



BURMA REPORT

June 2007

မြန်မာ့ - မှတ်တမ်း

Issue N° 48

The International Herald Tribune - Published: June 1, 2007

The Lady and the junta - (By Jared Genser & Meghan Barron) -

BurmaNewsGroup:: Burma Related News - Jun 01, 2007.- "TIN KYI" <tinkyi@sbcglobal.net> -
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WASHINGTON:

Halfway around the world, a 61-year-old woman sits alone in her home, as she has for years. The telephone is forever silent, because the line is disconnected. The doorbell never rings, because visitors are forbidden. There is no mail, there is no news.

For Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of Myanmar and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, there is almost complete isolation.

For more than 11 of the past 17 years, the military dictatorship that rules Myanmar, also known as Burma, has held Suu Kyi under house arrest. The generals initially claimed the seclusion was for her own protection.

Now they assert that this pacifist and devout Buddhist is a "threat to national peace and tranquility." When her dying husband requested entry to Myanmar to see her one last time, even that request was denied.

"Please use your liberty to promote ours," Suu Kyi has said. The international community has responded with a litany of goodwill gestures, reaffirmed in a fourth judgment by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that she is being detained in violation of international law. But so far, everything has failed to produce results.

As he has done each year since 2003, the leader of the ruling junta, General Than Shwe, again recently extended her sentence for an additional one-year term.

Much more is at stake than the fate of one woman - "The Lady" - as she is affectionately referred to by her people. While Suu Kyi spends day after day trapped in her home, the junta ravages her country and brutalizes her people.

More than 3,000 villages have been destroyed since 1996 as the military wages a relentless campaign of killing, torture and rape against ethnic minorities. A million refugees have fled the country and 600,000 internally displaced people struggle to subsist in primitive jungle conditions. More than 800,000 people are used as forced labor and the country has over 70,000 child soldiers.

As Myanmar disintegrates, its decay seeps into neighboring countries, threatening regional security. Myanmar is currently the world's second largest exporter of heroin and opiates as well as a major producer of methamphetamines. The junta's failure to address its burgeoning HIV/AIDS crisis has led to the spread of the disease along the drug routes into neighboring countries.

The need for international action has never been more pressing. The first step towards saving Myanmar is saving its elected leader, Suu Kyi, whose political party, the National League for Democracy and its allies won over 80 percent of the seats in the 1990 parliamentary election.

The UN General Assembly and the former Commission on Human Rights have adopted 29 consecutive resolutions on Myanmar, many calling for Suu Kyi's release. The former and current secretaries general, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki Moon, and the European Union have urged her release.

Even the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which had been reluctant to pressure one of its members, has called for her release.

Earlier this month, former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik of Norway and 58 other former presidents and prime ministers, including such prominent figures as Bill Clinton, George H. W. Bush, Jimmy Carter, Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa, Kim Dae Jung, Corazon Aquino, Megawati Sukarnoputri and Margaret Thatcher, called for Suu Kyi's release.

This courageous woman still strikes fear in the heart of the Burmese junta. The international clamor for her release was ignored.

The stakes are too high for the international community to relent. "The struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma is a struggle for life and dignity. It is a struggle that encompasses our political, social, and economic aspirations," Suu Kyi has said.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

Although the international community has so far failed Myanmar, we must persist. The injustice of the Lady's ongoing detention and the suffering of her people remains a stain on our collective conscience.

Jared Genser and Meghan Barron are volunteer lawyers with Freedom Now in Washington who represent Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>

Burma's 88 Generation Students Group Slams China, Russia

By Yeni - June 4, 2007 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7368

The Burmese regime's extension of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest had the support of China and Russia, Burma's 88 Generation Students group charged on Monday.

The group also criticized China and Russia for vetoing a draft UN Security Council resolution on Burma, saying they had "missed an opportunity to respond to the situation in our country constructively, collectively and effectively within the United Nations framework."

Ko Ko Gyi, a leader of the group, said China and Russia should recognize the fact that the stability of the region is better if Burma becomes a democratic country."

Both China and Russia maintain close relations with the Burmese junta and have repeatedly said Burma's problems were the domestic concern of a sovereign state.

China's Foreign Ministry restated Beijing's policy recently in a statement saying Suu Kyi's continuing detention was an internal affair. China "hopes to see Myanmar [Burma] maintain political stability and continue to make progress in the process of national reconciliation," the Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said.

