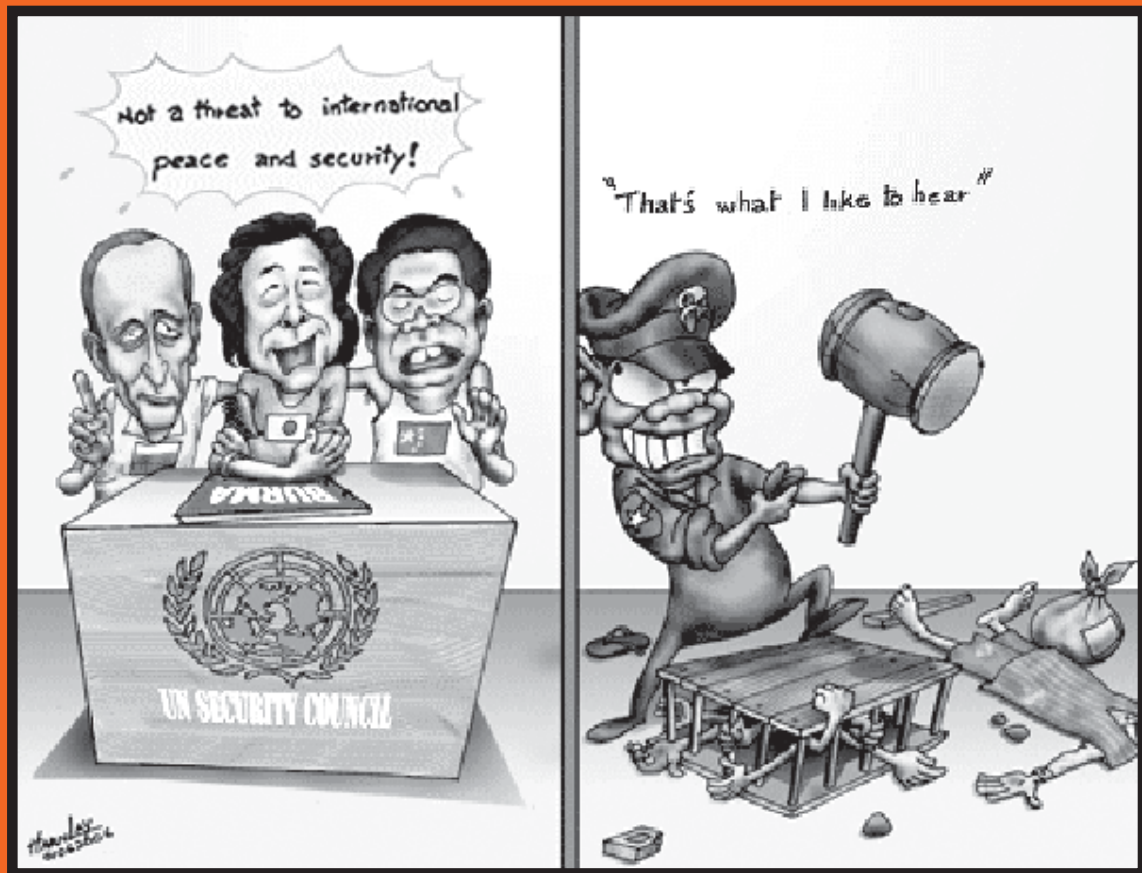


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Burma Briefing: Issues and Concerns Volume 3



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ASEAN'S PATIENCE WEARS THIN

A NEW BURMA AGENDA

"... it is not over yet. Both ASEAN and the world community must push for change in Myanmar. ASEAN must also push for Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom." — Zaid Ibrahim, AIPMC Chairman¹

The AIPMC continued its efforts to keep Burma at the top of the ASEAN agenda, setting a deadline of September 2006 for Burma's military regime to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners and implement concrete steps towards democratization and national reconciliation. If the SPDC failed to do so, the AIPMC vowed to commence efforts to suspend Myanmar's ASEAN membership. Teresa Kok, Secretary of AIPMC and Malaysian MP said **"We will campaign in each of our respective governments to have Myanmar suspended from ASEAN."**²

The AIPMC also acknowledged the importance of the "Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma" report and endorsed the reports recommendation that the UN Security Council adopt a resolution on Burma.

In terms of possible actions by the UNSC on Burma, the Philippines become the *only* ASEAN country to openly support such an effort in November. Philippines President's Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye: "President Arroyo agreed to support efforts in the United Nations."³ However, statements made later indicate a possible change of heart by other ASEAN members on this issue.

CLINGING TO "CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT"

Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo: "What's happening in Myanmar is very sad and a bit of an embarrassment to the ASEAN family. [...] Some of the things which have happened there recently are still a mystery to us. [...] But they are part of the family and we've got to support each other, so I hope the issue will not be too much of a distraction."⁴

In the months between the ASEAN Ministerial meeting in July and the ASEAN summit in December 2006, ASEAN leaders attempted to show a united front and noted "constructive engagement was the path to follow in its dealings with the junta. In doing so, ASEAN leaders rejected the position of the AIPMC on Burma's military regime.

On 28 September 2005, Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong said that expelling Myanmar from ASEAN would not help solve the military-ruled country's problems. Lee said taking a confrontational stand with threats of expulsion was not the bloc's way of dealing with its members. Lee said ASEAN leaders and officials have discussed the issue of Burma among themselves and agreed to continue engaging their neighbor. "Myanmar is a member of ASEAN. It's got certain internal problems ... and we've discussed this with them. It's caused

The formation of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) in November of 2004 has played a pivotal role in reshaping ASEAN policy towards Burma. The Caucus remains steadfast in its efforts to bring democratic reform to Burma and having the UN Security Council pass a resolution on Burma.

ASEAN's attitude towards Burma has been impacted by two main events over the past 18 months. The first involved the controversy that swirled around the ASEAN Chair issue. The second involved the junta's defiant attitude in allowing the visit of ASEAN Envoy - Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar.

ASEAN leaders have been increasingly frustrated by the hollow promises of the SPDC to initiate genuine political reform and the junta's reliance on the move to Pyinmana to disengage from ASEAN.

ASEAN leaders have come to the realization that its defense of Burma's military regime is causing serious problems with ASEAN's international relations.

ASEAN's growing frustration with Burma's military junta has resulted in an apparent shift in ASEAN that may lead to support for a UNSC resolution on Burma.

difficulties with our relations with our dialogue partners, the Europeans and the Americans," he said. "But within ASEAN, we have to manage these issues in a way which will be helpful, effective and constructive in the long term."⁵

On 29 September 2005, Malaysia's deputy PM Najib Razak acknowledged that ASEAN's policy "of constructive engagement has shown some dividends but not as much as we had hoped," but added that there would be no change of course. "I think we have to continue to pursue this and hopefully things get better...We're still trying,"⁶

On the issue of possible UNSC action on Burma Thai Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon said, "Our feeling is that it's not a constructive thing to do in the Security Council. We feel that it may not be a good way to resolve or make things improve⁷... We need interactions with Myanmar. Sometimes people think that we haven't really achieved results, therefore the door (to dialogue) is not useful. But the door remains useful⁸... People have criticized the door that we have opened for Myanmar. The door is to transmit information back and forth. So this is the point of emphasis- that the door is important"⁹

29 Sep 05: Malaysia's Deputy PM Najib Razak acknowledged that ASEAN's policy "of constructive engagement has shown some dividends but not as much as we had hoped..." but added "... hopefully things get better... We're still trying,"⁶

12 Oct 05: Syed Hamid Albar said SPDC leaders expressed concerns that bringing democracy could create social instability: "... They said they want to avoid a situation like Iraq, which is gripped by violence."

UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail rejected the claims: "I don't see any parallels between Myanmar and Iraq... Iraq is a very bad case where unilateralism was allowed to happen... Nobody is talking about taking unilateral action [against Myanmar]."¹²

10 Dec 05: Australian FM Alexander Downer recalls: "Ever since I've been Foreign Minister, I have been told by three foreign ministers in that time that they were gradually moving towards constitutional reform. Well, the progress has been about as fast as glue flowing up a hill."¹⁵

In November 2005, Malaysian PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said, "[ASEAN's] commitment to continue with the engagement with Myanmar is a strategy that we believe can work. It takes time, it's a little bit slow but I think we cannot be confrontational with Myanmar. That's not the ASEAN way."¹⁰

IS JUNTA'S ROADMAP STILL ON TRACK?

During a two-day visit to Burma on 9-10 October 2005, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar reportedly said that Rangoon is making progress in political reform. "They're eager to see democracy taking place, but they don't want to hurry or be pressured by others... maybe including the United Nations,"¹¹ Syed Hamid Albar said SPDC leaders, including Sr Gen Than Shwe expressed concerns that bringing democracy could create social instability. He continued saying, "They want to ensure that the environment is conducive without chaos for them to introduce democracy... They said they want to avoid a situation like Iraq, which is gripped by violence."¹²

Upon his return from Rangoon, Syed Hamid Albar said that Burma is taking cautious but definite steps towards its first democratic elections since 1990. "They're moving towards it slowly but steadily, although some Western countries have

been putting pressure, saying that things should be moving much faster... A country that is used to a particular system for so long shouldn't switch to another style too drastically... I believe that they truly want to move in that direction... They [the US] feel that we are not firm enough with Myanmar, but we respect the sovereignty of fellow ASEAN members and will help them along the way."¹³

NATIONAL CONVENTION RECONVENES IN DECEMBER

In May 2005, SPDC Sr Gen Than Shwe told UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that the convention was going well and could be completed by the end of 2005.¹⁴

In yet another attempt to put a "happy face" on state-sponsored terrorism, the SPDC convened a new session of the National Convention (NC) on 5 December 2005. The National Convention first convened in 1993. On 31 January 2006, after meeting for nearly two months with no notable progress, the NC adjourned. Lt Gen Thein Sein, NC chairman, said in his closing speech that the convention would resume at the end of the year. Diplomatic circles in Rangoon said that the adjournment shows, yet again, that the military regime was not really interested in carrying out democratic reforms.¹⁶

TENSION OVER MOVE TO PYINMANA AT ASEAN SUMMIT

On 13 December 2005, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said that Rangoon has never informed neighbors of political developments. PM Thaksin expressed concern over the situation in Burma, saying the junta had never discussed any aspect of political reform with its ASEAN colleagues. Thaksin said he had told his junta counterpart that ASEAN, and notably Thailand, which fully supported Burma for long time, felt "uncomfortable" because the junta had never kept the group informed.¹⁷

In remarks to parliament, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said, "If Myanmar needs time out to attend to its own domestic preoccupations, I think we should respect it but, at the same time, the rest of ASEAN should not be held back. I think we will have to distance ourselves a bit if it is not possible for them to engage us in a way which we find necessary to defend them internationally."¹⁸

ASEAN'S FACT-FINDING MISSION – DETERMINATION, THEN CONSTERNATION

On 12 December 2005 at the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, SPDC Foreign Minister, Nyan Win, agreed to let Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar visit Burma on a fact-finding mission. In discussing the purpose of the visit, Syed Hamid Albar said, "Enough of talking... We want to see some action... We want to see something very tangible, like perhaps the release of the detained people¹⁹... We encouraged Myanmar to expedite the process. We also call for the release of those placed under detention²⁰... The foreign ministers as well as the leaders have told them that it is not sufficient just to say that the constitution drafting process

has resumed, and ASEAN needs to see and feel and learn first-hand about any progress to be able to convince the international community on the Burma road to democracy... We remain engaged with Burma no matter how difficult it is."²¹

At the end of 2005, there were no dates set for Syed Hamid Albar's trip to Burma yet Syed Hamid remained optimistic about his mission and said, "I hope my visit will fulfill the goal agreed upon during the conference, which was to see Myanmar gaining democracy... If we leave Myanmar in this current situation, the pressure... will not only be on Myanmar, but also ASEAN."²²

SPDC STALLS SYED'S VISIT

On 6 January 2006, SPDC Foreign Minister Nyan Win announced that the expected visit of Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar had been delayed because the military regime was too busy moving its administrative capital to Pyinmana.²³

On 9 January 2006, Syed Hamid Albar discussed the conditions that would need to be met to make his fact finding mission a success. Syed said, "... I told them, if I go to Myanmar I have to see all the political parties in Myanmar. Otherwise I think we would lose our credibility... I don't think it's good for Myanmar to be isolated. This is what ASEAN is trying to do, to encourage it to interact. But we need to know what is happening... I mentioned to them that they were the ones who gave the date and said that the best time to come is in January... I thought that the best thing is for me to communicate directly with the foreign minister, and he explained to me [the delay was] because of their move to the capital. I accept it at face value but I think we would like to visit as soon as possible, maybe some time in late Feb or early March... So I think the best thing for Myanmar to do is to cooperate... If they want us to speak on their behalf then we need the ammunition."²⁴

As of mid-February 2006, there were still no dates for Syed's visit to Rangoon. On 17 February 2006, Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN Sec Gen said, "We are frustrated. We feel that diplomatic efforts should produce some concrete step forward... Our friends in Myanmar feel their domestic preoccupations come first. It looks like we are losing momentum."²⁵

On 7 March 2006 Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said, "My trip is still stalled... They have not given us a date. We recognise there is a communication problem since they relocated their capital... Malaysia has been supportive of a constructive role... When we are given a task, we would like to perform the task."²⁶ While the SPDC kept Syed Hamid Albar waiting, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited Burma on 1-2 March 2006 and on 8-11 March 2006 Indian A.P.J. Abdul Kalam paid a state visit to Rangoon.

Finally, on 19 March 2006 Syed Hamid Albar announced that his trip to Burma had been scheduled but his tone about what he would accomplish while in Rangoon was muted. Syed said,

13 Dec 05: Thai PM Thaksin expressed concern and told his junta counterpart that ASEAN, and notably Thailand, which fully supported Burma for long time, felt "uncomfortable" because the junta had never kept the group informed.¹⁷

13 Dec 05: Syed Hamid Albar: "Enough of talking... We want to see some action... We want to see something very tangible, like perhaps the release of the detained people."¹⁹

5 Mar 06: Singapore FM George Yeo told his parliament: "... the rest of ASEAN should not be held back. I think we will have to distance ourselves a bit if it is not possible for them to engage us in a way which we find necessary to defend them internationally."¹⁸

23 Mar 06: Syed Hamid Albar was finally allowed to visit Rangoon but cut his trip short after being denied access to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition party representatives. "They [the SPDC] told me Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD no longer have any influence. I told them if that's the case, let me see them."³⁰

"I would not put any expectations [about the visit to Burma]. I hope it is part of a confidence building mechanism. We hope to build trust. Ultimately, it will be Myanmar's own process."²⁷

On 23 March 2006, Syed Hamid Albar arrived in Rangoon for what was originally scheduled as a 3-day official visit.²⁸ But Syed cut his trip short and returned to Malaysia on 24 March after being denied access to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition party representatives.

After returning from Rangoon Syed said, "I would not consider it [the trip] as a total success... I am happy as well as not so happy... Much more needs to be done for ASEAN to be able to convince the international community that there is progress made²⁹... They [the SPDC] told me Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD no longer have any influence. I told them if that's the case, let me see them³⁰... I told them [the SPDC] it would have been better if I had been allowed to meet Suu Kyi and other political leaders as it would be a step towards their democratic reform."³¹

Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN Sec-Gen: "Most of ASEAN believe that Myanmar authorities can only move forward if you have certain leverage applied on them... The best way is to work with our neighbors who have better leverage with Myanmar. China and India have common borders with Myanmar... There is a certain impatience because the people around the region as well as around the world say, You keep talking, you keep going there - and then what happened."³²

There has been a growing realisation in ASEAN that its defense of Burma's regime has been counter-productive and Burma remains an impediment to international engagement. In May 2006, the EU expressed serious concerns about engaging ASEAN in 'free trade' discussions as long as Burma was part of ASEAN.³⁶

In June 2006, Syed Hamid Albar appeared to be speaking for ASEAN when he said, "There is lack of confidence in Myanmar on ASEAN. I think the best thing is for Myanmar to be put under the purview of the UN Secretary-General (Kofi Annan)."⁴¹

FRUSTRATION IN UBUD

On 19-20 April 2006, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting was held in Ubud, Indonesia. Discussions about Burma carried overtones of frustration. There was an apparent feeling that ASEAN was incapable of having any impact on the military regime and some expressed an opinion that the job of bringing democratic reform rested with India and China.

Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN Sec-Gen said, "Most of ASEAN believe that Myanmar authorities can only move forward if you have certain leverage applied on them... The best way is to work with our neighbors who have better leverage with Myanmar. China and India have common borders with Myanmar... They are also very involved in cross-border trade, in investment, in tourism and in other things... There is a certain impatience because the people around the region as well as around the world say, You keep talking, you keep going there - and then what happened."³²

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said, "The Myanmar issue is difficult for ASEAN. We must admit that, but we should not see it as solely the burden of ASEAN. There are also major key players that have significant influence: China and India... They can help by promoting democracy in Myanmar. They can help in any way they can."³³

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar: "We did not come up with any consensus, but we addressed the issue... If Myanmar does not want to make a move, there is nothing we can do."³⁴ Thai Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon: "I was disappointed that [Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed

Hamid Albar] was not able to meet Aung San Suu Kyi... There is a general feeling that the visit by the ASEAN representative to Myanmar should be seen as a part of the process of ASEAN involvement in the process of national reconciliation in Myanmar."³⁵

There has been a growing realisation among ASEAN leaders that its defense of Burma's military regime has produced more negative than positive results. Burma remains an impediment to engagement with the international community, especially with the US and EU. Most recently, the EU expressed serious concerns about engaging ASEAN in 'free trade' discussions as long as Burma was part of ASEAN.³⁶

A POSSIBLE CHANGE OF HEART?

On 9 May 2006, the SPDC was absent from the inaugural gathering of Southeast Asian Defense Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur.³⁷ Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Razak said, "We invited Myanmar to attend this meeting. We were hoping that they would attend but they cited domestic commitments and for that reason they are not able to come."³⁸

While ASEAN continued to fret over what to do about Burma, global pressure was increasing to have the UN Security Council adopt a resolution in Burma.

In a surprising development, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari was allowed visited Burma on 18-20 May 2006. During Gambari's visit, he was allowed to hold audiences with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi other leaders of the National League for Democracy. Many regarded Gambari's visit as an SPDC effort to defuse possible UN action and a possible window of opportunity for the SPDC to send a signal that it was sincere about democratic reform. UN Gen-Sec Kofi Annan urged the SPDC to do the "right thing" and release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.³⁹

Any hope that the SPDC would change course faded quickly when the junta extended Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's detention for another year on 27 May 2006. Regarding the decision to extend Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's detention, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said, "I am very surprised. I was hoping ... that they would not extend the house arrest. But that is their right. Of course, we are disappointed."⁴⁰

More recently, Syed Hamid Albar appeared to be speaking for ASEAN as a whole when he said, "There is lack of confidence in Myanmar on ASEAN. I think the best thing is for Myanmar to be put under the purview of the UN Secretary General (Kofi Annan)," Syed Hamid told AFP. "Myanmar does not want ASEAN to play a role. They see ASEAN as not being fit to play a role," he said.⁴¹

There is a role for ASEAN to play and that role is to support a binding UN Security Council resolution on Burma. Even if the SPDC disengages itself from ASEAN, it does not mean that the serious regional problems caused by Burma will go away without some form of meaningful intervention. ASEAN's support for the intervention will ensure outcomes that are conducive to creating better conditions for the peoples of Burma as well as a better ASEAN community.

AIPMC CONTINUES TO LEAD THE WAY

On 20 June 2006, AIPMC President Zaid Ibrahim said, "We urge the United Nations to take the issue to the Security Council. There is no democratic progress in Myanmar and ASEAN is lost on what to do. Unless there is pressure from the UN and the Security Council, I do not see any changes taking place and Aung San Suu Kyi will continue to be detained."⁴²

Under the sponsorship of the AIPMC, on 27 June 2006, 503 MPs from 34 countries signed a letter written to members of the United Nations Security Council, and UN Sec-Gen Kofi Annan, calling for a binding resolution to address the crisis in military ruled Burma.

The letter is believed to be the largest number of MPs that have written to the Council in this way.⁴³ With its dedication to bringing democracy to Burma, the AIPMC will continue to influence policy on Burma, regionally and internationally.

Footnotes

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- 2 AIPMC (23 Sep 05) ASEAN Parliamentarians Tell Myanmar: Release Suu Kyi or Get Suspended
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- 4 Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Singapore hopes Myanmar won't be distraction at Kuala Lumpur summit, 07 Dec 05
- 5 AFP (28 Sep 05) Expelling Myanmar from ASEAN will not solve problem: Singapore's Lee
- 6 Irrawaddy (29 Sep 05) Malaysia disappointed with Asean's Burma path
- 7 AFP (7 Nov 05) Thailand opposes calls for UN to take up Myanmar's rights abuse
- 8 AFP (7 Nov 05) Thailand opposes calls for UN to take up Myanmar's rights abuse
- 9 AFP (8 Nov 05) Thai FM says bringing Myanmar into dialogue vital to bird flu fight
- 10 AFP (19 Nov 05) ASEAN cannot be confrontational on Myanmar: Malaysian PM
- 11 Irrawaddy (11 Oct 05) Asean Lawmakers Call Joint Action on Burma Reform
- 12 AP (12 Oct 05) Fast-Track to democracy won't cause chaos in Burma, says Razali
- 13 New Straits Times (11 Oct 05) Myanmar inching towards democracy
- 14 Mizzima News (2 Dec 05) National Convention is behind schedule military tells foreign officials
- 15 DVB (10 Dec 05) Aussie FM expresses frustration with Burma junta
- 16 DVB (31 Jan 06) Burma junta adjourns 'National Convention' yet again
- 17 The Nation (14 Dec 05) ASEAN Summit: Burma makes Thaksin 'uncomfortable'
- 18 Financial Express Bangladesh (5 Mar 06) ASEAN should 'consider distancing itself from Myanmar'
- 19 New York Times (13 Dec 05) As an Asian century is planned, U.S. power stays in the shadows
- 20 Irrawaddy (12 Dec 05) Asean Urges Burma to Reform, Free Political Prisoners
- 21 Bangkok Post (13 Dec 05) Junta invites Asean chair to tour Burma

On 27 June 2006, 503 MPs from 34 countries signed a letter initiated by the AIPMC to members of the UN Security Council, and UN Sec Gen Kofi Annan, calling for a binding resolution to address the crisis in military ruled Burma. The letter is believed to be the largest number of MPs that have written to the Council in this way

ASEAN has an important role to play in supporting a binding UN Security Council resolution on Burma. The serious regional problems caused by Burma will not go away without some form of meaningful intervention. A UN Security Council resolution will do much to hasten a political solution in Burma, benefiting both the peoples of Burma and ASEAN.

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- 23 AP (06 Jan 06) Too busy to host ASEAN envoy this month, says Myanmar junta
- 24 AFP (09 Jan 06) ASEAN envoy insists on meeting Suu Kyi during Myanmar visit
- 25 Irrawaddy (17 Feb 06) Indonesian President to Visit Burma
- 26 DVB (07 Mar 06) Slow boat to Rangoon: Burma trip stalled says Malaysian FM
- 27 AFP (19 Mar 06) Myanmar finally sets date for delayed ASEAN visit
- 28 Irrawaddy (23 Mar 06) Asean envoy arrives in Rangoon
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- 30 DVB (27 Mar 06) ASEAN envoy admits trip to Burma was not a total success
- 31 New Straits Times (28 Mar 06) Myanmar's runaround treatment not unusual
- 32 AFP (19 Apr 06) China and India should use economic leverage to persuade Myanmar: ASEAN chief
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- 34 Mizzima News (20 Apr 06) ASEAN foreign ministers fail to reach agreement on Burma
- 35 AFP (21 Apr 06) Thailand "disappointed" ASEAN envoy did not meet Suu Kyi
- 36 AP (17 May 06) EU trade chief says free trade negotiations with ASEAN likely despite Myanmar sanctions
- 37 AFP (09 May 06) ASEAN hopes Myanmar will attend next defence ministers' meet
- 38 AFP (09 May 06) ASEAN hopes Myanmar will attend next defence ministers' meet
- 39 Mizzima News (25 May 06) Annan calls for Aung San Suu Kyi's release
- 40 AP (27 May 06) Detention of Myanmar's Suu Kyi extended, 27 May 06
- 41 AFP (21 Jun 06) Malaysia signals region losing patience on Myanmar
- 42 AFP (20 Jun 06) SE Asia presses Myanmar, says region "lost"
- 43 AIPMC (27 Jun 06) 503 parliamentarians from 34 countries demand Security Council action on Burma

BURMA BACKS OFF FROM THE ASEAN CHAIR

Unprecedented pressure from ASEAN governments and parliamentarians led to the Burmese junta's reluctant decision to relinquish its first opportunity at chairing ASEAN in 2006. Although billed as "Burma's own decision", the move – affecting the regime's credibility and prestige – was a defeat for regime head Senior-General Than Shwe.

Sen. Gen. Than Shwe, desperate to cling to the chair in the face of increasing pressure, tried to play the China card at the last minute. However, the strategy backfired, leading ASEAN to insist, in a thinly-veiled message, that his regime relinquish the chair at the 2005 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Laos.

A week-long news blackout in Rangoon suggests that Than Shwe's withdrawal from the ASEAN chair was seen as a failure that could undermine his authority in a junta already demoralized by a sharply deteriorating economy as well as heightened internal and international pressure.

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Myanmar (AIPMC) is credited for leading the regional charge against Burma, and has arguably achieved more in the seven months of its existence than ASEAN had achieved in eight years of "constructive engagement" with Burma.

ASEAN foreign ministers eventually found their voices and began publicly questioning Burma's capability in chairing ASEAN.

Ministers and parliamentarians from all over ASEAN were elated and relieved by the withdrawal, while the US, EU and Japan welcomed it. However, all parties realise much more pressure is needed to push for actual reforms in Burma.

Opposition to Burma's military regime assuming the ASEAN Chair became a 'grassroots' issue among ASEAN Parliamentarians who pressured their own governments to confront the matter. International pressure, in particular from the US and the EU, was also an important factor in making ASEAN leaders confront the long-held principles of "constructive engagement" and "non-interference". Initially, Rangoon-based diplomats and analysts were sure that Sen Gen Than Shwe would insist on claiming the 2006 rotating ASEAN chairmanship. Many believed Than Shwe had too much to lose and he would not back down, especially since he was confident in China's support.¹

AIPMC LEADS ASEAN CHAIR CAMPAIGN

"The sentiment is that why would we allow a country like Myanmar to sit as chairman of the ASEAN when it is ruled by a military dictatorship and has no parliament." – Philippines Representative and AIPMC member, Loretta Ann Rosales²

In February 2005, the Philippine House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for "ASEAN to reconsider Myanmar's chairmanship of the 2006 ASEAN Meeting." A similar motion passed in the Philippine Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.³

In March 2005, Malaysian Parliamentarian and AIMPC chair, Zaid Ibrahim, submitted a motion before the Malaysian parliament seeking to suspend Burma from the ASEAN chair until democratic reforms are carried out.⁴ While Zaid was optimistic that the motion would be approved, the Malaysian government was less supportive of such moves.⁵

On 20 April 2005, the Philippines Senate unanimously approved a resolution calling for ASEAN to strip Burma of the chairmanship. Burma "should not assume the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2006 unless there has been compliance with the principles of human rights law, particularly those which necessitate the freedom from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi," the resolution said.⁶

In late April, Malaysian lawmakers attempted to pass a resolution seeking to deny Burma the ASEAN chairmanship unless it implements democratic reforms but their efforts were blocked by Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who reportedly intervened to postpone a vote on the resolution.⁷

On 9 May 2005, 78 of 200 Thai senators signed a petition urging their government to oppose Burma becoming the ASEAN Chair. In an apparent reaction to the petition, Thai Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon said that Thailand was seeking a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Kantathi told reporters, "The government is working on it and as a matter of fact we have the same goal (as the senators). I can't disclose any details because it's a sensitive issue."⁸

On 1 June 2005, Indonesia's parliament issued a resolution urging the government to boycott ASEAN meetings next year if Burma's military regime takes over the chairmanship of the regional grouping. The parliament made the move after lawmakers met with two rights activists from Burma, who urged them to do more to persuade Jakarta to pressure the junta in Rangoon.⁹

In early June, the AIPMC revisited the ASEAN chair issue after a meeting in Singapore. A statement issued after the meeting called for the "lifting of restrictions" on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as other political prisoners, and the setting of a "firm schedule" for the completion of a new constitution and other reforms.

AIPMC Chairman Zaid Ibrahim told the press, "It's time for ASEAN to take a stand, that if Myanmar does not make progress on its roadmap to democracy, it should relinquish the chairmanship."¹⁰

THE MOOD SHIFTS

In the months preceding the July ASEAN Ministerial meeting in Vientiane, concerns by ASEAN leaders over Burma becoming the ASEAN chair were increasingly voiced. At first, it appeared that ASEAN would adhere to its principle of "non-interference" in dealing with the Burma chairmanship issue. But as more pressure was applied, the mood in ASEAN changed.

The issue of the ASEAN chair issue was first discussed head to head with the junta at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' retreat on 9-10 April 2005 in Cebu, Philippines. Prior to the retreat, Philippines Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said, "Someone will bring it up. We go by consensus, so let us hope that there is consensus on the issue."¹²

When the retreat concluded on 11 April 2005, ASEAN foreign ministers postponed a decision on whether Burma should chair the group. ASEAN chairman, Lao Foreign Minister Somsavat Lengsavad, told reporters "It has been agreed that since this is an informal meeting, we should discuss the Myanmar issue at the upcoming ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Vientiane (in July). It was not included in the agenda item of the meeting."

Despite the lack of an agenda item, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said the Burma issue was discussed during a long coffee break as "an intimate and private" family problem. Yeo also indicated that the SPDC was reminded to put a timetable on its roadmap to democracy and freeing opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.¹³

GLOBAL CONCERN GROWS

As the ASEAN Ministerial meeting drew near, global concern over Burma assuming the ASEAN Chairmanship mounted. On 4 May 2005, US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick, warned of "severe limitations" on US-ASEAN relations if the SPDC chaired the grouping (ASEAN). Zoellick met with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon to discuss Washington's views about the pace of reforms in Burma. In a statement to the press in Bangkok Zoellick said, "I did express our concern about how it would hinder our dealings with ASEAN if Burma were the chair, but I recognize that's a decision for the ASEAN countries to make."¹⁵

On 12 May 2005, the European Parliament called for a boycott of the ASEAN if Burma assumes its rotating chair. The resolution said the EU "should not participate in the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Post Ministerial Meeting and other ASEAN meetings and events should Burma become the chair of ASEAN in 2006 without meeting any of the minimum conditions" regarding human rights and democratic reform.¹⁶

"There must be a time frame for constructive engagement, it cannot go on and on forever. Parliament feels that after (almost) 10 years, we can safely say that constructive engagement is not working and maybe we ought to try something else." — Nazri Abdul Aziz, Malaysian parliamentarian¹¹

"No other member in the 38-year history of ASEAN has garnered such negative attention for the entire group ... or been the cause of multiple cancelled meetings between the group and key dialogue partners." — Zaid Ibrahim, AIPMC President addressing ASEAN's problems with Burma.¹⁴

On 22 June 2005, diplomatic sources said that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may skip the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July amid concerns in Washington the region was not pushing enough for democratic reforms in Burma.¹⁷ The United States had previously indicated it might boycott ASEAN meetings if Burma takes up the chair of the regional body in 2006, as planned.¹⁸

On 7 July 2005, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice met with Thai PM, Thaksin Shinawatra. During the meeting, Secretary Rice said she had stressed the need for Burma to make progress toward democracy, and release political opponents including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Ms. Rice also confirmed she would not attend the ASEAN meeting in Laos.¹⁹

ASEAN SPEAKS OUT

Following the Cebu Retreat, ASEAN leaders actually began publicly saying that Burma would forgo the ASEAN chair.

Cambodia's Prince Norodom Ranariddh said that in the near future Burma's military regime will announce its decision not to assume the chairmanship of the ASEAN in July of 2006. Prince Ranariddh said, "Because of internal problems, Myanmar has agreed not to host the ASEAN summit next year, and in the future Myanmar will announce it."²⁰

Indonesia Foreign Ministry spokesman Marty Natalegawa was quoted as having said that the SPDC was expected to formally announce its decision to skip the ASEAN chairmanship by July this year.²¹

Thai Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkhon said that Burma's military regime may back away from the ASEAN chairmanship. Kantathi said that Burma declining the ASEAN chairmanship was "one of the possibilities" being considered. "No one would like to see the chairmanship becoming an obstacle for the functioning of ASEAN."²²

On 10 June 2005, two ASEAN Foreign Ministers expressed their desire to see Burma forego the rotating chairmanship. Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said ASEAN respected Burma's sovereignty and the country's right to make its own decision. "But it's also our duty to inform them [the junta] of the feelings of each ASEAN country," he said.

"This (deferment) should not be seen as an excuse to ignore the urgent need for political reforms in Myanmar. Myanmar will continue to afflict ASEAN long after this debate on the chairmanship is over." — Teresa Kok, Malaysian parliamentarian and Secretary of the AIPMC.²⁵

Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said he and Nyan Win had both gone to the restroom during a break in intense discussions about Burma's 2006 chairmanship. "I was in the toilet with the Myanmar minister," Yeo told reporters. "He said 'Yes, we are going to announce our decision' ".

Syed's opinion echoed that of Singapore's Foreign Minister, George Yeo, who was reported as saying Rangoon should forgo its chairmanship of the ASEAN grouping next year because of international concerns over its human rights record.²³

In an indication that Burma's military regime was beginning to buckle, on 22 June 2005 Thai Foreign Minister Kanthathi Suphamongkhon said that ASEAN had received "very positive signs" that Burma would give up its chairmanship of the group due in 2006 and he was hopeful the issue would be concluded soon.²⁴

THE JUNTA DEFERS

At the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on 26 July 2005, SPDC Foreign Minister Nyan Win broke the news about his Burma's decision to opt out of the ASEAN chair to his Singapore counterpart while they were in the restroom.

Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said he and Nyan Win had both gone to the restroom during a break in intense discussions about Burma's 2006 chairmanship. "I was in the toilet with the Myanmar minister," Yeo told reporters. "He said 'Yes, we are going to announce our decision'. So I said, 'Then it's important that we rally around'. 'And so we proceeded to the coffee break, he gave us the decision and we rallied around him.'"²⁶

Footnotes

- 1 Straits Times (23 May 05) Don't push Myanmar into a corner
- 2 Manila Standard (6 Apr 05) ASEAN dared to act on Myanmar
- 3 Manila Bulletin Online (21 Feb 05) Myanmar PM Soe Win urged to waive chairmanship of ASEAN
- 4 Malaysiakini (15 Mar 05) Malaysian MP submits motion for parliamentary debate on Burma
- 5 Irrawaddy (22 Mar 05) Malaysia Increases Pressure on Burma; AP (29 Mar 05) SEA lawmakers to call for censure of Burma;
- 6 AFP (20 Apr 05) Philippine Senate passes resolution against Myanmar's ASEAN chairmanship
- 7 AFP (29 Apr 05) Malaysian PM defends blocking of anti-Myanmar motion in parliament
- 8 AFP (10 May 05) Thailand seeking to end Myanmar's ASEAN chair deadlock: Thai FM
- 9 AP (1 Jun 05) Indonesian parliament rejects Myanmar's plan to chair ASEAN
- 10 AFP (2 Jun 05) ASEAN legislators urge Myanmar to implement democratic reforms
- 11 Reuters (25 Mar 05) ANALYSIS-SE Asia's club of nations turns up heat on Myanmar
- 12 Irrawaddy (5 Apr 05) Asean foreign ministers may support to block Burma from taking chair
- 13 Reuters (11 Apr 05) ASEAN skirts Myanmar issue, but rift remains
- 14 AFP (19 Jul 05) Myanmar poses a constant headache for 10-nation ASEAN
- 15 AFP (4 May 05) ASEAN-US ties at risk if Myanmar becomes chair, says top US official
- 16 AFP (12 May 05) European Parliament calls for boycott of ASEAN if Burma presides
- 17 AFP (22 Jun 05) Rice may skip key ASEAN talks amid Myanmar concerns
- 18 VOA (11 Jul 05) Rice Urges Thailand to Press for Reform in Burma
- 19 VOA (11 Jul 05) Rice Urges Thailand to Press for Reform in Burma
- 20 Japan Economic Newswire (21 Apr 05) Prince Ranariddh says Myanmar will abandon ASEAN chairmanship
- 21 Asia Pulse (27 Apr 05) Philippines may yet assume 2006 chairmanship of Asean
- 22 AP (4 May 05) Myanmar may decide to pull out of ASEAN chairmanship, Thai official says
- 23 The Nation (10 Jun 05) ASEAN chair: Members express concern: No demands made, but junta warned of consequences if it decides to lead
- 24 Reuters (22 Jun 05) - Myanmar likely to forego ASEAN chair - Thailand
- 25 AIPMC (26 Jul 05) Statement on deferment of Myanmar as ASEAN chair in 2006
- 26 AFP (26 Jul 05) Myanmar breaks decision on ASEAN chair to Singapore in restroom

UNSC: GRIP TIGHTENS ON THE SPDC

TUTU-HAVEL REPORT: SPDC THREATENS INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

In September 2005, the global law firm DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary published “**Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma**”, a report commissioned by Vacláv Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, and Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

The report provides a detailed overview of the reasons why the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) needs act on Burma and makes recommendations on how to peacefully achieve democratic change in the military-ruled country.

The “Threat to the Peace” report was positively received by Burma’s pro-democracy parties, ethnic groups, activists inside Burma, as well as Burmese in exile, ASEAN legislators, and human rights groups abroad, and provided much-needed boost to the international campaign to bring the issue of Burma before the UN Security Council.¹

RUSSIA & CHINA: USUAL SUSPECTS STYMIE US EFFORTS

Following the publication of the “Threat to the Peace” report, the US took the initiative to bring the discussion on the situation in Burma before the UN Security Council. American diplomats toured several key capitals around the world to try to convince at least nine of the 15-member Council’s governments to formally place Burma on the UNSC agenda.

Efforts to put Burma before the UN Security Council seemed to be gaining ground when Philippines President Gloria Arroyo voiced her support for placing Burma on the UN Security Council agenda.²

The US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton raised the issue before the UNSC on 30 November 2005. “The human rights situation is disconcerting due to the international security consequences of the regime’s actions,” Bolton said in his letter to Russia’s Ambassador to the UN, Andrei Denisov, the Council president for November.³

However, veto-wielding Council members Russia and China remained steadfast in opposing the move to officially place Burma on the UNSC agenda. “We don’t see any threats to international peace and security,” Denisov said.⁴ “Basically we are saying that Myanmar’s issues are issues of internal affairs,” Liu Jianchao, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman agreed.⁵

China and Russia’s opposition did not come as a surprise. The former provides the SPDC with much needed trade revenue, foreign investment and lines of credit for infrastructure development in Burma, and the latter is, after China, the junta’s number two supplier of military hardware and technology. [See “China, India & Russia”]

In September 2005 a groundbreaking report, “Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma” is released, paving the way for a global campaign to bring the situation of Burma before the United Nations Security Council.

