

Democratic Voice of Burma
Political Prisoners News
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Poets lead protest in military head's home town

Sep 03, 2007

A group of writers and poets from Kyaukse, the home town of junta leader senior general Than Shwe, staged a protest against high fuel prices today, according to eyewitnesses.

Well-known writer Nyunt Lwin told DVB that he, along with poets Tin Latt Ko and Zin Kyaw Pai, led a group of fourteen writers in a protest march from the Kyaukse Hospital to areas on the other side of town.

“Writers face the same economic hardships as other citizens and it is about time we came out and expressed our feelings. We don't care if the authorities decide to ban us from writing or arrest us,” Nyunt Lwin said.

“Burmese writers have a history of standing up for people in past battles for freedom.”

Nyunt Lwin said the group was forced to stop marching and change direction at one point today, after learning that a group of more than 50 police officers in prison vans were waiting for them further up the road.

The demonstration ended at the Arahan pagoda, where the writers said they prayed for lower fuel and commodity prices and for the freedom of detained Kyaukse National League for Democracy member Ko Kyaw Thu Moe Myint who was arrested yesterday.

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More than 1000 march in Laputta

Sep 03, 2007

More than 1000 people took to the streets in the Irrawaddy town of Laputta today, to protest the Burmese military's recent decision to drastically increase fuel prices.

Protestors and eyewitnesses told DVB today that the demonstration was started by just three men—Ko Aung Moe Win, Ko Htay Win and Ko Kyi Then—who began waving placards condemning the price hikes at about 8:00am this morning.

Hundreds of bystanders then joined the protest, pushing the crowd's numbers up to more than 300 people as Ko Aung Moe Win, Ko Htay Win and Ko Kyi Then gave public speeches.

Later, as the protestors marched through the streets, hundreds more bystanders joined in bringing the number of demonstrators to more than 1000, according to onlookers.

Dr Aye Kyu, an elected member of parliament from Laputta, told DVB that the protest was then stopped by the chairman of the township peace and development council and plain clothes police officers as the demonstrators reached a bus stop near the edge of the town.

“The township chief told the protestors that they wanted them to come for ‘a talk’ with officials. He said the authorities would let them go after peaceful discussions,” Dr Aye Kyu said, adding that the leaders of the protest were seen being driven off in a military jeep.

“The number of civilians that joined the protest was unbelievably large. It was definitely successful,” Dr Aye Kyu said.

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Thousands protest arrests in Taunggok

Sep 04, 2007

About 2000 people, led by a group of National League for Democracy members, marched through Taunggok today, demanding information on two protestors arrested on Friday.

Taunggok NLD secretary U Khin Hla told DVB that he and a group of about 14 other party members inadvertently started a mass demonstration at about 9am this morning when they decided to walk to the police station to demand information on the whereabouts of Ko Sithu and Ko Than Lwin.

The two men were beaten by a soldier and arrested late last week after staging a protest against high fuel prices in Burma. The Taunggok NLD released a statement on Sunday saying that the men’s detention for more than 24 hours without charge was illegal.

The party also vowed to intensify pressure on the authorities if the protestors were not released. After receiving no response from the government, U Khin Hla said he decided to march down to the police station to demand answers.

The group of NLD members first marched to the township market near where the two men were arrested and gave public speeches demanding their release.

“I said that these two guys knew they were going to get arrested but they were brave anyway and that I was going to the police station to demand an explanation,” U Khin Hla told DVB.

By the time the NLD members reached the police station, they were being followed by hundreds of people, according to eyewitnesses. But officers at the station told U Khin Hla that the police chief was at the township peace and development council office so the group marched there and demanded answers from the police chief and the township chairman.

“The police chief’s answer was that they weren’t actually detaining the protestors but he refused to give any more information on their whereabouts,” U Khin Hla said.

The officials reportedly told the group that if they wanted answers they should walk go and talk to the two men’s parents. So the large group of people marched towards the men’s homes, gathering bystanders as they went.

By the time they reached their destination, eyewitnesses said 2000 people and about 50 officials and Union Solidarity and Development Association members had started to follow them.

The officials then ordered U Khin Hla to tell the bystanders to go home.

“I told the authorities that I had no right to tell them to stop following me and that they were only doing it to show their support for the two guys who were arrested and to show their dissatisfaction with the high gas prices,” U Khin Hla said.

