BURMA BULLETIN

A month-in-review of events in Burma

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

Issue 14 **February 2008**

- **SPDC announces constitutional referendum for May. Despite calls for a free and fair process, the SPDC imposes rules that ban campaigning against the referendum, bar monks and nuns from voting, and do not allow for an independent monitoring of the process.**
- **Taking for granted the outcome of the referendum, the SPDC also announces general elections for 2010. The junta declares that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will be barred from contesting the polls. The USDA mobilizes to search for candidates.**
- **The SPDC announcements draw harsh criticism from pro-democracy groups and ethnic organizations. The NLD warns against increased instability should the proposed constitution be adopted.**
- **The international community reacts with skepticism to the regime's plan. Indonesia urges the SPDC to revise the constitution before the referendum and demands that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi be included in the process.**
- **Exiled groups announce a draft alternative constitution that has been endorsed by 90 organizations.**
- **Burma's record on press freedom is still one of the world's worst, say two independent reports. In February, the regime arrests two more journalists.**
- **The US strengthens financial sanctions on the junta's business cronies. Meanwhile, local activists launch a consumer boycott in Burma.**
- **The SPDC increases rice exports to Bangladesh while domestic shortages continue. Rice prices are up by 10% in the first two weeks of February.**

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KEY STORY

SPDC announces referendum and general elections

On 9 February, the SPDC announced it will hold a constitutional referendum in May followed by "multi-party democratic elections" in 2010.[1]

On 19 February, the SPDC announced that the drafting of the constitution had been completed.[2] State media said the junta-appointed Constitution Drafting Commission finished the document after more

[1] Reuters (09 Feb 08) Myanmar junta to hold elections in 2010; BBC (09 Feb 08) Burmese junta sets voting dates; AP (09 Feb 08) Myanmar junta schedules constitutional referendum for 2008, election for 2010; AFP (10 Feb 08) Myanmar junta sets timetable for polls; Irrawaddy (10 Feb 08) The devil's in the details
[2] BBC (19 Feb 08) Burma confirms draft constitution

than two months of work.[3] However, the text of the constitution has not been disclosed.[4] Head of the Drafting Commission Aung Toe indicated that few changes had been made from the guidelines already made public.[5] SPDC Foreign Minister Nyan Win revealed that that the new constitution would bar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from the elections because of her marriage to foreign national Michael Aris, who died in 1999, and because their children hold foreign passports.[6]

The junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) is widely expected to be in charge of the organization of the constitutional referendum and the 2010 general election. Reports have already surfaced that the USDA is mobilizing to identify individuals loyal to the military regime to be selected as candidates in the election.[7] According to the pro-junta National Unity Party (NUP) Secretary General Khin Maung Gyi, the USDA would also become a political party to contest the polls.[8]

On 26 February, the SPDC announced the rules for the referendum on the proposed constitution. According to the rules, Monks and nuns are barred from voting. Anyone who distributes leaflets or makes speeches against the referendum can be imprisoned for three years. There was no mention of independent observers being allowed to monitor the voting process. The referendum will be announced at least 21 days before the balloting. Based on an initial reading of the rules, it would appear that the adoption of the constitution only requires the reporting of the percentage of votes in favor in relation to the total number of eligible voters.[9]

The SPDC also appointed a 45-member Referendum Convening Commission to oversee the referendum.[10] Most of the commission members are junta-handpicked individuals who served as delegates at the National Convention and in the Constitution Drafting Committee.[11]

Pro-democracy and ethnic groups reject SPDC's plan

- The **National League for Democracy (NLD)** called the SPDC's announcement of referendum and elections "vague, incomplete and strange." NLD spokesman Nyan Win expressed surprise that the election had been planned before the results of the constitutional referendum were known.[12] The NLD warned that the SPDC's unilateral announcement of a constitutional referendum and general elections could create more instability and would not lead to meaningful political dialogue and national reconciliation.[13] The NLD also termed the SPDC's remarks that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would not be allowed to stand in elections in 2010 as "unlawful" and a "personal, political attack" because the constitution and elections laws had not been adopted.[14]
- The **88 Generation Students** described the SPDC's plans as a "declaration of war by the military regime against the people of Burma." The group said the junta was attempting to legalize the military dictatorship with a "sham constitution" and urged people to vote against the charter.[15] The group reiterated that an unrepresentative constitution could only lead to national unrest and called for tripartite dialogue as the only way to bring about national reconciliation and democratic transition.[16]

