

News from Burma

Sunday 9 December 2007, by [Khant Zaw](#), [Mizzima News](#), [Myo Gyi](#) (Date first published: 6 December 2007).

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Burmese refugees in Thailand face food aid cut

Mizzima News (www.mizzima.com)

December 6, 2007 - A cut in food provisions has had to be enforced on Burmese refugees by a humanitarian agency working along the Thai-Burmese border due to fund shortfall.

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium, which has been providing food aid to over 150,000 Burmese refugees in 10 camps for nearly two decades, said the shortfall in funding and continuous influx of new refugees has forced the group to roll back its food supplies.

"We are affected by exchange rates (US dollar to the Thai Baht), and we continue to see new arrivals in the camps, even as commodity prices rise," Sally Thompson, deputy Executive Director of the TBBC said.

The strength of the Thai Baht against the US dollar means that the group is losing about 7 percent of around 80 million baht, of its funding. Therefore, the group is being forced to consider cutting off some of the food supplies.

The cut in food provisions began since the beginning of December. While the group continues to provide major staple food, it has reduced a few food items including chilies, and fish paste, Ms

Thompson said.

However, Thompson said, the cutbacks are temporary and they will resume normal supply once more funding is received.

“To solve these problems, we are seeking some more funds through our contacts with various communities and are trying to get more funds for 2008,” added Thompson.

Saw La Myint, an official of the Karen Refugees Committee, said, “It seems it is not their policy to reduce supplies but because of the situation they have to reduce some of the less important things like soap, chilies and fish paste.”

The TBBC provides a refugee with rice, cooking oil, mung beans, chilies, sugar, salt, soap, charcoal, bean cake and fish paste. TBBC also provides food, shelter and non food items to displaced people from Burma.

“It is possible that they have to cutback food provisions as more refugees have come to the border area in 2007,” Saw La Myint, said.

However, he expressed concern over the cut back of food provisions saying it will mean extremely hard times adjusting with limited supplies.

Besides, the group, which is also providing food and shelter to Internally Displaced Persons in conflict zones inside Burma, said the cutback will also impact the IDPs living inside Burma.

Pe Sai Leng, a Shan ethnic refugee, while expressing his concern over the cutback, said the hardest hit will be the IDPs, who will now receive only food supplies for four months from the initial six months supply.

The TBBC, which was formed with 11 international non-governmental organizations, said it will strive to garner more support to increase its funding in order to keep up with the needs of the Burmese refugees and IDPs.

China supplies military trucks to Burma

Myo Gyi

Mizzima News (www.mizzima.com)

December 6, 2007 - Several military trucks are believed to have been supplied to the Burmese junta by China. They were seen arriving on the Sino-Burmese border town of Ruili this morning, a local eyewitness said.

The light weight medium FAW trucks, manufactured by Chinese owned Tongfeng Company, were seen lining up at Ruili town, a Burmese who works at the car servicing centre told Mizzima.

“The trucks arrived this morning. They are light weight and all of them are of the same design. Since the trucks were dirty, they sent it to us for car wash,” the local said.

Another Burmese businessman at Kyegaung town, said the trucks, which are to be sent to the

Burmese Army as the first batch through the Muse-Kyegaung Road, are currently parked in front of the Kyegaung Customs office.

"Yes the trucks are now parked in front of the customs office. There are more than 200 trucks lined up," the businessman told Mizzima.

A source close to the Chinese authorities told Mizzima that about 400 military trucks will be sent to Burma as the first batch and more are expected to be sent later.

He also added that the Chinese authorities in early November sent six rocket carriers trucks through the Kyegaung-Muse Road.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese military analyst based on the Sino-Burmese border said, "China has been supplying military trucks regularly. But it has been quite sometime now that they had stopped supplying. But it is again resumed supply."

"It is actually hampering China's image, because it is currently facing a lot of condemnation for supplying the Burmese junta with military hardware. But since China chose to continue supplying amidst mounting pressure, may be it wants to show that it is supporting the Burmese junta openly," added Aung Kyaw Zaw.

