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Free all political prisoners, free Aung San Suu Kyi, free Burma.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Wednesday, April 7, 2010, news@irrawaddy.org.

Suu Kyi 'Happy' with NLD Decision: Lawyers

By BA KAUNG, Wednesday, April 7, 2010 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18236

Detained Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi told her lawyers that she is happy with her party's decision not to register, according to one of her lawyers.

Suu Kyi made the comment in a meeting with two of her lawyers on Tuesday, said Kyi Win. On March 29, Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), decided not to register for this year's general election, opening the way for the regime to ban the party as of May 7.

Suu Kyi urged her lawyers to pursue legal procedures against the regime's unjust election laws, Kyi Win said.

"Daw Suu told us to continue legal efforts against the unjust laws," said Kyi Win, who is also an official of the NLD, adding that the party leaders, chairman Aung Shwe and Vice Chairman Tin Oo, will probably send a letter to Burma's attorney-general to take up further legal complaints about the election laws.

Last month, the party leaders filed a lawsuit against military junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe at the country's supreme court stating the regime's election laws are unjust and one-sided. But the court refused to handle the case, saying it had no power over the issue.

A party source said that through her lawyers, Suu Kyi has asked not only the NLD party, but also other ethnic political parties and even families of political prisoners, to take up legal proceedings against the election laws.

On Tuesday, the party publicly apologized to its supporters across the country for "the unsuccessful struggle for democracy" that it had waged for more than 20 years, attributing the failure to the regime's persecution.

Parties have until May 7 to register for the upcoming election or will cease to exist, according to the election laws. Some observers view the party decision not to register as naïve, pointing out that the party has driven itself into a dead-end by doing exactly what the regime wants it to do.

A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission - April 23, 2010 - AHRC News <listadmin@ahrchk.net> AHRC-STM-065-2010

BURMA: Elections without speech

 <<http://blogs.spjnetwork.org/ijc/?p=1213>>

When the military government of Burma passed five new laws and four bylaws during March in preparation for planned elections later this year, it attracted a lot of interest, discussion and analysis in the global media. The only place where the media did not pick up the story was in Burma, or Myanmar, itself. Aside from official announcements in the turgid state mouthpieces and some articles in news journals iterating the facts, there was no analysis, commentary or debate.

The absence of debate was not because the persons writing and publishing these periodicals did not want discussion, or even try to have some. According to various reports, journalists have interviewed experts and obtained views that they had thought would be printable. But instead, journals have so far been prohibited from covering anything significant about the laws at all, or the parties now registering for the upcoming ballot. The absurd situation exists of an election having been announced and the process of party registration begun without anything other than formal acknowledgement of these facts in the local media.

Burma is a difficult place to be a reporter. The Asian Human Rights Commission has itself over a number of years taken up and followed cases of journalists and others who have been imprisoned for acts that in other countries are simply taken for granted, such as filming people at electoral booths during the 2008 referendum ([AHRC-UAC-040-2009](http://www.ahrchk.net/ahrc-040-2009)).

But the blackout on news about the electoral process is not merely a question of media freedom. It is indicative of far deeper dysfunction that prohibits the possibility of free or fair elections. The problem is not just one of how journalists can communicate with their society but how their society can communicate with itself.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

The vitality of a society depends upon its capacity for internal communication. It is no coincidence that the most successful and happy societies in the world today are where people can communicate with one another, freely and equitably. Internal communication is not about the number and size of television stations or political parties. It is about the extent to which everyone is able to communicate with everyone else, the extent to which there is widespread participation and sharing of ideas from different quarters, with which to grow and improve as a community.

In recent years, the Internet and mobile technologies have brought about many new opportunities for this sort of communication, and it is not surprising that the military regime in Burma has only slowly and reluctantly opened up the country to them, with severe warnings to users that transgress vague laws on usage. Today Internet cafes around the country carry warnings on their walls and above computers that users are not to access either political or pornographic websites. In Burma, politics and pornography are indeed analogous.

Where internal communication is blocked for a long time, as it has been in Burma, it brings about all sorts of deep psychoses hidden under the surface of day-to-day life. As different parts of society are not able to communicate openly with each other, problems build up and fester. Tensions may emerge that are a consequence of other aspects of life about which people can do nothing. They become deeply frustrated and angry, and occasionally the frustration and anger burst out suddenly on a very large scale, as during the nationwide protests of 2007. At such times, when the authorities use force to bring people back under control the problems are again submerged and worsened.

