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ALTERNATIVE A S E A N N E T W O R K O N B U R M A
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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- **UN Human Rights Council condemns the SPDC's ongoing systematic violations of human rights. UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma says that there are 2,100 political prisoners in the country and criticizes the SPDC for using kangaroo courts to try regime opponents.**
- **The regime continues to crack down on dissidents. In March, the SPDC detains 20 activists, including nine NLD members, and sentences 32 to prison terms.**
- **UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention says that the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is illegal, even under SPDC law,**
- **Pro-democracy groups launch a petition drive for the release of Burma's political prisoners.**
- **SPDC continues to subject Rohingya and Muslims in Arakan State to harassment, arbitrary arrest, extortion, and religious persecution.**
- **SPDC fence construction on Bangladesh border increases forced labor in Northern Arakan State.**
- **SPDC continues to frustrate humanitarian aid efforts both within the Irrawaddy delta and beyond.**
- **Economic and political pressure creates climate of fear for Burmese migrant workers in Northern Thailand.**
- **EU and US say that sanctions on SPDC are under review.**
- **ASEAN leaders tell the SPDC to solve the Rohingya problem and hold a credible and inclusive election in 2010.**
- **China and SPDC ink pipeline and more dam deals while Norway's state pension fund sells its stake in a Chinese company that sold military trucks to the SPDC.**
- **SPDC reports that FY 2008-2009 trade surplus hits US\$2.5 billion with foreign investment up by more than 90%.**

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KEY STORY

Human Rights Council condemns SPDC

On 27 March, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) passed a resolution that condemned the SPDC for the “ongoing systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms” of the Burmese people.¹ It was the 19th resolution passed by the Geneva-based body against Burma’s military regime since 1992. The resolution called on the SPDC:

- To engage in a genuine, substantive and time-bound process of open dialogue and national reconciliation with all political parties and ethnic groups;
- To release all political prisoners;
- To ensure free and fair electoral process that is transparent and inclusive; and
- To undertake a transparent, inclusive and comprehensive review of compliance of the Constitution with international human rights law.

The HRC’s resolution also extended for one year the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana.²

Ojea Quintana report

On 17 March, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana presented his report to the Human Rights Council. Among the report’s findings:³

- There are more than 2,100 political prisoners in Burma, including 16 journalists and bloggers;
- Between October and December 2008, the regime sentenced about 400 political prisoners to prison sentences;
- Many political prisoners were sentenced in closed-door hearings, without access to legal representation, and with contrived evidence against them;
- Over 600 political prisoners were transferred to prisons far from their hometowns; and
- Political prisoners were subjected to torture and ill-treatment during interrogation.

Responding to the report, the SPDC Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Wunna Maung Lwin reiterated the regime’s outrageous claim that there were no political prisoners in Burma.⁴

Daw Suu illegally detained

On 16 March, two UN human rights monitoring mechanisms said that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s detention contravenes both international human rights standards and the regime’s own law.

In his report to the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana said that Daw Suu’s detention violated Articles 9, 10 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and urged the SPDC to release her.⁵

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention made public its [November 2008 opinion](#), which stated that the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is illegal under the SPDC law. The UN body requested the SPDC to immediately and unconditionally release her from house arrest.⁶

¹ Reuters (27 Mar 09) U.N. rights body condemns systematic abuses in Myanmar; HRC, 10th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 20 March 2009, UN Doc A/HRC/10/L.28

² HRC, 10th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 20 March 2009, UN Doc A/HRC/10/L.28

³ HRC, 10th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, 11 March 2009, UN Doc. A/HRC/10/19

⁴ SPDC (17 Mar 09) Statement by His Excellency U Wunna Maung Lwin, Ambassador/ Permanent Representative and Leader of the Myanmar Delegation to the 10th Session of the Human Rights Council; AP (17 Mar 09) Myanmar arrests 5 members of pro-democracy party

⁵ HRC, 10th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, 11 March 2009, UN Doc. A/HRC/10/19

⁶ Reuters (23 Mar 09) Suu Kyi detention breaks Myanmar law: U.N. body

Political prisoners

On 13 March, exiled Burmese rights groups, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB), launched the signature campaign “[Free Burma’s Political Prisoners Now](#)” to mark Burma’s Human Rights Day. The petition drive, which is backed by 166 exiled Burmese and international solidarity groups, aims to collect 888,888 signatures by 24 May - the day that marks Daw Aung San Kyi’s sixth consecutive year of detention. The signatures will be sent to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.⁷

Meanwhile, the regime continued to crack down on dissidents. In March, the SPDC detained 20 activists, including nine NLD members, and sentenced 32 to prison terms.

Arrests

- **2 March:** SPDC authorities in Taungoo, Pegu Division, arrested Thein Lwin, a Thaketa Township NLD organizing committee member.⁸
- **3 March:** SPDC authorities in Twante Township, Rangoon Division, arrested NLD sympathizer Khin Zaw along with seven NLD supporters after they collected signatures for the release of political prisoners.⁹
- **6 March:** SPDC authorities in Rangoon’s Sanchaung Township arrested NLD member Sein Hlaing.¹⁰ He was involved in the NLD’s program to support political prisoners.¹¹
- **7 March:** SPDC authorities in Rangoon’s Hlaing Township arrested NLD member Shwe Gyo.¹²
- **10 March:** Special Branch police in Akyab, Arakan State, arrested four NLD youth members and a monk from Tawra Monastery for praying for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the Lawkanandar pagoda.¹³
- **13 March:** SPDC authorities in Rangoon’s Ahlone Township arrested NLD member and social worker Myint Myint San aka Ma Cho. She had been providing support to political prisoners with the NLD’s Social Supporting Committee.¹⁴
- **15 March:** SPDC authorities in Rangoon arrested NLD member Kyi Lwin, 53.¹⁵
- **20 March:** It was reported that SPDC Military Intelligence at a checkpoint on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road in Arakan State detained 60-year-old retired police official Mrat Tun for providing information to a Burmese media group in Bangladesh.¹⁶
- **27 March:** Police in Twante Township, Rangoon Division, arrested private tutor Aung Pe after he stood outside the Township NLD office for over five hours.¹⁷

