



BURMA REPORT

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

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Burma At 60: Time for Change!

Bangkok, 29 December, (Asiantribune.com): The brief socio-economic overview of Burma's past 60 years presents the grim realization that the past 2 years have witnessed a sharp decline in Burma on all fronts.

Altsean-Burma is releasing a briefer ahead of Burma's 60th anniversary of independence on January 4, 2008 alleged despite public relations efforts aimed at staving off both external and internal pressure, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has perpetrated such serious mismanagement, repression and corruption that the consequences are not only threatening Burma's stability but that of its immediate region as well.

Altsean-Burma is releasing a briefer ahead of Burma's 60th anniversary of independence on January 4, 2008.

Tragically, the consequences of Burmese military regime's gross mismanagement and violations do not offer any cause for celebration, Altsean-Burma pointed out.

"Under the leadership of Senior General Than Shwe, the SPDC has turned Burma into a state of disgraceful decay. Thanks to Than Shwe, more than 90% of the people are living below the poverty line while he uses up the country's resources to wage war against ethnic families and build tributes to his own ego," said Altsean-Burma Coordinator Debbie Stothard.

"It should not be forgotten that Burma used to be regarded as the Southeast Asian nation 'most likely to succeed', because of its rich natural resources, strong civil service and respected education system. It is not too late to bring Burma back to the path of its original destiny. The SPDC can change the situation by taking the immediate steps of releasing all political prisoners, declaring a national ceasefire and commencing tripartite dialogue," emphasized Ms Stothard. She also reiterated that ASEAN, China, and India have a collective obligation to convince the Burmese regime to change.

2008 also marks 20 years since the 8888 uprising.
- Asian Tribune -

The Irrawaddy Online News Alert: - The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>, January 02, 2008 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/>

Where Truth Stands - http://www.irrawaddy.org/letter.php?art_id=9785

by Richard J Tilley - Charleston - South Carolina - Letters to the Editor_2008

We are put in an irreconcilable position concerning the future of Burma. There is little hope the Burmese junta will hold talks with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or any other interested party in the coming year. 2008 will be another stifle hold on an already limping movement. I only say the movement is limping because it is being held back in every direction. The UN Security Council cannot pass any measures due to China and Russia. Asean will not take firm steps to deal with the junta for fear of trade fallouts as well as the fear of the organization falling apart at the seams. The US does not wish to get too deeply involved other than more rhetoric from a lame-duck State Department and the EU would just as easily prefer to trade with Burma if they could escape the public outcry for doing so. So, where does that leave us for 2008?

Unfortunately it seems it is up to the people and the organizations skills of laymen, monks and the NLD [National League for Democracy] members who have managed to escape imprisonment. They and they alone can help bring democratic reform to Burma. The reason this is a bad thing is because they will no doubt pay the price with their lives. The rest of the world will stand behind them, not alongside them, and watch and as they valiantly march towards their fate—prison, labor camps and even death.

The rest of us outside Burma must help the cause by educating anyone who will listen. Only by striking a blow against ignorance can we render the lack of knowledge of what is going on in Burma as no longer an excuse for it to continue for another year. We must speak for those who are unable to speak for themselves. This seems to me our best option at this time.

As an American, this is difficult. Our nation is preoccupied with Iraq and the war on terror. Look at us. We even left

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Afghanistan behind in our march to war. It seems to me half the nation is too war weary to hear about another oppressed nation, BUT the other half wants to know more, wants to do more, wants to do something to make a difference. This is where we can make a difference.

This is where we can make our stand. Martin Luther famously said, "Here I stand." And the writer Erasmus answered back, "I stand here and here and here."

Well, I too stand here and here and here. I stand for the people of Burma across the entire nation facing a varied sort of oppression and violent abuse on a day-in day-out basis.

But there is hope. The struggle for democracy and individual freedom does not end with any one individual. We have many to look up to who have each in their own way given something up for the cause of the people of Burma. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Gambira, Ko Min Ko Naing, Su Su Nway, Dr Cynthia Maung, Ko Htay Kywa, U Win Tin, the 88 Generation Students group leaders inside and outside of Burma. We have many heroes to look up to: The survivors who escaped the burning of Karen villages, the women of Chin State, the Free Burma Rangers. The list goes on and on and on.

How can we be lacking in inspiration? We, being the average individual who watches and mourns for the Burmese and ethnic people of Burma. How can we let 2008 be like 2007? We must not wait for the people to rise. We must prepare the world for their rise. We must let the world know. I once told myself, we must help the people to help themselves. But really we must help ourselves to help the people. That is where the truth stands.

