

Headlines in Review

1997

December 31: 1996: In a press conference, Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt states that SLORC has arrested 47 members of the Burma Communist Party, including 13 NLD members, for their involvement in recent student unrest.

December 31: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attends a New Year's Eve dinner at the home of U Kyi Maung and urges the world to apply more pressure on the SLORC in 1997 to allow democracy.

January 2: 97 SLORC states that foreign journalists will no longer be allowed to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at her home in University Avenue, Rangoon.

January 3: Two Karenni refugees are killed and a further 10 are injured when Burmese soldiers fire mortar shells and automatic weapons into Karenni refugee camp in northern Mae Hong Song, Thailand.

January 4: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi marks the 49th anniversary of independence with a vow to step up efforts to bring democracy to Burma despite increasing restrictions on her and her supporters.

January 4: Peregrine Capital Myanmar Ltd, a subsidiary of Peregrine Investment Holdings Ltd, announces it has decided to stop its operations in Burma, due to the non-materialisation of a privatization program, and widespread controversy surrounding its operations.

January 7: Malaysian Foreign Minister, Abdullah Badawi, confirms that Malaysia would like Burma to be integrated into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1997.

January 8: SLORC official media announces that Saw U Reh, a former elected representative of the NLD, has been sentenced to 17 years in prison.

- January 11: Riot police prevent supporters of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from gathering in Rangoon amid tight security linked to the opening of a national sports festival.
- January 14: Delegates from 14 ethnic groups in Burma condemn the ruling military junta and voices support for the NLD, at the closing ceremony of Ethnic Nationalities Seminar held in Karen-held territory.
- January 16: The United Nations Committee on Children's Rights recommends that the SLORC take specific action to eradicate child labor, the recruitment of minors into the army, and child prostitution.
- January 17: Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, urges the ASEAN to pressure the ruling junta in Burma into holding talks with the opposition.
- January 18: SLORC announces that 20 people, including six members of the NLD have been jailed for seven years for their role in the December 1996 student unrest.
- January 18: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi confirms that 20 people jailed by the SLORC were denied access to legal counsel and must be presumed innocent.
- January 19: SLORC claims that supporters of NLD are being blocked from gathering to hear her speeches because of public complaints.
- January 22: China agrees to boost military cooperation with Burma, including training and exchange of intelligence.
- January 26: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi receives an honorary Doctor of Law degree at the American University and urges Americans to boycott companies doing business with Burma's military regime.
- January 28: Cambodia co-Premier Hun Sen arrives Burma and holds talks with senior members of Burma's regime.
- January 28: Pepsi Co Inc. confirms that its relationship with a local Burmese bottler had been 'completely severed' on January 15, and that all production and distribution of Pepsi products will cease by May 31.
- January 28: SLORC announces that 14 people, including five members of the

- NLD, have been found guilty of provoking students and throwing rocks at security personnel during protests in December. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says the sentences are a sham since the trials are not made public.
- January 29: DKBA troops burn down the Mae La, Ban Huay Kalok and Huay Bong refugee camps and leave 10,000 homeless. They also kill two people, including a Thai man, as well as seriously wounding two refugee children.
- January 30: SLORC hits back at the US State Department's Annual Human Rights Practices Report for its accusations of human rights abuses in Burma, saying they are 'nonsense' and part of a conspiracy against SLORC.
- February 1:** The SLORC announces it has uncovered a plot by exiled students and 'subversives' to create unrest in the country.
- February 1: SLORC Foreign Minister, U Ohn Gyaw, repeats in a SLORC press conference that it has no plans to extradite wanted former drug-lord, Khun Sa, to the United States in the absence of legal requirements to do so.
- February 3: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says during her news conference that a SLORC minister has encouraged junta supporters to murder her.
- February 4: Thai Foreign Ministry summons Burmese Ambassador, U Hla Maung, and lodges a strong diplomatic protest against recent attack on three refugee camps in Thailand by pro-Rangoon DKBA troops.
- February 5: Unocal Corp, states that the best way to promote democracy in Burma is for firms like fast food giant McDonalds to commence operations there.
- February 6: Thailand Foreign Minister Prachuab Chaiyasan says that Western nations should ask Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to 'tone down' her stance in order to reach a compromise with the SLORC leaders.
- February 10: The pro-Rangoon DKBA vows to keep attacking ethnic Karen refugees sheltering in camps along the Burma-Thai border. Captain Htu Wa, the DKBA's commander-in-chief, in a statement made to

reporters at his camp on the Burmese side of the Moei River.

