

Uprising 2007

September 2007 saw the biggest demonstrations in Burma since the 1988 uprising. Tens of thousands of monks led massive demonstrations in towns and cities across Burma. Thousands of Burmese civilians from all walks of life joined the protests to call for an end to military rule.

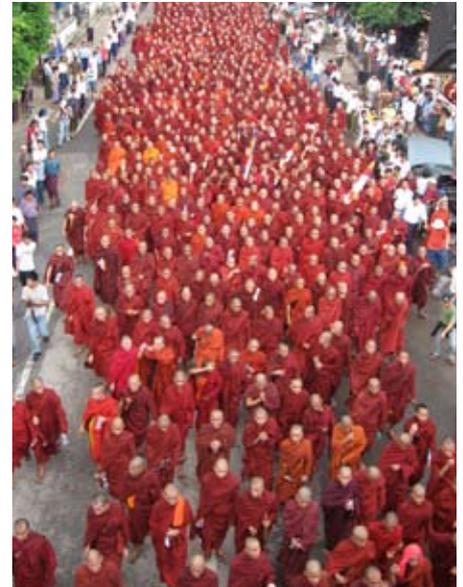
The protests started on 19 August after the regime raised fuel prices, without warning, by up to 500% on 15 August. The demonstrations that followed were led by prominent leaders of the '88 Generation Students group of pro-democracy activists. The regime began a brutal crackdown on the peaceful demonstrators, arresting hundreds of people, including many of the protest leaders. Activists were forced into hiding as the regime launched a manhunt against the organisers. However, despite the regime's continued campaign of intimidation, harassment and arrests, protests continued and took on a new momentum when Buddhist monks joined the demonstrations.

Monks first joined the protests on 28 August when they took part in a demonstration in Sittwe, north west Burma. On 5 September, tension escalated during a demonstration led by monks in the town of Pakkoku, near Mandalay, as regime soldiers fired warning shots and used tear gas to break up the peaceful protest. The monks, led by a coalition of monk groups called the All Burma Monks Alliance, demanded an apology for the violence, the release of all detained demonstrators and political prisoners and action to ease the economic hardship exacerbated by the fuel price rises. They gave the regime a deadline of 17 September to respond.

The junta's failure to meet these demands triggered a new wave of nationwide protests. Initially wary of taking part in the demonstrations, bystanders cheered and showed solidarity with the monks. However, as the protests grew in size and spread throughout most of Burma, tens of thousands of ordinary Burmese from all walks of life joined the monks in the protests.

On 22 September a crowd of 2,000 monks and civilians walked past a roadblock and gathered outside Aung San Suu Kyi's house. Aung San Suu Kyi left her house to greet and pray with Buddhist monks outside her gate. This was the first time she had been seen in public since 2003. The rally was a strong and clear display of unity between the monks and the pro-democracy movement. By 24 September over 100,000 monks and ordinary citizens were marching in Rangoon and demonstrations were taking place in every state and division in Burma.

Despite some of the strictest media censorship in the world, Burmese activists were able to post pictures and videos of the demonstrations on websites and blogs, ensuring that images of the protests were seen worldwide. The regime resorted to shutting off the country's internet connection in an attempt to stop the flow of news and pictures getting out.



The crackdown

As the demonstrations grew larger, the regime stepped up security in Burma's main cities and prepared to quash the protests. Burma Campaign UK sources in Rangoon reported regime plans to infiltrate demonstrations in order to spark violence, with soldiers ordered to shave their heads and dress as monks. On 25 September the regime imposed a curfew from 9pm to 5am and banned any gathering of more than five people. Hardened battle troops from conflict areas in Eastern Burma were redeployed to Rangoon.

On 26 September the regime began a massive crackdown against demonstrators. Soldiers carried out dawn raids on monasteries. Monks were forcibly disrobed, severely beaten, kicked, and taken away by the security forces. During a raid in monasteries in Myitkyina, Kachin State, SPDC security forces reportedly beat four monks to death. The Assistance Association of Political Prisoners has reported that a total of 52 monasteries were raided during the crackdown.

Army troops and riot police clubbed and tear-gassed protesters, fired shots on protesting monks and demonstrators, and arrested hundreds of the monks who were at the heart of the demonstrations. Shops and government offices were shut down, and all civil servants were sent home. Schools were also ordered to close. The crackdown continued for two more days as troops fired into the crowds and used tear gas to disperse demonstrators. Soldiers and police chased and beat protesters and took others away in trucks. Around 20,000 troops were deployed in Rangoon.

The regime's official figures put the death toll at 10 people. However, up to 200 are believed to have been killed during the crackdown. Horrific reports from Burma revealed that hospitals and clinics were ordered not to give any treatment to the wounded and that the army carried out secret night-time cremations of victims.

