

BURMA BULLETIN

XXXXXXXX A month-in-review of events in Burma XXXXXXXX

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

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- The SPDC announces that the constitutional referendum will be held on 10 May. Pro-democracy groups and ethnic organizations call for “No” vote.
- Defiant campaign gains momentum across Burma despite arrests of at least 48 activists including 25 NLD members for promoting “No” vote.
- Harassment, intimidation, vote-buying, and propaganda characterize the SPDC’s “Yes” vote campaign. Voting irregularities and voter fraud are pervasive as referendum day draws closer.
- In Thailand, 54 migrant workers including children from Burma, suffocate while being trucked to jobs in Phuket. The incident sparks protests and rekindles debate on the migrants’ rights in Thailand.
- Departures of Rohingya boat people to Malaysia end as the monsoon season begins. The exodus of people from Arakan State to Bangladesh continues.
- US, UK, and France seek new UN Security Council presidential statement on Burma. EU Parliament calls for expanded sanctions and international arms embargo on the SPDC.
- SPDC Vice Sr Gen Maung Aye visits India and inks a US\$135 million investment deal on transport links between Akyab port and India’s Northeastern States. India sweetens the deal by delivering military equipment to the SPDC.
- SPDC PM’s visit to Thailand sets off alarm bells. Thai PM Samak Sundaravej says he has no problem with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s continued house arrest.

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KEY STORY

Referendum: no chance to read the constitution

On 9 April, the SPDC announced that the constitutional referendum would be held on 10 May.¹ On the same day, the regime distributed copies of the constitution to bookshops to be sold for 1,000 kyat (US\$1) a copy.² However, the 194-page document, which contains 457 articles, has not been widely distributed among the people.³ The SPDC printed 465,000 copies of the constitution for a voting public

¹ AP (10 Apr 08) Myanmar junta sets May 10 for holding constitutional referendum; AFP (09 Apr 08) Myanmar sets constitutional referendum for May 10; Mizzima News (09 Apr 08) Junta sets referendum date on May 10

² AP (10 Apr 08) Myanmar junta sets May 10 for holding constitutional referendum; AP (10 Apr 08) Myanmar publishes text of military-backed proposed constitution; AFP (09 Apr 08) Myanmar sets constitutional referendum for May 10

³ Kaladan News (28 Apr 08) Deputy home minister orders release of arrested MMC members

of over 30 million.⁴ In addition, the SPDC did not translate the constitution into any of the ethnic nationalities' languages or English. It would appear that the SPDC does not want Burma's people or the international community to know what is in the constitution.

For more detailed information and analysis on the SPDC's May referendum and draft constitution, please see Altsean-Burma briefer *The SPDC constitutional referendum: A dead end for democracy in Burma*, available at: <http://www.altsean.org/Reports/SPDCReferendum.php>

“No” vote campaign gains momentum

In April, more of Burma's pro-democracy groups and ethnic organizations urged people to vote “No” in the referendum.

- **2 April:** National League for Democracy (NLD) called for a “No” vote. The party also issued a short guide explaining to voters how to cast their ballots.⁵ On 10 April, the NLD called on the SPDC to allow international observers to monitor the referendum proceedings.⁶
- **4 April:** All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) urged Burmese people to vote “No”.⁷
- **7 April:** Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) urged people to vote “No” because the constitution will result in prolonged military rule and further political, economic, and social crises.⁸
- **18 April:** Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) urged Burmese people to vote “No”.⁹
- **30 April:** United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) urged voters to cast a “No” vote.¹⁰
- An umbrella group representing students from the University of Marine Technology, Eastern Rangoon University, and Thanlyin Government Technical College, urged voters to vote “No”.¹¹
- Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) called on Shan people to vote “No” because the draft constitution was the result of an illegitimate process.¹²
- The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) ceasefire group said it would abstain from voting.¹³

Activists also stepped up the “No” vote campaign across Burma's States and Divisions, with most simply using “X” to mean “No” (there is only one box in the ballot – voters must clearly mark X for “No”; anything else will be interpreted as a tick, meaning “yes”):

- **Arakan State**
 - **24-26 April:** Anti-referendum pamphlets were distributed in Akyab, Kyaukprou and Rambree.¹⁴
 - Anti-referendum campaigners tied “No” posters around dogs' necks in Akyab, provoking hilarity as police chased the canines.¹⁵
- **Kachin State**
 - **14-15 April:** All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU) launched an anti-referendum poster campaign in Myitkyina, Waingmaw, and Bhamo Townships.¹⁶
 - **20 April:** AKSYU pasted “No” vote posters and distributed anti-referendum leaflets in Bhamo, Momauk, Shwegu, and Mansi Townships.¹⁷
- **Karen State**
 - Campaigners in Pa-an distributed anti-referendum pamphlets to local people.¹⁸

⁴ NLM (17 Apr 08) Commission for Holding Referendum meets with sub-commissions at different levels in Sagaing, Magway, Bago, Bago (West), Ayeyawady Divisions; UNICEF (Jan 08) State of the World's Children 2008

⁵ AFP (02 Apr 08) Aung San Suu Kyi's party calls for 'no' vote on Myanmar constitution; BBC (02 Apr 08) Call to reject Burma constitution

⁶ Reuters (10 Apr 08) Myanmar crackdown on “no” campaign begins: opposition; Mizzima News (10 Apr 08) Nothing 'free and fair' in run up to referendum: Opposition; Irrawaddy (10 Apr 08) NLD Wants International Observers at May 10 Referendum

⁷ DVB (07 Apr 08) ABFSU joins calls to vote “No” in referendum

⁸ Ethnic Nationalities Council (07 Apr 08) Statement on the forthcoming SPDC's referendum; DVB (08 Apr 08) ENC fears constitution will erode rights

⁹ Kachin News Group (18 Apr 08) KWAT urges people to cast “No” vote

¹⁰ Kachin News Group (30 Apr 08) UNA urge people to reveal their desire in referendum

