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Media and Protests in the Myanmar Crisis

Medien und Proteste während der Krise in Myanmar

Lea Buck

Abstract

Recent public protests that had initially started in Myanmar in August 2007 found strong publicity in international news media coverage. New communication technology played a key role in the circumvention of censorship and enabled the submission of information to a global audience. Many of these images and information were collected by citizen journalists. The impact of the internet became blatantly obvious when the regime took the extreme measure of a complete internet shutdown on 29 September to finally control the flow of information. This analysis examines the circumvention of censorship as well as the respective strategies of the involved actors in their news coverage. Moreover, the regime's response to the high attention is of central interest as well as the context in which the media news coverage has operated. Arguably, global awareness led to a high amount of international pressure on the regime. It is argued that the regime responded with a mixed strategy of increased repression on the one hand and a more cooperative attitude on the international level on the other hand.

Keywords: Myanmar, media coverage, censorship, new communication technology, citizen journalists, exile media

Introduction

The recent protests in Myanmar gained a high degree of international news media coverage. For a couple of days Myanmar was one of the main topics among most international media despite its usually isolated role. There was a great difference to the protests that took place in 1988 when only few images and information on the protests were available and only with significant delays. This article investigates the role of the media in the recent protests in Myanmar. The aim is to analyse the way media were utilised by the actors involved. In order to do so the interaction and relation between the regime, opposition and international news media will be examined.

The key question asks how media were employed from the respective actors. From this question several aspects arise: How was censorship circumvented; which impact had new communication technologies and how did the regime respond to the news coverage? Since censorship and restrictions on press freedom are particularly strict in Myanmar, high publicity and the large number of images of the protest cannot be taken for granted. Exile media and citizen journalists were certainly successful in bringing the topic to international awareness. This huge success of dissidents and exile media has to be regarded in the context of new communication technology. New technology enabled the distribution of information despite a restrictive system of control. The exceptional development of relying on citizen journalists and the apparent impact of new technology on the news coverage of the protest have even found their way into the news as such. Most major news media contained a story on Burmese bloggers, netizens or citizen journalists, respectively (to mention just a few: Abb 2007; Crispin 2007; Delaney 2007; Hauck 2007; Holmes 2007; Spiegel Online International 2007).

Global awareness accounted for a high amount of pressure on the Burmese military regime. The regime responded with a mixed strategy: On the one hand it increased repression against protesters, on the other hand it was pushed to a more cooperative stance at the international level. The strongest response has appeared through attempts to undercut further flow of information, localise points of dissent and propagate its own version of the events. While it took some time until the regime managed to break the spread of images and news, it finally succeeded with the climax of the "information war" on 29 September in the form of an almost unique complete shut down of the internet (ONI 2007:4). There were suddenly only few images of the protest and the international awareness descended. It is likely that the events will lead to increased internet control in the near future. Yet, it has to be awaited to what extent the regime will be able to maintain a high and effective level of control. Eventually, the impact of media attention has been limited and could not stop the regime from its violent crackdown of the protests, albeit the regime has still shown a high sensibility towards the media coverage and it might have led to a more cooperative stance in the aftermath of the protests. Arguably, this is also due to the high pressure that was placed on the regime in the light of extensive media coverage.

This article will start with an assessment of the framework in which the protest took place. At first censorship, internet restrictions and official media will be examined. An assessment of means to circumvent these restrictions as well as

an overview of independent and exile media in the Burmese context will follow. Finally, the interaction of the different levels will be analysed with a special focus on new media technology in this context. The analysis will basically follow the chronological course of the protests.

