

## CHAPTER III

### POLITICAL AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT OF BURMA IN RELATION TO THE HEALTH SITUATION

This chapter is divided broadly into 2 different sections; political and development. Firstly in the political section, issues surrounding the militarization, ethnic groups and the rise of the women's movement in Burma are discussed. Then these issues are linked within regional political ties such as ASEAN, India and China. Secondly these link with the second section focusing more specifically on development issues relating to livelihoods and economic disparity which consequently leaves areas of Chin state food insecure. The above will help to conceptualize the current situation in Burma, in relation to the current health situation which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

#### 3.1 Politics

The dire political situation in Burma has also severely affected the development of the country, especially in ethnic areas. The last democratic elections were held in 1990 with Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) winning over 82% of the votes (Irrawaddy, 2009). However, these results were not honored and instead severe restrictions have been placed on political parties in Burma. Such restrictions go against the "*fundamental freedoms, promotion and protection of human rights, and promotion of social justice,*" which are fundamental rights of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). This declaration was adopted during the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. While the UDHR is not legally binding, the importance of this declaration is that it is an obligation for all countries belonging to the United Nations (UN) to uphold the declaration's fundamental rights. The declaration also has provisions for health care related to: article 25. "(1) *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and*

*medical care and necessary social services,”* (UNDHR, 2010). It also specifically highlights mothers and their children as stipulated in, *“(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.”* (UNDHR, 2010)

### **3.1.1 Militarization**

The SPDC is a deep-rooted military-orientated institution within Burma and has been in power in one form or another for nearly five decades since a military coup in 1962. The current strength of military is believed to number up to 500,000 soldiers (Burma Campaign UK, 2010) and has been headed by Senior General Than Shwe since 1992, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The disparity of the SPDC in allocating the national budgets on the military is highlighted in the fact that it is estimated by the World Bank to spend more than 40% of the country's total GDP on defense. (Women of Burma, 2008: 30) This fact has resulted in a dire lack of investment in key public sectors such as health and education which, combined, only account for 1.4% of GDP. (Turnell, 2008: 3)

One of the main reasons that the military has remained in power for so long is the recruitment of child soldiers, evidence of which can be found in the following, *“Despite national legislation which prohibits the recruitment of children below 18 years of age into armed forces or groups, minors continue to be recruited in the armed forces of all parties including non-state groups.”* (UNICEF, 2008) Within the SPDC military it is estimated that there are up to 70,000 child soldiers, (Cary, 2005: 8) making it the largest user of child soldiers in the world. Child soldiers are easy to target, vulnerable and can be systematically brainwashed to fit in with the ideology of the military. This ideology centers on instilling extreme nationalist feelings and the beliefs that they are protecting the sovereignty of the country. State propaganda also helps to drive these nationalist sentiments through disseminating slogans such as *“crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.”* (New Light of Myanmar, 2004) These types of slogans are common throughout the country,



which are often referring negatively to pro-democracy groups both domestically and internationally.

Another factor in the drive for the recruitment of child soldiers is partly a result of high desertion rates amongst the Burmese army. In the process of the recruitment of child soldiers, battalion commanders are offered incentives such as money, leave from work and promotion. Equally, they face the potential threat of considerable disciplinary pressures if they fail to meet the increasingly demanding recruitment quotas set by military generals. A clear indication of the recruitment drive can be seen in the fact that from 2006 recruitment levels increased fourfold to monthly targets of up to 7000 soldiers. (HRW, 2007: 7) These incentives and pressures combined with weak enforcement of domestic laws, which prohibit the recruitment of anyone less than 18 years old, ensures that recruiters face insignificant penalties. This only helps to perpetuate further the widespread abuse of power and impunity within the system. Importantly, even though the SPDC have signed the International Child Rights Convention (CRC) in 1991, they have failed in their obligations to protect the basic rights of a child under the age of 18: there are specific articles relating to "*protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation.*" (UNICEF, 2010) Therefore the SPDC should be held accountable for these state-sanctioned policies and distinct lack of progress in regard to specifically safeguarding children under the age of 18.

