

BURMA BULLETIN

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- **SPDC refuses to amend the proposed constitution and rejects UN offer of technical assistance for the referendum vote in May. The junta tightly controls the referendum process and bullies voters to vote “Yes”. Three arrested for commenting on the referendum.**
- **Defying regime threats and harassment, political activists, monks, and students across Burma express their opposition to the referendum and campaign for a “No” vote. Monks and activists outside Burma support the “No” vote campaign.**
- **In a dramatic protest against the SPDC, a man sets himself ablaze in front of thousands of pilgrims at Rangoon’s Shwedagon Pagoda.**
- **UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Paulo Sergio Pinheiro slams the SPDC for its false claims of democratization. SPDC denies him entry into Burma. The Human Rights Council passes yet another resolution condemning the SPDC’s human rights violations.**
- **More activists arrested. Monk leader U Gambira put in solitary for chanting *metta* prayers.**
- **SPDC accuses Gambari of “bias” and acting outside his role as a “mediator”.**
- **Thai PM visits Burma and resurrects his predecessor’s business-first, good-neighbor policy with the SPDC. Thailand and the SPDC sign trade and investment deals.**
- **ILO says that forced labor in Burma is still a “serious problem”. In March, more instances of forced labor surface.**
- **SPDC Army forces attack eight villages in Karen State. Over 2,000 villagers flee to the jungle.**

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KEY STORY

SPDC Constitutional Referendum: Vote “Yes” or go to jail

Despite calls from the UN, pro-democracy forces, and the international community for a more inclusive and participatory constitution-drafting process, the SPDC refused to amend the proposed constitution. “It is impossible to draft the constitution again,” SPDC Information Minister Brig Gen Kyaw Hsan told UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari on 7 March.¹ To date, the regime has not made public the text of the proposed constitution.

¹ AFP (08 Mar 08) Myanmar refuses to amend charter barring Suu Kyi from polls

Meanwhile, SPDC authorities started registering citizens aged 18 and older in preparation for the May referendum. The SPDC issued temporary identity cards to allow nationals without identity cards to be included on the referendum voter rolls.² Temporary identity cards were also distributed to Rohingya, ethnic ceasefire groups, and residents of ethnic areas.³ The regime carried out the registration process through SPDC local authorities, USDA members, military intelligence, police and immigration officials.⁴

As the registration process started, it became clear that the regime intended to tightly control the referendum organization and force voters into approving the constitution.

- SPDC authorities threatened voters with heavy fines and prison terms voters if they failed to cast a “Yes” vote in the referendum.⁵ On 29 February, SPDC Special Branch police arrested three Rangoon residents for making comments about the referendum.⁶ The SPDC also ordered civil servants to vote “Yes”.⁷
- SPDC local authorities appointed poll booth officers and instructed them to get “Yes” votes.⁸
- In Townships across Burma the regime set up sub-commissions staffed mainly with local SPDC officials and USDA members.⁹
- The regime rejected an offer of UN technical assistance and help with providing observers at the referendum.¹⁰
- The SPDC charged about 20 detained pro-democracy activists, including 88 Generations Students Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, under Law 5/96. The regime has used Law 5/96, which carries a penalty of up to 20 years’ jail, to imprison activists who criticize the constitution-drafting process.¹¹

“No” vote movement gains momentum

Defying regime threats and harassment, activists across Burma expressed their opposition to the referendum and campaigned for a “No” vote.

- **3 March:** Buddhist monks in Mandalay launched a poster campaign urging a “No” vote at the referendum. Posters appeared in various locations in Amarapura Township, including several monasteries and Yadanapon University.¹²
- **Early March:** University students and monks in Moulmein, Mon State, distributed leaflets opposing the referendum.¹³

² IMNA (02 Mar 08) TPP authorities requiring temporary identification for referendum; a resident; SHAN (03 Mar 08) Authorities collecting names for referendum; Kachin News Group (04 Mar 08) Tacheleik residents told to call back family members from abroad; IMNA (03 Mar 08) Junta authorities expedite family list work; SHAN (05 Mar 08) Local authorities renew ID cards to the people; Irrawaddy (10 Mar 08) Junta forcing migrants home for Referendum; Irrawaddy (12 Mar 08) Rangoon division ordered to support Referendum

³ Mizzima News (04 Mar 08) Junta begin registering ceasefire groups; Kachin News Group (06 Mar 08) Junta issues temporary identity cards in NDAK headquarters; Kachin News Group (17 Mar 08) The junta orders census in more KIO controlled areas; Kaladan News (03 Mar 08) Junta to issue temporary certificates to youth

⁴ IMNA (02 Mar 08) TPP authorities requiring temporary identification for referendum; a resident; Kachin News Group (26 Mar 08) Enumerators in Bhamo district in a spot; SHAN (05 Mar 08) Local authorities renew ID cards to the people

⁵ Mizzima News (21 Mar 08) Immigration officials mobilize locals to support new constitution; SHAN (24 Mar 08) ID cards issued in Shan State; voters coerced to support constitution; Irrawaddy (20 Mar 08) Referendum: “No” Vote Gaining Momentum; Kachin News Group (10 Mar 08) Junta force school teachers to support referendum; Kaladan News (15 Mar 08) Burma’s security’s campaign for next constitutional referendum; Kaladan News (19 Mar 08) Junta campaigns to get “yes” vote in northern Arakan; SHAN (19 Mar 08) Junta authorities coax, threaten civilians to support charter; DVB (31 Mar 08) Burma military pressures people to vote Yes

⁶ Irrawaddy (03 Mar 08) Three people arrested for comments on referendum

⁷ Irrawaddy (17 Mar 08) ‘Vote Yes’ Junta Tells Civil Servants; Kaladan News (19 Mar 08) Junta campaigns to get “yes” vote in northern Arakan; SHAN (19 Mar 08) Junta authorities coax, threaten civilians to support charter

