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EU-MADE ROCKETS, GUNS AND ENGINES RISK UNDERMINING MYANMAR ARMS EMBARGO

New report by Amnesty International, Saferworld and other NGOs . - Euro-Burma Office / "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be> - 17.07.2007

The proposed transfer to Myanmar (Burma) of a military helicopter containing components and technology from as many as six European Union countries threatens to undermine an EU arms embargo on Myanmar, according to a new report issued today.

'Indian helicopters for Myanmar: making a mockery of the EU arms embargo?', a report by European and international NGOs, including Amnesty International and Saferworld, cites credible sources who say that the Indian government is planning to transfer the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) to Myanmar. It reveals how the Indian-manufactured helicopter would not be operational without vital components from EU Member States and highlights the urgent need for stricter EU arms controls.

Should this transfer go ahead, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK could be undermining an EU arms embargo on Myanmar in place since 1988.

Variants of the ALH attack helicopter contain rocket launchers from Belgium; rockets, guns and engines from France; brake systems from Italy; fuel tanks and gearboxes from the UK and self-protection equipment from a Swedish company. German companies have been crucial to the design development of the ALH.

Saferworld's Roy Isbister said:

„The EU embargo explicitly states that no military equipment should be supplied, either directly or indirectly, for use in Myanmar - what's the point in having an arms embargo if it is not going to be implemented or enforced?“

Myanmar - or Burma - has a widely-documented record of serious human rights violations, which the United Nations has described as widespread and systematic. Such abuses include summary executions, torture, and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Amnesty International's arms control researcher Helen Hughes said:

„Greater attention has to be given to the end-use agreements and the re-export of components from EU member states. Otherwise, these states could find themselves indirectly propping up a brutal regime which they themselves have condemned and whose violations have amounted to crimes against humanity.“

Info Birmanie, Burma Campaign, France said:

„The EU must stand by its obligations to prevent its military equipment being used in Burma and urge the Indian Government to stop this transfer. EU equipment must not be allowed to be used in connection with human rights abuses in Burma.“

The report also identifies US companies involved in the making of military equipment for the ALH despite a US arms embargo on Myanmar. Currently, there are no existing restrictions on India transferring these weapons to Myanmar.

The report calls on the EU to initiate immediate consultations with the Indian government. If India plans to supply or has indeed already supplied ALHs to Myanmar, EU member states should:

- * withdraw all existing export licence authorisations and refuse any new applications for any transfers of components or technology that could be used for the ALH;
- * discontinue all future production co-operation with India that might lead to transfers of embargoed equipment to Myanmar;
- * attach to all future licences for transfers of controlled goods and technology to India a strict and enforceable condition prohibiting re-export to states under embargo.

In addition to improving national and EU practice, EU member states should give their full support to current efforts to develop an international Arms Trade Treaty, establishing globally-binding rules on arms transfers in accordance with international law and human rights standards.

Where parts of the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) originate:

Belgium: * Rocket launchers - produced by Forges de Zebrugge FZ

France: * Engines - produced by Turbomecca - * Guns - produced by GIAT - * Rockets - from Matra Bae Dynamics

Germany: * Supplies parts - SITEC Aerospace manufacturers components for flight/engine controls - * Eurocopter involved in the development of the ALH

Italy: * Brake systems - from Elettronica Aster SpA

Sweden: * Self-protection equipment - supplied by Avitronics, a company co-owned by Saab AB

United Kingdom: * Hydraulic package - supplied by APPH Precision Hydraulics Ltd. - * Flotation equipment and self-sealing fuel tank systems - supplied by FPT Industries - * Fuel tanks, flotation equipment and internal gearbox - supplied by GKN Westland

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Myanmar: ICRC denounces major and repeated violations of international humanitarian law - ICRC-29-06-2007 Press Release 82/07

Yangon / Geneva (ICRC) - The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Jakob Kellenberger, has strongly denounced violations of international humanitarian law committed against civilians and detainees by the government of Myanmar and demanded that the government take urgent action to end these violations and prevent them from recurring.

"The persistent use of detainees as porters for the armed forces is a matter of grave humanitarian concern. The actions of the authorities have also resulted in immense suffering for thousands of people in conflict-affected areas," said Mr Kellenberger. "The ICRC has repeatedly drawn attention to these abuses but the authorities have failed to put a stop to them."