[3] AP (20 Feb 08) Myanmar Says Constitution Draft Is Ready
[4] Irrawaddy (20 Feb 08) Burma's Draft Constitution Completed
[5] Sydney Morning Herald (19 Feb 08) Burma bars Suu Kyi from elections
[6] AFP (20 Feb 08) Aung San Suu Kyi barred from Myanmar elections: FM; Washington Post (20 Feb 08) Myanmar to bar Suu Kyi from 2010 polls: report; Irrawaddy (20 Feb 08) Singapore FM: Suu Kyi to be Barred from Voting in 2010
[7] Irrawaddy (11 Feb 08) USDA to organize referendum, election; Mizzima News (14 Feb 08) USDA searching for prospective candidates; Irrawaddy (21 Feb 08) USDA starts recruitment drive ahead of referendum
[8] DPA (11 Feb 08) Suu Kyi freedom vow; Irrawaddy (11 Feb 08) USDA to organize referendum, election
[9] NLM (28 Feb 08) The Referendum Law for the Approval of the Draft Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008
[10] AFP (27 Feb 08) Myanmar Outlaws Speeches, Leaflets About Referendum; AP (27 Feb 08) Myanmar to Jail Referendum Disrupters
[11] AP (26 Feb 08) Myanmar enacts law on constitution vote; AFP (27 Feb 08) Burma sets up referendum panel
[12] BBC (09 Feb 08) Burmese junta sets voting dates
[13] AP (19 Feb 08) Myanmar pro-democracy party warns that referendum plan could be destabilizing; Irrawaddy (20 Feb 08) Burma's Draft Constitution Completed
[14] AP (25 Feb 08) Myanmar minister's remark on Suu Kyi 'unlawful,' party says
[15] AP (11 Feb 08) Groups that led Myanmar's pro-democracy protests denounce Junta's polling plans; Reuters (11 Feb 08) Dissidents line up to fight Myanmar constitution; DPA (11 Feb 08) Suu Kyi freedom vow; AP (19 Feb 08) Myanmar pro-democracy party warns that referendum plan could be destabilizing
[16] DVB (11 Feb 08) 88 students slam government election pledge; Mizzima News (11 Feb 08) Burmese junta's statement evokes mixed response

- The **All-Burmese Monks Alliance (ABMA)** denounced the SPDC's plans for the constitutional referendum in May as an effort to perpetuate the junta's rule. The ABMA urged the junta to hold reconciliation talks with the NLD and representatives of ethnic groups.[17]
- The **National Coalition Government of Union of Burma** called for a boycott of the constitutional referendum and elections.[18]
- Shing Pe Ling, MP and Chairman of the **Chin National League for Democracy** criticized the junta's constitutional referendum. Ling said that the SPDC's proposed constitution denies the ethnic nationalities' aspiration for a federalist system and violates the spirit of the Panglong agreement.[19]
- The **Mon National Democratic Front** and the **Chin National Front** called on their people to reject the SPDC's constitutional referendum and election plan.[20]
- The **Pa-O National Liberation Organization** demanded that the SPDC's constitutional referendum and general election be cancelled.[21]
- The **New Mon State Party** said that the SPDC's announcement had destroyed the chances of negotiations for national reconciliation.[22]

International community critical of junta's announcements

- **Indonesian FM Hassan Wirajuda** said that the SPDC's constitution should be revised before being put to a national referendum to ensure that the interests of opposition and ethnic groups were protected.[23] Wirajuda also said that Indonesia wants to see Daw Aung San Suu Kyi included in the political process in Burma.[24]
- **UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki-moon** urged the SPDC to ensure that the constitution represents all people in the country and to hold substantive talks with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on the referendum.[25]
- The **US** said that the SPDC's plan for a constitutional referendum in May and general elections in 2010 was flawed.[26] Washington also criticized the SPDC's announcement to ban Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from running in elections in 2010.[27]
- **Australian FM Stephen Smith** said: "We're not persuaded that this is anything more than a cynical sham." [28]
- The **EU** said that the SPDC should free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners to show that it is serious about the transition to civilian rule.[29]
- Singapore **FM George Yeo** said that the SPDC's announcement to bar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in elections is odd and out of date.[30]

INSIDE BURMA

NLD harassment

- **1 February**: SPDC Special Branch Police in Rangoon's North Dagon Myothit Township took two NLD youth members into custody.[31]
- **12 February**: SPDC police, security forces, and pagoda officials at the Phaungtaw Oo pagoda in Taunggoat, Arakan State, blocked a group of local NLD members from holding a candlelight vigil