The campaign has attracted support from diverse groups, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), other pro-democracy parties, ethnic groups, activists inside Burma, as well as Burmese in exile, ASEAN legislators, and human rights groups abroad.

On 16 December 2005, the UN Under-Secretary Ibrahim Gambari briefed the UNSC on the situation on Burma.

Parliamentarians worldwide have passed resolutions demanding a UNSC resolution on Burma.

Following his fact-finding visit to Burma in May 2006, Gambari held a second briefing before the Council.

The US continues to push for a UNSC resolution on Burma and Russia and China continue to oppose the move.

ASEAN’s frustration towards the SPDC may open the way for support of the UNSC dealing with the military regime. Philippines President Gloria Arroyo has already publicly supported a UNSC resolution.

The regime is already in breach of UNSC resolution 1674 on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and resolution 1261 on the use of children as soldiers.

Because of China and Russia opposition to placing Burma as a formal matter on the UNSC agenda, on 2 December the 15 Council members reached a compromise to receive a briefing on the situation in Burma.

UNSC, TAKE 1: “THREAT TO THE PEACE” FINDINGS CONFIRMED

The UNSC heard the briefing on Burma on 16 December 2005. UN Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari, conducted the briefing. UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, was also in attendance at the briefing.

The “Threat to the Peace” report:

- Reviews past UN Security Council interventions in Haiti, Liberia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and Yemen.
- Analyzes the criteria that justified those UN Security Council interventions:
 1. Overthrow of democratically elected government;
 2. Conflict among factions;
 3. Major human rights violations;
 4. Refugee outflows;
 5. Outflows of drugs and HIV/AIDS.
- Demonstrates the presence of all five criteria necessary for UN Security Council intervention in the situation of Burma
- Calls for a UNSC resolution on Burma requiring the SPDC to:
 1. Work with the Secretary-General’s office in implementing a plan for national reconciliation and a restoration of a democratically-elected government;
 2. Ensure the immediate and unhindered access to all parts of the country for the international humanitarian organizations to provide humanitarian assistance;
 3. Immediately and unconditionally release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience.

Mr. Gambari reportedly highlighted the following points at the 16 December briefing:

- SPDC’s failure to pursue a process of national reconciliation
- Deteriorated socio-economic situation (food insecurity, limited health care, inadequate education opportunities)
- Humanitarian emergency (HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB)
- SPDC interference and restrictions in the delivery of humanitarian aid
- Widespread and systematic violation of human right
- Arbitrary arrests and detention of political prisoners
- Widespread and unabated use of forced labor
- Use of child soldiers

- Abuses against ethnic group, including the forced relocation of villages and other acts, which are reportedly being monitored by the special advisor to the secretary general on the prevention of genocide, Mr. Juan Mendez

- Significant numbers of IDPs

- Drug use and production. Drug use linked to the increase in HIV/AIDS

UNSC, TAKE 2: PRESSURE SHOULD CONTINUE

In an attempt to defuse pressure from the international community, in particular the UN Security Council, the SPDC allowed the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari to carry out a visit to Burma from 18 to 20 May 2006 [See “Junta Rejects Dialogue”].

Gambari briefed the UN Security Council on his visit on 31 May. He reportedly stressed the importance of the Council’s support in helping the Secretariat carry out the good offices of the Secretary-General. He also indicated that the UN should continue to work with interested member states and partners like ASEAN to push for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s release.⁶

However, despite perceived gains of the visit that saw Gambari meeting with NLD leaders and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the regime refused to release the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate just days before the briefing. They instead released labor activists Su Su Nway and Aye Myint. [See “Labor”]

UNSC, TAKE 3: WHO’S IN, WHO’S OUT

After Gambari’s second briefing, the US stepped up their efforts to pursue a UN Security Council resolution that underscores the international community’s concerns about the situation in Burma, including the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the need for an inclusive and democratic political process.⁷ “We intend to offer a resolution,” spokesman for the US Mission to the UN Richard Grenell said.⁸

France, Britain, Slovakia and other council members reportedly backed the US position and asserted Burma’s military regime should not think it had done enough just by welcoming Gambari. But according to diplomatic sources, Russian, Chinese and Japanese representatives to the UN said they would not support Burma’s inclusion on the Security Council agenda.⁹

Russia reiterated that it would be completely inappropriate to put Burma on the agenda, as it does not represent a threat to international peace and security. China also insisted that the military-ruled country does not pose a threat and the situation would get worse if the UN were to be involved.¹⁰

Japanese ambassador to the UN Kenzo Oshima said: “We are happy with the way the briefing has been provided, but we would not be happy with going any further than that... I

don't consider the situation in Myanmar as a situation that poses a threat to international peace and security."¹¹ However, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro recognized the need for the international community to apply stronger pressure on Burma to prompt the country's democratization.¹²

ASEAN: FROM NON-INTERFERENCE TO UN INTERFERENCE?

As the campaign to place Burma on the UNSC agenda gathered strength, ASEAN progressively departed from its traditional policy of non-interference. In December 2005 the 10-nation bloc abandoned claims that Burma's affairs are merely internal issues and demanded the military regime to show more progress in the implementation of democratic reforms. [See "ASEAN's Patience"]

In January 2006 Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar went a step further, indicating that if Burma's junta did not start cooperating with the international community and ASEAN, pressure on the junta would gain momentum, possibly resulting in UN Security Council action.¹³

Syed Hamid's words were echoed by former United Nations Special Envoy for Burma Razali Ismail. "The longer the regime is obdurate, and the more people hear about problems from within, and if ASEAN cannot make an impact or influence, then one way or another it leads to the Security Council," the ex-Malaysian diplomat said.¹⁴

The junta's decision to extend Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest by another year on 27 May 2006, ultimately convinced ASEAN of the need for the UN to be seized of the issue of Burma. "There is lack of confidence in Myanmar on ASEAN. I think the best thing is for Myanmar to be put under the purview of the UN Secretary General," said Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar.¹⁵

LEGISLATORS UNITE IN SUPPORT OF UNSC RESOLUTION

Since the publication of the "Threat to the Peace" report in September 2005, parliamentarians worldwide have given a new boost to the international campaign to have the UNSC formally discuss and adopt a resolution on the situation in Burma.

Some of the key actions undertaken by legislators to express their support for a UNSC resolution on Burma include:

On 17 November 2005, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the UN Security Council to address the situation in Burma and to empower the UN Secretary-General to mediate in Burma to bring about national reconciliation and a transition to democracy.¹⁶

On 25 November 2005, 120 Philippines legislators from various political parties called on the Philippines government to urge ASEAN to support the inclusion of Burma on the UN Security Council agenda.¹⁷

On 11 May 2006, the cross-party group of British parliamentarians "All-Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy

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in Burma" submitted an early day motion to the British government calling for the UN Security Council's urgent intervention to stop atrocities in Burma.¹⁸

On 18 May 2006, the US Senate adopted a resolution calling on Washington to spearhead a campaign for a UN Security Council resolution compelling Burma's military junta to work with the world body on a plan for national reconciliation.

In early June 2006, 25 members of India's parliament signed a document urging the UNSC to pressure Burma's military regime over Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's ongoing detention. The members of both houses of parliament also reportedly called on the Indian government to join international efforts to promote democracy and national reconciliation in Burma.¹⁹

On 19 June 2006 a bipartisan group of 68 South Korean legislators signed a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners.²⁰

On 27 June 2006, as part of a campaign led by the **ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC)**, 503 members of parliament from 34 countries sent letters to the UN Security Council members and the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan calling for a binding resolution on Burma. The letters were signed by MPs from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Cambodia, Canada, China (Hong Kong), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the US.²¹

ASEAN parliamentarians in particular have been very active in expressing their support for the inclusion of Burma on the UN Security Council agenda:

On **23 September 2005** the AIPMC, welcoming the publication of the “Threat to the Peace” report, said: “The AIPMC would support resolutions at the Security Council that require the SPDC to work with the UN Secretary-General’s office to formulate a plan for national reconciliation to mitigate Myanmar’s threat to international peace and security. Such a resolution should also require that the secretary general make periodic progress reports to the Security Council to gauge the progress made.”²²

On **3 October 2005**, Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP and AIPMC chairman, expressed his support for the proposal of former Czech president Vaclav Havel and South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “I think it’s a good idea. I think we should support that.” “I think, nothing has changed... We hope that the Security Council will do something.”²³

On **10 October 2005**, Jon Ungphakorn, Thai Senator and AIPMC member said: “The issue of Burma must be given a high profile.”²⁴ “We would all like to see our governments take a stronger stand on the Burma issue... I think we could then have a very good resolution in the Security Council.”²⁵

On **10 October 2005**, Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP and AIPMC chairman, speaking at the UN Headquarters in New York City, said: “The deteriorating situation in Myanmar is affecting not only those within the country, but people outside its borders as well.”²⁶

On **25 November 2005** Philippines legislator Etta Rosales said: “The Tutu-Havel reports that Burma is not just a severe human rights problem, but also a continuously growing threat to international peace and security.”²⁷

On **8 May 2006** the AIPMC, condemning the SPDC Army offensive against Karen civilians in Eastern Burma, said: “The UNSC must play its role [in] acting on global calls for Burma to be placed on the UNSC agenda and immediately act to put a stop to the current violence in the country.”²⁸

On **24 May 2006**, the AIPMC welcomed the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari’s briefing on Burma: “We urge the UNSC to then act accordingly by initiating concrete steps to resolve the political deadlock, as well as the deteriorating social and economic conditions, in Burma.”²⁹

Footnotes

1 NLD (21 Sep 05) National League for Democracy’s Special Statement on the Report of Former Czech President Vaclav Havel and Bishop Desmond Tutu, Calling the UN Security Council to Act in Burma; 11 Ethnic Nationality Parties that won 67 Seats in the 1990 General Election (24 Sep 05) Special Announcement; Committee Representing People’s Parliament (30 Sep 05) Special Announcement on the Report, “Threat to the Peace; A Call to the UN Security Council to Act in Burma”; AIPMC (23 Sep 05) Time for the Security Council to Discuss Myanmar; DVB (05 Oct 05) AIPMC members and MEPs to strive harder for change in Burma; ICFTU (21 Oct 05) ICFTU Calls for UN Security Council Debate; DVB (30 Sep 05) The Student Generation Since 1988 supports the Report “Threat to the Peace; A

Call to the UN Security Council to Act in Burma”, Commissioned by Former Czech President Vaclav Havel and 1984 Nobel Peace Prize Recipient Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa; European Burma Network (09 Oct 05) Statement; Human Rights Watch (14 Oct 05) UN: Security Council Should Take Up Burma’s Human Rights Crisis

2 Mizzima News (21 Nov 05) Arroyo signals support for Security Council action on Burma: Reports; Mizzima News (22 Nov 05) Philippines officials confirm support for UN talks on Burma

3 Bangkok Post (03 Dec 05) UN Security Council about face, demand report on Burma

4 AP (01 Dec 05) U.S. seeks consensus on Myanmar inquiry

5 AFP (14 Dec 05) China says human rights in Myanmar an internal issue

6 <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org> (01 June 06) Update Report No. 1 Myanmar; available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Update%20Report%201%20June%202006_Myanmar.pdf

7 Mizzima News (01 Jun 06) US to push for Security Council resolution on Burma

8 AP (01 Jun 06) U.S. plans to pursue U.N. resolution on Myanmar but Russia, China and Japan object, U.N. diplomats say

9 AP (01 Jun 06) U.S. plans to pursue U.N. resolution on Myanmar but Russia, China and Japan object, U.N. diplomats say

10 AP (01 Jun 06) U.S. plans to pursue U.N. resolution on Myanmar but Russia, China and Japan object, U.N. diplomats say

11 Mizzima News (01 Jun 06) US to push for Security Council resolution on Burma; AP (01 Jun 06) U.S. plans to pursue U.N. resolution on Myanmar but Russia, China and Japan object, U.N. diplomats say

12 DVB (01 Jul 06) Japan, U.S. agree on need for int’l pressure on Burma

13 Mizzima News (20 Jan 06) UN Security Council need not act on Burma: Malaysian FM

14 DVB (09 Jan 06) Burma junta on a collision course with UN Security Council – envoy

15 AFP (21 Jun 06) Malaysia signals region losing patience on Myanmar

16 Mizzima News (18 Nov 05) EU Parliament passes resolution on Burma Security Council talks

17 Office of Rep. Mario “Mayong” Joyo Aguja (25 Nov 05) Despite house division on political crises, house reps unite on Burma

18 Irrawaddy (11 May 06) British Legislators Urge UNSC Intervention on Burma

19 Mizzima News (16 Jun 06) Indian MPs call for Security Council pressure on Burma

20 Yonhap (19 Jun 06) South Korean lawmakers call for release of Burma’s Aung Sang Suu Kyi

21 Mizzima News (27 Jun 06) 503 MPs demand Security Council action on Burma

22 AIPMC (23 Sep 05) Time for the Security Council to discuss Myanmar

23 DVB (05 Oct 05) AIPMC members and MEPs to strive harder for change in Burma

24 Irrawaddy (11 Oct 05) Asean Lawmakers Call Joint Action on Burma Reform

25 AFP (11 Oct 05) ASEAN lawmakers urge Annan to mobilize world drive for democracy in Myanmar

26 Reuters (11 Oct 05) Southeast Asia deputies want U.N. action on Myanmar

27 Office of Rep. Mario “Mayong” Joyo Aguja (25 Nov 05) Despite house division on political crises, house reps unite on Burma

28 AIPMC (08 May 06) Statement on attacks against innocent lives and displacement of ethnic groups in Burma

29 AIPMC (24 May 06) Calling for Aung San Suu Kyi’s immediate release

SPDC: SHAKEUPS AND RESHUFFLES

The sudden move of the capital to Pyinmana has strained tensions in the top ranks, with SPDC No. 2 Gen Maung Aye rumored to be particularly annoyed. This has exacerbated anger and anxieties resulting from the widespread purge of former Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt in late 2004. Sen Gen Than Shwe's physical frailty increases with his paranoia, and no obvious protégé has emerged as his successor.

Sen Gen Than Shwe continues to arrange his hand with successive reshuffles designed to keep power away from Gen Maung Aye.

Reports from inside Burma suggest that Gen Maung Aye actually has the numbers to stage a take-over, but he isn't interested, and he is only keeping up the power-games with Sen Gen Than Shwe in order to avoid joining Gen Khin Nyunt under house arrest.¹

KHIN NYUNT SENTENCED; JOINED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The purge of Khin Nyunt appears complete. On 22 July 2005 former Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt received a **44-year suspended sentence** after being convicted on eight charges including bribery and corruption by a secret tribunal inside Rangoon's Insein Prison. The tribunal also handed down prison sentences on similar charges to people linked to Khin Nyunt, including his two sons Zaw Naing Oo and Ye Naing Win receiving sentences of **68 years and 51 years** respectively.²

In July 2005 the junta's former Ministers of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Agriculture, Tin Hlaing, Win Aung, and Nyunt Tin, were arrested for their alleged involvement in economic crimes and corruption.³

Former SPDC Foreign Minister Win Aung is reported to have been arrested in January 2006, and it is thought that he will be indicted on corruption and bribery charges.⁴

Following the dissolution of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), the junta promptly made plans for the creation of new Special Police Information Forces to carry out intelligence operations previously done by the MIS.⁵ The former commander of Rangoon Division military command, General Myint Swe, was appointed as the temporary head of the new **Defense Services Intelligence**.⁶

MINISTRIES MERRY-GO-ROUND

Purges in October and again in December 2004 attempted to eliminate any trace of the former PM Khin Nyunt [See table – "Who's In, Who's Out?"]. This tightened the military control over every aspect of government, and further centralized the command structure within the army.⁸ A further shuffle in August 05 seemed to conclude this process.

In 2006, a new and massive shake-up was initiated in mid-May, that called the country's top 12 generals to Pyinmana Naypyidaw in the new hyper-secure War Office.⁹

Following the shake-up in November 2004, former PM Gen Khin Nyunt receives a 44-year suspended sentence.

Defense Services Intelligence replaces the defunct Military Intelligence Services.

The move to Pyinmana strains tensions with two major reshuffles in 2006 so far.

The creation of the Naypyidaw Regional Military Command brings to 13 the number of Burma's regional military commands.

Regional Commanders are shifted from one end of the country to the next, suggesting a power struggle between SPDC chairman Sen Gen Than Shwe and his deputy Vice Sen Gen Maung Aye.

Discontent amongst the lower ranks causes desertions in Arakan, Mon and Chin States, leaving 63% of battalions operating at less than 43% of their full strength, with 36% operating as low as 29% capacity.

Following the defection of a key Burmese diplomat in Washington DC, civilian ambassadors and diplomats are dismissed and military officers take their places.

In an announcement on 16 May **six Ministries had been allocated, four Deputies** had been appointed, and **four top officials were ready to "retire"**.¹⁰

Not all the new positions have been filled yet, but Snr Gen Than Shwe is reportedly favouring a younger generation of graduates from the National Defence academy who are supposed to contribute to a new program of economic liberalisation and transition to civilian government with Snr Gen Than Shwe in the role of President-for-Life.¹¹

TROUBLE AT THE BORDER

All border trade gates were left ineffective after a raid on the Customs office and arrests of officers (including four directors and the director general Khin Maung Lin) at the Rangoon Airport in late June 2006.¹² This followed arrests at the China-Burma border in May of officials and traders, including the Chairman of the Burmese Traders Association. Other merchants and officers were arrested, have fled or have gone into hiding.¹³ Some say that the purge is the outcome of a dispute over the distribution of the proceeds of bribes.¹⁴ Others suggest that the move is a genuine crackdown on corruption, the affects of which will be felt in other ministries in the coming months.¹⁵

WHO'S IN, WHO'S OUT

The following lists those most significantly affected by ministerial reshuffles and "retirements" November 2004 to June 2006⁷

OUT

MINISTERS

Maj Gen Kyi Aung, Retired Minister of Culture

Than Aung, Fmr Minister of Education

Maj Gen Sein Htwa, Retired Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Tin Hlaing, Detained Fmr Minister of Interior

Win Aung, Detained Minister of Foreign Affairs

Nyunt Tin, Detained Fmr Minister of Agriculture

DEPUTY MINISTERS

Maung Aung, Retired Dep Min of Immigration and Population

Maj Gen Khin Maung Win, Retired Dep Min of Defence

Thein Sein, Retired Dep Min of Information

Brig Gen Aung Thein, Retired Dep Min of Information

Myint Thein, Retired Dep Min of Mines

Brig Gen Soe Win Maung, Retired Dep Min of Culture

Brig Gen Than Tun, Retired Dep Min of Border Areas, National Races and Dev

Brig Gen Thein Tun, Retired Dep Min of Industry-1

Pe Than, Retired Dep Min of Transport

OTHERS

Soe Tint, Fmr Dir Gen PMs Office

Brig Gen Pyi Sone, Retired, PMs Office

Than Shwe, Retired, PMs Office

Lt Col Pe Nyein, Fmr Dir Gen SPDC Office; now under house arrest

Nyunt Swe, Retired, Civil Service Selection and Training Board

IN

MINISTERS

Maj Gen Khin Aung Mying, Minister of Culture

Dr Chan Nyein, Minister of Education. Previously Dep Minister of Science and Technology.

Maj Gen Maung Maung Swe, Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Maj Gen Tin Htut, Minister of Cooperatives

Col Zaw Min, Minister of Electric Power - 1

Maj Gen Khin Maung Myint, Minister of Electric Power - 2

Maj Gen Soe Naing, Minister of Hotel and Tourism

DEPUTY MINISTERS

Maj Gen Aung Kyi, Dep Minister of Immigration and Population

Maj Gen Kyi Win, Dep Minister of Defense

Col Thurein Zaw, Dep Minister National Planning and Economic Dev

Dr Paing Soe, Dep Minister of Health

Maj Gen Aye Myint, Dep Minister of Defense

OTHERS

Brig Gen Win Aung, **Brig Gen Soe Oo**, **Brig Gen Nyi Tun** and **Brig Gen Kyaw Aung**, Members, Civil Service Selection and Training Board

DIRECTOR GENERALS

Lin Myaing, Dir Gen Foreign Ministry. Previously US ambassador

Tin Htut, Dir Gen Cooperatives

Zaw Min, Dir Gen Electric Power - 1

Brig Gen Kyaw Kyaw, Dir Gen Protocol Department. Previously Ministry of Defense

Col Htay Lwin, Dir Gen Central Equipment Statistics and Inspection Department. Previously Ministry of Defense

Myat Thu, Dir Gen Project Appraisal and Progress Reporting Department. Previously Deputy Dir Gen

ARMY COMMANDERS IN A STATE OF FLUX

The power struggle between the SPDC chairman Sr General Than Shwe and his second-in-command Vice Sr General Maung Aye was the driver behind a series of reshuffles that affected nearly all regional commanders [see Box].¹⁶ The May and August 2005 reshuffles saw neither promotions nor transfers to civilian departments for the officers, but exchange of places among the commanders, in a move that might reflect the fragility of alliances at the top, and the difficulty the junta’s two top generals have in agreeing to change.¹⁷

On 26 January 2006, the most recent power play affecting SPDC commanders saw Brig Gen Hla Htay Win replacing Lt Gen Myint Swe as commander of the Rangoon Command.¹⁸ Myint Swe, who is known to be closely tied to Than Shwe, was in turn appointed as chief of the newly created Bureau of Special Operations (BSOs) under the Ministry of Defense.¹⁹ The new BSO will limit the power of Maung Aye-aligned Hla Htay Win, and the move is seen as a weakening of Maung Aye.²⁰

In successive reshuffles involving high-ranking military positions, Col Maung Maung Ohn replaced Brig Gen Sein Win as the commander of Brigade 101, Brigade 11 Commander Brig Gen Hla Htay Win’s position was taken by Col Bo Lwin, while Col Khin Maung Thein was appointed Commander of Brigade 22 and Col Thant Swe Commander of Brigade 77.²¹

13TH REGIONAL COMMAND CREATED

Following the decision to move the capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana Naypyidaw [See “Bunkered”], the regime set up the “Naypyidaw Regional Military Command”, which will control the region where the central administration and the war office are located. The new command brings to 13 the number of Burma’s regional military commands.²²

DESERTIONS

While commanders were shunted from one area to the next, reports were received of those lower down the ranks slinking away. Despite huge defense spending, coercive recruitment practices, low pay and meager rations have led to serious drops in morale and widespread desertion.²³ Underpaid and undersupplied soldiers depend on extortion, confiscation and forced labor to survive.²⁴

WEAKENED STRENGTH

According to leaked minutes of the Tatmadaw Organization Committee, a recent recruitment drive brought in 6275 new soldiers, but during the same time period 8760 soldiers were lost from service, including 4701 absent without leave and 2000 arrested.²⁵

According to the same report, 284 of the infantry battalions contain less than 200 soldiers each (29% of prescribed capacity), and another 220 have between 200 to 300 (between 29 and 43% of prescribed capacity).²⁶

COMMAND SWAP	
Command	May 2005
Southwest to S-east	Maj Gen Soe Naing
Southeast to S-west	Maj Gen Thuya Myint Aung
to Central	Maj Gen Khin Zaw
to Eastern	Maj Gen Ye Myint
to Western	Maj Gen Khin Maung Myint
to Triangle	Maj Gen Min Aung Naing
Aug 05	
Northern to Coastal	Maj Gen Maung Maung Swe
Coastal to Northern	Maj Gen Ohn Myint
26 Jan 06	
LID 11 to Rangoon	Brig Gen Hla Htay Win
Rgn to Chief BSO	Lt Gen Myint Swe
Promotions	
Lt Gen Soe Win	Gen Soe Win
Maj Gen Myint Swe	Lt Gen Myint Swe
From: Irrawaddy (25 May 05) Regional Commanders reportedly reshuffled; BBC (26 May 2005) Burma Reshuffles regional commanders	

At the end of 2005, there were 791 operational infantry battalions – this means that 63% of battalions were operating at less than 43% of their full strength, with 36% operating as low as 29% capacity.²⁷

In Arakan State the SPDC Army and the Navy are reportedly faced with an increasing number of desertions that are said to be linked to poor pay, inadequate rations and unequal treatment.²⁸ According to an SPDC Army report, between May and August 2005, 101 SPDC Army soldiers deserted from the SPDC Army Military Operations Command 9 in Kyauk Taw. On 23 December 2005 seven Navy personnel fled the Danyawaddy naval base in Kyaukpyu.²⁹ They were captured and summarily executed one week later by soldiers of LIB 34.³⁰

Others have successfully escaped with their families from bases in Mon and Chin State and sought refuge in India and Thailand.³¹

THE DIPLOMATIC CIRCLE

Defected		Country
March 05	Khin Lay Nyo	UN (NY)
	Aung Lin Htut	US
Recalled to Rangoon		
April 05	Dr Kyaw Win	UK
	Mya Than	UN (Geneva)
Change of Address		
April 05	Hla Than	<i>fr</i> Singapore <i>to</i> Sri Lanka
	Myo Myint	<i>fr</i> Thailand <i>to</i> Nepal
	Khin Maung Aye	<i>fr</i> Italy <i>to</i> Laos
Appointed		
23 Dec 05	Aung Khin Soe	Nepal
31 Jan 06	Kyar Nyo Chit Pe	Belgium
31 Jan 06	Soe Nwe	Serbia
16 May 06	Saw Hla Min	Switzerland
23 May 06	Tin Win	Poland
From the Military to Diplomacy		
2 Jun 06	Myin Aung	Malaysia
	Myint Aung	Singapore

From: DVB (23 Apr 05), (29 April 05), (2 June 2005) and (2 Jun 06); Irr (31 Jan 06): NLM (05 Jan 06), (24 Jun 06), (14 Jun 06) and (4 Jun 06); Reuters (3 Apr 06)

DIPLOMATIC DEFECTIONS

In early March 2005, Khin Lay Nyo, a SPDC embassy staff based in the New York's United Nations HQ applied for political asylum in the US.³² On 1 April 2005 Aung Lin Htut, a retired SPDC Army major attached to the Myanmar embassy in Washington, absconded with his family after reportedly applying for political asylum in the US on 27 March.³³

The defections triggered a wave of dismissals and new appointments, and unconfirmed reports of an increasing number of diplomats considering seeking political asylum.³⁴

From December 2005 a rash of new appointments appeared, with the addition a new position in Belgium for Kyar Nyo Chit, in an attempt by the SPDC to establish closer diplomatic relations with the European Union.³⁵

Moreover, the junta considerably **increased the presence of officers from combat forces among the diplomatic service**. More than 10 officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel were transferred to the junta's Foreign Office and at least five officers above the rank of brigadier generals were appointed as ambassadors.³⁶

Footnotes

- 1 Irr (March 06) Papering the Cracks
- 2 AFP (14 June 05) Myanmar's junta opens trial of former premier; AFP (22 July 05) Former Myanmar PM gets 44-year suspended sentence: legal source
- 3 AT (12 Jul 05) Trial of strength in Myanmar
- 4 DVB (27 Jan 06) Former Burmese FM reportedly detained by special police agents
- 5 DVB (13 Jan 05) Burmese police retrained to be intelligence forces; DVB (25 Dec 04) A new Burmese police force to be formed
- 6 DVB (13 Jan 05) Burmese police retrained to be intelligence forces
- 7 AFP (11 Aug 06) Myanmar reshuffles military commanders and ministers; AT (12 Jul 05) Trial of strength in Myanmar; DVB (10 Aug 06) Another one bites the dust: Top Burma junta official sacked; Irr (17 Jan 05) Burma's Man in Washington Promoted; NLM (16 May 06) Appointment of Ministers; NLM (16 May 06) Reassignment of Duties of Ministers; NLM (16 May 06) Appointment of Deputy Ministers; NLM (16 May 06) Appointment of Members of Civil Service selection and training board; NLM (17 Jun 06) Permission Granted for Retirement; NLM (24 Jun 06) Myanmar Gazette
- 8 Bangkok Post (29 Jun 05) Back to chauvinism, xenophobia
- 9 AFP (15 May 06) Myanmar junta to hold key meeting in new capital
- 10 NLM (16 May 06) Reassignment of duties of Ministers; NLM (16 May 06); Appointment of Ministers NLM (17 June 06) Permission granted for retirement
- 11 Asia Times (04 July 06) Myanmar's long march to civilian rule
- 12 DVB (30 Jun 06) Burmese border trade affected by arrests of customs officials
- 13 DVB (11 May 06) Sino-Burmese border gate reopens after some 100 people arrested for "corruption"
- 14 DVB (11 May 06) Sino-Burmese border gate reopens after some 100 people arrested for "corruption"
- 15 Narinjara (02 July 06) Power passes to next generation of Myanmar generals
- 16 BBC (26 May 05) Burma reshuffles regional commanders
- 17 DVB (01 Jun 05) Reshuffles of commanders confirmed by Burma junta
- 18 Irr (27 Jan 06) Change of Guard in Rangoon; Mizzima (27 Jan 06) Burma's new Rangoon and special bureau military heads named; Narinjara (28 Jan 06) Reshuffle in higher echelons of Burmese military
- 19 Mizzima (27 Jan 06) Burma's new Rangoon and special bureau military heads named
- 20 Mizzima (15 Feb 06) Conflict in the ranks
- 21 DVB (31 May 05) More changes within Burma despite increasing discontent
- 22 AFP (20 Nov 05) Myanmar expands military presence after creating new 'capital'
- 23 , 24 , 25 and 26 Nation (03 Mar 06) Paranoid Burmese military a regional threat
- 27 Network for Democracy and Development (June 2006) Documentation and Research Department
- 28 Khonumthung (26 Nov 05) Discrimination, over work and poor pay force soldiers to quit; Narinjara (19 Oct 05) Increasing number of desertion of Burmese Army in Arakan State
- 29 Narinjara (26 Dec 05) Seven Navy men desert from Danyawadi Naval base in Arakan
- 30 Narinjara (13 Jan 06) Navy deserters captured and executed
- 31 IMNA (11 Oct 05) More personnel desert Burmese Army; DVB (26 Dec 05) Seven Burmese soldiers on the run with arms, ammunition
- 32 DVB (23 Apr 05) Another Burmese embassy staff applied asylum in US
- 33 Reuters (03 Apr 05) Myanmar Says embassy official in US Absconds; DVB (03 Apr 05) Burmese diplomats: Slaves or Traitors
- 34 DVB (02 June 2005) New ambassadors appointed by Burma junta; DVB (29 Apr 05) Burma opposition radio reports diplomats fear Rangoon recall, mulling asylum
- 35 Irr (31 Jan 06) Junta Opens Diplomatic Tie with Belgium
- 36 DVB (19 May 05) All change: Burma reshuffles officers again

BUNKERED: SPDC MOVES TO PYINMANA NAYPYIDAW

DON'T CALL US – WE'LL CALL YOU

“If you need to communicate on urgent matters, you can send a fax to Pyinmana... We will send you the new numbers in due course, and you will be informed of the date to start communicating with us.” – SPDC Information Minister Kyaw San said in a statement.¹

“There is nothing to eat, drink and nothing to buy. Just nothing. My boss even told me that he now understands what hell is.” – Government worker.²

At 6:37 a.m. on 6 November 2005 with a shout of “Let’s go”, a convoy of trucks began a huge, expensive and baffling transfer of the military regime’s ministries from the capital Rangoon to a secret mountain-side compound 320 kilometres to the north.³

HOW TO MOVE A CAPITAL

First, award the contracts to cronies

According to a source, plans to move Burma’s capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana have been in place since 2001.⁴

It was also reported that a number of construction companies with close links to the SPDC were involved with the project.⁵

News accounts on the proposed move began to surface in November of 2004 when it was reported that Gen Thura Shwe Mann, the then SPDC Joint Chief of Staff, was making preparations to transfer the War Office to Pyinmana. In early February 2005, unidentified sources from the Burma Broadcasting Service reported that Taktong, a city 30 miles north of Pyinmana had been chosen for the new capital.⁶ In late February 2005, a reporter for the New Light of Myanmar said that her boss had informed her that the paper was moving to Pyinmana.⁷

Then add lots of forced labor

On 18 February 2005, the ILO reported on an allegation that the SPDC Army was using extensive forced labor in Pyinmana and Lewe townships in Mandalay Division to construct camps and facilities for SPDC Army Battalions 603, 604, 605 and an air defence battalion.

At least 14 villages in the area had to provide 200 workers each, on a daily basis, for this work.⁸ As recently as February 2006, 900 prisoners from Insein Prison in Rangoon were transferred to Pyinmana to finish the construction work.⁹

Next, slap a gag order and intimidate staff

On 14 June 2005, sources in Rangoon reported that the SPDC will move at least five of its ministries and almost all state media north from Rangoon to Pyinmana.¹⁰ During an emergency cabinet meeting in the last week of June 2005, the SPDC budgeted US\$17 million for the development of the military town of Pyinmana.¹¹ On 5 July, it was reported that the SPDC

The SPDC moves its ministries to Pyinmana, later renamed Pyinmana Naypyidaw in central Burma, some 320km north of Rangoon. The move was kept secret even from government employees who were given only two days to prepare shifting.

The sudden and bizarre move caused great consternation amongst international diplomats and ASEAN leaders, already concerned with the SPDC’s tendency to irrational behaviour.

Government workers, who cannot refuse the orders to transfer under threat of imprisonment, complain of the lack of accommodation and food in Pyinmana Naypyidaw. Many have had to leave their families in Rangoon. Foreign diplomats in Rangoon meanwhile complain they were left in the dark about the move.

Building and construction at Pyinmana Naypyidaw has been on a massive scale. The new military complex reportedly extends over 100 square kilometers. Land was confiscated from thousands of villagers for the new capital and another 5,000 villagers will be displaced during 2006. Forced labor reportedly built a stellar golf course, escape tunnels, bunkers, a military hospital, an airstrip and a mammoth hydroelectric plant.

The reasons for the move to Pyinmana Naypyidaw range from strategic to paranoia (of a sea-borne attack from the US) to the bizarre (soothsayers think Rangoon may be on the verge of collapse). Or perhaps the new name for the capital, “Naypyidaw”, (‘place of a king’ or ‘royal city’) proves that Than Shwe really does think he is the new emperor of Burma.

warned its ministerial staff not to discuss the move to Pyinmana with media sources. An employee in the Agricultural Ministry said that employees had to submit names of their companions and family members along with their job description. Those who have already submitted the names cannot resign their job without being labeled a rebel.¹²

On 13 July 2005, a senior executive in the Education Ministry said that an official notification had been issued ordering all the government ministries to move to the new capital, Yezin, near Pyinmana no later than the end of September.¹³ On 2 November, it was reported that the move to Pyinmana, which had been delayed for unexplained reasons, was back on track. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Information were given two weeks to make the move.¹⁴

The building of the new capital is adversely affecting the economy. The junta gave its civil servants a substantial salary increase in an attempt to soothe the pain of relocation to Pynmana Naypyidaw. The salary increase has contributed to the spiralling rate of inflation in Burma.

In addition, the regime is defaulting on payments owed to contractors building Pynmana Naypyidaw. Electric power requirements of the SPDC ministries and military HQ at Pynmana Naypyidaw is leaving the rest of the country in the dark.

The relocation of the capital to Pynmana Naypyidaw has spurred the SPDC Army to launch a brutal offensive against ethnic minorities in the area. Ethnic Karens have borne the brunt of the latest offensive that has caused the displacement of an estimated 18,000 villagers. The current SPDC Army operation against the Karen is the biggest offensive since 1997 and has created a 15-fold surge of refugees crossing into Thailand.

And finally, get some good numbers from Than Shwe's astrologer

Without prior official announcement, the move to Pynmana began on 6 November. A senior SPDC official said, "We started moving effective this morning. Convoys of trucks, carrying things and personnel from various ministries left here for Pynmana early this morning." A government worker said, "No leave, no transfers and no resignations are allowed at the moment. We are not allowed to bring our family."¹⁵

Leaving Rangoon at 6:37 am on 6 November, opening 11 ministries at 11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month, suggests that, just like in days of Ne Win, astrologers and numerologists have had a hand in the process.¹⁶

JAIL FOR TRYING TO RESIGN

A government worker said those who applied to resign were threatened with imprisonment. Those who quit their jobs or refuse to obey the order are to be sentenced to a minimum of five years in prison, causing considerable resentment and anger.¹⁷ A Ministry of Agriculture worker said many civil servants did not want to leave Rangoon. "The family members are very unhappy about [the move] because their children are attending schools and colleges in Rangoon. Some officers have their own business in Rangoon, so they do not want to shift, but they have no choice," she said.¹⁸ According to unconfirmed reports, SPDC authorities detained 10 army officers for discussing the move to Pynmana. In addition, seventeen civil servants resigned their positions and went into hiding.¹⁹

FOOD & SHELTER IN SHORT SUPPLY

Some of the SPDC government workers in the first group to be moved managed to phone back to Rangoon, mainly to ask relatives to send them food. One said they spent the night on the floor of an assembly hall, and were informed they would receive meals for two days and then have to fend for themselves.²⁰

A Pynmana resident said the new administrative town is still under construction and SPDC government workers are camping out in the open with no proper facilities such as drinking water.²¹

On 11 November, hundreds of trucks carrying a second wave of SPDC government workers departed for Pynmana.²² All SPDC government ministries had been instructed to finish the relocation by 31 December.²³ On 20 November 2005, the fourth batch of civil servants transferred to Pynmana. The Ministries involved in the move were reported to be from Defence, Border Trading, Hotel & Tourism, Trade and Commerce, Agriculture and Marine Departments.²⁴

NEW CAPITAL OR CONCENTRATION CAMP?

