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SAFFRON REVOLUTION A YEAR LATER: IT'S NOT OVER

- The spirit of the monk-led Saffron Revolution that moved hundreds of thousands of people to hold protests throughout Burma and inspired hundreds of solidarity events around the globe lives on.
- Despite the worst crackdown by the army since 1988, monks have persevered in their defiance of the SPDC, including boycotting members of the military regime and their families. Monks have also led the international campaign for an arms embargo on Burma.
- At the same time, the Buddhist clergy continues to play a vital role in welfare and disaster relief. They delivered aid and provided accommodation for 70% of homeless cyclone Nargis survivors in Rangoon and throughout the Irrawaddy delta.
- The SPDC has exacerbated the conditions that led to the Saffron Revolution. The SPDC has intensified repression, obstructed and manipulated humanitarian aid efforts, and persisted with gross economic mismanagement.
- Even as it seeks more aid dollars, the regime ignores calls from the UNSC, UNGA, and UNHRC to release political prisoners. The number of dissidents detained in Burma's prisons has hit a record high of 1,900 - up 65.2% from July 2007.
- The regime's persecution of the Buddhist clergy continues. In the first eight months of 2008, the SPDC arrested 17 monks and sentenced nine of them to prison terms. 196 monks remain detained in Burma's prisons.
- In an effort to stave off international pressure, the SPDC appointed SPDC Liaison Minister Maj Gen Aung Kyi who met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi five times. Daw Suu and the NLD repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction with the talks which have stalled.
- The SPDC continues to face internal instability due to the ongoing power struggle between its two top generals. The discontent among the regime's rank and file for being ordered to kill monks has intensified over the mishandling of cyclone Nargis, with the SPDC Army hit particularly hard by desertions.
- The bloody repression of the Saffron Revolution and the ongoing military offensive against ethnic nationalities in Eastern Burma provide compelling evidence of how the military regime uses its armed forces to oppress the Burmese people. Over the past year, the junta has continued to purchase arms and other military supplies from China, Russia, and India.
- The SPDC's criminal mismanagement of the economy that triggered the Saffron Revolution continues. By the end of 2007, inflation was at 50%. After cyclone Nargis, the price of rice doubled.

INSIDE

- 2 Endless crackdown
- 4 One year at monasteries
- 4 Monks still targeted
- 5 Monks challenge SPDC
- 7 Monks go global
- 7 Monks and Nargis
- 8 Dialogue
- 9 SPDC in disarray
- 9 Internal conflicts
- 10 Dissatisfaction grows
- 10 Army desertions
- 11 Navy sinking
- 11 Arms flow into Burma
- 12 SPDC offensive
- 12 Economy
- 12 Business as usual

After the Saffron Revolution: the endless crackdown

The nationwide protests in August-September of 2007 were sparked by the sharp fuel price hike and saw extraordinary participation by the Burmese people from all walks of life. Political activists, students, monks, and ordinary citizens took to the streets to peacefully demand change from the military régime. However, the SPDC has failed to address the underlying causes for the Saffron Revolution. In fact, the opposite is true. Repression has intensified, the economic conditions have worsened, and the SPDC has refused to meet UN demands to promote democratic reforms.

On 11 October 2007, the UN Security Council issued a Presidential Statement that strongly deplored the SPDC's repression of pro-democracy demonstrators and called for the release of all political prisoners and remaining detainees.¹ Up to 6,000 people, including at least 1,400 monks, were detained during the bloody crackdown [See box].² Resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council in November and December 2007 respectively echoed the Security Council's call for the release of all political prisoners in Burma.³ On 18 June, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution criticizing the regime for not heeding the previous 18 council resolutions as well as UN Security Council Presidential Statements.⁴

Instead of releasing political prisoners, the SPDC intensified the detention of dissidents. The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro reported that in December 2007 there were over 1,750 political prisoners in Burma.⁵ Pinheiro found that the number had gone up to 1,850 by January 2008.⁶ In June 2008, Pinheiro's successor, Thomas Ojea Quintana, set the number of political prisoners at 1,900.⁷ This figure represents a 65.2% increase from July 2007, when there were 1,150 political prisoners in Burma.⁸

The SPDC has continued to detain dissidents in appalling conditions and refused to allow both family members and the International Red Cross to visit them. During the height of the crackdown, SPDC authorities detained people in large capacity facilities.⁹ Released detainees reported being kept in cramped conditions in small rooms, with some standing shoulder to shoulder, unable to lie down.¹⁰ Cells lacked ventilation or toilets. Prisoners also reported a lack of food and drinking water and being denied adequate medical attention by prisons' staff.¹¹ Released prisoners reported being severely and repeatedly beaten, kicked, and verbally abused by prison authorities during interrogation sessions.¹² At least 18 people died in custody due to extremely harsh conditions.¹³

SAFFRON REVOLUTION IN NUMBERS

Between 19 August and 31 October, hundreds of thousands of monks, nuns, and citizens participated in over 150 protests spread across nearly every State and Division in Burma.

The regime detained up to 6,000 people and killed at least 31 during the crackdown. It detained 18 elected MPs, several thousand monks, 274 NLD members, and 25 88-Generation Students members. At least 18 detainees died in custody due to extremely harsh conditions.

People in over 35 countries organized hundreds of rallies, vigils, marches, petitions, and protests during and following the Saffron Revolution.

¹ Bangkok Post (12 Oct 07) UN issues weak rebuke of Burma violence

² AP (04 Oct 07) French ambassador says Myanmar stepping up arrests, raiding monasteries; AP (06 Oct 07) Myanmar seeks alleged monk 'ringleaders'; AP (12 Oct 07) Burma's junta of beating, killing detainees, Norway-based radio says

³ Reuters (20 Nov 07) U.N. panel raps nations for rights abuses; Reuters (20 Nov 07) UN rights panel rebukes Myanmar, Iran, North Korea; AFP (20 Nov 07) UN panel slams Myanmar crackdown on protests; Malaysia Sun (21 Nov 07) India votes against UN resolution on Myanmar; UNGA (28 Feb 08) Resolution 62/222; HRC (14 Dec 07) Resolution 6/33

⁴ UN News Center (18 Jun 08) Myanmar: UN Human Rights Council condemns 'ongoing systematic violations'

⁵ HRC, 7th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, 7 March 2008, Para 15; UN Doc A/HRC/7/24

⁶ HRC, 7th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, 5 March 2008, Para 43; UN Doc A/HRC/7/18

⁷ HRC, 8th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 12 June 2008, UN Doc A/HRC/8/L.12, Para 27

⁸ HRC, 6th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 7 December 2007, UN Doc A/HRC/6/14, Para 25

⁹ Human Rights Council, 6th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, 7 December 2007, UN Doc A/HRC/6/14

¹⁰ CNN (13 Oct 07) Myanmar captives 'kept in squalor'; DVB (11 Oct 07) Detainees transferred due to prison overcrowding; Irrawaddy (11 Oct 07) Monks in hell

¹¹ CNN (13 Oct 07) Myanmar captives 'kept in squalor'; Irrawaddy (11 Oct 07) Monks in hell; AP (12 Oct 07) Burma's junta of beating, killing detainees, Norway-based radio says; AP (12 Oct 07) Dissident group: Myanmar guards brutalized pro-democracy detainees; Irrawaddy (11 Oct 07) Monks in hell

