



BURMA REPORT

October 2008

မြန်မာ့ - မှတ်တမ်း

Issue N° 65

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

Mizzima News - October 22, 2008 - <http://www.mizzima.com/edop/commentary/1174-make-burma-ungovernable>

Make Burma 'ungovernable' - Salai Za Ceu Lian

THE BURMANET NEWS, October 22, 2008, Issue # 358 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> <www.burmanet.org> -

The prospect of Burma transforming into a democratic state from totalitarian rule seems to be diminishing, as the junta gears up to implement their own seven-step roadmap to so-called 'disciplined democracy'.

The fact that the regime is hell-bent on its own roadmap is clearly indicative of the considerable weakness of the democratic opposition of Burma as a whole. For the last 18 years, since Burma's 1990 general election, the military junta has shown no real sign of flexibility and willingness to find a negotiated settlement to the country's long crisis concerning the democratic opposition. As long as the junta sees no potential threat to their power from the opposition, no one should be under any illusion that the military regime will actually hand over power or make a concerted effort to compromise.

It should be understood that the junta's leadership will try to cling to power at all costs. This is a given. While safeguarding against opposition forces, the regime will neither initiate nor support a genuine democratic reform effort unless their power is threatened. Only if there is enormous and irresistible pressure, will the repressive regime be open to negotiating with the democratic opposition. The sad truth is that a transition to democracy for an authoritarian country does not come without enormous cost and sacrifice.

Drawing lessons from countries having gone through such transitions, the first step towards democracy often begins with a crisis caused by the authoritarian regime, which degenerates into a peoples' uprising, followed by mass riots and a nationwide protest against the ruling government which eventually forces dictators in power to relinquish their rule. We have had more than our fair share of such crises and uprisings in Burma, yet the regime continuously consolidates its power. It's become clear that without concerted and persistent efforts to resist and discredit the military junta - especially from the inside - the people's demand of democratic reform seems impossible.

Take the case of South Africa, where the xenophobic National Party governed the country from 1948 to 1994. Despite the apartheid regime's oppression of the opposition, the democratic movement relentlessly tried to create a crisis with the goal of making the country 'ungovernable'.

In time, the democratic movement propelled the government to negotiate with the opposition. Even after the main opposition force - the African National Congress - was banned, the opposition managed to organize a dramatic series of events, including the student uprising in 1976; an anti-apartheid campaign that ground down the South African economy; and most importantly, the continued efforts of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in destabilizing the country in order to achieve their goal of making South Africa 'ungovernable'. Meanwhile, the apartheid regime's heavy-handed military strategy failed, only fueling the opposition movement.

Having seen the failure of oppressive military strategy in trying to contain and eliminate the opposition's campaign, South African President F.W de Klerk had no choice but to install a legitimate government by sharing power with opposition leaders when he assumed office in 1989. Through this power-sharing negotiation, the eventual success of the democratic movement was realized in 1994.

In retrospect, the success of the democratic movement in South Africa could not have been possible without the persistent and courageous efforts of the United Democratic Front, the front that led South African peoples from all walks of life to join their movement against the oppressive apartheid regime. Crucially, the UDF nation-wide movement was initiated and led by prominent leaders of the UDF such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Alan Boesak, while African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela remained imprisoned.

The South African example demonstrates that democratic forces can be effective despite the fact that an authoritarian regime will do whatever it can to stay in power even to the extent that it will employ military force to suppress the opposition. In the case of South Africa, democratic forces from not only within the country but also in exile contributed toward the movement's eventual success. Both locals and expatriates employed a variety of means to discredit the apartheid regime. In 1994, their efforts forced an end to four-decades of apartheid rule.

When this lesson is applied to Burma, no one would dispute the fact that Burmese citizens from all walks of life have done

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

their part to protest repressive military rule. Yes, thousands of peaceful demonstrators have already died in cold blood. Sadly, despite all the sacrifices they have made for our country, the just cause for which they have fought has not been realized. Again and again, sporadic and occasional uprisings against the Burmese military junta have proven that genuine democratic reform is unachievable without the persistent and coordinated efforts of a nationwide people's movement

While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains crippled in a similar way to that of Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, it is unfortunate that other main opposition leaders in Burma today cannot provide overall strategic and organizational leadership. For the last 18 years, the main opposition leaders inside Burma – including most MPs elected in 1990 – have done nothing more effective than issuing statements. One can't help but wonder, is that what they were elected for?