¹¹ DVB (08 Apr 08) Youth activists urge “No” vote in referendum

¹² DVB (21 Apr 08) Shan party urges “No” vote for genuine democracy

¹³ Mizzima News (21 Apr 08) Authorities in Kachin state campaign for 'Yes' vote

¹⁴ Kaladan News (28 Apr 08) Anti-referendum paper distributed in Arakan

¹⁵ Narinjara News (30 Apr 08) Dogs enlisted for anti-referendum campaign

¹⁶ Kachin News Group (17 Apr 08) Junta collects list of supporters of referendum

¹⁷ Kachin News Group (21 Apr 08) Vote 'No' posters appear in more towns in Northern Burma

- **Karenni State**
 - “No” leaflets, posters, and VCDs emerged in Loikaw, Dimawso, and Moebye Townships.¹⁹
- **Magwe Division**
 - Activists wrote “No” on the walls of a pagoda compound and on the Township USDA chief’s house.²⁰
 - Activists painted “X” marks on dogs in Pwint Phyu Township. “No” graffiti appeared on the walls of a local primary school.²¹
 - Activists distributed leaflets urging people to vote “No” in Myaing Township.²²
- **Mandalay Division**
 - “No” graffiti appeared in Mandalay’s streets, around Mandalay Hill, and on roads to Sagaing.²³
 - Villagers painted their walls and fences with “X” marks in Myingyan Township. “X” posters appeared on the walls of local Buddhist monasteries.²⁴
- **Mon State**
 - Activists campaigned against the constitution in Moulmein, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, Paung, Kawkareik, Ye, and Chaungzon Townships.²⁵
 - **14 April:** Activists spray-painted “No” on walls, roads, and bus stops along the Moulmein-Kyaitmayaw road.²⁶
 - **24 April:** Activists distributed “No” flyers in Thanbyuzayat.²⁷
- **Rangoon Division**
 - The Rangoon-based student organization Generation Wave called on students and youth to write “X” on the school walls and other public buildings to urge for a “No” vote.²⁸
 - **7 April:** An activist painted “No” on the entrance sign of the Mya Yeik Nyo Royal Hotel in Rangoon. The hotel is owned by regime’s crony Khin Shwe.²⁹
- **Shan State**
 - **16 April:** Activists distributed leaflets urging people to vote “No” on the streets of Namkham.³⁰

Thousands of expatriate and exiled Burmese held anti-referendum protests in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Bangladesh, South Korea, Japan, Australia, Canada, and US.³¹

SPDC campaign: Intimidation, vote-buying, and propaganda

In addition to the ongoing arrest and harassment of the “No” vote activists [See below *Atmosphere of oppression*], the regime resorted to intimidation as well as incentives in order to get people to vote in favor of the constitution.

Threats against voters if they failed to vote “Yes” included:

- Prosecution, fines, and imprisonment.³²

¹⁸ Irrawaddy (09 Apr 08) Activists Take “Vote No” Campaign to Countryside; IMNA (25 Apr 08) Referendum campaigns speed up in Mon state

¹⁹ Kantarawaddy Times (28 Apr 08) Vote ‘No’ campaign begins in Karenni state

²⁰ DVB (28 Apr 08) “Vote No” campaign continues across Burma

²¹ DVB (28 Apr 08) “Vote No” campaign continues across Burma

²² DVB (28 Apr 08) “Vote No” campaign continues across Burma

²³ Irrawaddy (09 Apr 08) Activists Take “Vote No” Campaign to Countryside; DVB (28 Apr 08) “Vote No” campaign continues across Burma

²⁴ Mizzima News (28 Apr 08) Villagers paint cross signs on walls, reject constitution

²⁵ IMNA (17 Apr 08) Referendum campaigns wide spread in Mon state during water festival; IMNA (09 Apr 08) Vote “No” and wait a decade for elections: Referendum Commission; IMNA (21 Apr 08) Junta desperate to have constitution approved: MNDF leader; IMNA (25 Apr 08) Referendum campaigns speed up in Mon state

²⁶ Kaowao News (21 Apr 08) Songkran graffiti campaign continues through Mon State

²⁷ IMNA (25 Apr 08) Referendum campaigns speed up in Mon state

²⁸ DVB (08 Apr 08) Youth activists urge “No” vote in referendum; Irrawaddy (09 Apr 08) Activists Take “Vote No” Campaign to Countryside

²⁹ Irrawaddy (08 Apr 08) Security tightens around ‘vote no’ campaign

³⁰ SHAN (18 Apr 08) Youth group distributes ‘Vote No’ leaflets

³¹ Narinjara News (04 Apr 08) Long March Activist Reach Second Largest City of Bangladesh; Mizzima News (11 Apr 08) New York rally to support Burmese democracy movement; Mizzima News (22 Apr 08) Burmese overstaying stage protest at Burmese embassy in Tokyo; Mizzima News (23 Apr 08) Protests over referendum in Malaysia; Irrawaddy (25 Apr 08) Burmese Abroad to Demonstrate Against Constitution; Mizzima News (27 Apr 08) Activists protest as embassy conducts polling; SHAN (27 Apr 08) Burmese monks denounce referendum; AP (28 Apr 08) Overseas Burmese protest Constitution

³² Irrawaddy (23 Apr 08) Military commanders join referendum “vote yes” campaign; IMNA (27 Apr 08) If you not vote “No” you go to jail: TPDC member; IMNA (21 Apr 08) Junta desperate to have constitution approved: MNDF leader; IMNA (09 Apr 08) Vote

- Dismissal for civil servants and school teachers.³³
- Land confiscation for farmers.³⁴
- Closure for business owners.³⁵
- Barring students from continuing their studies.³⁶

In exchange for a “Yes” vote, the regime offered incentives that included:

- Release from prison before 10 May for some inmates in Rangoon’s Insein Prison.³⁷
- Rice, salt, mobile phones for villagers in various Townships in Kachin State.³⁸
- Less taxation for rice farmers in Kyauktaw Township, Arakan State.³⁹
- Exemption from housing tax for slum dwellers in Myingyan, Mandalay Division.⁴⁰
- No toll collection and freedom of movement for traders in Northern Arakan State.⁴¹
- Free eye check and treatment for villagers in Namkham Township, Shan State.⁴²

The regime stepped up the “Yes” vote propoganda, while barring media from publishing the views of supporters of a “No” vote.

