

ALTSEAN

BURMA

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

BN 2007/1034: September 14, 2007

FUEL PRICE HIKES INFLAME BURMESE PEOPLE

- The SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) increases fuel prices by up to 500% overnight, affecting the cost of essential commodities and transport. The price of rice doubles, causing great hardship. Many small and medium enterprises are crippled.
- The sharp increase sparks nationwide protests that see extraordinary participation by Burmese people from all walks of life around the country. Protests are recorded in most of Burma's states and divisions.
- The dramatic show of anger and courage by the long-suffering Burmese public is due to the intolerable burden of the SPDC's long-term economic mismanagement. Resentment over the junta's rampant corruption and loss of confidence in the regime's roadmap for democracy also fuel the people's discontent.
- The SPDC reacts by attacking and arresting over 150 peaceful demonstrators and key activists. In most cases, pro-junta groups are used to intimidate and attack protesters. Despite this, the resistance continues. In one incident in Central Burma, monks hold SPDC officials hostage to secure the release of the detained colleagues.
- The protests feature the unprecedented use of media technology. Secret video footage and photos of the protests have been made available on the internet by various independent media. For updates, please visit Altsean's interactive map at <http://www.altsean.org/Photogalleries/ProtestsMap.php>
- The international community condemns the arrests of activists and protesters calling for their immediate release, and for the junta to engage in genuine dialogue.
- The SPDC's inflexibility is likely to prolong the economic crisis, worsening domestic instability. The region will be affected as more economic refugees flee to neighboring countries and pressure intensifies on communities to engage in illicit activities for their survival.
- The international community, including India, China, and ASEAN, must revive and step up its advocacy and pressure to ensure that the crisis is eased through dialogue, and push further for a sustainable solution that involves all key stakeholders in Burma.
- Revived measures should include a resolution by the UN Security Council calling upon the SPDC to actively cooperate with the UN in delivering on promises for genuine political and economic reform.
- It is in the interests of Burma's main partners, including China, India, and ASEAN, that Burma's protracted deterioration is halted and the root causes resolved. This includes a halt to military hostilities against ethnic communities, the release of all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders, and political dialogue.

P O BOX 296, LARDPRAO POST OFFICE, BANGKOK 10310, THAILAND
TEL ▼ [6681] 850 9008 EMAIL ▼ altsean@altsean.org WEB ▼ www.altsean.org

Fuel price hike shock

On 15 August, the SPDC unexpectedly increased the price of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by 500%, doubled diesel prices, and increased the price of petrol by two-thirds.¹ In response, buses and taxis in Rangoon and Mandalay immediately doubled their fares. About 60% of city buses did not operate on 15 August. Most were back in service on 16 and 17, with doubled fares 50 kyat to 100 kyat, according to passengers. On 1 September, domestic airfares for local passengers rose 30%.²

Caught by surprise, some commuters didn't have the money to get on the bus, and many car owners left gas stations with half-empty tanks. Laborers in Burma's main cities, who earn less than 2,000 kyat (US\$1.50) a day, will now have to pay between half and three quarters of their wages in travel costs.³ High transport and fuel costs quickly impacted the rest of the economy. Within days, the price of essential commodities such as rice had been affected. Some businesses faced with rising costs were forced to close.⁴

Possible reasons for the price hike:

- A foreign exchange and budgetary crisis, worsened by construction costs in Naypyidaw.
- The SPDC can no longer afford to subsidize fuel costs. Demand, especially for diesel, has grown, and revenue from gas exports is insufficient to cover the escalating costs.
- It is part of the SPDC's economic and financial reform program. The hikes coincided with a high-level mission to Burma by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.
- The SPDC wants to privatize the fuel distribution system and to sell the retail outlets to a private company, probably Tay Za and his Htoo Trading Group. Subsidies would have to be removed to make the business profitable, destroy the black market, and deliver a monopoly.
- Some SPDC leaders want to undermine Than Shwe, and calculated that the fuel prices would trigger unrest and riots.
- The SPDC incited the unrest as a way to arrest pro-democracy leaders like Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, or to postponement of the upcoming visit by UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari.

Extraordinary protests, unsurprising crackdowns

The nationwide protests sparked by the sharp fuel price hike saw extraordinary participation by the Burmese people from all walks of life. Political activists, students, monks, and ordinary citizens appeared willing to take great risks to demand change from the military regime. During all demonstrations, bystanders cheered and showed solidarity with the protesters.