The NLD members were then allowed to leave without further inference.

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Taungkok protestors released

Sep 05, 2007

Ko Sithu and Ko Than Lwin, who were arrested after staging a protest over high fuel prices in Taungkok last Friday, were released at about 6am this morning.

Taungkok National League for Democracy's secretary U Khin Hla told DVB today that the two men were in good health.

“The authorities asked them to sign an agreement not to protest again in the future but they both refused,” U Khin Hla said.

Ko Sithu told DVB that he and Ko Than Lwin were held by the authorities in a government guest house but were not interrogated or badly treated by officials.

“We were treated and fed well,” Ko Situ said.

He said that he protested because his family was struggling financially as a result of high fuel and commodity prices and because he had the right to protest peacefully.

“I’m a member of one of many families who are facing poverty. Everyone else in my community is facing the same problems. It was my decision to protest,” Ko Sithu said.

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Seven activists arrested since Laputta protest

Sep 05, 2007

Seven activists involved in a large protest in Laputta on Monday have been arrested, according to the Irrawaddy National League for Democracy.

U Win Myint, secretary of the NLD’s Irrawaddy branch, told DVB today that the protest leaders Ko Aung Moe Win, Ko Kyi Than and Ko Htay as well as activists Ko Pauksa, Ko Pho Cho, Ko Maung Kyaw and Ko Hla Soe were now in custody.

The four activists were reportedly arrested after trying to stop officials from arresting the protest leaders.

“They pulled away the hands of an official who was trying to pull away Ko Aung Moe Win from the protest scene. They told the official he had no right to treat a peaceful protestor in such a way. Now they have been arrested too,” U Win Myint said.

The seven men are believed to be detained separately at the Bayin Naung government guest house, the government’s religious affairs headquarters, a guest house owned by the forestry ministry, the municipal office and the town hall.

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Soldiers fire warning rounds at Pakokku monks

Sep 05, 2007

Armed Burmese soldiers fired warning shots into the air in Pakokku this morning in a violent bid to stop 600 Buddhist monks staging a protest over the poor economic conditions in the country.

The monks had started a protest march from a monastery on the west side of Pakokku. As they walked through the town, they were reportedly cheered on by more than 10,000 bystanders who had turned out to watch the demonstration.

“They were just walking in a line with four or five monks walking side by side at a time, which is the way they usually travel when they are collecting alms,” one eyewitness said.

“They were chanting metta and wishing for everyone to be free from the oppression of others,” the eyewitness said.

A monk who participated in the protest told DVB that members of his monastery were struggling financially with many unable to afford the 50-kyat razors they needed to keep their heads shaved.

“We can’t sit back and watch the people who sponsor us sink into poverty. Their poverty is our poverty as well,” the monk said.

As the large group of monks reached Pakokku’s Middle School (3), they were confronted by two Burmese military platoons and two unmarked vehicles. In an attempt to disperse the monks, the soldiers fired warning shots into the air.

“They fired about 10 or 15 bullets before they started to drag away the monks and beat up bystanders with bamboo sticks,” one bystander said.

“The soldiers were in full uniforms . . . Now they are clearing up slippers left by monks when they fled the scene in dismay,” the bystander said.

The incident marks the first time since the recent wave of protests started in Burma that uniformed soldiers have fired rounds in response.

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Bago monks warned against protesting

Sep 06, 2007

The head monks from several Bago monasteries have reportedly been warned against staging protests and ordered to pass information on demonstrators to the military.

A monk from the Sasana Mandai monastery told DVB yesterday that military officials had visited several head monks in the past month.

“A brigade commander visited our monastery on the 4th of this month. He told our head monk that he needed to call the military and inform them if he heard about any one protesting,” the monk said on condition of anonymity.

Residents in Bago said security in the town had been tightened in the past few days and that plain clothes government supporters were closely watching all the monasteries.

U Kaweinda Biwuntha, head of the well-known Masoeyein monastery in Mandalay said yesterday that the military were entirely to blame for the recent spate of protests over high fuel and commodity prices.

“Everything happening now is because of the people’s dissatisfaction with the government. The issues of commodity prices are just catalysts . . . These protests represent a call from the people for the military to step down,” U Kaweinda Biwuntha said.