- February 10: SLORC Lt-General Khin Nyunt says that the SLORC wants to make peace with ethnic-insurgent group, the Karen National Union, but that the offer has been rejected by the KNU.
- February 11: Amnesty International calls for 'a constructive and open discussion on human rights issue' when Asian and European foreign ministers meet in Singapore on February 13, 1997.
- February 12: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi celebrates Union Day in Burma with her supporters, despite military efforts to blockade the approaches to her compound. Hundreds of people are turned away by armed riot police as they try to gain access to her home.
- February 12: The Thai government approves a venture between Thai petroleum company, PTT and its Burmese counterpart, MOGE, as well as the Texaco, Premier and Nippon oil companies, to develop, produce and transmit natural gas from three exploration tracts in the Yetagun offshore gas field and from two other tracts nearby in which PTT is already taking part.
- February 12: The SLORC troops launch a major offensive against key KNU strongholds along the Thai-Burma border, driving thousands of refugees into Thailand.
- February 13: Asean and the EU compromise on the controversy surrounding Burma's participation in Asean by agreeing to mention it without comment in the joint declaration.
- February 15: Thailand Foreign Minister Prachuab Chaiyasan urges the EU and Asean to share responsibility in bringing positive change to Burma.
- February 17: Frances Vendrell, director the Political Affairs Department and representatives of the UN General Secretary arrives Rangoon and will meet leaders and officials of the SLORC.
- February 21: Indonesia's President Suharto arrives Burma for a landmark visit aims at promoting bilateral ties as well as assessing Burma's readiness for full membership in Asean.

- February 24: Visiting UN representative, Frances Vendrell meets with Khun Htun Oo, a prominent Shan opposition leader, as well as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
- February 24: An initial group of 618 Karen refugees from Ban Thi Pho in Umphang district, Thailand are relocated to a site near Ban Nu Pho, Umphang district. It is announced that all 7,000-8,000 refugees in the area will be moved to the new site at a later date.
- February 25: The Thai Army, notorious 9th Division in Kanchanaburi province separates refugee men, aged 15 years and older, from their families in a temporary refugee site and forcibly returns them to Burma.
- February 25: SLORC Army Chief, Maung Aye, and his Thai counterpart, Gen. Chetta Thanajaro, meet at Tachilek, a Burmese border town, to discuss escalating border problems between the two countries.
- February 26: Around 3,000 women and children from Ban Bong Ti pass in Kanchanaburi province are repatriated to Taw Ma Pwu village in Burma.
- February 27: Thai paratroopers and Burmese forces clash briefly near the Thai border of Pu Nam Rawn where over 2,300 Karen refugees are taking refuge.
- February 28: The USA condemns Burma, Afghanistan and four others countries for failing to cooperate fully in the fight against drug trafficking.
- March 2:** The KNU vows to keep fighting unless the ruling junta resumes peace talks, amid a massive offensive against them by SLORC troops which has displaced thousands of civilians.
- March 2: The Thai army issues an announcement, dismissing allegations that Thai troops have forced thousands of Karen refugees in Kanchanaburi back to war zones in Burma.
- March 4: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi alleges that members of her NLD party are the targets of fresh persecution with 'unprecedented severity'.
- March 4: Refugees from Phu Nam Rawn are relocated to Phu Muang in Muang district of Kanchanaburi.