Censorship and Media Restrictions in Myanmar

Considering the isolated and sometimes forgotten role of Myanmar it is actually surprising that the recent protests found so much attention in the media. This is particular the case when Myanmar's policy towards media restrictions and internet filtering is examined. According to the Reporters Without Borders *Press Freedom Index 2006* Myanmar is ranked 164th out of 168 states. Myanmar is also counted among the strictest regimes in the field of internet restrictions (ONI 2005:4). Nevertheless, Myanmar does not have an all-embracing control of press and internet. Myanmar is still considered an authoritarian state in contrast to totalitarian regimes. Totalitarian regimes strive for the "total" and contest the separation between state and society, while authoritarian regimes compromise limited scope for pluralism (Linz 2000:66, 159-170). After all, there is at least some private press, and internet connections exist. Myanmar's censorship very much exemplifies a conflict between political control and the economic potential of new technologies. Yet, the aim of political control remains the dominant aspect in Myanmar (Gomez/Gan 2004:xviiif).

Censorship is targeted at both directions: at the outflow as well as the inflow of information. Even though censorship and filtering is possible, it is not a simple task. Especially the internet is quick in responding and opening new channels – effective control means a heavy workload of monitoring and requires resources and know-how (Seib 2003:634f.).

Media in Myanmar

There is no free media inside the country. The approximately 100 private press periodicals are under strict surveillance from the government and there is little scope to escape control (RSF 2007:1). Amendments took place in 2005 and 2006 after the removal of prime minister Khin Nyunt though this did not lead to more liberalisation. Any printed material has to be submitted to the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division before distribution is granted. Under the Printers and Publishers Registration Law any criticism is illicit: "coverage must be positive and constructive" (IPI 2006:2; ONI 2005:8), violation can be inflicted with up

to seven years in prison. The regime is willing to extend prison sentences: the journalist and pro-democracy activist U Win Tin, for instance, has already been imprisoned for 18 years, since 1989. In 2007 – prior to the protests – several journalists have been imprisoned for taking unauthorised pictures of the new capital Nayphitaw (RSF 2007:1).

Some of the official media like the daily *New Light of Myanmar* function simply as a mouthpiece of the regime. The weekly *Myanmar Times* is more eager to present itself as neutral and sometimes mentions (at least in its English version) political events in a less propagandistic way. However, following the purge of Khin Nyunt the publisher was arrested and the newspaper has been under army control ever since (Lintner 2005). Finally, there are private media that usually ignore the political dimension in their coverage. The censorship system obliges any media inside Myanmar to self-censorship if they want to continue their work. It was reported that some of these journals decided to suspend publications during the unrest as they otherwise would have been forced to print official propaganda material (Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), 28.9.07).

The news coverage of the official media varies between the ignorance of events, the downplay, and the open agitation against protests and participants. It is not unusual to include some form of conspiracy – in the recent cases the strategy was to present protesters as "bogus monks" and blame foreign governments and media ("neo-colonialists") as being behind the unrest. The official media even published a detailed report on the dangers and arising problems of a free press (NLM, 27.9.07).

It is rather difficult for foreign journalists and media to operate inside Myanmar. As soon as the protests had started visas were denied to journalists (RSF 2007). Yet, it has to be kept in mind that the regime often struggles to fully enforce its own tight restrictions. Eventually, Myanmar remains a weak state in many areas, without control on informal channels and networks that enable foreign journalists to operate from inside the country.

Internet in Myanmar

There are only two internet providers in Myanmar that are both under state control. In a survey in 2005 the OpenNet Initiative (ONI) came to the conclusion that Myanmar is heavily blocking websites. Almost every email provider was blocked; 80% of websites with sensitive content related to Myanmar were blocked and a large number of additional websites in several other categories,

too (ONI 2005:16-22). Every computer has to be registered with the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs. There are several regulations concerning internet usage, e.g. only the registered owner is allowed to use a connection. The omission to register can mean up to 15 years in prison (ONI 2005:10). However, tests on filtered website show a not very systematic approach to internet filtering and clear differences between the two providers. Hence, there are (or at least were) gaps in the control of the internet. Particularly personal weblogs (blogs) and proxy servers were often accessible – those websites were of high importance in the delivery of information during the protests. Filtering can be circumvented when internet surfing is conducted via a non-blocked proxy and thereby blocked websites are not contacted directly. As soon as a proxy site appears to be blocked, usually a new version under an altered domain will quickly emerge (Crispin 2007).