Under these circumstances, the type of controlled communication that the military regime in Burma envisages for the anticipated elections is not a form of communication at all. It is a mere contrivance aimed at a different type of social control from what came before. This is obvious from reading Burma's print media: when officialdom says it is now okay to publish cartoons, everyone publishes cartoons; when officialdom says that it is now okay to comment on new political parties, everyone will comment. In this way, the government hopes to construct a wall of its own opinions in which the public will be a mere onlooker and recipient of fabricated, sanctioned views.

The jerking puppet-like responses of private media outlets to the instructions of the government on the upcoming elections and manifest lack of commentary are merely manifestations of much deeper afflictions. Artificial debate will, of course, do nothing to address or ease these. In fact, it will only make them worse. Until there are enough opportunities for open communication about the psychological illnesses that society has contracted from decades of military rule, the possibility of some kind of democratic government emerging in Burma is zero. Under these conditions, the only type of politics that can be practiced, the only type of politics possible is the politics of demoralization, the politics of despair.

[This is the third in a series of statements by the AHRC on the planned general elections in Burma. The previous two were "Elections without a judiciary" ([AHRC-STM-059-2010](#)) and, "Elections without rights" ([AHRC-STM-063-2010](#)). Next: "The politics of despair".]

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About AHRC: *The Asian Human Rights Commission is a regional non-governmental organisation monitoring and lobbying human rights issues in Asia. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984.*

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter, May 5, 2010 - <news@irrawaddy.org>, <www.irrawaddy.org>

Tight Censorship on Reporting USDP

By **WAI MOE** , Wednesday, **May 5, 2010** - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18388>



Prime Minister Thein Sein with two other USDP leaders who are government officials inspecting a cement plant near Mandalay (Photo: AP)

Burma's censorship board is keeping a tight control on reporting about the junta's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by Prime Minister Thein Sein in private journals.

Journalists in Rangoon said the censorship board, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division under the Ministry of Information, does not allow any questioning on the controversial formation of Thein Sein's USDP, which was formed directly from the state mass organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

"Any critical questions on the formation of the USDP in journals have been removed by the censorship board," said an editor with a Rangoon journal who requested anonymity, "But all positive writing is allowed."

"Indirect mention or quotes in journals that contrast the formation of the USDP under Prime Minister Thein

Sein with the election law have been taken out," he said, adding that journals had published news related to the USDP on both front and inside pages this week.

However, journalists in Rangoon said reporting that the USDP is the prime minister's party was not allowed in front page reporting. The censorship board also removed any comments about the 2008 Constitution clause that bans government officials' involvement in political parties

Thein Sein's formation of a political party is controversial because analysts say he broke the junta's own Political Party Registration Law's chapter 4 (D) and chapter 7 (D), which bar government officials from forming political parties and using government property.

Political observers in Rangoon said the junta could practice double standards regardless, and some government sources argue that Thein Sein and other ministers are no longer government officials because they have resigned their military commissions and only play a political role.

Three days before the USDP applied to the Union Election Commission under Thein Sein's leadership on April 29, the war office announced his retirement and that of 22 other military officials.

Despite the controversy over the junta's USDP, the election commission approved its application along with nine other parties on Tuesday, according to an announcement in state-run newspapers on Wednesday. "Among the groups that submitted applications to set up political parties, the UEC [Union Election Commission] passed the following parties to set up political parties today as they are found to be in accord with Political Parties Registration Law and Rules," reported *The New Light of Myanmar*.

The USDP is expected to contest all constituencies amounting to 75 percent of the total 1,158 seats of the union parliament as well as parliaments of states and divisions in Burma in the coming election later this year.

A quarter of Burma's parliaments will be reserved for military officials appointed by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Thursday (06.05.10) is the deadline for the main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and other remaining parties in the 1990 elections to prolong their existence by registering their parties with the current election commission.

The international community and Burmese are waiting to see whether the junta will crackdown on the opposition following the deadline for the NLD led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, which decided to avoid party registration in late March.

Officials from the Ministry of Information have called local journalists to a press conference in Naypyidaw on Thursday, which could mainly focus on recent bombings in Burma including the New Year festival blast in Rangoon.

The USDP party issue, the fate of the NLD and the junta's other steps toward the election may also be on the press conference agenda.