When the people of Burma gave them a mandate to govern in 1990, they did so in full belief that those elected representatives would responsibly and courageously stand up to serve the national interest of the country and protect them against the authoritarian rules of the military dictatorship. It is unfortunate that none of their expectations have been met. Given that the opposition leadership has been thrown into total disarray at this point in our history, it is unimaginable that Burma will have competent and dedicated opposition leadership equivalent to that of the UDF. That said, we must now strive to 'make Burma ungovernable' until the junta is forced to cede to the demands of the people and reinstall civilian rule.

The task is ours for the taking. While Daw Suu and some political figures are under house arrest and in jail, it is paramount that those who have been elected in 1990 take charge of leading the movement, particularly a 'people's power movement'. They must do so by relentlessly organizing a persistent nationwide movement through the instigation of civil disobedience against the military regime. As a grand strategy, when leading the opposition movement, they should be offensive rather than defensive and proactive rather than reactive in discrediting Burma's illegitimate rulers. More important than ever before, it is necessary that the democratic opposition should devote resources, both human and material, towards strengthening the movement inside Burma. The fight for democracy in Burma must be vigorously carried on, not just because it is possible, but because it is necessary.

The Irrawaddy - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14365

Where Would Burma Be without Suu Kyi? - By **KYAW ZWA MOE** OCTOBER, 2008 - VOLUME 16 NO.10

Recent events have raised concerns about Aung San Suu Kyi's health—and questions about how the pro-democracy movement would cope without her

LET'S imagine a situation: Burma without Aung San Suu Kyi. Undoubtedly, the ruling generals would see this as a dream come true. But for the majority of Burmese, it would come as a great disappointment to lose the leader of the country's pro-democracy movement.

Suu Kyi may be a prisoner, but she still has immense power. She strikes fear into the hearts of heavily armed men, while giving moral strength to the powerless. She is the hope of the people of Burma, who have struggled to survive under the boot of their military rulers for the past 46 years.

Her recent refusal to receive food deliveries raised serious concerns about her health and worries about the country's future without her.

According to her lawyer and her doctor—the only two people who were able to meet her during her month-long ordeal, which began in mid-August—Suu Kyi's protest against her continued unlawful detention had left her thin and malnourished.

It was the first time in two decades that Suu Kyi had subjected herself to a hunger strike. Soon after beginning her first period of house arrest in 1989, she refused food and demanded to be placed in prison alongside her colleagues. After several weeks, she won guarantees that her fellow pro-democracy activists would not be tortured, and ended her protest. Her weight had dropped from 48 kg (106 lbs) to just 40 kg (90 lbs), and she suffered hair loss, impaired vision and a weakened immune system.

At the time, Suu Kyi was still in her early forties. Now she is in her sixties, and the impact on her health has presumably been much greater, even if she merely restricted her intake of food to the barest requirements for survival.

What would happen if Suu Kyi died or became so unhealthy that she couldn't continue her role as the political leader of Burma's pro-democracy movement? It is something we need to ask in light of the fact that she has spent 13 of the past 19 years under house arrest, without regular access to proper medical treatment and under immense psychological pressure.

Most people would prefer not to think of Burma's future without Suu Kyi. Her absence from politics would probably be a



Aung San Suu Kyi at her Inya Lake home in 1996
(Photo: Nic Dunlop/Panos)

death blow to the already weakened democracy struggle, because she has no obvious successor as leader of the movement.

On the other hand, the ruling generals would probably see Suu Kyi's demise as an end to an era of trouble. After all, she is even now regarded as a threat to their hold on power.

From the generals' viewpoint, there are many reasons to believe that the future without Suu Kyi would be very bright indeed. For one thing, they would not have to fear a repeat of the non-violent confrontation that she initiated in early 1989, when she called on people to resist unlawful decrees imposed by the junta. The movement continued for months, until July 19, when the regime used an overwhelming show of force to stop a planned Martyrs' Day march. The next day, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for the first time.

Another reason the generals would be happy to see the back of Suu Kyi is that it would probably mean no more electoral upsets like the one the world witnessed in 1990. Despite the regime's efforts to ensure a victory for the pro-junta party, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy inflicted a stunning defeat, winning more than 80 percent of seats in parliament. It was Suu Kyi who urged her party to contest the election, despite the fact that she was still under house arrest at the time and not permitted to participate herself. Even within the confines of her home, she showed the generals that she could make life difficult for them.

