

BURMA BULLETIN

XXXXXXXX A month-in-review of events in Burma XXXXXXXX

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
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- The SPDC continues to sentence activists to lengthy prison terms and to transfer political prisoners to Burma's most remote prisons. Approximately 276 activists have been sentenced so far in this year, some with multiple jail terms.
- Ban says 'no' to calls to return to Burma.
- Ethnic nationalities continue to flee to neighboring countries to escape persecution and crippling poverty.
- As a consequence of the global financial crisis, migrant workers are fired and deported to Burma.
- Farmers report failing harvests. Despite this, the regime continues to increase rice exports.
- The SPDC says that Burma's economy will not be affected by the global financial crisis and that the agricultural sector can employ "millions" more.
- SPDC refuses to let Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meet her lawyer.

*Please note that this is an "early edition" to accommodate the holiday season, covering 1-24 December. The Bulletin will return in the new year with a "bumper edition" that will cover 25 December to 31 January.

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KEY STORY

Ban says 'no' to calls to return to Burma

Despite calls from former world leaders, Asian MPs, and diplomats for UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon to return to Burma, Ban said that he had no intention of returning to Burma unless the SPDC sent clear signals about implementing tangible reforms. On 18 December, the NLD supported Ban's stance: An NLD spokesperson said that without genuine change in Burma, Ban should not visit nor should he come just for a visit without action.¹

- **3 December:** 112 former heads of government, representing more than 50 countries, urged UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon to use his good offices to secure the release of all political prisoners in Burma by the end of the year.²
- **8 December:** 241 MPs from Asian countries called on Ban to go to Burma and urge the SPDC to release all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.³
- **15 December:** EU Special Envoy on Burma Piero Fassino said a visit to Burma by the UN Sec-Gen would have a positive impact and trigger dialogue with the NLD.⁴

¹ IMNA (18 Dec 08) Opposition leaders support UN Secretary-General's refusal to visit Burma

² Irrawaddy (03 Dec 08) Former Leaders Urge UN to Press Burma on Prisoner Releases

³ Mizzima News (08 Dec 08) Asian parliamentarians urge Ban to persuade Burmese junta

⁴ AFP (15 Dec 08) UN chief visit would help Myanmar: EU envoy

In response:

- **3 December:** UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon ruled out a visit to Burma until such time he is assured that his presence in the country will help to move it closer to the goal of establishing a genuine democracy.⁵
- **5 December:** Ban said that his direct involvement was "not enough" to resolve the current political situation in Burma and said that all of Burma's neighbors must play a more assertive role.⁶ Ban also said that there was "growing frustration" around the world with the SPDC.⁷
- **16 December:** Ban's spokesperson said that before the UN Sec-Gen would go to Burma he would have to have some indication that it would be a fruitful visit.⁸
- **17 December:** Ban said that the SPDC had failed to deliver on its promises for democratic dialogue and the release of political prisoners.⁹

INSIDE BURMA

Daw Suu watch

- **9 December:** The regime rejected the request of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer Kyi Win to meet her to discuss the pending legal challenge over the latest extension of her house arrest.¹⁰
- **12 December:** Nobel Peace Laureates urged Europe and the United Nations to push harder to achieve the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners in Burma. They also urged world leaders to force the SPDC to start the reconciliation process in order to restore democracy and respect for fundamental human rights.¹¹

HUMAN RIGHTS

Prison sentences

A total of 7 activists were sentenced:

- **1 December:** A court in Rangoon's Insein prison sentenced relief activists Thant Zin Aung and Zaw Thet Htwe to three and four more years in prison respectively. The two had already been sentenced to 15 years on 21 November.¹²
- **8 December:** Rangoon's Kyimyindine Township court sentenced three people to prison terms for reporting a labor rights issue to the ILO. Factory worker Khin Maung Cho aka Pho Toke, Kan Myint, and NLD member Nyo Win were sentenced to 19, 10, and five years in prison respectively.¹³
- **15 December:** SPDC court sentenced Thant Zin Oo to six months in jail for reading a letter to his brother, detained NLD member Thant Zin Myo.¹⁴
- **17 December:** A court in Insein prison sentenced Zaw Naing Htwe to nine years in jail for receiving a letter from his brother, political prisoner Kyaw Kyaw Htwe aka Markee.¹⁵

