

BURMA BULLETIN

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ALTERNATIVE A S E A N N E T W O R K O N B U R M A
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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- **SPDC sabotages ASEAN Summit. ASEAN leaders: decide to deport Rohingya - if they really exist; adopt a draft of toothless procedures for ASEAN's human rights body; and allow the junta to hijack meaningful dialogue with civil society organizations.**
- **The Tripartite Core Group calls for additional Nargis aid, while the SPDC limits the TCG's mandate to mid-2010. Independent report concludes that SPDC abuses during post-Nargis humanitarian response may amount to crimes against humanity.**
- **UNODC says that poppy cultivation in Burma increased by 3% in 2008 - the second consecutive annual increase. US State Department says that Burma remains the largest source for methamphetamines in Asia.**
- **UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari returns to Burma and says his visit doesn't yield any "tangible outcomes". UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Ojea Quintana visits the country and says the human rights situation has not improved.**
- **The regime sentences ten dissidents, including two monks and two elected MPs, to prison terms. SPDC extends the house arrest of NLD Deputy Chairman Tin Oo by another year.**
- **SPDC releases 6,313 prisoners, mostly common criminals, in an attempt to defuse international pressure ahead of the ASEAN Summit. Only 24 of those released are political prisoners.**
- **ILO says that the SPDC's use of forced labor is getting worse. In February, three villagers die while performing forced labor.**

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KEY STORY

SPDC sabotages ASEAN Summit

From 27 February to 1 March, the delayed ASEAN summit convened in Hua Hin, Thailand, in its first meeting since the ASEAN Charter became effective. Despite numerous statements by ASEAN Sec-Gen Surin Pitsuwan that the ASEAN Charter would 'reinvent' ASEAN, when the summit was over it was clear that the SPDC had sabotaged the three days of meetings. At the end of its deliberations, ASEAN had failed to: 1) positively address the Rohingya issue; 2) establish enforcement powers for a human rights body; and 3) initiate a meaningful dialogue with civil society organizations.

Rohingya to be deported

The summit convened against a backdrop of Rohingya boat people who continued to flee Burma and Bangladesh. [See Altsean-Burma's *January 2009 Burma Bulletin* and briefer *Rohingya, asylum seekers & migrants from Burma: A human security priority for ASEAN*] In the two months before the summit, the SPDC's persecution of Rohingya caught the attention of the international community as numerous reports on the plight of Rohingya boat people surfaced.

- **2 February:** Indonesia's Navy rescued 198 Rohingya boat people off the coast of Aceh. Rohingya said that Thai authorities towed them back to sea and they had drifted for three weeks on a boat without an engine.¹
- **8 February:** It was reported that three Rohingya couples fled from Arakan State to Bangladesh due to fear of torture and imprisonment for getting married without permission from SPDC authorities.²
- **9 February:** In a letter written to Hong Kong's diplomatic community, the SPDC's Counsel-General in Hong Kong Gen Ye Myint Aung denied that Rohingya were an ethnic group of Burma because of their dark brown skin and said Rohingya were as "ugly as ogres".³

In the run-up to the summit, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, as well as ASEAN Sec-Gen Surin Pitsuwan, all said the Rohingya issue would be brought up for discussion at the ASEAN summit.⁴ However, at the summit itself, ASEAN leaders were complacent and satisfied with SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein's offer to repatriate the Rohingya if they could prove they were 'Bengalis' who had settled in Burma.⁵ Tragically, ASEAN's acceptance of the SPDC's offer does not address the root causes of the Rohingya exodus and fails to provide adequate protection to Rohingya. The real sentiment in ASEAN toward Rohingya was expressed by Malaysia's FM Rais Yatim who said: "Malaysia has accepted the Rohingyas on humanitarian ground [but] please don't give us more. We already have a burdensome responsibility."⁶ ASEAN leaders also agreed to shunt the Rohingya issue off to the "Bali Process", an Asia-Pacific forum on illegal migration and trafficking issues.⁷

Despite ASEAN's submission to the SPDC's stance on Rohingya, others in the international community noted the reality of the persecution they face in Burma:

- **1 February:** The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) urged the governments of Thailand and Indonesia to treat the Rohingya boat people humanely and accord them protection.⁸
- **5 February:** The European Parliament called on the SPDC to restore citizenship rights to Rohingya and urged Thailand not to repatriate Rohingya.⁹
- **8 February:** US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher said the US wanted the SPDC to stop the persecution of Rohingya.¹⁰
- **12 February:** Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim called on the international community to take quick and decisive action to help alleviate the plight of Rohingya.¹¹

Human rights body a 'paper tiger'

On 27 February, hopes for meaningful enforcement of human rights issues in ASEAN through the newly created human rights body were dashed when ASEAN FMs approved a draft terms of reference for the body. As currently written, the terms do not empower the body to investigate human rights