According to ONI only few people inside Myanmar have internet access; in 2005 just 0.6% of the population were connected to the internet. Since internet is relatively expensive considering Burmese salaries, only a small part – mainly urban elites – is regularly using the internet (ONI 2005:5). Arguably, these low figures are somehow misleading as internet cafés are the most common way to access the internet (Crispin 2007). In addition to an obliged registration of each user, cyber café owners are required to disable proxies or any tunnelling software. Moreover, the activity of users has to be monitored by screen shots every five minutes. These screen shots protocols have to be submitted to the licensing company which is closely linked to the regime. In fact, prior to the protests, these obligations existed more in theory as that they were actually enforced (ONI 2005:10-12).

'Independent' Media: Exile Media, International Media and Internet Activism

As shown, the restrictions on media and internet are considerably high in Myanmar. Nevertheless for a while the regime has had severe difficulties to undercut the outflow of information. To understand this, it is essential to consider new communication technologies and the Burmese exile media. There is a considerable number of exile media organisations in neighbouring as well as overseas countries. The most important include *The Irrawaddy* based in Thailand, *Mizzima News* reporting from India and the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), a radio station that is maintained by exiled Burmese in Norway. In addition,

there is Burmese broadcasting by international news agencies such as the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia (RFA) and the BBC Burmese Service. There is no stringent line to what extent exile media are aimed at an international audience or has the aim to bring back news into the country – in the end it is a bi-directional endeavour. Media that are mainly in Burmese and broadcasted to Myanmar are targeted at people inside the country. The procedure can be seen as a "feedback loop" (Danitz/Strobel 2001:132). News are smuggled out and then broadcasted into the country by outside radio stations and via the internet.

The home country from which exile media are operating is not without concern either. The regime has pressured its neighbouring countries to persecute exile journalists. The International Press Institute has monitored these developments in India, Bangladesh, China and Thailand (IPI 2005:1f.). While Thailand, for instance, does have advantages as a neighbouring country and by accommodating a large number of Burmese people, there is also Thai repression against Burmese organisations, including exile media. In late October 2007 there was an explicit warning circulating among Burmese exile media to keep a low profile because of threats by Thai authorities (*Irrawaddy*, 29.10.07). Overall it can be stated that in relation to other exile media the Burmese are relatively well organised. The organisations work from several countries, with most participants and media makers having an activist background.

There are different levels of independent journalist activity.[1] During the protests on the grass root level there were citizen journalists submitting mobile phone film material and other information and images to overseas blogs, video sharing websites like YouTube or exile media. Exile media do have several inside contacts that deliver information via mobile phones, email or internet chat rooms; new communications technologies are vital to obtain information (IPI 2006:2). Moreover, there are international mainstream media that partly rely on the above sources although they also collect their own information. All levels – ordinary bloggers, exile media and major news media – can be regarded as sources of information for the public, yet, there are differences.

Most blogs operate from overseas and post images and news that are sent by people inside Myanmar. A few blogs also posted online comments from inside the country.[2] There is some controversy on citizen networks and the impact of

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[1] In this context the term 'independent' does not refer to the neutrality of coverage but on media that is not state-controlled.

internet activism: Some see those as "counter-hegemonic forces and expression of democratic participation. Other see them, on the contrary as undemocratic and largely destructive" (Deibert 2000:255). Indeed: citizen journalists hardly represent the average inhabitant of Myanmar but rather urban elites or university students. Plus, from a critical standpoint it can be noted that blogs were quick in publishing rumours that often proved wrong or images that were not related to the context. On the other hand it can be argued that these limitations are outweighed by the immense virtues of alternative sources of information that are able to circumvent censorship and in the end enable a more multi-faceted understanding of the course of events. Internet has made it much more troublesome to misinform the public and in this sense functions as a further challenge for authoritarian regime (Cullen/Fu 1998:165). Therefore new media can be seen as decentralisation of "the production of knowledge" and thus, as a check on those who dominate the flow of information (Wheeler 1998:220).

