.php>.

Annotation: The Federation of Trade Unions - Burma (FTUB) highlights ongoing human rights violations in Burma relating to labor rights and working conditions. The FTU has documented reports of individual cases of forced labor, engaged in dialogue with the International Labor Organization (ILO) over rights violations, and has pushed for the ILO and other members of the international community to place pressure on Burmese authorities over human rights conditions. The report presented here documents the status of forced labor in Burma, and provides three options that can be employed to combat forced labor: compulsory International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisdiction, an advisory ICJ opinion, or the establishment of a tribunal under the ILO jurisdiction.

Free Burma Rangers. 2007. “Burma Army Persecution Forces People to Flee and Beatings Paralyze One Man in Chin State, Western Burma.”

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2007/20071016.html>.

Annotation: In this report by Free Burma Rangers, the authors present the findings of four interviews conducted in Burma’s Chin State. The interviews highlight abuses of forced labor, extortion, rape, beatings, extra-judicial killings, refugees, and ill-treatment, all due to the policies and presence of the Burmese army in civilian territories. The report also contains pictures and testimony from victims of the abuses documented within the interviews. The report lacks analysis, but it provides detailed accounts of atrocities ongoing in the State.

Human Rights Watch. 2001. “Burma Still Using Forced Labor.”

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2001/06/12/burma181.htm>.

Annotation: Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented the violations of forced labor standards in Burma. HRW reports that thus far, no one has been prosecuted of violations of forced labor laws under section 374 of Burma's penal code. HRW reports that people as young as ten years old have been victims of forced labor. Moreover, they are routinely beaten, tortured, and threatened with death if they do not comply, or if they attempt to escape. HRW urges the Myanmar authorities to cooperate with the ILO and other independent monitors, and urges the international community to keep up pressure.

Human Rights Watch. 2007. "Burma: Natural Gas Project Threatens Human Rights."  
<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2007/03/24/burma15557.htm>.

Annotation: Human Rights Watch expresses concern over a proposed plan to build gas pipelines through ventures with Indian and South Korean firms. Such ventures in the past have led to serious violations of human rights such as land confiscation, forced labor, and murder. Profits from gas exports are directly funding the Burmese junta, which is a regime that has one of the poorest human rights records worldwide. Human Rights Watch calls on these foreign firms, along with the Burmese junta, to uphold all ethical business practices and international human rights norms.

International Crisis Group. 2006. "Myanmar: New Threats to Humanitarian Aid."  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4565&l=1>.

Annotation: This report highlights the different obstacles that Myanmar has created against allowing humanitarian aid to enter the country. While the dire human rights and humanitarian situation in Myanmar continues, the government is placing greater restrictions on aid agencies, forcing some key ones to pull out. Groups abroad have also placed pressure on aid agencies not to operate, which has only exacerbated the morbid conditions. Ethnic minority populations are increasingly vulnerable, as the government is continuing their military operations whilst tightening their grip on aid agencies attempting to operate in the areas. The International Crisis Group warns that such a move could lead to greater social and political instability within the country.

International Labour Organization. 2005. "Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29)."  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb294/pdf/gb-6-2.pdf>.

Annotation: The International Labour Organization's (ILO) report provides a detailed account of forced labor issues in Myanmar. It examines the cooperation of Myanmar authorities, their relative lack and failure to cooperate, individual cases, and policy recommendations. Most notably, the ILO reports that when victims file complaints of forced labor, they are often met with threats from the authorities in order to discourage further complaints. These threats have even been sent to the Liaison Officer of the ILO. The ILO encourages Myanmar to remain a member of the ILO in the face of threats that Myanmar may opt to withdraw its membership.

Karen Human Rights Group. 2005. "Nyaunglebin District: Food Supplies Destroyed, Villagers Forcibly Displaced, and Region-wide Forced Labour as SPDC Forces Seek Control Over Civilians." <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2005/khrg05f4.html>.

Annotation: This report presents evidence of the SPDC using people in relocation sites and villages they control as forced labor to strengthen the network of roads and Army camps - the main tools of military control over the civilian population—while Army officers plunder

people's belongings for personal gain. In both hills and plains, increased militarization is bringing on food shortages and poverty.

Karen Human Rights Group. 2005. "Toungoo District: Civilians Displaced by Dams, Roads, and Military Control." <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2005/khrg05f7.html>.