Civil servants transferred to Pynmana have been surrounded with barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers after some civil servants fled and returned to Rangoon.²⁵ A month later, civil servants were still unable to settle down due to lack of food, water and proper accommodation.²⁶

NEW COMMAND CREATED

On 27 January 2006, SPDC Army Rangoon Commander, Lt Gen Myint Swe, became the head of a newly created Bureau of Special Operations. The SPDC established the Bureau of Special Operations as a result of the move to Pynmana. As commander of the Bureau of Special Operations, Lt Gen Myint Swe will have administrative control over the economic sector for Rangoon, Pegu and Pynmana. Brig Gen Hla Htay Win assumed the Rangoon Military Command as a result of Myint Swe's new appointment.²⁷

SPDC USES PYNMANA MOVE TO DELAY ASEAN VISIT

On 6 January 2006, SPDC Foreign Minister Nyan Win said that the planned visit of ASEAN Special Envoy and Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar was being postponed indefinitely because the military regime was too busy with the move to Pynmana. The Malaysian FM was to visit Burma to assess the junta's initiatives for democratic reform. The junta agreed to the visit at the ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur in December of 2005. The latest statement from the military regime drew sharp criticism from the Asean Inter-parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC). AIPMC chairman Zaid Ibrahim said, "This (Myanmar) is a rogue nation. They do not care what others think of it. The move to delay Syed Hamid's trip is a double slap on the face for the regional grouping. I think Asean has to look at this issue if it is worth

to have Myanmar in the grouping.²⁸ When the junta finally allowed Syed Hamid Albar to visit Rangoon in late March, he was not allowed to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or any other opposition group representatives.²⁹

EMBASSIES CAN MOVE AT THE END OF 2007

On 9 December 2005, SPDC Protocol chief, Thura U Aung Htet, told foreign diplomats that the junta is preparing land for embassies and UN organizations in Pinyinmana. An Asian diplomat who attended the briefing said, "They said it will take two years to finish the infrastructure like roads, water, etc. We were told that we can start to build the new embassies and residences from the end of 2007."³⁰

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

On 8 November 2005, it was reported that the new capital would be named "Yan Lon" meaning "secure from strife".³¹ On 12 November, sources in Rangoon confirmed the government plans to name the new capital in Pinyinmana 'Nay Pyi Daw' meaning 'place of a king' in old-fashioned usage.³² On 22 March 2006, all SPDC-controlled newspapers, TV and radio stations all started referring to the new capital as "Pinyinmana Naypyidaw" after the new name was first used during a national TV weather report on the evening of 21 March.³³

The building and construction at Pinyinmana Naypyidaw has been on a massive scale. The new military complex reportedly extends over 100 square kilometers.³⁴

Land was confiscated from thousands of villagers for the new capital and another 5,000 villagers will be displaced during 2006. Forced labor reportedly built a "stellar" golf course, escape tunnels, bunkers, a military hospital, an airstrip and a mammoth hydroelectric plant.³⁵ Mansions for the senior generals, government offices and national headquarters for the country's ethnic groups are being built. The national headquarters is to be 30 meters high according to the architectural plans. A new Parliament is under construction as well.³⁶

Land confiscation and village relocations continue with new projects being constructed. All villages situated near the newly built Aye-la airport in the southeast of nearby Lewe were ordered to relocate by May 2006.³⁷

WHY THE MOVE?

During a brief news conference on 7 November 2005, the junta's Information Minister, Brig Gen Kyaw San, said that the move was made because communication lines are much better at Pinyinmana.³⁸ But as is the case with many SPDC decisions, the move to Pinyinmana Naypyidaw defies rational explanation. Therefore, speculation has run rampant on what has motivated the military regime to engage in such an unwarranted extravagance. The following reasons have been given for the move:

- Concern about a possible sea-borne attack on the regime, perhaps by a "western power".³⁹

WHY MOVE?

Speculation has been rife over why the regime moved its capital in such a rush when it could ill afford such a mega-project and when facilities were incomplete. Possible theories include:

Fear of attack from foreign or local forces - Not only is Pinyinmana Naypyidaw safe from possible air attacks from an invading force, but the generals can also vanish in thick jungle and mountainous terrain around the area, to stage guerrilla warfare.

To ward off doom - a soothsayer recently predicted Rangoon was on the verge of 'collapse'.

Delusions of grandeur - Some reckon Sen Gen Than Shwe is imitating habits of Burmese kings who built new capitals and pagodas while in power.

Rebranding the regime - The Pinyinmana project is a key part of the generals' relaunch of itself as a nominally democratic government legitimized by its so-called "roadmap to democracy" that has excluded and/marginalised most of the country's political stakeholders.

A siege mentality - The generals may be feeling uncomfortable having to live amongst the consequences of their misrule in Rangoon and other large urban centres.

- Some military analysts think Pinyinmana Naypyidaw is strategically important. Not only is it safe from possible air attacks from an invading force, but the generals can also vanish in thick jungle and mountainous terrain around the area, to stage guerrilla warfare against any intruders.⁴⁰
- With Pinyinmana Naypyidaw as their headquarters, the generals would be able quickly to deal with areas where ethnic nationality insurgents could cause trouble.⁴¹
- Sources suspect the junta is preparing a secure site for Burma's nuclear program.⁴²
- Some analysts attribute the move to a soothsayer who recently predicted Rangoon was on the verge of 'collapse'.⁴³
- Some reckon Sen Gen Than Shwe is imitating habits of Burmese kings who built new capitals and pagodas while in power.⁴⁴
- The Pinyinmana project is a key part of the generals' vision for the future. As the constitution-drafting National Convention winds up next year, the generals plan a "separation of

"They are using thousands of troops to clean up the area...They kill, they rape, they loot, they burn, everything, so people have to flee. If you are Karen, they will attack you. They are pushing the Karen out of Burma." - Colonel Nerdah Mya, Karen National Union (KNU).⁵⁰

"We interviewed new refugees. Some of them said the Burmese troops burnt their paddy fields. Some of them had to work as porters for four days a week and had only two days to work for themselves. So they no longer wanted to live there. Almost all local residents near the military camps have fled." - Saw Jway Nway, Karen Refugee Committee.⁵¹

"It has been clear for many years that the Karen people are facing genocide and experiencing crimes against humanity and war crimes. This latest evidence adds further weight to these charges." - Lord David Alton, British House of Lords.⁵²

power" among the armed forces. Under the plan, a group of army leaders are expected to keep control of the armed forces while the former generals become leaders of a new civilian government.⁴⁵

A western diplomat said, "The ministers would go there, but they would keep a presence here in Rangoon with the deputy ministers. This would allow another layer of screening when it comes to welcoming visiting foreigners."⁴⁶

ISOLATION, INSULATION & INCREASED HOSTILITIES AGAINST ETHNIC MINORITIES

Outside the realm of speculation, there are two known qualities that can be attributed to Pinyinman Naypyidaw. First, the geographic location of Pinyinman Naypyidaw will facilitate the SPDC Army's intervention with Burma's armed ethnic groups. Since 8 November 2005, military orders to all of the SPDC regional commanders have been issued from Pinyinman Naypyidaw.⁴⁷ To provide increased security for the area, the SPDC Army has deployed more forces to the area surrounding Pinyinman Naypyidaw.⁴⁸

Second, its distance from Rangoon will serve to further isolate and insulate the military regime from international media and other organizations, such as the ILO, that the junta despises. An aid worker recently said, "It will make things more complicated in terms of getting work done, though, if the only guy who can give the go-ahead on a project is in Pinyinman, while you're stuck in [Rangoon]."⁴⁹

OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE KAREN

Coinciding with the move to Pinyinman Naypyidaw, the SPDC Army increased its troop strength in the areas surrounding the new capital. In November of 2005 SPDC Army forces launched a new campaign against the Karen that is reportedly the biggest SPDC military operation against the Karen since 1997. The current offensive has been concentrated in a north south corridor running about 120 kilometers miles from Toungoo down to Shwegyin in Karen State where the SPDC Army has established new camps and a more permanent presence.⁵³ [See map] SPDC Army troops from Thandaung-based Battalion 124 have been laying landmines east of the new capital of Pinyinman Naypyidaw in Taungoo District.⁵⁴ At least two civilians died and seven were injured in landmine explosions in the area during January 2006.⁵⁵ In February 2006, troops from SPDC Army Battalion 66 moved to Thandaung.⁵⁶ At the end of February, one of the main units from the Hsenwi-based Military Operations Command (MOC) No.16 was deployed in the Toungoo area.⁵⁷

KNU spokesman, David Takabaw, said that SPDC soldiers are committing extra-judicial killings, rape, looting and the destructions of homes and farms in the process, causing Karen villagers to flee their homes.⁵⁸ Since December 2005, the UNHCR has recorded a 15-fold surge in the number of refugees from Burma crossing into Thailand. According to refugees and aid groups, thousands more are trapped in the jungle, their escape route blocked by government troops.⁵⁹ Sally Thompson, deputy head of the Thailand Burma Border Consortium group, said 1,300 Karen had arrived in North-western Thailand's Maeramuang refugee camp since the dry-season offensive started in late 2005. The refugees, who had walked through the jungle for weeks, reported that SPDC Army troops had burned their villages, destroyed their crops, taken their livestock and tried to push some into forced labour.⁶⁰ The total number of displaced Karen was estimated to be 18,000. [see "Karen State: Facing Genocide?"]

UN/NGOS/DIPLOMATS FRUSTRATED

UN officials fear the relocation of ministries to Pinyinman Naypyidaw may further encroach on their ability to work effectively in Burma. UN Resident Coordinator in Burma Charles Petrie said, "We're still not sure exactly how we will be able to continue interacting with our counterpart ministries during this period and afterwards."⁶¹

A foreign businessman expressed dismay at the transition, saying government ministries were virtually paralyzed. "All communications inter-office have totally broken down," he said. "There is nobody to sign anything, and nobody knows how to get in touch with anybody."⁶²

A Western diplomat said, "This is a disaster... We are facing delays even as things are right now, so it could be even worse if we have to fax to Pinyinman."⁶³

THE IMPACT ON BURMA'S ECONOMY

In an effort to ease the anger of civil servants over the move to Pyinmana Naypyidaw, on 25 March 2006 the SPDC announced a 10-fold salary increase to go into effect on April 1.⁶⁴ Burma economists believe the junta would need about 100 billion kyat (US\$71.5 million) to implement the wage hike.⁶⁵ A Rangoon economist said, "We're expecting the regime to increase revenue by raising taxes and printing more money."⁶⁶ [see "Lots of Kyat, No Rice"]

The announced pay raise has had a significant impact on the price of commodities and the value of the kyat. On 26 March 2005, the day following the announced salary increases, gold prices in Burma soared to 390,000 kyat per tical (0.56 ounces) from 340,000 kyat.⁶⁷ In late April, the increase in cost of commodities in Burma from the previous month were noted as follows:

- Petrol prices jumped from 2,400 kyat per gallon to 3600 kyat (a 50% increase);⁶⁸
- Diesel fuel increased from 3,000 kyat per gallon to 4,200 kyat (a 40% increase);⁶⁹
- The price of gold went from 350,000 kyat per tical to 450,000 kyat (a 29% increase);⁷⁰ and
- The value of the kyat on the black market dropped from 1,150 for US\$1 to 1,435 for US\$1 (a fall in value of 20%).⁷¹

Footnotes

- 1 The Independent (8 Nov 05) - Burma's rulers take the road to Mandalay
- 2 Asia Times (on line www.atimes.com) (23 Nov 05) Myanmar's leaders take to the hills
- 3 Sydney Morning Herald (15 Nov 05) - Astrologers the likely drivers of Burma junta's capital idea
- 4 Irrawaddy (14 June 2005) More government ministries and media to leave Rangoon
- 5 SHAN (21 Nov 04) Army set to move command from Rangoon
- 6 SHAN (8 Feb 05) Pyinmana, Burma's "Pentagon"
- 7 Irrawaddy (27 Feb 05) New Light, New Location
- 8 ILO, 292nd Session (Mar 2005) - GB.292/7/2
- 9 DVB (02 Feb 06) 900 prisoners transferred to central Burma to build the new capital
- 10 Irrawaddy (14 Jun 05) More government ministries and media to leave Rangoon
- 11 Mizzima (1 July 2005) US \$17 million for new military town
- 12 Mizzima (5 July 2005) Move to new military town kept secret
- 13 DVB (13 July 2005) Burma said to order ministries to relocate to new capital by September
- 14 Mizzima (2 Nov 05) Junta gears up for move to Pyinmana
- 15 Reuters (6 Nov 05) Myanmar junta moves key ministries from capital
- 16 Mizzima (11 Nov 05) Deconstructing the Pyinmana move

REST OF BURMA LEFT IN DARKNESS

Pyinmana Naypyidaw is receiving uninterrupted electric power after diverting it from other towns, including Pyi, Rangoon and Mandalay. An official from the Ministry of Electric Power said power generated by the Paunglaung power plant was being drawn from other towns including Pyi, Wetpoko, Innma and Yethashe.

A Rangoon resident said: "The situation of power supply in Yangon is worse than before. Even in the downtown six townships, which got uninterrupted power supply previously are now facing regular six hours load shedding daily".⁷²

SPDC IN DEFAULT?

According to a recent media report, the SPDC is stalling on payments worth millions of US dollars to domestic and international contractors developing facilities in and around the Pyinmana Naypyidaw. The military regime's failure to settle costs for the construction is understood to have put a serious financial strain on the Rangoon-based companies building the new capital, including Htoo Trading, Eden Group and Asia World.⁷³

17 DVB (6 Nov 05) Quo Vadis: Burma junta moving ministries into jungles

18 Mizzima (8 Nov 05) Junta confirms Pyinmana shift

19 DVB (21 Nov 05) 100 homes dismantled by Burmese authorities for new capital

20 AFP (7 Nov 05) Myanmar presses on with move to half-finished government compound

21 DVB (9 Nov 05) Burma junta grabs lands from farmers to build offices at Pyinmana

22 DVB (11 Nov 05) Second batch of civil servants leave Rangoon for Pyinmana

23 DVB (12 Nov 05) Burma junta army issues orders from new HQs at Pyinmana

24 DVB (19 Nov 05) Fourth batch of Burmese civil servants moving to Pyinmana

25 DVB (23 Nov 05) Burmese civil servants kept within barbed wires at new capital

26 DVB (28 Nov 05) Burmese civil servants feeling dejected by the relocation of capital

27 Mizzima News (27 Jan 06) Burma's new Rangoon and special bureau military heads named

28 AFP (07 Jan 06) 'Too busy' Myanmar puts off ASEAN envoy visit

29 AP (24 Mar 06) Malaysian Leader Cuts Short Myanmar Trip; The Irrawaddy (24 March 06) ASEAN envoy fails to meet Burmese opposition

30 Associated Press (9 Dec 05) Myanmar says foreign governments can start building embassies at new capital in 2007

- 31 The Independent (8 Nov 05) Burma's rulers take the road to Mandalay
- 32 Mizzima (12 Nov 05) Burma's new capital named Nay Pyi Daw
- 33 DPA (22 Mar 06) Myanmar's new capital gets a new royal surname
- 34 Bangkok Post (08 Nov 05) Government on the Run
- 35 The Independent (8 Nov 05) Burma's rulers take the road to Mandalay
- 36 IPS (20 Jul 05) Burma: Fearing Invasion, Junta Plans a New Capital in the Hills
- 37 DVB (23 Feb 06) Villages situated near Burma's Aye-la airport ordered to move out
- 38 DVB (7 Nov 05) Burma junta confirms relocation of ministries
- 39 Irrawaddy (27 Feb 05) New Light, New Location
- 40 Bangkok Post (6 June 2005) Is junta planning to abandon Rangoon?
- 41 Bangkok Post (6 June 2005) Is junta planning to abandon Rangoon?
- 42 SHAN (12 Aug 05) Is nuke plant being moved from the plains to the hills?
- 43 The Independent (8 Nov 05) Burma's rulers take the road to Mandalay
- 44 Mizzima (10 Nov 05) Pyinmana, the Road Map and Aung San Suu Kyi
- 45 Mizzima (14 Nov 05) Pyinmana: The Long Arm of the Law
- 46 AFP (5 Jul 05) Myanmar's junta pondering leaving Yangon for somewhere "safer": analysts
- 47 DVB (12 Nov 05) Burma junta army issues orders from new HQs at Pyinmana
- 48 Mizzima News (08 Feb 06) Pyinmana move creates problems for Karen: KNU
- 49 Mizzima (4 Nov 05) Losing Touch
- 50 Agence France Presse (11 Apr 06) Myanmar troops reportedly attacking minority villages
- 51 NMG (25 Feb 06) Flight of people to Thailand continues
- 52 AP (28 Apr 06) Myanmar troops pursuing 2,000 ethnic Karen villagers hiding out in jungles
- 53 Irrawaddy (25 Apr 06) Burmese Army's Karen attacks "worst since 1997"
- 54 DVB (01 Feb 06) Burma junta plants more landmines to 'protect' new capital
- 55 Irrawaddy (02 Feb 06) KNU Claims Mines Planted in Division Close to Pyinmana
- 56 Mizzima News (08 Feb 06) Pyinmana move creates problems for Karen: KNU
- 57 SHAN (23 Mar 06) All eyes on new Burma division on border
- 58 DVB (11 Apr 06) Burmese soldiers 'clearing' Karen villages from central Burma – KNU
- 59 The Times (28 Mar 06) Thousands lose homes to capital in the jungle
- 60 Agence France Presse (11 Apr 06) Myanmar troops reportedly attacking minority villages
- 61 Irrawaddy (10 Nov 05) UN Fears Pyinmana Effect as Government Loses Touch
- 62 Financial Times (UK) (09 Nov 05) Rangoon in shock as junta moves ministries north
- 63 Scotsman, UK (AP) (09 Nov 05) Envoys baffled by Burmese move
- 64 Agence France Presse (25 Mar 06) Myanmar civil servants to receive 10-fold raise: official
- 65 Irrawaddy (28 Apr 06) Fatter Pay Packets Further Boost Inflation in Burma
- 66 Mizzima News (21 Apr 06) Burmese gold sales hit new low
- 67 Xinhua (30 Mar 2006) Myanmar seeks ways to cope with rising commodity prices
- 68 AFP (14 May 06) Myanmar's inflation soars after military raises wages
- 69 AFP (14 May 06) Myanmar's inflation soars after military raises wages
- 70 AFP (14 May 06) Myanmar's inflation soars after military raises wages
- 71 Irr (21 Apr 06) Junta Targets Gold Dealers in Anti-Inflation Drive
- 72 Mizzima (12 Apr 06) Pyinmana gets 24-hour power at the expense of other cities
- 73 Irrawaddy (18 May 06) Junta failing to pay for military facilities
- 74 Bangkok Post (08 Nov 05) Government on the Run
- 75 The Nation (14 Nov 05) Pyinmana: More Lodge than bunker
- 76 SHAN (21 Nov 04) Army set to move command from Rangoon
- 77 Mizzima (1 July 2005) US \$17 million for new military town
- 78 Sydney Morning Herald (15 Nov 05) - Astrologers the likely drivers of Burma junta's capital idea
- 79 DVB (12 Nov 05) Burma junta army issues orders from new HQs at Pyinmana
- 80 AFP (20 Nov 05) Myanmar expands military presence after creating new 'capital'
- 81 Mizz (05 Jan 06) More civil servants to relocate to Pyinmana in January
- 82 AFP (04 Feb 06) Myanmar hopes to complete move to new capital in February: officials
- 83 DVB (01 Feb 06) Burma junta plants more landmines to 'protect' new capital
- 84 AFP (08 Feb 06) Newspaper presses to start rolling at Myanmar's new capital
- 85 DVB (17 Feb 06) Warding off evil: Burma junta carries out new house blessing ceremony
- 86 AFP (17 Feb 06) Myanmar military supremo arrives in new capital: sources
- 87 AP (10 Mar 06) Myanmar border areas minister appointed mayor of new capital city
- 88 Agence France Presse (25 Mar 06) Myanmar civil servants to receive 10-fold raise: official
- 89 AFP (14 May 06) Myanmar's inflation soars after military raises wages
- 90 Irrawaddy (18 May 06) Junta failing to pay for military facilities

PYINMANA FACT SHEET

Pyinmana Naypyidaw is located about 320 kilometers north of Rangoon. The whole area under construction is more than 100 km². The complex will house the military war office, all SPDC ministries and a new parliament.⁷⁴ The SPDC military HQ will be located at Pinlaung, north of Pyinmana, while government ministries will be located 10 kms west of Pyinmana at Kyet Pyay (aka Kyappay).⁷⁵

In November of 2004 it was reported the SPDC was preparing to transfer the War Office to Pyinmana.⁷⁶ During an emergency cabinet meeting in June 2005, the SPDC allocated US\$17 million for construction at Pyinmana.⁷⁷

SPDC government ministries began moving to Pyinmana Naypyidaw on 6 November 2005.⁷⁸ Since 8 November 2005, military orders to all of the SPDC regional commanders have been issued from Kyappay.⁷⁹

In November 2005, the SPDC Army launched a new campaign against the Karen in the area surrounding Pyinmana Naypyidaw. (See Map) By May 2006, the military operation had caused the displacement of 18,000 Karen.

On 20 November 2005 it was reported that the SPDC Army set up a new regional command, the "Naypyidaw Regional Military Command", bringing the number of SPDC regional military commands to 13.⁸⁰

On 5 January 2006 it was reported that new registration cards are to be issued for all civil servants from the ministry of agriculture listing their new address as Naypyidaw division, Naypyidaw township.⁸¹

On 4 February 2006, a senior official with the Ministry of Home Affairs said that the move of SPDC Ministries would be completed by the end of February.⁸²

It was reported in early February 2006 that the SPDC Army had been laying landmines in Taungoo District 80 kilometers east of Pyinmana Naypyidaw, allegedly to secure the new capital. In January the mines killed two civilians and wounded another five.⁸³

On 9 February 2006, 3 SPDC-owned newspapers, the English-language New Light of Myanmar and the Burmese-language Myanmar Ahlin and Mirror newspapers, began operations in Pyinmana Naypyidaw.⁸⁴

On 17 February 2006, Sr Gen Than Shwe carried out a house blessing ceremony at Pyinmana Naypyidaw.⁸⁵ He had reportedly gone to pick up the key to his recently completed mansion.⁸⁶

On 27 February, 2006 the SPDC appointed border areas minister, Col Thein Nyunt, as mayor of Pyinmana.⁸⁷

On 25 March 2006, the SPDC announced a 10-fold salary increase for civil servants effective 1 April.⁸⁸ The announcement sent commodity prices soaring and the value of the kyat dropping substantially.⁸⁹

On 27 March 2006, for the first time, the SPDC held an Armed Forces Day ceremony at Pyinmana Naypyidaw. The ceremony was broadcast on live TV. Sr Gen Than Shwe said: "Our military should be worthy heirs to the traditions of the capable military established by noble kings Anawrahta, Bayint Naung and Alaung Phaya U Aung Zeya."

On 18 May 2006, it was reported that the SPDC was failing to pay the contractors involved in the construction of the new facilities at Pyinmana Naypyidaw. The amounts ran to millions of US dollars.⁹⁰



AN EXPLOSIVE YEAR IN RANGOON

During the past 18 months, there were a total of 24 bombs detonated in locations throughout Burma [See map].

Rangoon was the site of 14 of the 24 explosions and Mandalay was targeted as well. Three of the incidents resulted in the loss of life. The number and increased frequency of the bomb blasts is an obvious indication of the growing instability within the SPDC and serves to illustrate the inability of the junta in adequately maintaining safety and security within its borders.

MAY 2005 BLASTS IN RANGOON CAUSE LOSS OF LIFE, SCORES WOUNDED

A climate of fear has prevailed in the Burmese capital since a set of bombs was detonated in May 2005 at three separate locations, including the Rangoon Convention Center where a Thai trade fair was being held. The explosions killed at least 11 people and injured over a hundred others.

The SPDC blamed overseas opposition groups and even implied that the CIA was involved.

The bombings have been commonly assumed to be an “inside job” to justify increased military actions against dissident groups, or as an expression of tensions between Gen Maung Aye and “young guns” aligned with Gen Than Shwe.¹

NO SOLID LEADS

The SPDC said traces of RDX explosive were found at the bomb-sites. They said RDX is not available in Burma and is utilized by “the armies in big nations,” and that the bombs could only be handled by “well-trained bombers”.²

This is not true. RDX is a relatively cheap explosive used in a wide range of civilian and military applications. It is also exported by NORINCO, a Chinese company with close ties to the SPDC.³ The SPDC has used RDX in landmines against ethnic groups.⁴

RANGOON REMAINS A TARGET

An explosion outside the Traders Hotel in Rangoon’s business district in October 2005 was the second bombing in Rangoon in a period of five months.

Then, on 20 April 2006 between 1:00 and 3:00 am, a series of bomb blasts occurred in downtown Rangoon causing property damage but no casualties. According to local residents, the blasts occurred at Dagon, Kyauktada and Lanmadaw Townships. Two blasts occurred at Rangoon General Post Office and Telecommunication Office. Other blasts targeted electrical power transformers and a railroad behind the Bogyoke Market.

SPDC TARGETS THE USUAL SUSPECTS; LAUNCHES ASSAULT ON KAREN

The junta claimed that the May 2005 Rangoon bombings were a coordinated operation of the Karen, Shan and Karenni groups with the aid and support of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).⁵

On 14 January 2006, Maung Maung Oo and Chit Thein Tun, members of the Burmese Student’s Organization, were kidnapped by an unknown armed group in India and forcibly taken into Burma. Once inside Burma, the SPDC Army accused the men of involvement in bomb blasts at the Nanpharlonge market in Tamu Township. In April 2006, both men were sentenced to death by summary trial inside Mandalay Prison.⁶

On 5 February 2006, the SPDC arrested Aung Cho Oo, a member the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF), and accused him of involvement in the May 2005 Rangoon bombings. Aung Cho Oo denied the charges.⁷

On 2 March 2006, SPDC authorities arrested Saw Gay The Mu, a member of the Karen National Union (KNU), just hours after he allegedly planted one bomb near a high school and another near a power transformer in Taungoo Township.⁸ A spokesperson for the KNU said the charges against Saw Gay The Mu were groundless and denied that the KNU was in any way involved in the bomb blasts.⁹

In April 2006, the SPDC declared that four opposition organizations, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the Federation of Trade Union - Burma (FTUB), the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the National League for Democracy-Liberated Area (NLD-LA) were terrorist organizations.¹⁰

On 27 April 2006, the SPDC threatened to declare the NLD an unlawful association because there was sufficient evidence to show that it has ties to terrorist organizations.¹¹

In May 2006, the SPDC said its massive military campaign against the Karen was undertaken because the Karen National Union (KNU) was responsible for numerous bomb blasts. SPDC Information Officer, Brig Gen Kyaw Hsan said, “We have to launch military offensives against the KNU because since early this year, the KNU stepped up its destructive acts such as exploding a series of bombs and laying mines on rail lines.”¹²

Speculation and uncertainty continue to prevail: “There are all kinds of rumors circulating but nobody knows for sure who was behind it. The thing is, this regime has no shortage of enemies.” – a Western diplomat’s statement on the May 2005 Rangoon bomb blasts.¹³

“We feel we are living in a state of fear. We are scared of the consequences from this.” – Rangoon resident and politician Win Naing on the April 2006 Rangoon bombings.¹⁴

A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

On **17 March 2005**, a bomb exploded on an empty bus in Rangoon. There were no reported injuries.¹⁵

On **19 March 2005**, a bomb exploded in a toilet at the Panorama Hotel in Rangoon. There were no reported injuries.¹⁶

On **22 March 2005**, the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors (VBSW) claimed responsibility for the two Rangoon bombs.¹⁷

On **26 April 2005**, two women were killed and 16 others wounded when a bomb exploded in a market in Mandalay. The SPDC blamed “insurgent destructive elements”.¹⁸

On **7 May 2005**, a series of three bomb explosions ripped through Rangoon. The first one occurred at approximately 2:50 p.m. at the Rangoon Trade Center in Mingala Taungnyunt Township. The second explosion occurred at 2:55 p.m. at the Junction-8 Center in Mayangon Township. The third explosion occurred at approximately 3.00 p.m. at the Dagon Centre in Sangyoung Township. Eleven persons died and 162 others were injured in the explosions, according to official sources. Other sources put the death toll much higher.¹⁹

On **12 May 2005**, a bomb exploded at a bridge near Nyaungpintha Village, Magwe. No casualties were reported.²⁰

On **21 October 2005**, a blast occurred outside the luxury Traders Hotel in Rangoon. No casualties were reported.²¹ On **23 October 2005**, SPDC Information Minister Brig Gen Kyaw San said that the explosion near Traders Hotel was the joint handiwork of ABSDF, VBSW and the KNU.²²

On **3 January 2006**, the eve of Burma’s independence celebrations, two bombs exploded in Pegu. There were no reported casualties. A Pegu resident said, “A blast occurred around 7:00 pm near a school. I heard the explosion but there were no casualties. Security is very tight today in Pegu.”²³

On **8 January 2006**, two bombs detonated at Nantpharlon market in Tamu. The first bomb exploded at 8:15 am near the Tokyo restaurant, killing the restaurant owner. A second bomb went off hours later near the Shwe Kaung Hlan tea shop.²⁴ It was later reported that that the owner was killed.²⁵

On **15 January 2006**, a bomb exploded at Taungoo railway station at 4:00 am, with no reported injuries or damage.²⁶

On **30 January 2006**, a bomb was discovered at Pyu Development Market in Pegu. The bomb was removed and exploded an hour later while in the possession of the police.²⁷

On **1 February 2006**, a series of small explosions occurred near a gas pipeline in Mudon township, Mon State. According to local sources, no damage was caused to the pipeline that carries gas from the Yadana offshore field to a cement factory in Myaingkalay village in Karen State.²⁸

On **14 February 2006**, a bomb exploded in the border town of Myawaddy, Karen State. The blast occurred about 10:00 am near the offices of the Union Solidarity and Development Association and the New Mon State Party.²⁹

On **2 March 2006**, two small bombs exploded in Taungoo Township, Pegu Division. A blast occurred near a high school. The second blast damaged a wall near a power transformer. There were no casualties reported as a result of the bombs.³⁰



In the early hours of **20 April 2006**, a series of at least 5 bomb blasts hit the business district of Rangoon, causing property damage but no casualties. The explosions damaged the general Post and Telecommunications building, electricity transformers and a railroad behind the Bogyoke market.³¹

On **5 May 2006**, a bomb exploded on a railroad line north-east of Rangoon. The explosion damaged a transformer and a fence on the rail line to Penwogon and Kyaukkyi.³²

RANGOON JITTERS

The 7 May 2005 bomb explosions in Rangoon were very tragic given the loss of life and casualties. The SPDC acknowledged 11 killed and 162 injured.³³ Thai news sources put the death toll at 21³⁴, while other sources put the death toll as high as 70.³⁵ The explosions occurred at two crowded shopping centers and the Rangoon Convention Center where a Thai trade fair was being held.³⁶

The tragic events that unfolded in Rangoon on 7 May brought the SPDC into the international spotlight and put the military regime under intense scrutiny by the international community. The SPDC’s reactions in blaming the explosions on as many people as possible and restricting media coverage of the disaster were predictable.

With the reasons for the blasts unclear, and perpetrators largely unknown, a climate of fear descended on the residents of Rangoon. Restaurants, hotels, and shopping centers all registered sharp drops in business activity.

THE IMPROBABLE RDX STORY

The military regime first assigned blame for the explosions to internal ethnic insurgent groups and exiled political groups. The junta claimed the bombing was a coordinated operation of the Karen, Shan and Karenni groups with the aid and support of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).³⁷

When the military junta alleged that it had found RDX residue in the bomb fuses, it concocted a story that RDX was a sophisticated explosive material only available to superpowers.³⁸ The military regime alleged that the bombings were the handiwork of the CIA.³⁹ The junta even claimed that the Thai government was part of the conspiracy.⁴⁰

RDX enjoys widespread use in bomb fuses, and has become the second-most-widely used high explosive in the military, exceeded only by TNT. RDX is rarely used alone; it is widely used as a component of plastic explosives, detonators, high explosives in artillery rounds, Claymore mines, and demolition kits. RDX has limited civilian use as a rat poison.⁴¹ A partially state-owned Chinese company, NORINCO (China North Industries Group), has been supplying the SPDC with RDX in recent years.⁴²

The SPDC produces landmines, including the MM1, the MM2, and a Claymore-type directional fragmentation mine at the Myanmar Defense Products Industries No. 4 plant in Prome.⁴³ Explosives used in landmines are TNT, RDX, composition B, and C-4.⁴⁴

MORE LIKELY EXPLANATIONS?

- The SPDC did it to strengthen internal integrity. Speculations have been rife about the military's declining unity.⁴⁵
- It was an expression of tensions between Gen Maung Aye and "young guns" aligned with Sr Gen Than Shwe.⁴⁶
- It was done by disgruntled ex-MI agents angered by the loss of business interests and lengthy jails sentences imposed on their colleagues.
- It was the work of a new, secretive, anti-military group comprised of young activists frustrated at the opposition's anti-confrontational approach.

An analysis of the situation shows that the SPDC stands to benefit the most from the bombings.⁴⁷

- The SPDC can use the bombings as evidence of a "terrorist threat" inside Burma to justify its ongoing assaults against opposition groups and ethnic minorities.
- It offers an excuse to defer political reforms .

Toe Zaw Latt, a researcher from the Burma Fund, noted that Sr Gen Than Shwe's background in Psychological Warfare is an important factor to consider in the bombings and said, "He is especially skilled at projecting threats to the nation that appeal to the hearts and minds not only of ordinary soldiers but also middle-class Rangoon society."⁴⁸

Footnotes

- 1 Bangkok Post (13 May 05) Only junta has capacity for such careful planning
- 2 Xinhua (15 May 05) Myanmar charges superpower with being behind bomb attacks & Financial Times (May 17 05) Burma accuses foreigners of bomb attacks
- 3 Jane's Intelligence Review (Feb 1994) China's Arms Trade Bureaucracy
- 4 Andrew Selth (2000) Landmines in Burma: The Military Dimension available at <http://www.burmaproject.org/burmadebate/winter00landmines.html>
- 5 Irrawaddy (9 May 05) Many more than 11 thought dead in Rangoon bomb attacks
- 6 Mizzima News (17 May 06) Two Burmese students sentenced to death
- 7 AFP (21 Feb 06) Myanmar arrests student group member over 2005 bombings
- 8 AFP (08 Mar 06) Myanmar arrests ethnic rebel over small bombings
- 9 Irrawaddy (08 Mar 06) Taungoo Bombings—KNU Soldier Arrested
- 10 Xinhua (14 Apr 06) Myanmar charges 4 anti-gov't associations with terrifying country
- 11 Irrawaddy (27 Apr 06) NLD Under New Threat
- 12 Mizzima News (15 May 06) Burmese military blame Karen situation on KNU
- 13 Reuters (10 May 05) Myanmar urges vigilance as post-bomb rumours swirl
- 14 Irrawaddy (20 Apr 06) Explosions rock downtown Rangoon
- 15 and 16: DVB (19 Mar 05) Another bomb exploded in Rangoon
- 17 DVB (23 Mar 05) Student warriors warn three more blasts in Burma
- 18 Reuters (27 Apr 05) Myanmar junta blames rebels for Mandalay blast
- 19 The New Light of Myanmar (7 May 05) - Bomb explosions occur in Yangon due to inhumane acts committed by terrorists Bomb blasts at crowded sites left innocent people dead, injured
- 20 DVB (12 May 05) Another bomb exploded in upper Burma
- 21 Kyodo News (22 Oct 05) - Bomb explodes in front of Yangon hotel
- 22 DVB (23 Oct 05) No surprise: Burma junta blames exiled groups for blast in Rangoon
- 23 AP (04 Jan 06) Burma commemorates Independence Day
- 24 Mizz (09 Jan 06) One Killed in Burma border town blasts
- 25 Mizzima News (12 Jan 06) Burmese groups on India border deny bombing involvement
- 26 DVB (16 Jan 06) A bomb exploded at Burma's Taungoo station
- 27 Irrawaddy (01 Feb 06) Another Bomb Blast in Pegu Division
- 28 Mizzima News (03 Feb 06) Gas pipeline undamaged by explosions in Mon State
- 29 Mizzima News (14 Feb 06) Bomb explodes in Myawaddy
- 30 AFP (3 Mar 06) Small bombs hit central Myanmar, no injuries: report
- 31 Irrawaddy (20 Apr 06) Explosions rock downtown Rangoon
- 32 AP (06 May 06) Bomb explodes on rail line in Myanmar; no injuries reported
- 33 IHT (9 May 05) Myanmar junta and rebels spar after blasts kill 11
- 34 Reuters (10 May 05) Myanmar urges vigilance as post-bomb rumours swirl
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LOTS OF KYAT, NO RICE

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

The SPDC reported 12% growth in 2004, followed by 12.2% in 2005.¹ The Asian Development Bank's Annual Outlook, called this figure into question, pointing out that input use patterns (energy, fertilizers) suggest the contrary.²

Independent estimates suggest growth was negative in 2004 at -2.7% before making a moderate recovery to 1.5% in 2005.³ Sluggish growth is predicted to continue in 2006, rising to 2.5% in 2007 driven by extractive exploitation of oil and gas reserves.⁴

The agriculture and manufacturing sectors, Burma's main employers, remain weak without genuine investment, discouraging returns and an unpredictable investment climate.⁵

The props that are keeping the economy shakily upright – oil and gas revenues – are not keeping the population fed and clothed. Every arrest of ministers and purge of ministries only serves to underline the luxury that generals are able to sustain on their income of perks and bribes. The gap between the cost of living and income has widened further for ordinary citizens. The per capita annual income is estimated to be US\$225 (civil servant US\$240), but the price of an average meal is about US\$0.45.⁶

INFLATION

Inflation was back in double digits in 2005 and the first half of 2006 after a relatively stable 4.5% in 2004.⁷ In the first half of 2005 the unofficial exchange rate was steady at around 950 kyat to US\$1.⁸ It peaked at 1,300 kyat in November 2005, before stabilizing to 1,150 in March 2006. In April and May 2006 it hovered at around 1,300, sometimes reaching above 1,400.⁹

SPARE CHANGE?

On 30 September 2005 the military authorities introduced new currency notes of 1,000, 500 and 200 kyat denominations.¹⁰ Rumors spread across the country of an imminent demonetization program.¹¹ The price of gold, already up 25% since the sacking of former PM Khin Nyunt, went up again in the second week of November as people sought to dump currency and buy up other assets.¹² The exchange rate peaked in November at 1,300 kyat to US\$1.¹³

FUEL PRICES SOAR

In October 2005, the SPDC removed fuel subsidies, which along with inflation, increased fuel prices by almost 900%. The price of a gallon of fuel in November was 1,500 kyat, up from 180 kyat from the previous month.¹⁴ This put sharp inflationary pressure on the real price of food, energy and medicines.¹⁵

By the end of January 2006, the price of petrol had doubled again to 3,000 kyat per gallon.¹⁶

Essential transportation costs were one of the most immediately affected by the rising fuel costs. The cost of a bus fare between Akyab and Rangoon had risen from 8,000 to 12,000

The junta reports economic growth in double figures in 2005, but the ADB suggested "sluggish" growth might be a more accurate description.

The economy has reached all-time lows that mirror the conditions that were one of the triggers of the 1988 civil unrest.

Inflation was back in double digits after a relatively stable 2004. It first soared after a decision to increase fuel prices by more than 900%, then rocketed higher following the move of the capital to Pyinmana Naypyidaw and the ensuing crisis.

The junta's continues to cultivate favorable trade relations with ASEAN, India and China.

Increases in tourist arrivals were reported, but the majority were day-tripper border crossings from China and Thailand.

In a landmark case, Unocal agreed to settle lawsuits filed in the US for human rights violations committed during its involvement in a pipeline project in Burma. French oil giant Total settled out of court for US\$6.12 million.