The findings outlined below are based on observations made by ICRC delegates and numerous allegations of abuse collected by the ICRC during private interviews with thousands of civilians and detainees, mainly between 2000 and 2005. Systematic abuses against detainees and civilians are the primary source of serious concern.

Abuses against detainees

Under the prison system set up by the government, every year thousands of detainees have been forced to support the armed forces by serving as porters. This institutionalized and widespread practice has frequently led to the abuse of detainees and exposed them to the dangers of armed conflict. Many detainees used as porters have suffered from exhaustion and malnutrition and been subjected to degrading treatment. Some have been murdered.

"The practice known as 'portering' persists today despite numerous representations made by the ICRC. It constitutes a major violation of various provisions of international humanitarian law," said Mr Kellenberger.

Abuses against civilians

The Myanmar armed forces have committed repeated abuses against men, women and children living in communities affected by armed conflict along the Thai-Myanmar border. These have included the large-scale destruction of food supplies and of means of production. The armed forces have severely restricted the population's freedom of movement in these areas, making it impossible for many villagers to work in their fields. This has had a significant impact on the economy, aggravating an already precarious humanitarian situation. Furthermore, the armed forces have committed numerous acts of violence against people living in these areas, including murder, and subjected them to arbitrary arrest and detention. They have also forced villagers to directly support military operations or to leave their homes.

The behaviour and actions of the armed forces have helped create a climate of constant fear among the population and have forced thousands of people to join the ranks of the internally displaced or to flee abroad.

"The repeated abuses committed against men, women and children living along the Thai-Myanmar border violate many provisions of international humanitarian law," said Mr Kellenberger.

Government refusal to engage in dialogue

"Despite repeated entreaties by the ICRC, the authorities have consistently refused to enter into a serious discussion of these abuses with a view to putting a stop to them," said Mr Kellenberger. In addition, increasingly severe restrictions

imposed on the ICRC by the government have made it impossible for the organization's staff to move about independently in the affected areas and have hampered the delivery of aid intended for strictly humanitarian, apolitical purposes. Since late 2005 the authorities have also prevented the ICRC from visiting places of detention in accordance with its usual procedures, which include carrying out private interviews with detainees.

"The continuing deadlock with the authorities has led the ICRC to take the exceptional step of making its concerns public," said Mr Kellenberger. "The organization uses confidential and bilateral dialogue as its preferred means of achieving results. However, this presupposes that parties to a conflict are willing to enter into a serious discussion and take into account the ICRC's recommendations. This has not been the case with the authorities of Myanmar and that is why the ICRC has decided to speak out publicly."

"I urge the government of Myanmar to put a stop to all violations of international humanitarian law and to ensure that they do not recur," concluded Mr Kellenberger. "I would also like to remind all States party to the Geneva Conventions of their obligation, under Article 1, to respect and to ensure respect for the Conventions."

The ICRC stands ready to do everything it can to pursue its humanitarian activities for people in Myanmar who require assistance, in accordance with its internationally recognized mandate under the Geneva Conventions, the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its customary working procedures.

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June 29, 2007 - Agence France Presse

US, Myanmar hold rare talks in China over Aung San Suu Kyi - P. Parameswaran

The.BurmaNet News, June 29, 2007. Issue # 3237 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

The United States held rare talks with the Myanmar military junta in Beijing to press for the release of the Southeast Asian state's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Department said Thursday.

At the China-brokered talks this week, US officials were "clear and direct" in demanding the release of the opposition leader and thousands of other political prisoners in Myanmar, spokesman Tom Casey said. The junta leaders however did not seem to relent, he said.

It was the highest level direct talks between the rival nations in recent years, with the US officials led by deputy US assistant secretary of state Eric John, the top Southeast Asian diplomat in the State Department.

One US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the discussions were "very pointed and very direct."

"I don't think we saw anything coming out of them that will indicate, unfortunately, that they have changed their basic opinions," Casey said of the junta leaders who attended the talks -- information minister Kyaw Hsan, foreign minister Nyan Win and culture minister Khin Aung Nyint.

"We certainly did not hear that they were planning on releasing Aung San Suu Kyi or other political prisoners," he said.

Myanmar requested the meeting and Beijing, instead of Yangon, was chosen as the venue because the junta refused to meet a key condition by Washington -- allow US officials to first meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 11 of the past 18 years under house arrest, Casey said.

"The government of Burma often prefers that we would meet with them in Burma. Our longstanding policy is we will not meet them in Burma -- outside of our embassy offices -- if they will not allow us to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi," he said.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962.