- March 5: An Environmental Impact Assessment report (EIA) relevant to the construction of the Yadana gas pipeline project is re-submitted to the Thai Office of Environmental Policy and Planning (OEPP).
- March 6: The South African President, currently in Singapore, urges deeper engagement between South Africa and Southeast Asia, saying alleged human rights abuses in Burma will not effect future ties with the booming region.
- March 7: Thailand Army Chief, Gen. Chetta Thanajaro, states that the UNHCR will not be allowed to provide assistance to ethnic Karen refugees.
- March 8: Thai National Security Council deputy chief, Kachadpai Buruspattana, comments that the international community should refrain from criticizing Thailand over it's handling of Karen refugees, and instead appreciate it's effort to care for refugees over the past 13 years.
- March 9: 1,500 Karen civilians who have taken sanctuary in the Thung Yai Naresuan wildlife reserve in Kanchanaburi, are sent back across the border into Burma.
- March 10: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi urges compassion and help for ethnic Karen refugees who have fled to Thailand in the face of attacks by SLORC, in a video-taped message.
- March 10: A group of 1,800 Karen refugees in Thong Pha Phum are pushed back into Burma by Thai authorities.
- March 11: A NSC meeting in Thailand, chaired by Thai PM, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, adopts a resolution that Thailand will push back more than 100,000 ethnic refugees to Burma as soon as fighting in the country subsides.
- March 12: Thai Army Chief, Gen. Chetta Thanajaro, and his Burmese counterpart, Gen. Maung Aye, meet halfway across the Thai-Burma friendship bridge in Myawaddy and negotiate the resumption of the bridge's construction.
- March 13: A 30-year agreement for Thailand to buy natural gas from Burma's offshore Yetagun gas field is signed by PTT governor and

- representatives of the Yetagun developing group led by US Oil giant, Texaco.
- March 18: SLORC announces that US and Burmese drug officials have completed a four-day joint survey of opium poppy fields to determine the yield of the drug in the current growing season.
- March 19: SLORC has placed five cities on a security alert after religious unrest involving Buddhists and Muslims in Mandalay.
- March 21: The US State Department warns its citizens against travel to Burma without 'a compelling reason', amid unrest in Rangoon and Mandalay.
- March 22: The Karen Refugee Committee urges the Thai government to allow the UNHCR to provide aid and assistance to around 90,000 Karen refugees.
- March 24: Thailand's National Environment Board (NEB), approves a PTT-conducted environmental impact assessment, amid criticism from environmental and human rights groups.
- March 24: The EU strips Burma of special trading privileges in reaction to reports that it has used forced labor to help boost exports.
- March 25: Thai Army Chief, Gen. Chetta Thanajaro, re-states that Thailand has no policy of allowing UNHCR to provide humanitarian aid to Karen refugees in Thailand.
- March 26: SLORC denies reports that it is sheltering Li Yun-chuang, an alleged drug trafficker, wanted in connection with the seizure of the largest shipment of heroin.
- March 27: SLORC celebrates Army Day with a parade of thousands of soldiers, held amid tight security following a spate of communal unrest in Rangoon.
- April 1:** A Connecticut-based legislative committee approves a bill that will prohibit the state from purchasing goods and services from companies doing business in Burma.
- April 6: SLORC warns Burmese citizens to refrain from political agitation

and unrest during the upcoming New Year festival and tells official to maintain a high security alert.