Prison sentences

- **5 March:** A court in Rangoon’s Insein prison sentenced 88 Generation Students Win Maw, Zaw Zaw Min aka Baung Baung, and Aung Zaw Oo to an additional ten years in prison for sending news about the Saffron Revolution through the internet. They will now serve a total of 17, 12, and 22 years in prison respectively.¹⁸
- **11 March:** A court in Insein prison sentenced relief worker Min Thein Tun aka Thiha to 17 years in jail for helping coordinate cyclone Nargis relief efforts through the internet.¹⁹

⁷ Irrawaddy (10 Mar 09) Electricity shortages, students and unrest; Irrawaddy (11 Mar 09) Signatures wanted to free political prisoners; DVB (13 Mar 09) 888,888 political prisoner campaign launches today

⁸ Mizzima News (16 Mar 09) Ailing NLD party worker arrested

⁹ DVB (09 Mar 09) Eight people arrested after signature campaign

¹⁰ DVB (10 Mar 09) Two NLD members in unspecified arrest

¹¹ Mizzima News (08 Mar 09) Former political prisoner detained

¹² DVB (10 Mar 09) Two NLD members in unspecified arrest

¹³ Kaladan News (12 Mar 09) Authorities arrest NLD youth in Akyab

¹⁴ AP (18 Mar 09) Myanmar arrests 5 members of pro-democracy party; Irrawaddy (16 Mar 09) Four NLD Members Arrested

¹⁵ AP (18 Mar 09) Myanmar arrests 5 members of pro-democracy party; Mizzima News (16 Mar 09) Ailing NLD party worker arrested

¹⁶ Narinjara News (26 Mar 09) Retired police official arrested for connections with exiled media

¹⁷ Mizzima News (27 Mar 09) Lone protestor detained

¹⁸ DVB (06 Mar 09) Pop star imprisoned for further 10 years; UPI (19 Mar 09) Cyber-thought crime in Bangkok and Rangoon

¹⁹ DVB (18 Mar 09) Prisoners living in dire conditions hundreds of miles from families

- **12 March:** Rangoon's North Dagon Township court sentenced six relatives of monk leader U Gambira, including his brother Aung Ko Ko Lwin, to five years in prison with hard labor.²⁰
- **17 March:** A court in Magwe Division sentenced lawyer Pho Phyu to four years in prison. Pho Phyu defended farmers whose land had been forcibly seized by the SPDC Army in Natmawk Township.²¹
- **23 March:** A court in Insein prison sentenced former student activists Yin Yin Waing, Tin Tin Cho, Myat Thu, and Ni Moe Hlaing to three years in prison. They volunteered as relief workers in the Irrawaddy delta and collected donations from friends and relatives following cyclone Nargis.²²
- **23 March:** A court in Insein prison sentenced NLD members Htet Htet Oo Wai, Win Myint Maung, and Tun Tun Win to five years in prison for calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in front of the People's Assembly building in Rangoon on 30 December 2008.²³
- **23 March:** A Maungdaw district court sentenced local businessman Nyunt Maung, 45, to one year in prison for sending information to a Burmese media group in Bangladesh.²⁴
- **23 March:** A court in Insein prison sentenced activists Aung Kyaw Oo, Zeya Oo, Htin Aung, Than Tun Zin, Tin Tun, and Myo Thant to prison terms ranging from two to seven years for distributing political leaflets in Rangoon on behalf of the 88 Generation Students on 7 August 2008.²⁵
- **24 March:** A court in Twante Township, Rangoon Division, sentenced NLD sympathizer Khin Zaw and three NLD supporters to seven days in prison.²⁶ [See above *Arrests*]
- **30 March:** A court in Rangoon's Thingangyun Township sentenced six NLD members to five years in prison and extended the eight-year sentence of NLD member Ye Zaw Htike by an additional 10 years.²⁷

INSIDE BURMA

2010 elections

More pro-democracy groups in and outside of Burma joined the ranks of those who oppose the 2010 election.

- **12 March:** The Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP)* announced that its member political parties would not participate in the 2010 election unless the constitution is amended.²⁸
- **22 March:** The exiled coalition group Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB) announced that it opposed the election.²⁹

On 27 March, on the occasion of the Armed Forces military parade in Naypyidaw, SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe gave a 17-minute speech that focused on the elections. Than Shwe said political parties that will contest the elections should "refrain from inciting unrest, avoid personal attacks and smear campaigns,"³⁰ and urged them to shun foreign ideologies. "Some parties look to foreign countries for guidance and inspiration, follow the imported ideologies and directives irrationally," he said.³¹ Than

²⁰ DVB (13 Mar 09) Brother-in-law of ABMA leader sentenced to five years' hard labour; Irrawaddy (13 Mar 09) Monk's family members sentenced in reprisal

²¹ AP (20 Mar 09) Myanmar imprisons activist lawyer for 4 years; DVB (18 Mar 09) Farmers' lawyer sentenced to four years in prison