Annotation: 'Development' as implemented by the SPDC in Toungoo District of northern Karen State means dams, roads, military camps, and relocation sites. This report gives examples of how dams and roads are restricting the movement of civilians, bringing more forced labour to villages, and bringing more extortion and taxation to the people. New military camps are confiscating hundreds of acres of productive farmland. Villagers are being forced to fill military roles as sentries for roads and military installations. Forced relocation sites are depriving people not only of their homes and fields, but more importantly of their freedom to support themselves.

Karen Human Rights Group. 2006. "Forced Labour, Extortion and the State of Education in Dooplaya District." <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2007/khrg07f8.html>.

Annotation: The Karen River Watch group documents human rights violations being committed in the Karen (Kayin) minority region on the Burma-Thai border. Forced labor is reported as a tool of the military junta to not only obtain free labor, but also as a means of subjugating ethnic minority populations that have high levels of insurgency. Such blanket policies force gross and systematic violations of human rights on civilians as a means of deterring the insurgency.

Karen Human Rights Group. 2006. "Surviving in Shadow: Widespread Militarization and the Systematic Use of Forced Labour in the Campaign for Control of Thaton District." <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2006/khrg0601a.htm>.

Annotation: This report examines the role of militarization in facilitating human rights violations in the Thaton District. The villagers are regularly called upon to fulfill the unrelenting array of demands for forced labor, building materials, food, and money. The military government, along with breakaway factions of armed groups that have signed cease-fire agreements with government troops, are conscripting villagers into forced labor. Military camps have been built in the region, placing great restrictions on the movement of villagers. Food shortages have also proven problematic.

Karen Human Rights Group. 2007. "Development by Decree: The Politics of Poverty and Control in Karen State." <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2007/khrg0701.html>.

Annotation: The report highlights the ongoing militarization of the Karen State by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Myanmar's military government. By building grand development projects in the state, villagers have often had to provide the labor and resources for

construction. While the government maintains that these development projects are beneficial and are supported by the local people, it is argued in this report that these projects are simply another means for state military to gain access to remote regions, control civilian life, and extend its rule.

Karen Human Rights Group. 2007. "State Repression and the Creation of Poverty in Southern Karen State." <http://khrhg.org/khrhg2007/khrhg07f2.html>.

Annotation: The Karen Human Rights Group presents a report on forced labor in Burma. It is a well-documented account, which uses testimonials from victims and researchers stationed inside Burma. It also provides solid background information on the issues underlying the human rights violations specific to Burma.

Karen River Watch. 2004. "Damming At Gunpoint." <http://www.salweenwatch.org/downloads/Damming-at-gunpoint.pdf>.

Annotation: The Karen River Watch group documents human rights violations that are being committed in the Karen (Kayin) minority region on the Burma-Thai border, most specifically pertaining to the construction of dams.

Landmine Monitor. 2005. Burma (Myanmar), Landmine Monitor Report 2005. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2005/burma.html>.

Annotation: The Landmine Monitor provides a well-documented report on Myanmar's landmine conditions. The Landmine Monitor reports that the Burmese Army light infantry brigade 439 is alleged to have forcibly conscripted civilians to act as porters for the military in landmine de-mining operations. This process has inevitably led to civilian amputations, serious injuries, and even death. Rehabilitation of landmine victims, although improving, is still severely lacking due to the neglect of civilian populations across the country.

Loveman, Alisa. 2006. "Burma Activists Reject Weakening of Safeguard Standards at the Asia Development Bank." [http://www.earthrights.org/burmafeature/adb\\_continues\\_to\\_promote\\_harmful\\_infrastructure\\_projects\\_in\\_burma.html](http://www.earthrights.org/burmafeature/adb_continues_to_promote_harmful_infrastructure_projects_in_burma.html).

Annotation: This press release by Earth Rights International documents a growing concern of accountability and transparency over funding and support for development projects that use forced labor and forced relocations of populations within the state. International organizations, most notably the Asia Development Bank (ADB), are continuing to provide technical and monetary support for development initiatives that only exacerbate human rights violations in Burma. The ADB estimates that it spends \$59,482 per year to attend conferences and

workshops. Earth Rights International has repeatedly called for the ADB to stop funding projects that are known to be complicit in human rights violations.

Marwaan, Macan-Markar. 2007. "BURMA: Asia Highway to Disaster?" *International Press Service*, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=37499>.

Annotation: This article documents the alleged use of forced labor along the Asian Highway Project that has been sponsored by the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The segment of the road that cuts through Myanmar has reportedly been built via forced labor, land confiscation, and through other violations of human rights. Unfortunately, U.N. officials have responded to the allegations as though they were either unaware of such occurrences, or have denied any such findings. Furthermore, regions that are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance have been left to fend for themselves, as aid agencies have been restricted from serving certain vulnerable populations.