Rumors of Burmese military head facing psychological problems

Mizzima News (www.mizzima.com)

December 6, 2007 - Burmese junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe is reportedly suffering from strain and psychological problems and has sought an appointment at a hospital in Singapore for treatment, sources close to the military establishment said.

"Senior General Than Shwe has suffered a sudden attack and is now seeking an appointment with a psychiatrist in Singapore," the source told Mizzima.

While the information cannot be independently confirmed, Htay Aung, a Burmese military analyst based in Thailand said, "It is likely as he [Than Shwe] is getting old."

The Burmese military Supremo today met a Chinese official, who pressurized him to conduct economic reforms to solve the socio-economic crisis in the country, the source said.

"After the meeting he [Than Shwe] was so angry at having to listen to instructions from the hated Chinese that he fainted," the source added.

The source, however, did not elaborate on details of the general's plan to go to Singapore for treatment.

Burmese media group in exile receives award

Khant Zaw

Mizzima News (www.mizzima.com)

December 6, 2007 - The Democratic Voice of Burma based in Oslo, has been awarded the 2007 media award by the Reporters Sans Frontières, an international media rights group, for its outstanding coverage of the recent protests in Burma. The award carries 2,500 Euros.

The Democratic Voice of Burma, which has a Television, Radio broadcasting as well as online news service, was among the few Burmese exiled media groups covering the recent monk-led protests in Burma, which was eventually crackdown upon by the ruling junta.

The RSF, during its 16th award giving ceremony in Paris, awarded the DVB for its reliable source of news during the recent imbroglio in Burma.

Vincent Brossel, head of RSF's Asia desk said, "I am proud that RSF recognized the important work of Burmese journalists, especially DVB. It is a tribute for all Burmese who covered the news of recent demonstrations, despite risks."

During the recent protests in Burma, the media played a vital role in disseminating information about the ground situation to the international community through the use of various means of communication means including internet and telephone lines.

However, the Burmese junta, which initially exercised a certain level of tolerance, resorted to tough measures and cut-off internet connections and several telephone lines of key political activists. The junta also arrested several local as well as foreign journalists and y killed a Japanese photojournalist, Kenji Nagai, who was covering the events as it unfolded.

DVB was at the forefront in covering news and information from Burma during the protests. And its pre-matured TV broadcasting played a vital role as it produced raw footage of the Burmese soldiers shooting protesters.

Despite the Burmese junta's claim that the Japanese journalist was killed by accident, when a stray bullet hit him as troops fired warning shots in the air, a raw footage by the DVB clearly showed a Burmese soldier shooting Kenji Nagai at point blank range.

"I am so proud and honoured to receive the Media prize, because it is not only for us, but also for the people of Burma who made sacrifices for the country," said Moe Aye, News Editor of DVB.

"The news reporters could not have done anything without being supported by the citizens of Burma. At the same time, I am deeply saddened for reporters and citizens who were arrested, or have disappeared, been tortured and killed in their pursuit of freedom of expression. Burma is very different from other countries, because newsmakers in Burma are victims of human rights violations."

DVB was formed in 1992 by student activists, who escaped the Burmese junta's brutal crackdown on protesters in 1988. While it began humbly as a Radio broadcasting station, over the years it has expanded to a Television station broadcasting directly to Burma.

With a viewership and audience claim of more two million, the DVB today stands as one of the biggest Burmese media groups in exile that provide immense information on Burma.

With a cash prize of 2,500 Euros, the RSF has chosen to honour the DVB and recognize its efforts in

producing reliable information on Burma.

(Commentary)

India should not Prove Gandhi Wrong & Irrelevant in Myanmar

By : B.Raman

C3S Paper No.82

December 5, 2007 - In the wake of the widespread non-violent protest movement against the military junta by large sections of the monks and students in August and September, 2007, the Myanmar military Junta, under international pressure, gave the impression of responding at long last to international concerns over its policies. Pressure from China also played an important role in this matter.

2. It allowed Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Special Representative on Myanmar, to visit the country twice and meet not only senior officers of the Junta, including Gen. Than Shwe, but also Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader under house arrest. It appointed Col. Aung Kyi, Labour Minister, as an intermediary to interact with Suu Kyi and allowed Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN special rapporteur on human rights, also to visit the country. It claimed to have released most of those arrested in connection with the agitation.

