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Free all political prisoners, free Burma.

ThaungN@aol.com - Myanmar picks Junta's PM as president - :Fri, 04. Feb 2011 18:36:37

Associated Press - Fri, 04. Feb 2011 <http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110204/ap_on_re_as/as_myanmar_president>

Military junta ex-general named Myanmar president

YANGON, Myanmar – Myanmar's newly elected parliament named a key figure in the long-ruling military junta as president Friday, ensuring that the first civilian government in decades will be dominated by the army that has brutally suppressed dissent.

The appointment of [Thein Sein](#), 65, was the latest step in Myanmar's self-declared transition to democracy following elections in November, but critics including recently freed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi have slammed the process as a sham aimed at cementing military rule.

"This is not surprising. It is what we had expected," Nobel Peace Prize laureate [Suu Kyi](#) told reporters Friday. Suu Kyi's party won the previous elections in 1990 but was blocked at the time from taking power by the military. The party boycotted November's vote, calling it unfair.

Suu Kyi spent 15 of the last 21 years in prison or under house arrest and was released late last year after the vote was held.

The military's delegates in parliament and their civilian allies hold an 80 percent majority in the new legislature, which handpicked the new president from a pool of three vice presidents named on Thursday. Thein Sein is the most prominent of the three and was seen as a shoe-in for the head of government.

An upper house lawmaker, Khin Shwe, contacted as he left the parliament said Thein Sein won 408 out of 659 votes.

The future role of junta chief Senior Gen. Than Shwe, who has wielded absolute power since 1992, remains unclear. But he is expected to remain a dominant force.

Under the 2008 constitution that came into force Monday with the opening of the Union Parliament, the president appoints the commander-in-chief, chief ministers of the regions and states and several Cabinet ministers.

Thein Sein is a former general who served as the junta's prime minister from October 2007 and now heads the military-backed Union Solidarity and [Development Party](#), which won a huge majority in November's general elections that much of the international community dismissed as rigged in favor of the junta.

He also has an image as a "clean" soldier, not engaged in corruption. Still, as prime minister and the fourth-ranking military leader in the junta, Thein Sein previously did not have much decision-making power.

Members of the new president's political party described him as a moderate with political skills that went unnoticed in his previous job.

"He's a very patient man and very decisive. I believe he can do more for the welfare of the grassroots people, and I see him as a person who can help develop Myanmar's economy," said Khin Shwe, a business tycoon and lawmaker from Thein Sein's USDP party.

The army has held power in Myanmar since 1962. There has been general curiosity in Myanmar about who will become the next president, but there is also a widespread perception that the military cheated in the elections and that the new government will not bring democratic change.

(This version corrects that Suu Kyi was detained for 15 of last 21 years)

THE BURMANET NEWS, February 10, 2011 Issue #4138, "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20730>

Than Shwe to Head Extra-Constitutional 'State Supreme Council'

By THE IRRAWADDY

Thursday, February 10, 2011

RANGOON—Although the Burmese military regime said that it will hand over state power to president-elect Thein Sein and the new government on March 15, junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe has now revealed that he will personally lead a

newly created council called the “State Supreme Council,” which as its name implies will be the most powerful body in the country, according to sources in Naypyidaw.



Junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe, center, with Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, left, and a group of other regime generals.

Two bodies have now emerged in the new government's administrative structure that observers say will have powers that reach—either directly or indirectly—above and beyond the powers of the new civilian executive and legislative branches. The first is the eight-member State Supreme Council, which is nowhere mentioned in the 2008 Constitution and will be led by Than Shwe. The second is the eleven-member National Defense and Security Council (NDSC), which is called for in the 2008 Constitution and will be led by Thein Sein.

“The State Supreme Council will become the highest body of the state. While it will assume an advisory role to guide the future governments, the body will be very influential,” said a source close to the military.

The members of the State Supreme Council will be: Snr-Gen Than Shwe, Vice Snr-Gen

Maung Aye, Pyithu Hluttaw [Lower House] Speaker Thura Shwe Mann, President-elect Thein Sein, Vice President-elect Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, former Lt. Gen Tin Aye and other two senior military generals.

