



BURMA REPORT

January 2010

မြန်မာ့ - မှတ်တမ်း

Issue N[∞] 80

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

THE BURMANET NEWS, December 22, 2009 -, Issue #3865 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> -<www.burmanet.org>

Associated Press: Tue 22 Dec 2009 Burmanet / editor, BurmaNet

Obama has powerful tool to pressure Myanmar -

Forster Klug - <<http://www.burmanet.org/news/2009/12/22/associated-press-obama-has-powerful-tool-to-pressure-myanmar-%e2%80%93-forster-klug/>>

Washington – If talks with Myanmar over democratic reforms fail, the Obama administration could tie up large amounts of money that the country's ruling generals stash in international banks from the sale of natural gas. So far the administration has been hesitant to go that route.

But pressuring banks to avoid doing business with Myanmar's leaders could be a powerful economic weapon one that already is being used elsewhere. It's an approach, for example, that has been used to try to push North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions.

Congress already has provided the power for the administration to go after the banks and some rights groups want President Barack Obama to use it right away, or at least if direct talks fail.

U.S. officials have just started face-to-face negotiations and want to give them more time to show results. Imposing the banking sanctions would be expensive and time-consuming, and Myanmar isn't a top priority on a crowded foreign policy agenda that includes Afghanistan and Iran.

Still, the administration has warned of tougher action if engagement breaks down with Myanmar, also known as Burma. And the mere threat could add force to the U.S. negotiating position.

"We will reserve the option of tightening sanctions on the regime and its supporters to respond to events in Burma," Obama's top diplomat for East Asia, Kurt Campbell, told lawmakers in September.

Myanmar has one of the most repressive governments in the world and has been controlled by the military since 1962. For years, the United States has used punishing sanctions to try to force change on the country, with little success. Former President George W. Bush's administration favored shunning Myanmar, and Bush's wife, Laura, and many in Congress were strong advocates of the nascent democracy movement there.

Now, the Obama administration has reversed the isolation policy in favor of engagement, which it hopes will persuade the generals to grant greater freedoms to opposition parties and minorities and to free political prisoners.

Myanmar has since made a few symbolic gestures of good will, letting detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi meet with Campbell, for instance, and releasing some political prisoners. At the same time, it has continued to persecute ethnic minorities, journalists and student activists.

Obama himself spoke of a possibly stronger position on Myanmar in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. There will be engagement and diplomacy with Myanmar, he said, "but there must be consequences when those things fail."

Activists say financial measures that hinder Myanmar's ruling generals' ability to access the international banking system might do what broader economic sanctions have failed to do.

"What the Burmese government values is not its commerce with the outside world but the financial proceeds of that commerce," said Tom Malinowski of Human Rights Watch. "Once the Burmese government deposits the checks in its bank accounts, there's a lot the United States government can do to prevent that money from being used in the international banking system."

Treasury officials have targeted 40 people and 44 entities since the Myanmar junta killed and arrested protesters during demonstrations in 2007. Being added to the sanctions list prevents people from making transactions in the banking system of the United States.

But a 2008 law grants the Treasury Department authority to impose conditions on banking relationships, meaning sanctions could affect activities of international banks.

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Myanmar has lucrative natural gas deals with its neighbors and with some European and U.S. companies, with revenues going into foreign banks. Under its new authority, the U.S. can let these banks know it has concerns about their association with Myanmar that could hurt these banks' ability to work with U.S. financial institutions, said Jennifer Quigley, advocacy director for the U.S. Campaign for Burma.

Supporters of the banking sanctions often raise North Korea, saying that the United States effectively froze the North out of the international banking system in 2005, hurting leader Kim Jong Il.

For the moment, the Obama administration is urging patience as it pursues talks.

Next year's elections in Myanmar will provide a good look at the junta's intentions. A big question will be whether high-level U.S.-Myanmar talks lead to true participation by minorities and opposition groups or merely let the generals consolidate power.

Newsletter - December 15, 2009 - <news@irrawaddy.org> - <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/>>

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=17400&page=2>

Decision Time for Than Shwe

By **BAMARGYI** - CONTRIBUTOR Tuesday, **December 15, 2009**

There is a wide belief among democratic forces that the 2010 general election will be good for Burma—but are these optimists really aware of how the regime will organize it?