⁸ Mizzima News (13 Mar 08) Junta appoints poll booth officers in Mandalay

⁹ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 08) Referendum sub-commissions formed by local authorities; Narinjara News (24 Mar 08) Township Election Commission Formed in Western Burma; Kachin News Group (25 Mar 08) Junta forms Quarter Election Commissions in Myitkyina

¹⁰ AFP (08 Mar 08) UN envoy meets Myanmar vote chief: officials; CNA (09 Mar 08) UN envoy extends Myanmar mission after vote setback

¹¹ AP (01 Mar 08) Lawyer says detained Myanmar activists face new charge carrying 20-year jail term

¹² Irrawaddy (04 Mar 08) Mandalay monks launch anti-referendum poster campaign; Mizzima News (05 Mar 08) Anti-referendum posters in Central Burma

¹³ IMNA (12 Mar 08) Mon students, youth and monks oppose referendum

- **14 March:** 88 Generation Students group urged voters to reject the proposed constitution when it goes to a referendum in May. The group said the proposed constitution does not ensure equal rights for all ethnic groups, was written without the participation of elected representatives, and would only perpetuate military rule.¹⁴
- **17 March:** NLD in Yenanchaung Township, Magwe Division, expressed opposition to the referendum.¹⁵
- **18 March:** All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) released a statement calling on citizens to oppose the referendum.¹⁶
- **20 March:** It was reported that VCDs of a satirical comedy that urge Burmese people to vote “No” in the referendum appeared in several areas and markets in downtown Rangoon.¹⁷
- **22 March:** NLD in Taunggoat Township, Arakan State, expressed opposition to the referendum.¹⁸
- **23 March:** Activists in Muse, Shan State, distributed leaflets and pasted posters that urged local people to vote “No” in the referendum.¹⁹
- **25 March:** In a campaign organized by the All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU), university students in Myitkyina and Waingmaw Townships, Kachin State, pasted hundreds of posters exhorting people to vote “No” in the referendum.²⁰
- **25 March:** Shan State Army–South urged all ceasefire groups to jointly oppose the SPDC's constitutional referendum.²¹
- **26 March:** ABMA released a statement urging Burmese people to vote “No” in the referendum.²²
- **27 March:** About 50 NLD supporters, including NLD youth members, protested the SPDC-drafted constitution in front of the party’s headquarters in Rangoon. Wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the word “No”, the protesters urged voters to reject the constitution in the referendum.²³ “No” vote t-shirts have spread to Mandalay and other cities in Burma.²⁴
- **31 March:** Committee Representing People’s Parliament (CRPP) expressed opposition to the referendum.²⁵



Monks builds opposition to the referendum outside Burma

- International Burmese Monk Organization (IBMO) leaders U Pannya Vamsa, U Uttara, Maung Chan, and Khime Soe declared that they have no faith in the referendum.²⁶ The IBMO met with

¹⁴ AFP (14 Mar 08) Pro-democracy group urges 'No' on Myanmar constitution

¹⁵ DVB (17 Mar 08) Arakan NLD urges action against referendum

¹⁶ Irrawaddy (18 Mar 08) Burmese Monks Call for Exam, Constitution Boycott

¹⁷ Irrawaddy (26 Mar 08) Anti-government Campaigns Continue in Burma; Irrawaddy (20 Mar 08) Referendum: “No” Vote Gaining Momentum

¹⁸ Mizzima News (24 Mar 08) Taungup NLD opposes referendum

¹⁹ Mizzima News (25 Mar 08) Student activists initiate vote 'No' campaign

²⁰ Kachin News Group (25 Mar 08) Students paste "No" vote posters on referendum in Northern Burma

²¹ Mizzima News (25 Mar 08) Shan rebels sound warning bells to all ceasefire armed groups

²² DVB (26 Mar 08) Monk group urges Burmese people to vote No

²³ AFP (27 Mar 08) Suu Kyi Supporters Protest Against Burma Charter Backed by Junta; Mizzima News (27 Mar 08) NLD Youth commence 'Vote NO' campaign

²⁴ DVB (26 Mar 08) T-shirt campaign promotes No vote

²⁵ CRPP (31 Mar 08) An appeal letter from Members of Parliament from Burma (Myanmar) to parliamentarians around the world

²⁶ New Zealand Herald (27 Mar 08) Monks denounce referendum call; UNPO (03 Mar 08) Burma: Monk organization Sasana Moli boycotts proposed elections

government officials in Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand in order to build international support for their campaign.²⁷

- On 9 March, monks of the exiled International Thasana Ushaung Sangadaw Union of Burma and monks from Chittagong Hill Tracts protested in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh. They demanded that the constitution be scrapped and all political detainees released.²⁸
- On 27 March, 13 Arakanese in exile, including five monks, began a march from Dhaka to Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh to express their opposition to the referendum.²⁹

International reactions to the referendum

- **12 March:** EU Special Envoy for Burma Piero Fassino expressed concern over the SPDC's rejection of UN proposals and on behalf the EU urged the SPDC to release all political prisoners and allow them to take part in the referendum as a guarantee of a free and fair process.³⁰
- **14 March:** US lawmakers introduced a Congressional resolution that denounced the SPDC's draft constitution as one-sided, undemocratic, and illegitimate.³¹ The resolution urged US President George Bush to push the UNSC:
 - to reject the SPDC's constitution;
 - to pass a binding resolution that will compel the regime to comply with UNSC calls for genuine political dialogue and the release of political prisoners; and
 - to pass a comprehensive arms embargo against the junta.