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won elections in 1990, but the military did not recognize the result and has kept her locked in her lakeside home, despite fierce international criticism.

Casey said Washington decided to have the talks with the junta to "reinforce the messages they were receiving" from the UN special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, who had visited Yangon several times to press the military rulers to release Aung San Suu Kyi and bring about national reconciliation.

The junta reportedly is anxious for Gambari, who was allowed twice to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, to pay another visit to Myanmar in July when it finalizes a national convention to draw up guidelines for a new constitution.

Gambari was in Washington last week holding talks with US officials ahead of the Beijing meeting in what some diplomatic sources said was part of a fresh bid to bring about political dialogue between the junta and the NLD.

"I believe they want to make use of this small window that is available to get the dialogue going before the constitution is drawn up," said a source.

By hosting the US talks with Myanmar, China is playing a role similar to that of the six-party talks which it convened in 2003 aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear weapons drive.

"It's especially significant that these talks took place in Beijing and were arranged by the Chinese, although China will not be a publicly active participant," said former US envoy to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke.

"While these talks are unlikely to be productive, after years of nothing on Burma, perhaps they will be the beginning of a process in which China can play a role similar to that in North Korea," he said in an opinion piece in the Washington Post Thursday. China and Russia, which have both invested in Myanmar's energy sector, vetoed a US-led UN draft resolution in January urging Myanmar to swiftly return to democracy and free all political detainees.

Jeremy Woodrum, director of the Washington-based US Campaign for Burma, said China should respect the call by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

"Aung San Suu Kyi is much a China prisoner as she is a prisoner of the Burmese regime," he said.

Xinhua News - 12 July, 2007

China brings together US, Myanmar meeting

Burma News - 13 July 2007 - Euro-Burma Office "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>

Beijing - Representatives of the US and Myanmar had met recently in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry said Thursday (12.07.07).

Spokesman Qin Gang told a press briefing Thursday that at the request of both the US and Myanmar, China had helped to arrange a meeting between representatives of the two countries recently.

He did not say when did it take place or what was discussed.

Qin said, 'we believe that direct dialogue and candid exchange of views between the US and Myanmar on their respective concerns can help promote mutual understanding, and are therefore positive and beneficial.'

Bangkok Post - Monday - June 25, 2007 - FOCUS / INTERNATIONAL ROLE IN RANGOON -

UN aims to restart Burma dialogue

Recognises talks with Rangoon must be revived if the world body is to remain relevant in the reform process

By LARRY JAGAN - BURMA RELATED NEWS - JUNE 26, 2007. Tin Kyi <mtinkyi7@yahoo.com> --NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK@yahooogroups.com

The United Nations is urgently trying to find new ways of effectively encouraging the Burmese military government to push forward with its policy of national reconciliation _ a term the military junta uses to describe its road map to political reform.

For nearly two decades, resolutions passed at the annual UN General Assembly have mandated the UN secretary-general to use his good offices to support the regime's efforts to introduce democratic reform.

Now the UN is trying to revive its involvement in Burma's national reconciliation process.

Two weeks ago the newly appointed special adviser to the secretary-general, Ibrahim Gambari, held a secret meeting in New York with independent Burma specialists and senior UN officials, including the UN resident coordinator in Rangoon, Charles Petrie, to map out a Burma strategy for the UN.

The special adviser reportedly realises the UN must immediately restart its efforts to support attempts by Burma's political forces to enter some form of genuine political dialogue, or risk being sidelined and unable to play a constructive role in the national reconciliation process.

He is keen to return to Burma as soon as possible, but feels he needs to consult with some of Burma's key neighbours and allies, particularly Beijing, before he visits the country again, according to a senior source at the UN.

For its part, the junta is anxious for Mr Gambari to come in mid-July and attend the opening of the National Convention, which is to draw up guidelines for the new constitution, according to a senior Burmese official.

The constitutional process is set to resume on July 18, and according to Burma's acting prime minister, Thein Sein, who also oversees the National Convention, this will be the last session of the body.

"There is no way the special adviser would come during the first week of the convention," a senior UN official said.

"That would be tantamount to giving the convention a UN seal of approval, but an August visit is not impossible."