Unfortunately often these child soldiers are placed on the front lines in ethnic conflict areas in a policy by SPDC called the Self Reliance Program. This results in army personnel having to fend for themselves purposely with little supplies. They are also faced with the harsh dilemma of having to meet their basic survival needs such as water, food and shelter, but having to commit human rights abuses in the process. In terms of the impact militarization has had on health, this cycle further perpetuates the deterioration of the physical wellbeing of the civilians who are affected. However, more long-term and of great concern is the psychological and mental condition of these victims of prolonged militarization which also includes the soldiers themselves.

### 3.1.2 Militarization in Ethnic Areas, With Emphasis in Chin State

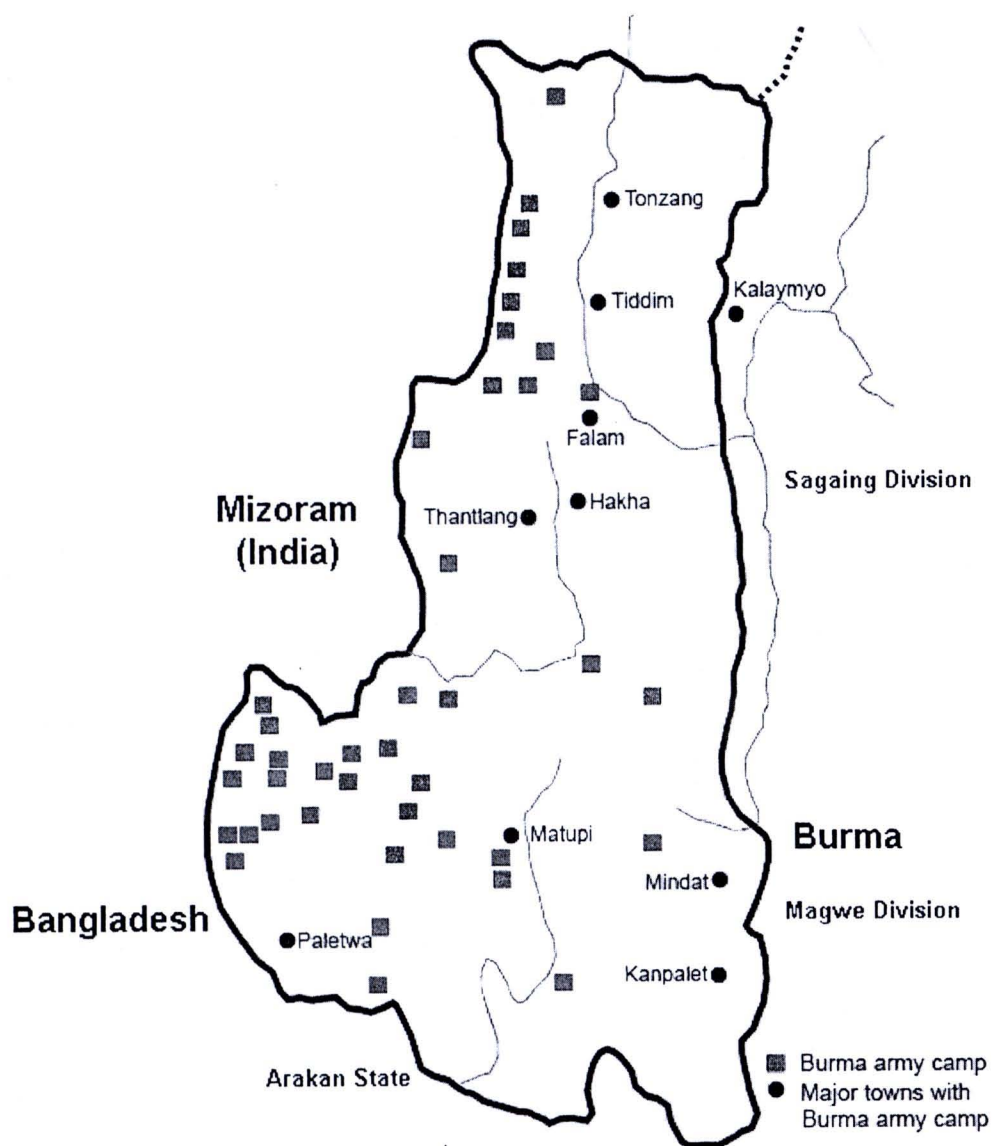
Within Burma there are approximately several dozen main ethnic armed groups. These groups have arisen for a number of reasons such as: historically, as an outcome of increased militarization by SPDC in ethnic areas and fundamentally due to a lack of genuine political inclusiveness which respects the rights and semi-autonomy of ethnic groups. Civil war has been long and protracted for over 60 years in ethnic areas of Burma. Approximately 27 of the armed ethnic forces, have signed ceasefire agreements with the SPDC since 1989 (Global Justice Centre, 2004). However, these ceasefire agreements (which on paper can look an impressive feat), benefit only a small population within the ceasefire groups' designated areas, which permits them to collect taxes and conduct business. The SPDC has used strategies akin to the British colonial tactics of "divide and rule," which has helped to segregate similar ethnic groups along religious lines. Any potential coalition of opposition forces therefore becomes weaker through such disunity. Additionally, the ceasefire agreements can mask the hidden agendas of the SPDC to Burmanise and assimilate ethnic areas in a process of state building. Evidence of this process of Burmanization can be further substantiated by referring to Figure 5: Map of Chin state with Burma army camps. In 1988 there were no Burmese army camps present, which contrasts completely with today's situation with currently over 50 camps. (HRW, 2009: 22)