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Two more activists arrested in Bogalay

Sep 07, 2007

Two more people have been arrested for their involvement in Wednesday’s protest against high fuel and commodity prices led by the National League for Democracy in Bogalay.

NLD officials Daw Khin Lay and Daw Mi Mi Sein were arrested in Bogalay market by female members of the government-supported Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association on 5 September, according to a family member who did not want to be named. This followed the arrests of party chairman U Aung Khin Bo and deputy secretary U Khin Maung Chit that morning.

"The Women Entrepreneurs were accompanied by the township police chief. They said they wanted to talk to Daw Khin Lay and Daw Mi Mi Sein and promised they would let them go after they had spoken to them," said the family member.

The protest was reportedly supported by over 1000 bystanders.

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Pakokku residents arrested for foreign media contact

Sep 11, 2007

Pakokku authorities have arrested four town residents for allegedly providing foreign media with information on the protest staged last week by monks over poor economic conditions, according to local residents.

Four Pakokku residents; U Thant Shin, U Nay La, U Sein Linn and U Thar Aung, were arrested by authorities on Friday evening and held at the police station but were later sent to the police station jail.

"They were arrested under suspicion of speaking by telephone to reporters from foreign news agencies. They were kept in the police station at first and family members were allowed to visit and give food to them," said an unnamed monk.

"But they were then moved to the police station jail on Sunday and their current situation is unknown."

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Man in Taunggok stages solo demonstration

Sep 11, 2007

A man in Arakan state's Taunggok township this morning staged a solo demonstration demanding State Peace and Development Council leader senior general Than Shwe be expelled from Buddhist religious society.

Ko Soe Win, a resident of Sar-Pyin village, was disappointed by soldiers' aggressive crackdown on the monks' protest in Pakokku last week, and walked the 20-mile journey to Taunggok to stage a solo demonstration, an eye-witness told DVB. Ko Soe Win held placards near the town market at around 8am, calling for the expulsion of Than Shwe from the Buddhist religion and the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the 88 generation students, but was arrested by township police and Ward Peace and Development Council officials.

"He was seen handcuffed and being led away by police officers," said the eye-witness.

Ko Soe Win's current whereabouts are unknown. Meanwhile, another source in Taunggok said that authorities have placed restrictions on mass-transportation between Taunggok and nearby villages for the past three days based on indications that local villagers were preparing for a public protest in Taunggok.

"They are refusing to permit boats and buses with a lot of passengers to enter the town," said the source, adding that travellers from more distant regions had no such problems.

Two other men were also arrested by Taunggok authorities on August 31 for protesting against increased fuel and commodity prices. They were released last Wednesday after being detained for five days.

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Kyaukpadaung monks march against the military

Sep 17, 2007

More than 700 monks from Kyaukpadaung staged a walking protest early this morning in a show of support for nationwide demonstrations tipped to be held tomorrow.

One of the monks who led the protest told DVB on condition of anonymity that the protest started at around 5:30am and was organised by monks from the Khaymathiwun monastery. Monks from three other monasteries in the town were also reported to have joined the protest.

“About 700 monks gathered at Phayagyi pagoda during the early morning alms collection and circled the pagoda, chanting metta for people to be freed from their suffering, before proceeding into town,” said the monk.

“We staged this protest to strongly denounce [the government's] brutal crackdown on monks protesting in Pakokku two weeks ago and to reiterate the monks' demands for an apology from the government,” said the monk, adding that the protest ended peacefully around 7am with no harassment from the authorities.

According to the monk, the protest was staged as a show of support for two statements released last week by the All-Burmese Alliance of Monks demanding an apology from the ruling junta for their brutal crackdown on the Pakokku protest on September 5.

The statements warned that there would be nationwide demonstrations by monks if an apology was not forthcoming and that from Monday, all monks would stop accepting alms from government officials and supporters.

The monk who led this morning's protest also said that about 1000 bystanders took to the streets to support the demonstration and pay homage to the protestors.

“Since the protest was very early in morning a lot of people were still in bed. But when they heard us chanting metta they came out of their houses immediately and paid homage to us. Some even cried,” he said.

Kyaukpadaung township is home to 40 monasteries and more than 1000 monks.

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Chauk monks stage small protest

Sep 17, 2007

About 30 monks from Magwe division's Chauk township staged a protest yesterday, marching through town and chanting metta for several hours, according to eyewitnesses.

