

BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2007
CHAPTER 11

**THE SAFFRON
REVOLUTION – THE 2007
PRO-DEMOCRACY
MOVEMENT**

“Over the past year, we monks have been facing increasing difficulties when we went out to collect food. Only three families out of every 30 can afford to donate food because the civilians are also facing great difficulties for their livelihoods.”

- Bullets in the Alms Bowl, HRDU, March 2008

11.1 Introduction

The months of August and September 2007 gave rise to the largest public display of opposition against the military regime in Burma in almost 20 years. Not since the mass popular protests of 1988 has there been such widespread public outcry opposed to the junta. Dubbed the “Saffron Revolution” for the thousands of Buddhist monks who lead the protests, hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life took to the streets in protest across the country in each of Burma’s seven states and seven divisions. By the end of September 2007, at least 227 separate protests had been staged in no fewer than 66 different towns and cities across the country.¹

In a country where any form of public discord draws swift and harsh punishment, demonstrations of this scale are rare. The fundamental freedoms of the rights to assembly, association, expression and opinion are strictly repressed through an extensive system of harsh laws designed to safeguard the regime from all forms of open dissent or criticism.

In March 2008, HRDU released the highly-detailed and widely acclaimed report, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl; An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, which focused on the events leading up to, during, and following the protests.² Considerable detail was employed in analyzing the underlying root causes which gave rise to the protests, the strategies and tactics utilized by the SPDC and its agents in putting down the protests, and the ongoing campaign of arrests following the protests. This chapter draws heavily from that 180-page document and is thus largely a summary of the findings of that report. The protests are also dealt with in Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press from the basis of those rights.



Thousands of monks joined the peaceful anti-junta protests, aptly named the Saffron Revolution.
[Photo: Mizzima/Myo Khin]

11.2 Prologue to the Protests – A Summary of Causes

On 15 August 2007, the SPDC unexpectedly announced sharp increases in domestic fuel prices. The rise in fuel prices and its effects on basic commodity prices initially sparked the mass protests. The price of diesel was doubled overnight and the cost of petrol was increased by over 60 percent, while the price of compressed natural gas (CNG) was increased by a staggering 500 percent. Compressed Natural Gas, had been widely promoted by the SPDC for use in commercial vehicles, and the majority of public buses in the cities of Burma are powered by it. As a result bus fares increased sharply, severely impacting people's ability to travel to work and ultimately feed themselves and their families. Many Burmese workers, particularly those living in the poor suburbs and satellite towns of Rangoon, earning around 1,000 kyat a day, now had to pay anywhere up to 800 kyat for transport, leaving only 200 kyat a day for food.³

Furthermore, the increase in fuel costs created an associated increase in the price of this food. The agricultural industry depends on fuel for irrigation, processing, and transportation of crops, while shops and small businesses must use diesel to run generators amid the frequent electricity blackouts. By the end of August 2007, the price of food, clothing, and other basic commodities had increased significantly. The price of rice, for example, had jumped 10 percent, meat 15 percent, and a standard plate of noodles at a roadside food stall had tripled. Meanwhile other food and commodity prices continued to rise.⁴

On 17 August 2007, two days after the price of fuel was raised by the SPDC, U Htin Kyaw, of the Myanmar Development Committee (MDC), called for nationwide protests before disappearing into hiding. Political activists in Rangoon responded over the following days by organizing marches throughout the city, in the largest protests held in Burma for over a decade. Initially the demonstrations did not incorporate any overt demands; but rather consisted of groups of people walking across Rangoon in the symbolic act of the people's inability to afford the increased bus fares.⁵

Soon after, on 19 August 2007, over 500 activists, including various leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group who had led the mass protests two decades earlier, marched in Rangoon against the widespread price rises of fuel, food, clothing and other basic commodities.⁶

Over the next two weeks, hundreds of people marched in protest almost daily through the streets of Rangoon and other towns and cities across the country. Activists were reported as having been frequently beaten with sticks, fired upon with slingshots, and abducted and detained by the SPDC and its paramilitary agents. In an attempt to put down the ongoing demonstrations the SPDC had arrested over 150 activists and protest leaders by the end of August 2007, including almost all of the leaders of the 88 Generation Students' Group.⁷

On 28 August 2007, members of Burma's monastic community joined the protests for the first time in the town of Sittwe (Akyab), in Arakan State.⁸ The addition of the monks and nuns to the demonstrations proved pivotal, serving to legitimize and strengthen the protest movement. In Burma, as in all Buddhist countries, the monastic and lay communities are co-dependent on one another for their survival. The monastic community is reliant upon the general population for their material survival, provided to them on their daily alms rounds, while the lay community relies on the monks and nuns for spiritual guidance, in which the very act of giving alms is done to foster virtue through the deed of charity.⁹ However, the sharp increase in food and commodity prices threatened to upset this important bond with many civilians no longer able to afford to support the monks in addition to their own families.