It was also Suu Kyi who called for a boycott of the National Convention in 1995. She made this decision a few months after being released from six years of house arrest because she deemed the convention convened to draft a new constitution as undemocratic. The generals have never forgiven her for continuing to resist their

plans even after they were good enough to give her back her freedom.

In 1998, Suu Kyi once again proved to be a thorn in the side of the generals. That was the year she spearheaded the creation of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament, a body that directly challenged the junta's right to rule. The generals wasted no time in arresting members of the newly formed group.

Since then, Suu Kyi has enjoyed a few brief interludes of relative freedom. Each time, she demonstrated that her immense appeal was in no way diminished by her long absence from the public eye. She campaigned around the country, drawing crowds of thousands eager to hear her speak. Her engaging and courageous speeches inspired hope in the hearts of countless ordinary Burmese—and intense anger among the country's military rulers, who watched her every move and did everything they could to keep her away from her adoring audiences.

All of these episodes have only served to convince the generals that they need to keep her on a tight rein if they want to carry through their agenda. Last year, they finally succeeded in completing their constitution, which they will use to usher in a new era of military-dominated "democracy" that excludes a democratic opposition. It is doubtful that they would have been able to achieve this long-pursued goal if they hadn't kept Suu Kyi confined within the walls of her residential compound for the past five years.

Suu Kyi's reputation as a troublemaker within the military government's ruling circles has earned her a further—illegal—extension of her current period of house arrest. Although she should have been released in May under Section 10 (b) of the State Protection Act, which only allows for a maximum sentence of five years, she is still in detention.

The regime is now preparing for the next stage in its transition to quasi-civilian rule—the 2010 election, which is intended to undo the damage of the 1990 vote. But in order to reverse the tide of history, the generals know that Suu Kyi must remain detained and silenced.

If Suu Kyi's health were to fail prior to the election, it would probably deliver the regime the victory that has eluded it for the past two decades. Her death would not spell the end of the democracy movement, but it would leave it greatly weakened.

Although Suu Kyi has spent most of the past two decades almost completely cut off from the outside world, she is still Burma's single greatest hope for democratic change. She is also a leader who is widely trusted by people of every ethnicity in Burma, and one who is respected by the international community, which will have a major role to play in helping to restore the country's economy.

She has the rare ability to speak to the generals in a straightforward, unflinching manner. Indeed, her power derives almost entirely from what she calls "plain honesty in politics." Her courage, dedication and steadfast adherence to the truth have empowered her to speak for the people of Burma in a way that no one else can at this point in the country's history.

After 46 years under military rule, Burma is very lucky to have someone who can still command such immense power through the sheer force of her convictions. Without her, life would go on, but the country would be impoverished in a way that makes even its current circumstances seem tolerable by comparison.

The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Thursday, October 9, 2008 - news@irrawaddy.org

Ban Tries to Avoid a Fruitless Visit - By **KYAW ZWA MOE** - October 9, 2008

<http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=14417 >

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is clearly worried about his next trip to Burma. The reason: he doesn't want to visit the generals and end up like his UN envoys—coming home without any tangible political progress.

Ban expressed his doubts this week about his tentatively scheduled trip in December in a press conference at UN headquarters in New York. He hopes to go to Burma to kick off a dialogue between the military regime and opposition groups and to secure the release of all political prisoners, including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

But before he goes, Ban is clearly signaling Snr-Gen Than Shwe: You have to agree to a political concession.

"As to my visit, when I said I will be personally engaged, that meant that I would be willing to pay a return visit to Myanmar [Burma] at an appropriate time," Ban said. "But you should also know that without any tangible or very favorable results to be achieved, I may not be in a position to visit Myanmar without any expectations."

Ban is right to suspect the generals won't pay any attention to the usual UN proposals for democratic reform. For his visit to take place, he clearly needs a signal from the junta in Naypyidaw that it is ready to make some concessions, to guarantee he can leave with some "tangible results."

Real political dialogue is the best means to resolve the country's political issues and the release of all political prisoners is essential to build confidence between the two sides for a meaningful dialogue.

Late last month, the regime released a handful of political prisoners among a government amnesty for 9,002 prisoners. But the number of political prisoners in Burma has nearly doubled, according to the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

"By nearly doubling the number of political prisoners, the Burmese regime is directly defying the United Nations, including the UN Security Council," said a joint statement by the human rights group and the US Campaign for Burma based in Washington DC.

