Win Tin Congratulates Obama, Calls for Regime Change in Burma

By WAI MOE

Prominent Burmese opposition leader Win Tin on Monday congratulated the citizens of the United States for electing Barack Obama as president. At the same time, he said that Burma too was in need of “regime change.”

Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Monday, the National League for Democracy (NLD) executive member said, “I would first like to congratulate the American people and president-elect Barack Obama.”

Win Tin continued by urging the US to adopt a multilateral approach toward Burma.

“We need support from the international community,” he said. “We want the US to work with the international community and the United Nations [on Burma].”

A veteran newspaper editor and political prisoner who was released from Burma’s infamous Insein Prison in September after serving 19 years for opposing military rule, Win Tin, 79, used the occasion of leadership change in the US to call for similar action in the Southeast Asian nation.

“We need regime change in Burma,” he said. “The people of Burma want change. They voted in the NLD in the 1990 election.”

The opposition NLD party, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory in Burmese elections in May 1990. However, the ruling military junta refused to honor the election results.

Win Tin pointed out that previous US administrations had cordial relations with several dictatorial regimes around the world. He warned it was important for the “leader of the free world” not to compromise with authoritarian regimes.

Win Tin also said that more effective sanctions and proactive pressure from the international community were necessary for Burma’s democracy efforts.

As US senators, Obama and Vice President-elect Joe Biden have previously supported US sanctions against the Burmese ruling generals and their cronies.

In Obama’s very first speech after being declared the winner on November 4, the president-elect addressed US foreign policy by saying, “To those who would tear this world down—we will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security—we support you.”

Prior to the US presidential elections, Frank Jannuzi, a senior Asia advisor to the Obama campaign, said that Burmese issues should not prevent deeper US engagement with Asean, according to a news report by Agence France-Presse on October 31.

“Rather, the United States should work with Asean to ensure that Burma lives up to its obligation as an Asean member,” he said.

However, Dr Tin Maung Maung Than, a Burmese scholar based in Singapore, told The Irrawaddy that the incoming administration’s policy on Burma will be difficult to gauge at the moment. However, he said he believed that it would be more or less the same as the Bush administration’s policy. President Bush’s Burma policy has been seen as radical and won praise from Burmese living inside and outside Burma.

However, the Bush administration was often criticized for neglecting Southeast Asia. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice regularly skipped the annual Asean regional forum.

With on-going wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a global financial crisis to contend with, Tin Maung Maung Than said he didn’t expect the new administration to engage Asean immediately. “Asean won’t be a top priority for the moment,” he said.
He pointed out, however, that President Bush had appointed Scot Marciel, a senior state department officer, as the US special envoy to Asean.


**Obama energizes Burma’s ethnic minorities**

Electing Barack Obama as president of the United States of America is a new history in the making. It not only gives a new hope to the Americans, but excitement is felt around the world.

He is the first president from a minority community in a predominantly white society. His election to the White House may have proven wrong to people who have prejudices about white supremacy in American politics. African-Americans make only 12.8% of the United States population as per the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 estimate.

A number of similarities can be found in the United States politics and that of Southeast Asian country Burma. Although Burma is comparatively smaller in size than the state of Texas, there are as many as 135 “ethnic races” in the country according to the military regime.

One similarity between Burma and the United States is that: the whites constitute 80.1% of the United States population (2006 estimate); whereas, approximately 60 percent of the population in Burma is ethnic Burmans. Ethnicity plays a vital role in Burma’s politics.

The present military regime is overwhelmingly dominated by ethnic Burmans. Discrimination on the basis of religion and race is prevalent in the country. Under the present military regime, even the most outstanding and potential individual from a minority group stands little to no chance of becoming the leader of the country.

There are a number of reasons why Obama was elected to the most coveted position on earth. Among others, his vision to take America into a new direction convinces voters in an unprecedented turnout with his words “yes we can.”

The entire world is also buoyed by his extraordinarily successful campaigns and passionate advocacy to use diplomatic means in resolving crises around the world — from Darfur to Burma and to Afghanistan.

His historic victory was a dream come true, and it was a shock to many Americans and people around the world until recently. Not only was he little known to the outside world, his entry into U.S. national politics was also not long ago.