Exile media follow a more professional approach and declare themselves as advocates of unbiased news and neutral coverage. Having said that there remains a blurred line between political opposition and independent media coverage. The background of most exile Burmese media makers shows a high degree of involvement in activism. In fact, most exile media are at the same time opposition and media. However, in general, exile media were more cautious in publishing rumours than the grass root internet activist level and attempted to get some confirmation before news were published. Arguably, there was still a considerable degree of exaggeration and news (or hopes) that sometimes proved wrong. As a final level there were international media that relied on both sources in their coverage but was much more reluctant to mention rumours without any further confirmation. On all levels the internet was of high importance, particularly to render possibly a coverage that was very fast in responding to any new events. In the next section the examined levels and interaction will be analysed in the actual and chronological context of the protests.

Media Strategies in the Recent Protests

There was a strong dynamic within the protests through the involvement of revered monks, the usage of modern communication technology and a high

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2   Some prominent examples of blogs are www.kohtike.blogspot.com,
www.niknayman.blogspot.com and www.isoneseyar.blogspot.com.

level of international awareness. Yet, one has to bear in mind that the high
international attention was not simply due to citizen journalists and exile media.
As a prerequisite the power of the images should be taken into account: inter
alia, the protests were peaceful and included Buddhist monks with alms bowls
turned upside down; a detained Nobel laureate in the background; civilians
building human chains around marching monks. These images encountered a
strong symbolism and it is not surprising as such that they were met with a good
reception in the mainstream news. However, that these strong and symbolic
protests did not remain unnoticed and that images of it existed after all, can be
accounted to the successful circumvention of restrictions and application of new
communication technology. The internet certainly became an important "tool
of activism" in these protests (Denning 2001:242), even though the regime was
sensitive and attempted to prevent the bi-directional flow of information from
the beginning. It failed till September 29th when a complete internet shut down
was ordered.

Initially, protests started in August after the rise of fuel prises. On 21 August
the *New Light of Myanmar* announced the arrests of 13 demonstrators (NLM,
13.9.07). The violent break-up of protesting monks in Pakokku on 5 September
was the trigger for further protests that quickly developed into mass protests.
In the beginning, the regime kept a rather low profile. On 7 September some
Pakokku residents were arrested for alleged contacts with foreign media (DVB,
11.9.07). There were also reports by exile media on the disconnection of phone
lines of NLD members and journalists and the lowering of internet speed as soon
as protests had started (*Mizzima News*, 29.8.07; *Irrawaddy*, 10.9.07). Already
on 3 September YouTube was added into the filtering system (*Mizzima News*,
7.9.07). The official news media hardly mentioned any protests until a few days
prior to the crackdown. The Pakokku incident was indeed mentioned in the
NLM on 7 September, yet it was declared that in fact security forces had to
protect the abbot of a monastery and bystanders from a group of monks that was
incited by oppositional political extremists (NLM, 7.9.07). Overall the official
media was dominated by insignificant news on infrastructure projects and theatre
performances. In addition an emphasis was placed on such news that presented
close links between the military junta and the clergy. Several images of military
leaders with senior monks were issued. The *Myanmar Times* did not mention
the protest in its weekly edition that coincided with the mass protests (*Myanmar
Times*, Vol.20, No.385).

In the beginning, the regime completely failed to prevent the outflow of information. During the first week the protests were mainly covered by exile media. But when monks kept marching and the demonstrations were gaining momentum, international media also started to report on the protests. As a result the images surely have had a huge impact. Many of these images were not taken by professional journalists but by normal citizens with mobile phones and sent to outside media. There is a high number of news that most likely would not have come to international (and also national) knowledge otherwise.