If Ban goes to Burma without a guarantee of some concrete political breakthroughs, he will further jeopardize the credibility of the UN. Many UN envoys, including the current special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, have repeatedly fallen victim to the general's manipulation for their own purposes.

By signaling the regime that he will visit only if they agree to some of the UN-mandated changes, Ban is taking a tougher stand.

If the junta fails to come up with some compromises before his visit, Ban will be in a better position to go back to the Security Council and seek new measures to achieve UN-mandated goals.

As a result, the generals may face even more pressure. Ban is exercising tactical diplomacy, putting pressure on the junta prior to his visit. Nyan Win, a spokesperson of Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy, called Ban's move "right."

But the question is what more can Ban and the Security Council do? In October 2007, the council approved a presidential statement on Burma, calling for the release of political prisoners. Anything stronger would require the approval of permanent members China and Russia, two staunch Burma supporters, who are likely to balk.

In the past two decades, Burma has become a diplomatic graveyard, running through the previous seven UN special envoys to Burma.

What will play out in the coming weeks is an effort by Ban to play the best card he has and to avoid another frustrating, fruitless trip to a government that has repeatedly shown it has no regard for world opinion.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Tuesday, October 14, 2008 - news@irrawaddy.org
http://www.irrawaddymedia.com/print_article.php?art_id=14437

CONTRIBUTOR The Intricacies of Ban's Role in Burma

By NEHGINPAO KIPGEN

Tuesday, October 14, 2008

Earlier this year I authored an analytical article entitled "Don't Blame Gambari" in reference to how Ibrahim Gambari's unyielding mission to Burma had been largely perceived.

The article discussed how the UN special advisor was assigned a critical diplomatic task without an enforcement power from the UN Security Council. His latest visit in August was decried by the Burmese opposition as abject failure. The National League for Democracy (NLD) called it a "waste of time."

With the UN special advisor's diplomatic efforts seemingly waning, voices of concern and frustration have overwhelmed the good offices of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

One advantage the secretary-general might have over his special advisor, who is a Nigerian diplomat, is that Ban was a South Korean career diplomat who may be better versed in dealing with Asians.

When Ban became the first Asian to hold the secretary-general's post after U Thant of Burma, there was high expectation for some sort of solution to Burma's political problems.

Unambiguously, the office of the UN secretary-general has embarked on a number of unprecedented initiatives in attempts to effect change in Burma. One most notable aspect of Ban's involvement is the formation of the "Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar [Burma]."

In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, the UN secretary-general made a humanitarian visit to Burma. Although not expressed explicitly, Ban could have sensed the xenophobic nature of the isolated military leaders. This was the last meeting between Snr-Gen Than Shwe and the UN leadership.

Last month, Ban convened a "high-level" meeting of the Group of Friends. The Security Council reported: "The members of the Group expressed continued support for the Secretary-General's Good Offices and encouraged Myanmar to use this channel to address key issues of concern to the international community."

Burma activists and analysts alike are divided on whether Ban Ki-moon should make a second visit to Burma. Proponents are of the view that his visit may boost the democratization process; whereas other analysts are skeptical of the probability of any democratic change without the Security Council's mandate.

While the majority of political pundits may agree on the necessity and vitality of the UN's continued engagement in Burma, opinions are noticeably differing on approaches and existing applied strategies.

In his October 7 press briefing, Ban told reporters in New York that "...you should also know that without any tangible or very favorable results to be achieved, then I may not be in a position to visit Myanmar." The NLD was quick to welcome the statement.

It is very unlikely, at least for now, that the military that proceeded with a referendum to adopt a new constitution in the midst of Cyclone Nargis will swerve or scuttle the proposed seven-step "road map" before the 2010 election.

The State Peace and Development Council understands the ineffectiveness of the United Nations' engagement in the absence of Security Council's mandate. The recent strained relations between Western countries and Russia might have also widened the gap of cooperation within the Security Council.

The good offices of the secretary-general have given it a shot—but with no bullets. If no change is happening from within Burma, the international community might have to wait a day for the Security Council veto system to change, or a surprise move by China and Russia to side with the three other permanent members or abstain from voting.

At this juncture, even if Ban chooses to visit Burma, not much should be expected out of it. However, the UN's continued engagement is very essential.