- SPDC-run MRTV has been constantly broadcasting programs and songs urging a “Yes” vote.⁴³
- Regime-controlled newspapers have also been carrying slogans, editorials, cartoons, and poems calling for a “Yes” vote.⁴⁴
- The SPDC Censorship Board imposed restrictive rules on media coverage of the referendum.⁴⁵

Rigging the vote

Despite the regime’s claims that the polling would be conducted in a free and fair manner,⁴⁶ serious voting irregularities and fraud have been pervasive in the weeks leading up to referendum day:

- The SPDC included 33,000 USDA members who were under the age of 18 in the voters' roll in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State.⁴⁷ According to the regime’s Referendum Law, citizens under the age of 18 are ineligible to vote.⁴⁸
- SPDC authorities provided temporary ID cards to thousands of Chinese citizens in Namkham, Muse, and Panghsai Townships in Northern Shan State.⁴⁹ According to the regime’s Referendum Law, foreign nationals are barred from voting.⁵⁰

“No” and wait a decade for elections: Referendum Commission; SHAN (11 Apr 08) Many townships forced to support the draft constitution; Mizzima News (28 Apr 08) Forced advance ‘Yes’ voting in Bhamo; Irrawaddy (24 Apr 08) Junta using threats to win referendum vote, says NLD; Kachin News Group (29 Apr 08) KIO receives junta’s vote commission training

³³ Khonumthng News (19 Apr 08) Constitutional training for government employees; SHAN (11 Apr 08) Many townships forced to support the draft constitution; Irrawaddy (24 Apr 08) Junta using threats to win referendum vote, says NLD

³⁴ DVB (28 Apr 08) “Vote No” campaign continues across Burma

³⁵ DVB (30 Apr 08) Businesses threatened with closure for ‘No’ vote

³⁶ Irrawaddy (24 Apr 08) Junta using threats to win referendum vote, says NLD

³⁷ DVB (02 Apr 08) Prisoners offered sentence reductions to vote “Yes”; DVB (09 Apr 08) Detained monks to be given lay identity cards

³⁸ Mizzima News (21 Apr 08) Authorities in Kachin state campaign for ‘Yes’ vote; DVB (22 Apr 08) Rural Kachin offered incentives to vote “Yes”; AsiaNews (23 Apr 08) In the Burmese countryside, elderly and sick forced to vote “yes”; Irrawaddy (23 Apr 08) Military commanders join referendum “vote yes” campaign; Kachin News Group (24 Apr 08) Junta woos rural people with rice and salt in referendum campaign

³⁹ Kaladan News (22 Apr 08) MOCs woo people to cast the “Yes” vote in Kyauktaw

⁴⁰ Mizzima News (28 Apr 08) Villagers paint cross signs on walls, reject constitution

⁴¹ Narinjara News (28 Apr 08) Army stops toll collection in western Burma

⁴² SHAN (27 Apr 08) Junta offers eye treatment for free

⁴³ Reuters (21 Apr 08) Myanmar arrests keep pressure on “no” campaign; New Straits Times (23 Apr 08) No room for No amid the junta’s Yes drive

⁴⁴ Reuters (21 Apr 08) Myanmar arrests keep pressure on “no” campaign; New Straits Times (23 Apr 08) No room for No amid the junta’s Yes drive

⁴⁵ AFP (24 Apr 08) No press freedom for Myanmar constitution vote: RSF; DVB (04 Apr 08) Censors restrict media reporting on referendum

⁴⁶ Xinhua (24 Apr 08) Over 4 mln Yangon population declared as eligible voters for Myanmar referendum

⁴⁷ Kachin News Group (14 Apr 08) Junta includes underage people in voters' list

⁴⁸ NLM (28 Feb 08) The Referendum Law for the Approval of the Draft Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, Chapter 5

⁴⁹ SHAN (25 Apr 08) Junta issues ID cards to Chinese citizens

⁵⁰ NLM (28 Feb 08) The Referendum Law for the Approval of the Draft Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, Chapter 5

- SPDC authorities cast advance “Yes” votes on behalf of numerous individuals, including factory workers and school teachers, without their knowledge.⁵¹
- The regime forced elderly citizens to cast advance “Yes” votes in Bhamo Township, Kachin State, and in areas near Mandalay.⁵²
- SPDC authorities reportedly issued identity cards to monks detained in Rangoon’s Insein prison to force them to vote “Yes”.⁵³ According to the regime’s Referendum Law, the Buddhist clergy is barred from voting.⁵⁴
- SPDC authorities in Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Rathidaung and Minbya Townships, Arakan State, provided training to polling booth staff on how to persuade people to cast “Yes” votes.⁵⁵
- On 27 April, Burmese Embassy staff in Singapore prevented many Burmese nationals residing in the island-state from voting because they were wearing “No” t-shirts. In addition, only 10,000 were listed on the voters’ roll while over 30,000 Burmese legally reside in Singapore.⁵⁶

Atmosphere of oppression

In April, the regime arrested at least 48 activists including 25 NLD members for campaigning against the SPDC’s constitution.

- **1 April:** SPDC Special Branch police arrested NLD youth coordinator Aung Htun and Thingangyun Township’s NLD chairman Tin Myint in Rangoon.⁵⁷
- **6 April:** Police arrested Thein Lwin, NLD member from Rambree Township, Arakan State, for possessing statements against the referendum.⁵⁸
- **13 April:** SPDC authorities arrested more than 20 NLD activists for campaigning against the referendum in Akyab, Arakan State. The activists were released the next day.⁵⁹
- **15 April:** SPDC authorities arrested NLD youth member Myo Nyunt near Rangoon.⁶⁰ SPDC authorities also arrested NLD member Tin Win for posting “No” signs on billboards during the Thingyan festival in Rangoon.⁶¹
- **22 April:** SPDC authorities arrested at least 23 people wearing “No” t-shirts in Akyab, Arakan State.⁶²

