

BURMA BULLETIN

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- On 3 May, the category three cyclone Nargis hits the Irrawaddy delta and Rangoon. The SPDC fails to prepare, despite receiving many warnings. As of 31 May, the death toll stands at over 133,000.
- Prices of food and basic commodities skyrocket. An estimated 1.6 million hectares of Burma's most productive rice fields are destroyed.
- Monks intervene by distributing food and providing accommodation for 70% of homeless survivors.
- Despite assurances to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the SPDC blocks international assistance by delaying visas to aid workers and preventing access to the worst-hit areas.
- The SPDC appropriates aid, forces survivors to work and pay for donated items.
- Despite calls from pro-democracy forces and the international community to focus on relief operations in the areas hit by cyclone Nargis, the regime pushes ahead with its constitutional referendum on 10 and 24 May.
- SPDC conducts the referendum in an overall climate of intimidation. In May, the regime arrests 67 people for opposing the SPDC's constitution, bringing to 124 the total of "No" vote supporters arrested since March. Widespread voting irregularities and fraud are reported in most of Burma's States and Divisions.
- The referendum results provide conclusive evidence that it is a sham. The SPDC announces that 92.4% of voters approved the constitution, with a turnout of 98.1%.
- SPDC extends the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The ongoing crackdown on the NLD continues. In May, the regime detains at least 34 party members.

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KEY STORY

Cyclone Nargis hits¹

On 3 May, the category three cyclone Nargis hit the Irrawaddy delta and Rangoon with wind speeds reaching 190 km/h.² The SPDC declared a state of emergency across five regions: Rangoon, Irrawaddy, Pegu Divisions; Karen and Mon States. The total population of the disaster area is approximately 24 million.³

¹ More details on Cyclone Nargis and its aftermath available in the briefers "DISASTER" (BN2008/1042), covering 3-9 May, and "SPDC TURNS DISASTER INTO CATASTROPHE" (BN 2008/1043), covering 9-23 May, available at www.altsean.org

² BBC Burmese Service (03 May 08) Cyclone hits Rangoon

³ UN News Center (07 May 08) UN calls on Myanmar to facilitate aid delivery to cyclone victims; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Junta May Seek International Aid; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000

SPDC downplays death toll

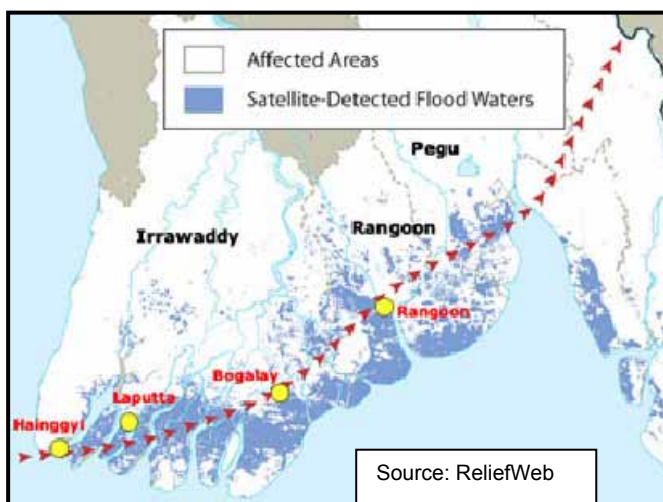
The SPDC initially reported that the cyclone killed 350 people.⁴ On 16 May, the SPDC said that 77,738 persons had died, 55,917 were missing, and 19,359 sustained injuries.⁵ The SPDC's figures stood in stark contrast to those of aid agencies. The International Federation of the Red Cross put the death toll between 68,833 and 127,990.⁶ An estimated 40% of the dead or missing were believed to be children.⁷ The UN estimated that 2.4 million people were affected by the cyclone.⁸

SPDC fails to warn or prepare population

From 26 April, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in Bangkok issued multiple cyclone warnings to the SPDC. From 30 April, the IMD updated the junta every three hours about the cyclone.⁹ The junta mouthpiece New Light of Myanmar's "Storm news" section predicted "widespread rain or thundershowers" with winds reaching 110 kilometers per hour.¹⁰ State media warnings failed to tell people how to prepare when the cyclone hit land, and villagers were provided with no instructions or assistance to evacuate.¹¹ "Looking at the number of deaths, it leads us to think that an early warning system had not been put in place," said a spokesperson for the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.¹²

The SPDC's propaganda machine went into overdrive in order to keep people the dark about the true magnitude of the tragedy unleashed by cyclone Nargis. The junta portrayed itself as being fully in control of the relief effort in its own publications. Its censorship board prevented local media from traveling to the delta, covering the suffering of cyclone victims or carrying unofficial death tolls.¹³

- On 19 May, SPDC Army soldiers from Light Infantry Division 66 arrested eight local journalists who had allegedly failed to inform authorities of their presence in Labutta Township.¹⁴
- On 13 May, in an SPDC orchestrated media event, SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein visited Labutta, where 100 blue-colored tents had been erected. Media coverage failed to show the tens of thousands of survivors without any shelter.¹⁵
- The SPDC refused to issue entry visas to foreign journalists.¹⁶ The SPDC deported two British correspondents and banned Swedish journalist Bertil Lintner.¹⁷ SPDC military intelligence officials kept hotels popular with journalists in Rangoon under constant surveillance.¹⁸



⁴ BBC Burmese Service (04 May 08) 350 killed in Burma cyclone

⁵ NLM (16 May 08) Latest casualty figures

⁶ AP (15 May 08) Myanmar cyclone death toll soars above 43,000; Reuters (15 May 08) UN says up to 2.5 million affected in Myanmar cyclone

⁷ CNA (08 May 08) Myanmar survivors emerge desperate for help

⁸ OCHA (20 May 08) Cyclone Nargis - Myanmar - OCHA Situation Report No. 16

⁹ Times (06 May 08) India says it warned Burma about cyclone; Mizzima News (06 May 08) Burma knew of cyclone nearly a week before it hit

¹⁰ NLM (02 May 08) "Storm News"

¹¹ AP (03 May 08) Myanmar warns of strong winds, high tides as Cyclone Nargis heads toward coast; Mizzima News (06 May 08) Burma knew of cyclone nearly a week before it hit

¹² AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says cyclone death toll tops 15,000

¹³ DVB (17 May 08) Reporters banned from photographing storm damage; Mizzima News (20 May 08) Weekly journals ordered not to cover "destruction", but cover "reconstruction"; Irrawaddy (13 May 08) Danger: Getting the Truth Out of Burma; RSF (06 May 08) Burma - Military government urged to issue press visas to foreign media; CPJ (14 May 08) Burma: Authorities restrict Cyclone Nargis news coverage; Mizzima News (12 May 08) Burmese journals face restrictions on cyclone coverage

¹⁴ Irrawaddy (21 May 08) 8 Burmese journalists arrested in Laputta

¹⁵ Irrawaddy (17 May 08) With the refugees in Laputta

¹⁶ IPS (13 May 08) Foreigners, Cameras Banned in Cyclone-Hit Areas; CPJ (14 May 08) Burma: Authorities restrict Cyclone Nargis news coverage

- The regime tapped some journalists' telephones and threatened others.¹⁹
- On 7 May, SPDC authorities turned back a relief flight from Qatar because it had an unauthorized "media group" on board.²¹

Situation "normal" according to the SPDC

The prices of food and other basic commodities skyrocketed after the cyclone.²² Aid workers and residents waited in line for hours to buy gasoline to fuel generators and cars.²³ People were unable to repair their houses due to shortages of materials in stores.²⁴ SPDC Information Minister Kyaw Hsan said military personnel were "doing their best." However, in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, SPDC soldiers were reportedly only clearing streets where top military officials resided.²⁵ In the face of an escalating humanitarian crisis, on 7 May state-run television quoted SPDC Rangoon official Gen Tha Aye as saying the situation was "returning to normal."²⁶

Prices (in kyat, US\$1=1,100 kyat) ²⁰	Before Nargis	After Nargis
Rice/kg	500	1,500
Egg	300	400
Pork/kg	2,761	3,067
Shrimp/kg	3,750	8,125
Cooking oil/liter	1,840	8,000
Cooking charcoal	4,000	7,000
Cooking gas 25 liter	20,000	25,000
Pack of candles	500	1,000
Gas/gallon	4,200	10,000
Diesel/gallon	4,500	18,000
Bus fare	200	500
water/liter	250	500
Zinc roofing	4,000	8,000
Iron nails/kg	940	3,125

While people die, SPDC blocks, steals, and sells aid

Despite the urgent need for aid workers to reach disaster-affected areas, the SPDC obstructed the work of humanitarian agencies, refused to issue visas to aid workers, prevented aid from reaching survivors, and attempted to profit from aid deliveries.