[17] AP (11 Feb 08) Groups that led Myanmar's pro-democracy protests denounce Junta's polling plans
[18] Irrawaddy (11 Feb 08) Burmese exile leader calls for referendum boycott
[19] Mizzima News (12 Feb 08) Veteran Chin politician criticizes junta's announcement
[20] IMNA (13 Feb 07) MNDF requests its nationals to ignore referendum and elections; Khonumthung News (21 Feb 08) Chins in exile reject Burmese regime's announcements
[21] DVB (20 Feb 08) PNLO strikes on military targets
[22] IMNA (22 Feb 08) Referendum will destroy chances of reconciliation: NMSP
[23] FT (22 Feb 08) Burma's constitution attacked
[24] AFP (27 Feb 07) Indonesia wants Suu Kyi in Myanmar democracy process
[25] AP (12 Feb 08) UN Chief Urges Talks in Myanmar
[26] VOA (11 Feb 08) White House Criticizes Burma Referendum Plan
[27] AP (20 Feb 07) US criticizes ban in Myanmar preventing pro-democracy leader from running in elections
[28] AP (11 Feb 08) Myanmar junta's scheduling of election, constitutional referendum fails to mollify critics
[29] Reuters (18 Feb 07) Freeing dissidents seen as vital to Myanmar transition
[30] VOA (20 Feb 08) ASEAN expresses concern over Burma's election ban against Aung San Suu Kyi
[31] Mizzima News (01 Feb 07) Burmese authorities take in another two NLD youth

and offering food to the monks to mark Union Day.[32] NLD member Chit Htwe was arrested as he tried to get past security at the pagoda. In Sagaing Division, the regime refused to allow the NLD to hold Union Day celebrations.[33] Restrictions were also imposed on NLD members in Mandalay Division.[34]

- **13 February**: SPDC extended the house arrest of NLD Vice Chairman Tin Oo for another year.[35]

Pro-democracy activities

- **5 February**: The NLD invited ethnic ceasefire groups to meet at its Rangoon headquarters for talks on resolving their differences.[36] The call remained unanswered, as the ceasefire groups, while pleased by the NLD invitation, appeared wary of showing public support for such talks.[37]
- **5 February**: The Rangoon Division of the People's Movement called on the SPDC to kick-start tripartite dialogue. The group said it fully supported the NLD's Independence Day demand to make 2008 the year of national reconciliation.[38]
- **12 February**: About 600 people, including NLD members, ethnic leaders, 88 Generation Students, and veteran politicians, celebrated the 61st anniversary of Burma's Union Day at the NLD headquarters in Rangoon. In a statement issued during the ceremony, the NLD called for tripartite dialogue, the release of all political prisoners, and national reconciliation.[39] In the evening, pro-democracy forces held a Union Day banquet in Rangoon. About 50 representatives of pro-democracy organizations and ceasefire groups attended the event.[40]
- **13 February**: NLD members and student youth across Burma celebrated the 93rd birthday of independence hero General Aung San. About 150 people attended a celebration at the house of NLD member Lay Lwin in Rangoon's South Dagon Township. Small groups of people also gathered at pagodas around Rangoon for candlelight vigils.[41]

Anti-junta protests

- **First week of February**: Activists in Rangoon began a leaflet campaign urging Burmese people to boycott businesses belonging to cronies and supporters of the regime. The boycott included Myanmar Beer, Dagon Beer, London Cigarettes and Vegas Cigarettes, the state-owned Aung Bar Lay Lottery and J' Donuts coffee shops which are believed to be owned by Than Shwe's son. Junta crony Tay Za's Htoo Trading Company Limited was also on the boycott list as well as State-run newspapers New Light of Myanmar, Mirror, and two privately run journals, Nan Myint and Snapshot.[42]
- **12 February**: More than 30 protesters dressed in blue prison uniforms staged a protest outside the NLD headquarters in Rangoon. The protesters demanded the release of political prisoners and respect for UN resolutions on Burma.[43]
- **12 February**: University students with the All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU) distributed leaflets and pasted posters on walls in Myitkyina and Mogaung, Kachin State. The handouts and posters called for tripartite dialogue and the release of all political prisoners, and criticized the SPDC's constitutional referendum.[44]

[32] DVB (12 Feb 08) Pagoda closed to Taunggok NLD members; Narinjara News (13 Feb 08) Authorities foil Union Day ceremony in Taungup
[33] DVB (13 Feb 08) Authorities disrupt NLD Union Day activities
[34] Mizzima News (12 Feb 08) NLD reiterates call for tripartite dialogue
[35] AFP (13 Feb 08) Myanmar extends arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi's deputy: official; Reuters (13 Feb 08) Myanmar gives top dissident another year in jail
[36] AFP (05 Feb 08) Suu Kyi's party invites pro-junta ethnic groups for talks; AP (06 Feb 08) NLD seeks talks with junta's ethnic allies
[37] Irrawaddy (06 Feb 08) Slow response by ethnic groups to NLD's invitation
[38] Mizzima News (05 Feb 08) Implement reforms or "Prepare for the worst": activists
[39] Mizzima News (12 Feb 08) NLD reiterates call for tripartite dialogue; Irrawaddy (12 Feb 08) Union Day protest in Rangoon
[40] Mizzima News (13 Feb 08) Ceasefire groups join in opposition dinner
[41] DVB (14 Feb 08) Activists commemorate general Aung San's birthday
[42] Irrawaddy (08 Feb 08) New campaign to boycott Burmese businesses
[43] Irrawaddy (12 Feb 08) Union Day protest in Rangoon
[44] Kachin News Group (12 Feb 08) Students distribute five-point charter of demands on Union Day

