

BURMA BULLETIN

A month-in-review of events in Burma

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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March 2007

- **SPDC Army in decay: morale declines while desertions increase; many units at less than 20% of full strength.**
- **The regime's military offensive in Karen State continued throughout March. About 1,000 civilians were displaced by the latest attacks. Since the beginning of 2006, more than 80 civilians have been killed in Eastern Burma as a result of the SPDC Army ongoing campaign. 27,000 have been displaced since the start of the campaign in Nov 2005.**
- **The regime continues to intimidate, harass, and arbitrarily detain activists and ordinary citizens. 15 activists are arrested in March. One of them is arrested four times in four weeks. One more case of custodial death is reported.**
- **Outbreaks of bird flu hit Rangoon - again. Delays in informing public and allowing expert access. Chicken industry hit hard and no assistance in sight.**
- **Reports of forced labor persist despite SPDC/ILO agreement on forced labor MoU.**
- **Malaysia at odds with UNHCR over raids on refugees from Burma and arrests of newborn babies; Bangladesh bulldozes Burmese refugee camps at Cox's Bazaar; Rohingya look for safe haven**
- **ASEAN Task Force scraps sanctions in proposed ASEAN Charter; ASEAN MPs urge strong action on Burma.**

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KEY STORY

SPDC Army: Understaffed, Underpaid, Unhappy

Despite huge defense spending and coercive recruitment practices, the SPDC Army's rank and file is plagued by widespread desertion and serious drops in morale. Armed forces staffing continues to decline, while discontent for the harsh conditions of service is mounting among the troops.

In the weeks leading up to the Armed Forces Day, the SPDC stepped up its propaganda in controlled media to project and image of a strong and modern Army. Eager to show its muscles, the SPDC even

granted access to foreign media to cover the 27 March military parade held in Naypyidaw, where 15,000 soldiers marched under a scorching sun.¹

However, the regime's stunts appear to be a desperate attempt to cover up the real and miserable situation for the Army's rank and file. Jane's Defence Weekly reported on March 27 a leaked document that summarizes the last quarterly meeting of the SPDC Army's top officials in September 2006²:

- During the four-month period proceeding September 2006, 9,497 troops were lost from service. This is up 8% from the same period in 2005, when 8,760 troops were lost from service. This trend is explained by increasing rate of desertions among the SPDC Army. The cause of desertions appears to be linked to hard conditions, inadequate rations, and infrequent field inspections.
- During the same period, battalions were operating at less than 20% of their full strength, with some frontline units staffed by as few as 15 troops (less than 2% of the prescribed capacity).
- Discipline among the ranks is also deteriorating, with battalion commanders chastised for drinking excessively and for being fixated on profit making and womanizing.
- Recruitment of troops has intensified to offset the increasing rate of desertions. However, resources are lacking. Regiments are fined when they fail to meet their recruitment quotas. Battalion commanders have been told to change recruitment practices, focus on rural areas, and involve the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) in the recruitment drive.
- Underpaid and undersupplied soldiers depend on extortion, confiscation and forced labor to survive. Battalion commanders were ordered to seek their own funds in order to supplement meager central salary and rations budgetary disbursements. Regiments are also ordered to raise funds through the sale of seized crops and goods.

Poor health for a poor army

HIV/AIDS and hepatitis infections among armed forces personnel further complicate staffing problems. During the second tri-annual meeting in 2006, it was reported that more than 13,700 soldiers were infected with HIV or Hepatitis B, including 2,182 officers. This is thought to reflect an infection rate of more than 4% of the armed forces.³ Soldiers even have trouble getting basic medical care services. On 18 March, 300 troops from SPDC Army battalions based in Ye Township traveled to Azin village to attend a free health clinic sponsored by a local seafood company.⁴

INSIDE BURMA

New campaign, new harassment

On 4 March, the "88 Generation Students" group's "Open heart" letter campaign ended after two-months [See *February 2007 Burma Bulletin*]. Activist Ko Ko Gyi said the group had received more than 20,000 letters.⁵

On 11 March, the group launched a new campaign called "White Sunday" to express support to family members of imprisoned political prisoners. About 70 activists visited the families of three political prisoners in Rangoon. Former student leader and political prisoner Min Ko Naing said the activists plan to visit about three families every Sunday.⁶

As the "88 Generation Students" campaign drive continued, the group's activities have faced increasing harassment and intimidation by the SPDC. SPDC authorities have stepped up surveillance of individual members and have prevented activists from visiting families of political prisoners.⁷

¹ AFP (27 Mar 07) Might, defiance as Myanmar vows to crush opponents

² Jane's Defence Weekly (04 Apr 07) Myanmar army document spotlights low morale;

³ Jane's Defence Weekly (04 Apr 07) Myanmar army document spotlights low morale; SHAN (27 Mar 07) Burma Army has more battalions, less men

⁴ IMNA (23 Mar 07) Troops deprive locals of health check up facilities

⁵ DVB (05 Mar 07) 88 students' Open Heart campaign ends

⁶ AFP (12 Mar 07) Another activist arrested in Myanmar; Mizzima News (12 Mar 07) 88 generation launches 'White Sunday'

⁷ AFP (12 Mar 07) Another activist arrested in Myanmar; Irrawaddy (22 Mar 07) Junta hinders activist 'White Sunday' campaign

- **9 March:** SPDC authorities visited the house of an “88 Generation Students” member, Ko Ant Bwe Kyaw, and threatened to confiscate his laptop computer.⁸
- **10 March:** SPDC special police raided the homes of “88 Generation Students” members Ko Htun Myint Aung, Ko Pandit Htun, Ko Thein Lin Soe and Ko Aung That Zin. The four were taken into custody and interrogated before being released on the same day.⁹
- **18 March:** 15 to 20 people in plainclothes tried to block about 60 activists from the “88 Generation Students” as they approached the home of political prisoner Myo Myint Zaw in Rangoon’s Bahan Township.¹⁰

Arrests merry go round

In March, the SPDC again cracked down on the protesters who had taken part in the 22 February anti-junta demonstration in downtown Rangoon, after a first wave of arrests at the end of February [See *February 2007 Burma Bulletin*]. The latest arrests brought to 19 the number of protesters taken into custody by SPDC authorities following the 22 February demonstration.