Ben Rogers <brogers50@hotmail.com>:[NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] DVB - Than Shwe

THE BURMANET NEWS - April 10 - 12, 2010, Issue #3938 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

Democratic Voice of Burma - <www.dvb.org> no/analysis/> the-general-> must-not-> be-disturbed/> 8617>

'The General must not be disturbed'

By **BENEDICT ROGERS** Published: 12 April 2010

Burma's Senior General Than Shwe is undoubtedly number one. Since he took power in 1992, he has consolidated his own personal position in a way that means Burma is no longer ruled by a collection of Generals, as it was from September 1988 until the mid-1990s, but by one man, Burma's

Evidence of this is abundant, but an illustration came when British politician Andrew Mitchell MP visited Rangoon in 2007. He asked the Deputy Foreign Minister if he could visit Aung San Suu Kyi. The Deputy Foreign Minister trembled, saying only one man could give permission: Than Shwe. "Well call him up then," Mitchell suggested. Such an idea was enough to turn the Deputy Foreign Minister's face pale. The Senior General must not be disturbed, he retorted.

Writing a biography of Than Shwe is far from easy. Few people know much about him, and access to him or his family, for an activist like me, is impossible. I requested an interview with him, and with the Burmese ambassador in



Than Shwe's success lies in being a 'skilled manipulator'

London, but received no reply. Instead, I had to rely on anecdotes from defectors from the Burma Army who have known him at different times, during his military training, his time as South-West Regional Commander and as Senior General, and the impressions of international diplomats who have met him. I conducted extensive interviews with people such as former UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail, former British ambassador Mark Canning, former Australian, American, Japanese and Thai diplomats, and others. I also travelled to Burma, visiting Naypyidaw and talking to people in various parts of the country and along its borders about life under Than Shwe's rule. I was told many stories, some of which I believe are true and others are impossible to verify. Rumour surrounds Than Shwe, but even if some stories are untrue, the fact that they spread says something about him and his family, and how widely disliked they are. In every rumour, there is at least a grain of truth, a flash of insight into his character and mindset.

Than Shwe was born in Kyaukse, an area near Mandalay well known for its conservative culture. His education was limited, and after only a year as a postman, he joined the Officer Training School (OTS) and rose through the ranks of the Tatmadaw. In 1958, the year the military took control of the government for the first time, Than Shwe joined the office of the Director of Education and Psychological Warfare, where he gained grounding in the skills of propaganda and divide-and-rule which he uses to manipulate and destroy his opponents today. His time in the Central School of Political Sciences a few years later was also influential. Tasked with teaching the Burmese Way to Socialism, Ne Win's ideological framework designed to justify military rule, described by one former diplomat as "an amalgam of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx", Than Shwe taught history. His love of the ancient Burmese warrior kings, on whom he models himself, and his penchant for giving visiting diplomats long, distorted lectures on Burmese history, is likely to have grown from this time. At least one reason for the move to a new capital, Naypyidaw, described by former British ambassador Mark Canning as "the most awful place you have ever been to," is that Burmese kings had a tradition of building new capitals, as part of their legacy. Naypyidaw means "the Seat of Kings", and is part of Than Shwe's legacy.

According to those who knew Than Shwe during the 1960s and 1970s, he was not regarded as a particularly successful soldier. Sein Thaug says he was "not very smart, very quiet, and always willing to say things to please the commander ... but no one was impressed." But this very lack of flair, ability, charisma and overt ambition was the secret of his success. "Than Shwe kept quiet – he knew that if you show off too much in the military, you are likely to be chopped," said one of his former colleagues.

In fact, some question the extent of his battlefield experience altogether, and most doubt that the medals he wears today were earned. There are even some stories of real incompetence and cowardice. Former Communist soldier Aung Kyaw Zaw claims that in a battle between the Tatmadaw and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1980, Than Shwe was ordered to move his troops into Khangtang and the Loi Mwe Valley. He fulfilled this command, but then switched off his radio for two days and disappeared. "He went to sleep in the valley," says Aung Kyaw Zaw. "He didn't want to fight." When he finally resumed communications, his superiors were furious. "They told him to take off his badge and rank and hand them over to senior officers. They told him he was incapable."

Bizarrely, however, it was his very lack of competence that brought him to Ne Win's attention. Although Ne Win and his top advisors doubted Than Shwe's military prowess, they had no reservations about his loyalty. "Ne Win didn't like good soldiers, he only liked followers, dull people like Than Shwe," concludes Aung Kyaw Zaw.