The 88 Generation Students group, however, charges that while China and Russia claim they want to see prosperity and stability in Burma they refuse to join the international community in calling for democratization, including the release of all political prisoners.

"With the strong backing of China and Russia, Burmese generals extended Daw Suu's detention for another year," said Ko Ko Gyi.- It means that hope for our country's national reconciliation is turned down again."

Despite the veto by China and Russia of the US and British-sponsored motion to put Burma on the agenda of the Security Council, the US will continue to raise the issue of human rights violations by the Burmese military government, the new US Ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad, told *The Irrawaddy* last month.

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Burma: Land of political, economic and social depression

By Myat Soe - <http://www.mizzima.com/MizzimaNews/EdOp/2007/June/01-June-2007.html>

Time was when Burma was the wealthiest country in Southeast Asia and the world's largest rice exporter. But the country is now on a suicidal downslide, suffering as it is from decades of political, economic and social depression. Past years of political wavering proved obscure for the country. Coups and countercoups, arrest and detention, assassinations, disappearance, torture, degrading treatment, and suspension of civil liberties became the order of the day. The political situation in Burma has a direct impact on the poor quality of education and healthcare available to the general public.

Also because of the regime's failure to provide individuals with basic necessities, such as access to adequate food and housing, its maintenance of huge discrepancies in wealth, economic and social depression envelopes Burma. In the most extreme cases of misdistribution, many suffer from poverty while the elite of the regime live in relative luxury. Such injustice came from unfair hiring procedures, lack of available jobs and education, and insufficient health care. All these conditions are leading people to believe that they have not received a "fair share" of the benefits and resources available in Burmese society. Instead of addressing systemic economic injustice and creating social and economic safety nets, the regime is trying to escalate tension with opposition groups and civilian populations.

The ruling junta is selling the nation's natural resources for themselves and their families to prosper, ignoring the welfare of the people who should be the true beneficiaries of the country's natural resources. To make matters worse, the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), has unleashed violent mob attacks against Human Rights activists and ordinary citizens. This has escalated social unrest and no one has been brought to justice.

General Than Shwe who wishes to be honoured with a state funeral, is far worse than late General Ne Win who drove his country to poverty and disrepute over a 26-year reign. Than Shwe promoted and painted himself as a benevolent ruler and hero to his lackeys while engaging in unspeakably vile atrocities in secret, and defied the international community by refusing to pursue democratization and national reconciliation. No time frame for political

development has been set over the last two decades.

While the regime's ailing Generals spent months in Singapore for medical treatment, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate has spent most of the past 17 years under house arrest. Many elderly political leaders are languishing in the regime's prisons. While the ruling junta is purchasing new weapons from China, India and Russia and increasing its military spending, many people are dying of hunger and of AIDS which is devastating Burma. Burmese refugees are suffering the growing humanitarian crisis in neighbouring countries.

Although elections were held in 1990, the result has been ignored, and the political oppression has threatened the country's stability. Burma has one of the poorest health records and lowest standards of living in the developing world. In an August 2002 report by Nonviolence International, Burma is shown to have the highest rate of military expenditure, in comparison to health and education spending, of any other ASEAN nation. Health and education are given incredibly low priorities in the national budget. Lip service to these issues often takes the place of substantial reforms or programmes. As a result, millions of people are living without very basic necessities of life - food, water, housing, sanitation, health, education among others.

First, the UN designated Burma a 'Least Developed Nation' in 1987, officially recognizing the once prosperous country as one of the 10 poorest nations in the world. On 10 August, Ne Win admitted in a televised broadcast that mistakes have been made during his 25-year dictatorship. But the current regime does not admit the country is a failed state when compared to its neighbours and ignored 28 resolutions adopted by the U.N. General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, as well as the actions undertaken by the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and his office over the past ten years. The four envoys to Burma mandated by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, recorded the SPDC's unlawful methods of political and ethnic repression which have intensified and been consolidated.

Second, the junta's defiance is similar to Nazi Germany during World War II, which refused ICRCs visiting and monitoring POW camps, organizing relief assistance for civilian populations, and administering the exchange of messages regarding prisoners and missing persons. In fact, General Than Shwe and his regime refused to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit prisoners privately and to function independently. The ruling Generals still continue allows serious abuses, including extra judicial killings, custodial deaths, disappearances, and torture.