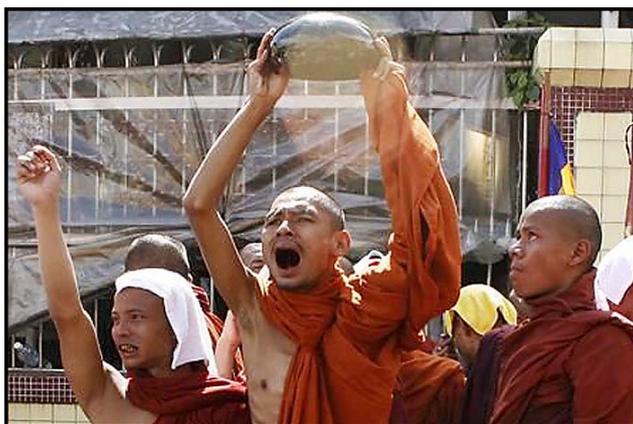
On 5 September 2007, a crowd estimated to number approximately 500 monks was dispersed by SPDC army soldiers who fired their weapons over the monks' heads and assaulted a number of the protestors in Pakokku, Magwe Division. At least one monk was confirmed killed, while reports emerged of another who had been tied to lamp post by the soldiers and beaten with the butts of their rifles.¹⁰ The following day, a group of monks from the Maha Visutarama Monastery held almost 20 SPDC officials hostage and set fire to their vehicles in retaliation. The officials were released unharmed six hours later.¹¹

Two days later, on 7 September 2007, an underground association of Buddhist monks calling themselves the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) issued a set of demands unto the SPDC in response to the events of the past few days. These demands included:

1. The issuance of a public apology for the crackdown on the peaceful demonstration of monks in Pakokku;
2. The immediate reduction of all basic food, fuel, and commodity prices;
3. The unconditional release all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all detainees arrested for their involvement in demonstrations over the fuel and commodity price increases; and
4. The immediate commencement of genuine and sincere dialogue with democratic opposition groups to resolve the crises and difficulties suffered by the populace.

Along with these demands, the ABMA issued an ultimatum to the SPDC stating that should these demands not be met by 17 September 2007, they would call upon the monastic community throughout the country to enact a *Patam nikkujjana kamma* ('overturning of the alms bowl') boycott of the regime and its associates. This boycott, which represents the harshest criticism that the monastic community can deliver, proscribes all religious activities involving the junta, including the acceptance of alms.

On 17 September 2007, when the SPDC had failed to even address any of the ABMA's demands, let alone make any genuine attempt to fulfil them, the excommunicative decree was read out in numerous locations around the country.¹² Following the declaration of the boycott, large-scale protests were resumed, although in numbers far greater than anything witnessed thus far.



A Buddhist monk in Rangoon holds his alms bowl aloft in the symbolic *Patam nikkujjana kamma* or the “overturning of the alms bowl”, representing the boycott on all religious activities, including the acceptance of alms from the military junta and its associates. The boycott was enacted nationwide following a failure by the SPDC to respond to the monks' demands for reform. [Photo: Reuters].

11.3 The Protests and their Suppression

On 18 September 2007, the day after the boycott had been issued, it was reported that a procession of approximately 1,000 monks marched to Sule Pagoda in downtown Rangoon where they gave political speeches to thousands of people who had followed the monks, walking alongside them in a human chain to protect them from any attacks that the omnipresent security personnel may launch upon them.¹³ However, no such attacks came. The security personnel hung back, while members of the junta-affiliated Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) and *Swan Arr Shin* ('masters of physical force') shadowed their route and videotaped and photographed the monks, presumably so that they would know who to target for arrest later.¹⁴ Hundreds of monks also staged protests in various locations around the country, such as in Kyauk Padaung, Aunglan and Pakokku as the wave of demonstrations continued to gather momentum.¹⁵ Processions of up to 2,000 monks from Pegu also reportedly came out in support of the religious boycott.¹⁶

Also on 18 September 2007, crowds of protesting monks and civilians in the remote city of Sittwe in Arakan State were dispersed by SPDC security forces in the first use of direct force since the protests had commenced on 19 August 2007. According to reports, SPDC army soldiers fired directly into crowds with rubber bullets and canisters of tear gas and beat civilians and monks alike with batons. U Warathami, a monk who was captured by SPDC army soldiers during the protest attested that several soldiers tied his hands behind his back before repeatedly beating him. *"They restrained me and hit me in the face and also on my head which started to bleed. They also kicked me with their boots. I had cuts on my head and my ears and several of my teeth were knocked out of place,"* U Warathami said.¹⁷ Similarly, another eyewitness testified to HRDU:

"On 18 September 2007, the authorities called Lon Htein [riot police] tried to stop the monks leading the protests by shooting them with rubber bullets. I witnessed them beating the monks and people and using teargas to split the protests group up. Many monks and people were injured. Four monks were arrested after they had been injured. The monks were released in the evening at 4:00 pm after they signed a vow not to protest again. On 19 September, the authorities continued to beat the monks and people, using tear gas to disperse the protests. Mostly it was the monks and people who led the protests who were among the worst wounded".¹⁸

Though violence was used against the protestors in Sittwe, where news of it would not likely reach the outside world, security personnel stationed elsewhere throughout the country showed a remarkable and uncharacteristic level of restraint towards the demonstrators, possibly under orders not to attack knowing that the world was now watching.

Over the coming days, the protests continued unabated, with monks leading large-scale demonstrations across the country. Demonstrations were reported to have taken place in at least 25 other cities and towns across the country, in Rangoon, Pegu, Mandalay, Sagaing and Magwe, and Tenasserim Divisions, as well as in Mon, Kachin and Arakan States, the majority of which were lead by a phalanx of saffron-robed monks chanting the *metta sutta* (the Buddha's words of loving kindness).

In an unexpected turn of events, on 22 September 2007, a crowd estimated to number 2,000 protestors, approximately half of whom were monks were allowed to pass security checkpoints and continue on to the home of detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who emerged from her home to pray with the monks.



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi pays her respects to protesting monks at her gate on 22 September 2007.
[Photo: unknown]

On 24 September, it was reported that an estimated 100,000 protestors took to the streets in Sittwe, Arakan State. According to reports, Buddhists and Muslims marched side-by-side, unified in their fight to see the end of military rule.¹⁹ Similarly, crowds estimated to have numbered 100,000 people were also reported to be demonstrating in Rangoon. Among these crowds were well-known celebrities, MP-elects, members of the political opposition and students.²⁰ It was reported that thousands of members of Rangoon's Muslim community had also joined these protests, marching alongside the Buddhist monks. One Burmese Muslim later commented on the protests: *"For the first time in our lives we felt a sense of solidarity with the Buddhist Burmese"*.²¹

That evening, SPDC Minister for Religious Affairs Brigadier General Thura Maung, was quoted on State television as threatening that action would be taken against the monks and civilians should they continue with their protests. Trucks mounted with loudspeakers also toured Rangoon's streets, warning those who continued to participate in the protests would be dealt with under prevailing Burmese laws.

Heedless of this overt threat, the following day, on 25 September 2007, tens of thousands of people once again took to the streets of Rangoon in protest. That evening, the trucks bearing loudspeakers toured the streets again, announcing the imposition of a night time curfew and repeated the decree banning all assemblies of more than five people under Order #2/88. Meanwhile, monasteries across Rangoon and in other parts of the country were visited by security forces who threatened the monks with arrest if they continued to participate in the demonstrations. In Rangoon, eyewitnesses said that more than 100,000 people had again taken part in demonstrations despite heavy security presence on the streets.²²

However, as was widely expected by those participating in the protests and by Burma commentators around the world, the patience and tolerance of the SPDC was sure to run out and when it did, the SPDC would inevitably revert to their tried and proven use of violence in suppressing public dissent.

Then, on 26 September 2007, tens of thousands of protestors once again took to the streets of Rangoon, although this time, hundreds of SPDC army soldiers, riot police, and members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* had been stationed throughout the city, and numerous

monasteries were cordoned off by security forces, trapping the monks inside. Approximately 1,000 monk and civilian protestors were trapped by security barricades set up behind them on the road leading down from the east gate of the Shwedagon Pagoda.²³ A large number of the monks who had been cornered were ordered into military trucks so that they could be returned to their monasteries. Wary that this was a trap, the monks agreed to disperse but only if they could find their own way back to their monasteries.²⁴ However, the standoff persisted after the security personnel refused to accept this compromise. Then, at approximately 11:30 am, an elderly senior monk, reported to have been over 80 years of age, approached the security personnel to negotiate a solution to the stalemate but was immediately pushed to the ground and beaten with the butt of one of the soldier's rifles. A number of youths attempted to intervene, but also became targets and were beaten about the head with bamboo staves. An eyewitness interviewed by HRDU reported that:

*"People were getting angry. They had never witnessed a monk being beaten by the police before. The people took some bricks in their hands but the monks stopped them from using them. We really wanted to attack the authorities but one of the monks implored us to remain peaceful"*²⁵