- The SPDC set up roadblocks on the main roads to the Irrawaddy delta regions to block foreign aid workers from accessing the worst affected areas.²⁷ Local NGOs and individuals had to negotiate and bribe their way into the area.²⁸
- By 22 May, no foreign UN relief worker had been allowed to visit the delta, and hundreds of requests for visas were piling up at embassies. Following talks with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Sr Gen Than Shwe promised that "all" foreign aid workers would be granted access. However, by 28 May only seven foreign UN relief workers had made it out of Rangoon.²⁹
- The SPDC showed particular concern over donated items that could be used to access the delta or communicate with the outside world.³⁰ All telephones had to be bought from the SPDC Ministry of Posts and Communications for the price of \$1,500 each, for a maximum of ten phones for agency.³¹

¹⁷ CPJ (14 May 08) Burma: Authorities restrict Cyclone Nargis news coverage; RSF (06 May 08) Burma - Military government urged to issue press visas to foreign media; Mizzima News (06 May 08) BBC reporter deported from airport by junta; AP (26 May 08) Burma bans top Western journalist, deports another

¹⁸ Irrawaddy (13 May 08) Danger: Getting the Truth Out of Burma

¹⁹ Irrawaddy (13 May 08) Danger: Getting the Truth Out of Burma

²⁰ AAP (13 May 08) Aussie aid to arrive in Burma today; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Junta May Seek International Aid; Mizzima News (05 May 08) Dead bodies laying in the streets of Day Da Ye: Eyewitness Account; Irrawaddy (04 May 08) Commodity Prices Rise in Devastated Rangoon; Irrawaddy (06 May 08) Residents Say 22 Villages Destroyed in Laputta Township; Mizzima News (04 May 08) Gas prices spiral to all-time high; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Junta May Seek International Aid; IMNA (07 May 08) Residents restrict travel due to rising bus fares; Mizzima News (05 May 08) Dead bodies laying in the streets of Day Da Ye: Eyewitness Account; Mizzima News (07 May 08) Most Rangoon journals closed after cyclone Aussie aid to arrive in Burma today; Mizzima News (24 May 08) Fish safe for consumption: Doctors

²¹ NLM (09 May 08) Myanmar receiving emergency relief provisions, making strenuous efforts to transport them without delay to affected areas

²² Mizzima News (04 May 08) Gas prices spiral to all-time high

²³ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; Mizzima News (06 May 08) Security agencies put on high alert for referendum

²⁴ Mizzima News (04 May 08) Water shortage in Rangoon, People rush to buy basic needs

²⁵ Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Nearly 4,000 People Dead; 3,000 People Missing

²⁶ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

²⁷ AFP (07 May 08) Fears for millions as Myanmar blocks aid workers; AP (16 May 08) Myanmar's junta confines foreigners to Yangon; Nation (15 May 08) Millions of refugees at risk of disease; AP (16 May 08) UN Says Nobody Knows Full Extent of Cyclone Disaster

²⁸ Irrawaddy (16 May 08) Local Heroes Emerge to Help Cyclone Victims; DVB (19 May 08) Villager describes situation in Kunchangone

²⁹ Reuters (29 May 08) Myanmar grants visas but access to delta still slow; AP (24 May 08) Aid Agencies Cautiously Welcome Burma Pledge

³⁰ OCHA (17 May 08) Cyclone Nargis - Myanmar - OCHA Situation Report No. 13; Wall Street Journal (29 May 08) Aid agencies push Myanmar for more access to quake area

- On 9 May, the SPDC seized the WFP's first two planeloads of food.³² The WFP immediately responded by suspending flights, but resumed them the next day saying the scale of the humanitarian crisis necessitated sending the aid even if they could not control its distribution.³³
- Displaced survivors had their supplies confiscated,³⁴ were given spoiled or poor-quality food instead of nutrition-rich biscuits sent by international donors,³⁵ were charged for relief items,³⁶ or were told that they had to vote "Yes" in the constitutional referendum in order to receive aid.³⁷
- Aid packages delivered to survivors in donation ceremonies carried the stamp of the junta over the label of the original donor.³⁸
- Instead of providing basic relief items, the SPDC donated TV, DVD and VCD players to cyclone survivors in Bassein and Hlinethaya Townships, Irrawaddy Division.³⁹
- SPDC authorities used the cyclone disaster as a pretext for extorting money, food and cattle from people in several townships in Pegu Division⁴⁰ and in Shan,⁴¹ Arakan,⁴² Chin,⁴³ and Mon States.⁴⁴
- Foreign-donated food and shelter items were found on sale.⁴⁵ Rangoon shopkeepers reported that SPDC army trucks delivered rice and oil from international donors for resale in markets.⁴⁶
- Monks, NLD members, local celebrities, and ordinary people loaded their cars with supplies and drove to deliver aid to survivors in Rangoon and throughout the delta.⁴⁷ SPDC officials prevented them from talking to cyclone survivors and ordered them to leave the supplies with soldiers for distribution.⁴⁸ Others were threatened, intimidated, and detained. An NLD member was arrested.⁴⁹
- SPDC officials instructed aid agencies not to cooperate with monks' efforts.⁵⁰ The regime also distributed leaflets to citizens discouraging them from helping, and suggested that giving food may make victims "lazy and more dependent on others."⁵¹

³¹ OCHA (17 May 08) Cyclone Nargis - Myanmar - OCHA Situation Report No. 13; IHT (28 May 08) Even with access, distributing aid in Myanmar is difficult

³² New York Times (09 May 08) U.N. resuming aid to Myanmar after dispute with junta

³³ Asia Times (14 May 08) Why Myanmar's junta steals foreign aid

³⁴ DVB (19 May 08) Villager describes situation in Kunchangone

³⁵ AP (13 May 08) Most Cyclone Victims Without Relief; Regime Accused of Stealing Aid; AP (15 May 08) Myanmar cyclone death toll soars above 43,000; DVB (21 May 08) Cyclone victims suspect officials of switching aid; DVB (19 May 08) Villager describes situation in Kunchangone

³⁶ DVB (17 May 08) Cyclone survivors forced to work and pay for aid; Irrawaddy (07 May 08) Monks aid survivors, authorities sell rooftops; DVB (13 May 08) Relief supplies appropriated by officials in Bogalay; DVB (13 May 08) Nargis cyclone: eyewitness account of an aid worker in Bogalay/Bogale; DVB (08 May 08) USDA claims credit for disaster relief efforts

³⁷ Irrawaddy (12 May 08) Rangoon struggles to survive; DVB (17 May 08) Cyclone survivors forced to work and pay for food

³⁸ Nation (15 May 08) Millions of refugees at risk of disease; Asia Times (14 May 08) Why Myanmar's junta steals foreign aid

³⁹ NLM (07 May 08) Prime Minister General Thein Sein inspects Nargis-hit areas, provides relief supplies to storm victims; NLM (13 May 08) Arrangements made to accommodate victims in foreign-donated tents

⁴⁰ DVB (28 May 08) Local authorities skim money off farm subsidies

⁴¹ SHAN (15 May 08) Market sellers forced to donate for Cyclone Nargis victims; SHAN (26 May 08) Shan State assigned 500 cows, buffaloes to aid Nargis victims

⁴² Narinjara (29 May 08) Cattle from Arakan state sent to Nargis victim; Narinjara News (22 May 08) Arakanese Township to raise 30 million Kyat for Nargis victims ; Kaladan News (24 May 08) Forcible collection of money for cyclone fund in Arakan; Narinjara News (30 May 08) 300 Buffaloes to be Purchased for Irrawaddy Farmers