Since the beginning of 2008, the regime has arrested and imprisoned at least 101 activists, including NLD members, journalists, poets, Buddhist monks, and students.⁶³

USDA and Swan Arr Shin thugs also increased attacks against NLD members and political activists. Harassment of NLD members were reported in Rangoon, Mandalay, and Irrawaddy Divisions as well as in Arakan State.⁶⁴

- **3 April:** Two thugs armed with clubs attacked and injured NLD member Tin Yu in Rangoon.⁶⁵

⁵¹ DVB (25 Apr 08) Officials vote “Yes” on behalf of civil servant; DVB (28 Apr 08) Government workers forced to vote “Yes”; DVB (24 Apr 08) Factory workers pressured to cast multiple “Yes” votes; Irrawaddy (30 Apr 08) Pre-marked ballots issued in Burmese referendum

⁵² Mizzima News (28 Apr 08) Forced advance ‘Yes’ voting in Bhamo; AsiaNews (23 Apr 08) In the Burmese countryside, elderly and sick forced to vote “yes”

⁵³ DVB (09 Apr 08) Detained monks to be given lay identity cards

⁵⁴ NLM (28 Feb 08) The Referendum Law for the Approval of the Draft Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, Chapter 5

⁵⁵ Kaladan News (12 Apr 08) SPDC’s referendum training concluded in Arakan

⁵⁶ Bangkok Post (27 Apr 08) Burma bars anti-constitution group from voting; Mizzima News (27 Apr 08) Irregularities in absentee voting in Singapore, Malaysia

⁵⁷ DVB (02 Apr 08) NLD youth coordinator arrested; Mizzima News (02 Apr 08) Junta arrests more opposition members

⁵⁸ Narinjara News (11 Apr 08) NLD member arrested for statement; Irrawaddy (09 Apr 08) Activists Take “Vote No” Campaign to Countryside

⁵⁹ Reuters (16 Apr 08) Junta briefly detains “No” campaigners; Guardian (15 Apr 08) Burmese junta arrests opposition aide; Irrawaddy (18 Apr 08) Pro-Junta Thugs Continue Attacks on Activists

⁶⁰ AFP (15 Apr 08) Myanmar detains at least 20 activists; AP (15 Apr 08) Myanmar Detains at Least 20 Activists

⁶¹ Irrawaddy (18 Apr 08) Pro-Junta Thugs Continue Attacks on Activists; DVB (18 Apr 08) NLD member beaten and arrested for “No” placards

⁶² New Straits Times (23 Apr 08) No room for No amid the junta’s Yes drive

⁶³ AFP (02 Apr 08) Myanmar junta arrests 52 activists in 2008: watchdog

⁶⁴ Reuters (10 Apr 08) Myanmar crackdown on “no” campaign begins: opposition; Irrawaddy (18 Apr 08) Pro-Junta Thugs Continue Attacks on Activists

- **7 April:** Village Peace and Development Council Chairman Aung Myint accompanied by about 200 workers ransacked the shop of NLD member Ba Sein in Akyab, Arakan State.⁶⁶
- **16 April:** Thugs armed with clubs attacked Thi Han, an NLD youth leader from Rangoon's South Dagon Myothit Township. Thi Han was wearing a "No" vote t-shirt when the attack occurred.⁶⁷
- **20 April:** Thugs on motorcycles threw rocks at the homes of senior NLD members Myint Soe and Aung Ko Ko in Mandalay.⁶⁸
- **22 April:** SPDC officials and police raided the homes of three NLD members in Rangoon's South Dagon Myothit Township.⁶⁹

International reactions to the referendum

- **2 April:** India urged the SPDC to push forward the national reconciliation process.⁷⁰
- **2 April:** The US condemned the new arrests of political activists which contributed to a "climate of fear and repression" ahead of the referendum.⁷¹
- **9 April:** US President George W. Bush and Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong urged the SPDC to begin talks with opposition forces.⁷²
- **17 April:** US President George Bush and UK PM Gordon Brown called on the SPDC to invite international observers to the referendum.⁷³
- **18 April:** Michael Williams, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's envoy on Burma, said an "atmosphere of intimidation" was clouding the referendum.⁷⁴
- **25 April:** French Human Rights Minister Rama Yade said that she hoped the referendum would be held under clear and transparent conditions.⁷⁵
- **28 April:** Thailand's FM Noppadon Pattama said he hoped the referendum would be "credible".⁷⁶

INSIDE BURMA

Arms flowing into Burma

In April, new reports of arms delivery to the SPDC surfaced:

- **2 April:** 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.⁷⁷
- **11 April:** Over 50 Chinese-made military trucks were seen on the Sino-Burma border town of Ruili. The trucks are designed to tow artillery and transport military supplies,⁷⁸ believed to be part of a larger truck consignment from China to the SPDC.⁷⁹ [See *January 2008 Burma Bulletin*]
- **Mid-April:** Trucks transporting military equipment including artillery shells, bullets, and guns secretly 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.⁸⁰ [See below *India deal*]

⁶⁵ Irrawaddy (04 Apr 08) More opposition activists attacked by thugs; DVB (07 Apr 08) Second NLD member attacked in Hlaing Tharyar; Mizzima News (04 Apr 08) Another NLD member beaten up

⁶⁶ Kaladan News (11 Apr 08) NLD member's shop destroyed and looted in Sittwe

⁶⁷ Irrawaddy (18 Apr 08) Pro-Junta Thugs Continue Attacks on Activists

⁶⁸ DVB (23 Apr 08) NLD secretary's home attacked; Irrawaddy (24 Apr 08) More harassment, attacks on opposition activists underway

⁶⁹ Irrawaddy (24 Apr 08) More harassment, attacks on opposition activists underway

⁷⁰ AFP (03 Apr 04) India urges Myanmar to push reconciliation

⁷¹ AFP (02 Apr 08) US condemns Myanmar arrests of political activists

⁷² IHT (09 Apr 08) Bush condemns Myanmar after meeting with Singapore minister

⁷³ Irrawaddy (18 Apr 08) Bush, Brown Call for Referendum Observers

⁷⁴ AFP (18 Apr 08) 'Atmosphere of intimidation' clouds Myanmar polls: British envoy