The SPDC reacted to the peaceful protests by violently cracking down on demonstrators. As of early September, over 150 people were detained over the protests.⁵ In most cases, the regime relied on plainclothes security officials and thugs from the pro-junta USDA and Swan Arr Shin to intimidate and attack protesters. The USDA reportedly paid between 2,000 and 2,500 kyat per day to those who participated in the crackdowns on protesters. Others reportedly received food in addition to cash.⁶

On 5 September, SPDC Army soldiers fired warning shots to break up a demonstration of several hundred monks in Pakokku, Magwe Division. Some of the monks were severely beaten and three were arrested.⁷ The following day, angered by the SPDC authorities' heavy-handed actions, monks from Pakokku's largest monastery held about 20 junta officials

¹ AP (15 Aug 07) Myanmar's Junta Imposes a 100 Percent Fuel Hike

² DPA (03 Sep 07) Burma's domestic airfares up 30%

³ Bangkok Post (10 Aug 07) Soaring petrol costs deepen woes

⁴ Irrawaddy (15 Aug 07) Natural Gas Price Triples in Burma

⁵ AFP (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks end standoff, release local officials; AFP (01 Sep 07) Myanmar opposition calls for dialogue as charter talks near end

⁶ Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) USDA Stirs Trouble for Peaceful Protesters

⁷ AP (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks briefly hold hostages; AP (06 Sep 07) Protesting Myanmar monks free hostages; AFP (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks end standoff, release local officials; Reuters (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks seize govt officials, burn cars; DVB (06 Sep 07) Pakokku monks release detained officials

hostage to secure the release of the three detained monks.⁸ Both the SPDC officials and the monks were released on the afternoon of 6 September.⁹

Below is a summary of the anti-junta demonstrations and related arrests between 19 August and 12 September.

Protest		Arrest
Rangoon: More than 400 people marched for nine kilometers from Kokine junction to Tamwe market in a protest led by members of the 88 Generation Students. ¹⁰	19 Aug	
Rangoon: 6 NLD youth members marched from the Chaukhtatgyi pagoda to their party headquarters in Bahan Township. ¹¹	21 Aug	Rangoon: 13 members of the 88 Generation Students group Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Pyone Cho, Min Zeya, Mya Aye, Jimmy, Zeya, Kyaw Kyaw Htwe, Arnt Bwe Kyaw, Panneik Tun, Zaw Zaw Min, Thet Zaw and Nyan Lin Tun were arrested in night raids. ¹² They were subsequently detained in Rangoon's Insein Prison. ¹³ Rangoon: 5 university students, Kyaw Ko Ko, Nyan Oo, Yar Zar Mon, Nyan Linn Oo and Nyi Lwin Oo, were arrested while pasting a poster demanding lower fuel and basic commodities prices. ¹⁴
Rangoon: About 300 protesters took part in a demonstration in the northern outskirts of the city. ¹⁵	22 Aug	Rangoon: 8 activists, Naw Ohn Hla, San San Myint, Htet Htet Oo Wai, Yin Yin Myat, Daw Yin Shwe, San San Lwin, Than Zaw Myint, and Khin Maung Yi were arrested during a demonstration in the northern outskirts of the city. ¹⁶ They were released hours later after being questioned by the police. ¹⁷
Rangoon: About 40 activists including NLD members marched for about two miles toward the party headquarters in Bahan Township. ¹⁸ Rangoon: 61-year-old former political	23 Aug	Rangoon: 13 NLD members Tun Myint, Ye Pi Jin, Tin Oo Maung, Phyo Min Kyin, Min Thein, Min Aung, Tin Myint, Aung Kyaw Oo, Aung Min Naing, Tin Zaw Oo, Myo Khin, Zaw Zaw Aung, and Ko Kyi Phyu were

⁸ AP (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks briefly hold hostages; Reuters (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks seize govt officials, burn cars; AP (06 Sep 07) Protesting Myanmar monks free hostages; AFP (06 Sep 07) Myanmar monks end standoff, release local officials; DVB (06 Sep 07) Pakokku monks release detained officials

⁹ Mizzima News (06 Sep 07) Junta, monks exchange detainees in Pakhokku

¹⁰ AFP (19 Aug 07) Hundreds protest in Myanmar over fuel price hike; AFP (20 Aug 07) Fuel price hike sparks protest in Myanmar; IHT (19 Aug 07) Pro-democracy activists march against fuel price hike in Myanmar; DVB (20 Aug 07) Rangoon activists march against fuel prices