Third, three of the world's most isolated, paranoid and repressive states (Burma, Iran and North Korea) have agreed to restore diplomatic relations after a break of many years. The diplomatic ties between Burma, Iran and North Korea will have a far-reaching impact on the region and the international community. The fact of the matter is Burma is trying to acquire knowledge and nuclear technology from North Korea and Iran to build nuclear reactors in the country for energy purposes while there are many resources (solar, wind, natural gas,) available and can be used. The question is: how will the regime prepare for catastrophic disasters and operate safely while the country has not enough maintenance budget to improve the current sewage and waste disposal systems? even in the capital Rangoon?

To build nuclear reactors, there are substantial cleanup costs to consider. For example, Ukraine pays Russia \$60-80 million for the nuclear-waste disposals. The regime should reconsider the concerns of international community both intellectually and economically in this area. It is not a right time to build nuclear reactors while the country has lack of resources. Mass casualties resulting from impending nuclear disasters are real deep concerns for the citizens of Burma if the nuclear facilities are poorly designed, built and maintained without safety standards.

There are many lessons to be learnt from the worst industrial disasters in history. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and World Health Organization reported 56 deaths in the Chernobyl accident. The Bhopal Disaster of 1984 is the worst industrial disaster in history. It was caused by the release of 40 tons of methyl isocyanides from a Union Carbide pesticide plant located in the heart of the city of Bhopal, India. The gases injured between 150,000 to 600,000 unsuspected victims, and snuffed out at least 15,000 innocent lives.

The Burmese rulers are not only functioning against the will of Burmese citizens, but also against the concerns of the international community. As a consequence of the home -grown tyranny, the country becomes from the wealthiest country in Southeast Asia to a land with political, economic and social depression.

(The writer Myat Soe is a former Central Executive Committee member of All Burma Federation of Student Unions (1988) and currently serves as the Research Director of Justice for Human Rights in Burma. He graduated from Indiana University, and earned his MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University.)

June 5, 2007 Irrawaddy - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7382 - The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>

Burma environmentalist urges junta action on deforestation - Htet Aung

THE BURMANET NEWS - June 5, 2007 - Issue # 3219 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

A prominent Burmese environmentalist has called on Burma's ruling junta to introduce cleaner development mechanisms instead of relying on the sale of timber that contributes to the country's already rampant deforestation.

„I advised the government in my research paper not to rely so much on logging timbers, but to encourage the business of eco-tourism as an alternative way, which can also conserve our forests,“ said U Ohn, general secretary of the Forest Resource Environment Development and Conservation Association. „But they don't seem to believe it.“

The Rangoon-based FREDa, the only local NGO devoted to conserving Burma's forests, has been active in establishing mangrove nurseries and installing mangrove plantations in abandoned paddy lands in Burma's delta area.

U Ohn spoke to The Irrawaddy by phone on Monday, on the eve of World Environment Day commemorated today.

Burma contains some 34 million hectares of natural forest—the second-largest in Southeast Asia after Indonesia.

U Ohn said that forests cover about half of the land in the country in terms of quantity, but the quality of the remaining forests is questionable. Valuable timbers increasingly fall prey to loggers, leaving inferior trees in the country's forests.

„What makes me sad is that people don't think about how to conserve natural resources while using them for commercial benefit,“ U Ohn said.

The international environmental watchdog group Global Witness reported in late 2005 that rampant deforestation in Burma's northern Kachin State was due to illegal logging by Chinese companies.

Villagers in other parts of Burma frequently report that unrestrained commercial logging in the past few years has dramatically altered their local forest areas.

Other international reports on Burma allege that deforestation has worsened under the country's current military leaders, as the government and ethnic ceasefire groups continue to harvest timber in frontier areas, particularly near the country's borders with Thailand and China.

U Ohn suggests that instead of culling Burma's forests, the government should promote eco-tourism by nurturing them. He recommends several areas that he considers well suited to such a program: the Popa area in Burma's central dry zone, the forests around Inle Lake in southern Shan State, areas of northern Kachin State and western Arakan State, the mangrove forests in the Irrawaddy Delta and coral reefs in Tenasserim Division.

Natural resources such as oil, gas and timber now top Burma's list of exports, with timber accounting for US \$519 million in the fiscal year 2006-07.

U Ohn lives by the motto „A tree saved is better than a tree planted.“ But he knows his battle for environmental responsibility in Burma will not be an easy one.