⁵ Irrawaddy (04 Dec 08) Ban Rules Out Visit to Burma

⁶ Irrawaddy (06 Dec 08) UN Role "Not Enough": Ban

⁷ AP (06 Dec 08) UN chief says world is frustrated with Myanmar

⁸ Irrawaddy (17 Dec 08) No Immediate Plans for Gambari to Visit Burma

⁹ Mizzima News (18 Dec 08) Ban criticizes Burma for shying away from democratization

¹⁰ AFP (12 Dec 08) Myanmar working on Aung San Suu Kyi detention appeal: party; DVB (11 Dec 08) Lawyers denied permission to meet Daw Suu

¹¹ AFP (12 Dec 08) Nobel laureates launch appeal for Aung San Suu Kyi

¹² Mizzima News (01 Dec 08) Total prison term for Zarganar climbs to 59 years

¹³ DVB (09 Dec 08) Factory worker jailed for 19 years after ILO report

¹⁴ Irrawaddy (19 Dec 08) Letters Land Prisoners' Relatives, Guards in Jail Friday

¹⁵ Irrawaddy (19 Dec 08) Letters Land Prisoners' Relatives, Guards in Jail Friday

Prison transfers

In December, the regime continued to transfer political prisoners to some of Burma's most remote prisons.

- **1 December:** Monk leader U Gambira was transferred from Insein prison to Hkamti prison in Sagaing Division. U Gambira's older brother Aung Kyaw Kyaw was transferred to Taunggyi prison in Shan State. NLD members Wunna Maung, Thiha Thet Tin, Thein Zaw, and Htun Oo a.k.a. Ngar Kalar were transferred to Pegu prison, Myitkyina prison in Kachin State, Kengtung prison in Shan State, and Taungoo prison in Pegu Division respectively.¹⁶
- **3 December:** Hip hop singer and Generation Wave member Zeyar Thaw was transferred from Rangoon's Insein prison to Kawthaung prison in Tenasserim Division. Generation Wave members Aung Zay Phyo, Thiha Win Tin, and Arkar Bo were transferred to Taungoo prison in Pegu Division, Nyaung-U prison in Mandalay Division, and Kyaukpyu prison in Arakan State respectively.¹⁷
- **3 December:** Monk U Sandar Thiri, from Damma Theingi Shwe Theim monastery in Rangoon's Thingangyun Township, was transferred from Insein prison to Akyab prison in Arakan State. Political prisoners Htun Htun Naing and Zayar Lin were transferred to Bhamo prison in Kachin State and Akyab prison respectively.¹⁸

Detention conditions

- 88 Generation Students leader Min Ko Naing's health deteriorated following his transfer to Kengtung prison in Shan State. He is being confined to his cell.¹⁹
- NLD member Kan Tun, 67, suffered a stroke in Obo prison, Mandalay Division.²⁰
- SPDC authorities in Pegu prison severely beat and denied medical treatment to NLD youth member Aung Kyaw Oo.²¹
- SPDC authorities in Myitkyina prison, Kachin State failed to distribute Red Cross-donated blankets and mosquito nets.²²

DISPLACEMENT

Migrant workers hit by global financial crisis

As a consequence of the global financial crisis, employers of migrant workers in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand have started to lay off workers. In late November and the first week of December, more than 550 Burmese migrant workers in Malaysia and Thailand were laid off.²³ Workers who were laid-off in Malaysia and Singapore were immediately deported. Many of the workers who were laid off had not earned enough money to cover agent fees they paid to get their jobs.²⁴

In Thailand, authorities targeted undocumented workers first.²⁵ Beginning in early December in Mae Sot, Thai authorities cracked down on undocumented Burmese migrants and were arresting 100 to 150 workers every day. Hundreds fled to hide in the jungle.²⁶ Hundreds of others anticipated dismissal, cuts in pay, and overtime.²⁷ Industrial production in Thailand's Tak Province is estimated to fall 30% in 2009.²⁸