¹ IHT (03 Feb 09) Boat people set adrift by Thailand land in Indonesia

² Kaladan News (18 Feb 09) Three couples flee to Bangladesh for fear of torture and imprisonment

³ AFP (11 Feb 09) Myanmar envoy brands boatpeople 'ugly as ogres': report

⁴ AFP (20 Feb 09) 'Regional' solution for Myanmar migrants: Thai PM; Mizzima News (23 Feb 09) ASEAN leaders urged to address Burma's rights issues in upcoming; The Age (Australia) (23 Feb 09) Malaysia to put Burma under spotlight

⁵ DPA (27 Feb 09) South-east Asia agrees to regional Rohingya approach

⁶ Bernama (27 Feb 09) Rohingyas: Asean To Take One Step At A Time

⁷ DPA (27 Feb 09) South-east Asia agrees to regional Rohingya approach

⁸ AIPMC (01 Feb 09) Regional MPs concerned with deportations of Rohingyas, urges protection

⁹ Mizzima News (06 Feb 09) European Parliament urges junta to restore citizenship rights to Rohingya

¹⁰ Reuters (09 Feb 09) U.S. wants Myanmar to stop persecution of Rohingyas

¹¹ Irrawaddy (20 Feb 09) Thai PM to Discuss Rohingya in Jakarta

abuses in ASEAN member states if they are not welcomed by the host country.¹² The document said that the rights body would "promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms" in the region but will abide by ASEAN's policy of non-interference in members' internal affairs. In addition, the terms of reference say that any decisions on human rights violations "shall be based on consultation and consensus," which gives the SPDC veto power over any matter before the body.¹³

SPDC and Cambodia scuttle dialogue with civil society

On 28 February, two ASEAN civil society representatives, Khin Ohmar from Burma and Pen Somony from Cambodia, were forced to withdraw from meeting ASEAN leaders after SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein and Cambodian PM Hun Sen threatened to boycott the event.¹⁴ Thai PM Abhisit Vejjajiva and Thai FM Kasit Piromya met separately with Khin Ohmar and Pen Somony.¹⁵

INSIDE BURMA

SPDC obstructs aid

Even though international donors had funded two-thirds of the previous post-Nargis relief funding effort, the ASEAN-SPDC-UN Tripartite Core Group (TCG) appealed to the international community for more relief funds.¹⁶ On 9 February, the TCG drew up a three-year plan to begin in early 2009, urging international donors to provide the US\$691 million needed to improve nutrition, health and livelihoods in cyclone-affected areas.¹⁷ However, on 27 February it was reported that the SPDC had balked at the three year plan and only agreed to extend the TCG's work to mid-2010, as the regime gears up for a general election.¹⁸

On 27 February, the relief group Emergency Assistance Team and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health released an independent assessment of the post-Nargis humanitarian response. The report outlined the SPDC's systematic obstruction and misappropriation of aid, intimidation of relief workers, forced relocation of survivors, and use of forced labor in the cyclone-affected areas. It concluded that these systematic abuses may amount to crimes against humanity and that the UN Security Council should refer the SPDC for investigation by the International Criminal Court.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the SPDC continued to hamper the delivery of aid in the Irrawaddy delta and beyond. On 27 February, it was reported that SPDC authorities in Bogale Township, Irrawaddy Division, demanded money from farmers for fertilizers donated by the US-based charity International Development Enterprise. Local farmers said it would be better for donors to give aid directly into their hands in the future.²⁰ On 9 February, a fire broke out in Chanmyatharzi Township, Mandalay Division, leaving over 1,000 people homeless.²¹ While local residents provided food and aid for those affected by the fire, donors were discouraged by SPDC authorities from making private donations not channeled through the local authorities. The SPDC threatened those accepting private donations with prosecution.²²

New democracy campaigns launched

In February, the SPDC's ongoing political repression and economic mismanagement sparked new campaigns across Burma.

¹² DPA (28 Feb 09) ASEAN human rights body gets off to rocky start

¹³ Irrawaddy (27 Feb 09) Asean Human Rights Body Lacks Power to Punish

¹⁴ Bernama (28 Feb 09) Myanmar, Cambodian Civil Society Representatives Stay Out Of Asean Talks

¹⁵ Bernama (28 Feb 09) Myanmar, Cambodian Civil Society Representatives Stay Out Of Asean Talks

¹⁶ IRIN (12 Jan 08) Myanmar: Capacity challenges remain

¹⁷ AP (09 Feb 09) \$700 million sought for Myanmar cyclone recovery

¹⁸ Reuters (27 Feb 09) Myanmar curbs cyclone recovery plan ahead of election

¹⁹ Emergency Assistance Team (EAT) & Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (Feb 09) After the Storm: Voices from the Delta

