

Asia-Pacific People's Partnership on Burma (APPPB)
**SUMMARY OF DEMONSTRATIONS AND RELATED EVENTS IN
BURMA**

September 9-15, 2007

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SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The effects of the fuel price hike imposed last month in Burma are already becoming evident, according to several news agencies. The Independent Mon News Agency (IMNA) reported that in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, the number of beggars, most of them children, has started increasing. Kaladan News has reported on the increase in commodity prices as follows: kerosene up 20%; beef up 25-50%; and eggs up 100%. Rice, which generally serves as a bellwether of the overall economic situation in the country, has risen 42% to 75% in some markets.

"Arresting and killing people will not free us from economic hardship." - Htay Kywe

The week saw an increase in tactics by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to quell the protests. While they have carried out more arrests and refused access to those already detained, they have also made strong efforts to interrupt access to information, cutting off phone lines and internet web sites. The authorities are clearly alarmed by the threat of a massive protest led by monks throughout the country, and they have implemented various means to combat the potential protest, including increased surveillance, donations to senior monks, and a propaganda campaign.

While the authorities have responded to protests over the fuel price hike by cracking down on the demonstrators, they have not addressed the economic situation that prompted the most sustained series of protests since 1988. Asia Times correspondent Larry Jagan suggests that "the demonstrations that started against the ruling junta's fuel-price policy now threaten to become a full-blown mass political movement due to the military's heavy-handed handling of protesters" and says the increasing role of the monks in the movement "may yet prove to be a watershed moment."

An underground movement of monks has made several demands of the authorities, including a public apology for the violence inflicted during last week's protest in Pakkhoku. They have announced that if their demands are not met by Monday, September 17, they will call for a nationwide boycott of any religious activities involving the SPDC, USDA, and Swan-aah-shin members.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Monday, September 10, 2007

Nyaungdone, Irrawaddy Division

Two monks staged a sit-in protest on Monday in front of the hospital in the town of Nyaungdone, Irrawaddy Division in protest of high fuel and commodities prices. Before a large crowd could gather, the local authorities took them away and sent them back to their monastic authority.

Wednesday, September 12, 2007

Taunggok, Rakhine State

On Wednesday, Soe Aung, a solo protestor in his late 20s, marched 20 miles from his village to the town of Taunggok, waving a placard urging the Buddhist equivalent of excommunication of SPDC Senior General Than Shwe, calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and demanding a reversal of last month's fuel price hike. He was arrested then tried and sentenced in a closed hearing to four years in prison. He is the first arrested demonstrator to be sentenced since the start of protests.

Poster Campaign

Kachin State

A poster campaign, carried out by emboldened Myitkyina University students against the Burmese military junta increased this week. Student activists distributed 500 posters with a five-point charter, demanding that the ruling junta roll back the country's fuel and essential commodities prices, cease development of the Myitsone hydroelectric power project, end land confiscation, scrap the outcome of the National Convention, and start tripartite dialogue.

Turning of Alms Bowls Campaign Planned

An underground movement of monks, called the "Alliance of all Burmese Buddhist Monks," has made a collective call for a nationwide "turning of alms bowls" to protest the violent attack by authorities on last week's peaceful demonstration in Pakkhoku. The monks are calling for a boycott of any religious activities, including accepting alms, involving members of the SPDC, the USDA, and Swan-aah-shin if their demands are not met by September 17. Their demands include for the SPDC to:

- issue a public apology for the brutal and rude crackdown on the peaceful demonstration of monks in Pakkhoku
- release all detained monks
- effectively address the suffering of the people caused by the fuel price hike.

If the boycott is carried out, SPDC, USDA, and Swan-aah-shin members will no longer be able to participate in religious services with the monks. The “turning of alms bowls” is considered the harshest punishment and sanction by the religious authorities against the lay community. In 1990, similar action was taken by the monks due to the violent crackdown on the monks by the authorities. As a result, many leading monks were arrested, disrobed and imprisoned.

ABDUCTIONS, ARRESTS, INTIMIDATION, AND SURVEILLANCE

Junta Propaganda Campaign

The SPDC has begun a propaganda campaign accusing the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the 88 Generation Students of terrorism, contact with exile groups, and of receiving financial support from Western nations. Analysts see these increased attacks against the NLD as a move to increase restrictions on the party and possibly ban it altogether.