With the increased militarization of Chin State, there has been a substantial increase in human-rights abuses perpetrated by the SPDC including widespread forced labor, arbitrary taxation, land confiscation, rape and killings. Another dynamic in terms of militarization in the context of Chin State is the Chin ethnic resistance in the form of the Chin National Front (CNF) and its military armed wing, the Chin National Army (CNA). The CNF was formed in March 1988 (CNF, 2010) as an open response to opposing the rule of the Burmese military over ethnic areas of Burma. At presently the CNA's armed resistance has been completely overwhelmed with the increased militarization of Chin State and the Burmese military soldiers heavily outnumbering CNA's. With the Burmese military having permanent army camps it is extremely dangerous for locals to show any support for the CNF and CNA as this is

met with harsh punishments. Until today the CNF and CNA have not signed any ceasefire agreement with the Burmese military.

The large number of camps in Chin State also helps the military maintain control over the general population and resistance movement. This is similar to the military tactic used in other ethnic areas such as Karen State in their four cuts policy of cutting revenue, information, recruits and food. (Tharckabaw, 2003) While the situation in Chin State may not be so pronounced when compared to the horrific conflict situation in Karen state, nevertheless the human tragedy of prolonged increased militarization should not be discounted as it affects every sphere of society including the link to poor health with the people's basic survival under threat.

Figure 5 Map of Chin State with Burmese Army Camps



Note: (Human Rights Watch, 2008)



### **3.1.3 Border Guard Force**

More recent strategies by the SPDC to control armed ethnic groups center on assimilating and integrating these groups into a Border Guard Force (BGF), ahead of the proposed elections in November 2010. The SPDC have issued various deadlines for these groups to adhere to the State ruling of coming under the premise of forming a National Army, fundamentally which will be controlled by the president, Than Shwe. Moreover there has been a lot of criticism and resistance from many of the larger non-ceasefire ethnic armed resistance such as Wa and the Kachin who have openly defied the deadlines imposed by SPDC. The situation remains very much a potential for renewed fighting which will again have a knock-on effect in regard to a humanitarian disaster with victims of conflict, food and water security and refugee overflows to neighboring countries. This can be substantiated by the fact that in August 2009 over 37,000 Kokang ethnic population and Chinese (Irrawaddy, 2009) fled over the Chinese border as fighting broke out between SPDC and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) within the Kokang region of north-east Shan state.

With the potential of a renewal of widespread civil war, it remains to be seen how this very sensitive issue of BGF will be dealt with by the present SPDC. They will want at all costs to avoid any potential mass conflict ahead of their proposed election, especially as it could damage relations with China and neighboring countries.

