

BURMA BULLETIN

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ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
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- **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi slams the SPDC for stalling dialogue. Daw Suu says that meetings with the SPDC Liaison Minister, Aung Kyi, lack time frame and might give rise to “false hopes”.**
- **While the SPDC stalls political dialogue, the junta’s persecution of NLD members intensifies. In January, the regime detains 12 NLD members, bringing the total of NLD members under detention to 104.**
- **Activists across Burma continue to carry out peaceful anti-junta protests amid tight security. The All Burmese Buddhist Monks Alliance renews calls for a boycott of the military regime.**
- **UNICEF reports Burma as having the 2nd highest child mortality rate in Asia. Up to 400 children are dying every day in Burma, mostly from preventable conditions.**
- **International Burmese Monks Organization calls on the international community to intensify efforts to facilitate reconciliation in Burma.**
- **Four bomb blasts kill three people. SPDC could be the mastermind behind the blasts in an effort to unite the military which is plagued by discontent.**
- **UN Security Council meets to discuss the SPDC’s delay for Gambari’s return. SPDC remains in international spotlight.**
- **SPDC restrictions on the delivery of aid and the free movement of agricultural produce continue to exacerbate hunger in Burma’s most impoverished areas.**

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KEY STORY

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi slams SPDC over stalled talks

In the face of renewed international criticism over the lack of progress in the talks with the NLD, [See below *International Relations*] the junta sought to ease the pressure by holding another session of talks. On 11 January, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the SPDC Liaison Minister, Maj Gen Aung Kyi, met for an hour in Rangoon.¹ During the meeting, Daw Suu reiterated her request to include representatives of ethnic groups in the talks.²

¹ AFP (11 Jan 08) Aung San Suu Kyi meets Myanmar junta official; Reuters (11 Jan 08) Detained Suu Kyi meets Myanmar junta minister

² Reuters (30 Jan 08) "Prepare for worst", Suu Kyi tells Myanmar

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi expressed her dissatisfaction with the meetings with Aung Kyi and the lack of any time frame for the talks.³

On 30 January, during a 90-minute meeting with senior NLD members at a Rangoon state house, Daw Suu reportedly said she feared the junta was toying with her and the talks might give rise to “false hope”. “Let’s hope for the best and prepare for the worst,” she told senior NLD members. Following the meeting with senior NLD members, Daw Suu had another meeting with Aung Kyi.⁴ This was the fifth meeting between the two since Aung Kyi’s appointment as Liaison Minister in October 2007.

Persecution intensifies

While the SPDC stalled political dialogue, the junta’s persecution of NLD members intensified. In January, the regime detained 12 NLD members, bringing the total numbers of NLD members under detention to 104.

- **2 January:** SPDC authorities detained six NLD members in Pwintphyu Township, Magwe Division, to prevent them from attending Independence Day celebrations in Yenangchaung Township. Elected MP, Dr. Aung Moe Nyo, was among those detained.
- **4 January:** SPDC authorities arrested three NLD youth members, Htet Htet Aung, Kyaw Kyaw and Kyaw Zin Win, in Rangoon.⁵ SPDC authorities briefly detained the Yenangchaung NLD Chairman, Khin Win.⁶
- **9 January:** SPDC authorities arrested Sanchaung Township’s NLD Chairman, Thet Wei, for possessing documents regarding human rights violations committed by the regime. On 11 January, a court in Rangoon’s Kyauktada Township released him on a 500,000 kyat bail.⁷
- **13 January:** SPDC authorities in Taungdwingyi Township, Magwe Division arrested the NLD Deputy Chairman, Maung Soe, and the Township NLD Communications Committee member Par Lay.⁸ Both were released on 16 January after reportedly being tortured during their detention.⁹
- **15 January:** SPDC authorities prevented Kyin Maung, the NLD Chairman in Thada Oo Township, Mandalay Division, from donating rice to poor families and warned him against making donations in the future.¹⁰
- **22 January:** SPDC authorities in Taunggoat Township, Arakan State, arrested two NLD youth wing members, Zaw Naing and Kalar Shwe, for protesting against the military regime.¹¹
- **23 January:** About 80 armed police prevented five NLD members in Taunggoat Township from going to the Township’s NLD Vice-Chairman’s home.¹²
- **29 January:** Police arrested NLD member and blogger, Nay Phone Latt, in Rangoon.¹³

NLD activities

Despite ongoing harassment, NLD activities continued in January.