¹¹ Mizzima News (21 Aug 07) Activists continue protest despite attempts to stop them; Irrawaddy (21 Aug 07) Junta Targets Opposition Members amid Tension over Fuel Hike

¹² AP (21 Aug 07) Myanmar Arrests Pro-Democracy Leaders; Reuters (22 Aug 07) Myanmar arrests 13 dissidents ahead of protest; NLM (22 Aug 07) Agitators taken into custody for undermining stability and security of the nation, attempting to disrupt National Convention; Irrawaddy (22 Aug 07) Junta Arrests Prominent Activists; DVB (22 Aug 07) 88 student leaders and activists arrested; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

¹³ AFP (25 Aug 07) Protesters sent to notorious Myanmar prison; Reuters (26 Aug 07) Arrested Myanmar activists moved to notorious jail

¹⁴ Asian Tribune (22 Aug 07) Burmese military regime began cracking down on the protesting 8888 Generation Student leaders in the midnight; Mizzima News (22 Aug 07) Junta arrest 88 Generation student leaders, including Burma's second most prominent person Min Ko Naing; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

¹⁵ AP (22 Aug 07) Arrests Fail to Deter Myanmar Protesters; NYT (22 Aug 07) Democracy rally held in Myanmar; Irrawaddy (22 Aug 07) Protests Continue in Rangoon; DVB (22 Aug 07) Protestors march in Rangoon despite arrests

¹⁶ NLM (25 Aug 07) Some NLD members involved in acts of harming peace and stability of State; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

¹⁷ NLM (25 Aug 07) Some NLD members involved in acts of harming peace and stability of State DVB (24 Aug 07) Naw Ohn Hla released

¹⁸ AFP (23 Aug 07) Myanmar protesters defy junta with new rally; AP (23 Aug 07) Myanmar protesters march despite arrests; Reuters (23 Aug 07) Myanmar junta squashes more protests in Yangon; VOA (23 Aug 07) Burma's Security Forces Block Third Protest in a Week; Independent (24 Aug 07) Burmese junta in military build-up after fuel protests; Bangkok Post (23 Aug 07) New protests, arrests in Burma; Irrawaddy (23 Aug 07) Junta Cracks Down as Rangoon Protests Spread; DVB (23 Aug 07) More protestors bashed in Rangoon

<p>prisoner, Ohn Than, staged a 10-minute solo protest outside the US Embassy.¹⁹</p> <p>Yenanchaung Township (Magwe Division): About 60 demonstrators peacefully marched in protest for about an hour.²⁰</p>		<p>taken into custody as they were marching toward the party headquarters in Bahan Township.²¹</p> <p>Rangoon: 61-year-old former political prisoner, Ohn Than was arrested after staging a 10-minute solo protest outside the US Embassy.²²</p>
<p>Rangoon: About 100 people gathered to demonstrate in front of the City Hall.²³</p> <p>Bassein (Irrawaddy Division): Aye Win staged a solo protest.²⁴</p>	24 Aug	<p>Rangoon: 19 activists, Nyo Nyo Lwin, Myint Oo, Khin Mar Cho, Sein Htwe, Soe Soe, Thinzar, Tin Hla, Ni Ni Aye, Myint Maw, San San Myint, Khin San Oo, May Theingi, Tun Tun Win, Than Hlaing, Aung Kyaw Naing, Lu Aye, Myint Naing, Myo Min Maung, and Kyaw Thurein, were arrested while demonstrating in front of the City Hall.²⁵</p> <p>Rangoon: 7 NLD youth members including Nyunt Win, Aung Saw Oo, Saw Lwin, Thein Myint Tun, Thein Htay, Min Min Oo, and Tin Maung Kyi were arrested at a bus stop in South Dagon Township.²⁶</p> <p>Rangoon: Prominent activist Myint Aye was arrested in Kyimyindine Township.²⁷</p> <p>Bassein (Irrawaddy Division): Aye Win was arrested after staging a solo protest.²⁸ He was released on the night of 30 August.²⁹</p>
<p>Rangoon: 4 activists including Zaw Nyut, Ko Kan, Han Ti, and the leader of the Myanmar Development Committee Htin Kyaw, were arrested after a demonstration at Theingyi market in Latha Township.³⁰</p> <p>Mogok (Mandalay Division): more than 150 people held a peaceful demonstration.³¹</p>	25 Aug	<p>Rangoon: 4 activists including Zaw Nyut, Ko Kan, Han Ti, and the leader of the Myanmar Development Committee Htin Kyaw, were arrested after a demonstration at Theingyi market in Latha Township.³²</p>

