

Regime launches crackdown on democracy activists

The dictatorship in Burma has launched a brutal crackdown on democracy activists, following protests over huge increases in the cost of living. On 15th August the regime raised fuel prices, without warning, by up to 500%, effectively doubling transport costs overnight. The price rises are causing real hardship, with increased costs of basic foods and people unable to afford their bus fare to work. Even before the price hikes, inflation was estimated at 30%. In response to the massive price rises, hundreds of Rangoon residents took to the streets to demonstrate, while hundreds more cheered them on. On 19th August prominent leaders of the '88 Student Generation group walked in solidarity with residents in Rangoon and the protests spread across the country.

The regime has responded to the protests with a brutal crackdown on the peaceful demonstrators. On the eve of a major protest in Rangoon on 22 August, the regime arrested 13 leading democracy activists in midnight raids. More than 150 people have now been arrested, and most remain in detention. The regime has accused peaceful protestors of involvement in terrorism, and is threatening jail terms of up to 20 years. High profile members of the 88 Student Generation of democracy activists Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi and Ko Jimmy are among those arrested. The regime has also stationed military vehicles and personnel out of sight in government compounds and houses around Rangoon, enabling the regime to reach all parts of the city within minutes. So far the military presence on the streets has been limited, with the regime relying on the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), its political militia, to harass, intimidate and even arrest protestors. Despite the intimidation and brutal attacks by USDA thugs, hundreds of demonstrators have continued to protest across the country.

International leaders have condemned the regime's violence against protestors. President Bush issued a statement on 30 August condemning the regime's violent crackdown and calling for the release of political prisoners. First Lady Laura Bush also personally phoned UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to appeal for UN action to prevent further violence. However, words of concern have yet to be translated into action by the UN or EU. On 31st August campaign groups held a Europe-wide day of protest at the failure of the European Union to take any concrete action in response to the crackdown. To date the only step taken by the EU has been to issue a statement of concern. "The EU is one of the most powerful political and economic organisations in the world, but it is doing nothing to support those risking arrest and torture in Burma. The EU must strengthen the Common Position on Burma, and give its support to Burma being addressed by the United Nations Security Council." said Myo Thein, Campaigns Officer at Burma Campaign UK.



Burmese MPs offer alternative roadmap and threaten boycott of sham constitution

92 Burmese MPs, elected to parliament in 1990 but never allowed to take office, have written to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calling on the United Nations to do more to help bring national reconciliation and democracy to Burma. The MPs outlined seven alternative steps for a transition to democracy in place of the junta's discredited seven step 'road map to democracy'. They warned that they would urge people in Burma to vote against the regime's "sham" constitution unless the process becomes democratic and allows the participation of the National League for Democracy and ethnic groups.

"We would like to declare clearly that we will not accept any solution made by one-sided action of the SPDC with use of force, threat, pressure and manipulation," the MPs said in the letter. "If the SPDC continues to implement its seven-step road map without cooperating with the peoples' representatives and without listening to the real desire of the people of Myanmar/Burma and repeated requests from the international community, the SPDC's orchestrated constitution would be surely challenged by the people of Myanmar/Burma, including the ethnic nationalities. We will be joining with them to oppose this sham-constitution and leading to educate and organize the people of Myanmar/Burma to vote against it in the referendum," the MPs warned.

8.8.88 remembered

Hundreds of people gathered at the Six Storey Pagoda in Rangoon to mark the 19th anniversary of the democracy uprising on 8 August 1988, and mourn the deaths of the hundreds killed by the army in the uprising. The commemoration ceremony was organised by the 88 Generation Students, who were student leaders in the 1988 uprising. Ko Ko Gyi, a member of the 88 Generation Students who has since been arrested in the crackdown, said the people attending the service vowed to continue the struggle for democracy.