Than Shwe benefited from Ne Win's suspicion of potential rivals in the regime, particularly after the coup plot against Ne Win in 1976, and was rewarded for his loyalty. His rose to become South-West Regional Commander, where according to those who knew him he developed a passion for infrastructure projects and false propaganda. He embarked on a campaign to improve literacy rates, and declared victory, claiming to have eliminated illiteracy in the Irrawaddy Delta. Others who were there at the time claim there remained many people who could not read or write.

Despite presiding over a system of widespread forced labour, Than Shwe gained a reputation among those who worked for him as Regional Commander as a modest man with simple tastes and no signs of the cruelty and corruption endemic in his family and regime today. One of his former staff says that in the early 1980s, Than Shwe was "a nice guy".

But if a palm-reader were consulted, they would not conclude that Than Shwe is a nice guy. According to palm-readers, most people have three lines on their palms: a life line, indicating health, a head line representing intellect, and a heart line, meaning compassion. Look at a photograph of Than Shwe waving, and you will see: he has no heart line.

After the brutal suppression of the democracy movement in 1988 and the return of a fully-fledged military regime, Than Shwe became the number two, under General Saw Maung. He manoeuvred skilfully to oust Saw Maung in 1992, perhaps together with Khin Nyunt, and became the Senior General. Rumours suggest Than Shwe may have been involved in drugging Saw Maung. However, even despite his ruthlessness in ousting Saw Maung, Than Shwe was perceived as a stop-gap. Ne Win saw him as less of a threat to him than Khin Nyunt, and therefore a safer bet. Diplomats say he was seen as a "short-termer" > . A former Thai ambassador recalls: "He played the fool at the beginning, giving the impression of a parochial, unambitious person, giving Ne Win the impression that he could trust him, that he was not hungry for power. He was a mastermind – he fooled everybody."

Razali Ismail says Than Shwe can be "very charming and friendly when he wants to be," but most diplomats who have met him describe him as "cold and humourless". Humour, said one, "is not part of his personality" and he has a "plump, sullen face". He speaks English quite well, loves Manchester United, watches Chinese Shaolin martial arts movies, reads

TIME magazine and, reportedly, surfs the Internet. He eats simply, preferring basic curries, fried morning glory, fish-head soup and gourd and magnolia fritters. He is slow to make decisions, but when he does, he tends to overreact. During the Saffron Revolution, he reportedly went into a deep depression, and refused to eat anything except chicken rice soup.

His wife, Kyaing Kyaing, is a significant influence, particularly as far as astrologers are concerned. She had been married before, to another soldier who was killed in battle. Versions vary, but one account suggests Than Shwe was ordered by his superior to marry his fallen comrade's widow, while another version says soldiers drew lots to decide who should marry her and he drew the short straw. She is known to dislike Aung San Suu Kyi at least as much as he does, if not more. Former diplomats say that Aung San Suu Kyi "represents everything that [the Generals and their wives] are not" – she is beautiful, intelligent, sophisticated, highly-educated and well-travelled.

How has Than Shwe maintained, indeed tightened, such a strong personal grip on power? He is despised and feared in equal measure, yet unlike other dictators, possesses no charisma to inspire loyalty. The answer, according to one diplomat, is that he controls the levers of power, especially regarding patronage and promotion. Many soldiers owe their careers to him, just as he owed his to Ne Win. Only when he had reached the very top did Than Shwe assert his own power. When he went as far as putting Ne Win and his family under house arrest, it was, says a former diplomat, "a pretty powerful statement of intent." He has built several power bases, notably the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), a group of business cronies, the new capital, a new constitution and fake elections that will ensure military rule and protection for him and his family after his eventual retirement or death.

These are just some of the themes I explore in my book, in addition to his family's greed and corruption, his grandson's antics and the crimes against humanity perpetrated by his regime. In addition, the book examines the influence of astrology, the drugs trade, the nuclear programme, arms purchases, biological and chemical weapons, relations with China, Russia and North Korea, Khin Nyunt's demise, Maung Aye's role, the development of the USDA and Swann Arr Shin, the cronies, the succession, Naypyidaw, the Saffron Revolution, Cyclone Nargis and Than Shwe's attitudes toward Aung San Suu Kyi who, according to Razali Ismail, "frightened the hell out of the military". The conclusion I reach is that Than Shwe is a skilled manipulator, who knows how to play people off each other. Although not educated academically, it is a mistake to underestimate him or to think of him as mad or stupid. He is ruthless and brutal, but he knows what he wants and has shown a remarkable ability to get it. His very colourlessness and lack of flamboyance is the secret of his success.