- **6 March:** Protesters Aye Kyi, Myint Shwe, Tin Min Khaing, Win Aung, Aye Lwin, Thein Aung Myint, and Moe Aung Soe were detained in Aung Thabye police interrogation center.¹¹ They were released on the night of 13 March after a week of detention and interrogation.¹² Another protester, Htin Kyaw, was arrested on the night of 6 March and released on the morning of 7 March, after being warned by SPDC authorities not to stage protests in the future.¹³
- **8 March:** SPDC Special Branch police arrested 71-year-old veteran politician U Win Naing and demonstrator Htin Kyaw soon after a press conference held at the residence of U Win Naing. U Win Naing and Htin Kyaw had called the press conference to brief journalists about the deteriorating situation in Burma.¹⁴ The two were released on 9 March after being warned by the Ministry of Home Affairs that they could be sentenced to life in prison for spreading misinformation about the junta.¹⁵
- **16 March:** protester Soe Myint Htein was arrested in Rangoon’s North Okkalapa Township by the SPDC Special Branch police and subsequently detained at the Aung Thabye interrogation center.¹⁶
- **22 March:** SPDC police rearrested Htin Kyaw for staging a solo protest calling for religious freedom in front of the Hledan market in Rangoon. Authorities had earlier prevented him from serving as a monk at a monastery in Rangoon.¹⁷ He was released on 23 March.¹⁸
- **“Gold card” candidate?** Activist Htin Kyaw appears to be eligible for the SPDC jail equivalent of a frequent flyer card, having been arrested 4 times in 4 weeks on 22 February, 6 March, 8 March and 22 March.

National Convention: no end in sight

On 26 March, SPDC information minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan said that the constitution-drafting process through the National Convention was “near completion”. Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan indicated that the detailed basic principles of all the remaining seven chapters would be adopted at the forthcoming session of the convention. He failed however to set a date for the fifth and final session of the

⁸ DVB (11 Mar 07) Burma press scrutiny officials inspect computer training centre, individual

⁹ DVB (12 Mar 07) Special police interrogate 88 generation students

¹⁰ Irrawaddy (22 Mar 07) Junta hinders activist ‘White Sunday’ campaign

¹¹ AP (07 Mar 07) Myanmar detains 8 who took part in rare protest last month; Mizzima News (07 Mar 07) Junta’s second crackdown on protesters; Irrawaddy (07 Mar 07) More Rangoon protesters arrested

¹² Irrawaddy (14 Mar 07) Seven protesters released in Rangoon; Mizzima News (14 Mar 07) Seven demonstrators released

¹³ AP (07 Mar 07) Myanmar detains 8 who took part in rare protest last month; Mizzima News (07 Mar 07) Junta’s second crackdown on protesters; Irrawaddy (07 Mar 07) More Rangoon protesters arrested

¹⁴ Mizzima News (08 Mar 07) Special Branch picks up U Win Naing and Htin Kyaw

¹⁵ AFP (09 Mar 07) Myanmar releases protest leader; Mizzima News (10 Mar 07) Junta releases U Win Naing and Htin Kyaw

¹⁶ Irrawaddy (19 Mar 07) Another protestor arrested in Rangoon

¹⁷ IHT (22 Mar 07) Persistent protestor detained for 4th time in month in Myanmar

¹⁸ Irrawaddy (23 Mar 07) Solo Protester Released in Rangoon

convention, expected later in the year. “It will either be before or after the rainy season,” said Kyaw Hsan. Since 1993, the national convention has laid down detailed basic principles for eight chapters out of 15.¹⁹

Junta’s medical travels

Singapore continues to be the preferred destination for junta officials fleeing from Burma’s dilapidated healthcare system. On 20 March, an official from the Burmese embassy in Singapore revealed SPDC Prime Minister General Soe Win was being treated at the Singapore General Hospital for a “serious” undisclosed illness. The 58-year-old general had reportedly arrived in Singapore in late February on a private visit. According to unconfirmed reports, he may be suffering from leukemia and has asked for retirement.²⁰ General Soe Win’s hospitalization follows Senior General Than Shwe’s health check up in the same hospital at the end of December 2006 [See *January 2007 Burma Bulletin*].

Karen State: attacks and displacement continue

The regime’s military offensive in Karen State continued throughout March. About 1,000 civilians were displaced by the latest attacks. Since the beginning of 2006, more than 80 civilians have been killed in Eastern Burma as a result of the SPDC Army ongoing campaign.²¹

- **8 March:** SPDC Army troops and about 20 soldiers from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)’s Battalion 907 launched a military offensive on the base of the Karen National Union (KNU) Battalion 201 at Maekalawkhi camp, located 30 kilometers from Myawaddy. Ten SPDC Army soldiers and four KNU fighters were killed in the clash, which also forced at least 300 civilians to flee into neighboring Thailand.²²
- **10 March:** a clash between the SPDC Army and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) killed at least two KNLA soldiers and a 15-year-old boy in Kaw-ka-reik Township, Karen State.²³
- **15 March:** SPDC Army Infantry Battalion (IB) 379 and 380 attacked the Saw Ka Der area of Southern Mon Township in Karen State. More than 600 villagers fled their homes and went into hiding in the jungle.²⁴
- **18 March:** SPDC Army based at Yetagun army camp shelled villages South of Bawgali Gyi, in Toungoo District, Karen State.²⁵
- **20 March:** SPDC Army Military Operations Command (MOC) 1 attacked the area of Tha Da Der and Hta Kaw To Baw villages in northern Papun District, Karen State. More than 400 villagers fled the attack and went hiding in the jungle. Three people were killed and one wounded in the fighting between SPDC Army troops and KNLA fighters.²⁶

CNF and KNPP meet with SPDC to discuss ceasefire agreements

Following a “peace agreement” between the SPDC and a KNU splinter group, two other armed opposition groups initiated ceasefire discussions with the junta.