As required by the 2008 Constitution, the NDSC will be comprised of the president, two vice presidents, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, vice commander-in-chief, and the ministers of defense, home, foreign affairs and border affairs.

Meanwhile, according to sources in Naypyidaw, Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council will hand over power to the new government on March 15. The sources said that army commanders, heads of the military's Bureaus of Special Operations and retired generals are currently meeting to discuss the transfer of power to the new civilian regime in Naypyidaw, which will consist mostly of former generals.

According to sources close to the military in Naypyidaw, there is discontent among the military because the latest appointments of certain high-ranking military officials to major positions in the new government structure was apparently based on loyalty to Than Shwe rather than military hierarchy.

In particular, Lt-Gen Thura Myint Aung was not chosen by Than Shwe as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and after complaining of being assigned the position of defense minister he was removed and placed under house arrest.

The Irrawaddy - The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Thursday, February 10, 2011, Thu, 10. Feb 2011, news@irrawaddy.org

Myint Aung Dismissed, Placed Under House Arrest

By WAI MOE Thursday, February 10, 2011 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20725>

Lt-Gen Myint Aung, Burma's former adjutant general, who was appointed defense minister by junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe last week, has been placed under house arrest in Naypyidaw after formally declining the ministerial position, according to sources in the Burmese capital.

“Thura” Myint Aung was thought to be in line for the position as commander-in-chief of the armed forces—a title held currently by Than Shwe—but the military junta strongman has not stepped down.

“He reportedly said that he did not want to be the defense minister under the possible new Commander-in-Chief Lt-Gen Min Aung Hlaing,” a military source said.

Myint Aung graduated from the elite Defense Services Academy (DSA) Intake 18 while Min Aung Hlaing was from DSA Intake 19; Myint Aung therefore being one year senior to Min Aung Hlaing.

Sources in Naypyidaw concur that Myint Aung was popular and respected among his peers and subordinates while Min Aung Hlaing is generally seen as “arrogant.”

Lt-Gen Ko Ko will now take over as head of the Defense Ministry, it was announced at Parliament on Wednesday.



Myint Aung

After turning down the cabinet position last week, Myint Aung was dismissed from his role as lieutenant-general then placed under house arrest and separated from his family, a source said, adding that houses in Rangoon and Naypyidaw and a vehicle that had been provided for him have been retaken.

A businessman close to Myint Aung's family said that his family members were back home in Rangoon earlier this week, but that Myint Aung did not appear.

Along with more than one dozen senior military officials, such as Gen Shwe Mann, Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo, Lt-Gen Tin Aye and Lt-Gen Ko Ko, 55-year-old Myint Aung was removed from his military position in late August.

However, Myint Aung, Ko Ko and some others continued to serve in military uniform while Shwe Mann, Tin Aung Myint Oo and Tin Aye shed their uniforms to take part in November's general elections.

At the time, rumors from Naypyidaw suggested that Than Shwe favored Myint Aung and Ko Ko to succeed him and his deputy, Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, respectively.

Myint Aung's last public appearance was on Nov 7 when *MRTV* evening news showed him and his wife voting at a polling station

in Naypyidaw alongside other generals and their wives.

Under the autocratic rule of Than Shwe, the rise and fall of many military generals has been swift and at times seemingly arbitrary.

Zin Linn <zinlinn@cscoms.com>, [NLDmembrsnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] News & Articles on Burma, 15.02.2011

The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Wednesday, February 16, 2011, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Tin Aye, Protégé of Burmese Junta Leader, Resigns

By **THE IRRAWADDY** Wednesday, February 16, 2011 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20770>

Tin Aye, a former top general and a member of the Lower House of Burma's military-dominated Parliament, resigned from the country's main legislature today in a move seen as a sign of growing dissatisfaction among senior military figures with the country's new power-sharing arrangement.



In this photo taken on Aug. 25, 2008, Tin Aye meets Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie in Beijing. (Photo: Xinhua)

According to opposition MPs, Tin Aye, a protégé of Burmese junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe and the former chief of Defense Industries, did not appear at today's session of Parliament.

"Tin Aye's letter requesting permission to resign was read out by Khin Aung Myint, the speaker of the Upper House, today. All of the MP were surprised," an opposition MP told *The Irrawaddy*.