- **13 February**: About 50 students marched in the streets of Akyab, Arakan State, to protest the SPDC authorities' doubling of school bus fares.[45] The Generation Wave and Freedom Fighters groups distributed anti-junta leaflets in Rangoon's Kamaryut Township.[46]

Call for Olympics boycott

On 25 February, the 88 Generation Students called for an international boycott of this year's Beijing Olympic Games. The group accused China of arming the SPDC and failing to facilitate meaningful dialogue with the pro-democracy forces.[47]

Pro-democracy exile groups complete draft constitution

On 15 February, Burmese opposition groups in exile announced the completion of a draft federal constitution. The draft constitution is endorsed by over 90 pro-democracy and ethnic organizations. The Secretary of the Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee (FCDCC)[48] Dr. Lian Sakhong said the draft constitution outlines a genuine federal system that excludes the right to secession.[49] The committee now intends to put its draft before the people of Burma for discussion and feedback.[50]

KNU top leader assassinated

On 14 February, two unidentified assailants shot and killed Karen National Union (KNU) General Secretary Mahn Sha Lah Phan at his home in Mae Sot, Thailand. The KNU's second in command, Htoo Htoo Lay, 61, became the group's new leader.[51] Speculation has run rampant about who was behind the assassination. Mahn Sha Lah Phan's son, Hse Hse, blamed the pro-junta Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).[52] Sources close to the DKBA said that the killing was most likely carried out by Soe Myint and several other members of DKBA Battalion 999.[53] The DKBA is frequently involved in joint operations with SPDC Army units in attacking KNU bases.

Bombs

- **9 February**: A bomb blast in a garbage container at the main gate of Sitkhine Pawndawgyi Bridge in Akyab, Arakan State, damaged three military combat vans. No one was killed or wounded. The bomb blast was believed to be the work of inter-city bus drivers who were fed up with continued SPDC extortion and insufficient fuel supply.[54]
- **18 February**: Four small bombs exploded in Tachilek, Eastern Shan State. The first bomb went off near the Paradise Hotel and damaged the hotel's staff quarters. Three other bombs exploded immediately afterwards near a teashop. No one claimed responsibility for the bomb blasts.[55]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Monks still targeted

SPDC surveillance and harassment of monasteries and monks continued. Amid rumors of further protests, immigration department officials have been checking monk lists in every monastery in

[45] Narinjara News (18 Feb 08) Sittwe students protest bus fair increase
[46] DVB (14 Feb 08) Activists commemorate general Aung San's birthday
[47] AP (25 Feb 08) Myanmar group calls for Olympic boycott
[48] The FCDCC was formed on 19 April 2005 and is made up of members of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, the National Council of the Union of Burma, the National Democratic Front, the United Nationalities League for Democracy, the Women's League of Burma, the Nationalities Youth Forum and the Students and Youth Congress of Burma.
[49] Mizzima News (15 Feb 08) Burmese opposition groups challenge junta's constitution
[50] DVB (15 Feb 08) Burmese exiled activists complete draft constitution
[51] AP (15 Feb 08) Karen rebels vow to continue fighting against Burma junta
[52] Reuters (14 Feb 08) Myanmar rebel leader shot dead in Thai town
[53] Irrawaddy (21 Feb 08) DKBA members kill Mahn Sha: Karen sources
[54] Kaladan News (10 Feb 08) Bomb blast in Akyab
[55] AP (20 Feb 08) 4 small bombs explode at hotel in Burma; Irrawaddy (19 Feb 08) Bombs explode in Tachilek; Xinhua (19 Feb 08) Four bomb explosions rock Myanmar border town

Maungdaw Township, Arakan State.[56] Residents in Pakokku, Magwe Division, reported a heavy presence of military intelligence, police, and USDA members monitoring local monasteries. SPDC authorities are reportedly monitoring monastery visitors and recording phone calls to and from the monasteries.[57]

Despite the SPDC intimidation, monks continued to refuse alms from SPDC military members and their supporters.[58] The SPDC also appears to be threatened by Dhamma talks. On 16 February, SPDC authorities in Pwint Phyu Township, Magwe Division, cancelled a Dhamma talk by abbot Thu Mingala and ordered him to leave town. The local police chief punched and arrested a young man when he demanded an explanation for the cancellation. He was released the next day after paying 100,000 kyat.[59]

Detention conditions

On 5 February, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Paulo Sergio Pinheiro expressed dismay that peaceful demonstrators and activists continued to be arrested, detained, and sentenced to prison terms under security laws. Pinheiro said that the prosecutions were a "flagrant abuse of people's right to a free and fair trial." Pinheiro also called on the SPDC to provide adequate medical care to demonstrators and activists imprisoned since last year's crackdown.[60]