⁴³ Reuters (24 May 08) Cyclone increases army looting on Myanmar borders

⁴⁴ IMNA (21 May 08) Seeds being collected for Irrawaddy where no paddy can be grown now; Narinjara News (20 May 08) Paddy Seed from Arakan Sent to Delta

⁴⁵ DVB (21 May 08) Locals claim Rangoon authorities still misappropriating aid; Mizzima (16 May 08) Aid supplies resold in markets, junta issues warning; Mizzima News (14 May 08) Mockery of human tragedy; relief supplies on sale; Irrawaddy (15 May 08) A trickle of aid reaches survivors; Mizzima (16 May 08) Aid supplies resold in markets, junta issues warning; DVB (19 May 08) Villager describes situation in Kunchangone; Irrawaddy (19 May 08) Not Much Aid Reaching Laputta Victims

⁴⁶ DVB (17 May 08) Rangoon resident claims military selling aid supplies

⁴⁷ Irrawaddy (23 May 08) Local People Respond to Call for Aid; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Cyclone could unleash political upheaval; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Aid Agencies Struggle to Assess Burma Cyclone Damage; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Nearly 4,000 People Dead; 3,000 People Missing; Irrawaddy (07 May 08) Monks aid survivors, authorities sell rooftops; DVB (05 May 08) Rangoon residents suffer in cyclone aftermath; Irrawaddy (07 May 08) Monks aid survivors, authorities sell rooftops; Irrawaddy (07 May 08) Rangoon Struggling to Restore Utilities; DVB (08 May 08) NLD offers to help distribute cyclone aid

⁴⁸ BBC (21 May 08) Burmese dodge junta to supply aid; DVB (19 May 08) Villager describes situation in Kunchangone; DVB (21 May 08) Phyu Phyu Thin and team help remote villagers; DVB (21 May 08) Joint relief efforts in Irrawaddy Delta; Irrawaddy (16 May 08) Local Heroes Emerge to Help Cyclone Victims; Irrawaddy (20 May 08) Leading monks send money, aid to refugees, Star (16 May 08) Response to killer cyclone highlights the animosity between the country's military and Buddhist clergy; DVB (20 May 08) Monks and celebrities step up relief efforts

⁴⁹ New York Times (23 May 08) Junta offers showcase camps, but most Burmese lack aid; The Times (UK) (23 May 08) Britain's aid millions channelled through tycoon with ties to Burmese junta; Mizzima News (27 May 08) Over 70 cars impounded after distribution of relief material; DVB (27 May 08) Private aid trucks seized by police; AP (28 May 08) Myanmar's cyclone survivors bullied by military; forced to work, return to demolished homes; Mizzima News (30 May 08) Private donors given free access to cyclone victims; Irrawaddy (30 May 08) Burmese Celebrities Try to Help Survivors; DVB (26 May 08) Donors detained after aid distribution; DVB (15 May 08) Storm victims arrested and driven out from shelters

⁵⁰ DVB (16 May 08) Monks prevented from working with other donors

Monks shelter survivors, SPDC forces refugees out of shelter

According to an assessment, monks sheltered 70% of survivors were sheltered in monasteries and bore the main burden for their care.⁵² The SPDC attempted to move people out of monasteries in Labutta and Bogale, reportedly fearing that large numbers of people in monasteries could lead to further dissent.⁵³ By 30 May, the SPDC had managed, with threats of violence, to empty camps established in Bogale and Labutta.⁵⁴ A UNICEF spokesperson accused the SPDC of “dumping” survivors near devastated villages with virtually no aid supplies.⁵⁵

- SPDC authorities told displaced survivors in Bogale that they would have to return to their villages to make room for paid “fake refugees” who would provide “interviews” for UN inspections.⁵⁶
- The SPDC forced 9,200 survivors in Wakema Township relief camps to return to their villages by 24 May.⁵⁷
- In Rangoon, SPDC official ordered more than 5,000 cyclone survivors sheltered in monasteries, churches, and schools to return to their ruined homes to make way for the 24 May referendum.⁵⁸
- On 27 May, SPDC authorities forced survivors at gunpoint to leave a hospital in Bassein District, Irrawaddy Division, and return to their villages.⁵⁹
- SPDC authorities in Rangoon’s Dawpon Township ordered survivors to leave, and threatened to prosecute home owners who sheltered survivors.⁶⁰
- The SPDC cleared out 39 camps around Kyauktan near Rangoon.⁶¹

Aid trickles in

On 6 May, international aid began to trickle into Burma.⁶² The UN launched a flash appeal for US\$201 million. By 28 May US\$81.2 million had been contributed.⁶³ Aid agencies battled to secure increasing donations even as the regime, notorious for being the most corrupt in the world, obstructed their work and blocked access to affected areas. The WFP estimated that the daily aid volume was about one third of what was needed.⁶⁴

- By 28 May, the WFP estimated that only 485,000 people (or 20%) of the estimated 2.4 million affected by the cyclone had received their first ration of food.⁶⁵ The SPDC still hadn’t permitted the WFP to import basic food items.⁶⁶
- Asian countries had an easier time gaining access.⁶⁷ On 6 May, a Thai military transport plane unloaded 30 tons of medical supplies and 12 tons of food and basic necessities at Rangoon International Airport.⁶⁸ 150 medical experts from Asia have arrived in Burma with supplies.⁶⁹

⁵¹ The Telegraph (UK) (20 May 08) Burma cyclone: World Bank refuses loan claiming junta is in debt; Irrawaddy (23 May 08) Authorities tighten restrictions on private aid efforts

⁵² Myanmar Cyclone Nargis Information Center (17 May 08) Rapid assessment of cyclone Nargis affected areas in Myanmar

⁵³ Star (16 May 08) Response to killer cyclone highlights the animosity between the country’s military and Buddhist clergy; DVB (12 May 08) Refugees forcibly removed from monasteries in Bogalay

⁵⁴ BBC (30 May 08) UN condemns Burma ‘camp closures’; AP (30 May 08) UN Confirms Cyclone Refugees Forced Back to Devastated Villages; Bangkok Post (30 May 08) UN warns Burma it is endangering its citizens; DVB (13 May 08) Cyclone refugees in Bogalay forced to relocate; DVB (14 May 08) Villager describes latest situation in Bogalay

⁵⁵ BBC (30 May 08) UN condemns Burma ‘camp closures’; AP (30 May 08) UN Confirms Cyclone Refugees Forced Back to Devastated Villages; Bangkok Post (30 May 08) UN warns Burma it is endangering its citizens

⁵⁶ DVB (21 May 08) Junta pays ‘fake refugees’ to pose as cyclone victims; Irrawaddy (21 May 08) Cyclone survivors don’t want UN chief to visit Delta; New York Times (23 May 08) Junta offers showcase camps, but most Burmese lack aid; Irrawaddy (24 May 08) Cyclone survivors forcibly evicted

⁵⁷ Irrawaddy (24 May 08) Cyclone survivors forcibly evicted

⁵⁸ Guardian (12 May 08) Refugees living in village school face eviction; Irrawaddy (15 May 08) Cyclone Survivors Told to Return to Shattered Homes; DVB (21 May 08) Kaw Hmoo cyclone victims forced out of camps; Irrawaddy (29 May 08) Massive Forced Evictions in Refugee Camps

⁵⁹ DVB (27 May 08) Forced returns raise tensions in Irrawaddy

⁶⁰ DVB (14 May 08) Refugees driven out of Dawpon township

⁶¹ ABC (30 May 08) Burma begins mass evictions from cyclone camps

⁶² Reuters (06 May 08) Hundreds of thousands need help in Myanmar: U.N.; AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000

⁶³ OCHA (29 May 08) Myanmar: Cyclone Nargis Situation Report No. 24

⁶⁴ Wall Street Journal (19 May 08) Myanmar slowly opens door for international donations

