

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

Sunday August 26 – Saturday, September 1, 2007

See www.apppb.blogspot.com for daily updates and links to further information.

ANALYSIS OF THE PRICE HIKE

A fuel price hike on August 15, implemented by Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) without warning or explanation, has sparked two weeks of protests in Burma. The protests have been met with a violent crackdown by the SPDC and its proxies, the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA) and Swan-aah-shin (roughly translated as *Masters of Force*). Burmese authorities claimed that they raised the fuel prices because steep increases in world oil prices left them no longer able to afford heavy fuel subsidies. However, economic analysts have criticized the regime for not recognizing the impact the overnight, drastic increase would have. While much speculation is circulated about the reasons behind the timing and severity of the price hike, what is certain is that the price hike has had a devastating effect on the livelihoods of the Burmese people, many of whom live under the poverty line and struggle for daily survival.

ANALYSIS OF THE ABDUCTIONS, ARRESTS, INTIMIDATION, AND SURVEILLANCE

On August 8, 1988 tens of thousands people marched in the streets of the cities and towns of Burma demanding an end to military rule and calling for multi-party elections. For nearly six months leading up to the dramatic 8-8-88 demonstrations, small protests increased in size as people's anger grew over the deteriorating economic situation and the use of force by soldiers in military uniform. The protests over the last two weeks are the most widespread and most sustained since 1988. This time, the military has changed its tactics and is using proxies – the USDA and the Swan-aah-shin – to intimidate, beat, and abduct demonstrators.

The USDA is a nationwide civilian organization sponsored by the SPDC. It is ostensibly a "social welfare" organization but has served as the political arm of the SPDC. As a 2006 report by the Network for Democracy and Development (NDD) states, the USDA is "involved in most cases of political violence in the country, and their culture of thuggish behavior is a key factor in the climate of fear pervasive in Burma today." Many suspect the USDA is being groomed to become a political party. The exile media group Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) has reported that the person closely supervising the use of force in the arrests in Rangoon is Colonel Than Han, the same officer who was in charge of the 2003 violent attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) colleagues at Depayin. DVB reports that U Aung Thaung, secretary of the USDA, is directing the USDA's role.

The Swan-aah-shin has emerged only recently and not much is known about the group. At a November 2006 press conference, Brig-Gen Khin Yi responded to a journalist's question about the Swan-aah-shin saying that "members of the Fire Brigade, Red Cross and Ward Peace and Development Councils are [given] a helping hand to the tasks of law enforcement and community peace and tranquility without salaries and they are the strength who provide assistance voluntarily." (Myanmar.com: Questions and Answers at press conference (7/2006) of Information Committee). Reports suggest that former members of ward councils, ex-convicts, and some street vendors have been recruited and trained to form the group. Some analysts also suspect that, after a recent wave of prisoner releases, the regime recruited the

former convicts into the Swan-aah-shin. It is becoming clear that their membership is drawn from the unemployed underclass, and they are operating primarily in larger cities.

During the two weeks of protests, plainclothes security force, USDA, and Swan-aah-shin members have verbally harassed and, armed with sticks, beaten demonstrators. Reports of activists being “arrested” are often mistaken. In fact, the SPDC is arranging for people in civilian clothes to abduct activists and drag them to trucks or vans that have been made ready to take them away. The Asian Human Rights Commission has commented that by these blatant and lawless abductions, the military regime cannot even claim to subscribe to the tenets of its own "law and order" agenda.

To discourage further protests, authorities have contacted monks (particularly in Mandalay) and teachers to pressure them to not join any demonstrations, to use their influence to keep others from demonstrating, and to monitor those who might try to lead people into the streets. USDA and Swan-aah-shin members have also threatened journalists covering the demonstrations. Despite the harassment, journalists and other civilians have been able to distribute videos, photos, audio recordings, and testimony about the demonstrations to exile groups. Burmese exile media have then broadcast the news back into the country, so Burmese citizens are able to learn about demonstrations in other areas almost as they happen.