⁷⁵ AFP (25 Apr 08) France wants 'transparent' Myanmar referendum: minister

⁷⁶ The Straits Times (28 Apr 08) Thailand hopes Myanmar referendum is 'credible'

⁷⁷ 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

⁷⁸ Mizzima News (11 Apr 08) Chinese trucks to tow howitzer arrive on border

⁷⁹ Irrawaddy (19 Apr 08) Burma's Trading Neighbors Offering Military Gifts

⁸⁰ Irrawaddy (19 Apr 08) Burma's Trading Neighbors Offering Military Gifts

HUMAN RIGHTS

Prison sentences

On 2 April, Rangoon's Western District Court sentenced NLD member Ohn Than to 20 years in prison for demonstrating against the military regime in front of the US embassy in Rangoon on 23 August 2007.⁸¹ A day earlier, Amnesty International said the SPDC had sentenced at least 40 people to prison terms, including seven Buddhist monks, for protests during August-September 2007.⁸²

Death and suffering in Burma's prisons

- **1 April:** SPDC authorities in Rangoon's Insein prison enacted new regulations that bar visitation rights for non-family members. The measure ended the NLD's assistance program that provided food and other items to inmates who were unable to receive visits from their relatives.⁸³
- **19 April:** Azizullah, a 30-year-old man from Rathidaung Township, Arakan State, died in Akyab prison. He reportedly did not receive proper medical treatment.⁸⁴
- **21 April:** Detained HIV activist and NLD member Than Naing suffered paralysis over half of his face in Insein prison. His health is said to be deteriorating.⁸⁵
- Detained Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP) member Myo Thant's health is said to be poor following his 13-day hunger strike in Insein prison.⁸⁶ [See *March 2008 Burma Bulletin*]
- In Insein prison, 88 Generation Students leader Min Ko Naing suffers from a serious eye problem, but has been denied medical treatment.⁸⁷ 88 Generation Students leader Ko Ko Gyi has been suffering from stomach problems.⁸⁸

DISPLACEMENT

Fifty-four migrant workers suffocate in Thailand

On 9 April, 54 undocumented migrants including children from Mon State died in Thailand while being transported from Ranong to Phuket in a sealed freezer truck.⁸⁹ Sixty-six survived.⁹⁰ 14 child survivors were handed over to immigration authorities for deportation. The adult survivors received two-month suspended sentences and a 1,000 baht fine for violating Thailand's immigration laws.⁹¹

The incident focused attention on the problems associated with smuggling and trafficking of people from Burma to Thailand. According to the Migrant Worker Group, more than 100 people have died while being transported to Thailand in the past year.⁹² Provincial authorities ordered stricter controls on undocumented migrant workers from Burma.⁹³ However, there was some recognition of the need for a more humane approach. Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama, the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), and the Human Rights Commission called for the survivors to be permitted to stay on in Thailand and assist police in identifying the traffickers.⁹⁴ Noppadon also called on the SPDC to cooperate with Thailand in combating human trafficking.⁹⁵ The International Labor Organization called

⁸¹ AP (04 Apr 08) Activist who staged solo protest against Myanmar junta gets life sentence; Mizzima News (03 Apr 08) Solo protester sentenced to life imprisonment; DVB (03 Apr 08) Solo demonstrator given 20-year sentence

⁸² AFP (01 Apr 08) At least 40 protesters convicted in secret Myanmar trials: Amnesty

⁸³ DVB (04 Apr 08) NLD banned from visiting prisoners

⁸⁴ Kaladan News (28 Apr 08) Prisoner dies in Akyab jail

⁸⁵ Mizzima News (29 Apr 08) Imprisoned Burmese activist paralyzed

⁸⁶ Mizzima News (09 Apr 08) Burmese rights activists remanded without appearing in court

⁸⁷ Mizzima News (18 Apr 08) Min Ko Naing needs urgent eye treatment: AAPP; DVB (18 Apr 08) Min Ko Naing requests treatment for eye problems

⁸⁸ DVB (25 Apr 08) Detained 88 Generation Students' health worsens

⁸⁹ Reuters (10 Apr 08) Myanmar migrant recalls container horror

⁹⁰ Bangkok Post (22 Apr 08) No human trafficking here

⁹¹ AFP (11 Apr 08) Thai court jails Myanmar container survivors for three days

⁹² Reuters (13 Apr 08) No light at end of Thai-Myanmar smuggling tunnel - Nopporn Wong-Anan

⁹³ AP (11 Apr 08) Deaths highlight plight of Myanmar migrants DVB (23 Apr 08) NGOs call for justice after migrant deaths

⁹⁴ Bangkok Post (22 Apr 08) No human trafficking here; Thai Press Reports (15 Apr 08) Thailand DSI to seize assets of Myanmar human traffickers; Thai News Agencies (17 Apr 08) Thai FM: Myanmar survivors should not be prosecuted

⁹⁵ Nation (11 Apr 08) Thailand sends condolence over deaths of Burmese job seekers

on the Thai government to overhaul its system for employing foreign workers, saying the current system had allowed trafficking to flourish.⁹⁶