²² Irrawaddy (24 Mar 09) Insein court sentences 13 more political activists; Mizzima News (24 Mar 09) NLD requests meeting with party leaders

²³ Irrawaddy (24 Mar 09) Insein court sentences 13 more political activists; Mizzima News (24 Mar 09) NLD requests meeting with party leaders

²⁴ Narinjara News (28 Mar 09) Businessman Sentenced to One Year in Prison for Sharing Information

²⁵ Mizzima News (24 Mar 09) NLD requests meeting with party leaders

²⁶ Mizzima News (25 Mar 09) Three NLD members framed and jailed for exposing corruption

²⁷ Irrawaddy (31 Mar 09) More NLD members receive lengthy prison sentences

* CRPP comprises National League for Democracy, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Zomi National Congress (ZNC), and Mon National League for Democracy.

²⁸ Irrawaddy (13 Mar 09) We Will Boycott Election: CRPP; Mizzima News (13 Mar 09) Major parties not to contest polls unless constitution is revised; DVB (13 Mar 09) Pro-democracy committee tells UN to stay away from 2010 elections

²⁹ DVB (24 Mar 09) Coalition group will not contest 2010 election

³⁰ AP (27 Mar 09) Myanmar junta chief sets guidelines for 2010 polls

³¹ AFP (27 Mar 09) Myanmar leader warns on democracy at parade

Shwe also indicated that there would be no review of the SPDC-drafted constitution, saying the charter was “adopted by the people.”³²

SPDC Army desertions

- **4 March:** Two SPDC Army soldiers from Infantry Battalion 65 defected to the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) 727th Brigade. Seven other SPDC Army soldiers deserted on the same day.³³
- **21 March:** Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) arrested three SPDC Army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 538 who sought refuge at a pagoda near Thanchi in Bandarban District. The three soldiers reportedly fled to Bangladesh out of fear of punishment for losing a rifle magazine and ammunition during a border patrol.³⁴

Bombs

- **3 March:** Two bombs exploded in Rangoon’s Sanchaung and Kamayut Townships. No casualties were reported.³⁵ On 5 March, police in Rangoon’s Thingangyun Township detained a youth for questioning in connection with the bomb blasts.³⁶
- **26 March:** A bomb blast at a guesthouse in Rangoon’s North Okkalapa Township killed one person and injured two.³⁷

At the monasteries

Monks in Magwe and Mandalay Divisions launched a petition drive that urged the SPDC to end the ban on audiovisual material featuring “dharma lectures”. The ban had been in force since January. The dharma lectures are based on classical Buddhist stories but are often interpreted as criticism of the military regime.³⁸

On 25 March, it was reported that monks in Shwe Pyi Village, Paletwa Township, Chin State, held two drunk SPDC Army soldiers from LIB 289 overnight at a local monastery. The monks held the soldiers because they assaulted two local women.³⁹

Post-Nargis recovery: One step forward, two steps back

In addition to the SPDC’s decision to restrict the mandate of the Tripartite Core Group to one year when it had originally planned a three year recovery plan, [See *February 2009 Burma Bulletin*] the junta ended a program to fast-track visa applications for foreign aid workers. Foreigners involved in the cyclone Nargis relief effort must now revert to the protracted visa application process in place since February 2006.⁴⁰

On 3 March, Burma Economic Watch (BEW) published a critique of the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP), which said the plan was a “deeply disappointing document.” In addition, BEW said that the PONREPP recommendations would “condemn Burma to a continuation of the policies and programs, which have impoverished this once prosperous and hopeful country.”⁴¹ BEW noted that virtually all reconstruction efforts are dominated by the SPDC in a failed top-down model of development. The review added that PONREPP had no justification for seeking US\$691 million from

³² AP (27 Mar 09) Myanmar junta chief sets guidelines for 2010 polls

³³ SHAN (06 Mar 09) Two desert to SSA

³⁴ Daily Star (22 Mar 09) 5 Myanmar nationals arrested; Kaladan News (22 Mar 09) 3 armies, 2 spies of Burma arrested in border area ; Narinjara News (23 Mar 09) Three Burmese Army deserters interrogated in Dhaka

³⁵ AP (03 Mar 09) 2 explosions strike in Myanmar’s biggest city; DVB (04 Mar 09) Two bomb blasts hit Rangoon; Mizzima News (04 Mar 09) Twin bombs explode in Rangoon; Irrawaddy (04 Mar 09) Two Bombs Explode in Rangoon—No Casualties; AFP (05 Mar 09) Myanmar urges vigilance after bomb blasts

³⁶ DVB (06 Mar 09) Youth detained over Rangoon bomb blasts

³⁷ AFP (26 Mar 09) One dead in Myanmar blast: official; Mizzima News (27 Mar 09) One killed, two injured in North Okkalapa blast

³⁸ Irrawaddy (26 Mar 09) Monks protest banning of “Dharma Lectures”; DVB (27 Mar 09) Monks protest against banning of ceremony

³⁹ Narinjara News (25 Mar 09) Monks Clash with Drunken Soldiers

⁴⁰ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 09) Regime stops fast-tracking visas for relief workers

⁴¹ Mizzima News (06 Mar 09) TCG mandate extended, critics question PONREPP

the international community for continued humanitarian assistance while the junta was sitting on foreign reserves which BEW estimated at US\$3-4 billion.⁴²

On 17 March, Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, Tomás Ojea Quintana, reported to the UN Human Rights Council that living conditions for many in the Irrawaddy delta remained difficult, with some 15% of children suffering malnutrition, many households still living in poor shelters, and an estimated one million people in need of food aid.⁴³

Water crisis in the delta

On 3 March, relief workers with Thai-based Emergency Assistance Team-Burma (EAT-Burma) said that cyclone Nargis survivors in Labutta Township, Irrawaddy Division, were in desperate need of potable water. The organization said that 35 villages in the township faced a water crisis.⁴⁴

The Irrawaddy delta region faces a water shortage after lakes and ponds used for drinking water were contaminated by sea water during cyclone Nargis. In addition, SPDC red tape requiring aid workers to obtain prior permission for water distribution has frustrated the delivery of sufficient water supplies.⁴⁵

Crisis beyond the delta

While international attention has been focused on post-Nargis recovery, dire humanitarian conditions outside the delta region have largely gone unaddressed.