Logging business profits are being diverted away from communities and armed opposition groups to the SPDC through changes in China's policy.

kyat by the end of December.¹⁷ The trend continued into 2006, with Rangoon university students finding their monthly transport costs rising from 3,000 kyat to 8,000 between May and June.¹⁸

Utility prices were also affected, with subsidies for water services removed. In August 2005, in Rangoon the price for a unit of water rose eightfold from 6.50 kyat to 55 kyat.¹⁹

THE COST OF FEEDING A FAMILY

The visit of WFP chief Jim Morris in August 2005 drew attention to the anomaly of widespread malnutrition in Burma during a time of rice surpluses, noting particular concern about the situation in Northern Arakan State.²⁰ Trade in rice is particularly stifled in Arakan state, and increasingly rice is being smuggled from Bangladesh in order to offset shortages.²¹ In targeted areas, rice and paddy are periodically confiscated, forcibly sold or prevented from being traded; forcing starving communities to relocate.²² [See Humanitarian Aid and Karen briefers]

The SPDC has continued its practice of withholding export licenses to growers in order to keep down the price. However, the restrictions are occasionally lifted in order to obtain foreign exchange, with the result of highly volatile domestic prices and unstable incomes for rice growers.²³

A SAMPLING OF FOOD PRICES

Rice: Price of a 50 kg bag of medium coarse rice went up from 9,500 - 10,000 kyat to 11,000 - 12,000 in two weeks. High quality rice went from 11,000 - 11,500 kyat to 13,000 - 14,000 kyat.²⁴ (End of December 2005, Northern Arakan State).²⁵

Price of a sack of low-quality rice increased from 1,500 to 5,000 kyat, and price of good quality rice doubled from 10,000 to 20,000 kyat in the first two months of 2006. (End of February, Rangoon).²⁶

Beef: price of one viss (1.6 kg) went up from 1,000 to 3,000 kyat in the first two months of 2006.²⁷

Fat: price of a can went from 11,400 kyat in January 2006 to 13,000 kyat in February 2006. (End of February, Moulmein).²⁸

In Ramree (Rambree) Island Township farmers who cannot fulfill their quotas are forced to purchase rice at the market price of 2,000 kyat a tin to sell to the regime at 350 kyat. As a result of increased rice quotas and a poor harvest as of 15 January only one out of 15 Townships in Arakan state had been able to meet most of the rice quota.²⁹

PYINMANA MOVE WREAKS HAVOC

The major driver of inflation throughout 2005-6 has been the big budget deficit. Beyond the usual inexplicable excesses of the junta, the move to Pyinmana Naypyidaw has come at a huge financial, as well as social, cost.

Unpaid bills

The move to Pyinmana Naypyidaw in November 2005 occurred well before facilities and infrastructure was ready. Civil servants and their families arrived under threat of imprisonment.³⁰ Reports emerged of civil servants camping on assembly hall floors, without access to safe drinking water.³¹ [See "Bunkered"]

Six months have passed and some buildings have appeared, but the SPDC is reported to not have the millions of US dollars it owes in unpaid installments to contractors involved in building and infrastructure projects at Pyinmana Naypyidaw. The building is likely to continue at its own pace however, with junta favorites Tay Za and "former" opium kingpin Lo Hsing Han in charge of the "public works".³²

Prices soar (again)

The forced relocation of high-ranking civil servants to Pyinmana Naypyidaw cut people off from their main sources of income – their sideline businesses. These civil servants have historically supplemented their inadequate salaries with entrenched and locally accepted petty- and not-so-petty corruption.³³ (Transparency International study 2005 rates Burma amongst the most corrupt 5 countries in the world.³⁴)

On 25 March 2006, in an effort to suppress the anger of these public servants, and to counter the risk of desertions, the SPDC announced a 10-fold salary increase to go into effect on 1 April.³⁵ Published wage increases ranged from 1,000% for top-ranked to 500% for the lowest paid.³⁶ Burma economists estimated that the junta would need about 100 billion kyat (US\$71,500,000) to implement the wage hike, the bulk of the financing coming from printing money.³⁷

The day following the announced salary increases, gold prices in Burma had jumped from 340,000 kyat per tical (1.63 grams) to 390,000 kyat per tical.³⁸ In late April, the increases in cost of commodities in Burma from the previous month were noted as follows:

- Petrol prices jumped from 2,400 to 3600 kyat per gallon,³⁹
- Diesel fuel increased from 3,000 to 4,200 kyat per gallon,⁴⁰
- Gold went from 350,000 to 450,000 kyat per tical,⁴¹ and
- The value of the kyat on the black market dropped from 1,150 for US\$1 to 1,435 for US\$1.⁴²

Having to adjust their own budgets for inflation, the SPDC energy authority increased the fee for electricity 10 times.⁴³ One unit of electricity was raked up from 2.50 kyat to 25 kyat.⁴⁴ The preferential pricing scheme for civil servants – that sold electricity at 0.50 kyat per unit – was also removed.⁴⁵ Residents report that the additional fee has not brought better services, and that the supply remains irregular.⁴⁶ Businesses were also affected, with the industrial price raised to 50 kyat.⁴⁷

The SPDC also set up a committee in April 2006 that had the task of controlling prices of basic food items in Rangoon division. Its approach appeared to be issuing warnings or revoking licenses of traders who were judged to be raising the price of essential food items "excessively".⁴⁸ Arrests of currency traders and businesses that attempt to hedge against currency fluctuations have done nothing to encourage entrepreneurs.⁴⁹

Real estate prices have also been affected, with the price for 100-150 square feet in downtown Pyinmana Naypyidaw rising from 10 million kyat in 2005 to more than 100 million kyat in 2006.⁵⁰ In Rangoon, prices plummeted, in some cases by half.⁵¹

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

The junta continues to aggressively pursue sources of foreign capital in China, India and Russia [See "China, India & Russia"]. In spite of this, foreign investment dropped slightly by 11.6% in 2005 to US\$113 million from US\$128 million in 2004, with the bulk of funds directed at the oil and gas markets and manufacturing.⁵²

According to Rangoon-based Weekly Eleven News, the junta's Foreign Investment Commission lists the following foreign investment figures for 2005.

Top Investors (Out of 27 in total)⁵³

1. Singapore - \$1.572 billion spread across 72 projects
2. Britain - US\$1.431 billion across 38 projects
3. Thailand - \$1.341 billion invested in 55 projects
4. Malaysia
5. Hong Kong

Investment Sectors⁵⁴

1. Oil and Gas - US\$2.494 billion or 32.69% (Thailand's PTTEP and Malaysia's Petronas are the two largest investors)
2. Manufacturing - US\$1.61 billion
3. Real Estate - US\$1.025 billion
4. Mining - US\$534.19 million

Foreign investment in Agriculture, which promises the most potential for passing on a direct return to the people, with 60% of the country's population dependent on it, amounted to just US\$34.35 million.⁵⁵

TRADE

Burma has enjoyed a trade surplus in the past four consecutive years (since 2002-03) despite fluctuation in the trade volume, which jumped from US\$3.8 billion in 2000-01 to US\$5.07 billion in 2001-02, to US\$5.3 billion in 2002-03, down to US\$4.5 billion in 2003-04 and picked up to US\$4.9 billion in 2004-05.⁵⁶

Trade remains a relatively small proportion of GDP at around 1-2% (including border trade). Exports are dominated by extractive oil, gas and other natural resources at levels that are unsustainable in the mid and long term.⁵⁷

Additionally, the surplus can be accounted for by the fact that the SPDC calculates the kyat at a constant price instead of current/market price - about the only advantage to be taken of rampant inflation.

SPDC accounts calculate Burma's total exports at US\$3.5 billion in 2005-06, up from US\$2.9 in 2004-05, with a trade surplus of US\$1.6 billion.⁵⁸ Burma's trade within ASEAN is mainly with Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Thailand

Trade between Thailand and Burma reached a record 90.4 billion Thai Baht (US\$2.4 billion) in the first eleven months of 2005, an increase of more than 17% from the total for the previous year.⁵⁹

Much of this is natural gas that Thailand imports from Burma, contributing to a substantial trade deficit for Thailand of approximately US\$1.57 billion for 2005.⁶⁰ Thailand generates about 70% of its electricity from natural gas, much of which comes from Burma.⁶¹ Thailand's energy interests have led it to invest considerably in infrastructure in Burma.

According to Thai Customs Department statistics, Thailand also imports about US\$49 million worth of fish, US\$90 million worth of timber and US\$76.4 million worth of copper from Burma. Through the first 11 months of 2005, Thailand exported 25.5 billion Thai Baht (US\$674 million) in goods to Burma, consisting mostly of vehicles, steel, electronics and palm oil.⁶² Thailand was Burma's biggest export partner in 2006, making up nearly a third of all exports.⁶³ 15.1% of all Burma's imports came from Thailand.⁶⁴

India

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India is ranked as the second most important market for Burma exports and the seventh most important source of its im-

Foreign investment dropped slightly by 11.6% in 2005 from 2004, with the bulk of funds directed at the oil and gas markets and manufacturing.

Meanwhile, investment in the agricultural sector, which employs 60% of the country's population, amounted to just US\$34.35 million.

Trade remains a relatively small proportion of GDP at around 1-2% (including border trade). Exports are dominated by extractive oil, gas and other natural resources at levels that are unsustainable in the mid and long term.

The trade surplus enjoyed by the SPDC can be accounted for by its practice of calculating kyat at a constant price instead of the current/market price - about the only advantage to be taken of rampant inflation.

ports in the fiscal year of 2004-05.⁶⁵ In 2005-06, 9.3% of Burma's exports went to India.⁶⁶ Burma and India are working together in the areas of agriculture, telecommunications, oil and gas sectors and increasing business-to-business interactions in the private sector.⁶⁷ On 10 April 2005, the India Commerce Ministry opened a foreign trade office in Imphal, Manipur. The opening of the office was designed to promote border trade between India and Burma.⁶⁸

Malaysia, Indonesia

The Minister of International Trade and Industry Datin Seri Rafidah Aziz has renewed **Malaysia's** commitment to further increase bilateral trade with Burma in 2006.⁶⁹

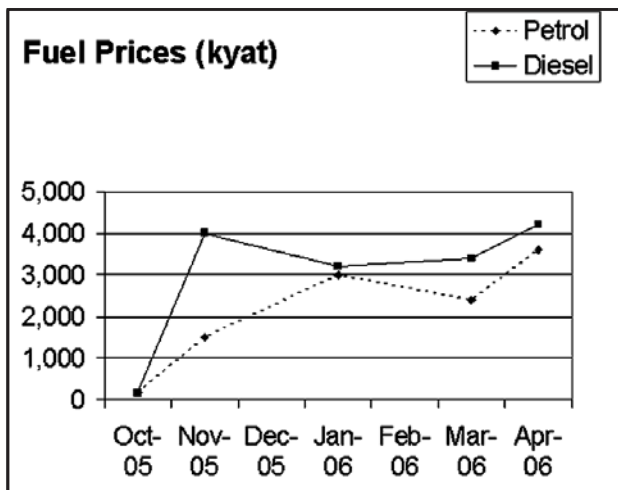
Bilateral trade between **Indonesia** and Burma was \$77.7 million in 2004, with imports from Indonesia at \$60.3 million, according to Statistics Indonesia.⁷⁰

China

Officially, trade doubled in the five years to 2004, reaching US\$1.1 billion.⁷¹ In 2004, 13.85% of Burma's exports were destined for China and more than 25% of total imports to Burma came from China.⁷² In 2005, China was Burma's largest source of imports accounting for 28.5% of total imports to Burma.⁷³ By 2006, China had increased its share of imports to Burma to 31.1% and reduced its share of exports to 5.8%.⁷⁴

ASEAN-CHINA LIBERALIZATION

On 29 November 2005 **ASEAN** leaders agreed to a 6-year program to fast-track trade liberalization and regional integration. The six-year plan aims to remove tariffs on products by 2010 for ASEAN's six more-developed members - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The group's less-developed members - Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Vietnam - will have until 2015 to drop their tariffs. ASEAN members also signed a separate agreement to liberalize tariffs in 11 key sectors, including autos, textiles and electronics, by 2007 for their six more-developed members and 2012 for the other four.⁷⁵



On the same day, Southeast Asian nations and **China** signed an accord to create the world's biggest free trade area by removing tariffs for their two billion people by decade's end.⁷⁶

SANCTIONS

The **US** extended its economic sanctions on Burma on 18 May 2006, claiming the military rulers presented an "extraordinary and unusual threat" to US security and foreign policy.⁷⁷ The **EU** maintained its limited sanctions, extending them on 27 April 2006 for another year "in view of the current political situation."⁷⁸

VOLUNTARY PULL-OUTS

Some private foreign investors have withdrawn of their own accord. Forty percent of the South Korean textile firms have left in the last 3 years, citing currency controls, power shortages, and poor infrastructure.⁷⁹

DHL, the global parcel-carrier, announced in May 2006 that it will not renew its joint venture with the junta since 1997 which is set to expire at the end of 2006.

Companies that withdrew in 2005 included Outdoor Clothing company "Gill" and travel companies Austrian Airlines, Easttravel and Frommers Guides.⁸⁰

TOURISM

Official statistics show that there were 666,000 tourist visits to Burma in 2005, bringing US\$153 million to the country.⁸¹

The numbers were up slightly from 2004's 657,000 visits.⁸² However, it's estimated that 60% were "day visitors" crossing the border from China and Thailand, spending their time in Chinese-owned businesses and casinos, and offering little opportunity for income returns to the wider economy.⁸³

In the meantime, local hoteliers in October 2005 launched a drive to develop resorts along Burma's undiscovered beaches "to attract more international travelers". Other projects include the opening by April 2005 of 10 hotels in Ngapali, Burma's best-known beach destination, northwest of Rangoon, and the approval given for 20 new resorts south of Ngapali.⁸⁴

EXPLOITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Logging Industry

From 2005-07, the SPDC's stated goal is to export 600 tons of sculptures and 300 tons of furniture to China as part of a contract for value-added wood products.⁸⁵ Illegal but entrenched (and highly profitable) logging of teak continues between Wa, Kachin and Shan communities and Chinese businesses.⁸⁶ The proliferating logging industry, both legal and illegal, has not only had devastating environmental consequences but also has caused the displacement of villagers as well as the use of forced labor.⁸⁷

The 1.5 million cubic meters of timber delivered to China in 2005 is estimated to have been worth US\$350 million.⁸⁸

After a long campaign by environmental groups, China announced its intention to clamp down on illegal logging in May 2006, tightening its borders and ordering Chinese workers to leave Burma. But the SPDC has had a role in this change of policy as much as the international shame campaign of the NGOs. The SPDC's favorite business mogul Tay Za's Htoo Trading Company had bought out a logging concession earlier in 2006 only to discover that the area had already been stripped of the higher value hardwoods. Arrests of Chinese timber merchants followed, causing a diplomatic stir.⁸⁹ The real outcome of this change in policy is that only "legal", i.e. SPDC-controlled through Myanmar Timber Enterprise, logging will continue.⁹⁰

The real losers here, along with the forests themselves, are the communities that live in forested areas. These communities depend on forests for their livelihoods, and many are likely to be relocated with the change in control of the business transferring from the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) to the SPDC.⁹¹

Additionally, the KIO, as well as being the area's opposition group, is the main provider of social services to villagers, delivered through logging profits.⁹² It is expected that the industry will be used to divide opposition groups by trading loyalty for logging permits.⁹³

Total and UNOCAL

In 2005 two groundbreaking settlements involving multinational oil companies Total and Unocal set significant precedents for corporate social responsibility. Unocal and Total agreed to compensate two groups of villagers from ethnic areas in southern Burma for the serious human rights violations suffered in the mid-1990s at the hands of the SPDC military. The army was providing security during the construction of the Yadana natural gas pipeline by both multinationals. Plaintiffs had alleged that Unocal and Total must have known that human rights violations, including forced labor, rape and murder, were occurring.⁹⁴

Unocal settles human rights suit

At the end of January 2005, Unocal finally agreed to settle lawsuits filed in the U.S. court system concerning the company's responsibility for systematic human rights violations and abuses, carried out by the SPDC military stationed along the pipeline in Burma. The settlement marks a milestone in the

use of the US justice system to put on trial human rights violators. Although the details of the settlement are confidential, Unocal is expected to pay about \$30 million to compensate 15 plaintiffs and establish a fund to improve the living conditions, health care, and education in the pipeline region.⁹⁵

Total Oil

French oil giant Total settled out-of-court for US\$6.12 million with 12 claimants in November 2005. In agreeing to the settlement Total denied any admissions regarding the use of forced labor, conceding only that it was “socially responsible” for the situation that it “found” there.⁹⁶ The funds cover compensation to individuals, as well as “social works” in border areas for displaced persons.⁹⁷

At least two major NGOs refused the multi-million dollar funding package, citing ethical considerations in accepting being funded by a company that ignores human rights considerations.⁹⁸ Doubts continue as to how much of the money touted will be implemented, as well as the sincerity of the gesture whilst the corporation maintains its presence. Some claim that the compensation will lead to further finances flowing back to the regime.⁹⁹

The campaign against Total continues, with European consumer, legislator and investment groups raising their concerns.¹⁰⁰ Together with Malaysia’s state oil company Petronas, the companies provided the regime with an estimated US\$1 billion in revenue in 2005. This is money into the generals’ pockets and guns into the hands of SPDC troops, while the gas flows mostly to Thailand.¹⁰¹

Power to the People?

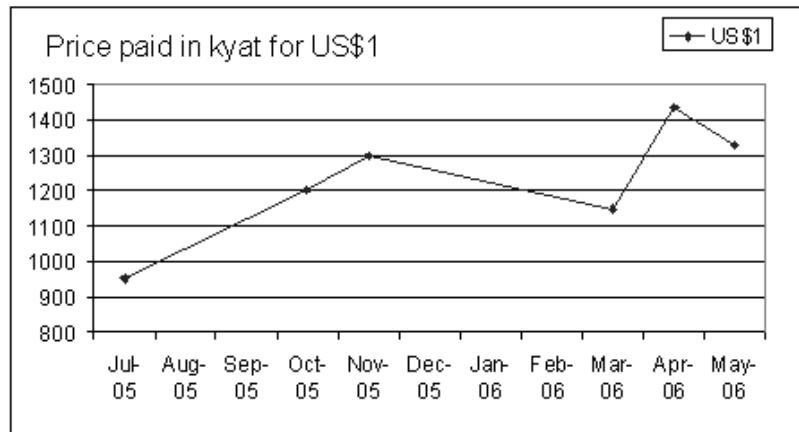
The least likely outcome of the presence of oil corporations inside Burma is that communities will receive reliable and affordable power. As it is, only 5% of the population has access to the electricity network at all.¹⁰² The new capital has been blamed for diverting already unpredictable supplies away from the commercial center Rangoon.¹⁰³ Residents and businesses face regular blackouts despite huge outlays, and developments in regional areas have only served to supply military bases.¹⁰⁴ [see “Bunkered”]

Vehicle changeover

Unable to face the prospect of rising world oil prices, the SPDC was reportedly planning to convert all petrol or diesel-operated engines in the country into natural-gas-fired ones.¹⁰⁵ Huge areas of land have been cleared of traditional cropping to make way for physic nut and jatropa plantations for biofuel,¹⁰⁶ with the intention of reducing the import of US\$200 million diesel and crude per year.¹⁰⁷

Shwe Projects

In cooperation with Burma’s military junta, a consortium of Indian and Korean corporations is currently exploring gas fields off the coast of Arakan State. These fields - labeled A-1, or “Shwe”, the Burmese word for gold - are expected to



hold one of the largest gas yields in Southeast Asia and could well become the military regime’s largest single source of foreign income. However, there is no evidence that ethnic communities will derive any direct benefit from the project; rather, it is feared that the ethnic population will be negatively impacted, as the “Shwe project” provides an excuse to further militarize and exploit the frontier areas of Arakan and Chin States. [see “China, India and Russia”]

Salween projects

On 9 December 2005 Burma’s military junta and the State-owned Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) signed a Memorandum of Understanding that paves the way for the construction of five dams inside Burma and along the Thai-Burma border on the Salween and Tenasserim Rivers. Thailand is increasingly energy-dependent on Burma.¹⁰⁸

The first structure on the Salween will be the Hat Gyi dam at Haygui in Karen State. However, damming the river poses a threat to the livelihoods of all local ethnic communities all along the river that passes through Karen, Karrenni, Mon and Shan States.¹⁰⁹

Despite public pressure and questions raised over the legality of the EGAT deal, Thailand’s MDX group signed a 15-year, US\$6 billion agreement with the SPDC in April 2006 to build a new 7,110 megawatt Ta Song hydropower plant on the Salween in Shan State.¹¹⁰

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- 104 Irr (07 Apr 05) Rangoon Residents Still in the Dark; Narinjara (11 May 05) Three hydro-power plants are being built in Arakan
- 105 Xinhua (17 Oct 04) Myanmar to change all automobiles into gas-fired ones
- 106 IMNA (25 May 06) Residents plant physic nuts in front of homes
- 107 Xinhua (18 Jan 06) Myanmar eyes physic nut oil as fuel to help solve oil crisis
- 108 Mizzima (15 Dec 06) Burma's Salween dams threaten environment, livelihoods
- 109 and 100: AP (04 Apr 06) Burma and Thailand sign a 6 billion US\$ hydropower plant agreement

CHINA, INDIA & RUSSIA: THE SPDC'S STRATEGIC PARTNERS

CHINA: ONLY INTERESTED IN ECONOMIC "INTERFERENCE"

China's approach of ignoring political instability and human rights violations in the pursuit of economic interests has been characterised by such interactions as the following:

In December 2005, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao told his SPDC counterpart Gen Soe Win that China would maintain its policy of non-interference in Burma's internal affairs. In a meeting on the sidelines of the East-Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Wen said the Burmese government and people should tackle the "situation" by themselves, "while the international community should provide constructive help to them."¹

In 2005, China was Burma's largest source of imports accounting for 28.5% of total imports to Burma.²

In 2004, 13.85% of Burma's exports were destined for China. China is currently the 11th largest foreign investor in Burma and has plans to invest an additional US\$203.52 million in 25 new projects.³

China's trade with Burma reached US\$119,377,000 in April 2005, and trade in January-April reached US\$394,955,000, up 7.2% for the year.⁴

INDIA: TURNING INTO ANOTHER CHINA?

In its eagerness to compete with China, the democratically elected Indian government apparently has no qualms about adopting the same ethical standards as its arch rival:

"Our basic principle is to live in peaceful co-existence and we do not believe in exporting ideologies. It is for the people of the country to decide what type of government they would like to have." – Statement of India Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee in response to a question in why India was not pressing Burma to undertake democratic reforms.⁵

On 12 May 2006, the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry stated that India and Burma agreed to expand and diversify bilateral trade to US\$ one billion by the end of 2006.

India is ranked as the second most important market for Burma exports and the seventh most important source of its imports in the fiscal year of 2004-05.

Burma and India are working together in the agriculture, telecommunications, oil and gas sectors and increasing business-to-business interactions in the private sector.⁶

Burma remains the biggest exporter of beans and pulses in Southeast Asia. It exports the crop mainly to India, followed by Japan and ASEAN member countries.⁷

The SPDC has skillfully played off China and India by exploiting their traditional political and economic rivalries.

This has enabled the SPDC to gain much needed trade revenue, military aid, and technology, as well as substantial amounts of foreign investment and lines of credit from both China and India.

India's concern for democratic reform and protection of human rights in Burma has been largely overshadowed by its economic and geopolitical concerns.

Ironically, China and India's rivalry has blinded them to the fact that their unconditional engagement with the SPDC is perpetuating the conditions that lead to the growth of HIV/AIDs, drug trafficking, human trafficking and organized crime in their respective countries. It is also allowing the regime to delay political and economic reforms needed to make Burma a stable economic partner.

After China, Russia is the junta's number two supplier of military hardware and technology.

The SPDC is counting on its relations with China and Russia to prevent the adoption of a resolution on Burma by the UN Security Council.

China is thought to be using its influence on other UN Security Council members to block the tabling of a resolution on Burma. China is apparently reluctant to use its veto power. Doing so would force them to openly protect the SPDC, putting China at odds with ASEAN.

SPDC RELATIONS WITH CHINA & INDIA

During the past 18 months, the SPDC has enjoyed improved diplomatic relations with both India and China which has resulted in significant trade agreements and lines of credit. Both India and China have been courting the SPDC in order to win the battle over Burma's oil and gas resources and to protect their respective economic, political, and national security interests.

The junta benefits enormously from this rivalry. Confident in China and India's backing, the junta has been able to side-step increased calls for democratic reform from its ASEAN neighbors. India, as the world's largest democracy, has deliberately turned a blind eye to the ongoing human rights abuses in Burma in order to pursue its economic agenda and its "look east" diplomatic initiatives with the SPDC.

HOW SPDC WINS THE RACE

CHINA

Trade and Diplomacy

On 27 April 2005, SPDC FM U Nyan Win departed for Beijing for a 4-day visit aimed at promoting traditional and friendly ties between the two countries.⁸

On 29 April 2005, during talks with his SPDC counterpart, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said China is ready to step up efforts to promote bilateral ties with Burma.⁹

On 4 July 2005, trade representatives from Burma and China signed \$290 million worth of bilateral trade contracts and memoranda in a ceremony in Kunming, China.¹⁰

On 11 April 2006, SPDC officials from the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Transport, and the Department of Border Trade, as well as a 60-strong Chinese delegation opened a new China-Burma border economic zone at Muse, Shan State.¹¹

On 19 April 2006, a SPDC delegation led by the Deputy FM Kyaw Thu left for Beijing to discuss timber and mining issues with Chinese officials.¹²

From 14-18 February 2006, a SPDC delegation led by PM Gen Soe Win, paid an official visit to China. Eight pacts, covering areas such as energy, information technology and agriculture, were signed. Other deals signed covered air links, economic technological cooperation, a credit arrangement for fertilizer and an MoU to build an "information highway" in Burma.¹³

Oil and Gas

On 19 October 2005, SPDC PM Gen Soe Win, speaking at the opening ceremony of 2nd China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit held in Nanning, China, hoped for more trade and investment from China to Burma and suggested investment in the hydroelectric and oil and gas sector.¹⁴

On 7 December 2005, the SPDC Ministry of Energy signed an MoU with China's PetroChina for the sale of 6.5 trillion cubic feet of gas from Burma's A-1 block over the next 30 years. The gas will be transported via pipeline to Kunming.¹⁵

ASEAN

On 27 July 2005, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing cut short his meeting with the 24-member ASEAN Regional Forum in Vientiane and departed for Rangoon.¹⁶ Given the timing, which coincided with fierce lobbying for enlargement of the UN Security Council, there were strong grounds to believe that Li's quick departure for Rangoon was linked. Many knowledgeable sources now say his main mission was to secure the SPDC's vote against Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.¹⁷

On 14 December 2005, in a meeting on the sidelines of the East-Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao told his SPDC counterpart, Gen Soe Win, that China would maintain its policy of non-interference in Burma's internal affairs.¹⁸

Economic Aid

On 10 June 2006, it was reported that China had signed an agreement to provide Burma with a special low-interest loan. A Chinese embassy official said the loan was for US\$200 million in buyer's credit.¹⁹

INDIA

Trade and Diplomacy

On 25 March 2005, Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh visited Burma and met with his SPDC counterpart Nyan Win.²⁰

On 19 October 2005, SPDC Deputy Foreign Minister, Kyaw Thu, arrived in New Delhi to discuss bilateral relations. Kyaw Thu met with his Indian counterpart External Affairs Ministry Secretary Shyam Saran.²¹

On 11 March 2006, Indian President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam said that a "systematic" and "synergetic" policy had to be drawn up for strongly favoring a trade volume between Burma and India at around US\$ two billion in the next three years.²²

Military Cooperation

On 2 November 2005, SPDC Chair, Sr Gen Than Shwe, met with visiting Indian Chief of Army Staff Gen Joginder Jaswant Singh. The meeting took place at the conclusion of Singh's five-day goodwill visit to enhance military ties with Burma.²³

On 12 February 2005, India and Burma signed an agreement to suppress terrorism through information sharing on subversive activity, drug trafficking, and gun running.

On 8 March 2006, Burma and India signed three agreements, including one that committed the Indian government to providing Burma with access to its remote sensing data from Indian satellites at subsidized rates. In the petroleum sector the two countries agreed to enhance cooperation in the exploration of Burma's offshore reserves and confirmed that Burma would treat India as a "preferential buyer" of its natural gas exports.²⁴

On 20 April 2006, SPDC and Indian military officials agreed to extend co-ordination and strengthen joint intelligence mechanisms during a meeting in India.²⁵

Oil and Gas

On 10 January 2006, Ajay Tyagi, India's Joint Secretary (Gas), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas cut short his visit to Burma and returned to India after he was informed that the SPDC Energy Ministry signed an MoU with PetroChina on 7 December 2005 for sale of 6.5 trillion cubic feet of gas from Block A-1 reserve over 30 years.²⁶

On 8 March 2006, Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam arrived in Rangoon.²⁷ During the visit, SPDC officials signed an energy co-operation deal with India identical to one it agreed to in the previous year with China²⁸

Economic Aid

According to a news report dated 20 June 2006, the Export and Import Bank of India is likely to extend a US\$20 million loan to the SPDC for modernization of a refinery project. "An agreement is scheduled to be signed for the US\$20 million Line of Credit to Myanmar within a couple of weeks," a senior Exim Bank official said.²⁹

OIL & GAS: WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS?

According to the SPDC Foreign Investment Commission, the oil and natural gas sector dominates Burma's foreign investment, accounting for US\$2.635 billion out of a total of US\$7.785 billion of contracted foreign investment as of January 2006.

With three main large offshore and 19 onshore oil and gas fields, Burma has a total of 87 trillion cubic-feet (TCF) or 2.46 trillion cubic-meters (TCM) of gas reserve and 3.2 billion barrels of recoverable crude oil reserve. Latest official figures show that in the first quarter of 2005-06 ending in March, Burma generated 2.1 million barrels of crude oil and 2.98 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas. Gas exports during the period were 3.227 BCM, earning US\$ 359 million. In the fiscal year of 2004-2005, Burma produced 7.48 million barrels of crude oil and 10.69 BCM of gas. Over US\$1 billion was gained from exporting 9.5 BCM of the gas production.³⁰

INDIA'S STALLED PIPELINE OPENS DOOR FOR SPDC/CHINA GAS DEAL

India's plan to build a pipeline from Burma through Bangladesh has been blocked because of Bangladesh's demands for key concessions.³² Bangladesh agreed in principle to the project in June 2004, but nothing tangible has happened since.³³ India refused to address Bangladesh's claims on grounds that it is improper to address bilateral issues in a tri-lateral agreement between Burma, India and Bangladesh.³⁴ The impasse caused India to begin feasibility studies to implement the pipeline project without the need to transverse Bangladeshi territory.³⁵ It has also requested bids from shipping companies on transporting liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or compressed natural gas (CNG) from Burma's offshore oil fields.³⁶

The Burma-India pipeline project delay seemed to prompt China to assert its presence in Burma's oil and gas sector. On 24 November 2005, China Oilfield Services announced that it would provide offshore drilling services to Daewoo's Burma operations as part of a US\$6 million deal.³⁷ On 7 December 2005 the SPDC Ministry of Energy signed a MoU with China's PetroChina for the sale of 6.5 trillion cubic feet of gas from Burma's A-1 block over the next 30 years. The gas will be transported via a pipeline to Kunming.³⁸

Then, on 16 January 2006, China Oil Field Services Limited announced a deal to provide drilling services at three sites at the onshore Block M in Arakan State. The contracts are worth RMB 40 million (US \$4.9 million) in total.³⁹ The Burma-China pipeline became more of a reality on 17 April 2006 when the state-owned China Business newspaper reported that China's National Development and Reform Commission approved an oil pipeline project linking Akyab in Burma's Arakan State to Kunming in the Chinese province of Yunnan.⁴⁰

India first learned of the Burma/China December 2005 gas deal in early January 2006 when Ajay Tyagi, the Joint Secretary of India's Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, was in Rangoon for discussions with the SPDC. Upon learning the news Mr. Tyagi cut short his trip and returned to India.

"In the longer term such monies allow the regime more breathing space to keep at bay the fundamental reforms the country requires." — Dr Sean Turnell, Burma Economic Watch, Macquarie University, Australia.³¹

To allay India's evident anger over the SPDC/China pipeline agreement, SPDC Chairman, Sr Gen Than Shwe extended an olive branch to the Indian Government and invited India's President to visit Rangoon. India accepted. On 8 March 2006 Indian President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, became the first Indian President to visit Rangoon and the highest level visit from India since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi traveled to Rangoon in December 1987.⁴¹

The visit was a very profitable event for the SPDC. President Kalam's visit saw India and the SPDC ink an agreement to provide gas to India along the same lines contained in the SPDC/China deal.⁴² India also agreed to give the SPDC access to images and data from its satellites and pledged enhanced cooperation in surveying Burma's offshore for gas and oil reserves.⁴³

CHINA & INDIA FUEL THE SPDC MILITARY

China

According to sources close to the SPDC Air Force, a team of high-ranking SPDC officials led by Air Force Commander, Lt Gen Myat Hein, secretly went to China during the week of 18 April 2005 to discuss the procurement of spare parts for fighter jets and the upgrading of the SPDC Air Force.⁴⁴

On 18 May 2005, sources from the SPDC military reported that more than 100 six-wheeled Chinese military trucks were ready to be transferred to the SPDC from Ruili in Yunnan province. It was the third time the Chinese army trucks have been sent to Burma within a year.⁴⁵ On 24-25 May, it was reported more than 200 Chinese-made military trucks bought by the military regime had crossed the border arriving in the northern Shan State town of Muse, from Ruili in Yunnan province.⁴⁶ On 7 August 2005, it was reported that 100 more military trucks were imported through Ruili.⁴⁷

India

A consignment of communication equipment was presented to SPDC officials during the visit of Indian Navy Chief Arun Prakash to Rangoon on 19-22 January 2006.⁴⁸ During the visit, Burma's military regime proposed the creation of navy bases in Burma where the Indian Navy could train SPDC Navy personnel in the use of weaponry, sensors, engineering, and offshore operations.⁴⁹ The last part of the military aid package involved the sale of British-made BN-2 Islander aircraft, a twin-engine light aircraft used mostly for survey and reconnaissance work, to Burma.⁵⁰ Despite protests from the UK Government over the sale, the Indian Navy says it is going ahead with the aircraft transfer at "friendship prices".⁵¹

"Expanding multilateral cooperation with Myanmar is one of the most important directions of Russia's foreign policy in South-East Asia." - spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry.⁵²

Andrey Denisov, Russia's UN ambassador, called the situation in Burma "difficult," but "we don't see any threats to international peace and security."⁵³

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE: MORE WEAPONS FOR THE SPDC

Russia's biggest arms trader, Rosoboronexport opened an office in Burma towards the end of 2005. Dir Gen Sergei Chemezov said, "We open representations in the countries that show direct interest in procurement of Russian weapons. Wherever we see such interest, we send our representative there immediately to establish relations with the Defense Ministry or other uniformed agencies, offering our technical and commercial projects and informing of the Russian armament and military hardware."⁵⁴

SPDC Vice-Chairman, Gen Maung Aye visited Russia in the first week of April accompanied by high-ranking officers and business tycoon, Tay Za.

After China, Russia is said to be the second biggest supplier of arms to Burma.⁵⁵ Gen Maung Aye's trip was the first visit to Russia by a senior Burmese military leader in over four decades.⁵⁶ During the visit, SPDC Foreign Minister Nyan Win met his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on 3 April 2006 as part of a series of talks covering trade, energy and military affairs.

A spokesman for the Russian foreign minister said, "Russian business is evincing interest in prospecting and mining useful minerals in Myanmar, as well as in the development of the country's hydraulic power system, transport and communication services. In demand in Russia are such Myanmar-produced goods as rubber, rice, fruits, sea products and ready-made garments."⁵⁷

Gen Maung Aye called on Russian companies to invest in his country: "We have rubber, gas and oil, and there are many opportunities for cooperation in production."⁵⁸ On 3 April 2006, Gen Maung Aye held wide-ranging negotiations with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov and other senior Russian officials.

During the negotiations, Russia reportedly agreed to supply a wide range of arms including air defense systems and MiG-29 fighters to Burma in exchange for access to the rich oil and gas resources.⁵⁹ In addition, Russia's Zarubezhneft oil company inked a memorandum of understanding with the SPDC Energy Ministry.⁶⁰

THE TRUE COSTS

Both India and China are being negatively impacted by the spread of HIV/AIDS to its people from Burma. The spread of HIV/AIDS is directly linked to the production, smuggling and use of heroin and amphetamines from Burma.

A recent report released by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) and the Indian government said, "Drug trafficking across the common border of Myanmar and the northeastern state of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland occurs with ease. Despite the existence of heavy security, heroin does transit the border and is therefore accessible to the local youths of these states."

The report added that HIV has assumed the proportion of a 'generalized epidemic' among injecting drug users in Manipur and Nagaland. The report noted a pattern of HIV infection and stated: 'Northeastern states which are distant from the Myanmar border have generally reported fewer episodes of heroin injecting compared to the states which are closer to the border. Thus, there is a direct correlation between proximity to the border and drug abuse. Injecting drug users represent a significant incubus for the indirect spread of HIV to people who have never used drugs.'

India's northeast - Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Tripura - has been declared as one of the country's high-risk zones with close to 100,000 people infected with HIV.⁶¹

China is suffering a similar fate. Its HIV infection rate is also rising. According to a joint survey by China's Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, there were 25,000 deaths and 70,000 new cases in 2005, transmitted primarily through injecting drug use and unprotected sex.

Yunnan state, which borders Burma, is among the worst-hit provinces. The so-called Burma Road, a trade lifeline which links the Yunnanese capital of Kunming with the northern Burmese city of Mandalay, is a major transmission route, an "AIDS highway" plied by thousands of truckers every day. In short, Burma is fueling an epidemic in a country too huge and populous for the world to safely ignore.⁶²

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL DYNAMIC

To date, both Russia and China have provided the SPDC with political backing at the UNSC. [see "UNSC: Grip Tightens"]

However, some analysts believe that China will avoid using its veto power by "persuading" other countries on the Security Council not to support the tabling of a resolution on Burma. By avoiding the use of its veto power, China will be able to avoid placing itself at odds with ASEAN where the sentiment for UN involvement in Burma is growing.

While India is not a UNSC member, its position on Burma appears to be in a state of flux. As more Indian parliamentarians challenge India's support of the SPDC, India's policies can be changed. A convergence of political dynamics in the region and the world would enable the UNSC to act on Burma.

