

The Mon Forum

Issue No. 10/2008

October 31, 2008

The Publication of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (BURMA)

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Some Acronyms in This Issue

- SPDC- State Peace and Development Council
NLD- National League for Democracy
USDA- Union Solidarity and Development Association
ABMA- All Burma Monks Alliance
AAPPB- According to a by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners Burma
DDoS- Distributed Denial of Service
PDC- Peace and Development Council

News

SPDC confiscating and reselling vehicles in Mon State

Mon State, October 21, 2008

SPDC authorities in Mon State are seizing unlicensed trucks while also selling vehicles that have already been impounded. Purchasing the vehicles from government officials does not confer them, and residents are reluctant to buy the vehicles because they are likely to be seized again.

Authorities set up two new checkpoints in Moulmein in the second week of October. Drivers passing through the checkpoints must prove their vehicles to be registered, or have them impounded. An unknown number of vehicles have been seized, but a HURFOM field reporter witnessed the seizure of two trucks on the night of October 14th.

News of the checkpoints spread quickly throughout the area. Owners without auto licenses are afraid to drive, and many are hiding vehicles at home or in the forest.

One checkpoint is located at the Than Lwin Bridge, which controls access to Moulmein from the west. The second is located at a busy roundabout where the roads to Kyaitmaryaw and Karen State enter Moulmein. The checkpoints are operated by soldiers, traffic police and road transportation authorities.



Confiscated vehicles in Moulmein, Mon State

SPDC Creates USDA as a Main Political Party in 2010 Elections

The Burmese military government continues to ignore calls -- domestic and international -- urging it to enter into political dialogue with opposition groups. Although many in the international community have condemned the SPDC's "7 Point Road Map" to democracy, the regime plans to carry out stage #5: elections in 2010. In stage #4, a sham referendum approved a new Constitution, drafted without real input from any but the allies of the regime.

The Constitution guarantees the SPDC 25% of seats in the parliament and important positions in government. The SPDC will also morph its civilian thug group, the USDA, into a political party. The 2010 election will assuredly be undemocratic, and the USDA is guaranteed to "win" a significant portion of seats.

Now, the SPDC is appointing admired persons and their supporters in important USDA positions like USDA Chairman or General Secretary at village, township or state/division levels. They expect the admired persons -- university or college teachers, school principals and public servants -- to garner the USDA respect and support from the people.

If the SPDC plan succeeds, it will remain in power. The USDA may officially become a party and hold government seats after the 2010 elections, but it will be clear who is in control: the same army officers in the parliament still control them behind the scenes.

Confiscated vehicles are temporarily stored at Moulmein Stadium, before disappearing to Naypyidaw, the Southeast Command headquarters and other locations undisclosed.

At the same, army officers are quietly letting it be known that vehicles seized in years past are up for sale, says a HURFOM field reporter in Par Ook. Par Ook, 12 kilometers from Moulmein, is close to the headquarters of the Southeast Command and home to a high concentration of military and government personnel.

On the morning of October 16th, the reporter was able to listen to a tea shop conversation between a high level officer and businessmen. Cars seized in 2005 are up for sale, at a cost of between 2 and 3 million kyat, the officer said.

A HURFOM reporter in Mudon Township also reported that confiscated vehicles are being sold. Two trucks, originally seized in 2007, were recently bought from Light Infantry Battalion No. 210 for 2.5 and 3 million kyat.

The reporter in Par Ook, however, reported that people are hesitant to buy the impounded vehicles for fear that they will be seized again. A man close to an auto trader in Moulmein agreed, saying, "At the same time they confiscate trucks they want to sell others. What kind of policy are they implementing? Nobody can be sure what the authorities will do." Sources in the New Mon State Party report that even the party is hesitant to purchase the vehicles for fear that they will simply be reconfiscated.

According to research by HURFOM field reporters, more than 2,000 vehicles in Mon State were seized from 2005 until 2008. The number was calculated based on information compiled from monasteries, villagers and ethnic ceasefire groups including the NMSP, Karen National Union, Karen Peace Front and Democratic Buddhist

Army. In an extreme example, eight vehicles were seized from the Kawpein Monastery alone, 2 kilometers from Moulmein, said a former monk.

An officially licensed vehicle, imported by sanctioned businesses in Rangoon, can typically be expected to cost 5 billion kyat. Legally owning a vehicle in Burma is consequently prohibitively expensive for most residents and autos are generally imported illegally from Thailand and China. These vehicles can be licensed. Though cheaper than buying a legal vehicle in Rangoon such licensing is still expensive; in the last five months, a one year license purchased in Moulmein cost between 1.7 and 2 million kyat.

Villagers along the Ye to Tenasserim Division road forced to make road repairs

October 16, 2008, Southern Ye Township:

Residents of villages along the Ye to Tenasserim Division road are being forced to work as unpaid laborers, say local sources. Beginning in the first week of October, Captain Yae Lin Oo from Infantry Battalion No. 31 began forcing households in Han-Gan, Chan-Gu, Dot-Pound, Toe-Tat-Ywa-Thit, Yin-Ye, Yin-Dein and Mi-Htaw-Hlar Lay villages, in Ye Township, Mon State, to make road repairs and clear brush.