It was striking how quickly footage was delivered. In the international news media it started in mid-September with images of chanting monks marching through the monsoon and being cheered at by civilians; in the following week the images of mass protests by monks and civilians were shown. As soon as the regime started its crackdown and blockading and raiding monasteries the number of participating monks visibly shrank, instead images of violence emerged. Few of these images were taken by professional journalists or with proper equipment, instead it appeared as secretively taken amateur footage and pictures. An important example is a blurred photo of Aung San Suu Kyi greeting a group of monks in front of her residence on 22 September. Without this picture this image the news on monks getting through to her, may have remained nothing but a rumour.

What was also particular about the publicity of the protests is that proper spokespersons or leaders were not visible. Some committees were formed, statements issued and exile activists as well as some artists published comments (e.g. *Irrawaddy*, 21.9.07). Yet, overall publicity did not arose around personification but around the images that were steadily delivered. However, once the internet was shut down and citizen journalists targeted, the flow of information quickly descended (*Irrawaddy*, 2.10.07; Lee Corporal 2007). The following chart indicates the Myanmar coverage in selected international news media. It can be seen that international awareness suddenly emerged at the end of September 2007, yet it can also be seen that the international coverage quickly decreased as soon as the internet was shut down and little information got out.

Figure 1   Myanmar Coverage in Selected International News Media

global media coverage of the Myanmar crisis
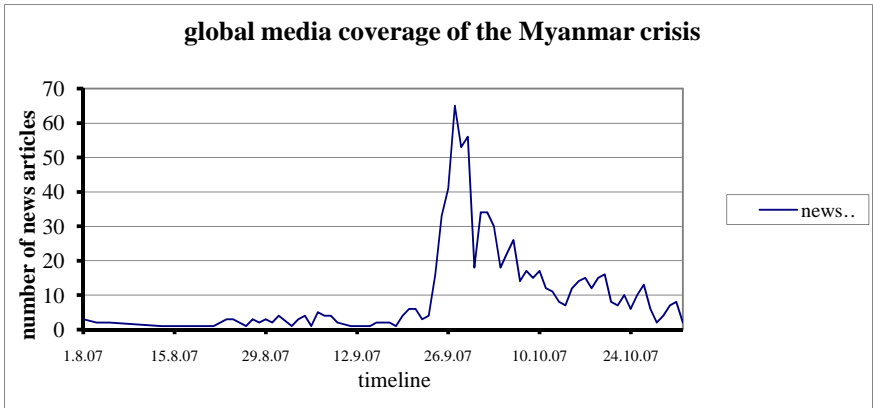
Source: On the basis of data by reuters alert net world press tracker. Reuters alert net world press tracker is based on the evaluation of 107 English language print publications from around the world. The chart indicates the number of news articles on the Myanmar crisis in these publications. http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/FACTIVA/mediaindex.htm.

As soon as the protests were not ignored anymore, the regime developed its own strategy to illegitimate the protests. The following quote illustrates the argumentation:

> The root cause [...] is the perpetration of internal and external destructionists, who are jealous of national development and stability, to harm all the government's endeavours through various methods. Some global powers who practise hegemonism totally dislike the proposed constitution as it contains stipulations assuring self-determination and prohibiting the stationing of foreign troops on Myanmar soil. Hence, those powers in collusion with a group of destructionists from inside the nation are stirring up disturbances. The protest walk occurring in Myanmar is one of the plots systematically manipulated from abroad (NLM, 24.9.07).