Fourteen prime ministers for states and divisions will be selected by the president and will select their own cabinet ministers. Elected or selected members of parliament will play no role in the state's cabinet. Parliament will convene occasionally but members will only read prepared papers.

The only viable event in the whole process is the election of the president. As things stand, only the regime's No 3, Thura Shwe Mann, is eligible for the post.

Like the 2008 referendum that paved the way for the 2010 election, the poll is already a done deal.

The aftermath, however, is uncertain. Nobody knows what will happen after the junta achieves its goal of giving itself legitimacy.

Junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe's instruction is to change the system but not the people behind it.

The charade is nothing new in Burmese politics. In 1974, for instance, Gen Ne Win's revolutionary council won legitimacy as an elected government with the help of ballot boxes but against the wishes of the majority of the people.

The 1974 election left the ruling council intact, with the chairmen of the townships and town councils becoming members of parliament.

The slogan was democratic socialism but corruption became institutionalized. The government was unpopular, including among party officials and elected representatives.

Than Shwe is now following the same course. The players and the timeframe have changed but the basic plot and aims are the same.

Public opinion is the last thing on the minds of Than Shwe and the other junta generals. Their plan and its execution do not call for the participation of the citizens

The generals have their lackeys, minions and paid workers who will act according to the prescribed scheme.

General Ne Win realized that he made mistakes, discovering in 1987 that he had been badly deceived by his subordinates all along. Realizing his errors and believing he could manipulate the situation, Ne Win abandoned his lieutenants and turned to multiparty democracy.

But his deputies refused to enact his program for change, the Burmese Socialist Program Party collapsed and the army took over.

A wave of oppression followed, seriously damaging the people's morale. Then came the events of 1988 and Than Shwe's unexpected assumption of power. By then, all efforts to save the country had been wasted.

Ne Win began his failed campaign in 1974 but realized his failures only in 1987. He chose to abandoned his colleagues

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and the party, which was badly misguided and could not cope with the changes.

His attempt to change the system without changing the people behind it was a failed endeavor from the start. Subordinates lied to him for fear of losing their positions.

Than Shwe—who has also failed to recognize the true situation and has miscalculated his power—is bound to repeat the same mistakes as Ne Win.

The governing council thinks that 13 percent growth is a reality. Now that US \$4 billion in natural gas revenue is sitting in the banks, it doesn't care any more. The generals just want to enjoy their new-found wealth.

With increasing wealth and with nobody challenging his authority, Than Shwe naturally wants China off his back.

Now that US President Obama is proposing dialogue and a new policy on Burma, Than Shwe might recognize the price he paid for friendship with China, which has sought dividends by doing business with rogue states.

Than Shwe approached Russia through U Thaung, Minister of Science and Technology, sending many young officers for training in the former communist states. But no visible achievement was scored there.

Gaining US friendship would have been a dream two years ago, but today it's a reality. There is only factor in the way of making this friendship a lasting one—the cooperation of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Until recently, Than Shwe recoiled at the very mention of Suu Kyi's name. Today he realizes that his only chance of escaping without a scratch depends on her.

Suu Kyi's cooperation is not possible, however, without real change. Political prisoners must be freed and the unresolved 1990 election has to be settled. The new constitution also needs her blessing.

The animosity towards Suu Kyi harbored over the years has also taken hold of Than Shwe's followers, who are like-minded people. Now Than Shwe needs to win over their support in making friends with the democratic opposition.

The hatred Than Shwe cultivated within the junta makes it difficult to change his direction. He has to convince his own people how badly he needs her friendship to move forward.

(Page 2 of 2)

Their worry is, of course, self-preservation—if democracy flourishes, they will lose their positions and status.

This is the critical time for Than Shwe to seize his opportunity. He has to go against the flow and reverse the trend he himself created. The obstacles won't be easy to overcome. A radically fresh outlook is needed.

There is still enough time if Than Shwe wants to make the election really democratic and help form a truly democratic government.

This is the only way that he can emerge as a hero and escape Ne Win's fate. If he sticks to his corrupt generals that fate is assured.

With Suu Kyi's help, Than Shwe could be a savior of the nation. A truly democratic government would provide a fresh start, with Than Shwe's influence still intact. The country would be spared turmoil as a new batch of leaders took over.