The regime arrested over 6000 people during the crackdown, including an estimated 1400 monks. Many of the detainees sustained injuries during the demonstrations, but have been denied proper medical attention. Detainees are subjected to brutal torture, not given enough food or water, and many are kept in dirty, crowded facilities where the spread of disease is likely.

Peaceful resistance continues

Despite the crackdown and continued heavy military presence in the streets of Burma's main cities, Burma's people have continued to defy the regime with peaceful acts of resistance. For example, in several townships in Rangoon, dogs were seen roaming the streets with pictures of Than Shwe and other regime leaders strung around their necks. Associating anybody with a dog is a very serious insult in Burma. Trains were painted with anti-junta slogans and anti-junta leaflets denouncing the brutal crackdown and calling for renewed struggle were secretly distributed in Akyab, Arakan State.

On 26 October, exactly a month after the violent crackdown, several groups of people dressed in yellow clothes and carrying yellow candles and flowers held prayers at Rangoon's Shwedagon pagoda. And monks took to the streets again at the end of October when around 200 monks marched in Pakokku.



The International Reaction

The regime's brutal crackdown on Buddhist monks and peaceful civilian demonstrators drew widespread condemnation from world leaders and increased sanctions against the regime.

New sanctions increase pressure on regime

European Union

The European Union came under increasing pressure to take action, following the arrests and crackdown on peaceful protestors. In September, the campaign for tougher action from the EU was aided by the personal intervention of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who pledged to push for stronger sanctions.

On 15 October EU Foreign Ministers finally agreed to strengthen targeted sanctions against Burma's military regime. The new measures include a ban on investment in, and imports of, Burmese timber, metals and gems. It is also considering a ban on all new investment if the regime does not enter into genuine dialogue with the democracy movement.

"This is a significant breakthrough," said Zoya Phan, Campaigns Officer at the Burma Campaign UK. "The EU is finally starting to impose sanctions that bite. It also sends a strong message of solidarity to the people of Burma. However, the EU should continue to increase pressure on the regime by imposing the investment ban as soon as possible and implementing a ban on financial transactions."

US

On 25 September President Bush announced increased economic sanctions against the regime. The new sanctions block the property holdings of SPDC leaders and individuals who provide financial backing for the regime. The US will also impose an expanded visa ban on individuals responsible for human rights violations in Burma, as well as their family members. Further measures were announced on 19 October, including an extension of the asset freeze to additional members of the regime, and a ban on the import of gemstones from Burma through third countries.

Australia

On 27 September, Australian Prime Minister John Howard announced that Australia would tighten existing visa restrictions on regime officials and was also examining the adoption of some targeted financial sanctions on regime officials.

UN Security Council issues first formal statement

In a significant step, the Security Council issued its first ever formal statement on Burma on 11 October, "strongly" deploring the regime's repression of pro-democracy demonstrators and calling for the early release of all political prisoners. It also called on the SPDC and all other parties concerned to work together towards a de-escalation of the situation and a peaceful solution. The statement was supported by China and Russia, who had vetoed a UNSC resolution on Burma in January 2007.

"The United Nations has taken another step on its painstakingly slow efforts to address the situation in Burma," said Mark Farmaner, Acting Director of the Burma Campaign UK. "But the regime have been snubbing UN requests for almost 20 years. A binding resolution is needed to push the regime into genuine talks about reform."

Gambari fails to deliver

UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari visited Burma at the end of September in the hope of starting talks between the regime and the democracy movement. Gambari met Aung San Suu Kyi on 29 September but was kept waiting until 2 October before finally meeting Than Shwe and other SPDC leaders. However, the regime is still refusing to enter into genuine dialogue. As preconditions to any talks, Than Shwe has insisted that the National League for Democracy first agree to stop calling for human rights and democracy, and to stop calling for international support.

In October, Gambari returned to Asia for consultations with key governments on efforts to promote talks between the military junta and the opposition. Gambari's itinerary involved discussions with the governments of Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China and Japan.

Pinheiro to visit Burma

On 2 October, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution that "strongly deplored" the violent repression of peaceful protesters in Burma. The resolution also requested that UN Special Rapporteur, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, be allowed into Burma to report on the human rights situation. On 22 October, Pinheiro said he would visit Burma in November, the first time the regime has allowed him to visit in four years.

ASEAN

On 24 September, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) called for the UN Security Council to pass a resolution on Burma and take steps to intervene in the crisis. On 28 September, the group called for the expulsion of Burma from ASEAN.