²⁰ DVB (27 Feb 09) Authorities charge farmers for aid-donated fertilizer

²¹ DVB (12 Feb 09) Mandalay fire victims need blankets and nets

²² DVB (18 Feb 09) Authorities ban direct donations to fire victims

- **5 February:** Generation Wave group launched a new campaign calling for government change. Activists sprayed graffiti, put up posters, and distributed leaflets in several Rangoon Townships.²³
- **12 February:** The NLD launched a signature campaign calling for the release of all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Tin Oo.²⁴ The campaign quickly spread from Rangoon to other parts of Burma.²⁵
- **14 February:** Generation Wave, All Burma Federation of Student Unions, and Best Fertilizer groups promoted a rose campaign to call for a peaceful resolution of Burma's crises. Activists asked people to offer roses at pagodas, send postcards, and wear clothes featuring roses.²⁶
- **16 February:** Residents in Meikhtila, Mandalay Division, sent a letter signed by over 500 people to local SPDC authorities and to Naypyidaw demanding 24-hour power and water supply. NLD members in Chauk, Magwe Division, launched a similar petition, collecting over 800 signatures.²⁷
- **17 February:** NLD members in Meikhtila Township, Mandalay Division, and in Pegu offered alms to monks and held prayers for the release of all political prisoners.²⁸

2010 election boycott

Following the January announcement of election boycott by Kachin Independence Organization, Kachin National Organization, New Mon State Party, and Mon National Democratic Front, [See *January 2008 Burma Bulletin*] in February, five more ethnic organizations expressed opposition to the SPDC's 2010 election:

- **7 February:** The Shan State Army – South vowed to oppose the election.²⁹
- **19 February:** The Palaung State Liberation Front, the Palaung Women's Organization, and the Ta'ang Student and Youth Organization called on the international community to oppose the election.³⁰
- **22 February:** The United Nationalities Alliance, a coalition of 12 ethnic political parties that won 10% of the parliamentary seats in the 1990 election, announced that they would not contest the polls.³¹

Meanwhile, the junta launched Northern Star, a new mouthpiece for SPDC election propaganda.³² Retired Maj Win Tin, the Northern Star's chief editor, said: "We will report that there is no alternative way except the roadmap and encourage people to support this most appropriate way."³³

SPDC reshuffle

In another cabinet reshuffle, the SPDC replaced the Minister of Immigration and Population Maj Gen Saw Lwin and the Minister of Construction Maj Gen Saw Tun with Home Affairs Minister Maj Gen Maung Oo and Minister for Electric Power-2 Maj Gen Khin Maung Myint respectively. The SPDC also transferred the Deputy Foreign Minister and Head of the Tripartite Core Group Kyaw Thu to the junta's Civil Service Selection and Training Board.³⁴

²³ DVB (06 Feb 09) Generation Wave launches new campaign

²⁴ AP (12 Feb 09) Myanmar party to petition for Suu Kyi's freedom; Mizzima News (12 Feb 09) NLD launches signature campaign on Union Day

²⁵ Mizzima News (17 Feb 09) 'Free Daw Suu Kyi' campaign spreads; DVB (17 Feb 09) Maddaya NLD joins signature campaign; Mizzima News (12 Feb 09) NLD launches signature campaign on Union Day

²⁶ DVB (11 Feb 09) Activists launch Valentine's Day rose campaign

²⁷ Mizzima News (17 Feb 09) 'Free Daw Suu Kyi' campaign spreads

²⁸ Mizzima News (17 Feb 09) 'Free Daw Suu Kyi' campaign spreads

²⁹ Bangkok Post (07 Feb 09) Rebels to combat Burma polls

³⁰ DVB (20 Feb 09) Palaung organisations speak out against election

³¹ DPA (22 Feb 09) Myanmar releases at least 19 political prisoners

³² Irrawaddy (04 Feb 09) New Burmese Political Journal Appears

³³ Irrawaddy (04 Feb 09) New Burmese Political Journal Appears

³⁴ Mizzima News (05 Feb 09) Junta continues cabinet reshuffle

Opium poppy cultivation up

On 2 February, the UNODC released a report that stated poppy cultivation in Burma increased by 3% in 2008 - the second consecutive annual increase. Opium poppy cultivation has rebounded by about 33% - to 28,500 hectares - between 2006 and 2008.³⁵

On 27 February, the US State Department released its annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. As with the UNODC, the report noted an increase in opium poppy cultivation. The report also said that Burma remained the largest source for methamphetamine tablets in Asia and a major drug transit or major illicit drug producing country.³⁶

Meanwhile, opium poppy cultivators in Taunggyi, Shan State, are facing hardship and indebtedness because most of their poppy crop failed due to harsh weather conditions.³⁷ Other opium poppy growers in Southern Shan State are facing a more bizarre situation in that the SPDC Army is still imposing its customary 'poppy tax' on poppy fields that it destroyed.³⁸