Benedict Rogers is a writer and human rights activist working with Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). His book *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant* will be published by Silkworm Books in June 2010.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Tuesday, May 4, 2010 - <news@irrawaddy.org> – <www.irrawaddy.org> -

Policeman Injured in Warehouse Explosion

By **KYAW THEIN KHA**, Tuesday, May 4, 2010 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18372>

A special branch police officer was injured in one of three explosions that ripped through a tractor warehouse of the agriculture office in Kyauktaga township, Bago Division, a local resident reported on Tuesday.

The explosions occurred in the night of April 30-May 1, the source told *The Irrawaddy*.

The blasts came two days after a bomb explosion in Loikaw Township Police Station on 28 April, when one person was killed and four police officers injured.

Earlier, on April 15, 10 people were killed and 170 injured in bomb attacks in Rangoon, blamed by the regime on exiles and ethnic armed groups. The *Weekly Journal* reported in its latest issue that authorities have verified that the series of three bombs exploded during water festival are grenades while another explosive device had been found in a beer can at the site of the Rangoon blasts.

A reward of 1 million kyat (about US \$1,000) has been posted by the authorities for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the attacks.

The Kachin State Peace and Development Council has also announced a 5 million kyat (\$5,000) reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for a bomb attack at the site of the Myitsone dam. Four people died and 12 were injured in the attack, according to the Kachin News Group.

Ten bomb attacks have occurred in Burma since February, killing 16 people and injuring nearly 200. The authorities are still investigating all 10.

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The MIZZIMA - Friday, 09 April 2010 17:38 Mizzima News

EU urged to join calls for UN probe

<<http://www.mizzima.com/news/world/3806-eu-urged-to-join-calls-for-un-probe.html>>

Mizzima (New Delhi) – The European Union should follow the lead of its members United Kingdom and Czech Republic in calling for a United Nations commission of inquiry into serious crimes committed by the Burmese junta, campaigners have said.

Burma Campaign UK, based in London, on Thursday applauded the Czech Republic's stance on its support for the establishment of commission of inquiry to probe possible crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese rulers. Similar commissions have been set up to examine events in the Darfur region of Sudan and Lebanon.

Prague, in response to a reporter's questions, said: "The Czech Republic remains concerned at continuous grave human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar. Despite the government's 'Roadmap to Democracy' and before the expected this year's elections, political repression, and military attacks against civilians of ethnic nationalities continue in scale and gravity that may entail international crimes under the terms of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court."

Mizzima contacted Czech Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Filip Kanda, who confirmed the government's stance.

The Rome Statute is the treaty that established the *International Criminal Court (ICC)* after a UN General Assembly in 1998 convened a diplomatic conference in Rome. *It came into effect in 2002.* As of last October, 110 states are party to the statute and 38 states have signed but not ratified the treaty. It defines the functions, jurisdiction and structure of the permanent tribunal to punish individuals who commit genocide and other serious international crimes.

"We believe that the possibility of establishing a commission of inquiry should be seriously examined," the original reply said, as quoted on the Burma Campaign UK website.

The Czech Republic is the third country to call for the UN to establish a commission of inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in the military-ruled Southeast Asian nation, after Australia and the United Kingdom last month expressed backing for such a move.

In response to that stance, Burma Campaign director Mark Farmaner on Thursday said: "It is time that the EU discussed officially adopting support for a UN inquiry, and should include this in the draft United Nations General Assembly resolution on Burma later this year."

He said, as with the Czech Republic, it is time other EU countries also began to take the initiative and support the call for the establishing a commission of inquiry, he said. "We want other European countries to come aboard and we hope the European Union will officially support as they support the global arms embargo," Mr Farmaner told Mizzima.

The calls for such an inquiry on Burma and to bring the ruling generals to the ICC have long been raised by campaigners. But UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, last month brought fresh momentum with his recommendation for such an investigation. Mr Quintana, who has made three visits to the country in the almost two years since taking the UN post, said the continuing rights violations needed to be investigated because of the "pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights".