¹² AP (12 Oct 07) Burma's junta of beating, killing detainees, Norway-based radio says; AP (12 Oct 07) Dissident group: Myanmar guards brutalized pro-democracy detainees; Irrawaddy (11 Oct 07) Monks in hell; Irrawaddy (11 Oct 07) 88 Generation Students, Other Detainees Tortured in Interrogation Centers

¹³ AP (12 Oct 07) Burma's junta of beating, killing detainees, Norway-based radio says; AP (12 Oct 07) Dissident group: Myanmar guards brutalized pro-democracy detainees; DVB (08 Oct 07) Two detainees die in custody; Irrawaddy (11 Oct 07) 88 Generation

In 2008, the SPDC continued to arrests activists for peacefully expressing their opposition to the military regime. As of 22 September, the junta had arrested a total of 370 activists, including 121 NLD members, and three elected MPs. The SPDC also detained 13 journalists and reporters. The SPDC has also continued to use its draconian “security laws” and sham legal proceedings to charge, prosecute, and sentence to prison terms pro-democracy activists. Since January, the regime has jailed 56 dissidents.

On 13 February, the SPDC extended the house arrest of NLD Vice Chairman Tin Oo for another year.¹⁴ On 27 May, the regime extended Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest by another year.¹⁵ On 6 June, the SPDC indicated that Daw Suu could be detained up to 27 November 2009 under the 1975 State Protection Law.¹⁶

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS: “STRONGLY DEPLORE...ABHORRENT AND UNACCEPTABLE...REVULSION”

The SPDC’s brutal assault on Buddhist monks and peaceful civilian demonstrators drew widespread international condemnation. ASEAN members were harsh critics. China even called for national reconciliation in Burma.

- US, UK, EU, Canada, Czech Republic, Ireland, Sweden and the Philippines demanded that SPDC immediately release the protesters and engage in genuine dialogue with the pro-democracy movement and ethnic groups.¹⁷
- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that the use of force to put down peaceful protests in Burma was “abhorrent and unacceptable”. He also urged the SPDC to release detainees and start a dialogue with political opponents.¹⁸ The UN Security Council issued a statement “strongly” deploring the SPDC’s repression of pro-democracy demonstrators and called for the early release of all political prisoners and remaining detainees.¹⁹ The statement was not blocked by China or Russia, who vetoed a UNSC resolution on Burma in January 2007.
- China’s Ambassador to the UN, Wang Guangya, said that China wished to see stability, mutual reconciliation, and progress towards democracy in Burma.²⁰ Premier Wen Jiabao confirmed China’s shift, and expressed hopes that stability, national reconciliation, and democracy will be achieved as soon as possible through peaceful means.²¹ The past five years of increased trade with China and increased Chinese investment in Burma have strengthened the junta’s income sources, and reduced any incentive for them to implement urgently-needed reforms.
- ASEAN Foreign Ministers expressed their revulsion to SPDC FM Nyan Win over reports that demonstrations in Burma were being suppressed by violence.²²

However, one year on, while the regime has failed to meet any of these demands and has turned a “natural disaster into a catastrophe”, ASEAN Sec-Gen Surin Pitsuwan is claiming humanitarian relief efforts as a victory for ASEAN-led mediation.²³

Students, Other Detainees Tortured in Interrogation Centers; DVB (11 Oct 07) NLD member dies during interrogation; Bangkok Post (11 Oct 07) Burmese dissident ‘tortured to death’; Reuters (07 Dec 07) UN expert cites reports of burned bodies in Myanmar; AP (07 Dec 07) Reports: Myanmar Crackdown Deaths Higher; AP (07 Dec 07) Reports: Far More Dead in Myanmar Crackdown Than Junta Has Acknowledged; AP (07 Dec 07) UN Says 31 Killed in Myanmar Crackdown; AP (07 Dec 07) Junta killed 31 people identifiable by name, says UN expert who visited Myanmar; Reuters (07 Dec 07) U.N. report raises death toll in Myanmar crackdown; Reuters (08 Dec 07) Protesters’ bodies may have been burned: UN

¹⁴ AFP (13 Feb 08) Myanmar extends arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi’s deputy: official; Reuters (13 Feb 08) Myanmar gives top dissident another year in jail

¹⁵ Reuters (27 May 08) Myanmar extends Suu Kyi house arrest; Irrawaddy (27 May 08) NLD members arrested; Suu Kyi’s sentence extended

¹⁶ Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland (06 Jun 08) Rebuttal Statement by His Excellency U Wunna Maung Lwin, Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar at the Eighth Session of the Human Rights Council

¹⁷ US Department of State (22 Aug 07) Arrest of Pro-Democracy Activists in Burma; AFP (30 Aug 07) Bush condemns Myanmar junta for crackdown; FCO – UK (22 Aug 07) Burma: Arrests of Democracy Activists; EU External Relations (25 Aug 07) CFSP Statement: Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU; DFAIT (22 Aug 07) Canada condemns detention of prominent Burmese pro-democracy activists; Czech Republic MFA (24 Aug 07) Statement of the MFA on the Arrest of Burma Activists; Irish DFA (24 Aug 07) Minister Condemns Detention of Democracy Activists in Burma; Swedish Ministry For Foreign Affairs (24 Aug 07) Statement by Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt on recent developments in Burma; AFP (30 Aug 07) Bush condemns Myanmar junta for crackdown; Senate of the Philippines (26 Sep 07) Resolution No. 19 adopted September 26, 2007; Inquirer.net. (28 Sep 07) Arroyo urges Myanmar to takes steps toward democracy

¹⁸ NYT (06 Oct 07) U.N. Chief calls crackdown in Myanmar ‘abhorrent’

¹⁹ Bangkok Post (12 Oct 07) UN issues weak rebuke of Burma violence

²⁰ AP (27 Sep 07) UNSC Concerned About Myanmar Crackdown

²¹ Bloomberg (30 Sep 07) China Backs End to Myanmar Violence; UN Envoy Arrives

²² AFP (28 Sep 07) ASEAN voices ‘revulsion’ over Myanmar crackdown

²³ Channel News Asia (04 Sep 08) Recovery efforts improving in Myanmar, says ASEAN Secretary General

ONE YEAR AT THE MONASTERIES

On 14 November 2007, SPDC Defense Minister Maj Gen Aye Myint said that “normalcy” had returned to Burma.²⁴ The SPDC’s statement was contradicted by the ongoing arrest, harassment, and intimidation of monks over the past ten months. The regime stepped up its presence in and around monasteries across Burma.²⁵ Surveillance of monks’ activities intensified and SPDC authorities have carried out raids in various monasteries.²⁶ In the first eight months of 2008, the regime arrested 17 monks and sentenced nine of them to prison terms. On 27 August, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said that 196 monks remained detained in Burma’s prisons.²⁷

