

Burma 2007: The Year in Review

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• JANUARY

04—A leading pro-democracy activist movement, the 88 Generation Students group, launches a new petition campaign, “Open Heart,” calling for people to write letters to government leaders urging reform in politics, the economy and social affairs.

11—Five leading activists of the 88 Generation Students group—Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Htay Kywe, Min Zeya and Pyone Cho—who were arrested in 2006 and accused of “causing internal commotion and committing terrorist attacks in connection with Washington” are freed.

15—A small bomb explodes at a post office in Shwegonding, an eastern suburb of Rangoon, at 12:50 p.m. local time. One person is reported injured.

21—Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye and other junta officials meet with the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Shri Pranab Mukherjee. India promises further military aid to Burma’s ruling junta and asks for increased cooperation in fighting Indian insurgent groups operating along its border with Burma.

• FEBRUARY

13—The detention under house arrest of Tin Oo, deputy leader of Burma’s opposition party, the National League for Democracy, is extended for one year.

Htin Kyaw, leading activist [Photo: AFP]

22—About 15 protesters, led by well-known activist Htin Kyaw, demonstrate at a crowded market in downtown Rangoon and later march to Sule Pagoda. They hold placards and distribute leaflets calling on the government to lower food prices and improve welfare services. Burmese authorities detain at least five people.

• MARCH

21—Burma’s prime minister, Soe Win, is treated in one of Singapore’s public hospitals for a serious but undisclosed illness, the Burmese embassy reports. Some sources say he has leukemia.

22—Htin Kyaw, 44, one of the leaders of a demonstration in downtown Rangoon in February, is arrested while staging a solo protest at Hledan Market near Rangoon University.

26—The Burmese junta grants 50 foreign journalists visas to cover the Armed Forces Day military parade in Naypyidaw.

• APRIL

02—Burma reports an outbreak of H5N1 bird flu at a poultry farm in Htaukkyant, north of Rangoon. One thousand chickens died.

Kim Yong Il, deputy foreign minister of North Korea [Photo: AFP]

25—A four-person team, led by North Korea's Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Yong Il, arrives in Rangoon and reaches an agreement with Burmese officials to resume diplomatic ties.

• MAY

15—A letter, signed by 59 former heads of state, urges the Burmese military leaders to free Aung San Suu Kyi. The signatures come from Asia, Africa, Europe and North and South America.

20—A North Korean cargo ship, the Kang Nam I, docks at Thilawa port in Burma for the first time since diplomatic ties were resumed.

23—US first lady Laura Bush and women US senators launch a campaign for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and call for a renewal of the official US boycott against Burmese imports.

27—Hundreds of supporters of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, led by Min Ko Naing, a prominent anti-government activist, march to Shwedagon Pagoda to pray for Suu Kyi's release, but are blocked by about 100 pro-junta thugs. There is no violence.

• JUNE

05—Eleven HIV/AIDS patients are detained in the Weibagi Hospital in Rangoon following the group's demonstrations calling for the release of a prominent HIV/AIDS activist, Phyu Phyu Thin, who was arrested earlier by authorities.

Laura Bush meets pro-democracy supporters in Washington DC [Photo: ENC]

A Burmese ethnic delegation meets with US first lady Laura Bush in the White House in Washington, DC, and calls on the US to help protect ethnic minorities and to promote democracy in Burma.

25—India starts training Burmese air force officers at a naval air base in Kochi. The Burmese air crew are said to be learning to operate sophisticated air defense equipment and aircraft.

28—A tornado rips through South Dagon Township in Rangoon. Three people die, at least five are injured, 90 homes are destroyed and 500 homes are damaged.

• JULY

Most delegates to the junta's National Convention were hand-picked [Photo: AFP]

18—The military government commences the final stage of the National Convention.

23 —An advertisement placed in the English-language Myanmar Times newspaper by a satirical art group, Danish-based "Surrend," has a hidden message calling the country's military ruler, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, a "killer."

29—Southeast Asian countries set up a safety watchdog to ensure that nuclear power plants in the region are not used to produce weapons or aid rogue groups.

• AUGUST

01—Burma's military government appoints an ambassador to North Korea for the first time since 1983. The ambassador, Thein Lwin, will serve concurrently as ambassador to China.

15—Burma's ruling junta imposes a surprise 100 percent hike in petrol and diesel prices and a five-fold price increase for natural gas at state-run stations.

19—About 500 people, led by former student activists of the 88 Generation Students group, stage a protest in Rangoon against high fuel price hikes.

21—Burmese authorities arrest at least 13 prominent activists of the 88 Students Generation group, including leaders who staged a protest against fuel price increases.

24—About 25 pro-democracy protesters are arrested and beaten by members of two pro-junta groups—the Union Solidarity and Development Association and Pyithu Swan Ah Shin—while gathering to demonstrate in front of Rangoon’s City Hall.

27—Snr-Gen Than Shwe meets Gen Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Army, in Naypyidaw. On his last trip to Burma before retiring, Gen Sonthi says that during his two-day visit he accepted a request from the Burmese army to help restore peace between the junta and the armed ethnic groups in Burma.

• SEPTEMBER

03—Burma’s National Convention wraps up its work on adopting basic principles for a new constitution after 14 years of deliberation. The closing ceremony—unlike the opening one—is a quiet affair, conducted in the absence of the media and foreign diplomats.

05—Monks chanting the “Metta Sutta” (the Buddha’s words on loving kindness) in Pakokku, upper Burma, are brutally attacked by police, soldiers and pro-junta paramilitary thugs. Three monks are tied to an electricity pole and beaten with rifle butts and bludgeons. A prominent monk, U Sandima, sustains head injuries.