A Nigerian diplomat, Mr Gambari has now effectively replaced the previous special envoy for Burma, the former Malaysian diplomat Ismail Razali. Mr Gambari visited Burma twice last year as head of the UN's political affairs department. During those trips he met the country's top military leaders, including Senior General Than Shwe, and the detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose house arrest was recently extended for a year.

In fact, the UN envoy was the only person from the outside allowed to see Mrs Suu Kyi in the last three years, apart from her doctor.

Mr Gambari understands that he needs to give Burma his full attention if the UN is to have any hope of helping the national reconciliation process. But he also knows that if he is to be effective, the UN needs a detailed and well-considered strategy, and a mechanism to implement it, before he ventures forth on another exploratory trip to Burma, according to a senior aide at the UN.

That will be the main purpose of his talks with senior Asian diplomats in the region's key capitals, especially Beijing, before he heads off to see the generals again.

The UN's involvement in Burma has distinct aspects to it. The key one of course is helping the national reconciliation process and Burma's return to democracy, for which in his new role Mr Gambari would be primarily responsible. The other areas are human rights, for which there are several special rapporteurs and representatives _ including Brazilian lawyer and academic Paulo Sergio Pinheiro who has not been allowed back into Burma now for more than three years, humanitarian assistance, economic reform and the establishment of the rule of law. While these are separate concerns, the UN sees the need for all activities related to the country to be coordinated at the highest level within the organisation.

When Mr Gambari returns to Burma he will meet all the sides _ the military and pro-democracy groups, including Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy, and the ethnic minority groups. His primary concern though will be to explore whether there is a role for the UN in the national reconciliation process and what that might be, according to a senior UN official.

Mr Gambari's first visit, more than a year ago, was essentially to re-establish a relationship with the regime and the other key players. This was necessary because the previous special envoy had effectively become persona non grata with the junta and had been refused access to Burma, after what proved to be his last visit in March 2004. So after more than a two-year gap, it was crucial for the UN to re-establish contact.

Six months later he had a follow-up meeting and told the regime what he expected them to do as a goodwill gesture to build trust and show their commitment to the national reconciliation process.

"Having done that it is important for him to ask the generals, pro-democracy groups and ethnic leaders what they expect of him," said a senior Western diplomat.

Mr Gambari understands that a lot of time has been wasted since his last visit, largely because of internal UN problems and restructuring under the new secretary-general who took office earlier this year.

Now the UN needs to move quickly if it is to play a meaningful role. In fact, there were those at the meeting in New York who urged Mr Gambari to go back to Burma as soon as possible, even before the National Convention resumes its deliberations, said a source at the meeting.

This would make sense as the National Convention _ the first step on the Burmese road map to democracy announced by then-prime minister General Khin Nyunt in August 2003 _ is drawing to an end. If the UN and the international community are to have an effective role, even as interlocutors rather than mediators, it would be useful for the UN special adviser to be involved before the completion of the first step. But there may not be time to organise this and Mr Gambari himself may not be fully prepared, said a Rangoon-based Western diplomat.

In terms of a new strategy, the recent meeting in New York focused on two main themes, according to sources who

attended the event. The first was the need to engage China as a central player in supporting national reconciliation in Burma.

There was a consensus that while Beijing may have limited sway with the generals, the Chinese were the only ones who might be able to influence the junta, if they were inclined to do so.

"Beijing, the rest of Asia, and the UN should recognise that they have a common objective _ regional stability _ and a strong, transparent, developed Burma would no longer be a threat to regional security," said a Western diplomat.

"This has to be the thrust of Gambari's approach _ not the need for democracy and human rights," he added.

There have been signs recently that this may also match Beijing's view and that they are willing to discuss these matters privately with other countries. There has been high-level dialogue about Burma between the US and China at the level of Christopher Hill, US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said a source at the US State Department.

The Chinese have also been pressing Washington to start its own bilateral dialogue with the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) on Burma's political future, said a senior Chinese government official.

On the other hand, with planned Chinese mega-projects in northern Burma _ the road linking China to India and two proposed pipelines _ Burma's economy and country will be radically transformed.

It will become completely dominated by Beijing. The generals must know this and it might make them more ready to accept UN assistance.

The other key factor that the meeting identified was how to give the pro-democracy leader, Mrs Suu Kyi, a role.

"While we cannot convince the Chinese that she is the answer, we need to make her less irrelevant and recognise that at the very least she is part of the solution that would ensure regional stability," the meeting was told.