UWSA-SPDC relations deteriorating

Tensions between the SPDC Army and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) increased since the latter's unilateral designation of its territory as the "Wa State Government Special Region" without prior SPDC agreement [See *January 2009 Burma Bulletin*]. Since then, it was reported that hundreds of SPDC soldiers had been deployed along the border with the UWSA held territory which heightened speculation about possible escalation.³⁹ Later reports confirmed an armed clash between SPDC Army and UWSA forces in Hopang Township, Shan State, resulting in casualties on both sides.⁴⁰

Youth denied

- **2 February:** It was reported that SPDC authorities demolished two school buildings in Phoe Yoe Su village, Kawa Township, Pegu Division to make way for a new construction project. The demolition forced school children to move classes to the local monastery's compound.⁴¹
- **19 February:** It was reported that schools in Tachilek, Southern Shan State, charged students for school materials donated by the UNICEF. Teachers charged five to 20 baht from each student before handing them exercise books and stationery.⁴²

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ojea Quintana's second visit

On 19 February, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana concluded a six-day visit to the country. He said human rights in Burma had not improved since his first visit seven months earlier.⁴³

Ojea Quintana achieved little or nothing during his visit. The SPDC dictated his agenda and denied him access to Arakan and Kachin States.⁴⁴ The Special Rapporteur failed to meet with NLD leaders, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and members of other pro-democracy and ethnic groups. Instead, he

³⁵ IHT (02 Feb 09) UN reports more opium coming from Myanmar

³⁶ US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (27 Feb 08) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Volume I Drug and Chemical Control March 2009

³⁷ SHAN (06 Feb 09) Locals in Shan State face impact of low opium output

³⁸ SHAN (04 Feb 09) Local authorities told to destroy poppy cultivation collect tax

³⁹ SHAN (10 Feb 09) More Burma Army troops along border with Wa

⁴⁰ SHAN (10 Feb 09) Wa plays fight down

⁴¹ DVB (02 Feb 09) School demolished by education authorities in Bago

⁴² SHAN (19 Feb 09) Schools in Tachilek collect student money for UNICEF aid

⁴³ Reuters (19 Feb 09) Envoy says Myanmar rights grim; DPA (19 Feb 09) Myanmar human rights situation 'challenging,' admits UN envoy; AFP (19 Feb 09) Myanmar rights situation still challenging: UN

⁴⁴ Reuters (19 Feb 09) Envoy says Myanmar rights grim; Mizzima News (19 Feb 09) Quintana did not meet Zargarnar says UN

held meetings with regime officials, ministers, and pro-junta organizations.⁴⁵ On 15-16 February, the SPDC took him to Karen State where the Special Rapporteur met with members of the pro-junta armed groups Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council.⁴⁶

The SPDC allowed Ojea Quintana to visit only a handful of political prisoners. On 15 February, the Special Rapporteur visited Hpa-an prison in Karen State.⁴⁷ On 16 February, he met with five political prisoners in Rangoon's Insein prison.⁴⁸ SPDC authorities showcased improved conditions in both prisons for the occasion.⁴⁹

Arrests

- **14 February:** SPDC authorities in Rangoon's North Okkalapa Township arrested three members of the Best Fertilizer group for distributing leaflets as part of their rose campaign.⁵⁰
- **17 February:** Police in Myitkyina, Kachin State, arrested two local youths for surfing banned websites dealing with Burma.⁵¹

New prison sentences

- **4 February:** A court in Rangoon's South Dagon Township sentenced All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) activist Dee Nyein Lin, 20, to an additional five years in prison, for unlawful association. He had already been sentenced to 10-year prison term.⁵²
- **9 February:** Rangoon's Mingalataungnyunt Township court sentenced ABFSU leaders Kyaw Ko Ko and Nyan Linn Aung to three years in prison.⁵³
- **13 February:** SPDC extended the house arrest of NLD Deputy Chairman Tin Oo by another year.⁵⁴
- **13 February:** A court in Insein prison sentenced NLD elected MPs Nyi Pu and Tin Min Htut to 15 years in prison for writing an open letter to the UN.⁵⁵
- **20 February:** SPDC court sentenced monks U Khemitta aka Ko Ko Thant, U Wilatha aka Wai Min Tun, and their four helpers from Nan U monastery in Rangoon's Mingalataungnyunt Township to five years in prison on charges of possession of explosives.⁵⁶

Prison sentence reductions

- **13 February:** Rangoon divisional court reduced Zarganar's prison term by 24 years. Zarganar will have to serve the remaining 35 years.⁵⁷ Journalist Zaw Thet Htway's 19-year prison term was reduced from 18 to 10 years. Tin Maung Aye aka Gatone Lay was granted a 15-year reduction from his 29-year initial sentence.⁵⁸