⁶⁵ DMHA (29 May 08) Cyclone Nargis Update

⁶⁶ DMHA (29 May 08) Cyclone Nargis Update

- Private donors reported that while aid had reached Labutta and Bogale, the villagers in surrounding areas were becoming increasingly desperate.⁷⁰ In South Dagon Township, residents rioted, demanding local authorities release donated food and shelter items.⁷¹
- The US, France, and the UK deployed aid vessels anchored in international waters where they waited for permission from the SPDC to unload. The ships carried helicopters, boats, amphibious vehicles, relief supplies (enough food to feed at least 100,000 people for 15 days, and shelter for more than 15,000 people), water and water purification supplies, and disaster relief personnel.⁷² The SPDC's UN envoy accused France of sending a warship.⁷³ On 25 May, France instead handed over the 1,000 tons of aid to the WFP.⁷⁴
- Save the Children and Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) were forced to call on the service of one of Burma's tycoons, Serge Pun, for advice on how to work with and negotiate on the military junta's restrictions.⁷⁵

Help us help you

*“This is inhuman. We have an intolerable situation created by a natural disaster. It is being made into a man-made catastrophe by the negligence, the neglect and the inhuman treatment of the Burmese people by a regime that is failing to act and to allow the international community to do what it wants to do.”*⁷⁶ - UK PM Gordon Brown

As the SPDC stonewalled the delivery of aid, frustration in the international community grew. Western and Asian governments called on the SPDC to cooperate with the international community in bringing relief to the affected communities.

- **7 May:** “What remains is for the Burmese government to allow the international community to help its people. [...] “It should be a simple matter. It’s not a matter of politics. It’s a matter of a humanitarian crisis.”⁷⁷ - US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
- **8 May:** “Given the magnitude of the disaster in Myanmar, the international community has expressed concern and willingness to provide assistance. This is natural and we hope Myanmar will cooperate with the international community and have consultations with the international community.”⁷⁸ - China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang
- **8 May:** “I hope that we will have an opening before it’s too late [...]. It's very much a matter of urgency. [ASEAN is] trying to communicate [to the regime] the sense of urgency and the flood of goodwill that is being offered.”⁷⁹ - ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan
- **12 May:** “It is increasingly important that the Burmese authorities recognize that their lack of cooperation is preventing assistance getting to people, and that unfettered access should be made available immediately.”⁸⁰ - UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown
- **30 May:** "It's regrettable that the Myanmar government has responded in this way. Myanmar's partners in ASEAN have all been deeply concerned by the massive suffering of the victims, which a

⁶⁷ IOM (16 May 08) Myanmar: IOM accepts emergency drug consignment, expands funding base; Irrawaddy (15 May 08) Asean assessment team expected in Burma today

⁶⁸ AP (06 May 08) Myanmar delta, where 22,000 died, isolated after cyclone; Bangkok Post (07 May 08) Cyclone Nargis death toll soars past 22,000; Washington Post (07 May 08) 60,000 Dead or Missing in Burma

⁶⁹ DPA (23 May 08) Philippines to dispatch medical team to Myanmar next week – Summary; BBC (16 May 08) India sends doctors to Burma; IOM (16 May 08) Myanmar: IOM accepts emergency drug consignment, expands funding base; DPA (22 May 08) Singapore sends two medical teams to Myanmar; DPA (23 May 08) Beijing already has given its ally Burma relief supplies valued at 30 million yuan (\$4.3 million); Japan Times (30 May 08) Japanese medical team heads off to Myanmar

⁷⁰ Irrawaddy (16 May 08) Burmese Relief Workers Bring Aid to Desperate Villagers

⁷¹ Mizzima (21 May 08) Cyclone victims take on junta authorities in Rangoon

⁷² Irrawaddy (19 May 08) US Aid 'Waiting Patiently', AP (17 May 08) French Navy ship hover near Burma; Evening Echo (19 May 08) British aid ships ready for 'deal' in Burma

⁷³ IHT (16 May 08) Rain pushes Myanmar death toll higher

⁷⁴ Reuters (26 May 08) Angry France Diverts Myanmar Aid To Thailand; Nation (28 May 08) French supplies for Burma unload in Phuket

⁷⁵ Times (UK) (23 May 08) Britain's aid millions channeled through tycoon with ties to Burmese junta

⁷⁶ Telegraph (18 May 08) Myanmar cyclone: Burma junta is killing its own people, says West

⁷⁷ AFP (08 May 08) Rice says Myanmar crisis 'not a matter of politics'

⁷⁸ AFP (08 May 08) China urges Myanmar to work with global community after cyclone

⁷⁹ AFP (08 May 08) Myanmar must open up 'before it's too late': ASEAN chief

⁸⁰ Irrawaddy (13 May 08) Britain orders warship to deploy off Burma

more rapid international relief operation could have minimized.”⁸¹ - Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

Frustration at the UN also grew. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made numerous attempts to telephone SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe to no avail.⁸² Ban also asked the SPDC to postpone the constitutional referendum, because relief assistance to cyclone victims was more important.⁸³

- **8 May:** “I’m disappointed by the progress we’ve seen.” - John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.⁸⁴
- **12 May:** “I want to register my deep concern – and immense frustration – at the unacceptably slow response to this grave humanitarian crisis. [...] I therefore call, in the most strenuous terms, on the Government of Myanmar to put its people’s lives first. It must do all that it can to prevent the disaster from becoming even more serious.”⁸⁵ - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
- **14 May:** “Even though the [Burmese] government has shown some sense of flexibility, at this time it’s far, far too short.”⁸⁶ - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
- **16 May:** “[...] we are at a critical point. Unless more aid gets into the country—quickly—we face the risk of an outbreak of infectious diseases that could dramatically worsen today’s crisis. There is no more time to lose.”⁸⁷ - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

ASEAN to the rescue?

On 19 May at an emergency meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers, the SPDC agreed to the creation of an ASEAN mechanism to oversee the distribution of foreign relief.⁸⁸ International agencies welcomed the news, but with some caution. Absurdly stating that relief efforts were complete, the SPDC announced that it was ready to receive contributions for reconstruction efforts, and requested US\$11.7 billion for reconstruction.⁸⁹ Independent experts put the damage bill closer to \$3.6 billion.⁹⁰ ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan said that the junta needed to verify its assessment and figures to convince the international community.⁹¹ In mid-May, the SPDC assigned 43 companies to receive lucrative construction contracts. Many of these companies are known to have close ties to the regime and some are targeted by international sanctions.⁹²

Ban breaks through

On 22 May, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Burma to inspect areas devastated by Cyclone Nargis and talk to the SPDC about speeding up disaster relief for the people.⁹³ On 23 May, after a two-hour meeting with SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that Than Shwe had agreed to allow “all aid workers” into the country to help cyclone survivors.⁹⁴

On 25 May, ASEAN and the UN held an International Pledging Conference in Rangoon.⁹⁵ The SPDC showed much enthusiasm about discussions over “reconstruction,” including appealing to the World Bank for a loan. Several countries made preliminary pledges of more than \$150 million, but most were

⁸¹ ABS-CBN (30 May 08) Myanmar’s cyclone response regrettable: Singapore PM

⁸² Irrawaddy (13 May 08) Junta Leader Won’t Answer My Calls: Ban Ki-moon

⁸³ UN (08 May 08) Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Myanmar

⁸⁴ AP (09 May 08) UN officials criticize Myanmar’s response to cyclone

⁸⁵ UN News Center (12 May 08) Response to cyclone in Myanmar ‘unacceptably slow’ – Ban Ki-moon

⁸⁶ BBC News (14 May 08) ‘No access’ to Burma cyclone zone

⁸⁷ Irrawaddy (17 May 08) No time to lose: Ban to General Assembly

⁸⁸ AFP (19 May 08) Fundraising meeting set for Burma; Irrawaddy (19 May 08) Asean to Handle Foreign Aid for Burma

⁸⁹ Washington Post (23 May 08) Burmese aid request stirs concerns

⁹⁰ Irrawaddy (16 May 08) Nargis Costing Burma \$3 Billion; Wall Street Journal (19 May 08) Myanmar slowly opens door for international donations