Footnotes

- 1 Irrawaddy (15 Dec 05) Chinese PM Reiterates Non-Interference in Burma
- 2 http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/burma/burma_brief.html
- 3 NLM (23 Oct 05) Further promote Myanmar- PRC trade and investment
- 4 Xinhua (29 Jun 05) China's trade with Myanmar in Apr. 2005
- 5 AFP (3 Jun 06) New Delhi will not meddle with Myanmar: Indian defence minister
- 6 Xinhua (12 May 06) India, Myanmar vow to enhance bilateral trade
- 7 Xinhua (1 Dec 05) Myanmar extends beans, pulses cultivation to boost production
- 8 Xinhua (27 Apr 05) Myanmar FM begins China visit
- 9 Xinhua (29 Apr 05) China to further relations with Myanmar: Chinese FM
- 10 Kyodo News Service (9 July 2005) Myanmar, China sign \$290 mil. trade deals
- 11 Mizzima News (11 April 06) New trade zone opens on China-Burma border
- 12 Mizzima News (20 Apr 06) Burmese deputy FM visits China
- 13 AFP (14 Feb 06) Myanmar PM secures economic deals with ally China
- 14 NLM (23 Oct 05) Further promote Myanmar- PRC trade and investment
- 15 Mizzima News (12 Jan 06) Pipeline future uncertain after Burma reneges on gas deal with India
- 16 Irrawaddy (28 July 2005) Rangoon and Beijing's quiet diplomacy
- 17 Bangkok Post (2 Aug 05) Burma opens up to the UN
- 18 Irrawaddy (15 Dec 05) Chinese PM Reiterates Non-Interference in Burma
- 19 AP (10 Jun 06) China signs pact to provide Myanmar with US\$200 million loan
- 20 AFP (25 Mar 05) Indian FM Singh holds talks in Myanmar
- 21 Mizzima News (19 Oct 05) - Burma 's deputy FM visits India
- 22 Narinjara News (12 Mar 06) Burma-India trade volume projected at \$2b
- 23 Xinhua (2 Nov 05) Myanmar top leader meets Indian chief of army staff
- 24 DPA (10 Mar 06) India boosts cooperate with Myanmar
- 25 Mizzima News (21 Apr 06) India and Burma armies agree on coordination
- 26 Asia Pulse (11 Jan 06) Myanmar declines to supply gas to India, prefers China
- 27 AP (08 Mar 06) India's president arrives on three-day state visit to Myanmar
- 28 Reuters (08 Mar 06) Myanmar keeps gas options open with India pact
- 29 Asia Pulse (20 Jun 06) Myanmar to get US\$20 mln loan from India Exim Bank
- 30 Xinhua (10 Apr 06) Oil, gas sector dominates foreign investment in Myanmar
- 31 RUSI Newsbrief (Feb 2006) Burma Sells Gas to China (www.rusi.org/publications/newsbrief/ref:P43F484BCD09F0)
- 32 Xinhua (23 Jun 05) - Bangladesh puts strings for India-Myanmar gas pipeline
- 33 The Times of India (3 Jun 04) Dakha clears passage for Myanmar Gas pipeline
- 34 Mizzima (05 Sep 05) - Tri-nation gas pipeline: Dhaka-Delhi fail to reach consensus
- 35 Mizzima News (04 Jan 06) India may import Burmese gas thru' its NE region bypassing Bangladesh
- 36 Mizzima News (17 Feb 06) GAIL invites bids to transport Burma gas
- 37 Irrawaddy (25 Nov 05) Chinese Oil and Gas Firm Signs Burma Deal with Daewoo
- 38 Mizzima News (12 Jan 06) Pipeline future uncertain after Burma reneges on gas deal with India

Both India and China are being negatively impacted by the spread of HIV/AIDS that is directly linked to the production, smuggling and use of heroin and amphetamines from Burma.

The traffic of illicit drugs has increased alongside the economic activities pursued by China and India.

Revenues and political support from China and India have enabled the SPDC to perpetuate its particular brand of misgovernance and human rights abuses that makes more communities vulnerable to human trafficking and organized crime.

Support from China, India and Russia also encourages the SPDC to be complacent about implementing urgently needed reforms to deal with the destabilizing threat of epidemics, transnational crime and mass movements of people.

- 39 Irrawaddy (17 Jan 06) China Signs Drilling Deal in Burma
- 40 AFP (17 Apr 06) China gives green light to Myanmar oil pipeline
- 41 The Hindu (02 Feb 06) Kalam to visit Myanmar
- 42 Reuters (08 Mar 06) Myanmar keeps gas options open with India pact
- 43 DPA (10 Mar 06) India boosts cooperate with Myanmar
- 44 DVB (27 Apr 05) Secret Burmese mission to China
- 45 DVB (18 May 05) Chinese send army trucks to Burma
- 46 Irrawaddy (26 May 05) Chinese military trucks arrive
- 47 Mizzima News (7 Aug 05) SPDC buys more military trucks
- 48 The Asian Age (19 Jan 06) Indian navy chief to present communication equipment to Burma
- 49 Irrawaddy (26 Jan 06) Britain Urges India to Scrap Aircraft Deal with Burma
- 50 Irrawaddy (26 Jan 06) Britain Urges India to Scrap Aircraft Deal with Burma
- 51 India Today (09 Feb 06) India is wooing Myanmar to keep out China and check Northeastern rebels
- 52 TASS (31 Mar 06) Russia shows interest in developing cooperation with Myanmar
- 53 AP (1 Dec 05) U.S. seeks consensus on Myanmar inquiry
- 54 Mizzima (28 Sep 05) Russian arms dealer to open office in Burma
- 55 DVB (30 Mar 06) From Russia with love: Burma junta's No.2 invited to Russia
- 56 Xinhua (02 Apr 06) Myanmar's second top leader leaves for Russia on official visit; DVB (02 Apr 06) Burma junta 2nd chief departs for Moscow
- 57 Mizzima News (03 Apr 06) Burma's second-in-command starts Russia visit
- 58 AP (04 Apr 06) Russia to Work Closer With Myanmar
- 59 Press Trust of India (04 Apr 06) Russia to supply wide range of arms to Myanmar
- 60 AP (04 Apr 06) Russia to Work Closer With Myanmar
- 61 Indo-Asian News Service (30 May 06) Drug Flow from Myanmar Fuels Northeast HIV Epidemic: UN
- 62 Irrawaddy (July 06) AIDS: Burma's shadowy mass export

JUNTA REJECTS DIALOGUE – CRACKDOWN ON NLD INTENSIFIES

Despite the oppression, the NLD continued to carry out its political activities. The NLD's repeated calls for open dialogue between the political parties representing the people and the SPDC have been disregarded by the SPDC leadership.

In February 2006, the NLD offered to recognize the SPDC as legitimate transitional government if it agreed to convene the 1990 elected parliament. The junta rejected the offer and intensified threats against the NLD, which holds over 80% of the parliamentary seats.

The SPDC continued to target NLD members. 83 NLD members have been arrested since January 2005. Three MPs have been imprisoned over the same period, bringing to 11 the total of NLD MPs currently detained by the regime.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest was extended in May 2006 for another year. Other prominent NLD leaders like U Tin Oo and elected MPs Dr Than Nyein and Dr May Win Myint also had their terms of detention extended.

The SPDC imposed bans and restrictions on NLD activities, harassed, threatened, intimidated, and forced members to resign.

SPDC SNUBS NLD'S OFFERS

Despite the military regime's attempts to restrict and shut down the party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) has continued to carry out its political activities.

On 12 February 2006, the 59th anniversary of Burma's Union Day, the NLD extended an olive branch to the military regime, taking an unprecedented step in the quest for national reconciliation. In its proposal, Burma's main opposition party offered to recognize the military regime as the country's legitimate transitional government if the junta freed its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and convened the parliament in accordance with the 1990 election results.¹ The NLD proposal received unanimous support from other opposition political parties, ethnic groups, activists inside Burma, as well as Burmese in exile, ASEAN legislators, and human rights groups abroad.²

The SPDC did not officially respond to the NLD's national reconciliation offer within the 17 April deadline.³ However, articles and commentaries in the state-run media repeatedly described the proposal as "wrong", "impractical", "unrealistic", and "contradictory".⁴

The regime's official silence was intermittently broken by thinly-veiled threats by the SPDC's Information Minister Brig. Gen Kyaw Hsan, who repeatedly accused the NLD and other opposition groups of maintaining links with exiled organizations to plot terrorist activities in the country.⁵

Despite the growing pressure exerted by the regime, the NLD renewed its offer for dialogue on 21 April, calling again on the SPDC to accept its Union Day proposal to convene a parliament comprised of winning candidates from the 1990 elections, in exchange for recognition of the junta as the legitimate transitional government. The NLD set 27 May, the anniversary of the 1990 elections, as the deadline for responding to the new proposal.⁶

On 26 April the junta issued a statement that formally rejected the opposition's latest offer of a dialogue. At a press conference in Keng Tong, about 700 kilometers northeast of Rangoon, the SPDC's Information Minister Brig. Gen Kyaw Hsan termed the NLD calls for dialogue as "above-ground attacks" on the military regime and said the proposals were "mere fantasy" and "not logical."⁷ Kyaw Hsan also dismissed the NLD's requests for dialogue suggesting that if the party wanted to talk they should attend the military-run National Convention.⁸

The NLD however remained steadfast in its rejection of the constitution drafting body. On 19 May 2006, NLD chairman Aung Shwe and five other senior NLD members were allowed to meet with the UN undersecretary-general for political affairs Ibrahim Gambari at the SPDC's guesthouse in Rangoon.⁹ During an hour-long discussion, the NLD made clear that the party has no intention take part in the National Convention, where delegates are handpicked by the junta, political debate is precluded, and outcomes predetermined. The NLD also urged Gambari to push the junta towards dialogue, using the party's Union Day offer as the starting point for the process of national reconciliation.¹⁰

Frustrated by the failures of previous envoys in progressing dialogue with the regime, the NLD also requested the UN secretary-general to appoint an international negotiator "rich in political experience and vision" and acceptable to both sides to bring about a dialogue between the NLD and the junta.¹¹

DENIED DIALOGUE

The NLD Union Day power-sharing proposal was only the latest in a series of calls for open dialogue made by the pro-democracy party over the last 18 months.

On 4 January 2006, in a speech marking Burma's Independence Day, NLD spokesperson U Lwin proposed that a new "supreme leading body" bringing together military regime, winning political parties from the 1990 election, and ethnic groups could guide the country through its transition to democratic rule.¹²

On 24 October 2005, all free NLD MPs gathered together for a three-day meeting for the first time since the May 2003 Depayin Massacre.¹³ The resulting statement called for new channels of communication with the junta, saying the “two sides must engage in dialogues to the point of satisfaction for both and achieve the national reconciliation.”¹⁴

On 27 March 2005 the NLD renewed requests for dialogue in a speech to commemorate Anti-Fascist Resistance Day.¹⁵

During Union Day celebrations on 12 February 2005, the NLD reissued their demands for the release of political prisoners and genuine dialogue.¹⁶

On 13 January 2005 the NLD offered to “start from a clean slate.” Spokesperson U Lwin, however, elaborated that NLD participation in the NC remained contingent on the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo and the reopening of NLD offices.¹⁷

In celebration of Burma’s Independence Day on 4 January 2005, the NLD renewed their appeal for dialogue between the junta and “the political parties representing the people” and demanded the release of all political prisoners.¹⁸

SPDC STILL AFRAID OF “THE LADY”

Despite repeated claims by junta’s officials that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has no more influence in Burma’s political scene,¹⁹ the regime is well aware of the pro-democracy leader’s popularity and continues to keep her under house arrest and away from the public eye.

After being barred from meeting foreigners for more than two years, on 20 May 2006 Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed to meet the UN undersecretary-general for political affairs Ibrahim Gambari. The two met for about one hour at a SPDC guesthouse in Rangoon.²⁰

Gambari’s unexpected meeting with Daw Suu sparked speculation that the Nobel Peace Laureate would be released the following week, when her detention came up for review. Expectations that the junta would release the democracy leader grew in the next days, after the SPDC police chief Maj-Gen Khin Yi publicly admitted that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest was unlikely to pose a threat to the country’s political stability.²¹

On 26 May, during a visit to Bangkok, Thailand, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan appealed directly to the SPDC Chairman, Sr Gen Than Shwe, to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. “I’m relying on you, Gen.Than Shwe, to do the right thing,” Annan said.²² However, his hopes were dashed the next day, when Burma’s military regime extended her detention for another year.²³

On 19 June 2006 Daw Aung San Suu Kyi celebrated her 61st birthday confined to her lakeside residence in Rangoon, without access to any visitors except occasional checks by her personal physician and no telephone contact. She has spent about 10 of the last 17 years in detention, mostly under house arrest.²⁴

Fearful of the support she continues to command domestically and internationally, the regime continues to detain Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in order to keep her away from the public eye.

A senior UN official’s unexpected meeting with the Nobel Peace Laureate raised hopes for her release. Expectations grew after the SPDC police chief Maj-Gen Khin Yi publicly admitted that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest was unlikely to pose a threat to the country’s political stability.

On 26 May, during a visit to Bangkok, Thailand, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan appealed directly to the SPDC Chairman, Sr Gen Than Shwe, to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, saying “I’m relying on you, Gen.Than Shwe, to do the right thing.”²² However, the following day saw Burma’s military regime extend her detention for another year.

CRACKDOWN ON NLD INTENSIFIES

To stifle opposition the SPDC has routinely targeted, harassed, and imprisoned NLD members and leaders.

From January 2005 to June 2006, the regime **arrested 83 NLD members, including three elected MPs.** 11 NLD MPs remain detained in prisons across Burma.²⁵ [See “Political Prisoners”]

In addition to **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, other prominent NLD leaders** had their terms of detention arbitrarily extended, including U Tin Oo and elected MPs Dr. Than Nyein and Dr. May Win Myint.²⁶

On 1 May 2005, nine days after being arbitrarily arrested, **NLD youth member Aung Hlaing Win died** due to heavy-handed interrogation sessions.²⁷ When the NLD filed a complaint with Mayangon Township court, the court found Aung Hlaing Win had died of natural causes despite a medical report showing 24 external bruises, 3 broken ribs, a bruised heart, a swollen throat and infected stomach and intestines.²⁸

On 23 March 2006, **U Ko Oo**, the 64-year-old secretary of the NLD in Thayet Township, Magwe Division, died of liver failure at Thayet Hospital shortly after his transfer from Tharawaddy Jail in Pegu Division, where he had been imprisoned since 2000.²⁹

The NLD has reported extensive monitoring of its activities and harassment of their members by the SPDC.³⁰

On 15 September 2005 the SPDC and USDA of Twante Township, Rangoon Division **demolished an NLD office** during a road widening project.³¹ Meanwhile the NLD office building in Kawthaung Township, Tenasserim Division collapsed due to disrepair. NLD offices in nine other townships are similarly dilapidated and in need of serious repair.³²

From January 2005 to June 2006, the regime **arrested 83 NLD members, including three elected MPs**. 11 NLD MPs remain detained in prisons across Burma.

On 1 May 2005, nine days after being arbitrarily arrested, **NLD youth member Aung Hlaing Win died** after being subjected to heavy-handed interrogation sessions. When the NLD filed a complaint with Mayangon Township court, the court found Aung Hlaing Win had died of natural causes despite a medical report showing 24 external bruises, 3 broken ribs, a bruised heart, a swollen throat and infected stomach and intestines.

SPDC authorities and Special Branch police agents in Akyab Township, Arakan State have been **systematically harassing** NLD members, including the elected MP U Maung Krun Aung, **targeting their business** activities and forcing them to move to rural areas to earn a living.

On 5 October 2005 the SPDC election commission in Yamethin Township, Mandalay Division informed NLD leaders that they were **barred from carrying out political activities** because they had too few members to be recognized as a political party. They were then **threatened with arrest**.³³

On 12 January 2006 SPDC authorities in Daik-U Township in Pegu Division raided the business premises of NLD's supporter Kyaw Myint, and **fined, arrested, and blacklisted** his employees without giving any reason.³⁴

NLD members in Pegu have been repeatedly **summoned and intimidated** by Special Branch police agents and local township authority members. In one incident, dated 19 March 2006, local NLD leader Nyunt Kyi and chairperson Myint Than were summoned by the township authority chairman and warned not to take down the national flag or hoist the fighting peacock flag at a local State High School.³⁵

On 3 April 2006, SPDC authorities in Meikhtila District summoned the NLD chairman Dr. Thein Lwin and ordered him to stop all political activities. Thein Lwin has been **summoned and warned** three times since the NLD issued its Union Day statement on 12 February 2006.³⁶

According to reports in April 2006, SPDC authorities and Special Branch police agents in Akyab Township, Arakan State have been **systematically harassing** NLD members, including the elected MP U Maung Krun Aung, **targeting their business** activities and forcing them to move to rural areas to earn a living.³⁷

On 16 May 2006, a group of unknown individuals **threw stones** at the home of Mandalay Division NLD secretary Kan Tun.³⁸

During the night of 17 May 2006, the signboard of the NLD office in Northwest Township, Mandalay Division, was removed by a group of unknown individuals.³⁹

In June 2006 the junta's Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order requiring the presence of at least one member of the Ward Peace and Development Council **to record and take minutes and photographs of all meetings** held by all political parties in Burma.⁴⁰

NLD members in Thaton Township, Mon State have been **constantly monitored** by the junta's Special branch (SB) police. SB agents have been harassing the local NLD vice-chairwoman San Myint, interrogating her and **disrupting her business activities** by cutting off the phone line and electricity supply.⁴¹

The SPDC has resorted systematically to threats of arrest and offers of bribery to pressure NLD members into quitting the Party.⁴²

The military regime carried out a full-scale media campaign in the press against the NLD and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), the second-largest vote winner in the 1990 elections. State-run newspapers reported almost daily of NLD members resigning en masse allegedly out of their disillusionment about the party policies and its allegiance to "foreign powers."

According to the junta's mouthpiece, "New Light of Myanmar", between 21 April and 8 June 2006, 546 NLD members across Burma had quit the main opposition party. In fact, in most cases NLD members have been forced to resign by authorities and the Da-Na (Crime Suppression Squad) police under threat of arrest or other forms of intimidation.⁴³

SPDC authorities have also resorted to economic incentives to force NLD members to resign.⁴⁴ In an attempt to demoralize the remaining NLD members, the regime included in the lists of those who allegedly resigned names of individuals who had no affiliation with the NLD.⁴⁵

ACTIVITIES IMPEDED

The SPDC has also continued to impose arbitrary bans and restrictions on some NLD-organized events. Participants of NLD-organized activities were also subject to arrests and harassment by the authorities.

Anti-Fascist Resistance Day: The NLD in Taungdwinggyi and Natmauk Township, Magwe Division were barred from holding Anti-Fascist Resistance Day events on 27 March 2005, which commemorates the beginning of the resistance movement against Japanese occupation.⁴⁶

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 60th Birthday: The SPDC arrested NLD members who marked Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 60th Birthday on 19 June 2005 by releasing 61 doves at the Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon. They were released after they removed T-shirts that featured Daw Suu's photo and the slogan "Set her free."⁴⁷

Martyr's Day: On 20 July 2005, the 58th anniversary of the assassination of Burma's independence leaders, the SPDC prohibited the NLD from holding Martyr's Day ceremonies to honor fallen heroes, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's father, Gen Aung San.⁴⁸

NLD's Birthday: NLD members were subject to interrogation about their preparations for the 27 September 2005 17th Anniversary of the NLD. Although they were allowed to hold the event, afterwards several NLD participants continued to be harassed by the SPDC.⁴⁹

Kahtein Festival: Despite attempts to ban NLD's activities, members from Aungmye, Magwe Division celebrated the traditional religious festival of Kahtein in November. Participants however were subject to interrogations by the SPDC the following day.⁵⁰

National Day: NLD members from Taungdwingyi and Magwe Township, Magwe Division were forced to sign a pledge agreeing to refrain from organizing any events to celebrate National Day on 25 November 2005.⁵¹

Monthly meetings: On 1 December 2005, SPDC authorities in Shwebo Township, Sagaing Division, barred local NLD members from holding their monthly meetings.⁵²

Independence Day: On 4 January 2006, NLD HQs in Rangoon, party offices in Mandalay, and Sagaing Townships held ceremonies to mark the 58th anniversary of Independence Day despite intense surveillance by Special Branch police officers. NLD members in Sagaing Township held a small ceremony defying the local authorities' refusal to grant them permission to celebrate the anniversary.⁵³

Meeting and ceremonies: On 13 June 2006, local SPDC authorities in Haka Township, Chin State, banned NLD members from holding meetings and ceremonies. The Haka Township NLD chairman and secretary were summoned and forced to sign a pledge agreeing to refrain from defying the ban. Authorities seemed worried that party members might be celebrating their detained leader's 61st birthday on 19 June.⁵⁴

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 61st birthday: On 19 June 2006, Special Branch police agents videotaped and photographed NLD members and activists who were holding a ceremony in honor of the pro-democracy leader by releasing doves and balloons outside the party headquarters in Rangoon.⁵⁵

Party's regular meeting: Local SPDC authorities in Kachin State barred NLD members from holding their regular meeting scheduled to be held in Shwegu on 26 June.⁵⁶

The SPDC continues to be heavily allergic to birthdays and anniversaries as far as the NLD is concerned.

Members have been subjected to interrogation and intimidation over celebrations of national holidays, innocuous anniversaries and even Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday.

The use of flags and T-shirts also seemed to provoke the regime the way a red rag would enrage a bull. Activists were forced to strip off T-shirts that featured Daw Suu's photo and the slogan "Set her free" during a bird-release ceremony at the Shwedagon Pagoda to mark her 60th birthday.

Footnotes

1 Reuters (14 Feb 06) Myanmar opposition offers to recognize military rule

2 DVB (13 Feb 06) Exiled pro-democracy Burmese groups welcome NLD proposals; DVB (14 Feb 06) Renowned Burmese students express full support for NLD statement; DVB (14 Feb 06) Unofficial translation of 88 Generation students' statement in support of the NLD special statement; DVB (14 Feb 06) More supports for NLD's special statement on Burma's Union Day; Irrawaddy (14 Feb 06) Activists Back NLD Proposal.

3 DVB (17 Apr 06) Still no response from Burma junta over NLD offer

4 DVB (29 Mar 06) Propaganda war: Junta's paper hints NLD proposals not likely to be accepted; Irrawaddy (30 Mar 06) Junta indicates it may not accept NLD compromise; AP (06 Apr 06) State newspaper urges Myanmar opposition to abandon claim to power; Mizzima News (07 Apr 06) Burma's state press accuses NLD of delaying democracy; Irrawaddy (07 Apr 06) State media slams NLD reconciliation offer.

5 DVB (22 Feb 06) Shut up or be shut in: Burma junta warns crackdowns on opposition

6 Irrawaddy (21 Apr 06) Never Say Never

7 Kyodo News (26 Apr 06) Myanmar junta says no dialogue with Suu Kyi's NLD; Mizzima News (28 Apr 06) Palpable tension in Rangoon as military slams NLD offer

8 Mizzima News (28 Apr 06) Palpable tension in Rangoon as military slams NLD offer

9 Irrawaddy (19 May 06) Gambari Meets Senior NLD Members

10 Mizzima News (19 May 06) NLD urges Gambari to push for dialogue; DVB (19 May 06) Burma NLD calls for dialogue process in talks with UN envoy; Irrawaddy (19 May 06) Gambari Meets Senior NLD Members; DPA (09 Jun 06) Myanmar opposition sends UN's Kofi Annan a letter

11 DVB (4 Jun 06) Burma NLD asks UN to act as negotiator for national reconciliation

12 Irrawaddy (06 Jan 06) NLD Proposal Wins Wide Support

13 Irrawaddy (25 Oct 05) Suu Kyi's 10 years detention marked worldwide

14 DVB (26 Oct 05) NLD to open a new communication channel with Burma junta; DVB (28 Oct 05) Burma NLD vows to continue persuading the junta for dialogues

- 15 DVB (27 Mar 05) Burmese activists and leaders mark 60th anniversary of Resistance Day
- 16 DVB (12 Feb 05) Burmese Union Day celebrated by NLD
- 17 AFP (13 Jan 05) Myanmar opposition NLD considers helping junta draft constitution
- 18 AFP (04 Jan 05) At least 25 dissidents freed in Myanmar mass prisoner release: NLD
- 19 AP (27 Mar 06) Myanmar junta considers Suu Kyi irrelevant, says ASEAN envoy; DVB (23 May 06) Truism: Suu Kyi's release will not cause instability – Burma police chief; DVB (24 May 06) Release Aung San Suu Kyi if she doesn't pose any threat as claimed – NLD
- 20 Irrawaddy (20 May 06) Senior UN Official Meets with Aung San Suu Kyi
- 21 DVB (23 May 06) Truism: Suu Kyi's release will not cause instability – Burma police chief; DVB (24 May 06) Release Aung San Suu Kyi if she doesn't pose any threat as claimed – NLD
- 22 United Nations (26 May 06) Statement by the Secretary-General on Myanmar
- 23 Reuters (27 May 06) Myanmar gives Suu Kyi another year of house arrest
- 24 DVB (23 May 06) Truism: Suu Kyi's release will not cause instability – Burma police chief
- 25 Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (12 Jul 06) E-mail communication
- 26 U.S. Campaign for Burma (21 Mar 05) Locked up forever? Burma campaigners seek ruling from United Nations on ten imprisoned dissidents
- 27 AFP (17 May 05) Myanmar opposition party to file complaint over NLD member's mystery death
- 28 AFP (17 May 05) Myanmar opposition party to file complaint over NLD member's mystery death; Irrawaddy (08 Jun 05) Doctors confirm torture of NLD Youth member; AFP (10 Jun 05) Myanmar court says NLD member died in custody of natural causes
- 29 DVB (24 Mar 06) Tortured: Another political prisoner dies at Burma's Tharawaddy Jail; AAPP (25 Mar 06) Democracy Activist and NLD Member Dies in Thayet Prison
- 30 DVB (15 May 05) Burma Sagaing NLD members to increase political activities; DVB (15 Aug 05) Arakan NLD leaders detained on foreign currency trading; DVB (01 Aug 05) NLD members in central Burma intimidated but the fight goes on.
- 31 DVB (15 Sep 05) Rangoon Twante NLD office demolished by Burmese authorities
- 32 DVB (23 Sep 05) NLD office at Kawthaung collapses in southern Burma
- 33 DVB (06 Oct 05) Burmese authorities intimidate NLD leaders again
- 34 DVB (Jan 19) Burma NLD supporter harrassed and intimidated at Daik-U
- 35 DVB (21 Mar 06) Diehards: NLD members pressured and intimidated in Burma's Pegu
- 36 DVB (03 Apr 06) Meikhtila NLD pressured to dissolve party
- 37 DVB (18 Apr 06) Sittwe NLD put under great pressure by Burmese authorities; Narinjara News (23 May 06) Burmese junta deprives NLD MP of business opportunities in Arakan
- 38 DVB (17 May 06) Mandalay Northwest NLD's signboard taken down
- 39 DVB (17 May 06) Mandalay Northwest NLD's signboard taken down
- 40 DVB (07 Jun 06) Political parties come under more pressure from Burma junta
- 41 DVB (15 Jun 06) Thaton NLD members monitored by Burma special police
- 42 DVB (05 Jan 05) NLD youth received threatening letters from Burma junta; DVB (10 Jun 05) Burma junta enticing NLD members to quit party in Maymyo; DVB (04 Nov 05) Burma junta's USDA members pressure NLD members to quit party
- 43 Reuters (01 May 06) Suu Kyi's party hit by resignations; DVB (09 May 06) Political massacre: Burma junta continues to pressurise NLD members to quit party; Irrawaddy (08 Jun 06) NLD Says Regime Coerced Member to Resign; DVB (27 Apr 06) Another NLD leader forced to resign by pressures from Burma junta; SHAN (30 Apr 06) Embattled NLD has company; DVB (08 May 06) New light on the old lies of Myanmar: NLD members forced to resign and non-members named as quitters; AP (07 Jun 06) Myanmar pro-democracy party says members' resignations illegally coerced; DVB (12 Jun 06) Burma NLD reject junta's accusations, says resignations forced
- 44 DVB (27 Apr 06) Another NLD leader forced to resign by pressures from Burma junta; DVB (24 Apr 06) Political cleansing: Mandalay NLD vice-chairman Saw Htay resigns; Irrawaddy (02 May 06) Junta Claims More than 40 NLD Members Resign; AP (07 Jun 06) Myanmar pro-democracy party says members' resignations illegally coerced
- 45 DVB (08 May 06) New light on the old lies of Myanmar: NLD members forced to resign and non-members named as quitters; DVB (17 May 06) New lies of Myanmar repeated: NLD members still pressured to quit party
- 46 DVB (28 Mar 05) NLD members in Taungdwinggyi not allowed to mark Resistance Day
- 47 The Nation (20 June 2005) Thousands rally to call for Suu Kyi's release
- 48 AFP (19 July 2005) Myanmar bars opposition from honouring slain independence leaders
- 49 DVB (29 Sep 05) Burmese authorities interrogate NLD leaders in Pegu
- 50 DVB (18 Oct 05) Aunglan NLD Katina festival successful despite bans
- 51 DVB (11 Nov 05) Magwe NLD told indirectly not to mark Burmese National Day; DVB (10 Nov 05) Taungdwinggyi NLD warned not to mark Burmese National Day
- 52 DVB (05 Dec 05) Shwebo NLD barred from holding meetings by Burmese authorities
- 53 Mizzima News (04 Jan 06) Burmese opposition groups mark Independence Day
- 54 DVB (13 Jun 06) Burma's Chin Satte Haka NLD not allowed to hold meetings or ceremonies
- 55 AFP (19 Jun 06) Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi turns 61 under house arrest; NMG (19 Jun 06) Suu Kyi's birthday celebrated at NLD headquarters
- 56 DVB (27 Jun 06) Kachin State NLD forced to cancel meeting

UPDATE: POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA

As of 1 July 2006, 1,167 political prisoners remain detained in prisons across Burma. Two of them are still behind bars despite having already served their prison term. Thirteen elected MPs (12 of whom represented the NLD in the last elections) are still in prison.¹

DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND U TIN OO

The SPDC has not released prominent political prisoners, including **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi**, NLD's General Secretary, and **U Tin Oo**, NLD's Vice Chairman. Despite strident calls for her release, the junta on 27 May 2006 extended Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest for another year.² On 24 October 2005 she marked a total of 10 years in detention.³ [See NLD] On 13 February 2006 U Tin Oo's house arrest was extended by a further year.⁴

NEW ARRESTS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

Political arrests, detentions and trials have continued throughout the last 18 months. Members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) have been routinely targeted by the junta, solely on the basis of their peaceful political activities. Since 1 January 2005 SPDC authorities have arrested 83 NLD members, including three MPs. 25 NLD members, including 11 MPs, remain detained in prisons across Burma.⁵

On **19 December 2004** military authorities in Rangoon arrested five NLD members **U Ba Myint**, **Ko Khin Kyaw**, **Aung Moe San**, **U Ba Tint** and **Ko Thet Naing**, for distributing human rights educational leaflets.⁶ On **13 June 2005**, they were all given life sentences by Rangoon's Insein prison special court. The five were never allowed to see their family since they were arrested and none of them were given access to legal representation.⁷

On **6 July 2005** NLD member **Dr. Win Aung**, was arrested and sentenced two days later to a 10-year prison term for videotaping and recording rallying trips of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and distributing a book written by an exiled Burmese author.⁸

On **20 July 2005** local authorities arrested NLD Arakan State Akyab NLD chairman San Shwe Tun and organizing committee member Aung Pan Tha for allegedly trading foreign currencies.⁹ They were both sentenced to three years in prison in the first week of March 2006.¹⁰

On 20 November 2005, local authorities arrested Ko Ko Myint and Thein Zaw, two NLD members from Shwegu Township, Kachin State, after packets of opium resin were allegedly found in their house compound.¹¹ On 7 February 2006 they were sentenced to 7 years jail for illegal drug possession.¹²

In **January 2006**, Aye Thein, an NLD youth official from Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Division, was arrested and sentenced to a five-year prison term on human trafficking charges for eloping and marrying his long-time girlfriend. On 26 January, he was transferred to the Kabaw hard labour camp in northwestern Burma.¹³

As of 1 July 2006, 1,167 political prisoners remain detained in prisons across Burma. They include 13 elected MPs (12 of whom represented the NLD in the 1990 elections).

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest was extended on 27 May 2006 for another year.

NLD members and MPs as well as ethnic leaders were targeted in a wave of politically-motivated arrests during the last 18 months. A total of 83 NLD members, including three of its MPs were arrested. 25 NLD members and 11 NLD MPs remain detained in prisons across Burma. Top Shan and Mon leaders were also imprisoned and sentenced to lengthy jail terms.

Prison conditions in Burma continue to be poor, and prisoners continue to be denied necessary medical treatment and an adequate diet.

In September 2005 an outbreak of cholera in Thawaraddy prison claimed the lives of 40 inmates, including at least one political prisoner. 12 more died in a cholera outbreak at Akyab prison in December 2005 – January 2006.

Nine reported cases of custodial deaths of political prisoners took place between May 2005 and May 2006.

In December 2005 ICRC suspended prisons inspections following the USDA's interference.

Arrests of members of ethnic nationalities' political parties have also continued.

On **7 February 2005**, 10 Shan activists were arrested for participating in a gathering to commemorate Shan State day and for creating an "illegal" organization without permission, i.e. the Shan State Joint Action Committee. Those arrested included MP **U Khun Tun Oo**, Chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), and **Sai Nyunt Lwin**, SNLD's General Secretary. All 10 activists were charged with conspiracy against the State. An eleventh person, 84-year-old veteran Shan activist **Shwe Ohn**, was placed under house arrest.¹⁴ He was released on 8 February 2006.¹⁵

On **3 November 2005**, Khun Tun Oo was sentenced to **90 years in prison**, while Shan State Peace Council Chairman (SSPC) Gen **Hso Ten** was sentenced to **106 years**. Another six Shan leaders were all given **70-year sentences** each.¹⁶

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All 10 activists were charged with conspiracy against the State. An eleventh person, 84-year-old veteran Shan activist Shwe Ohn, was placed under house arrest. He was released on 8 February 2006.

On 3 November 2005 Khun Tun Oo was sentenced to 90 years in prison, while Shan State Peace Council Chairman (SSPC) Gen Hso Ten was sentenced to 106 years. Another six Shan leaders were all given 70-year sentences each.

On **8 July 2005**, SPDC military authorities arrested **Nai Sein Aye**, Chairman of the Mon Literature and Culture Committee in Thanbyuzayat Township.¹⁷

On **3 August 2005**, SPDC authorities arrested **Sa Oo Kya**, a member of the Shan State Advisory Council (SSAC).¹⁸ On **30 September 2005**, he was sentenced to a 10-year sentence for defaming the State and an additional three-year sentence and a 2,000 kyat fine for operating in the tourism industry without a license.¹⁹

On **3 December 2005**, SPDC authorities in northern Shan State arrested 8 people, including **Dr. Sai Maw Kham**, Chairman of the Shan State Literature and Culture Committee, supposedly for being involved in the organization of the Shan New Year's celebrations.²⁰

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPS)

Between February and March 2005 the junta arrested five elected MPs, of whom three belong to the NLD. They were all subsequently sentenced to long prison terms. 13 MPs, 11 of whom belong to the NLD, remain detained in prisons across Burma.²¹

On **7 February 2005**, **U Khun Tun Oo**, a Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) elected MP from Shan State, was among the 10 Shan political activists arrested. ²² [See above]

On **25 February 2005**, **U Kyaw Khin**, an NLD elected MP from Shan State was arrested by military intelligence agents for distributing political leaflets and inciting people to take part in political activities. On 8 April he was sentenced to 14 years in prison.²³

On **17 March 2005**, SPDC authorities arrested **U Kyaw San**,

an NLD elected MP from Sagaing Division and **U Kyaw Min**, National Democratic Party for Human Rights (NDPHR) elected MP from Arakan State.²⁴ On 6 June 2005 U Kyaw San was sentenced to seven years in prison for allegedly keeping "illegal" goods belonging to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).²⁵

On 29 July 2005 U Kyaw Min was sentenced to 47-years in prison and his wife and children each received a 17-year prison term. They were all also fined 50,000 kyat each and sentenced to serve two extra years if they refused to pay.²⁶ The plight of the Muslim family raised the ire of Rohingya activists.

On **30 March 2005**, SPDC authorities arrested **U Saw Hlaing**, an NLD MP from Sagaing Division.²⁷ On 26 May he was sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment for keeping "unlicensed" second-hand computers.²⁸

EXTENDED SENTENCES

The SPDC has continued to use legislation that allows extended detention without charge or trial. Among those currently detained under this legislation are opposition leaders **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi** and **U Tin Oo**.

Two NLD elected MPs also had detention orders renewed on them since January 2005. On **18 January 2005**, and again on **18 January 2006**, the prison sentence imposed on **Dr Than Nyein** was extended for another year.²⁹

On **2 February 2005** and again on **3 February 2006**, the SPDC extended the jail sentence of **Daw May Win Myint** by another year.³⁰

CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

Prison conditions in Burma continue to be poor, and prisoners continue to be denied necessary medical treatment and an adequate diet. Heart disease, hypertension, arthritis, dysentery, urinary infections, kidney disease, mental illnesses, tuberculosis, gastric and liver disorders as well as malnutrition-related, skin and eye diseases continue to be the most commonly reported conditions affecting political prisoners.³¹

At the end of September 2005, a serious cholera outbreak in Tharawaddy Prison, north of Rangoon, resulted in the death of more than 40 inmates, including a political prisoner, Arakan Communist Party member **Aung Yet Khaing** who had been detained since 1986.³²

Between December 2005 and January 2006, cholera killed at least 12 prisoners in Akyab Prison, Arakan State.³³

Both outbreaks reportedly originated from spoiled food supplies coupled with bad sanitary conditions within the prison.³⁴

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Corporal punishment, shackling, solitary confinement in darkened cells, food and water deprivation and other forms of ill-treatment have continued to be regularly used by SPDC authorities against political prisoners in prisons across Burma.³⁵

They have particularly been used against political prisoners who have protested their conditions of detention.

On **28 April 2005**, it was reported that SPDC prison authorities in Insein Prison severely beat 20 political prisoners after they had engaged in a hunger strike. At least two of the prisoners were confined to special cells where dogs trained by the SPDC military are kenneled.³⁶ The prisoners were protesting at the prison authorities' decision to detain political prisoners with common criminals.³⁷ Prison authorities subsequently transferred eight of the political prisoners involved in the hunger strike to prisons located in places far from Rangoon and their family members.³⁸

On **24 January 2006**, two prisoners were killed and 17 seriously injured in Kalemyo Jail in Sagaing Division, after prison staff severely beat around 80 prisoners who were protesting against a prolonged water shortage inside the prison. An NLD youth member, **Nyunt Aung**, was reportedly among the prisoners in serious condition.³⁹

Moreover, SPDC has continued to use criminal prisoners to beat other prisoners, including political prisoners. Ko Shwe Maung, a Mandalay NLD member was reportedly stripped, covered with a black hood and severely beaten by prisoners belonging to the "Balagyi", a group allegedly close to U Thaug Myint, the prison supervisor.⁴⁰

On **24 August 2005**, Ko Htun Htun, a political prisoner, was severely beaten in Insein Prison by members of the "Scorpion Gang". He was seriously wounded in the attack and taken to the prison hospital for treatment. The "Scorpion Gang" is reputed to have connections with top SPDC officials and enjoys privileged status in the prison.⁴¹ On 30 September 2005, a further attack carried out by members of the "Scorpion Gang" in Insein Prison targeted another political prisoner, U Aung Phay.⁴²

On **2 January 2006**, Ko Aung San Myat, Ko Thiha Tun and Ko Han Win Aung, three political prisoners, were beaten by a group of five criminal inmates in Insein Prison.⁴³

Prison authorities reportedly did not intervene during those incidents and took no actions against the assailants following the attacks.⁴⁴

CUSTODIAL DEATHS

There have been nine reported cases of political prisoners who have died in custody between May 2005 and May 2006.