Rohingya continue to flee

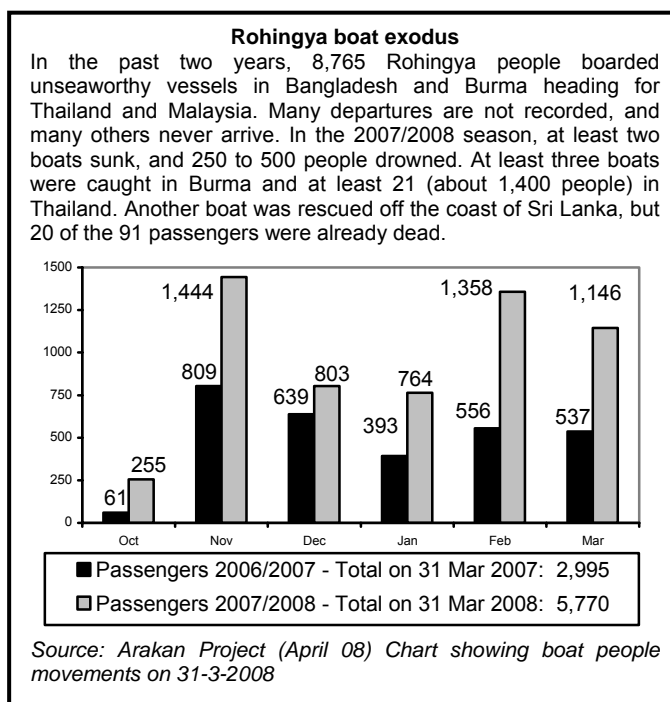
As the “sailing season” for Rohingya boat people came to an end, on 20 April a boatload of 50 young Rohingya men drifted ashore at Hnitkayin village, Southern Mon State.⁹⁷ [See *November 2007 and March 2008 Burma Bulletins*] Rohingya continue to flee Arakan State for Bangladesh. In April, the Bangladesh Rifles deported at least 93 people caught crossing into Bangladesh from Burma.⁹⁸

Riot in Bangladesh

On 2 April, a riot broke out in Nayapara refugee camp in Bangladesh after the Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) - Holland medical unit decided to hand over their operations to a local NGO. During the riot, refugees clashed with local police.⁹⁹ Eight refugees and two police were injured.¹⁰⁰ Police filed charges against 60 refugees in connection with the incident.¹⁰¹

Riot in Malaysia

On 21 April, 72 Burmese detainees in Lenggeng camp, south of Kuala Lumpur, forced their way into an administrative building and set it ablaze.¹⁰² Malaysian officials admitted that overcrowding was one of reasons for the unrest. However, Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said the solution was tighter border security, not new facilities.¹⁰³



In late March, authorities increased round-ups of Burmese people living in Malaysia. Those arrested included refugees with UNHCR documentation and migrant workers with legal permits.¹⁰⁴ Offices of ethnic organizations were also raided.¹⁰⁵

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

US, UK, and France push for new UNSC presidential statement

During April, the US, along with France and the UK, attempted to get the UN Security Council to issue a new presidential statement on the SPDC’s referendum. However, China and Russia continued to block the effort to get the non-binding presidential statement passed.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁶ AP (11 Apr 08) Thailand Set to Deport Myanmar Workers; ILO (11 Apr 08) Statement Regarding the Deaths of Migrant Workers in Thailand

⁹⁷ IMNA (21 Apr 08) Fifty Muslims starve for a week after boat runs out of fuel at sea

⁹⁸ Narinjara News (03 Apr 08) Fifty three Burmese nationals pushed back; Kaladan News (02 Apr 08) BDR arrests 25 Burmese nationals en route to Cox’s Bazaar; Kaladan News (01 Apr 08) BDR pushes back five Burmese nationals.

⁹⁹ Kaladan News (03 Apr 08) Refugees and police clash, ten injured

¹⁰⁰ Kaladan News (03 Apr 08) Refugees and police clash, ten injured

¹⁰¹ Kaladan News (04 Apr 08) Police file cases against 50 to 60 Rohingya refugees

¹⁰² Reuters (23 Apr 08) Malaysia rights panel sees migrant social time bomb

¹⁰³ AP (28 Apr 08) Malaysia Tightens Borders against Illegal Immigrants

¹⁰⁴ DVB (08 Apr 08) Malaysia steps up action against Burmese migrants

¹⁰⁵ DVB (10 Apr 08) Malaysia continues crackdown on Burmese migrants

¹⁰⁶ Irrawaddy (28 Apr 08) UNSC deadlocked on Burma

- **2 April:** US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Alejandro D. Wolff said that the US, UK, and France would seek a presidential statement on Burma.¹⁰⁷ The draft expressed regret at the SPDC's slow progress in meeting previous council demands for political dialogue and release of political prisoners and called for planned elections to be open to all candidates.¹⁰⁸
- **7 April:** Both China and Russia expressed their opposition to the draft statement.¹⁰⁹
- **23 April:** The US, UK, and France circulated a revised draft presidential statement that called on the SPDC to take urgent steps to initiate a dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and allow all other political actors to fully participate in the May constitutional referendum.¹¹⁰
- **24 April:** Security Council members met to discuss the second draft.

Pinheiro's parting remark: SPDC's referendum is "surreal"

On 14 April, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, launched a stinging criticism of the SPDC's planned referendum. "How can you have a referendum when you make repression against those that are intending to say 'no'? This is completely surreal," Pinheiro said. "If you say a real political transition process is taking place in Myanmar, this would be almost offensive to countries in Asia like the Philippines and Indonesia or Thailand that passed through a transition process to democracy. I will end my mandate saying that this is not a democratic political transition," Pinheiro asserted.¹¹¹

EU MPs call for expanded sanctions and worldwide arms embargo

- **24 April:** The European Parliament adopted a resolution that calls for expanded and more targeted sanctions against the SPDC, a worldwide arms embargo and the release of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.¹¹²
- **29 April:** The EU FMs agreed to a 12-month extension on sanctions against Burma's regime, threatening to expand sanctions over ongoing concerns about the political situation there. They also endorsed the European Parliament's call for an international arms embargo on the SPDC.¹¹³

SPDC PM's visit to Thailand sets off alarm bells

On 29 April, SPDC PM Lt Gen Thein Sein arrived in Thailand for a 3-day official visit.¹¹⁴ Thein Sein told Thai PM Samak Sundaravej the SPDC has no plans to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi - either before or after the constitutional referendum.¹¹⁵ In what was widely seen as evidence of increasing Thai deference to the SPDC, Samak declared Thailand had no problem with Daw Suu's continued house arrest¹¹⁶ and reiterated Thailand's support for the SPDC's referendum.¹¹⁷ His statement sent Thai-Burma relations back more than three years, when former PM Thaksin Shinawatra said that Daw Suu's detention was "reasonable".¹¹⁸ [*March 2008 Burma Bulletin* has Samak's prior pro-SPDC comments]