⁹¹ Nation (23 May 08) A Coalition of Mercy

⁹² Washington Post (23 May 08) Burmese aid request stirs concerns; Irrawaddy (16 May 08) Regime cronies win contracts for cyclone reconstruction work

⁹³ AP (23 May 08) ASEAN chief pushes for transparency by Myanmar; Bangkok Post (22 May 08) UN chief arrives in Burma on aid mission

⁹⁴ AP (23 May 08) U.N. chief: Myanmar to allow all aid workers

⁹⁵ AP (20 May 08) Myanmar opens door to help from Asian neighbors

contingent on access.⁹⁶ On 26 May, the UN said it could reach all cyclone survivors within seven days if the SPDC honored its promise to allow foreign aid workers to move around freely.⁹⁷ On 27 May, ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan said that the SPDC must begin to allow foreign aid workers unhindered access to the areas hardest-hit by Cyclone Nargis if it hopes to keep the trust of the international aid community. “What has to be delivered is real activities” Surin said.⁹⁸ While eager to receive international hand-outs, the SPDC has an estimated US\$4 billion in foreign reserves and receives an estimated US\$150 million in monthly gas exports revenues.⁹⁹

Despite the SPDC’s pledge to open up the country to relief supplies and aid personnel, the SPDC stalled foreign aid efforts and showed utter contempt for foreign disaster relief. On 29 May, the SPDC said that people of the delta would survive without the “chocolate bars” offered by the international community.¹⁰⁰

Food security a priority

The SPDC and the international community agreed that rehabilitation of the 1.6 million hectares of Burma’s most productive rice producing land is a priority. The FAO warned that farmers had 90 days at the most to return to their land to plant a new crop before the monsoon, or they would face another season with no harvest.¹⁰¹ Delta farmers also lost 280,000 cattle.¹⁰² Despite its demands for assistance, on 20 May, the SPDC exported 7,000 tons of rice to Sri Lanka.¹⁰³

Children at risk

Of the children that survived, many are believed to be orphans or separated from family, and are living in makeshift shelters. The situation leaves them open to trafficking and sexual abuse.¹⁰⁴ On 12 May, UNICEF’s chief child protection officer reported that police arrested two people when they attempted to recruit orphaned children in a shelter in Rangoon.¹⁰⁵ It was also reported that an SPDC unit rounded up and took away 300 children in and around Labutta with promises of food and shelter.¹⁰⁶

INSIDE BURMA

Referendum in the rubble

*“How can I vote while many people are dying? It is more important to save lives.”*¹⁰⁷ – A Rangoon resident.

Despite calls from pro-democracy forces and the international community - including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon¹⁰⁸ - to focus on relief operations in the areas hit by cyclone Nargis, the regime pushed ahead with its constitutional referendum on 10 May. The junta delayed the vote by two weeks in the 47 Townships (40 in Rangoon Division and seven in Irrawaddy Division) that had been worst affected by the cyclone.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁶ New York Times (26 May 08) Donors Press Myanmar to Let Aid Workers In; AP (26 May 08) \$100 million offered to Myanmar

⁹⁷ Sky News (26 May 08) UN Close To Reaching Burma Survivors

⁹⁸ Bangkok Post (27 May 08) Surin warns junta

⁹⁹ Burma Information Network (22 May 08) Chronology of the recent statements of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with respect to Burma

¹⁰⁰ AP (29 May 08) Myanmar blasts aid donors for not giving more

¹⁰¹ AP (14 May 08) UN warns of rice shortage in Myanmar as planting season approaches

¹⁰² AP (28 May 08) UN warns of rice shortage in Myanmar as planting season approaches

¹⁰³ IANS (22 May 08) Fearing shortage, Sri Lanka imports rice from Myanmar

¹⁰⁴ AP (15 May 08) UN: Most schools ravaged in Myanmar’s cyclone zone; Irrawaddy (21 May 08) Children of the cyclone

¹⁰⁵ Telegraph (UK) (13 May 08) Burma cyclone: British aid reaching Rangoon

¹⁰⁶ Mizzima News (22 May 08) Cyclone orphans could be trafficked: Human Right group

¹⁰⁷ Mizzima News (24 May 08) Burma concludes second round of referendum polling

¹⁰⁸ AP (09 May 08) UN officials criticize Myanmar’s response to cyclone

¹⁰⁹ AFP (15 May 08) Myanmar says constitution approved by 92.4 percent; AP (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved; IHT (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved in referendum

Ignoring a 2 May UN Security Council presidential statement that called on the regime to make the referendum “free and fair” and “inclusive and credible,”¹¹⁰ the SPDC resorted to widespread fraud and a campaign of intimidation to ensure approval of the constitution. [See below *Orchestrating a farce*]. The referendum results provided conclusive evidence that the referendum process was a sham. On 15 May, the junta made the outrageous claim that 92.4% of the voters approved the constitution, with a turnout of more than 99%.¹¹¹ The 10 May results made the balloting in the remaining 47 Townships meaningless, as the constitution’s approval could not be reversed mathematically.¹¹²

In preparation for the second round of voting, the regime forced cyclone victims out of schools, monasteries, and community centers so that they could be used as polling stations.¹¹³ The SPDC also ordered cyclone survivors to leave their temporary shelters to cast their votes.¹¹⁴ On 26 May, the SPDC announced that 92.4% of voters had approved the constitution, with a turnout of 98.1%.¹¹⁵

Referendum results ¹¹⁶						
	10 May		24 May		Total	
Eligible voters	22,708,434		4,580,393		27,288,827	
Turnout	22,496,660	99.06%	4,280,015	93.44%	26,776,675	98.12%
“Yes”	20,786,596	92.39%	3,977,528	92.93%	24,764,124	92.48%
“No”	1,375,480	6.11%	256,232	5.98%	1,631,712	6.09%
Canceled	334,584	1.48%	46,255	1.08%	380,839	1.42%

Pro-democracy forces reject results

- Pro-democracy and ethnic parties, including the NLD, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and the New Mon State Party (NMSP), promptly rejected the referendum results.¹¹⁷
- **19 May:** About 200 people led by NLD members in Taunggoat, Arakan State, held a three-hour protest against the local SPDC authorities’ announcement that “Yes” votes had prevailed in the Township.¹¹⁸
- **26 May:** The NLD said the referendum was neither free nor fair and lacked credibility. “It is a rigged referendum and does not reflect the peoples’ desire,” said NLD spokesperson Nyan Win.¹¹⁹

Orchestrating a farce

“The less they come, the more we can put ticks.”¹²⁰ - SPDC official in Kunhing Township, Shan State.

The SPDC conducted the referendum in what the European Union described as “an overall climate of intimidation.”¹²¹ [See also *March and April 2008 Burma Bulletins*] Widespread voting irregularities and fraud were reported in most of Burma’s States and Divisions.

¹¹⁰ UNSC (02 May 08) Statement by the President of the Security Council - S/PRST/2008/13

¹¹¹ AFP (15 May 08) Myanmar says constitution approved by 92.4 percent; AP (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved; IHT (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved in referendum

¹¹² AFP (15 May 08) Myanmar says constitution approved by 92.4 percent; AP (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved; IHT (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved in referendum

¹¹³ AFP (24 May 08) Burma votes across cyclone zone; AP (22 May 08) Cyclone Nargis survivors ousted from shelters in Myanmar; Guardian (12 May 08) Refugees living in village school face eviction; Irrawaddy (15 May 08) Cyclone Survivors Told to Return to Shattered Homes; DVB (21 May 08) Kaw Hmoo cyclone victims forced out of camps; Mizzima News (14 May 08) Cyclone survivors told to make room for voters; DVB (22 May 08) Refugees moved out to make way for polling station; DVB (16 May 08) Cyclone victims forced out of shelters to vote

¹¹⁴ AFP (24 May 08) Burma votes across cyclone zone; DVB (16 May 08) Cyclone victims forced out of shelters to vote

¹¹⁵ AP (26 May 08) Referendum approved in cyclone-hit areas; DPA (26 May 08) Myanmar junta claims cyclone-hit areas endorse pro-military charter; Mizzima News (26 May 08) Burma’s draft constitution: ‘Overwhelming support in cyclone hit regions’