¹⁶ Irrawaddy (01 Dec 08) Gambira, five others sent to remote prisons; DVB (03 Dec 08) More prisoners transferred to remote jails
¹⁷ Mizzima News (03 Dec 08) Burma's jailed hip hop singers shifted to remote prisons; Irrawaddy (03 Dec 08) Hip-hop Star Banished to Remote Prison
¹⁸ Irrawaddy (03 Dec 08) Hip-hop Star Banished to Remote Prison
¹⁹ DVB (11 Dec 08) Min Ko Naing's health suffers in Keng Tung
²⁰ Mizzima News (18 Dec 08) Mandalay Division NLD Secretary suffers apoplexy in prison
²¹ Irrawaddy (17 Dec 08) How the Regime Punishes Political Prisoners' Families
²² DVB (12 Dec 08) Activists' families denied overnight passes in Myitkyina
²³ Irrawaddy (02 Dec 08) World economic crisis hits Burmese workers in Malaysia; IMNA (04 Dec 08) Migrant factory workers from Burma hit by Thailand's economic slowdown; Irrawaddy (09 Dec 08) More Burmese workers leave Malaysia
²⁴ Irrawaddy (02 Dec 08) World economic crisis hits Burmese workers in Malaysia
²⁵ IMNA (08 Dec 08) Burmese migrants in dire straits post meltdown
²⁶ Irrawaddy (12 Dec 08) Illegal migrant workers arrested; Others hide in jungle
²⁷ SHAN (03 Dec 08) Migrant workers facing hardships under global financial turmoil
²⁸ IMNA (08 Dec 08) Burmese migrants in dire straits post meltdown

Death, detention and deportation

On 1 December, SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein blithely declared that there were “plenty of jobs available for millions of Burmese migrant workers if they are forced to return home” and that Burma would not be affected by the global financial meltdown.²⁹ Despite this, people continue to leave Burma and the situation for undocumented migrant workers continued to be difficult and dangerous.

- **15 December:** At least seven migrant workers and their Thai driver were killed in a road accident when their driver attempted to avoid being apprehended by Thai authorities in Kanchanaburi.³⁰ The eight survivors were detained.³¹
- **16 December:** Thai authorities sentenced 15 migrant workers from Burma, including a 15-year-old girl, to four years in jail for working in Bangkok with fake permits. They had paid their employer 6,000 baht (US\$175) for the permits. The Thai employer, who provided the permits, escaped punishment.³²
- **17 December:** Malaysian authorities deported 40 migrant workers to Burma after they protested against tightening regulations on migrant workers.³³

Exodus from Irrawaddy Division, Arakan and Chin States

The exodus of Rohingya from Arakan State continued in December. In addition, Chin fled a famine in Western Burma and cyclone survivors left the Irrawaddy Division where conditions are still dire.

- **1 December:** About 100 boat-people from Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships in Arakan State left for Malaysia. Each passenger paid 400,000 kyat. A local broker, with the cooperation of Na Sa Ka Sector Commander Maj Than Htay, arranged the transport. On 7 December, Thai authorities seized the boat when it arrived in Thailand.³⁴
- **8 December:** SPDC soldiers apprehended 108 boat people in Thilawa Port, Rangoon Division, after their boat to Thailand was swept off-course by a storm. They had each paid 60,000 kyat for their passage. SPDC soldiers arrested the boat driver and passengers and sent them to Insein prison.³⁵
- In the seven months since cyclone Nargis, about 600 survivors have arrived in Mae Sot, Thailand.³⁶
- More than 2,000 Chin have arrived in Thailand through Three Pagodas Pass, Mon State, in recent months, forced from their lands by a food crisis.³⁷
- Two hundred new arrivals from Burma arrive in Malaysia every week looking for work, according to the Burma Workers’ Rights Protection Committee.³⁸

ECONOMY

Rice trade, confiscations and shortages

Despite countrywide shortages and malnutrition, the regime has increased exports. On 1 December, SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein urged the agricultural sector to increase rice exports to 3 million tons.³⁹ In the 2007/2008 fiscal year, about 20,000 tons of rice were exported. Up to October in 2008/2009, over 170,000 tons of rice were exported. Export volume of animal products also rose by 25.4%.⁴⁰

²⁹ Irrawaddy (09 Dec 08) More Burmese workers leave Malaysia

³⁰ AFP (16 Dec 08) Seven Myanmar migrants, 1 Thai killed in Thailand

³¹ IMNA (17 Dec 08) Thai Immigration detaining migrant workers who survived Monday’s accident

³² DVB (18 Dec 08) 15 migrant workers jailed in Thailand

³³ DVB (18 Dec 08) Burmese migrants deported from Malaysia after protest

³⁴ Kaladan News (15 Dec 08) Four engine boats leave for Malaysia with boat-people in a month