- **4 January:** NLD held a ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of Burma’s Independence Day at its Rangoon headquarters. The NLD issued a statement calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the resumption of political talks with pro-democracy forces. Over 600 participants, including veteran politicians, foreign diplomats, activists,

³ Reuters (30 Jan 08) "Prepare for worst", Suu Kyi tells Myanmar

⁴ Reuters (30 Jan 08) "Prepare for worst", Suu Kyi tells Myanmar

⁵ DVB (07 Jan 08) Junta continues to arrest activists; DVB (11 Jan 08) NLD chairperson in San Chaung arrested

⁶ DVB (04 Jan 08) NLD members kept from independence celebrations; DVB (10 Jan 08) NLD member slams independence day disruptions

⁷ Irrawaddy (11 Jan 08) NLD Member Released in Human Rights Case; DVB (11 Jan 08) NLD chairperson in San Chaung arrested

⁸ DVB (15 Jan 08) NLD members arrested in Magwe division

⁹ Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Two opposition leaders released after traumatic interrogation; DVB (18 Jan 08) NLD member threatened during interrogation

¹⁰ Mizzima News (16 Jan 08) Central Burma officials halt rice donation by opposition member

¹¹ Mizzima News (22 Jan 08) Two NLD youths arrested for protesting in Taungkok; DVB (22 Jan 08) Two NLD members arrested in Taungkok; Irrawaddy (28 Jan 08) Anti-regime poster campaign in Arakan State

¹² Mizzima News (24 Jan 08) 80 armed policemen disperse five NLD members; DVB (24 Jan 08) Security forces break up NLD group

¹³ Mizzima News (29 Jan 08) Blogger arrested by police: Friends; Mizzima News (29 Jan 08) Burmese bloggers hide from police

and party members attended the event. Plainclothes SPDC officers videotaped the arrival and departure of participants from across the street.¹⁴

- **4 January:** NLD youth members launched a new bi-monthly bulletin called Ah-yoan-thit, or “Dawn”. It was the first NLD publication issued since the regime stopped an earlier bulletin in 1990.¹⁵ [See below *Freedom of information*]
- **7 January:** It was reported that about 7,000 people signed a petition demanding the release of the Taunggoat Township NLD secretary Khin Hla and his deputy, Min Aung.¹⁶

Spain honors Daw Suu

On 24 January, Spain awarded Daw Aung San Suu Kyi the “Abogados de Atocha” for her work on political reconciliation. NCGUB member Bo Hla Tint accepted the award on Daw Suu’s behalf.¹⁷

INSIDE BURMA

Child mortality worse than Sudan

On 23 January, UNICEF launched its annual report, “The State of the World’s Children”. The report revealed that between 270 and 400 children are dying every day in Burma, mostly from preventable conditions. The report rated Burma as having the 2nd highest child mortality rate in Asia.¹⁸

| | Under 5 mortality rate* | Infant mortality rate* | % infant low birth weight | % under 5 stunting |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Afghanistan | 257 | 165 | | 54 |
| Burma | 104 | 74 | 15 | 53 |
| Singapore | 3 | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| Vietnam | 17 | 15 | 7 | 30 |
| Sudan | 89 | 61 | 31 | 43 |

*per 1,000 live births

Further restrictions on the delivery of aid

On 11 January, the SPDC Ministry of Home Affairs summoned humanitarian aid agencies to a meeting in Naypyidaw and warned them to follow rules strictly and to report details of their field trips. According to leaked minutes of the meeting, new supplementary restrictions have been developed for aid agencies, requiring foreigners working with INGOs to be accompanied by a ministry liaison officer when traveling and further limiting the rules on data collection, prohibiting collecting information other than that relating to public health.¹⁹

Anti-junta protests continue

In January, activists across Burma continued to carry out peaceful anti-junta protests amid tight security.

- **1 January:** The All Burmese Buddhist Monks Alliance (ABMA) released a statement saying they would continue their boycott of the military regime and urging Burmese people to continue the peaceful fight for their freedom. The ABMA called for the release of all political prisoners and urged the SPDC to solve the current political crisis by means of dialogue.²⁰
- **4 January:** The Steering Committee of Mass Movement (SCMM), a new umbrella group representing various civil society organizations,²¹ called on the SPDC to speed up political reform and release all political prisoners by 12 February, Burma’s Union Day.²²

¹⁴ AP (05 Jan 08) Suu Kyi plea raised on Myanmar holiday; Irrawaddy (04 Jan 08) No freedom, no independence; Mizzima News (04 Jan 08) Burmese opposition reiterates call for dialogue on Independence day

¹⁵ Irrawaddy (07 Jan 08) New opposition bulletin published in Rangoon

¹⁶ DVB (07 Jan 08) 7000 sign petition for jailed Arakan NLD leaders

¹⁷ Irrawaddy (24 Jan 08) Suu Kyi wins another Award

¹⁸ AP (24 Jan 08) Burma has second highest child mortality rate in Asia

¹⁹ BBC Burmese Service (21 Jan 08) Burma tightened the rules for INGOs; Mizzima News (29 Jan 08) Burma’s government tightens its grip on international aid agencies

²⁰ Irrawaddy (02 Jan 08) Monk Movement Calls for Release of Detainees

²¹ The group includes the Alliance of All-Burmese Monks Alliance, the 88 Generation Students group, the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, the Burma Muslim League for Peace, the Burma Lawyers’ Union, the New Generation Journalists Union (Burma), the Organizing Committee of Mass Movement (Mandalay), the Committee of Mass Movement (Rangoon Division), and The Association of Writers and Artists.