Civilians make human chain around protesting monks in Rangoon on 25 September. [Photo: unknown]

Soon after the attack on the elderly monk, the security forces then turned their attention to the trapped group. The riot police began their assault, beating and arresting whoever they could and they were joined in their attack by members of *Swan Arr Shin*. Those who were caught were loaded into military trucks and driven away from the scene.²⁶ At least 30 monks and a further 50 civilians were beaten and taken away to an unknown destination by the security personnel. A large crowd of onlookers separated from the scene by the security barriers, outraged by what they were witnessing, threw stones and projectiles at the security forces, who in turn returned fire with tear gas canisters. Credible reports also testified that gunshots soon followed.

Conflicting reports have put the number of dead from this initial crackdown at between three and five. Meanwhile, eyewitnesses have testified as having seen numerous demonstrators *"lying motionless on the ground after being beaten by security forces"*, although in all the chaos of the scene, it was difficult for them to ascertain if they were dead or merely unconscious.²⁷

Although many protestors (possibly even hundreds) had been arrested during this crackdown, the vast majority managed to escape. Many of this number soon regrouped a

short distance away to continue their protest.

A few hours after the initial attacks outside the Shwedagon Pagoda, many of those who had fled had reassembled near the Sule Pagoda in downtown Rangoon where they were again met with violence at the hands of the security personnel. Security forces fired warning shots and tear gas canisters in an attempt to disperse the large crowd which had gathered along Sule Pagoda Road. As more columns of protestors began to arrive in the downtown area, the security forces stepped up their response. It was reported that shots were fired directly into the crowds at the Sule Pagoda, outside nearby Rangoon City Hall, on Maha Bandoola Road, and also at Thakin Mya Park.²⁸

“We linked hands and made a human shield in front of the monks but we had no idea what to do next. We all just sat down on the ground. The troops advancing from the railway crossing approached us and fired four shots into the crowd. A 20-year-old man from our group took a hit on his back and he fell down covered in blood.”²⁹

Meanwhile, shots were reportedly fired over the heads of protestors and tear gas canisters were hurled at crowds of up to 10,000 in Mandalay. Also in Mandalay, members of the NLD, namely, Tin Aung, Khin Maung Thaung and Myo Naing, along with well-known comedian Par Par Lay, were arrested after they had publicly offered alms to the protesting monks. In other areas, more than 200 monks in Myitkyina and Bhamo in Kachin State were arrested in a midnight raid on their monastery.³⁰

Overnight, numerous monasteries around the country were raided by SPDC army soldiers and security personnel to remove the monks and the legitimacy they gave to the demonstrations. A number of prominent monasteries around Rangoon, notably Ngwe Kyar Yan, Maggin, Pinnya Ramika, Shwetaungpaw, Dhammazaya, Sandilayama, Zayawaddy, Pannitayama, and Mingala Rama Pali University Monasteries were raided, during which hundreds of monks were reportedly arrested and detained. Some of these raids were particularly violent, with shots being fired inside the monasteries, and monks and those who tried to protect them, being severely beaten. At least five persons, four of whom were monks, were believed killed during these raids.³¹



A protester being arrested by members of the *Swan Arr Shin*. [Photo: Reuters]

Despite the heavy presence of security forces on the streets and the use of lethal force the previous day, the demonstrations continued in Rangoon on 27 September. The number of monks participating in the protests, however, was much smaller than on the previous day, largely due to the night time raids on a number of monasteries throughout Rangoon, and ongoing security presence at others.

On the morning of 27 September, residents of Rangoon's South Okkalapa Township began to gather in the streets outraged over the violent night time raids on local monasteries the night before. As the day progressed, the crowds gathered in the area grew to number several thousand. On Thit Sar Road, where the largest crowds had gathered, the SPDC army soldiers stationed there assembled a two-row defensive formation approximately 200 metres from the protesters. The first row of troops knelt in front of a second row of standing soldiers, all of whom trained their weapons on the crowd. An eyewitness from the crowd described to HRDU what happened next:

"A Hilux truck stopped at the junction and, through its loudspeaker, ordered the crowd to disperse immediately or be fired upon. There were approximately 20,000 people on the street at this time. The crowd did not disperse. We carried lamp posts and tree trunks into the street to make a barricade at the corner of Innwa Street and Thit Sar Road. When the soldiers saw what we were doing, they fired three tear gas bombs into the crowd. As soon as the final tears gas bomb exploded, the soldiers crossed our barriers and attacked the crowd. ... I witnessed two people beaten to death near our barrier. They were both men, aged between 25 and 30. These men were beaten on their backs and their waists as they tried to escape the attack. When they fell to the ground, the soldiers beat them as a group. The soldiers dragged their bodies by the legs back to the junction where many people could see their dead bodies lying beside the military trucks".³²