I remember talking to an African-American colleague sometime in 2006 of a black president sitting in the White House. His response was unambiguous; he never even dreamed of seeing an African-American becoming president of the U.S. in his lifetime. The gentleman, first name Terrance, was only in his 40s, hailing from Maryland State.

The world has now seen a new history in the making. Can a similar development be expected in Burma in a distant future? The military is obdurate on its seven-step “road map” leading to a nationwide election in 2010.


The Irrawaddy - [http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14584 - news@irrawaddy.org](http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14584 - news@irrawaddy.org)

**Southeast Asia Press Hails Obama**

By WAI MOE Thursday, November 6, 2008

The Southeast Asia press waxed hopeful and eloquent in the wake of US-president elect Barrack Obama’s landslide victory, which was seen as a historic moment touching the imagination of people around the world.

In Bangkok, The Nation newspaper said on Thursday that Obama’s victory signals a transformation within the US government and its people, citing one of Obama’s most important tasks as the restoration of America’s image on the global stage.

“If real change comes to America, it will have an effect that will change the rest of world,” The Nation said. “Such is the wonder of American power and its influence.”

In Indonesia, once Obama childhood home, The Jakarta Post published a report titled “Jakarta Celebrates the Menteng Kid’s Victory” on Thursday.

“Jakarta shared the anxiety and the joy of the US presidential election won by new Indonesian darling Barack Hussein Obama on Wednesday,” said the report.

The story noted a celebration at Obama’s former school in central Jakarta where students gathered to watch the US election results and pictures of Obama, taken during his school days, were displayed.
“A 15-minute silence has been held here every day since Monday to allow the students to pray for Obama’s victory,” the report said.

In reclusive Burma, the state-run newspaper, Myanma Alin, reported on Obama’s victory in a news story headlined, “Obama Wins US Presidential Election; Democrats will influence the White House and Congress”.

The Philippine Star, in an editorial, said Obama’s victory was proof that Americans were as tired as much as the rest of the world in the confrontational stance of President George W. Bush’s administration.

The editorial pointed out two challenges that Obama faces in the opening days of his presidency, the war on terrorism and the financial meltdown.

“The Democrats’ victory celebrations will be tempered by the reality that Obama is inheriting a country in crisis,” it said.

The Bangkok Post’s editorial on Thursday, “The Dream Is Still Alive,” said, “Many people in the US and around the world are looking at the election of a black president as proof that the American dream is still alive.”

The Bangkok Post predicted that the US will no longer go it alone in its foreign policy and no longer shirk its responsibility when it comes to climate change.

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Saffron revolution monks given lengthy jail terms
THE BURMANET NEWS - November 7, 2008, Issue # 2594 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - <www.burmanet.org>

Nov 07, 2008 (DVB)-Two monks arrested in connection with last year’s Saffron Revolution have been given lengthy jail terms by Rangoon Kyauktaga township court yesterday morning, according to legal sources.

Sayadaw U Indaka, abbot of Maggin monastery was sentenced to 16 and half years imprisonment while another monk U Eindiya who was staying at the monastery while it was raided by government officials in November 2007 was given 8 years, a lawyer told DVB on condition of anonymity.

The lawyer said the sentences were only for one of the many charges piled against the monks, and he also expressed concern over the remaining charges which could lead them into receiving more sentences in the future.

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The Irrawaddy http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14604 - <news@irrawaddy.org> <www.irrawaddy.org>

Young Burmese Blogger Sentenced to more than 20 Years in Jail
By SAW YAN NAING  Monday, November 10, 2008

A young Burmese blogger who was a major source of information for the outside world on the brutal regime crackdown on the September 2007 uprising was sentenced to 20 years and six months imprisonment on Monday.

Nay Phone Latt, 28, was sentenced by a court in Rangoon’s Insein Prison, according to his mother, Aye Than. He was convicted of contravening Public Offense Act 505 B by posting a cartoon depicting junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe on his blog site.

Nay Phone Latt’s colleague Thin July Kyaw was sentenced to two years imprisonment, Aye Than reported.