Captain Ye Lwin Oo ordered the headmen of each village to organize villagers into work groups, and gave them responsibility for repairs to sections of the road. Laborers have to clear brush and small trees from the sides of the road. They also have to fill in pot holes and ruts with soil dug from the sides of the road.

Each of the villages is home to around two hundred households, and every household is required to provide one person to assist the project. Laborers must bring

their own food and tools, as well as pay transportation costs if they live far away from their assigned section.

IB No. 31 has conscripted villagers in the past, but has usually given households the option of paying to hire a replacement laborer rather than provide a family member. This time, however, a HURFOM source in Han-Gan says villagers do not have such a choice. The same source reported that some families have been forced to send children to do the work.

Most villagers in the area are farmers, and the forced labor is monopolizing their time during a crucial harvest period. "Villagers are very busy with their own work because they have to harvest crops and clear their gardens. But now people have to leave their work to do the unpaid forced labor," said a HURFOM field reporter in the area. "My betel nut harvest is ready to be collected. If we wait, we will be late and thieves will steal the nuts. I will lose my income. Instead of working on my farm, I have to do unpaid work," a farmer told HURFOM.

According to a village headman in the area, the road repairs are the result of a recent visit by Maj-Gen Thar Aye aka Tha Aye, Chief of Bureau of Special Operations 4 (made up of Karen State, Mon State and Tennasserim Division). During the visit, Maj-Gen Thar Aye is reported to have admonished officers in control of the area for not maintaining the roads.

Villagers in Yebyu Township strained by the army's latest round of taxation

October 10, 2008, Yebyu Township

Villagers in the Thabyay Chaung village area, in Yebyu Township, have been ordered to pay a new set of taxes to Light Infantry Battalions No. 406 and 407, say local sources.

On October 2nd, LIB No. 407 ordered every household in Thabyay Chaung village, Yebyu Township, to make a new set of monthly payments of 800 to 1,000 kyat. "The money is to support army families while soldiers are away on military operations," said a thirty-year-old villager in the area.

Betel nut farmers about to enter the November harvest season will also be taxed by LIB No. 407, says Ko Soe, 45, a cattle trader from Thabyay Chaung. "I saw a group of soldiers from LIB No. 407 come to the village to collect the names of betel nut plantation owners. They plan to tax betel nut harvest next month." Ko Soe did not know how high the betel nut tax would be, but he said that farmers have had to pay the tax before: "During the harvest season last year, my uncle, who has a ten acre betel nut plantation, had to pay 50 kyat per viss." Viss are a unit of measurement used in Burma, approximately equivalent to 1.5 kilograms.

Daw Thit, 50, a betel nut owner who lives near Thabyay Chaung, added that LIB No. 406 will also be taxing betel nut. "According to village Peace and Development Council officials, next month LIB No. 406 is going to tax betel nut

more than last year, but I don't know how much more. I am worried because I could barely make enough after the taxes last year."

Officers say the betel nut taxes are to pay for repairs to the road connecting Thabyay Chaung to Thit-Toe-Dauk village. Residents, however, are skeptical about the actual use of the funds. "The village headmen said the money will pay for work on the Thabyay Chaung to Thit-Toe-Dauk road," says Daw Thit. "They already made us pay for construction on that road in June and July. Every household had to pay 300 kyat. But we haven't seen any improvements."

"Both LIBs No. 406 and 407 have farms as part of the army's 'Self-Reliance Program,' but it is never enough. They always make people provide them with cash, food and other goods," added another source. On September 28th, the source added, each household in the village was also ordered to pay 500 kyat for the maintenance of LIB No. 407's jatropha "physic nut" plantations.

The new taxes add onto existing taxation levied by the army, compounding difficulties faced by villagers in Yebyu. The worst of the taxes is a paddy quota enforced in Yebyu by LIBs No. 406, 407 and 408. For the last seven years, every household in villages around the battalions' headquarters has had to provide the army with three baskets of paddy rice. The paddy requirements strain villagers struggling to subsist, especially in years when rice crops are not bountiful. Even families that do not farm rice must supply the paddy, forcing them to purchase baskets, which each typically cost 5,000 kyat.

Burma's junta maintains the second largest standing army in Southeast Asia. According to Sean Turnell, a Burma expert from Australia's Macquarie University, the junta spends close to 40% of its annual budget on the military. This does not mean, however, battalions are outfitted sufficiently or soldiers given adequate salaries. Instead, the government encourages the military to be "self-reliant," directing the armed forces to augment government funding as necessary. This often leads to human rights violations as an army that operates with virtually no oversight or culpability seeks food and funds.

A variety of sources report that the rank and file of the Burmese army is increasingly unhappy with this situation. The Irrawaddy, for instance, recently published an article detailing rising numbers of desertions. In a recent extreme case, a soldier in LIB No. 707, in Taikgyi Township, Rangoon Division, assassinated an officer.