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)

AAPP <info@aappb.org> Oct 24, 2008

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

P.O. Box 93, Mae Sot, Tak Province 63110, Thailand

e.mail: info@aappb.org website: www.aappb.org

Immediate Release:

October 24, 2008

Six leaders were given a long term

Six leaders of National League for Democracy party who were arrested in September and October 2007 were given a long term imprisonment by Mandalay Divisional Court in this afternoon at Mandalay, a second capital of Burma. Many of them were charged under 505/b and 153/a and one was charged with 505/b only.

Those who were given imprisonment are:

- (1) Win Mya Mya (F) who is a organizing committee member of NLD Mandalay Division was given 12 years imprisonment.
- (2) Kan Tun, (M) Who is a secretary of the NLD Mandalay Division was 12 years imprisonment.
- (3) Than Lwin,(M) Who is a vice-chair person of the NLD Mandalay Division was 8 years imprisonment.
- (4) Min Thu,(M) Who is a In-charge of the Mogok township NLD, Mandalay Division was 13 years imprisonment.
- (5) Tin Ko Ko, (M) Who is an organizing committee member of Meiktila Township NLD of Mandalay division was given two years imprisonment.
- (6) Win Shwe (M) who is a member of Salin Township NLD of Magwe Devison was given to 11 years imprisonment.

Section 505(B): Whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement, rumour or report, with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility; shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

Section 153(A): Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representations, or otherwise, promotes or attempts to promote feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of [persons resident in the Union] shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

AAPP

More information, please contact to:

Ko Tate Naing at 66-(0)81-2878751

Ko Bo Kyi at 66-(0) 81-3248935

THE Irrawaddy - COMMENTARY - Newsletter for Friday, October 17, 2008 - news@irrawaddy.org

A House Divided - http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14467

By **KYAW ZWA MOE**

Friday, October 17, 2008

Now the issue isn't just about Burma's oppressive military regime. Or, the stand off between the junta and the opposition. It's now about the internal politics of the country's most popular opposition party founded by Aung San Suu Kyi.

The resignation of 109 youth members of the main opposition National League for Democracy is one of the most significant events since the formation of the party in 1988.

It throws into question the democratic workings of the party itself and further weakens the image of the party's aging leadership.

The resignation came after younger members' publicly voiced complaints that they aren't allowed to participate in decision-making. The move followed a statement by NLD chairman Aung Shwe naming six new youth advisers and ten others to lead youth activities without accepting nominations or suggestions from youth members.

It's awkward and embarrassing to see the leading pro-democracy group facing problems of democratic principles within its own membership.

"Our organization is a democratic one," said Khin Htun, who has loyally worked for the NLD youth wing during the past two decades but was among those who resigned. "We must respect the basis of democracy. If we don't respect the rules

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

of democracy, it will be very difficult to work out the process of democratic reform in Burma.”

Khin Htun has spent years in jail as a result of his dedication to the NLD since its formation in 1988. Like him, many of the 109 members who resigned are former political prisoners.

NLD leaders should allow youth members to play a role in decision-making and genuinely consider their views when deciding on policy issues.

“Youth is our future,” said Kin Htun. “I want to urge our leaders to include the viewpoint of the youth members.”

In fact, the NLD has faced this issue since the early 2000s, especially during times when Suu Kyi has been detained—she has been under house arrest for 13 of the past 19 years.

The current top NLD leaders generally regard themselves as caretakers of the party rather than innovative visionaries crafting a philosophy and strategy that will move the entire pro-democracy movement forward.

The current NLD leadership has been repeatedly challenged and questioned regarding its capability to lead the pro-democracy movement. Segments of the general public and groups within the core circle of activists and politicians have been disappointed that the NLD seems to be floating along aimlessly on automatic pilot and is in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Last year, Suu Kyi herself talked about party leadership. When she was allowed to meet with her party’s senior members, she counseled them to move forward without her. She said the party sometimes needs “to push and pull.” Sometimes she would lead and sometimes she would follow others’ leadership in the party, she said.

In fact, this issue seems to be exacerbated by a generation gap. Party chairman Aung Shwe and U Lwin are respectively in their early 90s and late 80s. Some activists don’t fully trust them because of their backgrounds as former army commanders who held high-ranking positions under Ne Win’s authoritarian government.

A popular exception is Tin Oo, the NLD’s vice-chairman who is currently under house arrest. In his early 80s, he’s gained great respect from the public even though he served as commander-in-chief under Ne Win’s government.