Another dissident who ridiculed the regime, Saw Wai, was sentenced to two years imprisonment for publishing a poem
mocking Than Shwe in the weekly Love Journal, according to Rangoon sources. The first words of each line of the Burmese language poem spelled out the message “Senior General Than Shwe is foolish with power.”

Nay Phone Latt’s blogs during the September 2007 uprising provided invaluable information about events within the locked-down country.

Two Rangoon journalists, Htun Htun Thein and Khin Maung Aye, of the privately-owned weekly News Watch, were arrested on November 5 and are being detained in Insein Prison. The media rights organizations Reporters without Borders and Burma Media Association have demanded their immediate release.

The current regime crackdown is also aimed at silencing legal attempts to ensure fair trials for dissidents now appearing before judges in closed court sessions.

Two weeks ago, three defense lawyers, Nyi Nyi Htwe, Aung Thein and Khin Maung Shein were imprisoned for between four and six months for contempt of court after complaining of unfair treatment.

Four other defense lawyers, Kyaw Hoe, Maung Maung Latt, Myint Thaung and Khin Htay Kyew have been barred from representing their clients since November 5, according to Kyaw Hoe. The lawyers are representing several dissidents, including members of the 88 Generation Students group.

“I asked a prison authority why I was not allowed to appear in court,” said Kyaw Hoe. “He said there was no reason and that the order had come from higher officials.”

Members of the 88 Generation Students group were now appearing daily in court without their defense lawyers, Kyaw Hoe said.

Two lawyers, Myint Thaung and Khin Htay Kyi, who represent the prominent labor activist Su Su Nway, withdrew from court proceedings at the weekend, citing unfair treatment, according to the accused’s sister, Htay Htay Kyi.

Htay Htay Kyi said Su Su Nway would be sentenced on Tuesday. The winner of the 2006 John Humphrey Freedom Award was originally charged with “threatening the stability of the government,” under articles 124, 130 and 505 of the penal code, but new charges have now been added.

In a statement in Washington, the US State Department criticized the imprisonment of the four defense lawyers and urged the Burmese regime to drop all charges and release them.

Deputy Spokesman Robert Wood called on the junta to stop harassing and arresting citizens for peacefully practicing their internationally recognized human rights, to release all political prisoners, and to start a genuine dialogue with democratic forces and ethnic minority groups for democratic reform in Burma.

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Myanmar courts imprison ethnic minority activists.

A court in military-ruled Myanmar sentenced three ethnic minority activists and a well-known Buddhist monk to prison Tuesday, continuing a crackdown that began last week with pro-democracy activists.

Meanwhile, five United Nations experts issued a statement in Geneva strongly condemning the “severe convictions and the unfair trials of prisoners of conscience in Myanmar.” At least 70 activists were sentenced to prison terms last week, and another seven on Monday.

Chin leader Chin Sian Thang said a court inside Yangon’s Insein Prison on Tuesday sentenced his son, Kam Lat Khaot to 33 years in prison and his nephew, Kai Kham Kwai, to eight years.

Chin Sian Thang said a member of the Arakan minority was also given 33 years. The Arakan, like the Chin, are clustered in western Myanmar.

Ashin Gambira, one of the most prominent monks leading pro-democracy protests in September 2007, was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and still faces further charges, he said.

“The judicial system in Myanmar has collapsed and the courts are passing down sentences in contravention of the law. These secret trials are blatant violations of human rights,” Chin Sian Thang said.

Chin Sian Thang is a prominent politician who won a parliamentary seat in elections in 1990, the results of which were
never recognized by the ruling junta. He said he received information about the sentencing while waiting outside the prison.

The Chin leader said he was detained for about a month during last year's pro-democracy demonstrations, while his son and nephew were arrested in October. The junta's repression of the protests resulted in at least 31 people being killed and thousands detained, according to U.N. estimates.

The statement from the U.N. experts said they «strongly urge the Myanmar authorities to cease harassing and arresting individuals for peacefully exercising their internationally recognized human rights.

“They further demand that all detainees be retried in open hearings respecting fair trial standards and the immediate release of their defense counsels,” it said. Three defense lawyers have been sentenced to several months imprisonment for contempt of court, while several others have been barred from representing their clients.