- In his 16 March report to the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana recommended the expansion of the TCG's mandate beyond cyclone-affected areas to address humanitarian needs in other states.⁴⁶
- On 18 March, US-based Refugees International called for a humanitarian needs assessment in the areas outside the delta, such as the drought prone areas of Magwe, Mandalay, and Pegu Divisions, as well as Arakan and Chin States.⁴⁷
- On 19 March it was reported that Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Holland noted that post-Nargis aid had yet to translate into better access or more funds for aid operations in areas beyond the Irrawaddy delta, where needs are great and often unmet. MSF pointed out that the TCG mechanism does not apply outside the Irrawaddy delta, where long-standing SPDC restrictions on aid agencies are still in place.⁴⁸

Protests

On 6 March, about 100 students in Moulmein, Mon State, took to the streets to protest an inadequate supply of electricity.⁴⁹ Rangoon has also been hit with insufficient power. Since mid-February, downtown Rangoon has received an average of six hours of electricity daily while suburban areas got only three hours a day.⁵⁰

On 20 March, about 20 residents of Zeekone village who lost their homes during cyclone Nargis demonstrated in front of the Township Peace and Development Council office in Twante, Rangoon Division. The protesters demanded the reconstruction of their homes and claimed that the regime only rebuilt the houses of villagers with close ties to local SPDC authorities.⁵¹

⁴² Irrawaddy (10 Mar 09) Economists Criticize Tripartite Core Group

⁴³ HRC (11 Mar 09) 10th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar: Tomás Ojea Quintana

⁴⁴ Mizzima (03 Mar 09) Cyclone Nargis victims badly need potable water

⁴⁵ Irrawaddy (19 Mar 09) Drinking water crisis in Delta

⁴⁶ HRC, 10th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, 11 March 2009, UN Doc. A/HRC/10/19

⁴⁷ Mizzima News (20 Mar 09) Report urges more relief funds for Burma

⁴⁸ IRIN News (19 Mar 09) Beyond the delta, aid projects miss out

⁴⁹ IMNA (09 Mar 09) Electricity returns after students stage protest in Moulmein

⁵⁰ Mizzima News (06 Mar 09) Severe power shortage in commercial city

⁵¹ Mizzima News (20 Mar 09) Protest in Twante over unfair reconstruction; Irrawaddy (20 Mar 09) Homeless Cyclone Survivors Demonstrate; DVB (23 Mar 09) Nargis victims protest after being denied new housing

Speed out of Burma

During March, there was a significant increase in amphetamine seizures, which serves to underscore that Burma remains the major source of ‘speed’ in Southeast Asia.

- **2 March:** Thai Army personnel at the Thai-Burma border town of Mae Sai seized a machine used to produce methamphetamine tablets that was being smuggled into Burma.⁵²
- **8 March:** SPDC officials seized about two million amphetamine pills and one million kyat (US \$1,000) in cash from a truck in Tachilek Township, near the Thai-Burma border.⁵³
- **20 March:** Bangladesh police arrested two women in Teknaf and seized 1,500 amphetamine tablets. The amphetamine tablets had been smuggled from Burma to be sold in local markets in the border area.⁵⁴

HUMAN RIGHTS

Rohingya and Muslims in Arakan State

The military regime continued to subject Rohingya and Muslims in Arakan State to harassment, arbitrary arrest, extortion, and religious persecution.

- **2 March:** Na Sa Ka in Buthidaung Township, Arakan State, detained four mosque committee members in Phone Nyo Hlake village for extending the veranda of a mosque by nine inches. They were released on 9 March, after paying a three million kyat bribe.⁵⁵
- **3 March:** Na Sa Ka personnel in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, began the annual routine of registration of Rohingya by taking photographs of Rohingya families. Na Sa Ka collected 2,000 kyat from each family.⁵⁶ Na Sa Ka also took photographs of religious buildings and villagers were forced to pay 2,000 kyat per photograph.⁵⁷
- **5 March:** SPDC Military Intelligence in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, detained two local Muslim youths on suspicion of drug smuggling. The two youths were severely tortured during interrogation and released on 11 March after paying a 350,000 kyat bribe. On 14 March, one of them died as a result of the injuries.⁵⁸
- **10 March:** Na Sa Ka in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, arrested three local Rohingya villagers for their alleged involvement in people smuggling to Malaysia via Bangladesh. One of the villagers was released on 12 March after paying a 75,000 kyat bribe.⁵⁹
- **12 March:** Na Sa Ka forces prevented Rohingya farmers from selling seasonal farm produce in local markets in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.⁶⁰
- **20 March:** Na Sa Ka in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, arrested a 45-year-old local Rohingya for possessing a mobile phone charger. He was later released after paying a 500,000 kyat bribe.⁶¹