³⁵ DVB (11 Dec 08) Over 100 migrants from Arakan arrested

³⁶ IRIN (03 Dec 08) MYANMAR-THAILAND: Cyclone migrants face challenges

³⁷ Irrawaddy (12 Dec 08) Chin, faced with food shortage, entering Thailand

³⁸ Irrawaddy (09 Dec 08) More Burmese workers leave Malaysia

³⁹ Hindu (02 Dec 08) Myanmar PM urges exporting more rice

⁴⁰ Hindu (02 Dec 08) Myanmar PM urges exporting more rice

The rice yield in areas of Bogale Township, Irrawaddy Division, has fallen from between 500 – 625 kilos to 125-190 kilos per acre. Farmers say that the shortages were due to poor plant stock and fertilizer shortages. Farmers complained that local SPDC authorities confiscated donated machinery and diesel, and sold them for a profit. Farmers also reported that the price of rice has been affected by the global financial crisis.⁴¹ Traders have reportedly begun stockpiling grains they don't want to sell at a loss.⁴² In Pyapon Township, Irrawaddy Division, vast areas of farmland were still not ready for cultivation and up to half the villagers were reportedly unemployed, without cattle, diesel or seed.⁴³

Financial crisis

Businesses in and around Rangoon affected by the global financial crisis have been forced to lay off staff.⁴⁴ Burmese migrant workers returned home to a situation more desperate than ever.⁴⁵ [See above *Migrant workers hit by global financial crisis*] Those returning from high tech jobs in Singapore complained that their industry is non-existent in Burma.⁴⁶

The junta's cronies were more realistic. On 3 December, Tay Za met with senior executives of his Htoo Trading and affiliated companies and told them that the global recession was severely affecting the business climate. Tay Za told those at the meeting that Burma's GDP would fall from US\$3.6 billion in 2007 to just \$2.6 billion in 2008.⁴⁷

New deals, more shame

Burma Campaign UK added 30 new companies to its "dirty list" of 170 companies that directly or indirectly help to finance the SPDC. The list includes 57 travel and tourism companies.⁴⁸ The group reiterated its call for further targeted sanctions against the regime.⁴⁹ The regime continued to pursue foreign investment and closer trade links.

- **Early December:** Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry announced an agreement with India to conduct trade transactions in Euros and Singapore dollars.⁵⁰
- **3 December:** A SPDC delegation held talks with Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry officials on ways to increase economic cooperation and remove trade barriers.⁵¹
- **11 December:** The Indian government agreed to export 950 tons of wheat to Burma.⁵²
- **17 December:** Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry reported it had signed an agreement with Thailand to increase trade.⁵³
- **17 December:** Electricity Authority of Thailand announced that it will establish a joint venture to develop the Hatgyi dam on the Salween River in Burma.⁵⁴

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN DECEMBER

1	Fire destroys Moulmein's second largest market. Fire truck arrives without water.
1	UNICEF reports that two thirds of people living with HIV/AIDS in Burma are under 24.
1	Chinese authorities from Kunming and SPDC officials from Rangoon sign an agreement to establish a bond of friendship between the two cities.
2	SPDC officials arrest 19 North Korean nationals at Tachilek, Shan State, and charge them with illegal entry.

⁴¹ DVB (16 Dec 08) Rice yield down in Bogalay after cyclone

⁴² Irrawaddy (09 Dec 08) Isolated, but not insulated

⁴³ Irrawaddy (11 Dec 08) Junta Demand for Higher Rice Production Derided

⁴⁴ Irrawaddy (12 Dec 08) Rangoon Joblessness Rises

⁴⁵ DVB (10 Dec 08) Unemployment on the rise in Rangoon

⁴⁶ Mizzima News (04 Dec 08) Rangoon firms into lay-off; job seekers mount

⁴⁷ Irrawaddy (12 Dec 08) Tay Za: Recession taking a toll – Min Lwin

⁴⁸ BCUK (16 Dec 08) Biggest ever Burma 'Dirty List' published http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/dirty_list/dirty_list_print.html

⁴⁹ Irrawaddy (12 Dec 08) 'Dirty List' of Firms Dealing with Burma Grows

⁵⁰ Myanmar Times (08 Dec 08) India, Myanmar cut deal to trade in euros and Singaporean dollars