Matthews, Bruce. 1998. "The Present Fortune of Tradition-Bound Authoritarianism in Myanmar." Vol. 71, *Pacific Affairs*, University of British Columbia.

Annotation: This article seeks to understand authoritarianism in Burma through the lens of political culture. The author examines the persistence of authoritarian rule in Burma by examining the contribution of Burmese culture and history, which include its historical military dominance and loyalty within the military. However, the article indicates that due to changing economic and social conditions, authoritarianism is ending slowly.

Matthews, Bruce, ed. 2001. *The Legacy of Tradition and Authority: Buddhism and the Nation in Myanmar*. Edited by I. Harris, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia*. Continuum International Publishing Group. New York.

Annotation: Bruce Matthews looks at the ways in which culture, and more specifically, Buddhist culture, has played a role in the survival of authoritarianism in Myanmar. His argument is that Buddhism was oftentimes the common factor that linked the people of Myanmar together in its early stages of independence, which gave rise to many ethnic separatist movements. Secondly, Matthews sheds light on the political activism with which the Buddhist sangha was involved throughout its history. He notes that in the decades following military rule, the role of Buddhism has diminished significantly, although it still remains important within the civilian population.

McCarthy, Stephen. 2000. "Ten Years of Chaos in Burma: Foreign Investment and Economic Liberalization under the SLORC-SPDC, 1988-1998." *Pacific Affairs*, University of British Columbia 73 (2): 233-262.

Annotation: This article reviews the economic policies of the ruling military government of Myanmar. It traces Burma from its days of socialism to its current era of foreign investment and

economic liberalization. It examines the laws that were employed that allowed for foreign investment and economic liberalization, and ultimately argues that the government's liberalization initiatives failed due to shortsightedness and misguided policymaking.

McCoy, Clifford. 2007. "Capitalizing the Thai-Burma Border." *Asia Times Online*, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/IF21Ae02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/IF21Ae02.html).

Annotation: *Asia Times* highlights the ongoing problem of forced labor and forced evictions in Burma. Myanmar and Thai officials are creating large-scale farms that would allow for the confiscation of local ethnic farmers' lands, which would force the farmers to farm commercial farms. Farmers are given no compensation, and some of have been displaced and forced to seek placement in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border.

McCoy Clifford. 2007. "Seedlings of Evil Growing in Myanmar." *Asia Times Online*, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/IH23Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/IH23Ae01.html).

Annotation: This article speaks to yet another military-backed economic endeavor that is intended to bring about development and profit for the country at large costs for the civilian populations. Through a joint venture, mainly through Chinese investors, villagers are being forced to buy and cultivate hybrid rice seeds. Due to the costs of fertilizers, pesticides, and mechanized farming tools that these seeds require, farmers cannot afford to operate. Many are finding themselves in debt, and thus are forced to sell their lands or risk its confiscation by government authorities.

Migdal, Joel S., Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue. 1994. State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Annotation: The authors of this article examine the role of the 'state' in the developing world. Their main argument is that the state and society have a recursive relationship, influencing each other constantly. However, it is ultimately the state that is the principal subject in the international community.

National Coalition of the Union of Burma, Human Rights Documentation Unit. 2006. "Chapter 1: Forced Labor and Forced Conscription." <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs4/HRDU2006-CD/labour.html>.

Annotation: This is a comprehensive report that documents all aspects of forced labor issues in Myanmar through the government-in-exile. The report documents serious cases of forced labor due to the conscription of military porters, forced labor in development projects, and forced convict labor. It also provides a detailed list of forced labor victims and their villages, Myanmar's negotiations with the International Labor Organization, and forced labor incidents within each state.

Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2006. 2006. "Chapter 3: Arbitrary Detention, Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances." <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs4/HRDU2006-CD/arrest.html>.

Annotation: This is another comprehensive report that documents all aspects of forced labor issues in Myanmar through the government-in-exile. The report documents serious cases of forced labor due to the conscription of military porters, forced labor in development projects, and forced convict labor. It also provides a detailed list of forced labor victims and their villages, Myanmar's negotiations with the International Labor Organization, and forced labor incidents within each state.

Parker, Clive. 2006. "Naypyidaw: A Dusty Work in Progress." [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=6427](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=6427).

Annotation: The Irrawaddy reports that the new capital city of Naypyidaw has been partly built on the backs of local villagers, without pay or compensation. Since construction first started, some 2,800 alleged victims have filed formal complaints to the International Labor Organization for acts of forced labor. Laborers were largely responsible for building military camps for three army battalions and an air force battalion. Additionally, villages were forced to provide roofing and construction materials for the projects. The International Labor Organization is fearful that victims will be persecuted in retaliation for filing the complaints.

