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**News – Kokang conflict & China**

**Fighting Stops as Kokang Surrender Arms to Chinese**

*Irrawaddy - 29 August, 2009*

By Wai Moe

Fighting near the Sino-Burmese border came to an abrupt halt today after about 700 Kokang troops handed over their weapons to Chinese officials following days of clashes that sent thousands fleeing across the border.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese military analyst who is close to the Kokang, told *The Irrawaddy* on Saturday that at least 700 soldiers from the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), an ethnic-Kokang militia, crossed the border into China today and surrendered their arms to local officials.

He added that troops from the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a much larger force allied to the Kokang, have been repositioned to Wa-controlled territory.

*The Irrawaddy* was unable to verify this information with other independent sources.

The sudden end to the fighting came a day after Kokang and UWSA troops ambushed a convoy of Burmese army vehicles in Kokang territory. According to unconfirmed reports, more than a dozen Burmese soldiers were killed in the attack.

On Thursday, a 20-year ceasefire between the Burmese army and the armed ethnic groups broke down after government forces moved to occupy Kokang territory. Since then, the Burmese army has sent reinforcements into the area from Light Infantry Divisions 33 and 99.

The crisis began on Monday, when tens of thousands of refugees, including Chinese businessmen, started flooding across the border into China from Laogai, a town in Kokang territory. Cross-border trade in Laogai has since come to a standstill and trading at other border checkpoints has decreased, say sources in the area.

The rapidly deteriorating situation caused consternation in Beijing, which has long had close relations with both sides in the conflict. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu said China hoped the Burmese junta would deal with the situation properly and ensure stability along the border and protect Chinese citizens in Burma.

“China is following the situation closely and has expressed concern to Myanmar [Burma],” said Jiang.

Some observers said that junta head Snr-Gen Than Shwe’s decision to send troops into Kokang territory despite China’s concerns showed his determination to demonstrate that he will not be constrained by Beijing.

“The Burmese junta doesn’t care what anybody thinks, so I don’t think the generals are thinking about China’s response,” said Chan Tun, a former Burmese ambassador to China.

But while Naypyidaw showed little concern about the consequences of renewed fighting in the area, Beijing couldn’t ignore the worsening situation, as Chinese living near the border expressed outrage at the Burmese military’s actions.

“I feel upset with the Burmese government. The Kokang people have Chinese blood. And in China, many people are so angry that they are urging the Chinese government to send troops to help the Kokang,” said a Chinese journalist who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Although Beijing appears to have defused the potentially explosive situation for the time being, it remains to be seen if fighting will resume between the Burmese and the Wa, who command a much larger military force than the Kokang.

The current conflict stems from the refusal of ethnic ceasefire groups, including Kokang, Wa, Kachin and Shan militias, to transform themselves into border security forces under Burmese military command.

The 20,000-strong UWSA presents the greatest obstacle to Burmese ambitions to pacify the country's borders after six decades of civil conflict. Although they were among the first ethnic groups to sign a ceasefire agreement with the current regime in 1989, they have also been the most resistant to any effort to weaken their hold over their territory.

In Rangoon, news of the clashes in the country's north has revived memories of the insurgencies that wracked the region for decades.

"People here are talking about it at teashops. They are saying that this is the return of civil war," said an editor of a private weekly journal in Rangoon.

Meanwhile, Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), called for a peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict in northern Burma.

"We want the junta to resolve the issue in a peaceful way with ethnic groups," NLD spokesman Han Thar Myint told *The Irrawaddy* on Saturday. "The cause of the conflict is the Burmese regime's failure to resolve problems in the country politically."

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**[China angered by clashes in Burma](#)**

*Financial Times* – 31 August 2009

By Tim Johnston in Bangkok

A high-stakes bid by Burma to bring to heel the ethnic militias which have challenged its rule for more than 60 years has driven up to 30,000 refugees into China and drawn a rare rebuke from the regime's most important ally.

Fighting erupted last week between government troops and members of a militia known as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army in the Kokang region of north-east Burma. The clashes broke a ceasefire which the government and the militia signed more than 20 years ago.

The ostensible spark for the clashes was a move against a gun repair factory the government believed was being used as a front for narcotics manufacturing, but fighting escalated, with Burmese troops taking control of Lougai, the Kokang capital.

The violence intensified on Saturday despite a call by the Chinese authorities for calm. But witnesses on the border said it was calmer on Sunday, in part because 700 NDAA fighters had fled across the border and surrendered their weapons to Chinese authorities.

The Chinese foreign ministry issued a statement on Friday calling on Burma to "properly handle domestic problems and maintain stability in the China-Burma border region".

"We also urge Burma to protect the security and legal rights of Chinese citizens in Burma," it said.

Kitty McKinsey, with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said: "We have reports that between 10,000 and 30,000 people have crossed the border [into China]."

The Chinese authorities have set up a tented camp in the city of Nansan, just across the border in the southern Yunnan province, where the refugees are being provided with food and medical care.

The Kokang militia is one of 17 ethnic armies that have signed ceasefire agreements with the government. The agreements have held for the best part of 20 years, but tensions have built ahead of planned elections next year with a government demand that the groups convert their forces into border guard units under the command of the national army. The ethnic armies see the demand as a threat to the autonomy of their enclaves and none has yet submitted.

The International Crisis Group, the Brussels-based research group, said the regime's demand for the ethnic armies to join the border guard "would greatly reduce their autonomy and would represent a major concession in return for which they are being offered no political quid pro quo by the regime".

Though China has been the key patron of the Burmese military regime, Beijing also maintains ties with a number of the ethnic enclaves and much of the border region sees Chinese involved in gems, timber and jade trading and entrepreneurs opening hotels.

The Kokang fighting has drawn in other groups including the United Wa State Army, which with some 20,000 fighters is the largest ethnic army.

The US Campaign for Burma, an overseas opposition group, said on Saturday that it expected the government to move against other groups in the coming days.

Some 40 per cent of Burma's 56m people belong to an ethnic minority, with most concentrated in the highlands that abut the country's borders.

The government, led by Senior General Than Shwe, is keen to break the power of the ethnic armies before the elections.

"When Than Shwe wakes up at night, he isn't worrying about democracy, or international pressure," said a western diplomat who did not want to be identified. "He's worrying about the ethnic groups."

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### [Myanmar says 26 forces, 8 rebels killed at border](#)

*AP – 30 August 2009*

YANGON, Myanmar — The Myanmar junta has ended a news blackout about clashes with ethnic rebels near the China border, saying three days of fighting killed 26 government forces and at least eight rebels.

A government announcement read aloud on state-run TV news broadcasts said the fighting had ended. It showed still photographs of police corpses and Kokang people fleeing.

The Sunday evening announcement said "the region has now regained peace."

It said fighting killed 26 junta soldiers and police and left 47 wounded. The announcement said eight bodies of Kokang rebels were found and 600 pieces of weapons seized.

There was no way to independently verify the figures.

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### [Myanmar refugees leave China as battles ending](#)

*AP – 31 August 2009*

By Ng Han Guan

NANSAN, China — Myanmar refugees began heading home from China on Monday as fighting between government troops and a rebel militia that left more than 30 people dead appeared to be over.

More than 30,000 civilian refugees streamed into China to escape the fighting, which broke out last week after hundreds of Myanmar soldiers moved into Kokang, an ethnically Chinese region in northeastern Myanmar run by a local militia.

The shooting ended Saturday, and hundreds of refugees were transported Monday to the border, where they walked through the gate, clutching bags and blankets.

Local government official Li Hui said about 2,000 refugees had gone back by mid-afternoon Monday.

Many were returning to ruined homes and businesses, and it wasn't clear what percentage of Chinese investors who had moved in large numbers to Kokang in recent years would be going back.

At the border crossing, Chinese businesswoman Li Chunhua wept as she told of seeing the entire stock of her clothing store carried off by Myanmar government soldiers.

"There's nothing left," Li said.

Hundreds of Kokang rebels had fled the clashes, surrendering their weapons and uniforms to Chinese border police and crossing to safety after several days of skirmishes.

Myanmar's junta said three days of fighting killed 26 government soldiers and at least eight rebels. It said the clashes had ended and "the region has now regained stability."

Myanmar is trying to consolidate control over several armed ethnic groups along its borders to ensure smooth conditions for next year's national elections, the first in nearly 20 years. Several groups are resisting pressure to join the military to become border guards ahead of the elections.

The clashes and the flow of refugees have strained Beijing's close relations with Myanmar's ruling generals, prompting a rare demand last week from China's Foreign Ministry for Myanmar to end the fighting and protect the interests of Chinese citizens in the area.

Myanmar apologized for the death of one Chinese national from three artillery shells fired into Chinese territory, China's official Xinhua News Agency said. That followed China's issuing of a "stern representation" over the matter, it said.

The agency quoted local police chief Meng Sutie as saying 37,000 people, both Burmese and Chinese, had fled into China since fighting broke out.

The crisis comes amid a push by China to ensure stability ahead of Oct. 1 celebrations to mark 60 years of communist rule. China borders a number of volatile states, including Pakistan and North Korea, and the country's leaders have struggled to maintain order within the country, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang, where ethnic minorities have chafed against Beijing's rule.

Myanmar's conflict area is on the fringe of the drug-producing Golden Triangle region where Myanmar, Thailand and Laos meet. Many of the ethnic armies there have used the trade in heroin and amphetamines to finance their operations, with much of their product smuggled into China.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is the second largest exporter of heroin after Afghanistan.

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**[Nearly 30,000 civilians flee conflicts in Northeastern Burma: UN](#)**

*Mizzima - 29 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi – As many as 30,000 civilians have fled to China in the wake of fighting between government troops and ethnic rebels in Burma's north-eastern region, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said on Friday.

"Our information is that as many as 30,000 people may have taken shelter in Nansan County since August 8, saying they were fleeing fighting between Myanmar [Burma] government troops and ethnic minority groups," Andrej Mahecic, UNHCR spokesperson said at the press briefing, on Friday in Geneva.

Mahecic said the UNHCR is "liaising with the authorities to investigate what their needs are," and expressed appreciation of China for not sending away the refugees as a respect to the non-refoulement principle.

"We have been informed that local authorities in Yunnan Province have already provided emergency shelter, food and medical care to the refugees," Mahecic said.

As thousands continued crossing the Sino-Burma border on Friday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry in a statement posted on its website said China hopes that "Myanmar [Burma] can appropriately solve its relevant internal problems and safeguard the stability of the China-Myanmar border."

"We also urge Myanmar [Burma] to protect the safety and legal rights of Chinese citizens in Myanmar [Burma]," said spokeswoman Jiang Yu in the statement.

On Friday skirmishes continued in at least three places including in Lao Kai, capital of the Kokang region.

Tension between the two sides, building up since early August sparked a conflict on Thursday and violated 20 years of ceasefire agreement.

According to Sein Kyi, Editor of the Thailand-based Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN), the conflict is likely to mount further and even spread to full-fledged civil war, as the Kokang group, is now joined by its allies – the United Wa State Army – another ethnic armed group.

Trouble between the Kokang, also known as the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the junta began to snowball when the latter in early August began moving in more troops on the pretext of a drug eradication programme.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese analyst based at the Sino-Burma border, said the ruling junta is disappointed with the cease-fired group following its refusal to accept the junta's proposal to transform their army into a border guard force.

The tension escalated on August 8 and on August 23 when the residence of Kokang's supreme leader Peng Jiasheng was raided in searching of illicit drugs and weapons. However, Peng evaded both the raids.

The junta then issued an arrest warrant for Peng and the military occupied Peng's former headquarters of Loa Kai.

"Now Peng and his troops are in the jungles," said Sein Kyi.

The MNDAA, UWSA, Mongla or Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in mid-August formed an alliance dubbed the Myanmar Peace and Democracy Front (MPDF).

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### [Scorched earth victims ordered to rebuild houses](#)

*DVB – 28 August 2009*

Villagers in Burma's central Shan state whose houses were razed in the junta's latest scorched earth campaign this month have been ordered by the army to rebuild their property.

Some 500 hundred houses were burnt down by the Burmese army near Laihka town in Shan state between 27 July and 1 August, uprooting around 10,000 civilians.

Sein Kyi, deputy editor of the Shan Herald Agency for News, said that army officials in the area recently ordered those who fled to return to their villages and rebuild their homes.

"They also shot video and picture footage of the villages being rebuilt to make it look like the army was actually helping the villagers."

He said the villages were burnt down by army soldiers together with troops from a splinter group of the opposition Shan State Army, known as the Brigade 758.

"Now the army officials are telling villagers it was the Brigade 758 who burnt down their houses, despite warning [the brigade] not to," he said.

"But actually, it was the [government] troops who burnt down the villages and the Brigade 758 was only accompanying them."

The order to rebuild the villages follows a press conference held two weeks ago in Bangkok by Shan right groups, who reported that around 40 villages have been targeted in the campaign.

According to the groups, it is the single largest forced relocation in Shan state since a campaign from 1996 to 1998 saw the uprooting of 300,000 villagers, many of whom fled to Thailand.

Some aid materials, brought to the displaced by sympathisers in nearby towns and villages, were reportedly intercepted by the army on August 7.

Sein Kyi said that the materials were recently distributed to the villagers under the army battalion's name.

Much of the scorched earth campaign has focused on Laikha township, where over 100 villagers, including women, have been arrested and tortured, and three have died. Many of these were displaced by the previous campaign.

*Reporting by Aye Nai*

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**News – Other**

**[US 'seriously considering' new Burma policy](#)**

*DVB – 31 August 2009*

The United States is seriously considering implementing new policy to Burma, according to US officials who visited Burma last week in what appeared to be a data-collecting mission.

Three US Congress staff met with members of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party in Rangoon on Friday.

“They came with concern about humanitarian aid. During the discussion with us, they also asked about the current political situation in Burma,” said NLD spokesperson Nyan Win.

NLD members were reportedly asked about the living conditions for the 2,100 political prisoners in Burma, as well as Aung San Suu Kyi’s extended detention under house arrest.

“We told them there was no proper medical assistance in the prison and that the inmates’ basic human rights, such as [the right] to read a book or a newspaper were also denied,” said Nyan Win.

The US announced earlier this year that it would be reviewing its policy to Burma in light of the ineffectiveness of sanctions.

Although an economic embargo has been in place since 1997, there have been apparently few concessions from the ruling junta, which now receives strong economic and political support from China.

The recent visit to Burma by US senator Jim Webb, who is outspoken in his anti-sanctions stance, was the first for a senior US official in over a decade.

Nyan Win said that he did not know whether Friday’s visit by Congressmen was related to Webb’s talks with the junta, but that it was “a possibility”.

“They said the US government is seriously considering implementing a new policy [to Burma] but added that the new policy is not to be expected to soon,” he said.

“We assume this group is here to collect statistics on Burma’s economy and the political situation.”

*Reporting by Khin Hnin Htet*

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**[US Congress Staffers Meet NLD](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 28 August 2009*

Three US Congress staffers met with representatives from the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) in Rangoon for talks about political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the US policy review on Burma, an NLD spokesman said.

“We met with the Congress staffers at NLD headquarters at 4 p.m. On Friday. The main reason for their trip is to discuss humanitarian issues,” NLD spokesman Nyan Win said. “We talked about Burmese politics—the first issue they raised concerned the political prisoners.”

The US Congress staffers also asked about Suu Kyi’s detention, he said.

During the meeting, the staffers told the NLD policymakers are still discussing a US policy shift in Washington. “But they said they did not think a decision on the Burma policy review will come soon,” Nyan Win said.

After US Senator Jim Webb’s recent trip and article in the *New York Times*, Nyan Win said he told the Congress staffers that Suu Kyi said she did not think his trip and his writing reflected the policy of the Obama administration.

“I think the staffers came to Burma to survey the facts for the policy review or for Congress,” he said.

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**Monks form secret organizations**

*Mizzima - 28 August 2009*

by Phanida

Chiang Mai – The internet has revealed more and more statements relating to forming of anti-junta secret organizations by monks.

The statements issued by the All Burma Students Union said branch organizations under the aegis of the underground All Burma Monks Organization were formed in Pegu, Irrawaddy and Rangoon Division. The information is being disseminated among Burmese internet users.

The All Burma Monks Organization Foreign Affairs in-charge Sayadaw U Eithiriya said that these branches were formed with the intention of toppling the military junta through mass movements, taking to the streets unitedly and with solidarity in order to achieve victory.

"We have consolidated all monk organizations such as Sangha Samaggi (Sangha Union), Young Monks Union and Thawthuzana. But for all these organizations, it is very difficult to form a unified organization. So we have now arranged to let all these organizations conduct their movements in their own area under the unified command and instruction of a central leadership," he said.

The monks' organization's has demanded that the junta make a formal apology for its atrocities, killings and persecution committed against monks. The apology should come before the deadline of October 2, noon.

The monk-led demonstrations spread like wildfire across the country after the local authorities beat up monks in Pakokku in early September 2007.

The monks took to the streets and chanted Metta sutra in Rangoon, Mandalay and other major cities. The security forces retaliated by brutally cracking down on the demonstrators, killing and arresting them.

Among the instances of brutal crackdowns, is the infamous incident, where the security forces raided Ngwe Kyar Yan monastery in Rangoon on November 24, 2007 and beat up all the monks they found inside and arrested them.

The Minister of Ministry of Religion accused the arrested monks of being imposters.

The statement issued by the All Burma Monks Organization is being widely disseminated among the people of Burma. A spokesperson of the organization U Dhama Wuntha told Mizzima that the monks in Burma are facing difficulty in going about their movement.

"In fact, we are mobilizing people through this movement. We showed them what we are doing and are trying to boost their morale. We are into this movement inside Burma without almost any political space. First we launched a poster campaign as part of an awareness campaign among the people and to encourage them to join us. Now we can no longer do these," he said.

The spokesman of the underground student organization Zar Ni said that they were getting ready to join the ex-communicative boycott when the All Burma Monk Organization launches it.

"To what extent the monks launch the boycott and how much it will spread, depend on the leading monks. When this movement forges ahead, our All Burma Federation of Student Union will join them and will fight the junta at the forefront," he said.

According to a source from Naypyidaw War Office, the junta has intelligence inputs on such a monk-led movement and they are monitoring the situation closely.

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**Myanmar's Suu Kyi to renovate home to stop trespassers**

*AFP – 31 August 2009*

YANGON — Myanmar's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi plans to renovate her crumbling lakeside home to keep out trespassers, her lawyer said Monday.

The Nobel peace laureate had her house arrest extended by 18 months earlier this month for violating her detention rules after a bizarre incident in which an American man swam uninvited to her Yangon residence in May.

Nyan Win, one of her lawyers and the spokesman for her National League for Democracy (NLD) party, said Suu Kyi had been in contact with an architect about making renovations.

"She worries for the security of her house and that's why she wants to repair it," he said. "It is to prevent another trespassing."

Nyan Win said the democracy icon would pay for the renovations, which are still in the planning stages but will include fixing a balcony, herself.

He said she was concerned about security despite the house being more heavily guarded by authorities now than it was before John Yettaw made the trip across Inya Lake using a pair of homemade flippers.

Yettaw was sentenced to seven years hard labour for the stunt but was freed after a visit by US senator Jim Webb earlier this month.

Suu Kyi's own conviction over the incident, which sparked international outrage, means she will not be free for elections promised by Myanmar's junta in 2010.

She has spent much of the past two decades under house arrest at the family mansion since the junta refused to recognise the NLD's landslide victory in 1990.

After a stint in the notorious Insein prison for her trial, she returned to the house with her two aides, where they live an isolated existence with no Internet or telephone access and almost no visitors except doctors and lawyers.

Her lawyers are expected to file an appeal against her conviction early next week.

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### [Suu Kyi intruder talks of 'dream'](#)

*BBC – 29 August 2009*

The American man who swam to the lakeside home of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has spoken of his sorrow that his action led to her arrest and trial.

John Yettaw told the BBC's Newshour programme that he had a dream that Ms Suu Kyi was going to be murdered, and swam to her home wearing home-made flippers to warn her.

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### [Economic Crisis Hits Burmese Migrant Women](#)

*Irrawaddy – 31 August 2009*

By Marwaan Macan-Markar / IPS Writer

BANGKOK — The global financial crisis is threatening to shred the dreams of thousands of women from Burma, who have fled their military-ruled country over the past decade for better jobs in more prosperous Thailand, say activists.

Mae Sot, a town along the Thai-Burma border that has been a magnet for female migrant workers, is one area where this pain is being felt, they add. Ongoing conflicts between the military and ethnic groups and a depressed economy in Burma, also known as Myanmar, are among the reasons behind such flight across the border.

"There is growing worry among these women that they will not be able to remit part of their earnings to their families in Burma," says Jackie Pollock, director of the Migrant Action Programme, a group lobbying for migrants' rights in Thailand. "Entire families depend on such remittances, which are about 2,500 baht (about 75 U.S. dollars) every quarter."

She expects this predicament to worsen as the crisis, which has resulted in the drying up of export markets in the United States, unfolds in the months ahead. "It is just starting to hit them. The families in Burma are living off what was saved from last year's remittances."

This economic downturn is squeezing a female labour force that is already being discriminated against by the factory owners, mostly Thais, who refuse to pay the daily minimum wage. The Burmese women who labour for hours behind sewing machines get between 60 and 80 baht a day, whereas the minimum wage set out by the Thai state for Mae Sot is 151 baht (4.57 U.S. dollars) a day.

These women make up the predominant labour force in the nearly 300 export-oriented textile and garment factories in Mae Sot, reveals a report launched Friday in Bangkok. Each factory employs 100 to 1,000 workers, while "about another 200 unregistered 'home factories' would employ between five and 20 workers," says the report.

This female labour force is part of the estimated 300,000 Burmese migrant workers in Mae Sot, which also provides work in other areas. That includes jobs in agriculture, construction, domestic work, call centres, the entertainment industry and on garbage sites.

In all these fields of labour, "women are shouldering a disproportionate burden," says Soe Lin Aung, co-author of the 48-page report, 'Critical Times—Migrants and the Economy in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot.'" A substantial number of women we surveyed—43 percent—reported a drop in their incomes."

"Knitting factories, which produce warm clothing largely for very hard-hit US and European markets, are said to be struggling disproportionately, with demand dropping steeply," states the report. "The local chapter of the Federation of Thai Industries claims that orders have dropped by 12 percent, and 'the talk,' as one report puts it, is overwhelming layoffs, reduced working hours and increased difficulty finding new jobs."

Currently, the average monthly income for a worker in such factories hovers close to 2,500 baht, with only regular shifts available. Yet "at this time last year, which is a relatively high season, a knitting factory employee might have made 6,000 baht (182 US dollars) a month, while a garment factory worker would have made a bit more than 3,000 baht, including overtime hours," adds the report.

"I can't support my parents because I'm not in a good job situation. My brother and sister are also not okay ù they also can't support with any money," says one female migrant worker interviewed for the report.

The money sent home by the migrant workers has become a vital lifeline for the families they have left behind, most of whom are elderly fathers and mothers and children too young to work.

"Over 30 people have come to work in Thailand from my village," says Deng Lungjong, who works in the northern city of Chiang Mai, another magnet for Burmese women in search of jobs.

"There are six people in my village that are depending on the money I remit home," the 26-year-old said in an interview. "Earlier I could remit money four times a year; now I can only send twice a year."

The migrant workers in Mae Sot and Chiang Mai are among an estimated two million registered and unregistered migrant workers from Burma, Cambodia and Laos in Thailand. They labour in work described by labour rights groups as "dirty, dangerous and difficult." The majority of them—over one million—are from Burma.

The plight of the migrant workers in Mae Sot—or other parts of Thailand feeling the economic pain—hardly surprises the International Labour Organisation (ILO). "All too often migrant workers in poorly visible categories of work tend to be the shock absorbers during an economic downturn," says Tim De Meyer, labour standards specialist at the Bangkok-based Asia office of the ILO.

In fact, the Geneva-based body did have the female migrant workers from Burma in mind when it said earlier this year that the current economic meltdown has a "woman's face," since women laborers are affected more severely, and differently, compared to their male counterparts.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the ILO projected that as many as 27 more people could become unemployed, pushing the total number of people in the region without jobs to 112.2 million.

And hit taken by women in this dire picture stems from the work they do: often in labour-intensive export industries like the ones in Mae Sot.

It was a similar scenario that played out a decade ago, when Southeast Asia was hit by the 1997 financial crisis, decimating once vibrant, export-driven economies. In Thailand, for instance, 95 percent of the workers laid off from the garment sector were women, according to the ILO.

But despite such a reality repeating itself in places like Mae Sot, the female migrants from Burma are reluctant to return home. "While the situation may be getting bad here, the situation is worse in Burma," says Deng, who have been working in Thailand for 10 years. "My family at home has only me to depend on."

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### [Thailand Urged to Protect Migrant Workers from Burma](#)

*VOA - 28 August 2009*

By Daniel Schearf, Bangkok

A Thailand-based activist group says migrant workers from Burma are significantly worse off than they were a year ago. The group is urging the Thai government to extend legal protections and social safety nets to migrant workers.

The Migrant Assistance Program Foundation, known as MAP, says the global economic downturn has hit migrants from Burma particularly hard.

According to research released by MAP Friday at the Bangkok press club, 70 percent of workers from Burma in two Thai cities say they are having more difficulty finding work. And while the cost of living has gone up, 30 percent say their wages were cut during the past year.

The report says factory workers have suffered the worst as exports have dropped with low foreign demand.

Soe Lin Aung is one of the authors of the report. He says MAP is asking the Thai government to fully integrate migrants into the social security system and to include them in economic recovery packages.

"We're also asking that they monitor and enforce relevant labor laws along the lines of working hours, minimum wage, and severance pay," he said. "The Thai government should lift travel restrictions for migrants. If we allow migrants to move more freely they can have an easier time of locating safe and secure employment, which is good for migrants and it's good for the economy frankly because then the migrant worker population can be more responsive to changing economic conditions if they can move more freely."

Soe Lin Aung says the group is also asking the Thai government to stop threatening to deport illegal migrants, which he said would help build a more inclusive society.

Most of the migrant workers in Thailand are undocumented and risk exploitation from employers.

The MAP report says women from Burma have been affected more than men. Many female migrants in Thailand work as household maids.

Deng Lungjong represents a migrant domestic worker group in Chiang Mai. She says employers have stopped paying benefits and annual wage increases and some are even withholding pay.

But, despite the worsening job situation in Thailand, she says they are not encouraging migrant workers to stay in Burma.

She says they do not discourage friends to come to Thailand because whatever the situation is like here it is worse in Burma. She says there is no work in Burma, whereas in Thailand there are still bits and pieces.

The MAP research was based on interviews, focus groups and survey results from more than four-hundred migrants from Burma working in the northern Thai cities of Mae Sot and Chiang Mai.

Some 300,000 to 400,000 migrant workers from Burma work in the two cities, mainly in agriculture, construction, and factories.

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**Battalions Ordered to Make Slingshots and Canes for Crackdowns**

*Narinjara News – 30 August 2009*

Sittwe: The Burmese army authority has ordered some battalions in Arakan State to make slingshots and cane sticks for use in crackdowns on possible demonstrations in Arakan State, said a source close to army officials.

Battalions based in Buthidaung in northern Arakan as well as battalions in Rathidaung, Ponna Kyunt, Sittwe, Paletwa, and Kyauktaw have been ordered by high army officials at Western Command to produce the weapons. Nasaka headquarters based in Maungdaw also received the orders.

"I was told by an army officer that all battalions in Arakan are now making 100 slingshots and 100 cane sticks. The slingshots are made with a rubber strip and the sticks are made of cane, but the sticks are only two feet long," the source said.

In its orders, the authority instructed the battalions to complete the work by August.

An activists from Taungup Town said, "Whenever police teams are deployed in our town to beef up security, the police bring slingshots and cane sticks to crack down on demonstrators. The stick is intended for use in close confrontations between the police force and demonstrators. while the slingshot is intended to be used from a long distance to crack down on demonstrators."

A source from Maungdaw said that the Nasaka headquarters is also making the slingshots and sticks quickly after receiving the instructions from the high authority.

The army authority in Arakan State reportedly believes that demonstrations against the government will emerge during the anniversary of the Saffron Revolution protests in September.

A politician from Sittwe said that the authority in Arakan State is preparing everything to crack down on demonstrations if they occur in Arakan.

According to a local source, the authorities have also beefed up security at all major towns in Arakan with additional police and riot police deployments, as the anniversary day of the Saffron Revolution protests is very near.

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**Myanmar establishes diplomatic ties with Zimbabwe**

*Xinhua - 29 August 2009*

YANGON, -- Myanmar has established diplomatic ties with Zimbabwe at ambassadorial level, bringing the total number of countries in the world with which Myanmar has such links up to 98 since it regained independence in 1948, state-run newspaper the New Light of Myanmar reported Saturday.

An agreement on the establishment of diplomatic ties was signed by the ambassadors of Myanmar and Zimbabwe to India in New Delhi Thursday, the report said.

According to the Foreign Ministry, Myanmar has so far set up embassies in 30 countries and two permanent missions in New York and Geneva, and three consulates-general in China's Hong Kong and Kunming and India's Calcutta, respectively.

Meanwhile, 28 countries have their embassies in Myanmar. In addition, China and India have respectively set up consulates-general in Myanmar's Mandalay, the second largest city, while Switzerland in Yangon and Bangladesh in Sittway.

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***Opinion / Analysis***

## **EDITORIAL: Impotent China**

*Irrawaddy – 29 August 2009*

The increased tension and fighting between Burmese troops and ethnic armies along the Sino-Burmese border has sent thousands of refugees fleeing to China. This has prompted Chinese foreign ministry officials to express hope that Burma can “properly deal with its domestic issue to safeguard the regional stability of its bordering area with China.”

Authorities in the southeastern Chinese province of Yunnan say some 10,000 people have already fled across the border from Burma in recent days due to the recent clashes. Most are Burmese-born Chinese and Chinese nationals living along the border.

Over the past few months, Beijing has been engaging in quiet diplomacy with Naypyidaw to urge the Burmese junta to solve the ethnic issue along the border in a peaceful way. When Gen Maung Aye visited Beijing in June, Chinese leaders again requested him not to use force against ethnic ceasefire groups and to maintain stability there.

Burmese leaders are also reportedly unhappy, as Chinese continue to support ethnic groups along the border. Many Burmese military leaders harbor anti-China sentiments, as China has in the past heavily backed ethnic armies and the now defunct Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The Wa and Chinese from the Kokang region were former members of the CPB.

However, it seems the Burmese leaders did not listen to China’s advice. Instead, the regime went ahead with plans to press the ethnic groups near the border to disarm and form border guard forces. The regime aims to complete this transformation before elections are held next year.

The current conflict has been 20 years in the making. It is a direct result of the regime’s refusal to grant the ethnic ceasefire groups the self-determination they seek within the framework of a federal union.

The greatest irony of this situation is that China, a major arms supplier and staunch ally of the repressive regime for the past two decades, has proven to be impotent in its efforts to persuade the junta leaders to find a political solution to this issue.

China has consistently backed the regime at the UN Security Council, exercising its veto power to block resolutions condemning the regime for its brutal repression of dissent, arguing that these actions do not represent a threat to international security.

In early August, Chinese foreign ministry officials even defended the regime’s decision to sentence detained Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi to a further 18 months under house arrest, saying that the international community must respect Burma’s judicial sovereignty.

After decades of defending the junta, China’s leaders are learning the hard way that the Burmese junta’s sole concern is its own self-preservation. It cares as little about what Beijing wants as it does about the democratic aspirations of Burma’s people.

Like it or not, Beijing’s approach to Burma—and its status as an emerging superpower—is being put to the test. Unless it can find a way to rein in the generals, China risks not only instability along its border with Burma, but also appearing to be powerless to defend its own interests.

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**28/08/2009**

***News – Kokang conflict & China***

**Rebels say junta shell kills Chinese soldiers**

*S.H.A.N. - 28 August 2009*

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) that has joined battle with its Kokang ally against the Burma Army yesterday said a shell aimed for its mountain base near the border had overshot the mark and killed one People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldier while wounding two others.

"When the Burma Army launched attack against the mountain base near Qingsuihe (Chinshwehaw) in the afternoon, we had no choice, but to join the fight," said a UWSA officer who asked not to be named.

Kokang's Qingsuihe, also known as Nampha in Shan is opposite the Wa's Namteuk (written Nanding in Pinyin) in the south. The two towns are separated by the Namting, a tributary of the Salween, and connected by a bridge. The fall of the strategic mountain base would have threatened Namteuk, according to the UWSA.

"We captured more than a hundred POWs, whom we turned over to the PLA," he claimed.

No independent confirmation of the rebels' statement could be obtained as yet. (Latest information says the casualties were civilians, not PLA soldiers)

Resumption of hostilities between the Kokang-Wa-Mongla forces and the Burma Army (after 20 years of an uneasy but working truce) started yesterday morning when a police patrol that had strayed too near the Kokangs' temporary headquarters was attacked. Three policeman were reportedly killed and the rest fled across the border where they were disarmed by the PLA. (Kachin News Group reported they were soldiers in police uniforms.)

Meanwhile, the Burma Army that had ousted Kokang leader Peng Jiasheng has appointed his former deputy-turned-defector Bai Souqian as the new leader. "The Kokang Army (also known as Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army) has about 1,000 troops," said a businessman who had just gone out of business in Kokang. "Not more than 200 had joined Bai. The rest are still with Peng."

The Burma Army's next target after Kokang that covers the Wa's northern border could be Mongla that protects the Wa's southern border, said a the anti-Rangoon Shan State Army (SSA) 'South' source. The closure of two borders could have strangled the UWSA to death without fighting, according to a Thai security source.

However, according to reports coming from the Thai-Burma border, the Burma Army's next target could also be the UWSA's 171st Military Region, opposite Thailand's Maehongson, Chiangmai and Chiangrai provinces.

The Operations Commander in Mongton, opposite Chinagmai, reportedly demanded on 26 August that the Wa withdraw from all their bases west of the Mongton-BP1 (Thai border) road. "He didn't give any deadline as in the past," said an informed source in Mongton. "He just said 'at once'. Naturally, the Wa, instead of complying with his order, merely reinforced their positions."

On the other hand, no reports of the new Burma Army units into the area have been received, said the SSA South. "But all our units have been placed on the alert," said Col Yawdserk, the SSA's supreme commander.

Meanwhile, Hkun Okker of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) said Burma's military rulers could find itself fighting on two fronts as in 1988. "September is the second anniversary of the Saffron Revolution," he told SHAN. "I certainly hope the two parties (those protesting in the towns and cities and those fighting on the borders) can find ways to cooperate and coordinate their activities."

The military regime that was facing 8888 uprising on the one hand and facing the Chinese-backed Communist Party of Burma (CPB) on the other was saved by the mutinies that erupted within the CPB's ranks in 1989. The ensuing ceasefire pacts between the mutineers and Burma's military government had been celebrated by Kokang, Wa and Mongla in March, April and June respectively.

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**[Fighting breaks out between Kokang and government troops](#)**

*Mizzima - 27 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi – The palpable tension between Kokang and Burmese troops, finally sparked a clash on Thursday with at least three separate gun battles taking place along the Sino-Burmese border.

The first clash, according to border sources, occurred at about 7 a.m. (local time) near the town of Yan Lone Chai on the Sino-Burmese border. In another incident, the Peng Jiasheng led faction of the Kokang

Army ambushed government troops which were trailing them in the jungle. Later in the evening, the two armies skirmished near the town of Chin Shui Haw along the border for more than an hour.

"The battle has begun between the Kokang and the junta's troops," said Sino-Burmese border based analyst Aung Kyaw Zaw.

On Tuesday, he told Mizzima that fighting seemed imminent as tension between the two groups was building up.

According to Aung Kyaw Zaw and other observers, tension began to mount between the Peng Jiasheng led Kokang rebels and Tatmadaw soldiers after the Kokang, like many other armed ceasefire groups, rejected the junta's proposal of transforming their army into a Border Guard Force to be controlled by the regime.

Unable to persuade the ceasefire groups to transform, the junta had extended the deadline for the groups to decide on the proposal to October.

Though Peng and his loyalists had rejected the proposal, the junta exploited fissures in the Kokang force as Bai Xuoqian, deputy to Peng, was keen to comply with the junta's proposal.

Meanwhile, government troops have been infiltrating Kokang Special Region (1) under the pretext of drug eradication, setting up a Regional Operation Command in Lao Kai.

Government troops and police raided Peng's residence in Lao Kai on August 8 and again on August 21. But Peng evaded both the raids.

Following the raids, the Lashio police station on August 22 served a summons to Peng and three other colleagues, including his brother, to appear before the court. But the four did not show up and as a result the court issued an arrest warrant for Peng and his group.

On the wanted list of the Burmese junta, Peng and his troops, as of Tuesday, moved out of Lao Kai to the north, having lost control over Kokang's capital.

On Tuesday, sources said government troops reorganized the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and installed Bai Xuoqian as their leader.

But Aung Kyaw Zaw said, "Most of the Kokang troops have joined Peng and only a few remain with Bai in Lao Kai. Bai does not really have an army with him."

Once members of the powerful Burma Communist Party (BCP), MNDAA, or the Kokang Army, broke away from the BCP in 1989 and signed a ceasefire agreement with the ruling junta the same year. The ethnic Chinese Kokang, following the ceasefire pact, enjoyed special privileges and were allotted several business concessions.

Mizzima's correspondent on the Sino-Burmese border added, "Peng's troops are now literally breaking away from the ceasefire agreement and are hiding in the jungles."

Phoe Than Gyaung, spokesperson of the Burma Communist Party, on Thursday said he is aware of the ongoing conflict and tension in the Kokang area and feels sad that they have also fallen victim to the junta's old and devious trick of divide and rule.

"It is the junta's tactic to always divide the groups. Though the Kokang has broken away from us, we consider them our good friends and it is sad that there is a conflict amidst them," Phoe Than Gyuang elaborated.

But he hoped that the Burmese junta might not come down heavily on the Kokang Army as they are busy with plans for the 2010 general election and handling the internal political situation revolving around the sentencing of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Aung Naing Oo, a Thailand-based analyst, on Wednesday told Mizzima that the Kokang case is another classic example of the junta's tactics in action, and other ceasefire groups including the United Wa State Army (UWSA) can start preparing for their turn.

The UWSA and Kokang Army both broke away from the BCP, once a powerful group that posed a direct threat to the Rangoon government. But the loss of the UWSA, Kokang Army and other groups drastically weakened the BCP to where it is, today, almost non-functional with only a few remaining members.

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[Myanmar fighting raises civil war fears: analysts](#)

*AFP – 28 August 2009*

BANGKOK — Fighting between Myanmar's junta and ethnic groups Friday raised fears of full-scale civil war and forced more refugees from the northeast across the Chinese border, media and analysts said.

A battle in Shan state between the Kogang rebel group and the government's army began Thursday, breaking a 20-year ceasefire, according to the US Campaign for Burma (USCB), which uses Myanmar's former name.

More than 10,000 refugees have crossed into the Chinese border town of Nansan in southwestern Yunnan province since August 8 and at least one Myanmar policeman was reportedly killed during the fight, the campaign group said.

"People say they have been hearing gunshots and explosions," said Khuensai Jaiyen, editor of the Shan Herald Agency for News.

He said another ethnic group, the United Wa State Army, had now reportedly joined the Kokang forces' fight against the junta and he warned that other groups currently under ceasefire agreements could join in.

"If the Burmese army is returning to a reconciliatory stance it might get better but if not it might be blown into a full-scale civil war," Khuensai Jaiyen said.

He added that the government was trying to create stability ahead of elections scheduled in 2010 but warned "it will be the opposite".

David Mathieson, a Myanmar analyst at Human Rights Watch, agreed full-scale civil war was "a very real fear".

"This could potentially be the flash point that draws in several other groups to the resumption of open conflict," he said.

Myanmar, under military rule since 1962, has signed ceasefires with 17 ethnic armed groups.

Chinese state media reported Friday, citing local officials, that Myanmar nationals were still crossing the border into Yunnan province, without giving a specific figure.

"It's difficult to get a real-time update of that number," Yu Chunyan, a spokesman for the provincial government, was quoted as saying in the English-language Global Times.

The newspaper reported that China had increased the number of armed police along the common border.

Refugees have been settled in a temporary camp, and Chinese officials were providing food and medical care, the state Xinhua news agency reported, citing unnamed provincial government sources.

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[Ethnic group in Myanmar said to break cease-fire](#)

*AP – 27 August 2009*

BANGKOK — Fighting reportedly broke out Thursday between an ethnic militia and government security forces in northeastern Myanmar, breaching a two-decade cease-fire.

Several minorities living in military-ruled Myanmar's border areas have continued their long struggles for autonomy despite cease-fires with the military regime that seized power in 1988.

Fighters for the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army — representing the Kokang minority — on Thursday attacked a police post along the border with China near the town of Laogai, according to the U.S. Campaign for Burma.

The Washington-based lobbying group said several police officers were killed and the rebels temporarily occupied the post.

The Kachin News Group, an online news agency that covers the Kachin minority in northern Myanmar, also reported the attack as well as several other clashes.

Reports of the fighting could not be independently confirmed.

Tensions between the Kokang and the government have risen recently after the ethnic group defied an order to allow its guerrillas to be incorporated into a border guard force under army command.

The junta plans an election next year, the first since 1990's abortive polls, the result of which were ignored by the military when the National League for Democracy party won by a landslide. The military has been anxious to assure stability ahead of the vote.

On Wednesday, Myanmar ethnic groups and Chinese media reported that thousands of people fled into China this month after tensions flared between the Kokang and government.

Some 10,000 left the Kokang area in Myanmar's northeastern Shan state between Aug. 7 and Aug. 12 after a military confrontation, The Chongqing Evening Post reported.

The trigger for the confrontation was an Aug. 8 raid on the home of Kokang leader Peng Jiashen — also known as Phon Kyar Shin — ostensibly to look for illegal drugs.

Peng's troops in the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army began mobilizing, but were forced out of Laogai on Tuesday by government soldiers and members of a breakaway Kokang faction.

According to the U.S. Campaign for Burma, Peng issued a statement Thursday calling for talks with the government and for newly deployed troops to withdraw from the area.

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#### [More fighting feared as thousands flee Myanmar: activists](#)

*AFP – 27 August 2009*

BANGKOK — Fighting between Myanmar's junta and ethnic rebel groups in northeastern Myanmar was expected to escalate after thousands of refugees fled to the Chinese border, activists said Thursday.

The exodus from Kokang in Shan state began on August 8 after Myanmar's junta deployed troops in the mainly ethnic Chinese region, said the US Campaign for Burma (USCB), which uses Myanmar's former name.

The USCB said "tens of thousands of ethnic people" had fled the region as China's Chongqing Evening Post reported that up to 10,000 refugees had arrived in the Chinese border town of Nansan in southwestern Yunnan province.

The exodus began after Myanmar sent dozens of military police to crack down on a gun-repair factory suspected of being a front for drugs production, sparking fear among locals, the report said.

Although the newspaper said the situation had eased, with China helping to repatriate the refugees, the Washington-based USCB warned of more confrontation after tensions "escalated to a dangerous level" in recent days.

The group said a 20-year ceasefire between Kokang rebels and Myanmar's government now seemed to be "effectively broken."

It also said the Kokang forces were divided, with one faction joining the government's troops occupying Laogai, capital of the Kogang region.

The other faction, which refused to obey the junta's order to place its troops under army control, had withdrawn from Laogai to take up positions in surrounding mountains.

"More confrontation and military encounters are expected in the following days and thousands of villagers are fleeing to the China-Burma border to avoid the war," it said.

Myanmar, under military rule since 1962, has signed ceasefires with 17 ethnic armed groups.

Rights groups have accused the military regime of committing crimes against humanity by targeting civilians during offensives against ethnic rebels.