His resignation follows recent reports of the arrest and dismissal of Lt-Gen Thura Myint Aung, who was reportedly in line to succeed Than Shwe as commander-in-chief of Burma's armed forces, and adds to speculation that top generals are unhappy with their new positions within the country's post-election political order.

Tin Aye, who won a seat in Mandalay Division's Tada-U Township as a member of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development

Party, is currently a member of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, which is due to be dissolved once a

new government is formed.

A graduate of Intake 9 of the elite Defense Services Academy, Tin Aye has made numerous official visits to various countries, including China, North Korea, Russia and Ukraine to procure arms and military equipment.

When Gen Shwe Mann, the regime's No 3, made a secret visit to Pyongyang in November 2008, Tin Aye was among the senior military officials who accompanied him.

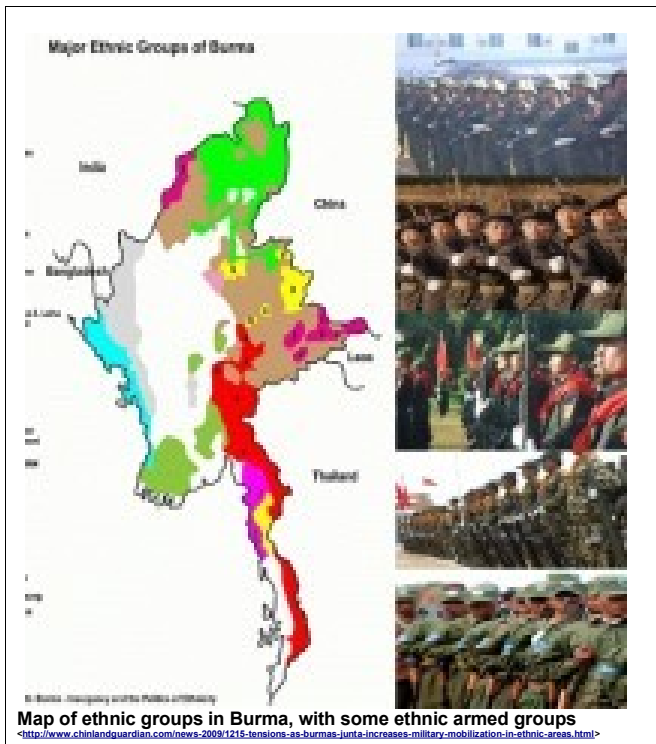
Tin Aye also served as the chief of Defense Industries, which makes munitions for Burma's armed forces, and took over as chairman of the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd, a military-owned conglomerate, when Lt-Gen Win Myint, a former adjutant-general, was removed in 2002.

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Tensions as Burma's Junta Increases Military Mobilization in Ethnic Areas -

<<http://www.chinlandguardian.com/news-2009/1215-tensions-as-burmas-junta-increases-military-mobilization-in-ethnic-areas.html>>

25 February 2011: Within just more than three weeks of convening its new Parliament, the military-turned-civilian government of Burma steps up its military presence in some parts of ethnic areas while still launching brutal attacks in others, instead of making attempts to bring national reconciliation and peace into the country.



The latest movement of Burma's regime in its military build-up and mobilization in ethnic areas has increased tensions among ethnic armed groups, signalling a possible outbreak of civil war in the country, according to sources.

In Kachin State early this week, several tanks, trucks and troops of Burma Army have been transferred into the outskirts of Waingmaw Town near Laiza, General Headquarters of Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), according to the Kachin News.

About 100 Kachin youths have fled into the KIO military base following forced military conscription by the junta's Northern Command in Kachin State since 17 February 2011.

On 7 February this year, there was an open-fire clash between Mohnyin-based Burma Army Infantry Battalion No. 15 and Kachin Independence Army's battalion 27 in Manwin Township.

In Shan State, the military authorities have closed the roads leading to Wanhai of Kehsi Township since 20 February 2011 where an anti-Border Guard Force armed group, Shan State Army (SSA-North), stations .

The move has been claimed as an immediate reaction to SSA-North's participating in the recent formation of UNFC (United Nationalities Federal Council), an alliance of ethnic armed ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups.