In February, new reports emerged of poor detention conditions:

- Ohn Than, a demonstrator detained in Rangoon's Insein prison, was placed in solitary confinement and denied family visits after writing a letter about poor living conditions inside the prison. Ohn Than suffers from hypertension and kidney stones.[61]
- 88 Generation Students group member Mie Mie's health is deteriorating due to the Insein prison authorities' refusal to provide adequate medical care. Mie Mie is suffering from a heart problem.[62]
- In the night between 21 and 22 February, Zawmir Uddin, a 26-year-old Rohingya from Akyab, Arakan State, died in police custody after local policemen severely beaten him.[63]

Freedom of information

In February, two independent organizations reported on the deteriorating situation of freedom of information in Burma:

On 4 February, the **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** annual report "Attacks on the Press in 2007" said:[64]

- Burma is the sixth leading jailer of journalists in the world.
- In 2007, there was a "significant deterioration" in the working conditions of journalists in Burma. The pervading atmosphere of censorship, threats, and arrests contribute to Burma being "one of the world's most repressive media environments."
- During the September protests, the regime subjected journalists to increased forms of repression and intimidation, including the cutting of phone lines, blocking internet access, the closing of independent news outlets, and the arbitrary confiscation of photographic and recording equipment.

On 13 February, **Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF)** "2008 Annual Report" said:[65]

- Working conditions for journalists in Burma significantly deteriorated from mid-August 2007.

[56] Narinjara News (24 Feb 08) Immigration Checks List of Monks on Western Border
[57] Irrawaddy (01 Feb 08) Subdued but Unbowed
[58] Irrawaddy (01 Feb 08) Subdued but Unbowed
[59] DVB (18 Feb 08) Authorities ban Dhamma talk in Magwe
[60] Reuters (05 Feb 08) UN envoy urges Myanmar to treat ailing prisoners
[61] DVB (04 Feb 08) Solo demonstrator in solitary confinement
[62] Mizzima News (05 Feb 08) 88 student leader Mie Mie's health deteriorates in detention
[63] Kaladan News (23 Feb 08) Rohingya cremated according to Buddhist rites in Akyab
[64] Mizzima News (05 Feb 08) Dangers for journalists in Burma on the rise
[65] Mizzima News (14 Feb 08) Nine Burmese journalists remain behind bars

- Fifteen journalists were arrested as a result of covering the protests, while Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai was killed and other foreign correspondents closely monitored. Nine journalists remained in detention as of 1 January 2008.
- The regime blocked internet access and restricted the sale of foreign periodicals in the days and months following the protests.
- Several journalists suspected of sympathy with the protest movement were banned from writing articles.

The junta's ongoing restrictions to freedom of information reinforced the findings of CPJ and RSF:

- **Early February**: The SPDC Censorship Board banned the publication of any announcement made by the charity Free Funeral Service Society's in the weekly Ray of Light journal.[66]
- **Early February**: The SPDC Press Scrutiny Board's Director Maj Tin Swe summoned and warned the editors of 15 periodicals and journals not to post uncensored articles and news on their websites.[67]
- **3 February**: Police in Rangoon charged NLD member and blogger Nay Phone Latt. If convicted, Nay Phone Latt faces up to seven years of imprisonment.[68]
- **15 February**: SPDC military intelligence officers raided the office of the Myanmar Nation weekly in Rangoon and arrested the paper's chief editor Thet Zin and office manager Sein Win Maung. Officials seized a copy of Pinheiro's report on Burma, a Shan ethnic leader's book on federalism, and a VCD on the September uprising.[69] On 18 February, the junta's Censorship Board ordered that the publication of the Myanmar Nation be suspended and its offices be closed temporarily.[70]

Rohingya targeted

Rohingya continued to be arbitrarily harassed, arrested, and detained on fabricated charges to extort money. Na Sa Ka Area No 5 in Maungdaw Township is particularly notorious, where more than 80 Rohingya have been taken to a temporary detention center since the start of 2008.[71]

- **2 February**: Na Sa Ka Area 5 officials arrested two men from Kkuppagoung village, on charges of illegally crossing the border and human trafficking. Nasaka ordered them to pay six million kyat for their release.[72]
- **4 February**: Na Sa Ka Area 5 officials arrested two men from Auk Pyoma village on charges of using Bangladeshi mobile phones. They were released the next day after their relatives paid four million kyat.[73]
- **7 February:** Maungdaw police arrested a woman from Myoma Ka Nyin Tan village on charges of having a mobile phone. Na Sa Ka officials ordered her to pay 600,000 kyat for her release.[74]
- **8 February**: Na Sa Ka Area 5 officials arrested a man from Mayazin Para village, Bawli Bazaar, on charges of having a mobile phone and told him to pay two million kyat for his release. He was unable to pay and is still in detention.[75]
- **10 February:** Na Sa Ka Area 3 officials arrested a local businessman for building his house without permission. He was released a week later after paying 2.5 million kyat.[76]
- **12 February**: Bawli Bazaar police arrested a man on charges of traveling to Bangladesh and ordered him to pay 50,000 kyat for his release.[77]