- **9 January:** Members of the All Kachin Students Union distributed over 500 anti-junta posters and leaflets in the streets of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. The posters and leaflets called for the release of all political prisoners, urged the SPDC to engage in tripartite dialogue, expressed opposition towards the junta-sponsored constitutional referendum, and demanded a halt to the Myitsone Dam project on the Irrawaddy River.²³
- **14 January:** Abbot Nyanissara delivered a sermon in Sagaing Division that used allegories to tell his audiences that regimes have fallen before. He has been repeating the same message in a series of sermons around the country. Several of Nyanissara's sermons are being distributed on DVDs.²⁴
- **17 January:** Armed SPDC security forces, USDA and Swan Arr Shin members prevented about 200 people, including ten monks, from holding a demonstration in Taunggoat Township, Arakan State.²⁵
- **19 January:** Activists distributed anti-junta flyers in the streets of Taunggoat and Kyaukprou in Arakan State, despite heavy security in the area.²⁶
- **27 January:** Activists in Taunggoat, Kyaukprou and Rambree Townships, Arakan State, affixed posters in hospitals, markets, and other public places. The posters called for the release of all political prisoners and urged the SPDC to start dialogue with pro-democracy groups.²⁷
- **28 January:** Activists in Akyab, Arakan State, launched a poster campaign demanding the release of all political prisoners.²⁸

Monks go global

The International Burmese Monks Organization (IMBO) has begun a global tour raising awareness of the situation in Burma. The group was established in October 2007 and now has over 300 members from 14 countries.²⁹ On 15 January, the IMBO called on international leaders to back their demand for an immediate meeting between the SPDC and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. They said the UN-led reconciliation effort in Burma is too slow.³⁰

Explosive month

In January, four bomb blasts killed three people and injured five in Burma.

- **11 January:** A bomb exploded in the toilet of the Naypyidaw railway station, killing a 40-year-old woman. Investigators claimed the woman set off the bomb.³¹
- **11 January:** A bomb exploded during a circus show in Nyaungbintha Village in Pyu Township, Pegu Division. The explosion injured four civilians and killed the 25-year-old member of the Karen National Union (KNU) who allegedly planted the explosive.³²
- **13 January:** A bomb exploded in a toilet at the Rangoon railway station, injuring a 73-year-old woman.³³
- **16 January:** A bomb on a passenger bus traveling from Kyaukkyi, Pegu Division, to Rangoon, killed the 35-year-old driver. The explosion occurred in Pinyinongyi, Pegu Township.³⁴

²² Irrawaddy (04 Jan 08) New Mass Movement issues open letter to junta

²³ Irrawaddy (10 Jan 08) Young Activists Wage Pro-democracy Poster Campaign in Myitkyina; Kachin News Group (10 Jan 08) Over 350 anti-junta posters distributed on State Day eve

²⁴ Los Angeles Time (14 Jan 08) Monk's words stir the spirit of Myanmar's resistance - Paul Watson

²⁵ Irrawaddy (17 Jan 08) Security forces break up attempted demonstration in Western Burma; Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Taungkok demonstrations abandoned for fear of violent backlash

²⁶ Narinjara News (21 Jan 08) Anti-Government Flyers Distributed in Arakan

²⁷ Irrawaddy (28 Jan 08) Anti-regime poster campaign in Arakan State; Kaladan News (30 Jan 08) Anti-state poster campaign in four towns in Arakan State

²⁸ Kaladan News (30 Jan 08) Anti-state poster campaign in four towns in Arakan State

²⁹ Mizzima News (21 Jan 08) Sasana Moli sets up 14 global branches

³⁰ TNS (16 Jan 08) Myanmar: Overseas monks urge meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and junta leader

³¹ AP (11 Jan 08) Explosion Reported in Myanmar Capital; Reuters (11 Jan 08) Bomb kills woman in Myanmar's new capital; AP (13 Jan 08) Bomb kills ethnic Karen rebel, injures 4 civilians in Myanmar, state media reports

³² AP (13 Jan 08) Bomb kills ethnic Karen rebel, injures 4 civilians in Myanmar, state media reports; AP (14 Jan 08) Explosion wounds 1 at railway station in Myanmar's commercial capital; DPA (13 Jan 08) Woman wounded in latest bomb blast to hit Myanmar

³³ DPA (13 Jan 08) Woman wounded in latest bomb blast to hit Myanmar

³⁴ AP (16 Jan 08) Explosion on Myanmar bus kills 1; AFP (17 Jan 08) Bus conductor killed in Myanmar bombing: state media; BBC (17 Jan 08) Worker killed in Burma bus blast; Xinhua (17 Jan 08) Official: one killed in bomb blast in Myanmar

The SPDC blamed the bomb blasts on the KNU. State-run press claimed the group received backing from a “foreign organization” to “perpetrate destructive acts inside the country” using “US-made powerful explosives.”³⁵ KNU spokesman, David Taw, denied the organization had anything to do with the bombs.³⁶ Analysts indicated that the SPDC could have masterminded the blasts to unite the military, which is plagued by discontent over the junta's September brutal crackdown.³⁷ [See *November and December 2007 Burma Bulletins*]

SPDC to step up Karen State offensive

The SPDC Army deployed more troops in Karen State in preparation for renewed offensives against the KNU and other ethnic armed opposition groups.