Monks still targeted

- **4 November:** SPDC authorities in Sagaing Township, Sagaing Division, arrested 27-year-old abbot U Gambira, the leader of the All-Burmese Monks Alliance, which spearheaded the September anti-junta protests.²⁸ In August 2008, a court in Insein prison charged him with illegal gathering, violation of immigration laws, illegal contacts with foreign organizations, inciting a public riot, causing public alarm, resisting orders of authorities to disperse, and religious defamation.²⁹
- **5 November:** SPDC authorities arrested U Khaymarwuntha, a 20-year-old monk from Zantila Kamahtan monastery in Rangoon’s South Dagon Township, for his involvement in the anti-junta demonstrations.³⁰
- **15 November:** About 150 USDA members, Township officials, and police officers raided Aung Dhamma Pala monastery in Rangoon. One monk was beaten and taken into custody.³¹ One monk was arrested when police raided Tayzar Rama Kaman Htan monastery in Akyab, Arakan State.³²
- **29 November:** SPDC authorities ordered the closure of Maggin Monastery in Rangoon’s Thingangyun Township. The monastery, which provides care for people with HIV/AIDS, had been raided four times since September.³³
- **3 January:** SPDC security forces arrested a monk in Rangoon.³⁴

SAFFRON REVOLUTION: TIMELINE

15 August: SPDC unexpectedly increases the price of compressed natural gas by 500%, doubles diesel prices, and increases the price of petrol by two-thirds.

19 August: More than 400 people march nine kilometers from Kokine junction to Tamwe market in Rangoon in a protest led by 88 Generation Students.

28 August: About 200 monks protest the fuel price hikes in Akyab, Arakan State.

5 September: SPDC Army soldiers fire warning shots to break up a demonstration of several hundred monks in Pakokku, Magwe Division. Some of the monks are severely beaten and three are arrested.

17 September: SPDC fails to meet the All-Burmese Monks Alliance’s demands to roll back the fuel price hikes, apologize for the Pakokku incident, release all political prisoners, and kick-start dialogue with pro-democracy forces.

18 September: Monks begin marching through the streets of Burma’s main cities to protest against the military regime. The demonstrations quickly spread to other towns across Burma.

22 September: A crowd of 2,000 monks and civilians walk past a roadblock and rally outside the lakeside house where Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is detained.

24 September: In the largest public demonstration since 1988, about 20,000 monks lead as many as 100,000 people through the streets of Rangoon.

25 September: SPDC imposes a curfew from 9 pm to 5 am in Rangoon and bans any gathering of more than five people. Similar restrictions are imposed in Mandalay.

26 September: SPDC begins a massive crackdown against demonstrators. Between 26 and 27 September, the SPDC arrests over 600 monks throughout Burma.

²⁴ AFP (14 Nov 07) We are in control: Myanmar defence official

²⁵ VOA (02 Jan 08) Crackdown Against Buddhist Monks Shakes Burmese Society; Mizzima News (17 Mar 08) Soldiers surround Rangoon’s Kaba Aye Pagoda; DVB (30 Apr 08) Authorities keep Rangoon monks under close watch; DVB (05 Aug 08) Monks pressured for accepting NLD offering; Narinjara News (18 Aug 08) Army and Police Deploy at Sittwe Monastery; DVB (29 Aug 08) Security stepped up in Pakokku; Irrawaddy (09 Sep 08) Commemoration of monk’s death muted in Arakan State

²⁶ Irrawaddy (01 Feb 08) Subdued but Unbowed; Narinjara News (24 Feb 08) Immigration Checks List of Monks on Western Border; Narinjara News (02 Apr 08) Monastery, home raided in Sittwe; Mizzima News (27 Apr 08) Junta monitors Buddhist monasteries; DVB (16 Jul 08) Monks continue regime boycott; Narinjara (09 Aug 08) Police Raid Two Monasteries in Sittwe; DVB (29 Aug 08) Rangoon authorities collect monks’ personal data; IMNA (01 Sep 08) Monks under restriction a year after protests against junta; DVB (05 Sept 08) Abbot detained in monastery raid; Mizzima News (05 Sep 08) Junta warns monks to stay away from politics and protests

²⁷ Irrawaddy (27 Aug 08) Arrested monks held in Rangoon detention center

²⁸ Mizzima News (13 Nov 07) Junta arrests prominent Abbot U Gambira; DVB (13 Nov 07) Monk leader U Gambira arrested

²⁹ DVB (19 Aug 08) U Gambira charged with 10 offences; DVB (21 Aug 08) Trials open for U Gambira and Htin Kyaw; Irrawaddy (21 Aug 08) Junta disrobes, charges leading monk; Mizzima News (21 Aug 08) Court charges monk on 10 counts

³⁰ DVB (08 Nov 07) Monk arrested in South Dagon

³¹ DVB (16 Nov 07) Monk held after monastery raid

³² Monk Arrested in Police Raid

³³ AP (30 Nov 07) AIDS Monastery Ordered Shut in Myanmar

³⁴ Irrawaddy (04 Jan 08) New Mass Movement issues open letter to junta; DVB (07 Jan 08) Junta continues to arrest activists

- **Mid-March:** It was reported that SPDC soldiers and riot police locked down and surrounded Kaba Aye monastery in Rangoon.³⁵
- **19 June:** Junta-backed thugs arrested a monk who participated in a ceremony to celebrate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 63rd birthday outside the NLD headquarters in Rangoon.³⁶
- **15 July:** SPDC authorities arrested nine monks at Rangoon railway station and detained them at Insein prison.³⁷ They were subsequently sentenced to two years' imprisonment for religious defamation.³⁸
- **Early August:** Reports emerged that the SPDC had ordered Rangoon monasteries to send monks back to their hometowns. Monks believed that the measures were intended to reduce the number of monks in Rangoon before 8 August.³⁹ Additionally, some abbots in Rangoon and Pegu did not accept students who participated in the Saffron Revolution.⁴⁰
- **8 August:** SPDC authorities in Rambree, Arakan State, detained Taung Kyaunn monastery's abbot U Thumana.⁴¹
- **8 August:** SPDC police and local authorities raided Kyin Thi Nat Kong and Say Gri monasteries in Akyab, Arakan State. Police were reportedly searching for monk leaders planning an 8-8-88 commemoration demonstration.⁴²
- **Mid-August:** It was reported that Insein prison authorities suspended visitation rights for about 15 monks and nuns imprisoned in connection with the September 2007 anti-junta demonstrations.⁴³
- **Mid-August:** SPDC authorities reportedly deployed soldiers and police near Addi Htan monastery on the outskirts of Akyab.⁴⁴
- **23 August:** SPDC authorities arrested two young monks from Thardu monastery in Rangoon's Kyimyindaing Township.⁴⁵
- **Early September:** It was reported that three monks were arrested at Pegu's Shwe Maw Daw pagoda.⁴⁶

Monks challenge the regime

Despite the ongoing persecution, monks across Burma continued to oppose the military regime.