The youth members who resigned represent a critical core of the party—indeed it’s very future. A mass resignation is a significant signal that shouldn’t be ignored or discounted.

This is a critical moment for the NLD leadership. It makes little sense to criticize the authoritarian military regime when the opposition party’s own house is in danger of collapse.

Unity within the NLD and unity within the entire pro-democracy movement is critical to the country’s future.

It’s time for the country’s pro-democracy groups to unite under simple, clear policy goals. The NLD can show the way by quickly repairing the distrust and division within its own party.

ABC News - 16 October 2008 - <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/story?id=6039724&page=1>

Burma News - 16 October 2008 - burma_news@verizon.net - www.euro-burma.eu "EBO" Euro-Burma Office 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium

Super Rats Invade; Blamed for Myanmar Famine

As Thousands Starve, Officials Seize Food Aid, Relief Groups Say

By Kylie Sobel

A rat infestation so severe that an estimated 100,000 people are on the brink of starvation is devastating the ChinState in Western Myanmar, and the nation’s government is doing nothing to help its people, according to activists fighting for aid.

Human right organizations on the ground say as many as 100 children and elderly have already died from malnutrition as the rats ravage the community’s crops. While this infestation started as a natural disaster, it is being met by gross neglect by the nation’s leaders, according to the rights groups.

"The famine is little known, poorly dealt with, and ignored by the government," said Salai Bawi Lian of the Chin Human Rights Organization, which is based in Canada.

"In this area, people have been suffering, dying, no people know about it," Lian said of the Chin region, which he described at the most isolated jungle area in the country.

In Myanmar, the phenomenon causing the famine is known as "maudam"- a happening that occurs about once every 50 years, in which flowering bamboo trees produce a fruit on which the rat population gorges. The last time it struck was in 1958, with other occurrences in 1911 and 1862.

Instead of cannibalizing their young for food, as these rats normally do, the bamboo fruit provides the rats with the means to multiply by the millions. And when there is no fruit left, the plague of hungry rats decimate rice and corn crops in Western Myanmar so much so that an estimated 200 villages of an estimated 100,000 Chin people are now without food.

"Rats are everywhere, everywhere," Victor Biak Lian, the chair of the Chin Human Rights organization who recently visited the region. "What I see is starvation."

And while the rat problem is explosive, the rights groups say that what is even more horrific is the way in which the Myanmar government has responded: by doing nothing. Myanmar is not the only nation plagued by this phenomenon, but aid workers say it is the only one where no action is being taken by its government. The bamboo flower-fuelled disaster has also hit India, but the government there formed alliances with NGOs and prepared for the crisis.



Chin villagers in Western Myanmar crouch around a pile of rats collected and killed over the course

"We have to be very careful when dealing with the government in Myanmar," said Paul Risley, a spokesperson for the Asian division of U.N. World Food Program. "They are almost as bad as the government in North Korea, with a bunch of old generals sitting high in their newly built capital."

The U.N. has recently sent international staff to ChinState, but Risley said aid agencies in the affected areas have to be careful not just to provide food for needy villages, which could lead to those villages being overwhelmed by hungry villagers from other areas. Instead, the U.N. has proposed a work-for-food program in which Chin farmers and villages will jointly work on community projects -- like building roads and schools -- in exchange for bags of rice.

"As long as we are taking care of the food problem that the generals of the Myanmar government would otherwise have to deal with themselves, we are fairly confident we can do this," Risley continued, saying that the government could end up constraining relief efforts.

The Myanmar government did not return phone calls from ABC News.

MIZZIMA – October 24, 2008 - Recent Burmese News – "Hla Kyaing" <hla.kyaing@gmail.com> Sat, 25. Oct 2008
<http://www.mizzima.com/edop/letters/1187-a-tour-operator-from-asia-tells-of-his-recent-experience-travelling-in-burma-.html>

A tour operator from Asia tells of his recent experience travelling in Burma

by **Mizzima News**

Friday, 24 October 2008 12:21

Dear Editor

If things weren't already strange enough in our industry, here's some information you might like to be aware of.

After days of hassle, we finally gained permission to travel by ferry to Pathein in Burma's Irrawaddy Division. No one knew if it was okay for foreigners to travel to Pathein yet or not. But eventually, following many trips to local offices and a lot of talking, we were allowed to travel on an old boat that I don't think had been cleaned since my last trip.