- April 6: A bomb explodes at SLORC leader, Lt-Gen. Tin Oo's house, killing his eldest daughter.
- April 9: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi urges the 53rd session of the UN Convention on Human Rights in Geneva to adopt a strong resolution condemning the ruling military regime in Burma, in a video-taped message.
- April 10: A United Nations special human rights rapporteur to Burma expresses 'profound regret' that there has been no change in the human rights situation in Burma over the past year.
- April 14: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi urges 600 supporters during the Buddhist New Year's celebration, not to forget their countrymen jailed for advocating democracy.
- April 16: The UN Commission on Human Rights passes a strongly-worded resolution condemning the SLORC for its poor human rights record.
- April 22: American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, announces a ban on new investment by Americans in Burma, under a 1996 law allowing such a measure if human rights abuses in the country worsened.
- April 23: The Australian government states that it will not join a US move to impose economic sanctions on Burma over human rights abuses by its military regime.
- April 24: SLORC Lt-Col. Hla Min states that recently imposed sanctions are part of a broader US strategy aimed at preventing Burma from entering the protective fold of ASEAN memberships.
- April 24: Malaysian PM, Mahathir Mohammed, states that he disagrees with US sanctions and that the measures would only hurt the Burma's people, and not its government.
- April 25: The US again notes its opposition to Burma joining ASEAN, but states that it welcomes the memberships of Laos and Cambodia.
- April 27: A group of 30 armed DKBA troops open fire and burn down part

- of the Hta Per Pu camp in Umphang district, Thailand, killing one refugee man.
- April 28: SLORC Foreign, Minister U Ohn Gyaw, states that Burma has no plans to retaliate against the US for economic sanctions.
- April 28: Two Mon villages with around 300 makeshift shelters are set alight after SLORC troops overrun a Mon military base at Tab Guncha.
- April 29: SLORC Secretary-2, Lt-Gen. Tin Oo, states that traitors within the country are turning into ‘terrorists’ with the aid of foreign backing.
- May 1:** A Colorado Senate Resolution is passed against doing business with Burma.
- May 4: A SLORC-sponsored USDA mass rally at Thuwanna Sports Stadium issues a threat to ‘punish’ Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and USA.
- May 9: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi holds a two-hour meeting with Alavaro de Soto, UN Assistant Secretary-General for political affairs, at the home of a UN representative in Burma.
- May 14: SLORC makes a statement to Thai reporters accompanying Thai Prime Minister to Rangoon, to avoid contact with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The restriction is set out in a formal letter sent to the Thai Foreign Ministry.
- May 14: The New York City Council votes to stop doing business with companies involved in business in Burma, in a move to use city funds ‘to do good and not to encourage evil’.
- May 16: Thai PM, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, leaves on a two-day official visit to Burma. Both leaders from two countries agree to clear up remaining border problems and boost trade and investment ties.
- May 16: John Imle, President of Unocal Corp., meets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at her home and talks for several hours.
- May 17: Burma hands-over heroin trafficking suspect, Li Yun-chun, to Thai authorities after having denied that he had fled to Burma.

- May 21: NLD source says SLORC has arrested at least 50 senior members of the party ahead of the May 27th election anniversary.
- May 25: NLD source says SLORC has detained at least 350 supporters of the party, but announces to go ahead with a party meeting on May 27.
- May 26: SLORC announces it has sentenced U Myo Khin, NLD secretary for Yankin township to four years in jail on a charge of falsifying documents.
- May 27: Ralph Zacklin, interim UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expresses concern over Burma's recent detention and arrest of opposition party members.
- May 27: Hundreds of armed riot police stop supporters of NLD from meeting at Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's home for a party congress.
- May 29: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi appeals in a smuggled video-taped message for Asean to begin talking with her party.
- May 30: About 100 armed DKBA burns two refugee camps in Tak province, killing two people and leaving at least 11,000 people homeless.
- May 31: ASEAN decides to formally admit a further three members- Burma, Cambodia and Laos- as early as July.
- June 2:** Canadian ambassador to Thailand says Canada will uphold its 'critical engagement' policy toward Burma, despite its scheduled admission into ASEAN.
- June 3: NLD sources confirm that SLORC has started releasing most NLD members who had been detained in May.
- June 8: U Tin Shwe, a 67-year-old NLD organizer, dies of heart failure at Rangoon General Hospital, according to SLORC.
- June 10: Malaysia Foreign Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, arrives in Rangoon to formally notify Burma of its admission to ASEAN in July.