On 27 March, the UN Human Rights Council’s resolution on Burma urged the SPDC to recognize the rights of Rohingya and to end the “unacceptable discrimination, human rights abuse and severe economic deprivation they face.”⁶²

⁵² Mizzima News (03 Mar 09) Drug-producing machine to be smuggled into Burma seized by Thai Army

⁵³ NMG (12 Mar 09) Millions of amphetamine pills seized in Tachilek

⁵⁴ Narinjara News (23 Mar 09) Two Women Arrested with Yaba

⁵⁵ Kaladan News (24 Mar 09) Mosque committee members arrested by Nasaka in Buthidaung

⁵⁶ Kaladan News (07 Mar 09) Security force collects money for family group Photograph

⁵⁷ Kaladan News (24 Mar 09) Mosque committee members arrested by Nasaka in Buthidaung

⁵⁸ Kaladan News (16 Mar 09) Torture kills one injures another

⁵⁹ Kaladan News (28 Mar 09) Nasaka arrests three men in Maungdaw

⁶⁰ Kaladan News (12 Mar 09) Authorities stop farmers from selling produce in local areas

⁶¹ Kaladan News (28 Mar 09) Maulvi arrested for mobile charger in Maungdaw

⁶² HRC, 10th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 20 March 2009, UN Doc A/HRC/10/L.28

SPDC “internet enemy”

On 12 March, Reporters sans Frontiers (RSF) released “Internet Enemies”, a report that named Burma among the 12 countries that enforce heavy internet censorship.⁶³ The report’s findings included:

- Burma is one of the least connected countries in the world, with only 40,000 users connected to the internet;
- SPDC authorization is required to get an internet connection at home;
- Service providers offer prohibitive prices for membership and connection is commonly slow;
- The SPDC controls the country’s only two service providers, MPT and Bagan Cybertech;
- Laws concerning electronic communications and the dissemination of news online are among the most restrictive in the world, exposing Internet users to very harsh prison sentences; and
- In 2008, the SPDC jailed under the Electronic Act comedian Zarganar and blogger Nay Phone Latt to lengthy prison sentences.

Detention conditions

- 88 Generation Students’ leader Min Ko Naing is suffering from poor health due to lack of exercise in Kengtung prison, Shan State. Prison authorities also barred him from receiving books and magazines from outside.⁶⁴
- Labor rights activist Su Su Nway received medical treatment at Kale general hospital in Sagaing Division due to her deteriorating health condition.⁶⁵
- About 10 political prisoners, including 88 Generation Student Htay Kywe, monk leader U Eindriya, and NLD Taunggoat Township Secretary Zaw Naing, were put in solitary confinement in Buthidaung prison, Arakan State.⁶⁶
- Weekly Eleven editor Kyaw Kyaw Thant has breathing difficulties after being confined in a small cell and denied regular exercise in Insein prison.⁶⁷
- NLD youth coordinator Htun Htun Naing was denied food and medicine brought by his family members in Mandalay’s Meikhtila prison.⁶⁸

Forced labor

- **3 March:** It was reported that the SPDC Army had forced villagers in Paletwa Township, Chin State, to transport army rations from an inland port to army camps stationed along the Indo-Burma border.⁶⁹
- **Since 6 March:** It was reported that the SPDC’s use of forced labor had increased in Northern Arakan to fence the border with Bangladesh. The SPDC transported the supplies to build the fence by boat from Akyab to Maungdaw Township. Local SPDC officials forced villagers to unload the supplies upon reaching Maungdaw Township. SPDC authorities also ordered Maungdaw Township villagers to provide 15,000 bricks per village tract for the fencing project.⁷⁰
- **18 March:** SPDC soldiers in Naing Chaung Village, Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, detained around 100 Rohingya who were building a road as part of a World Food Program project. The SPDC soldiers took the Rohingya to perform forced labor to bring wood posts for construction of army camps.⁷¹

⁶³ RSF (12 Mar 09) Internet Enemies - Burma

⁶⁴ DVB (04 Mar 09) Imprisoned students’ leader in declining health

⁶⁵ Irrawaddy (20 Mar 09) Su Su Nway in Kalay Hospital

⁶⁶ DVB (05 Mar 09) Political prisoners locked in isolation cells; Narinjara News (05 Mar 09) Situation for political prisoners in Buthidaung deteriorates

⁶⁷ DVB (06 Mar 09) Pop star imprisoned for further 10 years

⁶⁸ DVB (18 Mar 09) Prisoners living in dire conditions hundreds of miles from families

⁶⁹ Narinjara News (03 Mar 09) People Forced to Transport Army Rations

⁷⁰ Kaladan News (16 Mar 09) Forced labor heightens in Northern Arakan for border fencing project

⁷¹ Kaladan News (18 Mar 09) Army forces villagers into labor in Maungdaw

DISPLACEMENT

Rohingya – still a problem by any other name...

ASEAN leaders acted on their promise to solve the plight of the Rohingya boat people during the 14th ASEAN Summit by deciding to simply re-name them “illegal migrants from the Indian Ocean.” ASEAN caved in to the SPDC, which refused to acknowledge the Rohingya as their own.⁷² However, on 1 March, Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong warned that ASEAN must seriously address the issue of stateless Rohingya refugees fleeing Burma or risk losing credibility.⁷³

The UNHCR intervened on the Rohingya issue on several fronts. Thailand and UNHCR agreed to jointly introduce a handbook for screening Bengalis from the Rohingya boat people.⁷⁴ In addition, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres went to Burma on 7 March to assess UNHCR projects in the country.⁷⁵ During his six-day trip, Guterres discussed Rohingya refugee issues with SPDC officials in Naypyidaw, traveled to Akyab and Rathidaung in Arakan State, and visited Mergui in Tenasserim Division. As a result of his visit Guterres concluded that UNHCR’s current level of activities in Northern Arakan State did not correspond to the actual needs and a decision was taken to upgrade the program with immediate effect.⁷⁶

Migrant crackdown

Increasing restrictions and actions against Burmese – both migrants and political dissidents – have been taking place in Thailand. This has given rise to fears that a crackdown on Thai-based Burmese dissidents is being pursued in tandem with a sweep against migrant workers during the global economic crisis.