07—After organizing a seminar at a US Embassy center earlier this year, six labor activists are given jail sentences of up to 28 years each by a court set up inside Insein Prison in northern Rangoon.

10—The Alliance of All Burmese Buddhist Monks urges all monks to refuse alms from members of the military regime unless an apology is given for the violent way in which protesting monks were dispersed by the authorities and pro-junta thugs in Pakokku. It warns it will hold “patam nikkujjana kamma”—a boycott of alms from members of the military regime.

18—Hundreds of monks march peacefully through downtown Rangoon and Pegu. They also march in Pakokku and other towns in Magwe Division. The monks walk in procession to local temples, chanting the “Metta Sutta” and “Paritta Sutta.”

A demonstration by monks and civilians in Sittwe in Arakan State is broken up by the authorities using tear gas. Hundreds of local people join in the demonstration, including Muslim residents of the town.

20—On the third day of protests, about 1,000 Buddhist monks march peacefully through Rangoon, carrying religious flags, with one monk carrying his alms bowl upside-down as a symbol of not accepting alms from the military government or its supporters. Hundreds of students and young people protect the monks by joining hands to form a human chain.

22—Security forces, bearing riot shields, line up in front of monks who are chanting the “Metta Sutta” at Aung San Suu Kyi’s lakeside home on Rangoon’s University Avenue. She comes to her gate and talks briefly with one leading monk.

In Mandalay, about 10,000 monks march through the city in the largest anti-junta protest to date.

[Aung San Suu Kyi appears at the entrance of her compound to greet protesting monks in September]

24—Tens of thousands of monks and laypeople march in Pegu, Mandalay, Sagaing, Magwe and Kawthaung in Tenasserim Division, as well as in towns in Mon, Arakan and Kachin states.

26—Burmese security forces fire directly at protesting monks and other demonstrators in Rangoon, reportedly killing five monks and one woman in separate clashes.

27—Troops and riot police use a vehicle to break down the main gate of Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery. Shots are fired and tear gas used in rounding up about 150 of the monastery's monks. Soldiers also raid Maggin and Mogaung monasteries and arrest monks.

A 50-year-old Japanese journalist, Kenji Nagai, is shot by security forces. Witnesses report that several other people are killed in the protests.

28—The flow of Internet information out of Burma is cut off, in response to the flood of photographs, videos, news reports and e-mails sent out of the country to the international media and the rest of the world by Burmese citizens.

30—The UN special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, holds a meeting with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in an attempt to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. Gambari later meets with the junta's head, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, and other top generals in Naypyidaw.

• OCTOBER

04—Snr-Gen Than Shwe announces that he will meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, if she agrees to preconditions: discontinue confrontation with the government, stop devastating the economy and cease promoting economic sanctions.

07—A shot is fired at the Chinese consulate in Mandalay, an indication of many Burmese people's annoyance with the Chinese community. No injuries are reported. China is targeted in demonstrations because of its support for the Burmese military regime.

14—The state funeral of the late prime minister, Gen Soe Win, 59, who died on October 12, is held at Mingaladon Defence Services General Hospital.

19—President George W Bush expands US sanctions against Burma's rulers, adding 11 more Burmese military leaders and 12 business cronies to a list already facing sanctions.

24—Acting prime minister Lt-Gen Thein Sein, secretary-1 of the Burmese junta, is appointed premier and Lt-Gen Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, a hard-liner, is appointed secretary-1.

25—The Burmese government's minister for relations, ex Maj-Gen Aung Kyi, meets Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the NLD, at Seinle Kantha Guest House in Rangoon.

Air Bagan Ltd announces it will suspend flights to Singapore from November 4, after owner Tay Za and his companies are targeted by the new US sanctions on key supporters of the military regime.

26—Khun Sa, the drug warlord-cum-freedom fighter and once one of the world's most wanted men, dies in Rangoon at the age of 74.

30—Burma's military government agrees to the appointment of Kim Sok Chol, 52, as Pyongyang's

ambassador.

31—More than 100 monks in Pakokku Township in Burma's Magwe Division march, chanting the "Metta Sutta," in the first public demonstration since the government's deadly crackdown in September.

• NOVEMBER

02—The Burmese military regime announces its intention to expel UN resident coordinator Charles Petrie due to his criticism of the junta.

08—UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari holds talks with three representatives of the NLD—Chairman Aung Shwe, Secretary U Lwin and Nyunt Wai—for 45 minutes in Naypyidaw, attempting to reconcile the ruling military and the pro-democracy party.

Lt-Gen Thein Sein, Burma's new prime minister, starts a three-nation tour of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to acquaint himself with regional leaders.

09—Detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi welcomes the possibility of dialogue and urges constructive engagement on all sides, in a statement read by Gambari on her behalf in Singapore.

Aung San Suu Kyi meets with NLD leaders—Chairman Aung Shwe, Secretary U Lwin, Nyunt Wai and spokesman Nyan Win—for two and a half hours at a government guest house in Rangoon. It is first time she has been allowed to meet with any of her colleagues in three years.

13—UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, visits detainees at Insein Prison in Rangoon.

18—Arriving at the annual Asean summit in Singapore, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao calls for national reconciliation in Burma and backs the initiatives of the UN envoys.

19— Burma's state-run newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, reports that there is "no reason to hold further discussions with any person or any organization except at the National Convention."

Asean leaders urge Burma's junta to open meaningful dialogue with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, release her from house arrest, free all political detainees and work toward a "peaceful transition to democracy."

P.S.

* From The Irrawaddy:

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