INSIDE BURMA

Resistance days

- **21 March:** In a dramatic protest against the SPDC, Thaw Zin Naing, a 26-year-old man, set himself ablaze in front of thousands of pilgrims at Rangoon's Shwedagon pagoda. "Down with the military regime," he reportedly shouted before dousing his body with gasoline.³² The protester was taken to Rangoon General Hospital where he remains in critical condition and under tight surveillance.³³
- **27 March:** NLD held a ceremony to mark the 63rd anniversary of Resistance Day at its Rangoon headquarters. Over 500 people including NLD supporters, activists, politicians, and foreign diplomats attended the event. The NLD issued a statement urging the SPDC to convene the Parliament elected in 1990 and release all political prisoners.³⁴ NLD held similar ceremonies in Mandalay and Magwe Divisions.³⁵ The SPDC observes March 27 as "Armed Forces Day".

Monks continue boycott

The regime increased its security presence at key monasteries in Rangoon. SPDC soldiers and riot police locked down and surrounded Kaba Aye monastery; four trucks and more than one hundred soldiers were seen in the vicinity.³⁶ In spite of this, monks continued to boycott the regime:

- **18 March:** All-Burmese Monks Alliance (ABMA) released a statement urging monks to boycott the religious exam.³⁷ Monks in Rangoon, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, and Sagaing Divisions and Arakan State reported widespread monk participation in the boycott.³⁸

²⁷ AP (06 Mar 08) Myanmar Monk tells story of killings, SMH (10 Mar 08) Burmese monk's mission to tell world how it is, New Zealand Herald (27 Mar 08) Monks denounce referendum call

²⁸ Kaladan News (10 Mar 08) Anti- Burmese referendum rally in Cox's Bazar

²⁹ Narinjara News (28 Mar 08) Burmese start long march in Bangladesh to protest referendum

³⁰ Office of the European Union Special Envoy for Burma/Myanmar (12 Mar 08) Burma: EU concerned by junta's uncooperative stance. We seek democratic guarantees on the referendum process, and the release of political prisoners, says Piero Fassino

³¹ Mizzima News (18 Mar 08) US Congressmen propose rejection of junta's constitution; Irrawaddy (18 Mar 08) US rejects junta draft constitution; *H. Con. Res. 317: Condemning the Burmese regime's undemocratic constitution and scheduled referendum (14 Mar 08)*

³² AP (23 Mar 08) Man sets himself alight at Myanmar's Shwedagon pagoda

³³ DVB (25 Mar 08) Man under armed guard after setting fire to himself; Mizzima News (25 Mar 08) Self immolator's health critical

³⁴ AFP (27 Mar 08) Suu Kyi Supporters Protest Against Burma Charter Backed by Junta; Mizzima News (27 Mar 08) NLD Youth commence 'Vote NO' campaign

³⁵ DVB (28 Mar 08) NLD marks Anti-Fascist Revolution Day

³⁶ Mizzima News (17 Mar 08) Soldiers surround Rangoon's Kaba Aye Pagoda

- **26 March:** ABMA released a statement urging monks to continue their boycott of the junta. It also called on the SPDC to release detained protestors and investigate the deaths caused during the crackdown.³⁹

SPDC restricts humanitarian aid

In March, the SPDC ordered a meeting of international aid organizations working on HIV/AIDS in Mandalay to cease health, education, and counseling activities to local communities.⁴⁰ The SPDC's Mandalay Health Department issued a letter directing a drop-in centre operated by Population Services International to halt their activities, which included work on HIV/AIDS issues and counseling.⁴¹

HUMAN RIGHTS

More arrests

- **8 March:** SPDC authorities arrested Thant Zin and Tun Tun, two NLD members from Rangoon's Hlaing Township, for possession of "Rambo 4" DVDs.⁴² The regime has banned the film in Burma.
- **12 March:** SPDC authorities arrested nine members of the Generation Wave group.⁴³
- **16 March:** SPDC authorities arrested Kyaw Ko Ko and Nyan Linn Aung, two leaders of the All-Burmese Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).⁴⁴
- **30 March:** SPDC authorities arrested six NLD members in connection with the 27 March anti-referendum protest in front of the party headquarters in Rangoon.⁴⁵ [See above *Resistance days*]

Death and suffering in Burma's prisons

- On 2 March, Insein prison authorities put Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP) member Myo Thant in solitary confinement in the dog kennels. On 14 March, Myo Thant began a hunger strike.⁴⁶ He suffers from lung and heart problems.⁴⁷
- On 6 March, 30-year-old NLD member Win Tin died of tuberculosis in Tharrawaddy prison in Pegu Division.⁴⁸
- On 14 March, ABMA leader U Gambira was put in solitary confinement in Insein prison for chanting *metta*, a Buddhist prayer for loving kindness.⁴⁹
- Elected MP Dr Zaw Myint Maung was denied medical treatment in Myitkyina prison despite his deteriorating health condition.⁵⁰
- NLD member Nay Win was denied medical care for hypertension in Myitkyina prison.⁵¹
- Insein prison authorities put 88 Generation Students member Markee, HRDP member Kyi Phyu and activist Htin Kyaw in solitary confinement.⁵² Htin Kyaw was put in solitary confinement in the dog kennels after shouting political slogans against SPDC leaders and the referendum. Political prisoner Sithu Maung was also put in solitary confinement for protesting abuses against detainees.⁵³
- In Mandalay prison, NLD member and elected MP Than Lwin lost sight in his left eye due to lack of medical treatment.⁵⁴

³⁷ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 08) Mandalay monks launch anti-referendum poster campaign

³⁸ Irrawaddy (18 Mar 08) Burmese Monks Call for Exam, Constitution Boycott

³⁹ DVB (26 Mar 08) Monk group urges Burmese people to vote No

⁴⁰ Times (29 Mar 08) Ban by junta puts lives of HIV patients at risk in Burma; Irrawaddy (26 Mar 08) Regime restricts more NGO activities