Tens of thousands of refugees live along Thailand's border with Myanmar, most of whom have fled army crackdowns in the east.

The USCB said it now expected the junta to employ similar strategies to "wipe out ethnic resistance" in northern Myanmar, resulting in more refugees and also more sexual violence in the region.

It added that the junta's chance of moving forward with its plan for elections in 2010 were "very thin," as it had failed to disarm ethnic groups and make them join in the electoral process.

A border official in Nansan, who asked not to be named, confirmed that "many" Myanmar nationals had arrived in China in recent weeks, but could not give a precise figure.

He said local and provincial authorities had set up an office to deal with the influx of refugees, without elaborating.

Earlier this month, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on Myanmar's junta to immediately end attacks against civilians after thousands were displaced in Shan state.

It said that the Myanmar army had reportedly deployed battalions to clear civilians from large areas in central Shan between July 27 and August 1, burning down more than 500 houses as they attacked 39 villages in the area.

HRW said it thought the operation was part of an intensified campaign against Shan State Army-South, an insurgent group that operates in the area.

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#### [Ceasefire group split sparks tension](#)

*DVB – 27 August 2009*

An influential ceasefire group in northern Burma has split after pro-junta members announced the formation of a new committee, according to a political analyst on the China-Burma border.

The Kokang group, based in eastern Shan state, on Tuesday formed a new Central Executive Committee, following which it announced that the Kokang Special Region would be under new administration.

Political analyst Aung Kyaw Zaw said that the majority of the region, including the capital Laogai, is now said to be under joint control of the Burmese army and the splinter group.

After the coup, the splinter group released a statement urging some 1,500 followers of ousted leader Peng Jiasheng, who fled Laogai and is now near the China-Burma border, to come back and surrender.

According to Aung Kyaw Zaw, the statement said that Peng Jiasheng is wanted for drug-trafficking and that those fail to comeback at a given time would be regarded as enemies and be destroyed.

Peng Jiasheng responded yesterday with a statement calling on the government to investigate the coup and withdraw government troops sent to the region on August 23.

He also urged the junta to publicly reject the new group because "they do not represent the [Kokang] people".

China, which is believed to be backing many of the ceasefire groups in the region, has subsequently sent more troops to its border and is preparing to send a team of delegates to Lasho town and Mandalay's capital Mandalay to discuss the issue.

Meanwhile, local civilians in the region have fled variously into China and inner Shan state.

Regional allies of the original Kokang group, the United Wa State Army, Mongla Army, the Shan State Army (North) and the Kachin Independence Army are also preparing for conflict, said Aung Kyaw Zaw.

According to unconfirmed reports, around a hundred troops from Peng Jiasheng's group defected to the pro-junta side yesterday evening.

*Reporting by Htet Aung Kyaw*

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[China to promote trade with Thailand and Burma](#)

*Mizzima - 27 August 2009*

by Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai - With China keen on opening one more border trade checkpoint with Burma, a boost in trade is likely by corporates in Northern Thailand and southern China.

Thailand's Department of Exporting Promotion organized an event on Wednesday to promote trading and investing in Xishuangbanna Prefecture in Yunnan Province, southern China close to Shan State in Burma.

Apmornphan Nimanan, Chiang Mai province Governor presided over the event and said that Thailand and Xishuangbanna have close cultural ties. Besides, transportation is smooth along Mekong River and over land by R3A route between Thailand – Lao – China or R3B between Thailand – Burma – China, according to a report in the government run Thailand's News Bureau website.

Earlier, regarding discussions with officials in Chiang Rai Province, Qian Min, the Director of Trade Office's Xixuangbanna said R3B is the shorter route but there are many checkpoints in Burma that result in excessive transport costs.

"Our officials will discuss this issue with the Burmese authority in Keng Tung and open the Mongla-Daluo border checkpoint soon," he said. Kieng Tung is located in Shan State, Burma.

The Burmese side of the Mongla-Daluo checkpoint is under the control of the ceasefire group the National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS), led by Sai Linn aka Lin Mingxian, which is also known as Shan State Special Region 4.

Dao Linyin, Governor of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture said in Chiang Mai that the R3A is used officially, which would benefit trading between China and Southeast Asian nations.

"China would speed up cooperation with Thailand in commercial, investment and tourism and infrastructure development. We will also provide more support for investors with special privileges. If there are problems that the local government can solve, we will do so immediately," she said.

Early this year, Chinese authorities placed restrictions on this border checkpoint to curb drug smuggling, where trading and other business including casinos were affected.

Burma's cross-border trade was banned by the late dictator Gen. Ne Win after the military assumed power in 1962 but the ban was lifted following negotiations in 1988.

Bilateral trade has risen steadily since, increasing by 60 per cent in the fiscal year ending 31 March, 2008, and constitutes 24 per cent of Burma's trade, making China a major trading partner, second only to Thailand.

Trading between China and Thailand has also risen steadily. In 2008 it was more than 36,000 million US\$ which rose by about 20 per cent compared to 2007 but the global economic meltdown resulted in a significant drop early this year.

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**News – Other**

[Myanmar activist says China ignores junta's graft](#)

*AP – 27 August 2009*

By Jim Gomez

MANILA, Philippines — China and other governments with lucrative business deals in Myanmar are ignoring massive corruption by its ruling military junta, a pro-democracy activist said Thursday.

Ka Hsaw Wa said corruption has become the second worst problem in Myanmar after widespread human rights violations and afflicts all levels of its government.

He spoke to The Associated Press in Manila, where he was named one of six recipients of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay award, considered Asia's version of the Nobel Prize, for documenting human rights and environmental abuses in his country.

Corruption in Myanmar should be dealt with urgently, since most people struggle to afford three meals a day, Ka Hsaw Wa said. But obtaining evidence is almost impossible, he said.

"It's simply economic plunder," Ka Hsaw Wa said, adding that "99.9 percent of the ruling junta, from a normal soldier to the top generals, are completely corrupt."

He said corruption within the military should be apparent to friendly foreign governments like China, but they look the other way.

"We won't turn a blind eye to that (corruption), of course," said Ethan Sun, a spokesman at the Chinese Embassy in Manila. He added, however, that trade and economic cooperation "benefit the peoples of both countries."

China has often supported the junta against international pressure in the past.

Most generals live in sprawling, heavily guarded compounds which are off-limits to the public, he said. When a secret video of the lavish 2006 wedding of senior Gen. Than Shwe's daughter surfaced on YouTube, it caused outrage in his country.

International watchdogs have consistently ranked Myanmar, also known as Burma, among the world's most corrupt nations. Transparency International's 2008 list put it next to last, ahead of only Somalia.

The junta does not publicly respond to accusations of corruption, but it has launched anti-corruption drives mostly targeting low-level offenses. A call to the embassy in Manila was not answered Thursday.

"A lot of countries want to swallow Burma alive, it's so rich in natural resources," Ka Hsaw Wa said. "But they try not to see (corruption) in a way that they can do business there."

While the Myanmar government officially restricts logging, middle-level military officers have cut down huge swaths of rain forests for personal profit, he said.

Ka Hsaw Wa, a member of Myanmar's ethnic Karen minority, was a 17-year-old student activist when the government violently suppressed 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations. After his arrest, he fled to the jungle where he witnessed atrocities committed against villagers, the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation said.

EarthRights, the nonprofit group he co-founded, filed a case in the United States in 1996 against the U.S.-based oil company Unocal for alleged complicity in human rights and environmental abuses committed by Myanmar's military in the building of the Yadana gas pipeline. After 10 years of litigation, Unocal agreed to compensate the 11 petitioners.

EarthRights also runs a school in Thailand that trains young people from Myanmar and other countries in nonviolent social change.

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### **[Burma Review to be Completed Soon: US](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 28 August 2009*

By Lalit K Jha / Washington

The Obama Administration on Thursday indicated that its policy review on Burma is could be completed in the next few weeks.

The acceleration of the Burma review process, which was started by the Obama Administration in February this year, follows recent developments including the visit to Burma of Sen James Webb and the extension of house arrest for the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"I would expect that in light of recent developments, we would advance that review and reach some judgments in the next few weeks," said Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P J Crowley at the daily State Department news conference.

Last week, Crowley had said that extension of house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi would have a negative impact on the review process.

On his return from Burma, Webb briefed officials at the State Department on the talks he had with the Sen-Gen Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi. He was the first American lawmaker to visit Burma in a decade. Webb is expected to meet Secretary of State Hillary Clinton after her vacation.

Noting that the focus of the Obama Administration on Burma has multiple dimensions, Crowley said: "One of the dimensions is their continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, and 2,100 other political prisoners. Our second dimension is the ethnic conflict that continues in Burma and what we could do to try to encourage a broader dialogue within Burma.

"We have an interest in seeing Burma stabilize," he said. "We have an interest in seeing Burma end its isolation. How we do that is a subject of review."

Meanwhile lawyers of Suu Kyi said they will submit an appeal to the Divisional Court in Rangoon next week against the criminal conviction that put the democracy leader under house arrest for 18 more months.

Nyan Win, one of the lawyers and spokesperson for National League for Democracy, said the lawyers met Suu Kyi for two hours on Thursday afternoon to finalize details of her appeal.

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### [Burmese Exile Government Urges Washington to Stay Firm on Sanctions](#)

VOA - 27 August 2009

By Daniel Schearf, Bangkok

A spokesman for the Burmese government in exile has urged Washington not to hastily ease sanctions against Burma's military government. The exile government and rights groups support U.S. engagement with Burma, but they also want pressure for change.

A spokesman for the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, Zin Linn, says U.S. sanctions should stay in place until opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is released and Burma's rulers agree to talks with the opposition.

"All the sanctions made by the U.S. and EU will hurt directly to the military junta, the generals, and only their cronies," he said. "Not hurt to the ordinary peoples, because all the economic business, all the big industries are in the hands of the generals and their relatives. No other, ordinary people have a chance, or they have no rights to participate in the economic sectors."

Zin Linn was responding to U.S. Senator Jim Webb's call for reducing sanctions and further engaging Burma's rulers.

In an opinion article published this week in the *New York Times* newspaper, Webb said the sanctions had only entrenched the Burmese generals and isolated the country.

Benjamin Zawacki, a Burma researcher for Amnesty International, says isolating a military government that is all too willing to isolate itself is counter-productive. He says regional engagement is the only way that changes are going to come.

"Further engagement and further pressure are not mutually exclusive policies or tactics," said Zawacki. "And, so it needs more of both of those things."

Zin Linn says he agrees the sanctions have not brought change. But he says Washington must continue to pressure Burma's rulers to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other key opposition figures if they want to see democracy in the country.

Webb says sanctions also allow China, which does not support the measures, to dramatically increase its economic and political influence with Burma, which he called a "dangerous strategic imbalance."

Senator Webb earlier this month became the most senior U.S. politician to visit Burma in a decade.

He met with Burma's reclusive military leader Than Shwe and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. He also secured the release of American John Yettaw, who was sentenced to seven years hard labor for visiting Aung San Suu Kyi without official permission.

The military government extended her house arrest by 18 months for allowing the uninvited guest to stay two days.

The military has held Aung San Suu Kyi for 14 of the past 20 years, drawing condemnation by much of the international community, including the United States and the United Nations.

The National League for Democracy, which Aung San Suu Kyi leads, won Burma's last election, in 1990, but was never allowed to take office. Many of those elected were forced to flee the country and they have formed the government in exile.

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**[Japanese FM exhorts Burma to release Aung San Suu Kyi](#)**

*Mizzima - 27 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi – The Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone reiterated Japan's expectation from Burma's ruling junta to release detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi expeditiously.

Nakasone, during a brief meeting with visiting Burmese Agriculture and Irrigation Minister Maj-Gen Htay Oo, on Tuesday said Tokyo strongly expects that the Burmese regime will swiftly release Aung San Suu Kyi and allow her to participate in the process of democratization in Burma.

Nakasone said, for the general elections slated for 2010 to be acceptable by the international community, "Japan strongly expects that Myanmar [Burma] proceed with the democratization process with the participation of all the parties concerned."

Japan is also taking note that the Burmese government referred to the possible early release of Aung San Suu Kyi and urged the Burmese junta to quickly implement it, as releasing her and allowing her to participate in the democratization process would be of great benefit to Burma, Nakasone said.

Responding to Nakasone, Htay Oo said, his government is considering the early release of Aung San Suu Kyi, "if she leads an honest life" during her 18-month detention.

Htay Oo, who is also secretary of the junta-backed civilian organisation, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), said Aung San Suu Kyi has been dealt with in accordance with the law but as a gesture of respect to her late father, General Aung San, Snr. Gen Than Shwe had commuted her sentence to 18 months and allowed her to serve it at her home.

On August 11, Aung San Suu Kyi and her two live-in party house mates, were sentenced to three years in prison with hard labour by the Insein prison special court on charges of violating her previous detention terms by allowing an American, John Yettaw, to visit her at her lakeside home.

But Than Shwe, Burma's supreme military leader, issued an executive order commuting the sentence to half of that pronounced by the court. He allowed her and her two friends to serve time in her home with restrictions.

The sponsored trip of Htay Oo and the delegation he led, including Tin Htut Oo, Director General of the Agricultural Department and other officials of the Military Affairs Security (MAS), according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, is meant to explore possible cooperation with Japan on agriculture and irrigation sectors.

Yuki Akimoto, a Japanese researcher on Burma, said the trip could be a sign indicating the increasingly cosy relationship between Japan and the Burmese Generals.

But Dr. Min Nyo, in-charge of an exiled group, Burma Office, in Tokyo, said Japan, despite its continued engagement with the Burmese ruling junta, has lately become vocal particularly over the trial and sentencing of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Dr Min Nyo said he expects Japan's new government to take a stronger stance on Burma's military rulers.

According to Akimoto, Japan wants Burma to conduct the elections in a way that the international community could endorse, as it wants to step up its engagement with Burma. And in accordance, has provided training to at least five Burmese officials on electoral mores.

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### [US man wept 'every day' over Suu Kyi trial](#)

*AFP – 27 August 2009*

WASHINGTON — John Yettaw wept "every day" after he was jailed and later freed by Myanmar's military junta for swimming to Aung San Suu Kyi's home, he claimed in an interview broadcast Thursday.

A devout Mormon from Falcon, Missouri, Yettaw had been sentenced to seven years' hard labor for swimming to the lakeside home of the democracy icon in early May using a pair of homemade flippers, but he was freed after a visit by Democratic Senator Jim Webb earlier this month.

The bizarre incident, which led some to allege Yettaw was mentally ill, landed Suu Kyi back into house arrest for another 18 months, meaning that she will be locked up during elections promised by the ruling junta in 2010.

"Little did I know they were going to arrest her and put her on trial," Yettaw told CNN in his first interview since he was freed, insisting he was perfectly sane.

"I wept every day, I suffered every day."

Yettaw, who plans to write a book about the ordeal, said his motives were purely humanitarian and prompted by visions that Myanmar's generals "were going to murder her."

"I had a premonition. I'm going to free a political prisoner in Burma," the retired bus driver and Vietnam War veteran said.

"It's about stopping the killings. And that's what it was from day one... This has been her message of peace."

Asked if Suu Kyi was glad to see him arrive at her home, Yettaw said: "absolutely."

Police, he said, interrogated him day and night for two and a half weeks.

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### [Opposition activists launch yellow campaign](#)

*Mizzima - 27 August 2009*

by Myint Maung

New Delhi – With the second anniversary of the 'Saffron Revolution' round the corner, 10 opposition activists launched a campaign in Rangoon last Tuesday to pay tribute to monks, who took part in chanting Metta sutra two years ago.

The activists donned yellow symbols during their weekly so-called 'Tuesday prayer campaign', conducted in Shwedagon pagoda for the release of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

"September is drawing close. So we wore yellow ribbons, yellow hairpins, yellow flowers and yellow dresses as symbols, while paying tribute to the 'Saffron Revolution' during our prayer campaign. We prayed for the release of our leader," Naw Ohn Hla, one of the campaigners, told Mizzima.

Officials of the Burmese military junta keep a hawk's eye on the prayer campaign, suspicious and apprehensive that it would again become part of a growing mass movement against the regime. There have been several instances when campaigners have been arrested.

The activists plan to forge ahead with the yellow campaign with their prayer meetings and prayer services at pagodas every Tuesday until September 25.

"This campaign has started in Rangoon. Other towns and cities can join us. It (junta) cannot do anything to us for just wearing these yellow symbols. So we request all to join us. I'd like to say do not forget our religion and sasana," Naw Ohn Hla said.

Thousands of monks hit the streets in September 2007 and chanted Metta Sutra in Rangoon and other cities. But the security forces came down heavily in a brutal crackdown, killing, maiming and arresting at random, breaking up the demonstrations.

The junta, however, claimed 10 people, including some monks were killed during the movement, but the opposition forces felt that the actual death toll was much higher than the official statistics dished out.

According to the Thai based 'Association for Assistance to Political Prisoners-Burma' (AAPP-B), formed by former Burmese political prisoners, over 200 monks were arrested during the demonstration. More than 2,100 political prisoners are languishing in jails throughout Burma, AAPP said.

Prayer campaigns were also launched in other cities such as Mandalay, Meiktila, Yemethin, Yenanchaung and Pegu by activists yesterday, calling for the release of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

Meanwhile, activists lodged a complaint with the junta supremo Senior Gen. Than Shwe by sending a letter, which says that the local authorities tried to threaten the monasteries where the Naw Ohn Hla led group were conducting prayers and offerings were being made to Buddhist monks.

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### [Indian- Burmese military officials meet](#)

*Mizzima - 27 August 2009*

by Salai Pi Pi

New Delhi – A six-day meeting between Indian and Burmese military officers began on Wednesday in Kalemio town, Sagaing division in North-western Burma, to discuss issues relating to border management, as part of an ongoing military level cooperation.

The bi-annual India-Burma border meeting is the 37th held between military officials of the two countries. A 14-member Indian Army delegation led by Major General S S Pawar, Chief Of Staff of the Assam Rifle's Headquarter 3 Corps based in Imphal, capital of Manipur state, has travelled to Kalaymyo town.

An Assam Rifles press release said, the meeting will enhance on border management, including curbing activities of insurgent groups operating along the border.

"The India-Burma Border Liaison Meet is a landmark event, where representatives of both the armies interact and coordinate on border management activities," the press release said.

"The event also provides an opportunity to all the delegates to know each other on a personal level and helps in further strengthening the bonds of friendship between both the countries," the press release added.

The meeting being held between August 26 and 31 and is held twice annually. Military cooperation between the two countries, in areas including tackling insurgents, arms smuggling, and cross border crimes, is part of bilateral relationship.

India and Burma share a porous border of 1,643 kilometres. The Indian military establishment as well as sources on the border said, several Indian insurgents including the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), a Manipuri militant outfit, are based in Sagaing division in Burma.

The last meeting was held at the headquarters of Assam Rifles' 3 Corps in Imphal of Manipur state in May.

Following the meeting, a Burmese Army delegation led by Brig Gen Tin Maung Ohn, Deputy Commander of the Northwest Military Command, went to Kolkata, West Bengal in India and met with military officers of the Eastern Command.

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**[Living Silence in Burma: Christina Fink](#)**

*IMNA - 27 August 2009*

*The American author, Christina Fink has recently released a second edition of her book "Living Silence". Fink has worked with Burmese communities for about 14 years.*

In her press release she jokingly explained the book is titled as such because, "People are not allowed to open their mouths." 'Living Silence' in Burma does not mean people never talk, but rather conveys a message about the circumstances of Burmese civilians' daily lives which are under so much pressure that they are afraid of saying the wrong thing by mistake, putting them into trouble at anytime.

This fear makes people constantly censor themselves and be careful what they say and do, in order to protect their own security. As Fink explains, the people actually don't like the military but it is too dangerous to speak out because they want their families to be safe, so that they can raise their children within the rules.

Fink has spoken with different kinds of people such as ordinary villagers, monks, business people, NGOs workers, retired soldiers and officers.

"This is not a natural way of living. The natural way of living is that people can express themselves freely and can get a critical or a positive opinion to try to make their society a better place," Fink explained. "But, in Burma, many people are not able to do that. They are not able to contribute fully because of the insecurity they live with under military rules."

It is not just politicians who are frightened by the government. The military rule prohibit and affect every aspect of people's rights in Burma, such as the way parents raise their children, the way people practice their religion and even the arts like painting and music.

Fink hopes to highlight how military affects people's voices, how people feel and what makes people have to act a certain way to protect their family and to survive.

The military previews and checks the work of all moviemakers and painters before it can reach the public eye. The military even takes seriously the color of paintings – the regime claims red represent revolution and yellow represents Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Fink cites one example where a child's painting had been censored and had not been allowed to exhibit because of too many colors prohibited by military. However, She points out, some positive progress has been made towards bringing about change in Burma despite the fact that there are still a lot of negative things being done by the Burmese military authorities, especially in human rights abuses.

One positive change, according to Fink, has been the number of International NGOs that can now work in Burma. The military rule in Burma still works the same way as 9 or 10 years ago, but what more positive is the development of more effective social work and many more health and community organizations.

Many media sources have increased, even under strict censorship, and many more Burmese students can now study abroad and attend training programs compared to before.

According to Fink it is important to distinguish between the regime and the civil services; there are many good people who are working in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Social Welfare. Many of these people are truly dedicated to making the country a better place because they are not the ones who make the policies. They often don't have very much money or resources, and are limited in what they can do.

"So we should not look at the whole government as a problem. Not the whole government is the problem," emphasized Fink. "It is only the regime. People should be clear that they [civil services] are very different from the military regime."

The book covers Burma's colonial period to 2008. The first edition came out in 2001 and only covered events up to 1999. The second edition now has an additional chapter covering from 2002 to 2008.

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**Opinion / Analysis**

**COMMENTARY: No Turning Back By Aung Zaw**

*Irrawaddy – 27 August 2009*

It's no secret that the regime in Burma wants to repair its frosty relationship with America. It would especially like to see the lifting of US sanctions, which have an impact not only on the general population, but are also hampering the junta leaders' ambition to build a modern armed forces.

Historically, there is little reason for the two countries to regard each other as enemies. Despite the US-backed occupation of northern Shan State by the Chinese Kuomintang in the 1950s, Burmese military commanders have never felt the same hostility toward the US that they reserve for Burma's former colonial masters, the British.

Burma's current rulers have not forgotten that their predecessor, Gen Ne Win, was a guest in the White House just a few years after seizing power. At the time, the US was keen to get a foothold in a country on China's doorstep. Ironically, when Ne Win killed unarmed students in 1970s, it was Beijing, not Washington, that expressed outrage.

Fearing Communist China's growing influence in the region, the US had no qualms about forming close military ties with Burma. For decades, top officers in the Burmese armed forces attended West Point and the Command and General Staff College, while key members of Burma's most feared spy agency were trained by the CIA.

Washington was also generous with its military hardware. Until the late 1980s, Burma's army and air force employed US jet fighters, helicopters and M-16 assault rifles. Bell helicopters supplied by the US to help Burma wage a war on drugs were also used in operations against ethnic insurgents. And when Burmese riot police fired on students in 1988, they were armed with American-made M-16s.

But it was at this point that US-Burma relations rapidly deteriorated. After decades of ignoring Burma's poor human rights record and political repression, Washington suddenly became a staunch champion of the country's brutally suppressed pro-democracy movement and an outspoken critic of the junta that seized power in 1988.

Now, after two decades of treating Burma's rulers like pariahs, Washington is reviewing its policy toward the country as part of President Barack Obama's new, less confrontational approach to dealing with the world's dictators. Even as he tells "those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent" that they are "on the wrong side of history," Obama says that he is ready to offer his hand to those who are "willing to unclench their fist."

The Burmese generals were quick to read this as a sign that the US was likely to soften its stance toward them, and were only too happy to share Obama's conciliatory message with the people of Burma in state-run media—except for the part about the need for dictators to "unclench their fist" if they want to enjoy better relations with the US, which was deemed too "sensitive" by the junta's censors.

In August, the generals finally got their chance to show the world that they, too, were ready to extend their hand in friendship. The highly publicized visit of US Sen Jim Webb was lauded in the state-run press as "a success for both sides as well as the first step to promotion of the relations between the two countries."

A commentary in *The New Light of Myanmar*, a regime mouthpiece, noted that Webb did not act like a typical "neocolonialist" or "loud-mouthed bully." However, it cautiously added that Webb's visit was just "the first step toward marching to a 1,000-mile destination."

What was most remarkable about this encounter was how starkly Webb's reception contrasted with that of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who traveled to Naypyidaw in June but was denied a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi. The difference signaled the junta's eagerness to cut a deal with Washington.

The immediate outcome of Webb's visit was the release of John Yettaw, the American who had been sentenced to seven years in prison for illegally entering Suu Kyi's residential compound in May. Meanwhile, Suu Kyi and her two live-in aides are now serving a further 18 months under house arrest because of Yettaw's actions.

To the junta's way of thinking, all of this makes perfectly good sense. Just as Suu Kyi's trial and conviction were obviously politically motivated, Yettaw's release was clearly a political gambit intended to improve the regime's chances of repairing ties with the US.

But the regime is going to have to go a lot further if it expects the Obama administration to meet it halfway. Following Webb's visit, the White House issued a statement welcoming the junta's gesture, but also urging "the Burmese leadership in this spirit to release all the political prisoners it is holding in detention or in house arrest, including Aung San Suu Kyi."

Clearly, then, Webb's visit was not the breakthrough that he and other champions of engagement with the regime hoped it would be. If Burma's rulers think they can simply return to the "good old days" when Washington didn't care how dictators behaved, as long as they were friendly to America's interests, they are mistaken. Until it makes real changes in its behavior, the junta's dream of rapprochement with the US will remain a "1,000-mile destination."

*[This article appears in September issue of The Irrawaddy.]*

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### **SCENARIOS: Myanmar's uncertain post-election future**

*Reuters – 27 August 2009*

BANGKOK (Reuters) - Next year military-ruled Myanmar will hold its first democratic election in two decades, polls that critics say will be a sham resulting in no significant transfer of power to a civilian government.

The resource-rich nation of 48 million people is heading for a period of uncertainty, with concerns about economic and social stability and whether the country will really become any more democratic after almost five decades of army rule.

Following are possible post-election scenarios:

#### **COSMETIC CHANGE ONLY, MILITARY RETAINS POWER**

Few believe the military will really hand over power to a civilian government. The new constitution guarantees the army 25 percent of parliamentary seats, and retired generals or army proxies are expected to run and win plenty more. The military will have jurisdiction over key ministries and reserves the right to take power at a time of national crisis.

Civilians backed, or at least vetted, by the junta will probably be given some government positions, but analysts say the power-hungry and staunchly nationalist military will still control the major policy and budgetary decisions.

"The generals have made sure they'll retain some power because they believe they are the only institution that can keep the country together," said Myanmar analyst David Steinberg, a Georgetown University academic.

#### **... IN THAT CASE, WILL SANCTIONS REMAIN?**

Most analysts believe the West will maintain sanctions if the election is deemed a sham, although the United States is reviewing its policy and other voices are saying that sanctions have done nothing to change the nature of the military regime.

One worry in the West is that sanctions are allowing the Chinese to strengthen their presence in neighboring Myanmar.

A pipeline is scheduled to take gas from the country to Yunnan province from 2012 and an oil pipeline is also planned, which would allow Chinese tankers to avoid the Malacca Straits.

One concern in both the West and Asian countries is that such commercial involvement, as well as undermining Western sanctions, could bring a military dimension, strengthening Chinese military clout in the region.

#### GRADUAL TRANSFER TO CIVILIAN CONTROL

In the long term, Myanmar could undergo a gradual transition of power to a civilian government, free of military control. This would be an evolutionary process rather than a junta-inspired shift.

Future elections, constitutional amendments and shifts in the power structure or patronage systems could lead to the emergence of splinter groups or factions within the military; some may favor offering roles to experienced, educated civilians deemed capable of handling key areas, in particular, the economy.

"The generals may believe they can control political proxies, crony businessmen, military colleagues and ethnic factions ... but in a new context these groups might develop independent agendas," the International Crisis Group said in a report.

#### THE PEOPLE MAY REJECT MILITARY-CONTROLLED GOVERNMENT

Decades of economic mismanagement, human rights abuses and failure to invest sufficiently in education, health and public services have created deep public resentment of the military.

Nationwide monk-led protests in 2007 triggered by increases in fuel and cooking gas prices stoked public anger. The bloody crackdown that followed showed the junta had no qualms about using force to suppress dissent.

Myanmar's people have been promised big things after the elections. Analysts say they could revolt if a new government fails to deliver the goods.

"Attitudes have changed radically there," said Trevor Wilson, a former Australian ambassador to Myanmar, now an academic.

"The military has made plenty of mistakes before, so there's definitely potential for things to explode if they continue to handle things badly."

#### "DEMOCRACY" FAILS, MILITARY TAKES BACK POWER

The last time elections were held in 1990, the result was unfavorable for the generals and they refused to hand over power. If the 2010 election process throws up problems, the regime could scrap or indefinitely postpone the polls, citing reasons of national security and stability.

Even if a government and national assembly are in place, a constitutional clause allows the commander-in-chief to dissolve the house and assume power at a time of crisis. If army influence wanes, it could provoke a crisis of its own making as a pretext to wrestle back control.

"They have given themselves a way out," said Win Min, an academic and Burmese exile. "They can take back power whenever they want to."

However, most analysts say this is unlikely: provisions written into the constitution, drafted mainly by the military, will ensure there is no real threat to the status quo.

(Reporting by Bangkok Newsroom; Editing by Alan Raybould)

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**27/08/2009**

**News – Kokang**

**[Kokangs victim of junta's old tactics: observers](#)**

*Mizzima - 27 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Burma's military rulers have yet again resorted to a divide and rule policy to break up the Kokang ceasefire armed group, which refused to toe the junta's line of transforming its army to a border guard force, observers said.

On Wednesday, Peng Jiasheng, the Supreme Commander of the Kokang Army lost his capital Lao Kai and was forced along with his troops out of the town, as his deputy Bai Souqian and other Kokang militias took over the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), also known as the Kokang Army, reports said.

According to the Thailand based Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN), the former Kokang Army led by Peng were not to be seen in Lao Kai, which is swarming with Burmese soldiers and the police as well as Kokang militias backed by the Burmese Army.

But sources said, Peng and his troops are headed for the north of Lao Kai and tension between the troops is high and a shoot-out could be eminent.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Sino-Burma border based military analyst, said, "it is a case of letting the Kokangs fight each other. The junta had applied this tactic a long time back and is now using it again to break the Kokang."

He said the Burmese Army has sided with Peng's former deputy Bai Souqian, who is now leading the Kokang militias in Lao Kai. According to reports, he has also reportedly been joined by other Kokang militias including Peng's arch-rival Yang Mouliang.

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese analyst based in Thailand said, the junta's tactics are becoming obsolete and predictable, but sadly, groups are still finding themselves falling into the pit.

"We have seen the junta's tactics at work with other rebels. The Kokang's case is similar. The junta knows that by eliminating the Kokang, they can weaken other groups including the United Wa State Army (UWSA)," Aung Naing Oo said.

The MNDAA, the UWSA, the Kachin Independence Organization and the Maile or National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), the four groups that have turned down the junta's proposal to transform their armies, have recently entered into an alliance called the Myanmar Peace and Democracy Front.

The junta, in April, had proposed to all ceasefire armed groups to transform their army into the Border Guard Force, a force to be controlled and administered by the Burmese Army. But many groups including the four alliances have rejected the proposal.

Aung Naing Oo said it is crucial for the junta to persuade the ceasefire groups to transform their armies, as it is crucial for the junta to conduct elections in areas controlled by the ceasefire groups.

"If the ceasefire groups are rejecting their plan, the credibility of the elections in 2010 will have a severe impact, though it will not be able to stop the junta from conducting it," he added.

In a bid to eliminate Peng Jiasheng, the Burmese Army has ordered raids at his residence under the pretext of drug eradication. The police in Lashio had also ordered Peng and three others to appear before the court.

But when Peng refused to appear, the authorities issued an arrest warrant for him and three others including his younger brother, Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

"I don't think they can catch Peng just like that. It will require a fight. But if there is any clash the Burmese Army can say it is between the Kokangs," he added.

Meanwhile, Aung Naing Oo cautioned that the junta's tactics of infiltrating into the Kokang leadership should be a step to watch for other ceasefire groups including the UWSA and the KIO.

"We have seen the split of the Karen National Union and how the junta has played its role. Now, it is very likely that they will further move on with their plans for other groups," he added.

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## **Burma army standoff forces 10,000 into China**

*DVB - 26 August 2009*

A mass exodus of Burmese into China has taken place this week following a standoff between Burmese troops and armed ethnic groups in northern Burma, local sources say.

An eye-witness in southern China's Nansan town told Reuters today that large groups crossed the border from Shan state's Kokang town into China on Tuesday. Around 10,000 people are thought to have crossed so far.

An alliance of four armed ethnic groups known as the Myanmar Peace and Democracy Front (MPDF) released a statement on 21 August detailing the standoff.

The statement, obtained by US Campaign for Burma, said that a "military confrontation" between the MPDF and Burmese army had occurred on 8 August "due to the military threat and instigation by the government with the reason of anti-narcotic action".

It added that the incident caused "shock and frustration" throughout the region and border area, and warned that it "effectively shadows and darkens" relations between ethnic groups and the government.

Relations between the Burmese government and ceasefire groups have been strained in recent months following pressure from the junta to transform themselves into border patrol groups.

The ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) say the move would return groups to the 'legal fold', although a number of ceasefire groups claim it would significantly weaken them.

Furthermore, claims from the junta that the groups could form political parties to contest next year's elections have been dismissed as a ploy to neutralize their threat by bringing them under the government's control.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the first ceasefire agreements signed between the government and armed ethnic groups.

A number of significant groups, such as the Karen National Union (KNU), refuse to sign an agreement and continue to fight against the Burmese army.

The conflict between the KNU and government has stretched over 60 years, and is thought to be one of the world's longest running.

*Reporting by Francis Wade*

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## **Junta Tries to Discredit Kokang Leaders Linked to Drugs**

*Irrawaddy – 26 August 2009*

By Saw Yan Naing

The recent tension between government troops and the Kokang ceasefire group in northern Shan State is seen by observers as a tactic to pressure the Kokang into joining the junta's border guard force.

After junta troops entered the Kokang-controlled area on Tuesday, Lt-Gen Ye Myint, chief of the military affairs security unit, arrived in Lao Kai and met with newly appointed Kokang leaders, said Aung Kyaw Zaw, an analyst on the Sino-Burma.

Nyo Ohn Myint, a Burmese politician in exile, said the regime is trying to show that the Kokang and the Wa ceasefire groups are heavily involved in drug production and sales, in an effort to discredit current leaders and to replace them with leaders who may be willing to cooperate with the regime.

"I think the regime is using a clever mechanism to handle the crisis with the ceasefire groups," he said.

He noted that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) has been identified by the United States as an organization deeply involved in the drug trade.

Observers said the junta sees the Kokang as one of the weakest ceasefire groups, and one it may be able to convince to transition into a border guard force.

"The scenario for the Kokang is not good," said Aung Kyaw Zaw. "They may end up complying with the junta."

Burma watcher David Scott Mathieson noted that the regime wants all ethnic ceasefire groups to join the border guard force by October.

Tension mounted last week when junta troops raided the home of a Kokang leader, Peng Jiasheng, in a search for drugs. He is said to have left the area and be in a UWSA-controlled area.

Meanwhile, the state-run newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar*, reported that a large amount of illegal drugs was seized on Monday in Tachileik, located opposite Mai Sai, Thailand.

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**News – Other**

**[US senator lashes Myanmar sanctions](#)**

*AFP – 27 August 2009*

By Shaun Tandon

WASHINGTON — US Senator Jim Webb, back from a rare trip to Myanmar, called sanctions against the military regime "overwhelmingly counterproductive" and asked the opposition to consider taking part in upcoming elections.

Webb, whose against-the-grain views on Myanmar have infuriated some activists, voiced concern that Western isolation of Myanmar pushed it into the arms of China, "furthering a dangerous strategic imbalance in the region."

The United States and European Union have imposed sanctions on Myanmar, earlier known as Burma, due to its refusal to recognize the last elections in 1990 and prolonged detention of the victor, democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

"While the political motivations behind this approach are laudable, the result has been overwhelmingly counterproductive," Webb wrote Wednesday in *The New York Times*.

"The ruling regime has become more entrenched and at the same time more isolated. The Burmese people have lost access to the outside world," said Webb, who on August 15 became the first US official to meet the junta's reclusive leader Than Shwe.

Webb said he opposed lifting sanctions due to US economic interests or "if such a decision were seen as a capitulation of our long-held position that Myanmar should abandon its repressive military system in favor of democratic rule.

"But it would be just as bad for us to fold our arms, turn our heads and pretend that by failing to do anything about the situation in Myanmar we are somehow helping to solve it," he said.

State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said Webb's views are "something we're going to be looking at" in a review of Myanmar policy initiated after President Barack Obama took office.

The Obama team has been skeptical about sanctions as a diplomatic tool and supports engagement with US foes, although the State Department earlier assured Aung San Suu Kyi supporters in Congress it was not looking to open trade with Myanmar.

Webb, a gruff Vietnam veteran and author who belongs to Obama's Democratic Party, said the United States could offer to help Myanmar carry out elections next year.

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy has denounced the vote -- the first since the 1990 polls -- as a sham, particularly as the Nobel laureate remains under house arrest.

But Webb said the opposition party "might consider the advantages of participation as part of a longer-term political strategy."

"There is room for engagement" between the United States and Myanmar, Webb wrote. "Many Asian countries -- China among them -- do not even allow opposition parties."

Webb, who heads the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Asia, won the freedom of a troubled American who had been jailed in Myanmar for swimming to Aung San Suu Kyi's home.

But Myanmar democracy activists have been livid. Pyinya Zawta, a prominent monk who lives in exile in the United States after being jailed for leading pro-democracy protests, said Webb is "despised by the people of Burma."

"Webb claims that the Burmese people would benefit from interaction with the outside world, as if we need to be condescendingly 'taught' by Americans about our rights and responsibilities," Zawta wrote in *The Irrawaddy*, a newsmagazine set up by Myanmar exiles in Thailand.

"Had Webb spent some time with real Burmese people apart from the military regime and others who share his views, he would better understand the sacrifice we made for democracy," he said.

Walter Lohman, director of the Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think-tank, also faulted Webb on sanctions, saying that China and Southeast Asian nations provided a lifeline to Myanmar.

"It is demonstrably true that American sanctions have not brought about change in Burma," Lohman said.

"But the answer lies in building the necessary international consensus to pressure it, not abandoning the effort," he said.

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### **NLD Leader Wants More Security**

*RFA – 26 August 2009*

*A lawyer for Burma's opposition leader says she never discussed anything sensitive with the American whose unwanted visit brought her 18 more months under house arrest.*

BANGKOK—Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi wants more security around her home, after she was sentenced to 18 more months under house arrest for letting an unwanted visitor into the lakeside compound, her lawyer said.

Nyan Win, who represented the Nobel peace laureate at her trial for allowing an American, John Yettaw, into her home, also expressed puzzlement at Yettaw's statement that he and Aung San Suu Kyi had held confidential discussions and that she was "ecstatic" to see him.

"Aung San Suu Kyi never discussed anything with Yettaw except to repeatedly urge him to return home to his family," Nyan Win said in a telephone interview, adding that he had discussed the issue with Aung San Suu Kyi ahead of her trial and that no such conversation with Yettaw had occurred.

Yettaw's comments in a broadcast interview with CNN were "out of sync" with statements he made during his testimony, Nyan Win said, calling them "false" and saying that they created "a lot of implications."

#### *Appeal planned*

"Aung San Suu Kyi has requested security upgrades to her compound to protect it from unwanted entry," he said. "Her concern was brought on by Yettaw's visit."

In his CNN interview, Yettaw—who was sentenced to seven years' hard labor but released and sent home last week—said Aung San Suu Kyi was "ecstatic that I was there, but at the same time extremely frightened."

He went on to call the situation "delicate" and said he didn't want to "share details because by virtue of confidentiality and out of respect, I told her I would never discuss what we discussed."

Nyan Win also said Aung San Suu Kyi was "wrongly sentenced" and her legal team would appeal. "The draft is nearly done. We will meet with her [Thursday], perhaps in the afternoon, to discuss the draft," he said.

Aung San Suu Kyi was convicted Aug. 11 of breaching the terms of her house arrest when Yettaw visited her home. She was ordered to serve 18 months under house arrest.

She was whisked to her tightly guarded home the day she was convicted. She has been detained for about 14 of the last 20 years for her nonviolent political activities, but this year marked the first time she faced criminal charges.

Yettaw was deported from Burma on Aug. 16, after a visit by U.S. Senator Jim Webb. Webb was the first senior U.S. official to meet Gen. Than Shwe, the reclusive leader of the ruling junta.

*Conviction expected*

During previous periods of detention, members of the youth wing of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) guarded her compound, but the junta no longer allows that.

"That is something that we might ask for as an alternative to a security upgrade," Nyan Win said. "The government has set up security police around the compound, but they are only posted outside."

The verdict against Aung San Suu Kyi was widely seen as a ploy to prevent her from contesting government-controlled national elections set for 2010.

Those polls will be Burma's first since 1990, when the NLD won by a landslide but was never allowed to take power.

*Original reporting by Khin Maung Soe for RFA's Burmese service. Burmese service director: Nyein Shwe. Translated by Nyein Shwe. Written for the Web in English by Joshua Lipos. Edited by Sarah Jackson-Han.*

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### **Junta Warns Buddhist Monks Online**

*Irrawaddy – 26 August 2009*

By Arkar Moe

A military government Web site, "*kyaymon*" [meaning "the mirror"], which operates as an online daily newspaper in Burmese, on Wednesday criticized two well-known Buddhist monks' organizations and warned that the Burmese military authorities will take action against them.

The Burmese-language *kyaymon* Web site claimed that the International Burmese Monks' Organization [commonly known as "Sasana Moli"] and the Sangha League (Myanmar) are trying to launch another monks' boycott in Burma similar to the 2007 Saffron Revolution when Buddhist monks were instrumental in leading anti-government protests.

The Web site claimed that U Nayaka and U Candobhasacara from Sasana Moli, and U Jotika, U Paramikhanti and Shwe Zin Tun from Sangha League (Myanmar) are playing leading roles in the movement and that the Burmese public would not approve of it.

It went on to say that the Burmese government would not tolerate this type of movement and would take "severe action" against those involved in it. The Web site urged the public "not to become the monks' victims."

The warning comes the day after *The Irrawaddy* reported that several exiled monk leaders had said that Buddhist monks across the country were preparing to stage a third boycott of military personnel and their families.

A monk from Sangha League (Myanmar) told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday: "It is clear that the Burmese military junta is afraid of the movements of Buddhist monks. It also raises the possibility of the authorities planting fake monks in monasteries and committing violations against our religion.

"Several saffron robe dealers near the Shwedagon Pagoda told our monks that the military authorities had come and bought about 500 saffron robes from them on September 21, 2007. They used those robes as disguises to infiltrate the protests," he added.

Sangha League (Myanmar) issued a statement on August 22 saying that it was cooperating with 14 other political groups to confront the Burmese military junta.

The US-based International Burmese Monks' Organization was founded in October 2007 by two revered monks, the late U Kovida and the Malaysian-born Venerable Pannya Vamsa. It says on its Web site that it aims to "give voice to the brave people and monks who have been silenced," and is "dedicated to peace and freedom in Burma."

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday, one of its leaders, Ashin Sopaka, said, "This [attack] shows that the Burmese dictators will counterattack the media with their own media weapons. They always do wrong and they are constantly breaking the codes of human rights.