On **7 May 2005**, **Aung Hlaing Win**, a 30-year-old NLD youth member, died while being detained and interrogated by SPDC military intelligence officials.⁴⁵ Authorities claimed that he had died from a heart attack while being interrogated.⁴⁶ However, a post-mortem examination carried out by a team of medical experts revealed that Aung Hlaing had died as a result of extensive injuries, including 24 external bruises, three broken ribs, a bruised heart and a swollen throat.⁴⁷

While death sentences are rarely imposed on political prisoners, the severe conditions of incarceration, along with targeted violence and torture result in many deaths. Warden-endorsed violence against political prisoners continues to be a serious problem.

In April 2005, 20 political prisoners were severely beaten for holding a hunger strike. At least two of the prisoners were confined to dog kennels that normally house dogs trained by the SPDC military. Prison authorities subsequently transferred 8 of the political prisoners involved to prisons far from Rangoon and their family members.

In January 2006, two prisoners were killed and 17 seriously injured in Kalemyo Jail in Sagaing Division, after prison staff severely beat around 80 prisoners who were protesting against a prolonged water shortage inside the prison.

The SPDC has continued to use criminal prisoners to beat other prisoners, including political prisoners. Ko Shwe Maung, a Mandalay NLD member was reportedly stripped, covered with a black hood and severely beaten by prisoners close to the prison supervisor.

The notorious "Scorpion Gang" terrorizes political prisoners in Insein Prison. The "Scorpion Gang" is reputed to have connections with top SPDC officials and enjoys privileged status in the prison.

Prison authorities are not known to intervene during attacks against political prisoners and assailants are not subjected to investigation or punishment.

On **7 July 2005**, **Saw Stanford**, a schoolteacher from Tagu Seik Village, Irrawaddy Division was arrested with 16 other Karen villagers by SPDC Army soldiers during a raid on the village. He reportedly died during an interrogation session in which the soldiers used electric shocks.⁴⁸

On **30 May 2005**, **Min Tun Wai**, a NLD member from Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, sentenced to 7 years in prison by a local court, died in Moulmein Prison and his body was buried on the same day without the knowledge of his family members.⁴⁹

On **28 September 2005**, **Nai Ong Lorn**, a Mon political prisoner who was arrested in connection to assassination attempts on military leaders and subsequently sentenced to life, reportedly died of an unspecified disease while being detained in Insein Prison.⁵⁰

In March 2006, former political prisoner Ko Thet Naing Oo was beaten to death by police, fire brigade and members of the state-sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) at a Rangoon market. Two men who tried to defend Ko Thet Naing Oo during the attack were arrested for "obstructing justice".

The same month, an unnamed youth who worked as a porter at a Mandalay Market was arrested and beaten up by municipal officials on suspicion of committing a crime. He was then handcuffed and handed over to a local police station where agents interrogated and beat him to death.

On **5 November 2005**, **Aung Myint Thein**, a human rights activist who was arrested on 2 July for having contacts with the outlawed Federation of the Trade Unions of Burma, reportedly died from dysentery or cholera in Insein Jail.⁵¹

On **16 December 2005**, Aung Zaw Latt, a 30-year-old activist sentenced in 1999 to eight years for his alleged involvement in the failed "9999" uprising, died in Pegu Prison reportedly due to lack of proper TB treatment.⁵²

On **11 January 2006**, Khin Maung Lwin, a 38-year-old activist sentenced in 1998 to 10 years for allegedly defaming the state and publishing a letter addressed to the junta, died in Putao Hospital, one day after his transfer from Putao Prison, Kachin State. Despite Khin Maung Lwin's deteriorating condition, SPDC authorities had repeatedly denied his previous requests for hospitalization.⁵³

On **23 March 2006**, U Ko Oo, the 64-year-old secretary of the NLD in Thayet Township, Magwe Division, died of liver failure at Thayet Hospital shortly after his transfer from Tharawaddy Jail where he had been imprisoned since 2000.⁵⁴

On **2 May 2006**, U Myint Than, one of the 10 Shan activists arrested on February 2005 on charges of creating "illegal" organizations without permission and sentenced to 79 years in November 2005, died of a stroke at general hospital shortly after his transfer from Thandwe Prison, Arakan State.⁵⁵

Custodial deaths also involved military intelligence agents who had been jailed following the purge of former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt.

In **January 2005**, it was reported that **Brig-Gen Myint Aung Zaw**, head of the administration department at the Office of Chief of Military Intelligence (OCMI) died in late 2004 while detained in Insein Prison. He was believed to have died while being interrogated in the military's investigation center and his body was secretly cremated.⁵⁶

In **early January 2005**, counter intelligence officer **Colonel Tin Hla** was reportedly killed during the interrogation process in Insein Prison. He was secretly buried at Ye-Way cemetery in Rangoon on 5 January 2005.⁵⁷

On **17 January 2005**, **U Toe Paing**, Na-Sa-Ka (Border Control Forces) official died in Putao Prison, Kachin State. It was not clear whether he died from torture or illness.⁵⁸

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

On 17 March 2006, **Ko Thet Naing Oo**, a 40-year-old former student and political prisoner, was beaten to death by police, fire brigade and members of the state-sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) at Thiri Mingala market in Rangoon.⁵⁹ Police in Rangoon detained two men, Ko Win Myint and Ko Khin Maung Zaw, who tried to defend Ko Thet Naing Oo during the attack for obstructing justice.⁶⁰ However, the authorities did not carry out any thorough investigation into the circumstances of Ko Thet Naing Oo's murder and failed to bring to justice those responsible for his death.

On the eve of 27 March 2006, an **unnamed youth** who was working as a cart-pushing porter at Kaingdang Market in Mandalay, was arrested and beaten up by municipal officials on suspicion of committing a crime. He was then handcuffed and handed over to a local police station where agents interrogated and beat him to death.⁶¹

ICRC SUSPENDS VISITS

In December 2005 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suspended prison visits throughout Burma following interference by the junta-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), which insisted on joining ICRC representatives during prisons' inspections.⁶² [See "Bound and Gagged"]

RELEASES

Between 18 November 2004 and 3 January 2005 the junta announced the release of 19,906 prisoners. However, there was no independent way to confirm the figures, and it was believed that the overwhelming majority of the released prisoners were either petty criminals or convicts who had nearly or entirely completed their sentences.⁶³ In practice, it is estimated that the junta released only 87 political prisoners.⁶⁴

On 6 July 2005, the SPDC released 334 prisoners, including 253 political prisoners, from prisons across the country.⁶⁵

FOOTNOTES

1 Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (03 Jul 06) E-mail communication

2 Reuters (27 May 06) Myanmar gives Suu Kyi another year of house arrest

3 AFP (24 Oct 05) Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi in detention 10 years: activists

4 AFP (13 Feb 06) Myanmar junta extends detention of Suu Kyi's top lieutenant; Mizzima News (14 Feb 06) Amnesty International condemns NLD leaders' ongoing detention

5 Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (12 Jul 06) E-mail communication

- 6 DVB (20 Dec 04) Military junta arrests four political activists; DVB (12 May 05) NLD leader Ba Myint tried in Rangoon Insein Jail
- 7 DVB (13 June 2005) NLD members given life sentence by Burma junta
- 8 DVB (02 Nov 05) NLD Dr. Win Aung's appeal rejected by Burmese court
- 9 DVB (15 Aug 05) Arakan NLD leaders detained on foreign currency trading
- 10 DVB (07 Mar 06) Two NLD leaders sent to jail by Burmese authorities
- 11 DVB (21 Nov 05) Two Shwegu NLD leaders arrested by Burmese authorities
- 12 DVB (08 Feb 06) Two Shwegu NLD members sent to prison in upper Burma; Irrawaddy (09 Feb 06) NLD Members Jailed on Drugs Charges
- 13 DVB (16 Jan 06) Mandalay NLD member and supporters sent to prison; DVB (Jan 19) Burma NLD youth accused of human-trafficking to be sent to gulag
- 14 SHAN (10 Feb 05) Shan leaders take state-financed holiday; DVB (10 Feb 05) Shan opposition leaders detained; AFP (15 Mar 05) Ten Shan activists arrested in Myanmar for conspiracy: minister
- 15 DVB (10 Feb 06) Breaking News: Shan leader Shwe Ohn released from house arrest in Burma
- 16 DVB (04 Nov 05) Shan leaders sentenced in Rangoon Insein Jail
- 17 Kaowao (22 July 2005) Detainees interrogated after Rangoon explosion
- 18 DVB (05 Aug 05) Another Shan leader detained by Burma junta
- 19 DVB (30 Sep 05) Burma Shan leader Oo Kya gets 13 years; DVB (02 Oct 05) Burmese authorities detain Shan leader for defamation
- 20 DVB (08 Dec 05) Shan leaders arrested for celebrating national New Year; Shan Herald Agency for News (07 Dec 05) Human rights crackdown follows Shan New Year
- 21 Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (12 Jul 06) E-mail communication
- 22 SHAN (10 Feb 05) Shan leaders take state-financed holiday; DVB (10 Feb 05) Shan opposition leaders detained; AFP (15 Mar 05) Ten Shan activists arrested in Myanmar for conspiracy: minister
- 23 DVB (08 Apr 05) Taunggyi NLD MP Kyaw Khin given another 14 years in prison
- 24 Reuters (18 Mar 05) Myanmar junta arrests two politicians; DVB (18 Mar 05) Another Burmese MP detained while U Kyaw San staging hunger strike
- 25 DVB (06 Jun 05) Detained NLD Kyaw San sent to prison again by Burma junta; DVB (19 Sep 05) Burma Sagaing NLD Kyaw San case to be heard
- 26 DVB (29 Jul 05) Burmese Arakan MP and family given lengthy prison terms; DVB (02 Aug 05) Burma Arakan MP Kyaw Min and family fined on top sentences
- 27 DVB (02 Apr 05) Authorities said to detain Burmese pro-democracy MP
- 28 DVB (26 May 05) NLD MP sent to prison by Burmese court for keeping broken computers
- 29 Irrawaddy (24 Jan 05) NLD Politician's Prison Term Again Extended; DVB (18 Jan 06) Burmese MP Than Nyein's sentence extended again; DVB (08 Feb 05) Dr. May Win Myint given one more year imprisonment; DVB (08 Feb 06) Burmese political prisoner May Win Myint given extended sentence
- 30 DVB (09 Feb 05) Jail terms of NLD representatives extended
- 31 DVB (19 Jan 05) Burmese political prisoners' health conditions; DVB (30 Jan 05) Dr Than Nyein's health deteriorates in Burmese jail; DVB (6 Feb 05) Burmese political prisoner seriously ill in Thayet Prison; Mizzima (13 Mar 05) Burmese Journalist's Diamond Jubilee Birthday in Prison; AAPP (22 Mar 05) Information Release: Political Prisoner Suffers from Serious Health Condition; DVB (27 Mar 05) Burmese MP, Dr. Than Nyein still not allowed to receive medical treatment; DVB (29 Mar 05) Political prisoner Saw Win's health deteriorates; Irrawaddy (25 Apr 05) Political prisoners' health deteriorating, says report - Shah Paung; DVB (13 May 05) Conditions of prisoners at Burma remote areas not good; DVB (01 Sep 05) Political prisoners' health condition in Burma; DVB (08 Sep 05) Burmese prisoner Ko Oo's condition deteriorates; DVB (14 Sep 05) Health conditions of two Mon prisoners in Rangoon; DVB (15 Sep 05) Burmese student prisoner Thet Win Aung still not well; DVB (20 Sep 05) Burmese prisoner Aung Shin not well; DVB (10 Oct 05) Burmese prisoner Soe Han's health deteriorates; DVB (14 Oct 05) Burmese heroine Su Su Nway deprived of essential medicines; DVB (14 Oct 05) Burmese prisoner Thet Win Aung's condition has not improved; DVB (18 Oct 05) Burmese prisoners Buthidaung MP and wife not well; DVB (25 Oct 05) Burmese prisoners' health condition; Than Nyein & May Win Myint; IMNA (05 Nov 05) Mon political prisoner suffers from depression; DVB (09 Nov 05) Burmese prisoners' health conditions deteriorate; DVB (11 Nov 05) Detained wedding guests released from Burmese jail; DVB (26 Nov 05) Khin Maung Lwin seriously ill in Puta-O Jail and no treatment given to him; IMNA (18 Dec 05) The Mon Political Prisoner in Depression; DVB (06 Jan 06) Political Prisoner Tun Lin Kyaw is seriously ill; Mizzima News (13 Jan 06) Burma's prison conditions deteriorating; welfare group; DVB (16 Jan 06) Burmese political prisoner Than Win Hlaing not well; DVB (17 Jan 06) Burma Taunggyi MP Kyaw Khin's eye condition deteriorate; DVB (19 Jan 06) Two Burmese political prisoners, Saw Win and Aye Aung serious ill; Irrawaddy (25 Jan 06) Rights Group Calls for Improved Prison Conditions; DVB (25 Jan 06) Burmese political prisoner Than Win Hlaing seriously ill; Narinjara News (26 Jan 06) Health of political prisoner deteriorates in Burmese jail; AAPP (25 Mar 06) Democracy Activist and NLD Member Dies in Thayet Prison; DVB (17 Feb 06) Burmese political prisoner Zaw Myint Maung ill; DVB (28 Feb 06) Goodwill: Burmese prisoner Zaw Myint Maung given medical check-up; DVB (09 Mar 06) Burmese prisoner Kyaw Khin in a critical state; DVB (16 Mar 06) Detained Rangoon MP Dr. Than Nyein not well; DVB (16 Mar 06) Detained solo protester Tun Lin Kyaw suffers severe TB; DVB (31 Mar 06) Shan prisoner Myint Than seriously ill; DVB (11 Apr 06) NLD Kyaw San's appeal rejected by Burma's high court; DVB (21 May 06) Political prisoner Thet Oo not well in Insein Jail; DVB (23 May 06) Detained NLD MP Than Nyein not allowed to receive medical treatment; DVB (13 Jun 06) Burmese prisoner Than Win Hliang's condition deteriorates
- 32 DVB (30 Sep 05) Cholera outbreak in Burma Tharawaddy latest: 40 dead within one day;
- 33 DVB (16 Jan 06) Prisoners die from cholera outbreak at Sittwe in west Burma
- 34 DVB (26 Sep 05) Cholera outbreak inside Burma Tharawaddy Prison; AAPP (27 Sep 05) Outbreak of Diarrhea in Tharawaddy Prison; DVB (28 Sep 05) Cholera outbreak at Burma Tharawaddy Jail latest; DVB (30 Sep 05) Cholera outbreak in Burma Tharawaddy latest: 40 dead within one day
- 35 DVB (05 Apr 05) Burmese prisoners sent to isolation cells for complaining; Irrawaddy (06 May 05) Nine stage hunger strike at Insein Prison; DVB (06 May 05) Latest situation of Hunger strikers inside the Insein prison; DVB (09 May 05) Exiled Burmese government urges UN to help tortured prisoners; DVB (13 Apr 05) Burmese prison authority uses thugs to beat up prisoner
- 36 Irrawaddy (06 May 05) Nine stage hunger strike at Insein Prison; DVB (12 May 05) Burmese prisoners transferred for staging hunger strike

- 37 DVB (06 May 05) Latest situation of Hunger strikers inside the Insein prison
- 38 DVB (12 May 05) Burmese prisoners transferred for staging hunger strike
- 39 DVB (28 Jan 06) Prisoners beaten up and killed in Burma's Kalemyo Prison; DVB (30 Jan 06) Two inmates reported killed in Burmese prison riot
- 40 DVB (13 Apr 05) Burmese prison authority uses thugs to beat up prisoner
- 41 Mizzima News (19 Sep 05) Political Prisoner Beaten By Scorpion Gang
- 42 AAPP (05 Oct 05) Gang members in Insein Prison continuously attack political prisoners
- 43 AAPP (11 Jan 06) Three Political Prisoner Harshly Beaten again by Criminals in Insein Prison; Irrawaddy (11 Jan 06) Political prisoners reportedly beaten at Insein Prison; Narinjara News (12 Jan 06) Criminals attack
- 44 AAPP(05 Oct 05) Gang members in Insein Prison continuously attack political prisoners
- 45 DVB (12 May 05) NLD relative tortured to death by Burmese officials and buried secretly
- 46 DVB (12 May 05) NLD relative tortured to death by Burmese officials and buried secretly
- 47 Irrawaddy (8 June 2005) Doctors confirm torture of NLD Youth member
- 48 DVB (01 Sep 05) Dead Karen teacher's relatives lodge complaint to Burma junta
- 49 DVB (12 Sep 05) Another prisoner's corpse disappeared in Burma
- 50 IMNA (29 Sep 05) Mon Political Prisoner Dies in Prison
- 51 DVB (09 Nov 05) Another Burmese political prisoner dies in detention
- 52 Democratic Voice of Burma (20 Dec 05) Death camp Burma: Another political prisoner dies in detention
- 53 AAPP (12 Jan 06) A Political Prisoner Passed Away in Putao Prison; Irrawaddy (12 Jan 06) Another Political Prisoner Dies in Burma; DVB (11 Jan 06) Another Burmese political prisoner dies in prison
- 54 DVB (24 Mar 06) Tortured: Another political prisoner dies at Burma's Tharawaddy Jail; AAPP (25 Mar 06) Democracy Activist and NLD Member Dies in Thayet Prison
- 55 AAPP (04 May 06) Shan Political Prisoner Arrested in 2005 Dies; Third Political Prisoner to Die in 2006; DVB (03 May 06) Killing them softly & painfully: Another Burmese political prisoner dies in detention
- 56 Irrawaddy (25 Jan 05) Heads of Military Intelligence Detained and Tortured
- 57 DVB (21 Jan 05) Burmese border official died in prison
- 58 DVB (21 Jan 05) Burmese border official died in prison
- 59 DVB (18 Mar 06) Ex-Burmese political prisoner beaten to death: Mother tells horror; RFA (24 Mar 06) Burmese Student Leader Calls For Non-Violent Resistance After Mob Killing
- 60 RFA (24 Mar 06) Burmese Student Leader Calls For Non-Violent Resistance After Mob Killing
- 61 DVB (31 Mar 06) Serial killers: Another Burmese youth died in the hand of police
- 62 Irrawaddy (21 Dec 06) Relief agency wants to go alone
- 63 BBC (20 Nov 04) Burma junta frees top dissident
- 64 Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (11 Nov 05) E-mail communication
- 65 AFP (07 July 2005) Myanmar says 400 prisoners freed, refuses to identify them; Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (6 Sep 05) E-mail communication

ETHNIC RELATIONS: PERSECUTIONS INTENSIFY

SHAN STATE

Shan Leaders Arrested

From 7 to 9 February 2005, the SPDC arrested about 30 Shan leaders and activists. The regime accused the group of creating an organization, the Shan State Joint Action Committee.

Although many were released, at least ten prominent stood trial, including Hkun Htun Oo and General Hso Ten, Chairmen of the SNLD and SSPC respectively.¹

The trials took place in Insein Prison with little procedural protections² and they were sentenced to long prison terms on 3 November.³ [see "Political Prisoners"]

SSA-South stands its ground

Supported by the junta, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) led by druglord Wei Hsuehkan, initiated a series of offensives against the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S). On 12 March 2005, the UWSA besieged SSA's Loi Lam base.⁴ The following day about 200 Wa soldiers launched attacks on the SSA Kor Kha hill base.⁵ Skirmishes continued throughout March.⁶ In April, the UWSA unsuccessfully attacked SSA-S's base in Lio Taileng and Ban Mai Lan with SPDC reinforcements.⁷ During the hostilities, the UWSA troops destroyed Shan villages causing thousands to flee.⁸

By the end of April 2005, the UWSA had suffered a significant number of casualties as well as an increasing rate of defection.⁹ Attacks against the SSA-S however continued with support from SPDC troops. Meanwhile, the SSA-S received reinforcement by the SSNA, which joined their ranks on 21 May.¹⁰ Renewed aggression eventually led to the surrender of 119 SSA soldiers, including the SSNA 6th Brigade on 24 July.¹¹ Five days later, the SPDC deployed a mortar attack on a SSA outpost north of its base Loi Taileng.¹² In September, the SSA-S reported three additional major clashes with the SPDC.¹³

On 2 January 2006, after a four-month hide-and-seek campaign, around 40 soldiers of the SSA-S and their commander, Sa Khun Kyaw, surrendered to the SPDC Army near the village of Namtee, Nam Kham Township in northeast Shan State.¹⁴ The capture of Sa Khun Kyaw gave new energy to the military campaign carried out by the SPDC Army in Northern Shan State, where at least six light infantry battalions (LIBs) launched an operation against the Shan State Army's 758th Brigade led by Col Moengzuen.¹⁵ In March 2006, Sa Khun Kyaw, along with 24 SSA-S soldiers, was sentenced to death at a trial in Lashio Prison in northern Shan State.¹⁶

On 23 January 2006, an SSA-S unit exchanged fire with SPDC troops at Loi Pangkaw, Mongkerng Township. The battle reportedly yielded 11 SPDC casualties including commander, Captain Kyaw Oh as well as radio equipment and light and heavy arms. The SSA-S reported one casualty and four injured.¹⁷

Attacks and harassment of ethnic groups and ethnic leaders, including lengthy jail terms for Shan leaders, further erode the viability of the junta's "roadmap for democracy".

Top Shan leaders including Hkun Htun Oo and Gen Hso Ten were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms for allegedly being involved in the formation of the Shan State Joint Action Committee.

Shan State National Army (SSNA) ended a 10-year ceasefire by joining the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) in battle against the regime-aligned UWSA. Meanwhile, Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) also came under attack from SPDC troops.

The declaration of Shan "independence" by a little-known exiled group gave the SPDC an excuse to crack down on all Shan groups and their leaders.

On 22 April 2006, while on the way to intercept a drug shipment near Maejok, SSA-S troops unexpectedly ran into SPDC troops.¹⁸ An initial three-hour firefight ensued between the two sides¹⁹ after which both retreated to new positions. SSA-S troops attempting to scavenge the battlefield for evidence linking the SPDC Army to the drug shipment became victims of SPDC sniper-fire.²⁰

Fighting resumed on 27 April 2006 when a joint SPDC-Wa force moved on the SSA-S while it maintained its position.²¹

Shan State National Army (SSNA) ends ceasefire with SPDC

Increased pressure on the SSNA by SPDC forced the surrender of the 11th Brigade in early April 2005.²² Following the surrender, 1,000 SSNA troops led by Col Sai Yee fled their Loikhurh base on 9 April.²³ Despite a consolidation of the SSNA command in early May the 19th Brigade surrendered to the SPDC after a series of raids on SSNA property.²⁴

Sustained pressure on the SSNA eventually led it to join arms with the SSA-S, effectively terminating a 1995 ceasefire agreement with the junta.²⁵

At the end of January 2006, Col Sai Yee was elected Vice-President of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Shan State Army-South's supreme political body. Col Yawdserk, the SSA-S leader, was re-elected President of the RCSS.²⁶

The Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) surrendered to SPDC in April 2005.

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) rejected the junta's ceasefire offer.

Chemical warfare was allegedly used by the SPDC in offensives against the KNPP. Soldiers experienced blisters, lung irritation, shortness of breath, and diarrhea.

The ceasefire group Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) threatened to merge with the KNU if forced by the SPDC to disarm.

The junta stepped up military attacks on the Karen, targeting and killing scores of civilians, including children.

SSA-North: the current target

Encouraged by their success in pressuring some brigades of the SSNA to surrender, the SPDC turned their attention on the SSA-N by meeting their officials on 11 April 2005.²⁷ But when negotiations broke down, the junta instigated raids and arrests of SSA-N officials.²⁸ An order issued by the SPDC on 24 August led the SSA-N 3rd Brigade to withdraw from its controlled areas on 13 September.²⁹ The 3rd Brigade surrendered to the SPDC in October.³⁰ SPDC attacks against the SSA-N continue.³¹ On 10 February, the SPDC Army fired at SSA-N officers while they were meeting with local headmen at a village in SSA-N Brigade-3 Mong Kher region in Northern Shan State. It was later confirmed that the attack resulted in no casualties on either side. Rather than retaliate, the SSA-N sent Captain Sai Zarm to meet with SPDC commanders and defuse the situation.³²

Shan "independence"

Causing controversy throughout the Shan community, on 17 April 2005, a little known Shan exile group led by Prince Sukhanpha declared the formation of an independent Shan State, subsequently named the Interim Shan Government (ISG).³³ On 19 April, the SPDC banned the group for attempting to undermine the stability of the state.³⁴ The declaration spurred criticism from ethnic and political groups.³⁵ Despite efforts, the ISG failed to gain recognition.³⁶ Meanwhile, the declaration led to increased targeting of Shans by the SPDC.³⁷

Additionally the declaration led to a split in the SSA-S. In April 2005, Brigade-758 troops under the command of Col Moengzuen pledged support to the new ISG, putting them at odds with the SSA-S. The splinter group took refuge in the central region of Shan State and formed the Shan State Army Central (SSA-C). In April 2006, the SSA-S sent 300 troops to reconcile with the SSA-C. The SPDC reportedly attacked the SSA-S several times during its journey.³⁸ In July 2006 it was reported that the SSA-C had signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC under which it had been provided with land and 30 million kyat for development.³⁹

United Wa State Army at odds with SPDC

Not all was well with the junta's favorite partner-in-crime in the illegal drugs business. An SPDC military buildup in Wa territory increased tension with the UWSA in December 2004.⁴⁰ Hostility escalated after five SPDC soldiers were injured in an attack on 22 December 2004 by suspected UWSA soldiers. In response, SPDC troops launched a mortar attack on suspected UWSA hideouts.⁴¹

Speculation of a covert campaign against the UWSA grew in August 2005 as the SPDC issued an ultimatum for the surrender of unregistered motor vehicles in the Wa possession.⁴² The UWSA were previously exempt from the policy, as part of the range of benefits enjoyed through their alliance with the SPDC, especially with ousted Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt. Highlighting their fall from grace, over 100 UWSA members were detained by the SPDC in connection with their unlicensed vehicles in September and November 2005.⁴³

On 9 April 2006, the SPDC offered an "exchange arms for peace" deal to the UWSA. This came at a time when Wa supreme commander Bao Youxiang had taken leave from his administrative and military duties. All operations were under the command of his two brothers, Youri and Youliang. A Wa source said of the offer, "It will be impossible for us to comply."⁴⁴

Palaung State Liberation Army surrenders

On 29 April 2005, the PSLA formally surrendered to the SPDC Army at a ceremony attended by the junta's Secretary-1 Lt-Gen Thein Sein in Mantong, northern Shan State. The PSLA reportedly handed in its arms in accordance with the military regime's "exchange arms for peace" program.⁴⁵

However, the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), witnessing a further deterioration in the situation in Northern Shan State after the PSLA's surrender, pledged to continue the armed struggle against the SPDC.⁴⁶

PREPARE FOR SELF-DEFENCE SAYS NDF

At the sixth conference of the National Democratic Front (NDF) from 20-22 April 2006, delegates from nine of Burma's ethnic armed resistance groups collectively spoke out against the SPDC and its 7-Point Roadmap to Democracy.⁴⁷

Gen-Sec of the NDF, Col. Hkun Okker, mentioned the handovers of arms by both the Palaung State Liberation Army (PLSA) and Shan State National Army (SSNA) and the negative consequences each one had on civilians in those areas such as rapes, land confiscations, portering and forced labor for SPDC development projects.

For these reasons, the conference urged other groups of the need to "prepare for self-defense."⁴⁸

KARENNI STATE

Chemical warfare?

Clashes between the SPDC and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) continued throughout the year.⁴⁹

SPDC bombardment of a KNPP base near the Thai border during the beginning of the year prompted Thailand to call for an end to the attacks after several mortars landed in Thai territory⁵⁰ that caused alarm in the refugee camps along the border. The offensives also displaced hundreds of Karenni villagers.⁵¹

During a series of February 2005 attacks, the SPDC was alleged to have used chemical warfare against Karenni fighters causing victims to suffer from blisters, lung irritation, shortness of breath, and diarrhea.⁵²

On 31 March 2005 SPDC troops from LIB 214, attacked Kwa Kee Village. As villagers fled, soldiers looted the town and arrested four villagers.⁵³

On 16 December 2005 SPDC Army troops in conjunction with soldiers from pro-junta factions of the Karenni Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front (KNPLF) and the Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO) launched an offensive in Southwestern Karenni State. As a result, more than 200 people from the villages of Hpa Poe and Geh Kaw Per fled into the jungle.⁵⁴

On 17 December 2005 the SPDC Army's LIB 428, along with 4 companies from the KNSO attacked the Yaw Ah Ta Ka Village, assaulting villagers and kidnapping three women.⁵⁵

On 23 December 2005 the SPDC Army's LIB 424 raided and set fire to Dikawpu village, destroying 25 homes. Similarly, a column from the LIB 426 raided Ywapu village, looted the villagers' homes.⁵⁶

Ceasefire Talks

In June 2005, the KNPP indicated a willingness to engage in ceasefire talks with the junta.⁵⁷ On August 21, the SPDC presented the KNPP with the same "arms for peace" peace deal offered in 1995.⁵⁸ Hoping for something more, KNPP General Secretary Raymond Htoo said, "[W]e don't call it peace by just handing over weapons to the SPDC."⁵⁹

In December 2005 the KNPLF and a Karenni Catholic pastor offered to mediate peace talks between the KNPP and the junta. The KNPP General Secretary expressed doubts about KNPLF-brokered talks but left the door open for further negotiations.⁶⁰

In February 2006, Htoo said that fighting between the SPDC and KNPP continued in eastern Burma. "They are trying every means to sideline us, split us and attack us."⁶¹

In May 2006, the SPDC branded the KNPP a "terrorist group" and urged the Thai military to do its part to drive KNPP members out of refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border and back into Burma.⁶²

Arakanese villagers were subjected to torture, deprivation of food, land confiscation, forced labor, extortion, and restrictions of movements. The intensified persecution sparked off a violent retaliation in one incident.

Violent retaliation against intensified repression also took place in Chin State.

The New Mon State Party refused to disarm despite harassment.

High tension prevailed in Kachin State as KIO and groups become increasingly factionalized.

The National Democratic Front (NDF), concerned over the systematic human rights violations linked to the regime's so-called roadmap to democracy and surrenders of arms, urges group to "prepare for self-defense".

KAREN STATE

Karen National Union (KNU)

After ceasefire talks were interrupted with the ouster of Gen Khin Nyunt, discussions did not resume until March 2005 but that too ended without success.⁶³ On 7 December 2005 a group of six Karen officials from the Karen National Liberation Army's Brigade 7 reportedly met in Bangkok with the junta ambassador to Thailand, Col Tin Soe, in an attempt to hold separate talks with the regime.⁶⁴ The initiative however did not produce any significant outcome in the peace process.⁶⁵ Showing little enthusiasm for talking, the SPDC instead increased military pressure on the KNU and Karen civilians in hopes of its surrender.⁶⁶

On 8 November 2004, SPDC troops initiated attacks at Shwe Kyin, Kyauk Gyi, Taungoo and Tenesserim regions.⁶⁷ Abuses against Karen villagers followed.⁶⁸

On 10 January 2005, 300 SPDC soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 250 disrupted Karen New Year's celebrations in Lawse Village. The fighting that ensued was described as "heavy" and resulted in the displacement of some 500 villagers.⁶⁹

In March 2005, KNU spokesperson Saw Sarky reported, "sustained major operations in Nyaunglebin and Toungoo districts...with forced relocation of civilians, torching of Karen and Karenni villages, rape, torture and extrajudicial executions of civilians."⁷⁰

In May 2005, the SPDC increased its presence in Nyaunglebin, Toungoo and Pegu Divisions.⁷¹ By October, the SPDC imposed blockades in the area.⁷²

On 7 July 2005, a raid on Tagu Village by the SPDC resulted in the one death and the arrest of about 50 villagers.⁷³ SPDC troops surrounded the village throughout mid-August.⁷⁴

In an attempt to impose psychological pressure on the KNU, in September 2005 the SPDC bribed ex-KNU members in Thailand into “surrendering”.⁷⁵

On 15 November 2005, troops of the SPDC Army’s LIB 421 opened fire on villagers who were working in the paddy fields. Three people were killed, including a six-year child.⁷⁶

On 26 November 2005 the SPDC Army’s LIB 73 attacked Htee Kaw Htaw village. 30 houses were burned down and around 900 villagers from the area fled into the jungle.⁷⁷

On 31 January 2006 the KNU president Ba Thin Sein, in a speech marking the 57th anniversary of Karen Revolution Day, urged the Karen people to continue their fight for independence from Burma’s ruling junta “until victory is achieved.”⁷⁸

SPDC offensive against the Karen

In February 2006, the SPDC Army embarked on its largest campaign against the Karen since 1997. As of June 2006, more than 18,000 unarmed civilians have been internally displaced by the actions of the SPDC which has included burning villages, killings, torture, rape, destruction of food supplies and planting of landmines.⁷⁹ [See Karen Offensive]

DKBA threatens KNU link-up

Prior to 14 November 2004 discussions on the conditions of their ceasefire agreement, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was forced to provide the SPDC with information on their members and weaponry.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, beginning in late November, the military increased its presence in the Three Pagodas Pass area, where the DKBA forces are active.⁸¹ In a meeting in early May, the SPDC had urged the DKBA to surrender.⁸² In response, the DKBA indicated that it was “very likely to merge with the KNU if the junta keeps pressuring it to disarm.”⁸³

SPDC kills two young DKBA soldiers

On 4 March 2006, the SPDC shot dead two 16 year old DKBA soldiers. The SPDC claimed it was a case of mistaken identity and that the firing soldiers believed the two were KNU troops with whom they were fighting at the time.⁸⁴ DKBA instead said the two soldiers were sleeping while they waited to collect tax from traders traveling along the Makatha natural road when they were killed.⁸⁵

The incident sparked outrage among DKBA soldiers who took to the streets near Three Pagoda Pass, firing their guns into the air.⁸⁶ In response, the SPDC Army’s Southeast Region commander Col. Thit Swe visited the Three Pagoda Pass area, where he met with DKBA officials and presented his apologies to DKBA soldiers.⁸⁷

MON STATE

NMSP chooses not to disarm

For two months, the SPDC cut off economic support for the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and increased restrictions on business operations in Mon State⁸⁸ to “persuade” the ceasefire group to surrender its arms. In September 2005, the SPDC only partially resumed payments, providing 1/10 of the promised amount, while continuing to limit certain industries.⁸⁹ NMSP also reported heightened travel restrictions within the state.⁹⁰ Furthermore, villagers have been subject to an extensive array of abuse including forced labor, portering, conscription, extortion, use of villagers as mine sweepers and property destruction.⁹¹ In response to the harassment, the NMSP called for UN intervention.⁹² Despite growing frustration with the SPDC’s actions, the NMSP has so far refused to surrender its arms.⁹³

Despite calls by some of its representatives to do otherwise, the NMSP decided at the third annual Mon National Conference held 26-28 April 2006 to stick to its 1995 ceasefire agreement with the SPDC. The conference was held on the Thai-Burma border and attended by representatives from over 80 Mon organizations as well as the US, Canada, Australia, Malaysia and Thailand.⁹⁴

KACHIN STATE

KIO factionalized

Tensions between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and other Kachin groups have been on the rise. In December 2004, the New Democratic Army- Kachin (NDA-K) called for investigations on the KIO suspecting their involvement in the 10 December bombing of the convoy of NDA-K leader Zahkung Ting Ying. KIO denied involvement. Meanwhile the NDA-K rejected a joint investigation.⁹⁵

In March 2005, the KIO refused to recognize a splinter group formed by the organization’s former intelligence chief Colonel Lasang Awngwa in early 2004. The KIO could not accept “the formation of any other new organization” but indicated willingness for reconciliation.⁹⁶

On 1 August 2005, 37 members of the splinter group defected and rejoined the KIO.⁹⁷ Meanwhile the junta met with Col Lasang Awngwa’s group on 6 August 2005 to convince them to remain independent in the hopes of maintaining factional splits among the Kachin.⁹⁸ Accepting the junta’s offer to relocate to a new territory under guarantees of security and support caused another split among the Kachin groups as 300 members of Col Lasang’s splinter group refused to join the move to Ja Htu Pa.⁹⁹

Tension increased also between the KIO and Rangoon after the SPDC Army’s LIB-68 launched an attack on 2 January 2006 on a KIO base camp in Muse Township in Northern Shan State, killing six people, including one KIO officer.¹⁰⁰ The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) demanded an urgent inquiry into the attack, which the SPDC Army claimed to have been an accidental shooting.¹⁰¹ In February 2006 a KIO

team led by Vice-Chairman Dr. Tu Ja met with SPDC intelligence chief Lt-Gen Myint Swe in Rangoon and KIO official Col Gunmaw met with SPDC Army planner Lt-Col San Shwe Tha in Kutkhaing to discuss the matter.¹⁰²

On 11 February 2006, four KIA members were arrested by the SPDC for passing through a junta-controlled area near Mansi Township, Bhamo District in Kachin State, this despite the area's regular use by the KIA.¹⁰³ On 20 April, SPDC soldiers stormed four KIA Fourth Brigade outposts near Mongko in northern Shan State. The attack was part of the SPDC's operation against the KIA's Second and Eighth Brigades that concluded on 21 April.¹⁰⁴ During the attack, 13 KIA soldiers were abducted by the SPDC.¹⁰⁵ On 21 April, the SPDC arrested 14 KIO members in the Majjaya region of northern Shan State.¹⁰⁶

(NDA-K): Botched Coup

On 14 September 2005, Layawk Zelum, the New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA-K) Secretary overthrew Chairman Zahkung for "corrupt practices".¹⁰⁷ As the SPDC took position near NDA-K headquarters, conflict seemed imminent.¹⁰⁸ On 26 September, however, Chairman Zahkung was peacefully restored to power with the help of Col Lasang Awngwa's group. Three instigators of the coup were arrested and turned over to the SPDC. Layawk Zelum however evaded capture.¹⁰⁹

Six days later, about 30 of the coup followers, belonging to the NDA-K's Brigade-4, surrendered their arms to the SPDC.¹¹⁰ The botched coup sparked renewed military pressure on the NDA-K to dissolve its Brigade-4.¹¹¹ In 2006 Layawk Zelum again attempted to grab power in the NDA-K. On 24 May, 40 men from the Layawk Zelum splinter group seized the Kampaiti base of the NDA-K.¹¹² The NDA-K was able to recapture the base the following day, killing three and capturing 13 members of the splinter group.¹¹³