- Over 90 SPDC Army battalions, comprising between 11,000 and 14,000 troops, are operating in three Karen State Districts - Papun, Nyaunglebin, and Taungoo.³⁸
- The SPDC Army is constructing two new roads in Toungoo District, Karen State, to link their camps and now have over 27 battalions in the District. Villagers have been forced to clear roads, work as porters and act as minesweepers.³⁹
- The increased militarization has resulted in the displacement of at least 12,900 civilians in Nyaunglebin District, 3,000 - 4,000 in Papun District and 7,000 in Taungoo District.⁴⁰

Chinese trucks delivered

On 16 January, about 100 Chinese manufactured 'First Automobile Works' (FAW) military trucks arrived at Jiang Hkong on the China-Burma border. The six-wheel military trucks were the second shipment of a total of 1,000 trucks that the Chinese government sold to the SPDC. The first delivery of about 400 FAW trucks was made in December 2007.⁴¹

HUMAN RIGHTS

More arrests, charges

- **3 January:** SPDC security forces arrested one monk and two laymen in Rangoon. In a separate incident, SPDC authorities arrested 88 Generations Students, Ko Ko Maung and Min Han.⁴²
- **7 January:** SPDC authorities arrested a 25-year-old member of the Shan Literature and Cultural Committee (SLCC), Maung Tun, for singing a Shan political song at the Shan New Year celebration in Mong Yai, Northern Shan State.⁴³
- **Late January:** SPDC charged 88 Generation Students group Min Ko Naing Htay Kywe, and Mie Mie for violating the Printing and Publishing Act. If convicted, they could face up to seven years in prison. The SPDC also filed criminal charges against detained NLD member Su Su Nway⁴⁴

Detention conditions

- At Rangoon's Insein prison, detained 88 Generations Students leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi are reportedly in poor health.⁴⁵ 88 Generation Students member Hla Myo Naung, also detained in Insein prison, is nearly blind in both eyes.⁴⁶

³⁵ DPA (13 Jan 08) Woman wounded in latest bomb blast to hit Myanmar; AP (13 Jan 08) Bomb kills ethnic Karen rebel, injures 4 civilians in Myanmar, state media reports; AP (14 Jan 08) Explosion wounds 1 at railway station in Myanmar's commercial capital Irrawaddy (14 Jan 08) KNU and regime trade charges over bomb attacks

³⁷ Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Another blast in Burma kills bus conductor

³⁸ Asian Tribune (16 Jan 08) Ten civilians killed as Burma army increases presence in Karen state

³⁹ Asian Tribune (16 Jan 08) Ten civilians killed as Burma army increases presence in Karen state

⁴⁰ Mizzima News (16 Jan 08) Over 40,000 villagers internally displaced in Karen state

⁴¹ DVB (17 Jan 08) Second delivery of military trucks from China; Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Chinese military trucks for Burma Army arrive on border

⁴² Irrawaddy (04 Jan 08) New Mass Movement issues open letter to junta; DVB (07 Jan 08) Junta continues to arrest activists

⁴³ SHAN (11 Jan 08) Youth arrested for singing political song

⁴⁴ Reuters (29 Jan 08) Myanmar junta charges leading protesters; Irrawaddy (30 Jan 08) Junta Charges More Political Prisoners, Others Seriously ill

⁴⁵ Irrawaddy (16 Jan 08) Pro-democracy political prisoners in poor health condition

⁴⁶ Irrawaddy (16 Jan 08) Pro-democracy political prisoners in poor health condition

- On 22 January, 78-year-old journalist, Win Tin, was taken from his cell in Insein prison and admitted to Rangoon general hospital.⁴⁷ On 26 January, he underwent a hernia operation.⁴⁸
- Imprisoned Shan leader Hkun Htun Oo's prostate problems have reportedly worsened since the end of December. Hkun Htun Oo also suffers from diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure.⁴⁹
- Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) member, Hla Aung, who is detained in Kyaukpyu prison, Arakan State, is suffering from high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism, and diabetes. SPDC prison authorities have so far denied adequate medical treatment.⁵⁰
- NLD elected MP, Than Lwin, lost eyesight in one of his eyes during his detention at Ohbo prison in Mandalay. Than Lwin also suffers from heart problems.⁵¹
- Pro-democracy activist, Win Maw, and 88 Generation Students member, Kyaw Soe, are reportedly in poor health. Both were subjected to water torture during interrogations in Insein prison.⁵²
- Magwe Division NLD Committee member, Myint Oo, suffers from pneumonia. He is detained in a Mandalay prison.⁵³

Freedom of information

In January, the regime continued to impose restrictions on internet access, censored publications, and silenced dissenting voices.