“Our monks will surely boycott them if they persist with their religious abuses. All our monks need to boycott this Burmese dictatorship for the sake of our religion and in the interest of peace for all people,” he said.

Burmese monks have boycotted the military regime and their cronies twice in recent history: the first time in 1990 following the suppression of Aung San Suu Kyi and her opposition party, the National League for Democracy, after they had won the last general election by a landslide; and again in 2007, the so-called “Saffron Revolution,” when monk-led demonstrations against price hikes in Rangoon turned into a national uprising.

Ashin Candobhasacara, a secretary of the Sasana Moli, told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday: “Our International Burmese Monks’ Organization and the international community have called on the Burmese junta to release all political prisoners, including monks and nuns.

“Buddha told us that monks have to boycott those who violate religious principles. There is no doubt that the Burmese dictators have killed and arrested many monks and nuns, and have raided and destroyed monasteries.

“So, if they do not apologize to the monks for their religious abuses, we must boycott them according to Buddhist doctrine. We are ready to sacrifice our lives for Buddhism and peace for all,” he said.

The International Burmese Monks’ Organization issued an announcement on Monday to mark the second anniversary of the Saffron Movement, saying it will demonstrate against the Burmese junta by reciting the “*Metta Sutta*” (the Buddha’s words of loving-kindness) in front of the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh and in Union Square in New York on September 24 - 26.

According to official data, there are more than 400,000 monks in Burma, and its community, the *sangha*, is considered one of the strongest and most revered institutions in the country. It has always played an important role in Burma’s social and political affairs, often in opposition to oppressive regimes.

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**[Australia Says ‘No’ to Cross-border Relief](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 26 August 2009*

By Alex Lewis

CANBERRA/Australia—Dr Cynthia Maung knows what pain looks like. Since 1988, her Mae Tao clinic has served as a crucial sanctuary for Burmese refugees and migrant workers seeking health care and emergency treatment at the Thai-Burmese border.

“Over the past 20 years, the civil war has been ongoing,” said Dr Cynthia. “And so has the displacement of villagers from their homes.

“Today more than 500,000 people are internally displaced in Burma, and another 2 million are living in Thailand. We try to address this crisis as best we can,” she told a conference in Sydney, Australia, last week.

One of the world’s longest running yet least reported conflicts has turned the mountainous jungles of the Thai-Burmese border region into a lethal game of hide and seek for generations of villagers from ethnic groups such as Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan.

Since independence in 1948, the Burmese military has battled the various insurgent armies of the ethnic minorities, which have refused to accept subjugation to the central government.

The conflict has left thousands dead and a steady wave of refugees continues into Thailand to this day—a recent escalation of fighting in Shan and Karen states the latest catalyst for another surge in numbers fleeing the conflict zones.

Those who have made it across the border to jungle refugee camps or towns such as Mae Sot are by bureaucratic definition mostly “illegal.”

Unable to obtain official papers from the Thai authorities and therefore under constant threat of deportation, their personal limbo has by default created a ready source of sweatshop labor readily exploited by Thai manufacturers.

“Those [Burmese living in Thailand] without papers go into hiding if Manchester United loses a game of football,” said Burma expert Dr Jane Ferguson rather cryptically at last week’s Burma Update Conference at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Then she explained how Thai police generally support Manchester United and have a syndicate betting on the team. If their team loses, they often feel aggrieved and have gambling debts, so they “threaten the [Burmese] workers with deportation if they don’t pay up,” she said.

The main objective of Dr Cynthia’s visit last week to Australia as part of a delegation of prominent humanitarian workers was to seek a government review of Australia’s aid commitment to Burma. More specifically, her presence boosted a request for a moderate increase in the funding received by the cross-border organizations (CBOs) in Thailand.

“The Australian government has committed \$29 million dollars [Australian] in aid to Burma this year, but of that less than 1 million will make it to the eastern border region—the region that needs it the most,” said Zoe Bedford of Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA), who helped bring the delegation to Australia for a series of conferences and meetings with Australian government authorities.

It is believed that the Burmese junta provides about US 70 cents per person each year for health care, and little if any of that nominal sum makes it to the conflict zones in the volatile eastern region.

“It is very difficult to take any official numbers too seriously,” said Dr Sean Turnell, the head of Burma Economic Watch at Macquarie University in Sydney. “At best 70 cents is making it to the people of Burma not in these conflict zones. You need to remember we are dealing with officially the second most corrupt country in the world ... [therefore] the work done by these CBOs is crucial.”

The establishment in 1997 of the Backpacker Health Worker teams in Mae Sot is a clear example of the sheer determination to help that exists on the border.

The teams receive training at Dr Cynthia’s clinic from medical trainers before crossing the border—often at great risk to their personal safety and in defiance of the Burmese military—with backpacks of medical supplies to provide primary health care to those in need.

In the wake of last year’s Cyclone Nargis disaster, the Backpack group had teams providing relief in the disaster areas within days, while the international aid community was held up by Burmese red tape at the airport in Bangkok.

The parallels with official aid policy are reflective of this situation. With a clear lack of transparency, international aid money may get little mileage once reaching official channels inside Burma. The shady money-changing practices of the regime aside, the multilateral aid organizations that receive most of the Australian aid money have no access to eastern Burma and therefore have no way of providing support. Again, stuck at the gate.

It is this very point the delegation was striving to make.

“If you want to talk bang for your buck, the work being done on the border, compared to, say, the salaries of UN staff, well it just doesn’t make sense not to put more money in this direction,” said delegation member Dr Voravit Suwanvanichkij. “Burma was once the rice basket of Southeast Asia, yet the literal disinvestment in the country by the junta has seen it become the region’s basket case.”

Assistant Director-General (Southeast Asia Branch) of AusAID Michael Wilson made Australia’s position clear in Canberra last week. “Burma is not number one; is probably not even number two—but it is high on the list of countries we need to try and work with despite the unique challenges presented,” he said.

Despite acknowledging the need to keep working closely on Burma, Wilson’s line was echoed throughout Canberra, where despite positive support for his group’s work, no change in the direction of Australian aid would occur due to some supposed issues of geopolitics.

Canberra's message came despite the USA, UK, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Ireland and Canada all committing significant funding to the Thai-Burmese border region this year.

"Mr McMullan [Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance] appeared sympathetic to the dire needs of the internally displaced in eastern Burma, but as AusAID has already prioritized aid through Rangoon, his kind words won't help or stop the suffering for thousands of our people," said Dr Cynthia, adding: "AusAID money will be going where it cannot reach any of Burma's most vulnerable people."

In light of the recent worldwide media coverage of the trial and conviction of Burma's pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi—who shared the 2008 Catalonia International Prize with Dr Cynthia—the delegation may have hoped for better results, but in the end left Australia at the weekend empty-handed.

However, the delegates said they were committed to continue their push with APHEDA for a funding review.

Hardly the international face of Burma, yet revered to an almost saintly status for her tireless work by those in the know, Dr Cynthia Maung returns to Mae Sot to continue supporting desperate people—malaria patients, landmine victims, malnourished children and many more—who are often too easily forgotten about.

After 20 years, she must be wondering if the help will ever arrive.

*Alex Lewis is freelance Australian journalist living in Sydney.*

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### [ADB: Slowdown Mars Poverty Reduction Goals in Asia](#)

*Irrawaddy – 26 August 2009*

By Teresa Cerojano / AP Writer

MANILA — Large pockets of extreme poverty and hunger persist in Asia, where the global downturn makes it more difficult to achieve UN goals to reduce the ranks of the poor, the Asian Development Bank said Wednesday.

Supporting smaller businesses, where most Asians are employed, is key to fueling domestic demand and growth, the Manila-based lender said in a report on key economic indicators.

In 19 Asian economies, including the most populous China and India, more than 10 percent of people live on less than \$1.25 a day and more than 10 percent are malnourished. This is despite the region's success over the last 15 years in cutting the number of poor from one in two to around one in four, the report said.

Nepal is the worst off with 55.1 percent of its population surviving on less than \$1.25 a day. In China and India, 15.9 percent and 41.6 percent of the population live below the poverty line, respectively.

Income gap remains wide in many other countries.

More than 30 percent of Tajikistan's population suffers from hunger, as do 20-30 percent of the people in Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and East Timor, the ADB said.

Among the so-called UN Millennium Development Goals is cutting in half extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 and reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters over the same period.

The report said that Asia faces serious challenges in meeting goals linked to sanitation and maternal deaths, which remain unacceptably high in countries such as Afghanistan, Nepal and Laos.

About 1,800 out of every 100,000 Afghan women die in childbirth while more than a quarter of urban households in 13 countries still lack access to improved sanitation, the bank said.

The ADB's chief economist Lee Jong-wha said it was too early to say if current positive economic signs in Asia and other economies mean a global recovery is taking hold.

For Asia to cope with the global downturn, it needs to strengthen domestic demand to sustain growth, said chief ADB economist Lee Jong-wha. Global demand for Asian exports was expected to remain sluggish, but the region could see a V-shaped recovery in 2010, he said.

"It's unlikely that Asia can export its way out of this slump, as they did after the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis," Lee told *The Associated Press*. "This crisis clearly shows that Asia cannot rely only on external demand but must diversify its sources of growth and revive its domestic industries."

"A return to a fast-growing developing Asia will require some rebalancing of growth toward domestic demand in the region as a whole," it said.

Governments should focus not only on fiscal stimulus and large enterprises but on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises—where most Asian workers are employed—to build a substantial urban middle class with spending power, he said.

They could do that by strengthening infrastructure, particularly transportation and electricity links, and removing regulations to make it easier to do business.

Lee said the ADB will revise its growth forecast for Asia in September.

In March, the bank predicted a 3 percent growth rate in 2009 for emerging East Asian economies and 6 percent growth in 2010, which is still below the 9.7 percent expansion in 2007.

*Associated Press writer Eileen Ng in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, contributed to this*

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**Kachin hills worried about second famine caused by rats**

*Kachin News Group - 26 August 2009*

Kachin people in the hills in Burma's northern Kachin State, who rely mainly on cultivation, are worried regarding a second bout of famine caused by rats, said Kachin hill sources.

Local people said the rat population has risen significantly and the rodents have destroyed rice and crops in plantations in the Triangle Areas (also called Mali-N'Mai Walawng and Mali-Hkrang Walawng in Kachin) over the last two weeks. This is the region between Mali Hka River and N'mai Hka River.

A village elder in N'paw Hkyet, where 18 households with over a hundred people live in the Triangle Areas, who arrived in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, said the rat population has multiplied suddenly. The rodents have destroyed all crops in his village over the last two weeks.

People in the areas are worried about a second famine brought on by rats because the same situation is true for the entire Triangle Areas, added the village elder.

The village elder of N'paw Hkyet reached Myitkyina to explain the situation and seek food and aid from local and international non-governmental organizations in anticipation of a famine, said a person who met him in Myitkyina.

The first severe Yu Li Hku in Kachin, meaning "rat-famine" in Kachin history occurred in the Triangle Areas in 1977 after bamboos flowered. Rats are known to eat the flowers and multiply and then destroy crops and food stocks.

The famine occurred during civil wars between the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Burmese ruler General Ne Win's Burma Communist Programme Party in these areas.

Thousands of people suffered from the famine and a huge number of people in Kachin history fled to the famine-evacuated areas like Myitkyina, Hukawng Valley and Puta-O, according to the victims of yesteryears.

Currently, there are several hundred villages with thousands of ethnic Kachin people remaining in the areas, said locals.

The Triangle Areas are controlled by the KIO. The 1st Brigade of Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed-wing of KIO is also based in the areas and is a stronghold of the KIO/A.

On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chins in Chin State in the country's west have been suffering from famine caused by rats since late 2007.

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**175 boat-people return back Bangladesh from deadly sea**

*Kaladan Press - 26 August 2009*

Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh: On August 24, after languishing in Andaman jail for about eight months, 175 boat-people were handed over to Bangladesh Red Crescent under the supervision of Bangladesh Rifles at the Benapole-Petrapole border at around 9 am, who were rescued from the deadly sea route near the Andaman Islands, said Moniur (23), one of those who returned.

Indian coastguards rescued at least 300 people from near death from a sinking engine less boat in December, 2008 as they were forced aboard and set adrift with scanty food and drink allegedly by Thai navy after they made an abortive attempt to go to Malaysia in search of jobs, according to the India rescued department sources.

Indonesia's navy and Indian coastguards rescued boat people believed to be minority Muslims from Burma where human rights activists say were beaten and set adrift in open sea to die or into hell by the Thai military to deny them sanctuary

The boat people claim, Thailand's navy intercepted their boat, detained them in filthy conditions for a week, tossed several bound men into the open sea and finally set their barge adrift in international waters — with no sail, scarcely any food and little hope of survival who floated aimlessly for 15 days in the deadly sea where most of boat people died, according to the boatpeople report.

The boat people who were rescued by India coastguards from drifting in deadly sea were return back to the Bangladesh are:- from Cox's Bazar 9, Ukhia 12, Teknaf 61, Chakoria 38, Ramu 18, Kutubdia 5 and one each from Moheskhali and Pekoua Kuta Khali and other are Bandarban districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts, he added.

Azizul Islam, assistant commissioner, Cox's Bazar on behalf of deputy commissioner and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society officials, Cox's Bazar district unit officials were received the returnee boat people who arrived in Cox's bazaar yesterday noon. Their family members were also waiting for them in the receiving point.

According to Moniur , "At first our boat along with 152 people was stopped by the Burmese Navy, and they provided us some rice, water and oil and then they showed us the way to Maylaysia. They didn't create any trouble, but, when we reached the Thai coast, we were stopped again by the Thai Navy. They fed us and said that we have the chance to live with Thai Muslims. By saying that, at around 5 pm, and after seizing our clothes, they put us in a boat and sailed to an isolated Island from Ranong. After arrival at the island, we saw that about 300 to 400 boat-people had already been detained. We lived with them for two days in that island. The authorities fed us again."

Two days later, six empty boats or trawlers arrived to the island, and put all 577 boat-people to four boats or trawlers and they took off the engines from the trawlers and put two rice bags and two gallons (30 liters) of water per boat and took the trawlers to deep sea tying it behind their ship. The authorities promised to transfer the boatpeople to a Malaysian ship which will take them to Maylaysia. After 38 hours on sea, they cut off the ropes and let us drift in the deep sea to die, Moniur added.

After which the trawlers floated on the sea, and one went to a westerly direction, two trawlers went to the south and the last one went to the east with the current. The trawler which went to west direction, he (Moniur) was in it. After 13 days of floating on sea, the trawler reached the base of a hill and stayed there one day. 19 people of the 152 boatpeople died of hunger while adrift. Next day, they reached a village walking. The villagers fed them, said Moniur.

The Indian Navy on the Andaman Island, took them to a training camp and detained them there. They were well fed and given medical treatment. They stayed there for around eight months. However, on August 20, 175 people (including 15 Rohingya) were put on a boat, and then after four days and four nights, it reached Kolkata. They were driven to Benapole border check post of India-Bangladesh. At last, they reached at Cox's Bazaar in the evening of August 25, Moniur added.

Tareque Md. Ariful Islam, counselor of Bangladesh mission in Kolkata, officials of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) police and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society formally received them at Benapole. He added that after permission from the Indian Government, they were brought to Kolkata from Port Blair, the capital of Andaman Islands on August 21. They reached Kolkata on August 23.

The Bangladesh authorities had an arrangement for primary check up and treatment by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and International Committee of the Red Cross at Benapole check post.

Kabir Uddin, a member of the returnee group, saying that nearly 500 Bangladeshis and Burmese were started for Malaysia from Teknaf by a trawler through the Bay of Bengal. But when the trawler reached Thai territory, were arrested by the Thai Coast Guards, where the Thai authority tortured us first and then took the trawler in the deep sea tying it behind their ship. From there we reached near the Andamans and later were rescued by Indian helicopter, many of our group died of hunger in the deep sea.

There are about 283 people present in Blair camp. Some touts took kyat 5,000 to 20,000 from them saying that they will provide jobs in Malaysia, said Moniur , who reached Cox's Bazaar on August 25.

Returnees Hashim, said some local human traffickers took Taka 13,000 to 40,000 promising them jobs in Malaysia and put them on trawlers from Teknaf in Cox's Bazaar for Malaysia.

The repatriation process of 175 boat-people from the Andaman was being supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi and Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Kolkata, said officials.

A first batch of 49 persons were sent back earlier this year after due verification. Now, the second batch of 175 Bangladeshis have been sent to their native land.

Indian ships had "rescued 446 Bangladeshi and Burmese refugees from four boats" since December 29, said Indian Coast Guard commander S.P. Sharma, according to AFP report.

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***Opinion / Analysis***

**EDITORIAL: Tension in the North**  
*Irrawaddy - 26 August 2009*

Tension between the Burmese military and the ethnic ceasefire militias has been rising along the Sino-Burmese border in recent months.

The latest episode occurred on Monday, when junta troops moved against the leader of the Kokang ceasefire group known as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in the Lao Kai area in northern Shan State.

Kokang leader Pheung Kya-shin escaped arrest by Burmese troops who were looking for illegal drugs in his home, fleeing with his followers. Pheung Kya-shin, also known as Peng Jiasheng, negotiated the ceasefire agreement between the MNDAA and the regime in 1989.

The main reason for the increased tension has been the regime's adamant demand for ceasefire groups to transform their militias into border guard forces, and the ceasefire groups' steadfast refusal to comply.

In April 2009, the regime told ceasefire groups about their plan to transform the ceasefire militias into a border guard force.

Under the new scheme, each border guard battalion would have 326 troops, with 30 soldiers from the Burmese army, including one of three commanding officers, who would take charge of administration. The border guard battalions would only be located in the territory of the ceasefire groups, and their members would receive the same pay as regular Burmese soldiers.

Large and powerful ethnic armed groups, like the Kachin, Wa and Kokang based along the Sino-Burmese border, have refused to accept the order, but smaller, weaker groups are more likely to agree.

Understandably, the ceasefire groups want to maintain their independent armed forces to control their own territories and enjoy self-determination.

Analysts predict that the regime's next target will be the Wa. The United Wa State Party's (UWSP) opposition to the junta's proposal has led to heightened tensions and speculation about a renewal of armed conflict.

However, the Wa army has 20,000 soldiers and the regime is unlikely to risk fighting on the Chinese border. Chinese officials who are sympathetic to ethnic groups on the border have warned the Burmese not to initiate military conflict in the area.

As in the case of the Kokang group, whose new leaders are likely to be more pliant to Burmese military demands in the absence of Pheung Kya-shin, it is likely that the regime will wait for the Wa leadership to weaken.

In the south, the regime employed a divide and rule strategy to defeat the Karen National Union. The ongoing internal conflicts and infighting among Karen groups seriously weakened the once formidable Karen forces.

The ethnic armed groups in the north are not united enough to confront the regime, nor have they shown a clear political vision for the future of Burma. In the past, they expressed a desire for a federal union and sent representatives to the military-sponsored National Convention to seek amendments to the constitution, but the regime rejected their proposals.

Like the Burmese military dictators, the leaders of the ethnic groups in the north are feudal warlords who are anything but democratic. Making matters worse, the Wa and Kokang leaders are renowned for their involvement in the drug trade.

The US has blacklisted many of their leaders. In 2005, the US Department of Justice announced the indictment of eight UWSP leaders, including Chairman Bao You Chang.

Hostile attitudes have hardened and preparations for an offensive on the Wa and Kokang groups have heightened since US Senator Jim Webb, who advocates engagement with the regime, visited Burma in mid-August.

The regime knows that fighting against notorious drug lords would gain the sympathy if not blessing of the US. Ironically, it is the same regime that previously turned a blind eye on the drug trade in the north, even allowing Wa and Kokang leaders to establish businesses in Burma to launder drug money.

Resolving the status of ethnic groups in the political structure of Burma is an important issue that requires a durable political solution. Meanwhile, maintaining peace in Burma is paramount, but the regime's recent actions against the Kokang and other ethnic groups along the border can only increase distrust and exacerbate tensions.

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#### **CONTRIBUTOR : Webb's Misguided Views - By Pyinya Zawta**

*Irrawaddy – 26 August 2009*

US Sen Jim Webb recently traveled to Burma to lean not on Burma's military regime, but to pressure my country's democracy movement into giving up economic sanctions—the most important tool in our struggle for freedom.

Although he emphasized the necessity of the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, this falls far short of the demands of the US, the United Nations and the European Union for the immediate and unconditional release of all my country's 2,100 political prisoners.

Webb's ignorance of the situation in my country was revealed in his book "*A Time to Fight*" in which he came down squarely on the side of the oppressors in Burma. He wrote about the demonstrations which took place in Burma in 2007, led by Buddhist monks such as myself.

"If Westerners had remained in the country this moment might never have occurred, because it is entirely possible that conditions may have improved rather than deteriorated."

Webb's statement is either shockingly naïve or willfully misleading. We Buddhist monks, whom Webb discounts as a "throng," marched for an end to military dictatorship in Burma not because we wanted

marginal improvements in our economy. We marched because we believe in freedom and democracy and are willing to make sacrifices to reach those goals.

Webb claims that the Burmese people would benefit from interaction with the outside world, as if we need to be condescendingly "taught" by Americans about our rights and responsibilities. Had Webb spent some time with real Burmese people apart from the military regime and others who share his views, he would better understand the sacrifice we made for democracy, and he would know that we Burmese value the longstanding support we have had from the US Congress.

Webb, an author, has proven extremely manipulative in his use of language, calling for "engagement" and "interaction" instead of sanctions. His implication is that the Burmese people are solely set on sanctions and confrontation—the exact same language used by Burma's military regime, which couldn't be further from the truth. The truth is that the world is not as black and white as Webb would have it. We want the United States to talk to and negotiate with Burma's military regime, but this shouldn't preclude increasing international pressure. The US appears to be able to carry out this policy with other countries such as in North Korea where it is willing to talk to the North Koreans while at the same time increasing sanctions if Pyongyang doesn't respond. Webb is intent on driving a wedge into this process in the case of Burma. We must choose, he explains, between sanctions and engagement—there can be no sophisticated strategy, only complete involvement or none at all.

What Webb proposes—lifting sanctions on Burma—translates to basically handing over the Burmese peoples' natural resources to rapacious multinational corporations, particularly Big Oil. If the US lifts sanctions on Burma, there will be a rush of companies into Burma intent on looting my country's natural heritage and the benefits of such "engagement" will flow directly to the military regime.

In terms of human rights, Webb has remained focused only on Suu Kyi's freedom and ability to participate in scheduled elections in Burma, never mind the fact that the Burmese regime has already rigged the elections so that no matter who participates there will be many more decades of complete military rule.

The new constitution is an air-tight document that gives no room whatsoever for reform from within. At the same time, Webb has completely ignored the purposeful, massive human rights violations carried out by Burma's military regime. The human rights nightmare in Burma includes the recruitment of tens of thousands of child soldiers, pressing hundreds of thousands of Burmese into forced labor and the widespread rape of ethnic minority women.

Luckily for the Burmese people, Webb is not the only US senator. Recently, the US Senate voted unanimously to extend sanctions on Burma. President Obama signed the bill into law.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is a student of politics and more likely to examine the facts on the ground instead of falling for blanket ideological generalizations. While Webb may seek to sell out Aung San Suu Kyi, our courageous Buddhist monks, and all the people of Burma, we hold out hope that Secretary Clinton and President Obama will take a more nuanced view in formulating policy toward Burma.

In particular, the US should seek to negotiate with Burma's military regime—but, at the same time, carry forward along the lines of the advice offered by South Africa's Nobel Peace Prize recipient Desmond Tutu: seek a global arms embargo on Burma's military regime, start a UN Security Council investigation into crimes against humanity committed by the regime, and begin the process to full implementation of financial sanctions against the regime and its cronies.

Webb is now despised by the people of Burma. If he succeeds in achieving a shift in US policy to abandon sanctions, he will have secured his place in history as one of the most important supporters of Than Swe's military dictatorship.

*U Pyinya Zawta, Buddhist monk, was actively involved in the 1988 demonstrations. He was sentenced to three years in prison in 1990 and again sentenced to seven years in 1998. He is one of the founding members of the All Burma Monks' Alliance (ABMA) which lead the 2007 Saffron Revolution. He is now in exile in New York after fleeing the country due to the threat of arrest.*

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## **COMMENTARY : Releasing the Tiger's Tail - By Yeni**

*Irrawaddy – 26 August 2009*

The International Crisis Group (ICG), a Brussels-based think tank, has recently released a new report on next year's elections in Burma. The report concludes that although the elections are not likely to be free or fair, they could set the stage for the current leadership of the ruling junta to step down, potentially creating the conditions for genuine change. Therefore, the report says, "all stakeholders should be alert to opportunities that may arise to push the new government toward reform and reconciliation."

The Burmese generals have vowed to hold the election in 2010, and are now doing everything in their almost absolute power to ensure that it goes according to plan. It has just extended the house arrest of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi for a further 18 months, and continues to hold around 2,100 other political activists behind bars. It is also trying to tame restive ethnic armies, forcing thousands of civilians to flee to neighboring countries. None of this bodes well for the junta's hopes of using the election as a means of winning international legitimacy.

Another problem for the generals is the deeply flawed constitution, which was loosely modeled on the Indonesian *dwifungsi*, or dual function, system that gives the military a key role in the political arena. Approved in a sham referendum last year, the constitution is widely seen as a means of continuing military rule in another guise. Although Snr-Gen Than Shwe, the regime's reclusive leader, claimed in an Armed Forces Day speech last year that he had a "sincere aim of developing the country without any craving for power," no one doubts that he will continue to wield considerable influence after the election.

But both the constitution and his advancing age mean that Than Shwe cannot remain in his current position forever. This is why the ICG reports suggests that both he and his second in command, Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, may soon step down or move to ceremonial roles, making way for a younger generation of military leaders. However, even such a move is fraught with risks. Although Than Shwe fears that a full transition to democracy could lead to war-crimes trials or even lynch mobs, he also knows that even a modest devolution of his powers could make him vulnerable.

The retribution Than Shwe fears most is from within the military. He is haunted by the memory of his predecessor, Ne Win, who ruled Burma for nearly three decades. Ne Win ran the country into the ground through a combination of brutal suppression, a crude socialist ideology and superstition, but continued to enjoy senior statesman status for more than a decade after stepping down from power. But this ended in 2002, when he was arrested and placed under house arrest after his son-in-law and three grandsons were found guilty of plotting to overthrow the regime with the aid of renegade officers and black magic.

"He knows very well about the tradition of the armed forces," said a Burmese political analyst. "If he is not in uniform, he can't control the armed forces anymore."

This is why ICG rightly concludes that even assuming that the intention of the regime is to consolidate military rule rather than begin a transition away from it, such processes often lead in unexpected directions. Than Shwe might know that his policies are misguided and ineffective, but as Ne Win's fate proved, "It was like having caught hold of a tiger's tail... there was nothing else to do but hang on to it."

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## **COMMENTARY: Cruelty and heartlessness – By Sanitsuda Ekachai**

*Bangkok Post – 27 August 2009*

*If decency is measured by how we treat those inferior to us, then we cannot call ourselves decent, given our heartlessness towards migrant workers.*

Last week, two Rohingya teenage boys wilted and died inside Ranong detention centre. Doomed for a life in a limbo behind bars, they just lost the will to eat, to move, to live. Out of intolerable despair, they simply perished.

One was 18, the other only 15.

Imagine their mothers' grief.

The week before, police in Samut Prakan province raided a cultural festival of ethnic Karen migrant workers while they were in the middle of a religious ceremony. It so happened that it was also Her

Majesty the Queen's birthday and Mother's Day that day, so a ceremony to express filial gratitude and to pay homage to the Queen was also part of the festival.

Still the police thought what they were doing posed a threat to society. More than 150 workers were arrested and immediately sent to the immigration centre for deportation.

Many of them are legally registered migrant workers. Many have wives and children back here. Imagine their families' shock and agony...

This is probably the crux of the problem - our inability to imagine the suffering of the downtrodden, which narrows our minds and shuts our hearts - although we take pride in calling ours a Buddhist country.

Of course, we can continue pointing the finger at the ruthless Burmese junta for drowning us with endless waves of war and economic refugees. In fact, this is what many of us do to free our troubled conscience whenever we hear of abuse. But the blame game does not address another important part of the oppression problem - our own heartlessness.

It is estimated that there are more than two million migrant workers in Thailand. Most of them are ethnic minorities who have fled extortion, persecution and harsh poverty in lawless Burma. The Muslim minority Rohingya, for example, are not even recognised as Burmese citizens and, according to the Burmese junta, must be expelled. The Karen, meanwhile, are considered dangerous rivals who must be suppressed.

In Thailand, these people are often subjected to slave-like work conditions. If the Thai workers faced the same plight overseas, however, we would be fuming and frothing with anger against such inhumanity.

Whenever there arises a tragic case of rights abuse at home, we will hear human rights activists lecturing the authorities about Thailand's duty to protect basic rights and freedoms of migrant workers in accordance with various international declarations and rights conventions.

Mostly it is a useless exercise. Not because these rights are not locally applicable, but for these principles to materialise, the parties concerned must share a moral common ground: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Which is not the case here. Why so? Ask the authorities and they will chime in condescendingly: "We need to protect our national security." The overwhelming influx of illegal immigrants is stealing scarce resources from lawful Thai citizens, they charge. Besides, these people carry with them a host of diseases. Their strange language and culture also make it difficult to monitor their criminal activities, thus posing a threat to society.

Being nice only attracts more of them to come, they insist.

Sadly, this heartlessness prevails because it strikes a chord with mainstream society.

It is not that we are inherently cruel. It is only that we are the products of racist nationalism which permeates every social institution in our society.

Yes, prejudice is human when we are still trapped in the "we/they" dichotomy driven by instinctive group preservation. But it is another matter when we let it grow into inhumanity to legitimise what is otherwise unacceptable cruelty.

We must rethink our racist nationalism. Not only to save our souls. When identity politics of the downtrodden can easily turn ugly, undoing racism is a necessity to save our children and our country from ethnic violence.

*Sanitsuda Ekachai is Assistant Editor, Bangkok Post.*

**26/08/2009**

**News – Kokang**

**[Kokang capital falls: "Not shoot first" policy under fire](#)**

*S.H.A.N. - 26 August 2009*

Laogai, the capital of Kokang, just 5 months after celebrating the 20th anniversary of peace with the country's military rulers, is under Burma Army control since Monday night, 24 August, according to sources.

"I haven't seen any Kokang fighters all day," said one of the few remaining residents told SHAN yesterday. "Everywhere it's the Burmese the soldiers."

Another source said he had gone past what was until yesterday the mansion of Peng Jiasheng, the Kokang supreme leader and saw only Burmese policemen both inside and outside the wall.

Peng and three others, which included his younger brother Jiafu and two sons, were said to have escaped to the north with his troops.

According to the latest information, Peng and troops loyal to him are still holding positions northeast of Laogai and at Qingsuihe (Chinshwehaw) aka Nampha on the southern border with Wa.

As the new base at Kunghsa is just 4km from Laogai, the Burma Army could have mounted an attack if it chose to. "But they have yet to do it, probably because it is too uncomfortably near the Chinese border," said a source from the border. "The Burma Army has instead brought in other Kokang rivals of Peng to deal with him. Apart from Bai Souqian (his former deputy), there are now Kokang militias loyal to the Burma Army from Kunlong, Hopang and even his archenemy Yang Mouliang. If there is going to be any shooting, the Burma Army can now tell the Chinese it's a fight among the Kokangs, the Burma Army has nothing to do with it."

On the other side of the border, China has set up a temporary holding center for the refugees from Burma, according to the same source. "They are giving them a blanket and a mat each, besides food," he said.

Meanwhile, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) is reportedly holding an emergency meeting with its Kokang ally this morning at Namteuk, south of Qingshihe.

The two towns are separated by the Namting and connected by a bridge over it. "The fall of Qingsuihe," admitted a Wa source, "could greatly threaten the safety of Namteuk and restrict our movements."

Namteuk is the headquarters of the UWSA's 318th Division, commanded by Bao Ai Roong, the Wa supreme leader's nephew.

The fall of Laogai without a shot being fired has brought into question the practicality of the "Not Shooting First" policy of the Peace and Democracy Front (PDF), whose members include Kokang, Wa and Mongla. "We should also have spelled out what movements by the Burma Army would be deemed as hostile acts," said a Shan ceasefire officer. "Now, because we have said that we won't shoot first, the Burma Army is being allowed to beef up its forces around us."

The Kokang debacle could be repeated elsewhere, he warned, if the alliance continued to hold on the policy.

Kokang, since 1989, had been under the control of Peng Jiasheng. The Burmese authorities, now that an arrest warrant for him has been issued, is reportedly encouraging Peng's rival groups to set up a new leadership.

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### [Thousands flood into China after Myanmar army standoff](#)

*Reuters – 26 August 2009 3:30am EDT*

BANGKOK - Tension between Myanmar government troops and an armed ethnic group has sparked an exodus of thousands of people into China from northeastern Myanmar, activists and witnesses said on Wednesday.

Large groups crossed the border on Tuesday from Kokang in Myanmar's Shan State, said a Reuters witness in Nansan, a town in China's southern Yunnan province. About 10,000 people have fled Kokang since August 8, China's Chongqing Evening News reported.

The Washington-based U.S. Campaign for Burma said tensions first flared on August 8 when the Myanmar army deployed hundreds of troops in Kokang, a mostly ethnic Chinese region where rebels have observed a two-decade-old ceasefire with the government.

The rebels issued a statement via the Myanmar Peace and Democracy Front (MPDF), a newly formed alliance of four ethnic groups, saying the army was pressuring its fighters to join a border security force under the government's control ahead of Myanmar's elections planned for 2010.

"Tensions are extremely high," the MPDF said in the statement issued via the U.S. Campaign for Burma. "With anticipation of resurgence of war, tens of thousands of ethnic people have fled."

A Nansan shop owner, Xie Feifei, said refugees were being housed by the local government in disused or half-built homes. He did not know of any who had been sent back.

"We haven't had anything like this happen for about 10 years," Xie told Reuters by telephone on Wednesday. "Many people have been coming across the border but it's fallen off now," Xie added. "I think everyone who wants to escape has already."

A local government official in Nansan, however, told Reuters that no refugees had entered the town.

The U.S. Campaign for Burma said the mobilization of troops was a move by the junta to force ethnic groups to form political parties to contest next year's election, the first in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, in 20 years.

Many ethnic groups feel they have nothing to gain from running in the polls and suspect the junta is trying to neutralize their threat by bringing rebel fighters into the army under the command of the Yangon regime.

The MPDF and Chinese media reports said troops had attacked a factory used by the ethnic groups to service and repair weapons on suspicion it was being used to produce illicit drugs. They said a standoff ensued, prompting thousands to flee the area. Myanmar, which has been ruled by the military since a 1962 coup, is home to more than 100 different ethnic groups.

Many armed groups observe a ceasefire with the government but several have resisted. Ethnic insurgencies have continued, in many cases fueled by the opium trade.

(Reporting by Martin Petty and Chris Buckley in Beijing; Editing by Jason Szep)

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**[Spurt in tension between Burmese Army and Kokang rebels](#)**

*Mizzima - 25 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - With the arrival of over 60 army trucks carrying Burmese troops, fresh tension has flared up between ethnic Kokang rebel groups and the Burmese Army in northeastern Shan State with the ruling junta issuing an arrest warrant for the Kokang leader Peng Jiasheng, sources said.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Sino-Burma border based military analyst, said the tension between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) also known as Kokang Army and the Burmese troops had risen to a new level and that there could be a fresh clash between the two anytime.

"The tension is high and there are possibilities of a fresh conflict. But as of now both sides seem to be restrained," Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

The tension, according to Aung Kyaw Zaw, began since the MNDAA like many other ceasefire armed groups, rejected the junta's proposal to transform its army into a 'Border Guard Force', an army to be maintained and managed by the ruling junta.

However, the Burmese Army wants to avoid a confrontation with the Kokang Army and is using various tactics to win the group to their side by infiltrating into the groups' leadership and breaking their unity, Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

"The junta wants to break the Kokang like they did with other armed rebel groups. So, they are dealing with a few Kokang officers, who are interested to join them. And the Burmese Army has named these people new leaders of the Kokang group," he said.

The fresh tension was in evidence on Monday, when the Burmese Army ordered the Kokang Army to move out of the Kokang Special Region saying they are to take up the security in the region. The Kokang Army, apparently, refused and geared up for a confrontation.

Aung Kyaw Zaw said the Burmese Army is creating tension between the Kokang leadership, which seems to be divided between the Kokang Supreme Commander Peng Jiasheng and his Deputy Commander Bai Souqian.

Bai, reportedly has wooed about 100 soldiers to his side but they do not seem to post any kind of threat to Peng, who enjoys the support of the majority of the army, he added.

Peng Jiasheng, also known as Phone Kyar Shin, escaped arrest at least three times including during the August 23 incident, where he was rounded up by about 100 troops at his home in Lao Kai.

"The Burmese Army does not want to negotiate with Peng Jiasheng but they want to use some of the Kokang officers who are willing to oblige it. So, they have issued an arrest warrant for the Kokang leader," Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

On August 22, police in Northern Shan State's capital Lashio served summons for Peng, his younger brother Jiafu and his two sons to appear in court. But the four, did not show up.

"How can they go, it is an arrest order. It would be difficult for the Burmese Army to arrest Peng Jiasheng," Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

Analysts said the Burmese junta is deeply disappointed with the rejection by several ceasefire ethnic armed groups over their proposal to transform their armies into a border guard force.

The junta has been persuading the ceasefire groups to transform their armies into the BGF, which will be under the junta's administration, as their new constitution, does not allow any other armed forces apart from the main 'Tatmadaw'.

Several armed groups including the MNDAA, Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and United Wa State Army (UWSA) has rejected the junta's proposal. But Aung Kyaw Zaw said the junta is currently targeting the MNDAA, as the group is the weakest among the armed groups.

"Approximately the MNDAA has about 1,500 troops and the junta thinks that they can threaten them and forcibly persuade them to transform. And besides, the junta already has several army battalions stationed in the Kokang region," he added.

After the MNDAA rejected the junta's proposal, the junta has brought in more troops under the pretext of a drug eradication programme and had so far deployed over seven more battalions.

"I think there are about 3,000 Burmese Army troops based in the Kokang area now," Aung Kyaw Zaw, who maintains a close relationship with armed rebel groups along the Sino-Burmese border said.

Since the problems are not directly with the Burmese Army but more of an internal disagreement, Kokang's allies including the United Wa State Army (UWSA) are unable to assist.

In a statement released on August 21, the Myanmar Peace and Democratic Front, an alliance of four ceasefire groups – MNDAA, UWSA, Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) also known as Mailai – condemned the Burmese Army for their interference in the problems of the Kokang Army.

The group said, the Burmese Army's activities were being conducted under the pretext of drug eradication and expressed their full support to the Kokang Army.

Meanwhile, the fresh tension between the Burmese Army and the Kokang Army has forced several hundred villagers to flee to neighboring China, causing concern to the Chinese authorities.

Reports said, at least 10, 000 villagers have fled to the Chinese border.

A report by the Thailand-based, Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN), said over 700 soldiers of China's People's Liberation Army had been deployed along the Sino-Burma border in anticipation of any hostilities that might break out between the Kokang and the Burmese Army.

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### [Armed groups to step up resistance](#)

*DVB – 25 August 2009*

Burma's armed ethnic groups will increase cooperation with ceasefire groups in an effort to strengthen resistance against government army forces, following a meeting of eight opposition groups.

The alliance of ethnic armed groups, the National Democratic Front (NDF), concluded its Central Executive Committee's three-day meeting on Sunday.

The eight-strong coalition, which includes the Karen National Union (KNU) and New Mon State Party (NMSP), two of Burma's principle armed opposition groups, discussed the ongoing issue of government pressure to transform ceasefire groups into border patrol forces.

A number of the ceasefire groups, including the NMSP, have resisted the pressure to return to what the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) calls the 'legal fold', which would give them legitimacy as groups but significantly weaken their manpower and influence.

"We wholeheartedly support the decision of our brothers, the ceasefire groups, not to agree with the SPDC's plan to transform them into border militias," said Mai Phone Kyaw, general secretary of the NDF.

A statement released by the NDF said that ethnic groups "have a right to operate in their own regions to protect their own people".

Mai Phone Kyaw said the junta is attempting to distract from growing international pressure on it by stepping up confrontation against opposition groups.

The government's latest offensive against the KNU, which began in June, has resulted in nearly 5000 Karen fleeing across the border into Thailand.

The conflict between the Burmese government and the KNU, which has stretched over 60 years, is thought to be one of the world's longest running.

"We discussed in our meeting how to step up our resistance and to prepare for a combat," Mai Phone Kyaw said.

"We will continue our resistance against the SPDC junta by any means possible until we are granted our rights as the ethnic people of Burma."

*Reporting by Aye Nai*

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### [Junta reiterates October deadline on KIA](#)

*Kachin News Group - 25 August 2009*

In a reminder Burma's military junta has demanded handing over of the manpower of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the main ethnic Kachin ceasefire group and its armed wing, in northern Burma and one of the strongest ethnic armed groups in the country before the October deadline set by the regime, said local sources.

KIO/KIA's entire manpower was sought by Maj-Gen Soe Win, local chief negotiator of the ruling junta and commander of the Northern Regional Command (Ma-Pa-Kha) based in Kachin State's capital Myitkyina during a meeting with KIO delegates in the capital on August 22, said KIO officials in Laiza headquarters on the Sino-Burma border in Kachin State.

This meeting followed when the KIO submitted the list of over 10 organizational departments to the junta on August 12.

According to KIO delegates, Commander Soe Win kept repeating to the KIO at the meeting to convert its armed-wing the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) to a battalion of the Border Guard Force (BGF) under the control of the Burmese Army. The KIO has rejected the proposal.

The eight KIO delegates led by Vice-president No. 1 Lt-Gen Gauri Zau Seng told the commander that it cannot provide the list of men and women in service in the KIO and KIA by the October deadline. On the contrary, it would like to keep discussions on the issue going with the new government after next year's general elections, said KIO sources.

On July 8, the KIO clearly submitted its two organizational demands--- the KIA to convert to a self-controlled Kachin Regional Guard Force (KRGF) and power sharing in the new Kachin State government with direct participation of KIO people after next year's general elections.

The KIO's demands are yet to be considered by the junta. But it has been increasingly pressurizing it to accept the Burmese Army-controlled BGF, said KIO officials in Laiza headquarters.

At the moment, both the Burmese Army and the KIA are sending more and more troops to Hpakant jade mining land following a face off between them two weeks ago, said KIA sources. The military stand off was resolved by commander Soe Win and KIO Vice-chairman Lt-Gen N'ban La Awng.

The KIO/A has forged an alliance with four ethnic ceasefire groups in Shan State to defend themselves if any group is attacked by the Burmese Army. The allies are the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N), United Wa State Army (UWSA), Kokang ceasefire group and Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS), said KIO officials.

The KIO has accepted in principle the transformation of its armed-wing proposed by the junta to all ethnic ceasefire groups in the country last May because it would like to resolve the political problems between them by political means through dialogues, said KIO officials.

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#### **News - Other**

#### **[Does Myanmar Want Nuclear Weapons?](#)**

*NPR (Morning Edition) – 24 August 2009*

by Michael Sullivan

There is no doubt Myanmar has a nuclear program. It sent scientists, technicians and army officers to Russia for training in recent years. And Moscow has agreed to supply Myanmar, formerly Burma, with a small nuclear reactor for civilian use. The question is, do the Burmese generals want a nuclear weapon, too? [4 min 50 sec]

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#### **[Without constitution amendment elections cannot herald change: NLD](#)**

*Mizzima - 25 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Unless Burma's military regime releases political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and amends the 2008 constitution, the 2010 general elections will be meaningless and will not usher in any kind of change, the National League for Democracy has said.