This, of course, will remain Mr Gambari's most difficult task _ to get the generals and some of their key Asian allies to accept that Mrs Suu Kyi cannot continue to be ignored. Whether he can get her freed is another matter. And of course nothing short of an unconditional release from house arrest would satisfy the pro-democracy movement inside the country and most of the international community.

But the special adviser faces the same difficulties his predecessors did: the intransigence of Burma's top military leaders and their reluctance to allow what they regard as foreign interference, combined with their grave mistrust of the UN in general.

The Nation

Burma walks a thin line with Asean - Dr Pavin Chachavalpongpun: *Special to The Nation*

BURMA RELATED NEWS - JUNE 26, 2007 - Tin Kyi <mtinkyi7@yahoo.com> - NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK@yahoo.com

Published on Jun 26, 2007

Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) turned 62 on June 19 while remaining under the house arrest that was recently extended for another year by the Burmese junta.

Amid increasing international calls for Suu Kyi's freedom, the focus is however not on her struggle against the Burmese regime for now. But July marks the 10th anniversary of Burma becoming a member of Asean. It is time now for Asean to seriously assess the membership of Burma, its promises given upon admission and how things have changed both in Burma and Asean itself.

In 1997, Thailand was a staunch supporter of Burma joining Asean. Then PM Chavalit Yongchaiyuth did not even hide the secret that he was a fan of the Burmese junta. In fact, Chavalit's endorsement of Burma's membership was not the first controversy he sank himself into.

After the Burmese military's suppression of democratic forces in 1988, Chatchai Choonhavan's buffet government, which included Chavalit as Army chief, adopted a friendly policy toward Burma based on mutual commercial interests with the consent of the military that was equally insatiably hungry. Chavalit was dispatched to Rangoon to mend bilateral ties. He was the first foreign dignitary to visit Burma after its brutal crackdown on pro-democracy activists.

With Thai support for Burma's Asean membership, Chavalit firmly defended the Burmese regime. He

declared: "I believe the generals in the ruling SLORC will listen to me because we are friends. The Burmese are good people. They are more devout Buddhists than us." Chavalit also assured us that the Burmese military had no plan to stay in power forever. Ten years on, the junta does not seem to be willing to give up political power any time soon. The period is certainly long enough to severely damage Burma's democratic institutions.

In the past decade, not only has the Burmese military shown no sign of responding to international demands for political reforms, it has continued to challenge regional peace and security. This year alone, the junta's erratic behaviour captured world attention on numerous occasions, ranging from its diplomatic normalisation with North Korea and speculation that Pyongyang might have assisted in the development of a Burmese nuclear reactor, a deal with Russia in the building of a nuclear research centre in Rangoon, coupled with the extension of Suu Kyi's imprisonment.

Not long before that, Burma voluntarily relinquished its Asean chairmanship following harsh criticism from the world community. The Burmese government has since channelled its loyalty toward China, Russia and India, who have willingly provided it with political sanctuary.

In the Asean context, the Burma issue has always been thorny, acting as a barrier in the organisation's relations with the outside world, particular with Europe.

Meanwhile, the US was sceptical about the way Asean handled Burma. This led to the renewal of American sanctions on Burma in May 2007 for another year because of the lack of a genuine dialogue between all stakeholders in Burmese politics.

When Asean opened the door for Burma in 1997, its members did not specifically hope to act as "agents of change" in the Burmese political stalemate. Logically speaking, Asean itself was vulnerable and plagued by slow progress, with more "don'ts" than "do's," with its notorious non-interference principle, and questions of legitimacy of each member government. In piggy-backing Burma, Asean felt for the first time a sense of a regional belonging against outside pressure.

This mentality has proved to be disastrous. With no real will to push for political change in Burma, Asean kept turning a blind eye to the worsening situation there. Asean members' private interests ruled over efforts to bring transformation to Rangoon. For Burma, Asean has been a fancy dress to put on so it could look normal. In reality, conditions in Burma have remained abnormal, with an ongoing civil war, a power struggle between the government and the opposition, and prolonged ethnic insurgencies.

But Asean has recently been more mature in its thinking. In the past few years, Asean leaders have spoken out vigorously that Burma would >from now on have to defend itself before the international community. The Asean charter, to be finalised at the end of the year, will serve as a legal yardstick against any member who fails to abide by the rules. And there is no exception for Burma. Thus, 1997 and 2007 differ greatly in the way Asean has come to define the Burma issue. With Asean's tougher stance, one can only wait and see whether the grouping can make a real impact on Burmese political development, or if it will even drive Burma further into the arms of China and its other allies.