⁴¹ Irrawaddy (26 Mar 08) Regime restricts more NGO activities

⁴² DVB (10 Mar 08) NLD members arrested over Rambo DVDs

⁴³ Irrawaddy (14 Mar 08) Dissidents fear security reinforcements

⁴⁴ DVB (17 Mar 08) Two ABFSU leaders arrested; Irrawaddy (18 Mar 08) Burmese Monks Call for Exam, Constitution Boycott

⁴⁵ DVB (31 Mar 08) NLD members arrested after demonstration

⁴⁶ DVB (19 Mar 08) Detainee on hunger strike to protest ill-treatment

⁴⁷ DVB (11 Mar 08) Htin Kyaw in isolation after prison protest

⁴⁸ Irrawaddy (07 Mar 08) Political prisoner, 'afraid of nothing,' dies of TB; DVB (10 Mar 08) Political prisoner dies in Bago prison

⁴⁹ DVB (18 Mar 08) U Gambira held in solitary confinement; DVB (25 Mar 08) Insein prison inmates join metta chanting campaign

⁵⁰ Mizzima News (03 Mar 08) Treatment denied to detained opposition MP

⁵¹ Mizzima News (03 Mar 08) Treatment denied to detained opposition MP

⁵² Mizzima News (04 Mar 08) Detained 88 student activist sealed-off in dark cell

⁵³ DVB (11 Mar 08) Htin Kyaw in isolation after prison protest

⁵⁴ DVB (05 Mar 08) NLD member loses sight due to lack of treatment

- Detained Poet Saw Wai was treated for a hernia in Insein prison hospital.⁵⁵
- Insein prison authorities confined student leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi to their cells.⁵⁶
- 88 Generation Student member Mya Aye is suffering from lung-related problems in Insein prison.⁵⁷

Pinheiro and HRC slam SPDC

On 14 March, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Paulo Sergio Pinheiro slammed the SPDC for its patently false claims of democratization. “There is a contradiction between what the government of Myanmar says it is doing, and what is really happening,” Pinheiro said. “If you believe in gnomes, trolls, and elves, you can believe in this process of democracy in Myanmar,” he added.⁵⁸ “No referendum or elections can be fair, no transition to democracy can be effective, without the release of political prisoners, the authorization for all political parties to operate, and the protection of the basic civil and political freedoms, all non-existent in Myanmar,” Pinheiro concluded.⁵⁹ The SPDC denied Pinheiro a travel visa despite a UN Human Rights Council request for a follow-up visit.⁶⁰

On 13 March, in his last report presented to the Human Rights Council as UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, Pinheiro said that:⁶¹

- The SPDC accelerated unlawful arrests. At least 70 individuals were arrested, with some 62 still detained since his last visit to Burma in November. Some 1,850 political prisoners remain detained in Burma’s prisons.
- Initial indications by the SPDC of a willingness to address human rights abuses had “disappeared.” There was no evidence that anyone responsible for the September’s killings or excessive use of force had been held accountable.
- Increasing militarization, extrajudicial killings, attacks on civilians, forced displacement continued to occur in Karen State.
- A culture of impunity thrived, with those perpetrating torture, forced labor, sexual violence, and the recruitment of child soldiers going unpunished.
- There have been marked signs of deterioration in the economic and social sectors, including the apparent lack of a primary level education for over half of Burma’s children.
- SPDC local authorities continued to impose forced labor for public infrastructure and services.
- The announcement of a referendum was at odds with wide restrictions on free speech and the ongoing harassment of political opponents.

On 28 March, the Human Rights Council passed a resolution that strongly condemned the SPDC’s systematic human rights violations. The resolution said the regime failed to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the violent repression of last year’s peaceful demonstrations. It also urged the junta to make the constitution-drafting process inclusive, participatory, and transparent.⁶²

The UN body also passed a separate resolution extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma for another year and appointed Argentine Tomás Ojea Quintana as Pinheiro’s successor.⁶³

⁵⁵ DVB (21 Mar 08) Detained poet in hospital with hernia

⁵⁶ AFP (25 Mar 08) Activist Says Jailed Burma Protesters in Worsening Health

⁵⁷ DVB (27 Mar 08) 88 Students leaders in poor health

⁵⁸ Bangkok Post (14 Mar 08) Outgoing UN rights expert on Myanmar says government has OK’d visit

⁵⁹ Reuters (14 Mar 08) UN rights sleuth says Myanmar democracy is fantasy; Reuters (14 Mar 08) U.N. rights envoy sees “elfin” democracy in Myanmar

⁶⁰ Reuters (15 Mar 08) UN rights envoy denied Burma visa

⁶¹ AFP (12 Mar 08) UN expert says unlawful arrests in Myanmar accelerating; Mizzima News (13 Mar 08) Human rights inside Burma continue their slide; Reuters (14 Mar 08) UN rights sleuth says Myanmar democracy is fantasy; Reuters (14 Mar 08) U.N. rights envoy sees “elfin” democracy in Myanmar; Bangkok Post (14 Mar 08) UN rapporteur ridicules Burma ‘democracy’

⁶² AP (28 Mar 08) UN body condemns systematic rights abuses by Myanmar government; AFP (28 Mar 08) UN rights council condemns Myanmar’s human rights record

⁶³ Reuters (28 Mar 08) U.N. rights body condemns Myanmar for abuses

ILO: Forced Labor in Burma is still a problem

Against a backdrop of a 10 March ILO report⁶⁴ that said forced labor in Burma continued to be a “serious problem”, more instances of forced labor surfaced.