Over 100 people were abducted or otherwise detained in the first week of protests. During this second week, at least 42 people were abducted or arrested, bringing the total to 143 or more. 15 of those taken into custody were subsequently released, and at least 128 activists are still in custody. Among those abducted this week are two people who provided water to the monks conducting a demonstration in Sittwe (see below). Thirteen leaders of the 88 Generation Students Group reportedly are being held at Insein Prison in Rangoon. State press has accused them of “agitating to undermine stability and security of the state,” a charge that could carry a prison sentence of up to a 20 years. Authorities continue to harass their families, conducting violent searches of their homes and confiscating materials. Families have been barred from visiting the detainees. All of the detained 88 Generation Students Group leaders and many of the other activists previously served long jail sentences, surviving torture and solitary confinement. Ko Tate, of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), expressed concern about their well-being. “We know from firsthand experience that those arrested in Burma are always brutally tortured – both physically and psychologically – immediately upon arrest.” The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), which monitors prison conditions in many conflict settings, has not been able to visit Burmese prisons since late 2005 because authorities have prevented visits in accordance with the ICRC’s usual procedures, which include carrying out private interviews with detainees.

Also of concern is the well-being of those 88 Generation Students Group leaders who are still at large, including:

- Ko Htay Kywe
- Ko Myo Gyi (a) Ko Aung Myo Tint
- Ma Nilar Thein
- Ma Mi Mi
- Ko Hla Myo Naung
- Ko Aung Naing
- Ko Ko Gyi (Sangyaung)
- Ko Soe Tun
- Ko Tun Myint Aung
- Ko Sein Hlaing
- Ko Tin Htoo Aung

In addition, NLD members who have gone into hiding to avoid arrest include female activists:

- Ma Su Su Nway
- Ma Phyu Phyu Thin
- Ma Khin Htar Yee

Authorities have circulated arrest warrants for and photos of these activists, added security personnel near their homes, paid rickshaw drivers and hotel operators to inform the authorities if they see the activists, and conducted raids of the homes of the activists' friends and acquaintances.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Sunday, August 26, 2007

Rangoon was quiet on the 26th as security personnel, most in civilian garb, increased their presents throughout the city. The hunt for activists who had gone into hiding went into full force.

Monday, August 27, 2007

Protest in Pegu

A protest of about 40 demonstrators, led by NLD Member-elect of Parliament U Tin Shwe, was joined by onlookers and grew to a couple hundred in the town of Pegu (Bago), 75 kilometers north of Rangoon. The demonstrators, calling for a decrease in fuel prices, marched from a market to Shwe Maw Daw Pagoda, where an attack by someone, probably Swan-aah-shin, led to the detention of about 50 activists. Onlookers gathered around the authorities' offices where the detainees were being interrogated, and authorities released the activists after about two hours.

In addition to the Pegu protest, news emerged that anti-government posters had been displayed in markets and schools in the town of Aung Lan in Magwe Division in central Burma. Authorities removed them the same day they appeared. In addition, students at Sittwe (Akyab) University in the capital of Arakan State, who usually ride buses, have been walking to their classes in a show of protest against the price hike. The university principal has asked them to resume taking the bus, and authorities have lowered the bus fare to the pre-increase rate. Students in Sittwe (Akyab) have a history of this type of action. The fares were lowered unofficially and informally.

In Rangoon, authorities arrested Kyaw San of the Tri-Colour Student and Youth Group. On the same day, 15 more were abducted and later released.

Tuesday, August 28, 2007

Rangoon Protest – Hlaedan

Despite the arrests last week of the most prominent 88 Generation Students Group leaders, about 50 people marched in the Hlaedan area of Rangoon calling for a reduction of fuel prices. Prominent labour activist and NLD member Ma Su Su Nway was among the protestors. Non-uniformed security forces – likely a combination of USDA, Swan-aah-shin, and plain-clothed riot police – disrupted the protest, abducting and dragging away 15-20 of the activists. Witnesses saw security forces brutally beat not only those being abducted but also some onlookers who tried to intervene. Ma Su Su Nway escaped the abduction but was taken for medical treatment. She later went into hiding.

Sittwe (Akyab) Protests

A demonstration by about 300 people, mostly Buddhist monks, took place in Sittwe (Akyab), the capital of Arakan (Rakhine) State. Protestors marched from Payagyi Monastery down a road in the center of the city calling for a lowering of fuel prices. Soldiers and police arrived and broke up the protest. At the time, no one was arrested, but that evening authorities arrested a monk from Payagyi Monastery and two students. They were all later released.

Two additional protests were held in Arakan (Rakhine) State. 100 people demonstrated in Kraukpru, holding up portraits of NLD leader Daw Aung Suu Kyi and 88 Generation Students Group leader Ko Min Ko Naing. Monks and students also led this demonstration, and no arrests were reported. Another demonstration was reportedly held in Taungup Township, but few details are available.