¹⁹ Xinhua (26 Mar 07) Myanmar to continue to implement roadmap process without delay: spokesman; DPA (26 Mar 07) Myanmar nearing democracy, minister claims

²⁰ AP (21 Mar 07) Myanmar prime minister treated for 'serious' condition in Singapore hospital; AFP (20 Mar 07) Myanmar PM in Singapore hospital

²¹ Mizzima News (26 Mar 07) Three die, over a 1,000 flee fresh army offensive in Karen districts

²² AP (11 Mar 07) 300 Karen flee to Thailand after Myanmar offensive; Mizzima News (08 Mar 07) KNU camp attacked by Burma Army and DKBA troops; NMG (08 Mar 07) KNU base under attack, 200 villagers flee to border

²³ IMNA (12 Mar 07) Two KNLA soldiers and a boy killed in fire fight in Kaw-ka-reik

²⁴ NMG (26 Mar 07) Burma Army offensives kill three KNLA, force a thousand to flee; Free Burma Rangers (24 Mar 07) Week of attacks: Over 1,000 Villagers Displaced as Burma Army Launches New Attacks in Papun District and Mon Township

²⁵ Free Burma Rangers (24 Mar 07) Week of attacks: Over 1,000 Villagers Displaced as Burma Army Launches New Attacks in Papun District and Mon Township

²⁶ NMG (26 Mar 07) Burma Army offensives kill three KNLA, force a thousand to flee; Free Burma Rangers (24 Mar 07) Week of attacks: Over 1,000 Villagers Displaced as Burma Army Launches New Attacks in Papun District and Mon Township

- **15-16 March:** representatives of the Chin National Front (CNF) met with SPDC authorities to begin discussions on a possible ceasefire agreement.²⁷ The CNF indicated that discussions with the SPDC will continue later this year.²⁸
- **23 March:** representatives from the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the SPDC met for ceasefire negotiations.²⁹ But the KNPP has balked at further discussions with the SPDC after SPDC Army forces fired mortars on a KNPP military camp at Nya Mo on 26 March.³⁰

More bird flu, FAO waits for SPDC permission to help

On 26 February, bird flu killed 68 birds on at a small farm in Rangoon. According to official reports, new outbreaks of bird flu had affected the five townships of Mayangon, Hlaingtharya, North Okkalapa, Mingaladon and Hmawby by the time of publication. Between 28 February and 18 March, the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) reported that 1,863 birds had been found dead with the virus and 37,883 birds had been culled.³¹ Another 324 wild birds found dead in over 16 townships in Rangoon and Pegu Division were tested. Of these, six crows showed signs of bird flu.³²

In response to the initial outbreaks, a three-week ban was placed on the sale and movement of poultry within a 10 kilometer radius encompassing Mayangon, Yankin and South Okkalapa.³³ As with the 2006 outbreak, the SPDC waited several days before it reported the outbreak to its own people. Finally, on 2 March, a flurry of advice began appearing almost daily in the New Light of Myanmar, urging pet-owners not to allow their animals to eat wild birds and reporting numerous accounts of wild birds dying of causes other than bird flu.³⁴ Despite the severity of the situation, seven days after the first outbreak, Tang Zhenping, FAO representative in Rangoon, said that the SPDC had not made any specific requests for assistance. He also said that a FAO expert currently in Burma was still waiting for permission to visit the affected area.³⁵

As with the 2006 outbreaks of bird flu, the international community rushed to assistance of the junta. International donors pledged US\$1.4 million in emergency assistance, including US\$500,000 worth of equipment from the US. However, FAO said more is needed for intensive surveillance, strengthening of laboratory capabilities, public awareness campaigns, and animal health services.³⁶

As well the risk bird flu posed to people's health, the chicken industry and those that rely on it for their livelihood were also impacted. "My chicken sales are down about 30%," said Rangoon chicken seller. "Some customers don't want to touch the chicken. They don't even want to walk by my shop."³⁷

There has been no assistance provided to affected farmers and their families, or others in the industry. According to one market official in Rangoon's livestock market, within two days of the announcement prices had fallen nearly 25%, from 2625 kyat to 2000 kyat per kilo.³⁸ Poor families are buying up big, benefiting from the low prices but risking infection.

Thai authorities and the SPDC banned the import and export of chicken and eggs across the border points, including Tachileik and Myawaddy. The Manipur government in northeastern India also issued an alert. The Indian army, paramilitary, police and district administration were instructed to remain vigilant in preventing imports.³⁹

²⁷ Khonumthung News (18 Mar 07) CNF peace delegates back home

²⁸ Mizzima News (20 Mar 07) CNF-Junta for second round of talks soon

²⁹ Irrawaddy (23 Mar 07) Karenni rebel group, Junta begin peace talks

³⁰ Kanatarawaddy Times (27 Mar 07) KNPP lambasts junta over mortar fire on its camp

³¹ NLM (20 Mar 07) Latest developments about bird flu in Yangon

³² Xinhua (27 Mar 07) Myanmar confirms bird flu outbreak in five townships in Yangon