The first step Than Shwe must take is to talk to Suu Kyi. Progress would then naturally follow.

news@irrawaddy.org - The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Friday, December 11, 2009

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=17383>

Obama Warns Dictators of 'Consequences' in Nobel Acceptance Speech - By LALIT K JHA Friday, December 11, 2009

WASHINGTON — Even as his administration begins a new policy of engagement with Burma's junta, US President Barack Obama warned in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech on Thursday that oppressive regimes face “consequences” if they violate the rights of their own citizens.

In his speech, delivered in Oslo, Norway, Obama specifically mentioned Burma as one of the countries where there is systematic abuse of human rights by the government and honored opposition leader and fellow Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi for her commitment to democratic reform.

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A portrait of Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is held during a torchlit parade to a hotel where US President Barack Obama was staying in Oslo on December 10. (Photo: Reuters)

Acknowledging that he has adopted a policy of engagement with the Burmese junta, Obama said that “sanctions without outreach—and condemnation without discussion—can carry forward a crippling status quo. No repressive regime can move down a new path unless it has the choice of an open door.”

However, he also warned that the world could not afford to ignore threats to peace from regimes that menace their neighbors or their own citizens.

“Those who seek peace cannot stand idly by as nations arm themselves for nuclear war. The same principle applies to those who violate international laws by brutalizing their own people,” he said.

“When there is genocide in Darfur, systematic rape in Congo, repression in Burma—there must be consequences,” he added.

“Yes, there will be engagement; yes, there will be diplomacy—but there must be consequences when those things fail. And the closer we stand together, the less likely we will be faced with the choice between armed intervention and complicity in oppression.”

Obama also rejected the notion that governments must chose between promoting human rights and narrowly pursuing national interests, noting that “neither America’s interests nor the world’s are served by the denial of human aspirations.”

Peace, he said, “is unstable where citizens are denied the right to speak freely or worship as they please; choose their own leaders or assemble without fear.”

“America will always be a voice for those aspirations that are universal,”

said Obama.

“We will bear witness to the quiet dignity of reformers like Aung Sang Suu Kyi; to the bravery of Zimbabweans who cast their ballots in the face of beatings; to the hundreds of thousands who have marched silently through the streets of Iran,” Obama said.

“It is telling that the leaders of these governments fear the aspirations of their own people more than the power of any other nation. And it is the responsibility of all free people and free nations to make clear that these movements—these movements of hope and history—they have us on their side.”

On Oct. 9, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee announced that it had awarded the prize to Obama for “his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.”

Obama said in a statement soon after the announcement that he would accept the award as “a call to action, a call for all nations to confront the common challenges of the 21st century.”

“To be honest, I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who’ve been honored by this prize, men and women who’ve inspired me and inspired the entire world through their courageous pursuit of peace,” Obama said at the time.

Meanwhile, Obama’s National Security Adviser, James Jones, said in an statement issued on International Human Rights Day that the Obama administration would continue to call attention to the repression in Burma and Iran.

Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, also said that the world needed US leadership to deal with human rights abuses noting that violations and genocide continue without resolution in Darfur, while in Burma, Suu Kyi still languishes in detention.

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the ranking member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said the US must never lose sight of the plight of those living under dictatorial regimes in China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Burma, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere.

minye kyawswar <minyekyawswar8888@gmail.com> - [8888peoplepower] Latest news:<http://8888newgenerations.blogspot.com/> - Fri, 04. Dec 2009

The Daily Star - <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=116396>>

EU to begin Myanmar political dialogue

Top court agrees to hear Suu Kyi appeal - **AfP**, Yangon - Sat. December 5, 2009 -

The European Union will begin "sustained political dialogue" with Myanmar following the thawing of relations between the junta-led nation and the US, the regional bloc's ambassador said Thursday.

Ambassador David Lipman spoke to reporters in Myanmar's main city Yangon after meeting with the country's leader Senior General Than Shwe to obtain diplomatic credentials in the remote capital Naypyidaw a day earlier.

"We had a good discussion about future relations between the European Union and Myanmar and we are looking forward," Lipman said of the 30-minute meeting.



Aung San Suu Kyi

"I think the government would like to engage with the European Union. They are already engaging with the United States," he said.

Last month US President Barack Obama signalled a new approach with Myanmar when he met Prime Minister Thein Sein along with other leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in Singapore.