- **Early January:** The SPDC ordered a 166-fold increase in the annual satellite television license, from 6,000 kyat (US\$5) to one million kyat (US\$780).⁵⁴ New users will have to pay 2 million kyat.⁵⁵ The move is believed to be an attempt by the regime to stop people from watching international news broadcasts.⁵⁶
- **15 January:** The SPDC's Press Scrutiny and Registration Board summoned NLD officials to warn them against publishing the NLD youth wing bulletin.⁵⁷ [See above *NLD*]
- **17 January:** The SPDC blocked the popular internet blog www.blogger.com.⁵⁸ It was also reported that the Special Police instructed internet café owners in Rangoon to install software to monitor internet usage and report weekly.⁵⁹
- **Mid-January:** The SPDC's censorship board ordered the weekly Myanmar Times to suspend publication for one week and sack at least one of its Burmese editors for publishing a report about the increased price of satellite dish licenses in its 11 January issue.⁶⁰
- **22 January:** SPDC security forces arrested poet Saw Wai for writing a Valentine's Day poem. The initial letters of each line of the poem published in the weekly Love journal, read: "General Than Shwe is crazy with power."⁶¹

DISPLACEMENT

Exodus continues from Arakan State

People continued to flee oppression and restrictions in Arakan State, most attempting to reach Malaysia in unseaworthy and over-crowded boats.⁶²

⁴⁷ AFP (26 Jan 08) Jailed Myanmar journalist hospitalised: family; Irrawaddy (24 Jan 08) Imprisoned writer Win Tin admitted to hospital; RSF (24 Jan 08) Burma - Imprisoned journalist U Win Tin is hospitalized, while poet is arrested

⁴⁸ DVB (29 Jan 08) U Win Tin in good condition after operation

⁴⁹ BBC Burmese Service (07 Jan 08) Imprisoned SNLD leaders' health deteriorate; Irrawaddy (08 Jan 08) Detained Ethnic Leaders Denied Outside Medical Aid

⁵⁰ BBC Burmese Service (07 Jan 08) Imprisoned SNLD leaders' health deteriorate; Irrawaddy (08 Jan 08) Detained Ethnic Leaders Denied Outside Medical Aid

⁵¹ DVB (22 Jan 08) NLD member suffers health problems in detention; Mizzima News (24 Jan 08) Burmese opposition MP loses eyesight in prison

⁵² Irrawaddy (16 Jan 08) Pro-democracy political prisoners in poor health condition

⁵³ Irrawaddy (16 Jan 08) Pro-democracy political prisoners in poor health condition

⁵⁴ Reuters (02 Jan 08) Myanmar junta hikes satellite TV fees

⁵⁵ DVB (03 Jan 08) Steep rise in satellite TV fees

⁵⁶ Reuters (02 Jan 08) Myanmar junta hikes satellite TV fees

⁵⁷ DVB (16 Jan 08) NLD warned over political journals

⁵⁸ Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Myanmar telecom blocks bloggers

⁵⁹ DVB (07 Jan 08) Increased monitoring of internet users in Rangoon

⁶⁰ AP (17 Jan 08) Myanmar newspaper irks censors; RSF (16 Jan 08) Myanmar Times and other media threatened and sanctioned by military censors; Irrawaddy (15 Jan 08) Myanmar Times falls victim to Burma's "Comical Ali"; BBC Burmese Service (20 Jan 08) Journalist reveals the reasons to have resigned

⁶¹ BBC (23 Jan 08) Burma poet held for secret insult; Irrawaddy (23 Jan 08) Poet Arrested After Coded Protest

- **1 January:** Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) deported five young men to Burma after arresting them in Bangladesh the previous day.⁶³
- **2 December:** Thai Navy arrested 72 Rohingya in a boat found drifting in Thai territory near Khura Buri District.⁶⁴
- **5 January:** Bangladesh Navy arrested five Burmese nationals and seized a trawler from Kutub Dia, Cox's Bazaar district. Another 34 escaped.⁶⁵ On the same day, another 50 boat-people attempted to depart for Malaysia from Zalia Palong, Cox's Bazar. The trip was thwarted when their trawler ran aground shortly after they left. None was arrested.⁶⁶
- **14 January:** Thai authorities arrested over 100 Rohingya from Maungdaw Township in Thai territorial waters and detained them at the Khura Buri police station.⁶⁷
- **21 January:** Thai marine police arrested 43 Rohingya in their boat in the Andaman Sea.⁶⁸
- **22 January:** BDR arrested six Natata villagers trying to enter Bangladesh.⁶⁹
- **25 January:** BDR deported 19 Burmese nationals, including children.⁷⁰
- **26 January:** BDR deported a Rakhine man after they caught him in the Teknaf border area.⁷¹

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SPDC stalls Gambari's return