The U.N. experts are Tomas Ojea Quintana, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; Leandro Despouy, rapporteur for the independence of judges and lawyers; Frank La Rue, rapporteur for freedom of opinion and expression; Margaret Sekaggya, rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Asma Jahangir, rapporteur for freedom of religion or belief.

Reporters Without Border, 14.11-08 -

Reporters Without Borders and the Burma Media Association are outraged by the two-year sentence passed today on Ein Khaing Oo, a 24-year-old woman journalist employed by the weekly Ecovision Journal, for taking photos of Cyclone Nargis victims. She was arrest in Rangoon last June.

“This unjust sentence comes amid a wave of unprecedented sentences for journalists and activists,” the two organisations said. “We appeal to Burma’s military authorities to free Ein Khaing Oo, whose only crime was to cover the humanitarian disaster in the Irrawaddy delta.”

According to Mizzima, The sentence was handed down today by a Rangoon court at the end of a trial held behind closed doors with no defence lawyer. She was accused of taking photos that could be used by foreign news media. Arrested on 10 June while covering a demonstration by Nargis victims outside a UN building in Rangoon, Ein Khaing Oo has already spent five months in Insein prison.

Another journalist, Zaw Thet Htwe, and a blogger, Zarganar, are also being held for helping Nargis victims. Zarganar was arrested after giving an interview to a BBC television reporter. Verdicts are expected in their cases in the coming days. The toll from Cyclone Nargis’ passage across Burma in May was around 130,000 people dead or missing.

Ein Khaing Oo

http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=29295

AFP - http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20081112/wl_asia_afp/myanmpoliticsdemocracy_081112080936

Myanmar crackdown intensifies as labour activist jailed

YANGON (AFP)-Myanmar’s ruling junta is stepping up efforts to curb dissent ahead of 2010 elections, rights groups said Wednesday after a labour activist became the latest dissident to receive a lengthy jail sentence.

A crackdown on people involved in protests in mid-2007 that were brutally crushed by the military has seen at least 31 activists imprisoned this week, ranging from pro-democracy veterans to a popular blogger.

The latest case saw prominent labour advocate Su Su Nway sentenced to 12-and-a-half years in jail on Tuesday for putting up anti-government posters in the wake of the demonstrations, her lawyer Khin Htay Kywe told AFP.

Her colleague Bo Bo Win Naing, who was arrested with her in November last year, received an eight-year sentence, said the lawyer, who is also a member of detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's party.

Another 23 activists were each sentenced to 65 years in prison on Tuesday, while a leading blogger and a poet who
wrote a coded criticism of junta leader Than Shwe were among six people sentenced on Monday.

Fourteen of those jailed on Tuesday are former students who were members of the "88 Generation," which led a major uprising 20 years ago that the military regime also brutally suppressed, a western diplomat based in Yangon told AFP.

"We understand and are proud for them although we cannot do anything right now. We are not frightened," said Amar Nyunt, 63, whose son Jimmy and daughter-in-law Nilar Thein were among those to receive 65-year jail terms.

She said she was caring for the jailed couple's 19-month-old daughter, adding: "She is in good health. We will take good care of her while her parents are in prison."

Sein Linn, 67, the father of Pannate Tun, another of the activists sentenced on Tuesday, said he fell sick after hearing of the punishment.

"I got high blood pressure when I heard the news yesterday," he said. "I do not understand politics but I cannot afford to do anything apart from feeling for him."

New York-based Human Rights Watch called the trials "unfair" and called on the Myanmar regime to free 70 activists on trial, mostly in relation to the protests in August and September 2007.

"These last few weeks show a more concentrated crackdown on dissent clearly aimed at intimidating the population," said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

The military regime has promised to hold elections in 2010, and Pearson said the convictions were likely an attempt to stifle any dissent ahead of the polls, which critics say aim only to entrench the army's power.

"Burma's leaders are clearing the decks of political activists before they announce the next round of sham political reforms," Pearson said, referring to Myanmar by its former name, which was changed by the generals in 1989.