- **Since 3 March:** SPDC Army Battalion No. 289 in Inn Township, Chin State, has used 80 villagers in Paletwa Township for forced labor in SPDC Army agricultural projects and animal farms.⁶⁵
- **26 March:** It was reported that about 15 households in Toe Thet Ywar Thit Village of Kaw-Zar Sub Township, Mon State, had relocated to Hangan village in Ye Township because their livelihoods were at risk due to forced labor at an SPDC Army camp.⁶⁶
- **Since 20 March:** Local SPDC authorities and USDA officials in Mrauk-U Township, Arakan State, have ordered about 100 Rohingya villagers to perform forced labor to repair the Township’s drainage system.⁶⁷
- **Since 21 March:** Local SPDC authorities have forced about 50 villagers from Vasali model village located near Maungdaw in Arakan State to perform labor on a SPDC-owned rubber plantation.⁶⁸

Burma’s human rights record worsened: US report

On 11 March, the US State Department released its annual global report on human rights. According to the report, Burma remained among the world’s top 10 offenders and its “abysmal” human rights record worsened in 2007.⁶⁹ The report said:

- The regime continued to commit extrajudicial killings and was responsible for disappearances, arbitrary and indefinite detentions, rape, and torture.
- The SPDC continued to use force to prohibit all public speech critical of the regime.
- Political prisoners were routinely confined and subjected to beatings and severe mistreatment by common criminals.
- Despite promises of dialogue, the SPDC did not honor its commitment to begin a genuine dialogue with pro-democracy forces and ethnic groups.
- Defying calls from the UN Security Council and ASEAN for the early release of all political prisoners, the regime continued to detain and imprison pro-democracy leaders.⁷⁰

Freedom of information

- The SPDC Censorship Board’s director Maj Tint Swe reportedly pressured the Myanmar Nation’s publisher to turn the weekly journal into a regime mouthpiece.⁷¹
- The SPDC Censorship Board suspended publication of the weekly 7 Days News during 19-26 March for reporting on a multiple murder. On 3 March, unknown assailants fatally shot four family members and a housemaid at their residence in Kamayut Township.⁷²
- The SPDC Censorship Board prevented local media from reporting on the self-immolation of Thaw Zin Naing.⁷³ [See above *Resistance days*]
- In early March, the Myanmar Info-Tech Corporation Ltd, the only provider for licensed Internet cafés in Burma, announced a plan to compile a list of all if its customers in Burma. SPDC authorities will use the list to facilitate monitoring of internet activity.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) GB. 301/6/2 March 2008

⁶⁵ Kaladan News (07 Mar 08) Forced labor for Burmese army’s lucrative business

⁶⁶ IMNA (26 Mar 08) Mon villagers flee from abuse to southern Ye Township

⁶⁷ Kaladan News (27 Mar 08) Forced labor for drainage system in Mrauk-U

⁶⁸ Narinjara News (26 Mar 08) Forced labour in rubber plantation

⁶⁹ AFP (11 Mar 08) US drops China from list of top human rights abusers; AP (12 Mar 08) US Say Burma’s Human Rights Record Getting Worse; Mizzima News (12 Mar 08) Junta slammed; Beijing offered slight reprieve

⁷⁰ Reuters (11 Mar 08) Myanmar ‘07 crackdown worsened bad rights record: U.S.

⁷¹ Irrawaddy (05 Mar 08) Junta increases pressure on media

⁷² Mizzima News (17 Mar 08) Week’s suspension of 7 Days News journal for reporting murders; Irrawaddy (17 Mar 08) Burmese Censorship Board Threatens Two Weeklies

⁷³ DVB (25 Mar 08) Man under armed guard after setting fire to himself

⁷⁴ Irrawaddy (13 Mar 08) Stopping the Flow of Information

- The SPDC Censorship board briefly banned the work of renowned veteran journalist Ludu Sein Win, who regularly writes for the Akhwint Alan Journal and the Weekly Eleven Journal. The ban was believed to come in response to Ludu Sein Win's criticism of the military regime during an audio message recorded in early March.⁷⁵
- SPDC police raided VCD rental shops across the country to seize copies of the film "Rambo 4."⁷⁶

DISPLACEMENT

More boat people

People continued to flee oppression and discrimination in Burma in unseaworthy and over-crowded boats from Bangladesh.

- **29 February:** Forty-five Rohingya left for Malaysia from Bangladesh's Shapuri Dip aboard a fishing trawler.⁷⁷
- **2 March:** Fifty Burmese boat people were rescued 280 km northeast of Sri Lanka after 22 days at sea after their wooden trawler stalled en route to Malaysia. Seventeen died before the rescue.⁷⁸
- **8 March:** Two days after departing from a Teknaf jetty, 115 Rohingya and Bangladeshi people were missing after their boat sank.⁷⁹
- **22 March:** Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) deported five Burmese, including two children that were caught attempting to cross the Naff River.⁸⁰
- **23 March:** Teknaf police arrested seven Burmese in Teknaf who were planning to travel by boat to Malaysia.⁸¹
- **24 March:** Teknaf police arrested seven Burmese while others fled from the scene where they were preparing to depart by boat for Malaysia.⁸²
- **25 March:** BDR arrested 13 Rohingya in Cox's Bazaar. The group said that they were UNHCR recognized refugees living in camps along the border.⁸³
- **25 March:** BDR detained 70 people from Burma caught crossing the border at Teknaf.⁸⁴

The arrival of boat people continues to place a burden on receiving countries. On 28 March, Thai PM said that Thailand's navy was investigating resettling Rohingya in Thailand on a deserted island.⁸⁵

Malaysia

On 22 March, thugs from Malaysia's infamous RELA rounded up more than 500 people from Burma. Two hundred Rohingya refugees, pregnant women, and about 50 children from a UNHCR program were among those arrested.⁸⁶