The 2010 general election, proposed by the ruling junta, is based on the 2008 constitution, which enshrines the role of the military. It cannot provide an opportunity for change unless the regime considers reviewing the constitution, Dr. Win Naing, a spokesperson for the NLD said.

"The 2010 elections cannot be an opportunity for change in Burma unless the junta reviews and amends the constitution," he said.

It has been 20 years now, and the junta is aware that it cannot continue ruling the country in an illegitimate manner. Since the junta is not prepared to make any kind of drastic reforms, it drafted the constitution to legitimize its role, he added.

Dr. Win Naing's remarks came in response to the recent report released by the International Crisis Group, which urged all stake holders in Burmese politics to prepare to seize an opportunity of change that is likely to be a fall out of the 2010 elections.

The ICG in its report released on Thursday said the 2010 election is an opportunity for change and urged the international community, the Burmese opposition including the NLD, the military government and other stake holders not to squander the opportunity.

"All stakeholders should be alert to opportunities that may arise to push the new government towards reform and reconciliation," the report, titled "Myanmar: Towards the Elections", said.

The report also argues that boycotting or opposing the election would only push things into the hands of the military as it would not prevent the elections from taking place.

But Dr. Win Naing said if the elections take place without any consideration for the opposition's demands, it would only produce a result that is predictable – continued military rule – and the only difference this time would be "a legitimized military rule".

"We don't see it as an opportunity. The conditions before the elections are important and if nothing changes and if the junta goes ahead with its plans, it is predictable," he added.

But he did not criticize the ICG report stating, "It is their view and we appreciate it for expressing such ideas. It does not matter whether we agree with it or not."

But functioning within a rigidly controlled environment, Dr. Win Naing said, people living in Burma understand the military's mentality and need to assess the situation before taking any decision.

"As we have mentioned in our 'Shwegondine Declaration' if the ruling government does not implement our proposals, we would be forced to re-think how we should go about the 2010 election," he added.

On August 11, the NLD's general secretary Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to a further 18 months in detention, which is widely believed by observers as a move to keep her away from the 2010 election scenario.

Similarly, members of the NLD in Rangoon have been harassed and tortured for their political activities.

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### [Monk Leaders Call for Third Sangha Boycott](#)

*Irrawaddy* – 25 August 2009

By Arkar Moe

Several exiled Buddhist monk leaders have told *The Irrawaddy* that Burmese monks across Burma are preparing to launch another boycott of military personnel and their families due to ongoing abuses against Buddhist doctrine and clergy by the ruling military junta.

Known as a "*pattanikkujjana*" in Pali, a Buddhist monks' boycott involves refusing morning alms from those said to have violated religious principles.

Burmese monks have declared a *pattanikkujjana* against the military regime and their cronies twice in recent history: the first time in 1990 following the suppression of Aung San Suu Kyi and her opposition party, the National League for Democracy, after they had won a national election by a landslide; and again in 2007, the so-called "Saffron Revolution," when monks led demonstrations against price hikes in Rangoon that turned into a national uprising against the government.

Burma's monasteries, some housing as many as 1,000 practicing monks, have been largely silent since the junta ordered a crackdown on the monk-led protests in August and September 2007. But several sources say that the simmering resentment could come to a head again in the lead-up to the regime's election planned for 2010.

A monk in Rangoon who asked to remain anonymous told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday: "The local authorities are closely watching the monks and their monasteries. Moreover, there are plainclothes security forces keeping an eye on them."

The military authorities closed and sealed Maggin monastery in Rangoon's Thingankyun Township in November 2007 after its abbot, Sayadaw U Indaka, was arrested for his involvement in the demonstrations. The monks and novices were evicted along with several HIV/ AIDS patients who were receiving treatment in the monastery at the time.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy*, Ashin Issariya, one of the leaders of the exiled All Burma Monks' Alliance (ABMA), said, "I want to call on all people and organizations to take part in a third monks' boycott for the sake of peace and the welfare of all Burmese people.

"The Lord Buddha said that the *sangha* (Buddhist monkhood) had to carry out their religious duties by sacrificing their lives.

"Therefore, all members of the *sangha* must act to protect the Buddhist religion and the welfare of our people," he said.

Currently, Burma's Ministry of Religious Affairs is effectively controlling and curtailing the nations' Buddhist monks under an order by the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (the state-sponsored Buddhist monks' organization), which has restricted monks' travel and gatherings.

Ashin Issariya said that the junta's troops and loyalists had committed many religious crimes, such as killing and arresting monks and nuns, raiding and destroying monasteries, and defiling Buddha images.

He added that there is no freedom of religion under the military junta and that all religions are affected.

"Therefore, if the military authorities do not apologize for their abuses and crimes, it is the responsibility of all monks, nuns and laypersons to boycott the junta," he said.

Some activists in Burma told *The Irrawaddy* that currently many monks' organizations and monasteries are trying to organize themselves and set up cooperation and communication with monks' groups in other parts of the country.

Ashin Thavara, a secretary of the India-based All Burma Monks' Representative Committee (ABMRC), told *The Irrawaddy*: "Nowadays, the ABMRC is cooperating with the ABMA to not only carry out our religious duties, but to help the people and achieve peace in Burma and throughout the world.

"It is high time that all the people of Burma and around the world take action and boycott Burma's military dictators," he said.

Ashin Thavara claimed that during the September uprising, the junta's soldiers and loyalist thugs raided and destroyed more than 60 monasteries, and beat, arrested and killed several hundred monks and nuns. He said that there are currently more than 250 monks and more than 20 nuns in prison in Burma for their political activities.

"Some of them were sentenced to hard labor," he added. "Others were sent with military battalions to work as porters at the front lines of the battlefields."

During the 2007 Saffron Revolution, monks enacted a boycott of military families and their cronies by overturning their alms bowls to refuse alms, an act of defiance that marked the uprising.

According to official data, there are more than 400,000 monks in Burma, and its community, the *sangha*, is considered one of the strongest and most revered institutions in the country. It has always played an important role in Burma's social and political affairs, often in opposition to oppressive regimes.

Ashin Candobhasacara, one of the leaders of the US-based International Burmese Monks' Organization, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday: "Our organization issued an announcement on Monday to mark the second anniversary of the Saffron Movement, and we plan to demonstrate against the Burmese junta by reciting the "*Metta Sutta*" (the Buddha's words of loving-kindness) in front of the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh and in Union Square in New York on September 24 to 26.

"Now, all people and all organizations need to cooperate and condemn Burma's military dictators," he said. "We will encourage and support all the brave monks and demonstrators because they are sacrificing their lives and property for religion and peace in Burma and throughout the world."

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### [SPECIAL: Digging the Tunnels, Part Three](#)

*DVB – 25 August 2009*

Burma is aggressively bolstering its defence in the event of an invasion, according to a series of leaked reports and testimonies that outline a myriad of projects ranging from tunnel digging to possible nuclear proliferation.

In recent weeks, DVB has revealed that with North Korean help, the Burmese junta is developing a complex network of tunnels that can accommodate heavy weaponry and battalions of troops during military operations.

Since then, speculation has grown that Burma is aiming to obtain a nuclear bomb, following testimonies given by two senior Burmese defectors that accuse the government of developing a nuclear reactor in northern Burma. However, further leaked reports show that the defence project runs deeper, with plans drawn up to incorporate civilians in military operations, should the country be invaded.

A leaked report entitled 'Rangoon Division Military Command: regional mobilisation project' (hereafter known as 'RDMC report') is one of a number of documents obtained by DVB that outline the various stages of Burma's defence strategy, ones that range from the strengthening of militia groups to use of human shields.

The RDMC outlines several potential scenarios in which Burma could be attacked by "exiled insurgents and opposition groups" or "invasion by means of a coalition army led by a powerful nation". Much of the preparation is going into bolstering its air defense, implying that an air attack is most likely. There is also another scenario, strongly hinted at in a report entitled 'Burma-Thai Naval Capabilities', that points to recent border problems between the two countries as being possible cause for an air invasion by Thailand.

In the RDMC defence project, Rangoon division is to be divided into six zones. Methods of defence in case of attack include "conventional warfare" and "guerilla warfare", but there is a third strategy, in which the government will use militia groups alongside the Burmese army – this is one reason why they have been developing and nurturing various militias, such as the notorious Swan Arr Shin.

In a project named 'Militia strategy', the list of forces that could be turned into militia is being drawn up systematically, region by region, and includes groups that vary from fire fighters to civil servants to medical workers. Furthermore, families of army troops have been instructed to rally the public so that soldiers can be 'disappeared' among civilians and the public can be used in fighting.

Lists of all bridges in Rangoon division have been made in order to cut off the enemy's communication lines during military operations, and all sea routes that could be entered by the enemy are to be designated as minefields.

Furthermore, road blocks and barriers are to be constructed along the roads so that enemy tanks could not enter them easily. According to the RDMC report, the generals believe they can resist the attacks in tunnel stations built in Hmawbi, Phoogyi, Phaunggyi, Indaing, 9-Mile, and Military Hospital in Rangoon division.

Another project, known as 'The Peoples Air Defence' project, outlines a training programme on defence against an aerial attack. Groups of 30 people, likely to be army troops, are taught how to use surface-to-air and handheld missiles, and anti-aircraft guns.

The report for 'The Peoples Air Defence' project details the building of portable missile bases, which would be positioned at crowded areas of the towns, and on top of high-rise the buildings. In this case one could assume that the military is preparing to use human shield as one of its strategies.

Other missile bases and anti-aircraft cannons are located in Rangoon division military command region, and at 15 strategic points inside and outside of the city. These are connected by fibre optic cable networks and radios and telephones, and are connected to the main command centre in case of an emergency.

The report details that the movement of enemies will be monitored by using Russian-made long range radars at Zin Kyaik, Myeik and Kalama mountains outside of Rangoon division. A radar system at Rangoon division radar reception station in Phaunggyi will also be used.

Another leaked military operation report shows that five radar stations designed for air defence purposes are being built at Tavoy and Ngwesaung, with the help of Russian experts. Engineers have been instructed to move these into the tunnels if necessary.

In a confidential report of the minutes of a 2006 meeting between Burma's second-in-command, Maung Aye, and Russia's Deputy Minister of Defense, Yury Nikolayevich Baluyevsky, the two spoke of Russian cooperation in supplying Burma with a guided missile system and training Burmese in operation of the system. Russia already supplies Burma with fighter jets and helicopters.

Information leaked from inside Burma about North Korean and Russia involvement in Burma's military ambitions has been reinforced by such high-profile visits of Burmese officials to the two countries in recent years.

Included in Shwe Mann's trip to North Korea was a visit to tunnel complexes dug deep into the side of mountains that can hold heavy armoury, including chemical weapons. The North Koreans are known to be expert tunnel diggers, and thus it is unsurprising that the Burmese junta would look to them in assistance for their project. It was during this trip that the two countries formalised military cooperation, and photographs released since by DVB show North Korean advisors training Burmese engineers in the construction of tunnels.

Elements of Shwe Mann's trip were mirrored in Maung Aye's meeting with senior Russian defence officials. While Shwe Mann visited radar and jamming stations in North Korea, Maung Aye similarly requested assistance in radar and communication technology, as well as the training of Burmese in using them. During this meeting, Baluyevsky replied that "[Russia's] president has already directed us to teach Burmese trainees at a cheap price".

While military cooperation between countries is normal, as is a country's wish to bolster its own defence, Burma's method is cause for alarm. What its strategy effectively entails is the forced transformation of civilian groups into armed militias, and the planting of would-be military targets for the enemy in populous areas. Moreover, the Burmese economy is in tatters, yet the government allocates some 40 percent of its annual budget to reinforcing itself against an enemy that doesn't exist.

Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the whole project is found in the final stage of the resistance planning in another leaked military report. Before the melting away of Burmese troops, "overground" opposition groups and pro-democracy activists are to be regarded as the enemy, and are to be wiped out completely. This would be orchestrated with the help of Swan Arr Shin, USDA and other pro-junta groups, which are currently being expanded and trained should the situation necessitate their assistance.

*Reporting by DVB*

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### [Daewoo invest \\$5.6 billion in Burma gas](#)

*DVB – 25 August 2009*

South Korean company Daewoo International is waiting for the go-ahead from the Burmese government to invest nearly \$US5.6 billion in Burma's gas fields, with the produce destined for China.

If approved, the deal will see Daewoo supplying the China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) over the course of 30 years with around seven percent of the country's current gas consumption, although this is expected to grow rapidly.

Burma has huge offshore natural gas reserves in the Bay of Bengal which already cater for much of Thailand's energy needs.

Advocacy groups have complained that the vast majority of Burma's natural energy is being shipped out of the country, despite many of the major cities suffering frequent blackouts.

Daewoo will be leading a consortium of companies, which includes India's Oil and Natural Gas Corp and GAIL company, the Myanmar Oil & Gas Enterprise, and the Korea Gas Corp.

The project includes the construction of 2,800 kilometer oil and gas pipelines, known as the Shwe Gas Project, running from Burma's western Arakan state to China's southwestern Yunnan province.

Until now China has relied on the congested Strait of Malacca, between Singapore and Indonesia's Sumatra peninsular, to transport oil from the Middle East to its energy-hungry population. According to Reuters, Burma will be able to tap the pipelines once they are in operation.

In June the Korean government rejected a complaint from two environmental advocacy groups, EarthRights International (ERI) and Shwe Gas Movement, that allegedly exposed human rights abuses surrounding the project.

China and Korea are two of only a handful of countries that still invest substantially in Burma, with China being its main trading partner and political ally.

Burma is subject to sanctions from a number of Western countries, including the United States and European Union, although these do not block investment in Burma's natural energy.

The EU recently ratcheted up its sanctions package on Burma, following the detention of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi earlier this month.

The United States is currently reviewing its policy towards Burma, following comments from some senior officials, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, that sanctions had failed.

*Reporting by Francis Wade*

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### **[Bangladesh Awards Gas Exploration Rights](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 25 August 2009*

By Julhas Alam / AP Writer

DHAKA — Bangladesh has awarded three offshore blocks to two global energy companies to explore for gas in the Bay of Bengal, a senior energy official said on Tuesday.

The US-based ConocoPhillips and Ireland's Tullow Oil could start exploration work by early next year, said Mohammad Muqtadir Ali, chairman of the state-owned Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation, or Petrobangla.

He said the decision came Monday from a Cabinet committee on economic affairs, the highest body to deal with economic issues, as the nation seeks new sources of gas amid a forecast that its current reserves will run out by 2014-15.

Ali, however, said the companies would not be allowed to explore for oil and gas in disputed waters, also claimed by India and Myanmar, in the Bay of Bengal.

"We will not allow them to work in the disputed waters," he told The Associated Press by phone.

The official said the oil companies are expected to invest a total of \$160.5 million in line with their initial bidding estimates for the exploration work. It will need years to complete the exploration job, he said.

Officials of the companies could not be immediately reached for comment.

Bangladesh has said it will fight internationally to establish its rights over the disputed waters, and is preparing to file its claims to the United Nations for a resolution. India and Burma claim the areas fall within their maritime boundaries.

Last year, Bangladesh's military-backed interim government divided the country's sea territory into 28 blocks in the Bay of Bengal and invited exploration bids, but failed to get much response apparently because of the dispute.

In November 2008, tensions mounted between Burma and Bangladesh after Burma escorted a South Korean gas exploration company into territory also claimed by Bangladesh. Both countries deployed their navies and finally ended the stand off with high-level diplomatic negotiations.

The government has recently asked energy authorities not to allow any new gas connections since the country is facing up to 250 million cubic feet in shortages of gas each day.

Currently, Sangu gas field, operated by Britain's Cairn Energy, is the country's lone operating offshore gas field.

Bangladesh has proven natural gas reserves of up to 15 trillion cubic feet.

Foreign companies have invested millions of dollars to explore and produce gas in deals with the state-run Petrobangla.

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**[ASEAN urged to form human rights court](#)**

*The Jakarta Post – 26 August 2009*

Ary Hermawan, Jakarta

A coalition of 70 Asian NGOs called on ASEAN countries Tuesday to create a regional human rights court, amid criticism over the grouping's failure to form a powerful rights commission and to push Myanmar to free Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy Task Force on ASEAN and Human Rights (SAPA-TFAHR) said it had sent an open letter to the high-level panel tasked with drafting the political declaration to the terms of reference (TOR) of the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission for Human Rights.

ASEAN recently approved the terms of reference establishing the first-ever human rights commission in the region, which has been widely criticized as powerless and even accused of being no more than "window dressing" for the organization once dubbed an exclusive club of dictators.

Indonesia, one of the only two full-fledged democracies in the region, secured commitments from other countries to sign a political declaration in return for its endorsement of the terms of reference it had earlier strongly opposed.

The declaration will provide a mandate that the rights commission, slated to be officially established in October, will be reviewed every five years.

The ASEAN panel will convene in Jakarta from Aug. 26 to 27.

In their letter, the NGOs said they demanded the regional grouping establish within 10 years a full-fledged regional human rights mechanism, whose standards they said had to be on a par with those of the mechanisms in other regions such as Africa and Europe, which already had rights courts.

"The evolution to develop protection mandates and a full-fledged human rights mechanism may take 100 years, or 10 years, or less," Indonesia's Rafendi Djamin, who co-signed the open letter to the ASEAN panel, said at a press conference in Jakarta.

"We're saying let's set a time frame, the sooner the better, but \*it\* should be no more than 10 years."

Sinapan Sammydorai, from the Think Center Singapore, said ASEAN countries must set a clear timeline for their human rights agenda, as they did when they decided to make the region a single market by 2015.

Honey Tan, from the ASEAN Women's Caucus, said although the political declaration was merely a declaration and therefore nonbinding, it could be used as an indicator to measure the improvements made by ASEAN.

She said the current TOR to the rights commission "lacked clarity" and "mostly contradict each other".

She also highlighted the fact the TOR did not specifically mention the concept of equality in its principle section, and instead used "negative statements" such as "avoidance of double standards" and "avoidance of politicization".

"If we want to say equality, \*then\* say equality; don't put it in the negative," she said.

Chalida Tajaroensuk, from Thailand's People's Empowerment Foundation, said the declaration "will serve as a guideline for the direction of the commission in the future.

In the next five years there will be an amendment to the TOR and we hope the protection elements can be included."

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### **Myanmar reports major drug bust near Thai border**

*AP – 26 August 2009*

YANGON, Myanmar — Police in Myanmar seized more than 100 blocks of heroin and nearly 3 million methamphetamine tablets near the border with Thailand in one of the military-ruled country's largest drug seizures, a state-run newspaper said Wednesday.

An anti-drug squad confiscated two guns and ammunition and arrested four people in the raid Monday on two houses in the northeastern town of Tachileik, the Myanmar Ahlin newspaper said.

Police seized 104 heroin blocks, including two that weighed 1,540 pounds (700 kilograms), the newspaper said. It did not give the weight of the remaining 102 blocks.

The seizure also included 2,926,000 methamphetamine pills and 46 pounds (21 kilograms) of powdered heroin, it said.

In July, 1,676 pounds (762 kilograms) of heroin and 340,000 methamphetamine pills were seized in the same border town, about 340 miles (550 kilometers) northeast of the country's largest city, Yangon. At the time, newspapers called it the biggest single seizure of heroin ever recorded in Myanmar.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, produced an estimated 410 tons of opium in 2008, enough to make around 40 tons of heroin, according to United Nations figures. The country is the world's second-largest producer after Afghanistan, which accounts for 90 percent of world output.

Myanmar is also a major source of methamphetamine. Much of it is trafficked to neighboring Thailand where abuse of the drug is rampant.

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### **Floods from dam near Thai-Burmese border cause concern**

*Mizzima - 26 August 2009*

by Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai –The incident of flash floods near the Thai-Burmese border last week points to the ineffectiveness of the authorities in addition to its blatant blacking out of information, environmentalists have pointed out.

Witoon Permpongsacharoen, an environmentalist attached to the 'Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance', a Bangkok based organization working closely with environmental issues in the region told Mizzima that the recent flooding from the Srikakarin Dam in the Kanchanaburi Province bordering Burma, affected several villages in the area.

But information on this was not available from the authorities.

"While compensation is necessary it is important that the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (currently the PTT Public Co. Ltd.) should clarify the facts. Earlier there had been warnings that the dam was vulnerable to earthquakes. Besides there was lack of study on the environmental effect in the area from the construction of the dam," he said.

"The media seems to have no interest in following up the issue though it affects so many villagers," he said.

Witton pointed out that the planned series of dams to be built on the Salween River in Burma will also be at risk from earthquakes "even though the authorities claim that engineering technology could solve this problem and resist damage from earthquakes, measuring up to seven on the Richter scale. But who can guarantee whether earthquakes will not be stronger?" he asked.

The dams has been built on the Srisawat active fault near the Three Pagoda Pass, both on the Thai–Burma border and is at risk from earthquakes.

The incident follows an accident during gas transmission from the Bongkot in the Thai Gulf and Yadana fields in Burma last week. To avoid a power blackout in western Thailand due to the stoppage, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) decided to release water from the Srinakarin Dam in Kanchanaburi province close to the Burmese border to generate power, which resulted in flooding large areas and affecting hundreds of local villagers. There are rumours that the dam has been damaged by an earthquake.

The cabinet was given the report and has acknowledged the technical problems. It was informed that eight villages in Muang district had been affected by floods, along with three resorts, some raft operations and farmlands. A committee has been set up to investigate the sudden release of water from the Srinakarin Dam.

Deputy permanent secretary Norkun Sitthiphong will chair the committee, which has been given seven days to investigate and submit a report.

"The committee will find out why the water had to be released and whether the decision was appropriate. It must also come up with preventive measures," he said, denying reports that the floods were caused by an earthquake.

However, in 2007 the fault line in Burma caused small earthquakes in the Golden Triangle areas, connecting Laos, Burma and Thailand, when a 6.1 magnitude earthquake occurred about 700 kilometres from Bangkok.

Such tremors were however not dangerous, but has been causing worry about fault lines near the capital such as the Sakaing fault in the Andaman Sea, 400 kilometres from Bangkok or the Three Pagoda fault zone and the Srisawat fault in Kanchanaburi, 200 kilometres from Bangkok.

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**[Burmese IT Contest to Aid Junta?](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 25 August 2009*

By Arkar Moe

Burmese IT technicians and bloggers suspect a Burmese search engine contest was designed by the Burmese military junta in order to increase its internet restriction technology and ability to control websites and blogs.

The Myanmar Computer Professional Association (MCPA) invited individuals and groups to compete for the title of MCPA Challenge Winner 2009 in the Myanmar Engine Contest, sources within the MCPA said last week.

The research-based contest is being held with the aim of "encouraging the development of the country's information and communication technology (ICT), expanding the use of the Myanmar (Burmese) language in the ICT sector and enhancing the youth's interest in the creation and ICT research," according to an MCPA statement.

"Building such a search engine is like creating a small version of Google," said a Rangoon-based IT expert speaking to *The Irrawaddy*. "It would take at least six months to create an engine that would be useful to governmental departments searching through data. Such an engine could help Burmese authorities find relevant information very quickly."

Contestants must register by Aug 30 and will be given six months to develop the engine after they have submitted an initial application. The winner will be announced in June 2010 and will be awarded US \$3,000.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, Rangoon-based activist Blogger Kamikaze said: "I am rather doubtful about this search engine contest. We need to carefully consider whether to compete in this contest because the military junta can use it to exploit IT technicians and control IT technology. They already block blogs and Web sites like Yahoo and Youtube, but most IT technicians and bloggers can overcome these obstacles."

The regime has been constructing a "Silicon Valley" called Yadanabon Cyber City near Maymyo in Mandalay Division, since June 2006. According to state-run newspapers, the facility is intended to serve as the sole nationwide internet service provider (ISP) in Burma.

Currently, Burma has three ISPs: the state-run Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), which operates Myanmar Info Tech; the semi-government-owned Myanmar Teleport Company Ltd (formerly Bagan Net); and Hanthawaddy National Gateway.

In 2005 the Burmese military junta became more sophisticated in censoring online material after the introduction of a new firewall supplied by the US-based company Fortinet.

According to the Norway-based *Pandia Search Engine News*, the new search engine contest could have two purposes.

One could be to identify young Burmese with computer skills and prevent them from developing technology that threatens the regime.

"We know of activists that have managed to get around the walls of the censors," *Pandia* said, "The opposition often use proxy servers and special software to get access to information.

"Another [purpose] could be to get the winners of the competition to serve the regime by developing a search engine that can be used to block any kind of unwanted information.

"It seems like the competition is open for non-Burmese as well, which means that they could hope to enlist politically naive computer experts in their fight against democracy. There is only one possible conclusion in our mind: a total boycott of this competition," *Pandia* said.

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**Opinion / Analysis**

**[Op-Ed Contributor: We Can't Afford to Ignore Myanmar - By Senator Jim Webb](#)**

*New York Times* – 26 August 2009

Washington

EIGHT years ago I visited Myanmar as a private citizen, traveling freely in the capital city of Yangon and around the countryside. This lush, breathtakingly beautiful nation was even then showing the strain of its severance from the outside world. I was a guest of an American businessman, and I understood the frustration and disappointment that he and others felt, knowing even then that tighter sanctions would soon drive them out of the country.

This month I became the first American political leader to visit Myanmar in 10 years, and the first-ever to meet with its reclusive leader, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, in the haunting, empty new capital of Naypyidaw. From there I flew to an even more patched-and-peeled Yangon, where I met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader and Nobel laureate who remains confined to her home. Among other requests, I asked Than Shwe to free her and allow her to participate in politics.

Leaving the country on a military plane with John Yettaw — an American who had been sentenced to seven years of hard labor for immigration offenses, and whose release I had also requested of Than Shwe — I was struck again by how badly the Burmese people need outside help. They are so hardened after decades of civil war and political stalemate that only an even-handed interlocutor can lift them out of the calcified intransigence that has damaged their lives and threatened the stability of Southeast Asia.

For more than 10 years, the United States and the European Union have employed a policy of ever-tightening economic sanctions against Myanmar, in part fueled by the military government's failure to recognize the results of a 1990 election won by Aung San Suu Kyi's party. While the political motivations behind this approach are laudable, the result has been overwhelmingly counterproductive. The ruling regime has become more entrenched and at the same time more isolated. The Burmese people have lost access to the outside world.

Sanctions by Western governments have not been matched by other countries, particularly Russia and China. Indeed, they have allowed China to dramatically increase its economic and political influence in Myanmar, furthering a dangerous strategic imbalance in the region.

According to the nonprofit group EarthRights International, at least 26 Chinese multinational corporations are now involved in more than 62 hydropower, oil, gas and mining projects in Myanmar. This is only the tip of the iceberg. In March, China and Myanmar signed a \$2.9-billion agreement for the construction of fuel pipelines that will transport Middle Eastern and African crude oil from Myanmar to China. When completed, Chinese oil tankers will no longer be required to pass through the Straits of Malacca, a time-consuming, strategically vital route where 80 percent of China's imported oil now passes.

If Chinese commercial influence in Myanmar continues to grow, a military presence could easily follow. Russia is assisting the Myanmar government on a nuclear research project. None of these projects have improved the daily life of the average citizen of Myanmar, who has almost no contact with the outside world and whose per capita income is among the lowest in Asia.

It would be wrong for the United States to lift sanctions on Myanmar purely on the basis of economic self-interest, or if such a decision were seen as a capitulation of our long-held position that Myanmar should abandon its repressive military system in favor of democratic rule. But it would be just as bad for us to fold our arms, turn our heads, and pretend that by failing to do anything about the situation in Myanmar we are somehow helping to solve it.

So what can and should be done?

First, we must focus on what is possible. The military government in Myanmar has committed itself to elections in 2010, as part of its announced "seven steps toward democracy." Many point out that the Constitution approved last year in a plebiscite is flawed, since it would allow the military to largely continue its domination of the government, and that the approval process itself was questionable. The legislation to put the Constitution into force has yet to be drafted. The National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, has not agreed to participate in next year's elections.

But there is room for engagement. Many Asian countries — China among them — do not even allow opposition parties. The National League for Democracy might consider the advantages of participation as part of a longer-term political strategy. And the United States could invigorate the debate with an offer to help assist the electoral process. The Myanmar government's answer to such an offer would be revealing.

Second, the United States needs to develop clearly articulated standards for its relations with the nondemocratic world. Our distinct policies toward different countries amount to a form of situational ethics that does not translate well into clear-headed diplomacy. We must talk to Myanmar's leaders. This does not mean that we should abandon our aspirations for a free and open Burmese society, but that our goal will be achieved only through a different course of action.

The United States refused to talk to the Chinese until 1971, more than 20 years after the Communist takeover, and did not resume full diplomatic relations until 1979. And yet China, with whom we seem inextricably tied both as a business partner and a strategic competitor, has no democracy and has never held a national election.

The Hanoi government agreed to internationally supervised elections for Vietnam in 1973, as a result of the Paris peace talks; Washington did not raise this as a precondition to furthering relations. As someone who has worked hard to build a bridge between Hanoi and America's strongly anticommunist Vietnamese community, I believe the greatest factor in creating a more open society inside Vietnam was the removal of America's trade embargo in 1994.

Third, our government leaders should call on China to end its silence about the situation in Myanmar, and to act responsibly, in keeping with its role as an ascending world power. Americans should not hold their collective breaths that China will give up the huge strategic advantage it has gained as a result of our current policies. But such a gesture from our government would hold far more sway in world opinion than has the repeated but predictable condemnation of Myanmar's military government.

Finally, with respect to reducing sanctions, we should proceed carefully but immediately. If there is reciprocation from the government of Myanmar in terms of removing the obstacles that now confront us, there would be several ways for our two governments to move forward. We could begin with humanitarian projects. We might also seek cooperation on our long-held desire to recover the remains of World War II airmen at crash sites in the country's north.

Our ultimate goal, as it always has been, should be to encourage Myanmar to become a responsible member of the world community, and to end the isolation of its people so that they can live in economic prosperity, under an open political system.

Jim Webb is a Democratic senator from Virginia.

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**25/08/2009**

**News**

**[Tension sparks people to flee into China](#)**

*SHAN - 24 August 2009*

Hseng Khio Fah

Latest reports from the Sino-Burma border say almost all of people in Laogai were reported to have been fleeing into China's Mansan Township after receiving a typed announcement in Chinese by the Kokang leaders this morning.

The statement issued by the Kokang leaders said "People need not be panicked by the current situation but they have to be prepared all the time," according to a copy sent to SHAN.

In the meantime, some local Burmese authorities of Laogai-based Regional Operations Command (ROC) and some Kokang leaders met at a hotel, which is located on the way to Si Aww village this morning, but no details have been disclosed. People therefore started fleeing despite the announcement, said a local resident who declined to be named.

"Not only people but also cars were almost gone. All shops are closed," he said, "Internet connection was also cut down since 2 pm (Burma Standard Time)."

All prisoners in Kokang jails were also released, according to him.

Tension between the two sides has been on the rise after local Burmese authorities recently entered Kokang's gun factory and seized all weapons.

On 23 August in the morning, more than 150 troops of the Burma Army from Hsenwi and Kutkhai were reported to have arrived in Laogai. Three days earlier, about 200 troops from Lashio were sent.

On 23 August, about 30 Kokang officials were also reported to have met in an area controlled by the United Wa State Army (UWSA), on the south bank of the Namting, according to local sources.

Right now, thousands of troops of the Burma Army have been taking positions in Kokang area. Security on the way from Kunlong and Laogai has also been tightened by the Burmese military. Rice and food supplies were also banned to be brought into Kokang areas, said another resident.

The tension between the Burma Army and the Kokang high since the Burma Army sent an armed force to investigate reports of Kokang force having an armed factory on 8 August.

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## [Army torches over 300 houses of ethnic Shan](#)

*Mizzima - 24 August 2009*

by Myo Gyi

Ruili – Over 300 houses were torched last month by local Burmese Army columns from townships in southern Shan State, the armed ethnic Shan group statement said.

A statement issued by the 'Restoration Council of Shan State' (RCSS) on August 21 said six Burmese Army battalions set over 300 houses on fire since July 27. RCSS is the political wing of the 'Shan State Army' (South) – SSA-S.

"We want the international community, especially ASEAN and UN human rights organizations to know about the human rights violations in Burma. This statement urges and reminds the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military clique to stop its human rights violations committed on both Shan people and the entire Burmese people," the SSA-S spokesman Sai Lao Sai told Mizzima. SSA-S has been waging war against the junta for the right to self-determination.

Following clashes between the junta's army and SSA-S in central Shan State last month, the Burmese Army destroyed the villages for their alleged role in supporting Shan rebels by setting their houses on fire in keeping with its four-cuts policy, which includes cutting off communication channels between the villagers and the rebel army.

Over 40 villages, which were forcibly relocated, are from Meng Neng, Kehsi, Meng Kai, Leikha, Panlong, Nam Pan, Mone and Kun Hein in southern Shan State. Villagers from these villages now have to roam and hide in the dense forests, spokesman Sai Lao Sai said.

About 42 houses were burnt down in Tatmauk and Wan Ho Lone villages in Leikha Township by army columns led by Maj. Kyaw Thu Hla and Maj. Zaw Myo from IB 12 under the command of LIB 88, the local villagers said.

In a separate video report sent by Mizzima undercover reporters, 154 houses could be seen torched on July 29 in Hokhe village, Meng Kai Township. It left 641 people homeless.

The villagers fled without being able to take any belongings. Among the losses were a small rice mill, six motorcycles, one hand tractor with a trailer and 50 oxen pulled carts.

The homeless people had to take refuge at the monasteries in nearby villages or stay with their relatives.

"They could not bring anything with them except some pots and some clothes. All the paddy was burnt down along with their houses," an undercover Mizzima reporter, who watched the carnage, said in his report from Burma.

Sai Lao Sai said that they had already compiled the human right violations report with facts and figures committed in Shan State from 1996 to 2008. "In their four-cuts campaign, the junta systematically commits human rights violations against the Shan people. This had forced nearly 1,000 villages to be relocated. Nearly 2 million ethnic Shan people are homeless and displaced.

At least 718 women were sexually assaulted and 12 women were killed in sexual violence in Shan State from 1996 to 2005, the RCSS statement said.

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## [Aung San Suu Kyi worse off this time in detention: lawyer](#)

*Mizzima - 24 August 2009*

by Phanida

Chiang Mai – Detained Burmese democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's situation under house arrest this time around is worse than her earlier term, her lawyer Nyan Win said.

The Burmese opposition leader was escorted back to her lakeside house on August 11, after her three-year prison with hard labour was commuted to 18 months.

"But since her return, the situation under which she is detained seems to be far more complicated and is worse than her earlier house arrest term," said Nyan Win, who is also the spokesperson for her party – the National League for Democracy.

He said, the eight-point condition imposed on her by the regime is amorphous and has created far more confusion.

"We don't know if she can accept guests or whether the guests have to first seek permission. Even we, her lawyers, are not sure of the implications of the eight-point condition," Nyan Win said.

Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence was commuted from three years with hard labour by an executive order from the junta supremo Snr Gen Than Shwe, which was read out in the court on August 11. The order also imposed eight conditions that she had to abide by.

Than Shwe's order, however, said she could be released if she is found serving her suspended sentence without violating the conditions.

The eight-point condition includes living in her lakeside house, freedom to stroll in the compound of her house, receiving medical treatment, receiving guests with prior permission from the authorities, allowed to watch Myanmar Television (MRTV), allowed to read books and journals and newspapers published after censorship and allowed to write to authorities if she wanted to do anything and seeking the permission of the concerned authorities before doing anything.

Nyan Win said the conditions are confusing and unclear. But he said, these points clearly indicate that the government wants Aung San Suu Kyi to steer clear of politics.

On August 11, the pro-democracy leader was visited by a physician sent by the government for a health check up, Nyan Win said.

"I don't know if the doctor had examined her [Aung San Suu Kyi], but what she told us is that she had requested the authorities to send her family doctor Dr. Tin Myo Win," Nyan Win said.

Following her return to her lakeside home, authorities removed two other workers living inside the compound of her house and only allowed her two party housemates – Khin Khin Win and Win Ma Ma – to stay with her.

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### **[Suu Kyi Asks for Return of Family Doctor](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 24 August 2009*

By Wai Moe

Burma's pro-democracy leader is seeking to have her regular physician, Tin Myo Win, reinstated as her primary doctor, following her return to her home after being sentenced to 18-months of house arrest.

Nyan Win, one of Suu Kyi's lawyer, told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday that since she returned home on August 11, the authorities sent another doctor to check on her health.

"She told officials that she wanted her family physician, Dr Tin Myo Win, to take care of her health," Nyan Win said. "So far, I don't think Dr Tin Myo Win has been able to visit her."

Tin Myo Win was a leading pro-democracy activist during the 1988 uprising that toppled the 26-year rule of the late dictator Ne Win.

After the military coup in September 1988, Tin Myo Win became a member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). In the following year, he was jailed.

He was the only regular visitor to see Suu Kyi during 2003-09, when he performed monthly check ups.

His regular visits were suspended when he was arrested and questioned after the American intruder John Yettaw entered Suu Kyi's lakeside house in Rangoon in early May.

Nyan Win said Suu Kyi's lawyers have asked the authorities to allow a meeting with their client to talk about an appeal of her conviction.

Last week, Suu Kyi asked clarification from authorities about one of eight conditions of her house arrest concerning visitors.

Suu Kyi was sentenced to 3-year imprisonment for violating the terms of her house arrest. Yettaw received a 7-year sentence. Her sentence was reduced to 18-months under house arrest.

Yettaw was granted amnesty after US Sen Jim Webb met with Snr-Gen Than Shwe.

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**'Evidence lacking' of Burma's nuke plans**

*Sydney Morning Herald – 24 August 2009*

Information leaking out of Burma raises suspicions of a clandestine nuclear program in cahoots with North Korea but there's no solid evidence, a new study says.

The paper, released by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) says any suggestion of a secret weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program conducted by a rogue state like Burma must be cause for serious concern.

The author, Griffith University research fellow Andrew Selth, said no one could underestimate the lengths to which Burma's military leaders would go to stay in power and to protect the country from perceived external threats.

"Some of the information that has leaked out of Burma appears credible, and in recent years other snippets of information have emerged which, taken together, must raise suspicions," he said.

Relations between Burma and North Korea, which both achieved independence in 1948, have been traditionally patchy but warmed in 1988 when Burma was ostracised by the west after the abortive 1988 pro-democracy uprising.

Mr Selth said reliable information was scarce but it seemed that Burma had purchased weapons and munitions from North Korea. Periodic visits of North Korean freighters to Rangoon have prompted speculation that Burma has acquired more advanced weaponry, such as SCUD-type missiles.

Media reports last month claimed Burma had embarked on a secret nuclear weapons program, aided by North Korea which has long conducted a clandestine nuclear weapons program, testing devices in 2006 and 2009.

Mr Selth said the US had steadfastly refused to accuse Burma of a secret WMD program, probably because it did not feel there was sufficient reliable evidence to mount a public case.

"Understandably, foreign officials looking at this issue are being very cautious. No one wants a repetition of the mistakes which preceded the 2003 Iraq War, either in underestimating a country's capabilities, or by giving too much credibility to a few untested intelligence sources," he said.

Mr Selth said the challenge was to determine if Burma had such a program and if so, to do something about it.

He said Burma's regime did not seem to fear international criticism or the threat of increased sanctions.

"The exposure of a WMD program would probably see Burma expelled from ASEAN," he said.

"Even if that were to occur, however, the generals seem prepared to see Burma return to its pre-1988 isolation and poverty, if that was the price they had to pay to remain masters of the country's and their own destiny."

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**Japan urges Myanmar junta to release Suu Kyi soon**

*AFP / Asia One – 25 August 2009*

TOKYO, Japan - Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, in talks Tuesday with a minister from Myanmar, urged the country's ruling junta to release pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi as soon as possible.

Tokyo "strongly expects the swift release of Aung San Suu Kyi... and that she will be able to participate in (Myanmar's) democratic process," Nakasone told Agriculture Minister Htay Oo, according to a statement.

Htay responded that the military regime "will consider her early release if she leads a sincere life," according to Japan's foreign ministry statement.

Earlier this month a prison court in Yangon convicted the Nobel laureate of breaching security laws and the regime returned her to house arrest for the next 18 months, drawing international condemnation.

The military has ruled Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, since 1962, launching bloody crackdowns on pro-democracy protests in 1988 and 2007 and jailing dozens of the junta's opponents over the past year.

Myanmar's generals have vowed to hold elections some time in 2010, the first national vote since 1990, when they refused to recognise an overwhelming victory by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

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[Cementing Japanese-Burmese relationship](#)

*Mizzima - 24 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi – The Burmese Agriculture and Irrigation Minister Maj-Gen Htay Oo's visit to Japan is yet another sign of the cosy relationship that Japan maintains with Burmese military generals, observers said.

Htay Oo, who is also secretary of the pro-junta civilian organization – the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) – is leading a team of delegates to Japan reportedly to explore possible cooperation with Burma on agriculture and irrigation sectors.

"But that is just a pretext. It's an all-expenses-paid trip. I think the visit is the Japanese government's way of telling the junta that Japan very much supports the regime and its "roadmap to democracy" including the 2010 elections," Yuki Akimoto, a Japanese researcher on Burma, said.

Akimoto also said, the visit could be the Japanese government's act to "soften the blow" of its statement that expressed "deep disappointment" over the verdict against Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi by the ruling junta.

"At the same time, Japan has always maintained that it has a special channel of communication with the junta, and it does not want to lose that channel by appearing to be aligned with other countries that issued critical statements about the verdict," she added.

Similarly, Dr. Min Nyo, in-charge of Burma Office in Tokyo said while the visit does not have much significance, it indicates the cosiness in the relationship between Japan and the Burmese junta.

"I don't think they [Htay Oo and team] can even meet important people here, as every politician is busy campaigning for the elections. But this trip is definitely a part of the two countries bilateral relationship," Dr. Min Nyo said.

Japan, which is Burma's largest humanitarian donor, has maintained a good rapport with the Burmese generals and reportedly trained at least five officers in electoral mores as a preparation for the 2010 elections.

Despite its friendly foreign policy vis a vis Burma, Japan, however, joined the international outcry over the sentencing of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi by the ruling generals.

"Before the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi, Japan refrained from criticising the Burmese junta but following the verdict, I think they were not at all happy," he added.

Dr. Min Nyo played down the significance of the visit, though it is the first highest Burmese official to visit Japan in four years.

He said, with the elections on, it would be extremely difficult for Japanese ministers both ruling or the opposition parties to entertain their Burmese friends.

However, Akimoto believes that it could be a trip in which the Burmese are trying to persuade the new Japanese government not to change their current policy on Burma.

"The government of Japan [by facilitating the visit] may be hoping that Htay Oo will convince the MPs that it is not necessary to change Japan's policy towards Burma," Akimoto said.

The Japanese opposition party – Democratic Party of Japan – is speculated to win the current elections and is expected to form the government in the next term.

Meanwhile, a group of Burmese activists in Tokyo held demonstrations in front of the Japanese Foreign Ministry protesting against Htay Oo's visit.

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### [Activists protest Htay Oo's secret visit to Japan](#)

*Mizzima - 24 August 2009*

by Phoe Zaw

Chiang Mai – Burmese activists on Monday held a protest rally against the secret visit to Japan by Htay Oo, Secretary of the pro-junta civilian organization – the Union Solidarity and Development Association - outside the hotel where he is staying.

The demonstrators hoisted the flag of the 'fighting peacock', a symbol representing the spirit of revolution in front of "The New Otani" hotel in Tokyo, where Htay Oo is putting up.

The flag fluttered along with that of China, Japan, Burma and Thai flags for a while before it was removed by security personnel.