Demonstrations and acts of defiance

- **3 November:** About 50 monks staged a demonstration in Mogok Township, Mandalay Division.⁴⁷
- **30 November:** SPDC authorities in Mogok, Mandalay Division, stopped 300 monks when they attempted to march from their monastery to a pagoda.⁴⁸
- **9 December:** Posters appeared in the streets of Pakokku, Magwe Division, urging monks to stage a new wave of protests on 4 January, Burma's Independence Day.⁴⁹
- **11-15 December:** A series of *dharmma* sermons were held in Rangoon's South Okkalapa Township. About 1,000 people including some former soldiers attended the *dharmma* sermons, which were increasingly regarded as an act of defiance against junta.⁵⁰ On 16 February, SPDC authorities in

³⁵ Mizzima News (17 Mar 08) Soldiers surround Rangoon's Kaba Aye Pagoda

³⁶ Reuters (19 Jun 08) Myanmar junta gang hits Suu Kyi birthday rally; DPA (19 Jun 08) Myanmar arrests Aung San Suu Kyi supporters on her birthday; Irrawaddy (19 Jun 08) NLD Members Arrested at Suu Kyi Birthday Celebration; DVB (19 Jun 08) NLD members beaten and arrested; Mizzima News (20 Jun 08) Junta continues tightening security outside NLD office; Irrawaddy (20 Jun 08) Junta Detains 14 Calling for Release of Suu Kyi; AFP (30 Jun 08) Suu Kyi's party urges release of Myanmar activists

³⁷ DVB (29 Jul 08) Nine monks arrested in Rangoon

³⁸ DVB (13 Aug 08) Monks given two-year prison term

³⁹ Kaowao News (03 Jul 08) Monks forced home from Rangoon

⁴⁰ IMNA (04 Jul 08) Monks return to Rangoon for Buddhist lent and further studies; IMNA (09 Jul 08) Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery continues

⁴¹ Kaladan News (11 Aug 08) Peaceful demonstrations in Arakan

⁴² Narinjara News (09 Aug 08) Police Raid Two Monasteries in Sittwe

⁴³ DVB (13 Aug 08) Monks and nuns banned from receiving visitors

⁴⁴ Narinjara News (18 Aug 08) Army and Police Deploy at Sittwe Monastery

⁴⁵ Irrawaddy (27 Aug 08) Arrested monks held in Rangoon detention center

⁴⁶ IMNA (01 Sep 08) Monks under restriction a year after protests against junta

⁴⁷ Irrawaddy (05 Nov 07) Arrests continue as Gambari holds talks

⁴⁸ Irrawaddy (30 Nov 07) Monastery closure makes mockery of Junta's Buddhist claims

⁴⁹ Mizzima News (21 Dec 07) Posters exhorting monks' to protest on Independence Day in Pakokku

⁵⁰ Irrawaddy (14 Dec 07) The role of Buddhism in the wake of the crackdown

Pwint Phyu Township, Magwe Division, cancelled a *dhamma* talk by abbot Thu Mingala and ordered him to leave town.⁵¹

- **14 January:** Abbot Nyanissara delivered a sermon in Sagaing Division that used allegories to tell his audiences that regimes have fallen before. He repeated the same message in a series of sermons around the country. Several of Nyanissara's sermons were distributed on DVDs.⁵²
- **24 August:** SPDC authorities stopped 40 monks when they attempted to march in the streets of in Akyab, Arakan State.⁵³
- **16 September:** A monk slashed his throat in a suicide attempt at Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda after running out of money to pay for medical care.⁵⁴

Opposition to the SPDC's referendum

On 26 February, the SPDC announced the rules for the referendum on their proposed constitution to be held in May. The rules barred Burma's over 300,000 Buddhist monks and nuns from voting.⁵⁵ The All-Burmese Monks Alliance denounced the SPDC's referendum as an effort to perpetuate the junta's rule⁵⁶ and released several statements calling on citizens to oppose it.⁵⁷

Defying regime threats and harassment, monks expressed their opposition to the referendum and campaigned for a "No" vote. On 3 March, monks in Mandalay launched a poster campaign urging a "No" vote. Posters appeared in various locations in Amarapura Township, including several monasteries and Yadanapon University.⁵⁸ In early March, monks in Moulmein, Mon State, distributed leaflets opposing the referendum.⁵⁹

Boycott of the regime

Monks also continued to boycott SPDC military members and their families by refusing alms, refusing to grant blessings, and refusing entry to SPDC officials.⁶⁰

- **18 November:** The All-Burmese Monks Alliance said that they would continue to boycott the military regime.⁶¹
- **26 November:** The All-Burmese Monks Alliance released a statement urging monks to boycott the annual monastic examinations to show solidarity with the monks targeted by the SPDC's crackdown.⁶² Following the call for a boycott, about 90% of monks did not enroll.⁶³
- **Late November:** Monks refused to perform a funeral blessing for a senior Swan Arr Shin member from Rangoon's Insein Township who had been actively involved in the September crackdown.⁶⁴
- **Early December:** Abbots of four monasteries in Pakokku, Magwe Division, refused to give blessings to a group of visiting SPDC officials.⁶⁵
- **4 December:** Monks at Seittabala monastery in Kyaukpadaung Township, Mandalay Division, refused a food donation from SPDC Minister of Industry-1, Aung Thaug.⁶⁶
- **9 December:** Posters appeared on the walls of monasteries in Pakokku, urging monks to renew the boycott.⁶⁷

⁵¹ DVB (18 Feb 08) Authorities ban Dhamma talk in Magwe

⁵² Los Angeles Time (14 Jan 08) Monk's words stir the spirit of Myanmar's resistance

⁵³ DVB (26 Aug 08) Sittwe monks' protest disrupted by authorities

⁵⁴ AP (17 Sep 08) Myanmar monk attempts suicide at famous temple

⁵⁵ NLM (28 Feb 08) The Referendum Law for the Approval of the Draft Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008

⁵⁶ AP (11 Feb 08) Groups that led Myanmar's pro-democracy protests denounce Junta's polling plans

⁵⁷ Irrawaddy (18 Mar 08) Burmese Monks Call for Exam, Constitution Boycott; DVB (26 Mar 08) Monk group urges Burmese people to vote No; Irrawaddy (10 May 08) Massive cheating reported from Referendum polling stations

⁵⁸ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 08) Mandalay monks launch anti-referendum poster campaign; Mizzima News (05 Mar 08) Anti-referendum posters in Central Burma

⁵⁹ IMNA (12 Mar 08) Mon students, youth and monks oppose referendum

⁶⁰ Irrawaddy (01 Feb 08) Subdued but Unbowed

⁶¹ DVB (19 Nov 07) Monks vow to continue junta boycott

⁶² DVB (27 Nov 07) Monks demand inquiry into deaths and disappearances; Irrawaddy (27 Nov 07) Burmese monks urged to boycott state-run exams

⁶³ Narinjara News (07 Dec 07) Monks boycott examinations; Irrawaddy (11 Dec 07) Junta tells USDA to prepare for more demonstrations