³³ AP (01 Mar 07) UN assists Myanmar in dealing with latest bird flu outbreak

³⁴ China View (04 Mar 07) Myanmar detects no new bird flu virus on dead fowls

³⁵ RFA (04 Mar 07) Burma Culls Poultry After Bird Flu Deaths

³⁶ Reuters (14 Mar 07) Myanmar needs more help to fight bird flu - FAO

³⁷ World Poultry (05 Mar 07) Myanmar poultry sales affected by bird flu

³⁸ World Poultry (05 Mar 07) Myanmar poultry sales affected by bird flu

³⁹ Mizzima News (27 Mar 07) Manipur bans poultry imports from Burma to prevent bird flu

HUMAN RIGHTS

Situation worsening: US report

On 6 March, the US State Department named Burma among the world's worst human rights offenders in its annual report examining the human rights record of more than 190 nations worldwide. The report said the military regime's human rights record worsened during 2006, as the junta detained opposition leaders, prevented aid groups from visiting prisoners, and increased attacks on minorities. The report also highlighted the SPDC's extensive use of executions, rape, torture, arbitrary detention and abuse of prisoners to maintain its grip on power.⁴⁰ The US State Department's findings are echoed in the events illustrated in the following incidents.

Harassment of activists

- **5 March:** SPDC authorities arrested pro-democracy activist Thwin Lin Aung while he was at Rangoon airport preparing to leave for the United States on a scholarship. No reason was given for his arrest.⁴¹
- **7 March:** SPDC Special Branch police arrested 65-year-old amateur satirist Thein Zan in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division, for posting on his fence an anti-junta satirical piece that criticized state-run newspapers for not informing the public about the deteriorating state of the economy in Burma. Thein Zan was charged with inciting public unrest under Article 505 of the penal code.⁴² He was unexpectedly released on bail from Rangoon's Insein Prison on 28 March.⁴³
- **20 March:** SPDC authorities arrested activists Kyaw Kyaw Oo and Kyaw Swe in Prome, Pegu Division, for distributing Burmese-language copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The two activists, who are members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters, were released from a local police station on the same day after authorities warned them not to continue distributing human rights material. The two activists were reportedly also forced to provide a list of HRDP members.⁴⁴
- **Mid-March:** SPDC authorities arrested Than Tun and Tin Htay, two residents of Nyaungdon Township, Irrawaddy Division, for possessing a copy of the video of the lavish wedding of Senior-Gen Than Shwe's daughter.⁴⁵
- **26 March:** SPDC authorities in Kyaukse Township, Mandalay Division, arrested teashop owner Ko Kyaw Thu Moe Myint for writing two poems that made reference to Burma's independence hero general Aung San.⁴⁶

Custodial death

In March, one more case of death in police custody is reported. On 18 March, SPDC authorities and USDA members in Rangoon's North Okkalapa Township arrested Naing Oo, a 36-year-old Rangoon resident. The next morning, Naing Oo's body was discovered by his brother, Min San, in a Ward Peace and Development Council office. SPDC authorities claimed Naing Oo died of a cold. However, Min San claimed that his brother's body and face showed signs of serious injuries. The rest of Naing Oo's family was barred from seeing the body, and the USDA quickly arranged the cremation.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ IHT (06 Mar 07) U.S. criticizes abuse in Southeast Asia, including Myanmar's worsening rights record VOA (06 Mar 07) U.S. Report Cites Human Rights Abuses in Sudan, China, Russia, Burma, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran
Bangkok Post (07 Mar 07) US: N.Korea, Burma most repressive

⁴¹ AFP (12 Mar 07) Another activist arrested in Myanmar

⁴² Mizzima News (08 Mar 07) Burmese elder arrested for satires on SPDC newspapers

⁴³ DVB (29 Mar 07) Political prisoner released from Insein after 22 days

⁴⁴ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 07) Burmese activists arrested for distributing UN rights document; Irrawaddy (21 Mar 07) Activists Who Distributed UN Declaration Released

⁴⁵ Irrawaddy (26 Mar 07) Two Arrested in Burma over Wedding VCD

⁴⁶ DVB (30 Mar 07) Would-be valentines poet arrested in Mandalay

⁴⁷ Irrawaddy (23 Mar 07) Lawlessness and Disorder in Burma

U Win Tin: another birthday behind bars

On 12 March, veteran Burmese writer U Win Tin turned 77 in his cell in Rangoon's Insein Prison. U Win Tin reportedly demanded his right to remission, having already served 18 of his 20 years' sentence. However, SPDC authorities ignored his demand. U Win Tin is suffering from diabetes and is reported to be taking diuretics due to high blood pressure. He has also had two heart attacks and a hernia operation.⁴⁸

Teenage rape victims jailed: it's International Women's Day in Burma

On 8 March, International Women's Day, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) released a statement calling on ASEAN and the international community to take action to stop the SPDC violence against women in Burma.⁴⁹ The WLB's statement drew attention to the case of four teenagers who were arrested in March for speaking to the media. In February they had been gang raped by seven SPDC Army troops.⁵⁰

Reports of forced labor persist despite SPDC/ILO agreement on forced labor MoU

A 26 February agreement between the ILO and the SPDC on a mechanism to report, process and seek redress for forced labor complaints led to an ILO decision on 28 March to defer referring the SPDC to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ILO noted that since the signing of the February agreement, four forced labor cases had been filed with the ILO and subsequently referred by the agency to a SPDC Working Group on forced labor for action.⁵¹

Despite the agreement with the ILO, the SPDC has shown its unwillingness to curb its pervasive forced labor practices. From 5-7 March, reports of forced labor surfaced in Arakan State and in Irrawaddy, Magwe and Pegu Divisions.