The regime was eager to handle the involvement of monks. According to the regime only 2% of Myanmar's monkhood participated in the protests. It was repeatedly stated that the protesting monks were bogus monks, accompanied by extensive theological derivations to prove that any form of protests by monks is against their rules and obligations and deprives them of their status (NLM, 24.9.,

6.10.07). Following this argumentation, it is the duty of the regime to protect the real monks from saboteurs dressed as monks (Rötzer 2007). In addition there were almost daily pictures showing generals with senior monks. As monks do have a venerated status in Myanmar society, the regime obviously was keen to construct some form of justification to act against protesting monks without losing legitimacy. On 15 September the NLM wrote as following:

> [...] saboteurs wickedly tried to trick members of the Sangha. [...] Their perpetration had spoiled the pure mind of some young monks who started to make street protests that are against the Sangha principles. So we will have to call those destructionists "devils". [...] those destructionist elements have tried to tarnish the noble and pure minds of young monks. Now all monks loathe those spoilers. [...] If a monk or some monks try to oppose the government that is promoting the religious sector as never before, we surely know who is wrong (NLM, 15.9.07).

The regime's line of argument in the official media support the assumption that the involvement of monks very much led to difficulties for the regime. In comparison to the usual approach against any public demonstrations over the past years, it took relatively long until the violent crackdown started. Arguably, the monks' involvement provided more scope for the protests in the beginning and enabled its own momentum. There are no valid statistics on Myanmar though when the quick growth of the protests is considered, it is likely that at least partly the feedback loop was working. This is also indicated by several government measures: for instance several popular blogs were added into the filtering machine (*Mizzima News*, 26.9.07). There were also increased attempts to block proxies. The popular proxy "G-lite" – leading to the expression "G-lite revolution" (ONI 2007:7) – was blocked in several versions, but there are so many altered versions that it seems an almost impossible undertaking to disable them all (Crispin 2007). Finally, the "information war" was fought via TV screen captions and newspaper advertisements accusing BBC, RFA and VOA of broadcasting "a sky-full of lies" (BBC News, 28.9.07). Foreign and exile media have generally been presented as a means of "colonialists" and "destructionists" who are trying to "make the nation lose independence" (NLM, 29.10.07).

Obviously the regime has been heavily relying on propaganda as well as on suppression as part of its media strategy. Still, independent news media have not been without failure, either. Especially the grass root blog level which is often not based on an experienced journalist background, provided a fertile ground

for rumours and misinformation. To mention just two examples: The prominent and often quoted blog of the London-based student Ko Htike published a comment that Blackwater agents were going to be employed by the junta. The obviously satirical text was misunderstood. On the same blog shocking images of dead bodies were published. These bodies were presented as victims of the regime although these photos were in fact taken from a car accident. In both cases the blogger himself informed the readers of the misinformation (www.ko-htike.blogspot.com (posted on October 4th, 2007)). After all, the "blogosphere" enacts some self-regulation and these rumours were only presented for a short while. Anyway, it can be stated that the immense attention towards blogs and high linkage among netizens has contributed to the overall extraordinary international awareness.

Misinformation occurred less often in the more professional exile media. However, also these media were quick in publishing rumours. An example: As soon as the crackdown had started, alleged divisions inside the army were reported. The Myanmar military junta remains non-transparent and it is hard to tell to what extent there may have been diverging positions; it is also likely that differences were existent and that some units retained from the extensive use of violence (for instance in Mandalay). However, some speculations on a possible coup inside the military that appeared shortly after the crackdown had started were slightly over-enthusiastic (*Mizzima News*, 28.9.07; *Irrawaddy*, 28.9.07). Major international news media were at this point more cautious in their coverage. Instead the difficulties to obtain independent and confirmed information were regularly mentioned. However, when reports on the alleged transfer of Aung San Suu Kyi to the "notorious Insein prison" appeared (*Irrawaddy*, 25.9.07), international news media quickly picked this up (e.g. Reuters, 25.9.07; *New York Times* (NYT), 26.9.07). Yet, it never proved right.

At any rate, it was obvious that the regime was not able control the news coverage despite the use of violence, severe threats, a strict curfew and other restrictive measure like the almost complete disconnection of mobile phone lines on 26 September (RSF 2007). In contrast, immediately after the crackdown had started images of it emerged and got through to international news coverage. A tragic example was the footage of the killing of the Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai.

Therefore, the complete internet shutdown was in a way the consistent (although not very sophisticated) reaction to the continued failure to control.