¹¹⁶ Commission for Holding the Referendum of the Union of Myanmar (15 May 08) Announcement No 10/2008; Commission for Holding the Referendum of the Union of Myanmar (26 May 08) Announcement No 11/2008

¹¹⁷ Mizzima News (15 May 08) Opposition, critics blast poll results; SHAN (14 May 08) Shan party dismisses “rigged” referendum; IMNA (12 May 08) NMSP will not recognize constitutional referendum

¹¹⁸ Narinjara News (25 May 08) Protest in Taungup Against Referendum Results

¹¹⁹ Mizzima News (26 May 08) Burma’s draft constitution: ‘Overwhelming support in cyclone hit regions’

¹²⁰ SHAN (12 May 08) The art of boxing with a bound opponent

¹²¹ DPA (29 May 08) EU “strongly deplores” Suu Kyi arrest extension

- **Unauthorized proxy voting:** SPDC authorities cast “Yes” ballots on behalf of voters. In many cases, voters went to the polling stations on voting day only to find out that their ballots had already been cast.¹²²
- **Absentee voting:** The regime made extensive use of absentee ballots to secure “Yes” votes ahead of voting day. In most cases SPDC authorities delivered ballots door-to-door and coerced people to vote in favor of the constitution.¹²³ In one incident in Tharawaddy, Pegu Division, SPDC authorities forced about 700 employees of a local factory to cast absentee “Yes” votes.¹²⁴
- **Pre-marked ballots:** SPDC authorities forced voters to cast ballots that had already been ticked to indicate a “Yes” vote.¹²⁵ In Mandalay, SPDC officials ordered local civil servants to tick “Yes” on 6,000 ballots the night before voting day.¹²⁶
- **No privacy:** Voters cast their ballots while SPDC officials, Army soldiers, USDA and Swan Arr Shin members looked on to make sure they voted “Yes.”¹²⁷
- **Threats and intimidation:** In the days leading up to the referendum as well as on voting day, the regime told voters that failure to vote “Yes” would be punished with fines and imprisonment.¹²⁸ Civil servants were also threatened with dismissal if they did not vote “Yes” to the constitution.¹²⁹
- **Military presence:** The regime deployed soldiers, police, and USDA members at polling stations throughout Burma on voting day. In many cases they ordered people to cast “Yes” votes.¹³⁰
- **Food for votes:** Authorities told cyclone survivors that they had to vote “Yes” to receive aid.¹³¹
- **No independent monitoring:** The SPDC did not allow any independent monitoring of the referendum proceedings.¹³² No foreign correspondents were allowed near the polling stations.¹³³
- **No polling stations:** In some villages people could not vote because the SPDC failed to set up polling stations.¹³⁴
- **Early closing:** In many Townships polling stations closed earlier than scheduled.¹³⁵

¹²² SHAN (10 May 08) Junta fights to win in Shan State; DVB (12 May 08) Junta continues dirty tricks as Burma votes; Mizzima News (11 May 08) Burma concludes referendum polling, but results 'pre-determined,' voters say; Mizzima News (24 May 08) Burma concludes second round of referendum polling; Irrawaddy (12 May 08) Mandalay Referendum Vote a Non-event; SHAN (14 May 08) Shan party dismisses “rigged” referendum; Khonumthung News (19 May 08) Chin National Council rejects junta's poll result; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum; Mizzima News (15 May 08) Surprised voters learn junta cast votes for them in 'rigged' referendum; IMNA (12 May 08) Seven residents arrested; Irrawaddy (10 May 08) Massive cheating reported from Referendum polling stations

¹²³ Mizzima News (11 May 08) Burma concludes referendum polling, but results 'pre-determined,' voters say; Kachin News Group (12 May 08) Junta rewards nursing student for supporting referendum; IMNA (12 May 08) NMSP will not recognize constitutional referendum; SHAN (22 May 08) Authorities force people to tick on referendum eve; Mizzima News (08 May 08) Villagers complain to commission over forcible voting; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum; Mizzima News (24 May 08) Burma concludes second round of referendum polling; Mizzima News (14 May 08) Cyclone survivors told to make room for voters

¹²⁴ DVB (12 May 08) Junta continues dirty tricks as Burma votes

¹²⁵ Irrawaddy (10 May 08) Massive cheating reported from Referendum polling stations; SHAN (12 May 08) The art of boxing with a bound opponent; Irrawaddy (11 May 08) Black Saturday; Mizzima News (15 May 08) Surprised voters learn junta cast votes for them in 'rigged' referendum; DVB (12 May 08) Junta continues dirty tricks as Burma votes; SHAN (13 May 08) Outskirts coerced, downtown free to cast “No”; SHAN (14 May 08) Shan party dismisses “rigged” referendum; Narinjara News (08 May 08) Readymade Ballots Distributed Before Referendum; Mizzima News (23 May 08) Junta's vote rigging efforts exposed again; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum

¹²⁶ Mizzima News (15 May 08) Surprised voters learn junta cast votes for them in 'rigged' referendum

¹²⁷ IHT (15 May 08) Myanmar says military-backed constitution approved in referendum; Irrawaddy (10 May 08) Massive cheating reported from Referendum polling stations; Irrawaddy (11 May 08) Black Saturday; DVB (12 May 08) NLD accuses junta of manipulating vote; Khonumthung News (15 May 08) Irregularities in constitutional referendum: CHRO; IMNA (15 May 08) Many polling stations in Mon state flouted referendum law

¹²⁸ DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum; Mizzima News (24 May 08) Burma concludes second round of referendum polling; IMNA (11 May 08) Burmese authorities cheat and threaten to get ‘Yes’ vote; Kaladan News (10 May 08) Referendum starts in Northern Arakan; Kaowao News (12 May 08) Southern Ye voting centers coerced; DVB (12 May 08) Junta continues dirty tricks as Burma votes; IMNA (12 May 08) NMSP will not recognize constitutional referendum;

¹²⁹ IMNA (24 May 08) Rangoon civil servants have no option but to vote ‘Yes’; Khonumthung News (15 May 08) Irregularities in constitutional referendum: CHRO

¹³⁰ Narinjara News (02 May 08) Army to be deployed in rural areas for referendum; Kaladan News (10 May 08) Referendum starts in Northern Arakan; SHAN (16 May 08) Civilians shed tears at referendum results; DVB (12 May 08) NLD accuses junta of manipulating vote; SHAN (10 May 08) Junta fights to win in Shan State; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum; IMNA (11 May 08) Burmese authorities cheat and threaten to get ‘Yes’ vote; Kaowao News (12 May 08) Southern Ye voting centers coerced; Khonumthung News (19 May 08) Chin National Council rejects junta's poll result

¹³¹ Irrawaddy (12 May 08) Rangoon struggles to survive; DVB (17 May 08) Cyclone survivors forced to work and pay for food; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum

¹³² DVB (12 May 08) NLD accuses junta of manipulating vote

¹³³ Irrawaddy (10 May 08) Massive cheating reported from Referendum polling stations

¹³⁴ Mizzima News (26 May 08) Burma's draft constitution: 'Overwhelming support in cyclone hit regions'; DVB (26 May 08) Voters go to the polls in delayed referendum; Mizzima News (24 May 08) Burma concludes second round of referendum polling

- **Tampering with ballots:** Lack of independent monitoring of voting procedures and pervasive misuse of absentee voting facilitated the regime's mishandling of ballots. Many reports emerged of SPDC authorities stuffing, altering, and destroying ballots.¹³⁶

Arrests of "No" vote supporters continue

In May, the regime arrested 67 people for opposing the SPDC's constitution, bringing to 124 the total of "No" vote supporters arrested since March. [See *March and April 2008 Burma Bulletins*]