„As an environmental NGO, our duty is to educate the government as well as the people to be aware of the country's environmental issues,“ said U Ohn. „Whether they listen or not depends on them. But we have to keep talking about it.“

Associated Press - 02 June 2007 -

Democracy supporters concerned over detention of Myanmar AIDS activist

Burma News - 05 June 2007 - <burma_news@verizon.net> - Euro-Burma Office <burma@euro-burma.be>

Democracy advocates in Myanmar expressed concern Saturday over the continued detention of a prominent AIDS activist who is a member of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party.

Police took Phyu Phyu Thin from her home on the night of May 21, telling her mother that she would be sent back after questioning.

"It is nearly two weeks since (she) has been taken from her home and we are worried about her. Authorities breached their promise because they had promised the family that she would be sent home," said Min Ko Naing, a prominent activist in the 88 Generation Students group, which advocates democracy in the military-run country.

He said the detention was also a blow to HIV/AIDS victims who regard Phyu Phyu Thin as a "mountain of hope."

"I can say with certainty that Phyu Phyu Thin had not violated any existing law. Her main activity is helping HIV/AIDS sufferers and uplifting the lives of HIV/AIDS patients," he said.

Phyu Phyu Thinn, 35, has been caring for HIV and AIDS patients since 2002, providing counseling and education,

sending them to clinics and providing accommodation to those from outlying areas.

June 11, 2007 - The Irrawaddy Online News Alert: The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org> -http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?cat_id=1#110607_6

Burma's Detained HIV/AIDS Activists Released

Eleven detained HIV/AIDS patients in Burma were released on Friday three days after they were detained in Rangoon's Weibagi Hospital, a contagious disease hospital. The patients were detained in the hospital following their demonstrations calling for the release of a prominent HIV/AIDS activist, Phyu Phyu Thin, who was arrested earlier by authorities. Phyu Phyu Thin worked to help about 30 HIV/AIDS patients and had been detained since May 21. The released patients earlier had participated in prayer vigils at pagodas in Rangoon for her release. According to Yazar, an HIV/AIDS activist, the released patients will continue their prayer vigils calling for Phyu Phyu Thin's release.

AFP - Saturday June 16, 2007

Myanmar dragging its feet on forced labour: ILO

BurmaNewsGroup:: Burma Related News Jun 09-16, 2007 - "TIN KYI" <tinkyi@sbcglobal.net>

GENEVA (AFP) - The International Labour Organisation on Friday warned that forced labour was still widespread in Myanmar, where the military junta has so far ignored ILO recommendations to stop the practice.

The ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards said in a statement that it was "profoundly concerned" by the situation and urged Myanmar to comply with the findings of an ILO inquiry.

"It concluded that... the imposition of forced labour continues to be widespread, particularly by the army, to which specific instructions should be issued," it added after a special meeting devoted to Myanmar.

The ILO committee highlighted the situation in Karen state and in Rakhine, saying it was "particularly serious."

It said an ILO-supervised system set up in Myanmar in March to receive complaints from victims of forced labour was resulting in official investigations and action against officials involved in the practice.

Nonetheless, it criticised the weakness of the penalties, saying they were often administrative measures rather than criminal sanctions.

It also questioned the impact of the mechanism in terms of eliminating forced labour, especially in border areas which are thought to be most affected.

In March, the ILO deferred an international legal challenge against Myanmar over forced labour, after the junta agreed to give victims a means of redress.

However, the deferral was conditional on full implementation of the deal and signs that forced labour was being tackled.

Earlier this month, ILO chief Juan Somavia said he was not satisfied with Myanmar's cooperation and signalled he was ready to increase the pressure if necessary.

The committee said the military junta has also failed to allow the ILO to bolster its international staff in Yangon to handle complaints.

Although the junta says it has banned forced labour, human rights groups have long said that little action has been taken, especially in areas where foreign visitors are barred.

Burma News - 05 June 2007 - Euro-Burma Office "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>

Myanmar announces 'final session' of constitutional talks

Agence France Presse - 05 June 2007

YANGON - Military-run Myanmar on Tuesday announced that its National Convention talks on drafting a constitution will resume on July 18, for what acting premier Thein Sein said would be the final session.

"We will resume the next session of the National Convention on July 18 this year at Nyaunghnapin camp," said Thein Sein, who is also chairman of the convention.

"It will be the final session," state-run television quoted him as saying.