The US and EU have sanctions against Myanmar because of its human rights record and detention of Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Lipman said future engagement would follow three tracks -- general humanitarian assistance, the giving of financial aid through non-government organisations, and now political discussion.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's Supreme Court agreed yesterday to hear an appeal against the extended house arrest of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, as the European Union said it wanted sustained dialogue with the ruling junta.

Nobel laureate Suu Kyi, 64, was ordered to spend another 18 months in detention in August after being convicted over an incident in which a US man swam to her house. A lower court rejected an initial appeal in October.

"EBO" - "Burma News" <burma_news@verizon.net> - Wed, 16. Dec 2009 21:02:32

AFP – 16 December 2009 <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gPKFNNSHDEMmVyWowzc8-Y6hCXyA>>

Myanmar's Suu Kyi in rare talks with party elders

YANGON – Myanmar's junta allowed detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to meet with three elderly senior members of her party Wednesday in a rare concession by the military regime.

The democracy icon was taken to a state guesthouse in Yangon for the talks with 92-year-old party chairman Aung Shwe, secretary Lwin, 85, and executive committee member Lun Tin, 89, all of whom are in poor health

"The authorities allowed us to meet Aung San Suu Kyi privately at the guesthouse. She paid her respects to us and gave presents and fruit baskets," said Lwin after the meeting, which lasted about 45 minutes.

"I had not met her since 2003," he told reporters.

"Aung San Suu Kyi asked us to allow her to reorganise the central executive committee. We accepted her request," he added. Most of the party's current 11-member committee are very old.

In a letter to Myanmar's military strongman Than Shwe last month, Suu Kyi requested she be allowed to visit the three men.

"Daw Suu accepted the authorities' suggestion to meet them all in one place for security reasons," her lawyer and NLD spokesman Nyan Win told reporters on Tuesday.

The visit followed a meeting between Suu Kyi and junta liaison officer Aung Kyi last Wednesday -- their third since the beginning of October -- where they discussed her letter to Than Shwe, Nyan Win said.

In the correspondence, she also asked to meet with the junta chief himself and said she wanted to cooperate with the government to get sanctions against Myanmar lifted for the benefit of the country.

"Daw Suu is also expecting the rest of her requests to be fulfilled. She's optimistic about her letter," Nyan Win said.

minye kyawswar <minyekyawswar8888@gmail.com>Mittwoch, den 09.12.2009 - NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK@yahoooogroups.com,

The New York Times - Published: December 9, 2009 By REUTERS

Myanmar Junta Calls Detained Suu Kyi "Dishonest"



Aung San Suu Kyi, Photograph by: AFP, AFP/Getty Images

YANGON (Reuters) - Myanmar's detained opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been insincere and dishonest in her offer to meet the country's military ruler and push for the lifting of Western sanctions, state media said on Wednesday.

Suu Kyi, who is held under house arrest, had tried to harm the government's image and her behaviour had been "highly questionable," said a commentary carried in three state-run newspapers, which serve as mouthpieces for the reclusive regime.

The 64-year-old Nobel peace laureate asked to meet junta leader Senior General Than Shwe in a letter dated November 11, saying she wanted to work with his government in the interests of the country.

In a similar letter on September 25 she stated her desire to work with Western countries and the junta to bring about the lifting of sanctions,

which critics say have been largely ineffective because of the regime's trade with China and India.

"Her letters suggest her dishonesty, and are designed to tarnish the image of the ruling government, putting all the blame on the government," said a commentary in the New Light of Myanmar.

This was the first response by the regime to Suu Kyi's requests and appeared to criticise the National League for Democracy (NLD) party leader for leaking one of the letters to the media.

"The two letters reflect her dishonesty. She should have approached the government in an honest way in order to work out the stalemate," it said.

Myanmar's military, which has ruled the country for almost 50 years and is shunned by the West because of its rights record, plans to hold multi-party elections in 2010 [ID:nBKK532864].

In the last letter, Suu Kyi expressed thanks to the regime for allowing her to meet U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, the highest-ranking U.S. diplomat to visit Myanmar in 14 years, in November.

Despite the criticism, on Wednesday Suu Kyi was allowed to meet a government minister assigned as a go-between for the regime, suggesting lines of communication were still open.

A Home Ministry official said she held talks for 50 minutes at a state guesthouse in Yangon with Labour Minister Aung Kyi, whom she has met twice since late September.