Demonstration outside Burmese Embassy, London

NLD rejects claims that sanctions don't work

The National League for Democracy has rejected claims by a pro-junta group that US economic sanctions were hurting the Burmese people. The NLD said that economic sanctions had helped put pressure on the military and that they were designed to complement the efforts of Burmese people towards democracy. NLD spokesperson U Myint Thein said that sanctions were helping push the military towards democratic reforms and national reconciliation. "We have also never heard any complaints from an individual or an organisation that sanctions had hurt their livelihoods," U Myint Thein said. "The sanctions are imposed on Burma by foreign nations who sympathise with the Burmese people who face human rights abuses, pressure and challenges in their fight for democracy," he said.

Gambari tours Southeast Asia

The Secretary General's Special Adviser to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, toured Southeast Asia in August, visiting Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Following the junta's crackdown on democracy activists, Gambari has come under criticism for his failure to respond to the violence and arrests and his seeming unwillingness to press for a visit to Burma as soon as possible.

Germany 5th largest importer of Burmese goods

A recent Economist Intelligence report shows that Germany imports more Burmese goods than any other European country and is the fifth largest destination for imports from Burma in the world. Thailand tops the list with 48% of imports, while China is third with 5.2% and Germany fifth at 2.6%.

Vietnam signs petroleum deal

Burma and Vietnam have signed a memorandum of understanding on petroleum cooperation. The signing was witnessed by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, who was in the new capital of Naypyitaw to discuss bilateral relations with the military regime.

ASEAN parliamentarians consider admitting Burmese MPs into regional assembly

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) has agreed to discuss the inclusion of Members of Parliament-elect from Burma into the organisation. Parliamentarians from Burma, elected during the 1990 General Elections, have long awaited recognition from AIPA and other regional parliamentary groupings. Dr Sann Aung, an elected Member of Parliament from Burma, said, "This is a big and long overdue move by regional Parliaments. The people of Burma, especially its

elected representatives, will warmly welcome the announcement and we look forward to a positive and progressive decision by AIPA to grant us our rightful place amongst them.”

US and Canada refuse to sit in ASEAN meeting with Burma

Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declined to attend the ASEAN Regional Forum on 1-2 August to avoid sitting with Burmese military representatives in the Forum. Condoleezza Rice openly boycotted her participation in the 2005 Forum held in Laos, because of Burma. This time Condoleezza Rice made a polite excuse saying that she had to visit the Middle East, while Peter MacKay said he could not attend the Forum “due to pressing domestic responsibilities.”

Burma expands trade ties with Sri Lanka

In further evidence of the regime’s drive to expand its interests internationally, a Burmese trade delegation visited Sri Lanka to develop business opportunities between the two countries. President Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Win Myint said, “We are part of a state delegation and are here to explore the possibilities of exports and imports between the two countries. Both nations could benefit from this.”

North Korea opens new Embassy in Burma

Following resumption of diplomatic relations in April, North Korean diplomats have arrived in Burma to open an embassy in Rangoon. Burma severed relations in 1983 following North Korea’s attempt to assassinate the President of South Korea during a visit to Burma. Burma has appointed its Ambassador to China, Thein Lwin, to also serve as Ambassador to North Korea.

Former Indian PM criticises India’s Burma policy

Former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral and Former Defence Minister George Fernandes have expressed concern over India’s policies towards the military junta in Burma. Speaking at a special conference organised for the release of the veteran Burmese journalist, U Win Tin, Gujral said that military rule in Burma in itself poses a threat to India’s national interest. He added that it was an irony that India, a role model in democracy, is surrounded by military governments in its neighbourhood, and called for a review of foreign policies for its neighbouring countries.

US Congress calls for boycott of Olympics

A group of US Representatives have introduced a resolution calling for a boycott of the 2008 Olympics

Games “unless the Chinese regime stops engaging in serious human rights abuses against its citizens and stops supporting serious human rights abuses by the Governments of Sudan, Burma, and North Korea against their citizens.”

University of Cape Town to honour Aung San Suu Kyi

The University of Cape Town is to confer an honorary doctorate of law on Aung San Suu Kyi. Vice-chancellor Njabulo Ndebele said UCT wanted to honour Suu Kyi for the personal sacrifices she had made for the freedom of her country’s people. “We acknowledge Suu Kyi as an extraordinary example of sheer strength, her wealth of knowledge, her perseverance and as a symbol of determination of women all over the world. Through Suu Kyi’s example, there is hope for millions of the down-trodden around the world.”