Burma Army has attacked the Shan State Army (North) four times since last year, according to the Shanland News.

Last Tuesday (22.02.2011), three Burmese soldiers were killed in a clash with Shan State Army (SSA-South) near Mongton Township in southern Shan State, said the Irrawaddy.

In Chin State, a Burmese soldier from Light Infantry No. 55 based in Sinletwa village camp last week was killed and another injured in a skirmish with troops from Chin National Army (CNA) in Paletwa Township near the Indo-Burma border.

In a statement issued yesterday (24.02.2011), the Karen National Union (KNU) rejected the baseless accusation made by Burma's military junta over opening fire at a farm in Shwegyin Township of Bago Division on 17 February leaving four workers dead and three wounded, saying: "It is just a smoke screen for the military dictatorship to build up an offensive against KNU and KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army)."

Vice-Chairman of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), Nai Rot Sa, said in his address at the 64th Mon National Day commemoration on 19 February 2011: "The regime want us to surrender our arms to them. We will never do it. We will join our people and fight for freedom with these arms."

Late last month, Karenni Army joined with the Karen National Liberation Army in saving local villagers who were forced by Burma Army soldiers to carry rations and other commodities near Peh Htar area of Pa Saung Township in Karenni State.

On 30 January 2011, just one day before the new Parliament was convened in Naypyidaw, a fight between Burma Army and the 5th Brigade of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) on the Thai-Burma border forced thousands of villagers into hiding near Moei river.

For decades, Burma's ethnic nationalities, which make up more than 40 percent of the whole population and take up 60 percent of the territory, have fought for freedom, equal rights, self-determination and democratic federalism of government.

Recently, two alliances of ethnic political and armed groups, CEFU (Committee for Emergence of a Federal Union) and UNFC (United Nationalities Federal Council) were established along the Thai-Burma border, calling for the formation of a genuine federal union of Burma.

The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Monday, February 21, 2011, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20795&page=1>

Families of Political Prisoners Barely Scraping By

By KYI WAI

Monday, February 21, 2011



Prison shackles used on political prisoners in Burma's jails. (Photo: <http://enigmaimages.wordpress.com>)

RANGOON—"There's a wooden wall in front and the house leans to the right as if it's about to collapse. If you just shout the name Thin Thin Yu, someone will come out," said a woman walking along Badaythar 2 street in Rangoon's western Hlaing Tharyar Township while carrying a jar of water on her shoulder.

Her description was accurate, so further up the street I easily found the house I was looking for—that of political prisoners Tin Yu, who is currently serving a nine and a half year sentence in Kalay Prison, and his son Than Zaw Myint, who is currently serving an 11 year sentence in Thaton Prison.

Inside the old wooden house—which was only about 10-15 feet wide—was a sad-looking woman wearing a worn-out white blouse who looked to be about 60-years-old. She was squatting on the floor and eating rice with baked shrimp-paste.

A short distance from her was another woman, about 30-years-old, who was putting Thanatkha—a fragrant liquid powder made from the bark of *Muraya Exotica*—on her round face that was framed by short black hair.

The elderly woman is the wife of Tin Yu and the mother of Than Myint Zaw; the younger woman is Thin Thin Yu, the daughter of Tin Yu and sister of Than Myit Zaw.

Thin Thin Yu said her father, over 60, was arrested around 2 a.m. on August 9, 2008 for his involvement in a prayer for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. He was sentenced to seven and a half years imprisonment at 8 a.m. the same day by Rangoon's Western Hlaing Tharyar Court. Afterward, he was sent to Insein Prison, where he later received an additional two years for joining a prison protest.

Thin Thin Yu said that the entire responsibility to take care of the family fell on her shoulders following the imprisonment of the two men. She is now the only bread-winner and struggles as a fish-vendor to earn the living expenses of her six-member family—including the school expenses of two children and the cost of visits to see her father and brother.

She said the house has been mortgaged and the family barely survives, but expressed gratitude to well-wishers who have supported them as much as possible during a time of great hardship.

"The National League for Democracy (NLD) has supported us as much as it can," Thin Thin Yu said. "I'm grateful for its support and that of other people. I will definitely tell my father and brother about it." When possible, Thin Thin Yu makes trips to see her father and brother, although it is difficult because she cannot see them both at the same time.