- In Pegu Division, villagers said that they were being forced by officials to guard the Rangoon-Pyinmana railway.
- Residents in Thandwe, Arakan State, reported that they were being forced to serve as lookouts for fires.
- On 7 March, villagers in several areas of Magwe Division reported being forced to plant castor oil crops and being used as porters by the SPDC Forestry Department officials. Irrawaddy Division residents also reported being forced to plant castor crops.⁵²
- Villagers from Burma who fled to Bangladesh reported that the SPDC Army has been using local villagers as military porters in a military operation that started on 25 March. The SPDC Army operation is in the western border area between Paletwa and Buthidaung Townships. The SPDC Army is using local villagers from several villages including Letpanwa, Tookpi, Sitaung, and Pyin Zaw to carry army materials and food.⁵³

DISPLACEMENT

Malaysia crackdowns and the UNHCR

Long running differences between the Malaysian government's immigration policy and the Kuala Lumpur United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office became public in March. Recent raids on migrant worker and refugee housing have prompted UNHCR to urge the Malaysian government not to treat refugees as criminals.⁵⁴ Home Affairs Minister Radzi Sheikh Ahmad

⁴⁸ Mizzima News (12 Mar 07) Veteran Burmese journalist spends another birthday in jail

⁴⁹ WLB (08 Mar 07) Jailing of gang-raped schoolgirls in Burma a shame on the region

⁵⁰ Kachin News Group (02 Mar 07) Four victims of rape by Burmese military put in jail

⁵¹ DVB (28 Mar 07) Burma escapes International Court of Justice referral

⁵² DVB (08 Mar 07) Widespread forced labour cases reported in Burma

⁵³ Narinjara News (29 Mar 07) Army use locals as porters in operation

⁵⁴ AP (09 Mar 07) Malaysia says it does not recognize refugees to prevent flood of economic migrants

announced that the government doesn't accept the UNHCR's powers and the agency was making it difficult for officials to crack down on illegal immigrants.⁵⁵

According to Suaram, a local human rights NGO, since the start of 2007 five raids have resulted in the detention of 74 UN certified refugees and 34 asylum seekers.⁵⁶

- **28 February:** a raid by immigration officers and thugs from the RELA "Volunteer Peoples' Corp" resulted in the detention of 50 ethnic Chin, including children of holders of UNHCR documents.⁵⁷
- **4 March:** Malaysian marine police arrested 108 men from Burma who tried to enter Malaysia in a fishing boat designed for a crew of ten. They have been handed over to immigration authorities.⁵⁸ The Rohingya Human Rights Organization in Malaysia called for their release, saying that they were escaping persecution.⁵⁹
- **First week of March:** Immigration officials arrested three newborn children and their respective parents within a few hours of discharge from hospital. In all three cases, at least one parent had UNHCR documents.⁶⁰
- **12 March:** RELA arrested 48 Chin asylum seekers from the Jalan Imbi neighborhood and take them to Seminyah detention camp for deportation. One of those arrested is Salai Ni Kio, a resettled refugee visiting from Denmark with valid travel documents.⁶¹

Bangladesh bulldozes camps

The Bangladesh interim administration has ordered about 6,000 refugees from Burma living in unofficial camps in Cox's Bazaar district to leave.⁶² According to UNHCR, all the unofficial camps in the Teknaf area are set to be demolished as part of an attempt to crackdown on illegal housing.

The UNHCR says it has been prevented from providing any assistance, and has called on the authorities to cooperate in the search for new homes. "We understand why the government doesn't want them living there, but to move them without having prepared any solution in advance is not very humane," said UNHCR Bangladesh representative Pia Prytz Phiri.⁶³

UNHCR sub-office head Jim Worrall observed that the simplest solution would be to allow the Teknaf refugees to vacate the camp-slums and return to their rented accommodation in local villages, which they were evicted from in 2004.

Rohingya boat people

Boat arrivals of Muslim Rohingya continue to arrive in Southern Thailand in March from Bangladesh. Those arriving attest to the persecution of Rohingya in Burma, and the inhuman living conditions for Rohingya in Bangladesh. According to a recent report from Human Rights Watch, more than 2,000 Rohingyas have arrived in southern Thailand since October 2006, most attempting to travel on to Malaysia. In the most recent cases reported:

- **10 March:** 67 Rohingya men were forced to return to Burma by Thai military authorities. Most have since returned to Thailand.
- **23 March:** Thai authorities arrested another 56 Rohingya men around Mae Sot and deported them the following day.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ AP (01 Mar 07) Arrests of refugees from Burma in Malaysia condemned

⁵⁶ AP (01 Mar 07) Arrests of refugees from Burma in Malaysia condemned

⁵⁷ AP (01 Mar 07) Arrests of refugees from Burma in Malaysia condemned

⁵⁸ AFP (05 Mar 07) Malaysia nabs Myanmar illegals with no food, water

⁵⁹ AFP (07 Mar 07) Free Myanmar migrants, rights group urges Malaysia

⁶⁰ Chinland Guardian (07 Mar 07) Malaysia arrests more refugee babies

⁶¹ Chinland Guardian (12 Mar 07) RELA raids continue in Malaysia

⁶² HRW (27 Mar 07) Rohingya Refugees from Burma Mistreated in Bangladesh

⁶³ UN News Center (08 Mar 07) Bangladesh: UN agency seeks solution for 6,000 Myanmar refugees facing eviction

⁶⁴ HRW (27 Mar 07) Rohingya Refugees from Burma Mistreated in Bangladesh

Those apprehended by Thai authorities are reportedly taken to Mae Sot and then forced into Burma, where they are detained in horrific conditions in an area controlled by the junta-aligned Democratic Karen Buddhist Army.⁶⁵

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

AIPMC calls Burma “a catastrophe”, urges ASEAN to take a strong stand

On 25 March, ASEAN legislators, describing Burma as “a human security catastrophe” urged their governments to take a stronger stand and recognize the seriousness of the human security problems being caused by the SPDC. The call came during a press conference of ASEAN parliamentarians held in Mae Sot, Thailand. The parliamentarians also stated that the regime's lack of democratic rule continues to negatively affect its neighboring countries and ASEAN as a whole.⁶⁶ Members of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) went to the Thai-Burma border to speak with recent arrivals from Burma, as well as with those who have been there for many years now, and to witness for themselves the situation of Burmese refugees who have fled Burma because of the junta's brutal human rights violations and grave economic mismanagement.