¹⁹ AP (23 Aug 07) Myanmar protesters march despite arrests; Reuters (23 Aug 07) Myanmar junta squashes more protests in Yangon; Mizzima News (23 Aug 07) Burmese junta arrests more activists but protest spreads

²⁰ AP (24 Aug 07) Arrests thwart new Myanmar protest; Reuters (26 Aug 07) Arrested Myanmar activists moved to notorious jail; Irrawaddy (23 Aug 07) Junta Cracks Down as Rangoon Protests Spread; Mizzima News (23 Aug 07) Burmese junta arrests more activists but protest spreads; DVB (23 Aug 07) More protestors bashed in Rangoon

²¹ NLM (25 Aug 07) Some NLD members involved in acts of harming peace and stability of State; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

²² AP (23 Aug 07) Myanmar protesters march despite arrests; Reuters (23 Aug 07) Myanmar junta squashes more protests in Yangon; Mizzima News (23 Aug 07) Burmese junta arrests more activists but protest spreads; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

²³ NLM (25 Aug 07) Some NLD members involved in acts of harming peace and stability of State; Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) Crackdown on Rangoon Protesters Continues

²⁴ Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) Crackdown on Rangoon Protesters Continues

²⁵ NLM (25 Aug 07) Some NLD members involved in acts of harming peace and stability of State; AFP (24 Aug 07) Myanmar arrests 20 more protesters; Reuters (24 Aug 07) Myanmar junta arrests 18 more in protest crackdown; AP (25 Aug 07) Myanmar detains at least 65 activists over fuel-price protests; Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) Crackdown on Rangoon Protesters Continues; AP (24 Aug 07) Arrests thwart new Myanmar protest; Reuters (26 Aug 07) Myanmar junta arrests key activist after manhunt; DVB (24 Aug 07) USDA members bash, arrest 30 activists; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

²⁶ Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) Crackdown on Rangoon Protesters Continues; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

²⁷ NLM (25 Aug 07) Some NLD members involved in acts of harming peace and stability of State; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

²⁸ Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) Crackdown on Rangoon Protesters Continues; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

²⁹ DVB (31 Aug 07) Bassein solo protestor released

³⁰ Irrawaddy (25 Aug 07) Burma Protests: the Situation on August 25

³¹ Reuters (26 Aug 07) Arrested Myanmar activists moved to notorious jail; Irrawaddy (25 Aug 07) More than 150 People Demonstrate in Mogok

³² AP (25 Aug 07) Myanmar detains at least 65 activists over fuel-price protests; Reuters (26 Aug 07) Myanmar junta arrests key activist after manhunt; BBC (26 Aug 07) Burma protest leader is arrested; Irrawaddy (25 Aug 07) More

Pegu (Pegu Division): About 50 activists including NLD members marched from the town's clock tower to the Shwemawdaw pagoda. ³³	27 Aug	Pegu: About 50 activists including NLD members were taken into custody for taking part in a demonstration and released two hours later. ³⁴
Rangoon: About 50 activists including NLD member Su Su Nway demonstrated near a bus stop in Hledan Township. ³⁵ Akyab (Arakan State): A 200-strong crowd of mostly Buddhist monks marched for about an hour through the centre of the city. ³⁶ Meikhtila (Mandalay Division): 20 NLD members marched in protest after attending a prayer session for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's release. ³⁷	28 Aug	Rangoon: About 10 NLD members arrested after attempting to stage a protest near a bus stop in Hledan Township. ³⁸ Akyab (Arakan State): A monk from Payagyi monastery and two students were arrested in connection with a protest in the city. They were released the following day. ³⁹ Akyab (Arakan State): 3 people were arrested for giving water to the monks during the demonstration. ⁴⁰
Tavoy (Tenasserim Division): About 100 university students on motorcycles protested around the town. ⁴¹	29 Aug	
Kyaukpadaung, (Mandalay Division): A group of about 25 people marched through the town. ⁴² Mandalay: 12 elected MPs marched from the NLD headquarters through the city streets for about an hour. ⁴³	30 Aug	
Taunggoat (Arakan State): Two men , Sithu and Than Lwin, demonstrated for about one-hour at the local market. ⁴⁴	31 Aug	Taunggoat (Arakan State): Two men, Sithu and Than Lwin, were arrested after a one-hour protest at the local market. ⁴⁵ They were released on 5 September. ⁴⁶
Labutta (Irrawaddy Division): More than 1,000 people demonstrated. ⁴⁷ Kyaukse (Mandalay Division): A group of 14 writers and poets led by Nyunt Lwin, Tin Latt Ko, and Zin Kyaw Pai, demonstrated in the hometown of junta leader senior general Than Shwe. ⁴⁸ Myitkyina (Kachin State): A group of university students put up a poster	03 Sep	Labutta (Irrawaddy Division): 7 activists , Aung Moe Win, Kyi Than, Htay, Pauksa, Pho Cho, Maung Kyaw, and Hla Soe were arrested during a large protest. ⁵² Buthidaung Township (Arakan State): Ray Thein , the son of a local NLD official, was arrested after staging a 45-minutes solo protest. ⁵³