It is unlikely Suu Kyi will get to meet Than Shwe. The 76-year-old strongman has been head of the junta for 17 years and plans to retire after the elections, but only, analysts say, after he has installed a favourable replacement.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of late independence hero Aung San, is seen as the biggest threat to the junta's grip on power and has been under detention of some form for 14 of the past 20 years.

She is appealing against a conviction for breaching an internal security law by allowing an American intruder to stay for two nights at her lakeside home.

The verdict was widely seen as an attempt to keep her sidelined in the run-up to the former Burma's first election in two decades. The NLD scored a landslide victory in the 1990 election that the military refused to recognise.

(Writing by Martin Petty; Editing by Alan Raybould)

news@irrawaddy.org - Newsletter for December 5, 2009 - Sat, 05. Dec 2009

green leave <greenleave2007@gmail.com> [8888peoplepower] Saffron Mail Letter, Sat, 05. Dec 2009

The Irrawaddy <http://www.irrawaddy.org/highlight.php?art_id=17360&page=2>

Young Voters Hold Mixed Views of Next Year's Election

By AUNG THET WINE

Saturday, December 5, 2009

RANGOON — Many young people in Burma say they won't go to the polling booths in next year's junta-sponsored

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general election if there are no political parties representing public interests, according to a poll conducted by The Irrawaddy.

The poll asked people who were too young to vote in the 1990 general election whether they would cast a ballot in the election slated to take place next year. The results showed that many would stay away unless they felt that citizen's interests were represented.



A member of the National League for Democracy pins a badge of the party's leader Aung San Suu Kyi on shirt of her colleague outside the party's headquarters during a celebration to mark the 89th anniversary of the country's National Day in November. (Photo: AP)

Sixty people between the ages of 18 and 29 responded to the poll. Respondents included 10 university students, seven media workers, four lawyers, seven manual laborers and a graduate from a military academy.

Many of the respondents said they considered the 2010 election to be the official conclusion of the prolonged period of military rule in Burma, but added that they doubted it would bring a genuine democratic government representing the people's concerns.

Many said they expected junta-backed parties and organizations, such as veterans associations and the the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a pro-military mass organization, to compete in the election, but saw little likelihood that political parties representing the people's interest would be allowed to participate.

"The junta's USDA organization has engaged in many pre-election activities, such as putting up USDA banners to publicize their volunteer work on road construction, bridge-building and other social welfare activities. They have been campaigning quite extensively, well in advance of the election laws that will officially begin the election period," said a 25-year-old mathematics student from Rangoon.

With less than a month to go before the start of 2010, the junta has yet to give any indication when it will hold the election, except to say that it will take place sometime next year. Many of those who responded to the poll said that the election law, whenever it is announced, would likely make it difficult for political parties to form and would also set many restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression during the election campaign.

"The junta promulgated the Constitution as it liked and I am pretty sure they will impose more restrictions to choke political parties with the coming election laws and regulations," said a legal intern from Rangoon.

Critics of the 2008 Constitution say that it contains many clauses that are contrary to democratic principles, including its guarantee of 25 percent of seats in parliament for the military. It also reserves more power for the commander-in-chief of the armed forces than for the president and allows the top general to legally seize power under certain conditions.

"The constitution starts with a clause stating that the union must practice a genuine, disciplined multiparty democratic system. But in a real democracy, there is no such notion as a 'disciplined democracy.' A real democracy is simply one that represents people's aspirations," said a female lawyer who took part in the survey.

But not everyone was so dismissive of the junta's intentions.

"Everyone should assist the military government with good will to transform from military rule to civilian rule peacefully and smoothly. The 2010 election is only the first step to a new democratic system without any bloodshed," said a youth trainee of Myanmar Egress, a locally based nongovernmental organization.

A 26-year-old military academy graduate also said that he strongly believed the nation would change its administrative system after the 2010 election.

"It's not only our people who eager to see change. The army servicemen are also hungry for change. Junior officers like us in the Burmese army are looking for change after the 2010 election," he said.

Some other respondents to the poll also expressed enthusiasm, even if they were less sure how it would shape the country's political landscape.

"Many young people are excited about the 2010 election, because it will give them a chance to see what role they can play in the future of the nation," said one IT professional.

Some young people who are struggling to make ends meet expressed hope that the post-election government will provide them with more economic opportunities to help them improve their living conditions.

"It is important for a household to be able to survive and live in well-being," said a factory worker who spoke with The Irrawaddy. "I will vote for whoever can create that kind of situation."