The National Convention has been held sporadically since 1993.

The last session at the secluded Nyaunghnapin military compound north of Yangon ended in late December after 11 weeks of discussion by more than 1,000 delegates hand-picked by the junta.

Thein Sein said the upcoming session will hammer out the final details of the charter, including articles on elections, political parties, the state flag and the national anthem.

"BURMA DIGEST" <tayzathuria@gmail.com> - 10.06.2007

Editorial: Let us request for UN supervision On SPDC Junta's Roadmap _Dr San Oo Aung -

The SPDC is overconfident and they think that they are powerful enough to proceed as they like on their own road map as if carrying out the Burmese saying_ *Nga Myin Ngar Saing, Sagaing yauk yauk; Nga Hlae Ngar htoe, Pago yauk yauk* (riding on my own horse and on my own boat to wherever I want

There will be no difference whether we just boycott or cast our vote in the coming referendum and elections, as SPDC will rig the results. In the last election of 1990, Myanmar Military stayed neutral and lost heavily. They are not that naive or ignorant to forget about that or to let it happen again.

Therefore, this time we all may need UN supervision and we must demand the referendum and election be held under strict supervision by UN Election Commission or UN monitors. UN appointed Election Commission consisting of international monitors should be allowed to supervise, manage, count the votes, to decide and declare the winner, and to transfer power duly to the election winning party.

We all must push at the UN Security Council to give the UN mandate for international supervision on the coming referendum and elections in Burma. If the SPDC refuse UN, it will become very apparent that those SPDC roadmap steps are just the smoke screen to trick the Burmese People and the International Community. Then we can persuade UN and International Community to punish SPDC junta heavily.

And, moreover, instead of just stating YES or NO on the whole constitution, Burmese people should be allowed to vote on individual different salient points such as_

1. The clauses in favour of perpetuation of military dominance.
2. The clauses which might bar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's eligibility to contest or to head the government, just because her late husband was not Burmese.
3. Definite points on Democracy, Human Rights, Individual Freedom and Basic principles of the Federal Union.

I believed that this is the only way to put the bell on the SPDC wild tiger. If they refuse they would definitely lost their legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the whole world. If they allow, they will not be able to rig, cheat, coerce, bully, or intimidate the people.

<<http://www.tayzathuria.org.uk/bd/2007/6/10/e/soa.htm>> "_ Editorial: Dr.San Oo Aung

June 12, 2007 - **The Irrawaddy** Online News Alert - The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>

Burma Opposition Leaders Dispute Asean Official's Comment

By Saw Yan Naing - June 12, 2007 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7444

Burmese opposition groups inside and outside the country have disputed comments by a high ranking Asean official who criticized Western sanctions, saying they do not work to enhance democratic reform in the country.

„Asean's comment is far away from reality," said Myint Thein, a spokesman of the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy.

"Meanwhile their [Asean's] constructive engagement, their non-interference in internal affairs policy, fails to move Burma towards democratic reform," Myint Thein said.

Ong Keng Yong, Asean secretary general, said the EU and the US need to find other ways to engage Burma instead of just applying economic sanctions against the Burmese military government.

„The sanctions do not work," he said. "Even if you pull out everybody, all economic investors from Myanmar [Burma], they are not going to collapse because their two large neighbors [China and India] will be ready to maintain them," Ong

told reporters Monday at the sidelines of the Asia Oil and Gas Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The NLD spokesperson said, „It is not time to criticize each other. It is time to cooperate and initiate different ways to enhance the democratization of Burma.“

Mahn Sha, the general secretary of the ethnic rebel group, the Karen National Union, said, „We think the sanctions are important and effective. The thing that doesn't work is Asean's constructive engagement policy because it means they have a good relationship in dealing with the Burmese government. It means they encourage the junta.“

He added, „Due to this reason, the junta doesn't care about any groups, such as the ILO, the Global Fund, the United Nations and the public inside Burma.“

Mya Aye, a leader of the 88 Generation Students, said, „We don't see any good and bad consequences following the economic sanctions. What we believe is that to achieve democratic change in Burma, the roles of Asean countries, China, Russia and the UN Security Council are very important. So we want international communities to try for every suitable way for democratic change.“

AFP - Thu Jun 14, 2007

US Congress asked to renew Myanmar sanctions

BurmaNewsGroup:: Burma Related News Jun 09-16, 2007 - "TIN KYI" <tinkyi@sbcglobal.net>

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The leader of US Senate Republicans on Thursday warned Myanmar that the wider world, and its southeast Asian neighbors, were becoming increasingly "outraged" with its suppression of democracy.