"Burma provides a rare example of a government [...] taking extreme measures to keep information from escaping its borders."[3] At this point the regime was successful in cutting a further outflow of information. This success could be monitored around the world. When images and news became rare, this quickly led to a decrease of news coverage (*Irrawaddy*, 2.10.07).

The regime remained eager to gain more control on the news flow. Civilians were frequently searched for photo equipment including mobile phones with cameras; and obviously a large number of people were arrested. At this point, the other side of the coin of all the images became blatantly clear: the regime used the material to find protesters (AT, 6.10.07). The internet was shut down till 4 October, when most street protests had been dispersed. From then on the internet was accessible in the night hours during the curfew (which automatically excluded internet cafés). It is likely that these measurements were taken in order to be able to control the relatively few users with home access (ONI 2007:11).

The regime's media strategy has continued after and while the crackdown took place. The crackdown was not denied by the junta though its own accounts of the protests were published: According to the regime 10 people died. Even though these figures were questioned by almost every news media on the basis of accounts giving by diplomats and anonymous citizens, the regime's death toll has so far not been replaced by widely quoted alternative figures. Arrests and raids of monasteries continued. The regime admitted the raid of 18 monasteries and published detailed lists on the number of found items, such as weapons, pornographic material or "US headbands" (NLM, 6.10.07). The obvious goal was a criminalisation of the protest and to construct a justification for the crackdown, this strategy was prolonged through the organisation of anti-protest mass rallies. Yet, suppression was also accompanied by unusual signs of cooperation. UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari was not only led into the country and able to meet Aung San Suu Kyi, actually these news were even on the front page of the *Myanmar Times* and several other newspapers. The news included photos of Suu Kyi and demanded dialogue as a first step to a democratic state (*Irrawaddy*, 22.10.07). The regime was also eager to publish the release of more than 2,000 detainees (NLM, 17.10.07) and step-by-step released most prominent detainees like the comedian Zarganar on 17 October (*Mizzima News*, 18.10.07). Another

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3   ONI 2007:11. The only comparable action occurred in Nepal in 2005.

popular theme in the news is the drafting of a new constitution.

This mixed strategy is targeted on internal legitimacy as well as on a softening of external pressure. There has been a high international pressure on the Myanmar regime before. Sanctions, for instance, are not a new idea and there have been several attempts to reach UN security council resolutions previously. In this regard it is not self-evident that the regime responses in a cooperative way to international pressure as it does to some extent at the moment. The international pressure after the crackdown was – even for Myanmar standards – particularly high and might have led to the necessity to show some signs of cooperation. Numerous governments issued public condemnations or at least concerns (for a detailed list see ALTSEAN 2007:12f.). This pressure in return has to be seen in the light of the extensive news coverage of the events.

Outlook

The double strategy of cooperation on the one hand and increased suppression on the other seems the intended way of the junta to deal with the current crisis. This path is clearly reflected in the way media are utilised. Yet, this strategy can hardly be regarded as an isolated decision by the junta, instead it emanates from high international pressure. Arguably, this strategy of partial cooperation yields some perils for the regime and it remains to be seen whether it will succeed as a mere window-dressing or whether efforts to appear cooperative could indeed produce some change, eventually.

A likely aspect of the repressive side of the strategy will be an increased awareness for internet control. Though 24h access to the internet returned on 9 October, it is reported that the regime has been eager since then to actually enforce its system of surveillance. Coupled with the ongoing persecution of protesters and citizen journalists, it is likely that in the near future fear and security concerns will lower internet activism. However, by looking beyond the current crisis the question arises whether or not the regime will be able to uphold the high level of control. The protest might also have had another consequence: A better connectivity and networks among exiled Burmese and activists around the world that might remain visible in the future. In the end, it is likely that activism will continue despite the current tighter restrictions. Finally, the unique development of internet activism and international publicity could also increase awareness in third countries that are eager to control the flow of information (ONI 2007:13).

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