The Yangon-based diplomat agreed, saying on condition of anonymity that the junta "wants to give a deterrent effect by sending a signal to opponents ahead of the elections announced for 2010."

The sentences were, however also a strong response by Myanmar to international calls for the freeing of political prisoners, the diplomat added.

Britain slammed the latest sentences, saying that until Aung San Suu Kyi was freed and restrictions on political parties were lifted "there can be nothing approaching free elections".

Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon called in a statement for Myanmar authorities "to release all political prisoners immediately."

Hundreds more activists remain in jail following the protests, which began as small rallies in August 2007 against the rising cost of living but escalated into huge protests led by Buddhist monks that posed the biggest challenge to junta rule in nearly two decades.

At least 31 people were killed in the crackdown, according to the United Nations.

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**Burma crackdown reflects Junta's insecurity** - Hannah Beech
THE BURMANET NEWS - November 13, 2008, Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> <www.burmanet.org>

The years piled up fast. Sixty-five years in prison each for 14 former student activists. Twenty-and-a-half years for a blogger. Twelve-and-a-half years for a labor leader. Six-and-a-half years for five Buddhist monks. Two years for a poet. In the space of just three days this week, more than 30 Burmese were sentenced to prison or hard labor by the country's ruling junta, a chilling legal onslaught that sent a clear message to other potential dissidents: speak out, and get used to life in a prison cell.

Even for a notoriously repressive regime, the jail sentences were unusually harsh. Last year, the generals who control Burma, also known as Myanmar, violently crushed a peaceful, monk-led protest movement calling for economic and
political reforms. Hopes that an influx of foreign aid — dispersed after Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy Delta last spring — would convince the junta to take a softer approach were dashed by the rash of detentions that accelerated in late October. Last week, two journalists were jailed, while three lawyers representing political activists have also been sentenced to prison. "These last few weeks show a more concentrated crackdown on dissent clearly aimed at intimidating the population," said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, in a statement from the New York-based rights group. "These peaceful activists should not be on trial in the first place, let alone thrown in prison for years after unfair trials."

Burma has scheduled multi-party elections in 2010. The polls are considered a charade by many international observers, who note that the leader of the main opposition party, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, is under house arrest and is barred from participating. But even after locking up a woman whose National League for Democracy won the 1990 elections that the junta then ignored, Burma's ruling brass still appears spooked by the power of the people. "Burma's leaders are clearing the decks of political activists," says Pearson, "before they announce the next round of sham political reforms." Overall, one Burmese exile group based in Thailand estimates that 2,120 Burmese now languish in jail for their political activism, nearly double the number who were in prison before last year's anti-government demonstrations.

Despite the predictable expressions of condemnation issued this week by countries like the U.S. and Britain, there's little that the West appears able to do to convince the junta, which has ruled since 1962, to treat its citizens more humanely. Economic sanctions by the U.S. and the European Union are undercut by the eagerness with which China and other Asian countries do business with Burma's generals. Although one of Asia's poorest nations, Burma holds a wealth of natural resources like timber, natural gas and precious stones.

The country's leaders have grown rich from the land's bounty, even as most Burmese struggle just to feed themselves. Roughly one-third of civilians live below the poverty line. Last month, many Burmese, who get their news from clandestine radio broadcasts, were shocked by a BBC Burmese service report that claimed a daughter of junta leader Than Shwe had spent more than $80,000 on a gold shopping spree in the city of Mandalay. Than Shwe himself brooks no dissent. The offense of Saw Wai, the poet who was sentenced to two years in prison? Writing a love poem published in a weekly magazine in which the first words of each line spelled out a brazen message: "Power Crazed Senior General Than Shwe."

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AFP  -  November 6, 2008  -  ABITSU - All Burma I.T Students' Union <http://www.abitsu.org/?p=3001>

Two Suu Kyi party lawyers charged by Myanmar junta

By Stanley   November 6, 2008

YANGON (AFP) - Two lawyers representing student activists from Myanmar's pro-democracy party have been charged with contempt of court, one of them told AFP Wednesday. Aung Thein and Khin Maung Shein will submit their defence at Myanmar's High Court on Thursday. No further details of their alleged crimes were available.