In an obvious attempt by the SPDC to blunt the effectiveness of the UN in Burma, the SPDC stalled the return of UN Special Advisor on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari. In early January, Gambari announced plans to return to Burma after meeting with Chinese and Indian officials.⁷² However, the SPDC told Gambari that it preferred a visit in mid-April.⁷³

On 17 January, the UN Security Council met behind closed doors with Gambari to discuss the lack of progress toward democratic reform in Burma.⁷⁴ After the meeting, the Council issued a Presidential statement that it “regretted the slow rate of progress” in achieving the objectives set by the Council last October. The objectives include steps by the SPDC to start a “genuine dialogue” for national reconciliation and the release of all political prisoners.⁷⁵

SPDC still in the international spotlight

During January, many nations called on the SPDC to hasten the process of national reconciliation and to release all political prisoners, including:

- **2 January:** India urged the SPDC to expedite political reform and national reconciliation. India's PM, Manmohan Singh, told SPDC FM, Nyan Win, that there was a greater urgency in bringing about political reform and national reconciliation and that the process had to be broadbased to include all sections of society including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and various ethnic groups in Burma.⁷⁶
- **3 January:** Czech FM, Karel Schwarzenberg, called on the SPDC to take the country towards democracy. Schwarzenberg challenged the junta to release all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and to start talks with the leaders of democratic forces in the country.⁷⁷

⁶² Kaladan News (26 Jan 08) BDR pushes back 19-Burmese national to Burma

⁶³ Kaladan News (02 Jan 08) BDR pushes back five Burmese nationals

⁶⁴ Bangkok Post (04 Jan 08) Navy arrests boat carrying 72 illegal Muslims from Burma

⁶⁵ Kaladan News (07 Jan 08) Five Burmese nationals and two Bangladeshis arrested in Cox's Bazar

⁶⁶ Kaladan News (07 Jan 08) Five Burmese nationals and two Bangladeshis arrested in Cox's Bazar

⁶⁷ NMG (14 Jan 08) Migrants totaling 100 arrested

⁶⁸ Bangkok Post (22 Jan 08) Rohingya arrested

⁶⁹ Kaladan News (24 Jan 08) Six Natata villagers flee to Bangladesh

⁷⁰ Kaladan News (26 Jan 08) BDR pushes back 19-Burmese national to Burma

⁷¹ Kaladan News (28 Jan 08) Burmese National pushed back

⁷² DPA (04 Jan 08) UN envoy to visit China, India for Myanmar talks

⁷³ UN News Center (17 Jan 08) UN envoy's return to Myanmar could spur further progress, says Security Council

⁷⁴ AFP (17 Jan 08) Security Council meets to discuss lack of progress in Myanmar

⁷⁵ UN News Center (17 Jan 08) UN envoy's return to Myanmar could spur further progress, says Security Council

⁷⁶ Reuters (02 Jan 08) India nudges Myanmar to hasten political reform

⁷⁷ AFP (04 Jan 08) Czech call on Myanmar to take democratic path

- **4 January:** British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, called for national reconciliation in Burma.⁷⁸
- **8 January:** Indonesia urged the SPDC to take more credible steps towards democratization, including releasing political prisoners. Indonesian FM, Hassan Wirajuda, said that his country was frustrated that years of attempts to engage Burma diplomatically had born little fruit.⁷⁹
- **17 January:** Japan urged the SPDC to hold talks with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and to work harder to implement democratic reforms. Japanese FM, Masahiko Komura, urged SPDC FM, Nyan Win, to cooperate with the UN on improving human rights conditions in the military-ruled nation.⁸⁰
- **22 January:** China urged the SPDC to allow UN Special Advisor on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, to return soon to promote a genuine dialogue between the junta and opposition.⁸¹
- **24 January:** US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, and French FM, Bernard Kouchner, issued a joint statement to express their continued concern about events transpiring in Burma.⁸²
- **25 January:** Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo called for ASEAN leaders to unite for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.⁸³

ECONOMY

Food shortages

On 2 January, the World Food Program (WFP) announced plans to extend its operations in Eastern Kachin State and to increase its food assistance to Rohingya in Northern Arakan State in 2008. Chris Kaye, WFP Country Director, said that their main challenges in distributing food assistance were SPDC restrictions on travel.⁸⁴

SPDC trade and travel restrictions, combined with rising prices due to the SPDC's economic mismanagement [see box⁸⁵], continue have a devastating effect on Burma's farmers. Aggravating an already dire situation, the SPDC has been forcing farmers to sell rice to the military below market prices. In addition, the SPDC is forcing farmers to plant unprofitable crops.

| Price increase | Now | Previous | Where |
|--------------------------|---------|----------|---------|
| Petrol (blackmarket) | 5,200 | 4,500 | Pegu |
| Diesel (blackmarket) | 5,800 | 4,000 | Pegu |
| Soya bean oil | 4,000 | 3,200 | Pegu |
| Gold (per tical) | 602,000 | 599,000 | Rangoon |
| Petrol (blackmarket) | 4,800 | 4,200 | Rangoon |
| Diesel (blackmarket) | 4,700 | 3,900 | Rangoon |
| Rice (low quality kilo) | 350 | 275 | Rangoon |
| Rice (high quality kilo) | 1,250 | 1,100 | Rangoon |
| Rice (low quality kilo) | 440 | 420 | Arakan |
| Rice (high quality kilo) | 550 | 535 | Arakan |