ARAKAN STATE

During August 2005 the SPDC Army continued to engage in clashes with the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA). Following such clashes, there were reports of the torture of Arakanese villagers who are accused of having contact with the ALA.¹¹⁴ Amid increased tensions, villagers in Maungdaw Township attacked local SPDC authorities on 16 September leaving one official dead and three seriously wounded.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, Arakan villagers have suffered a range of hardships at the hands of the regime, including severe rice shortages, forced labor, forced conscriptions, land confiscation of rubber plantations, extortion, and travel restrictions.¹¹⁶ The junta has reportedly resorted to offering economic incentives to armed opposition groups willing to surrender.¹¹⁷

On 16 November 2005 Col Khaing Zaw, the chief of the Arakan Army (AA), surrendered to the SPDC Army.¹¹⁸ In February 2006, rumors abounded among the opposition members and the media that he had been brought to Rangoon to be interrogated by the SPDC for his extensive information about rebels along the Burma-Bangladesh border.¹¹⁹

CHIN STATE

In retaliation for religious and other abuses against the Chin community, on 10 March 2005 the Chin National Front (CNF) ambushed soldiers from IB-266 in Htantalan Township killing two officers.¹²⁰

On 18 December 2005 Salai Ram Ling Hmung, chairman of the Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD), died in Rangoon. He had been the head of the CNLD since its formation in 1988.¹²¹

From 8-11 May 2006, the first Chin National Assembly was held on the Burma-India border. At the assembly, the Political Affairs Committee of Chinland (PACC) was changed to the Chin National Council (CNC). The PACC had functioned as a committee and the change to a council is more inclusive of the views of people inside and outside of Burma. The council is to pick up where the committee left off in working toward the political objectives of the Chin people.¹²²

TENASSERIM STATE

Tavoy surrenders to the SPDC

On 24 March 2006, five members of the Mergui-Tavoy United Front (MTUF) surrendered to the SPDC at Three Pagoda Pass.¹²³

In May, eight members of an unidentified armed group surrendered to the SPDC at Three Pagodas Pass. The men identified themselves as belonging to the People Defense Front (PDF), but the PDF and the MTUF both denied that the men were their members.¹²⁴

Footnotes

1 AFP (10 Mar 05) Ten Shan activists arrested in Myanmar for conspiracy: minister

2 DVB (30 Apr 05) Burma opposition radio says 10 detained Shan leaders "secretly" tried in jail

3 DVB (04 Nov 05) Shan leaders sentenced in Rangoon Insein Jail

4 SHAN (14 Mar 05) Shan, Wa dance to junta tune

5 BP (15 Mar 05) Wa troops attack SSA position, driven back

6 SHAN (23 Mar 05) Shan army fights on two fronts

7 BP (13 Apr 05) Stray shells land on Thai soil; SHAN (11 Apr 05) SSA: War with Wa inevitable; BP (13 Apr 05) Stray shells land on Thai soil

8 Irrawaddy (27 Apr 05) Burma border fighting hits new pitch

9 SHAN (09 May 05) Wa bucking up for new showdown; BP (23 Apr 05) Border Fighting/Shan Army Claims Upper Hand: Wa troops starving, defecting

10 AP (23 May 05) Two ethnic rebel groups announce merger to fight the junta

11 SHAN (09 May 05) Wa bucking up for new showdown; SHAN (11 May 05) More Wa on their way; SHAN (21 Jul 05) Burma Army seeks to block rebel movements; Irrawaddy (25 Jul 05) Members of two Shan groups disarm

12 SHAN (01 Aug 05) Army shelling raises false alarm

13 SHAN (12 Oct 05) Shan army reports on clashes

- 14 S.H.A.N. (03 Jan 06) The big chase; DVB (02 Jan 06) Shan fighters surrender to Burmese military authorities;
- 15 SHAN (18 Jan 06) Fresh campaign against SSA begins
- 16 DVB (10 Mar 06) 24 Shan fighters sentenced to death by Burmese court
- 17 SHAN (02 Feb 06) There is no Shan Government: Yawdserk
- 18 SHAN (21 Apr 06) Breaking News: SSA takes on Burma Army
- 19 DVB (22 Apr 06) Clash between Shan fighters and Burmese troops
- 20 SHAN (24 Apr 06) Stand off on the border
- 21 SHAN (27 Apr 06) Fighting resumes
- 22 SHAN (08 Apr 05) One ceasefire commander has had enough of it
- 23 SHAN (22 Apr 05) Junta plays good cop-bad cop
- 24 SHAN (06 May 05) Junta: From forced labor to forced submission; SHAN (03 May 05) The next one to go
- 25 AP (23 May 05) Two Ethnic Rebel Groups Announce Merger to Fight Junta; DVB (23 May 05) Anxieties for Burmese people as Shan fighters join forces
- 26 SHAN (28 Jan 06) Col Sai Yee elected to SSA leadership
- 27 Irrawaddy (12 Apr 05) Tension mounts between Shan and Rangoon
- 28 DVB (10 May 05) Shan "ceasefire" members arrested by Burmese soldiers; SHAN (6 May 05) Junta: From forced labor to forced submission
- 29 DVB (13 Sep 05) SSA-N warn: No surrender to Burma junta; SHAN (30 Aug 05) Ceasefire group gets marching orders
- 30 SHAN (25 Sep 05) The junta knows its stuff; SHAN (15 Nov 05) Junta keeps up the heat
- 31 SHAN (15 Nov 05) Junta keeps up the heat
- 32 DVB (10 Feb 06) Breaking News: Burmese troops attack a SSA-N base in Shan State
- 33 Xinhua (19 Apr 05) Myanmar declares Shan ethnic group as outlawed organization
- 34 Xinhua (19 Apr 05) Myanmar declares Shan ethnic group as outlawed organization; SHAN (20 Apr 05) Key Shan parties cold-shoulder Shan "government"
- 35 Groups issuing critical statements included: members of the Shan community, Shan Democratic Union, Restoration Council of Shan State, SNLD, SSA-S, NLD, NCGUB, veteran politician Thakhin Chan Tun, and the NMSP. See, SHAN (18 Apr 05) Shan elders declare independence; SHAN (20 Apr 05) Key Shan parties cold-shoulder Shan "government"; DVB (19 Apr 05) Reactions on declaration of "independence" by Shan elders; Kaowao (25 Apr 05) NMSP on Shan declaration; SHAN (1 Nov 05) Shan Foreign Minister faces the sack
- 36 SHAN (27 Apr 05) Shan 'government': we're genuine stuff; DPA (28 Apr 05) Self-declared "Shan government" seeks recognition
- 37 SHAN (20 May 05) Hundreds fleeing from hot spot township; SHAN (20 Jun 05) Hard to be Shan these days
- 38 Irrawaddy (19 May 06) Shan Rebels Seek Alliance
- 39 Irrawaddy (10 July 06) Shan rebels dismiss claims of mass defections
- 40 BBC/DVB (22 Dec 04) Clashes with United Wa State Army feared amid Burmese troop reinforcement
- 41 SHAN (23 Dec 04) Junta-Wa hostilities reported
- 42 SHAN (24 Aug 05) Junta moves baffle Burma watchers.
- 43 DVB (14 Nov 04) Tension between Burmese troops and UWSA; DVB (15 Sep 05) UWSA members detained by Burmese soldiers
- 44 SHAN (17 Apr 06) Wa "invited" to surrender
- 45 Irrawaddy (28 Apr 05) Another ethnic ceasefire group to disarm
- 46 IMNA (12 Jan 06) PSLF continues to adhere to PSLA policy
- 47 Narinjara News (26 Apr 06) NDF's sixth Congress Successfully Concluded
- 48 NMG (25 Apr 06) NDF urges armed groups to be prepared
- 49 DVB (19 Dec 04) Clash between Burma army and Karenni fighters
- 50 BBC Monitor (07 Jan 05) Burmese military reportedly attack Karenni base; DVB (17 Jan 05) Burmese troops intensify attacks on Karenni base; Irrawaddy (24 Jan 05) Burmese Army Targets Karennis; AFP (24 Jan 05) Myanmar attacks rebel base near Thai border: Thai army official
- 51 DVB (19 Dec 04) Clash between Burma army and Karenni fighters; BBC Monitor (07 Jan 05) Burmese military reportedly attack Karenni base
- 52 Mizzima (12 May 05) Number of mustard gas victims increase in Karenni camp; Radio Free Asia (24 May 2005) Burmese Army deserters describe transporting chemical artillery shells
- 53 FBR (31 Mar 05) Burma Army Attacks Karenni village, loots, and captures four villagers
- 54 FBR (16 Dec 05) Burma Army commences attacks in Southern Karenni State; Irrawaddy (19 Dec 05) Junta Forces Villagers into Jungle
- 55 FBR (27 Dec 05) Burma Army kidnaps three women, assaults villagers and attacks Karenni Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Karenni State
- 56 DVB (27 Dec 05) Human rights and unabated offensives in Karenni region
- 57 DVB (05 Jun 05) Karenni to abandon separate state claim and accept a federal Burma
- 58 Mizzima (22 Aug 05) Peace Broker contacts Burma's KNPP for "Arms for Peace" deal
- 59 DVB (22 Aug 05) Burma junta offers 'peace' to KNPP through go-between
- 60 Mizzima News (14 Dec 05) Karenni groups offer to mediate new KNPP cease-fire
- 61 DVB (27 Feb 06) Clashes between Burmese troops and Karenni fighters
- 62 Kantarawaddy Times (15 May 06) Junta official urges Thai authorities not to support KNPP
- 63 AP (21 Oct 04) Karen rebels return from Yangon after peace talks cut short by Myanmar prime minister's removal; Xinhua (16 Mar 05) Myanmar confirms peace talks with KNU underway; Irrawaddy (17 Mar 05) Regime "Willing to reach new ceasefire pact with KNU
- 64 Irrawaddy (27 Dec 05) Cracks Showing in KNU Leadership
- 65 Irrawaddy (27 Dec 05) Cracks Showing in KNU Leadership; Mizzima News (20 Jan 06) KNU armed wing stops talks with Burmese military
- 66 DVB (13 Jul 05) Burmese troops increasing attacks on KNU despite "gentlemen agreement"
- 67 DVB (11 Dec 04) Burma SPDC doesn't respect ceasefire agreement, says KNU
- 68 AP (13 Dec 04) Thousands flee Burma crackdown

- 69 Reuters (12 Jan 05) Myanmar villagers flee to Thailand after clashes
- 70 Asian Tribune (03 Feb 05) Burma Army attacks continue while regime talks peace; FBR (17 Mar 05) 1,300 IDPs flee the BA in Nyaunglebin District Karen State, Burma; DVB (25 Mar 05) KNU racking their brains over Burma junta "proposals," while attacks continue
- 71 Irrawaddy (13 May 05) Big Burma Army force reported sent to KNU area; FBR (16 May 05) Burma Army sends 10 battalions for operation in Eastern Toungoo and Nyaunglebin Districts, Karen State
- 72 BBC Burmese Service (02 Oct 05) KNU says junta carries out all cuts policy to Karen areas
- 73 and 74: DVB (12 Aug 05) More Karen villagers detained in delta Burma
- 75 DVB (08 Sep 05) Burma junta lures ex-KNU members to surrender
- 76 FBR (15 Nov 05) Burma Army troops kill a six year old child and two other Karenni villagers
- 77 DVB (29 Nov 05) More man-made disasters in Burma: 900 Karen villagers left homeless
- 78 Irrawaddy (31 Jan 06) KNU Marks Revolution Day
- 79 AP (12 Jun 06) New attacks by Myanmar army displace 4,100 more ethnic Karens: relief group
- 80 Kaowao (14 Nov 04) DKBA: Never surrender to SPDC
- 81 Irrawaddy (25 Nov 04) Burma Army told to disarm DKBA Troops
- 82 Kaowao (16 May 05) Surrender or Fight: DKBA Faces Dilemma
- 83 Irrawaddy (24 May 05) More ceasefire groups expected to break with Rangoon.
- 84 IMNA (05 Mar 06) DKBA dissatisfied with Burmese explanation over killing of its soldiers
- 85 IMNA (06 Mar 06) Southeast Command stops its local commander from meeting DKBA
- 86 IMNA (09 Mar 06) Angry DKBA soldiers fire guns in the air in Three Pagoda Pass
- 87 IMNA (12 Mar 06) DKBA brokers peace with military government
- 88 Irrawaddy (09 Sep 05) Burmese junta cuts support for NMSP
- 89 DVB (12 Sep 05) Burma junta resumes support for Mon ceasefire group
- 90 Kaowao (01 Oct 05) Mon Urge NMSP Not to Give Up Arms; Irrawaddy (04 Oct 05) Investigation of New Mon State Party Could Threaten Ceasefire
- 91 IMNA (26 Aug 05) Villagers' farm work restricted in Ye Township; Kaowao (27 Aug 05) Villagers Forced to Porter; Kaowao (27 Aug 05) Villagers Forced to Porter; DVB (12 Nov 05) Ceasefire groups unsure over the attendance of Burma Convention
- 92 DVB (25 May 05) NMSP urges UN to help solve political problems in Burma; IMNA (4 Nov 05) Military Regime adds muscle for security reasons
- 93 Irrawaddy (14 Oct 05) Ceasefire Groups Defiant
- 94 NMG (03 May 06) NMSP to maintain ceasefire hoping for talks
- 95 Irrawaddy (24 Dec 04) KIO Accused of Bomb Attack on NDA-K Leader
- 96 DVB (30 Mar 05) Unity problems among Kachin groups and Burma junta
- 97 DVB (02 Aug 05) Kachins reunite: KIO welcomes back 37 defectors in northern Burma
- 98 Irrawaddy (09 Aug 05) Splinter group talks stall; Mizzima (13 Aug 05) Junta Trying for a Split in Unified KSC
- 99 Irrawaddy (15 Nov 05) Further divisions in Kachin State
- 100 Mizzima News (03 Jan 06) Six Kachin shot dead by Burmese troops; DVB (03 Jan 06) Friendly fire: Burmese soldiers kill six KIO members in Shan State
- 101 DVB (05 Jan 06) KIO warns killing of its members jeopardises Burma convention
- 102 DVB (18 Feb 06) Kachin people feeling aggrieved by lack of action on deaths of KIO members
- 103 Mizzima News (14 Feb 06) Four KIA fighters arrested by Burmese military
- 104 Mizzima News (21 Apr 06) Burmese military raids KIA outposts
- 105 Irrawaddy (24 Apr 06) Drunk junta officer fails to convince a tense KIO
- 106 DVB (21 Apr 06) Special report: KIO members detained by Burmese army
- 107 Mizzima (15 Sep 05) Coup in Kachin Armed Group National Democratic Army; SHAN (23 Sep 05) No More Peace for Peace Groups
- 108 SHAN (23 Sep 05) No More Peace for Peace Groups
- 109 Mizzima (04 Oct 05) NDA-K coup leaders handed over to military
- 110 DVB (09 Oct 05) 30 Kachin NDA-K members defect to Burma Army
- 111 Irrawaddy (29 Dec 05) Kachin Group Told to Disarm
- 112 Irrawaddy (26 May 06) Kachin Ceasefire Group Implodes
- 113 Irrawaddy (29 May 06) Kachin Mutiny Ends
- 114 Narinjara (12 Aug 05) Armed clash occurs between Arakan Liberation Army and SPDC; Narinjara (27 Aug 05) Burmese Army Camped Inside Village Due to Fear of Attack
- 115 DVB (18 Sep 05) Burma Arakan authorities killed and wounded by locals
- 116 Kaladan (01 Sept 05) Villagers from Northern Arakan, suffer famine; Narinjara (18 Aug 05) Going Outside Prohibited After 10 p.m.; Narinjara (20 Aug 05) Army confiscates land for rubber plantations in Arakan; Narinjara (01 Aug 05) Arakanese villagers forced to aid in construction of gas pipeline
- 117 Narinjara News (09 Dec 05) Arakanese insurgent leaders lured with economic bait to surrender to junta
- 118 Narinjara (21 Nov 05) Arakan army chief surrenders to the Burmese Army
- 119 Narinjara News (02 Feb 06) Rumours surrounds former chief of staff of Arakan Army
- 120 DVB (17 Mar 05) Chin fighters killed two Burmese soldiers near India
- 121 Irrawaddy (23 Dec 05) Veteran Politician Dead at 48
- 122 Khonumthung News (13 May 06) CNC formed in Chin assembly
- 123 IMNA (26 Mar 06) Five members of Tavoy armed group surrender to Rangoon
- 124 IMNA (15 May 06) Eight members from unknown armed group surrender

KAREN STATE: FACING GENOCIDE?

"The atrocities committed by the Burmese military regime against the Karen people are every bit as bad as the war crimes in Bosnia. Yet unlike what happened in the case of Bosnia, there has been no international tribunal set up to try Burma's political and military leaders for their horrific crimes against humanity...It is the international community's willingness to trade with Burma which strengthens its regime, enabling them to have the money to buy weapons of destruction which they then use in their acts of genocide against the Karen people and other ethnic minorities." - Lord Alton, Jubilee Campaign

"All the incidents are the results of the well-planned underground plots of the KNU terrorist insurgents and their foreign masters, and the aboveground schemes from inside and outside the country to attack Myanmar." - SPDC Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan¹⁴

In the largest offensive since 1997, the SPDC Army has displaced an estimated eighteen thousand people *so far* since November 2005 in Western and Northern Karen state.

SPDC battalion commanders have ordered villagers to leave their homes or face summary execution, targeting Karen villages that do not have the protection of armed opposition groups.

Karen villagers arriving at Thai camps report being subject to genocide-like conditions as outlined in the convention: witnessing SPDC soldiers commit extra-judicial killings, rape and torture. At least 100 people are documented as having been killed.

GET OUT OF TOWN

SPDC army actions in Western and Northern Karen State have displaced an estimated eighteen thousand people so far.² The vast majority of people affected are ethnic Karen, in what is said to be the largest offensive against the Karen since 1997.³

At least 100 civilians are documented to have been killed, some of them viciously mutilated.⁴ Villagers unprotected by armed opposition groups have been shot at point blank range in coordinated attacks, and others shot as they fled.⁵

Undefended villages have been burned and the livelihoods of the villagers destroyed.⁶ The SPDC Army has laid landmines to kill and injure any villager who dares to return.⁷

Displaced Karen villagers arriving in Thailand and the humanitarian workers who have crossed into Burma to provide emergency assistance all agree: the attacks have deliberately targeted unarmed villagers who do not have the protection of armed opposition groups.

The campaign of displacement, killings, rape, torture and denial of food and medical supplies has "deliberately inflict[ed] on the group [ethnic Karen] conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part".⁸

MILITARY MOVEMENTS

The offensive began November 2005 as the SPDC army increased its presence in the area east of Pyinmana Naypyidaw in Toungoo and Nyanglebin districts, coinciding with the abrupt move of the capital [see Pyinmana Naypyidaw briefers].⁹

The offensive has since widened to a north-south corridor running about 75 miles from Toungoo down to Shwegyin in Karen State where the SPDC Army has established new camps and a more permanent presence.¹⁰

The stationing and movements of troops is effectively squeezing Karen Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) into a section of jungle with all routes of escape to Thailand or return to homelands blocked. Landmines have been newly laid to match this strategy. Food supplies have been burnt and destroyed, and SPDC troops have bought up all rice supplies in markets, aiming to cut off supplies to IDPs.¹¹

Some villages have received warning visits. Villagers of Ye Lo, Ta Pa Kee and Plo Baw Der (Toungoo District) were given three days, and threatened with death if they were seen in the village after this time.¹²

Other villages attacked have been fired on with mortar shells as troops approached, with additional firepower targeting escarpments, streambeds and other escape routes. Troops then entered villages firing at houses, livestock and villagers. Children, women and the elderly have died in such attacks. Rice, foodstocks, and cooking implements were also destroyed.¹³

PLAYING POLITICS

As reports of the offensive and the humanitarian crisis emerged in the international press and triggered international statements, the SPDC began a misinformation offensive.

The SPDC recruited testimonials against the Karen National Union (KNU) and published statements claiming a KNU bomb plot during ceasefire negotiations at the start of 2006 and human rights abuses, including the use of landmines.

In a press conference on 13 April SPDC Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan confirmed the fighting had occurred by condemning Karen "saboteurs" committing "atrocities".¹⁵

The KNU claims it is currently party to a verbal ceasefire with the SPDC. The current offensive clearly violates this, and the KNU claims that the SPDC used the informal agreement as an opportunity to build up troop presence unhindered.¹⁶ In the words of KNU General Secretary Mahn Sha “We’re angry, we want peace, but not at the cost of justice for our people. These attacks are against civilians, not Karen soldiers. They have total disregard for international law.”¹⁷

The SPDC asserted that they had taken the ‘precaution’ of relocating villagers in the interests of their own safety. The SPDC was able to offer no details or evidence, and this directly contradicts all the testimonies of those that have been able to reach the border, or of NGOs providing assistance inside. A small number of “model villages” exists; the KNU has identified residents as ex-KNU soldiers who surrendered in 1997.¹⁸

OH, REALLY?

The SPDC’s motivation in mounting this current offensive against the Karen is unclear.

There is a link with the move of the capital to Pyinmana Naypyidaw and the need to secure the area, however, the area under attack is too large for this to be the full explanation. Some of the villages cleared are closer to Rangoon than to Pyinmana Naypyidaw.¹⁹

If the justification is a need to wage a campaign against armed opposition groups, the timing is peculiar. The country is already tied up with economic and humanitarian crises, the Pyinmana Naypyidaw move, ministerial reshuffles, talk of UNSC intervention - while the KNU is not posing any particular threat at this time. Additionally, by all accounts (apart from those of the SPDC themselves), KNU strongholds have not been the main targets.

An estimated 15,000 Karen villagers are still hiding in the jungle, some prevented from traveling further, others hoping that they may be able to eventually return. Monsoon rains have begun, and attacks continue.

Displaced Karen villagers are without access to any healthcare. Dysentery and malaria are rife. Women are giving birth without any assistance. Lack of access to healthcare is exacerbated by the SPDC military’s historical targeting of backpack medics attempting to reach IDPs.

Only 1,500 have reached camps at the Thai-Burma border, but even this amount is placing stress on camp infrastructure.

The SPDC has mounted a counter attack to the international outcry, claiming in press briefings and state controlled media that it has initiated a counter offensive to protect all citizens from an insurgency by “barbarous opposition groups”.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Attacks stepped up in March 2006 with the situation rapidly deteriorating into a severe humanitarian crisis.²¹ An estimated 15,000 remain hiding in the jungles, without food, medicine or shelter.²² Thousands were pursued beyond their homes and attacked in their jungle refuge.²³ Some are unable to make the trip to Thailand; others wait hoping they may return to their homelands.²⁴

Humanitarian agencies have been forced out of the area and the SPDC is preventing their return through increased travel restrictions imposed after the move to Pyinmana Naypyidaw.²⁵ Backpack medic teams that do work in the region, are severely hampered by the harsh terrain and weather, and the SPDCs historical targeting of teams attempting to reach IDPs.



"We could not work. We couldn't go to our fields. We couldn't go out to buy food. My brother was shot because he ran when the soldiers told him to stop. It took us three months to get here. It was hard. I still hurt... my hands, my knees, my arms. We ate vegetables we found in the jungle. We worried about landmines. My children got sick, they had dysentery and diarrhea. We didn't want to leave, but it was impossible to stay in our village. They [soldiers] stole our chickens, pigs, rice store and burnt our village." - Naw Kwe La Paw, on arrival to Thailand.²⁰

"These people are just surviving, their health status is appalling, it's going down and down. They have no resources left. Fleeing to Thailand is not their first choice, but it's all they have left. They need security." - aid worker in Western Thailand.²⁶

THAILAND

The Thai-Burma Border Consortium has received 1,500 displaced persons from Northern Karen state and are "concerned that reports of large new numbers of new internally displaced could result in many more people crossing into Thailand as refugees in the coming months."²⁷

Hundreds of displaced Karen have reached the Salween River and are waiting in temporary shelters. The shelters will not stand up against expected monsoon rains, and many more people are anticipated to arrive.

Footnotes

- 1 As of 12 May 06 – although some displaced are attempting to return.
- 2 Irrawaddy (12 Jun 06) More IDPs in Karen State
- 3 Irrawaddy (25 Apr 06) Burmese Army's Karen attacks "worst since 1997"
- 4 AFP (11 Apr 06) Myanmar troops reportedly attacking minority villages
- 5 Conservative Home (19 May 06) Empower the "little people" to act while the dinosaurs snore...
- 6 AFP (11 Apr 06) Myanmar troops reportedly attacking minority villages
- 7 DVB (01 Feb 06) Burma junta plants more landmines to 'protect' new capital
- 8 OHCHR (09 Dec 48) Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article 3b
- 9 AP (18 May 06) Myanmar troops widen Karen offensive
- 10 Irr (25 Apr 06) Burmese Army's Karen attacks "worst since 1997"
- 11 KHRG (07 Jun 06) Offensive columns shell and burn villages, round up villagers in northern Papun and Tongoo districts
- 12 FBR (24 Apr 06) Toungoo and Muthraw Update
- 13 KHRG (19 May 06) Civilians as targets
- 14 NLM (30 May 06) KNU in reality is...
- 15 AFP (11 Apr 06) Myanmar troops reportedly attacking minority villages
- 16 KHRG (19 May 06) Civilians as targets
- 17 Irr (June 06) Rising Waters
- 18 Irr (June 06) Thapyaynyunt—A Model Burmese Village?
- 19 KHRG (19 May 06) Civilians as targets
- 20 Irr (June 06) Rising Waters
- 21 FBR (16 May 06) Attacks Continue in Toungoo District
- 22 Irr (June 2006) An Uncertain Fate
- 23 FBR (24 Apr 06) Toungoo and Muthraw Update
- 24 Irr (June 06) An Uncertain Fate
- 25 AFP (11 Apr 06) Myanmar troops reportedly attacking minority villages
- 26 Irrawaddy (June 06) Rising Waters
- 27 Reuters (26 May 06) Myanmar troops attack rebel villages, thousands flee

BOUND AND GAGGED: HUMANITARIAN AID IN BURMA

On 7 February 2006, the SPDC imposed new guidelines on the delivery of humanitarian aid in Burma. These guidelines set up complicated approval processes, restricted travel to and within the country, established new regulating bodies as well as empowered existing ones and altogether hindered the work of aid organizations in Burma, both foreign and domestic. In view of this, the guidelines are really just a continuation of SPDC policies. Implementation of World Food Programme (WFP), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) programs has long been a struggle under the watch of the SPDC.

SPDC TAXES WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

In August 2005 Jim Morris, Executive Director of the WFP, visited Burma and met with SPDC officials as well as members of the National League for Democracy (NLD). He voiced his concerns about an impending humanitarian crisis in Burma and restrictive policies of the SPDC that had inhibited aid workers from doing their jobs.

Morris declared it “absolutely unacceptable” that of the 5,500 tons of rice for distribution to vulnerable Muslim communities in Western Burma, only 430 tons of it had been delivered due to the permit requirements, checkpoints, local taxes and other restrictions that the SPDC places upon movement in Burma.

He also asked the SPDC to lift its 10% tax on WFP rice purchases, saying, “nowhere else in the world does the WFP pay an export tax for goods that we buy within the country to be distributed within the country.”¹

In September 2004, Deputy Executive Director of the WFP, Sheila Sisulu criticized the SPDC’s poor governance for contributing to the spread of poverty by imposing internal travel restrictions that had prevented farmers from getting their produce to the market. Sisulu said, “I told government officials the policies of government were in fact impoverishing these people.”²

GLOBAL FUND PULLOUT

On 19 August 2005, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria cancelled its funding of humanitarian aid to Burma, making it the first country in the three-year history of the Fund to have its grant recalled after initial approval.

The grant totaled US \$35.6 million with \$9 million earmarked for treatment and prevention of malaria, \$19.2 million for HIV/AIDS and \$7 million for tuberculosis.³ It was part of a larger grant of US \$98.4 million that was to be awarded over a five-year period.⁴ The Global Fund expected its efforts would have contributed to cutting the incidence of malaria in Burma in half by 2010.⁵

At the time of its decision the Global Fund had already allocated \$11.9 million to organizations working in Burma such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).⁶

Travel and other restrictions in Burma have hindered the work of the World Food Programme (WFP) and other aid agencies.

In August 2005, the Global Fund pulled funding from Burma because of restrictions on travel and procurement of medical supplies.

The French section of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) left Burma after SPDC created impossible working conditions. In Rangoon, MSF AIDS programs are being shutdown by the SPDC.

The move to Pinyinman adds more delays for aid workers left behind in Rangoon.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suspended prison visits in Burma after SPDC attempts at interference.

The Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) was evicted from Burma in March 2006.

Global Fund spokesman Jon Liden attributed the decision to recent restrictions placed upon aid workers by the SPDC. He said that by inhibiting UN staff to move about freely to oversee Global Fund-financed programs and by tangling the procurement of medical supplies in a web of bureaucracy, the SPDC had broken its agreement with the Global Fund.⁷

Liden said of the state of humanitarian aid in Burma, the SPDC has created “an impossibly difficult environment to work in ... They (SPDC) have made it very clear through their actions that they are not interested in the success of these grants.”⁸

ADIEU MSF

The French section of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) withdrew from Burma in December 2005.⁹

Since 2001, MSF France operated medical programs focusing on malaria in Mon and Karen states, but since 2004 the group had faced a number of obstacles in carrying out its work. “We have concluded that it is impossible to assist people living in these conflict areas given the conditions required to carry out independent humanitarian action. Our teams had no freedom of travel, we had less and less direct contact with the people we had come to help, we were unable to follow up our field activities...” said MSF Program Manager Dr. Herve Isambert.

Between October 2004 and February 2005, MSF France increasingly faced roadblocks in carrying out its work. The SPDC would authorize projects in Mon and Karen States only to withdraw the authorization shortly thereafter.

In February 2006, the SPDC imposed more restrictive guidelines for aid organizations:

- Aid workers cannot access project sites because of tight travel restrictions that require approval by the SPDC before aid workers can travel outside Rangoon.
- The series of approvals required before the implementation of humanitarian aid projects in Burma creates unnecessarily long delays for aid workers.
- The addition of the Central Coordination Committee (CCC) only creates one more bureaucratic layer for aid workers to overcome. Like the physical barriers the SPDC has created, the CCC slows down the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- The inclusion of government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) in state and local levels of the CCC is a deception by the SPDC to appear representative of the Burmese population when in reality each of these GONGOs is only a proxy of the SPDC.
- Aid workers face difficulties communicating with the necessary ministries about travel and coordination when the capital and all government buildings have been moved to Pyinmana yet aid workers remain left behind in Rangoon.
- The SPDC stymies delivery of aid by setting up roadblocks and checkpoints, requiring travel permits, and by taxing supplies at both the national and local levels. Funds that could otherwise be used to purchase aid materials are instead spent to overcome these regime-created barriers.
- By requiring aid organizations to deposit funds into a regime-operated bank, the SPDC is undermining attempts to achieve transparency and accountability in aid programs in Burma.
- The objectivity of aid work and surveys of conditions in Burma are compromised because of the SPDC's insistence that aid workers be accompanied by regime officials.
- By requiring aid organizations to select national staff from a regime-provided list, the SPDC is undermining the independence of aid organizations' ability to conduct objective work and runs contrary to the accepted norms on delivery of humanitarian aid.

Additionally, in 2005 the SPDC imposed complicated procedures for obtaining visas and required permission be granted before international staff could travel between the capital and the border areas.¹⁰ Stephan Jooris, the Swiss Coordinator of MSF claimed aid workers had to ask three weeks in advance before visiting sites outside of Rangoon.¹¹

Where it was allowed to work, MSF France faced obstacles to information as local health authorities were forbidden by the military to distribute any information.¹²

Dr. Isambert also said the MSF AIDS program in Rangoon was being compromised by interference from the SPDC. He said that the authorities were harassing Burmese doctors working with MSF.¹³ In a joint operation between MSF and the NLD, treatment houses have been set up in Rangoon to take in AIDS patients. In September 2005 and again in May 2006 it was reported that the SPDC had been threatening to confiscate property from the homeowners if they did not evict all their patients.¹⁴

GREEN BOOK = RED TAPE

On 7 February 2006, the SPDC issued new guidelines for the UN and other international aid organizations working in Burma. The Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development released the so-called "Green Book" of guidelines to a meeting of international aid organizations in Rangoon. Two versions were distributed one in English and the other in Burmese. Aid workers were thrown into confusion when it was discovered that the guidelines set forth in the Burmese version were much more restrictive than in the English version. In some instances, guidelines in the Burmese version were completely missing from the English version.¹⁵

Administrative hurdles & clearance procedures

Under the new guidelines, foreign agencies must draft a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with any concerned ministries before opening offices in Burma. This draft is then submitted to the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (MNPED) for final approval. Foreign agencies must also request approval before undertaking a project in Burma.

The approval process is long and tedious, requiring first that an agency consult with concerned ministries in order that a draft proposal is written. That proposal is then submitted by the agency to the MNPED where it is reviewed. Next, the MNPED sends it back to the ministry or ministries that initially worked on it so that they can review it once more. Finally it is put before the Foreign Affairs Policy Committee (FAPC) and a cabinet meeting for final approval. Larger projects also require the approval of the Office of the Attorney General.¹⁶ The guidelines, however, give no indication of how often the FAPC or the cabinet meets.

The junta's decision to abruptly move the capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana in November 2005 exemplifies the problems of this central coordination guideline. Aid organizations

are required to gain approval of every single phase of their work despite having limited access to the ministries from which they seek approval. One aid worker vented his frustration with the move saying, "It will make things more complicated in terms of getting work done, though, if the only guy who can give you the go-ahead on a project is in Pynmana, while you're stuck in [Rangoon]."¹⁷

Central coordination of all aid projects to be done by the SPDC

The new guidelines severely constrain the work of aid organizations by requiring registration of offices, selection of local staff from a junta-prepared list, oversight of all equipment and visas conferred on the involved ministry, and by creating a new Central Coordination Committee (CCC).

The CCC is chaired by the Minister for the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (MNPED) and vice-chaired by both the Minister for Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Minister of Home Affairs. Meetings of the CCC are to take place quarterly with emergency sessions when needed. Additional meetings will take place at the ministry, state/division, and township levels.

At the local level, the CCC would include members of the USDA, Myanmar Women Affairs Federation (MWAFF), Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), police and other Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs).¹⁸ The creation of the CCC creates one more layer of bureaucracy for organizations to go through as opposed to the old structure where they sought approval of just the Health Ministry and the Foreign Policy Committee.¹⁹ Moreover all aid organizations will be required to submit monthly and quarterly progress reports to the concerned ministries and to the MNPED.²⁰

Selection of national staff from a ministry-provided list

In the Burmese version of the guidelines, organizations are now required to choose their local staff from a list provided by the ministries. The list presumably includes persons in close offices with the SPDC such as members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), Myanmar Red Cross (MRC) or Myanmar Women Affairs Federation (MWAFF), which have all raised concerns among aid workers about their objectivity.²¹

Direct interference

In February 2006 the ICRC had no choice but to suspend prison visits inside Burma after the SPDC insisted that all visits be accompanied by a regime official. In particular the political arm of the SPDC, the USDA, insisted that it be present during visits.

The ICRC maintains it cannot agree to such a demand without violating its own principles of objectivity and independent verification that it employs in its interviews with prisoners.

In August 2005 Jim Morris, Executive Director of the WFP, voiced concerns about restrictive policies of the SPDC that had inhibited aid workers from doing their jobs. He declared it "absolutely unacceptable" that of the 5,500 tons of rice for distribution in Western Burma, only 430 tons of it had been delivered due to the permit requirements, checkpoints, local taxes and other restrictions that the SPDC places upon movement in Burma. He also asked the SPDC to lift its 10% tax on WFP rice purchases, saying, "nowhere else in the world does the WFP pay an export tax for goods that we buy within the country to be distributed within the country."¹

In September 2004, Deputy Executive Director of the WFP, Sheila Sisulu criticized the SPDC's poor governance for contributing to the spread of poverty by imposing internal travel restrictions that had prevented farmers from getting their produce to the market: "I told government officials the policies of government were in fact impoverishing these people."

In August 2005, Global Fund spokesman Jon Liden attributed the organisation's decision to withdraw from Burma to recent restrictions placed upon aid workers by the SPDC. He said the SPDC has created "an impossibly difficult environment to work in ... They (SPDC) have made it very clear through their actions that they are not interested in the success of these grants."

Fiona Terry, a spokesperson for the ICRC in Rangoon asserted that while the ICRC still has numerous other programs in Burma, the loss of the prison visits is significant because they provide not only documentation of conditions but also an opportunity to deliver much needed supplies like medicines and soap.²² In June 2006, the ICRC said that negotiations on prison visits between it and the SPDC remained in a stalemate. As a result ICRC is continuing to downscale its operations in Burma, cutting Burmese staff from 278 to 240 and foreign staff from 54 to 28.²³

Approval procedures for foreign staff

The guidelines also give greater leverage to the SPDC over the appointment of international staff. International staff are required to acquire a visa through their concerned ministry.²⁴

In March 2006 shortly after the release of the new guidelines, the Geneva-based **Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD)** announced it would be closing its office in Rangoon because the SPDC had refused to renew the visa of the group's representative there.²⁵ During its time in Burma the CHD attempted to facilitate talks between the SPDC and the opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD).

Foreign aid must be deposited in regime-operated bank

According to the SPDC's guidelines foreign agencies are now required to open an account with the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) for keeping all incoming project funds. To withdrawal funds, these agencies would have to coordinate in advance with the concerned ministries and then use a Foreign Exchange Certificate (FEC) for making payments.²⁶ Because the MFTB is operated by the SPDC this policy would severely undercut transparency and accountability in the appropriation of funds to aid agencies.

Footnotes

1 Reuters (5 Aug 05) Myanmar to lift food aid tax, barriers remain-WFP

2 Reuters (14 Sep 04) Myanmar drug war impoverishes former opium growers

3 AP (05 Jun 2005) Myanmar receives US\$9 million from Global Fund to fight malaria

4 Global Fund (18 Aug 05) Fact sheet: termination of grants to Myanmar

5 AP (05 Jun 2005) Myanmar receives US\$9 million from Global Fund to fight malaria

6 DVB (05 Sep 05) International community seeks to overcome Global Fund setback

7 Global Fund (19 Aug 05) Global Fund Statement

8 The Australian (20 Aug 05) Junta pressure forces AIDS fund out

9 Irrawaddy (20 Dec 05) Another international aid group pulls out

10 MSF (30 April 06) Why the French section of MSF has ended its activities in Myanmar

11 BBC News (25 Sep 05) Aid in Burma: When it's time to give up

12 MSF (30 April 06) Why the French section of MSF has ended its activities in Myanmar

13 MSF (30 April 06) Why the French section of MSF has ended its activities in Myanmar

14 DVB (20 Sep 05) NLD urge Burmese authorities to cooperate on fight against AIDS; DVB (19 May 06) Burmese authorities disrupting AIDS project in Rangoon

15 Mizzima News (13 Feb 06) Confusion over Burma's new UN and NGO guidelines

16 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (Feb 06) Guidelines for systematic and smooth implementation of socio-economic development activities in cooperation with UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs/INGOs

17 Mizzima (4 Nov 05) Loosing Touch

18 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (Feb 06) Guidelines for systematic and smooth implementation of socio-economic development activities in cooperation with UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs/INGOs

19 Xinhua (17 Feb 06) Myanmar to form coordination committee to work with UN

20 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (Feb 06) Guidelines for systematic and smooth implementation of socio-economic development activities in cooperation with UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs/INGOs

21 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (Feb 06) Guidelines for systematic and smooth implementation of socio-economic development activities in cooperation with UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs/INGOs

22 Reuters (27 Feb 06) Red Cross says Myanmar junta stops prison visits

23 Irrawaddy (26 Jun 06) ICRC continues to reduce staff in Burma

24 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (Feb 06) Guidelines for systematic and smooth implementation of socio-economic development activities in cooperation with UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs/INGOs

25 Irrawaddy (2 Mar 06) Geneva body to close Rangoon office

26 Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (Feb 06) Guidelines for systematic and smooth implementation of socio-economic development activities in cooperation with UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs/INGOs

RUFFLED FEATHERS: AVIAN FLU IN BURMA

PREVENTING A PANDEMIC SPDC-STYLE

The February to April 2006 outbreaks ended two years of speculation as to how (and whether) the military regime was maintaining its bird flu free status whilst repressing all opposition, administering a failing health system and simultaneously driving out INGOs with unworkable prohibitions and limitations on their operation and movements.