ASEAN Charter taskforce scraps sanctions against member States

In stark contrast to the strident statements of the AIPMC, ASEAN ministers have given new life to the SPDC's continued membership in the ASEAN community. Despite recommendations by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG)⁶⁷ that the ASEAN Charter include suspensions of rights and privileges for “breaches of ASEAN's objectives, major principles and commitments to important agreements”, on 26 March Philippine diplomat Rosario Manalo said that ASEAN FMs had rejected any proposed sanctions to be included in its proposed Charter. Manalo said, “It is divisive, confrontational and we don't want any provision that would embarrass any member state.” Manalo heads the ASEAN High Level Task Force that will draft the ASEAN Charter.⁶⁸

Burma mars EU/ASEAN Relations

Burma continues to be a millstone around the neck in the context of ASEAN's foreign relations initiatives. On 15 March, the EU and ASEAN officials agreed to boost political and economic cooperation, but Burma remained a barrier to a free trade pact. The EU is looking to increase economic cooperation with ASEAN via a free trade pact, but this has been held up by ASEAN's insistence on including Burma in any deal. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Walder said the EU wanted to see ASEAN countries press for improvement of human rights in Burma, including the release of democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.⁶⁹

Thai-Burma tensions mount over border incidents

Two border incidents involving Thai Army personnel, one caused by the SPDC Army and the other caused by the by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a pro-junta ceasefire group has led to diplomatic protests and the closure of Thai-Burma border checkpoints.

- **21 March:** a clash between Thai Army Rangers and SPDC Army soldiers in Thailand's northern province of Mae Hong Son resulted in the death of a Thai Ranger volunteer.⁷⁰
- **22 March:** two members of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) captured and detained two Thai border patrol police when they were bathing in a pond in Chong Jakae village, 200 meters inside Thailand.⁷¹

⁶⁵ HRW (27 Mar 07) Rohingya Refugees from Burma Mistreated in Bangladesh

⁶⁶ Narinjara News (26 Mar 07) Burma regional catastrophe: ASEAN Parliamentarians

⁶⁷ Report of the Eminent Persons Group on the ASEAN Charter, December 2006

⁶⁸ Sun Star (26 Mar 07) Proposed sanctions in Asean charter dropped, diplomat says

⁶⁹ Reuters (15 Mar 07) EU, ASEAN to boost ties, Myanmar obstructs on trade

⁷⁰ TNA (22 Mar 07) Thai-Myanmar border clash caused by misunderstanding, says Army chief

⁷¹ Bangkok Post (24 Mar 07) Burma urged to release Thai soldiers

- **23 March:** the Thai Foreign Ministry submitted an aide-memoire to the SPDC ambassador to Thailand, U Ye Win, to protest the death of the Thai Army Ranger.⁷²
- **24 March:** the Thai Army closed indefinitely the Thai-Burma border checkpoint at Three Pagodas Pass in Kanchanaburi Province in response to the kidnapping of the two Thai police.
- **26 March:** the DKBA released the two Thai border patrol police.⁷³ Thailand then reopened the border checkpoint with Burma at Three Pagodas Pass.⁷⁴
- **27 March:** SPDC authorities closed the Myawaddy and Three Pagodas Pass border checkpoints between Burma and Thailand without any advance notice. The checkpoints in the Thai side of the border remained open.⁷⁵

ECONOMY

China gets the gas. Maybe.

The SPDC has reportedly chosen China as the destination for the massive “Shwe” gas reserves. Reports in the India and South Korean press on 20 and 21 March said that the SPDC had told an Indian delegation the pipeline deal was off. Instead, a 900 km pipeline would be laid to China from blocks A1 and A3.⁷⁶

The SPDC’s choice is political and security motivated as much as economic. Choosing proposals from India, but also South Korea or Thailand, would ensure their support in international fora, but only China has veto power at the UN Security Council. According to the March Asian Development Bank “Outlook”, despite revenue from gas, Burma is still in an economic crisis because of crippling mismanagement of the economy.⁷⁷

The destiny of the gas may still be up for grabs. Conflicting messages suggest that details of the deal have not been finalized.

- **7 March:** During the visit of Bangladesh power and energy advisor Tapan Chowdhury’s to New Delhi, the interim Bangladesh administration was reportedly planning to discuss reviving the three nation gas talks. Preconditions placed by the previous administration had apparently been dropped.⁷⁸
- **14 March:** Burma Ambassador to India Kyi Thein told participants at a seminar on economic cooperation between the India and Burma that negotiations for the proposed India pipeline were still ongoing.⁷⁹
- **22 March:** Daewoo released a statement denying that a decision had been made, saying that the SPDC could not make a decision without consultation with Daewoo’s senior board.⁸⁰

New gas deals and discoveries

While speculation over major pipeline projects dominated the news this month, the SPDC continued to wrangle smaller deals and discoveries continue to be made by the SPDC and its partners.