### **3.1.4 The National Referendum in 2008**

More recently, the SPDC are in the process of legitimizing their authority through a proposed seven-stage roadmap to disciplined democracy. The dynamics behind this move towards disciplined democracy is part of the military's strategy of wanting to be perceived as a legitimate government in the eyes of the international community and especially the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is also a key exit strategy for the top military generals of the military such as Than

Shwe who is currently 77 years old. He is reported to be in increasingly poor health with numerous visits to private hospitals in Rangoon and Singapore. The proposed roadmap will help to safeguard retiring military generals and their families, while still maintaining the power of key institutions from behind the scenes. As part of the roadmap in 2008 a national referendum was held to enshrine a new constitution which perpetuates military rule with such articles as: *"The military's power to veto constitutional amendments provides blanket immunity for past atrocities."* (Burma Elections 2010: 2) In addition, the constitution also stipulates that, *"amendments to the constitution need at least a 75% vote."* (Burma Elections 2010: 2) Therefore with the military automatically given a share of the seats and the presence of their civilian proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), it will be impossible for ethnic groups to amend this one-sided pro-military constitution in the future without the consent from the military. The constitution lacks any form of a genuine inclusive process that includes the voices of other ethnic groups. Further, the president is not elected by popular vote; it is therefore highly likely that a pro-military backed person such as Than Shwe will remain in a position of absolute power and impunity.

Moreover, specifically relating to health care article 367, the constitution stipulates, *"Every citizen shall, in accord with the health policy laid down by the Union, have the right to health care."* (Ministry of Information, 2008: 152) However, even during the time of voting for the referendum in May 2008, Burma saw its worst natural disaster ever when Cyclone Nargis struck the Ayeyarwady Delta region. The death toll alone was over 100,000 deaths (BBC, 2008). It was during this period that the military kept back emergency aid and much-needed humanitarian assistance, including medical treatment from the victims who needed such help, which goes against their own proposed constitution's article 367 which refers to every citizen's right to healthcare. Sadly and ironically, days later the SPDC announced the adoption of the constitution with a turnout of over 99% countrywide and over 92.4% of citizens voting "yes" (BBC, 2008). However, given the context of the referendum taking place during Cyclone Nargis, which caused widespread displacement, these figures remain highly dubious and only further highlights the gross negligence of the SPDC in consolidating their own future instead of that of their citizens.



### 3.1.5 Elections in 2010

The SPDC have recently announced that democratic elections will be held on November 7<sup>th</sup> 2010. This will be the first time that elections will be held in over 2 decades, since the national 1990 s elections were not recognized by the military. There are currently 47 different parties in total that are registered from each of the 7 states and 7 divisions for the upcoming elections. Currently 42 parties have been approved including 9 state backed parties and the main civilian proxy of the military such as: USDP (Altsean, 2010) In the context of the 2010 elections within Chin State, 2 parties has registered with the election commission (EC) and are planning to contest including: Chin National Party (CNP) and Chin Progressive Party (CPP) who represent the entire Chin State consisting of the 9 townships and various Chin sub-tribes. However, it is important that they also have, where possible, representation and active participation from women; otherwise their rights and voices may not be represented specifically relating to women's rights. CPP has recently released a statement regarding their main policy, *"to create opportunities in Chin State for peace, health care, education and economic development, as well as promoting equal rights for Chin people within the Union and the right to preserve their natural resources, literature and cultural heritage."* (Weng, 2010) However one of the main problems ethnic political parties face are the high registration fees which have been outlined by the EC: this is having an effect on creating a barrier to enter the political frame. The formation of the EC itself is also contentious as it does not include representation from pro-democracy ethnic groups, and instead is headed by a former major-general Thein Soe who is appointed as chairman. (Burma Elections, 2010: 1) He was also responsible for drafting the 2008 Constitution, which fundamentally lacks inclusion of other ethnic groups in the process.