3. Now, confident that it has crushed the protest movement effectively and that the international focus on Myanmar is no longer as intense as it was from August to October, 2007, the Junta has once again reverted to its long-held stand that Myanmar will have democracy on its terms and in the colours decided by it and that Suu Kyi will have no role in the transition to democracy or in the governance of Myanmar as and when democracy is restored. Its interactions with her will be not on strategic issues of Myanmar's future and its transition to democracy, but on tactical issues relating to the containment and management of the anger of its people over its policies.

4. The Chinese pressure was confined to nudging the Junta to respond to international concerns. It was not related to the people's aspirations. The Chinese worries were and are not over the suppression of the people by the Junta, but over the likely negative impact of a worsening situation in Myanmar on its image in the months leading up to the Beijing Olympics of August, 2008. The Chinese were also worried that if the saffron revolution succeeded in Myanmar, it could next spread to Tibet. Thus, the signs of a slight opening up of the country and a more responsive Junta, which we saw in the wake of the protest movement, were a tactical move by the Junta, with a nod from Beijing, to prevent its being swept away by a combination of domestic and international storms. Now that the Junta feels that the storms have weakened and are unlikely to regain force in the near future, it is back to its unrelenting opposition to a restoration of democracy, with Suu Kyi playing a role in the transition.

5. This became evident at a press conference organised by the Junta at Naypyidaw, the new capital, on December 3, 2007. It was addressed, among others, by Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan, the Information Minister, Mr. Khin Yi, the national Police chief, and Aung Kyi, the Junta-designated intermediary with Suu Kyi. The salient points made by them were as follows:

Kyaw Hsan: The protests were the work of “bogus” monks organised by exiled dissidents and the US. “Actually, the August-September protests were trivial for the whole country. It is found with sound evidence that ex-convicted bogus monks got joined with anti-government groups inside and outside the country. Those unrests and violence, not participated by the majority of the people and the majority of monks, have been put under control.” The Government would stick to its own road map to democracy. There is no timeline for completing the charter. There would be no role for Aung San Suu Kyi or her National League for Democracy (NLD). “No assistance or advice from other persons is required.” No changes to the National Convention’s work would be considered. “It is not reasonable or fair to amend those principles adopted by the delegates.”

Khin Yi: The protesters had hoped to overthrow the Government. “The demonstrations and protests were planned and conspired months ahead to topple the Government.” He accused a non-governmental organisation called the Forum for Democracy in Burma of working with exiled dissidents to orchestrate the protests, and said the US Embassy had also helped train the activists. “The American Centre held a three-day training course on infiltrating and organising the public. The uprisings dissolved within a very short time frame simply because the general public did not take part and our security forces were able to make pre-emptive strikes.”

Aung Kyi: His three meetings with Suu Kyi had yielded “positive developments,” but he declined to elaborate.

6. While international organisations, media and elite have gone silent, supporters of the pro-democracy movement in the US have continued to keep the focus on Myanmar and its Junta. A special hearing on the subject was held by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom at Washington DC on the same day on which the Junta had organised its press conference. The hearing was addressed by Rev. Ashin Nayaka, of the International Burmese Monks’ Organisation, who is now a visiting Fellow at the Columbia University, Mr. Aung Din, Executive Director of the US Campaign for Burma, and Mr. Jared Genser, President of human rights group Freedom Now. The salient points of their presentations were as follows:

Ashin Nayaka: “Myanmar’s Buddhist monks are prepared to face another bloody confrontation with the ruling military government if the international community fails to force the Generals to accept democratic reforms. “Monks were a “symbol of hope” for reforms in Myanmar but were “forcibly disrobed, assaulted and killed” by the military Government. “If this continues unaddressed, further bloody confrontation is unavoidable. The very existence of monastic life is being destroyed by the evil military regime and it will face bloodshed again, if the international community, including the UN Security Council, cannot find a collective and effective way to stop this evil regime from killings and arrests.” He had been working closely with U Gambira, the leader of the Alliance of All Burma Buddhist Monks and key leader of the September protests arrested by the military government last month. He expressed regret that pressure by the international community on the military government had eased even as serious questions remained over the number of monks forcibly disrobed, imprisoned and killed following the protests. “Where has the global outcry gone? This should be of grave concern for all governments worldwide. This is a moral crisis that Americans must stand for.”