For some respondents, however, the way the election is conducted matters more than its actual outcome.

Although the junta leaders have promised to hold the 2010 election in a free and fair manner, there is every indication that the regime will continue to impose strict limits on media freedom.

"We haven't been allowed to freely publish news relating to the election until now. The censorship board has actually increased its restrictions on news related to politics and the election," said a 27-year-old journalist, adding that the election could not be considered free and fair without freedom of expression.

"If even journalists, who are regarded as the eyes and ears of a nation, can't express their opinions freely, ordinary citizens will find it hard to make informed decisions. But I don't see any prospect of media freedom in 2010," another local journalist said.



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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"AAPP(Burma)" <info@aappb.org> December 11, 2009

Updated Information about Nyi Nyi Aung's Hunger Strike

Freitag, 10.12.2009

The lawyer representing Kyaw Zaw Lwin (a.k.a. Nyi Nyi Aung), a political prisoner in Burma's Insein Prison and naturalized U.S. citizen, has disclosed that his client's trial will be postponed until next week due to health complications.

Kyaw Zaw Lwin, who was arrested upon arrival to Rangoon's international airport in September on charges related to fraud and carrying excessive amounts of Burmese currency, has been on a hunger strike since Saturday to protest the lack of prisoners' rights in Burma.

The U.S. Embassy's request today to meet with Kyaw Zaw Lwin has been denied, and any further details regarding his health status are currently unavailable; however there is growing concern for the wellbeing of the lifelong pro democracy activist.

-ENDS-

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news@irrawaddy.org - The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Friday, December 11, 2009

The Irrawaddy <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=17382>

UN Urged to Investigate Junta's Crimes Against Humanity - By LALIT K JHA Friday, December 11, 2009

WASHINGTON — Members of parliaments from 29 countries on Thursday urged the UN Security Council to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma and to impose a global arms embargo against the military regime.

There was no immediate reaction from either the office of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon or the Security Council

president for the month of December, Ambassador Michel Kafando of Burkina Faso.

The US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, told reporters at UN headquarters in New York that the Obama administration will continue its discussions at the UN here and in Geneva at the Human Rights Council on what actions might be desirable and feasible.

The letter urging the Security Council to establish an investigative body was supported by 442 members of parliaments.

Such UN action is long due, said the letter, which was initiated by two members of parliament from Japan, Azuma Konno, and Tadashi Inuzuka, both members of the ruling Democratic Party.

The letter charged that the Burmese military regime has carried out deadly attacks on its own people for decades and asked the Security Council to address the issue in an emergency meeting.

US Congressman Joseph Pitts in a statement, "This letter demonstrates that the eyes of the world are on Burma, and that we will call attention to the continued human rights violations perpetrated by the military regime."

"The destruction of villages and ethnic cleansing must stop," the statement said. "I am proud to stand with so many freely elected leaders from around the world to call for the regime to respect the rights of the people of Burma and to cease the senseless violence."

The appeal follows similar calls made earlier this year by lawmakers from the United States, Canada and Britain. In June, 55 members of US House of Representatives sent a letter to President Barack Obama urging him to encourage the UN Security Council to set up a commission of inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity in Burma.

THE BURMANET NEWS - December 4, 2009 Issue #3853 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

New York Times - <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/05/world/asia/05myanmar.html>>

Myanmar High Court to Consider Dissident's Appeal

By THOMAS FULLER - December 4, 2009

BANGKOK — The highest court in Myanmar has agreed to consider an appeal by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the country's battered democracy movement, over an 18-month extension of her longstanding house arrest, her lawyer said Friday.

The decision by the Supreme Court comes after a lower court's rejection in October and coincides with tentative signs of a thawing of relations between the country's military government and Western countries.

Lawyers will make an initial application on Dec. 21, and a judge will decide whether to grant a full hearing in front of the Supreme Court. A successful appeal raises the prospect that Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi might be able to play a role in elections that the military government has pledged to hold sometime next year.

In a telephone interview, her lawyer, U Kyi Win, said the Dec. 21 hearing was largely procedural. "It's a very routine matter," he said. "It's neither positive nor negative."

Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been confined to her home for 14 of the past 20 years, was sentenced to an additional 18 months of house arrest in August for allowing a foreigner into her home. Mr. Kyi Win said he would argue that the laws used to convict his client, a Nobel Peace laureate, were from the 1974 Constitution, which he claims is no longer in force as the country is under military rule.