[66] DVB (04 Feb 08) Funeral fund's announcements blocked
[67] Mizzima News (11 Feb 08) Censor board warns journalists
[68] Mizzima News (07 Feb 08) Blogger charged with unlawful association
[69] RSF (18 Feb 08) Burma - Police raid weekly, close it down and arrest editor and manager; Irrawaddy (18 Feb 08) Two Men Arrested at Rangoon Weekly; Mizzima News (18 Feb 08) Two journalists arrested in Rangoon; Mizzima News (18 Feb 08) Two journalists arrested in Rangoon
[70] Mizzima News (19 Feb 08) Distribution of 'Myanmar Nation' halted; DVB (19 Feb 08) Officials conduct second raid on journal office
[71] Kaladan News (06 Feb 08) Over 80 Rohingyas kept in area detention centre
[72] Kaladan News (06 Feb 08) Over 80 Rohingyas kept in area detention centre
[73] Kaladan News (06 Feb 08) Over 80 Rohingyas kept in area detention centre
[74] Kaladan News (23 Feb 08) Harassment by police, Nasaka and Sarapa in northern Arakan
[75] Kaladan News (23 Feb 08) Harassment by police, Nasaka and Sarapa in northern Arakan
[76] Kaladan News (19 Feb 08) Double standards by SPDC's authorities
[77] Kaladan News (23 Feb 08) Harassment by police, Nasaka and Sarapa in northern Arakan

- **24 February**: Maungdaw High Court sentenced 12 people from Thinn Baw Gwe village to seven years in jail for renovation of a mosque.[78]

Forced labor continues despite MoU

On 26 February, Executive Director of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Kari Tapiola said that the ILO had successfully concluded negotiations with the SPDC to extend a MoU dealing with forced labor complaints for another year. Despite the existence of the MoU, Tapiola said that forced labor abuses are still common.[79]

The SPDC also continued to intimidate forced labor complainants. On 31 January, ILO Liaison Officer in Burma Steven Marshall went to Taungdwingyi, Magwe Division, to investigate a forced labor complaint filed by two local villagers. Before his arrival, local SPDC authorities threatened villagers not to report the truth about the forced labor complaint. In addition, USDA and Swan Arr Shin members surrounded the house where the ILO official met with the two villagers.[80]

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Gambari's latest gambit

In late January, UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari returned to Asia to garner support for his mediation efforts between the SPDC and the NLD. Gambari's itinerary included stops in India, China, Singapore, Indonesia, and Japan. Gambari's mission also appeared to provide the needed leverage to allow him to return to Burma earlier than April, the month previously announced by the SPDC. On 21 February, Gambari announced that he will return to Burma in March and that he planned to discuss the country's "roadmap to democracy", including its plans to bar opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from taking part in elections.[81]

"Neighbor engagement" is Thailand's new approach for Burma

On 25 February, newly appointed Thai FM Noppadon Pattama said that Thailand has no choice but to put national economic interests before human rights concerns in dealing with Burma. "In the past, we had constructive engagement and flexible engagement, but they never took us anywhere. Now, we will adopt another approach neighbor engagement," Noppadon said.[82] The new Thai government is expected to restore business ties with the SPDC established by former PM, Thaksin Shinawatra.

ECONOMY

New banking sanctions

On 5 February, the US Treasury Department tightened banking sanctions against junta crony Tay Za. The latest sanctions also target family members of regime leaders and key individuals and businesses that are part of Tay Za's financial network.[83] The department's action froze any assets that they may have under US jurisdiction and barred Americans from conducting business with them.[84]

On 25 February, the US Treasury Department added to its list Asia World Co Ltd, its managing director Steven Law, his wife Cecelia Ng, and his father, reputed drug lord Lo Hsing Han.[85] This may be the

[78] Kaladan News (28 Feb 08) Twelve sentenced to seven years in jail for renovation of mosque
[79] Irrawaddy (27 Feb 08) ILO Extends "Understanding" with Burmese Regime
[80] Mizzima News (06 Feb 08) Complainant threatened not to disclose truth to ILO
[81] Irrawaddy (21 Feb 08) UN Envoy to Burma to Discuss Planned Elections
[82] Bangkok Post (26 Feb 06) New approach to Burma, says Noppadon
[83] Thiha (Tay Za's brother and business partner); Kyaw Thein (director of Tay Za's business ventures in Singapore); Khin Lay Thet (wife of Gen Thura Shwe Mann); Myint Myint Ko (wife of Construction Minister Saw Tun); Tin Lin Myint (wife of Lt-Gen Ye Myint); Myint Myint Soe (wife of Foreign Affairs Minister Nyan Win); Myanmar Avia Export Company Ltd; Ayer Shwe Wah Company Limited; and Pavo Aircraft Leasing Pte Ltd in Singapore.
[84] AFP (05 Feb 08) US expands sanctions on Myanmar regime family, tycoon
[85] Reuters (25 Feb 08) Treasury slaps more sanctions on Myanmar firms