Rotberg, Robert I., ed. 2007. Worst of the Worst. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Annotation: The chapter on Myanmar, presented by Prascilla Clapp, briefly describes the incidents of forced labor in Burma. Forced labor is mainly used by the local military authority to expand their reach into dense jungle locations, to porter military supplies, and to provide other military services. Nonetheless, in 2005, several local military officers were charged with violations of forced labor and were sentenced to sixteen months in jail. This is the only known example accountability for forced labor practices in Myanmar.

Selth, Andrew. 2002. Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory. Norwalk: Eastbridge.

Annotation: Selt describes the history, formation, development, role, and policies of the Burmese military. He seeks to understand the pivotal role that the Burmese military has played in Burmese society, especially in keeping tight control over Burmese society. He also seeks to explain and understand the army's ambitions, as it remains a powerful presence in the region.

Soros, George. Country In Crisis - Human Rights. <http://www3.soros.org/burma/CRISIS/hr.html>.

Annotation: Soros provides a general overview of the human rights conditions in Myanmar. Specifically, the article notes the violations of forced labor in ethnic minority regions where

forced labor persists in the form of military pottering, serving as a policy-like tactic to discourage ethnic insurgencies. It is also prevalent in the southeast regions, where UNOCAL and Total and building their pipelines. The synopsis also addresses the International Labor Organization's attempts to work with the authorities, and acknowledges Burma's lack of sincere cooperation in dealing with the matter. The website has live links to a host of other organizations working on human rights in Burma.

Thomson, Curtis N. 1995. "Political Stability and Minority Groups in Burma." *Geographical Reviews* 85 (3): 269-285.

Annotation: This journal article explains the many challenges facing ethnic minorities in Burma. It traces their present discontent back to colonial times. Thomson states that because the minorities are so fragmented in their desires, goals, needs, and language, it will be very hard for ethnic minorities in Burma to reach a collective bargain with the military. Although they share a common enemy, there has been too much splintering amongst the ethnic groups themselves. To conclude, Thomson sets out criteria that need to be met in order for the ethnic groups to reach their goals within Burmese society.

United Nations Human Rights Council. 2007. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro." <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G07/107/31/PDF/G0710731.pdf?OpenElement>.

Annotation: This U.N. document provides testimony from the U.N. Special Rapporteur (SR) to Myanmar on a variety of human rights issues. Most notably, it states that issues of forced labor have been reported in the country, and although the Myanmar government has said it would investigate such crimes, impunity prevails. Moreover, without access into the country, the SR can neither confirm nor deny these allegations; meanwhile, the Myanmar government continues to claim that such reports are invalid. The report ends with recommendations to implement International Labor Organization recommendations to end forced labor.

United States Government Accountability Office. 2007. "International Organizations: Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma." <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07457.pdf>.

Annotation: This U.S. report lists the restrictions that the Burmese government has placed on international organizations, thus impeding their work. It addresses in particular the areas of labor and prison conditions.



United States Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. 1998. "Report on Labor Practices in Burma." <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/ofr/burma1998/main.htm#ES>.

Annotation: The 1998 U.S. Department of Labor report is a comprehensive documentation of labor issues, violations, practices, and policies of Myanmar (Burma). Although this document is a bit outdated, it provides valuable insights into labor issues and violations on Burma, including forced labor for a variety of infrastructure and development projects, while at the same time providing an overview of applicable international laws.

Wellner, Pamela. 1994. "A Pipeline Killing Field: Exploitation of Burma's Natural Gas." *The Ecologist* 24 (5): 189.

Annotation: The author describes how development projects, as in the case of the Yadana oil line that was funded by European, U.S., and regional powers, have led to massive human rights violations and environmental degradation. Such development projects have forcibly removed villagers, and have harmed rare species in vast rain forests. The author documents working conditions in these labor projects, in addition to addressing environmental and ecological degradation.

Wilkison, Roger. 2006. "UN Labor Agency Considers Taking Burma to International Court over Forced Labor." *Voice of America*, <http://www.voanews.com/tibetan/archive/2006-11/2006-11-17-voa2.cfm>.

Annotation: After six years of no progress in talks between the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the government of Burma, the ILO in 2006 prepared to submit the case over to the U.N. Security Council. There, the Security Council could decide to send the case to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as well as the International Court of Justice. If sent to the ICC, the issue of forced labor could be tried under the ICC's jurisdiction over crimes against humanity and war crimes.