- Thai authorities instructed Burmese migrant workers in Chiang Mai Province to inform village authorities of their presence, regardless of their legal status.⁷⁷
- Authorities in Mae Rim, Chiang Mai Province, imposed a curfew on Burmese migrant workers, who are not permitted to drive motorbikes after 8 pm.⁷⁸ Authorities also forbade Burmese migrants from renting land or cultivating gardens.⁷⁹
- Director of Thailand’s Department of Employment Pichai Eakpitakdamrong urged Thai nationals to inform authorities of the presence of illegal migrant workers. Informants will be reportedly rewarded with a percentage of the fine as a “finders fee.”⁸⁰
- Exiled Burmese opposition groups based in Mae Sot, were forced to close down their offices following rumors of a crackdown by Thai authorities.⁸¹
- Thai military authorities ordered KNU leaders in Mae Sot to move out of Thailand.⁸²

More IDPs

On 5 March, the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) reported that the number of displaced persons in Eastern Burma had increased by an estimated 66,000 people, bringing the total for the area to at least 451,000 in 2008. According to IDMC assessments, in the past 12 years over 3,200 villages in Eastern Burma have been destroyed, forcibly relocated, or abandoned.⁸³

⁷² Malaysia Star (02 Mar 09) Rohingyas are now termed illegal migrants

⁷³ Straits Times (02 Mar 09) Asean must address Rohingya

⁷⁴ Bangkok Post (08 Mar 09) Minister, UN agree Rohingya proposal

⁷⁵ Mizzima News (09 Mar 09) UNHCR Chief in Burma on Rohingya Issue

⁷⁶ Irrawaddy (09 Mar 09) UNHCR Discusses Rohingya Issue with Burmese Regime; Kaladan News (11 Mar 09) UN refugee Chief visits Arakan State; DPA (11 Mar 09) UNHCR chief visits Myanmar’s Rakhine state, homeland of Rohingyas; AP (12 Mar 09) UN to increase focus on Myanmar’s Muslim migrants

⁷⁷ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 09) Burmese migrants come under stricter control

⁷⁸ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 09) Burmese migrants come under stricter control

⁷⁹ Irrawaddy (04 Mar 09) Burmese migrants come under stricter control

⁸⁰ Mizzima News (20 Mar 09) Reward to informants may increase corruption

⁸¹ DVB (12 Mar 09) Exiled Burmese groups close following rumours of Thai crackdown

⁸² Mizzima News (04 Mar 09) Pressure mounts on KNU to move out of Thailand: Sources

⁸³ Irrawaddy (06 Mar 09) Hundreds of thousands still displaced in Burma: Watchdog

Extra-judicial killing

On 7 March, the body of Nai Lon, a 35-year-old Mon man, was found after Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) detained him the day before while he allegedly attempted to traffic undocumented workers into Thailand. Sources from the search party who found the body reported that his neck was broken, his hands were bound and his body bore the marks of a beating.⁸⁴

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ASEAN pushes SPDC on Rohingya, 2010 elections

In the month after the conclusion of the ASEAN summit, SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein was on the road for discussions in Indonesia and Singapore while Thai FM Kasit Piromya went to Naypyidaw. Finding a solution for the Rohingya and the SPDC's planned 2010 elections were common themes in all of the meetings.

- **1 March:** The 14th ASEAN summit concluded. Thai PM Abhisit Vejjajiva said that ASEAN heads of state called on the SPDC to release of political prisoners and to have an “all-inclusive process” when the SPDC holds elections in 2010.⁸⁵
- **16 March:** Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono met with SPDC PM Gen. Thein Sein to discuss Rohingya boat people and the planned 2010 elections in Burma. Yudhoyono emphasized the need for a “practical solution” to resolve the Rohingya problem, and urged Burma to prove to the world that its road map to democracy could work by holding “fair” and “inclusive” general elections.⁸⁶
- **17 March:** Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong told SPDC PM Gen Thein that the SPDC needed to take bolder steps towards national reconciliation and to engage the international community. Lee said that Singapore would assist the junta to revive ties with the US and the EU.⁸⁷
- **22 March:** Thai FM Kasit Piromya began a two-day visit to Burma to discuss issues of undocumented migrants from Burma.⁸⁸ On 23 March, Kasit said that Thailand was willing to help convince Burma's ethnic armed opposition groups to join the SPDC's seven step roadmap.⁸⁹ “The Thai government supports the national reconciliation process in Burma as well as the political reform under the seven-step road map,” he said.⁹⁰

EU/US: Sanctions under review?