"The security personnel didn't notice it because we went and hoisted it at 5 am. They noticed it at 10 am and pulled it down. But we did it. Now they are treating the case seriously," a demonstrator told Mizzima.

"The action was meant to send a message to the junta, to embarrass it and to humiliate its political status. It is a warning against the regime's human rights violations," he added.

Maj-Gen Htay Oo, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, who arrived in Japan on August 20, has kept his visit low profile. However, Mizzima reported on his trip before his departure from Rangoon.

In another incident, at least 80 Burmese pro-democracy activists held demonstrations on Monday in front of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, protesting against welcoming members of the junta and the leader of the USDA, which was founded by the military regime.

The demonstrators also called for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

The USDA, a civilian organization, which was founded basically to help the people, has become infamous among the Burmese people as members of the organization are used by the ruling regime to suppress dissidents and political opponents.

USDA members were allegedly behind the brutal attack on the motorcade of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi at Debayin town in central Burma, while she was on a political tour in May 2003.

During the September monk-led protests, the USDA members were used by the junta to crackdown on demonstrating crowds.

Burma's military supremo Senior General Than Shwe is the patron of the USDA, which is supposed to play a leading political role in the forthcoming 2010 general elections.

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### [Thai citizenship to grant stateless near Burma border](#)

*Mizzima - 25 August 2009*

by Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai - Citizenship will be granted by Thailand to displaced Thai villagers, who were in Burma, during demarcation by the British a hundred years ago.

Surapong Kongchantuek of the Committee to amend the Thailand Citizenship Act told Mizzima that “the committee will finalize the law that would grant citizenship to Thai villagers near Thailand and the southern Burma border, who became stateless during demarcation.”

The Act formulated would provide an opportunity for the stateless group near the Thailand–Cambodia border for more than 4,000 people that share the same problem.

The 20,000 or so villagers live in Thailand’s Ranong and Prachoub Kirikhan and Chumporn provinces, bordering southern Burma. They are descendants of ethnic Thais who found themselves marooned in Burma by a British colonial demarcation package in 1868. Burma’s rulers would have nothing to do with them. They also face discrimination by the Burmese government.

According to the group some had to contend with land confiscation by the Burmese military without any compensation and some were forced to work as porters for the army.

Gradually whole communities moved from Tavoy and Taninsari south of Burma to neighbouring Siam, now Thailand. But Siam also shunned them, and subsequent Thai governments refused to recognize them as Thai citizens. The stateless status has caused them to lose their rights to access education, medical and other facilities. In addition they also face arrest because they have no ID cards.

Pakawin Saengkong, the representative of the group, who lives in Ranong Province, said that the process of granting citizenship has progressed. He added that they had fought for their rights for nearly a decade together with rights groups and academics.

“Currently, the registered members of the group are in the process of being verified along with the family. The committee consists of representatives from the group and Thai authorities. About 3,800 have been verified as a first step. The group is expected to seek cabinet approval by the end of this year or early 2010,” he said.

In October 2006, about 500 of the group travelled to Bangkok and submitted a letter addressed to the British Embassy in Bangkok, pleading for support in their efforts to get Thai citizenship, which they said resulted from the 19th century British colonial carve-up of a border region of Burma and Siam making them stateless.

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### **[KNU Struggles to Acquire Arms](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 24 August 2009*

By Saw Yan Naing

Despite being a major player in one of the longest-running civil wars in the world, the guerilla soldiers of the Karen National Union (KNU) are currently finding it difficult to acquire weapons of any description for their armed struggle against the Burmese military regime.

A commander of KNU’s military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), who asked to remain anonymous, said he is ready to buy weapons and has enough money to purchase what he needs, but he cannot find a broker who will sell to him.

“We have enough money,” he said. “We are in the market to buy dozens of assault rifles, preferable AK-47s, but it is proving hard to get them.

“We are careful with our old weapons and maintain them very well, so we can use them for a long time,” he said.

The KNLA produces some explosives, especially landmines; however, it is commonly believed that the Karen rebels do not have the capacity to produce high-grade weaponry, such as assault rifles, RPGs or mortars.

The KNLA commander said that the insurgents are able to pay for arms from the income they generate from local businesses, taxation and border trade with Thailand, including logging and the sale of gold and zinc.

He noted that the supply of arms has decreased greatly since the civil war ended in Cambodia and since the KNLA lost its base of Thai support.

*The Times* magazine in London reported in March that the KNU leadership was losing the support of the Thai government which it had previously been able to rely on for a supply of weapons.

Earlier this year, all KNLA commanders were asked to vacate Thai soil and return to areas under their control.

Founded in 1947, the KNU is the oldest rebel force in Burma and has been fighting for self-determination, autonomy and equality ever since the Burmese central government declared independence from Britain colonial rule in 1948.

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### [Rangoon factory fire kills three](#)

*DVB – 24 August 2009*

Three people have died after a fire broke out last week in an alcohol factory in Rangoon, causing nearly \$US7 million worth of damage.

The cause of the fire, which broke out on 22 August in a distillery belonging to the International Beverages Trading Co. Ltd in Rangoon's satellite district of Hlegu, is unknown.

According to a company official, the fire, fueled by highly inflammable materials used for distilling liquor, spread first to other parts in the factory compounds and it took some 30 fire trucks about six hours to completely suppress it.

"Some people speculate that it started from a boiler room where a lot of the materials stored there are highly inflammable," said the official, adding that "the whole factory was completely destroyed".

An official on duty at Hlegu police station said three people were killed in the incident while one was missing. Six people were sent to hospital with burn injuries. One fire truck that arrived at the scene also caught on fire, he said.

The IBTC's produces Grand Royal Whisky, one of the most successful brands in Burma.

The company's managing director, Aung Moe Kyaw, is the founder and owner of Ukthar United Football Club, representing Bago division in the country's Myanmar National League Football competition.

*Reporting by Min Lwin*

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### [Irrawaddy hydropower project to displace many Kachin villagers](#)

*Kachin News Group - 24 August 2009*

The Burmese military junta plans to shift ethnic Kachin villages around the hydropower project area in the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy River (also called Mali Hka River in Kachin) in Burma's northern Kachin State, said local sources.

Over 60 Kachin villages, around the hydropower project site near the confluence of Mali Hka River and N'mai Hka River also called Mali-N'mai Zup in Kachin and Myitsone in Burmese, 27 miles north of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, are on the list of villages to be moved by the junta, said a local watchdog group.

On August 5, officials of Myitkyina Town Administrative Office (Ma-Ya-Ka) including officials of multi-government departments in the town held a meeting with villagers of Chyinghkrang in the zone to be cleared, 17 miles north of Myitkyina. The villagers were officially told to shift by the Ma-Ya-Ka officials, said villagers.

Simultaneously, commander Maj-Gen Soe Win, of the Myitkyina-based Northern Regional command (Ma-Pa-Kha) met the same villagers next day. The villagers were told by the commander that they would have to move, added villagers.

The commander told the villagers by demonstrating with a bulldozer on the hill near the village that "You Kachins have lived on the mountain forever but you don't know about terrace cultivation. You don't need to dwell in the valley," villagers of Chyinghkrang quoted him as saying.

During the two-day meeting, some villagers attended without wearing clothes on the upper part of the body to show their displeasure regarding the plans of moving the villages, said participants.

Salang Tsa Ji, general secretary of Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG), based on the Sino-Burma border told KNG today, the junta has sanctioned 35 miles of land around the hydropower project site to the Burma-Asia World Company which has started inspection with the Chinese government's China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) since 2006.

The land includes about 2,000 acres of rubber plantation of Salang Wadu Sin Wa and over 300 acres of rubber plantation of Salang Yup Zau Hkawng, the owner of the Jadeland Myanmar Company, added KDNG general secretary Tsa Ji.

Local eyewitnesses said, the Asia World Company has been mining gold in Loiyang Bum Mountain, which is situated between Mali Hka River and N'Mai Hka River, near the confluence since last year.

On June 16 at Hebei Hall of the Great Hall of the People in China's capital Beijing, Burmese Ambassador to China U Thein Lwin and CPI president Mr. Lu Qizhou signed an agreement to implement hydropower projects in Mali Hka River, N'Mai Hka River and the Irrawaddy River confluence in Kachin State, according to the junta-run newspaper the New Light of Myanmar dated on June 21, 2009.

Following the agreement, the junta's No. 2 in the military hierarchy Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye visited the Irrawaddy River confluence on July 19, said local residents.

Soon after Snr-Gen Maung Aye's visit to the hydropower project site, each family in the villages around the project site were forcibly made to sign on a special form regarding displacement. The form was provided by the Asia World Company by the firm's personnel accompanied with policemen and government land-survey officers, said villagers of Tang Hpre at the confluence.

A villager of Tang Hpre said they had to fill up the form and give the family members' list along with their occupations, house status, number of fruit trees in the house compounds and the size of family-owned land and plantation.

The Kachin villagers around the hydropower project site are yet to be instructed to move to new areas. They have not been offered any compensation for their loss by either Asia World Company or the junta, said villagers in the zone.

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**[Old currency notes can cause infection: Doctors](#)**

*Mizzima News - 24 August 2009*

Chiang Mai – Old and worn out currency notes in circulation in Burma can cause serious health hazards through infection, doctors said.

The doctors said bacteria, viruses and protozoa besides many kinds of bacteria, which can cause itching, can be found on the torn and worn out currency notes.

"Handling torn and old currency notes can lead to respiratory infectious diseases, skin diseases such as ring worms and sweat fungi. So it is dangerous," Dr. Thiha Maung, Director of the 'National Health and Education Committee', an organization in exile, said.

He advises people to wash their hands and take care not to inhale the gas emanating from torn and old currency notes.

In former capital Rangoon too, people have no choice but use worn out notes.

The old currency notes may not cause as much harm to healthy young people and the middle aged but it can affect the health of babies, the elderly and pregnant women. So the vulnerable sections need to take care while handling old notes.

"It's better to wear surgical masks when counting such notes and then wash your hands," a doctor from Asia Tawwin Hospital in Sanchaung Township in Rangoon said.

Beginning last month, torn and old currency notes can be exchanged with new ones at the Myanmar Central Bank, Currency Department Counter on the corner of Strand Road and Bo Sun Pet Road and branches of the Myanmar Economic Bank.

But the number of torn notes, which can be exchanged with new ones, is limited to only 10 pieces a head. People want the government to raise the limit, it is learnt.

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### **Opinion / Analysis**

#### **[Punishment for a dream – the price of Burmese conscience](#)**

*Mizzima - 25 August 2009*

by Nay Tin Myint

News - William Harvard wrote: "The greatest glory of a free-born people is to transmit that freedom to their children." This is the dream that I had for Burma in 1988, and I still have the same dream today. As a university student in 1988, I never imagined that I would spend the next fifteen years of my life in Burma's notorious prisons for daring to hope for a better future.

It all began on a beautiful spring day, March 13, 1988, when I was a 21-year-old Rangoon University Zoology student in my senior year. Some Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) soldiers shot and killed an engineering student at the campus. Adding insult to injury, afterward the army denied any wrongdoing and ignored the students' request for an investigation, eventually leading the students to strike.

During the ensuing crackdown, armed government soldiers savagely attacked unarmed student demonstrators, stole their possessions and gang-raped hooded female students in custody. According to eyewitnesses, armed soldiers also threw students into Inya Lake and ponds, watching many students drown. Since that day the "White Bridge" of Rangoon Arts and Science University, where soldiers attacked the unarmed innocent university students, was famously renamed the "Red Bridge" for the blood spilt during those tragic times.

By August 8, 1988, the momentum of the students' strike in the spring mushroomed into a nationwide uprising, with Burmese fed up with the government's negligence rising up against the abusive military junta. During these demonstrations, as one of the founders of the Tri-color Youth Organization, I gave a speech condemning the BSPP ruling party's mismanagement of the country. I demanded justice for the army's brutality and for the government to tell us what happened to the Rangoon University students who disappeared in March. The ruling junta immediately arrested me.

Right after the arrest, government agents began to torture me with the aim of breaking my silence. They forced me to kneel down and crawl over sharp stones with hands cuffed behind my back. Then they hung me from my handcuffs with my legs barely touching the ground while I continued to bleed all night. The tormentors placed a tin bucket on my head and beat it until blood ran down my ears. They offered me no food until the third day, when they brought foul and inedible food accompanied by a scant amount of water. They continued to beat me and torture me with electric shock to force me to disclose the names of my associates. I refused to give up their names, either to stop the torture or to gain my release. I was prepared to die alone under torture rather than to subject other innocent political activists to the same brutal punishments.

The courts in Burma were as lawless and fraudulent as other institutions under military rule. An army colonel, the head of a martial court, asked, "Do you think what you are doing is right?" I answered, "Yes, what I am doing is right and I have a lot of support from the people." I continued to point out the failures of the ruling party and promised that one day they would be defeated. He apparently already had orders to sentence me to three years of hard labor in prison, but after my reply, furious, he increased it to four

years. He then asked whether I would like to comment on anything else. I replied, "Yes," but they refused to let me speak and dragged me away.

Similar to other leading political prisoners, they kept me alone in an eight by twelve foot cell in notorious Insein Prison near Rangoon. Although according to the official prison handbook prisoners have the right to take a walk twice a day and to have fifteen bowls of water for bathing, prison authorities locked me in my cell in clear violation of those rights. No prison in Burma followed the guidelines written in the prison manual. When, at the close of 1989, I demanded my rights according to the prison manual, they transferred me to another notorious prison, Tharawaddy, in Pegu.

In Tharawaddy, prison officials made me work in the plantation area. When they assigned me to collect toilet bowls, a job for criminal inmates, I refused, since I was not a criminal. Although I knew that my prison term would be reduced if I obeyed their rules I refused to be humiliated or degraded. Instead, I firmly held on to my convictions and did not surrender my political conscience for personal comfort or freedom.

Next, in an attempt to break my spirit further, they shackled my ankles and placed a metal bar between my legs. They continued to beat and kick me, even while I was shackled. During an episode of solitary confinement my toilet bowl was not collected for a month, and insects began crawling out of it and climbing onto me while I slept with no mattress or blanket on a concrete floor. I was not allowed to own clothing other than what I wore. After one month, my skin became infected and I suffered from stomach pain, but the prison warden refused treatment or for my family to bring any medication. When I tried to report this violation they transferred me to yet another prison, Myingyan, in central Burma in early 1991.

While at Myingyan prison they again immediately placed me in solitary confinement. They supplied only a small amount of food and allowed a bath once every three weeks. I could not wash clothes because there was not enough water. Therefore, I stood on my clothes while bathing and squeezed the water out to wash again. As a punishment for cleverly bathing and washing clothes at the same time, they added a second metal bar to my shackle. They also forced me to crawl over sharp stones with the shackle on, while two prison guards savagely struck me. The shackle stayed on for more than one year, and when it finally came off I was suffering from partial paralysis. I was not able to walk because my shackled legs had been held in an awkward position for so long and from the weakness caused by a general lack of nutrition.

Eventually I saw a prison doctor, but I still received no treatment for my paralysis. Finally, after a long interval, my family was allowed to visit and was permitted to supply medication. Although I was paralyzed I kept exercising my legs and I continued to discipline my mind. I needed to live, not to die in prison. I was determined not to let the military junta triumph over me. To keep my mind focused and sharp, I continued to meditate according to Burmese Buddhism.

In 1992, at the end of my four-year prison term, I was released only because of my physical disability. I spent the next six months in a hospital for medical treatment and physical rehabilitation. During this time I was invited to a meeting between National League for Democracy leaders Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Tin and the United Nations special representative to Burma. I agreed to have my name submitted to the United Nations for the purpose of this meeting. Soon after, the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) regime announced that a National Convention would be held to draw up a new constitution for Burma.

Since the ploy to draw up a new constitution came only after the army lost the 1990 general election, it was clear the generals were just buying time instead of genuinely preparing for a transfer of power. A constitutional convention dominated by handpicked delegates from the military and close associates of the army clearly was not intended to be free or fair. Not surprisingly, the junta intensified the crackdown on political dissidents and elected politicians, even while pushing for the National Convention on the pretext of writing a new constitution.

As democracy activists including myself began organizing with university students for a nationwide movement against the unlawful National Convention, SLORC henchmen came and raided my home, confiscated my personal possessions and arrested me for the second time on charges of distributing protest pamphlets and meeting with United Nations representatives. At my trial in October 1993, the judge told me, "You have been a leader during the 1988 unrest, and now you are protesting against the

National Convention with the intention of demeaning the dignity of the country." Along with a false accusation of my conspiring with armed rebels, he sentenced me to twenty years in prison with hard labor.

After holding me in Insein Prison for a few months they again transferred me to Myingyan. Gradually it became clear to me that by sending political prisoners like me to Myingyan again and again, the ruling junta intended not only to torture and break our political will but also planned to systematically kill and eliminate all political opposition without leaving any trace of evidence behind. This plan was instituted with the same efficiency as the plan for ethnic cleansing in remote jungle villages hidden from the view of the international community.

With this understanding, I approached the Myingyan Prison entrance with great apprehension. Upon arrival, I was blindfolded and severely beaten with my hands cuffed behind my back. The beating continued even after I fell to the ground. They shackled my legs and ordered me put in solitary confinement for another seven years.

It all began again with no bath for three months, a small amount of stale food and insufficient drinking water. To make life even more miserable the guards inside continually harassed political prisoners. To prevent contact between political prisoners when one of us was in the aisle, all other political prisoners were forced to sit in an extremely awkward position called "ponzan" at the back of their cells. On one occasion a prison guard savagely knocked me down in the shower after accusing me of making eye contact with other political prisoners, forcing me to crawl back to my cell.

Routine and cold-blooded assaults on political prisoners were meant as part of the punishment. For instance, frequently after I had finished cleaning the floor of my cell with my only sarong, a prison guard would blow the dust back in, subsequently striking me for not properly cleaning my cell. Subsisting all the while on a meager diet of foul rations contaminated with stones and un-hulled paddy grains added misery to our anguished years inside the prison and, consequently, political prisoners in Burma often succumbed to deteriorating health behind bars. When family members brought even a small amount of salt to alleviate the misery, prison authorities often punished the prisoners with more beatings.

According to the official prison manual, family visitations were allowed for up to 15 minutes. However, political prisoners were allowed only three minutes with family members who had often traveled long distances. The ruling junta also created an atmosphere in which family members and friends were forced to put pressure on prisoners to give up politics altogether. The junta frequently imposed penalties on innocent family members in an attempt to break down the political prisoners' final defenses – forcing them to watch family members suffer by being forced to travel to remote prisons for visitations that tested strength beyond the endurance of even the most dedicated democrats.

I was not allowed to read any book from 1994 to 2000. When the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) came to visit in 2000, restrictions were slightly eased, with authorities allowing us more food and longer showers. After the ICRC chief representative came to meet me in prison and recorded my prison experiences, I was further allowed a few books for reading. I was also able to see a prison doctor and was allowed to do some physical exercise.

In 2001, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the SPDC's General Khin Nyunt reached an agreement to work together. During that time, military intelligence (MI) frequently paid me visits and asked myself and other political prisoners to sign a pledge to never again engage in any political activity, in exchange for our release. Those of us who refused remained locked up in prison.

In early 2005, I was sent to Mandalay prison in upper Burma, where they immediately put me in solitary confinement for another six months. When authorities transferred me back to Myingyan for another stint in violation of my rights, I decided to go on hunger strike. On the sixth day of my hunger strike I was offered some water but the guards subsequently broke the water pot. After four more days without water I became unconscious. The Director General of the Penitentiary Department from Rangoon heard about me, immediately paying me a visit. I was brought to the hospital where I vomited blood and passed out. I was sustained only by the belief that my tormenters "can control me physically, but they cannot control my mind. My mind does not belong to them. My mind belongs to me."

I was eventually released on July 6, 2005, after over 15 years of imprisonment and nearly seven years in solitary confinement. "RELEASED" was just a statement on paper. Inside Burma I was never really free, since government agents continued to follow and watch my every move. Nevertheless, my mind was still occupied with 1988 and democratic aspirations for our people.

The generals in Burma wanted the Burmese people and the world to see that the army had the power to take away our lives, our liberty and our happiness at any time they chose. They wanted everyone to see the scars, the pain and the deaths of those who dared resist their brutal domination.

But even after 15 years in their infernal prisons, the SPDC was not able to make me obey their authority. My vow to continue struggling for democracy remained unbroken and I never wavered from my commitment toward freedom for Burma.

Countless people in Burma have sacrificed their lives and all that they held dear in the name of freedom for their children. The generals in Naypyitaw must see that our leaders, Aung San Suu Kyi and others who are still in prison will never give up their dream for democracy or exchange their political conscience for a life of luxury under the military regime.

Our real leaders know that there would not be an India without Gandhi, a South Africa without Nelson Mandela and an Obama without Martin Luther King, Jr. They also believe that Burma will overcome its troubles one day. Only for now, they need our help to make their dreams come true.

*(Nay Tin Myint escaped from Burma to Thailand in 2007. He was granted political asylum in the United States in 2008 and is the Secretary of the National League for Democracy – Liberated Area, USA branch.)*

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**[Burma's fishery export downward trend continue](#)**

*Mizzima - 25 August 2009*

by Myo Thein

Rangoon – Despite Burma's fishery products being a good revenue earner in the export market, this year also it has taken a beating and failed to achieve the target.

The target for fishery product export sector in the 2009-10 fiscal year is USD 700 million. However, the actual export until over two weeks ago after the first quarter has touched just over 21 per cent of the total export target.

It is learnt that a total trade value of USD 147.922 million has been exported from 1 April 2009 to 15 August 2009. The trade value through normal trade has touched USD 93.862 million so far.

“Our trade volume in the export market is higher than last year but the trade value is lower as the prices are falling following the global financial meltdown. We have to negotiate with our buyers with great difficulty to reach an agreement in a buyer's market,” a cold storage owner said.

“The trade volume is higher than previous corresponding months. But the trade value is lower than last year so we cannot yet reach the export target,” a director level official from the Fishery Department said.

Fresh water fish export accounts for the lion's share in the fishery products export with about 26 per cent of the total trade volume. The trade value of such fresh water fish export through 'Normal Trade' (going through border exit ports officially) has reached USD 39.619 million of which the major export item is 'Nga Myit Chin' (variety of carp), it is learnt.

The deadly cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy Delta region leaving over 130,000 people dead and millions of people homeless. One of the consequences of the cyclone is decline in fishery product export.

Despite the export target for 2008-09 fiscal year being USD 850 million, the actual export touched only USD 483 million, which was 56 per cent of the target. This trade value was USD 78 million lower than the value of USD 561 million in 2007-08 fiscal year.

Fishery product export through border exit ports such as Myeik (Mergui) and Maungdaw during the four and-a-half months of this fiscal year starting from 1 April are USD 25.163 and 1.881 million respectively. But the export through the sole Sino-Burma border exit port is USD 16.411 million.

The river crab exporters expect more export this year than in the 2008-09 fiscal year. The river crab exporters earned USD 2 million more than in 2007-08 fiscal year. The exporters could do breeding work successfully in a mass production scale in major export items to the China market. The export value rose due to the success in breeding and culture of soft shell fresh water crab, the exporters said.

After exports declined due to the global financial crisis, the fishery department explored the new export market in EU in association with the Myanmar Federation of Fishery and invited experts from EU countries and tried to abide by the stringent EU regulation.

But the requirement of the EU regulations in the fishery market is too high. So many cold storages and jetties withdrew from inspection by EU experts.

The export market is more competitive as fishery products from India entered the Bangladesh market, which is the major trading partner of Burmese fishery exporters.

“Currently India has banned export of fishery products but they enter Bangladesh market through illegal channels as the two countries have a long and porous border. India cannot control all illegal trading. Moreover the traders can save tax by operating through these illegal channels. So our exporters cannot compete with them. We only get a low price,” an exporter said.

Fishery business is flourishing in India but it has currently banned official export of fish and fishery products for self-sufficiency in the domestic market.

Despite the growing export of fishery products, the demand has fallen currently thanks to the global crisis, decline of demand in high-value fishery products and falling prices. So it is very difficult to reach the export target, a member of the Myanmar Federation of Fishery Rangoon Division said.

According to official statistics, the export value of Burmese fishery products is just 12 per cent of the total export earning of the country. It is the fourth largest export earner after gas, beans and pulses, and forest products.

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**24/08/2009**

**News**

**[Yettaw Says Guards Let Him Enter Suu Kyi Compound](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 22 August 2009*

John Yettaw, the American man who made international headlines after he swam to the lakeside home of detained Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in May, said in an interview published on Friday that guards did nothing to prevent him from entering her compound.

“I don’t know why they [security guards] didn’t stop me,” Yettaw said in a telephone interview with Newsweek magazine. “The man with the AK-47 shook my hand and let me in.”

In his first public statement on the circumstances of his visit to Suu Kyi’s home since leaving Burma, Yettaw appeared to lend credence to suspicions that the incident was part of an effort by the Burmese junta to extend Suu Kyi’s detention, which was due to end just weeks after Yettaw’s sudden appearance on the scene.

Although Yettaw declined to explain why he decided to return to Suu Kyi’s home after an earlier intrusion last November, during which her live-in aides told him to leave, the Newsweek report cites a Western diplomatic source who said that he may have been lured back by agents posing as members of her political party.

The source, citing intelligence reports, said that around a week before Yettaw's second swim, two men claiming to be members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy allegedly approached him in the Thai border town of Mae Sot and told him that Suu Kyi was ready to meet him.

According to the source, the intelligence reports also showed that senior Burmese officials had been instructed to find a pretext to keep Suu Kyi incarcerated as her May 27 release date approached.

On August 11, she was found guilty of violating the terms of her house arrest for allowing Yettaw to stay at her home overnight. She was sentenced to a further 18 months under house arrest—long enough to prevent her participating in elections slated for next year.

Despite evidence to suggest that the junta may have had a hand in orchestrating the incident, Yettaw dismissed suggestions that he was working on behalf of the regime or anybody else. "I've been accused of being CIA, of being on the books of the junta. The idea is just ridiculous," he told *Newsweek*.

"I want to free Myanmar [Burma]. I want to stop the suffering there. I am anti-junta. I will never be at peace, emotionally or psychologically, until that woman is free, until that nation is free," he said.

Yettaw was released by Burmese authorities and left Burma on August 16 after US Senator Jim Webb negotiated with the junta for his release during a high-profile visit.

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**'Than Shwe Should Be the First to Blink': Diplomat**

*Irrawaddy* - 22 August 2009

As Burma's state-run media continues to call on Washington to lift sanctions following the highly publicized visit of pro-engagement US Senator Jim Webb, a Western diplomat close to US officials says it is now up to the Burmese regime to make the next move.

"I don't think the US will be the first to blink. [Junta leader Snr-Gen] Than Shwe should be the one to blink now," said the Bangkok-based diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He said that Than Shwe needs to demonstrate that he is genuinely interested in political dialogue by releasing Burma's 2,100 political prisoners and allowing international monitors to ensure that next year's election is credible.

So far, however, the regime in Burma hasn't done anything to suggest that it wants to make political progress in the country, he said.

"Tangible and meaningful actions are needed, not just words," he told *The Irrawaddy*.

During his visit to Burma last weekend, Webb—who is also the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs—met with both Than Shwe and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

He also secured the release of American John William Yettaw, who had just been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for swimming to Suu Kyi's lakeside home.

Suu Kyi, who had been put on trial for allowing Yettaw to stay overnight to recover from muscle cramps, received a three-year prison sentence that was immediately reduced to 18 months under house arrest.

"If they are serious about the new relationship with the US, they should commute Suu Kyi's sentence completely and free her immediately," said the Western diplomat.

After Webb's visit, dissidents both inside and outside of Burma began to speculate about whether the US was going to shift its policy. However, given the ongoing political stalemate, Washington is not likely to make any major changes in its Burma policy, the diplomat said.

Indeed, the Obama administration has been careful to reiterate its position that encouraging national reconciliation in Burma, and not engagement with the regime, remains its top priority.

"We continue to look for signs that the Burmese government is prepared to embark on a meaningful dialogue with Aung Sun Suu Kyi, along with the rest of the democratic opposition," the Assistant

Secretary of State for Public Affairs, P J Crowley, told reporters at a daily State Department press briefing shortly after Webb's visit.

In a statement thanking the regime for Yettaw's release, the White House called on the junta to go further and free all political prisoners. "We urge the Burmese leadership in this spirit to release all the political prisoners it is holding in detention or in house arrest, including Aung San Suu Kyi," the statement said.

It seems unlikely, then, that Washington will relax its sanctions on the Burmese junta as long as it continues to persecute its political opponents.

"How can the US lift its sanctions without action in Burma?" asked the Western diplomat, adding that Than Shwe has "done nothing to loosen his grip."

During his meeting with Webb, Than Shwe reportedly told the senator that he could not allow UN chief Ban Ki-moon to meet Suu Kyi during his visit to Burma in June because she was on trial at the time. However, it is widely believed that his determination to isolate the pro-democracy leader stems from his strong personal animosity toward her.

Webb was the first senior US official to meet with Suu Kyi in more than a decade. In 1994, Congressman Bill Richardson spoke with the Nobel Peace Prize laureate for five hours at her house, accompanied by a reporter from *The New York Times*.

By contrast, Webb's meeting with Suu Kyi took place at a government guest house and lasted less than one hour.

A Burmese source in Rangoon confirmed that the regime imposed a strict time limit on the meeting, effectively preventing Webb and Suu Kyi from discussing the issues of sanctions and engagement in any depth.

This may account for the confusion over what Suu Kyi said to Webb about her stance on engagement.

Although Webb said at a press conference following his trip to Burma that Suu Kyi seemed open to the idea of more "interaction" between the regime and the West, she actually said that there was a greater need for domestic dialogue, according to her lawyer.

Webb, who is known for his strong criticism of US sanctions on Burma, will brief US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on his visit when he returns to Washington.

During a recent visit to Southeast Asia, Clinton hinted that the Obama administration might be prepared to "open up doors for investment and for other exchanges that would help the people of Burma," but made this conditional on Suu Kyi's release.

Since then, the regime has given no indication that it is interested in meeting this precondition for engagement, meaning that for the time being, at least, efforts to improve relations between Washington and Naypyidaw are at a standstill.

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**[US monitoring Myanmar on N.Korea sanctions: envoy](#)**

*AFP – 22 August 2009*

BANGKOK — A top US diplomat said Friday Washington was monitoring Myanmar's stated commitment to enforcing UN sanctions on North Korea, after reports of possible nuclear cooperation between the Asian nations.

Last month US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hailed a pledge by military-ruled Myanmar to abide by a UN resolution on the sanctions, following a rare meeting between US and Myanmar officials at an Asian summit.

But reports in recent weeks have said that Pyongyang is helping Myanmar to build a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction plant, and to build an atomic bomb within five years, causing regional concerns.

"The Burmese government did make a commitment during the course of the ARF (Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum) meetings in Phuket to implement the resolution," Ambassador Philip Goldberg, the US coordinator for the implementation of recent UN sanctions on Pyongyang, said in Bangkok.

"We hope and expect that that will be the case but it is something that will require further discussion," he told reporters. US officials refer to Myanmar by its former name, Burma.

Goldberg was in Bangkok as part of an Asian trip aimed at strengthening support for the UN Security Council resolution passed in July in response to North Korea's May 25 underground nuclear test and subsequent missile firings.

The expanded sanctions include tougher inspections of cargo suspected of containing banned missile and nuclear-related items, a tighter arms embargo and new targeted financial curbs to choke off revenue for Pyongyang's nuclear and missile sectors.

Goldberg said Myanmar also had an obligation to adhere to the sanctions resolution because it was a member of the United Nations.

"We will continue to verify that everybody has been abiding by that obligation," Goldberg said.

Suspicious about Myanmar and North Korea escalated in June after a US Navy destroyer began tracking a suspect North Korean ship reportedly heading for Myanmar. The ship eventually turned back to North Korea.

Goldberg also reiterated comments made in Singapore urging Southeast Asian financial institutions to remain vigilant in monitoring transactions that could boost North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missiles programmes.

He is later due to head to South Korea and Japan. He has already travelled to Malaysia, China, Russia and the United Nations to coordinate global efforts to implement the sanctions.

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[RI supports Myanmar's nuclear energy program](#)

*The Jakarta Post - 22 August 2009*

Indonesia will support Myanmar's nuclear energy program for civilian use, said a top official on Friday, amid controversy concerning the junta's poor human rights records and its nuclear weapon ambition.

Rezlan Ishar Jenie, Foreign Ministry's Director General for Multilateral Affairs, said Myanmar, as a member of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), had the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, regardless of how the country has enforced its human rights.

"Our concern about [Myanmar's] human rights records is separate from wishing to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes," he said.

"We oppose nuclear weapons but not nuclear energy for peaceful use. The most important thing is the control from the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]," said Rezlan during a memorial lecture and award presentation at the Indonesia's Institute of Science (LIPI).

The Memorial lecture to commemorate LIPI first chairman, Sarwono Prawirohadjo, was delivered by Dewi Fortuna Anwar, senior researcher of the institute and also member of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board member on Disarmament Matters (2008-2009).

Indonesia is a loud critic of Myanmar, which harshly suppressed the political dissent. The Myanmar military regime, who refused to acknowledge the 1990 landslide victory of main opposition party, has jailed thousands of political prisoners and dissenters, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar's court has recently handed out another 18 months of house arrest to Suu Kyi for violating her house arrest terms in a trial the global community called a "sham". Yangon has also recently drawn international concerns over reports from Australia that Myanmar will develop nuclear weapons with the help of North Korea.

Indian authorities have intercepted a North Korean ship over suspicion that it contained radioactive material for Myanmar. Myanmar has said they aimed to build a nuclear power plant for electricity but the Sydney Morning Herald reported recently that North Korea is helping Myanmar build a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction plan.

In response to the controversy of Myanmar's purpose of importing nuclear materials, Rezlan said: "Every member of NPT has the right to develop nuclear energy for civilian use under the control of IAEA."

He added the interception of shipment of nuclear materials from North Korea to Myanmar was conducted based on the decision of UN Security Council that ruled members to halt the transfer of all nuclear material to or from North Korea, and was not aimed at banning Yangon from developing nuclear energy.

"We have no problem if Myanmar wants to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purpose with the help of other countries," said Rezlan, nodding in agreement when asked whether Jakarta agreed with Myanmar getting help from China in developing its nuclear technology.

Dewi, who delivered the speech on disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, said although the reports over Myanmar's nuclear weapon strive had yet to be verified, it had sparked worries over the future of the region's nuclear-weapons-free-zone deal signed under the ASEAN Bangkok Treaty.

"Myanmar is allowed to develop nuclear technology for peaceful use. However it has to be noted that there is not much difference between nuclear technology for peaceful use and for warfare. Uranium material can be converted into nuclear weapon through enrichment. That's why the control over the use is very important," she said.

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### [Myanmar, S Korea strive for enhancing bilateral co-op in multi-sectors](#)

*Xinhua – 23 August 2009*

by Chen Meihua

YANGON -- Myanmar and South Korea have been striving for enhancing bilateral relations especially bilateral cooperation in a number of sectors such as economy, investment, education, tourism and culture.

According to the official statistics, Myanmar-South Korea bilateral trade amounted to 252 million U.S. dollars in the fiscal year of 2008-09 (April-March), significantly increasing from 108.2million dollars in 2007-08.

Of the total, Myanmar's export to Korea took 63.7 million dollars while its import from the East Asian country stood 188.48 million dollars.

South Korea has become the 8th largest trading partner of Myanmar which exported to Korea about 3,000 items of goods covering agricultural produces, marine and forest products, and garments, while it mainly imported from Korea steel, garment, electrical and electronic goods.

In a bid to boost trade with Myanmar, South Korea granted import duty free and quota free on 253 more Myanmar goods items for this year which include agricultural produces, marine and forestry products, textile and traditional handicraft products.

South Korea's duty exemption on the Myanmar commodities has brought the total number of goods items at HS 6 digit level originated from least-developed countries including Myanmar to 4,074.

In the first half of this year, with the order increasing by 30percent, Myanmar's garment export to South Korea rose with a proceeds of 14.4 million U.S. dollars, up 16.2 percent compared with the same period of last year.

In the investment sector, South Korea's investment in Myanmar reached 240 million U.S. dollars up to March this year since 1988, standing as the 10th largest foreign investor in the country according to the Union of Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI).

The East Asian country's investment in 37 projects accounted for 1.52 percent of Myanmar's total foreign investment of 15 billion dollars, the UMFCCI said.

Meanwhile, a South Korean leading private HC company is seeking new investment in Yadanar Theinki mining block in Myanmar's northern Shan state on a mutually-beneficial basis and a field survey has been underway since early this year.

Moreover, A total of seven Myanmar companies and 70 Korean companies have sought investment and trade worth of 31 million U.S. dollars in Myanmar following a sideline meeting of private entrepreneurs of both countries at the June commemorative summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Korea held in Jeju Island.

To encourage Myanmar workers to work in South Korea and solve domestic unemployment problem, under an agreement between the two countries' labor ministries, Myanmar has sent 389 workers in the first seven months of this year to work in the sectors of agriculture, marine, and industries under an employment permit system (EP system).

At the same time, with the sponsor of Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), dozens of government employees from various ministries are to be sent this year to pursue advanced technological expertise in the industry and IT fields under Korean government sponsorship.

So far, a total of 1,000 Myanmar state employees have been sent under KOICA sponsorship since 1991.

As part of the two countries' cooperation in the technological development in the irrigation sector, the KOICA is also building an irrigation-related laboratory center in country's second largest of Mandalay.

The KOICA has stationed in Myanmar since 1991 providing the technical expertise and equipment needed for social service organizations as well as training in related fields.

Dealing with the education sector, the South Korean government is offering more scholarships for Myanmar pre-university students to study Korean language in Korean university for three years and winning students could benefit from studying at the National Institute for International Education (NIED) in South Korea's capital city of Seoul.

In tourism sector, the KOICA has been cooperating with the Myanmar Ministry of Culture in implementing project of greening the ancient city of Bagan to attract more world travelers to the tourist site. The move would also affect prevention against forest depletion and preserving natural environment.

Furthermore, the two countries have also been cooperating in the sector of culture. Besides launching Korean film week, Korean TV and the KBS shot a documentary film -- Insight in Asia 2009 during last year and more documentary video on Myanmar's Theravada Buddhism titled "Road to Nibbana" will also be shot in the country's famous Inlay Water Village in northern Shan State.

In November last year, the KBS group had also come to Myanmar and video Myanmar's ancient city of Bagan where over 2,000 pagodas and monasteries lie.

In February this year, the Myanmar Ministry of Information and the Korea Broadcasting Institute (KBI) signed an agreement on shooting documentary film on Myanmar's Buddhism and natural scenery which will be broadcast in Korean TV channels such as KBS-1, KBS-2, MBC, and SBS.

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[Domestic journals can quote NLD spokesman](#)

*Mizzima - 21 August 2009*

by Nem Davies

New Delhi – Burma's Censor Board has relaxed its stringent rules and allowed two Rangoon based weekly journals to quote the spokesman of the main opposition party the 'National League for Democracy' (NLD).

The latest issues of 'The Voice' and '7 Days' could cover the news of Burmese democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, who is serving a suspended one and-a-half year prison sentence at her home by quoting party spokesman Nyan Win.

"Previously leave alone quoting him, we could not mention even his name in our publications. It is significant to see the censor board allowing us to cover news by quoting the NLD spokesman," an editor of a weekly journal told Mizzima.

The '7 Days' weekly journal in its latest issue carried an interview by her lawyer and party spokesman Nyan Win after he visited her house a day after the special court pronounced the verdict on her trial.

"I bought and gave two journal copies to her. We could give them to her now. She can also receive guests. So we talked with her today for about an hour, Suu Kyi's lawyer Nyan Win said," the journal reported.

Similarly 'The Voice' covered the same news with the headline 'Despite of arriving back at her home, ongoing house renovation allowed' by quoting Nyan Win.

The inside pages had news of the verdict, news of the renovation of her house, action taken against security personnel deployed at her residence for security lapses and Suu Kyi's release by 2011.

The junta allowed the journalists to visit the court and allowed them to cover the trial but did not allow it to be printed in their publications. One of the censored news, '75-minutes long court pronouncement of judgment' has been published in 'The Voice' now.

But journalists do not view this leniency as the beginning of a free press in Burma just because the Censor Board has allowed the journals to print news by quoting Suu Kyi's lawyer Nyan Win.

"Sometimes they permit some to be printed. And then they tighten the screw again. So we can't say this is the beginning of press freedom in our country. It's very difficult to comprehend the Censor Board," a reporter from Burma told Mizzima.

The junta has put the Burmese media on a leash and banned mention of the names of pro-democracy activists, politicians and their movements.

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**[Strategies of Dissent Evolving in Burma: Activists Find Political Breathing Room in Humanitarian Nonprofit Groups](#)**

*Washington Post - 24 August 2009*

RANGOON, Burma -- Call it the evolutionary school of revolution.

After years of brutally suppressed street protests, many Burmese have adopted a new strategy that they say takes advantage of small political openings to push for greater freedoms. They are distributing aid, teaching courses on civic engagement and quietly learning to govern.

"We are trying to mobilize people by changing their thought process," said an entrepreneur in the city of Mandalay who is setting up classes on leadership. He added half in jest, "Civil society is a guerrilla movement."

Government critics including many Burmese say opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's return to house arrest this month underscores the junta's resolve to keep her out of reach of the population ahead of parliamentary elections next year that many dismiss as a sham. But a growing number of educated, middle-class Burmese are pinning their hopes on what they call "community-based organizations," finding outlets for entrepreneurship and room to maneuver politically in a country with one of the world's most repressive governments.

At first light on a recent Sunday, a dozen doctors piled into two old vans, stopped for a hearty breakfast of fish stew and sticky rice, then headed out to dispatch free medicine and consult villagers an hour outside Rangoon. The group first came together two years ago to care for demonstrators beaten by security forces during monk-led protests. When Tropical Cyclone Nargis hit in May 2008, killing an estimated 140,000 people, the doctors joined countless Burmese in collecting emergency supplies for survivors while the junta rebuffed foreign aid dispatches.

Like many of those ad hoc groups, the doctors have since developed an informal nonprofit organization, meeting regularly and volunteering at an orphanage and in villages near Rangoon. The group's leader

secured funding from a foreign nonprofit agency and named his team "Volunteers for the Vulnerable," or V4V.

But to avoid having their activities labeled as activism, the leader negotiates weekly with the authorities for access to the villages under cover of an anodyne Burmese fixture -- the abbot of a local Buddhist monastery.

For their own safety, the V4V founder said, "not even all our members know the name of the group."

Successive military governments in Burma since 1962 have clamped down on civil society and forbade associations of more than five people. Burmese say they have come to see the activities of semi-illicit groups such as V4V as rare outlets for entrepreneurship and for maneuvering politically.

"There is still room to change at the small scale," said an AIDS activist, sipping juice in a teashop. "Many people say civil society is dead. But it never dies. Sometimes it takes different forms, under pretext of religion, under pretext of medicine."

A 32-year-old writer here said his father was a local township representative for Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, which won 1990 elections but was never allowed to take power. Suu Kyi has been confined to house arrest for 14 of the past 19 years, and the number of political detainees is estimated at about 2,000.

But the young writer sees a role for himself beyond the opposition party.

He said his life was transformed after he took a three-month course at a Rangoon nonprofit agency called Myanmar Egress, which runs classes for Burmese interested in development. Like many of the people interviewed for this story, he spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

He then quit his job at a business journal to freelance opinion columns under a pseudonym and has co-founded a nonprofit with other Egress alumni.

"I came to realize my daily life is being involved in politics, in the political economy," he said, a resolve triggered by the scenes of poverty he witnessed along his daily commute on a creaking, overcrowded bus through Rangoon. "My belief is that without political knowledge . . . people will just go around town and get shot. I am doing what I can as an educator and a journalist."