Once in Pathein we found that none of the guest houses in the city are allowed to have foreign guests anymore and that busses are being stopped on their way here and any foreigners travelling without travel papers are asked to get off the bus and are sent back to Rangoon. Additionally, one couple got sent back on the road from Pathein to the beach resort of Ngwe Saung. Even diplomats have been hassled.

We feel lucky to have gotten on the ferry, and then because we rode bicycles from Pathein to Ngwe Saung no one thought to stop us along the road. We were hoping to stay in an inexpensive guest house as we'd be in Pathein for 10 days, but instead we had to stay in a government hotel.

So, in case any tourists are thinking to travel here, make sure you have your travel documents and hotel reservations in order, as some of the hotels are demanding travel permission documents as well. Everyone, essentially, is covering their butts and collecting money along the way.

October 24, 2008

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Friday, October 24, 2008 - <news@irrawaddy.org> <www.irrawaddy.org>**ASEM Summit in Beijing Opens** - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14502>By **WEI MOE**

Friday, October 24, 2008

Burma is an issue on the agenda at the 7th Summit of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing on October 24-25, but Burmese Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein will not attend the conference.

According to a press release, the summit is scheduled to discuss the current world economic outlook; global issues such as disaster relief, food security and safety; international and regional development including counter-terrorism, nuclear disarmament, Burma, the Korean Peninsula; trade and investment; and cultural and social dialogue.



A soldier is wrapped by the flag he is holding during the official welcoming ceremony for Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing October 23. Dozens of Asian and European leaders, representing half the global economy, have gathered in Beijing this week at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) starting Friday. (Photo: Reuters)

The summit is being seen as an opportunity to talk with Chinese authorities about their obligation to ensure meaningful reform in Burma, said Debbie Stothard, coordinator of the Alternative Asean Network (Altsean).

The last ASEM Summit was in Helsinki in 2006. Before the summit in Finland's capital, there were arguments among European countries whether to approve a visa for Burmese foreign minister Nyan Win to a European Union country.

Twenty-seven countries from the EU are taking part; 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, plus China, India, Japan, Mongolia, Pakistan and South Korea.

Burmese Premier Gen Thein Sein was visiting China before the summit began, but has since returned to Burma. The state-run, *The New Light of Myanmar*, reported on Monday that the head of the junta, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, welcomed Thein Sein back at the Naypidaw Airport.

Thein Sein attended the 5th China-Asean Expo and the 5th China-Asean Business and Investment Summit in Nanning.

The Burmese premier met with Wen Jiabao's deputy, Wang Qishan, during the trip.

"According to protocol, Gen Thein Sein should meet Wen Jiabao [China's president]. I do not know why Gen Thein Sein could not meet Premier Wen," said Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political commentator in Thailand.

During the meeting with Wang Qishan, Thein Sein said that he believed China would continue to support the junta's seven-step roadmap for "transforming the country into a peaceful and discipline flourishing democratic nation," according to *The New Light of Myanmar*.

AFP - The BRUNEI TIMES - <www.bt.com.bn> - <http://www.bt.com.bn/en/asia_news/2008/10/27/myanmar_junta_relaxes_security_at_suu_kyis_home>

Myanmar junta relaxes security at Suu Kyi's home

YANGON

Monday, October 27, 2008

AUTHORITIES in military-run Myanmar yesterday removed barbed wire barriers and reduced security around the Yangon home of detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, an official from her party said.

Witnesses near the lakeside compound where the Nobel peace prize winner has been locked away for most of the past 19 years said that barricades and checkpoints preventing people from going near her house had been removed.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

"We noticed this morning that the security was reduced around her house," said Nyan Win, a spokesman for the National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

"Barbed wire was removed and every vehicle can pass the road in front of her house... (but) it's still early to comment on this situation."

The gate to her compound remained closed, witnesses said.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been under detention for 13 of the past 19 years, and is only allowed sporadic visits from her doctor and lawyer.

Asian and European leaders meeting in China on Saturday urged Myanmar's junta to release detained opposition members, while American officials also put out a fresh plea for an end to Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest last week.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 63, is currently appealing her detention, but the ruling generals have not yet indicated whether they will consider the case. Nyan Win said he had heard no news about her release.