The Irrawaddy Online News Alert - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9631

Laura Bush Lashes Out at Junta Again

by Lalit K Jha / New York - December 19, 2007

The US first lady, Laura Bush, on Tuesday lashed out at the Burmese military junta for failing to meet the "minimal expectations" of the international community and having made no "meaningful" effort to hold talks with pro-democracy leaders.



US First Lady Laura Bush(L) meets with the UN envoy for Burma Ibrahim Gambari at the White House in Washington, DC
[Photo:AFP]

The strongly worded statement from Laura Bush, who has taken an exceptionally keen interest in the country, comes a day after she was briefed by UN Special Envoy on Burma Ibrahim Gambari in the White House on December 17.

The White House issued the statement by Laura Bush later in the evening only after Gambari had briefed the members of the UN General Assembly in New York, following which he briefly addressed the media outside the Security Council.

"It is clear from the briefing that I received from UN special advisor Ibrahim Gambari yesterday, followed by his report to the United Nations General Assembly today, that Burma's General Than Shwe and his associates are failing to meet even the minimal expectations set out by the unanimous membership of the UN Security Council on October 11, 2007," Laura Bush said.

Through the presidential statement, the Security Council had called on the government of Burma to take all necessary measures to address the political, economic, humanitarian and human rights issues that are the concerns of its people.

It had also stressed the need for the Burmese government to create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned parties and ethnic groups in order to achieve an inclusive national reconciliation with the direct support of the UN. The Security Council also emphasized the importance of the early release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Laura Bush, who has issued several statements on the issue of Burma in the last few months, said the military junta has made no meaningful

attempt to talk with democratic activists.

"Instead, it has continued to harass and detain them," she charged, adding: "The junta leaders continue to sell the country's natural resources to enrich themselves."

"While they reject international calls for a democratic transition, they have put Burma in a shambles and placed its people in a perilous state," she said.

Children are being trafficked and subjected to forced recruitment into the military; citizens are fleeing the country to seek work and basic healthcare; meanwhile, infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and malaria, continue to spread unchecked, said the US first lady.

ABC Radio Australia-05/01/2008 - <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/news/stories/s2132186.htm>

Britain urges reconciliation in Burma

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British Foreign Secretary David Miliband has called for national reconciliation in Burma in a statement marking the country's 60th anniversary of independence from Britain.

He urged Burma's military rulers to engage in "constructive dialogue" following the junta's clampdown on dissent in September, and stressed that Britain remained keen on "international action".

The US First Lady Laura Bush also urged the world to condemn Burma's abuses" of human rights and urged the country's military rulers to free democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

She said the United States stands with Ms Suu Kyi and all those working to make sure the people of Burma celebrate real independence by next January 4.

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/news/stories/s2132186.htm>

Reuters – by Aung Hla Tun - January 4, 2008 –

Myanmar deploys riot police for Independence Day -

THE BURMANET NEWS - January 4, 2008 Issue # 3373 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

Myanmar's junta deployed riot police and fire trucks at potential flashpoints in Yangon on Friday to prevent pro-democracy protests on the 60th anniversary of independence from Britain.

Riot police took up positions outside the former capital's City Hall and the Shwedagon and Sule pagodas -- all key locations in mass anti-junta protests that erupted in September.

One government official, who did not want to be named, said local authorities had also been ordered to prepare gangs of "Swan-Arr-Shin", or "Masters of Force", thugs in case pro-democracy activists tried to demonstrate.

The junta, the latest face of 45 years of army rule in the former Burma, limited its celebrations to a military ceremony in the remote new capital, Naypyidaw, and a broadcast message from junta supremo Than Shwe.

Repeating an oft-touted slogan, the 75-year-old Senior General urged Myanmar's 53 million people to "make a firm resolve to build a new, peaceful, modern and developed discipline flourishing nation".

He made no mention of any dialogue with detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won an election landslide in 1990 only to be denied power by the army. The Nobel laureate has been in prison or under house arrest for most the interim.

Her father General Aung San is generally acknowledged as the father of independence.

At the headquarters of her National League for Democracy (NLD), about 350 people ranging from party faithful to Western diplomats held their own separate ceremony under the watchful gaze of secret police.

After killing at least 31 people in its suppression of the September protests, the junta is under unprecedented international pressure to talk to Suu Kyi about political reform and move towards restoring a modicum of civilian rule.

"We have not given up on the chance of dialogue," party spokesman Nyan Win said. "We do hope dialogue takes place and national reconciliation emerges in 2008. We want 2008 to be the year of reconciliation."

The junta appointed Labour Minister Aung Kyi to hold talks with Suu Kyi after September's violence. They held three meetings, details of which have not been disclosed.

