

EU rolls over Common Position with no changes

EU Foreign ministers met on April 23rd and agreed to renew the EU Common Position on Burma for a further year, with no new measures to increase pressure on the regime. The failure of the EU to take effective action was disappointing, but came as no surprise, as the EU has consistently failed to agree on any political or economic measures that would have a significant impact on the regime. The EU has not even formally supported moves for the UN Security Council to address the situation in Burma. The EU is divided over the approach it should take, with a handful of countries, including the UK, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Ireland and Denmark, generally showing greater support for Burma's democracy movement. Countries such as Germany, France, Austria, Spain, Italy and Poland tend to oppose increasing pressure on the regime, and some even favour closer economic and political relations. One positive move came in a statement the EU released (see end of this newsletter) which included a call for ethnic groups to be included in dialogue for change.

Jailed for being raped

Four teenage ethnic Kachin girls who were gang raped by SPDC soldiers in February, and then given jail sentences for prostitution, were reportedly been released on bail at the end of April. The attack took place in the town of Putao, in Kachin state in the north of Burma.

Burma and North Korea establish diplomatic relations

It's a marriage made in heaven, two of the world's most brutal regimes have re-established formal diplomatic relations following a visit to Burma by a delegation from North Korea. Burma severed relations in 1983 following North Korea's attempt to assassinate the President of South Korea with a bomb during a visit to Burma. "We had a wonderful visit. I am satisfied" said Kim Yong Il as he left.

Two activists freed

On April 2, a pro-democracy activist Thwin Lin Aung (arrested with no given reason on March 5 at the airport right before his departure for America on a scholarship) and U Thein Zan (arrested on March 7 for satirizing state news media articles after he stuck state propaganda on his fence) were both freed.

India to give more military aid to Burma

India has promised more arms and military training to Burma during a visit to India by the head of the Burmese navy, Vice-Admiral Soe Thane. India has already supplied two British made Islander surveillance aircraft, 105mm light artillery guns and T-55 tanks. In return the regime has stepped up attacks on Indian armed groups that have taken shelter in Burmese territory.

HIV patient arrested for protest



Tin Ko, a 33-year-old Burmese HIV patient, staged a solo protest on Wednesday in Rangoon on April 4th, calling for better health care for people who suffer from the disease. He was arrested following the protest.

8 arrested for peaceful demonstration

A protest held on 22nd April resulted in 8 people being arrested by the regime. Demonstrators were calling for action on the increasing costs of living in Burma, which is causing a lot of hardship for ordinary people.

Burma Army and DKBA attack KNU

On April 7th the Burmese Army and their allies, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, supported by the ex-KNU 7th Brigade commander Htin Maung, launched a military attack on the Karen National Liberation Army, the military wing of the Karen National Union. The attacks forced hundreds of civilians to flee the area.

Indian authorities close office of exile Burmese media organisation

Indian authorities sealed the New Delhi offices of the Mizzima News organisation on April 16th. The move prompted international criticism from Burmese democracy and freedom of expression organisations, and the offices were allowed to re-open on 18th April. As the Indian government moves closer to the SPDC it has become increasingly hostile to Burmese pro-democracy organisations. Three armed groups pledge end to landmine use The Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) and the Pa-O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO), all members of the armed, anti-junta alliance, the National Democratic Front of Burma (NDF), have declared that they will no longer use antipersonnel landmines in their armed struggle against the regime in Burma, Swiss-based NGO Geneva Call announced in a press release on 16 April 2006.

ASEAN won't defend regime

In another sign of ASEAN's increasing impatience with the SPDC, Malaysian Foreign Ministry parliamentary secretary Ahmad Shabery Cheek said Malaysia and other Asean members had made a stand not to defend Myanmar if the country's issue was raised at any international conference. "Now Myanmar has to defend itself if it was bombarded at any international forum," he said.

Where is the new UN envoy?

Concern is mounting over the continued delay in appointing a new Special Envoy to Burma. The former UN Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, visited Burma twice last year, but no envoy has been appointed since the new Secretary General Ban Ki Moon took over in January. Gambari has been appointed as an advisor on Burma, which has caused concern among democracy activists, who have dubbed him 'gullible Gambari' because of his apparent belief in whatever the regime tell him. His judgement has also been questioned following his appearance at the regime's sham National Convention, portrayed by the SPDC as UN endorsement of the process.

Democracy activists attacked

Members of the regime's civilian political militia, the Union Solidarity Development Association (UDSA), launched a brutal attack on two human rights activists on April 18th. Maung Maung Lay, 37 and Myint Naing, 40, members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters organization, were injured after being attacked by a 50 strong mob as they left a village in Hinthada, Ayeyarwaddy Division. The two were taken to hospital but for two days doctors refused to treat them.