Last month, she went to see her brother, Than Myint Zaw, who was wounded in the torso, head and ear while being beaten while under interrogation inside the prison and suffers from back-aches and ear-aches in cold weather.

Her father Tin Yu is also in bad health and is currently hospitalized in the Kalay Prison hospital.

"First, my father was transferred from Insein Prison to Khanti prison, located in Sagaing Division, in February 2010. He didn't receive any treatment there although his health deteriorated," said Thin Thin Yu. "I heard he was transferred to Kalay prison when his condition became worse, and he has been hospitalized in Kalay since he arrived there."

"He has high blood pressure and gastric problems," she said. "He is also blind so he has to stay in the hospital. I can't visit him every month. I can only go and see once every three or four months."

San Naing is another political prisoner, who is currently serving time for his involvement in an August 2007 protest against high commodity prices. San Naing was first detained for 40 days on May 15, 2007, but was arrested again in 2008 on the same charge and sentenced to nine and a half years in prison.

San Naing was the income provider for a seven member family that now barely survives. Inside his dilapidated hut, I saw a man and a woman about 70-years-old, both looking unhealthy, and two young children.

But San Naing younger brother, Myint San, said he is still very proud of him.

"My brother can't stand wrong-doing. He doesn't like unfairness either," said Myint San.

Myint San said that due to their financial hardship, his family has difficulty making prison visits on a regular basis. But he is grateful for the support given to his family by well-wishers and said such assistance is very helpful to the families of political prisoners.

Family members of another political prisoner, Kyi Myint, who is currently serving time in Insein Prison, also said they are thankful to friendly donors who give them monthly support.

"Political prisoners are very glad to know that they are now supported by well-wishers," said a relative of Kyi Myint.

Currently, over 2,000 political prisoners are serving prison terms in Burma.

On the 63rd anniversary of Burma's Independence Day, the NLD initiated a plan to provide assistance to political prisoners by well-wishers. According to the plan, those who are willing to support people who remain behind bars for their political activism pick the names of political prisoners they will help by playing a lucky draw.

Since 2000, the NLD's Central Social Welfare Aid Team has provided support to over 600 political prisoners, but the NLD still has the names of about 300 political prisoners who are waiting for help.

"There are many names left to be picked," said Tin Oo, the NLD's vice-chairman and the chairman of the Central Social Welfare Aid Team. "Therefore, we'd like to invite well wishers to come and play the lucky draw to pick names of political prisoners to support. For those who have already picked names, we'd like to ask them to meet with family members of

related political prisoners and encourage them as much they can. The Central Social Welfare Aid Team will help those who find it difficult to reach prisoners at remote prisons.”

The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Thursday, February 3, 2011, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy – COMMENTARY <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=20665&page=1>

Suu Kyi's Davos Speech: A Radical U-Turn?

By HTET AUNG

Thursday, February 3, 2011



In this photo taken on January 28, Burma's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi is pictured on a giant screen as she speaks in an audio address to the World Economic Forum in Davos. (Photo: Getty Images)

In her first major international speech since her release from house arrest in November, Burma's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi spoke for the first time about investment opportunities in Burma.

In an articulate pre-recorded message to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Suu Kyi lauded the potential for investment in Burma to a gathering of world leaders, businessmen, politicians, academics and civil society representatives.

Following growing criticism of her party's intransigence on the existing economic sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union, Canada and Australia, Suu Kyi acknowledged that the people of Burma has been left behind while their neighbors develop economic ties with the junta, and exploit Burma's abundant natural resources at the expense of internal political conflict in the country.

“We have already missed so many opportunities because of political conflicts in our country over the last 50 years,” said Suu Kyi in her speech. “Despite an abundance of natural resources, Burma's development has lagged far behind its neighbors.”

At first glimpse, her speech leads to the conclusion that Suu Kyi admits the sanctions have failed and have restricted Burma's development; even more so when she went on to encourage foreign investment, albeit with principles attached.

“I would like to request those who have invested or who are thinking of investing in Burma to put a premium on respect for the law, on environmental and social factors, on the rights of workers, on job creation and on the promotion of technological skills,” she said.