Undeterred by the violence that had just been visited upon them, many of those who had fled quickly reassembled a short distance away where they were joined by a large group of high school students. This group was also assaulted by security forces, who fired tear gas canisters and live rounds directly into the crowd. The evidence obtained through eyewitness testimonies strongly suggests that a large number of people were killed during events in South Okkalapa Township on 27 September. A report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) confirmed the deaths of eight persons in South Okkalapa Township alone. (For more information see Chapter 1: Extra-Judicial, Summary, and Arbitrary Executions and the previously published HRDU report: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

As in previous days, Sule Pagoda was one of the primary focal points of the protests with thousands of demonstrators converging on the site again on 27 September. By noon the crowds had swelled to have numbered tens of thousands of protestors, at which time a line of riot police armed with batons and riot shields began moving towards the crowd, but stopped just short of where they were seated on the ground. Soon afterwards, three truckloads of SPDC army soldiers and a smaller truck carrying *Swan Arr Shin* members approached the group from behind. Immediately and without warning the soldiers in these trucks opened fire into the protestors with live rounds. A young woman present at the protest described the scene to HRDU:

*“All of the protesters were sitting on the road. Soon, about 10 riot police, armed with shields and rubber batons, came up Sule Pagoda Road. People shouted at the riot police, saying they were only staging a peaceful protest. Some protesters started to flee from the scene when they saw the policemen coming forward. The monks and students who were sitting in the front row told everyone to sit still and not to confront the police. They stopped advancing when they were only a short distance from the protesters. ... Around one or two minutes after the army truck came they started to shoot continuously, firing more than ten times. I heard shouting from the crowd: ‘the people are dying; they are killing the people, run away, run away’. Others were saying ‘don’t run, don’t run’, because when the people sit down they beat them and when they run they shoot. When I looked back I saw two boys and one girl lying still on the ground. I do not know if they were alive or dead”.*³³

Some protestors began to reassemble outside the nearby Traders Hotel, prompting the arrival of additional SPDC army troops who issued a ten minute warning for the crowd to disperse or face “*extreme action*”. As soon as the ten minutes had elapsed, the soldiers opened fire directly into the crowd with live rounds and charged the protestors, beating and arresting anyone they could catch. At least one protestor was reported as having been beaten to death during this crackdown, while a number were believed to have been shot. The well-reported fatal shooting of Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai took place during this attack. He was shot once in the back from point blank range and then once more after he had fallen to the ground.³⁴ However, the actual number of deaths to have occurred during this particular attack remains unknown.

Immediately following this crackdown, the protestors once again attempted to reorganize on the Pansodan Road Bridge, only a few blocks away. Ko Thet Naing, a student who had travelled from upper Burma to join the protests was carrying the fighting peacock flag while leading the group, was shot in the head by a sniper and killed instantly. More shots were fired into the crowd, although it has been difficult to confirm if any other protestors were killed. A number of eyewitnesses to the event have testified to seeing fellow protestors falling to the ground after being shot.



Protesters in downtown Rangoon left their sandals behind when fleeing the army’s violence.
[Photo: unknown]

Concurrent to the events unfolding in downtown Rangoon, a number of other protests were being staged in other parts of the city. Tamwe Township State High School No.3 in northeastern Rangoon was the site of two additional crackdowns on 27 September. Ironically, the first attack came as one group of protestors were making a retreat so as to avoid confrontation with the authorities, who then set upon the crowd severely beating and arresting anyone they could catch. As in previous protests, the demonstrators fled the violence only to regroup a short distance away. Again, the security forces set upon this crowd and many were arrested, including many parents who were in the area to collect their children from a local primary school.

Meanwhile, another column of protestors, comprised by many who had fled the earlier crackdowns at the Sule Pagoda, marched into the area. Eyewitnesses reported that among the crowd, which by this point had swelled to number several thousand, were many students and adolescents. Almost immediately the crowd was ambushed by a number of SPDC army trucks from behind, one of which drove directly into the crowd, reportedly killing at least two people. The soldiers in the back of the trucks indiscriminately opened fire on the crowd of protestors, which, according to eyewitness reports, resulted in the deaths of many protestors. Many of those who had attempted to flee the carnage were shot in the back as they ran. Those who attempted to hide and even those who had surrendered were similarly gunned down. As soon as the shooting stopped riot police moved into the crowd beating and arresting those left behind and removing the bodies of the dead and wounded.