The previous 1990 democratically elected party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), who won 392 seats (Burma Campaign UK, 2010) has now had little choice but to have been forced to dissolve their party. Since May 2010 they have chosen not to contest in the November election due to the fundamental fact that over 1200 political prisoners are in prison or under house arrest including key people such

as Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Ko Naing. Some of the political prisoners are serving extended life sentences of up to 106 years. (Burma Elections, 2010: 3) In order for genuine free and fair elections to take place, pro- democracy coalition groups have called on 3 fundamental conditions to be met; these include:

- *“The release of all political prisoners.*
- *Cessation of hostilities against ethnic groups and pro-democracy forces.*
- *An inclusive dialogue with key stakeholders from democracy and ethnic groups, including a review of the 2008 Constitution.”*

(Burma Partnership, 2010: 5)

In order to have credible elections, these above fundamental conditions as well as freedom of assembly, association, speech, expression and movement should also be adhered to. Presently the proposed elections on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2010 which will activate the SPDC’s new constitution will as a well-known Burma expert Lintner argues, *“establish a structure designed to perpetuate military rule, not to change it.”* (Lintner, 2010) This highlights the importance of politics as this will in turn affect how policies are shaped relating to the delivery of health in the public and private sector within Chin State.

### 3.1.6 Ethnic Groups

Historically an agreement between ethnic groups and General Aung San was reached in 1947 with the signing of the Panglong Agreement which was fundamental for negotiating independence from the British in 1948. (Tinker, 1984: 404) However, it was during this timeframe that General Aung San was assassinated, which only further disunited an already fragile agreement and country. Over the next decade ethnic groups ratified the federal constitution, allowing them to secede after a decade of independence. This paved the way for the 1962 military coup and various military backed governments who propagated the Burmese Way to Socialism. This new ideology instilled strong nationalistic feelings and fundamentally pro military which still remain until this day, sidelining ethnic groups in the process.



As previously touched upon, the process of Burmanization is deep-rooted and can impact on all elements of society, not just increased militarization, as seen for example in ethnic areas where in the educational system outlawing the use of Chin language at schools and in the workplace is banned in Chin State and installing Burmese as the only language permitted. (BF-UPR, 2010: 9) This was indirectly achieved by the state through their policy of teachers from urban areas such as Mandalay and Rangoon being sent to Chin State to teach who are unable to speak the local Chin dialects. Teachers from these areas often feel isolated and homesick due to being unable to effectively communicate with the Chin in their own language, unfamiliar foods, lack of development and harsh living conditions. As a consequence, in some cases this causes teachers' attendance to plummet and also to seek a transfer to other more developed areas. In the longer term this directly affects the level of education that future generations of Chin will receive and thus the potential pool for much needed services such as education, health and politics.

### **3.1.7 Women's Movement**

The women's movement in Burma has strengthened considerably over the decades, especially with the country's iconic pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK). ASSK is the daughter of General Aung San who is deeply revered as a national Burmese hero for negotiating independence from the British. Comparatively, ASSK is equally perceived as a national hero for her role in fighting for the people of Burma- this time opposing the policies of SPDC. During her role in politics she became the Secretary-General of NLD, but this has come at a huge personal cost as she has had to spend in total over 15 years under house arrest since 1989. Significantly, her position as a prominent leader has given rise to a new generation of Burmese women to take to the stage in domestic, regional and international forums. Women groups in Burma and in exile have been able to mobilize themselves successfully into both community based ethnic organizations such as Karen Women's Organisation (KWO), Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) and Women's League of Chinland (WLC). Additionally these groups are also part of umbrella



organizations such as the Women's League of Burma (WLB) representing the voices of women from Burma.

### **3.1.7.1 CEDAW**

The value of this growing rise of women's voices being heard has importantly been a vital catalyst for pressuring the SPDC into signing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1997. Another factor in this respect is that SPDC desires to improve their international image by signing this convention. The convention has specific safeguards for women and actively promotes gender equality. This convention has been ratified by SPDC, meaning that the state has a legal obligation to implement the convention into domestic laws. As such, it is a powerful tool for women organizations to mobilize advocacy campaigns and press for policies which reduce violence against women and promote greater gender equality.