Thailand, with its own political deadlock, has a significant role to play on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Burma's membership of Asean. With the general election at the end of the year, and possibly with the return of the Democrat Party, Thailand's policy toward Burma may shift once again, and hopefully in contrast to its mistake in 1997.

Applying constructive engagement, flexible engagement, or whatever engagement one might call it, the bottom line is how Thailand can achieve its own national interests when dealing with Burma, on the basis of good governance and transparency. The homecoming of the Democrat Party may lighten the dark Thai-Burmese relations that have been seen since the Thaksin days.

Surin Pitsuwan, former foreign minister under the Chuan administration in the aftermath of Burma's admission to Asean, said recently in Tokyo that the Democrat Party upholds the principle of democracy and respect for human rights when it comes to managing relations with Burma.

Burma will walk a thinner line, particularly if it fails to fulfil national reconciliation and speed up the democratisation process. Asean's newfound maturity and a possible shift of Thai policy toward Rangoon will surely spoil the 10th anniversary of Burma's Asean membership, which it hopes to enjoy.

Dr Pavin Chachavalponpun is the author of "A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thainess in Thai-Burmese Relations."

AFP- Sat Jun 23,2007 2:12 AM ET

Myanmar pro-democracy party asks to meet Suu Kyi

YANGON (AFP) - Myanmar's pro-democracy party has asked the military government for permission to meet with its detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a spokesman said Saturday.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

No one from the National League for Democracy (NLD) has met with the Nobel peace laureate since 2004.

Spokesman Nyan Win said the party leadership wanted to see her to discuss legal options for appealing for her release from house arrest.

"Our chairman Mr Aung Shwe sent a letter to the cabinet in Naypyidaw on Thursday to ask permission to meet with Ms Aung San Suu Kyi," Nyan Win told AFP.

"We want to know what she thinks about a possible appeal to the authorities regarding her detention," he said.

Myanmar's military government in May extended Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest by another year, defying international demands for her immediate release.

The 62-year-old has spent more than 11 of the last 18 years under house arrest at her lakeside Yangon home and has little contact with the outside world, apart from her live-in maid and visits from her doctor.

The last time the opposition leader -- the world's only Nobel peace laureate in detention -- left her house was in November 2006 when the junta allowed her to meet visiting UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari for one hour.

Some 52 people have been in custody since last month after they were arrested for participating in a prayer vigil for Suu Kyi's release.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962. The NLD won elections in a landslide in 1990, but the military has not recognised the result.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20070623/wl_asia_afp/myanmarpoliticsoppositionsuukyi_070623061252

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Journalist U Win Tin Spends 18 years in Burmese Prison - 04.07.2007

By Zin Linn* - zinlinn@yahoo.com.au - NLDmembersSupportersofCRPPNLDnDASSK@yahoo.com, aapp_burma@yahoo.com

Today, June 4, marks the 18th year in prison for writer-journalist U Win Tin. He was a member of the central executive committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and a key adviser to Aung San Suu Kyi who has been leading peaceful protest against the military regime. He was picked up on this day in 1989, during a nation-wide crackdown by the military authorities on the opposition.

Initially, the sentence was for three years with hard labour. The charge: as a dissident 'he had used his influence upon people to urge them to mount a civil disobedience campaign against martial law. His jail term was subsequently extended to 21 years; the regime promised his release first in 2004 and later on in 2005 but these promises was never kept like all other promises the Junta has been making only to break. Since the beginning of 2006, U Win Tin is barred from receiving visits from the International Red Cross even.

U Win Tin, former editor-in-chief of the Hanthawadi Daily, spent his 77th birthday in solitary confinement on 12th of March. He is the only journalist- prisoner of conscience under solitary confinement for over 18 years. He also holds the record as the longest serving journalist detainees in the world. On one occasion, the prison authorities had assured the Red Cross that U Win would be released early and that his sentence would not be extended. The promise was a mirage.

The Junta has been pressurising him to give up political activity if he wants to breathe a free man. But U Win has turned down the demand not once but several times and refused to sign a letter on the dotted line. In July 2006, his name figured among 118 political prisoners listed for early release from Insein prison. But he was left out in the end for reasons that remain a mystery.

He was singled out of that group for the honour of being thrown back into solitary confinement. A jail officer reportedly told him in July 2006 that he could not hope for release as he did not do hard labour. What logic? Only a heartless junta can think sentencing an old person to hard labour.