Aung Din: The US should appoint a full-time sanctions coordinator for Myanmar as it did in the late 1990’s against Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic’s regime accused of genocide. This would enable coordination of global sanctions against Myanmar’s military Government. Citing the Australian Government which had targeted financial sanctions against 418 Myanmar citizens, including 40 businessmen, he asked the US Government to impose restrictions on more Myanmar businessmen who provided money to the military Government leaders and their families.

Jared Genser: He wanted that the US should consider imposing sanctions, such as those used against a Macau bank accused of money laundering for nuclear-armed North Korea, on a Southeast Asian state-owned bank suspected of links to Myanmar's military rulers. The US move against Banco Delta Asia in Macau is believed to have forced North Korea back to the negotiating table. According to him, a State-owned bank in one of the ASEAN countries was playing a similar role in backing the military Junta in Myanmar and US action against it might have an impact on Myanmar. He added: "Anecdotally in conversations with diplomats in ASEAN countries, I know there is a deep concern about the prospects of the United States doing to a state-owned bank what happened to Banco Delta Asia in Macau because of its laundering of North Korean funds." He did not name the bank.

7. The sanctions imposed till now have been directed mainly against the Junta and other Army officers. Suggestions for sanctions against Myanmar and foreign businessmen backing the Junta are now being made. In addition, sections of Burmese political exiles have been advocating that the US should also use the Beijing Olympics for keeping up pressure on China to make the Junta change its policies. Non-governmental elements in the US and West Europe have already been linking the human rights issue in Darfur in the Sudan and Tibet to the Olympics. They want that the issue of Chinese support to the Myanmar Junta should also be linked. They feel that while a call for the boycott of the Olympics by the participating Western countries would not work, a call for the boycott of the Olympics by the Western media in protest against Chinese policies in respect of Darfur, Tibet and Myanmar might. They want that even if the Western media is disinclined to boycott the Olympics, it could at least down-grade the coverage of the Olympics. These Myanmar exiles are also considering the issue of an appeal to foreign tourists not to go to Beijing to watch the games.

8. In the meanwhile, groups of students and monks inside Myanmar have not allowed themselves to be demoralised by the repressive policies of the Junta. They are now canvassing support for a non-cooperation movement similar to the movement started by Mahatma Gandhi against the British in India. This would involve a boycott of services and products of companies associated with the Junta.

9. India faces a strategic as well as an ethical dilemma in Myanmar. The strategic dimension arises from the importance of Myanmar for the internal security of our North-East and the need to counter the Chinese presence and designs in Myanmar, particularly in its North. The ethical dimension arises from India's status as a successful democracy, its long association with Myanmar political leaders and people and the fact that under Suu Kyi, the Myanmar people have been emulating the non-violent methods of Gandhiji. We will be betraying the memories of Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other freedom-fighters if we fail to support a Gandhi-inspired movement in Myanmar and instead support a military Junta, which rules the country in its interests and not in the interests of the people.

10. The strategic path need not exclude the ethical and vice versa. A mix of ethical and strategic parameters should govern our policy-making. Presently, the ethical parameters hardly have any influence in the policy-making on Myanmar. This position has to change and ethical parameters should play an important role. A beginning in this direction can be made by expanding the Myanmar language broadcasts of the All India Radio in order to provide for more time to political and economic issues, by allowing the leaders of the Myanmar exile movement in different countries to visit India in order to interact with our leaders, people and media and starting telecasts specially beamed to Myanmar. Our private TV channels should also play an active role in this.

11. Suu Kyi and her supporters are trying to prove that Gandhism has still got relevance and can work in restoring to their people their dignity and freedoms. We should not prove them wrong by continuing with our present policies.

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The Mizzima News

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