Minority leader Mitch McConnell said the military regime was getting more reckless and the humanitarian situation in the country was worsening, as he introduced a bill to extend economic sanctions on Myanmar for another year.

"Every dollar we keep out of the hands of this junta is one less dollar it can use to fund the conscription of children, its nuclear program, and the war it has waged against its own people for nearly two decades," McConnell said.

The Kentucky senator, a frequent critic of the Myanmar regime over its suppression of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), said support for sanctions was also growing in the US Congress.

"I am proud to say that even though the control of Congress has changed, its commitment to the people of Burma has not," McConnell said.

"Senator (Dianne) Feinstein and I are joined this year by 57 co-sponsors, more than last year and the year before that."

"The voices are not just coming from Washington. But the words and actions of Washington are beginning to cause others to take note of this dire situation."

US sanctions on Myanmar, which the United States still refers to as Burma, date from May 1997 and were stiffened by President George W. Bush in July 2003.

They prohibit new investments and exports of financial services to and imports from Myanmar. The United States has also frozen Myanmar junta members' assets in the United States and has broadened denial of visas to regime officials.

Burma News - 19 June 2007 - Euro-Burma Office - "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>

AUNG SAN SUU KYI picture displayed in Rome City Hall's square

Rome, Italy - 19.06.2007

Campidoglio: Rome celebrates Aung San Suu Kyi, the solitary, heroic, under house arrest, leader of Burmese people.

A big picture of the Peace Nobel Laureate, is being displayed in Campidoglio, Rome City Hall, to celebrate her 62nd birthday.

Mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni attended the event.

BURMA RELATED NEWS - JUNE 17-19, 2007. - Tin Kyi <mtinkyi7@yahoo.com>- [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK@yahoogroups.com

Myanmar's Suu Kyi turns 62 in isolation

By Aung Hla Tun - Tue Jun 19, 2007

YANGON

(Reuters) - Myanmar opposition leader and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi spent another birthday under house arrest

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on Tuesday as her supporters released doves and balloons to accompany prayers for her release.

To mark her 62nd birthday, around 300 supporters gathered at the dilapidated headquarters of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which won an election landslide victory in 1990 only to be denied power by the military junta.

The NLD reiterated its demand for the immediate and unconditional release of Suu Kyi, as well as the other 1,100 political prisoners believed to be behind bars in the former Burma.

As with countless other pleas on countless other "milestones" during Suu Kyi's 17 years of on-off detention, it is certain to fall on deaf ears.

Plain-clothes security police, their long-lens cameras clicking away, kept close watch over the NLD ceremony from across the road.

A dozen trucks filled with members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association -- the official name of the junta's political wing -- sat nearby.

In Manila, 20 people protested outside the Myanmar embassy, and there were similar scenes in New Delhi on Monday evening.

However, there were no demonstrations in Thailand, the traditional centre of the Myanmar dissident movement, for fear of repercussions from the military regime now in charge in Bangkok.

"BLACK SHEEP"

Suu Kyi's confinement in her lakeside home in Yangon was extended for another year in May despite international pleas to the generals to end her latest detention, which began in 2003.

The Nobel peace laureate has now been confined for more than 11 of the past 17 years, with her telephone line cut and no visitors allowed apart from her maid and doctor.

"In our view, until their constitution is ratified, she will not be released," said Sann Aung, a Bangkok-based leader of the government-in-exile set up after the junta ignored the 1990 election results.

"They are worried that she will be a threat to the National Convention and the referendum," he said, referring to the junta's constitution-drafting body which reconvenes for its last session in July.

The generals have promised a referendum on the new constitution and eventual elections, but refused to set a timetable. Critics call it a sham aimed at entrenching military control over Myanmar's 54 million people.

Sanctions imposed by the West have had little effect on the military, which has ruled Myanmar in various guises since 1962.

But neither has the soft diplomacy employed by Myanmar's partners in the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has been embarrassed by the junta's intransigence.

"Today, Burma is the black sheep of ASEAN," Thailand's Nation newspaper said in an editorial. "As long as Aung San Suu Kyi remains incarcerated, ASEAN's reputation and the group's international standing will be tarnished."