On 24 March, US State Department Director of Mainland Southeast Asian Affairs Stephen Blake, met with SPDC FM Maj Gen Nyan Win in Naypyidaw to discuss US-SPDC relations.⁹¹ On 25 March, Blake told the Committee Representing People of Parliament (CRPP) that some existing economic sanctions on Burma may be withdrawn while other targeted sanctions may remain in place.⁹² Despite Blake's statement to the CRPP, on 25 March US State Department spokesman Gordon Duguid said that Blake's meeting with SPDC FM Nyan Win did not signal a change in US policy towards Burma.⁹³

On 24 March, the EU's special envoy to Burma Piero Fassino said that the EU will wait until April before deciding whether to extend sanctions against Burma. “[W]e are ready to change the sanctions if there are some positive steps in (the) direction to obtain our goals,” Fassino said.⁹⁴

⁸⁴ IMNA (09 March 09) Bound, beaten body of human trafficker found after arrest by Thai border police

⁸⁵ Irrawaddy (02 Mar 09) Asean Leaders Call for Political Reform in Burma

⁸⁶ Jakarta Post (17 Mar 09) RI, Myanmar discuss democracy, refugees

⁸⁷ Reuters (18 Mar 09) Singapore urges Myanmar to reconcile with opponents

⁸⁸ Mizzima News (22 Mar 09) Thailand FM begin Burma visit

⁸⁹ Nation (24 Mar 09) Thailand to help with Burma's national reconciliation

⁹⁰ Bangkok Post (24 Mar 09) Kasit agrees to push KNU disarmament

⁹¹ AFP (25 Mar 09) US official in rare Myanmar talks

⁹² Irrawaddy (26 Mar 09) Changes proposed on US economic sanctions

⁹³ AFP (25 Mar 09) Myanmar Talks Do Not Signal Policy Shift

⁹⁴ Reuters (25 Mar 09) EU eyes extending Myanmar sanctions

ECONOMY

Gems sale

From 8-20 March, the SPDC held the 46th annual Myanmar Gems Emporium, having gained more than US\$191 million in sales from 3,500 lots of jade and other precious stones.⁹⁵ The auction took place amid reports of a drastic decline in both sales and exports of precious stones from Burma, due to increased US and EU targeted sanctions and the global economic crisis.⁹⁶

Sharing the spoils

While SPDC approaches the international community hat in hand, SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein announced an increase in Burma's trade surplus over the past fiscal year (April 08 – March 09), topping US\$2.5 billion.⁹⁷ Foreign investment in Burma also increased dramatically by 93% in 2008, and surpassed US\$974 million, according to official SPDC figures.⁹⁸ The sharp increase was attributed to China's massive investment of US\$855 million in Burma's mining sector combined with a global interest in Burma's natural resources.⁹⁹ Thailand tops the list of 29 countries investing in Burma with US\$7 billion. Russia invested US\$94 million in oil and gas exploitation, as did Vietnam with a US\$20 million investment.¹⁰⁰

Deals with China

On 26 March, SPDC Energy Minister Brig Gen Lun Thi and Head of China's National Energy Administration Zhang Guobao signed a cooperation agreement on the Sino-Burma Oil and Gas pipeline designed to link offshore fields in the Bay of Bengal with China's Yunnan Province.¹⁰¹

SPDC and China also concluded a series of bilateral agreements that included a framework agreement on development of hydropower resources in Burma by China and a Memorandum of Understanding on buyer's credit for construction projects between the Export-Import Bank of China and the SPDC Ministry of Finance and Revenue.¹⁰²

Divestment

- QBE, Australia's largest international general insurance group, ceased its business involvement in Burma after a successful boycott campaign led by the Burma Campaign UK.¹⁰³
- On 13 March, Norway's state pension fund Global sold its US\$4.6 million stake in the Chinese Dongfeng Motor Group over the group's sale of some 900 military trucks to the SPDC.¹⁰⁴
- On 16 March, following a joint trade meeting between Indonesian and SPDC representatives, SPDC Deputy Director General of the Trade Department Myo Oo admitted that international banking restrictions still posed a serious problem for the regime.¹⁰⁵

Going, going, gone

Families in Burma have suffered as the kyat strengthened, reducing the value of international remittances sent from overseas. For most of 2008, the market rate for the kyat was 1,200 to 1,300 to the

⁹⁵ AP (24 Mar 09) Gem sales earn Myanmar \$191 million

⁹⁶ BBC (17 Mar 09) Burma's gem mines face closure

⁹⁷ AFP (31 Mar 09) Myanmar posts 2.5 billion dollar trade surplus: PM

⁹⁸ Xinhua (18 Mar 09) Myanmar foreign investment rises sharply in 2008

⁹⁹ Xinhua (18 Mar 09) Myanmar foreign investment rises sharply in 2008

¹⁰⁰ Xinhua (18 Mar 09) Myanmar foreign investment rises sharply in 2008

¹⁰¹ Mizzima News (27 Mar 09) China, Burma to build cross border gas pipeline

¹⁰² Mizzima News (27 Mar 09) China, Burma to build cross border gas pipeline

¹⁰³ Mizzima News (11 Mar 09) Lloyd's Managing Agent cancels Burma Insurance

¹⁰⁴ AP (16 Mar 09) Norway's Vast Oil Wealth Fund Drops Chinese Firm; DVB (16 Mar 09) Norway divests from company supplying military trucks to Burma;

¹⁰⁵ Antara News (16 Mar 09) Indonesia, Myanmar agree to develop direct trade ties

US dollar. Now it has fallen below 1,000 kyat.¹⁰⁶ The average migrant worker sends home around US\$300 a year.¹⁰⁷