The Irrawaddy Newsletter for Friday, April 23, 2010 Datum: Fri, 23. Apr 2010 news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

US Congressman Calls For Burmese Military Revolt

By LALIT K. JHA - Friday, April 23, 2010 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18304>

WASHINGTON — US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher has urged "patriots" in the Burmese military to join pro-democracy advocates like Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic fighters to overthrow the military junta and restore democracy in Burma.

Speaking on the floor of the House of Representative, the California congressman said that patriots and freedom-loving people of Burma will either join against tyranny and foreign domination, or their country will be lost for generations to come.

"The time has come to choose," Rohrabacher said. "Let the Burmese, the ethnic people of Burma, the business and military leaders who long for a legitimate and honest government, and all of the other patriots there, let them have the courage to step forward and join together and retake their country. The time is now."

Rohrabacher said there needs to be reconciliation between the Burmans and the ethnic groups who make up half of

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US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher. (Photo: AP)

Burma's population, adding that in the decades-old insurgency the ethnic fighters have been the primary source of opposition to Burma's iron-fisted dictatorship.

"Urban democratic leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi and other patriotic Burmans have been beaten down and repressed and imprisoned. These two elements must come together, the Burmans and the ethnic groups that are fighting the Burmese dictatorship," Rohrabacher said. "They must come together as one under a banner promising respect for the rights and traditions of various people, those various people who make up the wonderfully diverse nation of Burma."

Rohrabacher appealed for members of the Burmese military to join the fight against the junta.

"An opposition coalition must be joined also by patriots in the military, professional soldiers who seek to remake their army into a respected defender of the nation, not a tool of corruption and foreign domination. It is time for leaders in the army to join the people and build a new, prosperous and free and, yes, independent Burma," Rohrabacher said.

"In the blink of an eye, Burma can reclaim its sovereignty

and can be put on the path to national reconciliation, democracy, and, yes, prosperity. The military in a new Burma, as are professional armies throughout the democratic nations of the world, will be a respected institution, not a tool of foreign domination, repression and corruption," he said.

Drawing attention to the history of the plight of the people of Burma, Rohrabacher recounted how shortly after World War II Burma was granted its independence from Great Britain. At that time, with democratic institutions in place, rich natural resources and an educated population, it was expected that Burma would become a wealthy, stable and free country.

"Sadly, that country, with so much potential, has been dominated by corrupt tyrants. And despite its vast natural wealth, its people suffer in abject poverty," Rohrabacher said.

He said the people of Burma are actually losing their country to a foreign power—China.

"A Chinese power grab is not only depleting and stealing Burma's natural resources, but slowly and surely, Burma is being turned into a subservient province of Beijing," Rohrabacher said. "China is literally stealing Burma from its own people, and it is accomplishing this monumental crime with the assistance of Burmese government officials whose lust for power is greater than any loyalty to their own national homeland."

"This is a great moment of opportunity," Rohrabacher said. "People of Burma, do not let this moment pass by. The world will celebrate with you as you recapture your nation. We are on your side."

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Burma Should Top Asean Agenda: Rights Groups

By SAW YAN NAING, Wednesday, April 7, 2010 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=18237>

International and regional rights groups and activists want the representatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to prioritize Burma's political crisis during the regional summit in Hanoi on April 8-9.

London-based international rights group Amnesty International released a statement on Wednesday saying that the Burma issue should be at the top of the agenda for Asean leaders in Hanoi as Burma's human rights record is a serious breach of the Asean Charter.

A regional rights group, the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), released a press advisory on Wednesday to Asean leaders to take urgent and tough action on Burma to obtain a clear and tangible commitment for a free and fair election. The petition was signed by 105 legislators from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and Singapore.

The press advisory also called on the summit to urgently raise and discuss the dire need for action and meaningful solutions to the political and human rights problems currently plaguing Burma.



A sweeper cleans the red carpet ahead of the 16th Asean summit in Hanoi on April 8. (Photo: Reuters)

Donna Guest, the deputy Asia Programme Director for Amnesty International, said in the statement: "It is clear that Myanmar [Burma] has been seriously and systematically breaching the Asean Charter's human rights provisions. It is now up to the summit, under its new chair Vietnam, to address this breach as a matter of urgency.

"Asean's reputation as a meaningful regional forum will suffer if it does not call for Myanmar to respect freedom of expression, assembly and association in the lead-up to the election," she added.

Burma's election laws, issued by the Burmese military regime in March, effectively bar at least 2,200 political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize winner and main opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, from participating in this year's election.