In 2006, a HURFOM reporter interviewed a soldier who had deserted from LIB No. 409, also based in Yebyu Township. The soldier complained of mistreatment by officers and a general lack of food and medical care. "A lot of commanders do not care about the soldiers. They just think about their own benefit and are not concerned about the lower ranks. There are many problems both in the families' barracks and battalions.' Mainly, the problems were related to soldiers' income and lack of rations," said the soldier, adding, "I was displeased and wanted to change my life. I knew there was no way to quit legitimately. The only way was to run away."

Report

A silenced anniversary: one year after the Saffron Revolution

I. Introduction

In August and September 2007 hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands of monks and civilians demonstrated in over twenty-five Burmese cities. The peaceful protests, dubbed the “Saffron Revolution” after the color of robes worn by monks who played a leading role, were Burma’s largest mass movement in two decades. Though the digital expertise of Burma’s dissident community ensured the events received international attention, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Burma’s military government reacted with overwhelming force. Unarmed protesters were beaten and shot. Thousands were detained and held in inhuman conditions. Some were tortured, others killed and arrests continued for months after.

In August and September 2008, one year later, streets in Burma remained quiet. With the exception of a few isolated, small-scale protests, the anniversary of the Saffron Revolution passed largely without event. The lack of an uprising disappointed some international pundits, who surmised that a “people power” revolution might be in the offing. The absence of notable public action on the Saffron Anniversary, however, was the predictable result of concerted prevention efforts by the SPDC. The SPDC’s violent crackdown in 2007 undoubtedly had a residual deterrent effect, as did the fact that key leaders remain arrested or missing. In 2008, the junta used the combination of preemptive arrests, travel restrictions and a visibly increased security presence to make it nearly impossible for dissident groups to plan or carry out protests. Monks and activists, key activist demographics in 2007, were particularly targeted. In a kind of fail-safe, communication channels, within and without Burma, were also attacked so that, should protests have occurred, they would have received limited international media coverage. This report begins with an overview of the Saffron Revolution throughout Burma, with particular attention paid to events in Mon State, Southern Burma. It then briefly outlines measures taken throughout Burma to prevent anniversary protests, before focusing on anti-protest measures in Mon State.

II. August and September 2007: peaceful protest, violent response

A. Demonstrations across the country



Mass demonstrations in Rangoon during September 2007

arrested and protests in Rangoon largely quelled.

On August 15th, the SPDC removed most of the country’s subsidies for fuel. The move, unexpected and announced without warning, caused diesel prices to double and increased the cost of natural gas by nearly 500%. The fuel price spike caused the costs of goods and transportation to skyrocket throughout the country, exacerbating already harsh living conditions. In response, on August 19th, small demonstrations began occurring in Rangoon, Burma’s old capital city. The protests were led by members of the opposition group the National League for Democracy (NLD), as well as ‘88 Generation Students, survivors of the last mass demonstrations to take place in Burma, in August 1988. Unfortunately, by August 25th, over one hundred people had been

Small protest, however, continued to be held throughout Burma, including in Arakan State’s capital city of Akyab, Mandalay and Irrawaddy Divisions. On September 5th, in Pakokku, Magwe Division, Buddhist monks involved themselves for the first time, marching to the cheers of thousands of onlookers. The Burmese army responded by firing gunshots over the heads of the monks. When they did not disperse, soldiers as well as members of SPDC-backed civilian groups the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and Swan Arr Shin (Masters of

Force) beat and apprehended the monks. Rumors, likely all founded, quickly spread that one monk was killed and others disrobed, tied to a lamppost and publicly beaten.

Burma is a deeply Buddhist country and the violence against monks – who hold a sacred social position – inspired revulsion. Within a few days, a new organization called itself the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA), demanded the SPDC apologize, take action to reduce commodity prices, release political prisoners and enter into dialogue with “democratic forces.” Failure to comply by September 17th, the group announced, would result in the religious excommunication of SPDC officials and their families. This threat carried serious weight, for the “overturning of alms bowls” would prevent SPDC officials from making “merit” by donating to monks, a crucial religious activity for even casual Buddhists.

The SPDC, however, refused to apologize. On September 14th, the ABMA called for protests to resume on September 18th and announced monks throughout Burma would refuse to accept alms from the SPDC. Protests broke out in Rangoon, as well as Magwe, Mandalay, Sagaing and Pegu Divisions. After a public show of support from Nobel laureate and beloved NLD Aung San Suu Kyi, the crowds became massive. On September 23rd, twenty thousand protesters, including three thousand monks, marched in Rangoon. On September 24th and 25th, thirty to fifty thousand monks joined by similar numbers of civilians marched in Rangoon, with large protests occurring in twenty-five other cities. On the night of the 25th, however, the SPDC began its crackdown. A 9pm curfew was enforced in Rangoon and military convoys entered the city. On September 26th, in response to continued large protests, the assembled army, riot police, USDA and Swan Arr Shin forces beat protesters, shot into crowds and arrested scores of people. Dozens of monasteries were raided and looted and hundreds of monks were detained. September 27th saw similar violence. Though protests continued through the end of September, the SPDC largely retook control as it flooded Rangoon and other large cities with thousands of troops, riot police, USDA and Swan Arr Shin.