first time US sanctions on Burma have targeted a non-Burmese citizen – Cecilia Ng is a Singaporean. It is possible that China's government-controlled CNOOC, China's largest producer of offshore crude oil and natural gas, will also be affected. Golden Aaron, one of the Singaporean registered companies owned by Law and Ng, is the joint venture partner of CNOOC in two exploration projects in Shwe deposits off the Arakan coast.[86]

Rice to Bangladesh

On 12 February, the SPDC agreed to export 300,000 metric tons of rice to address shortages in Bangladesh.[87] The SPDC Ministry of Commerce told Bangladesh authorities that payments for rice should be made by bank transfers via Singapore, in order to avoid US and EU banking sanctions.[88] While the SPDC exports rice to Bangladesh, they are restricting the transport of rice across the country, leading to shortages and price increases for their own people. In the first two weeks of February, the price of rice increased over 10%.[89]

Russian gold rush?

On 15 February, the SPDC's Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration Department and the Russian-Singapore firm, Victorious Glory International Pte, signed a gold exploration agreement in Naypyidaw.[90] The agreement covers gold and mineral surveys along the Uru River between Phakant, Kachin State and Homalin, Sagaing Division.[91] The environmental organization Kachin Development Networking Group suspected that the "other mineral" mentioned in the agreement is uranium. There have been reports of Russian mineral inspectors in Phakant, Kachin State, since 2007.[92]

OTHER BURMA NEWS IN FEBRUARY

1	Two hundred fifty-five people, mostly Karen villagers from Eastern Burma, arrive at the Thai-Burma border.
1	SPDC troops from LIB 31 order 250 residents of Klone Kanyar Village to leave within 15 days.
3	Bangladesh authorities say that the interim government is planning to import gas from Burma
4	SPDC authorities in Magwe Division prevent six NLD members from traveling to Yenanchaung for a religious ceremony.
4	47th anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day celebrated in Laiza, Kachin State.
4	The body of a USDA member is found beheaded in Htantabin Township, Rangoon Division.
5	Thai authorities kill a suspected drug smuggler from Burma and seize 200,000 amphetamine tablets.
5	In a raid on a border village, Bangladesh border authorities arrest a Burmese man with 205 amphetamine tablets in his possession.
5	Two unknown men abduct and kill two novices from the Wan Hsak Hsai Hkao monastery, Kunhing Township, Shan State.
5	US administration says that the SPDC is planning secret trials for U Gambira, a Buddhist monk, and 10 other pro-democracy activists.
6	Cin Sian Thang, a Chin ethnic leader, welcomes National League for Democracy invitation to Burma's ethnic minority groups to discuss their political differences.
7	Wa National Organization, a non-ceasefire Wa group, elects new leadership.
7	A 46-year-old man from Mone Township, Pegu Division loses his left foot after stepping on a landmine.
8	India's Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon calls on the SPDC to expedite the process of political reconciliation and transition to broad-based democracy.
10	Akyab SPDC authorities force residents to provide one member from each household to welcome a pro-junta monk.
10	Singapore says the plan to hold a constitutional referendum and election in Burma is "a positive development" but the political process must "inclusive" of all groups.
10	Japan says that it believes that a true dialogue participated in by all parties is crucial in achieving Burma's

[86] Forbes (27 Feb 08) Treasury Sanctions on Myanmar Traffickers Implicate CNOOC
[87] Kaladan News (01 Feb 08) Bangladesh imports rice from Burma via Teknaf border trade
[88] Irrawaddy (16 Feb 08) Burma Uses Singapore Banks to Dodge Sanctions
[89] DVB (18 Feb 08) Rice export restrictions drive up prices
[90] DPA (16 Feb 08) Russian company to dig for gold in Burma
[91] Reuters (16 Feb 08) Russian firm seeks gold in army-ruled Myanmar
[92] Kachin News Group (18 Feb 08) Russians arrive in Phakant much before mining agreement