“We will have to make a final defence tomorrow. We received a letter saying we were being charged with disrespecting the court,” Aung Thein said.

The pro-democracy National League of Democracy party spokesman Nyan Win said another lawyer, Nyi Nyi Htwe, who has also represented political activists, had been sentenced to six months in prison last week for disturbing court procedure.

“If we look at the situation for lawyers now, they are unable to do their work. If lawyers cannot work, the court is worthless. If the court is worthless, the country will also be worthless,” Nyan Win, himself a trained lawyer, said.

Aung Thein and Khin Maung Shein had represented nine detained student activists whose sentences were extended by six months last week for disturbing court procedure.

The student leaders, including well-known Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gy, had fired their lawyers and refused to cooperate with the court by sitting in silence.

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FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA
They have since been moved from Yangon’s Insein prison to Maubin prison in Ayeyawaddy division where they are now refusing family visits, one family member said.

The nine were among about 200 NLD members and activists arrested after leading a rally last year against steep rises in fuel prices that preceded a larger monk-led uprising.

The NLD party, led by detained Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory in 1990 elections but Myanmar’s junta never allowed them to take office.

She has spent most of the intervening years under house arrest in the country, which has been ruled by the military since 1962.

Severe prison sentences for Myanmar protesters expected in coming months

The 65-year prison sentences handed down this week to anti-government demonstrators in Myanmar are only the beginning of a series of verdicts expected in the coming months against hundreds more political prisoners, according to exile groups tracking the trials.

Of the 1,037 people arrested for political activities over the past 15 months, three-quarters of them - 788 to be exact - have yet to go before a judge or complete their trial, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a group based in Thailand.

Among those awaiting verdicts are protesters arrested for their involvement in the demonstrations of September 2007 that were led by Buddhist monks, including U Gambira, a monk who faces 50 years in prison. Zarganar, one of the country's best known comedians who supplied the monks with food, water and other supplies, is still in detention as well. He also faces up to 50 years in prison.

In a country where owning an unauthorized mobile phone or distributing a homemade video without government clearance can land you in jail, judges are using a raft of laws to justify harsh sentences.

Among those awaiting verdicts are protesters arrested for their involvement in the demonstrations of September 2007 that were led by Buddhist monks, including U Gambira, a monk who faces 50 years in prison. Zarganar, one of the country's best known comedians who supplied the monks with food, water and other supplies, is still in detention as well. He also faces up to 50 years in prison.

In a country where owning an unauthorized mobile phone or distributing a homemade video without government clearance can land you in jail, judges are using a raft of laws to justify harsh sentences.

The government has also charged many protesters with violating the Video Act, which carries a three-year prison sentence for anyone convicted of "copying, distributing, hiring or exhibiting video tape that has no video censor certificate."

Turnell says the use of these laws against protesters also seems to confirm the degree to which the generals were alarmed when protesters used the Internet and satellite phones, which are banned in the country, to broadcast images of the protest around the globe.

"They were really spooked by the method of protest as much as the protest itself," Turnell said.

The generals see technology as something "that the opposition possesses and that they don't," he said.

With a government as secretive as that of Myanmar - the trials of protesters are being held inside a prison without defense lawyers or family present - it is impossible to know why judges have handed down such unusually long prison sentences.

It is also unclear why the government waited until a few months ago to begin the trials.

Aung Din, a former political prisoner in Myanmar who is now executive director of the U.S. Campaign for Burma in Washington, an advocacy group, said the government was attempting to eliminate all potential opposition before a new Constitution takes effect in 2010.

"This was their message to other activists: We are going to arrest you guys and imprison you for many, many years," Aung Din said.

But the government may also be concerned about more immediate problems.
Revenue from the natural gas that Myanmar sells to Thailand is falling fast, in line with global oil and gas prices.

Turnell estimates that gas revenue has fallen about 25 percent. This year Thailand will pay a projected $3.5 billion for the Myanmar gas, about half of which goes to the generals. But shrinking payments from Thailand will reduce the amount of foreign currency the generals have and hurt their ability to buy military equipment or push ahead with the continuing construction of their new capital, Naypyidaw.