More displacement along the Thai border

On 4 March, SPDC Army's Military Operations Commands 4 and 16 attacked eight villages in northern Papun District, Karen State. More than 2,000 villagers were forced to flee to the jungle. The attack was the largest against civilians in northern Karen State since the SPDC Army completed the re-supply of its camps and construction of roads at the end of 2007.⁸⁷

⁷⁵ DVB (20 Mar 08) Ludu Sein Win banned after political speech; Mizzima News (20 Mar 08) Veteran Burmese writer banned from writing again; DVB (21 Mar 08) Censors allow Ludu Sein Win to publish again

⁷⁶ Mizzima News (24 Mar 08) Burmese police search for Rambo VCD

⁷⁷ Kaladan News (01 Mar 08) More boat-people leave for Malaysia

⁷⁸ Reuters (03 Mar 08) Myanmar and Bangladesh boat people perish off Sri Lanka

⁷⁹ Narinjara News (13 Mar 08) Migrant boat sinks, 115 missing

⁸⁰ Narinjara News (25 Mar 08) BDR changes tactics against Burmese Muslims

⁸¹ Kaladan News (24 Mar 08) Seven Burmese nationals arrested from Bangla-Burma border

⁸² Kaladan News (25 Mar 08) Seven more Burmese nationals arrested

⁸³ Narinjara News (24 Mar 08) 13 Burmese Nationals Arrested in Bangladesh

⁸⁴ Narinjara News (28 Mar 08) Seventy Burmese nationals arrested in Bangladesh

⁸⁵ Bangkok Post (29 Mar 08) Samak wants Rohingya put on an island

⁸⁶ Irrawaddy (24 Mar 08) Hundreds of Burmese Migrants Rounded Up in Malaysia

⁸⁷ Free Burma Rangers (08 Mar 08) Report: Over 2,100 displaced as Burma Army Mortars Villages and Burns Homes in New Attacks

On 26 March, the Thailand Burma Burma Consortium (TBBC) said that rising commodity prices, the strengthening of the Thai baht, and budgetary constraints were forcing cuts in food rations and other aid to more than 140,000 Burmese refugees in Thailand.⁸⁸

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SPDC spurns Gambari – again

On 6 March, UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari arrived in Burma for a five-day official visit.⁸⁹ During his visit, Gambari met with junta officials, including members of the SPDC-appointed constitutional referendum commission, and SPDC Information Minister Brig Gen Kyaw Hsan.⁹⁰ As with his previous visit, Gambari was unable to secure a meeting with SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe.⁹¹

In his meeting with Gambari, Kyaw Hsan outright rejected UN requests for reopening the constitutional drafting process to make it more inclusive and to engage in more substantive political dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.⁹² Kyaw Hsan accused Gambari of “bias” and “act[ing] outside [his] role as mediator” by releasing a statement from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in November.⁹³ [See *November 2007 Burma Bulletin*] Kyaw San also expressed unhappiness with Gambari’s trips to other countries in the region and warned that his role as an “impartial adviser” would be brought into question if he continued to listen to suggestions from Western nations.⁹⁴

On 8 March, Gambari met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD executives.⁹⁵ Gambari told the NLD leaders that they should grab any opportunities offered by the junta.⁹⁶ On 10 March Gambari met with Daw Aung Suu Kyi for a second time before leaving Burma.⁹⁷ On 18 March, he briefed the UN Security Council on his latest mission to Burma and offered a blunt assessment: “It is a source of disappointment that this latest visit did not yield any immediate tangible outcome.”⁹⁸

Thai PM Samak and SPDC cozy up

On 14 March, Thai PM Samak Sundaravej made a good will visit to Burma, his first since taking office. Upon his return, Samak’s controversial defense of the Burmese generals on the grounds that they were “good Buddhists” because “they meditated” caused widespread dismay in Thai society and compelled ASEAN Sec-Gen Surin Pitsuwan to intervene.⁹⁹

With the focus of the visit squarely on economic aid and cooperation, Samak made clear Thailand’s intention to continue former Thai PM Thaksin’s business-first, good-neighbor policy with the SPDC. Samak met with SPDC officials, including SPDC Sr Gen Than Shwe.¹⁰⁰

- Samak and SPDC PM Thein Sein witnessed the signing of an investment accord aimed at protecting Thai investors in Burma and helping to boost foreign investment in Thailand.

⁸⁸ AP (26 Mar 08) Soaring rice prices force drastic cuts in food aid to Myanmar refugees

⁸⁹ AFP (06 Mar 08) UN envoy arrives in Myanmar to push for reforms

⁹⁰ AP (07 Mar 08) Myanmar rejects reform calls from UN; Irrawaddy (07 Mar 08) Gambari to meet NLD on Saturday; AFP (08 Mar 08) UN envoy meets Myanmar vote chief: officials; CNA (09 Mar 08) UN envoy extends Myanmar mission after vote setback

⁹¹ AP (10 Mar 08) UN envoy meets with Myanmar democracy leader Suu Kyi, but junta chief shuns him; AFP (10 Mar 08) UN envoy meets Myanmar ministers amid rebuffs

⁹² AP (07 Mar 08) Myanmar rejects reform calls from UN

⁹³ AFP (08 Mar 08) Myanmar accuses UN envoy of favoring Aung San Suu Kyi

⁹⁴ AP (07 Mar 08) Myanmar rejects reform calls from UN; RFA (07 Mar 08) U.N. rejects Burma’s slap at special envoy

⁹⁵ AP (09 Mar 08) UN special envoy to Myanmar meets Suu Kyi after rebuff by government; AFP (06 Mar 08) UN envoy arrives in Myanmar to push for reforms; Xinhua (06 Mar 08) U.N. special envoy meets Myanmar FM

⁹⁶ AP (08 Mar 08) UN Myanmar Meets Suu Kyi

⁹⁷ Reuters (11 Mar 08) U.N. envoy leaves Myanmar as fails to convince junta

⁹⁸ Mizzima News (19 Mar 08) Gambari still hopeful after Burma visit failed to yield results