⁴⁵ AFP (19 Feb 09) Myanmar rights situation still challenging: UN; Mizzima News (18 Feb 09) Quintana meets Burma's Chief Justice; Mizzima News (19 Feb 09) Quintana winds up Burma visit; NLM (21 Feb 09) United Nations special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar concludes visit

⁴⁶ Asia Pacific News (15 Feb 09) Myanmar's ethnic Karen attack border town; Mizzima News (17 Feb 09) Quintana met five political prisoners in Insein; DVB (18 Feb 09) UN rights envoy Quintana meets political prisoners; Irrawaddy (17 Feb 09) UN Envoy meets political prisoners

⁴⁷ AP (16 Feb 09) Myanmar: UN Human Rights Envoy Visits Karen State; Irrawaddy (17 Feb 09) UN Envoy meets political prisoners

⁴⁸ Mizzima News (16 Feb 09) Quintana visits Insein prison; Mizzima News (16 Feb 09) Junta goes for prison makeover for visiting UN rights expert; Irrawaddy (17 Feb 09) UN Envoy meets political prisoners; DVB (18 Feb 09) UN rights envoy Quintana meets political prisoners; Mizzima News (17 Feb 09) Quintana met five political prisoners in Insein

⁴⁹ Mizzima News (16 Feb 09) Junta goes for prison makeover for visiting UN rights expert; DVB (16 Feb 09) UN rights envoy Quintana visits Pa-an prison

⁵⁰ DVB (17 Feb 09) Three activists arrested for rose campaign

⁵¹ Kachin News Group (22 Feb 09) Two internet users detained in Myitkyina for the first time

⁵² Irrawaddy (05 Feb 09) Young activist given 15-year sentence; Mizzima News (05 Feb 09) ABFSU leader Dee Nyein Linn sentenced to 5 more years in prison; DVB (05 Feb 09) Student activist sentenced to five more years

⁵³ DVB (10 Feb 09) ABFSU leaders jailed for three years

⁵⁴ AP (13 Feb 09) Myanmar extends detention of opposition leader; Mizzima News (13 Feb 09) NLD leader Tin Oo's house arrest extended

⁵⁵ Reuters (14 Feb 09) Myanmar jails opposition MPs ahead of U.N. envoy visit; DVB (13 Feb 09) Two elected MPs jailed for 15 years

⁵⁶ DVB (23 Feb 09) Eight monks among prisoners released

⁵⁷ Mizzima News (16 Feb 09) Zargana's prison term reduced by 24 years

⁵⁸ DVB (16 Feb 09) Zarganar's sentence reduced by 24 years

- **17 February:** An SPDC divisional court reduced sentences for activists Kathy Aung and Wai Myo Htoo from 26 years to 10 years.⁵⁹
- **20 February:** It was reported that Rangoon Divisional court reduced the prison sentence of labor activist Su Su Nway, from 12 years and six months to eight years and six months.⁶⁰
- **20 February:** Rangoon divisional court reduced blogger and NLD member Nay Phone Latt's prison sentence from 20 years and six months to 12 years.⁶¹

Mass release of prisoners

In an attempt to stave off international pressure ahead of the ASEAN Summit, the SPDC carried out yet another mass release of prisoners. On 20 February, the SPDC announced the release of 6,313 detainees from prisons across Burma as part of a general amnesty.⁶² Most of the prisoners released were common criminals.⁶³ Only 24 political prisoners were among those released.⁶⁴ They included 13 Buddhist monks, NLD member Thet Wei, who was sentenced to two years in jail in 2008 for reporting incidents of forced labor to the ILO, and NLD elected MP Dr. Zaw Myint Maung, who was jailed in 1991.⁶⁵

Most recent mass releases		
Date	Prisoners released	Political prisoners
18 November 2004	3,937	28
29 November 2004	5,311	12
13 December 2004	5,070	21
3 January 2005	5,588	26
6 July 2005	334	253
3 January 2007	2,831	50
23 September 2008	9,002	10
20 February 2009	6,313	24
Total	38,386	424

ILO: Forced labor getting worse

On 26 February, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the SPDC extended the Supplementary Understanding for the processing of forced labor complaints for another 12 months.⁶⁶ The ILO said that the existence of the complaint mechanism had no impact on the SPDC's reliance on forced labor. The ILO liaison officer in Rangoon Steve Marshall said that while forced labor by civilian authorities might have declined, the use of forced labor by the SPDC military was getting worse.⁶⁷ In February, three villagers died while performing forced labor.