"Many people climbed over the wall to hide in the buildings [in the school]. Some people just hid behind the brick wall. The people were so scared. People even hid inside the open drains. We climbed the brick wall into Tamwe [Township] High School No.3. People were climbing the wall to escape. I watched a young man get shot in the back. He did not move or make any sound after he fell. He was bleeding a lot. ... The crackdown went on for a long time. From where I was hiding I saw a soldier shoot a person hiding in the drain. The soldier just stood above the drain, and fired down into it. The soldiers then entered the building complex where I was hiding. They shouted 'Mother fuckers, come down from the building or else we will shoot to kill you all'. One man was hiding inside a small round water tank. The soldiers could find him easily, because he was shivering so much that the tank made a rhythmic noise. They told him to climb out, and told him that if he didn't they would shoot. He didn't dare to go out. 'Bang!' The soldier shot him and the bullet went through the tank. No sound came out of the tank after that".³⁵

As was said by HRDU in its report which focussed on the protests, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*:

"By 28 September 2007, the violence of the previous two days, the large number of arrests both on the streets and during night time raids, particularly on monasteries, coupled with a more established security presence in strategic areas throughout Rangoon, assured that protestors were not taking to the streets in the same numbers as they had in the days prior".³⁶

In the face of the increased security, a number of further protests were staged in various locations around Rangoon, although the majority of these were broken up soon after they commenced. A number of fatal shootings were also reported to have occurred on this day, though little information on the specific details has been made available. Bystanders on the streets, and even those persons remaining inside their homes, in downtown Rangoon also became target for arrest as the security forces asserted their control.

Likewise, the night time raids and arrests, especially on monasteries, continued unabated. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB), at least 52 monasteries across the country had been raided by security personnel between 25 September and 6 October 2007. On 4 October 2007, Shari Villarosa, the U.S. *Charge d’Affaires* in Burma, reported that her staff had visited 15 different monasteries throughout Rangoon, all of which had been emptied by that stage.³⁷



Shan villagers protest against the junta on 25 September 2007. [Photo: FBR]

After the protests had been put down, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro had been granted access to the country, the SPDC announced that a total of 15 people had been killed during the protests. Meanwhile, in his December 2007 report to the UN Human Rights Council, Pinheiro maintained that he could confirm the deaths of at least 31 persons in Rangoon alone.³⁸ Yet even this figure should be considered conservative as this includes the names of only those whose death the Special Rapporteur could confirm. Furthermore, in March 2008, six months after the protests, the AAPPB reported that at least 72 persons still remained unaccounted for. Also in March 2008, HRDU argued that given that the protests had been staged in no fewer than 66 towns and cities across the country, many of which at the time still lacked reliable information, coupled with the systematic removal of the dead and wounded from the site of each crackdown, and the disposal of the bodies during secret night time cremations, the number of fatalities arising from the protests may well be as high as a hundred.³⁹

11.4 The Aftermath of the Protests

The Campaign of Arrests

Following the suppression of the nationwide demonstrations, the SPDC stepped up its search for those suspected of participating in or supporting the protests. In the same manner that the protestors and political opposition used the available technology to disseminate information related to the protests to the outside world, the SPDC and its agents, the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin*, used the technology to track down and punish those who had been involved in the protests. Frequent reports emerged of protestors being followed by members of the USDA and *Swan Arr Shin* who filmed and photographed them during the protests. These images were later used to more easily identify protest leaders and others taking active roles in the movement.

By the end of the first week of October it was widely estimated that up to 6,000 people, including at least 1,400 monks, had been arrested since the commencement of the protests on 19 August.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, on 19 October, the SPDC declared through its mouthpiece, the *New Light of Myanmar*, that only 2,927 had been arrested, and that 2,550 of this number had already been released, leaving only 377 still in detention. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances).

Many of those arrested in relation to the protests were taken from their homes during midnight raids. These raids became increasingly systematic following the imposition of the curfew on the evening of 25 September, reaching a crescendo in the weeks after the suppression of the protests. The curfew not only restricted the movement of those targeted for arrest but also allowed the arrests to be conducted in secrecy under the cover of darkness.