- **6 March:** Thailand’s PTT Exploration and Production Company announced that two of its exploratory drills in M-9 had discovered gas flows of 14-30 million cubic feet of gas per day off the coast of Arakan State.⁸¹

⁷² TNA (24 Mar 07) Thailand protests to Myanmar over Ranger's death

⁷³ TNA (26 Mar 07) Myanmar releases two Thai border patrol police

⁷⁴ Thai Press Reports (28 Mar 07) Thailand opens Three Pagodas Pass after the release of border patrol police

⁷⁵ Mizzima News (28 Mar 07) Border checkpoints closed

⁷⁶ Times of India (21 Mar 07) Myanmar refuses to export gas to India

⁷⁷ ADB (Mar 07) Outlook 2007: Change amid growth

⁷⁸ Domain-b India (06 Mar 07) Bangladesh to revive India-Bangladesh-Myanmar gas pipeline talks

⁷⁹ Mizzima News (15 Mar 07) Indo-Burma gas pipeline under negotiation: Ambassador

⁸⁰ Irrawaddy (26 Mar 07) China gains ground in Burma gas grab

⁸¹ BP (06 Mar 07) PTTEP announces new gas finds in Burma

- **10 March:** Rimbunan Petrogas and UNOG sign a deal for offshore oil and gas exploration of M1 with MOGE. Rimbunan Petrogas is part of Malaysia’s Rimbunan Hijau group, a major logging conglomerate.⁸²
- **18 March:** The SPDC announces Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) signed a production and exploration contract with Russia’s Silver Wave Sputnik Petroleum and Singapore’s Silver Wave Energy at B2 onshore block in Ziphyutaung-Nandaw, northwestern Burma.⁸³

MARCH CHRONOLOGY

1	Jamal Hussain, a 30-year-old Rohingya from Kyinusi village in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, has one leg broken as a result of severe torture committed by SPDC Army soldiers.
2	Burmese Buddhist monk Ashin Sopaka has to call off his hunger strike outside the Burmese embassy in Bangkok after just over two hours after being threatened and pressured by Thai authorities.
2	Naiwiti Hontoe, a 58-year-old Thai businessman, is killed when his car runs over a land mine in the area near Boundary Post No.10 between Thailand’s province of Mae Hong Son and Burma’s Karenni State.
2	First reports of bird flu outbreak appear in Burma media.
4	The “88 Generation Students” group’s “Open Heart” letter campaign ends after a two-month run.
4	A villager from Pugonmyaung village, Nyaunglebin Township, is seriously injured by a landmine explosion near Panin village in Shwegyin Township.
4	Malaysian marine police arrest 108 men from Burma who try to enter Malaysia in a fishing boat designed for ten crew.
4	FAO reports that bird flu expert in Rangoon has not received permission to visit affected areas.
5-7	Reports of forced labor in Arakan State and in Irrawaddy, Magwe and Pegu Divisions. Forced labor activities include sentry duty and planting of castor oil plants.
6	Thailand’s PTTEP announces new gas finds in M9 off the Arakan coast.
7	Special Branch of the SPDC police arrest amateur satirist Thein Zan in Thingangyun Township, Rangoon Division, for writing satires and posting on his fence criticism of propaganda featured in state-run newspapers.
7	Mohammed Islam, a 30-year-old man from Seail Khli village tract, Rathedaung Township, Arakan State, is arrested and severely tortured by local Nasaka authorities.
7	Kawthaung Township NLD general secretary U Maung San is arrested by a joint force team led by SPDC army intelligence and police on suspicion of being involved in gunpowder trafficking.
7	The Rohingya Human Rights Organisation in Malaysia calls on authorities to release 108 detained migrants.
7	Bangladesh Power and Energy Advisor Tapan Chowdhury visits new Delhi, reportedly to revive 3-nation gas pipeline talks.
8	Combined forces from the SPDC Army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army attack a Karen National Union (KNU) Army camp at Maekalawkhi.
8	Women’s League of Burma releases statement calling on international support for ending violence against women in Burma.
8	Regional bird flu coordinator of the FAO and bird flu bio-security expert and lab technician of USAID reported to have visited Mayangon and Hlaingtharya.
10	SPDC special police raid homes of “88 Generation Students” group members Ko Htun Myint Aung, Ko Pandit Htun, Ko Thein Lin Soe and Ko Aung That Zin before interrogating them at an unknown location.
10	SPDC defends its human rights record against attacks from the United States, insisting it is part of larger plan by opponents to “tarnish” the regime’s image.
10	A 40-year-old man from Kyaukkyipauk Village is seriously injured by a landmine explosion in Htantabin Township.
10	67 Rohingya men are forcibly deported by Thai military into an area controlled by the DKBA.
10	Rimbunan Petrogas and UNOG sign a deal for offshore oil and gas exploration of M1 with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE)
11	“88 Generation Students” group launch a new campaign called “White Sunday” to express support to family members of imprisoned political prisoners.
11	Three construction workers from Burma are shot and killed in an attack on a construction site in Southern Thailand.
12	SPDC authorities arrest pro-democracy activist Thwin Lin Aung while he is at Rangoon airport preparing to leave for the United States on a scholarship.
12	Veteran Burmese writer U Win Tin spends his 77 th birthday on 12 March in Rangoon’s Insein Prison.