In response to these accusations, the 88 Generation Students issued a statement emphasizing their alignment with the people working for a peaceful resolution to the political and economic problems of the country. Later in the week, the NLD stated that the deterioration of the economic situation has tested the peoples' patience, and as a result they have been forced to take to the streets in protest. The NLD stressed that the junta is responsible for the peoples' desperation and the consequent protests and urged the regime to find a solution through political dialogue which would kick-start the process of national reconciliation. The NLD said the peaceful demonstrations are the outcome of the peoples' desperation and the party, though it stands with the people, is not involved in masterminding the protests.

“Protests are no longer fashionable” - *The New Light of Myanmar*

State-run media urged Burmese citizens to end anti-government protests and to instead express their views through a promised referendum on a new constitution. *The New Light of Myanmar* said protests “are no longer fashionable,” so people should make their stances known when they have a chance to approve a new, yet-to-be-drafted constitution in a national referendum to be held “soon.”

Intimidation and Coercion of Monks

SPDC authorities have been approaching the monastic authorities to control the movement of monks in each monastery. They have put restrictions on the times monks receive public offerings and in some places banned the collection of alms altogether. In some areas, they have imposed a curfew on the monasteries. In Mandalay, authorities this week barred a senior monk from giving a “Dhamma talk” (Buddhist teaching) which is regularly given during Buddhist Lent. They have posted police at

monasteries in Pakkhoku, Mandalay, and Rangoon. In some areas, police and USDA members are pretending to be monks to counter the peaceful protests by blending in to instigate violence and chaos, a tactic borrowed from previous counter-demonstration efforts.

Early in the week in Pakkhoku, senior monks were called to a meeting with high-level government officials and offered money. Fifteen senior monks from four monasteries were offered 30,000 kyat as compensation for monks who were beaten up and disrobed during the soldiers' crackdown on last week's protest. Some senior monks refused to attend the meeting, and those who attended expressed their disappointment that they were offered money instead of an apology. Officials in other parts of Burma have reportedly increased their donations, providing cooking oil and mobile phones, among other items. One media outlet has reported that in Mandalay, monks threw out a group of military officials when they tried to enter a temple with donations to appease the angry monks.

In addition, the SPDC has approached school headmasters, doctors, and other community leaders and asked them to persuade the monks not to participate in the planned "turning of alms bowls" boycott. They have also used the state-run media to urge monks not to participate in the boycott.

Security Forces on Alert

According to an intelligence report, on September 6 the SPDC Ministry of Home Affairs put all Police Forces, Riot Police forces and State Reserve Forces on "emergency period" alert. This directive also instructed the security forces to take precautionary measures not to allow demonstrators to overrun the police stations and riot police battalions.

Minister of the Home Affairs Lt. Gen. Maung Oo also briefed officials from different levels of Peace and Development Council Secretaries and the Burma Police Force on September 9th on his anti-riot strategy and plan. In his briefing, he instructed all these officials absolutely not to use armed force, to use riot police only when necessary, and to primarily use monks against monks, employers against employees, teachers and parents against students in dispersing crowds.

Another report identified Police Riot Control Regiments Commander, Lt-Col. Than Han (another army officer), as the person in charge of controlling the protests. He reportedly signed a directive, dated September 7, instructing the 16 regiments under his control to be ready for combating the protests. Lt-Col. Than Han was the field commanding officer who led the deadly attack on a convoy of NLD members at Depayin, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in 2003.

Status of the Abducted, Disappeared, Detained

Over 100 people have been abducted or detained during the peaceful protests since August 19, and the fate of most of them remains unknown. After rumors spread last

week of the death of Jimmy (aka Kyaw Min Yu) last week, family members of the detained 88 Generation Students leaders submitted an appeal to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Rangoon to help them discover where the leaders are being held. Family members paid a visit to Insein prison on Tuesday and were told by prison authorities that they didn't know the whereabouts of the detained activists and advised them to contact those who originally arrested the activists. Family members are still waiting for a response to their appeal from the ICRC for help in discovering the whereabouts of detainees.