⁶⁴ DVB (28 Nov 07) Monks refuse funeral blessing for militia leader

⁶⁵ DVB (07 Dec 07) Monasteries pass junta offerings to poor

⁶⁶ DVB (19 Dec 07) Mandalay monks decline junta offering

- **18 December:** 900 of 1,000 monks at Maha Gandhayon monastery in Mandalay refused to accept a food offering from SPDC Minister of Industry-1, Aung Thaung.⁶⁸
- **1 January:** All-Burmese Monks Alliance released a statement saying they would continue their boycott of the military regime.⁶⁹
- **18 March:** All-Burmese Monks Alliance released a statement urging monks to boycott the religious exam.⁷⁰ Monks in Rangoon, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, and Sagaing Divisions and Arakan State reported widespread monk participation in the boycott.⁷¹
- **26 March:** All-Burmese Monks Alliance released a statement urging monks to continue their boycott of the junta.⁷²
- **Mid-July:** Monks in Tenasserim, Magwe, and Mandalay Divisions reportedly said they would continue their boycott against SPDC members and their families despite pressure and scrutiny from authorities.⁷³
- **25 August:** Monks at Anauk-taik monastery in Pakokku rejected donations made by SPDC Communications Minister Maj Gen Thein Zaw.⁷⁴

Monks go global

In October 2007, a group of prominent Burmese Buddhist monks established the International Burmese Monks Organization (IBMO). The organization aims to raise international awareness about Burma's political struggles through the voices of the Buddhist clergy. By early 2008, the IBMO comprised over 300 members from 14 countries.⁷⁵

- On 15 January, the IBMO called on international leaders to back their demand for an immediate meeting between the SPDC and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.⁷⁶
- In February, the IBMO began a global tour raising awareness of the situation in Burma. The IBMO met with government officials in Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand in order to build international support for their campaign.⁷⁷
- On 27 March, IBMO leader U Pannya Vamsa expressed the group's opposition to the SPDC's constitutional referendum.⁷⁸

Monks and cyclone Nargis

Monks played a vital role in cyclone Nargis relief operations. In Rangoon, while SPDC authorities failed to provide timely assistance to cyclone survivors,⁷⁹ hundreds of monks intervened and helped clear the storm debris and provided victims with food.⁸⁰ Monks also contributed to delivering aid to survivors in the former capital and throughout the Irrawaddy delta.⁸¹

⁶⁷ Mizzima News (21 Dec 07) Posters exhorting monks' to protest on Independence Day in Pakokku

⁶⁸ DVB (19 Dec 07) Mandalay monks decline junta offering

⁶⁹ Irrawaddy (02 Jan 08) Monk Movement Calls for Release of Detainees

⁷⁰ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 08) Mandalay monks launch anti-referendum poster campaign

⁷¹ Irrawaddy (18 Mar 08) Burmese Monks Call for Exam, Constitution Boycott

⁷² DVB (26 Mar 08) Monk group urges Burmese people to vote No

⁷³ DVB (16 Jul 08) Monks continue regime boycott; IMNA (28 Jul 08) Wiping tears of monks with more pass figures

⁷⁴ DVB (29 Aug 08) Security stepped up in Pakokku

⁷⁵ Mizzima News (21 Jan 08) Sasana Moli sets up 14 global branches

⁷⁶ TNS (16 Jan 08) Myanmar: Overseas monks urge meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and junta leader

⁷⁷ 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

⁷⁸ New Zealand Herald (27 Mar 08) Monks denounce referendum call; UNPO (03 Mar 08) Burma: Monk organization Sasana Moli boycotts proposed elections

⁷⁹ AP (04 May 08) Cyclone kills more than 350 in Myanmar; AP (06 May 08) Transport, visa hurdles slowing aid to Myanmar storm victims; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Cyclone could unleash political upheaval; DVB (04 May 08) Local residents complain of lack of help after cyclone; Al Jazeera (05 May 08) Myanmar cyclone kills 10,000 people; AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

⁸⁰ 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; 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

⁸¹ 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) Rangoon Struggling to Restore Utilities

SPDC officials prevented monks from talking to cyclone survivors⁸² and instructed aid agencies not to cooperate with monks' efforts.⁸³ The junta barred media from reporting on the monks' relief efforts.⁸⁴

Over 70,000 cyclone survivors were sheltered in monasteries and monks bore the main responsibility for their care.⁸⁵ Fearing large numbers of people in monasteries could lead to unrest, the SPDC ordered people out of monasteries in Labutta and Bogale, Irrawaddy Division.⁸⁶ In Rangoon, SPDC officials evicted cyclone survivors sheltered in monasteries, churches, and schools to make way for the constitutional referendum.⁸⁷

DIALOGUE: THE SPDC'S DESPERATE BLUFF

The SPDC came under intense international pressure over the bloody crackdown on the August-September 2007 nationwide anti-junta protests. In an effort to appease world opinion and prevent closer scrutiny by the UN Security Council, the regime attempted to persuade the international community that it was serious about starting dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

On 4 October, SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe said he was willing to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under certain conditions. Demands included that Daw Suu abandon confrontation with the junta and withdraw calls for the imposition of sanctions.⁸⁸ On 8 October, the SPDC appointed Maj Gen Aung Kyi as the junta's Liaison Minister to hold talks with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.⁸⁹ He was the fourth official designated to liaise with Daw Suu since 1994.⁹⁰

On 8 November, Gambari read a statement in Singapore on behalf of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In her statement, Daw Suu expressed her willingness to cooperate with the SPDC to start **"a meaningful and time-bound dialogue with the SPDC leadership [...] as early as possible."** Daw Suu also indicated that any dialogue with the junta would require taking into consideration **"the interests and opinions of as broad a range of political organizations and forces as possible, in particular those of [the] ethnic nationality races."**⁹¹ Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 8 November statement received widespread support from Burma's pro-democracy organizations and ethnic groups.⁹²

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and SPDC Liaison Minister Maj Gen Aung Kyi met five times between October 2007 and January 2008.⁹³ Following her last meeting with Aung Kyi on 30 January 2008, Daw Suu

⁸² DVB (21 May 08) Joint relief efforts in Irrawaddy Delta; Star (16 May 08) Response to killer cyclone highlights the animosity between the country's military and Buddhist clergy

⁸³ DVB (16 May 08) Monks prevented from working with other donors

⁸⁴ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

⁸⁵ Myanmar Cyclone Nargis Information Center (17 May 08) Rapid assessment of cyclone Nargis affected areas in Myanmar

⁸⁶ 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

⁸⁷ 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

⁸⁸ AP (04 Oct 07) Myanmar junta chief willing to meet opposition leader Suu Kyi - but with conditions; AP (05 Oct 07) Myanmar leader willing to meet Suu Kyi; Reuters (04 Oct 07) Myanmar junta sets Suu Kyi talks conditions; AFP (04 Oct 07) Myanmar junta chief willing to meet Suu Kyi if she drops demands; AFP (06 Oct 07) Suu Kyi appears on state TV as under-fire Myanmar frees monks

⁸⁹ AFP (08 Oct 07) Myanmar junta names point man for relations with Suu Kyi; BBC (08 Oct 07) Burmese junta appoints go-between; New York Times (09 Oct 07) Myanmar appoints liaison to dissident; AP (25 Oct 07) Suu Kyi Meets Junta's Official

⁹⁰ Irrawaddy (09 Oct 07) Junta Appoints Liaison Officer for Suu Kyi

⁹¹ AP (08 Nov 07) Text of Aung San Suu Kyi's statement released by U.N. envoy; AP (08 Nov 07) Suu Kyi says she is ready to cooperate with junta; Reuters (08 Nov 07) Myanmar's Suu Kyi says ready to cooperate with gov't; Bloomberg (09 Nov 07) Gambari Says Suu Kyi, Myanmar Junta Set for 'Substantive' Talks