For months after the protests, arrests and detentions continued. The SPDC had openly filmed and photographed the demonstrations, and security forces used the evidence to round up participants. Monasteries were raided, some shut down permanently, and thousands of monks and civilians were detained and/or forced to return to their home villages. Calculating the number of people arrested, released or under continued detention is incredibly difficult, for the SPDC jealously guards such information. According to a report by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPPB), as of October 2008 Burma is verifiably home to 2,123 political prisoners. This number is a significant increase over the 1,192 imprisoned prior to the August 2007. At least a third of the 2008 number – 700 to 900 – are thought to be imprisoned for participating in the 2007 protests. SPDC statements in the government-controlled press admit that 2,836 people were temporarily arrested, but claim that only 91 remain in detention.

Calculating the number of people killed during the demonstrations is perhaps even more difficult. According to a report by UN special rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, at least 31 people died, up to 4,000 were arrested and 1,000 are still detained. The state-controlled press claimed that fewer than twenty were killed. Human Rights Watch, however, which conducted an exhaustive survey in Rangoon, including interviews with over one hundred witnesses and participants, concludes: “first-hand accounts...demonstrate that many more people were killed than the Burmese authorities are willing to admit, and sheds new light on the authorities’ systematic, often violent pursuit of monks, students, and other peaceful advocates of reform in the weeks and months after the protests.”

B. Demonstrations in Mon State

Protests in Mon State began quietly. Upset with the arrest of ‘88 Generation Students in Rangoon, students at Moulmein University began a poster campaign on the university campus as well as some city wards. On September 15th, posters went up describing the students’ dissatisfaction with the arrest of the leaders and demands for the lowering of fuel prices. In response, some universities were shut down, including Moulmein University, the Moulmein Education College, Nursing School and Government Technical College. Pa’an University in nearby Karen State was also closed. According to a lecturer at Moulmein University, the closures were directed by



Monks leading the September 2007 protests in Moulmein, Mon State

orders from the Burma's capital city, Naypyidaw.

On September 24th, demonstrators turned up the volume. At 1pm, more than 1,000 monks began marching from Moulmein's main market, Zay Gyi, accompanied by at least 4,000 members of the public, including dozens of university students. Still more civilians watched and paid obeisance from the side of road, as well as supported the monks by offering them water. Security forces followed the demonstration but did not intervene.

That night, rumors quickly spread that authorities would be raiding monasteries. Many monks subsequently went into hiding. In spite of the rumors, the next day at 1pm about 400 monks, mostly from Sin Phyu and Ye Kyaung monasteries, continued to protest, joined by about 1,000 civilians. The rumored raids never happened, and on September 26th at least 15,000 demonstrators gathered in Moulmein and began protesting at 1:50pm. Monks from Moulmein, Mudon Township in Mon State and Kawkareik Township in Karen State participated. The monks held religious flags, upturned alms bowls signifying the excommunication of SPDC authorities and signs calling for peace and love. The protest concluded without violence at 5pm.

By September 28th, however, Moulmein residents had been ordered not to gather in the streets. Students and monks, many of whom were living in Moulmein to study, were ordered to return to their home villages. Officers from the Military Southeast Command visited each monastery in Moulmein and told abbots they would be shot if the monks continued protesting. Armed sentries were placed outside each monastery.

On September 29th, USDA, riot police and armed troops from the Southeast Command visited monasteries and the Moulmein University campus. Remaining monks and students from outside the city were forced to return home and told they would be imprisoned if they were seen in the city again, even if they committed no crime.

Though the authorities were able to bring the protests to an end, Mon State was not characterized by the violent crackdowns seen in Rangoon and elsewhere. The fate of at least 200 hundred monks from Sin Phyu and Ye Kyaung monasteries who were forced to leave Moulmein is, however, still uncertain. The monks, who were issued travel documents from the Military Southeast Command, were seen leaving the city by train. According to a traveler, though his train was full of monks when he boarded, they had all disappeared before they reached their destinations. A second traveler confirmed this story, and said that he saw monks dragged from the train and arrested in Thaton, about 70 kilometers from Moulmein.

III. August and September 2008: crackdowns and quiet

A. Isolated protests

Demonstrations commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Saffron Revolution occurred through August and September in cities across the world, including the US, Japan and India. In Burma, however, only a few small-scale and isolated protests were undertaken. Exile news agency the Kaladan Press Network reported that at least 60 people in three towns in Arakan State attempted to stage small August 1988 anniversary protests. Later, on September 27th, at least 35 NLD members were able to march in Rangoon, even gaining access to the street on which Aung San Suu Kyi is under house arrest. Protests also continued to occur during September in Arakan State. At least twenty young monks with empty alms bowls marched in Kyaukpuru on September 24th, before being intercepted by plain-clothes security personnel and returned to their monastery. In Taunggup, 20 monks staged another brief peaceful demonstration before being stopped by officials. "We need to reveal what we have in our mind," one of the protesters told HURFOM. On September 26th, 10 monks in Rabre Township and 150 in Akyab also marched briefly before being stopped by security forces. Six protesters were arrested in Akyab.