Harassment and Intimidation Campaign

The authorities continue to harass, intimidate, and closely monitor the friends and relatives of the activists still in hiding, but those activists seem to have evaded arrest. According to a monk, local police in Rangoon were told that they will be rewarded 300,000 kyats if they could provide information of 88 Generation Students leaders in hiding.

Cutting off information

The regime this week made further moves to restrict the information flow both within the country and with the international community. Last week, it blocked access to the You Tube website, on which users have posted raw footage of the protests as well as the violence carried out against the demonstrators. Authorities also cut off service to several pro-democracy activists' mobile phones, including several of those in hiding, some foreign correspondents, and the telephone line of the NLD Headquarters in Rangoon.

Six Labor Activists Given Jail Sentences

In what is perhaps an indication of the harsh judicial treatment awaiting the activists who have recently been detained, six labor activists who were arrested on May 1, 2007 for organizing a Labor Day seminar at the US Embassy's American Center in Rangoon, were given excessive jail sentences by a court. Thurein Aung, Wai Lin, Myo Min, and Kyaw Win were sentenced to 28 years, and Nyi Nyi Zaw and Kyaw Kyaw were sentenced to 20 years in jail. All were found guilty of sedition, with the longer sentences going to those also found guilty of "illegal association." What they did at the May Day ceremony was explain labor rights to the workers," Aung Thein, who said he was forced to quit as the group's attorney by police harassment, said. "It had nothing to do with sedition."

RESPONSES

"China whole-heartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country." – Chinese diplomat Tang Jiaxuan

"We are all frustrated." - Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono

"There will be no progress in Myanmar's political transition unless people have space to express their views openly and peacefully." - Louise Arbour, High Commissioner for Human Rights

China

In comments to Burmese Foreign Minister U Nyan Win, who was visiting Beijing for talks this week, senior Chinese diplomat Tang Jiakuan said China whole-heartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country. He said China, as a friendly neighbor of Myanmar, sincerely hoped Myanmar would restore internal stability as soon as possible, properly handle issues and actively promote national reconciliation.

ASEAN

In a meeting with U.S. President George W. Bush, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono said he believed China and India should do more to help convince Myanmar to improve its dismal human rights. Wirayuda acknowledged that diplomatic efforts by the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to prod Burma to rapidly democratize have failed so far. "We are all frustrated," Wirayuda told reporters.

United Nations

This week, the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and on the independence of judges and lawyers issued a statement calling on the authorities to immediately release the peaceful protestors who have been detained following demonstrations against the fuel price hike.

In addition, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced that special envoy Ibrahim Gambari will visit Burma in mid-October to pursue UN efforts to support democracy and human rights. Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a statement saying, "There will be no progress in Myanmar's political transition unless people have space to express their views openly and peacefully." She also repeated her call for the Burmese government to release all political prisoners.

Demonstrations

UN Headquarters – September 10, 2007

Burmese expatriates staged a sit-in protest outside United Nations headquarters in New York this week to urge the UN Security Council to take up the issue of Burma's

crack down on pro-democracy demonstrations and to initiate action against the military regime. Organized by the Mobilization Forces of International Mass Campaign for Burma, the sit-in will continue until September 18, when a larger rally will be held with Burmese from various parts of the US attending.

Bangkok – September 12, 2007

Two Burmese Buddhist monks held a demonstration in front of the SPDC embassy in Bangkok on September 12 in support of the Buddhist monks inside the country who are calling for a proper apology from the authorities for their brutal crack-down on the peaceful demonstration of the monks in Pakkhoku on September 5. The two monks were arrested by Thai police and detained at Yannawa police station.

Planned Demonstrations on September 18, 2007

September 18th, 2007 will mark the 19th anniversary of the coup by the military regime following the nationwide democracy uprising in 1988. The U.S. Campaign for Burma has called on all Burmese and supporters of democracy and human rights in Burma throughout the world to organize demonstrations at China's embassies and consulates on that day.

The protests are a bid to pressure China into altering its stance and support for the military regime in Burma. The U.S. Campaign for Burma says that it has initiated this protest, the first ever of its kind, "since China has paralyzed the United Nations Security Council from doing its job on Burma."