On his 77th birthday, Reporters without Borders and the Burma Media Association lamented: "The inhumanity of this military junta, which has imprisoned a sick, 77-year-old man for nearly 18 years, needs no further proof. By refusing U Win Tin the right to early release, the regime breaks its own laws and promises. We call for him to be freed at once." The Committee to Protect Journalists also called on the military authorities to immediately release U Win Tin.

The seasoned journalist is not keeping good health. He has had at least two heart attacks. He suffers from hypertension, a degenerative spine condition, inflamed prostate and urinary infirmity. A prison physician provides him twice-monthly checkups. But he largely depends on the support of his friend's family, who regularly bring him food, medicine and clothes.

When Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Special Envoy for Human Rights in Myanmar, visited U Win Tin on his birthday in 2005, he was moved as much by the deplorable conditions he was kept in and by the fact that his failing health has been made worse by poor medical care and the effects of improper surgery. Prof. Pinheiro said in his report, "I was very moved when U Win Tin narrated how he has no access to paper or a pen".

This denial of 'instruments of his craft' has not served to silence the journalist and poet in U Win. To fight his forced silence, he fabricated his own ink out of powder extracted from the bricks of his cell, and fashioned a pen from a piece of bamboo mat. Although Prof. Pinheiro's mission is to secure freedom for all political prisoners, it is important for him to take up individual cases, especially of U Win and other political prisoners who are old or ill, more so as the PEN, Canada points out the detention of the journalist-author ? HR campaigner is a violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Presently in Burma, there is no freedom of association, no freedom of expression, no freedom of the press and no freedom of profession under Burmese military regime which styles itself as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Approximately 1200 prisoners of conscience and political prisoners are in custody; they include Members of Parliaments, students, doctors, teachers, journalists, writers, lawyers, actors and housewives. They are all serving long sentences in notorious prisons across Burma.

Democracy and national reconciliation will remain a mirage as long as the junta continues to incarcerate Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, and political activists for decades. If the SPDC truly wants to show its commitment to democratic process, it should release all political prisoners prior to resuming the so called national convention on 18 July 2007 at Nyaung-hnapin camp in Hmawbi Township.

People of Burma are deeply disturbed that ASEAN member states as well as neighbouring China and India are making no effort to promote stability in their country. They also feel sad that these powerful neighbours are ignoring the deteriorating rule of law and respect for all internationally recognized human rights and basic freedoms inside Burma.

The United Nations has been calling for political reforms including release of political prisoners since 1991. The world body has adopted several resolutions but these concerns have not gone beyond lip service. Without action, resolutions are of no avail. Global accords prohibiting torture and upholding human rights can not help prisoners of conscience ill-treated by the dictatorial regime. It is time to pay heed to the cries of agony.

Zin Linn - A former political prisoner is a writer - journalist in exile. He is an executive member of the Burma Media Association which is affiliated with Reporters Sans Frontiers based in Paris.

The Irrawaddy Online Newsletter for July 18, 2007 - The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>

Final NC Session Urged to Stick to Guidelines

By Khun Sam and AP - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7917

July 18, 2007 -

The Chairman of Burma's National Convention Convening Committee, Lt-Gen Thein Sein, called on delegates at the start of its final session on Wednesday not to seek amendments to constitutional guidelines agreed on at previous meetings.

The current session is continuing the work of drawing up guidelines for a new constitution. Burmese Information Minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan has said „a referendum as well as elections - will follow -quickly.?”

A local journalist quoted Thein Sein as saying: "Since this is the last session, delegates are asked to review the principles...without deviating from the already agreed guidelines." He warned that legal action would be taken against anyone trying to derail the process.

The journalist told The Irrawaddy that Kyaw Hsan offered no timetable for the next steps of the regime's so-called 'road map.'

Local journalists said security seemed tighter than at the previous session, which was convened last October. Foreign journalists were not present, and fewer diplomats than usual were seen.

Burmese opposition activists within Burma and abroad have denounced the National Convention and its decisions as a sham. They say the constitution will guarantee a major role for the military in the country's political future and prolong military dictatorship.

Twelve ethnic political parties in Burma last week urged the junta to amend some of the fundamental principles used in drafting the constitution and to draft a genuinely democratic federal union constitution.

The current final session could take about a month and a half to complete, according to Information Minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan.

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