Wednesday, August 29, 2007

Tavoy protest

The Independent Mon News Agency reported that university students in Tavoy in southern Burma's Tenneserim Division launched a protest, riding approximately 30 motorbikes through the town while shouting slogans calling for a lowering of fuel prices, leading to a gathering of approximately 100 people.

Thursday, August 30, 2007

Mandalay protests

Two separate demonstrations were launched in Mandalay Division. The first was in the city of Mandalay, Burma's second largest city and historically a hotbed of political activity. Twelve Members-elect of Parliament from the NLD marched through the city, starting from the city's NLD headquarters. The demonstration drew a total of 30 protestors, and ended because of heavy rain and without any arrests. In addition, a group of about 25 people marched through Kyaukpadaung of Mandalay Division calling for a reduction in fuel prices and the release of NLD and 88 Generation Students Group leaders. USDA and local authorities tried to break up the protest but were jeered at by onlookers supporting the demonstrators. No abductions or arrests were reported.

Hunger strike in Rangoon

Several protestors who were detained last week launched a hunger strike in their improvised detention center at the Kyaikkasan sports ground. One of their colleagues, NLD member Ko Ye Thein Naing, had suffered a broken leg when authorities and the militias broke up the protest last Tuesday, and had not received treatment. His colleagues began striking to demand that he receive treatment.

Friday, August 31, 2007

A two-person protest took place in Taunggok in Arakan (Rakhine) State. Ko Sithu and Ko Than Lwin held up placards in front of the Taunggok market calling for a reversal of the fuel price hike and other measures to improve people's livelihoods. When the two began walking through the town, authorities violently interrupted them but let them go, only to arrest them later in the day.

A New Campaign

A "noise campaign" has been announced for three evenings in September, with pamphlets announcing the strategy circulating in Rangoon this week. The pamphlets call on households to create a din on the evenings of September 11, 12 and 13 by banging pots, pans and other metal items. The noisy demonstrations are timed for 7:02 p.m., 8:01 p.m. and 9 p.m.. The digits of the three separate times add up to nine, a number given mystic importance by Burma's ruling elite. The campaign could garner widespread participation because of its anonymous, after-dark nature and because of its astrological nature. Word of the campaign is also spreading through mobile phone, email, and Internet web sites.

RESPONSES

Responses from the international community and Burmese groups in exile continued this week and included statements supporting the rights of the Burmese people to demonstrate peacefully. Protests were held in Bangkok, Seoul, cities throughout Europe and other sites. Of particular note are the following responses:

The Asian Human Rights Commission called for concrete UN action in its August 29 statement, “BURMA: What will it take for the UN to act?”

The Asian Human Rights Commission iterates its call for firm and deliberate action by the United Nations on Burma: now, today. It proposes that the Secretary General and High Commissioner each call urgent strategy meetings with concerned personnel and informed advisers – not merely persons with diplomatic credentials but those who know what is actually going on in the country – to discuss and propose immediate steps. It also echoes calls for an emergency session of the Security Council to be held on the same, as the consequences of the recent hikes in prices will under any circumstances have ramifications for the region.

Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the SPDC to release those who have been detained and to engage in consultation and dialogue with the demonstrators. However, she fell short of identifying or committing the UN to any concrete action. High-ranking legislators in the U.S. have called on the State Department to urge an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to address the human rights situation in Burma.

See www.apppb.blogspot.com for links to statements and reports of solidarity actions.

FROM WORDS TO ACTION

In last week’s summary, we encouraged you to **please write to your governments** (Ministries of Foreign Affairs and members of parliament) **to urge support for efforts to obtain UN Security Council backing for Dr. Gambari to visit Burma immediately and negotiate not only an end to the current crisis over the fuel hike and the arrests of demonstrators, but the ongoing political crisis that is at the heart of the problems in Burma.**

We reiterate that call and, out of concern for those who have been abducted and detained, we also request that Mr. Gambari and the UN Security Council press the SPDC to **allow the ICRC and all humanitarian organizations in Burma to operate freely.**

ABOUT APPPB

The Asia-Pacific Peoples’ Partnership on Burma (APPPB) is a movement of organizations and individuals that aims to develop a strong broad-based partnership of peoples of Asia-Pacific advocating and mobilizing a movement for promoting freedoms, democracy and human rights in Burma. This movement facilitates strategic linkages; coordinates activities; develops and shares its capacity and resources; channels information resources; and promotes dialogue towards unified approaches.