- On 4 January, Na Sa Ka ordered villagers to buy physic nut saplings and to plant them along the 12-mile road linking Maungdaw with Aley Than Kyaw village. Each family has to buy 10 saplings (150 kyat each) or face detention, additional forced labor, or fines.⁸⁶
- Local authorities in Arakan State and Pegu Division forced farmers to sell rice for SPDC military rations at 2,800 kyat per tin. The current market price is between 4,800 and 5,000 kyat.⁸⁷
- SPDC authorities in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships, Arakan State, issued an order preventing residents from transporting rice between towns from buying rice from traders.⁸⁸
- In Mon State, the SPDC forced farmers to grow summer paddy without making water available for irrigation.⁸⁹

⁷⁸ AFP (04 Jan 08) Britain urges reconciliation in Myanmar

⁷⁹ Irrawaddy (08 Jan 08) Indonesia Urges Burma to Do More on Democracy

⁸⁰ AP (17 Jan 07) Japan urges Myanmar to speed up democratic reforms, hold talks with Suu Kyi

⁸¹ Irrawaddy (22 Jan 08) China Urges Burma to Set Date for Gambari

⁸² Mizzima News (25 Jan 08) U.S., U.K. and France express solidarity for Burma

⁸³ PDI (26 Jan 07) Arroyo ups pressure to free Aung San Suu Kyi

⁸⁴ AP (10 Jan 08) UN Agency Says Myanmar Food Aid Hampered

⁸⁵ Mizzima News (04 Jan 08) Burma: New Year ushers in rise in fuel, commodity prices, Irrawaddy (16 Jan 08) Gold and fuel prices increasing; Kaladan News (06 Jan 08) Soaring price of rice in Maungdaw Township

⁸⁶ Kaladan News (17 Jan 08) Maungdaw villagers forced to buy physic nut saplings again

⁸⁷ DVB (17 Aug 08) Authorities demand cheap rice from farmers

⁸⁸ Kaladan News (06 Jan 08) Soaring price of rice in Maungdaw Township

⁸⁹ IMNA (23 Jan 08) Burmese junta force farmers to cultivate summer paddy

- In Chin State, 150 people left for India following a bad harvest.⁹⁰

Almost the most corrupt

The Heritage Foundation has ranked Burma 153rd of 157 in its 2008 index of economic freedom, just above Libya and below Turkmenistan. The report said that Burma's economy suffers from the lack of rule of law to guarantee investment freedom, financial freedom, property rights, and freedom from corruption.⁹¹

Gem show

From 15 to 18 January, the SPDC held its first gem sale of 2008. According to its own reports, 600 lots of gems and jade were sold from 1,600 lots on sale. The number of lots sold was considerably smaller than previous sales in 2007.⁹² On 11 January, Human Rights Watch renewed calls for increased sanctions and a gem industry boycott, noting that there were signs that existing sanctions were already having an impact.⁹³

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN JANUARY

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| 1 | Fifty Nataka families begin arriving in Maungdaw Township for settlement in model villages. |
| 2 | SPDC announces there will be no change in fuel prices. |
| 2 | Meeting takes place between SPDC Nyan Win, Indian PM Manmohan Singh, and Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee. Trade and energy issues on the agenda. |
| 3 | Two SPDC police rape a 14-year-old Rohingya girl from Phone Nyo Hlake village, Buthidaung Township in the presence of her parents. |
| 3 | EU Special Envoy on Burma, Piero Fassino, says that the world should maintain its focus on Burma. |
| 4 | NLD slams the SPDC for stalling dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. |
| 4 | Five monk organizations in Bangladesh form umbrella group, United Thinga Alliance, to support Buddhist monks in Burma. |
| 4 | SPDC police arrest, torture, and kill imam Moulvi Alizoher. |
| 4 | Nasaka orders villagers to buy physic nut saplings and plant them along the Maungdaw to Aley Than Kyaw village, Arakan State. |
| 4 | SPDC refuses to renew the registration of Mon, Karen, and Shan cultural groups, effectively closing them down. |
| 4 | SPDC authorities order villagers of Nurullah Para, Maungdaw Township, to build 100 houses for the Nataka villagers. |
| 4 | SPDC leader, Sr Gen Than Shwe, calls on Burmese people to cooperate with the regime's roadmap to democracy in his message on the occasion of Burma's 60th anniversary Independence Day. |
| 4 | US First Lady, Laura Bush, urges the world to condemn Burma's human rights abuses and urges the SPDC to free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. |
| 7 | A Prome court rejects the appeal filed by Human Rights Defenders and Promoters members, Thet Oo, Zaw Htun, and U Panita, against their two year's prison sentence. |
| 7 | SPDC Immigration official at the Maungdaw border crossing in Arakan State is arrested for corruption. |
| 8 | Residents of Taunggoat Township, Arakan State collect signatures for a petition to the International Labor Organization to address the SPDC's forced labor practices. |
| 9 | Qatar Airways suspends its four weekly flights to Burma |
| 10 | Nasaka establish new Nataka villages in Maungdaw Township, and confiscate 50 acres of land from Loung Don village, Nasaka area 4. |
| 11 | A 38-year-old villager from Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division loses his left foot after stepping on a landmine. |
| 11 | Three SPDC police rape a teenage Rohingya girl from Phone Nyo Hlake village, Buthidaung Township in the presence of her family |
| 11 | SPDC Sec 1, Lt Gen Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, meets with visiting Chinese National People's Congress He Luli, the Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee. |
| 12 | SPDC Army Commander of Let Wadad Pazun Chaung Army camp in Buthidaung Township orders Tat Min Chung and Kyaw Pyu Daung villagers to provide timber poles and bamboo to build a concert stage. |