- **3 February:** Two villagers in Kyauktada Township, Pegu Division, died when while performing forced labor when the pit in which they were working collapsed.⁶⁸
- **6 February:** A 50-year-old man from Kyauktalone Village, Pegu Division, died as a result of injuries he sustained while performing forced labor in digging a trench.⁶⁹
- **1 February:** Na Sa Ka officials ordered villagers in Maung Nama village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to provide firewood for baking bricks.⁷⁰
- **20 February:** It was reported that the SPDC Army was requiring local villagers in Paletwa Township, Chin State, to perform forced labor as porters during SPDC Army offensives against the Arakan Liberation Army.⁷¹

⁵⁹ RFA (17 Feb 09) Burma Cuts Jail Terms; Mizzima News (18 Feb 09) Prison terms commuted for two political prisoners

⁶⁰ DVB (20 Feb 09) Activist Su Su Nway's sentence reduced

⁶¹ DVB (20 Feb 09) Blogger Nay Phone Latt's sentence reduced; Irrawaddy (20 Feb 09) Popular Burmese Blogger's Jail Term Reduced

⁶² NLM (21 Feb 09) 6,313 prisoners granted amnesty

⁶³ DPA (22 Feb 09) Myanmar releases at least 19 political prisoners

⁶⁴ DVB (23 Feb 09) Amnesty granted to at least 23 political prisoners; Mizzima News (23 Feb 09) Junta released prisoners to ease off mounting pressure: critics; DVB (26 Feb 09) NLD member released in amnesty

⁶⁵ Reuters (22 Feb 09) Political prisoners among 6,000 freed in Myanmar; AP (22 Feb 09) 19 political prisoners released from Myanmar jails; DVB (23 Feb 09) Eight monks among prisoners released; DVB (23 Feb 09) Amnesty granted to at least 23 political prisoners

⁶⁶ Mizzima News (27 Feb 09) ILO, Burma extend 'supplementary understanding'

⁶⁷ DVB (27 Feb 09) Burma: No reduction in forced labour, says ILO

⁶⁸ DVB (16 Feb 09) Two die during forced labour session in Bago

⁶⁹ DVB (09 Feb 09) Man crushed during forced construction work

⁷⁰ Kaladan News (02 Feb 09) Nasaka Headquarters orders villagers to provide firewood for baking bricks

⁷¹ DVB (20 Feb 09) Chin villagers forced to work as army porters

DISPLACEMENT

Rohingya issue puts Burmese migrants in cross-hairs

If things weren't already bad enough for migrant labor from Burma, the Rohingya issue and the global economic slowdown have heightened the already existing tensions and hostilities towards Burmese migrants.

- Since the beginning of February, Malaysian authorities have arrested at least 350 Burmese migrant workers. Malaysia has announced that it will not extend any visas for foreign laborers.⁷²
- **4 February:** Thai Labor Minister Paitoon Kaewthong announced a delay in the issuance of work permits to 700,000 migrant workers until the end of March.⁷³
- **7 February:** A female Thai student at Mae Jo University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, was raped and murdered. Thai police subsequently charged two Burmese migrant workers with the crime. The incidents spurred Thai authorities to detain hundreds of undocumented migrant workers.⁷⁴ In addition, local residents and students took the law into their own hands in random acts of violence and harassment directed towards Burmese migrant workers.⁷⁵
- **15 February:** Philippines immigration officials barred ten Burmese nationals from entering the country for transit purposes.⁷⁶
- **26 February:** Thai authorities arrested about 500 Burmese migrant workers and their children in Mae Sot, Thailand.⁷⁷

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Gambari returns to Burma

On 31 January, UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari returned to Burma for a four-day visit in hopes of spurring dialogue between the SPDC and the NLD.⁷⁸

- **2 February:** Gambari met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the NLD Central Executive Committee at an SPDC guesthouse in Rangoon. The NLD urged Gambari to put more pressure on the SPDC to release all political prisoners, review the constitution, and convene the parliament.⁷⁹
- **3 February:** Gambari asked SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein to release more political prisoners, to consider a dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and to make the military-guided political process inclusive for all. In response Thein Sein said that if the UN wanted to see economic development and political stability, it should first try to remove economic sanctions and visa bans.⁸⁰
- **5 February:** Gambari briefed UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon in Delhi. After the meeting, UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon called on the SPDC and the NLD to resume substantive talks leading to national dialogue and reconciliation.⁸¹
- **10 February:** Ban Ki-moon once again urged the SPDC and the NLD to quickly resume talks.⁸²
- **20 February:** Gambari briefed UN Security Council members on his visit to Burma and said the visit had not yet yielded any "tangible outcomes".⁸³
- **23 February:** Ban Ki-moon called on the SPDC to release all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.⁸⁴

⁷² NMG (11 Feb 09) Burmese migrant workers insecure in Malaysia

⁷³ Irrawaddy (05 Feb 09) Burmese migrants in limbo

⁷⁴ Irrawaddy (12 Feb 09) Student's Murder Leads to Migrant Roundup; Mizzima (12 Feb 09) Raids follow rape case

⁷⁵ Irrawaddy (11 Feb 09) Burmese Migrant Workers Suspected of Murdering Thai Girl; SHAN (17 Feb 09) Crackdown continues in Chiangmai