Within Burma there is a direct connection between increased militarization by the State and violence against women, particularly in ethnic areas. In Chin State alone given the limitations of accessibility and also the difficulties of finding out information, 38 cases of violence and sexual crimes against Chin women that had been perpetrated by the SPDC were documented. (Women's League of Chinland, 2007: 1) WLC believes the actual number of cases is much higher, yet due to the difficulties posed with the sensitive subject and access to information remained limited. These shameless acts by the SPDC are often carried out by higher ranking officers in front of their fellow soldiers, which only further indoctrinate a culture of impunity and lack of rule of law, furthering perpetuating these types of atrocities. (Women of Burma, 2008: 60) Rape as a weapon is used as an unwritten policy by the state to sanction sexual violence by military personnel not just in Chin State, but all over Burma. Rape not only undermines rape survivors causing horrific psychological damage to them, but also destroys families and communities. The social stigma borne by rape survivors only helps to further destroy communities. Therefore the CEDAW

convention is an essential tool to hold the state more accountable and to stop the culture of impunity relating to discrimination and violence against women.

If we consider article 12 of the CEDAW convention: *“health care and family planning”* (United Nations, 2010), this also provides specific safeguards to maternal health issues facing the general women population of Burma,

*“1 State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.*

*2 State Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.”*  
(Women of Burma, 2008: 39)

### 3.1.8 ASEAN

ASEAN was first established in 1967, bringing in 10 countries located geographically in South-East Asia. More recently due to a severe economic crisis gripping the region this has resulted in the impetus to forge closer ties amongst members similar to a European Union system. This brought about the establishment of the ASEAN Charter in December 2008, which became a legally binding agreement amongst the 10 members. The basis of this strengthening of relationship is heavily weighted towards economic interests which as a group within the ASEAN region amounts to USD \$1.5 trillion GDP in 2009 alone (Union, 2010). Burma ratified the charter on July 21 2008 which is essential, in that the charter’s articles, for example article 1.11 mentions *“equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice;”* (ASEAN, 2007: 4). It is therefore a mandatory obligation of the state to actively address social welfare issues such as providing health and education public services.

### 3.1.8.1 ASEAN Human Rights Body

In addition to the ASEAN charter is the establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). It is the first mechanism in which ASEAN has tried to focus exclusively on human rights. All 10 ASEAN governments have agreed to implement the AICHR as part of article 14 in the ASEAN charter. The mechanism was made under the strong leadership of the ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan, who has helped to a certain extent to promote growth of democracy and human rights in the region. It will however be a test to see how the mechanism is implemented in reality, especially with the current chair of ASEAN presiding over by Vietnam. Within this mechanism there is also a strong potential for a conflict of interpretation of articles as can be seen by asking which has a higher priority, for example in the ASEAN charter and AICHR in regards to article 2e ASEAN charter: "*non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States;*" (ASEAN, 2007: 5) which can conflict directly with "*respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion and protection of social justice,*" (ASEAN, 2007: 6) especially in the case of Burma.

It is easy to criticize AIHCR and its terms of reference, which are more focused on constructive engagement essentially advisory, coordinating and consultative rather than any independent enforcement powers. Yet the fact that the AIHCR could act as a trigger for further discussion on human rights using other additional tools is a positive first step. Therefore a combination of international conventions, regional bodies and domestic laws are essential tools to hold the SPDC accountable and this can directly link to human rights and the right to health care.



### 3.1.9 India's Look East Policy and impact on Burma

As previously touched upon in the hypothesis, India's involvement in Burma is growing with increased interests in development projects since the initiation of India's Look East Policy in 1991. (Kuppuswamy, 2010) The primary aims of the policy are to counter China's influence in the region and move towards closer ties with ASEAN. Burma is fundamental to this policy as it serves as the main corridor by land for India into the mainland south-east Asia region.

Previously the SPDC relied heavily on China for political, economic and security issues, yet more recent events illustrate a calculated shift of policy by SPDC, for example as mentioned in the Border Guard Force section regarding 37,000 Kokang and Chinese fleeing to China due to fighting. The SPDC does not appear to feel threatened or fear reprisals from the Chinese government - something which previously they would have been very cautious about, given the sensitivities along the China-Burma border. This could be due to SPDC being very calculating in shifting their overreliance on China in favor of India and as a result strategically playing off the 2 countries' growing geopolitical importance that Burma represents.