	national reconciliation.
11	The Secretary General of the pro-junta National Unity Party Khin Maung Gyi speculates that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will be freed six months before the proposed 2010 election as part of an amnesty.
11	Bangladesh authorities arrest four Burmese nationals in Teknaf when they attempt to register for Bangladesh ID cards.
11	Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar says that Malaysia hopes Burma's decision to hold elections in 2010 will happen as planned and that all parties will participate according to democratic practice.
11	UK calls for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Ibrahim Gambari's immediate return to Burma.
12	UN Security Council debates measures against armies and groups using child soldiers, including the SPDC army.
12	88 Generation Students group says that tripartite dialogue is the best way to solve Burma's crisis.
12	Thai police arrest 31 undocumented migrants from Burma after smugglers transport them to Ranong Province, Thailand.
12	The price for a telephone connection drops by 100,000 kyat to 400,000 kyat.
12	Police officer urinates in the compound of the central mosque in Maungdaw town, Arakan State.
12	Four Natala villagers torture a 15-year-old Rohingya boy.
12	ASEAN Sec-Gen Surin Pitsuwan, says that the SPDC should be given the benefit of the doubt if they are serious about moving the country toward democracy. "
12	Russia's Foreign Ministry says that a national referendum on Burma's Constitution will defuse international tensions in Southeast Asia and set it on the path to democracy.
12	A landmine wounds a 39-year-old villager from Mone Township, Pegu Division.
12	In his Union Day speech, SPDC leader Sr Gen Than Shwe accuses pro-democracy and dissident groups of trying to tear the country apart.
13	US Senators introduce legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
13	Two Thai gunmen kill a Mon migrant worker in Surat Thani Province.
13	SPDC extends the house arrest of NLD Vice Chairman Tin Oo for another year.
13	UN Sec Gen Ban Ki-moon convenes a meeting of the 14-member "Group of Friends" to review recent developments in Burma.
14	Activists gather to commemorate the 13th anniversary of the death of U Nu at his daughter's house in Rangoon's Bahan Township.
14	Shan State Army unit attacks a 50-man SPDC Army patrol from Infantry Battalion 246 near Loi Mak Hin mountain, north of Wan Lao village, Khun Hing Township, Southern Shan State.
17	A heart specialist visits detained 80-year-old NLD Vice Chairman Tin Oo.
17	RELA arrest two Kachin UNHCR card holders and their children in Kotaraya, central Kuala Lumpur.
17	Pa-O National Liberation Organization launches strikes on two SPDC Army locations in Southern Shan State.
18	SPDC Army authorities detain three ethnic Pa-O ceasefire group leaders for questioning.
18	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari tells Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi that it is crucial that the international community moves quickly to lobby the SPDC to pledge changes.
18	EU reiterates its demands that the SPDC engage in genuine reform or face further punitive measures.
18	Vice Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi meets with UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari and says that China supports the UN mediation efforts in Burma.
19	Nine Nobel Peace Prize recipients release a public statement calling for the international community and the UN Security Council to impose arms embargoes on Burma.
19	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari calls on China to send the "right signals" to the SPDC to ensure its plans for political reform and eventual multi-party elections are inclusive and credible.
19	Singapore FM George Yeo says that ASEAN ministers want the SPDC's outcomes in conducting a constitutional referendum to be credible.
19	A 42-year-old villager from Kyaukkyi Township, Pegu Division, loses his right leg after stepping on a landmine.
20	NLD says the SPDC should make its draft constitution available for public review as a step toward conducting a free and fair referendum.
20	Kachin Independence Organization demands that the constitutional referendum be free and fair.
20	Exiled pro-democracy groups agree to reform the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma.
20	Five hundred thirty-one people depart by boat from Akyab for Malaysia.
20	Kachin Independence Organization demands that the constitutional referendum be free and fair.
21	Generation Wave group says they will not accept the SPDC's draft constitution.
22	An explosion in a garbage dump in Mae Sot Thailand injures 14 migrant workers from Burma.
22	UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari says that the SPDC should follow an inclusive process as it moves towards multi-party elections in 2010.

24	Fire in Tenasserim Division's Palaw Township destroys 196 houses and leaves 1,400 people homeless.
25	A fire at Mandalay's Yadanarbone Market injures 21 people and destroys 1,400 shops.
25	A fire in a two-story building at Ye Oat Kaan Village, Hlaing Tharyar Township, Rangoon, leaves 3,000 homeless.
25	US President George W. Bush describes the situation in Burma as "deplorable" and urges international pressure for democratic change and the release of political prisoners.
25	SPDC authorities charge the Myanmar Nation's chief editor Thet Zin and the office manager Sein Win Maung with illegal printing and publishing.
26	China Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao says that China had adopted a "good-neighborly, friendly" policy towards Burma.
27	NLD condemns the assassination of Karen leader Mahn Sha Lah Phan.
27	London-based Minority Rights Group ranks Burma as fifth in the world regarding the threat to ethnic and sectarian minorities.
28	NLD warns that the SPDC's constitutional referendum could hurt the nation's efforts toward political reconciliation.

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"No end in sight for internal displacement crisis", Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre Myanmar (Burma)
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"**Villager Shot and Killed as Burma Army Completes Rotation of Troops**", Free Burma Rangers (FBR)
http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2008/20080209.html

"**Children on the Move, the Cost of Oppression**", Free Burma Rangers (FBR)
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