The monks reportedly started marching from the Sanana Beikman Buddhist headquarters, past the football grounds and towards the local market.

“They were chanting metta all the way . . . People from the market wanted to join in but the monks told them it would be better if they didn't,” one eyewitness told DVB.

“They were followed by police vehicles and the authorities were taking photos of them,” the eyewitness said, adding that the government did not physically intervene.

Several Chauk residents said that an Aye Zedi pagoda authorities meeting was cancelled on Saturday after officials found out a group of monks were meeting at the pagoda at the same time to discuss plans for this week's nationwide demonstrations.

Sittwe soldiers use tear gas against protestors

Sep 18, 2007

Soldiers in Sittwe fired warning shots and threw tear gas shells at protestors today as Buddhist monks staged nation-wide demonstrations against the Burmese military.

A protest was started by about 300 monks at 1pm in the Arakan capital today, with some chanting metta and others carrying placards calling for lower commodity prices, according to eyewitnesses.

“Bystanders wanted to join the monks but they told them not to follow and that it was their responsibility to stage the protest by themselves,” one eyewitness told DVB, adding that thousands of civilians had taken to the streets to show their support for the demonstration.

The monks initially tried to march towards the Lawla Nandar pagoda but were blocked outside the Sittwe Union Solidarity and Development Association office by a large group of officials and security guards.

The monks then chose a different route to the pagoda but were again stopped as Burmese troops swarmed around the Sittwe city hall and started firing live rounds into the air and hurling tear gas shells into the crowd.

“They used more than 20 tear gas bombs. There were a lot of elderly people in the crowd and the gas hit them really hard. But they still kept following the monks,” a bystander who witnessed the confrontation said.

The soldiers appeared to be targeting bystanders and civilians attempting to join the protest according to reports. The monks continued their demonstration despite the confrontation and kept marching until 3pm.

The incident marked the second time since the recent wave of protest started in Burma that soldiers have resorted to firing warning shots to try to disperse groups of demonstrators. The first time live rounds were fired was on September 5, when soldiers cracked down on a protest staged by monks in Pakokku.

The military crack down resulted in demands by the The Alliance of All Burmese Monks for an official apology. Today’s protests marked the start of a nation-wide boycott and campaign against the Burmese government in response to its unwillingness to say sorry for the violent crackdown.

Monk bashed during September 18 Sittwe protest

Sep 21, 2007

A monk who took part in the September 18 protest in Sittwe, which was broken up by teams of soldiers with tear gas, said today that he was brutally bashed during the incident.

U Warathami told DVB today that after almost 20 canisters of tear gas were lobbed into the crowds of protestors by Burmese troops, several soldiers tied his hands behind his back before repeatedly beating him.

“They restrained me and hit me in the face and also on my head which started to bleed. They also kicked me with their boots. I had cuts on my head and my ears and several of my teeth were knocked out of place,” U Warathami said.

He said he was later taken to the office of the chief of Sittwe police with two other monks where he was tied up with a belt and beaten repeatedly until he became unconscious.

“When I woke up, I had already been dropped back off at the Dhammathukha monastery where I live,” he said.

The recent boycott of the Burmese military staged by the country’s monks was launched in reaction to the bashing of several other monks in Pakokku on September 5. Since then, widespread protests have swept Burma with more than 2000 monks taking to the streets in Pakokku, 1000 in Rangoon and a further 1000 demonstrating against state-sanctioned violence in Amarapura near Mandalay today.

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Police crack down on ongoing demonstrations

Sep 26, 2007

As demonstrations continue today in Rangoon, police have responded with crackdowns across the city, reportedly leaving some monks injured.

At 11.30am protesting monks tried to reach Shwedagon pagoda through the stairwell on its eastern side. On realising the gates were closed, the monks came back down the hill and tried to negotiate with pagoda officials to gain access to the pagoda compound, but encountered riot police who were waiting on the hill.

"The police were armed with shields and batons and they shouted profanities at the monks while beating them up. I saw about 5 to 10 young novices with their heads bleeding," said an eyewitness, who claimed that some officers at the back of the group were armed with automatic rifles.

Witnesses have also reported a number of crackdowns in other areas of Rangoon, with riot police throwing tear gas grenades. A total of about 20 grenades were said to have been used.