In April 2008 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between India and Burma for the Kaladan project with a view to increasing transport links between Burma, India and the region, which will provide river access, road access and increased trade routes from South-east Asia to India's landlocked north-east states. Over 1 million people are at risk of food insecurity in the project areas along the coast of Arakan State, Burma and also along the project site of the Kaladan River which is in Chin State. (Arakan Rivers Network, 2009: 7) Communities use this river for fishing and paddy field cultivation. Yet no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out and made public. Over 225km of the Kaladan River will be dredged to make the waterway passable by ships; such dredging is carried out through excavating sediment from the bottom of the water bed. This process can result in toxic chemicals being released from bottom sediments; also the disposal of the dredging material is a key issue. This is a major concern for the health situation of the Chin and

people of Arakan State who are likely to face a depletion of food sources along the river, risk of increased exposure to toxic chemicals and forced labor.

As a continuation of the Look East Policy, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010 Than Shwe visited India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on a 5 day state visit (Irrawaddy, 2010) focusing on strengthening ties between the 2 countries specifically relating to economic and security issues in the north-east of India bordering with Burma. This directly affects Chin State for security issues along the Indo-Burma border, which will become only stricter and also could affect the attempts at humanitarian assistance operating along the India-Burma border. Significantly in the context of this historic meeting, the Indian Prime Minister indirectly showed to the international community that he recognizes and legitimizes the Senior General ahead of the November 2010 elections.

## **3.2 Development Issues**

The next section focuses on development related issues and the impact it has had on the health situation.

### **3.2.1 Economy**

Another key element of SPDC remaining in power for so long is the exploitation of Burma's rich natural resources for their own self-interest. Systematic militarization in ethnic areas has given rise to large-scale resource extraction and infrastructure building. This has had the effect of destroying the natural environment and threatens the local management systems of communities. (Burma Environmental Working Group, 2009: 1) The consequences of this resource extraction are long-term with food insecurity becoming a major issue linked to the process of extraction often with no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) carried out prior to operation.

Related to resource extraction we can specifically consider gas. Burma has consistently ranked extremely low in the Corruption Perceptions Index since 2003



when Burma was first included; currently it is ranked 178 out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2009). The corruption stems from economic mismanagement and distortion of money generated by natural resources such as gas. For example the SPDC has earned approximately US\$4.83 billion since 2000 (Earth Rights International, 2009: 18) on just one of its gas pipeline projects entitled Yadana gas pipeline. The lack of accurate financial information which fails to show correctly the revenues generated by this project consequently affects the national budget allocated for education and health. It is clear that the vast majority of the civilian population sees little benefit from the extraction and selling of gas with only a small amount of labor generated during the initiation of the projects and fewer skills are transferred from the company to the local population.

In terms of an analysis of Burma's economy structure by sectors, it can be shown that the primary sector of agriculture, livestock, fishing and forestry accounts for the highest amount with over 47%, (ADB, 2007). This implies that Burma's economy is heavily reliant on the extractive industry. Secondary industries, which include manufacturing and processing, account for 13% (ADB, 2007) and the tertiary service industry including: trade, communications and finance account for 27%. (ADB, 2007). The secondary and tertiary sectors are a key indicator of a country's transformational growth, yet these figures remain relatively low, which creates a potential vulnerability to the fragile economy, especially with natural disasters such as Cyclone Nargis.

In relation to the current political-economy, the SPDC and its business partners are privatizing many sectors, buying strategic locations and buildings within urban centers of Burma. This is in anticipation of a more open market-based economy after the elections. These include the privatization of over 300 natural gas stations in Burma, buying strategic sea harbors, government buildings and the issuing of privatized licenses for hospitals and clinics. However, the real beneficiaries in this process are not the general population of Burma but the SPDC and the people who have enough money to afford the luxuries of private health care.