Washington called on the junta to release Suu Kyi and conduct a meaningful dialogue with the opposition.

"President Bush and I ask all nations to join in condemning the military junta for its shameful abuses of basic human rights," said first lady Laura Bush in a statement issued by her office.

"We urge the regime to fulfil its promises to the United Nations Security Council, and to take more than token steps toward meaningful dialogue with Burma's opposition. General Than Shwe must release Aung San Suu Kyi and other

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democratic leaders, so they can begin the process of national reconciliation," the statement said.

Myanmar was one of Asia's brightest prospects when it won independence from Britain in 1948. However, its economy has stagnated under four decades of military rule and a disastrous attempt at home-grown socialism.

The Irrawaddy Online News Alert: The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>- http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9751

Dhamma Banned in Burma by **Wai Moe** - December 27, 2007

THE BURMANET NEWS, December 22-28, 2007 Issue # 3369 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

The Burmese military government has ordered a ban on Buddhist dhamma talks and seminars in Rangoon, according to monks in the former capital.

The monks told The Irrawaddy on Thursday that dhamma [the Buddha's teachings] talks by four well-known monks were forced to cancel in December. The monks were named as: U Kawthala, also known as Dhamma Sedi Sayadaw; U Kawwida, also known as Mizzima Gon Yi Sayadaw; U Nadapadi, also known as Pyu Sayadaw; and U Sadila, also known as Lu Yay Chun Sayadaw.

Township authorities in Rangoon had been ordered to ban dhamma talks by the Regional Commander of Rangoon, said the sources. On Wednesday, U Kawwida, who is also a PhD in Buddhism, prepared to conduct a Buddhist tutorial in Insein Township, on the outskirts of Rangoon. However, officials arrived at the scene and ordered the dhamma talk to be stopped immediately.

"U Kawwida requested permission from the commander of the Rangoon Regional Command, Maj-Gen Hla Htay Win, to address the crowd, but the commander rejected the monk's request," said a monk, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"U Kawwida was scheduled to talk in Rangoon tomorrow, but he has been forced to cancel."

Meanwhile, in central Rangoon, a dhamma talk by Khamasiri Linkaya, also known as Shwepyihein Sayadaw, was stopped by authorities recently, according to sources in Rangoon.

Khamasiri Linkaya was then interrogated, said a monk who attended the talk, adding that the authorities suspected his speech was critical of the junta and might charge the senior monk.

Since November, dhamma VCDs featuring Burma's most respected senior monks, including U Nyanithara and U Kawwida, which are critical of the military crackdown, have reportedly been banned by the authorities.

"The authorities ban dhamma CDs and VCDs whether they are directly or indirectly critical of military rule," said a senior monk.

Meanwhile, the Buddhist University in Rangoon was ordered to close by authorities according to sources. Officials have yet to announce a date for the university to reopen. Monks from the Buddhist University were actively involved in the September uprising.

The Burmese junta often claims it believes deeply in Buddhism and encourages the growth of the faith. It's a claim that few Burmese people believe since the acts of brutality carried out by the authorities against the revered monks.

Irrawaddy.org - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/>

Weekend Edition – **counter punch** - <http://www.counterpunch.org/jameson12242007.html>

A Journey from Rangoon to Mae Sot on the Thai-Burma Border

Burma is Not Back to Normal - By **JILL JAMESON** - *December 24, 2007*

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A small Buddhist Peace Fellowship delegation went to Burma to bear witness to the suffering of the people following the brutal crackdown by the Burmese military at the end of September on monks and the people of Burma. We wanted to communicate the support and solidarity of the international community with the people of Burma, and to be a voice for the voiceless by sharing with our communities on return. Our communities had expressed their concerns and given generously, and we offered the donations to various groups to let them know that the rest of the world deeply cares about Burma. We wanted to explore channels for future further support inside Burma, as well as finding ways to support the monks in exile.

The participants included two people from Thailand including a socially engaged Buddhist monk, Hozan Alan Senauke, a Zen priest and from Buddhist Peace Fellowship USA, and Jill Jameson from Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Australia. Jill

has worked with people from Burma since 1994 facilitating grassroots leadership training, peace building and conflict transformation.

Inside Burma and on the Thai-Burma border we met with activists, monks, students, orphans, Western diplomats, and ordinary people in teashops and restaurants. We listened to their stories about events of the last several months, and how they are continuing to work both for the liberation of Burma as well as for their survival and that of their families. Wherever we went, people were very happy to meet with us, and welcomed the opportunity to share their stories.