Does this speech mark a radical U-turn in Suu Kyi's attitude toward sanctions? Did she simply want to make a point about foreign investment? Or is she offering yet another olive branch to the generals, touting herself as a cheerleader for the new government?

“I don't think her speech was a departure from her past approach,” said Prof. Sean Turnell of Macquarie University in Australia, a longterm economic expert on Burma. “What she said was not only sensible and reasonable in terms of social justice, but also in terms of sound economics.”

“She really called for an infusion of foreign investment in Burma that was both in and of itself intrinsically beneficial in terms of Burma's longterm economic development, and for the sort of environment that would maximize the benefits of such investment.”

Indeed, the speech proves Suu Kyi's commitment to the people of Burma to improve the lot of the common citizens while sacrificing the political platform of her party, which was coincidentally denied the right to exist by Burma's Court of Appeal on the same day she gave this speech at Davos.

Has her speech lessened the contentious debate about Burmese sanctions? Several Rangoon-based economists have recently analyzed whether the existing economic sanctions really hurt the ordinary people or the junta and its business circle.

Heading back to 1997 when the first US economic sanctions were imposed on the Burmese regime, more than 75 percent of Burma's population was agrarian or reliant on the agriculture industry for their livelihoods.

Then, as now, the traditional export markets for Burmese agricultural produce are largely within Asia, with a very tiny market in Africa, and nothing in North America or Europe. As the Asian countries did not impose economic sanctions on Burma, and in many cases actively engaged with the junta, no barriers existed in Asian trade and investment in Burma.

Therefore, the rise or decline of trade between Burma and its Asian neighbors has never had anything to do with the Western sanctions. Of course, at the same time it is fair to say that Asia's eagerness to do business with the junta is the major reason for the ineffectiveness of the economist sanctions. But on the whole, US and EU trade has played a minuscule role in the country's economy since long before sanctions hit the table.

The US financial sanctions blocked the junta's US Dollar transaction in its international trade, but Burma's business elite are still able to use the Euro and other currencies. Therefore, the junta's ability to sell natural gas to Thailand has remained unhindered, and it has in recent years been able to expand the market to China.

Natural resource exports such as oil, gas, gems and teak are thriving businesses, but ones which require a huge investment up front. Indisputably, these contracts have remained the domain of the military generals, their families and their cronies, and they do not affect the common people of Burma.

The tiny portion of the country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) from the industrial sector goes only to local markets.

Because of the low quality of the products, they don't have a market outside the country; their competitive power is further reduced due to the enhanced status of popular imports mainly from China, India and Thailand.

But many still favor targeted sanctions.

“I believe sanctions that limit the ability of regime officials and connected cronies to use the international financial system, to both expropriate and disguise ill-gotten rents from exclusive access to Burma's natural resources, will continue to have utility,” said Turnell.

In this point, a thorough policy analysis should be done on why the flow of foreign investments into the country's agricultural and industrial sectors has been extremely low while their flow in the area of the natural resource extraction has been skyrocketing.

“Investment in manufacturing, agriculture and the like requires a degree of certainty—of reasonable property rights against expropriation—but such rights are not present in Burma,” said Turnell, who established Burma Economic Watch, an online resource on Burma's economy. “Accordingly, Burma attracts the investment typical of that which flows to unstable states, the sort that through resource extraction (digging, cutting and carrying away) yields quick cash with little interaction with the economy as a whole.”

The rise and decline of the Foreign Direct Investment flow in a country depends mainly on domestic political and economic stability—the two areas are interlinked.

Suu Kyi emphasized this fact in her speech. “I believe that as necessary steps towards integration within the global community Burma must achieve national reconciliation, political stability and economic growth grounded in human resources development,” she said. “Without the first two—which are essential for the basic requirements of good governance such as transparency, accountability, credibility and integrity—social and economic development will remain mere pipe dreams.”

No government in this 21st century believes that it alone can build the state structures in the economic, social, political and cultural arenas without the support and active participation of its citizens.

Since her release, critics of Suu Kyi inside and outside the country have said that if Suu Kyi gave up her stand on

sanctions, dialogue could begin between the junta and the NLD. But they have never shown their broad analysis on what are the root causes that have brought about the long economic stagnation in Burma.