### **Civic Duties**

Many people in Rangoon expressed feeling a similar sense of duty as they have watched their military rulers decimate the education system and deepen poverty through mismanagement of the economy. In the past 50 years, Burma has fallen from among the richest countries in Asia to the bottom of regional development rankings.

"In Burma, the middle class is very thin," said a 38-year-old graphic designer who in 2004 helped found an undercover nonprofit group that recruits potential political leaders. "We need to grow, strengthen that. Most democratic countries have a broader middle class. It is the only way to go forward."

Such groups have also allowed urbanites to network in ways previously inconceivable.

### **Humanitarian and Political**

On a recent afternoon, students crowded into a musty hotel conference room for a three-hour lecture on civil society sponsored by Myanmar Egress.

Ten minutes before the class was to begin, barely a seat was vacant and still the students poured in, laughing, chatting or rifling through notes that curled at the edges in the damp heat. "They have a thirst for knowledge. They want to know. . . . They don't even take a break," said a 28-year-old Egress teacher, observing the 105 young adults from the back of the room. "This place is quite free, the only place we can talk about these things."

Some members of the groups reject any political motive in their activities, describing them as purely humanitarian. But others say that in Burma the two are intrinsically linked.

"At every meeting of nonprofits, the solution is always, in the end, political," said a Rangoon scholar who works with a foreign development organization.

The scholar is associated with a loose circle of influential academics, writers, negotiators between the junta and restive ethnic minorities, and businessmen at home and abroad who share a goal of finding a way through the political impasse.

"It's not that we oppose the NLD, but at least we take advantage of the opening space. . . . The NLD can't set a course. We have to find an alternative," said the scholar, who served 15 years in prison for writing about human rights.

But Suu Kyi's trial has made him less sanguine about prospects for change in next year's elections, the country's first since 1990. Going forward, he said, the key is "to prime the population for the transition."

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**Mutual farming system results in loss of land for farmers**

*Mizzima - 20 August 2009*

by Phanida

Chiang Mai – The mutual farming system in collaboration with private companies has been a disaster for over 1,600 farmers from Dagon Seikkan Township in Rangoon Division, with farmers losing their lands, according to the NLD Peasant Affairs Committee.

The new mutual farming system took off in over 30,000 acres of farmlands in a special agricultural zone last year. But this year, the private companies paid a pittance of only Kyat 20,000 per acre instead of the market price of Kyat 400,000 to 500,000 and then seized farmers' lands.

"The farmlands were taken over by paying only Kyat 20,000 per acre and farmers are not allowed to till the land. Moreover farmers were ordered to demolish the farmhouses on the lands. The farmers are seething in anger," the NLD Peasant Affairs Committee Secretary Kyaw Myint told Mizzima.

Over 10 private companies including Htoo, Dagon International, Pinle Koe Thwe, Good Brother, Ahmyother Totetyay, Shwe Nagar Min, Aden Co. worked the farmlands along with the farmers on a mutual farming system by sharing farm produce.

Under the agreement, the farmers, who own the lands, were to get 40 per cent of the profit and get extra money as wages if they worked on their own farmland as farmhands.

The private companies were to provide farming equipments and implements and all production costs. They firms were to get 60 per cent of the profit for investing.

But the private companies seem to have gone back on their commitment and are now paying at a rate, which is much below the market price. To make matters worse the companies are not letting the farmers work in their paddy fields as farmhands. Adding insult to injury they are being forced to demolish their farmhouses. A farmer from Thayetpin Chaung village has lodged a complaint at the NLD office by providing documentary evidence.

An official of one of the private companies working with farmers said that they could not make profits in keeping with the agreement but some companies did make some profit.

"Initially, we agreed. But later it didn't work out. Some companies paid Kyat 20,000. Those who could not work in their land were content with what they got. Some worked in their land and they got something but not in accordance with the agreement reached," he told Mizzima.

"As for the discontent among farmers, some people who bought the land when prices were low would say they are losing their farmlands. It depends on the private companies too. It's impossible to please everybody in every business," he added.

Over 8,800 acres of paddy fields owned by over 1,600 farmers have a dispute regarding profit sharing and ownership in the agriculture special zone in Dagon Seikkan Township. The villages where the dispute exists are Thayetpinchaung, Nyaungbin, Kyisu, Laydaungkan and Thonegwa, the NLD Peasant Affairs Committee Secretary said.

It is learnt that some farmers who received refund for their paddy fields have already lodged complaints with the Ministry of Agriculture and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

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**Mon splinter group demands money from farmers**

*IMNA - 21 August 2009*

Kon Hadae

A Mon splinter group has been asking for money from farmers in Mudon township.

On August 16th members of the Mon Peace and Defense Front (MPDF) gave out letters to farmers asking them to give money to the MPDF, said a local source.

The general Nai Aung Naing has commanded the MPDF, though he is not known to have had any involvement in the recent request for money.

According to locals, in the recent letter issued by the MPDF, the group demanded 1,500 kyat per acre from farmers. The letter states that the group will come in person and take the money from the farmers.

“As I heard, from the farmers, they do not go and give the money to the group. They [MPDF] will come and take the money on their own,” said one villager. “But they [MPDF] did not say when they come and take the money from the farmers.”

Nai Aung Naing was a former major general of the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), the armed wing of the New Mon State Party (NMSP). He split from the NMSP in 2008, forming the MPDF but left the group to join the monkhood in 2009.

In June IMNA reported that as a monk Nai Aung Naing was working to organize Senior Monks in Mon state to join the MPDF to support him for a position in the coming 2010 election. At that time MPDF members attempted to organize abbots from different monasteries to support him.

At this time there has yet been no report of MPDF members coming to collect money from farmers, according to sources.

It remains unclear why the MPDF has been asking for money. But according to one local farmer, “As I am heard in Mudon township, why Nai Aung Naing asked money the farmers is because they [MPDF] will buy weapons with this money.”

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**Shan leader: Stop junta from killing spree before more refugees flock to Thailand**

*S.H.A.N. - 21 August 2009*

Sao Yawdserk, the leader of the Shan State (SSA) South that has been fighting against Burma's military rulers, has warned Thailand of more asylum seekers unless the regional grouping Asean gives a down-to-earth interpretation of its cardinal policy of non-interference.

He was speaking in connection to the Burma Army's 5-day scorched earth campaign, 27 July – 1 August, that had left more than 10,000 people homeless in southern Shan State, according to the statement by Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) and Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) on 13 August.

His own statement issued today also put the loss of the villagers at K 936 million (\$ 850,000).

“The RCSS (Restoration Council of Shan State, the political arm of the SSA) calls on Asean, in spite of its non interference in the internal affairs of a member state, and the UN to investigate and help resolve the problems of the Union of Burma,” he said. “We beg of you not to allow the Burmese military regime continue killing its own people and engaging in ethnic cleansing. Otherwise more and more refugees will be flocking to Thailand.”

The SSA leader also accused the regime of instigating a racial war. “We have never killed ordinary Burmese civilians because we regarded them as human beings,” he said. “What the Burma Army is doing is tantamount to inciting an inter-racial conflict.”

Sai La, son of Long Kham and Pa Sway, Mongkeung, for instance, was shot while he was begging the soldiers not to burn his house and his body thrown into a latrine pit, reads the statement.

Even Lahu villagers, whom the Burma Army is using as anti-insurgency militias, are not spared, it says. Many of them in Mong Leum village, Mongnawng sub-township, Kehsi township, were reportedly detained and tortured during the campaign.

According to the latest information, the Burma Army has allowed the villagers who were forcibly relocated to Laikha, Namlan and Mongnawng to return to their villages, many of which had been razed to the ground. "They are also checking and stopping the people from fleeing to Thailand and telling the international media of what's happening back home," said a young Shan activist to SHAN.

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### **Opinion / Analysis**

#### **[In Support of the Struggle for Democracy in Burma By José Ramos-Horta](#)**

*Huffington Post – 19 August 2009*

The horrors of World War II should have shocked humanity into rejecting violence and wars forever, and ushered in an era of peace. Yet we continue to see countless abuses and crimes, in some instances, amounting to genocide because those who can prevent these crimes did little or nothing.

The "Killing Fields" of Cambodia in the 70s, the genocide in Rwanda in '94, the ongoing barbarities in Darfur (Sudan), Somalia and Democratic Republic Congo are just some examples reminding us that human beings, though endowed by God with intelligence and sentiments, so often behave in most inhuman cruel manner towards each other.

There comes a time when those who oppose violence and tyranny must rise up. Throughout history from Africa to Asia to Europe, millions of people have risen up against tyrants and brought them down thereby paving the way for freedom and democracy.

On August 5th, I was in Manila to pay tribute to an Asian hero, Corazon Aquino, who led the "People's Power" movement that toppled the Marcos' dictatorship in 1986. Millions of Filipinos paid tribute to the discreet and humble housewife turned international stateswoman and hero.

In 1998, students in Indonesia led a movement that brought down the Suharto dictatorship -- and contributed to our own freedom. Today, Indonesia and the Philippines are examples of tolerance and democracy in the region, maybe still imperfect like our own in Timor-Leste.

Greater powers have succumbed to people's will and sustained international pressure. The former Soviet Union and the Apartheid regime in South Africa are just some examples of this truth.

Burma and North Korea stand out among the few remaining outposts of tyrants, monuments of shame and embarrassment, in a world that has changed in the last 50 years. Tyrants who ruled with arrogance and incompetence, from Eastern Europe to Africa, Asia and Latin America, have mostly been blown away by the winds of change.

The time has come for more forceful and creative ways of fighting for democracy in Burma.

I am opposed to trade embargoes and economic sanctions against developing countries. While sanctions might be politically correct and satisfy our conscience, they are morally less defensible as they impose a harsher burden on an already desperately impoverished people.

However, I do not oppose efforts to freeze public and private assets held by the military and their associates in the region.

If the international community can freeze funds and assets held by individuals allegedly linked to violent extremist groups, there must be an equal moral and political will to target those who hold hostage an entire nation and have committed mass rape and murder against innocent people.

If it proves not possible to secure a binding UN Security Council Resolution on freezing funds and assets linked to the Burmese military that are held in accounts abroad, then the US, Europe, Japan, and other like-minded countries should on their own initiate such measures.

Police agencies, such as Interpol, must be instructed to identify funds and assets held anywhere in the world by the military and their associates, divulge the existence of such accounts, and the names of banks holding them. The tools used to intercept and dry up funding for terrorist groups must be used to choke the Burmese military and punish any financial institution that shelters their wealth.

The Obama administration has brought fresh air and new hope to the world and offered a window of opportunity for dialogue with regimes such as Burma's which may have allowed them to grab the olive branch and find an honorable way out of a situation they have dug themselves into through fear, arrogance and incompetence. However, the Burmese military rulers who have mismanaged and ruined a prosperous nation seem to have misread the Obama Administration's pragmatic and conciliatory approach as weakness.

I propose that Burma's membership in the UN and all UN Agencies and ASEAN be suspended; further, all countries must downgrade their diplomatic relations with Burma and allow for no more than one junior official to mind the embassy wherever there is one; Burmese diplomats wishing to defect should be granted asylum; likewise civilian and military personnel wishing to flee Burma should be supported.

Throughout the Cold War era, the US, Europe and Canada offered shelter to political refugees from the defunct Soviet Union and its Eastern European vassal states. So why not offer similar support for Burmese dissidents and defectors?

Major broadcasting institutions like Voice of America, BBC, and others should significantly expand their Burmese language programmes.

A significant number of the members of the Burmese army are unhappy with the situation, especially after they were ordered to beat up and shoot revered Buddhist monks in September 2007.

Every available means of communication must be used to inspire the officers' corps and soldiers to save the honor of the army and the country. They must be told of their tarnished prestige and the harm done to their country by a few decrepit and corrupt generals who are involved in mass murder and the plundering of their country.

The Burmese soldiers and officers must be told of their complicity in such crimes and must not turn their guns on their own people; they must rise up against the decrepit and corrupt generals.

Senior officers in Hitler's army displayed great courage and patriotism in trying to rid their country and the world of a seemingly omnipotent tyrant. Portuguese young army officers were the architects of the peaceful "Carnation Revolution" in 1974 that brought down the 50 year old Salazar dictatorship and paved the way for democracy in Portugal and independence of its overseas colonies. So the younger Burmese officer corps can be inspired to save their country through simple acts of patriotism and honor.

The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and UN agencies should, without delay, initiate studies and draft a blue-print for Burma's economic recovery and rebuild its financial system.

When freedom comes, and it will, the road to recovery and political stability will be a very rough and long one. Burma is a country much fractured along ethnic fault lines and plagued by armed drug warlords.

There is no denying that the military will continue to play an indispensable role in maintaining unity and stability in the country. So the new officer corps emerging in Burma should know that they have a historic opportunity to save their country and, together with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, restore Burma's place in the world.

But the Army and Police will have to be reformed and modernized and Burma's neighbors and friends must stand ready to assist in this regard.

Having followed developments in Burma for well over 20 years and seen numerous failed attempts at politely and pragmatically couching the ruling military to show restraint and engage its own people in meaningful dialogue, I believe this is the next practical escalation in making the generals pay the price for the war they have imposed on their own people.

The doors for diplomacy should remain open. If and when wisdom prevails and the military rulers decide to free Suu Kjie and other political prisoners, they must hear a heartfelt appreciation from the international

community; and if they take a step further by engaging Suu Kjie and other leaders in meaningful dialogue, the international community must offer immediate concrete support; if and when the military and Suu Kjie reach an agreement on steps towards free and democratic elections and the military have abided by the election outcome, then a major international pledging conference should be held where the world community should commit to assist Burma's economic recovery and in what we can anticipate to be a very complex and long road to peace, stability and prosperity.

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**CONTRIBUTOR: The Virtues of Careful Engagement - By Zarni**

*Irrawaddy – 21 August 2009*

As a dissident who openly turned his back on sanctions and, since 2003, has attempted engagement with the junta, albeit with little or no success, I welcome US Sen. Jim Webb's highly publicized visit to my native country.

In spite of my own failures in practicing "diplomacy without license," I can see virtues in a carefully developed engagement approach which compliments and strengthens—as opposed to undermines and contradicts—Aung San Suu Kyi-led opposition and ethnic minority resistance.

However, there are serious historical, analytical and empirical issues that need to be addressed if Washington's efforts at engagement with the regime are going to contribute concretely to both moving Burma's domestic politics forward and the economic betterment of our people. Not many analysts, Burmese or foreigner, pushing for engagement have yet raised these vital issues.

Some kind of self-censorship is prevalent among the writers and analysts who are currently pushing for engagement with the regime for fear of reprisal or in exchange for entry visas.

Instead, some of my fellow "engagers" are getting ahead of themselves. They sound increasingly preachy in their analyses and shrill with their pushes for engagement.

I didn't just advocate engagement. I walked the walk. I gave up my US asylum voluntarily and returned home to Burma, having left my 5-year-old daughter in California in her American mother's care. In good faith, I tried to work on both confidence building measures and more substantive issues, with both Gen Khin Nyunt's camp, and, post-2004 purge, with those who were responsible for his demise, for almost a decade.

While pro-sanctions dissidents and political NGOs obstinately refuse to acknowledge that China, India, Thailand and Russia, with their vested Burma interests, will not heed their pro-democracy calls, the engagers fail to recognize that the military regime has absolutely no desire to reconcile in any meaningful way with political opposition parties, dissidents or groups.

The regime may be likened to a clever fish which has learned to eat the bait around the hook.

If Western engagement with the military is to contribute to the Burmese opposition's uphill battle for genuine democratic and economic change, its overriding rationale cannot be Washington's needs to contain the growing power of capitalist China.

If Webb's push for "engagement" is for the normalization of US-Burma bilateral relations on the basis of a mutual fear of capitalist China, then sooner or later Washington will begin to treat the genuine process of democratization—Aung San Suu Kyi and 2,100 dissidents behind bars as well as oppressed and downtrodden ethnic communities in Burma's low intensity war zones—as an afterthought at best and an obstacle in pursuit of US commercial and strategic interests at worst. Where Washington goes, other Western interests will follow.

A clash of serious interests, rationales and values is already on the horizon.

While the generals are reportedly hailing the senator's red-carpeted visit as a "success," Aung San Suu Kyi appears to be the odd man out in this potentially new strategic equation between the two capitals. For she has made it clear to the senator that she did not share his (and Washington's) view of China as a hostile power next door to Burma, but rather a "friendly one." Her stance on the Sino-Burmese relations will also wreak havoc with some of the high profile Burmese opinion makers who openly push for engagement with Washington, in particular, and the West in general.

For example, in his recent *Washington Post* essay "*Let's talk to the Generals, China sure is*" (August 16), Thant Myint-U, the grandson of the late UN Secretary-General U Thant, argued "without Western engagement, however, Burma's 55 million people risk becoming a virtual colony of their 1.3 billion Chinese neighbors..."

Having lived a quarter century of my life under Ne Win's regime that cleverly exploited Western Containment policies, it worries me that "we the people" will be sold down the river again by Washington, especially since I learned first-hand Burmese democracy or human rights has never really been a serious US or Western policy goal, despite rhetoric to the contrary.

During my first-hand involvement in building the sanctions campaign, I became painfully aware of the fact that none of the Western powers, US, UK, France, Canada, Australia, Italy, Germany and the European Union would ever forego their energy interests out of Burma, in spite of their loud denunciation of the Chinese, the Indian, the Russian and the Asean business interests in exactly the same natural resource extractive sector.

Cynically, Nicholas Sarkozy's France consistently takes a hard-line stance on Burma at various international forums, including the Security Council, in order to preempt criticisms of France because of the multi-billion dollar energy interest in Burma via its national gas and oil firm Total. While three US presidents have ritualistically renewed the existing Burma sanctions every year since 1998, the American oil giant Chevron continues to pump gas and repatriate dollars back to its headquarters in Richmond, California, uninterrupted.

Small crumbs are thrown to Burmese communities near energy projects ostensibly out of "corporate social responsibility" while the lion's share goes to the generals who in turn are engaged, according to *The Irrawaddy* ("Burmese Generals' Goal: To Build the Strongest Army in South East Asia," August 20), in enormously costly "weaponization" projects on 22 different sites across Burma, producing or planning to produce both conventional and non-conventional weapons, with help from South and North Korea, Singapore, China and Russia.

In the early days of the sanctions campaign when the Chinese or the Indians were not yet in a position to project their economic or political clout, Western policy makers and advisers would not help create greater sanctions leverage to level the uneven playing field for the non-violent opposition inside Burma, nor would they consider reinforcing the legitimate pillar of armed resistance in Burma's opposition movement. Meanwhile, the United States and its Western allies were bombing oil rich nations such as Iraq "back to the stone age" for the control of oil and strategic territory.

Disillusioned with the Suu Kyi-led mainstream opposition which treats sanctions as the only venue for change and convinced of the futility of staying the sanction course, I renounced my support for sanctions as early as 2003.

I want to outline six fundamental issues that need to be a part of any discussion about how to push for meaningful social change in Burma.

First, contrary to the current media and policy discourses which portray the Burmese regime as "isolated," neither the Burmese military nor its social base and business cronies are isolated from the post-Cold War world. It is in fact engaged in a process of "regressive globalization."

How could a regime considered "isolated" receive solid military, economic and political support from the world's giants including Russia, China, and India, as well as a whole basket of Asian governments with varying clout—which also enjoys full economic engagement with the entire global natural resource extractive industry—not just state energy firms from Asian neighbors but also from multinationals from Australia, Canada, France, Italy and USA?

Second, the state in Burma is predatory and militarist in terms of its policy priorities, its institutional practices and its corporate worldview. Sen. Jim Webb was quoted as saying "(US economic) sanctions were the elephant in the room" which didn't get mentioned during his meeting with the junta head Than Shwe. Webb obviously failed to take note of the larger elephant—the predatory Burmese state and its militarist orientation. Empirically and historically, the state, in the hands of the generals since 1962, has vacuumed the country of all marketable natural resources much of which happen to be found in the ethnic minorities' ancestral land, confiscated a massive quantity of land, extracted labor from various pockets of

population and viewed politics as an extension of war and military operations. Indeed both resource and ethnic colonialisms are in full swing in military-ruled Burma.

Third, the self-perception of the military leaders is deeply feudal and paternalistic to a fault: the officers, big and small, require their subordinates to view them as "Big Father" or "Small Father"—not "senior or junior general." The generals view themselves in the mold of the "Buddhist" warrior kings of the bygone centuries who rise to power—usually in blood baths and military conquests—is glorified out of proportions in Burmese nationalist historiography.

Fourth, the corporate worldview among the officer corps is uncompromisingly statist. Because they have captured all institutions of government, they embrace the absolutist notion of state sovereignty which in effect views the head of state, not the people, as the sovereign. The result is the military which serves the sovereign leader feels no need to reconcile with any other organization in the country—not even with the most sacred segment of the Burmese society at large, namely Buddhist monks.

Fifth, those who think mere exposure of Burmese military officers to the West alone will change the illiberal character of the regime are suffering from historical amnesia, forgetting the role of the West in Ne Win's rise to power and the logistical, educational, technical and financial support the military institutions received from the West. Even in the heydays of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party, it was to the West (US, UK and West Germany) where the greatest number of the state's scholars and military officers were sent for advanced training. And no general in Burma's modern history was more exposed to the West than General Ne Win: even after his second military coup in 1962, the general was welcome at the White House and was reportedly sipping tea with Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace. He maintained a house in Wimbledon, played golf in Scotland, received annual medical check-ups in London, saw his psychotherapist in Vienna and stopped in Geneva to check his Swiss accounts!

Finally, Burma's society at large is deeply illiberal. Let's face it. We are an unmistakably hierarchical, intellectually intolerant, ethnically chauvinistic, semi-feudal lot. The ugly debates surrounding the plight of the Royhinga people in Western Burma, our overly personalized view of politics or the widespread social practice of privileging kinship and lineage over individual merits are only the tip of the cultural iceberg. Any attempts at social change will need to be fully cognizant of the illiberal features of the society, which will evolve only through sustained exposure to liberal cultures, ideas and societies in the region and globally.

Burma's problems are well-known and the atrocities well-documented. Un-strategically formulated sanction campaigns—of which I was a part—based on faulty assumptions about the role of human rights and democracy in Western foreign policies 20 years ago have created a situation where our Burmese people remain locked in poverty and oppression.

Another self-righteous push, out of "revolutionary pragmatism," to put the military in the driver's solo seat, again, for genuine reforms, despite its half-century of spectacular failures in nation building, will only further entrench the generals in power and politics.

The current top-down elitist approach towards engagement is narrow in scope, ill-conceived and woefully uninformed about how repressive regimes, left or right, civilian or military, foreign or native, change their policies and behavior. It has no greater potential to either improve our people's lives or liberalize the country's domestic politics than does the orthodoxy of unilateral sanctions.

*Dr. Zarni is a research fellow on Burma at the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics and founder of the Free Burma Coalition.*

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#### **EDITORIAL: Webb's Tangled Message**

*Irrawaddy – 21 August 2009*

When former US President Bill Clinton traveled to North Korea earlier this month to win the release of two imprisoned American journalists, he probably didn't realize that he was setting a trend. But less than two weeks after his high-profile visit to Pyongyang, another US politician had embarked on a similar—but even more ambitious—mission.

Unlike Clinton, Senator Jim Webb was not acting as an official emissary of the Obama administration when he went to Burma last week. This meant that he was free to set his own agenda, which went far beyond extracting an American citizen from a foreign prison. Although the release of John Yettaw enabled him to declare his visit a “success,” it was, in fact, only incidental to his mission, the real purpose of which was to set the stage for US engagement with Burma’s pariah regime.

Webb, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, is a prominent critic of US sanctions on Burma who has long argued that they are counterproductive to political progress in the country and not conducive to American interests. It came as no surprise, then, that the Burmese junta welcomed him with open arms.

Although Webb’s objective was clear, the message sent by his visit was not. Coming soon after a junta-controlled court sentenced Yettaw to seven years imprisonment for illegally entering the home of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Webb’s visit blurred the line between “engaging” the regime and rewarding it for egregious behavior.

Certainly, the regime came away from this as the big winner. Webb’s visit and Yettaw’s subsequent release gave the junta an undeserved opportunity to crow about its respect for “the rule of law, as well as humanitarianism and human rights,” at a time when its crackdown on opposition groups continues unabated. It also provided a convenient way to dispose of a pawn that had served its purpose—to prevent Suu Kyi’s participation in next year’s elections.

However, the real danger of Webb’s mixed message is not that it provides fodder for the regime’s propaganda machine, but that the generals themselves may actually see his visit as a vindication of their perverse notions of justice. Since Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested in July that the US might be ready to relax sanctions in exchange for Suu Kyi’s release, the generals have been carefully gauging US reactions to their behavior to see how much, or how little, they will have to concede to improve bilateral relations. At this stage, they probably believe that it will take very little to make Washington happy.

It also doesn’t help that Webb, who was allowed a rare meeting with Suu Kyi, got her message wrong, too. Although he claimed that she agreed with him that Burma needed to “interact” more with the West, her lawyer said that her real emphasis was on the need for interaction among Burmese—in other words, she reiterated her longstanding call for dialogue between the opposition and the regime.

If Webb wants to help Burma, he needs to send an unequivocal message to the regime that Washington will not be satisfied with anything less than the release of the country’s 2,100 political prisoners, including Suu Kyi. If he’s not prepared to make that demand, he should congratulate himself on the “success” of his mission, and leave it at that.

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**[Editorial: Burma's Other Prisoners Still A Concern](#)**

*VOA - 21 August 2009*

Burmese authorities have freed John Yettaw, who was convicted and sentenced following his uninvited visit to pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s house. In charges stemming from that incident, Ms. Suu Kyi was given an additional 18-month sentence, extending a detention that has lasted for much of the last 19 years.

While the United States welcomes Mr. Yettaw’s release, it remains very concerned about the continued detention of Ms. Suu Kyi and more than 2,100 other political prisoners, including Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and Su Su Nwe, who have been denied their liberty because of their pursuit of a government that respects the will, rights, and aspirations of all Burmese citizens.

While traveling in Burma in early May, Mr. Yettaw swam across a lake near Ms. Suu Kyi’s home, driven he said by a vision that terrorists were bent on killing her. He was sentenced to a 7-year prison term, including 4 years of hard labor, on charges that he violated the terms of her house arrest. For allegedly harboring him, Ms. Suu Kyi’s sentence extends a detention that has lasted for much of the last 19 years.

President Barack Obama said he was pleased with the Burmese government’s decision to free Mr. Yettaw. Burma has essentially been a military dictatorship for most of the last 47 years, and the U.S. has

been looking for signs that Burma is fundamentally changing its policies. Mr. Yettaw's release, however well intended, is not an indication that that is happening.

Thousands of political activists remain in jail. Their release would be significant. Burma's military leaders should also engage in a meaningful dialogue with their political opponents and move toward a peaceful transition to genuine democracy and national reconciliation.

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### [The Story of a Child Soldier](#)

*Irrawaddy - 21 August 2009*

By Saw Yan Naing

PAPUN, Karen State—Sixteen-year-old Htun Htun Oo, looked relieved and happy when he learned he would be leaving the conflict zone controlled by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers on the Burmese bank of the Salween River, opposite Thailand's Mae Hong Son province.

The prospect of going to study instead of facing more military duties gave him new hope.

Told he could leave, Htun Htun Oo quickly packed his clothes in a sling bag, put on a watch, applied some *Thanaka* (Burmese traditional makeup) to his cheeks and said goodbye to the Karen soldiers who had temporarily taken care of him.

Speaking quietly against a background of birdsong and eddying water in the fast flowing Salween River, he told us his story before he left.

Htun Htun Oo escaped from the Burmese Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 341 in Papun District in northern Karen State in July, making his way through the forest eastwards, even though he was not sure whether he would be killed when he reached KNLA-controlled territory.

Before he escaped, senior officers had regularly warned the troops that they would be tortured and killed if they surrendered to Karen rebels.

"Whether I lived or died didn't matter anymore," Htun Htun Oo said, "All I wanted to do was escape. I was ready for anything so long as I didn't have to stay another day in that battalion."

He said that he had to sleep rough in the jungle for three days before he reached the KNLA area.

"When I arrived on the Burmese side of the Salween River, I started to swim across," he said, pointing to the waters swollen with monsoon rain streaming by.

"The water was too fast and I was drifting downstream, trying to swim," he said, "Luckily a boat came along and picked me up.

"The Burmese officers would continually punish us and order us to do additional duties—we were no better than slaves," he said.

"They didn't give us enough food, and when we were too exhausted to follow orders, they liked to beat us. I was beaten three times for falling asleep when I was on guard duty at night.

"Every morning we had to get up at five and do military exercises," Htun Htun Oo said. "Around three in the afternoon we would be ordered into the jungle to cut bamboo and collect leaves to make temporary shelters.

"We didn't get enough time to sleep as we had guard duty at night. I couldn't take it any more and decided to run away," he said.

Htun Htun Oo earned 21,000 kyat [US \$19] a month, but said he only got about 7,000 kyat [\$6.40] after senior officers made deductions.

Htun Htun Oo said he saw child soldiers in other Burmese battalions, and he knew of eight other child soldiers in LIB 341 alone.

During military training, he said he spoke with a younger comrade called Ye Thew, who told him he had been sexually abused by higher ranking officers on several occasions.

Htun Htun Oo was seized by the Burmese army at a railway station in June 2007 while he was on his way to visit his uncle, who was a policeman in Rangoon,.

"A Burmese soldier asked me for my ID card, but I didn't have one because I hadn't applied for one by then. So they took me away," he said.

Htun Htun Oo's case is not untypical. The recruitment of child soldiers in Burma is still widely practiced by the Burmese army, according to Aye Myint, a leader of Guiding Star, a Burma-based social and labor rights group.

In the last three months, more than 20 children who say they were forced by Burmese officials to serve as soldiers were helped by Aye Myint's group and the International Labour Organization to return to their families.

Commenting in early August on reports that the Burmese government had released some children from the military, the UN's special representative for children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, was quoted by *Reuters* as saying: "We still are not sure how comprehensive that is and the extent of it. And so I am dispatching a team [to Burma] at the end of this month."

The team would hold talks with the Burmese regime and rebel groups, said Coomaraswamy.

In a report in June, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accused the Burmese military government and "ethnic rebel militias" of recruiting children to serve as fighters, saying that there had been "grave violations" against children in Burma.

According to a 2002 report by the Washington-based Human Rights Watch, there is no precise figure of the number of child soldiers serving in the Burmese army, but it was estimated that 35-45 percent of new recruits were children, some as young as 11, who were forcibly conscripted and brutally treated during training.

The report estimated that as many as 70,000 recruits were under the age of 18.

Htun Htun Oo said, "I have only one message for the youth of Burma—don't even think about joining the Burmese army. It is like being in a living hell. You will go so far from home that you will forget it even exists."

Asked about the Burmese regime's announcement that the military did not recruit child soldiers, he said, "They are lying."

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**21/08/2009**

## **News**

### **[ASEAN urge Suu Kyi appeal](#)**

*DVB – 21 August 2009*

Senior ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have agreed to urge regional foreign ministers to appeal to Burma for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, following talks in Jakarta.

The meeting follows international outcry over Suu Kyi's sentencing last week to a further 18 months under house arrest, which will keep her in detention beyond the elections next year.

If the appeal is approved, it would mark a break with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) much criticized policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

"We need to convey our legitimate concerns over the case of Aung San Suu Kyi," Imron Cotan, Indonesia's delegate at the Jakarta meeting, told Reuters.

"Be it in the form of a letter or joint statement it's up to the foreign ministers to decide."

ASEAN, which is currently chaired by Thailand, has delivered little more than vocal condemnation of Suu Kyi's sentencing.

But with Burma's growing reputation as the thorn in the side of the regional bloc, Thailand expressed fear soon after the trial that the pariah state was "tarnishing" the bloc's image.

The sentencing of Suu Kyi triggered a toughening of sanctions on Burma from the European Union, while the United States recently renewed its embargo on the country.

ASEAN however has consistently refused to issue sanctions, instead opting for a policy of engagement with the regime.

Continued trade with its neighbours, particularly China, has dampened the impact of sanctions. This has been acknowledged by the US, which is in the process of reviewing its policy to Burma.

While a number of Southeast Asian countries are apparently growing impatient with the intransigence of the military junta, there is expected to be resistance over the appeal from member countries such as Laos and Vietnam.

*Reporting by Francis Wade*

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### [Myanmar vote 'opportunity for change': think tank \(ICG\)](#)

*AFP – 21 August 2009*

By Danny Kemp

BANGKOK — Myanmar's elections next year are set to alter the political landscape despite not being free and fair, with a chance that leaders of the ruling junta could step aside, a think tank said Friday.

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group said in a report that the polls will give local and international stakeholders an opportunity to push for change, despite a constitution that entrenches the military's political role.

Myanmar's generals have vowed to hold the elections some time in 2010, the first national vote since 1990, when they refused to recognise an overwhelming victory by the party of pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

The ICG report said that the recent extension of Suu Kyi's house arrest by 18 months, after a bizarre incident in which an American man swam to her home, had returned attention to repression in Myanmar.

"But while the elections will not be free and fair... the constitution and elections together will fundamentally change the political landscape in a way the government may not be able to control," the report said.

The influential think tank said junta leader Than Shwe, 76, and his ageing deputy Maung Aye "may soon step down or move to ceremonial roles, making way for a younger military generation" after the polls.

"All stakeholders should be alert to opportunities that may arise to push the new government toward reform and reconciliation," the group said.

The report said that the military regime must make the electoral process "more credible" by freeing all political prisoners including Suu Kyi and by bringing in key electoral legislation as soon as possible.

But it also warned that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy -- which has said it will take part in the elections only if the constitution is changed -- that a boycott "could play into the hands of the military government."

The constitution, approved in a controversial referendum in May 2008 just days after a devastating cyclone hit Myanmar, prevents Suu Kyi from standing for president, even if she were not imprisoned.

It also gives the military a dominant political role, with a quarter of the seats in the upper and lower houses of parliament to be appointed by the army's commander-in-chief.

The military has ruled the country formerly known as Burma since 1962, launching bloody crackdowns on pro-democracy protests in 1988 and 2007 to preserve its rule and jailing dozens of its opponents over the last year.

But the new presidential system of government was "the most wide-ranging shake-up in a generation," the report said.

The report said the international community, including Myanmar's Southeast Asian neighbours, must continue to press the regime to make the vote as fair as possible "while looking for opportunities that the elections may bring."

The report comes just days after visiting US Senator Jim Webb held the first ever talks between a senior American official and Than Shwe, leading to the release of John Yettaw, the US man jailed for swimming to Suu Kyi's house.

Webb said his visit could lead to a "new approach" in US-Myanmar ties, including a rethink on sanctions, while Myanmar's junta-controlled media said the trip had been a "success" for both sides.

ICG report: [Myanmar: Towards the Elections](#), Asia Report N°174, 20 August 2009

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**[Pakistan Senate HR Committee condemns Burmese junta](#)**

*Mizzima - 20 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Pakistan's Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights on Wednesday came down heavily on Burma's military junta for sentencing opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and urged its government to sever diplomatic ties unless Burma releases the Noble Peace Laureate.

The committee, in its meeting under the chairmanship of Senator Afrasiab Khattak, said by sentencing Aung San Suu Kyi to another 18 months in detention, the Burmese junta is not only blatantly denying the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people but has also stubbornly ignored the demand of the international community.

"The despotic dictatorship has crossed all limits in violating international norms of democracy, civilized governance and human rights," reads the Committee's resolution published in a press statement on Wednesday.

The Committee also expressed its solidarity with the Burmese people in their struggle for fundamental rights and "demanded of the [Pakistan] government that it should sever diplomatic ties with the military regime of Myanmar [Burma] unless Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners are released and democratic rights and constitutional rule is restored."

The committee's call is the first official statement by the Pakistani government over the sentencing of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on August 11.

Pakistan and Burma are reported to have maintained a good military relationship with former Burmese Intelligence Chief Lt Gen Khin Nyunt paying a visit to Islamabad in June 2000. Khin Nyunt, who ranked third in the Burmese military hierarchy, was purged in 2004.

Pakistan's former President General Pervez Musharraf also paid a visit to Rangoon in May 2001.

Pakistan is known to have supplied Burma with conventional weapons and provided training for Burmese Army personnel in Pakistan.

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**[Regime Goal: The Strongest Army in Southeast Asia](#)**

*Irrawaddy - 20 August 2009*

By Min Lwin

The Burmese military regime is well on its way to modernizing its military services, including a self-manufacturing infrastructure for the army, navy and air force.

Many of the changes have occurred under the direction of Snr-Gen Than Shwe, who became chairman of the ruling council in 1992.

The Defense Industry (DI) ministry, Burma's main military industry agency, operates 22 manufacturing or procurement facilities, many located on the west bank of the Irrawaddy River west of the Pegu mountain range.

Lt-Gen Tin Aye, a trusted Than Shwe ally, is chief of the Defense Industry ministry.

Htay Aung, a Thailand-based military researcher, said that since the military took control of the country in 1988, Burma has steadily expanded its military services and modernized armament production and procurement.

"In Southeast Asia, Burma has the second largest military after Vietnam," Htay Aung told *The Irrawaddy*.

"The primary reason for military expansion is that the generals fear that Burma could face an invasion, since it is located between two giant neighbors [India and China]."

The regime also may be trying to acquire nuclear weapons, said Htay Aung.

Late in the 1950s, the Defense Industry, or *Ka Pa Sa*, maintained arms and ammunition production facilities under contract with the Federal Republic of Germany's state-owned Fritz Werner.

Since then, the Defense Industry network has expanded its infrastructure and today manufactures small arms, ammunitions, land mines and other military hardware. Analysts said the Defense Industry also produces surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), and may be in the process of exploring ways to build or acquire nuclear weapons.

One facility, the No (2) Defense Industry, located in Upper Min Hla Township in Magwe Division, was built by Singapore, say analysts. The facility is said to produce 60 mm, 81 mm, 105 mm and 120 mm mortars. Singapore is a major source of arms technology for Burma, according to analysts.

The Korean Daewoo Company signed a deal with the government in May 2002 to build an arms factory valued at US \$133 million near Prome in Pegu Division. The factory may build or assemble missiles.

No (10) Defense Industry was built in 1993 near Kongyi village in Upper-Min Hla Township in Magwe Division to manufacture surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), air-to-air missiles (AAMs) and rocket launchers. Parts and other material at the No (10) Defense Industry facility are believed to be supplied by South Korea, Russia and China. Defense analysts say the junta may have started a guided missile development program with the help of firms in Singapore.

In the face of an arms embargo by Western countries, the regime now relies on China, South Korea, North Korea and Russia for help in upgrading its military hardware.

The junta's desire to acquire some form of nuclear weapons has received extensive exposure in the media in recent months, including in *The Irrawaddy*.

A Rangoon-based company, Soe Min Htaik Co. Ltd, plays a central role in weapons procurement from China, South Korea, North Korea and Russia.

Soe Min Htaik Co. Ltd is a private company that was formed by Burma's Defense Industry in the early 1990.

Analysts say Soe Min Htaik Co. procured surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) from China and North Korea.

The Burmese military also has created two military-managed economic organizations: the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Limited (UMEHL), established in 1989 and 1990 respectively.

The mission of the two commercial enterprises is to make the military services self-sufficient. Heavy weapons, ammunition and other defense technology are acquired with profits from MEC and UMEHL.

The UMEHL has numerous subsidiary and affiliated firms engaged in trading with Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, China, South Korea and India. Cooking oil, fuel oil and automobiles are important imports while exports include cigarettes, beans and pulses, gems, garment products and gas.

UMEHL also has earned hundreds of millions of dollars from the Daewoo Company which has a contract to export natural gas.

Defense analysts have said that Than Shwe has a goal to acquire nuclear weapon capability by 2025.

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### [Campaigners call for commission of inquiry into junta crimes](#)

*Mizzima - 20 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Campaigners say now is the time for the international community, particularly the United Nations, to call on the Security Council to establish a commission of inquiry into crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by Burma's military rulers.

With the recent sentencing of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and the continued cleansing of minorities in remote areas of the country, Burma's military rulers have clearly demonstrated their ruthlessness and stubbornness in ignoring calls for reform, three campaign group said on Wednesday.

Debbie Stothard, coordinator for the Alternative Asean Network on Burma (Altsean Burma), one of the three groups that has called on the Security Council to establish a commission of inquiry, said the international community, while offering condemnation through rhetoric, has done little practical to push the junta to implement changes in Burma.

"It is high time that the international community stop accepting the junta's actions and stand up," Stothard told Mizzima on Thursday.

Altsean Burma, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Burma Lawyers Council (BLC) in their statement on Wednesday called on the European Union, which tightened economic sanctions on the junta in the wake of the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi, to support their call in setting up a commission of inquiry.

The statement said the new sanctions imposed by the EU are totally inadequate in the face of the worsening human rights situation and ongoing atrocities against ethnic nationalities in Burma.

"These sanctions reflect the political unwillingness of the EU to take a firm stance on this issue and increase dangerously the risk that the regime will consider this as a green light to continue committing international crimes," said Souhayr Belhassen, President of FIDH, in the statement.

On August 11, a special court in Rangoon's Insein Prison announced the verdict of the over two-month trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, finding her guilty and sentencing her to three years of prison with hard labor.

But the country's military Supremo, Senior General Than Shwe, intervened the court session via a special order and commuted the sentence by half, contingent upon good moral behavior, while also allowing her to serve her time at her lakeside home.

Following the sentencing several countries have issued statements condemning the junta, though a few have hailed the junta for its apparent leniency in commuting Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence.

"The EU must not be fooled by the SPDC's [Burma's military government] phony attempt to show leniency on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The SPDC has fulfilled its strategy to keep Daw Aung San Suu Kyi out of the picture while, at the same time, the SPDC tells the world that Burma is on the path to democracy. How can the SPDC's planned elections be given any credence when war still rages in Eastern Burma?" Stothard questioned.

Stothard said several thousand ethnic citizens in eastern Burma are currently being displaced as a result of fresh atrocities committed by the junta's soldiers.

"If the junta is sincere in their plans and want to implement changes, the junta must stop killing the ethnics. Burma's politics is not just about Aung San Suu Kyi and the regime but it is also the issue of ethnic nationalities," Stothard emphasized.

Stothard added that the international community, particularly the United Nations, has not been taking effective measures to force the junta to cease their behavior.

“The UN has very little or no pressure at all on the SPDC. And the SPDC knows that they can continue playing around with international politics,” she said, referring to the junta’s official name of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Meanwhile, the US-based Global Justice Centre (GJC), in a press statement, denounced UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for his reaction over the Burmese junta’s sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi, the only detained Nobel Peace Laureate.

The GJC said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s remarks on the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi are totally at odds with his mandate under the UN Charter.

“As a Representative of the UN, and given these circumstances, international law requires Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to call for an end to impunity, not convey his ‘disappointment’ and call for ‘reconciliation’,” argued the GJC in their statement.

The GJC said instead of calling the verdict “disappointing” and “deplorable”, Ban should refer the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court, concluding that Ban’s remarks “undermine the rule of law.”

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**Eastern Burma: Another Darfur?**

*Irrawaddy – 20 August 2009*

By Saw Yan Naing

You could say it runs in the family—45-year-old Saw Lubermoo’s grandmother and grandfather were IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), his parents were IDPs, and now he is an IDP.

The ethnic Karen says he has been constantly on the move and hiding in the jungle since he was four years of age.

He is among hundreds of thousands of ethnic Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan civilians who have been displaced in eastern Burma for decades.

According to a 2008 report by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, an umbrella group of donors and humanitarian organizations, the total number of IDPs in eastern Burma is likely to be well over half a million with at least 451,000 people estimated to have been displaced in rural areas alone. The group also says that many IDP cases in eastern Burma go unreported.