- June 12: Burmese officials close all border crossing sites opposite Mae Sod in Tak district, resulting in a significant disruption of cross-border trade.
- June 12: Japanese envoy, Hiroshi Hirabayashi, arrives in Rangoon for talks with Burma's leaders, to underscore Japan's concern over the crackdown on the democratic movement in Burma.
- June 16: Thailand begin to relocate Karen refugees from Phu Muang in Kanchanaburi province to Tham Hin camp in Ratchaburi province.
- June 19: Police prevent about a hundred of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters from visiting her Rangoon home to celebrate her 52nd birthday. Only 20 of her relatives and close aides are allowed inside the compound.
- June 24: Rockets are fired into Myawaddy, causing a fire but no injuries.
- June 27: SLORC Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt, condemns United States government funding agencies for supporting the Burmese pro-democracy movement, saying that funds have been used to finance terrorist activities by exile opposition groups.
- July 1:** Ethnic Shan groups accuse SLORC troops of massacring 58 civilians in Shan State in June.
- July 4: Thailand and Burma sign a memorandum to buy up to 1,500 megawatts of electricity from Burma by the year 2010.
- July 10: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi states that repression has increased and that the political and economic situation in Burma has worsened in the two years since she was released from house arrest.
- July 13: A six-member delegation of Chinese anti-narcotics officials arrives in Rangoon for meetings with the Burmese officials on the control of illegal drugs.
- July 17: Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt meets the chairman of the NLD U Aung Shwe and two other senior members, but the meeting did not signal the start of a political dialogue between the two, say SLORC and NLD officials.

- July 19: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attends an official Martyrs' Day wreath-laying ceremony, commemorating the 50th anniversary of her father's assassination.
- July 22: Bangladeshi authorities delay the planned repatriation of about 200 Burmese Muslim refugees from No-a Pa Ra camp amid fresh tensions.
- July 23: Lt-Gen Mya Thin recommends that prisons be tapped as a valuable source of labor and that prisoners should be fully utilized to develop the country.
- July 24: Senior General Saw Maung, former head of the SLORC, dies of a heart attack.
- July 27: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright calls for cooperation from ASEAN to ensure political reforms in Burma and a dialogue between the ruling junta and the NLD.
- July 28: European Union foreign ministers tell their ASEAN counterparts that the EU will not allow new member Burma to join ASEAN-EU meeting if such talks are held in Europe.
- August 4:** SLORC authorities in Myawaddy, a border town with Thailand, refuse to take back some 280 Muslim refugees, saying they are aliens and not Burmese nationals. They are among the 499 Burmese arrested and sent back to Burma by Thai authorities.
- August 5: A letter signed by 23 venerable politicians urges SLORC to hold dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party.
- August 12: SLORC reopens nearly 39,000 high schools two months later, but keeps closed some 30 universities and colleges suspected of being linked to student unrest.
- August 15: Thailand and Burma officially open the Thai-Burma friendship Bridge which crosses Myawaddy of Burma and Mae Sod of Thailand.
- August 17: SLORC announces a special court has sentenced three cousins of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and one other supporter for alleged involvement in US-funded terrorist conspiracy.

- August 19: Thailand and Burma sign an agreement for a comprehensive approach to settle boundary problems by agreeing to jointly demarcate the entire border between the two countries.
- August 28: A helicopter belonging to the Naresuan Task Forces of Thailand goes missing near the Thai-Burma border.
- September 1:** British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook rules out Burma's participation in an Asian-Europe summit in London in April 1998.
- September 9: Burmese dissidents in Thailand say a Thai missing helicopter was shot down by a Burmese infantry division stationed across the border.
- September 14: A Japanese embassy statement says that a UN disaster management team has reported serious flooding and loss of life in Burma.
- September 15: Thai authorities raid the Burmese exile government office and arrest 13 people, including three ministers.
- September 17: NLD issues a statement saying that it turned down talks with the SLORC because any dialogue would have to include its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
- September 23: Former strongman, Ne Win, arrives Indonesia at the invitation of President Suharto.
- September 24: NLD vows to go ahead with plans to hold a two-day special meeting to mark the ninth anniversary of its founding.
- September 27: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi calls for dialogue with the SLORC as the NLD opens a two-day special meeting without incident.
- October 3:** Diplomats say that the European Union's sanctions on Burma will be extended for six months from the end of October.
- October 4: Singapore's Trade and Industry Minister, Lee Yock Suab, calling for adequate transparency and protection of investment in Burma, cites the shortage of hard currency and tight exchange controls as difficulties faced by investors there.
- October 15: Burma and the Philippines sign an agreement to fight international