She has taken a radical step—perhaps with a conciliatory tone—in announcing her economic principles at the World Economic Forum. If the Burmese generals do place national interests above all else, and are truly serious about improving the country's economy, the time has come for the regime to consider Suu Kyi's offer to work together for the betterment of the people.

The Irrawaddy - The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Monday, February 14, 2011, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Suu Kyi Praises Egyptian Army

By THE IRRAWADDY - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20747> - Monday, February 14, 2011



An Egyptian Army soldier holds a baby atop of a tank, as the baby's parents take photographs, unseen, outside the Egyptian Museum near Tahrir Square in Cairo. (Photo: AP)

RANGOON — Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi urged the country's armed forces to follow the example of Egypt's army, which she praised for not using force against pro-democracy protesters who last week brought down President Hosni Mubarak's thirty years of authoritarian rule.

"Even when hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets, the Egyptian army didn't shoot. Instead, it sided with the people," said Suu Kyi in an interview with local reporters in Rangoon on Saturday.

"The Burmese *Tatmadaw* should follow their example," she said, referring to the country's military, which seized power from a democratic government in 1962 and is deeply unpopular for its brutal crackdowns on mass anti-government uprisings in 1988 and 2007.

The weeks-long protests in Egypt, which were led by Internet-savvy youths rather than by the mainstream political opposition, have also inspired Burmese young people to prepare for yet another uprising against military rule.

"We were so fascinated by how young people in Egypt organized their protests. If we can create a network, then we will not need to depend on a particular person for leadership," said a young Rangoon news reporter.

Suu Kyi said that the Internet and modern communication tools—which ignited the Egyptian pro-democracy movement—could also help to create a network among democracy supporters in Burma and strengthen their struggle against military rule.

In a recent interview with the *BBC*, however, she said she did not wish the events in Egypt to occur in her country, making it clear again that she preferred dialogue with Burma's military rulers over popular protests as a means to breaking the country's political deadlock.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party was disbanded last year after it refused to run in elections in November

that were marred by widespread vote-rigging. The party has no presence in the country's new military-dominated Parliament but continues to command strong popular support.

Earlier this month, the Parliament elected the junta's former prime minister, ex-Gen Thein Sein, as the president of the new government and has chosen several incumbent junta ministers for ministerial positions in the new cabinet.

On Sunday, a commentary in the Burma's state-run newspapers said that Suu Kyi and her party would "meet their tragic end" if they refused to change their continued support for Western economic sanctions against the regime.

THE BURMANET NEWS, February 12 – 14, 2011 Issue #4140, "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, newsletter covering Burma

Reuters, February 14, 2011, <<http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE71D4N920110214http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE71D4N920110214>>

U.S. criticizes Myanmar government threat on Suu Kyi

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Myanmar's threats against veteran pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi show the military-backed government has not changed despite elections in November that were widely dismissed as a fraud, the United States said on Monday.

"Burma claims there is a new era, but it is up to its old tricks by threatening Aung San Suu Kyi. New suits does not a new system make," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said in a message on Twitter.

Myanmar's state media said on Sunday that Suu Kyi and her party would meet a "tragic end" if they stick to their position including support for Western sanctions.



Aung San Suu Kyi

U.S. President Barack Obama entered office hoping to improve ties with Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, but has expressed frustration over what it says is the government's lack of willingness to engage in real reforms.

Political analysts have said the United States may nevertheless be reassessing its stance on sanctions, which critics say have failed and simply pushed the resource-rich country's ruling generals closer to China.

Suu Kyi was released from house arrest on November 13, days after a pro-military party swept elections widely dismissed as unfair and aimed at providing a civilian front for continued military rule.

Suu Kyi has hinted she might try to work with the West to review sanctions, imposed over Myanmar's human rights record and suppression of the democracy movement.

But both she and her National League for Democracy have subsequently said they see no reason to lift the sanctions now.