⁹⁰ DVB (21 Jan 08) Chin families flee food shortages

⁹¹ Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Burmese economic reform requires political change: expert

⁹² Irrawaddy (22 Jan 08) Sanctions affecting Burmese gems trade

⁹³ HRW (11 Jan 08) Crackdown in Burma: Targeted Sanctions Needed

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| 13 | A four-member Chinese-SPDC team visits Indin Village, Maungdaw Township, to assess mineral deposits. |
| 13 | Shan State Army patrol clashes with an SPDC Army patrol from the SPDC Army at Kawng Pek, 2 km north of Nawng Aw village. |
| 14 | Japan pledges US\$1.79 million to support a project for the improvement of maternal and child health care services in Burma through UNICEF. |
| 14 | NLD spokesperson, Nyan Win, says senior party members would like more frequent meetings with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. |
| 14 | SPDC Army soldiers force villagers from three villages in Kun Hing Township, Southern Shan State, to work as porters. |
| 17 | Inter-Parliamentary Union urges India and China to exert greater pressure on Burma's military junta to free its political prisoners. |
| 18 | NLD repeats its call for the military to free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her deputy Tin Oo. |
| 18 | A 26-year-old villager from Htantabin Township, Pegu Division, is injured after stepping on a landmine. |
| 20 | Malaysia's RELA raids a camp and burns homes of 75 refugees from Burma in Putra Jaya. |
| 21 | Rangoon Infectious Diseases hospital ends free medical services to HIV/AIDS patients. |
| 21 | Relatives of activists detained in Insein prison are denied prison visits due to stricter regulations on family visits. |
| 21 | Chinese State Councilor, Tang Jiaxuan, meets with SPDC Deputy FM, Maung Myint. |
| 21 | US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia, Scot Marciel, urges the international community to put more pressure on Burma's military rulers. |
| 22 | Two young monks arrive in Bangladesh after fleeing crackdowns in Irrawaddy Division. |
| 23 | Four children, aged between 12 and 15-years-old, are abducted from their workplace and sold to an SPDC army recruiter in Kyi Myint Taing, Rangoon Division. |
| 23 | Nasaka arrests a 48-year-old Village Peace and Development Council member for smuggling timber. |
| 25 | Malaysian police arrest 56 Chin refugees from Burma, including six girls and two toddlers, even though they are carrying UNHCR cards. |
| 25 | UN Special Advisor on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, arrives in Brussels for talks with senior EU officials in his continuing efforts to promote national reconciliation in Burma. |
| 26 | A 26-year-old villager from Mone Township, Pegu Division, loses his right eye after stepping on a landmine. |
| 28 | Seven SPDC Army soldiers killed and one Shan State Army soldier killed during clash in Shan State. |
| 28 | EU Special Envoy for Burma, Piero Fassino, arrives in Southeast Asia to undertake another diplomatic initiative on Burma. |
| 29 | UN Secretary General urges action against 12 armies and groups of using child soldiers, including the SPDC army. |
| 29 | UN Special Advisor on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, meets with Indian government officials to discuss Burma during a three-day visit. |
| 29 | EU Special Envoy for Burma, Piero Fassino, urges the SPDC to free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. |

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN JANUARY 2008

“Burma Army troops kill villagers and IDPs as they mass troops with over 90 battalions now in northern Karen State, Burma”, Free Burma Rangers (FBR)

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2008/20080110.html>

“Expansion of Burma Army Camps and Roads as New Troops Rotate In and Old Units Go Out”, Free Burma Rangers (FBR)

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2008/20080120.html>

“State of the World’s Children 2008: Child Survival”, UNICEF

http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/The_State_of_the_Worlds_Children_2008.pdf

“Index of Economic Freedom”, Heritage Foundation

<http://www.heritage.org/index/country.cfm?id=Burma>

“Children and Armed Conflict”, UN Secretary General

<http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=s/2007/757>