than 150 People Demonstrate in Mogok; Irrawaddy (25 Aug 07) Burmese Authorities Hunt Down Key Activists; DVB (25 Aug 07) Ko Htin Kyaw arrested

³³ Reuters (27 Aug 07) Protesters defy junta crackdown in Myanmar town; Irrawaddy (24 Aug 07) Crackdown on Rangoon Protesters Continues; DVB (27 Aug 07) Protestors march through Bago; DVB (27 Aug 07) Bago activists forced to sign agreement not to protest

³⁴ AFP (27 Aug 07) Myanmar junta arrests 50 after new protest

³⁵ AP (28 Aug 07) New Myanmar Protest Quashed in Minutes; AFP (28 Aug 07) Dozens detained over new protest in Myanmar; AFP (28 Aug 07) Protests spread around Myanmar; Reuters (28 Aug 07) Myanmar fuel protests spread to northwest oil city

³⁶ Reuters (28 Aug 07) Myanmar fuel protests spread to northwest oil city; DVB (28 Aug 07) Hundreds march against fuel prices in Sittwe

³⁷ AP (29 Aug 07) Security presence stifles protests in Myanmar's biggest city

³⁸ AFP (28 Aug 07) Dozens detained over new protest in Myanmar; DVB (28 Aug 07) Protestors arrested in Hledan; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

³⁹ Kaladan News (29 Aug 07) Monks and students demonstrate in Arakan State

⁴⁰ Reuters (30 Aug 07) Myanmar police raid homes as manhunt intensifies; Narinjara News (31 Aug 07) Water Distributors at Protest Still In Detention After Three Days

⁴¹ AP (29 Aug 07) Security presence stifles protests in Myanmar's biggest city; IMNA (29 Aug 07) University students in Tavoy stage protests

⁴² AP (30 Aug 07) Myanmar hunts protest leaders; DVB (30 Aug 07) Kyaukpadaung protestors call for release of detainees

⁴³ DVB (30 Aug 07) Twelve elected Burmese MPs stage peaceful protest

⁴⁴ DVB (31 Aug 07) Two men arrested after Taunggok protest

⁴⁵ DVB (31 Aug 07) Two men arrested after Taunggok protest; AAPP (31 Aug 07) More than 100 activists have been detained since peaceful protests in Burma began on August 19; Available at: <http://www.aappb.org>

⁴⁶ DVB (05 Sep 07) Taunggok protestors released

⁴⁷ IHT (03 Sep 07) Myanmar protest hits junta leader's hometown as calls for UN action intensify; DVB (03 Sep 07) More than 1000 march in Laputta

⁴⁸ IHT (03 Sep 07) Myanmar protest hits junta leader's hometown as calls for UN action intensify; DVB (03 Sep 07) Poets lead protest in military head's home town

<p>demanding a roll back of fuel prices and rejecting the outcome of the National Convention.⁴⁹</p> <p>Pakokku (Magwe Division): A group of 10 NLD members led by elected MP Hlaing Aye demonstrated marching to the local Peace and Development Council's office.⁵⁰</p> <p>Buthidaung Township (Arakan State): Ray Thein, the son of a local NLD official, staged a 45-minutes solo protest.⁵¹</p>		
<p>Taunggoat (Arakan State): About 1,000 people led by 15 NLD members marched demanding the release of two men arrested on 31 August for demonstrating against the rise in fuel prices.⁵⁴</p> <p>Haka (Chin State): A group of about 25 NLD members demonstrated against high commodity prices and increase in taxes.⁵⁵</p>	04 Sep	
<p>Bogale (Irrawaddy Division): 15 NLD members held a demonstration.⁵⁶</p> <p>Pakokku (Magwe Division): About 500 Buddhist monks held a protest, halting their demonstration only after SPDC Army soldiers fired warning shots.⁵⁷</p>	05 Sep	<p>Bogale (Irrawaddy Division): 3 local NLD members, Aung Khin Bo, Khin Lay and Mi Mi Sein, were arrested in connection with a demonstration.⁵⁸</p> <p>Pakokku (Magwe Division): Three monks were arrested during a demonstration. They were released on 6 September.⁵⁹</p>
<p>Gwa Township (Arakan State): Local NLD members led a one-hour demonstration.⁶⁰</p>	07 Sep	