⁷⁶ Philippines Star (18 Feb 09) 10 Myanmar nationals barred at Clark airport

⁷⁷ Irrawaddy (26 Feb 09) Mae Sot Raid Nets about 500 Migrant Workers

⁷⁸ UN News Center (30 Jan 09) UN envoy to begin four-day visit to Myanmar

⁷⁹ Mizzima News (02 Feb 09) NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi meets with Gambari

⁸⁰ AP (03 Feb 09) Myanmar: If UN wants stability, drop sanctions

⁸¹ UN News Center (05 Feb 09) Myanmar: Ban calls on Government, opposition to resume substantive talk

⁸² AP (10 Feb 09) UN chief says envoy had good talks in Myanmar

⁸³ UN News Center (20 Feb 09) UN envoy awaits "tangible" outcomes from latest Myanmar visit

⁸⁴ DPA (23 Feb 09) Ban urges release of all political prisoners in Myanmar

US: Burma policy under review

On 17 February, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that Washington was reviewing its policy on Burma. “We are looking at what steps we could take that might influence the current Burmese government and we are also looking for ways that we could more effectively help the Burmese people,” Clinton said.⁸⁵ On 25 February, the US ambassador to ASEAN Scot Marciel said that the US wanted ASEAN to “use whatever contacts and access they have in the country to encourage new thinking and reform and increase openness and political progress”.⁸⁶

Chinese flee Kachin State casino town

On 7 February, over 1,500 Chinese fled from Maijayang, Kachin State, back to China. Maijayang is a border town controlled by the ceasefire group Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The Chinese left Maijayang after negotiations between the KIO and Chinese authorities over missing and kidnapped Chinese gamblers from Chinese-owned casinos broke down. On 4 February, China stopped providing communication and utility services to Maijayang that left residents of in the dark and without telephone and internet services. China had given a list of more than 50 Chinese citizens to the KIO to be released. The KIO handed over about 40 persons to China.⁸⁷ On 25 February, China’s Foreign Ministry warned Chinese to not go to Burma to gamble because of the risks of kidnapping.⁸⁸

ECONOMY

Layoffs in Burma

Rangoon’s factories have laid off at least 3,000 workers, as a consequence of the global recession and the resulting drop in overseas orders.⁸⁹

“Booming” kyat

The black market value of the kyat hit new heights, continuing a trend from last month, trading this month at 950 kyat to the US dollar. Currency dealers attribute this shift to the growing numbers of Burmese who can no longer afford goods imported through border trade, increased foreign reserves from gas exports, and money flowing in from foreign aid.⁹⁰

International trade

- **8 February:** Indian Vice-President Mohammad Hamid Ansari ended his four-day official visit to Burma. During the visit, the two countries signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) on bilateral investment promotion and protection, on the establishment of an English language training center in Rangoon, and the establishment of an industrial training center in Pakokku, Magwe Division.⁹¹
- **19 February:** The Bangladeshi government sent a technical team headed by Bangladesh Bank’s Deputy Governor to Rangoon to establish direct banking arrangements in order to simplify the payment procedure between the two countries.⁹²
- Rice exports from Burma have nearly doubled since January, to around 400,000 tones.⁹³

⁸⁵ AFP (17 Feb 09) US looks for better way to sway Myanmar: Clinton

⁸⁶ AFP (25 Feb 09) US urges ASEAN to push for political progress in Myanmar

⁸⁷ Kachin News Group (09 Feb 09) Over 1,500 Chinese in Burma border flee

⁸⁸ Reuters (25 Feb 09) China warns of kidnappings at Myanmar casinos

⁸⁹ Mizzima News (05 Feb 09) Rangoon factories begin cutting jobs

⁹⁰ Irrawaddy (17 Feb 09) Kyat’s black market rate hits new heights

⁹¹ Xinhua (09 Feb 09) Indian Vice-President ends Myanmar visit

⁹² Mizzima News (19 Feb 09) Bangladesh sends team to weigh direct banking option with Burma

⁹³ Reuters (12 Feb 09) Myanmar doubles rice exports

Questionable tourism

UK watchdog group Tourism Concern reported that over a dozen British tour operators are selling holiday packages to Burma in resorts owned by individuals with links to the SPDC junta, allegedly in breach of a European Union blacklist.⁹⁴