⁸² AP (11 Mar 07) 2 little-known companies sign deal for Myanmar offshore oil, gas exploration

⁸³ AP (18 Mar 07) Singaporean companies sign oil exploration deal with Myanmar

13	After eight days of detention SPDC authorities release seven protesters arrested for taking part in the February anti-junta demonstration in downtown Rangoon.
14	Mr S. Regupathy, the Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs says that India submitted a proposal for the SPDC to cooperate on fencing approximately 10 kilometers of the Indo-Burma border.
15	EU and ASEAN agree to boost political and economic cooperation, but military-ruled Burma remains an obstacle to a full-blown free trade pact.
15	Three Diseases Fund announces it is considering allocating an additional US\$20 to Burma.
15	ICRC announces it will be closing Kengtung and Moulmein field offices at the end of March.
15	Chin National Front delegation begins two-day talks with SPDC officials in an attempt to negotiate a ceasefire agreement.
16	Soe Myint Htein, 42, one of the participants in the February anti-junta protest, is arrested in Rangoon by the SPDC Special Branch police.
17	New Light of Myanmar reports that SPDC authorities arrested 328 suspected drug dealers and seized 73 kilograms of opium and 15 kilograms of heroin in February.
18	A 36-year-old man from Rangoon is arrested by SPDC authorities and USDA members in North Okkalapa Township. His dead body is found the next morning in a Ward Peace and Development Council office.
18	More than 600 Karen at Vallay Village in Karen State stage a public protest to demand armed groups stop fighting.
19	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is awarded the first Netaji Subhas Award by the Netaji Subhas Foundation in Kolkata, India.
20	SPDC authorities in Prome arrest and briefly detain two activists for distributing copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
20	44th annual gems sale ends. 3,652 lots of jade, gems and pearls are sold.
21	Burmese embassy in Singapore says SPDC prime minister Gen Soe Win is being treated in one of the city state's public hospitals for a "serious" undisclosed illness.
21	Lao President Choummaly Sayasone arrives at Nay Pyi Taw to start a three-day state visit to Burma.
21	Trial of 34 Rakhine detained in India since 1998 begins in City Sessions Court, Kolkata.
22	A clash between Thai Army Rangers and SPDC Army soldiers results in the killing of a Thai Ranger volunteer.
22	SPDC police detains activist Htin Kyaw for staging a solo protest calling for freedom of religion in front of a busy market in Rangoon.
22	Two Democratic Karen Buddhist Army soldiers capture two Thai border police in Thai territory in in Sangkhlaburi district.
23	Villager has her left foot blown off by a landmine in the jungle 7 miles East of Mone, in Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division.
23	Representatives from the Karenni National Progressive Party and the SPDC meet for ceasefire negotiations.
23	Special Rapporteur for Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, says civilians are being targeted by SPDC Army soldiers in ongoing operations in eastern Burma in a briefing to the UN Human Rights Council.
24	Thailand closes Three Pagodas Pass Border checkpoint in response to the kidnap of two Thai border police.
24	56 Rohingya men are forcibly deported to DKBA-controlled areas of Burma by Thai authorities
26	Protests against Korea's Daewoo Corporation for allegedly selling military equipment to Burma's military regime in exchange for energy contracts take place in 15 countries.
26	ASEAN Charter taskforce rejects sanctions against member States.
26	Na Sa Ka forces 300 carpenters in Arakan State to construct 120 houses in a model village north of Arakan's western border township of Maungdaw.
27	National League for Democracy marks the anniversary of Burma's Resistance Day with a call on the SPDC to focus on improving the country's crumbling economy.
27	SPDC closes border checkpoints with Thailand at Myawaddy and Three Pagodas Pass.
27	UN Special Rapporteur Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro calls for the release of imprisoned journalist U Win Tin.
27	Kachin Independence Organization, New Democratic Army, and Lasang Awng Wa ceasefire group donate millions of kyat to the SPDC Kachin State Commander Maj Gen Ohn Myint on Armed Forces Day.
28	U Thein Zan is released from Insein prison after spending 22 days in detention.
28	Thailand reopens border checkpoint with Burma at Three Pagodas Pass.
28	ILO defers action on referring SPDC to the International Court of Justice.
28	SPDC keeps border checkpoint at Myawaddy closed. Thai authorities try to find out why.
28	350-member Chinese delegation begins a two-day visit to Burma and signs seven agreements trade and cooperation agreements to Yunnan Province.
29	Daw Khin Win, a 51-year-old farmer sentenced to a year in prison after accusing SPDC officials of corruption, is released from prison.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN MARCH 2007

“Burma - Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006”, US Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78768.htm>

The US State Department's annual report examines the human rights record of more than 190 nations worldwide. The report said Burma military regime's human rights record worsened during 2006.

“Burma Army Launches New Attack, Killing Three People and Displacing 201 Villagers in Mon Township, Eastern Burma”, Free Burma Rangers

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2007/20070321.html>

Report on SPDC Army attacks and atrocities against civilians in Mon Township, Karen State, in February and March 2007.

“Working Day and Night: The Plight of Migrant Child Workers in Mae Sot, Thailand”, International Labor Organization

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/child/trafficking/downloads/workingdayandnight-english.pdf>

Concludes that factory owners are trying to hire more young women from Burma in the belief that they will not cause trouble or form unions. Over 80 percent of the 313 Burmese children surveyed in the study - ranging from 12 to 17 years are forced to work between 11-12 hours a day, nearly half of them got no days off, and nearly one third were required to live at the factory.

“Unsafe State - State-sanctioned sexual violence against Chin women in Burma”, The Women's League of Chinland (WLC)

<http://www.chinwomen.org/media/UnsafeState.pdf>

Provides detailed evidence of the systematic sexual violence being committed by the SPDC Army in the isolated mountainous region of Chin State in Western Burma.

“Annual Report 2007”, UN Office of Drugs and Crime

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/annual_report_2007/AR06_fullreport.pdf

Provides an overview of UNODC's programs on illicit drugs and international organized crime, including human trafficking.

“International Narcotics Control Strategy Report”, US State Department

<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/>

Concludes that Burma has failed to make sufficient efforts during 2006 to meet its obligations under international counter narcotics agreements.

“2006 Report”, International Narcotics Control Board

http://www.incb.org/incb/annual_report_2006.html

Annual report. Includes some information of Chinese assistance to drug eradication programs in Kachin State.

“Outlook 2007: Change Amid Growth”, Asian Development Bank

<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2007/MYA.pdf>

Concludes that growth in Burma is not as high as reported and that gas revenues are not enough to sustain the economy due to the SPDC's mismanagement.