While the majority of those persons arrested for their role in the protests were later released, a number of protest leaders had charges brought against them. A group of nine Muslims from Rangoon, for example, who were arrested after offering water to protesting monks, were later charged with inciting public unrest.⁴¹ Similarly, Lieutenant Win Tun Aung of SPDC army Infantry Battalion (IB) #3 went into hiding after a warrant was issued for his arrest after he offered water to monks protesting in Mandalay.⁴²



Riot police were deployed throughout Rangoon during the protests and were used alongside SPDC army soldiers to suppress all displays of dissent. [Photo: unknown]

On numerous occasions the SPDC detained the family members of those whom they were unable to apprehend. These hostages were then used as bait to lure the intended target out of hiding so they could be arrested. On 2 October 2007, the abbot of Thitsar Mandai Monastery in Mingaladon Township of Rangoon was arrested when the monastery was raided by SPDC army troops. Villagers who enquired about the abbot at the army camp where he was being held were informed that he would not be released until they had apprehended his younger brother, also a monk, who was wanted for his involvement in the protests.⁴³ Likewise, in a number of cases entire neighbourhoods were collectively punished in those areas where the protests received more local support. For example, entire streets in Bahan Township of Rangoon near the east gate of Shwedagon Pagoda were arrested and detained, leaving only young children and the elderly behind.⁴⁴

On 7 November 2007, the SPDC maintained that only 91 persons arrested in connection with the demonstrations remained in detention, however, as of 30 January 2008, the AAPPB was able to confirm the continued detention 706 persons arrested for the role they had played in the protests.⁴⁵

Judicial Procedure

Many people who had been arrested for their part in the protests were detained for days, weeks or in some instances even months without being charged. Prolonged detention without charge of this duration is conducted contrary to not only various key tenets of international law, but also Burma's own Criminal Code which prescribes that a court order is required to detain any person for a period of longer than 24 hours.⁴⁶

In the first week of November 2007, the SPDC announced that at least 91 persons arrested in relation to the protests would be charged for having committed "*violent and terrorist acts*".⁴⁷ Many of those who were tried, were held incommunicado, denied access to legal council, and summarily sentenced under closed proceedings.

Section 505(b) of the Burmese Criminal Code was cited repeatedly in the sentencing of those who had been involved in the protests. This law permits imprisonment of up to two years for causing "*public mischief*" or for making dissident statements deemed to run contrary of the interests of the SPDC. Similarly, many protestors were charged under Section 143 of the Criminal Code which prohibits the gathering of more than five people. (For more information, see Chapter 9: Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press).

Conditions of Detention

With an estimated 6,000 persons taken into detention in relation to the protests, existing detention facilities soon became overcrowded far beyond their capacity. Thousands of detainees were reportedly kept in tremendously overcrowded and sub-standard conditions which resulted in at least 20 deaths in detention. A number of temporary facilities were set up by the regime to accommodate the thousands who had been apprehended. The Government Technical Institute (GTI) in Rangoon was one such facility and by the beginning of October 2007, was reported to hold approximately 2,000 protestors.⁴⁸

In addition to the gross overcrowding, detention facilities also lacked adequate clean water, food, mosquito nets and blankets. Released detainees have testified that space was at such a premium that they were not even able to lie down to sleep and that their 'cells' lacked toilet and sanitation facilities, forcing them to urinate and defecate where they sat.⁴⁹

Many of those detained were interrogated and tortured. According to released detainees, interrogations were typically conducted late at night and lasted many hours, presumably to deprive them of sleep. The detainees were typically beaten and tortured if the answers they provided during these sessions were not to the liking of their interrogators. Those who had endured these interrogations later testified that they were shown photographs and forced to identify the people that they depicted and to acknowledge that the protests had been organized by the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD). The questions and beatings continued until the interrogators were able to extract the confession that they were looking for.⁵⁰ No one was spared from the beatings. Men, women, children and monks were all treated equally – that is to say, badly. According to testimonies provided to HRDU, children as young as six were pitilessly beaten, as were the mentally handicapped. One report emerged that a woman who was seven month's pregnant was punched in the stomach during her interrogation, resulting in the loss of the baby.⁵¹

Many detainees had received severe injuries either during their arrest or the subsequent interrogations and the sub-standard conditions of detention in which they were held further exacerbated these injuries. However, in spite of the obvious suffering of many detainees, very few were provided with any form of medical care. The little treatment that was provided consisted of little more than the dispensing of Paracetamol and other painkillers.⁵² Similarly, reports emerged from Insein Prison that multiple detainees were administered medication with the same hypodermic needle.⁵³

According to the previously published HRDU report, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*, “As a result of the grossly substandard conditions, the torture visited upon detainees during interrogation, and a severe lack of medical treatment, many reports have emerged of detainees dying while in detention”.⁵⁴ The same report identified at least 20 persons arrested in relation to the protests as having died while in detention. (For more information, see Chapter 1: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the HRDU report, *Bullets in the Alms Bowl*).