The Asean legislators who signed the petition have also

voiced their grave concern over the expected general election and urged Vietnam, as the current Asean Chair, to raise and solve the issue of Burma's failure to assure free, fair and inclusive elections in the country.

The Burma election laws had earlier drawn criticism from the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines, and resulted in Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, opting out of the process.

"This summit is an opportunity for Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia to continue their demands for Myanmar to improve its human rights record," said Guest.

Amnesty International also called on all 10 of Asean's member states to keep pressing Burma to stop repressing dissidents and desist from committing widespread human rights abuses, especially in ethnic minority communities.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo has said he will urge Asean members at the summit to call for a reversal of Burma's electoral laws, which he said contravene the junta's promises to embark on a "road map to democracy," according to a report by *Agence France-Presse*.

According to a Jakarta Post report quoting Indonesia's Foreign Ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah on Monday: "Indonesia will address the issue of Myanmar at the summit and voice concerns over the urgency to ensure that the upcoming elections in Myanmar will be inclusive."

Rafendi Djamin, the Indonesian commissioner for the Asean Intergovernmental Commission for Human Rights, pointed out in *The Jakarta Post* that Asean's new "dispute settlement mechanism" (**DSM**) will increase the pressure for Burma to uphold its human rights commitment ahead of the election.

The DSM, which will be signed by the 10 Asean member states at the 16th Asean Summit in the Vietnamese capital, allows members disputing the implementation of the Asean Charter to take in a third party to help them solve differences, according to the report.

The DSM allows for four options—mediation, conciliation, good offices and arbitrary measures—in order to handle disputes arising from different interpretations of the Asean Charter implementation.

Human rights abuses are said to be the provision in the Charter that is most susceptible to disputes.

"There are many ways to intervene in Asean affairs," Jusuf Wanandi, a member of the board of directors at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, reportedly told *The Jakarta Post*.

"But the question is: how willing are we to undergo the intervention? Because mostly it is civil groups, and not so much the government, that is pushing for reform in Myanmar," said Wanandi.

Some observers believe that communist-ruled Vietnam will not strongly push Burma, as the host country can be criticized for its own flawed policies on rights and democracy.

During Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's visit to Burma recently, the two countries promoted their relationship and trade deals. Dung signed seven contracts and joint agreements on investment promotion and several economic sectors, including finance, communication, agriculture and mines.

Vietnam has said it will not allow Burmese civil society groups, including Burmese dissidents in exile, to attend the Asean sideline meetings as Thailand did last year.

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The Jakarta Post: <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/04/14/indonesia%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98credibility-play-role%E2%80%99-myanmar-transition.html>>

Indonesia's 'credibility to play role' in Myanmar transition

Lilian Budianto , The Jakarta Post | Wed, 04/14/2010 10:51 AM | World

A number of observers have suggested that initiatives to encourage Myanmar's military junta to hand over power to civilians include guaranteeing that they will not be prosecuted after stepping down. The Jakarta Post's **Lilian Budianto** talks about the issue with the president of Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy, **Carl Gershman**, currently in Jakarta for the 6th symposium of the "World Movement for Democracy". Gershman also said Indonesia could play a significant role in Myanmar's transition to democracy. Below are excerpts of the interview:

Question: Does providing guarantee that Myanmar's generals will be free from prosecution after they are not in power help lead to transition to democracy?

Answer: Yes, the generals in Myanmar want to know that they have a future after they are no longer in power.

They want some compromise. Just like in Indonesia; the military was moved out of politics but they retain some influence here.

In South Africa, (in the aftermath of apartheid system), not everybody was punished. Some peopleneed to be punished, such as those who committed crimes against humanity.

There are different levels of crimes but it is important to limit vengeance and retribution because if you go too far, you will destabilize the democratic transition.

Former rulers will fight and so you must find the middle ground. It is hard. Human rights activists sometimes are more interested in retribution than finding the middle ground because it involves compromise. You have to find a balance.

Is it acceptable for the international community to allow perpetrators of human rights crimes to walk free?

It will need compromise and constitutional reforms factoring in how to include the minority and how much power to give to the military (after the end of dictatorship). In Chile in 1989, you had (president Augusto) Pinochet out of office but the military had some influence afterward. In Poland in 1989, some radical activists were against some guarantees that were given to communists. But compromises are sometimes necessary.

You must deal with the past, which can arise in different ways.

What role can Indonesia play in Myanmar?