⁴⁹ Kachin News Group (03 Sep 07) Poster in Kachin state demanding oil price roll back and scrapping NC

⁵⁰ DVB (04 Sep 07) NLD protestors cheered in Pakokku

⁵¹ Narinjara News (03 Sep 07) Solo protester arrested in northern Arakan

⁵² DVB (05 Sep 07) Seven activists arrested since Laputta protest

⁵³ Narinjara News (03 Sep 07) Solo protester arrested in northern Arakan

⁵⁴ Reuters (04 Sep 07) Myanmar protest march attracts 1,000 people; DVB (04 Sep 07) Thousands protest arrests in Taunggok

⁵⁵ DVB (04 Sep 07) NLD members march in Hakha

⁵⁶ AP (05 Sep 07) Myanmar Breaks Up Monk Protest; DVB (05 Sep 07) NLD leader arrested after Bogalay protest

⁵⁷ AP (05 Sep 07) Myanmar Breaks Up Monk Protest; Reuters (05 Sep 07) Myanmar troops fire warning shots at monk protest

⁵⁸ DVB (05 Sep 07) NLD leader arrested after Bogalay protest

⁵⁹ AP (05 Sep 07) Myanmar Breaks Up Monk Protest; Reuters (05 Sep 07) Myanmar troops fire warning shots at monk protest AP (06 Sep 07) Protesting Myanmar monks free hostages

⁶⁰ Narinjara News (08 Sep 07) Peaceful Protests in Arakan's Southernmost Township

SPDC's violent repression meets with international condemnation

- The United States, the United Kingdom, the EU, Canada, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Sweden demanded the immediate release of the protesters, and that the SPDC engage in genuine dialogue with the pro-democracy movement and ethnic groups.⁶¹
- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon took a softer stance, asking the SPDC to “exercise maximum restraint in responding to any demonstrations.”⁶²
- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, expressed concern over the SPDC's arrest of student leaders and other protesters. Ms Arbour called on the SPDC to immediately release those detained and engage in consultation and dialogue with the demonstrators on their concerns.⁶³
- The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, deplored the arrests of the peaceful protesters and appealed for their immediate release.⁶⁴
- US Representative and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Lantos was joined by Senators Mitch McConnell and Dianne Feinstein in urging the US Department of State to call on the UN Security Council to hold an emergency meeting on human rights violations in Burma.⁶⁵
- UN Secretary-General Special Advisor on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, said that the SPDC's response to recent demonstrations runs counter to the spirit of the good offices mandate.⁶⁶
- The European Commission called human rights violations in Burma a scandal and said that the SPDC is a threat to the Southeast Asian region.⁶⁷
- A spokesman with China's Foreign Ministry said that China wants reconciliation and an improvement of conditions in Burma.⁶⁸ The past five years of increased trade with China and increased Chinese investment in Burma have strengthened the junta's income sources, and reduced any incentive for them to implement urgently-needed reforms.

Persistent dissent

The latest protests are not a new expression of dissent. Rising food prices, the arbitrary imposition of taxes, high costs of utilities that are never reliably delivered, have triggered small but persistent protests throughout 2007:

22 February: About 25 people took part in a 30-minute demonstration in downtown Rangoon, calling for improved health care and education, better pension benefits, and lower prices for food staples.⁶⁹

8 March: SPDC Special Branch police arrested 71-year-old veteran politician U Win Naing and demonstrator Htin Kyaw soon after a press conference held to brief journalists about the deteriorating situation in Burma.⁷⁰