According to Shan and Karen relief groups, there are currently about 20,000 IDPs in hiding in the jungles of central Shan State and northern Karen State.

A separate group of some 4,000 Karen villagers fled during the joint Burmese army– Democratic Karen Buddhist Army offensive against the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in June and are presently being sheltered on Thai soil.

Shan community-based rights groups, including the Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN), reported on August 13 that in the previous two weeks, the Burmese army had burned down more than 500 houses and forced about 40 villages to relocate, mostly in Laikha Township in Shan State.

On Wednesday, a top US administration official expressed anxiety over the displacement of thousands of civilians in northeastern parts of Burma due to the Burmese army’s military activities.

“We have been deeply concerned by very recent reports of large-scale displacement, perhaps as many or more than 10,000 civilians,” the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, Eric Schwartz, told reporters on Wednesday at a special briefing at the Foggy Bottom headquarters of the US State Department.

Observers and human rights advocacy groups have said that the conditions under which villagers are forced to become IDPs in eastern Burma is conducive with the criteria regarded by the International Criminal Court (ICC) as “crimes against humanity.”

Aung Htoo, the general-secretary of the exiled Burma Lawyers' Council (BLC), said, "We can say with certainty that crimes against humanity and war crimes are being committed in Burma.

Charm Tong, a spokesperson for SWAN, said, "The regime brazenly committed these crimes even as the whole world was watching them during the trial of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi."

Several activists have said that crimes committed by soldiers of the Burmese regime include murder, rape, torture, looting, forced relocations and displacement. Many compare the situation in eastern Burma to the Darfur crisis in western Sudan where about 300,000 people have been killed and 2.5 million have been displaced.

The ICC has issued a warrant for the arrest of President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, accusing him of being responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sudan.

Since 1997, the Burmese regime has destroyed over 3,000 villages and displaced over half a million civilians in eastern Burma. Karen sources report that there have been many unreported displacements and destroyed villages in Karen State alone since 1949 when the Karen armed revolution began.

International and regional rights groups, such as the International Federation for Human Rights, Altsean-Burma and Burma Lawyers' Council, have urged the European Union to support the establishment of a UN Security Council Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma.

Regional activist, Debbie Stothard, the coordinator of Altsean-Burma, said, "How can the SPDC's planned elections be given any credence when war still rages in eastern Burma?"

A Karen rebel commander with the KNLA for more than two decades said he decided to join the fight against the Burmese army after he witnessed the bloodthirsty murder of children by Burmese soldiers.

He could not control his emotions as he told the story. "In one village, I saw the Burmese army kill women and infants. This event motivated me to pick up a gun and protect my Karen people," he said.

"I have asked myself many times why Burmese soldiers are killing civilians. But, I have never found an answer."

A Karen girl, Taw Oo Paw, 13, said, "I pray every night before I go to bed that I can be reunited with my mother and my sisters, and return to my village and live in peace."

Her father was killed by the Burmese army and she has been separated from her mother and sisters for two years. She said that she hopes for a family reunion, one day.

*Washington-based The Irrawaddy correspondent Lalit K Jha also contributed into this article.*

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### **Junta Conscripts Ethnic Youths**

*Irrawaddy – 20 August 2009*

By Lawi Weng

About 70 Chin teenagers in Matupi Township in Chin State in western Burma have been forced into military training, according to Chin sources.

Local sources said soldiers from Infantry Battalion No.304, which is based in Matupi Township, ordered nine villages to select at least eight youths over 18-years-old per village for military training.

"People have to work in the fields to grow paddy at this time of year [the rainy season]. We are short of food and no one wants to go for military training," said a Chin resident in Matupi.

Matupi is one of seven townships in Chin State facing food shortages due to plagues of rats destroying crops.

The World Food Program (WFP) in Rangoon has reported that about 85 percent of the population in Chin State is in debt after borrowing money to buy food.

Similar conscription took place in the northern part of Ye Township in Mon State in southern Burma in July, when Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 343 ordered 200 youths to go for military training, according to Lawi Oung, a resident in Ye Township.

“The participants were taught how to beat people, how to handle riots and how to hold guns,” he said. “The training took one month, but the participants were only given fake bamboo guns during training.”

The families of those who refused to join had to pay 6,000 kyat [US \$5.50] for exemption, according to Lawi Oung.

The villages where conscription took place are in a “black area,” which is close to a Mon rebel-controlled area, according to Thailand-based the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM).

Analysts said that the junta is training militias to prevent any uprising in the planned 2010 election, but they may also be preparing them for use as frontline troops when they attack Mon rebels.

Junta troops have conducted similar military training in several townships in Shan State in Northern Burma in recent months, according to the Chiang Mai-based *Shan Herald Agency for News*.

About 100 youths in Muse Township near the Chinese border in northern Shan State were forced to undergo military training.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Thursday, Saengjuen, an editor for the *Shan Herald Agency for News*, said: “an estimated 1000 people have been forced into training. Many are former members of forces loyal to the drug lord Khun Sa [who died in Rangoon in 2007].”

“More people have been conscripted this year for basic military training, and to be taught how to collect news, organize campaigns and prepare military operations,” he said.

Saengjuen believes such militia troops will be used to attack armed ethnic ceasefire groups in Shan State, such as those in the Wa, Kokang, and Mong La areas, if tension keeps mounting.

Meanwhile, about 500 private mercenaries from Tang Yan Township in eastern Shan State were forced to join junta troops in preparation for a possible attack on the United Wa State Army (UWSA).

Tension between junta troops and ethnic ceasefire groups has been mounting after the latter refused to transform their troops into border guard forces in Shan State in July.

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### **[Face off between Burmese Army and KIA troops, clash averted](#)**

*Kachin News Group - 20 August 2009*

There was a face off between troops of the Burmese Army and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) soldiers in Burma's northern Kachin State about two weeks ago but a clash was averted. The stand off came even as the KIA and the junta are locked in discussions over their demands, said sources close to KIA.

The clash was about to occur when the Burmese soldiers encircled the KIA's battalion 6 based in Seng Ra in Hpakant jade land. Later the Burmese soldiers were surrounded by the KIA soldiers, said residents of Hpakant.

A gun battle between the two sides was narrowly averted because the permission to open fire by KIA's battalion 6 commander Major Yawngba Shawng was not granted by Maj-Gen Gunhtang Gam Shawng, chief of staff of the KIA based in the Laiza headquarters on the Sino-Burma border in Kachin State, said sources close to KIA's battalion 6.

In the stand off, the Burmese troops were led by Col. Than Aung, commander of the Hpakant-based Military Strategic Command. Reinforcements were sent from the Kachin State's capital Myitkyina, said Hpakant sources.

According to Hpakant residents, the face off between the KIA and Burmese troops follows a dispute between the KIA's battalion 6 commander Maj Yawngba Shawng and the Burmese Army's Hpakant strategic command commander Col. Than Aung over the July 4 and 5 severe floods and landslides in Hpakant.

A day after the floods and landslides the KIA's battalion 6 commander and his officers went to the office of Tit Tone Lone jade company in Hpakant, which was mainly responsible for the flooding and mudslides in Kalajaung quarter in Hpakant by its jade mining activities. They threatened the company's officials with showing pistols because they refused to clear the roads in the affected areas, said residents.

The threats by KIA's battalion 6 were to force the jade company to clear the road blocks. It came after the Hpakant Military Strategic command commander Col. Than Aung rejected the request by KIA's battalion 6 to instruct jade companies to clear road blocks, said KIA sources.

Col. Than Aung said he could not order the jade companies to take up rescue work and clear road blocks because he was not authorized by the Naypyitaw military junta brass, said residents of Hpakant.

After the threat to Tit Tone Lone jade company by KIA's battalion 6, the KIA's battalion 6 commander Maj-Yawngba Shawng and Hpakant Military Strategic Command Commander Col. Than Aung met for several days in Hpakant, said Hpakant sources.

Hpakant jade land was controlled by the KIA and its political wing the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) before it signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese junta on February 24, 1994.

Since then, Hpakant jade land is totally under the Ministry of Mines of the ruling junta where jade mining activities are undertaken with modern sophisticated machines. The jade sales account for the country's third largest foreign revenue, annually.

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### **Opinion / Analysis**

#### **CONTRIBUTOR: Time for Decisive Action - By Aung Moe Zaw**

*Irrawaddy – 20 August 2009*

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is guilty and her sentence is three years hard labor. That was the judgment handed down by a court in the compound of the notorious Insein Prison on August 11th, 2009. As a result, the military regime in Burma may believe that it has fulfilled its aim of excluding her and the pro-democracy forces from the country's political process.

There should be no doubt that Snr-Gen Than Shwe and the junta have no intention of reconciling with either Suu Kyi or any of the pro-democracy movement and ethnic forces for the interest of the various peoples or the nation.

They have made that blatantly clear time and time again, and now, this latest verdict is a loud resounding "No!" to domestic and international calls for reconciliation and an inclusive political process.

The National League for Democracy (NLD), the leadership of the pro-democracy movement, has decided to appeal the court decision. While exposing the absence of an independent judiciary and the rule of law is crucial to understanding the current state of Burma, is it really possible for a legal case to reform the judiciary system?

When the charges are trumped up, when the verdict is ridiculous and the when the sentence is politically manipulated, is it remotely possible for an appeal to successfully secure the release of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate?

Than Shwe has already given us his answer when he intervened to put his stamp of recognition of the courts' verdict and colluded with the court to sentence her to 18 months house arrest. However, he did not use his omnipresent power to intervene for her release.

His intervention can only be interpreted as a sign that the regime refuses to reconcile with Suu Kyi or to move toward national reconciliation and democratic transition.

It may be that the leadership of our movement has a strategic plan to bring about positive change through taking on the judiciary system and, indeed, in the face of such injustice, it is of course absolutely necessary to fight in the court.

The trial may also encourage international sympathy and support for the movement and contribute to raising public awareness, fueling discontent with the regime's wily ways.

However, one can't help but worry that the legal battle will divert the NLD's direction away from mobilizing the public, which is surely the most critical challenge at this current juncture; critical because the response to the looming challenge will define the future of the country's political process. This challenge is the 2010 election.

The forthcoming election—which will exclude all democrats from the nation's political process—will soon be accomplished, just as the referendum was accomplished, unless pro-democracy groups can change Than Shwe and his military clique's minds.

The election result will be just as rigged as the referendum's—unless, of course, the pro-democracy groups can change the rules of game beforehand.

The election will activate the military constitution, but will otherwise go nowhere except to legalize military rule in Burma.

The NLD proposed to the regime through its "Shwe-Gone-Taing Declaration" that it would consider participating in the election if certain conditions were met. Two vital conditions are the release of its leader, Daw Aung san Suu Kyi, and all other political prisoners, and the review and revision of the 2008 constitution. The NLD has indeed offered some middle ground to break t the country's political deadlock.

Again, Than Shwe has said "No" by transferring Suu Kyi to Insein Prison and bringing yet more charges against her.

In my opinion, in the face of all these refusals, the leadership of the pro-democracy movement is left with no choice but to oppose the elections in 2010 and must state so urgently and without diversion.

This is the right moment for them to bring all political forces on board to boycott the elections.

Time is running out for the leadership of the pro-democracy movement. The place for today's strategic battle is in the political arena, supported by the people. It is time for the leadership to take decisive action to prepare and mobilize for a mass boycott of the 2010 elections.

*Aung Moe Zaw is chairman of the Democratic Party for a New Society, an opposition group based in exile.*

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**[A message to Mr. John Yettaw](#)**

*Mizzima News - 21 August 2009*

Dear Mr. John Yettaw,

How are you doing? I hope you are better and ready for a good rest at your home, sweet home. I am glad you were released.

You may not have heard yet about the many speculations of your trial - which ranges from a story that you intentionally collaborated in this because Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not accept your first uninvited attempt to visit in November 2008. Or you were innocent at first and then systematically put into the act of conspiracy.

Many wonder at the way you got the visa from the country where your name is believed to be listed in police records due to suspicions over your first trip. You told Daw Aung San Suu Kyi that you swam across the lake in the dark in order to avoid anyone from seeing you. It is a huge lake and not easy to negotiate especially in the dark.

To neutralize these rumours, I would love to read if you or any of your associates can write a true story about both your trips, or just the second one. It would be very interesting and helpful if you could tell us how many people you met and got help throughout your trip from the very beginning, before you left your country. That may help everyone understand things a little better.

The country is being ruled by the regime since 1962 and we have been brutally treated till now. Thanks to internet technology now a days, we have received close attention from the outside world. Your individual action or cooperation with the regime will not create any misunderstanding between the Burmese people and the Americans or anybody.

I congratulate Mr. Jim Webb for being able to point out how Mr. Veto China is sucking neighbouring Burma's economic blood so greedily. He saved you from being used or abused by the regime. However, Mr. Jim Webb's mission to save you should not be given credit in the same way as that of Mr. Bill Clinton last month with North Korea for two American journalists.

I should let you know that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi stands as a good mother for our country. She has been, and will guide us to better lives. She must be released from house arrest as soon as possible so Burma has a chance to listen to her valuable speeches and advices, before it is too late. Do not forget that she won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections.

However, the regime is putting the same wine in a new bottle. She would have been hidden from the public one way or the other even if you did not visit. That's what the regime has been doing to her. Her life was at risk in Depayin.

Mr. John Yettaw, if you too "really want to use your liberty to promote ours", please share your experience with us.

Regards,

Karuṇāv

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### [Webb visit challenges opposition assumptions - by Joseph Ball](#)

*Mizzima - 20 August 2009*

The fallout from U.S. Senator Jim Webb's recent visit to Burma sheds light on inherent fissures and miscommunication both internal to Burma's leading pro-democracy alliance and between the opposition and at least one of its primary international backers. If the country's pro-democracy opposition, in its existing constitution, is to maximize its chances of success – these cracks in the foundation demand immediate attention.

In short, Burma's democratic opposition has crippled itself by relying far too heavily on two assumptions: 1) – that it necessarily understands and acts in accordance with the strategic thinking of National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and 2) – concluding that the interests of the United States intrinsically align themselves with those of the democratic opposition.

Taking the second point first, the interests of the United States in Burma have not changed in 20 years and ideologically have their roots in the first half of the 20th century. The Obama administration's approach to Burma, put succinctly, is a continuation of well-established U.S. policy to the region. The primary goal remains unaltered – containment of possible rival powers on the greater Eurasian landmass.

It should not be lost on interested parties, despite modest success toward Indian national interest, the importance of New Delhi in failing to significantly dent Chinese influence in Burma – for example, two years previously with the inability of India to secure contracts relating to the shipment of natural gas from Burma's Shwe gas field. Such a counter by a democratic/military U.S. ally to Beijing's growing clout was viewed by Washington as a critical development, despite New Delhi's lukewarm support for Burma's own democracy movement.

What has changed regarding U.S. foreign policy to Burma is the acceptable approaches to achieving America's overriding goal. While rhetoric relating to "democracy" and "human rights" has been and will remain en vogue – and sanctions are by no means to disappear overnight, the truth is far less idealistic and far more abrasive: the United States is concerned first and foremost with the national interests of the United States, to which democracy and human rights, as with elections, are tools to be used when convenient to confer legitimacy upon a favored policy and/or personality in pursuit of an American agenda.

If Burma's democratic opposition is solely concerned with the final outcome, then there remains little to differentiate their and U.S. interests. But, for considerable and influential portions of the aforementioned opposition bloc, the means to the end has come to be held just as sacrosanct as the end itself. This is wherein lies the present tension between Burma's pro-democracy opposition and the United States.

While the Bush administration for eight years – a stretch of time which dominates the recent post-'88 history of involvement by Washington in Burmese affairs and was in accord with the dominant hardline voice of Burma's democratic opposition – stood content with cries of 'right' versus 'wrong' and publicly sought the immediate overthrow of Burma's ruling generals as a means of countering Chinese – and to a lesser extent Russian – influence and presence in Burma, the Obama administration, while promoting the same goals, appears at least willing to explore alternative currents in support of American priorities.

Senator Webb himself is said to have drawn attention, during his tête-à-tête with Aung San Suu Kyi, as to his – and what can reasonably be said to be his country's – fear of growing Chinese dominance inside Burma. It was a succinct and brutally honest appraisal of U.S. interest in Burma, sounded by a ranking member of the Washington establishment and delivered to Burma's opposition leader.

Significantly, the affront was reportedly brushed aside by Burma's democracy icon, who expressed the opinion that there was nothing to fear from China and that the regional hegemon remained vital to the future of Burma and should, accordingly, not be vilified.

The response effectively signals that Suu Kyi is out of step with Washington's paramount interest in her country – though she may very well have spoken appropriately as a Burmese citizen and to the best interests of her motherland.

This leads to the second critical misstep of Burma's democratic opposition: convincing itself that it can speak for Aung San Suu Kyi.

Though recent months have seen a slight uptick in opposition interest to positively engage China, the by far dominant message to be taken from opposition activists and organizations during Suu Kyi's lengthy detention has been one of unabated condemnation and ridicule of Beijing and its policies.

It then follows that the attention, time and money directed at demonizing China has been used counter to the wishes of Burma's democracy icon and, accordingly, against what she perceives as in the best long-term interests of Burma. This is not to say that Burmese and Chinese interests are one and the same, but that the sowing of an antagonistic relationship between Rangoon/Naypyitaw and Beijing is counterproductive to the interests of the Burmese people.

China, as with the United States, is concerned with Chinese interests. By outwardly threatening Chinese investment and interests in Burma, the country's democratic opposition has served to diminish its own leverage.

Not of coincidence, the strong vitriol directed against Beijing by Burmese opposition parties does serve the stated interests of one country in particular – the United States. This is a fact not lost in the halls of Beijing or Naypyitaw, assisting – rightly or not – in painting the opposition as an arm of U.S. foreign policy and thereby an enemy to Burmese nationalism, the principle purview of Burma's men in arms.

Perhaps even more telling than the exchange regarding China, however, was the revelation at a press conference in Bangkok by Senator Webb following his visit, during which he inferred Suu Kyi may be accepting to the loosening of the sanctions noose. This sentiment sent shock waves through the opposition community as sanctions remain the cornerstone of their policy in confronting the junta.

It is unlikely that Senator Webb attempted to falsely misrepresent Suu Kyi on the issue of sanctions. What is far more likely is that opposition elements sought immediate word to the contrary from The Lady herself in order to patch over a potential momentous gap in the opposition's foundation.

Yet, tellingly, Suu Kyi's apparently unequivocal rebuttal of Senator Webb's assessment of China was again evidently accompanied by language of nuanced ambiguity as to the issue of sanctions – a choice of words then regurgitated and spun by the international media as proof that she stands firmly behind a sanctions regime.

The truth, as is usually the case, is not so simple.

As related via second-hand quotes, her sentiment that sanctions cannot be addressed until the regime first interacts "inside the country" can easily be interpreted as either accepting of an inevitable softening in sanctions as political reconciliation progresses or as steadfast support for an ongoing sanctions policy until opposition victory is relatively assured.

Both Webb and the democratic opposition took from Suu Kyi's musings what they wanted, the former as a convenience to providing flexibility in United States policy and the latter as necessitated by its already having invested so much in upholding an unbending sanctions policy attributed to be in agreement with the thinking of Suu Kyi.

Barring the advent of the acceptable means to the end of Burma's political deadlock as envisioned by Burma's pro-democracy opposition, is the community capable of reorienting itself to alternative strategies to secure the same end result if both its assumptions of internal leadership and external relationships prove compromised? Will the legacy of Aung San Suu Kyi be formed by The Lady herself or held hostage to those, as well-intentioned as may be the case, purporting to speak and act in her name? Can tough decisions be made in the name of and prioritizing national interest and realpolitik as opposed to "international norms" and moral absolutes?

In suggesting that Senator Webb's visit was ill-founded due to the "imperfect" nature of the 2008 Burma Constitution, the letter by three opposition groups directed to Webb and questioning his decision to visit Burma held but the latest indications of an opposition anchored to an irreconcilable, absolutist project. Constitutional perfection, as remarked upon by Thomas Jefferson, is a project in futility – which is far from saying that the constitutional process is not just that, an evolutionary cycle demanding of regular reassessment in the construction of a better constitution than the last.

What is urgently needed from Burma's opposition community is a substantive policy and strategic review, reflective of international relations and power politics as practiced, respective of existing avenues of communication and sensitive to the fact that the means to the end demands flexibility in order to maximize the chance of success.

Austere adherence to doctrinal rigidity – especially that premised on dubious assumptions – is ultimately a sign of weakness, not strength.

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**20/08/2009**

### **News**

#### [Myanmar junta urges West to lift sanctions](#)

*Reuters – 20 August 2009*

YANGON - Army-ruled Myanmar urged Western countries on Thursday to lift economic sanctions and allow the country to modernize and achieve its democratic goals.

A commentary in three official newspapers, which serve as mouthpieces for the reclusive junta, praised "visionary" United States officials who were critical of sanctions, which it said would not bring the downfall of the government.

"The more anti-government groups exercise economic sanctions as a means to put pressure on the government, the further the goal of democracy aspired by the people will divert from its route," the newspapers said.

It urged "all political forces to give up the tactic of economic sanctions and collectively open the golden door to a modern, developed and peaceful democratic nation."

The comments came days after a visit by Jim Webb, a U.S. senator who favors engagement with the generals. On Tuesday state media hailed his trip as a success [ID:nBKK184041].

Webb was the first U.S. official to visit Myanmar in more than a decade and met both junta supremo Than Shwe and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was returned to her home on August 11 to serve 18 months' house arrest for breaking a security law.

Webb was allowed to leave with American John Yettaw, whose visit to Suu Kyi's home in May had led to her latest conviction and who had himself been sentenced to seven years' hard labor.

"Fortune has somewhat smiled on Myanmar's people as there are several visionary officials in the U.S.'s top political area like Senator Webb," the commentary said.

The papers said the collapse of the regime was "far from a possibility" because trade with its neighbors had increased and the country had prospered in the past two decades of army rule.

The United States and European Union have used sanctions to try to force the regime to carry out reforms, but critics say Myanmar's thriving trade with China, India and Thailand have limited their effect.

Webb met Suu Kyi for 45 minutes on Friday and told reporters later that she was "not opposed" to the lifting of some sanctions, but he refused to elaborate.

Myanmar plans to hold multi-party elections next year, which critics have dismissed as a sham to entrench nearly half a century of army rule.

(Reporting by Aung Hla Tun; Writing by Martin Petty; Editing by Alan Raybould)

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[China failing on Myanmar, key US senator says](#)

AFP – 19 August 2009

HANOI — China has failed to show leadership in solving the political stalemate in Myanmar, a United States senator who made a landmark visit to the military-ruled country said in Vietnam Wednesday.

Senator Jim Webb arrived in Vietnam after securing at the weekend the release of an American man who swam to the house of Myanmar's detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

During his Myanmar visit, Webb became the first US official to speak with the junta's reclusive leader, Than Shwe.

The senator also met Suu Kyi without winning freedom for the Nobel laureate, whose house arrest was extended over the bizarre stunt by John Yettaw.

"When I returned to Bangkok from Myanmar I raised my view at that time, with respect to the issues in Myanmar, that the Chinese government should step forward and show leadership in assisting in solving that situation, and they have not done that yet," Webb told a Hanoi press conference on the last leg of a two-week Southeast Asian tour.

Beijing has long helped keep Myanmar afloat through trade ties, arms sales, and by shielding it from United Nations sanctions over rights abuses. China is a veto-wielding, permanent member of the Security Council.

The European Union, United States and other countries have targeted Myanmar with economic sanctions and travel bans but the military regime has so far proven impervious to these, partly due to support from nations including China.

While the US Congress has overwhelmingly backed trade restrictions against Myanmar, Webb has been a critic of sanctions and said in Bangkok that they had allowed Beijing to increase "dramatically" its influence in Myanmar.

The administration of President Barack Obama, particularly Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has indicated it is not keen on using sanctions as a diplomatic tool.

Webb, a Democrat and former Marine who served in Vietnam, chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia.

Yettaw flew home to the US on Wednesday after receiving medical tests in Bangkok but Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest, sentenced earlier this month to a further 18 months because of Yettaw's actions.

The ruling means she will be locked up during elections promised by the ruling junta in 2010.

Webb, who first returned to Vietnam 18 years ago, was to visit government officials and business leaders on his latest trip.

Asked whether he would seek the release of any Vietnamese prisoners, he said discussions over the political evolution of communist Vietnam are "an ongoing process" but he was not raising the matter on this trip.

In July, a group of US lawmakers said they were calling for the release of more than 100 non-violent Vietnamese political prisoners, some of them held for criticising the government, as part of an annual September 2 amnesty.

Vietnam says it does not punish anyone for political views and only prosecutes criminals for breaking the law.

Webb also visited Laos and Cambodia as part of his five-nation Southeast Asian tour whose purpose was "to emphasise how important Southeast Asia is to the United States".

He noted that Secretary of State Clinton has twice visited the region this year, showing "how we want to reinvigorate, from the United States' perspective, our relations in this region".

Clinton's signing in July of a friendship pact with Southeast Asia sent a strong signal of the US desire to deepen ties and counter China's increasing influence, diplomats said.

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[ASEAN mulls Suu Kyi amnesty call: Indonesia](#)

*AFP – 20 August 2009*

JAKARTA — Senior Asian officials met in Indonesia on Thursday to discuss issuing an unprecedented call for amnesty for Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, Indonesia's foreign ministry said.

The officials from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes Myanmar, were considering a "joint appeal" for Suu Kyi's release from house arrest, ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah said.

The appeal could be in the form of a letter to the Myanmar junta, which recently extended the Nobel Peace laureate's confinement for 18 months after a trial widely seen as a sham.

"From what I remember, this would be the first such joint appeal for amnesty," Faizasyah told AFP.

"We don't know what form it will take. It could be in the form of letter to Myanmar, but they will have to discuss this."

Any such appeal would signal a toughening of the bloc's attitude toward the junta and would be a significant departure from ASEAN's much-criticised principle of non-interference in members' internal affairs, analysts said.

"To my knowledge, this is a first for ASEAN. The effort is unusual and a step forward," Singapore Institute of International Affairs chairman Simon Tay said.

"They will not expel Myanmar or sanction it -- not yet -- but they will not sit impassively if the regime continues to act in this manner... If followed up, and the regime does respond, it can signal a diplomatic opening."

Thailand said last Friday it was pushing for a consensus among member states to ask Myanmar's military rulers to pardon Suu Kyi. Faizasyah said the initiative also had the full support of the Indonesian government.

Suu Kyi led her National League for Democracy to a landslide victory in elections in 1990, but the junta has refused to recognise the result and has kept her locked away in her lakeside home for 14 of the subsequent years.

As well as Myanmar, ASEAN also groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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## [Released Prisoner of Myanmar Junta Returns Home Unrepentant](#)

*New York Times – 19 August, 2009*

By Dirk Vanderhart and Susan Saulny

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. — [John Yettaw](#), the recently released prisoner of the military junta in [Myanmar](#) who illegally swam across a lake there in early May and set off a bizarre international spectacle, arrived here Wednesday night, fatigued and apparently unrepentant.

Mr. Yettaw, an eccentric adventurer who lives in the tiny rural community of Falcon, Mo., northeast of here, was escorted through a private exit at the airport terminal so he would not have to face reporters after his multistop, nearly daylong journey from Southeast Asia.

But in a layover in Chicago, where he was pushed in a wheelchair through O'Hare International Airport, he told The Associated Press, "If I had to do it again, I would do it a hundred times, a hundred times."

Mr. Yettaw, 53, was convicted last week in Myanmar of violating [immigration](#) law and local ordinances when he swam across a lake in central Yangon, the capital, to the villa where [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi](#), the country's pro-democracy leader, lives under house arrest.

The intrusion violated the terms of Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi's home confinement, under which she has lived for 14 of the past 20 years. Mr. Yettaw spent two days at the villa, claiming he had had a vision and came to save Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi from assassination. She pleaded with him to leave her heavily guarded compound, but he complained of ill health and she allowed him to stay.

A court sentenced Mrs. Aung San Suu-Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, to 18 months of additional house arrest, ensuring that she would remain in detention through a parliamentary election that is scheduled for next year.

Mr. Yettaw has provided little insight into his motivation for the swim. While waiting for his connecting flight in Chicago, he said, "I wish I could talk more; I can't," and made a zipper motion across his mouth.

At the same trial last week as Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi, Mr. Yettaw was sentenced to seven years of prison and hard labor. His ordeal ended on Sunday after Senator [Jim Webb](#), Democrat of Virginia, flew to Myanmar and met with the leader of the ruling junta, securing Mr. Yettaw's release. Washington policy has marginalized Myanmar for its human rights abuses and political repression.

Mr. Webb and Mr. Yettaw flew from Myanmar together and parted ways in Bangkok. Mr. Yettaw's arrival in Springfield was the beginning of the last leg of his journey home, where he lives with his wife on 150 acres of forest in the Ozark Mountains.

Mr. Yettaw, who has been ill since his arrest, wore a surgical mask to guard against infection while he traveled. He had suffered seizures during his trial and received medical treatment in Bangkok after being released.

Mr. Webb described him after the release as "not a well man" but also added: "I believe what happened was regrettable. He was trying to help. He's not a mean-spirited human being."

Mr. Yettaw's neighbors and friends said they had been praying for his safety, even while they do not fully understand what happened in Myanmar or why he went. Some thought the trip had to do with graduate studies in psychology, or perhaps a book Mr. Yettaw told them he wanted to write.

"I'll be glad to see him back," said one friend, Michael Assel, a retired Navy officer. "I would not question his motives like so many people have done. In my opinion, it's just his business. He got in trouble and for a while, it looked like he wouldn't get home, but he did, so I'm happy about that."

Dirk Vanderhart reported from Springfield, Mo., and Susan Saulny from Chicago.

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[Yettaw release 'will not affect' US policy to Burma](#)

*DVB – 19 August 2009*

The United States has said that the release of US citizen John Yettaw from a Burmese prison last week will not affect its ongoing review of policy towards Burma.

Yettaw, the man whose visit to Aung San Suu Kyi's compound in May triggered a trial which ended in guilty verdicts for both, was released last week following a visit to Burma by US senator Jim Webb.

Suu Kyi was sentenced to 18 months under house arrest, while Yettaw's sentence of seven years with hard labour was overturned after talks between Webb and Burma's reclusive junta leader, Than Shwe.

The US has said however that its review of policy to Burma will continue unaffected by Yettaw's high-profile release.

"We continue to look for signs that the Burmese government is prepared to embark on a meaningful dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi along with the rest of the democratic opposition," said Phillip Crowley, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs.

He said that the Obama administration is looking for signs that Burma is "fundamentally changing its approach and its policies," adding that "I don't think that Mr Yettaw's release is an indication of that."

The US recently renewed sanctions on the Burmese regime, although there have been several signs that the Obama administration could change tack on its policy.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in February that the US needed to review Burma policy in light of the failure of sanctions, which have proved ineffective given China's ongoing financial and political support for the regime.

Furthermore, the visit by Webb, the only senior US politician to have travelled to Burma in over a decade, suggests they may be looking to engage more with the regime, following years of isolation.

Obama said he is appreciative of Yettaw's release, although he urged Burma to release all 2,100 political prisoners.

Webb followed his visit with a statement expressing hope that the gesture offered by the Burmese government can be taken "as a way to begin laying a foundation of good will and confidence-building in the future".

*Reporting by Francis Wade*

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[Rights group urges Thailand to look after detained Rohingya](#)

*Mizzima - 20 August 2009*

by Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai – In the wake of two deaths in the detention camp, a rights group in Thailand has urged Thai authorities to provide humanitarian assistance including medicare to detained Rohingya asylum seekers.

Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB) in a statement on Tuesday said two Rohingya, who were detained in Ranong province's Immigration Office, died due to lack of medical attention.

The group said, on July 1, 2009, 20-year old, Abdul Salam, died while in detention. He vomited blood several times but officials did not pay heed and refused to take him to hospital or provide medical attention, resulting in his death.

Similarly, the group said, on August 13, 2009, an 18-year old, Hama Tula, died of an unidentified illness.

After the two deaths, the TACDB urged authorities to take several other sick Rohingya detainees in the camp to hospital.

The two dead were among a group of 78 detained 'Rohingya Boat People', who were arrested in January after their boat arrived on the Thai coast.

A number of them were sent back to Bangladesh after they admitted to being Bangladeshis and not Burmese and expressed their desire to go back home. Reportedly, 55 people are still in the Ranong Immigration Office.

The TACDB also urged the Thai government not to forcibly repatriate them as their lives are at risk in Burma.

The group further urged the authorities to allow the detainees to practice their religious rituals, as Ramadan, a holy month in the Islamic religion, is to begin from August 21. During this month, Muslims fast and pray throughout the day and eat only after sunset.

"We also called on the Thai government to clarify its policy so that it will not push the Rohingya group to face an uncertain destiny in Burma," the group said.

Besides, the group also called for investigation into the death of the two men, as they died in detention by the authorities. According to Thai law, families or representatives have the right to access the investigation.

Pol Lieutenant Colonel Nattarit Pinpak, Chief of Ranong Immigration Office said on Wednesday that the 55 Rohingya people, who were in Ranong, were sent to the Repatriation Center in Bangkok on the orders of the Royal Police Office in Bangkok.

Marut Hudsen, a 50-year old man from Arakan State in Burma said they are happy to be moved to the center but are worried about the future where they may be sent back to Burma, where everybody knows about difficulties they have to face.

"If we have a choice, we want to live in Thailand," Hudsen was quoted as saying by a Thai newspaper Komchadluek.

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[With no land, Rohingya refugees languish in jail](#)

*IMNA - 19 August 2009*

Rai Maraoh

A group of Rohingya people that was arrested trying to cross illegally into Rangnon, Thailand, remain in prison along the Thai-Burma border after Thai authorities were unable to find a location to repatriate the group.

About 50 Rohingya were arrested by the Thai police in July, as they attempted to enter Thailand by boat. The group, which was assisted by a broker, hoped to find better jobs and asylum in Malaysia.

The Rohingya are a state-less ethnic Muslim minority, traditionally from Arakan area in Western Burma. The Rohingya have attracted sporadic media attention over the last 20 years after facing a variety of abuses. However their status as refugees has been heavily disputed by both Burma and Thailand.

One factor in this dispute has been Burma's refusal to recognize the group as a legitimate ethnic minority. Having been striped of citizenship in 1982 the group faces regular abuses of religious persecution, land confiscation and arbitrary arrest by the Burmese government.

"Thai soldiers arrested a group of 50 Rohingya migrants, and tried to send them back, but the Rohingya haven't been sent back yet because they don't have their own land," said a Kawthaung resident. "Thai authorities have held them for over a month."

According to an article published by the New Light of Myanmar, a Burmese government controlled newspaper, on January 30th, 2009, there are more than 100 ethnic groups officially recognized by the government in Burma, however the Rohingya are not amongst the sanctioned groups.

Early last January a group of Rohingya people, who had been living in Arakan State in western Burma, were arrested by Thai authorities after they landed in Rangnon, according to an article published by the Irrawaddy. In a widely criticized response, the Thai authorities beat the attempted refugees and forced them back on boats, setting them adrift without engines, and few supplies.

At ASEAN's 14th summit meeting, the Burmese foreign minister, Nyan Win, stated that the Rohingya are not Burmese ethnic and that there are no Rohingya in Burma. The Junta has insisted that it will only take back migrants who can prove they are "Bengali", an ethnic group the government recognizes.

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[USDA Secretary to visit Japan](#)

*Mizzima - 19 August 2009*

by Nem Davies

New Delhi - A Burmese delegation led by the Secretary of the pro-junta civil organisation – the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) – will leave for Japan on a good will mission on Wednesday evening.

The delegation's week-long tour follows an invitation by the Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone. The delegation will be led by USDA Secretary U Htay Oo, who is also the Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation. He will be accompanied by Tin Htut Oo, Director General of the Agricultural Department and other officials including those of the Military Affairs Security (MAS).

The delegation will leave on Wednesday evening for Bangkok on a TG flight and will arrive in Tokyo on Thursday morning on a Nippon Airlines flight.

In Japan, the delegation will put up at the Hotel New Otani in Tokyo. On Thursday it will visit the Buddha statue located in a popular tourist attraction centre - Kamakura, north of Tokyo.

On August 23 and 24, the delegation is scheduled to meet Japanese opposition Members of Parliament. On August 25 it will meet the Japanese Foreign Minister. The same evening it will meet the Deputy Agriculture Minister.

While the trip is being termed as a friendly visit, it is also expected to be part of the Burmese junta's lobbying of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), currently the opposition party. The DPJ is expected to win the August 30 elections in Japan.

The pro-junta USDA led delegation, earlier, paid official visits to China and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the USDA is planning to organise a nation-wide conference in October at its newly constructed office in Burma's jungle capital city of Naypyitaw.

Sources in the USDA leadership said, the ruling military junta is likely to announce the electoral law for the 2010 general elections before the conference in October. The conference is expected to fully endorse the junta's plan.

The USDA office, located in a remote area of Naypyitaw along the Rangoon highway, is heading for completion.

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[Secret Norwegian Letter Blasts UN Chief](#)

*Irrawaddy – 20 August 2009*

By Doug Mellgren / AP Writer

OSLO — Norway's ambassador to the United Nations has accused Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a confidential letter of weak leadership, lack of charisma and angry outbursts, the Oslo newspaper *Aftenposten* newspaper reported.

The newspaper on Wednesday published what it said was a letter to Norway's foreign ministry from Mona Juul.

"At a time when the UN and multilateral solutions to global crises are more needed than ever, Ban and the UN are notable by their absence," the letter read.

Juul and her husband Terje Roed-Larsen—now a UN special envoy—had key roles in secretly brokering the now-failed 1993 Oslo peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Juul wrote that Ban showed "weak handling" of international challenges. She said he was a "passive observer" to Burma's arrest of opposition leader and Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, and she blasted his slow reaction to the civil war in Sri Lanka.

Norwegian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marte Lerberg Kopstad refused comment on the authenticity of the letter. She referred reporters to Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere's comment to *Aftenposten* that he had noted the matter, and that he saw Ban as "hard working" and a "good listener."

Juul's Norwegian-language letter was published halfway through Ban's term as UN secretary-general. He is due on an official visit to Norway starting August 31.

She continued: "In other crisis areas, such as Darfur, Somalia, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and not in the least the Congo, the secretary-general seems irresolute."

"Ban routinely has angry outbursts that even levelheaded and experienced co-workers have trouble dealing with," the letter said. Juul added that the mood among Ban's staff is "very tense."

A spokeswoman for Ban, Marie Okabe, said at UN headquarters in New York that his office would have no comment on the newspaper's report Wednesday. She said Ban's office was aware of the report but had not yet confirmed the authenticity of the letter.

Okabe noted, however, that "preparations are still ongoing" for Ban's trip to Norway's Arctic polar ice rim between August 31 and September 2, which has not yet been formally announced.

Asked by reporters whether Ban's trip might be canceled or affected in any way because of the letter's criticisms, Okabe declined to speculate but did not rule anything out.

The trip to various scientific research stations and retreating glaciers is intended to draw attention to the earth's warming as the UN prepares for a climate summit in September and tries to build momentum for a new global climate treaty in Copenhagen in December.

South Korean Ban became UN leader in January 2007. Roed-Larsen is his special envoy for implementation of a 2004 Security Council resolution on Syria and Lebanon.

*Associated Press Writer John Heilprin at the United Nations contributed to this report.*

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**Opinion / Analysis**

[Inside Intel / Myanmar learns to love the bomb? - By Yossi Melman](#)  
*Haaretz – 20 August 2009*

Myanmar has been in international headlines of late (or has been getting its 15 minutes of fame) because of the conduct of the repressive military junta that has ruled the country formerly known as Burma with an iron fist since 1988. (Previously, from 1962, the autocratic General Ne Win was in control.) The junta's cruelty found expression in May, 2008 when it refused to accept international humanitarian assistance for the victims of Cyclone Narkis in which some 50,000 people lost their lives, some 80,000 were injured and tens of thousands were left homeless.

The eyes of Western media and Myanmar's neighbors in southeast Asia have also been focused on that country because of the struggle for the freedom of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National Democratic League and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

She was recently sentenced once again by a court to three years' house arrest, a sentence that was later commuted to one and a half years.

In recent weeks, Myanmar has been in the news in a different context, however - the suspicion that it is trying to develop a secret plan for the production of nuclear weapons with the assistance of North Korea.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed concern about the strengthening of nuclear ties between the two countries during a visit to Thailand last month.

"We are worried about the transfer of nuclear technology and other dangerous weapons," Clinton said, hinting at the possibility of the sale of North Korean missiles to Myanmar.

Her statements came in the wake of American surveillance of a North Korean cargo ship which, according to intelligence assessments, was carrying nuclear equipment headed for Myanmar. There were hints from Washington that its forces would board the vessel because it was contravening international

sanctions. In the end, the ship did not reach its destination and the junta declared that it had never intended to go to Myanmar.

Even before that, a sensational report published in Australia stated that there was evidence that the two Asian pariah states were collaborating in the nuclear sphere. The report claimed that with the aid of North Korean experts, technology and equipment, Burma was devoting itself to secretly building a nuclear reactor and a facility for separating plutonium that would make it possible for to produce nuclear weapons.

The report was written by Prof. Desmond Ball of the National University of Australia and the Irish-Australian journalist Phil Thornton, who is based in Thailand. The two ground their statements on evidence they had collected over a period of two years from two Burmese defectors.

One defector was an officer who had served in a secret regiment made up of nuclear technicians and engineers who had been trained in Russia. In 2007, Russia signed an agreement for nuclear cooperation with Myanmar by which it would supply the junta with a small reactor that would operate on light water for research purposes.

According to the defector, Myanmar was planning to send about 1,000 experts for further study and training at Russian nuclear facilities. The fear in the West is that, under the aegis of this cooperation that is meant for civilian purposes and is legal under international treaties, the military junta is aiming to acquire experience and the capability of developing a parallel and secret nuclear program for military purposes. This would be a kind of Burmese version of what other countries like North Korea, Iran and Syria had done not too long ago, and India, Pakistan and - according to foreign media reports - Israel had in the more distant past.

The defector claimed, according to the authors of the report, that North Korean experts were working in the facility for enriching uranium at Thabeik Kyin, and that in return, Myanmar was selling uranium that had undergone chemical processing to North Korea and Iran.

The second source was a defector who had been a senior official in a company known as Htoo Trading, considered the Rangoon regime's arm for cooperation with Russia and North Korea. According to the report, this source provided them with detailed information about the company's activities before he died in 2008.

He was quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald and other world media outlets saying that the Myanmar government's explanations that they were engaged in a civilian nuclear program were "rubbish."

The defector reportedly said: "[The generals] claim that the nuclear program is aimed at producing medical isotopes for the country's health system."

But, he said, there was no use for nuclear knowledge and technology in the medical field in a country that could not even provide electricity to its hospitals.

### **Damascus connection**

Further evidence of the Myanmar government's apparent desire to acquire military nuclear capability was supplied recently by David Albright, the head of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, which specializes in tracking worldwide nuclear proliferation. Albright published information on the institute's Web site saying senior officials of the North Korean company, Namchongang Trading Corporation, recently visited Myanmar. Western countries have imposed sanctions on this company and forbidden trade relations with it.

This company had a branch in Damascus, which strengthened the suspicions that Bashar Assad's regime in Syria is aiming at developing nuclear weapons and that it set up the nuclear facility - which was destroyed by the Israeli air force in September 2007 - with the aid of the North Korean company and other elements from Pyongyang.

Israeli experts are also following reports of Myanmar's nuclear program with interest. However, like other Western countries, the Israelis are skeptical about the reliability of the two defectors' evidence, especially since there is no supporting evidence.