On Bahan (3) road, near Shwedagon pagoda, police armed with bamboo sticks were seen beating monks, nuns and civilians as they tried to flee. A local resident reported seeing protestors running through the streets to escape police, and other witnesses have reported that tear gas grenades were used.

Despite the crackdowns, protestors are continuing to demonstrate, with groups of protestors from different places coming together to march towards Sule pagoda. The police

response has increased tensions, and witnesses have heard people shouting profanities at passing military trucks.

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Military present at Mandalay protests

Sep 26, 2007

About 30,000 people have been protesting today in Mandalay, despite the visible military presence in the city.

The Mandalay protest was started by about 10,000 monks from Dhammikarama, Taing Hteelin, who were later joined by nuns and civilians. The protestors faced roadblocks, but were able to bypass them to continue on their march.

A local bystander said that the monks were stopped by soldiers while marching from the eastern gate of the historic Phayagyi pagoda.

"The soldiers were fully armed and stood blocking the road, but the monks went a different way to avoid direct confrontation," said the bystander.

Soldiers were also deployed in front of several monasteries to prevent monks from joining the protests.

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Military raids monasteries, bashes and arrests monks

Sep 27, 2007

About 700 monks and civilians were arrested late last night following a brutal attack by the military on at least three monasteries in Rangoon.

At the Ngway Kyar Yan Monastery in South Okkalapa township eyewitnesses described the scene of the arrests as unbelievable.

"Many spots of blood could still be seen in the morning in the monastery compound and nearby," one witness said.

Eyewitnesses said three trucks filled with soldiers arrived at the monastery at about 12:15am this morning. When the monks refused the soldiers' demand to open the gate, a fight broke out in which both sides hurled bricks at each other for about 20 minutes.

The soldiers eventually crashed through the gate with one of the trucks and used bamboo sticks to beat everyone in the monastery, including monks, laymen, women and children, some of whom were related to or were under the care of the head abbot, or sayadaw.

One witness said the soldiers shouted "harsh, abusive words" at the monks while they were beating them. One monk who had tried to warn the monastery of the soldiers' approach was beaten unconscious as he lay on the ground.

Another witness said the soldiers were led by a two-star general who beat some of the soldiers who were reluctant to harm the monks. The attack lasted about 90 minutes,

ending when about 60 monks and 40 laypeople were tossed into waiting trucks and driven to an unknown destination.

Broken glass and monks' robes could be seen scattered on the ground after the soldiers departed.

"The army stole everything from the monastery – cassette players, radios, money that had been donated, everything they could take," one witness said.

Among the arrestees were the second chief of the monastery, Sayadaw U Uttama, and another senior sayadaw, U Dhammadainna. However, the head sayadaw, who is a member of the State Sangamahanayaka Committee, was meditating in a hidden location in the monastery at the time of the assault and escaped arrest, as did a number of monks who were able to flee the soldiers.

People in the neighbourhood around the monastery gathered in the compound at dawn, many of them breaking into tears when they saw the devastation the military had left behind.

"It's impossible to believe that the government would brutalise the holy monks who represent our religion in this way," one bystander said.

Reports from Rangoon also indicate that soldiers raided several monasteries around the Moe Gound Pagoda and the Maggin monastery in Thingyangyun which provides accomodation to people living with HIV and AIDS. The incidents are though to have greatly increased the ire of monks throughout the city.

"The government is not doing this for stability. This is sacrilege directed at the religion we believe in," one Buddhist said.

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Security forces fire on school pupils

Sep 28, 2007

Government security forces beat up and fired upon young students in front of a school during yesterday's brutal crackdown on large-scale protests in Rangoon, according to witnesses.

A group of students was marching from Pansodan bridge to the high school in Tamwe township, while many other students were inside the school compound. Soldiers and government guards fired automatic weapons into the air and at chest-level to prevent marching students from reaching the school.

"There were primary-grade students studying inside the school and some of them were hit as well," said one of the witnesses.

Parents waiting to collect their children from school were also among those hit by bullets.

"They also rammed a truck with its headlights on into a crowd of students before arresting them at gunpoint," said another witness, who stated that about 300 students were arrested in the crackdown.

“Teachers at the school had to take all the children and their parents inside the school building and give them shelter,” the witness continued.

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