Indonesia has the authority and credibility to play a role in the transition of Burma considering that it is the largest country in Southeast Asia. It is a democracy ruled by the former military general. Indonesia has the authority to enter Burma more than we do. Indonesia believes in quiet diplomacy.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is a sophisticated man. He doesn't believe in imposing the will of Indonesia on Burma. Indonesia believes in a quiet diplomacy. He can use that to encourage a change in Burma, Indochina as well. Indonesia has a role to play beyond his border. We are engaging with Indonesia to spread democracy.

The relation between Indonesia and the US is one of the most important relations we have in the world in terms of democracy development. We have difficult relations with authoritarian countries. We must look together for a change to work together in Burma. It is important for the US to work with Indonesia on Burma.

What can push change in Myanmar?

Domestic drive. International push can only provide some aid but the drive has to come from within.

But the domestic factor is too weak?

It is not that the domestic factor is too weak but the military regime is too severe.

You have thousands of people who took to the streets in 2007 for revolutions, but they were repressed. One thing that was different in Burma: In the 1988 uprising, 3,000 people were killed while in the 2007 uprising, 100 were killed. There is space for a democratic voice in Burma.

What options does it have to lead to change?

It is possible that the people, like in the Philippines, have a non-violent revolution. However, that is not possible in Burma.

Indonesia has to play a role. The Indonesian President is from the military. He can show the Burmese that it is possible to make a transition to democracy and you have to pressure them but also enable them see that there is a future. Dictators tend to be very nervous because they committed crimes and are afraid the people will seek revenge.

A P <http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20100505/ap_on_re_as/as_myanmar_opposition>
<ThaungN@aol.com> - Myanmar opposition holds last event as legal party, Wed, 05. May 2010

Suu Kyi's Myanmar opposition party holds last event before authorities dissolve it

Wed May 5, 10:24 am ET



AP – Tin Oo, deputy leader of the detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

YANGON, Myanmar – The party of detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, founded more than 20 years ago to challenge military rule in Myanmar, held a final gathering Wednesday at its headquarters before its forced dissolution.

The National League for Democracy, which won a 1990 election but was denied power by the army, held an early celebration of Suu Kyi's June 19 birthday, an occasion on which it gives children of political prisoners financial aid for their education.

The League declined to reregister as a party this year, which new election laws required to contest an election supposed to be held sometime later this year. The League says the laws are undemocratic and unfair, and its non-registration is tantamount to an election boycott.

At the party's central office in Yangon, desks were being cleared, paper files tied up and locked away in cupboards and party property was inventoried. Under the law, the party becomes "null and void," at midnight Thursday.

However, Suu Kyi has instructed her party not to take down the party signboard or party flag featuring the "fighting peacock" after the deadline. She told her party members through the party spokesman that "she will never turn her back to the people or her struggle for democracy."

It is not clear what action authorities could take against such activity. The junta is intolerant of dissent, and has long repressed its opponents. According to the U.N. and human rights groups, there are more than 2,000 political prisoners nationwide.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's highest court rejected an application by Suu Kyi to annul some articles of the party registration law. Her filing in High Court last week challenged rules that included a bar on a convicted person being a member of a political party.

Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 14 of the past 20 years, was convicted last year of illegally harboring a visitor, an eccentric American who swam uninvited to her lakeside home.

The court also rejected an application to have seated the parliament elected in 1990.

About 150 members of the National League for Democracy gathered at their dilapidated two-story headquarters near the foot of Yangon's Shwedagon pagoda for Suu Kyi's 65th birthday celebration. Several foreign diplomats also attended.

"We cannot hold Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday at the party headquarters on June 19 though we will hold a religious ceremony at one of the member's house on Daw Suu's birthday," said Dr. May Win Myint, an elected candidate in 1990 and a senior party member. 'Daw' is a term of respect for older women.

"We are wrapping up our party work at the headquarters but we will carry out our political activities in any possible

manner and continue with other social welfare projects," she said.

Party spokesman Nyan Win said the party "may cease to exist under the law" but will continue to carry out social activities while party members will individually engage in political activities.

"We will survive as long as we have public support," Nyan Win said.

The new election laws in fact allowed the League's branch offices to reopen earlier this year, some seven years after they were shut by the government, which was anxious to demonstrate it was allowing the resumption of political activity ahead of the planned polls.

It remained unclear whether the branch offices would be permitted to stay open in some capacity after the party's headquarters closes.

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## Ten Years On

The Life and Views of a Burmese Student Political Prisoner

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