New Year message from the 88 Generation Students to all of our citizens

New Year day, 1369 Myanmar era
17 April, 2007 (Unofficial Translation)

Dear citizens,

This New Year is ours. On this auspicious occasion, we must resolve to create our glorious future by ourselves. We have natural resources, strategic geographical location and valuable human resources. Among our neighbours or among the international community, we should be proud of our country. About sixty years ago, our country had a good start among newly independent states for social, economic and political development. Difference of opinion is a basic instinct and a human nature. Political dispute is natural in politics too. The only important thing is to acquire opportunity or practice of solving those problems within the framework of the constitution. Because the disputes were not solved democratically by constitution but instead by military coup in addition to adoption of political and economic policies unilaterally, our country has become the world's poorest country. All of us are ashamed of this state of affairs. Dignity of our people and our country has reached its lowest.

Almost twenty years ago, we ourselves had tried to change our country. We were able to get rid of the single-party dictatorship. After the military coup, the army itself gave promises to practice multi-party democracy and market economy due to the effectiveness of our demands. If mutual understanding and cooperation among our ethnic nationalities and between the military and the democratic forces were achieved, the momentum of 8888 uprising is such that to be the fundamental driving force for rebirth of our country. Distrust, hatred, threat and fears we suffered throughout last year hindered our country from proper development. We have to eradicate those bad things from the past. We must build our political, economic and social life. Among each and every citizen, among ethnic nationalities, among different groups and parties, understanding and tolerance must be created. Dialogue must be initiated. Coming New Year shall be the New Year of genuine dialogue! We must commence dialogue along individual starting points. People who could solve their problems by means of negotiations are civilized people. A country which could solve its problems by means of negotiations is a civilized country.

All citizens, Arise! Sovereign power must descend from our citizens. We are the masters. We are the owners of the supreme power. We will build our country by our own hands. We will recover our dignity by ourselves. New Year is the New Year for all of us.

TOTAL Oil in court for human rights abuses

French oil giant Total Oil is being taken back to court in Belgium following a decision by the Justice Minister to use his positive injunction right to put the civil action against the company back at the investigation stage. Plaintiffs are suing Total Oil over human rights abuses as a result of its operations in Burma.

Army desertions continue to rise

Jane's Defense Weekly has obtained an internal SPDC document detailing the massive scale of deserting soldier from the army. Burma's exile pro-democracy organisations have been reporting for months that there has been a significant number of army deserters fleeing the country.

Two men jailed for wedding video

Two men were jailed on April 26th for possessing copies of a video of the wedding of the daughter of Than Shwe, dictator of Burma. The video was broadcast on TV stations worldwide after being posted on websites earlier this year.

Brown praises courage of Aung San Suu Kyi

British Chancellor Gordon Brown MP, widely expected to be the next Prime Minister when Tony Blair stands down, has featured Aung San Suu Kyi in a book he has written on people of courage to be published in June.

Car thief only wanted petrol

Police arrested a man responsible for a spate of car thefts in Rangoon, and found he was only stealing the cars for the petrol in them. Petrol is rationed in Burma. A gallon of petrol on the black market can cost more than a week's wages.

Development by decree

A new report by the Karen Human Rights group exposes how so-called development projects are being used to enrich the regime and tighten its control on the country.

<http://www.khrg.org/khrg2007/khrg0701.html>

Regime blocks aid to citizens

The US Government Accountability Office released a new report documenting the increasing restrictions the SPDC is placing on the delivery aid in Burma. An excerpt of the report summary follows:

Burma's military regime has blocked or impeded activities undertaken by many international organizations in Burma over the past 3 years. In 2004, the regime distanced itself from these organizations and began adopting increasingly restrictive policies. In 2006, it published formal guidelines to restrict international activities in Burma. These guidelines, which have yet to be fully implemented, contain provisions that UN officials consider to be unacceptable.

The regime's restrictions have had the greatest impact on international efforts to monitor prison conditions, investigate claims of forced labor, and assist victims of ethnic conflict. The regime has blocked ICRC efforts to monitor prison conditions and, until recently, ILO efforts to address forced labor. The regime has also restricted UNHCR and ICRC efforts to assist populations living in areas affected by ethnic conflict.

To a lesser degree, the regime has impeded UN food, development, and health programs by restricting their ability to (1) move food and international staff freely within the country and (2) conduct research needed to determine the nature and scope of some of Burma's problems. Despite these restrictions, several international organization officials told us they are still able to achieve meaningful results in their efforts to mitigate some of Burma's humanitarian, health, and development problems.

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**CAMPAIGNING
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**