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN FEBRUARY

2	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi tells UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari that the UN Sec Gen should not visit the country until political prisoners are freed.
4	NLD says it saw little progress from a visit by UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari.
6	SPDC Army soldiers from Infantry Battalion 31 kill two local boys in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division, for alleged ties with Mon resistance groups.
6	SPDC transfers 13 members of the 88 Generation Students from Rangoon's Insein Prison to remote prisons across Burma.
7	DKBA forces kidnap, beat, and then release Thai villagers near Umphang, Northern Thailand.
8	BDR patrol team apprehends and departs back to Burma a group of Rohingya who crossed the Naff River into Bangladesh.
8	Na Sa Ka officer in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, kills his commanding officer and then commits suicide.
9	Villagers in Kyauktaw, Arakan State, arrest SPDC Army Sgt Chit Sein from Light Infantry Battalion 377 after he attempts to rape a local woman.
10	NLD urges the international community to provide humanitarian support and protection to Rohingya boat people.
10	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari meets with Chinese FM Yang Jiechi to discuss Burma. China assured Gambari that it will continue to support the mediation efforts by the UN.
11	DKBA forces raid and destroy Koe Hta village near Myawaddy, Karen State.
11	In its annual "Attacks on the Press" report, the Committee to Protect Journalists says that Burma was the world's third worst jailer of journalists in 2008.
11	Indian MP Agatha Sangma says that SPDC officials assured India of action against militant groups in Northeast India attempting to take shelter Burma.
12	About 300 NLD members attend celebrations to mark Union Day at the party headquarters in Rangoon.
12	In his Union Day speech, SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe calls on the Burmese people "to prevent the danger of internal and external destructive elements attempting to undermine peace and stability."
12	Two Na Sa Ka personnel from Area 5 in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, are injured after shooting each other.
13	World Food Program provides rice to about 60 families in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.
13	More than 100 children and about 200 NLD members attend celebrations to mark general Aung San's birthday and Children's Day at the party headquarters in Rangoon.
13	Na Sa Ka forces order 47 families in Shwe Zaar Village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to vacate their village by the end of the month in order to establish an army camp.
13	State-run newspaper Myanma Ahlin reports that SPDC police, military, and customs officials seized 327 pounds of heroin, nearly 99 pounds of opium and 55,582 amphetamine tablets in January.
13	Na Sa Ka and Army personnel order the relocation of villagers of Amtolla Sara village in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, to build a military camp.
15	SPDC Army soldiers from Infantry Battalion 31 detain a 50-year-old man from YinYe village in Southern Ye Township, Mon State, for alleged ties with Mon resistance groups.
17	NLD issues a statement that reiterates the call for a dialogue between SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
17	State-run newspapers New Light of Myanmar, Myanma Alin, and Mirror, publish a commentary saying that satellite TV is a "decadent threat that undermines nationalism" and warns people to avoid satellite TV programs.
17	SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe meets with Thailand's army-commander-in-chief Anupong Paojinda in Naypyidaw.
18	Indonesia FM Hassan Wirayuda says that Indonesia wants the SPDC to allow Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic political parties to participate in the junta's 2010 election.
19	Karen National Union issues a statement criticizing UN Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari for not meeting representatives of Burma's ethnic nationalities during his last visit to the country.

⁹⁴ Guardian (17 Feb 09) Travel firms sell holidays to blacklisted Burmese resorts

19	UN General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto calls on both the SPDC and the NLD to resume substantive dialogue without preconditions and without further delay.
19	About 40 military vehicles transport SPDC Army soldiers from Light Infantry Division 77 back to their base in Pegu from Rangoon.
20	Locals attack Burmese refugees from the Leda settlement, Bangladesh, seriously injuring six, including women and children.
20	France and Britain strongly criticize the SPDC for failing to implement democratic reform and freeing political prisoners.
23	State-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar says that the visit of the UN's Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma was a success.
23	US urges the SPDC to free all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
23	EU Presidency calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, lifting all restrictions on political parties, and starting all-inclusive dialogue between the SPDC and the democratic forces, including ethnic groups.
24	NLD elected MPs and organizing committee members from 10 Townships in Rangoon Division meet at the party headquarters in Rangoon to discuss whether to contest the 2010 election.
25	US criticizes the SPDC's human rights record in its annual global report on human rights.
27	Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Nguyen Thanh Bien says that bilateral trade between Burma and Vietnam increased by 11 % from the previous year.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN FEBRUARY

“**After the Storm: Voices from the Delta**”, Emergency Assistance Team (EAT) & Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

http://www.jhsph.edu/humanrights/pdf/After_the_Storm_FullReport_27Feb09.pdf

“**Opium Poppy Cultivation in South East Asia**”, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/East_Asia_Opium_report_2008.pdf

“**International Narcotics Control Strategy Report**”, US Department of State - Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/120054.pdf>

“**2008 Human Rights Report: Burma**”, US Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eap/119035.htm>

“**Attacks on the Press in 2008: Burma**”, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

<http://cpj.org/2009/02/attacks-on-the-press-in-2008-burma.php>

“**How UK tour operators are supporting Burma's military regime through tourism**”, Tourism Concern

<http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/uploads/Campaigns/How-tour-operators-are-supporting-Burma-regime.pdf>