The SPDC claimed to have drafted a bird flu management strategy from late 2003. Poultry trade bans with all neighbors affected by the disease were put in place from January 2004, but reports from border areas suggest these were not upheld.¹ Regular announcements were made of initiatives relating to education, disease surveillance and victim treatment plan.² An infectious diseases centre outside of Rangoon was established, and a “response drill” was held at the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department headquarters.³

It was never clear who participated in the education programs. Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Major General Htay Oo obviously did not benefit. In December 2005 in a telling demonstration of how ill-equipped his department was to prevent or contain a disease outbreak, he claimed that the reason why Burma remained disease-free was because Burma was “quite a distance to come” and “they have to fly over high mountains to come to our country...we speculate that the birds that have this disease, they were left behind because they cannot fly over the mountains to enter our country.”⁴

RESPONDING TO THE SYMPTOMS

Just how bird flu free Burma was before February 2006 is still unclear. Certainly the population had its own fears, with the price of chicken in Rangoon halving by August 2005.⁵

The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Bangkok office identified in October 2005 that the disease had spread along migratory flight paths that included Burma.⁶ The FAO office in Rangoon had still not received any samples for testing from the junta from bird flu scares in Mon State in March/April 2005, reported as “Newcastle Disease” by SPDC officials.

Occasional rumors and accounts of human cases with bird-flu symptoms were also denied by the junta, and inconclusive in their evidence. Illness and three deaths in November 2005 in Shan State were dismissed as “a serious influenza-like illness” by an SPDC epidemiologist.⁷

Emergency clinics established in March 2006 at Myo-pa Village treated children for what was concluded to be fever and diarrhea. However, community members suspected bird flu, and health workers admitted that the hospital hadn’t had an inspection from bird flu experts.⁸

A more recent report from John Hopkins University’s Center for Public Health and Human Rights concluded that it is no surprise that the first outbreak was identified in Mandalay;

The first confirmed outbreak of the H5N1 virus within Burma began in mid-February with the death of 112 chickens in Aung Myae Thar Zan Township, Mandalay Division, nearly a year after suspected cases were reported by independent media.

The admission from the SPDC ended 2 years of speculation from Burma’s neighbors as to how (or whether) Burma was maintaining its “flu-free” status.

Previously, in December 2005, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Major General Htay Oo claimed that the country remained disease-free because Burma was “quite a distance to come” and “they have to fly over high mountains to come to our country...”

International agencies and neighboring countries quickly came to the SPDC’s aid with expertise, pesticides, laboratory equipment, medicine and finances.

Through its well-rehearsed routine of media suppression, the SPDC kept news of the outbreak out of local news sources and away from Burma’s population of more than 50 million – and proprietors of the country’s estimated 50 million chickens – until 16 March.

this was one of the few areas where health authorities and laboratories were sufficiently equipped for the H5N1 virus to be identified.⁹

In the words of foreign official based in Rangoon, “the potential for spread is very high, and just the basic capacity to do anything about it is very low.”¹⁰

BLACK SPOTS ON WINGS, BLACK HOLES OF INFORMATION

Before 16 March 2006 Burma’s population of more than 50 million - and proprietors of the country’s estimated 50 million chickens - had not received any official notification of bird flu.¹¹ Basic information, such as warning children not to play with dead birds, was delayed.¹²

The population in Rangoon and Mandalay found out what they could in their own fashion, through statements of INGOs on international short wave radio broadcasts, word-of-mouth and at chicken markets in urban centers.¹³

Following the official announcement of the outbreak in March 2006, daily television and radio broadcasts discussed the disease.¹⁴ However, accustomed to mistrusting SPDC announcements as well as negotiating the black market, people appeared to be making up their own minds about safety precautions.¹⁵

Accustomed to mistrusting SPDC announcements as well as negotiating the black market, people made up their own minds about safety precautions, and the relative benefit of taking advantage of the suddenly cheap source of meat.

Some important players – vets, farmers and health workers reported not being advised of symptoms and not being provided with necessary equipment, resources, or recovery support.

Throughout March 2006 the SPDC reiterated that the outbreak was under control, however, it was clear that the disease had spread beyond initial “restricted areas”.

Amongst the inadequate provisions introduced by the SPDC were more bizarre measures that included incinerating chicken feet at a crematorium.

At the end of the outbreak, 682,000 chicken and quail had been culled, and 180,000 eggs and 1.3 tons of poultry feed had been destroyed.

Health authorities in India, Bangladesh and Thailand have all stepped up border controls and trade restrictions.

Precautions were taken arbitrarily and consistently. Some gave up eating chicken altogether, some just the entrails.¹⁶ Public health instructions about safe cooking and preparation were unclear (the *New Light of Myanmar* advised “cooking well”¹⁷).

In the market Tamwe Chicken and Poultry market in Rangoon, workers interviewed reported that they were not worried and that they wore “shoes, gloves and masks”, but no protective coverings were seen amongst the feathers and blood.¹⁸

According to staff at Rangoon’s Hteinpin Crematorium, SPDC authorities commandeered the facility for the purpose of destroying chicken feet from a livestock company, holding up the daily work of disposing of human remains.¹⁹

Some not usually able to afford it took advantage of the suddenly cheap product.²⁰ While inflation was driving the prices of rice and other commodities up, the price of chicken meat fell from around US\$2.70 per viss (1.6kg) to US\$0.77 during the worst of the March 2006 outbreak, before rebounding.²¹

Some important players in the fight against an epidemic didn’t have key information. In the words of Mandalay doctor Nyan Tun “We still don’t know what the symptoms of bird flu are. We need to have many technical strategies for treatment, and we need to educate the people.”²²

LIMITS ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The SPDC’s acknowledgement of the presence of H5N1, and demands for assistance, came after two years of silence on bird flu, and in an atmosphere of increasing restrictions on the activities of INGOs and humanitarian assistance in Burma [see “Bound and Gagged”].²³ It was a move calculated to attract international funds on its own terms, with regional and international health bodies anxious about how the virus could spread and mutate from its incubation in Burma without the intervention of international expertise.

In response to the SPDC’s call for assistance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the National Laboratory for Animal Health and Livestock and Development Centre of Thailand provided equipment, pesticides and laboratory equipment worth US \$660,000.²⁴

China provided US\$125,000 for use in disease control, and the Japanese government provided equipment, medicine and other assistance worth US\$2.1 million.²⁵

After FAO lab tests in Bangkok confirmed H5N1 as the cause of death of the birds on 16 March, FAO experts were permitted to travel to affected regions to determine the source of the outbreak and to assess appropriate protections to be put in place.²⁶

On 10 April, FAO Asia-Pacific counterpart He Changchui admitted that the outbreaks were “more serious than what we imagined,” and said that the FAO was tracking 100 different sites of infection.²⁷ It was clear that the FAO wasn’t prepared to remain as upbeat as the announcements in the *New Light of Myanmar*.

It was not until 18 April that World Health Organization (WHO) and FAO were prepared to call the outbreak under control, and they did so cautiously – “There is no fresh outbreak in the last three days...for the time being, the situation is under control” said Kanokporn Coninck, technical officer at WHO Rangoon office.²⁸

Poultry was back on sale by the end of April 2006 with the SPDC claiming that there had been no fresh outbreaks after April 6.²⁹

THE THREAT REMAINS

Once news of the outbreak broke, India, Bangladesh and Thailand all strengthened their border protections³⁰.

In Thailand’s Tak province, response strategies have been in preparation since January 06 - including camp lockdowns, rapid testing, medical and NGO staff flu and Tamiflu vaccines (the treatment was not available to the resident refugees because of “a budget problem”).³¹

STAYING SAFE ON THE FARM

Throughout the outbreak, farmers and others in the poultry industry have been left exposed both to infection, and to losses of income and livelihood. When asked about arrangements and precautions during the culls, a farmer in Northern Sagaing Division reported: “We had to dig our own holes and bury the chickens. Earlier, we were told they would send help but in reality, no one was sent. We dug the holes and waited but they never came, so we had to hire workers to kill the birds, put them in bags, and bury them. Once that was done, we told the authorities that the birds had been buried, and we were given some disinfectants, which we had to spray ourselves by borrowing spraying cans.”³²

A farmer reported that on her farm of 750 chickens just outside of Mandalay she had been given no official instructions on what to do, or whether she was near the affected areas, or if her farm had been scheduled for culling. “I still don’t know what the symptoms of bird flu are, so how can I know if my chickens will die of bird flu?”³³

These farmers are now left to monitor the health of individual chickens, to make the difficult notification to authorities that their farms are an infection source needing to be quarantined and culled. When sales resumed in May, restocking was still prohibited.³⁴

Those not forced to kill their animals were still affected by the closed markets, falling prices and collapsing industry.³⁵ The SPDC’s Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department discussed emergency assistance to affected farmers, but it wasn’t until mid-June that it confirmed that 545 farms would be offered assistance – thought to be in the form of cut-price poultry feed and loans from the Livestock and Fisheries Bank, but still unseen by affected farmers.³⁶

According the SPDC, the final count is 682,000 chickens and quail culled; 180,000 eggs and 1.3 tons of poultry feed destroyed. Market confidence is at all-time lows, and the FAO continues to issue warnings about the inadequacy of SPDC infrastructure to detect and respond to future outbreaks.³⁷

Footnotes

- 1 AP (27 Jan 05) Burma bans poultry from bird flu countries
- 2 AP (01 Nov 05) Burma in bird flu checks
- 3 MT (07 Mar 06) Burma stages bird flu response drills
- 4 AFP (07 Dec 05) Bird flu still a mystery to most in Myanmar
- 5 SHAN (31 Aug 05) Suspected “bird-flu” in Rangoon?
- 6 Reuters (09 Oct 05) - Myanmar — the world’s bird flu black hole?
- 7 WP (15 Jan 06) Experts fear Burma is ill-equipped to handle bird flu
- 8 DVB (22 Mar 06) Children die at Burma’s Taungtha: Bird flu virus infection feared
- 9 Center for Public Health and Human Rights (Mar 06) Responding to AIDS, TB, Malaria and Emerging Infectious Diseases in Burma: Dilemmas of Policy and Practice, page 16
- 10 AFP (07 Dec 05) Bird flu still a mystery to most in Myanmar
- 11 Irr (14 Mar 06) Burmese still in the dark over bird flu scare
- 12 Baltimore Sun (23 Apr 06) Struggle against disease is a fight for human rights
- 13 AFP (13 Mar 06) Myanmar battles first bird flu outbreak

“We had to dig our own holes and bury the chickens. Earlier, we were told they would send help but in reality, no one was sent. We dug the holes and waited but they never came, so we had to hire workers to kill the birds, put them in bags, and bury them. Once that was done, we told the authorities that the birds had been buried, and we were given some disinfectants, which we had to spray ourselves by borrowing spraying cans.”
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14 Japan Economic Newswire (18 Mar 06) Bird flu kills over 10,000 birds in Myanmar, 41,000 birds culled

15 AFP (19 Mar 06) Chicken curry goes underground as Myanmar battles bird flu

16 AFP (07 Dec 05) Bird flu still a mystery to most in Myanmar

17 NLM (16 March 06) The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department The notification on Avian Influenza (bird flu) to the public

18 AFP (07 Dec 05) Bird flu still a mystery to most in Myanmar

19 DVB (26 Jan 06) Bird flu? Burmese authorities burn chicken feet in Rangoon

20 Irrawaddy (21 Mar 06) Mandalay struggles to contain bird flu

21 AP (19 Apr 06) Prices of chicken and eggs rebound in Myanmar after government says bird flu under control

22AFP (15 Mar 06) Burmese farmers struggle with news blackout on bird flu

23 For MSF-France’s account of why it could no longer work in Burma, see http://www.msf.org/msfinternational/invoke.cfm?objectId=4613E1EB-0D4F-C582-2770E8597606F085&component=toolkit.article&method=full_html

24 and 25: Xinhua (25 Apr 06) Myanmar to lift restrictions on bird-flu-affected areas

26 Reuters (16 Mar 06) Independent tests confirm H5N1 in Myanmar-FAO

27 Reuters (10 Apr 06) Myanmar fighting over 100 bird flu outbreaks: UN

28 Mizzima News (18 Apr 06) Bird flu under control in Burma: WHO, FAO

29 AFP (27 Apr 06) Myanmar to resume chicken sales after bird flu outbreak

30 Khonumthung (06 Apr 06) Ban on animal import affects Chin and Mizoram states, Mizzima News (14 Mar 06) Bangladesh moves to secure Burma border after bird flu reports, Reuters (25 Apr 06) Thailand wary of bird flu outbreaks among neighbours

31 Irr (24 Apr 06) Thailand in the Dark about Burma’s Bird Flu

32 DVB (06 Apr 06) Avian blues: Burma still culling poultry despite saying bird flu under control

33 AFP (15 Mar 06) Burmese farmers struggle with news blackout on bird flu

34 AFP (08 May 06) Bird flu experts to help combat virus in Myanmar

35 DVB (17 Mar 06) Outbreak of chicken flu could damage Burma’s economy

36 and 37: Irr (23 Jun 06) Burma plans compensation after bird flu outbreak

LABOR: GAINS FROM PRESSURE

The pattern of misbehaviour and/or threat followed by limited compliance when faced with pressure continues to characterise the SPDC's approach to the ILO.

Villagers who complained to the ILO were targeted by the SPDC, harassed, sued, and imprisoned. ILO representative in Burma Richard Horsey receives numerous death threats.

In June 2006, the International Labor Conference imposed two deadlines on the military regime: 1) By the end of July 2006, the SPDC must release any person imprisoned following contacts with the ILO and stop prosecutions that were currently underway. 2) By the end of October 2006, there must be an agreement on a credible mechanism for dealing with complaints of forced labor with all necessary guarantees for the protection of complainants.

Just before an ILO delegation arrived in Rangoon in late February 2005, SPDC officials in several villages were arrested for engaging in forced labor practices.⁴ However, the ILO delegation was not impressed with the military regime's superficial actions to curb the use of forced labor and left Rangoon two days ahead of schedule when SPDC Chairman, Sen Gen Than Shwe skipped an appointment with them.⁵

Matters continued to deteriorate when the SPDC renewed attacks on persons reporting forced labor practices. This resulted in an ILO recommendation in June 2005 that member countries "review their relationship" with the SPDC in regards to direct foreign investment.⁶ The ILO's ongoing investigation of forced labor complaints and its assertive intervention on behalf of individuals persecuted for contacting the ILO irked the SPDC. This included the two high profile cases of villager Su Su Nway and lawyer Aye Myint.

The SPDC told the ILO on 31 October 2005 that it intended to withdraw its membership⁷ but later backtracked at the General Session, when SPDC representatives pledged to cooperate with the organization.⁸ Meanwhile, Richard Horsey, ILO representative in Burma, was subjected to numerous death threats.⁹ Forced labor in Burma was again discussed at the ILO General Session in November 2005 in Geneva.¹⁰

The SPDC's disregard for concerns over forced labor practices prompted the May-June 2006 meeting of the International Labor Conference to impose two deadlines on the military regime: 1) By the end of July 2006, the SPDC must release any person who had been imprisoned following contacts with the ILO and stop prosecutions that were currently underway. 2) By the end of October 2006, there must be an agreement between the ILO and the SPDC on a credible mechanism for dealing with complaints of forced labor with all necessary guarantees for the protection of complainants.¹¹

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

On **31 January 2005**, SPDC authorities from Htan-Manaing and Mya-Sanni villages received jail terms for forced labor practices.¹² Village leaders at Kyaw Kaing village were arrested on the same charges. On 18 February 2005 the SPDC chairman of Ponpyin village was sentenced to 8 months jail for his use of forced labor.¹³ These events occurred just prior to an ILO delegation to Rangoon on 21 February 2005.¹⁴

On **23 February 2005**, the ILO delegation left Rangoon two days ahead of schedule. The team discovered that "for various reasons linked to the National Convention the program did not include the meetings that would have enabled it to successfully complete its mandate as it understood it".¹⁵

On **14 March 2005**, Soe Nyunt, Dir Gen of the Labor Ministry held a press conference to condemn the activities of the ILO. SPDC Information Minister Kyaw San said the ILO is "siding with expatriate destructionists".¹⁶

On **15 March 2005**, U Thaug, SPDC Labor Minister accused the ILO of exaggerating cases of forced labor to apply pressure on the military regime.¹⁷

On **25 March 2005**, the lawyers for the Htan-Manaing SPDC village authorities convicted for perpetrating forced labor appealed their convictions by relying on the legal argument that "volunteering" is a tradition in Burma and not forced labor.¹⁸

On **25 March 2005**, the ILO warned the SPDC that it has until April to improve forced labor issues or face sanctions.¹⁹

On **18 April 2005**, SPDC officials coerced two Ngapyin villagers into signing confessions that they filed false statements with the ILO. The villagers were brothers of Ko Win Lwin who died while doing forced labor on an SPDC road project.²⁰

On **11 May 2005**, the ILO said that Burma's military regime had made no progress on the issue of forced labor since the 1998 ILO inquiry.²¹

At the 93rd Session of the International Labor Conference during **31 May to 16 June 2005**, the junta was chastised for continued forced labor practices and intimidation of complainants. The ILO called on the international community to "intensify the review of their relations with Myanmar" and "take the appropriate actions, including as regards foreign direct investment."²²

On **June 30, 2005**, Lt Col Hla Swe, chairman of Magwe Division War Veterans Organization Supervisory committee suggested that Burma withdraw from the ILO.²³

On **July 30, 2005**, the SPDC targeted the ILO and the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) during a military-sponsored "mass meeting" entitled "Guard Against Danger Posed by Destructionists Through United Strength of the People."²⁴

On **14 October 2005**, SPDC officials sued three Ngapyin villagers for filing false reports with the ILO on forced labor in connection with the death of Win Lwin.²⁵

On **17 October 2005**, SPDC Htan Manaing village authorities retaliated against villagers who supported Su Su Nway.²⁶

On **18 October 2005**, the ICFTU released a report that noted that forced labor was “continuing unabated” due to the military regime’s suppression.²⁷

On **24 October 2005**, the ILO’s relationship with Burma’s military junta was reported to be in critical condition.²⁸

On **28 October 2005**, ILO Burma representative, Richard Horsey, issued a report that claimed he received 21 death threats during August and September 2005.²⁹

On **31 October 2005**, SPDC Labor Ministry informed Francis Maupain, ILO special advisor, of its intent to withdraw from the organization.³⁰

On **6 November 2005**, ILO Burma representative, Richard Horsey, left the country.³¹ On **7 November 2005**, he said he was not forced to leave the country.³²

On **11 November 2005**, an SPDC court sentenced nine people to prison terms ranging from 8 to 25 years for contacting the ILO. All nine were denied legal representation during their trials at Insein jail.³³

During **3-18 November 2005**, the ILO Governing Body met in Geneva. The ILO expressed grave concern about the degradation of the situation in Burma and issued an urgent request to the SPDC to insure the ILO representative in Burma can fully exercise his functions. The SPDC was encouraged to take advantage of the time before the March 2006 session to develop an effective dialogue with the ILO, which expressed particular concern over recent cases where individuals had been charged and jailed for assisting victims of forced labor.³⁴

On **3 June 2006**, the ILO Governing Body convened a “special sitting” on the continued use of forced labor in Burma. The resulting report made recommendations on possible actions to be taken against Burma including bringing the issue of forced labor before the International Court of Justice.³⁵

On **6 June 2006**, the SPDC released Su Su Nway from jail.³⁶

On **16 June 2006**, after reviewing the recommendations, the ILO Conference set out two areas that required “tangible and verifiable” action from Burma. These were: (1) releasing any person who had been imprisoned following contacts with the ILO and stopping prosecutions that were currently underway, by the end of July; and (2) achieving an agreement between Burma and the ILO by the end of October on a credible mechanism for dealing with complaints of forced labor with all necessary guarantees for the protection of complainants. At its November 2006 session, the ILO Governing Body would examine whether Burma had complied with these requirements and would have full authority to decide on the most appropriate course of action.³⁷

On **9 July 2006**, the SPDC released Aye Myint from jail.³⁸

ILO imposes July 2006 deadline on SPDC to release Aye Myint and implement credible forced labor complaint mechanism by October. Failure to comply with deadlines could result in ILO taking Burma before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

SPDC Releases human rights defenders Su Su Nway on 6 June 2006 and Aye Myint 9 July 2006 in direct response to ILO pressure.

Speaking of her unexpected release from jail, Su Su Nway said, “...I don’t feel happy or sad about my release because forced labor in Burma still exists...I took (my) prison uniform with me because I know that I will have to come back to prison until Burma gains democracy.”¹

“There is always a promise to do something, a few little steps... then a terrible backlash.”
–Ruth Dreifuss, ILO team member who visited Rangoon in Feb 2005.²

“Unfortunately, what we have seen in the last year is prosecutions of people who complain, rather than of the people who are responsible for the forced labor in the first place.” – Richard Horsey, ILO Liaison in Burma.³

THE CASE OF SU SU NWAY

How a brave woman in Burma challenged the SPDC in court for forced labor practices and instead found herself the target of a vicious campaign to silence her.

“This is a very significant development because this is the first time anybody has ever been found guilty of imposing forced labor in Myanmar.”—Richard Horsey, ILO liaison officer in Rangoon.³⁹

On 31 January 2005, the Kawmoo Township Court in Rangoon Division imposed sentences on three Htan-Manaing SPDC village officials for requiring Htan Manaing villagers to perform forced labor.

The SPDC village chairman, U Sein Paw, received a 16-month prison term while his village committee members, U Kyaw Thin and U Myint Thein (aka U Thankhe) were each sentenced to serve eight months in prison.⁴⁰ Ma Su Su Nway, a 34 year-old woman, was one of the Htan-Manaing villagers who brought charges against the village SPDC officials, one of whom was her cousin.⁴¹



Appeal Successful

Any sense that justice was served was quick to fade. On 16 March 2005, the three SPDC officials appealed their conviction to the Rangoon Division Court, which accepted amendments to their original sentences.⁴²

In response Su Su Nway said, “The defendants could be released scot-free at the Divisional court. . . . They could be just fined and released.”⁴³ The military regime’s perverted system of justice was just beginning to unfold into a concerted SPDC campaign aimed at silencing “troublemakers” like Su Su Nway.

Harassment begins

In April, Htan-Manaing village SPDC officials began to harass Su Su Nway and threatened to kill her.⁴⁴ In late April, the same officials that had been convicted on forced labor violations in January filed charges that Su Su Nway had obstructed them in the performance of their official duties.⁴⁵ On 30 June 2005, the Kawmoo Township Court charged Su Su Nway with violations of Act 294b and Act 506, for allegedly using abusive language and threatening the Htan-Manaing SPDC village authorities.⁴⁶

Su Su Nway denied the charges and said: “...I will stand for the truth, even on the pain of imprisonment. It is clear that they are plotting to land me in prison. However they are plotting to land me in prison or pressurizing me, I will stand for the truth, even on the pain of imprisonment. But, in my case, they want me to suffer from the beginning, and I don’t think they will just impose [a] fine on me. I think they will impose [a] full prison term.”⁴⁷

No Mercy

Su Su Nway suffers from heart disease, which worsened during the course of her trial that lasted until the end of September 2005. She was required to attend the trial even when she was seriously ill.⁴⁸ The harassment of Su Su Nway even included the intimidation of a nurse so that she could not receive treatment for her heart condition.⁴⁹ Su Su Nway’s trial concluded on 28 September 2005.⁵⁰

Sentencing and Jail: Unjust and unfair

On 18 October 2005, Su Su Nway was sentenced to 18 months in jail.⁵¹ After the sentencing, Su Su Nway was taken to Insein jail, where prison officials confiscated her heart medication.⁵²

On 17 October 2005, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) submitted the case of Su Su Nway to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.⁵³ AAPP Secretary Ko Tate Naing said, “Su Su Nway did not receive a fair trial... the authorities clearly intended to punish Su Su Nway for her bravery, and in doing so intimidate other villagers into not speaking out against the practice of forced labor.”⁵⁴

On 3 November 2005, NLD lawyers, Kyi Win and Myint Thauung, filed an appeal on Su Su Nway’s conviction with the Southern Rangoon District Court on grounds that she was wrongfully arrested and imprisoned.⁵⁵ A day later, the Division Court rejected the appeal without explanation. Further appeals would be made at the Division Court level.⁵⁶

Su Su Nway’s attorneys continued to appeal her conviction while her health worsened. On 21 November 2005, it was reported that her health was failing because prison officials were still withholding vital medication.⁵⁷

On 24 November 2005, the Rangoon Division court rejected a second appeal filed for Su Su Nway but her lawyers planned to lodge another appeal with the High Court.⁵⁸

In December 2005, Su Su Nway’s health continued to decline. A relative who saw her at the prison said that she was still denied medications and that she was in pain.⁵⁹ In early January 2006 Nyan Win, her lawyer, confirmed that Su Su Nway had been hospitalized at the prison’s clinic on 4 January 2006. Su Su Nway’s family visited her at the prison clinic on 7 January 2006 and noted that her condition was better.⁶⁰

On 1 February 2006, the SPDC Supreme Court summarily rejected Su Su Nway’s latest appeal within hours of the time it was filed.⁶¹ Undeterred, her lawyer, Myint Thauung, prepared to submit another appeal in early May 2006.⁶²

On 6 June 2006, the SPDC released Su Su Nway from prison. The release came after the ILO held a special sitting on Burma during its annual conference in Geneva on 3 June 2006. During the special sitting, Burma’s military regime was urged to release preferably by the following week, those imprisoned for lodging forced labor complaints.⁶³

Upon her release from jail, Su Su Nway said, “...I don’t feel happy or sad about my release because forced labor in Burma still exists. I will continue fighting against forced labor and all kinds of human rights abuses. I thank everybody who morally and physically supported me including the ILO and all concerned persons around the world. I took (my) prison uniform with me because I know that I will have to come back to prison until Burma gains democracy.”⁶⁴

“ILO 3” FREED, AYE MYINT REARRESTED

It takes a brave person to do the right thing in Burma. Aye Myint, 55, is one such man. On 27 August 2005, the SPDC arrested Aye Myint because he had the courage to speak up for villagers whose land had been confiscated. As a High Court lawyer from Pegu⁶⁵, Aye Myint was well aware of the risks. He had only just been released from prison a few months earlier after being convicted of high treason and sentenced to death in 2003.

The ILO Three

Aye Myint together with Shwe Mann and Min Kyi were infamously known as the “ILO 3”. They took great personal risks in filing forced labor reports with the ILO. The “ILO 3” were originally convicted of high treason and sentenced to death in November 2003, but continued ILO pressure and intervention led to their release in early 2005. The ILO intervened on their behalf when it became clear that the underlying reason for their arrest and imprisonment was related to filing reports with the ILO over the SPDC use of forced labor.⁶⁶

History repeats itself for Aye Myint

Aye Myint was arrested in August 2005 for filing a report with the ILO over the SPDC’s illegal confiscation of land⁶⁷ belonging to farmers in Phaungdawthi village whom he represented.⁶⁸ Win Tin Oo, the assistant SPDC police commander of Daik-U Township, arrested and charged Aye Myint under Emergency Provision Act 5C for allegedly forcing the farmers to write a false report to the ILO. Aye Myint’s trial began in Daik-U Township Court on 10 October 2005.⁶⁹

During Aye Myint’s trial, the SPDC failed to present any evidence to support the charge. In a strange twist of events,

members of the SPDC-sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and the Phaungdawthi SPDC village chairman testified that Aye Myint was innocent of the charges and that he was arrested unlawfully.⁷⁰ Despite the lack of evidence, the Daik-U Township Court sentenced Aye Myint to a 7-year jail term on 31 October 2005. He was taken to Pegu jail after sentencing.⁷¹ Mya Hla, of the NLD legal support group said "If it were a normal case, he would be released long ago. He should not even be charged."⁷²

The ILO expressed its serious concern over Aye Myint's conviction.⁷³ Aye Myint filed an appeal on the sentence and conviction with the Pegu District Court.⁷⁴

Aye Myint's health condition deteriorated during his incarceration.⁷⁵ On 2 January 2006, an SPDC district court rejected his appeal on the same day it was filed. San Maung, Aye Myint's attorney, vowed to appeal the conviction to higher courts.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the SPDC Bar Council revoked Aye Myint's license to practice law and dismissed him as a member of the High Court lawyer association.⁷⁷

After the ILO imposed a 31 July 2006 deadline on the release of all prisoners jailed for reporting forced labor issues, the SPDC released Aye Myint on 9 July 2006.

Footnotes

- 1 DVB (6 Jun 06) Breaking News: Su Su Nway Released
- 2 AP (24 Mar 05) Myanmar must stop backsliding on promise to wipe out forced labor
- 3 VOA News (16 Jun 06) ILO Condemns Forced Labor in Burma
- 4 DVB (31 Jan 05) - Local Burmese authorities sent to prison for forced labour practice; also see DVB (20 Feb 05) Local authorities arrested for the crimes of army officers in Burma Arakan State
- 5 Reuters (23 Feb 05) ILO team cuts short Myanmar visit – diplomat
- 6 ILO Press Release (4 Jun 05) International Labor Conference convenes Special Sitting for the fifth time in as many years to address forced labor issues in Burma
- 7 DVB (18 Nov 05) Cat and mouse game: Burma junta says it won't quit ILO
- 8 IPS (31 Oct 05) Myanmar works over UN labor body
- 9 Mizzima News (28 Oct 05) - ILO workers receive death threats as Burma plans to quit the group
- 10 ILO Press Release (3 Nov 05) – ILO/04/44
- 11 ILO Press Release (18 Nov 05) – ILO/04/44
- 12 DVB (31 Jan 05) - Local Burmese authorities sent to prison for forced labour practice
- 13 DVB (20 Feb 05) Local authorities arrested for the crimes of army officers in Burma Arakan State
- 14 AP (22 Feb 05) High-level ILO team probing forced labor visits Myanmar
- 15 UNI (24 Feb 05) Progress over forced labor frustrated in Burma
- 16 Asian Tribune (23 Mar 05) Burma's "Road Map", So Near and Yet So Far
- 17 Kyodo (17 Mar 05) Myanmar accuses ILO of exaggerating forced labor
- 18 DVB (25 Mar 05) It is not forced labor but Burmese tradition, says lawyer of authorities
- 19 IPS (25 Mar 05) ILO to Crack Whip on Junta
- 20 DVB (18 Apr 05) Villagers intimidated and forced into lying to ILO
- 21 AFP (11 May 05) No breakthrough against forced labour in Myanmar: ILO
- 22 ILO Press Release (4 Jun 05) International Labor Conference convenes Special Sitting for the fifth time in as many years to address forced labor issues in Burma
- 23 Associated Press (30 Jun 05) Myanmar war veterans urge military government to quit International Labor Organization
- 24 Narinjara (8 Aug 05) SPDC attacks ILO and FTUB through "forced mass rallies" in Akyab
- 25 DVB (20 Oct 05) More Burmese villagers sued for helping report forced labour to ILO
- 26 DVB (17 Oct 05) - Htan Manaing authority metes out revenge on Burmese villagers
- 27 Irrawaddy (18 Oct 05) - Junta still stalling on workers' rights, says union group
- 28 Irrawaddy (24 Oct 05) Situation Critical for the ILO in Burma
- 29 Mizzima News (28 Oct 05) - ILO workers receive death threats as Burma plans to quit the group
- 30 IPS (31 Oct 05) Myanmar works over UN labor body
- 31 Sunday Times (6 Nov 05) Burma drives out Briton for probing forced labour
- 32 Irrawaddy (7 Nov 05) ILO Representative Denies Quitting Burma
- 33 DVB (7 Dec 05) Nine people given lengthy jail terms for contacting ILO in Rangoon
- 34 ILO Press Release (18 Nov 05) – ILO/04/44
- 35 ILC95-PR2-2006-05-0218-1-En.doc
- 36 Asiantribune.com (8 Jun 05) Burmese Government released Su Su Nway
- 37 ILO Press Release (16 June 2006) ILO/06/35
- 38 Reuters (9 Jul 06) Myanmar frees lawyer jailed for forced labor
- 39 Kyodo (3 Feb 05) 4 Myanmar officials get jail over forced labor
- 40 and 41: DVB (31 Jan 05) - Local Burmese authorities sent to prison for forced labor practice
- 42 and 43: DVB (16 Mar 05) Burmese authorities could release culprits of forced labor practice
- 44 DVB (14 Apr 05) Burmese authorities plotting to trap and arrest Su Su Nway
- 45 DVB (22 Apr 05) - "Fearless" Su Su Nway charged with disrupting the authorities on duty
- 46 and 47: DVB (30 Jun 05) - Villager Su Su Nway to stand trial at Rangoon Kawmoo Court
- 48 DVB (23 Sep 05) Burmese heroine Su Su Nway not well
- 49 DVB (26 Sep 05) Burmese authorities intimidate nurse not to treat Su Su Nway
- 50 DVB (28 Sep 05) Htan Manaing NLD heroine Su Su Nway to be sentenced soon
- 51 Mizzima News (13 Oct 05) - Su Su Nway sentenced to 18 months
- 52 DVB (14 Oct 05) - Burmese heroine Su Su Nway deprived of essential medicines
- 53 and 54: AAPP Press Release (17 Oct 05) - Political Prisoner Su Su Nway's Case Submitted to the UN
- 55 and 56: DVB (03 Nov 05) - Su Su Nway's first appeal lodged by NLD lawyers
- 57 DVB (21 Nov 05) Burmese heroine Su Su Nway still not allowed to take vital medicines
- 58 DVB (24 Nov 05) Su Su Nway's appeal rejected by Rangoon Division court
- 59 DVB (10 Dec 05) Su Su Nway not well
- 60 DVB (09 Jan 06) Burmese Heroine Su Su Nway's health deteriorates
- 61 Irrawaddy (02 Feb 06) Su Su Nway's appeal rejected
- 62 DVB (29 Apr 06) Detained Burmese heroine Su Su Nway not well
- 63 Irrawaddy (6 Jun 06) Burmese Female Rights Defender Released
- 64 DVD (6 Jun 06) Breaking News: Su Su Nway Released
- 65 Irrawaddy (1 Nov 05) Lawyer jailed for representing dispossessed farmers
- 66 ILO Appendix I, Governing Body 289/8/2, 289th Session, March 2004.
- 67 DVB (05 Sep 05) Burmese lawyer Aye Myint detained again
- 68 and 69: DVB (11 Oct 05) Aye Myint innocent, testify Burmese authorities
- 70 DVB (11 Oct 05) Aye Myint innocent, testify Burmese authorities; also see DVB (19 Oct 05) Burmese lawyer Aye Myint's trial latest
- 71 and 72: DVB (31 Oct 05) Burmese lawyer Aye Myint sent to prison again
- 73 DVB (04 Oct 05) ILO and Burma Junta
- 74 DVB (05 Nov 05) Detained Burmese lawyer Aye Myint not allowed to see family
- 75 DVB (7 Dec 05) 'ILO prisoner' lawyer Aye Myint is not well
- 76 DVB (2 Jan 06) New year, same behaviour: Burmese lawyer Aye Myint's appeal rejected
- 77 DVB (5 Jun 06) Burmese lawyer Aye Myint's license withdrawn

SOME RESOURCES FROM ALTSEAN-BURMA

- 2000 Sep REPORT CARD: Stand Off!. A5, 40pp
- 2001 Mar REPORT CARD: Tentative Steps. A5, 80pp. Price \$5 each
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- 2001 Jun POSTER: What Women of Burma Want! A2. Price \$5 for 5
- 2001 Jun T-SHIRT: "Burma: Asean's Shame" US\$15/40 for US\$400
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- 2001 Dec T-SHIRT (Multilingual): "Free Aung San Suu Kyi" US\$15/40 for US\$400
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- 2002 Mar REPORT CARD: Labor Pains. A5, 64pp. Price \$5 each
- 2002 Apr SPECIAL REPORT: Some Talk, Little Action, Burma's Secret Talks. A5, 60pp. Price \$5
- 2002 Apr POSTER: Burma – Prison State! A2. Gratis.
- 2002 Jun BOOK: Burma ~ Women's Voices for Change. 116pp. US\$10
- 2002 Jul REPORT CARD: Rangoon Suspense. A5, 60pp. Price US\$5 each
- 2002 Sep REPORT CARD: New Page, Old Story. A5, 68pp. Price US\$5 each
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- 2003 Jan POSTER & POCKET PLANNER: ALTSEAN-BURMA ACTIVISTS' CALENDAR 2003. A2. Gratis.
- 2003 Feb T-SHIRT (Multilingual): "National Reconciliation" US\$15/40 for US\$400
- 2003 Mar Women's Report Card on Burma: Abused Bargaining Chips. 40pp. US\$5
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- 2003 Jun POSTCARDS: A set of 4 photos from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's travels in Burma (2002-2003). A5, colour.
- 2003 Nov REPORT CARD: Charm Offensive. A5, 72pp. Price \$5 each
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- 2003 Nov SPECIAL REPORT: Ready, Aim, Sanction! NonMilitary Options to Support Burma's Democratisation. A5, 212pp.
- 2004 Jan REPORT CARD: Under Pressure (1 July – 30 September 2003)
- 2004 Jan POSTER & POCKET PLANNER: ALTSEAN-BURMA ACTIVISTS' CALENDAR 2004
- 2004 Mar SPECIAL REPORT: On the Road to Democracy? (prepared for the 60th Session of the UNCHR)
- 2004 Apr POSTCARDS: Set of 10 postcards featuring Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Rallies in Burma
- 2004 Apr VIDEO/VCD: Depayin Report *plus* Raw Footage of Aung San Suu Kyi's Travels in Kachin & Shan States, Mandalay & Sagaing Division
- 2004 Apr WEB FEATURE: Slideshow of 87 photos of Daw Aung Suu Kyi's Rallies in Burma
- 2004 May WEB FEATURE: On the Road to Depayin – Speeches by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
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