- **4 May:** Na Sa Ka arrested two villagers from Rathidaung Township, Arakan State, for possession of anti-referendum posters.¹³⁷
- **5 May:** Police arrested four people in Paletwa Township, Chin State, for distributing anti-referendum posters and leaflets.¹³⁸
- **6 May:** Police arrested three NLD members in Salin Township, Magwe Division, for distributing copies of the NLD instructions on the referendum voting procedures.¹³⁹
- **7 May:** SPDC Army soldiers arrested four villagers in Paletwa Township, Chin State, for distributing anti-referendum leaflets.¹⁴⁰
- **Between 7 and 9 May:** Na Sa Ka arrested 48 people in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, for distributing anti-referendum posters.¹⁴¹
- **May 7:** SPDC authorities in Haka, Chin State, briefly detained NLD members Tial Chin and Ngun Zam for distributing "No" vote leaflets.¹⁴²
- **10 May:** SPDC authorities briefly detained one villager from Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, for voting "No."¹⁴³
- **11 May:** SPDC authorities in Namkham, Shan State, arrested a former village headman for possession of "No" vote leaflets.¹⁴⁴
- **16 May:** Police arrested two youths from Rambree Township, Arakan State, for telling their family members and village elders to cast "No" votes.¹⁴⁵

Daw Suu's detention extended

On 27 May, the SPDC extended the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁴⁶ It was unclear whether the extension was for another six months or a year. Under Article 10 of the 1975 State Protection Law, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi should have been freed on 25 May, because her five-year detention period, extended annually, ended on that day.¹⁴⁷

After the junta ignored numerous calls for the release of Daw Suu, Indonesia led the chorus of condemnation over the pro-democracy leader's extended detention.

- "The decision to extend the detention of Madame Aung San Suu Kyi is very much against the spirit of cooperation, of help from the international community."¹⁴⁸ - Indonesia Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda

¹³⁵ DVB (12 May 08) NLD accuses junta of manipulating vote; SHAN (12 May 08) The art of boxing with a bound opponent; IMNA (15 May 08) Many polling stations in Mon state flouted referendum law

¹³⁶ Kachin News Group (12 May 08) Junta rewards nursing student for supporting referendum; Kaladan News (12 May 08) Burma holds referendum regardless of cyclone devastation; IMNA (13 May 08) Yes' votes stuffed by poll station staff in Mon state; SHAN (14 May 08) Shan party dismisses "rigged" referendum

¹³⁷ Narinjara News (30 May 08) Two Missing After Arrest by Nasaka

¹³⁸ Narinjara News (07 May 08) Four arrested for anti-referendum campaign in Chin state

¹³⁹ DVB (07 May 08) Salin NLD members arrested for referendum pamphlets

¹⁴⁰ Khonumthung News (31 May 08) Four 'vote No' campaigners detained in Chin state

¹⁴¹ Narinjara News (10 May 08) 48 People Arrested in Maungdaw with Anti-Referendum Posters; Narinjara News (12 May 08) Identities of anti-referendum campaigners released

¹⁴² Khonumthung News (10 May 08) Voting on constitution begins in northwest Burma

¹⁴³ Kaladan News (12 May 08) Burma holds referendum regardless of cyclone devastation

¹⁴⁴ SHAN (14 May 08) Villager arrested for possession of anti-referendum leaflets

¹⁴⁵ Kaladan News (19 May 08) Two Rakhine youths arrested for disrupting referendum

¹⁴⁶ Reuters (27 May 08) Myanmar extends Suu Kyi house arrest; Irrawaddy (27 May 08) NLD members arrested; Suu Kyi's sentence extended

¹⁴⁷ Bangkok Post (23 May 08) Suu Kyi allowed to vote, ballot taken to her home

¹⁴⁸ Reuters (28 May 08) Indonesia joins in criticism of Myanmar over Suu Kyi

- “I regret the decision of the Government of Myanmar to extend for a sixth consecutive year the detention under house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi,”¹⁴⁹ - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
- “These continued severe restrictions on the freedom of expression and movement against Aung San Suu Kyi contravene basic human rights.”¹⁵⁰ – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour
- “The EU strongly deplores the decision of the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to extend the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.”¹⁵¹ - European Union Presidency
- “This measure testifies to the junta’s absence of will to cooperate with the international community.”¹⁵² - French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.
- “I was saddened, if not surprised, to learn that the Burmese Government has, once again, decided to extend the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi.”¹⁵³ - UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband.
- “I am deeply troubled by the Burmese regime's extension of National League for Democracy General Secretary and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest.”¹⁵⁴ - US President George W. Bush
- “I regret that overnight the Burmese military regime extended the detention of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.”¹⁵⁵ - Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith

NLD arrests

- **15 May:** Police arrested an NLD member from Rangoon’s South Dagon Township for attempting to meet with UN officials in Rangoon.¹⁵⁶
- **22 May:** Police arrested 13 NLD members in Rangoon.¹⁵⁷ Ten were released on the same day.¹⁵⁸
- **27 May:** Police arrested at least 15 NLD members as they were marching from the party headquarters to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s residence in Rangoon.¹⁵⁹

HUMAN RIGHTS

Custodial deaths

- **3 May:** SPDC soldiers and riot police opened fire on a large group of inmates in Rangoon’s Insein prison, killing 36 and injuring about 70. Soldiers and police were brought in to restore order after some inmates started a fire to warm up after cyclone Nargis had blown off the roof in one section of the prison.¹⁶⁰ Following the incident, prison authorities conducted an investigation that resulted in the death of four inmates during interrogation.¹⁶¹
- **20 May:** SPDC Army soldiers tortured to death a 35-year old retired New Mon State Party medical worker during interrogation in Khawzar police station, Mon State.¹⁶²

Cyclone doesn’t stop forced labor

Cyclone Nargis did not dampen the SPDC’s desire to use its own citizens, including cyclone victims, for forced labor. On 30 May, an ILO report on Burma warned of the increased risk of forced labor, child labor, human trafficking and migrant labor following cyclone Nargis.¹⁶³

¹⁴⁹ UN News Center (27 May 08) Myanmar: Ban Ki-moon ‘regrets’ continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

¹⁵⁰ DPA (28 May 08) UNHCR condemns extension of Suu Kyi’s detention

¹⁵¹ EU Presidency (29 May 08) Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the extension of the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

¹⁵² AP (29 May 08) Myanmar approves all pending visas for UN aid workers

¹⁵³ CNN (28 May 08) Anger at extension of Suu Kyi’s detention

¹⁵⁴ Mizzima (28 May 08) Junta faces condemnation for extending Suu Kyi’s detention

¹⁵⁵ Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs (28 May 08) Media Release: Australia Regrets Extended Detention of Aung San Suu Kyi

¹⁵⁶ DVB (15 May 08) Storm victims arrested and driven out from shelters

¹⁵⁷ Mizzima News (22 May 08) Junta arrests 13 opposition youth; DVB (22 May 08) At least 11 NLD members arrested in Rangoon

¹⁵⁸ Mizzima News (23 May 08) Junta frees 10 detained opposition youth members

¹⁵⁹ AFP (27 May 08) Myanmar arrests Aung San Suu Kyi allies; Mizzima News (27 May 08) Opposition youths marching to Suu Kyi house arrested; Irrawaddy (27 May 08) NLD members arrested; Suu Kyi’s sentence extended

¹⁶⁰ Mizzima News (05 May 08) 36 dead, 70 injured in fire at notorious prison; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Dozens Reported Dead in Insein Prison Clash; DVB (05 May 08) 36 Insein inmates killed in prison crackdown