The generals want the international community to believe that everything has returned to 'normal', that Burma is safe again for tourists, and that the disorder from the protests is over. But the 'normality' for Burma under the military regime is a state of fear and repression. This verbal whitewash from the regime was very different from what we learned from the people we met.

Neither army, police or beggars were evident in downtown Rangoon, but we heard from 'Aung Myint' that beggars and the homeless had been taken to detention centres, and that some of the army were dressed as monks at Shwedagon Pagoda, and others were in plain clothes. Our group was investigated on one of our visits to a monastic orphanage by plain clothes police and fortunately, giving out packets of noodle soup to the children had not been a crime.

People are suffering very deeply. They suffer the consequences of a failed state which spends according to IMF: 0.5% of GNP on health, 0.4% on education and 40% on defence on controlling their own people. 'Dr. Win' told us that many people just outside of Rangoon can only afford one meal a day, and that with fuel increases some people cannot afford the bus fare to go to work. We visited several Buddhist monastic schools and orphanages. At one of these there were 500 students, and often there was not enough food, only a little rice. Large classes of children sat at cramped benches, and the large dormitories smelt of neglect. During our visit, a health worker was lifting shirts to reveal ulcers and extensive ring worm, which were dabbed with a sulphur cream. Malnutrition, over-crowding and limited staff to care for the children surely exacerbate the problem. The families of children at such an orphanage as this cannot even afford the low fees of a government school. In the Rangoon Division alone we heard there were 162 such Buddhist orphanages. There are also many run by Christian denominations. 'Betty' who visits orphanages in other states, said there could be 'be hundreds of thousands of orphans'. Often, she said, the child's father was a soldier who had been killed, and mother may have been injured by a landmine gathering food in a forest. We also heard these children referred to as the 'scrap children' where many families are too poor to feed all their children. And their future? Many have no option but to join the army, or, to become a monk. And monks and soldiers are about equal in number. But many children are also forced conscripts to the army. Recent reports of child conscripts as young as 10 years have reached the international media. The regime's response to this we heard from 'Stephen' was to fine either the child or its parents, anything to avoid responsibility being taken by the generals.

We had heard how one prominent monk responding to the food shortages had set up a food station to produce low cost boxed meals to distribute through downtown shops and in rural areas. The Venerable was very reluctant to talk about this and fear was palpable. We had hoped to be able to contribute to this program but suspect the program may have been suspended.

People are controlled not only by military force but also by fear. This is all pervasive. People often speak in code to avoid being overheard by unknown security people in plain clothes, or by informers so poor and desperate for basic survival that they will inform on anybody. We also touched this fear, with our antennas out on stalks, hyper-alert with our main concern for our friends not to suffer the consequences of talking with us. But there was also an increase in anger and urgency since last I was in Burma. San, a gentle elderly man confided he would like to get rid of the leaders somehow for the greater good of all. Sitting at tea shops, people would approach us with a common theme; 'life is so difficult now', and '90% of the people are against this regime, and please do tell the international community' and 'do take our message to the Security Council'. All we could do was listen. And as Buddhists, this is a valuable practice. So many people had a deep need to talk and share, to tell the whole story so often in all its violent and brutal detail interspersed with jokes. Impossible to understand other than in terms of fear and power, and possibly history. Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of Burma threw some light on this back in 1991.

"It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it."

Since September people are suffering deeply from the brutal onslaught on the highly revered monks in a country where 90% are Buddhist, and where respect for monks is deeply imbued in their culture and way of life. Many monks we heard had been forcibly disrobed so they could be tortured. And it was not 2% of the monks as claimed by the generals who marched, but nearer 30% were involved in the protests. They were compassionately drawing attention to the recent dramatic increases in rice and fuel costs. They knew intimately of the people's plight their begging bowls providing an indication. Despite their poverty people still however gave a little rice to the monks.

We heard from 'Stephen' that there were four categories of people in the protest. There were those who were guilty by looking, those who clapped, those who offered water and those who marched. Only the first three categories were released after a month's interrogation, and then only if they signed that they would never again protest. The fourth category are probably still in detention. 'Stephen' also shared with us that his college friend who was now a colonel, had revealed details of invasion of a monastery while drunk, and that he was under orders to beat up monks when

questioning them. These are very concerning humanitarian aspects, and we need to keep asking where are the monks and the people detained? We further heard from 'Stephen' that soon after the protests ended, that the crematorium had been running at the unusual hour of 1-4am.