In a positive development, some members of the Swan Arr Shin, regular police and riot police have reportedly been offering sympathy and even subtle support to monks protesting in Akyab. "We received not only the people's support, but also the support of members of Swan Arr Shin, riot police, and the police force for our movement at present, because the economic hardship of their daily lives under the current military government has become intolerable," said Rakhaputta, a leading monk quoted by the Bangladesh-based opposition Narinjara News.

B. Countrywide crackdowns

Rakhaputta's experience is, however, the exception to the rule. Akyab, along with Mon State and the rest of Burma, have seen increased restrictions on the Saffron Anniversary. As early as the first week of August, Burma's exile news agencies began reporting an increasing presence of security personnel in Rangoon and other cities that played key roles in the 2007 protests. "Security personnel are swarming everywhere," a Rangoon resident told the

Delhi based news agency Mizzima in August. The trend continued, and by September more than 7,000 police were deployed throughout the city. Security forces stood sentry at monasteries and pagodas, as well as the offices of the NLD, universities and other public sites.

On September 27th, the Shan Herald Agency for News reported that travelers in Rangoon were being interrogated. "They checked every passenger on board buses, taxis and city buses asking for their name, address, ID number, purpose of visit and place of departure among other details. They also noted down the license plate numbers of the vehicles," a passenger who was checked by officials told the opposition news agency.

The Irrawaddy corroborated this story, adding that travelers without identification documents were arrested, while monks faced special scrutiny. Travelers from the Thai-Burma border also reported increased searches by security forces. Similarly, HURFOM reported as late as the first of October that sweeps were being conducted in Rangoon's Insein Township. Dozens of unregistered guests were arrested.



Armed riot police standing sentry in Rangoon during September 2008

In Akyab, in spite of the reported support from some officials, troops regularly patrolled the city and enforced a partial curfew. Troops in trucks outfitted with loudspeakers are reported to have been patrolling the town, announcing that an "insurgent group" is in town and encouraging residents to be cautious and cooperate with the army. People outside their homes after 6pm were also required to carry a copy of their family list and National Identity Card.

In addition to the visibly increased security presence, the SPDC also appears to have made preemptive arrests, snatching up protest leaders and suspected leaders. According to the AAPPB report, the SPDC steadily increased the number of people arrested for political activities as the Saffron Anniversary approached, with 13 arrested and detained in July, 37 in August and 41 in September. Hundreds more were arrested, interrogated and then released. "I can see a lot of people around my house keeping watch over my movements," a female member of the '88 Generation Students told Burma News International. "Whenever I wake up, I wonder whether I will still see my friend whom I talked to yesterday or whether he will be arrested. I also fear whether it will be my friends or me who will be arrested first. I am in constant fear wondering when they will come and arrest me," an NLD member who participated in both the 1988 and 2007 protest added in an interview with Mizzima.

C. The cyber offensive

One of the striking things about the events of August and September 2007 was the way they were publicized. Capitalizing on incompetence, indifference or some unknown SPDC strategy, witnesses in Burma were able to use Internet and cell phone technology to globally transmit information about the protests. Bloggers and citizen reporters were able to update blogs and send descriptions, photographs and even videos to exile Burmese news agencies, as well as international media outlets. The efforts effectively turned international media attention towards the plight of the peaceful protesters. The success, however, was short-lived. On September 29th, the SPDC shut down the Internet as well as suspended most cell phone service, stopping the flow of information.

Internet and cell phone access resumed eventually, but the SPDC appears to have learned its lesson. Internet access has always been strictly controlled – private access is rare, web browsing is filtered and public Internet cafes are heavily regulated and watched. But the SPDC has stepped up efforts to control the flow of information on the Saffron Anniversary. In the middle of September, for instance, Mizzima reported that connection speeds had been limited so much that using the internet, let alone uploading images or videos, was virtually impossible, forcing several Internet cafes in Rangoon to close.

Internet café owners in Moulmein, in turn, report being ordered to shorten their hours of operation at the end of September. Normally, a café owner told HURFOM, "we are allowed to stay open until 11pm. But last week they demanded we close at 8pm." Shop owners were also admonished for not providing complete enough information about their customers, and warned that they must document information on every user, including their National Identity Card numbers, addresses and web browser activity.

Burmese exile media groups also appear to have been un . In September, the news sites of exile news groups The Irrawaddy, Democratic Voice of Burma and New Era Journal were disabled by Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, which overloaded the websites' servers. Mizzima and the Democratic Voice of Burma were also disrupted by DDoS attacks in July. Mizzima continues to report attacks through October, including at least one attack by a group calling themselves "Independence Hackers from Burma," who replaced the site's news content with a crude message on October 2nd. "Why Hack This Website?" read one line, before offering an answer: "We Born for Hack Those F**king Media Website Are Ever Talk about only Worse News for Our Country."