Endnotes

- ¹ Source: Source: “Maroon Revolution in Numbers,” APPPB, October 2007.
- ² See: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008. This report is available for download from www.ncgub.net.
- ³ Source: “A People Running on Empty,” IPS, 24 August 2007; “Soaring petrol costs deepen woes,” *Bangkok Post*, 20 August 2007.
- ⁴ Sources: “Protests over commodity prices point to structural damage beyond a quick political fix,” *Mizzima News*, 22 August 2007; “Soaring petrol costs deepen woes,” *Bangkok Post*, 20 August 2007; “Food Prices Spark Open Dissidence,” *Mizzima News*, 28 February 2007.
- ⁵ Sources: “Summary of Events in Burma, August 19-25,” Asia Pacific Peoples Partnership on Burma, 2007; “Contrary to Claims of Burma’s Junta, More than One Hundred Activists Arrested in Five Days,” AAPPB, 27 August 2007; “Burma: 2007 Protests Against Fuel Prices,” AHRC, August 2007; “Burma: 2007 Protests Against Fuel Prices,” AHRC, August 2007.
- ⁶ Sources: Summary of Events in Burma, August 19-25,” APPPB, 2007; “Burma: 2007 Protests Against Fuel Prices,” AHRC, August 2007.
- ⁷ Sources: “Summary of Events in Burma, August 19-25,” APPPB, 2007; “Contrary to Claims of Burma’s Junta, More than One Hundred Activists Arrested in Five Days,” AAPPB, 27 August 2007; “Burma: 2007 Protests Against Fuel Prices,” AHRC, August 2007; “Location of arrested activists remains unknown,” *Irrawaddy*, 4 September 2007.
- ⁸ Sources: “Monks and students demonstrate in Arakan State,” *Kaladan News*, 29 August 2007.
- ⁹ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.
- ¹⁰ Source: *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Source: “Monks Set Fire to Government Cars,” DVB, 6 September 2007.
- ¹² Source: “AHRC appeals for global Buddhist boycott of Burma regime,” AHRC, 20 September 2007.
- ¹³ Source: “Huge Crowds Turn Out to Hear Monks Condemn Junta,” *Irrawaddy*, 19 September 2007.
- ¹⁴ Source: “Monks in Myanmar March In Protest for Third Day,” *New York Times*, 21 September 2007.
- ¹⁵ Source: “Monks March in Kyaukpadaung, Aung Lan and Pakkoku,” DVB, 18 September 2007.
- ¹⁶ Source: “Two Thousand Monks March in Bago,” DVB, 18 September 2007.
- ¹⁷ Source: “Monk Bashed During September 18 Sittwe Protest,” DVB, 21 September 2007.
- ¹⁸ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.
- ¹⁹ Source: “Summary of Events in Burma, August 19-25,” APPPB, 2007.
- ²⁰ Source: “Myanmar Anti-Government Protesters Claim 100,000 Marching Through Yangon,” AP, 24 September 2007.
- ²¹ Source: “Deceptively Calm” *Irrawaddy*, 1 December 2007.
- ²² Source: “Defiant Protests Continue Despite First Signs of Military Response,” DVB, 25 September 2007.
- ²³ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.
- ²⁴ Source: *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Source: *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Source: *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Source: *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Sources: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008; “Burma Army starts Killing,” DPA, 26 September 2007.
- ²⁹ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008
- ³⁰ Source: “Burmese Troops Fire on Rangoon Protestors; Unconfirmed Reports say Five Monks, One Woman Dead,” *Irrawaddy*, 26 September 2007.
- ³¹ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.
- ³² Source: *Ibid.*
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- ³⁴ Sources: “Japanese photographer killed, another foreign journalist injured”, RSF, 27 September 2007; “Japan inquiry into reporter death”, BBC News, 28 September 2007; “New footage of journalist shot in Burma shows soldier leaving scene with camera”, *Japan News Review*, 9 October 2007; “Video shows Japanese journalist 'being shot deliberately'”, *Times Online*, 28 September 2007.
- ³⁵ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.

³⁶ Source: *Ibid.*

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³⁸ Source: *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Human Rights Council, 6th Session, Agenda item 4, 7 December 2007.

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⁴¹ Source: "Muslims detained for giving water to monks," DVB, 7 November 2007.

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⁴³ Source: "Head monk held in exchange for brother," DVB, 18 October 2007.

⁴⁴ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.

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⁴⁷ Source: "Myanmar to 'take action' against 91 protesters," AFP, 7 November 2007.

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⁴⁹ Sources: "Songwriter Ko Ye Lwin released," DVB, 23 October 2007; "Conditions of Detention in Police Battalion #7, Rangoon," AAPPB, 21 September 2007; *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.

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⁵¹ *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.

⁵² Source: "Over 70 people released," DVB, 26 October 2007, translation by HRDU.

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⁵⁴ Source: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, HRDU, March 2008.