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN MARCH

1	Five men rape and murder two women in the Tha Rafi model village, in Arakan State.
2	Kachin State Interim Committee forms the Kachin State Progressive Party to contest the 2010 general elections.
3	SPDC charges detained NLD member Tin Yu and nine other people for obstructing officials in Insein prison.
4	Malaysia's FM Rais Yatim calls on the SPDC to assure its ASEAN neighbors that Rohingya boat people who fled Burma will not be persecuted if they are returned home.
4	Migrant labor rights organizations in Songkhla Province, Thailand, rescue two Burmese migrant workers after they had worked on a Thai fishing boat for 25 months without pay.
4	SPDC dismisses two US government's reports critical of its human rights record and counter-narcotics efforts as unfounded and politically motivated.
5	Dr Tin Myo Win and an eye specialist visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
5	UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay urges Burma's neighbors to provide refuge for Rohingya boat people and offer them protection in line with international standards.
6	SPDC authorities shut and seize the property of approximately 50 Chin orphanages in Rangoon because their licenses had allegedly expired.
6	SPDC authorities release lawyer Aung Thein and Khin Maung Shein from Irrawaddy Division's Bassein and Myaungmya prisons respectively.
11	US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a "beacon of hope, strength and liberty for people around the world."
11	SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe's close aide Col Than Swe is appointed ambassador to the UN.
12	Ei Ei Wai, a 24-year old Burmese migrant worker, drowns in Mahachai, Samut Sakhon Province, while trying to escape police arrest.
12	State-run newspaper Myanmar Ahlin reports that SPDC police, military, and customs officials seized more than 1.3 million methamphetamine tablets in February, a 25-fold increase over January's total.
12	European Parliamentary Caucus on Burma urges the EU to strengthen its Common Position on Burma when it is renewed in April.
13	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer Kyi Win sends a letter to SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein to seek permission to hold a meeting with the Nobel Peace Prize laureate.
13	Bangladesh army personnel arrest two Democratic Party of Arakan fighters in a forest near the Bangladesh-Burma border.
15	SPDC Health Ministry official says it has banned 43 brands of pickled tea leaves upon finding the chemical dye, Auramine O, in the food items.
15	Prison transfers: NLD members Myint Myint San and Ma Theingi from Rangoon's Insein prison to Pegu Division's Prome prison and Irrawaddy Division's Maubin prison respectively. Two other political prisoners from Insein prison to Magwe Division's Thayet prison.
16	Bangladeshi authorities arrest three Burmese nationals for illegally entering Bangladesh.
18	Singaporean activists denounce their government's decision to honor visiting SPDC PM Gen Thein Sein by naming a new orchid variety after him.
18	SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe meets with Chen Bingde, member of the Central Military Commission of China and Chief of General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.
19	NLD Central Executive Committee sends a request to SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe to seek permission to hold a meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
21	A 45-year-old villager is injured in a landmine blast in Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division.
21	SPDC Secretary-1 Lt Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo meets with the chairman of the DKBA Than Htoo Kyaw and says the military regime will continue to encourage the development of DKBA-controlled areas.
21	Na Sa Ka and SPDC Army soldiers in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, start erecting pillars for fencing the Burma-Bangladesh border.
23	SPDC's Permanent Representative to ASEAN Nyan Lynn presents his credentials to ASEAN Sec-Gen Surin Pitsuwan.
24	NLD Central Executive Committee issues a fresh appeal to seek permission to hold a meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
24	Three-day FTUB congress concludes on the Thai-Burma border, calling for economic sanctions against

¹⁰⁶ DPA (16 Mar 09) Appreciating kyat hits Myanmar workers' overseas earnings

¹⁰⁷ Economist (19 Mar 09) Myanmar's overflow

	the SPDC and a boycott of the junta's 2010 election.
24	US State Department's Director of Southeast Asian Affairs Stephen Blake meets with NLD representatives in Rangoon.
24	Singapore's Senior Minister for Foreign Affairs Balaji Sadasivan states that Singapore will not accept Rohingya refugees should they attempt to land, but will help them depart for third country.
24	KNU says it will not yield to any form of pressure to partake in the 2010 general election unless the SPDC implements changes to the constitution.
24	US government and Czech FM Karel Schwarzenberg say they are disappointed by the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest and the junta's failure to heed international calls for her release.
25	Li Changchun, a senior official of the Communist Party of China, arrives in Rangoon to begin an official goodwill visit.
25	SPDC Chairman Sr Gen Than Shwe promotes the junta's Secretary-1 Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo to the rank of four-star general.
26	Manas Kumar Mishra of TATA Motors, India's leading automaker, meets with SPDC Minister of Energy Vice-Admiral Soe Thein to discuss establishing a truck manufacturing unit in Burma.
27	About 500 people attend a ceremony to mark Resistance Day at the NLD headquarters in Rangoon.
27	US State Department includes Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" in its list of the world's worst violators of religious freedom.
27	SPDC Information Minister Brig Gen Kyaw Hsan says the junta is open to talks with the US.
28	SPDC authorities transfer NLD elected MP Than Lwin and NLD member Win Mya Mya from Mandalay prison to Loikaw prison in Karenni State and Putao prison in Kachin State respectively.
29	Thai Police arrest nearly 400 Burmese migrant workers during a raid on a charity rock concert held in Bangkok to raise money for HIV/AIDS.

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"Capitalizing on the gains", Refugees International (RI)
<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/sites/default/files/Burma031809.pdf>

"Comment on the 'Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan' (PONREPP)", Burma Economic Watch (BEW)
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/BEWStatementPONREPP.pdf>

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[http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/9E75F529DFCC4FD0C12575700038DDB2/\\$file/Myanmar_Overview_Mar09.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/9E75F529DFCC4FD0C12575700038DDB2/$file/Myanmar_Overview_Mar09.pdf)

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