In August, popular Burmese online forums Mystery Zillion and Planet Myanmar also experienced difficulties, which they have confirmed to be caused by DDoS attacks; Mystery Zillion was inoperable for most of August and lost all of the site content stored in its database, while Planet Myanmar went down for two weeks beginning August 9th. Neither site is politically oriented, and both prohibit explicit criticisms of the SPDC because they fear government censorship and restriction. "We are not interested in politics," says one of Mystery Zillion's founders, "our site is only for IT (information technology) development for young people inside Burma seeking IT knowledge." Planet Myanmar also strives to be non-political, and its content is oriented towards topics like IT, lifestyle, entertainment and relationships. The community forums do, however, provide information about bypassing restrictions the regime places on Internet access. This information is vital to people attempting to get news and information to foreign and exile news agencies and human rights organizations, as was done during August and September 2007.

IV. Protest prevention in Mon State: sentries, sweeps and checkpoints

A. Orders from Naypyidaw

In Mon State, Moulmein University students marked the 20th anniversary of the August 1988 uprising. At least 300 students attempted to attend school clothed in black, but were turned away by troops patrolling the campus. "They were not allowed to enter the school compound. They were thrown out by the school authorities," a student told HURFOM. September in Moulmein, home to protests in 2007, saw little action in 2008.

According to a highly placed civil servant in the Mon State Peace and Development Council (PDC) office, General That Naing Win, chairman of the Mon State PDC and Khin Maung Htwe, secretary of the Mon State PDC and head of the Mon State USDA, received orders from Naypyidaw to increase security in August and September. This order was relayed to Mon State's township level PDC authorities in a meeting that occurred during the first week of August. "Each Township is supposed to closely watch for suspicious activity and inform higher officials regularly. If needed, officials are to keep watch 24 hours a day," the source, who was present at the meeting, told HURFOM.

These orders were dutifully carried out. Sentries were posted throughout Moulmein, as well as some other villages in Mon State. Transit in and out of the capital was carefully watched and nightly sweeps conducted to keep tabs on out-of-town visitors were conducted in at least 14 of Moulmein's 24 wards.

B. Travel checkpoints

According to HURFOM field reporters, travel in and out of Moulmein began being heavily monitored in the first week of August. Checkpoints at either end of the Than Bridge controlling the entrance to Moulmein were installed and, all told, at least three new checkpoints were in operation along the bus route to Rangoon. Existing checkpoints were also staffed by larger than usual numbers of security personnel. Old checkpoints at Whall town and the Sit Taun bridge linking Mon State to Pegu Division were strengthened, while new checkpoints were installed at Hlegu town, both ends of the Than Lwin bridge, Kyik Htaw and Thaton towns. The checkpoints were generally operated by a 10 to 15 strong combined force of various security branches; in the last week of September, a single checkpoint on the Than Lwin bridge consisted 3 Myanmar police officers, 2 Military Security Affairs officers, 1 to 2 Special Branch officers, 1 Township PDC official, 2 plain clothes police officers, 2 female police officers and 2 immigration bureau officers.

Everyone passing through the checkpoints, including bus passengers and people in private cars or motorbikes, were required to disembark and walk through the checkpoints. In the past, passengers were usually allowed to remain in vehicles while the driver gave identity papers to checkpoint officers. Travelers in 2008, however, were required to personally present identity papers, as well as answer questions and have their belongings searched. Some travelers were required to explain where they came from, their destination, the reason for their trip and the duration of their stay. Passengers hailing from places outside Moulmein were subject to extra scrutiny, and Monks

in particular were targeted. Monks were required to provide their Monk Identity Cards, issued by the regime's Sangha Mahanayaka Committee. Monks were also asked detailed questions about their home and destination monasteries, including full addresses.

"Officials manning the gates check the monks at each gate on the highway to Rangoon and make pointed queries," one traveler said, adding, "Policemen don't allow the monks to leave the express buses from Mon State after it arrives in the Aung Minghalar highway gate station in Rangoon. They check the list of travelers being carried by the car driver." Another traveler, who regularly makes the Moulmein to Rangoon bus trip, reported that the checks along the road to Rangoon were continuing as late as October 10th. He also told HURFOM that the soldiers seemed unusually busy, and said that they were talking on their phones and radios a lot, and seemed to be reporting important things. According to a monk in Pegu Division some monks opted to try and avoid the checkpoints by taking a circuitous route, avoiding the main road to Rangoon.

C. Monitoring of public places

Beginning in the first week of August, HURFOM sources began reporting increase numbers of security personnel in Moulmein. Plain-clothes police, as well as uniformed and armed police officers, were reported to be standing sentry at busy intersections and roundabouts, the Zay Gyi market, religious sites, monasteries, train and bus stations and ferry docks. The sentries were reported to still be in place in the second week of October. "Some people had already forgotten about last year," a female shop owner in Moulmein told HURFOM, "But when they saw the troops in August and September it reminded me of the protests." When a HURFOM field reporter asked another source how he knew there were more sentries, given that many of them were in plain clothes, the source told him, "Everybody knows they are plain clothes police because we see the same people in the same place every day, with their bags and a hat, and in the bag we can hear their radios. They don't act like normal people; they stand around and watch everyone. When it is raining they stand outside with an umbrella. When it is hot they stay in the sun. It is clear they are on duty. We did not see anything like this before."

