



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

JULY
2009

10,000 villagers forced to flee in Shan State

In July, the Burmese Army launched a new attack in Shan State, Eastern Burma, forcing an estimated 10,000 ethnic Shan villagers from their homes. Regime troops burned down over 500 houses, scores of granaries, and forcibly relocated almost 40 villages, mostly in Laikha township.

The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) and the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) reported that over 100 villagers were arrested and tortured and at least three villagers killed. One young woman was shot while trying to retrieve her possessions from her burning house, and her body thrown into a pit latrine. Another woman was gang-raped in front of her husband by an officer and three of his troops.



A Shan village destroyed in recent attacks by the Burmese Army

The Burmese Army has been waging similar campaigns for years, with deliberate attacks on civilians, summary executions, rape, torture, destruction and forced relocation of villages, and use of child soldiers and forced labor. Between 1996 and 1998 more than 350,000 civilians were forcibly displaced from central Shan State, many of them have since fled to neighbouring Thailand.

Aung San Suu Kyi's trial continues



The trial of Aung San Suu Kyi continued throughout July. On 28 July, the court in Insein prison announced it would deliver the verdict on 31 July. However, the regime postponed the verdict to 11 August. The dictatorship often uses delaying tactics in order to avoid strong action by the international community.

Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested on 14 May and put on trial for breaking the terms of her house

arrest, which forbids visitors, after an American man, John Yettaw, swam across Inya Lake and refused to leave her house. Her trial began on 18th May and is being held in closed-door hearings inside Insein prison.

Ban Ki-moon visits Burma

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited Burma at the beginning of July, his first visit to Burma to discuss the political crisis.

Burma campaign groups had been calling on Ban Ki-moon to go to Burma and his trip could have been an opportunity to make a breakthrough. However, he did not secure a single concession from the regime and the trip was widely viewed as a failure.

Ban Ki-moon failed to do proper preparation work for his visit, relying instead on his advisor Ibrahim Gambari, who is widely considered gullible and incompetent. UN envoy Ibrahim

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Gambari made a two day trip to Burma at the end of June to discuss the Secretary General's visit to Burma. As with previous visits, Gambari was not allowed to see Senior General Than Shwe, Burma's dictator.



Ban Ki-moon meets Senior General Than Shwe

There have been 40 UN envoy visits to Burma, including 8 by Ibrahim Gambari. Since Ibrahim Gambari took over as envoy in 2006 there has been a dramatic escalation in human rights abuses, a doubling of the number of political prisoners, and the regime has defied the United Nations by pushing ahead with its so called roadmap to democracy, rather than entering into tri-partite dialogue as demanded by the UN.

Four ethnic ceasefire groups form military alliance

Four ethnic ceasefire groups, including two of the strongest ethnic armed groups in the country - the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) - have formed a military alliance in the event that the Burmese Army launches a military offensive against any member of the alliance.

According to KIO reports, the groups in the military alliance are the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) based in Kachin State and Northeast Shan State, Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS), the Kokang ceasefire group and the United Wa State Army (UWSA).

As tension builds up, an increasing number of Burmese troops are reportedly being deployed around the KIO headquarters in Laiza and the areas controlled by the other three ceasefire groups.

Burma - North Korea links deepen

Unconfirmed reports have emerged that North Korea has been helping Burma to build a secret nuclear reactor. Professor Desmond Ball of the Australian National University and Thai-based journalist Phil Thornton interviewed two Burmese defectors who claimed the regime is using North Korean assistance to build its own nuclear bomb within the next five years, although it has not been possible to verify their information.

One of the defectors was an officer with a secret nuclear battalion in the Burmese army. The other is a former executive of the regime's leading business partner, Htoo Trading, who handled nuclear contracts with Russia and North Korea.

Archbishop Tutu backs Global Arms Embargo on Burma

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called for a global arms embargo against Burma, accusing countries supplying arms to Burma of complicity with the atrocities being committed in the country.



Tutu also called for a Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity and war crimes being committed in Burma, saying; "Burma's generals are criminals, and must be treated as such."

US renews Burma sanctions

On 28 July, US President Barack Obama renewed US sanctions on Burma as he signed the 2003 Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act for one more year, extending economic sanctions on all imports from Burma.

Following the extension, Congressman Joseph Crowley said, "We must show the military

regime currently ruling with an iron fist in Burma that there are consequences for their actions.”

In May, President Obama extended the ban on US investment in Burma.

‘Saffron Premiere’ of Burma VJ



Vivienne Westwood with Burmese monks at BAFTA, London

The UK premiere of the award-winning documentary ‘Burma VJ’ was held on 14 July. Organised by the Co-operative, the ‘Saffron Premiere’ was hosted by Vivienne Westwood at BAFTA in London, and simultaneously screened via satellite link-up to over 40 cinemas around the country.

‘Burma VJ’ tells the remarkable story of the brave young video journalists who, using hidden cameras, put their lives on the line to tell the real story of the 2007 uprising in Burma and the subsequent crackdown by the ruling military regime. They now face up to 65 years in prison for simply recording the events in the film.

Richard Gere sent a video message of support to the premiere. On seeing Burma VJ, Gere said: “It is desperately important that people see this film and get involved in the movement to help Burma and Aung San Suu Kyi.”

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**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**