If the judge refuses to allow a full hearing, Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi can take the final step of requesting a "special leave to appeal," which is usually heard by the chief justice, Mr. Kyi Win said.

Despite her confinement, Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi has in recent months been able to meet with several visiting dignitaries, including a high-level delegation of United States diplomats.

After years of supporting economic sanctions, she has softened her tone toward the military government and last month sent a letter to Senior Gen. Than Shwe, the leader of the junta, requesting permission to meet with him.

Under the terms of the constitution due to take effect next year, Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi appears to be barred from holding office because her husband, who died in 1999, was a foreigner.

But her role as a possible campaigner could change the dynamics of the election, which, if held, would be the first since 1990, when Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory that was ignored by the generals

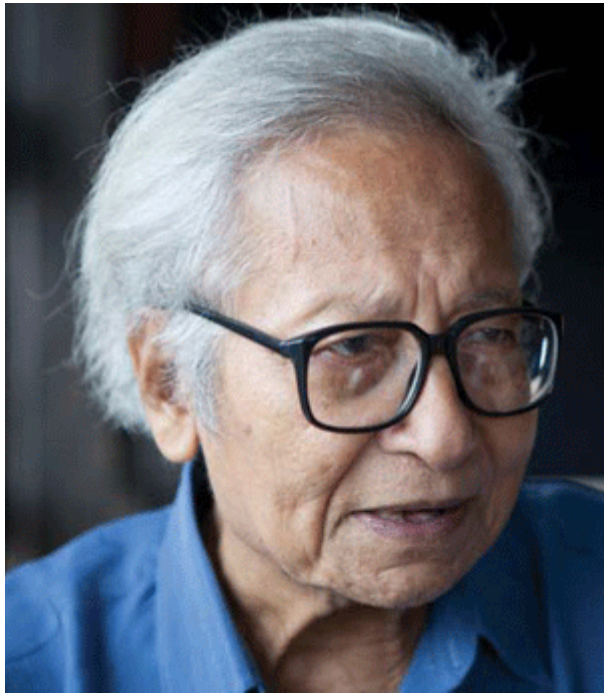
The Irrawaddy Magazine January, 2010 - Volume 18 No.1 - news@irrawaddy.org - www.irrawaddy.org/ Mittwoch (30.12.2009)

The Irrawaddy Magazine - JANUARY, 2010 - VOLUME 18 NO.1

Constructive Dialogue is the Solution - 2010 predictions

Given the terms of the Constitution and the junta's history, an election will not solve our problems.

Snr-Gen Than Shwe recently told members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association and the War Veterans Association that there will be no review of the Constitution and the 2010 election will be held based on the junta's seven-step "road map" to democracy. Will the election be held in the first half of the year? Time is running out fast.



WIN TIN, Opposition leader (Photo: Tom Parry)

It's essential that democracy exists in the period before and after the day of the election. The election in 1990 and the constitutional referendum in 2008 both lacked freedom and fairness.

In the 1990 election, there was no systematic preparation or fairness in voting and vote counting. Likewise, the referendum on the Constitution was conducted during a period of untold suffering after Cyclone Nargis. The country didn't know how to respond.

Given such a background, if the election is held as scheduled—whether the National League for Democracy contests it or not—the international community should be in a position to confirm the freedom and fairness of the election.

Whether Aung San Suu Kyi runs for office or not, the government formed after the election will not be democratic, because it will be formed in accord with the 2008 Constitution, which is a distortion of democracy based on Than Shwe's goals of military dominance.

The new government will receive little cooperation from ethnic nationalities. It is questionable how a parliament and government formed under such conditions could foster stability and trust.

We cannot accept the power structure that will emerge after the election. If the election is held as planned, our problems will not be solved. There is only one effective way out, and it is through

political dialogue.

As a leader representing the people, Suu Kyi should represent the democratic side. The ethnic nationalities will accept her leadership. In Suu Kyi's latest moves to engage the junta, perhaps a way forward has emerged.

The idea that the election itself is a way to solve the country's problems is mistaken. A constructive dialogue is the only way out of the present impasse.

Win Tin is a founding member of the National League for Democracy. He was imprisoned by the Burmese junta for 19 years following the 1988 demonstrations.

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