⁹² IMNA (12 Nov 07) Ethnic welcome Daw Su's message

⁹³ Reuters (25 Oct 07) Myanmar's detained Suu Kyi has talks with junta; AP (25 Oct 07) Suu Kyi Meets Junta's Official; AP (26 Oct 07) Show of Force in Myanmar on Anniversary; DVB (26 Oct 07) Daw Suu meets liaison minister; AP (09 Nov 07) Myanmar lifts some restraints on Suu Kyi; AP (09 Nov 07) Suu Kyi resigned to Myanmar house arrest; AP (10 Nov 07) Myanmar's Suu Kyi tells colleagues she is 'very optimistic' over prospects for talks; AP (10 Nov 07) Suu Kyi is front-page news in Myanmar; AFP (10 Nov 07) Myanmar's Suu Kyi says 'time for healing' after junta meeting; AP (10 Nov 07) Myanmar junta says it's putting energy into reform as Suu Kyi gets rare front-page billing; AFP (11 Nov 07) Suu Kyi meets party, junta; AP (19 Nov 07) Myanmar's Suu Kyi meets liaison minister; VOA (19 Nov 07) Burma's Detained Opposition Leader Meets With Government Liaison; AFP (20 Nov 07) Suu Kyi meets with Myanmar official; DVB (20 Nov 07) Daw Suu has third meeting with liaison minister; AFP (11 Jan 08) Aung San Suu Kyi meets Myanmar junta official; Reuters (11 Jan 08) Detained Suu Kyi meets Myanmar junta minister; Reuters (30 Jan 08) "Prepare for worst", Suu Kyi tells Myanmar

expressed her dissatisfaction with the talks and the lack of any time frame for dialogue.⁹⁴ Daw Suu reportedly said she feared the junta was toying with her and the talks might give rise to “false hope”.⁹⁵

SPDC IN DISARRAY

More internal conflicts and reshuffles

Following the Saffron Revolution, the regime continued to face internal instability due to the ongoing power struggle between the junta’s two top generals, Sr Gen Than Shwe and Vice Sr Gen Maung Aye, and their respective loyalists.

On 12 October, SPDC Prime Minister, Gen Soe Win, died at Rangoon’s Mingaladon military hospital.⁹⁶ Soe Win’s death triggered a reshuffle in the SPDC cabinet on 24 October. The SPDC appointed 62-year-old Lt Gen Thein Sein as the junta’s new Prime Minister.⁹⁷ Lt Gen Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, 57, current SPDC member and Quartermaster-General, replaced Thein Sein as the junta’s Secretary-1.⁹⁸ Deputy Labor Minister, Maj Gen Aung Kyi, believed to be close to Sr Gen Maung Aye, was promoted to Minister of Labor.⁹⁹ He replaced Than Shwe’s loyalist, Thaug.¹⁰⁰

The post-cyclone emergency triggered another massive shake-up. On 20-21 June, the regime reshuffled about 200 military officers, two ministers, five senior SPDC officials, seven Army Regional Commanders, and the Navy’s Commander-in-Chief.¹⁰¹ The move was part of SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe’s strategy to replace high-ranking officials with young officers to ensure military presence in future administrations.¹⁰² Most of the officers who were given control of strategic commands are Than Shwe loyalists.¹⁰³

Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement Minister Maj Gen Maung Maung Swe, who had been responsible for coordinating relief work with UN officials and foreign diplomats, lost his more lucrative post as Minister of Immigration and Population.¹⁰⁴ The change was allegedly made to allow him to concentrate on aid efforts.¹⁰⁵ The Navy’s Commander-in-Chief Lt Gen Soe Thein was relieved of his post - reportedly because of his slow response to the cyclone emergency.¹⁰⁶

Dissatisfaction grows from within

The violent handling of the Saffron Revolution by the SPDC resulted in increasing discontent among the regime’s rank and file.

- According to a high-ranking junta official, the SPDC detained five generals and more than 400 soldiers for refusing to fire on monks and protesters in Rangoon.¹⁰⁷
- In early October, Ye Min Tun, an SPDC Foreign Ministry official for 10 years, sent a letter of resignation to the Burmese embassy in London over the “horrible” treatment of Buddhist monks during the protests.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁴ Reuters (30 Jan 08) "Prepare for worst", Suu Kyi tells Myanmar

⁹⁵ Reuters (30 Jan 08) "Prepare for worst", Suu Kyi tells Myanmar

⁹⁶ AP (12 Oct 07) Myanmar Rejects UN Call for Negotiations; Mizzima News (12 Oct 07) Burmese Premier Soe Win dies; IMNA (12 Oct 07) Myanmar PM, Gen. Soe Win dies at 5: 30 p.m.

⁹⁷ AP (24 Oct 07) Thein Sein appointed Myanmar's prime minister; DVB (24 Oct 07) Junta announces new appointments; Mizzima News (25 Oct 07) Reshuffles in Burmese top posts; Mizzima News (25 Oct 07) Reshuffles in Burmese top posts

⁹⁸ Reuters (24 Oct 07) Myanmar junta names new senior official; AP (24 Oct 07) Thein Sein appointed Myanmar's prime minister; DVB (24 Oct 07) Junta announces new appointments; Mizzima News (25 Oct 07) Reshuffles in Burmese top posts

⁹⁹ AP (24 Oct 07) Thein Sein appointed Myanmar's prime minister; DVB (24 Oct 07) Junta announces new appointments; Mizzima News (25 Oct 07) Reshuffles in Burmese top posts; Irrawaddy (09 Oct 07) Aung Kyi: The Junta's New Liaison Officer

¹⁰⁰ Irrawaddy (09 Oct 07) Aung Kyi: The Junta's New Liaison Officer

¹⁰¹ AP (21 Jun 08) Myanmar's junta announces small reshuffle of Cabinet and military posts; AFP (24 Jun 08) Myanmar retires top military officers, reshuffles 150 staff; Mizzima News (20 Jun 08) Change of guard in Burmese junta; Mizzima News (23 Jun 08) Junta's reshuffle; what lies behind?; Kachin News Group (24 Jun 08) Junta supremo praises protégé in Kachin State

¹⁰² Irrawaddy (23 Jun 08) Reshuffle Could Signal Changes at the Top

¹⁰³ Mizzima News (23 Jun 08) Junta's reshuffle; what lies behind?