Analysts theorize that these harsh prison sentences may reflect a defensive crouch on the part of the generals in light of these unfavorable economic conditions.

The 14 activists who this week received sentences of 65 years were arrested in August 2007 as they marched in the street protesting high fuel prices, a demonstration that preceded the monk-led protests.

But 65 years is not the final verdict; they are awaiting judgment on a number of additional alleged infractions, including violation of the Video Act and the Printers and Publishers Registration Act, which requires that the government approve all books, films, magazines and songs before publication.

"We think they will receive a total of at least 150 years in prison each," Aung Din said.

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Doctor visits Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi: witnesses
Thu Nov 6, 2008  6:34 am ET

YANGON (AFP) A doctor visited Myanmar's detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Thursday, witnesses said, two months after her refusal of food supplies sparked concerns that she was malnourished.

Her regular doctor Tin Myo Win and his assistant went into the lakeside compound where Aung San Suu Kyi is detained in the early afternoon and stayed for about two hours, witnesses near her Yangon home told AFP.

There was no information about the nature of the visit, but a spokesman for her National League for Democracy party has previously said that Aung San Suu Kyi was given a clean bill of health after the doctor's last visit in October.

Tin Myo Win gave Aung San Suu Kyi an intravenous drip on September 14, about a month after she began refusing food rations delivered to her home, prompting her lawyer Kyi Win to describe her as "malnourished."

The NLD and Kyi Win always denied the 63-year-old was on hunger strike, but said she was only eating small amounts of food to call for greater human rights in Myanmar and to protest her detention.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who has no other source of food aside from the daily supplies provided by the military regime, started accepting the food rations again a few days after being given the drip.

The Nobel peace prize winner had been detained for most of the past two decades. She is kept mostly isolated from the outside world, only receiving occasional visits from her doctor and lawyer.

Her NLD won a landslide victory in a 1990 election but the military never allowed it to take office and instead cemented its decades-long grip on power.

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UN rights envoy says Burma's judiciary system flawed
by Solomon  Thursday, 13 November 2008 20:01

New Delhi - United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, says Burma's judicial system, which sentenced over 30 dissidents to long prison terms on Tuesday, is flawed and manipulated by the ruling junta.

Quintana, in an interview with Mizzima, said, "There is no independent and impartial judiciary system [in Burma]," referring to the sentencing of dissidents earlier this week to up to 65 years in prison.
Quintana, who made his inaugural investigative trip on the condition of human rights in Burma in August, said the proceedings that sentenced the activists "cannot be taken as a fair trial" and that the government should reconsider the convictions.

However, despite the UN rights expert's and the international community's condemnation of the Burmese military junta's earlier convictions, 11 more National League for Democracy members were today (13.11.08) handed sentences of seven and half years imprisonment.

Yesterday (12.11.08), a spokesperson for the UN Secretary General said in a statement that Ban Ki-moon is deeply concerned by the severe prison terms imposed on activists in connection with last year's peaceful demonstrations in Burma.

"He calls once again for all political prisoners to be released and for all citizens of Myanmar [Burma] to be allowed to freely participate in their country's political future as part of an inclusive national reconciliation process," the statement read.

With their words, Ban and Quintana joined the growing chorus of international condemnation over the junta's actions, which opposition groups say are aimed to eliminate all activists before the planned election in 2010.

Quintana stressed that the convictions of the activists should be reconsidered as they had not received a fair trial. He also said he will raise the issue of a fair court and an independent judicial system during his second visit to the country, which he believes will occur prior to March 2009.

"I am trying to go back to the country before March 2009, this [the judiciary system] will be part of my discussion in the country," Quintana told Mizzima.

In his earlier visit in August, the UN envoy proposed four core human rights elements to the Burmese junta for consideration, one of which was a review of national legislation in accordance with the new constitution and international obligations – in addition to the release of political prisoners, a review of the armed forces and look at how authority is exercised.

Quintana noted, "One of my goals for the next mission is to establish with the government for the implementation of these four core human rights elements."

"The human rights situation [in Burma] is a challenging task for me and for other human rights agencies," added the Special Rapporteur.

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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
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