'Peter' a reliable source, indicated numbers killed were much higher than given by the regime, and would seem to be higher than in the report by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Paulo Pinheiro, 7 Dec. 2007. We heard that 30 monks were killed in Yangon and more than 70 people were killed in detention after the demonstrations had stopped. Piheiro reported that 31 monks had been killed and a further 74 listed as missing, and up to 1000 still detained - 106 of these were women, of whom six were Buddhist nuns. We heard on a visit to one monastery, that the nuns from nearby had left, and that they miss their chanting in the mornings. What has happened to other nuns in Burma?

An English teacher monk at a monastic school and orphanage for 500 children said there were now 15 monks, 35 novices, 12 teachers and 80 resident children. Prior to September, there were 200 monks and novices who have not been heard of since their participation in the 'revolution' and who had fled. They were to make contact but nothing has been heard. It is feared they are in detention or worse.

On the Thai-Burma border there are many local organisations, such as the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. There were photos of political prisoners around the walls and a prison model exhibition, depicting the forms of torture employed. And yet speaking with 'Myint,' a survivor of torture and 15 years of prison, including several years in solitary confinement, we were left in no doubt about the extraordinary courage and ardent commitment for democracy, freedom and dignity of many of the activists.

So how is the military crackdown impacting on Buddhism? On the one hand, many monks have gone from being revered to now being treated as criminals. On the other, meditation practice would seem to be strong. Some political prisoners we met, have survived long incarceration and torture and overcome deep depression through their meditation practice. Some monasteries such as Maggin in Rangoon have been closed and the HIV/Aids patients it cared for have been dispersed. There are 3,000 Buddhist monasteries throughout the country which provide accommodation, food, care and education for many children, and we could not get answers who is now taking responsibility for the children.

On the Thai Burma border we met with three different groups of monks who had managed to flee. Their number is surprisingly low given the 100, 000 monks who actively participated, leaving grave concerns for the safety of those still in Burma. We heard that some monks from Mandalay had fled in terror to the border, disrobed and are now working as migrant workers. Other monks who have fled are living in 3 safe-houses set up for 51 new arrivals from September. Despite being out of Burma, they have great difficulties. They have been forbidden refuge in Thai temples 3 police cars were seen outside one temple keeping watch they have no travel permits and if caught, may be very heavily fined or sent back to Burma. UNHCR is also no longer registering asylum seekers. On the other hand, resettlement of refugees in third countries such as Australia and the United states, is having a de-stabilising effect on border communities. Those people with some level of training, such as health workers and teachers are being given priority causing hardship for the local communities whose resources are already severely over-stretched.

Despite the fear, the poverty and with little hope of change, people we met demonstrate huge generosity, a great sense of humour and deep caring for their country, which was once the rice bowl of Asia, and with many highly educated people. Many have found ways to survive, of finding opportunities in the cracks between conflict and possibility, of taking one step at a time. There is a refusal to give up people rising up again and again in full awareness of the consequences and risks to their lives and those of their families. Their message is very clear and urgent enough is enough, and it is time for freedom.

There is a growing movement with resonances of pre-independence India led by Gandhi. This mostly underground democracy movement inside Burma has strong links with a developing civil society and local organisations on the borders, linked with increased awareness and strength of an environmental movement. But it would seem that unless international community intervenes little will change for the people of Burma. Now is the time.

So, I feel a deep responsibility to speak out, to share as widely as possible, that life in Burma is 'not back to normal'. People have been disappeared. Far too many. Where are they, and what has happened to them? The intense and pervasive fear and gross human rights abuse contravene international conventions. Even those not in official detention are in effect in detention in a place called Burma. There were pleas from many we met not to allow our Asian neighbours to accept this 'normality', and a warning not to accept what the generals say will change. It is not evident that they care one scrap about the people they control. We in Australia should support the broad based democracy movement and the people inside Burma with a passion for freedom, on the need for dialogue and reconciliation. There are no easy solutions and the wounding has been long and deep but the question now that we have all seen the pictures and heard the cries for help, how can we continue to respond? I feel we must prioritise the freeing of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, and encourage dialogue and reconciliation. There is also a great need for healing and humanitarian support.

Jill Jameson is a member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. This is an account of her visit to Burma in early December.

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Can “Group of Friends” of Burma help Gambari? - By Dr. Sein Myint

Last Wednesday, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon formed a “Group of Friends” for Burma to help his special UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari, who is in close consultation with both the military generals and pro-democracy leaders, to encourage democracy and human rights in Burma.

The group is comprised of five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the US, Britain, China, Russia and France); four ASEAN members (Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam); the EU represented by Portugal; plus three major regional players—India, Japan and Australia; and Norway. To strengthen this noble cause it will be worthwhile to analyze how this “Group of Friends” can help Mr. Gambari’s future missions to Burma.