¹⁰⁴ New Kerala (23 Jun 08) Myanmar retires elderly junta lieutenant generals

¹⁰⁵ AP (21 Jun 08) Myanmar's junta announces small reshuffle of Cabinet and military posts

¹⁰⁶ Irrawaddy (20 Jun 08) Junta Reshuffles Cabinet, Top Military Posts

¹⁰⁷ AP (10 Oct 07) Generals, soldiers detained for refusing to shoot monks in Myanmar; AGI (10 Oct 07) Burma: 5 generals arrested for not shooting at monks

- According to some estimates, over 100 policemen from 16 police brigades deserted in the aftermath of the September 2007 crackdown.¹⁰⁹
- Several police officers who were ordered by SPDC Army troops from the Southeast Regional Command to open fire on protesting monks in Moulmein also expressed a desire to retire.¹¹⁰
- On 9 December, SPDC police chief, Brig Gen Khin Yi, ordered police forces around the country to put an end to the flow of officers deserting their positions.¹¹¹
- Police officers assigned to Rangoon's Shwedagon pagoda were given a 60% salary increase. They had complained about having gained a bad reputation for their role in the crackdown.¹¹²
- Civil servants from various departments expressed their desire to retire, as military officers began to occupy higher posts. In Mon State, about 400 military officers were transferred to education, forest, and customs departments.¹¹³
- Following cyclone Nargis, the regime barred civil servants in Naypyidaw from taking leave to contact or locate family members in cyclone-affected areas. However, many defied the order and left to check on their relatives.¹¹⁴ Military personnel with relatives in cyclone-affected areas also left their units without permission to return to their homes.¹¹⁵

Army desertions

Desertions have continued to hit the SPDC Army at a steady rate since the Saffron Revolution. The regime has resorted to forced recruitment of soldiers to make up for understaffed battalions.¹¹⁶

- Cpt Win Htun Aung, an SPDC Army officer from the Mandalay-based Light Infantry Battalion 3, fled his battalion after an arrest warrant was issued against him for giving water to monks during the September protests in Mandalay.¹¹⁷
- Cpt Hla Win from Battalion 99 fled to the Thai-Burma border, protesting the violence used against the monks.¹¹⁸
- In November, two soldiers aged 18 and 19 who deserted the SPDC Army's Light Infantry Battalion 564 stationed in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, fled to Bangladesh.¹¹⁹
- On 26 February, four deserters from the SPDC Army's Light Infantry Battalion 401's Regiment 1 surrendered to the Karen National Liberation Army.¹²⁰
- On 12 May, Indian police in Bualpui village in Lunglei district, Mizoram State, arrested Shwe, a 23-year-old SPDC Army deserter. Shwe, who had reportedly served in the SPDC Army for three years deserted because of shortage of rations and the discrimination meted out by high ranking officials in his battalion.¹²¹
- On 8 August, three Na Sa Ka officers arrived in Bangladesh after deserting from Na Sa Ka headquarters in Kyi Kan Byint in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.¹²²
- According to a report from the SPDC Army's Military Operation Command No. 15 based in Buthidaung, Arakan State, over 100 soldiers deserted from the headquarters in the first six months of 2008.¹²³

¹⁰⁸ BBC (09 Oct 07) Diplomat resigns over Burma monks

¹⁰⁹ DVB (12 Dec 07) Police chief orders clampdown on desertions

¹¹⁰ IMNA (05 Nov 07) Police officer ordered to shoot monks, wants to retire; IMNA (13 Nov 07) Upset government officers want to retire

¹¹¹ DVB (12 Dec 07) Police chief orders clampdown on desertions

¹¹² DVB (07 Dec 07) Pay rise for Shwedagon police

¹¹³ IMNA (13 Nov 07) Upset government officers want to retire

¹¹⁴ Irrawaddy (06 May 08) Burmese officials go AWOL to search for relatives

¹¹⁵ Irrawaddy (06 May 08) Burmese officials go AWOL to search for relatives

¹¹⁶ DVB (24 Dec 07) Forced military recruitment in Bago and Shan state; Mizzima News (21 Dec 07) Anti-riot training in Rangoon and Pakokku; Narinjara News (09 Sep 08) People's militia forced to join Army

¹¹⁷ DVB (08 Nov 07) Army officer flees under threat of arrest; Mizzima News (08 Nov 07) Top military leader shelves two disobedient commanders

¹¹⁸ Mizzima News (08 Nov 07) Top military leader shelves two disobedient commanders

¹¹⁹ Narinjara News (28 Nov 07) Two young soldiers desert Burmese Army

¹²⁰ DVB (29 Feb 08) Army deserters surrender to Karen rebels

¹²¹ Khonumthung News (16 May 08) Mizoram police arrest deserter from Burma Army

¹²² Narinjara News (11 Aug 08) Three Nasaka deserters arrive in Bangladesh

¹²³ Narinjara News (09 Sep 08) People's militia forced to join Army

Navy sinking

Cyclone Nargis had a devastating impact on the regime's Navy. The SPDC failed to warn and evacuate military personnel stationed along Burma's affected coastline. The storm sank as many as 25 naval ships. About 30 officers and 250 naval personnel were reported missing.¹²⁴ Particularly hard hit was the Pamawaddy Regional Command headquarters on Haigyi Island.¹²⁵ More than 1,500 Navy personnel were stationed at the base and about 2,000 family members lived on the island.¹²⁶ An unknown number of personnel and family members went missing.¹²⁷ The cyclone destroyed the barracks and family housing at the base. The shipyard was extensively damaged and a reconnaissance station was destroyed.¹²⁸ The Naval Training Center at Thanlyin, across the Pegu River from Rangoon, was also damaged.¹²⁹

Only about 20 naval personnel assigned to Haigyi Island returned to their units after the cyclone. They reportedly expressed their dissatisfaction for being presented with certificates instead of monetary compensation for the losses sustained from cyclone Nargis.¹³⁰

ARMS FLOW INTO BURMA

The bloody repression of the Saffron Revolution and the ongoing military offensive against ethnic nationalities in Eastern Burma provide compelling evidence of how the military regime uses its armed forces to oppress the Burmese people. Over the past year, the regime has continued to purchase arms and other military supplies from China, Russia, and India.

On 12 October 2007, an SPDC delegation headed by Lt Gen Myint Hlaing, Commander of the regime's Air Force, went to Russia to strengthen military ties with Moscow. The regime was reportedly interested in acquiring remotely piloted planes as well as BUK-M1 and TOR-M1 missile systems.¹³¹ The SPDC was also seeking to have its officers trained in Russian military facilities.¹³²

Between December 2007 and August 2008, the Chinese government delivered in four separate consignments over 750 Chinese military trucks "First Automobile Works" (FAW) to the SPDC.¹³³ The vehicles were part of a 3,500 truck consignment purchased by the junta.¹³⁴ The FAW trucks are designed to tow artillery and transport military supplies.¹³⁵ In early March, about 40 FAW trucks were sent to the Kyaikkasan police grounds in Rangoon's Bahan Township.¹³⁶

On 2 April 2008, Japan's public broadcaster NHK reported that North Korea had been selling the SPDC multiple rocket launchers with a range of about 65 kilometers. The report said that "full-scale" exports of the weapons had been handled by an unnamed Singapore trading company.¹³⁷

In mid-April 2008, trucks transporting military equipment including artillery shells, bullets, and guns entered Burma from Moreh in India's Northeastern State of Manipur. Citing military sources, the India-based newspaper Sangai Express said that the equipment was delivered as part of the trade deals reached between Delhi and the SPDC.¹³⁸