¹⁶¹ DVB (07 May 08) Four Insein prisoners die during interrogation

¹⁶² IMNA (26 May 08) Retired NMSP member killed in torture, many flee

- **5 May:** SPDC Army Division 101 Commander Maung Maung Oo ordered 270 villagers in Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division, to perform forced labor as porters for the army.¹⁶⁴
- **7 May:** SPDC Army LIB 439 ordered villagers from four Shazibo area villages in Pegu Division to build fences around their villages and army camps. In addition, 12 villagers were forced to porter army rations.¹⁶⁵
- **10 May:** SPDC authorities forced cyclone victims in Ngabyayma village in Southern Bogale, Irrawaddy Division, to cut trees and reconstruct roads destroyed by the cyclone.¹⁶⁶
- **12 May:** SPDC soldiers in Toungoo District, Pegu Division, forced 62 villagers to porter army rations.¹⁶⁷
- **13 May:** SPDC soldiers in Toungoo District, Pegu Division, forced another 52 villagers to porter army rations.¹⁶⁸
- **17 May:** Brig Gen Hla Myint, SPDC Deputy Commander, Northeastern Region Command, ordered villagers in Namkham Township, Shan State, to build fences and perform guard duty.¹⁶⁹
- **Since 19 May:** SPDC soldiers from LIB 289 have used villagers for forced labor to construct and renovate army barracks and to dig trenches in the camps in Paletwa Township, Chin State.¹⁷⁰
- **20 May:** Na Sa Ka authorities in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, ordered about 80 local villagers to rebuild parts of Na Sa Ka camps that were damaged by a storm on 18-19 May.¹⁷¹
- SPDC officials forced homeless cyclone survivors in Bogale and Mawlamyinegyun villages to dig rocks in a quarry in Maubin Town for as little as 1,000 kyat (US\$0.88) per day.¹⁷²

DISPLACEMENT

Refugees outside Burma struggle to survive

- On 27 May, Bangladesh and the UNHCR agreed to reactivate a 1992 mechanism for the deportation of 27,000 Rohingya refugees currently living in makeshift camps in Bangladesh. Activists slammed the decision, saying that “the people would definitely return home if they were free from the regime’s oppression—nobody would need to force them to go back on that day.”¹⁷³
- On 27 May, aid workers in Thailand warned that unless they received additional support, they would be forced to reduce Burmese refugees’ rations to half the international standard because of soaring global rice and oil prices.¹⁷⁴

ECONOMY

Business as usual

While the people of Burma struggled to recover, it was business as usual for the SPDC:

- On 19 May, on the sidelines of an emergency meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers to respond to the cyclone Nargis crisis, Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama and his SPDC counterpart

¹⁶³ Reuters (30 May 08) Myanmar may use forced labour in cyclone recovery-ILO

¹⁶⁴ Free Burma Rangers (29 May 08) Burma Army Attacks Villages in Eastern Burma as they Obstruct Relief to Cyclone Victims in the South

¹⁶⁵ Free Burma Rangers (29 May 08) Burma Army Attacks Villages in Eastern Burma as they Obstruct Relief to Cyclone Victims in the South

¹⁶⁶ DVB (17 May 08) Cyclone survivors forced to work and pay for aid 2008

¹⁶⁷ Free Burma Rangers (29 May 08) Burma Army Attacks Villages in Eastern Burma as they Obstruct Relief to Cyclone Victims in the South

¹⁶⁸ Free Burma Rangers (29 May 08) Burma Army Attacks Villages in Eastern Burma as they Obstruct Relief to Cyclone Victims in the South

¹⁶⁹ SHAN (22 May 08) Burma Army soldiers arrested in China

¹⁷⁰ Kaladan News(25 May 08) Forced labor in Pa Let Wa Township

¹⁷¹ Narinjara News (25 May 08) Forced Labor Used for Nasaka Camp Repair

¹⁷² Irrawaddy (24 May 08) Cyclone survivors forcibly evicted

¹⁷³ Irrawaddy (29 May 08) Bangladeshi Govt to Repatriate Rohingya Refugees

¹⁷⁴ TBBC (27 May 08) Struggling with Burma's Other Humanitarian Crisis

Nyan Win signed an agreement to develop Burma's Tavoy deep seaport and related infrastructure projects designed to facilitate goods transport from Europe and the Middle East.¹⁷⁵

- On 28 May, China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) and Daewoo International signed an agreement for joint oil and gas exploration in Burma.¹⁷⁶
- The US' Chevron, Thailand's PTTEP and Malaysia's UMW holding all reassured investors that they would continue "business as usual."¹⁷⁷

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN MAY

1	United Nationalities League for Democracy calls for a boycott of the referendum.
1	Hollywood actors begin a month-long video campaign to win support for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
1	US President George W Bush orders new sanctions on Burma that add SPDC-owned companies.
4	Unknown assailants shoot dead a USDA member and injure two junta officials in Namkham Township, Shan State.
5	Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier hosts a ceremony to confer honorary Canadian citizenship to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
6	NLD says it is "extremely unacceptable" to go ahead with the constitutional referendum in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis.
6	US President George W. Bush signs legislation that confers Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with the Congressional Gold Medal, the US Congress top civilian honor.
6	Chin National Front lambasts SPDC over its plan to annex parts of Chin State into Sagaing Division.
6	US House of Representatives passes a resolution that urges the UN Security Council not to accept the SPDC draft constitution.
7	KIO decides to support SPDC constitutional referendum.
9	All Burma Monks Alliance, 88 Generation Students, and All Burma Federation of Student Unions call for a "No" vote in the referendum.
10	SSA forces attack SPDC Army patrols near Nawngwoe and Phalam villages, Lawksawk Township, Shan State.
10	Insein prison authorities torture five political prisoners for refusing to do prison labor.
10	Unknown assailant shoots dead a police officer in Mudon Township, Mon State.
11	NLD issues statement condemning the SPDC for obstructing the delivery of aid to victims of cyclone Nargis.
11	Six SPDC soldiers killed in a clash between SSA and SPDC forces near Kenglom, Kunhing Township, Shan State. One SPDC soldier killed in fight between SSA and SPDC forces near Kali, Kunhing Township.
14	NLD slams the SPDC for holding the constitutional referendum in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis.
14	Thai PM Samak Sundaravej meets with SPDC PM Lt Gen Thein Sein.
15	Forty-three members of the US House of Representatives write to US President Bush asking him to backing efforts to provide urgent life-saving humanitarian aid to Burma.
17	Finnish FM Alexander Stubb says that the SPDC's refusal to grant full access to foreign aid and relief workers to help victims of cyclone Nargis approaches a crime against humanity.
18	SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe makes his first visit to relief camps in cyclone-affected areas.
19	Police in Taunggoat, Arakan State, disrupt a water pouring ceremony held by local residents and NLD members to mark the day the Buddha attained enlightenment.
19	SPDC announces a three-day mourning period for victims of cyclone Nargis beginning on 20 May.
20	World Bank says it cannot provide any financial assistance to Burma because the country is 10 years behind in its debts.
21	NLD calls on the UN to take a greater role in delivering aid to cyclone victims in Burma.
21	Chinese authorities detain six SPDC Army soldiers in Ziesiang, opposite Muse and Namkham Townships.
22	Karen National Union Chairman Pado Saw Ba Thin Sein dies.
22	European Parliament calls for SPDC leaders to be brought before the international court in The Hague if they continue to prevent aid from reaching cyclone-stricken regions.
23	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi casts absentee ballot at her home.
24	A boat carrying rations for the SPDC Army Light Infantry Battalion 289 sinks in the Kaladan River.
25	US State Department says it is dismayed that the SPDC conducted a second round of voting on its draft

¹⁷⁵ TNA (19 May 08) Thailand, Myanmar to develop Tavoy deepsea port

¹⁷⁶ Forbes (29 May 08) China's CNPC, SKorea's Daewoo Intl tie up for Myanmar oil/gas exploration

¹⁷⁷ Bloomberg News (21 May 08) Chevron sticking with Myanmar; Irrawaddy (11 May 08) Gas Fields Escape Cyclone's Fury; Star (Malaysia) (07 May 08) Local firms strive to sustain ops in Myanmar

	constitutional referendum on 24 May in the midst of a major humanitarian disaster.
26	A fire breaks out at the Burmese embassy in Bangkok. No embassy officials are injured.
29	SPDC announces that the new constitution has been “confirmed and enacted.”
29	SPDC accuses the National League for Democracy of stoking unrest among storm survivors.
30	About 300 NLD members gather at the party’s headquarters in Rangoon to mark the fifth anniversary of the Depayin massacre. NLD members in Mandalay also hold a memorial ceremony.

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN MAY

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“Vote to Nowhere - The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma”, Human Rights Watch

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<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2008/20080530.html>

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<http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/>

“The State of the World’s Human Rights”, Amnesty International

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