On the surface, there is no reason to doubt each country’s friendship and sincerity towards “Burma” as Burma has maintained her long standing Non-Aligned foreign policies since 1955, when the late Burmese Premier U Nu was one of founding signatories of the first Non-Aligned Movement Conference at Bandung, Indonesia.

However, if we dig deeper and carefully scrutinize the “Group of Friends,” each member’s “Friendliness” towards the current military government, the SPDC in Burma, falls into one of the two camps.

The first camp, the “political and/or economic friends” of the SPDC, is led by two permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and Russia, and regional giants Japan, India, four ASEAN countries, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam

The second camp, the “political friends” of the Burma Democratic Opposition but “politically not-so-friendly” to the SPDC, is led by the US, Britain, and France—three permanent members of the UN Security Council, and the EU, Portugal, Norway, and Australia.

The “Group of Friends” is an informal group hoping to assist Mr. Gambari’s mediation works in Burma, specifically to help find ways and means to persuade the recalcitrant Junta leader, Senior General Than Shwe and his hard-line loyalists, to release detained opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and start a meaningful dialogue with her.

Many countries listed in the camp led by China, have already publicly stated their view on the matter of releasing Daw ASSK as an internal affairs of Burma which only the Burmese can solve themselves. This camp wishes to leave the Generals alone to decide Burma’s fate without the outside interference.

But the second camp led by the US believes that the international community could not leave the SPDC’s gross human rights abuses on its citizens as an internal affair since the United Nations have the responsibility to protect millions of people living under the harsh military’s dictatorial and arbitrary laws.

While the US and her group push for a tougher position in dealing with the Junta, China and her group resist applying pressure preferring to use gentle persuasions to get things done.

So far, the Junta has survived the limited sanctions by the US and the EU as they have little direct effect on the government in Burma, and the SPCD has also brushed aside the gentle and persuasive “constructive engagements” initiated by the ASEAN neighbors.

With such diametrical views in both camps, getting a consensus on how to persuade and pressure the Junta for direct talks with Daw ASSK would need extra diplomatic skills by both the Secretary General and his special envoy.

A senior EU diplomat has said that “at least these diplomats have a place to meet and a format to work together”. The Japanese Ambassador has also given a positive note about the usefulness of the group for the Secretary General, and has added an assurance that ‘it is not against Burma’, perhaps, he has meant; ‘it is not against the SPDC’.

With such diverse opinions and views amongst the group members, one could not help wonder, how the “Friends” of the Junta will find a common ground with the “Friends” of Democratic opposition, and provide a magic formula to Mr. Gambari to bring to Naypyidaw.

Nevertheless, if this magic formula fails to work, perhaps, it is time for the “Friends” of Democratic opposition to start contemplating a more effective dose of medicine; certainly if the silver bullet fails may be a silver missile might do the trick.

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Tough road ahead for Surin

Asean Charter must be ratified by a quorum before the new secretary-general can carry on with his work

Published on January 13, 2008

Surin Pitsuwan has taken up his post as Asean secretary-general. He expressed the hope that the Asean Charter would be ratified within one year after Singapore became the first member of the grouping to ratify this historic document earlier this week. The island nation has set a good example by providing this calculated measure of support. As it turns out, there is a chance that the ratification process might take more than one year. At the Asean Summit in November, no leaders were able to commit to ratifying the charter within a specific time frame.

As a result of this lack of an agreed-upon timetable, the charter, which is supposed to streamline red tape and make the organisation more effective and responsive to civil society organisations in the region, may be stalled.

Furthermore, the expectations that the charter would also enhance the role of the secretary-general to speak and act on behalf of Asean remains a pipe dream.

At the moment, there is nothing to indicate that other countries might follow in Singapore's footsteps. Filipino President Gloria Arroyo warned in November that her country's parliament might not ratify the charter because of the ongoing political suppression in Burma.

Malaysia showed enthusiasm at first, but the issue has been put on the back burner due to scandals at home. Other countries have not yet said anything.

In Thailand's case, the new government has not yet been set up, so it will take a while. As host of the upcoming summit later this year, Thailand wants to make sure that all members ratify the charter so that it can be implemented right away.

If all members of Asean do not ratify the charter by the end of this year, then there must be an alternative plan, which would enable existing signatories to give the green light to take any significant stand and perhaps even to ratify the charter.

It is possible that six or seven signatories would be sufficient for a quorum. Already, it has been announced that there will not be a mid-year summit because the charter has not yet been ratified.

The charter stipulates that there should be two summit meetings annually. Other recommendations will need the charter's ratification to move ahead.

In fact, the delay of the ratification of the charter could also push back the establishment of an Asean human-rights body. Without the ratification, members could say that there is nothing to do for the time being. Asean leaders agree that the terms of reference should be first drawn up as guidelines for the human-rights body in Asean.