¹²⁴ Irrawaddy (12 May 08) Burmese Navy Decimated in Cyclone

¹²⁵ Irrawaddy (12 May 08) Burmese Navy Decimated in Cyclone

¹²⁶ Irrawaddy (26 May 08) Burma's navy suffers strategic losses

¹²⁷ Irrawaddy (26 May 08) Burma's navy suffers strategic losses

¹²⁸ Irrawaddy (12 May 08) Burmese Navy Decimated in Cyclone

¹²⁹ Irrawaddy (26 May 08) Burma's navy suffers strategic losses

¹³⁰ DVB (26 May 08) Naval soldiers dissatisfied with cyclone awards

¹³¹ Reuters (12 Oct 07) Myanmar generals visit arms maker in Russia

¹³² DPA (28 Oct 07) Myanmar regime officials in Moscow for military cooperation talks

¹³³ DVB (17 Jan 08) Second delivery of military trucks from China; Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Chinese military trucks for Burma Army arrive on border; Mizzima News (11 Apr 08) Chinese trucks to tow howitzer arrive on border; Irrawaddy (19 Apr 08) Burma's Trading Neighbors Offering Military Gifts; DVB (26 Aug 08) 200 more military trucks delivered from China

¹³⁴ DVB (26 Aug 08) 200 more military trucks delivered from China

¹³⁵ Mizzima News (11 Apr 08) Chinese trucks to tow howitzer arrive on border

¹³⁶ DPA (04 Mar 08) China-made police trucks arrive in Rangoon

¹³⁷ AFP (02 Apr 08) N Korea exporting multiple-launch rockets to Myanmar; Reuters (03 Apr 08) N Korea sells Rocket Launchers to Burma; Irrawaddy (03 Apr 08) N Korea Sells Rocket Launchers to Burma

¹³⁸ Irrawaddy (19 Apr 08) Burma's Trading Neighbors Offering Military Gifts

SPDC OFFENSIVE INTENSIFIES IN EASTERN BURMA

Since the end of November, the SPDC Army has stepped up its military offensive against civilians and armed opposition groups in Eastern Burma.¹³⁹

- The SPDC Army deployed 83 new battalions in Karen National Union (KNU) areas, bringing the number of battalions involved in military operations to 187.¹⁴⁰
- The SPDC Army is constructing two new roads in Toungoo District, Karen State, to link their camps and now have over 27 battalions in the District. Villagers have been forced to clear roads, work as porters and act as minesweepers.¹⁴¹
- On 14 February, two unidentified assailants shot and killed KNU General Secretary Mahn Sha Lah Phan at his home in Mae Sot, Thailand.¹⁴² Sources close to the pro-junta Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) said that the killing was most likely carried out by Soe Myint and several other members of DKBA Battalion 999.¹⁴³
- 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 2007.¹⁴⁴
- On 4 June, SPDC Army troops from Infantry Battalion 240 attacked Te Mu Der village in Papun District, Karen State. Soldiers burned rice stores, destroyed homes, farms, and damaged a church. Over 1,000 people from Te Mu Der and the nearby villages fled to the jungle.¹⁴⁵
- Renewed fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the DKBA resulted in more displacement in Eastern Burma.¹⁴⁶ In early July, 200 Karen villagers fled and took refuge at a local school in Tak Province, Thailand.¹⁴⁷ Later in the month, 300 Karen villagers fled to Thailand after DKBA and SPDC Army units invaded their villages.¹⁴⁸

ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT CONTINUES

The price hikes that precipitated the Saffron Revolution are only a small part of the SPDC's mismanagement of the economy which has impoverished the people of Burma. The Heritage Foundation ranked Burma 153rd of 157 in its 2008 index of economic freedom, just above Libya and below Turkmenistan.¹⁴⁹ 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".¹⁵⁰

By the end of 2007, Burma's inflation rate reached 50%. This was up from an already crippling 20% in 2006.¹⁵¹ In 2007, it was reported that 90% of the population were living on less than \$1 per day.¹⁵² After the August 2007 fuel price hikes, the WFP said that five million people in Burma – one in ten - did not have enough food because of repressive SPDC policies.¹⁵³ Before cyclone Nargis, the population in the Irrawaddy delta was already suffering from hunger with statistics that showed an estimated 30% chronic and 9% acute malnutrition.¹⁵⁴ In the aftermath of cyclone Nargis, rice prices doubled.¹⁵⁵

¹³⁹ IMNA (03 Dec 07) Military offensive force relocation of villagers; Mizzima News (10 Dec 07) Junta intensifies attacks on Karen rebels; Irrawaddy (11 Dec 07) Military offensive targeting villagers' food supplies

¹⁴⁰ Irrawaddy (11 Dec 07) Military offensive targeting villagers' food supplies

¹⁴¹ Asian Tribune (16 Jan 08) Ten civilians killed as Burma army increases presence in Karen state

¹⁴² AP (15 Feb 08) Karen rebels vow to continue fighting against Burma junta

¹⁴³ Irrawaddy (21 Feb 08) DKBA members kill Mahn Sha: Karen sources

¹⁴⁴ Free Burma Rangers (08 Mar 08) Report: Over 2,100 displaced as Burma Army Mortars Villages and Burns Homes in New Attacks

¹⁴⁵ Irrawaddy (09 Jun 08) 1,000 Karen villagers flee attacks Saw Yan Naing; DVB (10 Jun 08) 1000 Karen villagers displaced by attacks

¹⁴⁶ Irrawaddy (28 Jul 08) Karen villagers flee Burmese forces

¹⁴⁷ Irrawaddy (01 Jul 08) Fighting between KNLA and DKBA Continues

¹⁴⁸ Irrawaddy (09 Jul 08) Thousands of Karenni IDPs hide in jungle

¹⁴⁹ Mizzima News (17 Jan 08) Burmese economic reform requires political change: expert

¹⁵⁰ Brookings Institute (Mar 08) Index of State weakness in the Developing World

¹⁵¹ Irrawaddy (12 Dec 07) Influential magazine says next year more of same for Burma

¹⁵² BP (20 Aug 07) Soaring petrol costs deepen woes

¹⁵³ Independent (London) (19 Oct 07) Five million Burmese are going hungry, warns UN

¹⁵⁴ DMHA (24 May 08) Cyclone Nargis Update

¹⁵⁵ Altsean-Burma (May 08) Burma Bulletin: Issue 17

Business as usual

In the past year, the SPDC continued its extortion activities and wholesale-auction of the countries' resources. This is despite international scrutiny, local outcry, and the desperate need for investment in infrastructure.

Some countries, notably the US, the EU, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, increased their sanctions on the regime in late 2007 and early 2008.¹⁵⁶ Sanctions targeted specific industries, including gemstones, and specific individuals, including junta-crony Tay Za. While the junta has kept up its pursuit of investment from China, India, and Thailand, investment in Burma in 2007-2008 fell 77%, according to SPDC statistics. Investment in energy was \$172.72 million, compared to \$752.7 million the previous year.¹⁵⁷ Even this investment was in projects that will take energy resources out of the country. The local erratic supply of electricity has worsened in the past year.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Financial Times (12 Nov 07) Singapore feels the heat of drive against Burma

¹⁵⁷ AFP (25 Jul 08) Foreign Investment In Myanmar Falls 77% On Year – Government

¹⁵⁸ Mizzima News (23 Nov 07) Rangoon reels under prolonged power cuts