There were also reports of an increase in the watchfulness of authorities outside of Moulmein. "The authorities in some villages in Mudon Township have ordered USDA members to watch the situation in their villages. Some members have also been posted as sentries," said a youth from Ninelain village. "Even people who are not in the USDA are sometimes made to be sentries."

D. Monitoring of monasteries and religious sites

At least four monasteries in Moulmein, including Sin Phyu, Ye Kyaung, Sein Ma Ma and Sasarna 2500, were under twenty-four-hour monitoring from the first week of August through October. Two to six uniformed and plain clothes sentries are reported to have been standing sentry outside Sin Phyu and Ye Kyaung Monastery, with two to three posted at Sein Ma Ma Monastery and an unknown number posted at the Mon monastery Sasarna 2500. Some of the sentries were armed and carrying two-way radios. Monks leaving the monasteries to collect alms had to pass through the sentry line, and though they were not stopped for questioning they were eyed suspiciously. Visitors to the monasteries, as well as people passing by, were also watched carefully. "Day and night they are in front of our monastery. Our monastery watchmen were even asked about where they are from, how long they been at our monastery and why they are here," a young Buddhist monk from Sin Phyu told HURFOM.

Sin Phyu and Ye Kyaung were the two primary monasteries involved in the 2007 protests. They are also Mon State's largest monasteries, home to more than 750 and 500 monks respectively. Both monasteries are famous for the quality of their Buddhist teaching, and most of the monks they house are young. Sin Phyu is, notably, home to monks from outside the area, including Nyaung Oo, Mattaya and Amarpura Townships, all in Mandalay Division, often considered Burma's religious center. Sein Ma Ma is home to only 90 to 100 monks, while Sasarna 2500 hosts less than 100.



Uniformed and plain clothes sentries at the Kyaik Than Lan Pagoda in Moulmein, Mon State

Sentries were also posted at religious sites in Moulmein, including at the Kyaik Than Lan Pagoda and the Dhamma Yone, a popular religious gathering place. Kyaik Than Lan Pagoda, Dhamma Yone, Sin Phyu, Ye Kyaung and Sasarna 2500

are all located on a large hill, known as Taung Baw Tan, that overlooks Moulmein. In addition to the sentries at each individual location, Taung Baw Tan was patrolled 24 hours by 5 to 6 groups of 6 to 7 security personnel, including armed police and plain-clothed US A members. "The police are in both uniforms and plain clothes, and are patrolling the University and big pagoda in Moulmein," said one source. "There are about 50 police officers and soldiers patrolling in each place, and they keep watch twenty-four hours a day. The reason the sentries are there is because this time last year monks and student gathered and protested."



Department stickers on motorbikes at Moulmein University. License numbers obscured to protect the drivers.

E. Monitoring of students and universities

Moulmein University also received special monitoring beginning in August. Two main gates control entry into the university, and sentries were set up to monitor the comings and goings of students. Officials kept a record of exactly who was, and who was not, on campus at any given time by requiring students to present their student identity cards at the gate. "Both police and soldiers are standing sentry at the university's entry gate. They are making the students paranoid and sometimes we are too afraid to pass through the gate. This makes it difficult to continue studying, and I want to go home," said a first year student at Moulmein University. "Sometimes police have looked at us suspiciously, and even searched us without asking permission. We feel like prisoners – we have done nothing wrong but the authorities assume we are causing trouble. It's making some students frustrated and upset," said another student.

In the beginning of August, USDA officials spoke with the heads of each department at the university and instructed them and other professors to watch students and report on the situation. The USDA officials instructed the professors to pay particular attention for the presence of non-students on campus. In the first week of September, Students were also ordered to affix stickers to their bikes signifying which department they study in. A tutor at the university said, "Students feel very restricted. Police and soldiers and USDA keep watch as if there is a rebellion, and if they are suspicious they detain students immediately. We're not happy about that, and we don't want to watch the

students for the authorities, but we are ordered to."

F. Monitoring of government offices

A small bomb exploded in the Mudon Township Telecommunications Office in July. Mudon Township PDC officials subsequently ordered staff members of every government office to patrol their administrative centers, even requiring them to stand guard at night. The order even applied to schoolteachers, three to four of whom were required to act as school night security. "We have to take responsibility for the safety of the school because authorities are afraid of something happening like the explosions in Mudon," a principal told HURFOM.

HURFOM's source in the Mon State PDC office reported that the order to guard government offices was applied to Moulmein in the August meeting between state and township level PDC officials. "Government civil servants also have to guard their office from attacks or bombings, like the bombing in Rangoon," the source said, adding "There were bomb blasts at the USDA office in Rangoon near police station in Tamwey Township in Rangoon, they don't want anything like that in Moulmein. All civil servants have to participate in this operation." Civil servants from each department are required to work as night guards. They are not paid for the extra work.

G. Midnight ward sweeps

Out-of-town guests in Moulmein were kept track of carefully from September 1st through the second week of October. In at least fourteen of Moulmein's twenty-four wards, door-to-door sweeps were performed to check for outsiders. Every night after midnight, security personnel knocked on doors and checked for people not registered as guests or reflected on official family lists. Every family is required to register a list of family members with ward PDC officials. The paper, called Immigration Bureau Form # 10, includes pictures of each family member, their thumbprint and other information. Guests not on family lists are required to inform ward officials of plans to stay overnight.