### 3.2.2 Livelihoods

There is an interconnected relationship between health and livelihoods which can be further substantiated in the following, *“labour conditions play a critical role in determining the health of employees, families, and communities. Labour conditions influence health in these three spheres, but in different ways- by how work is structured, by the physical environment at the work site, and by the social and policy environment at work, among others.”* (Chantal, 2007: 170) Relating to livelihoods within Burma, almost 70% (Asia, 2010) of the population rely on agriculture as their basic livelihood and for food security. Yet external factors relating to the policies of the SPDC affect livelihoods and health through arbitrary taxation, hindering basic survival of families. Arbitrary taxation is often in the form of land confiscation, cattle, crops or forced labor. (Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma, 2010) When families are required to undertake forced labor, it takes them away from their livelihoods in the rice fields, often at critical times within the cycle of rice cultivation. The lack of benefits these taxes have is further substantiated in the following, *“People are paying large amounts of tax yet are receiving very limited public services and in some areas extremely limited access to health services, electricity and water.”* (Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma, 2010: 13) This system of taxes on livelihoods has a long-term impact on food security and overall health as families become more malnourished and financially poorer.

### 3.2.3 Food Insecurity

Another key impact on the health condition in Burma is a combination of external factors such as global world prices of rice increasing by 50% (Dr Cynthia Maung, 2008: 1) and also internal factors inside Burma such as Cyclone Nargis which has devastated the delta region of Burma. This area was the main area for growing rice, which has increased food insecurity to people in Burma. Climate change has also resulted in a lack of rains and late monsoon rains affecting the planting seasons.

### 3.2.4 Food Crisis in Chin State

Food security concerns have only been further exacerbated in Chin State with a severe food crisis caused by a plague of rats in a natural phenomenon traditionally called “*mautam*” by local Chin meaning “*dying bamboo*.” This phenomenon occurs every 48 years in Chin State, Burma and Mizoram State in north-east India. In Chin State alone, over 20% of the population has been affected by the *mautam* crisis. (Chin Human Rights Organisation, 2008: 3) During this freak phenomenon, vast forests of bamboo covered with jungle flower produce a type of bamboo fruit called “*maurai*,” which attracts the local rat population. These rats, which are usually moderate in numbers, consume this new abundant food resource. Locals believe this fruit has aphrodisiac properties, causing the rat numbers to rise exponentially.

In a twisted tale of bad luck, once the bamboo fruit surplus has been exhausted, the hungry plague of rats turn on villagers’ crops, causing a widespread food crisis. In certain areas of Chin state this food insecurity is causing malnutrition of the population. The situation in Chin state could be compared to the global health situation as cited in the following, “*the persistence of approximately 850 million persons suffering from malnutrition (marginally higher than the estimated 820 million at the turn of the century) may partly reflect the erosion of agro-ecosystem resources, and the occurrence of crop pests and diseases- and the persistence of unequal access to food supplies.*” (Robert Beadlehole, 2009)

Village elders who experienced first-hand the last *mautam* in 1958 explained that this time the situation is much worse. Unusually strong winds damaging crops and bamboo forests dying at different times have caused the rats to shift unpredictably from one area to another. The combination of this food crisis and militarization of their land has only compounded further their plight as argued in the following, “*Some forms of extraction from peasants are acceptable to them, while other forms are not. Peasants withstand exploitation, but not all kinds of exploitation, especially forms that put them consistently below a minimum line of subsistence, exposing them to undue risk.*” (Robbins, 2004: 56)

This exploitation by SPDC as previously mentioned is in huge contrast to neighboring Mizoram State, India which is also experiencing the crisis. Here the local government has a number of programs such as a Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration card which entitles families who are deemed to be most needy in a community to obtain rice at subsidized prices. Additionally, the proactive provisions by the State through crop substitution such as coffee, ginger or garlic which are not susceptible to the plague of rodents have been appropriate response mechanisms. The mautam food crisis is expected to end in 2010, but is having such an effect on the Chin that they are faced with little alternative but to migrate to India or other areas of Burma. It is reported that up to 4000 Chin have left due to the food crisis and compounding militarization. (Chin Human Rights Organisation, 2009: 1).