Surin will be in Naypyidaw this week for a ministerial meeting on arts and culture. It will be his first foreign trip since he took over the secretary-general position. His trip will be revealing, both about Burma's attitude towards his leadership and to the Asean Charter. After all, Burma has remained defiant in the face of all international pressure following the violent crackdown on demonstrators there in September of last year.

The leaders of the Burmese junta said that they would follow their political development plan, which includes the democratisation process set forth three years ago.

If that is the case, they would certainly like to resume their rotation into the Asean chairmanship, which they abandoned after heavy criticism from Asean and the international community in 2004. This would allow Burma to proceed with its business-as-usual political attitude.

Surin will have difficult tasks ahead of him. If he has the proper support of Asean leaders, Surin can be effective and make use of the connections he has established around the world. If not, he will follow the same path as his three predecessors and be held captive to bureaucracy and leadership idiosyncrasies.

Surin's dreams to carry on with the aspirations of Asean's founding fathers still remain on muddy ground, and will remain so unless there is a fundamental change in the Asean mindset. ### The Nation

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Hidden life of Burma's opposition - 01-08-08 BBC News, Bangkok

By Andrew Harding - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7177658.stm>

In a small, windowless room somewhere in Rangoon, a 35-year-old woman called Nilar Thein is wrestling with an unusual dilemma.

For the past four months, she has been on the run, scrambling between safe-houses, trying to keep a step ahead of the Burmese authorities as they hunt for the ringleaders of last September's protests.

Most of those in hiding have already been tracked down and imprisoned, but somehow Nilar has managed to evade capture.

"I'm very careful about my safety," she said, speaking on a mobile phone. She changes numbers regularly.

"I've found kind families who really helped me. It's thanks to them that I am still free. Still, I've had many narrow escapes."

But as the weeks slip by Nilar faces a growing quandary.

Should she remain in hiding indefinitely, or should she try to spearhead a new protest campaign against the Burmese authorities - a move almost guaranteeing her a lengthy prison sentence.

In many ways, Nilar's predicament is shared by the internal opposition movement as a whole, as it struggles to regroup after last year's dramatic street protests and the violent crackdown which followed.

"I feel inadequate when I hear that one of my colleagues has been arrested for their activities. I get quite depressed that I cannot go out and do as they did," said Nilar.

"My friends tell me not to get carried away by my emotions. We all decided who would go out and who would stay.

"There are many things that I can do while in hiding. But I don't see myself hiding like this forever. I'm just waiting for the right moment."

Child at risk

Nilar's position is complicated - to put it mildly - by her unusual family circumstances.

Her husband Kyaw Min Yu - also known as Jimmy - is already in Rangoon's notorious Insein jail.

He was arrested on 21 August after taking part in the very first street protests triggered by an overnight increase in the price of fuel.

"I get messages, indirectly, from him in jail," Nilar explained.

"He is in good health. But sometimes I feel so sad I want to go to prison just to see him."

As veteran members of Burma's 88 Generation Students - a pro-democracy group named after the last major uprising in 1988 - Nilar and Jimmy are both familiar with their country's penal system.

Between them they have spent 24 years in jail - Jimmy 16 years, Nilar eight.

In 2006, they decided to get married, and in April last year Nilar gave birth to a daughter, Phyu Nay Kyi Min Yu.

When Nilar went into hiding at the end of August, she initially took Phyu with her.

But the risks for both proved too great.

Once, while hiding in an attic, Nilar heard the police downstairs.

"I told my daughter - my dear, please don't make a noise. If you want to stay with mummy, please do not make any noise. I was breastfeeding her. She looked at me as if she understood the whole situation, and did not make a sound."

After that incident, Nilar decided to leave Phyu with her in-laws.

"There is tight security around my daughter now. The authorities are still hoping I will come to see her."



Nilar has been hiding in Rangoon since last year's protests

“ I don't see myself hiding like this forever. I'm just waiting for the right moment”



Nilar's husband Kyaw Min Yu (L) has spent 16 years in jail

“ There is tight security around my daughter now. The authorities are still hoping I will come to see her”

She believes they are using her daughter as a trap.

In prison, Jimmy is able to receive occasional visits from his daughter. But in hiding, Nilar has no direct contact whatsoever.

"[Sometimes it seems like] those in prison have better lives than us," she mused.

"They can leave their cells for walks, and see their families. I hear from friends that my daughter has grown so much. They told me how she giggled.

"But a baby should be under the close care of her own parents. I really want to be with my family - the three of us together."