ECONOMY

India deal

On 2 April, SPDC Vice Sr Gen Maung Aye signed an agreement with India on the Kaladan Project. The agreement provides for India to invest US\$135 million in Burma over the next five years in developing transport links between Akyab port and India's Northeastern States.¹¹⁹

¹⁰⁷ Reuters (02 Apr 08) West seeks new U.N. council statement on Myanmar

¹⁰⁸ Irrawaddy (03 Apr 08) US, Britain and France Seek UN Statement on Burma

¹⁰⁹ Irrawaddy (09 Apr 08) China, Russia oppose UN Security Council's draft presidential statement

¹¹⁰ AP (23 Apr 08) UN draft calls on Myanmar junta to take urgent steps to start talks with opposition's Suu Kyi

¹¹¹ Reuters (14 Apr 08) UN rights expert calls Myanmar vote plan "surreal"

¹¹² Press Release EU Parliament (24 Apr 08) Burma: broadened and more targeted sanctions needed, say MEPs

¹¹³ Bangkok Post (04 Apr 08) Europe extends sanctions on Burma

¹¹⁴ AP (29 Apr 08) Myanmar PM gets neighborly welcome in Thailand with home-cooked dinner by Thai leader

¹¹⁵ Reuters (30 Apr 08) Thai PM says Myanmar's Suu Kyi detention is "OK"

¹¹⁶ Reuters (30 Apr 08) Thai PM says Myanmar's Suu Kyi detention is "OK"

¹¹⁷ AP (30 Apr 08) Thai PM jokes that neighbor Myanmar's draft constitution offers a '50 percent democracy'

¹¹⁸ AP (11 Dec 04) Thai leader calls Myanmar's reasons for detaining Suu Kyi 'reasonable'

¹¹⁹ Reuters (03 Apr 08) India, Myanmar sign tax, transport pacts to boost trade

Maung Aye held talks on economic cooperation, security and energy.¹²⁰ He met with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Indian army chief Deepak Kapoor.¹²¹ Maung Aye expressed gratitude for India's assistance with infrastructure projects, road construction, lines of credit, and establishing an information technology center in Burma.¹²²

Rice exports and shortages

Burma appears to be increasing its rice exports despite the fact that farmers experienced a bad harvest last season. Farmers in Mon State complained that the 2007-2008 harvest was down 20%.¹²³

- Singapore's Saga Foodstuffs reported the import of 350 tons of Burmese rice in April.¹²⁵
- On 5 April, Sri Lanka's Minister of Trade, Marketing Development, Cooperative and Consumer Affairs Bandula Gunawardena and the SPDC signed an agreement for the SPDC to supply 50,000 tons of rice at US\$400 per ton.¹²⁶
- More than 2,000 tons of rice were exported to Bangladesh in April.¹²⁷
- Beginning in early April, rice smuggling to Thailand from Burma increased through Three Pagodas Pass at a rate of 18,000 kilos a day. The price for a 60-kilo sack of Burmese rice in Thailand increased by 17% during the past month.¹²⁸

| Trade (US\$m) fiscal year Apr 07- Mar 08 (SPDC figures) ¹²⁴ | |
|---|-----------------|
| Total trade | \$8,700 million |
| Exports total | \$5,900 million |
| Natural Gas | \$2,700 million |
| Agriculture | \$572 million |
| Gems | \$561 million |
| Fisheries | \$366 million |
| Imports total | \$2,800 million |
| Fuel | \$471 million |
| Textiles | \$276 million |
| Edible oil | \$251 million |
| Machinery parts | \$243 million |
| Automobiles | \$192 million |

Gas pipeline leaking

Between 1 and 10 April, two ruptures in the natural gas pipeline from the Yetagun Gas field in the Gulf of Martaban to Thailand forced Thailand's PTTEP to shut down production. The ruptures resulted in the loss of 400-500 million cubic feet of gas per day.¹²⁹ The pipeline breaks forced PTTEP to secure more than 350,000 liters of fuel oil from Malaysia and postpone routine maintenance.¹³⁰

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN APRIL

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | SPDC officials arrests four Township-level members of the Myanmar Muslim Council in raids of their homes in Maungdaw Township. |
| 1 | Two days of meetings between Bangladesh and SPDC officials to discuss maritime boundary issues end with no resolution. |
| 2 | SPDC Vice Sr Gen Maung Aye arrives in New Delhi on a four-day visit. |
| 3 | Chin Human Rights Organization says that SPDC officials are confiscating humanitarian aid intended for famine victims. |
| 3 | Burmese and Indian activists take part in a demonstration in New Delhi against the Indian government's policy on Burma. |
| 3 | 88 Generation Students group urges the United Nations to take strong action against the SPDC. |
| 3 | India asks the SPDC to launch military operations against Indian armed opposition groups based in Burma. |
| 4 | Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono receives a letter from SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe which assures there will be a continuing democratic process in Burma. |
| 4 | Norway's Finance Ministry announces that the Government Pension Fund is now barred from owning |

¹²⁰ AFP (02 Apr 08) India, Myanmar discuss trade, energy

¹²¹ AP (02 Apr 08) India to build Myanmar port

¹²² AP (03 Apr 08) India, Myanmar sign multimillion-dollar transport deal

¹²³ IMNA (04 Apr 08) Rice prices skyrocket

¹²⁴ DPA (08 Apr 08) Myanmar's gas exports to Thailand earn 2.7 billion dollars in 2007

¹²⁵ Earth Times (02 Apr 08) Stalls, restaurants turning to Myanmar for cheaper rice

¹²⁶ Sunday Observer (Sri Lanka) (06 Apr 08) 50,000 metric tons of rice from Myanmar

¹²⁷ Kaladan News (19 Apr 08) Many goods from Burma arrive at Teknaf land port

¹²⁸ Irrawaddy (17 Apr 08) Illegal rice import boom at Three Pagodas Pass

¹²⁹ Oil and Gas Journal (15 Apr 08) Yetagun gas field production resumes off Myanmar