⁶¹ US Department of State (22 Aug 07) Arrest of Pro-Democracy Activists in Burma; AFP (30 Aug 07) Bush condemns Myanmar junta for crackdown; FCO – UK (22 Aug 07) Burma: Arrests of Democracy Activists; EU External Relations (25 Aug 07) CFSP Statement: Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU; DFAIT (22 Aug 07) Canada condemns detention of prominent Burmese pro-democracy activists; Czech Republic MFA (24 Aug 07) Statement of the MFA on the Arrest of Burma Activists; Irish DFA (24 Aug 07) Minister Condemns Detention of Democracy Activists in Burma; Swedish Ministry For Foreign Affairs (24 Aug 07) Statement by Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt on recent developments in Burma; AFP (30 Aug 07) Bush condemns Myanmar junta for crackdown

⁶² UN News Center (23 Aug 07) Concerned over Myanmar arrests, Secretary-General calls for restraint, dialogue

⁶³ UNHCHR (26 Aug 07) United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights urges the Myanmar authorities to release student leaders and other protesters

⁶⁴ UN News Center (31 Aug 07) Myanmar: UN human rights experts calls for immediate release of protesters

⁶⁵ AP (29 Aug 07) U.S. senators ask State Department to arrange U.N. Security Council session on Myanmar

⁶⁶ Irrawaddy (04 Sept 07) Gambari defends UN against “Inaction on Burma” charge

⁶⁷ Reuters (06 Sep 07) EU calls rights violations in Myanmar a scandal

⁶⁸ Reuters (07 Sep 07) China says wants reconciliation in Myanmar

⁶⁹ AP (23 Feb 07) Myanmar Cracks down on protestors

⁷⁰ Mizzima News (08 Mar 07) Special Branch picks up U Win Naing and Htin Kyaw

4 April: 400 residents of Chauk Township, Magwe Division, demonstrated in front of the Township Development Committee office to protest the SPDC authorities' decision to double the municipal sales tax.

5 April: Shop owners in Chauk Township submitted a petition of 500 signatures against the tax increase to the municipal office.⁷¹

4 April: SPDC authorities arrested Tin Ko, a 33-year-old HIV patient from Kanma Township, Magwe Division, for staging a brief protest in Rangoon calling for easier access to antiretroviral treatment for people living outside the former capital.⁷²

22 April: SPDC police and USDA members assaulted and arrested seven protesters demonstrating at Rangoon's Thingangyun Sanpyat market. They were calling for lower commodity prices, better healthcare, and improved utility services.⁷³

19 June: SPDC authorities in Taunggoat Township, Arakan State, arrested 25-year-old Maung Kyaw Naing for staging a protest on high inflation.⁷⁴

24 June: SPDC authorities and fire brigade members in Rangoon arrested Ko Maung Oo for protesting against the junta's economic policies and calling for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's release.⁷⁵

Energy production and consumption in Burma

The current crisis in Burma is one preceded by decades of economic mismanagement, with the military leadership exploiting Burma's rich natural resources for their own profit. Ordinary people suffer chronic energy shortages, while oil, gas and hydropower are sold off to China and Thailand.

Power generation (kw installed capacity)			
Burma (2000)	Vietnam (2001)	Burma (2006)	Vietnam (2005)
1.4 mn	30,700 mn	1.8 mn	53,300 mn

The national electricity grid, where it exists, is inefficient, unreliable, and expensive. Refineries are insufficient and antiquated, and colonial-era hydropower plants regularly break down, and slow to a halt during the months of the dry season. Residents of Rangoon receive one to three hours supply of electricity per day.

Most shops, businesses, and factories in Rangoon and other urban centers rely on their own generators using diesel or compressed natural gas (CNG) to guarantee consistent electricity supply. The steep increase in diesel (200%) and CNG (500%) caused an unacceptable shock.

Gas is sold under a rationing system. Car owners are issued a ration allotment of 60 gallons per month.⁷⁶ Many of them sell part of the allotment to black market vendors to supplement their income.

INFLATION: A FACT OF LIFE IN BURMA

Overall: According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the rate of inflation peaked at 57.1% in 2002, and stood at 32.3% in August 2007, prior to the latest fuel hikes. These estimates are conservative. Inflation continued, but slowed in 2004, mainly resulting from a shortage of kyat notes and the 2003 bank liquidity crisis.

Oct 2005: the SPDC reduced fuel subsidies, leading to increases in fuel prices of almost 900%.

Apr 2006: The SPDC gave civil servants a 10-fold salary increase, triggering inflation in essential commodities.

Inflation hit SPDC budgets as well, and the SPDC energy authority increased the rate for electricity 1000% in May 2006.

Jun 2007: The SPDC banned the sale of diesel fuel to private transport companies, which resulted in black market diesel prices surging to 4,000 kyat per gallon.