(Reporting by Andrew Quinn; editing by John Whitesides)

The STRAITS TIMES - <http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/SEAsia/Story/STISStory_638117.html>

Associated Press – 23 February 2011 - <http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/SEAsia/Story/STISStory_638117.html>

US talks with Myanmar's Suu Kyi about aid

YANGON, Myanmar – The top U.S. diplomat in Myanmar said Wednesday he has begun talking with pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi about what sort of aid Washington should offer the military-dominated nation.

Charge d'Affaires Larry M. Dinger said the U.S. is also talking to the government and others about the issue, which hinges around long-standing sanctions Washington has applied because of human rights abuses by the country's junta and its failure to institute democracy.

Parliamentary rule was nominally restored last month, but a new civilian government has yet to be officially installed. The constitution and last year's elections were organized under the guidance of the military to preserve its influence.

Mr Dinger said he began talks with Ms Suu Kyi on Tuesday (22.02.2011) aimed at helping formulate US policy toward Myanmar. Washington's relations with Myanmar have been strained since the military crushed pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988, and the US still refers to the country by its old name, Burma, which was changed by the junta.

It also demonstrates its disapproval of the government by not posting a full ambassador in the country.

Han Tha, an executive member of Ms Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, confirmed that Ms Suu Kyi had talked with Mr Dinger for 1 1/2 hours at his residence, but declined to reveal the details of the talks. -- AP

The Irrawaddy **EDITORIAL** - Today's Newsletter for Monday, January 31, 2011 Datum: Mon, 31. Jan 2011 - news@irrawaddy.org

Burma Takes Another Step in the Wrong Direction

Monday, January 31, 2011 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=20642>

Under tight security, newly elected representatives to Burma's bicameral Parliament entered a place that few people have ever seen—the vast compound containing the cluster of 31 buildings that make up the new seat of the country's highest legislative assembly.

They did so in a duly regimented manner, as befits the standard-bearers of Burma's new era of “disciplined democracy”. For today marked not only the first time Parliament has been convened in the country in 22 years, but also the penultimate step of the ruling regime's “road map” to its own special brand of military-led parliamentary rule.

It was a big day for Burma's generals, but not, alas, for its people. While their putative representatives were marched into Parliament, most ordinary Burmese simply went on with their lives as usual, barely registering an event that had, after all, absolutely nothing to do with them.

That longed-for day when Burmese can hold their heads up in the world and call themselves citizens of a genuine democracy remains as remote today as ever. Still slaves in the eyes of their rulers, they know that their own struggle is nowhere near completion.

Far from being able to carry out the wishes of the people, many of Burma's new lawmakers are as much in the dark as everyone else. While the bulk of parliamentarians coming from the junta's proxy party or the ranks of military appointees may already know their orders, the rest have been kept guessing and reduced to groping one step at a time due to the junta's information blackout.

Until yesterday, none of the opposition MPs had even been instructed in how to cast a vote using the new red-yellow-green electronic voting system. Beyond that, everything's a blank, including when the next session of Parliament will be held and when it will end its activities.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear—that everyone will be expected to play by a set of very rigid rules. From the designated seating arrangements to restrictions on the right of MPs to speak in public about parliamentary affairs, everything will be regulated by a system designed to prevent any deviation from the script.

Except for state-run mouthpieces, this Parliament will be strictly off-limits to the media, whether local or foreign. Anyone found entering the parliamentary compound without permission will face a heavy prison sentence.

Despite all this, however, some still feel that a straitjacketed Parliament is better than no Parliament at all. After nearly half a century of military rule, however, there are not many Burmese left who are still willing to give their rulers the benefit of the doubt when they promise better things to come. Hope may not be dead entirely, but patience could soon run out if this new Parliament proves to be as ineffectual as an instrument of change as everyone expects it to be.

While some may insist that this Parliament, however imperfect, is the only way forward, they are seriously mistaken if they think that Burmese people will be satisfied with a system that continues to deny them their basic rights. The people of Burma have not forgotten their compatriots who have paid with their lives to help the country achieve genuine democracy, and will settle for nothing less themselves, no matter what the price.

What the world needs to know is that the little bit of history that has been made today will be swept away tomorrow if the new government that has yet to be formed continues to ignore the needs of the people. The democratic struggle led by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, as well as by a number of democratic organizations inside and outside the country, will not cease to exist simply because the junta has built a new Parliament and filled it with robots.



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