¹³⁰ Irrawaddy (03 Apr 08) Burma's Gas Pipeline to Be Fixed in 5 Days

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| | shares in companies that sell arms to Burma. |
| 5 | Weekly journal Myanmar Times reports that the SPDC has declared over 4 million Rangoon residents to be eligible to vote in the referendum. |
| 7 | Veteran writer and journalist Ludu Daw Amar dies in Mandalay at the age of 93. |
| 7 | US First Lady Laura Bush presents Vital Voices Global Leadership Awards to Burmese activists Charm Tong and Khin Omar. |
| 8 | Burmese activists conclude a 13-day anti-referendum walk from Dhaka to Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh. |
| 8 | Robber steals 900 million kyat from Rangoon's Thingankyun Township Myanmar Economic Bank. |
| 8 | Thai FM Noppadon Pattama makes a one-day visit to Burma and reportedly discusses a project to build a deep sea port at Tavoy, Tenasserim Division. |
| 9 | Thailand's PTTEP reaches an agreement with China's CNOOC Ltd to swap stakes in oil and gas blocks in Burma. |
| 9 | Scot Marciel, the prospective first US envoy to ASEAN, says that his key priority is to get ASEAN to press the SPDC to embrace democratic reforms. |
| 12 | Singapore's Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo says that he believes the SPDC's proposed constitution will not be to the liking of many. |
| 13 | A person with alleged ties to the Shan State Army throws a hand grenade into a crowd in Wanpun Village in Shan State. Five people are wounded in the attack. |
| 13 | UK PM Gordon Brown's envoy on Burma Michael Williams says that ASEAN must take action against Burma regarding its human rights situation if it wants to avoid future problems with the EU. |
| 15 | The world's oldest and longest wooden bridge collapses in Mandalay under the weight of Thingyan festival revelers. |
| 15 | A Mon splinter group led by Nai Ein Dae fires on a passenger bus in Southern Ye Township, seriously wounding three Mon villagers. |
| 17 | Kyaw Zin Naing, the 26-year-old man who set himself on fire protesting against the military regime, dies in Rangoon as a result of injuries. |
| 17 | An 18-year-old refugee woman from Dum Dum Meah camp, Bangladesh, is raped while fetching water. |
| 17 | SPDC authorities in Monywa, Sagaing Division, arrest rapper Yan Yan Chan. |
| 18 | About 30 Rohingya demonstrate peacefully in front of the Burmese and Thai embassies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. |
| 20 | Thai police raid a coconut plantation in southern Thailand and arrest 27 undocumented migrant workers from Burma. Three reportedly drown attempting to escape. |
| 20 | The SPDC declares Burma "bird flu free". |
| 20 | SPDC Deputy Home Minister Brig Gen Phone Swe orders the release of Myanmar Muslim Council members of Maungdaw, Arakan State. |
| 20 | Two small bombs explode in downtown Rangoon. No injuries are reported. |
| 21 | SPDC asks New Mon State Party, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, the Karen Peace Front, and the Pa-O National Organization ceasefire groups to provide security during the referendum. |
| 21 | SPDC Army orders 350 villagers in Namkham Township, Shan State, to perform forced labor to repair the collapsed bank of the Shweli Hydropower Dam Project. |
| 21 | A 26-year-old villager from Shwekyin Township, Pegu Division, dies as a result of a landmine explosion. |
| 22 | Over 100 Burmese nationals demonstrate in front of the Burmese embassy in Tokyo demanding their right to vote in the referendum. |
| 22 | SPDC accuses the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors of 20 April Rangoon bomb blasts. |
| 22 | Twenty-six-year-old USDA member Tun Thein is stabbed to death in Akyab, Arakan State. |
| 23 | Burmese nationals demonstrate against the referendum in front of the Burmese embassy in Kuala Lumpur. |
| 23 | Diplomats from the UK, EU, Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy, and UNHCR country representatives visit Nayapara and Dum Dum Meah camps in Bangladesh. |
| 24 | US Senate votes to award Daw Aung San Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal. |
| 25 | Germany adopts changes to immigration law to require Burmese citizens to obtain a transit visa for stopovers at German airports. |
| 25 | Malaysia's Astral Asia Bhd announces that it has terminated an oil palm plantation MoU with Myanmar Combiz Services Co Ltd and Green Futue Co Ltd. |
| 26 | Over 200 people take part in an anti-referendum demonstration organized by the International Burmese Monks Organization in Sydney, Australia. |
| 26 | Ten people are injured following a clash between Burmese migrant workers and policemen outside the Burmese embassy in Tokyo. |
| 26 | International Burmese Monks Organization in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, organizes a signature campaign against the referendum. |
| 26 | SPDC authorities prevent monks from gathering for a demonstration in front of Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda. |

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| 27 | About 100 activists hold an anti-referendum demonstration in front of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok, Thailand. |
| 29 | Freedom House says the media environment in Burma remained among the most tightly restricted in the world during 2007. |
| 30 | Thailand and SPDC sign an agreement on joint cooperation in drug suppression. |

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN APRIL

“Living Ghosts: The spiraling repression of the Karenni population by the Burmese military junta”, Burma Issues

<http://www.burmaissues.org/En/reports/livingghosts.html>

“Growing up under militarization: Abuse and agency of children in Karen State”, Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)

<http://www.khrg.org/khrg2008/khrg0801.html>

“Global overview of trends and developments in 2007”, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre/Norwegian Refugee Council

<http://www.nrc.no/arch/img/9267337.pdf>

“FMR30: Burma's displaced people”, Forced Migration Review

<http://www.fmreview.org/burma.htm>

“Atrocities Continue in Karen State, Burma”, Free Burma Rangers (FBR)

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2008/20080419.html>

“Lives Lost and Homes Destroyed: Villagers Suffer Under the Brutal Oppression of the Burma Army”, Free Burma Rangers (FBR)

<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2008/20080406.html>

“The Human Cost of Energy: Chevron’s Continuing Role in Financing Oppression and Profiting From Human Rights Abuses in Military-Ruled Burma”, Earthrights International

http://www.earthrights.org/files/Burma%20Project/Yadana/HCoE_pages.pdf

“Rich Pickings: how trade and investment keep the Burmese junta alive and kicking”, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article2023>

“Outlook 2008”, ADB

<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2008/>