⁹⁹ Irrawaddy (19 Mar 08) Asean Chief warns Thai PM about Burma; Bangkok Post (19 Mar 08) ASEAN secretary-general Surin advises Samak on Burma attitude

¹⁰⁰ Xinhua (14 Mar 08) Thai PM arrives Myanmar for goodwill visit; Mizzima News (14 Mar 08) Thailand’s Premier meets Burmese junta supreme

- The SPDC requested assistance from Thailand on its planned deep sea port project at Tavoy, Tenasserim Division,¹⁰¹ and agreed to re-open talks with Thailand on the purchase of gas from its Yadana gas field.¹⁰²
- On 15 March, Thai FM Noppadon Pattama confirmed that Thailand will push ahead with the Tasang Dam in Shan State.¹⁰³

On 20 March, Thai FM Noppadon Pattama expressed Thailand's opposition to western financial sanctions during an official visit to the US. He spoke of engagement with the SPDC "as a friend," and suggested that as ASEAN's next chair Thailand could do more to push the SPDC to change.¹⁰⁴

ECONOMY

Economic failure continues in 2008

The SPDC has failed to address the pressures that brought about economic crises of 2007 and the economy was showing the strain in March.

- Businesses have been struggling to keep up with rising costs. Since 27 February, the SPDC has cracked down on illegal trading of black-market fuel which has reportedly led to a 13% increase in black market prices. A gallon of gasoline has gone from 4,400 kyat (US\$4) to 5,000 kyat (\$4.50), and a gallon of diesel from 4,600 kyat (\$4.20) to 5,200 kyat (\$4.70).¹⁰⁵
- Prices have also increased for foreign trading companies who must now pay the semi-official rate of \$4.00 a gallon for diesel, up from \$3.52 on 27 February. This rate is only available to businesses which hold foreign currency accounts at the Myanmar Foreign Trading Bank.¹⁰⁶
- In an effort to appease people and businesses named on the US sanctions lists, the SPDC approved the opening of Singapore dollar currency accounts at the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank and Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank.¹⁰⁷
- Burma analyst Sean Turnell predicted that the SPDC would be more financially pressed in 2008 due to the lack of tourists, slowing tax revenues, postponed foreign investments, global liquidity and credit problems.¹⁰⁸ SPDC-controlled media reported that tourism almost halved in the three months following the Saffron Revolution.¹⁰⁹
- The Brookings Institute's annual "Failed State" index ranked Burma as the 17th weakest state in the world, one of five countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa with the label of "critically weak". Burma received the second-poorest overall "political" score, trailing only Somalia. It received the lowest possible scores for "voice and accountability" and "freedom" while coming in third worst for "corruption."¹¹⁰

Gems auction

From 9 to 20 March, the Myanmar Gems Enterprise held their second gem auction of 2008.¹¹¹ The SPDC hoped to sell more than 7,700 lots of precious stones with an approximate value of US\$153 million.¹¹² It is unclear how successful the event was in bringing the SPDC much-needed revenue. On

¹⁰¹ Xinhua (15 Mar 08) Thailand, Myanmar sign investment protection agreement

¹⁰² Nation (15 Mar 08) Thailand to tell other countries Burma's message : PM

¹⁰³ DPA (16 Mar 08) Thai premier praises Myanmar as peaceful and orderly – Summary

¹⁰⁴ AFP (20 Mar 08) Thailand to use 'quiet diplomacy' to make Myanmar democratic; Xinhua (21 Mar 08) Thailand opposes U.S. sanction against Myanmar

¹⁰⁵ Irrawaddy (06 Mar 08) Black market crackdown driving up fuel prices

¹⁰⁶ Irrawaddy (06 Mar 08) Black market crackdown driving up fuel prices

¹⁰⁷ Irrawaddy (08 Mar 08) Burma Authorizes Singapore Dollar Accounts at Banks

¹⁰⁸ Irrawaddy (01 Mar 08) Junta's Piggy Bank Full as Economy Sinks

¹⁰⁹ Reuters (14 Mar 08) Crackdown fallout hits Myanmar tourism hard

¹¹⁰ Brookings Institute (Mar 08) Index of State weakness in the Developing World

¹¹¹ Xinhua (11 Mar 08) Around 3,000 foreign merchants attends Myanmar gems emporium

¹¹² AFP (11 Mar 08) Myanmar auctions 153m dollars of jade, gems: organizers

the opening day only 47 lots were sold.¹¹³ In contrast to the 3,000 anticipated participants, only 281 foreign buyers reportedly attended.¹¹⁴

SPDC increases hardship for struggling farmers

Rather than providing assistance to struggling farmers, the SPDC has placed bans on bean export licenses until May 2008. The sale price has subsequently fallen from 5,000 kyat to between 3,500 and 4,000 kyat per kilo. The low bean prices coupled with a poor harvest have hit farmers hard in Tharawaddy Township, Pegu Division. Farms that previously produced 120 kilos per acre in 2008 have only harvested 20 to 25 kilos due to unseasonable rains.¹¹⁵

Thailand wheels and deals with the junta

While Thailand and the SPDC signed trade and investment deals with the junta, Thai corporations continued to benefit from the “good neighborly relations.” [See above *Thai PM Samak and SPDC cozy up*]

- Thai satellite operator ShinSat signed two five-year contracts worth US\$5 million with Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) for satellite broadband capacity.¹¹⁶
- Thailand’s Loxley Plc plans to launch the first convenience store in Burma in partnership with junta crony Dagon Win Aung.¹¹⁷