drug trafficking as well as a trade agreement, an agreement on technical cooperation in forestry and forest industries and an agreement establishing a joint commission for bilateral cooperation.

- October 20: Kyaw Din, 58, a member of NLD, dies at the prison hospital of acute pulmonary edema while serving a two-year jail sentence, according to the statement released by the SLORC.
- October 21: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi goes to Thaketa township in Rangoon to organize the youth NLD wing and speak to supporters. This is her first trip outside the capital since being released from her house arrest.
- October 28: Riot police scuffle with a dozen NLD supporters and prevent a meeting between them and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the Mayangone NLD office. Five members of the NLD, including an elected MP, are arrested.
- November 4:** Daw Aung San Suu Kyi postpones a planned meeting of her party because of tight security measures by the SLORC. Dozens of riot police are deployed to stop the meeting.
- November 5: SLORC authorities bar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from leaving her residence to attend the planned party meeting in Tamwe township NLD office.
- November 6: Thai army chief Gen. Chetta Thanajaro meets his Burmese counterpart Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt in Rangoon and agrees to ensure that Thai forces would prevent Burmese minority groups from using Thailand as bases for anti-SLORC activities.
- November 7: SLORC media accuse NLD of being a group of terrorists that create anarchy and demand changes in order to avoid a confrontation.
- November 9: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attends the memorial service at the home of the family of U Maung Ko, a member of her party who died seven years ago in prison.
- November 11: A Group of 98 Thais, including three women, are released from Burmese jails and return home on a military aircraft.
- November 13: Riot police put up barbed wire and spikes outside the Daw Aung

San Suu Kyi's home to stop her from going to an NLD meeting in Hlaing township, Rangoon.

November 14: Two refugees are killed by the Thai border task forces in Ban Kui Lortor in Umphang district while trying to repatriate some 1,000 Karen refugees.

November 15: 21-member SLORC is replaced with 19-member groups called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

November 16: The United Nations criticises Burma's record on human rights and the absence of steps towards a democratic government.

November 18: More than 2,000 Karen refugees in Ban Ale Tongku, Ban Kui Lortor and Ban Tee Jorchee are forcibly sent back to Burma by the Thai authorities.

November 20: The UNHCR spokeswoman says that the UNHCR has protested to Thailand about the forced relocation of 1,100 Burmese refugees to an unsafe place straddling the border.

November 25: NLD's statement accuses the SLORC of harassing party members in order to prevent them from attending the gathering on the 77th anniversary of the National Day.

December 7: Thailand and Burma agree to form a working group aimed at tackling the dual problem of illegal Burmese labor and overflowing refugee camps along the Thai side of the border.

December 10: SPDC (formerly SLORC) announces that it has dissolved its 14-member Advisory Group, formed less than a month ago, in a government shake-up.

December 12: SPDC says U Kyi Maung, vice-chairman of the NLD, has resigned from the party, but a senior party official denies the claim.

December 13: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed meets Senior General Than Swe, head of SPDC, and conveys concern over the situation in Burma.

December 16: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan meets Senior General Than

Shwe in Kuala Lumpur and says he would send a special envoy to Burma to meet leaders of the SPDC.

December 18: SPDC tells the NLD to stop holding mass gatherings or to risk losing meaningful dialogue between the SPDC Home affairs Minister Colonel Tin Hlaing and five central executive committee members of the NLD.

December 21: SPDC announces that the military leadership has reshuffled eight key cabinet positions, reorganizing the civilian wings.