Nilar spends her days waiting and planning, and her nights fighting with bronchitis and asthma attacks.

She has not stepped outside for more than a month, but may soon have to move to another location.

She says her years in solitary confinement have helped her cope with the isolation.

"I'm in a place where I cannot see the sun, or be touched by the wind," she said. "But it could be much worse."

Useful role

There are now other activists with her in hiding, but she does not want to give their names for security reasons.

"The only problem is if we fall ill. We cannot go out to see a doctor. But all of us have spent time in prison so we are used to the conditions."

Once, when an earlier hideout was surrounded by the authorities, Nilar managed to slip out of a side door and flag down a rickshaw taxi.

"When I glanced round, I saw a man with a walkie-talkie chasing me on a bicycle. I hid behind my umbrella." Luckily for her the rickshaw was quicker, and she managed to escape.

For now, Nilar insists she can still play a useful role in hiding.

"I don't think I am isolated at the moment, or sidelined. Many top leaders have been captured but I am in touch with all those who are still in the movement.

"We have contact and co-ordination. I have no plan to go abroad or into exile. If you hold on to your beliefs, you can overcome anything."

But after decades in power, Burma's military government is showing no signs of buckling under international or internal pressure.

Like the bruised opposition movement as a whole, Nilar acknowledges that she may soon be obliged to come out of hiding to challenge the junta once more.

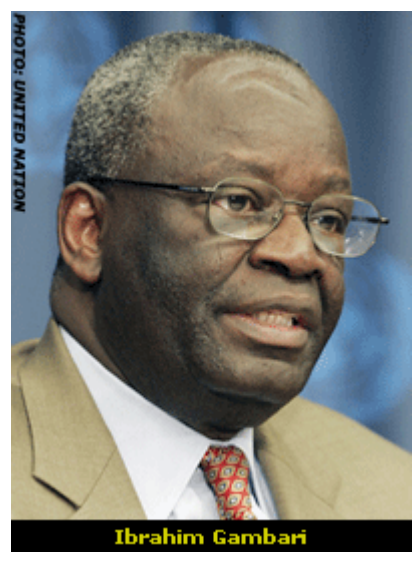
"I have thought about it and prepared for that moment," she said calmly.

"There is every chance I will be captured, but until that moment I will do what I must."

I'm in a place where I cannot see the sun, or be touched by the wind. But it could be much worse.

At least 31 people died in the protests led by monks in 2006

There is every chance I will be captured, but until that moment I will do what I must



The Irrawaddy Online News Alert: - The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>, Fri 11. Jan 2008

Gambari to Visit India, China in January

By **Lalit K Jha** / United Nations - January 11, 2008 -
http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9909

The UN Special Envoy on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, is scheduled to visit India and China in January to continue his consultations with two of Burma's key neighbors, a top UN official said on Thursday.

Calling India and China two major players in Burma, the UN spokesperson said the dates of his visit to the two countries have not yet been finalized.

"He is planning during this month to go to India and China," said the spokesperson. It is understood that Gambari is trying to schedule appointments with top leaders of India and China before announcing the dates.

"As you know, a number of things have happened in terms of consultation with different actors and different international leaders involved with the crisis," his spokesperson said. "As far as I know, he is just going to go further into discussions with two major actors in the situation in Myanmar [Burma]."

Gambari has an invitation from the Burmese government to return to the country to carry forward his mission of restoration of democracy and protection of human rights in the country.

"He has a standing invitation to go back to Burma," said the spokesperson. The visit will be scheduled sometime after his Gambari's visits to India and China.

Xinhua - 11 January 2008

Myanmar liaison minister meets Aung San Suu Kyi for fourth time

Euro-Burma Office - "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be> - <http://www.euro-burma.eu/www.euro-burma.eu>

YANGON, Jan. 11 -- Myanmar Liaison Minister U Aung Kyimet with detained political party leader Aung San Suu Kyi at the State Guest House here Friday afternoon, the state-run Radio Myanmar reported in a night broadcast.

Lasting for over an hour between 1:00 p.m. and 2:10 p.m. local time, the meeting was the fourth between the two since such talks were initiated in October last year, according to the report. They last met on Nov. 19, 2007.

The report did not disclose the details about their Friday meeting. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) said it had received no information about the meeting, but spokesman Nyan Win said he hoped she would also be allowed to meet her supporters.

"It's a positive sign if they really met," he told AFP. "They have to talk."

Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed to meet four NLD officials on November 9, but the party has had no direct contact with her since then.

Ten Years On

The Life and Views of a Burmese Student Political Prisoner

by **Moe Aye**

(Former Burmese Student Political Prisoner)

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