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN MARCH

1	Na Sa Ka shoots dead a cattle trader in Aley Than Kyaw village in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.
2	More than 30 police officers in Pegu Township are arrested for leaking information on a raid on illegal lottery sellers.
3	SPDC authorities in Akyab, Arakan State, briefly detain historian Aung Hla Thein.
3	SPDC Army soldiers from Infantry Battalion No. 31 shoot dead a 30-year-old woman who is tapping rubber sap in Ye Township, Mon State.
4	Chinese power producer Datang Group General Manager Zhai Ruoyu says that they will take a controlling stake in a hydropower project in Burma.
4	45 Mon IDPs are diagnosed with cholera in Ananbon village, Ye Township.
5	SPDC officials arrive in Taunggoat, Arakan State, to investigate individuals who filed complaints with the International Labor Organization about forced labor.
6	Monk U Awbata calls for a global weapons embargo on Burma.
6	UK accuses the SPDC of paying lip service to international calls for democratic reforms.
7	Activists in Indonesia denounce the SPDC’s constitutional referendum as “illegitimate” and call on ASEAN to reject it.
7	India and SPDC officials begin the 14 th round of Home Secretary level talks.
8	Outbreak of chicken pox kills four toddlers in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State.
8	Maungdaw Township Chairman Myint Maung arrests mosque committee member for renovating a mosque without permission.
8	A 40-year-old villager from Mone Township, Pegu Division, is injured after stepping on a landmine.
8	SPDC Army’s Western Command Commander Maung Shien orders SPDC authorities of four Townships in Arakan State to recruit 400 youths for military training.
8	Than Shwe’s daughter Thandar Shwe visits the Myanmar Furniture Fair in Rangoon and takes away furniture worth about US\$ 10,000 without payment.
9	Philippines President Gloria Arroyo condemns SPDC rejection of independent poll monitors.
10	NLD women’s wing celebrates International Women’s Day at the party headquarters in Rangoon.
10	Shan singer Sai Htee Saing dies in Rangoon.
10	Shan State Army - South forces in Mong Keung Township, Southern Shan State, clash with an SPDC Army patrol.

¹¹³ NLM (12 Mar 08) 47 gem lots sold at Myanma Gems Emporium

¹¹⁴ AFP (11 Mar 08) Myanmar auctions 153m dollars of jade, gems: organizers; Irrawaddy (12 Mar 08) Burmese Gems Losing Their Luster?

¹¹⁵ DVB (18 Mar 08) Bean farmers hit by poor harvest and low prices

¹¹⁶ Telecomasia (06 Mar 08) Shinsat wins two 5-year contracts in Myanmar

¹¹⁷ Irrawaddy (19 Mar 08) Thailand’s Business Plan for Burma

10	US Ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad and UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon express disappointment at the SPDC's refusal to take steps toward democracy
11	US Senate Women's Caucus on Burma sends a letter to UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari regarding the plight of women and girls in Burma.
12	Detained journalist Win Tin urges the SPDC to convene the Parliament.
13	About 400 Burmese nationals march in Tokyo demanding the release of political detainees in Burma.
13	SPDC steps up security in Rangoon on the 20 th anniversary of the killing of 23-year-old engineering student Phone Maw.
14	NLD criticizes the SPDC for not making public the proposed constitution.
14	Thai FM Samak says that Thailand disagrees with sanctions on Burma and is willing to help with the May referendum as a "friendly country".
16	Thai PM Samak describes killings and suppression of civilians in Burma as "normal."
16	A 27-year-old villager from Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division, is injured after stepping on a landmine.
17	Seven migrant workers from Burma shot in Imphal, Manipur.
17	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari briefs UN General Assembly President Srgian Kerim on his trip to Burma.
17	Vietnam UN Ambassador Le Luong Minh says that Vietnam supports the UN's role in resolving Burma's issues.
18	Four migrant workers from Burma murdered in Manipur.
18	SPDC Censorship Board allows the publication of Myanmar Nation to resume.
18	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari briefs UN Sec Gen Ban Ki-moon and the 'Group of Friends' on his trip to Burma.
18	US asks the UN Security Council to pressure the SPDC to allow international election observers for a constitutional referendum planned for May.
19	A 38-year-old villager loses his left foot after stepping on a landmine in Papun Township, Karen State.
20	ILO calls on the SPDC to make public statements reconfirming the prohibition of any form of forced labor and their ongoing commitment to the enforcement of that policy.
20	Maungdaw Township chairman Myint Maung is dismissed from his post for sexually abusing a female clerk.
21	SPDC authorities arrest two civilians and a monk in Rangoon for criticizing the performance of the fire brigade during a blaze in Lanmadaw Township.
21	A soldier from SPDC Army LIB 515 rapes a 17-year-old girl in her home in Shan State. Other soldiers beat and rob villagers that attempt to intervene.
26	88 Generation Students group and All Burma Monks' Alliance issue a joint statement criticizing UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari.
26	Police in Bawli Bazaar camp in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, arrest and torture a 21-year-old local villager for allegedly going to Bangladesh.
26	Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Thai PM Samak say that both countries support the SPDC's road map to democracy.
26	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari says that the SPDC is looking at the Indonesian model for its planned transition to civilian rule.
27	Refugees International calls on the US to increase its support for independent humanitarian aid in Burma.
27	Unknown assailants beat Human Rights Defenders and Promoters' founder Myint Aye in Rangoon's Sanchaung Township.
27	SPDC leader Sr Gen Than Shwe says that civilians will take the reins of government after elections in 2010.
28	NLD spokesman Myint Thein dies at a hospital in Singapore.
31	MI and special branch raid the Myanmar Muslim Council's office in Maungdaw and arrest 10 members.
31	Senior Chinese and SPDC military officials meet in Laiza, Kachin State, to discuss security on the Sino-Burma border.
31	SPDC and Bangladeshi officials meet to discuss maritime boundary issues.

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