⁵¹ Kuwait News Agency (03 Dec 08) Kuwait, Myanmar seek further trade ties Economics

⁵² Reuters (11 Dec 08) India allows limited wheat exports to Myanmar, Nepal

⁵³ Xinhua (17 Dec 08) Myanmar, Thailand to raise momentum of cooperation next year

⁵⁴ Irrawaddy (17 Dec 08) Cooler Approach, but Business as Usual with Junta

2	Unknown assailants kill a 32-year-old Na Sa Ka informer in Bakkha Ghona Dill, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.
3	Tokyo police announce the arrest of two men for smuggling five women from Burma.
3	SPDC officials in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, order 100 to 200 villagers to do construction work on the road connecting from Bawli Bazaar, Maungdaw Township, to Maung 3-mile Gate.
3	Unidentified teak smugglers behead a Na Sa Ka informer in Taung Wra Village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.
4	Veteran journalist and NLD member Win Tin is hospitalized in Rangoon.
4	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's is visited by her personal physician Dr Tin Myo Win.
5	SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe meets with visiting Chinese FM Yang Jiechi in Naypyidaw.
6	Kyauktaw SPDC Military Operation Command 9 issues new restrictions and fees for Eid observations.
10	About 350 demonstrators rally in Tokyo calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
10	The city of Morbegno, Italy, awards honorary citizenship to detained monk leader U Gambira.
10	Kanbawza and Yoma banks deny rumors that they will suspend cash withdrawals.
10	SPDC detains three Thi Pout Ka Low villagers following a firefight between SPDC Army and Karen National Union forces near Thi Pout Ka Low village, Kyainnseikyi Township, Karen State.
10	Representatives of Shan State Army-North, the New Mon State Party, and the Kachin Independence Organization reportedly meet in Rangoon to discuss whether to take part in the 2010 election.
11	SPDC authorities release Mandalay NLD elected MP Ohn Kyaing.
11	Two deserters from SPDC Army's Light Infantry Battalion 531 arrive at a Karenni- controlled area on the Thai-Burma border.
12	State-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar reports that in November, SPDC authorities seized 71.18 kilograms of opium, 7.6 kg of heroin, 0.7 kg of opium oil, 4.6 kg of low-grade opium and more than 220,000 amphetamine tablets.
12	Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications begins selling new SIM cards 25 times cheaper than previous, but increases call costs ten-fold.
12	SPDC authorities release Sandar Win, the daughter of former dictator Ne Win, after six years under house arrest.
12	Na Sa Ka personnel and local villagers clash in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.
13	Five SPDC Army soldiers from Light Battalion 20 are seriously injured in a road accident on the Rangoon-Akyab highway.
15	SPDC official says that a test drill in the disputed AD-7 offshore gas block failed to confirm commercially viable deposits.
15	SPDC authorities in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, demand 100,000 kyat from business to pay for road repairs.
15	Chin National Front announces that they will not accept the SPDC's planned general election scheduled for 2010.
15	World Association of Newspapers condemns the SPDC for cracking down on freedom of expression and calls for the release of all jailed journalists.
15	ASEAN Charter comes into force.
16	Around 300 young people from Rangoon, Mandalay, Magwe, and Irrawaddy Divisions attend a meeting at the NLD headquarters in Rangoon.
18	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma marks its 18th anniversary.
18	Rangoon SPDC authorities ban the delivery of a sermon by abbot U Thumingla.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN DECEMBER

“Burma Issues and Concerns Vol. 5 - Burma defiles the ASEAN Charter”, ALTSEAN-Burma

<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/PDF%20Format/Issues%20and%20Concerns/Issues%20and%20Concerns%20Vol%205.pdf>

“The state of human rights in Burma - 2008”, Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

http://material.ahrchk.net/hrreport/2008/AHRC-SPR-009-2008-Burma_AHRR2008.pdf

“Elephant and Ivory Trade in Myanmar”, WFP/TRAFFIC

http://assets.panda.org/downloads/mm_elephant_trade_report.pdf

“Top Ten humanitarian crises reveal growing insecurity, neglected health needs” Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF)

http://www.msf.org/msfinternational/invoke.cfm?objectid=5DF33660-15C5-F00A-253193DE95B01B70&component=toolkit.pressrelease&method=full_html