Jim Carrey releases appeal for Aung San Suu Kyi

Hollywood star Jim Carrey has released a public appeal urging people to join the effort to free Aung San Suu Kyi, the world’s only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient. In the video, Carrey calls Aung San Suu Kyi an “unsung hero” who “has been compared to Gandhi and Nelson Mandela”. You can view the video here: <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/aungsansuukyi.php>

Internet reaches less than 1% of Burmese

Figures produced by the Myanmar Post and Telecommunications (MPT) show that the number of internet users in Burma is barely 0.5 percent of the population, making Burma one of the most disconnected countries in the world. Reporters Without Borders has labelled Burma ‘an internet black hole’. Even for those with access to the internet, the regime’s internet policies are some of the most repressive in the world. For example, many websites are blocked and computers in internet cafes automatically execute screen captures every five minutes in order to monitor user activity.

Guards demand money from prisoners

Prisoners in Rangoon’s Insein Prison are being forced to pay for the cost of their detention. Families of political prisoners have complained that prison officials recently ordered inmates to pay for prison services with cash and said that 20 percent of all money coming in would have to be donated to the jail. They also said that officials had clamped down on the amount of food and medicine political prisoners were allowed to receive from outside and punished inmates who were found to have money by keeping them in solitary confinement.

Over 1,000 flee new attacks in Karen State

In August Burma Army soldiers launched further attacks on Karen villages in eastern Burma, burning homes and forcing villagers into hiding in the jungle. More than 1000 people have been forced to flee their homes because of these new attacks. This is the latest phase of the offensive which began in February 2006, and is now reported to have displaced over 30,000 people, according to the Free Burma Rangers.



Burma Army steps up recruitment in Kachin state

Burma's ruling junta has begun a fresh recruitment drive in Kachin State, northern Burma. The Kachin News Group has reported that nearly 600 people were recruited in August. Some local young people were detained on the roads at night by the army and sent to a military recruitment camp. In late July there were also reports that the army was forcibly recruiting young people in Kachin State. The reason behind the recruitment drive seems to be the increasing number of deserters from military bases around Kachin State.

Tension mounts between Wa and SPDC

Tension has been growing between the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Burmese Army in recent weeks following a government order that the Wa relocate military units near the Thai-Burmese border to the China-Burma border. According to a report by the Irrawaddy, both sides have been conducting military exercises in preparation for

armed conflict. The UWSA has an estimated 20,000 soldiers deployed along Burma's borders with Thailand and China and has been supporting the Burma Army in its attacks against the Shan State Army-South.

Media crackdown following spoof ad

Publishers of more than 10 weekly newspapers and magazines in Rangoon were reportedly summoned to the press scrutiny office and warned over violating censorship guidelines. The new media crackdown comes after a fake ad was placed in the Myanmar Times last month containing the word "Ewhsnahtrellik", ('killer Than Shwe' spelt backwards). Editors and publishers have reportedly been told that if a similar incident happens again, their publishing license will be revoked.

Women give birth in candle lit hospital

Pregnant women have been giving birth in candlelight in the Myitkyina Government Hospital in Kachin state, northern Burma, as electricity is only available to the hospital for two hours a day. Sources told the Kachin News Group that although the hospital has a private electric generator, it can only operate for one hour a day for the X-Ray machine. Patients needing surgery have to pay 7,500 Kyat (US \$6) per hour for the cost of electricity specially generated for the hospital's operating room by the generator.

Soldiers rape 10 year old girl

Four Burma Army soldiers raped a 10-year old Lahu girl in early June, according to the Shan Herald Agency for News. The girl was raped and left for dead under bushes. "She came out from bushes on regaining consciousness after an hour. Luckily, villagers found her on the roadside. She was in a critical condition. She was sent to hospital," said a relative of the victim. A local commander reportedly gave the girl's parents 700,000 Kyat as compensation and warned them not to talk about the rape.

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