Households and guests were subject to questioning, and had to explain whether guests were family, where they were from, the duration of their stay and why they were staying in Moulmein. "The officials came between 12 and

1am, when people were asleep. Mostly they seemed to be from the USDA, some were from the ward PDC," a source in the Myine-Thayar ward of Moulmein told HURFOM. Nightly sweeps were confirmed to have occurred in the following wards: Bo-Gone, Daiwon-Kwin, Daung-Zayat, Hle-Tan, Leinmaw-Zin, Maung-Ngan, Myay-Ni-Gone, Myine-Thayar, Ngan-Tay, Phet-Khin, Shwe-Tanng, T ung-Wai, Thiri-Myine and Zay-Cho.

Visitors at guesthouses were also monitored more carefully than usual in September. Typically, owners of guesthouses are required to supply a guest list to ward PDC author everyday by 8pm. In September, proprietors were instructed to send a second guest list to authorities 11pm so they could be made aware of late arriving visitors. The extra guesthouse monitoring was implemented by Min Lon Aung, head of the USDA in Moulmein, says a source close to the Moulmein USDA.

V. Conclusion

Though the increased security measures in August and September 2008 throughout Burma are widely assumed to be a concerted effort to prevent the reoccurrence of mass protests, no concrete evidence explaining SPDC motives has surfaced. Instead, the specter of internal and external threats to the safety of the nation was raised to justify tightening security. Rangoon saw at least four bombings in July, August and September, including a blast at a bus stop outside the Maha Bandoola Garden that injured 8 people on September 25th.



Police standing sentry in Rangoon during September 2008

A dissident group known as the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors took credit for some of the bombings, but the SPDC blamed the blasts on the NLD as well as exile groups on the Thai-Burma border. Preventing future bombings was then used to justify posting thousands of sentries in Rangoon and searching travelers from the Thai-Burma border area. A similar threat of bombing was used to force civil servants to guard offices in Mon State, and "rebels" were cited by soldiers to justify patrols in Akyab. Some residents, however, expressed their skepticism to HURFOM. In the case of the Rangoon bombings, they pointed out, regime authorities had been carefully checking visitors to the Bandoola Garden for two days prior to the blast. Authorities, the HURFOM sources said, could very well have planted the bombs in an attempt to generate a pretense for tightening security.

Such a cynical manipulation of public safety certainly has precedent. Indeed, it helped to birth the current regime, whose roots trace back to a 1962 coup, carried out to "save" Burma from an "unthinkable fate" at the hands of federalist insurgent groups. Similarly, after the 1988 protests, a dissident newspaper published a report documenting a secret August 23rd meeting between then-top General Ne Win and other highly ranked officials. The report outlined plans to weaken opposition groups by driving wedge between them and the general populace. To do this, security personal were to surreptitiously create such of anarchy and chaos that the "masses and business community (would) come to depend on the armed forces for protection." The strategies outlined in the document proved to so closely mirror actual events that some doubt the authenticity of the report. In any case, at the end of August 1988, over 9,000 prisoners were released from seven prisons under dubious circumstances. Planned or not,

Dear Readers,

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) was founded in 1995 by a group of young Mon people. The main objectives of HURFOM are:

- monitoring the human rights situation in Mon territory and southern Burma,
- protecting and promoting internationally recognized n rights in Burma

To these ends, we produce the monthly "Mon Forum" newsletter. We encourage you to write to us if you have feedback or know someone who might like to receive the newsletter. Please email or mail us a name and address; our contact information is on the back page.

With regards,

Director
Human Rights Foundation of Monland

crime and lawlessness in Burma certainly saw an upswing and the regime again consolidated power. Ironically, 9,002 prisoners were released on September 23, 2008.

Regardless of motive, the SPDC took a variety of steps that could both prevent protests, and position the regime to respond should protests have occurred. Though information about security practices throughout Burma is difficult to acquire, HURFOM's research in Moulmein serves as a useful template for understanding the regime's protest-prevention strategies. Sentries were posted throughout Moulmein, particularly public places and areas frequented by protest demographics like monks and students. They appear to have been both effective



Armed sentries outside a monastery in Mon State

at deterring protest, and positioning the regime to respond quickly should demonstrations have occurred. Indeed, the few anniversary protests that did occur in Burma were halted almost immediately. Checkpoints monitoring travelers, as well as sweeps conducted to document overnight guests, also provided an early warning system should large numbers of outsiders have arrived in Moulmein. Outsiders descending upon cities would have signaled impending protests, and the regime would have been ready to react immediately. Midnight checks would also have aided post-protest arrests, as SPDC authorities would likely have assumed all new guests during protest times to be participants. Checkpoints monitoring the attendance of Moulmein University students would have served a similar function for, had protests occurred, SPDC authorities could likely have determined who attended the protests by determining who had not attended class.

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HURFOM is also indebted to reporting done by exile Burmese media groups, including Burma News International, the Irrawaddy, Kachin News Group, Kaladan, Mizzima, Narinjara and the Shan Herald Agency for News.

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