⁷¹ Irrawaddy (05 Apr 07) Burma Township Residents Protest New Tax Rate

⁷² Irrawaddy (04 Apr 07) Solo Protest Staged by HIV Patient in Rangoon; DVB (05 Apr 07) Rangoon man protests lack of HIV treatment in Burma; DVB (11 Apr 07) Supporters call for the release of HIV protester

⁷³ Irrawaddy (23 Apr 07) Burma's junta vows to crack down on human rights activists; DVB (23 Apr 07) Rangoon protestors bashed, detained by police; ABC (22 Apr 07) Burma arrests seven over rare protest; Mizzima News (23 Apr 07) Junta detains seven protesters in Rangoon

⁷⁴ Mizzima News (20 Jun 07) Mother and sister of solo protester also arrested

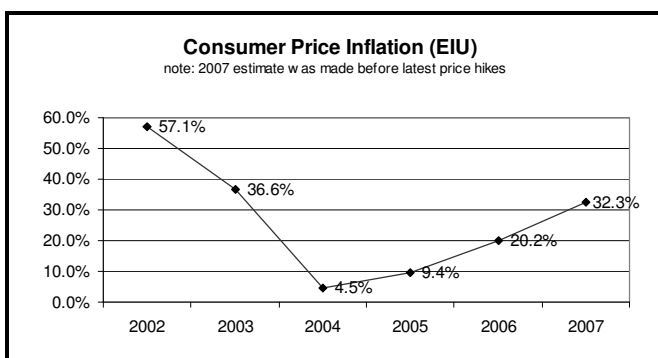
⁷⁵ DVB (27 Jun 07) Solo demonstrators take to Rangoon streets

⁷⁶ AP (15 Aug 07) Myanmar's Junta Imposes a 100 Percent Fuel Hike

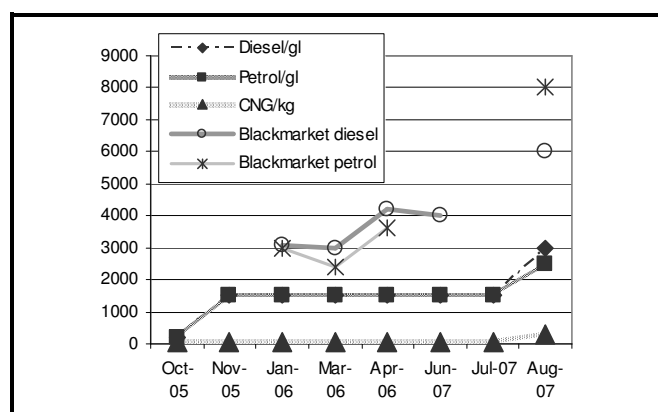
SPDC-created inflation: a longer trend

The junta disastrously mismanages Burma's economy, and rampant inflation is a part of everyday life in the country.⁷⁷ Most civilians have already been reduced to a hand-to-mouth existence. This situation is punctuated by periodic shocks, not unlike the August price hikes. In recent years:

October 2005: the SPDC reduced fuel subsidies, leading to increases in fuel prices of almost 900%. The price of a gallon of fuel in November was 1,500 kyat, up from 180 kyat from the previous month.⁷⁸ By the end of January 2006, the price of petrol on the black market was 3,000 kyat per gallon.⁷⁹ The cost of a bus fare between Akyab and Rangoon rose from 8,000 to 12,000⁸⁰



April 2006: the SPDC gave civil servants a 10-fold salary increase because of unhappiness with the move of the capital to Naypyidaw. This salary increase triggered inflation in essential commodities. Inflation hit SPDC budgets as well, and the SPDC energy authority increased the rate for electricity 1000% in May 2006.⁸¹



June 2007: the SPDC banned the sale of diesel fuel to private transport companies, which resulted in black market diesel prices surging to 4,000 kyat per gallon.⁸²

⁷⁷ EIU (Aug 07) Country Report: Myanmar (Burma)

⁷⁸ Xinhua (18 Jan 06) Myanmar eyes physic nut oil as fuel to help solve oil crisis

⁷⁹ IMNA (28 Jan 06) Petroleum price skyrockets yet again

⁸⁰ Narinjara (05 Dec 05) Transportation costs between Akyab and Rangoon more than doubles

⁸¹ AFP (23 May 06) Myanmar hikes electricity rates 10-fold

⁸² EIU (Aug 07) Country Report: Myanmar (Burma)