The level of security in the leafy Yangon neighbourhood where Aung San Suu Kyi lives fluctuates depending on the political climate, with more barricades being erected on sensitive occasions such as the democracy leader's birthday.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962. The NLD won a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the junta never allowed it to take office. AFP



Detained leader: File Photo taken on 9 November 2007 shows Myanmar detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Myanmar authorities yesterday removed barricades and checkpoints preventing people from going near Suu Kyi's home. - Picture: AFP

AAPP <info@aappb.org> - Wed, 29. Oct 2008

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

P.O. Box 93, Mae Sot, Tak Province 63110, Thailand

e-mail: info@aappb.org website: www.aappb.org

AAPP statement

Immediate release

Date: October 30, 2008

On October 29th 2008, nine leaders of the 88 Generation Students Group were sentenced to 6 months imprisonment by Northern Rangoon district court.

During the court hearing, Min Ko Naing and other defendants stood up and complained about the lack of a free and independent judiciary. The presiding judge accused them of interrupting court procedures and charged them under Section 228 of the Penal Code for contempt of court. He handed down a six-month sentence for nine student leaders - Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Mya Aye, Pyone Cho (aka) Htay Win Aung, Aung Thu, Htay Kywe, Nyan Lin, Myo Aung Naing, and Hla Myo Naung. The remaining defendants in court stood up and demanded that the judge sentence them too. The judge ordered security forces to remove the defendants from the court and adjourned the trial.

"Trials for political prisoners are grossly unfair," said Ko Tate, secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). "Judges and law officers are not operating independently of the ruling State Peace and Development Council. In this case 88 Generation leaders have been harshly punished simply for calling for their right to a free and fair trial to be respected."

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Friday, October 24, 2008 - <news@irrawaddy.org> <www.irrawaddy.org>

'Humanitarian Space' Still on the Agenda http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=14504

THE BURMANET NEWS - October 24, 2008, Issue # 3584 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> <www.burmanet.org>

EDITORIAL

Friday, October 24, 2008

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) called this week on the international community to build on relations with Burma's military regime in the wake of coordinated efforts made following the Cyclone Nargis disaster.

"The massive devastation caused by cyclone Nargis has prompted a period of unprecedented cooperation between the government and international humanitarian agencies to deliver emergency aid to the survivors," the ICG said in a report titled 'Burma/Myanmar after Nargis: Time to Normalise Aid Relations.' The report urged the international community to

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

"seize this opportunity to reverse longstanding, counterproductive aid policies."

In the meantime, with the support of regime apologists and business circles, some so-called experts have naively come to believe that a "space" would be opened up following the 2010 election and the enactment of provisions of the constitution.

It's still far from clear, however, whether these expectations can be met.

Instead, because of the junta's mishandling and mismanagement, there is little hope of a dramatic increase in the amount of aid. UN and NGO assistance, for instance, will run out at the end of April 2009.

Burma's political stakeholders, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, believe that the release of detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners is the key to an improved, all-inclusive, substantive and time-bound dialogue as a turning point in the country's political development. "There is no alternative to dialogue to ensure that all stakeholders can contribute to the future of their country," Ban said.

It should be noted that junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe announced a referendum on a new constitution and plans for a general election in 2010 after coming under international and regional pressure because of the regime's brutal crackdown on last September's demonstrations.

The "humanitarian space"—or what the ICG calls "unprecedented cooperation" between the Burmese junta and the international community—opened up in the Irrawaddy delta because of international and exiled Burmese media pressure on international governments and the UN to act to save the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

In the absence of any significant achievement, the ICG called for more comprehensive engagement with the Burmese regime rather than pressure and sanctions. It furthermore called on Western governments to "lift political restrictions on aid."

The Burmese people are pawns in the hands of the junta led by Than Shwe. Burma is a closed society strictly controlled by the military authorities, and the balance of power is still heavily weighted in favor of the army. There also is still a lack of willpower within the military towards political and economic reform.

So aid sent directly to the Burmese junta must be subject to transparency and accountability. If this is not assured it would be a big insult to those Burmese who have sacrificed their entire lives for the betterment of their homeland.

Ten Years On

The Life and Views of a Burmese Student Political Prisoner

by **Moe Aye**

(Former Burmese Student Political Prisoner)

(170 pages) in German Euro 10.- + Postage

Burma Büro e.V., P.O. Box N° 27 03 66, D-50509 Köln, Germany.

Tel: 0221-9522450 Fax:0221-9522470

e-Mail: <burmabureaugermany@t-online.de>

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
e-Mail: <burmabureaugermany@t-online.de> -

<http://www.burmabureaugermany.com>

<http://www.burma-report.de>