Irrawaddy - June 20, 2007 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7527

Conflicting interests impede Burma's democratization - Nehginpao Kipgen

BurmaNet News, June 20, 2007 Issue # 3230 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

Interests often dictate an individual or a nation in shaping diplomatic relations with others. Neither the world's lone superpower nor a dictatorial regime like Burma is an exception. Interests can be manifold: economic interest, political interest and strategic interest, among others. These interests are coupled by one's national security.

At a meeting on June 5, 2007, the chairman of National Convention Convening Commission announced that the convention final phase would resume on July 18, 2007, following its adjournment since December 29, 2006.

Lt-Gen Thein Sein said, "The government is constantly implementing the roadmap for a smooth transition to a peaceful, modern and developed discipline-flourishing democratic state."

A week later on the 12th, a group of bipartisan US senators, Mitch McConnell and Dianne Feinstein, joined by Patrick

Leahy, John McCain, Sam Brownback and Barack Obama, introduced legislation to renew economic sanctions on Burma.

Both programs are likely to proceed as envisaged. Despite critics calling the national convention a „sham,“ the military leadership appears resolute to the seven steps roadmap toward the so-called „disciplined democracy.“

The Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act was signed into law by US President George W Bush on July 28, 2003, in the aftermath of the attack on Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade at Depeyin on the May 30, 2003. The act freezes the assets of senior Burmese officials and bans virtually all remittances to Burma. The act has been renewed every year since then.

The interest of the military government is to consolidate its foothold and advance the country's democratization process in its own ways. It is also by and large a forgone conclusion that the Western nations will continue to impose sanctions and isolate this Southeast Asian nation, which has over 428,000-man army.

The Western world and Burmese opposition groups will cling to the argument that any outcome of the national convention is illegitimate, and therefore, unacceptable. In other words, the military regime will leave no mstone unturned to legitimize itself even if it resorts to coercion.

It is almost certain that Burma will have a general election under the supervision of the generals or officials appointed by them. If the election result goes in favor of the military government, which is very unlikely under a free and fair election, the name of the current regime State Peace and Development Council is expected to be replaced.

As Burma's internal problems are of an ethno-political nature, the military is keen on making excuses along the lines that the country could disintegrate on ethnic lines. In fact, with the nullification of the 1947 Panglong Agreement and the subsequent constitution, all ethnic nationalities of Burma can claim pre-independence status.

However, claiming pre-independence status is likely to create more instability and violence in this volatile nation. Building the Union of Burma would better serve the interests of the different nationalities. To do so, voices of both minority and majority ethnic nationalities need to be heard.

With the gradual development of a democratic struggle, the Burmese people now better understand the pros and cons of different governing systems around the world. Although democracy is not the perfect solution to the country's problems, it will be a hallmark to national reconciliation.

The basic principles of Burma's constitution drafted at the national convention are to frame a unitary or centralized government with ultimate power resting on the army. Conversely, the overwhelming majority of ethnic minorities would opt for a decentralized government of more autonomy in their respective states, administrative divisions and regions.

One other significant factor in the Burmese democratic movement is the role of Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD). There are world leaders who are very concerned about Suu Kyi's safety and freedom. on May 14, world leaders sent a letter to Snr-Gen Than Shwe urging him to release her was a dramatic example.

The more popular the lady is, the longer she might be put under house arrest, unless something unusual occurs. When the world looks on the lady with support, the military regime finds itself more threatened. To the army generals, confining the 62-year-old lady is an effective means of suppressing the democracy movement.

A contrasting interest of the opposition groups and their international supporters: to free Suu Kyi and allow the NLD and other ethnic groups to participate in a transparent convention leading to reconciliation. Unsurprisingly, Suu Kyi's house arrest was extended for another year on May 27.

The Burmese people both inside and outside the country will watch the slow-moving implementation of the seven steps roadmap toward democracy with skepticism and caution. The release of the 1991 Nobel peace laureate >from detention before the elections is also a miniscule possibility.

This slow-moving process of democratization is a heavy burden on more than 50 million citizens of Burma.

Nehginpao Kipgen is the general secretary of US-based Kuki International Forum and a researcher on the rise of political conflicts in modern Burma (1947-2004).

Free Burma, free Aung San Suu Kyi

Published by : Burma Buero e.V., P.O.Box 27 03 66, DE-50509 Cologne Tel: + 49 (0) 221-9522450 Fax: + 49(0) 221-9522470
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