On 26 September, the Philippines Senate adopted a resolution urging the UN Security Council, the EU and ASEAN to end Burma's military junta's violent repression of its people. On 28 September, Philippines President Gloria Arroyo called on the regime to "act in its own best interests to avoid its further isolation and to redeem its democracy without any further delay. We have patiently but persistently advised Myanmar within ASEAN that it must make greater and faster progress toward that goal."

On 27 September, ASEAN Foreign Ministers released a statement expressing their "revulsion to Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win over reports that the demonstrations in Myanmar are being suppressed by violent force and that there has been a number of fatalities. They strongly urged Myanmar to exercise utmost restraint and seek a political solution. They called upon Myanmar to resume its efforts at national reconciliation with all parties concerned, and work towards a peaceful transition to democracy. The Ministers called for the release of all political detainees including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi."

Japan

Japan cancelled \$4.7 million dollars in aid to Burma, equivalent to around 18 percent of the total grants and technical assistance Tokyo gave Burma last year.

Global day of action

On 6 October a global day of action for Burma was held, with tens of thousands of campaigners taking to the streets. Over 200 protests took place in 30 countries around the world in solidarity with the people of Burma and to call for urgent UN action on Burma. In London, monks led a march of 10,000 people through central London, culminating in a rally in Trafalgar Square. Before the march, a campaign delegation, including Zoya Phan and Myo Thein from Burma Campaign UK, met Prime Minister Gordon Brown.



Uprising Timeline

15 August The regime raises fuel prices, without warning, by up to 500%, effectively doubling transport costs overnight and driving up prices for food and other essentials.

19 August Prominent leaders of the '88 Generation Students group of pro-democracy activists lead a public protest against price rises through the streets of Rangoon. The protests spread across the country.

21 August On the eve of a major protest in Rangoon, the regime arrests 13 leading democracy activists in midnight raids.

22 August Hundreds of protesters march through Rangoon but it is broken up by members of the pro-regime militia, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), backed up by police. More activists are arrested.

28 August Police and USDA members break up pro-democracy protest in Rangoon, arresting dozens. Buddhist monks join a protest against fuel price increases in the northwestern city of Sittwe.

30 August A group of detained pro-democracy protesters launch hunger strike, demanding medical treatment for an injured protester.

3 September The protests continue to grow. More than 1,000 people demonstrate in Labutta, Irrawaddy Division.

4 September About 1,000 people led by 15 NLD members march in Taunggok, Arakan State, demanding the release of two men arrested on 31 August for demonstrating against the rise in fuel prices.

5 September SPDC soldiers fire warning shots to break up a demonstration of about 500 monks in Pakokku, Magwe Division. Some of the monks are severely beaten and three arrested.

6 September About 20 government officials are briefly held hostage by monks in Pakokku. The All Burma Monks Alliance give the regime a deadline of 17 September to apologise for the violent crackdown in Pakokku, to cut commodity prices, and to release political prisoners.

17 September The deadline for an apology passes with no word from the generals. The demonstrations increase.

18 September Monks hold a series of protests in Rangoon and other cities on the anniversary of 1988 coup. The monks begin boycotting alms from members of the military regime and their associates. The demonstrations grow bigger by the day.

24 September Up to 100,000 march in Rangoon, making it the biggest anti-government protest since 1988. The rallies centre on the Shwedagon and Sule pagodas, and demonstrations take place in towns and cities across Burma.

25 September Thousands of monks and supporters again gather in defiance of threats of a military crackdown. The regime imposes dusk-to-dawn curfew in Rangoon and Mandalay. Internet access is blocked.

26 September The crackdown begins. Overnight troops raid monasteries containing thousands of monks and prevent other monks from leaving. Soldiers and riot police are deployed around monasteries in Rangoon and other cities. Other high-profile protesters are arrested. Tens of thousands still take to the streets. Several demonstrators are shot dead.

27 September Japanese video journalist, Kenji Nagai, is shot dead after security forces use automatic weapons on protesters in Rangoon. Tens of thousands of people join protests that continue throughout the day.

28 September State media reports 9 deaths. Eyewitness reports suggest 200 people were killed.

29 September After several days of increasing web restrictions, the government cuts off internet access in Burma in an attempt to stop the flow of information.

30 September UN special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, visits Burma and meets Aung San Suu Kyi.

2 October Gambari meets General Than Shwe

11 October The UN Security Council issues its first ever formal statement on Burma, urging the regime to release political prisoners, end the use of violence against civilians, and start a genuine dialogue.

24 October Aung San Suu Kyi reaches a total of 12 years in detention

25 October Aung San Suu Kyi holds talks with the regime's newly appointed liaison officer, Aung Kyi, but no details of their discussion are made public.

31 October About 200 monks demonstrate in Pakokku.

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FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**