A similar approach has been adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is overseeing Myanmar's nuclear program. Myanmar is a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and it has Safeguard agreements with the agency. The most recent report published by the agency in May 2009, which checked 70 countries including Myanmar, noted that there was no evidence that Myanmar had violated its declared intent - to use its nuclear program solely for civilian purposes.

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[COMMENTARY: Garbled words; Naive Expectations By Kyaw Zwa Moe](#)

*Irrawaddy – 19 August 2009*

It was an upbeat story after a string of depressing events—a little like a caged bird being set free. A momentary sense of freedom, of compassion.

Everyone can share in the good fortune of John Yettaw's release after he was sentenced to seven years hard labor for intruding into the lakeside home of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in May.

Yettaw, a wayward, misguided US citizen, set off an unfortunate chain of events leading to a further 18-month sentence under house arrest for Suu Kyi.

Amid the hoopla of Yettaw's release, many Burma observers, policy makers and foreign media have praised US Sen Jim Webb, who managed to meet Snr-Gen Than Shwe and Suu Kyi during his Burma mission, praising his visit as a "success"—a potential game-changing moment in US-junta relations.

Not so. For the record, let me summarize the pertinent facts: Suu Kyi's detention was due to expire on May 27: the junta was searching for an excuse to extend her detention beyond the 2010 election. Eccentric Yettaw, who believed he was "sent" by God to save her from assassination, was arrested on May 3. As a main defendant, he was sentenced along with Suu Kyi, who received a three-year sentence on Aug 11.

Yettaw was released on Aug 16. To see Yettaw walk out of prison wasn't a surprise, but it reeked in bitter irony.

Webb was Yettaw's savior; Yettaw was the junta's savior. In twisted logic, the junta might even have seen his release as a reward for being the "God-sent," unwitting tool of Snr-Gen Than Shwe's devious plotting.

Behind this deeply dramatic story, however, there are two specific moments that we must not forget.

Before May 3, Suu Kyi was scheduled to be released; after Aug 11, she is under a new period of house arrest until 2011.

That is the real story.

So, how much importance should we give to the recent clamor about a potential "breakthrough" moment in US-Burma relations?

The US and Western countries could lift sanctions on the regime, open up economic engagement, lift visa bans on the generals, and so on, but the wise observer should not expect anything in return: no release of Suu Kyi and the 2,100 political prisoners, no full participation of opposition parties in the election, no free and fair election.

Any quid pro quo offer is not in the cards with the junta. It's never "give-and-take" with the generals; it's always "give-and-give." If you don't believe it, look at the generals' history.

Already, they are reveling in their good fortune. On Tuesday, the junta's state-run newspapers called Webb's visit a "success." An opinion piece in *The New Light of Myanmar* said: "The visit of Mr Jim Webb is a success for both sides as well as the first step to promotion of the relations between the two countries." It is interesting to see that the junta and Webb on are the same page in their views of the events.

More interestingly, Webb told reporters in Bangkok on Sunday: "I don't want to misrepresent her [Suu Kyi] views, but my clear impression is that she is not opposed to the lifting of some sanctions,"

But the next day that interpretation began to unravel. What Suu Kyi said to Webb was that "interaction" between the junta and the domestic opposition must occur before sanctions are lifted. The senator may have believed that the "interaction" referred to the junta and the international community's sanctions, according to Nyan Win, a spokesperson of her party, the National League for Democracy, who met with Suu Kyi on Monday.

"She told me that when she met with Sen Webb she reiterated the need for the Burmese regime to first interact 'inside the country.' She said only when that happens 'will Burma benefit from relations with the international community,'" Nyan Win told *The Irrawaddy*.

He said the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who is regarded as a strong supporter of economic sanctions, also told Webb: "She was not the one who imposed sanctions against the Burmese regime. She is not in a position to lift those sanctions."

Understandably, the international community is anxious to know exactly what Suu Kyi said. *The New York Times*, in its Wednesday editorial, wrote: "We would like to hear her views directly," referring to Webb's statement that she "is not opposed to lifting some sanctions."

Thus, Suu Kyi's clarification is important for international policy makers, including the Obama Administration, in order for it to shape its policy on the reclusive regime.

So what's the bottom line on this sorry episode? You can be happy that Yettaw, an ill man, is not in Insein Prison, but mourn the day the eccentric American decided to swim to Suu Kyi's rescue, offering the junta a golden opportunity to extend her house arrest.

On Webb's "breakthrough," there's no such thing. The future will be more of the same: a manipulative junta set in its ways, determined to form a military-dominated parliament next year, determined to ignore the calls of the international community.

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**14 - 19/08/2009**

***Aung San Suu Kyi***

**[ASEAN debates calling on Myanmar to free Suu Kyi](#)**

*Reuters – 19 August 2009*

JAKARTA - Senior Southeast Asian officials are meeting in Jakarta to debate whether to call on Myanmar to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Indonesia said on Wednesday.

Suu Kyi, who has spent 14 of the last 20 years in detention, was sentenced last week to a further 18 months of house arrest for violating an internal security law after an American man swam to her lakeside home uninvited.

Senior officials from the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) were meeting for dinner on Wednesday and then will hold more talks on Thursday, possibly going into Friday, to discuss sending a letter to Myanmar's ruling junta.

"They will seek to ask Myanmar to give amnesty but that's in principle only. I don't know exactly how it will be reflected in the letter," foreign ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah said by telephone, adding he was unsure whether the letter would also call for amnesty for other political prisoners.

"I suspect it will be Suu Kyi. I don't know if it will touch on all political prisoners."

Suu Kyi's sentence means she will be unable to take part in an election next year that have already been dismissed by critics as a sham aimed at legitimizing the army's grip on power.

Faizasyah would not be drawn on speculation that the meeting would be evenly split on the issue, with Myanmar and countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos expected to oppose the move.

"The 50-50 calculation of positions cannot yet be verified as the Senior Officials Meeting, one of the possible avenues to discuss it, has yet to meet," he said.

The regional grouping, unlike many Western nations, has so far given only a timid rebuke of Myanmar by expressing "deep disappointment" over the issue, although members such as Indonesia appear keen to send a sterner message.

ASEAN has a policy of non-interference in its members' domestic affairs and is seen by some as a toothless talking shop.

(Reporting by Sunanda Creagh; Editing by Ed Davies and Alex Richardson)

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### [UNSC expresses "serious concern" over Suu Kyi's sentence](#)

*Mizzima - 14 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi – The United Nations Security Council on Thursday expressed "serious concern" over the conviction and sentencing of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and joined the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in calling for the release of all political prisoners.

"The members of the Security Council express serious concern at the conviction and sentencing of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and its political impact," said the statement read out by the Council's rotating President British Ambassador John Sawers.

The statement from the Council, which came after two days of debate, also called for the release of all political prisoners.

Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was found guilty on Tuesday by the special court in Rangoon's Insein prison and sentenced to three years in prison with hard labour.

But minutes after the verdict, Burmese Home Minister intervened with a statement from the country's military leader Snr Gen Than Shwe stating that the sentence of Aung San Suu Kyi and her two live-in party mates be reduced to half and allow them to serve as a suspended sentence in her lakeside home.

Members of the council, in the statement "note the decision of the Government of Myanmar [Burma] to reduce Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence and urge the Government of Myanmar [Burma] to take further measures to create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned parties and ethnic groups in order to achieve an inclusive national reconciliation."

The council's statement, according to reports, was made weaker in language from the original text drafted by the United States that "condemned" the verdict on Aung San Suu Kyi and "demanded" the junta to immediately release her.

The council, which held an emergency close-door meeting on Tuesday over the sentence of Aung San Suu Kyi, took two days before it could come out with a statement because, according to an earlier Security Council report, some members wanted to consult with their government on the text of the statement.

China and Russia, both veto wielding countries in the council, in the past had blocked strong-worded condemnation on Burma, saying the Burmese affair is an internal issue and does not pose international or regional security threat.

Reflecting this stand, the Council's statement on Thursday said, "The members of the Security Council affirm their commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar, and in that context, reiterate that the future of Myanmar [Burma] lies in the hands of all its people."

Meanwhile, the European Union, which has imposed economic sanctions on Burma's military rulers since 1996, has added members of the judiciary responsible for the verdict on Aung San Suu Kyi to the existing list of persons and entities subject to a travel ban and to an assets freeze.

The list of persons and entities subject to the restrictive measures is extended to cover the assets freeze to enterprises that are owned and controlled by members of the regime in Burma/Myanmar or by persons or entities associated with them.

Aung San Suu Kyi, (64) has been under some form of detention for more than 13 of the past 19 years. And critics said, her latest detention of 18 months, is designed to keep her away from the junta's planned elections in 2010.

While the Security Council, UN Chief and several other governments condemned the Burmese junta for sentencing the Nobel Peace Laureate, Burma's neighbours including China, India and Thailand have made soft gestures of appreciation, indicating their views that the case is purely internal affairs of Burma.

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### [Suu Kyi Still a Potent Force for Change](#)

*Irrawaddy – 19 August 2009*

By Denis D Gray / Ap Writer

BANGKOK — Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi is back where the ruling generals want her: inside a crumbling mansion, lonely and isolated from the world.

But a fleeting emergence into public view showed that Suu Kyi's steely grace and charisma, along with her popularity, are intact. She remains a potentially potent force for change in a country that has seen virtually no deviation from harsh military rule for nearly half a century.

For now, the 64-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate, arguably the world's most famous prisoner, will likely return to her daily meditation, listening to radio news broadcasts and waiting for the occasional censored mail, including letters from two sons she last saw a decade ago.

What continues to keep Suu Kyi tenacious and focused on bringing democracy to Burma are her deep Buddhist faith, rigorous self-discipline and the guiding influence of her parents, those close to her say. The only apparent chink in her armor is a fondness for dark chocolate.

Although set within the teeming city of Rangoon, her police-ringed home might just as well be on another continent, removed from a downtrodden populace and a junta that extended her 14-year detention for another 18 months on Tuesday.

Suu Kyi was found guilty of violating the terms of her house arrest by harboring an American, John Yettaw, who swam across a lake to sneak uninvited into her compound. The 53-year-old man was sentenced to seven years, including four years' hard labor. But Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia recently secured his freedom with a plea to Burma's ruling military junta.

During her 86-day trial, diplomats and supporters were impressed by Suu Kyi's grace under pressure, rebuking those who called Yettaw a fool, sharing her birthday chocolate cake with prison guards and thanking envoys for their support.

"Despite almost two decades of extraordinary pressure—more than half of it in detention—and agonizing personal sacrifices, she looked in remarkable shape," wrote British Ambassador Mark Canning. "Calm, dignified, upright, exuding quiet authority but no hint of bitterness toward the prosecution side."

Josef Silverstein, professor emeritus at Rutgers University and an expert on Burma says that while she may never lead the country, she will always be influential.

"Don't write her off. If she is allowed to live, she has an important role to play in Burma's drama," he says.

Suu Kyi has sometimes been described as an accidental leader, having returned to her homeland in 1988 after two decades abroad to nurse her dying mother just as an uprising erupted against the military regime.

Daughter of the country's independence hero, Gen Aung San, Suu Kyi was thrust into the forefront of the 1988 demonstrations until the military crushed them brutally and clamped her under house arrest.

But as a teenager Suu Kyi had developed an intense interest in her father who was gunned down by political rivals when she was just a toddler, seemingly absorbing his fierce sense of nationalist mission, military-like discipline and a stubborn streak.

Suu Kyi lived with her mother in India, attended Oxford University, then worked for the United Nations in New York and Bhutan.

Despite the long absence, Aung Din, executive director of the US Campaign for Burma, said Suu Kyi had planned to come back one day to "complete her father's unfinished work, building a democratic country."

"While Suu Kyi's extreme fortitude can be considered an aspect of her natural character, without question her life has been shaped by her parentage," says Justin Wintle, author of the Suu Kyi biography "Perfect Hostage."

Close friends expect this grit to persist through the next phase of her incarceration in her mother's once grand two-story mansion, now gone to seed.

According to one, Su Su Lwin, Suu Kyi adheres to a strict daily routine, rising about 5 a.m., doing meditation and exercise, reading a great deal.

"She doesn't do anything excessively. She lives a very simple life," Su Su Lwin says. "She eats very little. She does like dark chocolate but even that she eats with a limit. She loves to dress up very nicely and neatly but she doesn't like extravagance."

Before her trial, Suu Kyi wasn't allowed telephone or Internet communications, but could get newspapers and listen to the radio. With no satellite dish on her compound, she was only able to watch state-run television.

Her contact with the outside world is unlikely to increase although she was allowed a rare meeting with American democrat senator this weekend.

She last saw sons Alexander and Kim in 2000, the year after her husband—British academic Michael Aris—died of cancer. The sons, now both in their 30s, have been stripped of their Burmese citizenship and barred from the country.

Suu Kyi was first arrested in 1989 and barred from contesting general elections called by the junta in May 1990. But her name inspired the opposition campaign and her party scored a landslide victory that the regime never recognized.

Suu Kyi has been offered an exit from her isolation: the junta gave her permission to leave the country when her husband died. But she refused, fearing she would never be allowed to return.

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**[White Campaign launched for Suu Kyi](#)**

*DVB – 15 August 2009*

A five-day public movement known as the White Campaign has been launched in Burma following the imprisonment of Aung San Suu Kyi and will be carried out across four of Burma's principle divisions.

The campaign was organized by a group who have continually held prayer ceremonies every Tuesday since Suu Kyi's first incarceration, and includes members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

Myint Myint Aye, NLD secretary in Mandalay division's Meikhtila township, who is one of the organisers of the campaign, urged the public to join.

"From 15 to 19 August, we will be wearing white and holding prayers at pagodas," he said. "This is to peacefully express our will to bring our leader to freedom. We urge our NLD members [across Burma] to join in with the campaign."

Anyone can join in with the campaign by wearing white, offering white flowers at pagoda and by painting houses and fences with the colour white, she said.

The campaign will be carried out in around 20 different townships in Bago, Mandalay, Magwe and Rangoon divisions.

Bago NLD women's wing leader Khin Nyunt Mu said the campaign "is not a demonstration, this is not an act against the government – we are to only show our will from inside the law."

"We urge the people to use everything white during the campaign – wear white, ride white and also offer white flowers at the pagoda as well as painting your house white or hang white plastic bags by your doors."

On Monday Suu Kyi was sentenced to a further 18 months under house arrest, following a visit by US citizen John Yettaw to her compound in May.

The verdict, although short of the anticipated five years in detention, has brought worldwide condemnation. Thailand said today that it was looking for a consensus among regional leaders to call for a pardon for Suu Kyi.

*Reporting by Naw Say Phaw*

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### **Yettaw released**

### **[Yettaw Heads Home](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 19 August 2009*

By Jocelyn Gecker / AP Writer

BANGKOK — American John Yettaw boarded a flight home Wednesday, ending an infamous journey that started three months ago with a secret swim to the home of Burma's detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi that landed them both in prison.

Yettaw, 53, of Falcon, Missouri, was sentenced last week to seven years of hard labor but freed Sunday with the help of a visiting US senator.

Meanwhile, democracy icon Suu Kyi and her two live-in aides remain in detention because of Yettaw's visit—a turn of events that the 64-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate called "very ugly," according to her lawyers.

Yettaw, who is reportedly in poor health, flew with Sen. Jim Webb to neighboring Thailand on a US government plane and underwent two days of medical tests at a private Bangkok hospital.

Seated in a wheelchair and wearing a face mask, Yettaw said "Love you!" to an *Associated Press* reporter before heading onto a United Airlines flight Wednesday morning. He repeatedly flashed the sign language symbol for "I love you," but made no other comments.

Dressed in a rumpled white shirt and tan pants, Yettaw looked pale and haggard. Asked about his health, he pointed to an IV inserted in the back of his right hand.

A woman who identified herself as a nurse held Yettaw's other hand as he was wheeled to a business class lounge at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport and told a reporter "he needs rest."

Yettaw was ticketed through to Springfield, Missouri in a business class seat, with stops in Tokyo and Chicago, according to airline officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose his itinerary.

US Embassy spokeswoman Cynthia Brown said she "cannot confirm his travel plans due to privacy concerns."

In early May, Yettaw traveled to Burma and donned homemade flippers for a nighttime swim to Suu Kyi's lakeside home. The bizarre incident led to trial that sparked global condemnation in which Suu Kyi was sentenced to an additional 18 months of detention for breaching the terms of her house arrest. She has already spent 14 of the past 20 years in detention.

Yettaw testified that he was on a divine mission to save Suu Kyi, saying he had a "vision" she was going to be assassinated and wanted to warn her. Suu Kyi testified that she repeatedly asked Yettaw to leave but relented because he complained of exhaustion and she was concerned for his safety. Suu Kyi's two assistants who live with her received the same sentence.

"It's very ugly that the person who caused the problem was released but the three people in the house remain detained," Suu Kyi said, according to attorney Nyan Win who visited her Monday.

Burma has said that Yettaw was freed on humanitarian grounds and because of his health. He reportedly suffers from diabetes, epilepsy and asthma and was hospitalized for a week during his trial after suffering seizures.

Burma has been under military rule since 1962. The junta last called elections in 1990 but refused but refused to honor the results when Suu Kyi's opposition party won overwhelmingly.

Diplomats and Burma experts widely believe Yettaw's intrusion into Suu Kyi's home gave the junta a legal pretext to keep her locked up through general elections scheduled for next year, which will be the first in two decades.

When Webb, a Democrat from Virginia, visited Burma last weekend he was given unprecedented access. He held rare meetings with both Suu Kyi and the country's reclusive leader, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, becoming the first senior US politician to meet the junta chief.

The junta's uncharacteristic hospitality has fueled questions over whether this could mark a turning point in Burma-US relations and lead to a softening of longtime sanctions — a prospect academics say is unlikely as long as the junta ignores international demands to free Suu Kyi ahead of 2010 elections.

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**'Humanitarian Junta,' Says State Press**

*Irrawaddy* – 19 August 2009

By Wai Moe

The Burmese military regime has shown itself as an advocate of human rights by releasing the American intruder, John W Yettaw, and is promoting bilateral relations with the US by hosting Senator Jim Webb, Burma's leading state-run newspaper said on Wednesday.

In an editorial titled "*Constructive attitude in the area of international relations*," the English-language *The New Light of Myanmar* said that in granting amnesty for Yettaw, the regime has shown respect for "the rule of law, as well as humanitarianism and human rights."

The editorial also noted that US Sen Webb's trip to Burma had ended successfully.

"We hope that his visit will help promote constructive views on bilateral relations and hold discussions based on mutual understanding between the US and Myanmar [Burma] in the future," the editorial said.

It also added that the Burmese regime is working with the international community by being "willing to fully cooperate with neighboring countries, regional countries and all other countries with a constructive attitude."

The comment is most likely linked to a reported conversation between Sen Webb and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Saturday when, in response to Webb's statement that Burma needs to have interaction with the international community, Suu Kyi said that first the regime must interact "inside the country."

Commenting on the *New Light of Myanmar's* editorial, Bo Kyi, the joint-secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a Burmese human rights group based in Thailand, said that if the regime really wants to show respect for the rule of law and human rights it must first release Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, and stop human rights violations in ethnic areas.

"It is clear that the junta released Yettaw after they had used him to keep Daw Aung San Suu Kyi continually under arrest during the elections in 2010," Bo Kyi said. "After sentencing her to 18 months house arrest, they do not need Mr Yettaw anymore."

According to AAPP and other human rights groups, Burma holds more than 2,100 dissidents in prison across the country and hundreds of thousands are internally displaced in eastern Burma.

Meanwhile, many private weekly journals in Burma are reporting good sales this week with the news of the verdict on Suu Kyi being the main attraction.

"Almost every journal can publish the news about The Lady [Suu Kyi] this week," a reporter in Rangoon who spoke on condition of anonymity told *The Irrawaddy*. "The censorship board is allowing journals to broadcast the news. Consequently, they have sold out quickly."

Another editor said she thought it was a good thing that news about Burma's most famous prisoner should appear in Burmese journals.

Although the news about Suu Kyi's trial is in popular demand among Burmese readers, the news of Sen Webb's trip has not been reported in private journals to date.

"Webb is already quite infamous among ordinary Burmese," said the Rangoon-based reporter.

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**[U.S. Prisoner Leaves Myanmar](#)**

*Wall Street Journal* – 17 August 2009

*Release, Secured by Sen. Jim Webb, Fuels Debate Over Role of Private Missions*

*BY WSJ Staff Reporters*

An American citizen jailed by Myanmar was free in Thailand's capital Sunday after a U.S. senator secured his release, but the outcome highlighted a debate in Washington over whether such negotiations help human rights in recalcitrant regimes or let those regimes off the hook too easily.

John Yettaw, who had been sentenced last week to seven years in jail for breaking the terms of dissident Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest, arrived in Bangkok with Sen. Jim Webb, who became the first U.S. political leader to meet Myanmar Senior Gen. Than Shwe. The ailing Mr. Yettaw is receiving medical treatment for a recent series of seizures.

Sen. Webb (D., Va.) heads a Senate subcommittee concerning U.S. policy to east Asia and is an outspoken advocate of easing sanctions on Myanmar, also known as Burma. He has argued that years of sanctions have failed to move the Southeast Asian country toward democratic reforms, and that curbing trade drives Myanmar into the arms of authoritarian neighbors such as China, which has been ramping up investment in the resource-rich country.

Sen. Webb said he would discuss his recommendations with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others on his return to Washington. Mrs. Clinton last month had offered a carrot at a regional-security conference in Thailand by saying that if Myanmar frees Ms. Suu Kyi, a jailed pro-democracy leader, it could open the way for the U.S. to allow investments in the country, which Washington currently targets with stiff economic sanctions.

During his visit, Sen. Webb was allowed to meet with Ms. Suu Kyi, raising tentative hopes among some exiled opposition figures that the military government may be signaling a willingness to soften its stance toward her.

At a news conference in Bangkok on Sunday, the senator said he "had a very long discussion" with Ms. Suu Kyi about when sanctions "work and when they don't work."

Speculation is growing among some dissidents that Ms. Suu Kyi is coming close to saying there is a case for easing sanctions on Myanmar. After realizing that sanctions have done little to dislodge the generals, "she wants to compromise," says Nyo Ohn Myint, a former close aide to Ms. Suu Kyi and a foreign-affairs spokesman for her political party, the National League for Democracy. "We need to sacrifice whatever it takes for the country."

Sen. Webb chose not to disclose any statements made on sanctions during discussions with Ms. Suu Kyi, saying she wanted to wait for a united statement from her National League.

Sen. Webb's private mission to Myanmar -- while approved by the White House -- has caused concern among U.S. conservatives and some Burmese dissident groups that worry the military regime will use his visit to improve its international image without having to give up any meaningful ground to its critics.

Many analysts had expected the Myanmar government to deport Mr. Yettaw, for instance, noting that the country has a history of releasing political prisoners when it wants to curry favor with the outside world.

Opponents of the regime note that such moves rarely are followed by meaningful political reform in the country.

In his meeting with Gen. Than Shwe in the remote administrative capital of Naypyidaw, Sen. Webb asked the government to overturn its decision to sentence Ms. Suu Kyi to 18 months of additional house arrest for the incident involving Mr. Yettaw, and allow her to play a political role -- a concession that would likely be the linchpin of any substantial improvement in relations between the U.S. and Myanmar. Mr. Yettaw swam uninvited to Ms. Suu Kyi's lakeside mansion in Yangon, the nation's largest city, violating terms of her house arrest.

Sen. Webb said in Bangkok that the country's military leadership didn't appear to understand the depth of international opposition to the decision to detain Ms. Suu Kyi, which would effectively sideline her during the run-up to national elections scheduled in 2010.

He said the release of Mr. Yettaw was a gesture "which we should be grateful for and hopefully build upon."

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### [Obama, Ban Ki-moon welcome Yettaw's release](#)

*Mizzima - 18 August 2009*

New Delhi - United States President Barack Obama and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Monday praised Senator Jim Webb for facilitating the release of American John William Yettaw but at the same time urged Burma's ruling junta to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Obama, in a White House statement, said he is pleased with the Burmese military regime's decision to release Yettaw and also noted their willingness to allow Senator Webb to meet detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and military chief Snr Gen Than Shwe.

"We urge the Burmese leadership in this spirit to release all the political prisoners it is holding in detention or in house arrest, including Aung San Suu Kyi," the statement said.

Yettaw (54) was arrested three months ago for allegedly swimming across Inya Lake in Rangoon and entering Aung San Suu Kyi's house and staying for two days. Authorities charged him along with Aung San Suu Kyi and her two other live-in party house mates for facilitating his stay in her house.

A special court in Rangoon's Insein prison on August 11, sentenced him to seven years of prison with hard labor while Aung San Suu Kyi and her two live-in house mates were sentenced to three years with hard labor. But a special executive order from Than Shwe halved the sentence of Aung San Suu Kyi and her friends to 18 months of suspended sentence and allowed them to serve at her home.

On Sunday, Yettaw was sent to Bangkok along with the visiting US Senator Jim Webb. The Burmese authorities said his release was purely on humanitarian grounds considering his deteriorating health. He is currently undergoing treatment in Bangkok.

The UN Chief Ban Ki-moon, according to his deputy spokesperson, welcomed the released of US citizen Yettaw and also welcomed the Burmese junta's willingness to meet visiting Senator Webb.

"The Secretary-General notes the visit of U.S. Senator Webb to Myanmar over the weekend and welcomes his engagement with Myanmar leaders as well as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi towards a peaceful, united, democratic Myanmar with full respect for the human rights of all its people," Marie Okabe, deputy spokesperson of the Secretary General told reporters on Monday.

The release of Yettaw, however, does not come as a surprise to many Burmese observers, as he was known to suffer health problems. He was reportedly having frequent seizures during his three months trial and was hospitalised at least once.

Meanwhile, the US State department on Monday said while it welcomed the release of Yettaw, it will have no impact on the ongoing policy review on Burma and remained concerned over the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and over 2,100 political prisoners.

Philip J. Crowley, the department's Assistant Secretary during a daily briefing told reporters, "I don't think that this is by itself going to have an impact on our ongoing review. Obviously, as we look at the current

situation, we remain very concerned about the continued detainment of Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,100 prisoners that are in detention.”

Crowley said US is continuing to look for signs that the Burmese Government is prepared to embark on a meaningful dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, along with the rest of the democratic opposition and move towards a peaceful transition to genuine democracy and national reconciliation.

Crowley’s remarks came as Burma watchers filled the media with various opinions and ideas that the release of Yettaw might be a concession on the part of the Burmese junta indicating their willingness to open up US-Burma relationship.

But Crowley said that the policy review on Burma is still continuing and Senator Webb will brief Secretary Clinton on his impression over his meetings with Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi.

“And that will inform what we think is both feasible and advisable in terms of our future policy with respect to Burma,” Crowley said.

In terms of the junta’s attitude on political changes, Crowley said, “we’ll be looking for signs that Burma is fundamentally changing its approach and its policies. I don’t think that Mr. Yettaw’s release is an indication of that.”

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### **Burmese Puzzled and Angered by Yettaw’s Release**

*Irrawaddy – 17 August 2009*

By Wai Moe

The release of John W Yettaw, the American who got Aung San Suu Kyi into trouble by intruding into her home, has puzzled and angered many Burmese.

Bo Kyi, joint-secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Burmese human rights group based on the Burmese-Thai border, said Yettaw’s release came as no surprise. “I think the regime just wanted to use him. Everybody knows that the regime wanted Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, not Yettaw.”

Bo Kyi was accused by the regime of sending the American to Burma, where he entered Suu Kyi’s home illegally at the beginning of May and gave the regime a pretext for arresting her and putting her on trial. She was sentenced to three years hard labor, but had her sentence cut to 18 months house arrest.

Yettaw was sentenced to seven years imprisonment, but a US senator, Jim Webb secured his release after a meeting with junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe.

Several Burmese, both within the country and in exile, likened the drama to a Hollywood farce.

One wrote on the Web site of *The Irrawaddy*: “Webb’s performance reminds me of Patti Page’s song ‘How much is that (Yankie) doggie in the window’ and [a] ‘Saving Private Yettaw’ movie directed by Than Shwe. Perhaps, they might win Oscars next year.”

A Rangoon physician said it was “unreasonable that the main culprit in the case was released but Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who is totally innocent, is still detained.”

Win Tin, a prominent opposition leader said the Burmese were interested not in the release of Yettaw but in Suu Kyi’s fate.

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese analyst based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, said the junta killed two birds with one stone by freeing Yettaw. “Now the regime successfully keeps Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under arrest and then they may reopen engagement with Washington.”

A veteran Rangoon journalist speculated that Webb’s success in securing Yettaw’s release was “part of the packages from America to restore a normal relationship with the regime.”

Speculation continued that Yettaw’s venture had been orchestrated—also with help from the US—to create a legal case against Suu Kyi. There were suggestions, not supported by hard evidence, that Yettaw had been paid by the regime to undertake it.

Yettaw claimed he entered Suu Kyi's home to warn her after dreaming that she was in danger of assassination.

For his part, Senator Webb said in Rangoon: "I believe he (Yettaw) was probably motivated by good intentions but he committed a very serious violation in this country."

Webb found good words to say to the regime about its role in the drama. "It was a good gesture from your country to our country for humanitarian reasons to allow him [Yettaw] to return to his family," he told the junta.

Not only Yettaw's family rejoiced at his release. One source at Insein Prison, where Yettaw spent the past three months—much of the time in the prison hospital—told *The Irrawaddy* anonymously: "He complained all the time."

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***US Senator Webb visit to Burma***

**[Interview with Sen. Webb: U.S. Can Help Myanmar Move Forward](#)**

*NPR (Morning Edition) – 19 August 2009*

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**[Burma hails 'successful' US senator visit](#)**

*DVB – 18 August 2009*

Burma's state-run media today called the recent visit by US senator Jim Webb, who secured the release of John Yettaw, a success and a demonstration of the junta's goodwill.

Webb left Burma last week after meeting with the junta leader Than Shwe, and imprisoned opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

A commentary published in three of Burma's main state-run media outlets said that the trip demonstrated the country's diplomatic friendliness towards the United States.

"The Senator's tour of Myanmar was welcomed and recognized both locally and globally as a successful visit," said the New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

[It] helps deepen the relations between the US and Myanmar and reflects Myanmar's magnanimity and consideration."

The meeting between Webb, who chairs a Senate subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific, and Than Shwe was the first time a senior US politician has met with the reclusive leader.

During talks between the two, Webb reportedly urged for the release of Suu Kyi, who was last week sentenced to a further 18 months under house arrest.

"I was very frank with [Than Shwe] in terms of my views," Webb told reporters in Bangkok on Monday. "The best thing on those issues is to see how the government responds."

During a visit to Burma by United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon in early July, the ruling generals twice denied his requests to meet with Suu Kyi, claiming that her trial forbade her from meeting with anyone.

Webb's visit came at a time of increasing speculation as to whether the US is rethinking policy to Burma.

The impact of sanctions has been called into question by senior US politicians, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, although the US did recently renew its sanctions package.

Webb has long called for the removal of the economic embargo in light of its apparent failure, and has said repeatedly that he favours engagement with the regime.

*Reporting by Francis Wade*

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## [Webb meets Aung San Suu Kyi](#)

*Mizzima - 15 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - In a significant development, which came as a surprise, US Senator Jim Webb, visiting Burma as part of a whistle stop tour of five Asian countries, on Saturday met detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was given an 18-month suspended sentence last week, her party spokesperson said.

Nyan Win, spokesperson of the National League for Democracy, said "Jim Webb met Aung San Suu Kyi this afternoon after coming back from Naypyitaw."

The Virginian Senator, earlier on Saturday met representatives of 10 political parties including three leaders of the NLD, who were summoned for a meeting to Naypyitaw. The Senator also met the Burmese junta supremo Snr Gen Than Shwe before flying to the former capital Rangoon.

Eyewitnesses said, Aung San Suu Kyi was seen escorted from her house on Saturday afternoon and taken to the government guest house, where she met the visiting US Senator.

In Naypyitaw, Nyan Win said, leaders of his party met Webb but declined to give details of their discussions.

Webb is the senior most US official to meet Burma's head of the junta Snr General Than Shwe in more than a decade. With the US reviewing its Burma policy, analysts believe that Webb's visit could be useful for the Obama administration to get a clearer picture of the situation in the reclusive Southeast Asian nation.

But Nyan Win said, "We don't have any official stand on Webb's visit as of now. And we understand that he is not representing the United States."

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## [No Change on Burma Policy: US](#)

*Irrawaddy - 18 August 2009*

By Lalit K Jha / Washington

US President Barack Obama on Monday said he appreciated the decision of the Burmese military government to release US citizen John W Yettaw; however, his administration said it would have no impact on its review of the Burma policy, noting that it is looking for positive pro-democracy signals from military regime.

"We continue to look for signs that the Burmese government is prepared to embark on a meaningful dialogue with Aung Sun Suu Kyi, along with the rest of the democratic opposition," the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, P.J. Crowley, told reporters at the daily State Department press briefing.

Soon thereafter, the White House issued a press statement which read: "The president is pleased that Senator Webb has facilitated the release of American citizen John Yettaw from detention in Burma. He appreciates this decision by the Burmese government."

Yettaw was released following a meeting between Sen Jim Webb and Burmese leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe last week.

"The president also notes that in addition to meeting with head of state Than Shwe, Senator Webb was able to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, the first meeting by a US official with her for many years," the statement said.

"We urge the Burmese leadership in this spirit to release all the political prisoners it is holding in detention or in house arrest, including Aung San Suu Kyi," it said.

On Sunday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was briefed by telephone by Sen Webb and the two are expected to meet after the return of the latter to the US.

"Having just met with the Burmese leadership, having just met with Aung San Suu Kyi herself, I think the Secretary [of State] will look forward to having a fuller discussion with Sen Webb, getting his impressions ... based on his meetings. And that will inform what we think is both feasible and advisable in terms of our future policy with respect to Burma," Crowley said.

Earlier responding to media queries, Crowley said the Obama administration will be looking for signs that Burma is fundamentally changing its approach and its policies. "I don't think that this is by itself going to have an impact on our ongoing review," he said.

Expressing concerned about the continued detainment of pro-democracy leader Suu Kyi and more than 2,100 political prisoners, Crowley said: "We continue to look for signs that the Burmese government is prepared to embark on a meaningful dialogue with Aung Sun Suu Kyi, along with the rest of the democratic opposition."

Burma needs to have a dialogue with a full range of ethnic minority leaders in Burma, and move towards a peaceful transition to genuine democracy and national reconciliation, he argued. He said there is no timetable for the ongoing review of its Burma policy and the US is keeping a close watch on developments.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon welcomed the release of Yettaw. "The secretary-general notes the visit of United States Sen Webb to Myanmar over the weekend and welcomes his engagement with Myanmar leaders as well as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi towards a peaceful, united, democratic Myanmar with full respect for the human rights of all its people," the deputy UN spokesperson, Marie Okabe, said.

"The secretary-general also welcomes the release of Mr Yettaw on humanitarian grounds," Okabe said in response to a question.

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### [US Senator's mercy mission to Burma may start a new process](#)

*Mizzima - 17 August 2009*

by Larry Jagan

Bangkok - The American senator, Jim Webb may have started something significant, but at this stage everything to do with his visit is still shrouded in mystery. Even at his two press conferences in Bangkok on consecutive days, the usually garrulous and talkative politician was overtly coy, dodging questions and being continually non-committal. "He appears frightened and is hiding something," said a senior western diplomat who closely follows Burmese affairs. "He knows more than he's telling, something is surely afoot."

This was certainly no ordinary or even private visit, despite senior state department officials insisting the senator visited Burma in a personal capacity. The US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, rang him last night to talk about the trip, Webb let slip during his encounter with the press on Monday. This only adds to the increasing suspicion that something significant may be happening beneath the public gaze. After all that is how serious diplomacy takes place.

Senator Webb, it must be remembered, is a rising political star in Washington, close to the Clintons and Barack Obama, according to sources on the Hill. He is also tipped to become the next secretary of defense, when the Bush-appointed Bill Gates stands down in around two years' time. So the US could not have had a better envoy – even if unofficially -- than this conservative Democrat from Virginia.

One of the key messages Webb passed onto Than Shwe was that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released before the 2010 election, and allowed a political role. "We will just have to wait and see how the Myanmar government responds," he told Mizzima. "I am hopeful that they will give my recommendation [that she be freed] serious consideration," he added.

The pro-democracy opposition abroad is still complaining that Webb's visit gave the Burmese military leaders international credibility, and even a measure of legitimacy. This accusation at least the senator dismisses. "I am not pro-Myanmar, but I believe the Burmese people deserve better than they are getting now. Isolation is only preventing them from developing economically and politically," he told journalists on

Sunday. A day later he was still loath to call his visit a success – the jury is still out, he implied. “It’s now in the hands of the Myanmar government,” he said.

Sensibly the senator is distancing himself from what many want to dub as his key success: bringing the American intruder, John Yettaw, out of Burma after he was officially deported on Sunday. It was Yettaw whose unwanted visit to Aung San Suu Kyi’s residence some three months ago resulted in the detained opposition leader being put under house arrest for a further 18 months. “Mr Yettaw’s actions were regrettable,” Webb said. “But the Myanmar government responded favourably to my request to release him on humanitarian grounds.”

The American was sentenced to seven years in jail with hard labour – and his family feared that given his ill-health he would not cope with conditions in a Burmese jail. In fact during his imprisonment while the trial as on he frequently needed medical attention and was hospitalised at least once. Many analysts saw the harsh sentence as an open invitation to Washington to open discussions with the military government.

Yettaw is now in a Bangkok hospital undergoing an intensive medical check-up before returning to the US. “He’s got severe medical problems, and had a relapse and fit this [Sunday] after he was handed over to US embassy officials,” a senior American state department diplomat told Mizzima on condition of anonymity.

The hapless American’s release was one of three major requests the US senator made during his crucial meeting with the junta’s reclusive leader, General Than Shwe. The other two were to be permitted to see the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and to strongly urge the regime to release her and allow her to fully participate in the country’s political process. “He granted my first two requests during our meeting, and there is yet to be a response to my third,” he told journalists at a press conference in Bangkok.

In fact it is the two meetings – the one with Than Shwe and the other with Aung San Suu Kyi – that may yet prove to be more significant than the release of the hapless American visitor. The senator remained coy about the details of the talks he had with the two, though he said he had an extensive exchange with both on the current political process, which the junta calls its roadmap to disciplined democracy. “Without Aung San Suu being released and allowed to participate in the elections, the US and the international community would find it impossible to accept the process as free and fair,” he told General Than Shwe.

The pro-democracy leader preferred to wait until she and her party had formulated a detailed policy towards the elections, before issuing a statement, he told Mizzima. On sanctions we had a long and vigorous discussion, he added. “It was my impression that she was not opposed to lifting some sanctions, that is all I will say as I do not want to misquote her,” he said. He declined to give further details. This seems to be an admission that the detained Nobel Laureate may have given the new US administration the green light to consider dismantling some of the sanctions.

Many analysts believe that it is the senator’s support for a change in US policy towards Burma and his opposition to the sanctions’ approach that encouraged the regime to invite him. That and the fact that he is a former soldier, a marine who fought in the Vietnam War would also have been important. Burma’s military rulers mistrust all civilians.

Senator Webb’s visit is the first by an American Congressman in more than 10 years. But US officials, and Webb himself, played down any suggestion that he was an envoy for the Obama administration or that he was an interlocutor between the two governments. “I went in a private capacity – and in my role as chairman of the Senate foreign affairs East Asia and the Pacific sub-committee,” he told journalists in Bangkok. “But I will be reporting back on the visit to the Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, on a wide variety of issues, including increasing humanitarian assistance,” he said. In fact Clinton could not wait until he returned and phoned him in Bangkok on Sunday evening.

Apart from conveying Aung San Suu Kyi’s best wishes to President Barack Obama, Webb said he had only his own impressions and general issues to report back to the White House. But all this will be part of the mix as the new administration mulls over what kind of policy changes might best help encourage the regime to introduce genuine political reform and make its roadmap internationally credible, according to senior state department officials. Many people are optimistic that the administration is planning significant if not radical changes to US policy towards Burma.

“Webb is after ‘aggressive engagement’, like Senator Lugar’s report on US-Cuban relations,” seasoned Burma-watcher, Derek Tonkin told Mizzima. “The US and Burma should now look for areas of mutual interest on which they can start talking -- narcotics, even US certification, international terrorism, piracy around SE Asia and off Somalia, communicable diseases, conservation -- the list is endless,” he said.

What is now needed is quiet diplomacy, a senior European diplomat with experience in behind-the-scenes exchanges and negotiations in Asia told Mizzima on condition of anonymity. Webb seems to be optimistic: “maybe this trip has helped to start the ball moving forward,” he said. But it is yet to be seen whether Webb’s trip is a one-off visit or the start of a new serious policy of engagement by Washington.

But more importantly, perhaps the visit and the outcomes show a new approach on the part of the junta. Senator Webb was given a ceremonial reception – with all the top generals – that is usually reserved only for visiting heads of state. Shown prominently on the state-run television, it clearly shows Burma’s military rulers now crave international, especially American, recognition, said a long-time foreign resident in Rangoon.

If the Burmese military regime really does want to engage with the international community, it may even heed some of its concerns, and then they will have no alternative but to deal with Aung San Suu Kyi. Than Shwe, at the behest of some of its Asian allies, especially Singapore and China, is keen to improve relations with the US, according to military sources in the Burmese capital Naypyitaw. The senator’s visit makes this extremely evident.

“You cannot fail to see in this that the junta is keen to tell the world that sanctions do not work and we are open to dialogue – at least with other governments, if not Aung San Suu Kyi and the pro-democracy movement inside the country,” said a western diplomat based in Rangoon.

But in the end the regime will proceed with its plans for a disciplined democracy no matter what the international community thinks. But what Webb’s visit does show is that Than Shwe is getting ready to push the process forward. The next step will be the creation of an interim government, according to senior Burmese military sources. Than Shwe plans to announce this soon and it will take control of the government for a year, possibly from September, a Burmese official told Mizzima. Aung Thaung, the minister and a close confidante of Than Shwe’s, recently told his deputies that there would be a new government soon, and he may no longer be the minister. Most other ministers have also told their staff that they will not be in their current posts by the end of the year.

“According to Than Shwe’s plans, all the current ministers will have to resign, if they are to join a political party and fight the forthcoming elections,” said the independent Burmese academic, Win Min based in Chiang Mai. So far there have been no hints as to who will be in the interim administration. Some analysts speculate that it may even include a senior member of the NLD.

But most diplomats and analysts in Rangoon remain skeptical that Than Shwe plans any real change, even the formation of an interim government may be intended to deflect international criticism. The end result of all these changes is clearly to make sure the military retains political control.

“There have been abundant signals that the roadmap is not an inclusive process and the referendum [in May last year] dispelled any remaining doubts – this is a hyper-flawed process that will not lead anywhere, it’s simply a consolidation of the military’s control of the state,” the former UN human rights rapporteur for Burma Professor Paulo Pinheiro recently told Mizzima.

But there may still be surprises in store. Never underestimate the generals’ cunning and ability to wrong-foot the opposition by doing the unexpected. Than Shwe is already planning to release political prisoners, including some high-profile activists, in the near future, according to a senior government source close to the junta leader.

After all, Than Shwe promised the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon when he visited Burma last month that political prisoners would be released. The Burmese Ambassador to New York re-iterated this when he told the UN Security Council last month that political prisoners would be released before the elections and allowed to participate – though did not say how many or who would be included.

So it should not be a surprise if Aung San Suu Kyi is freed before the elections – and maybe even sooner than that. Senator Webb’s coyness during his encounters with the press in Bangkok gives the impression

he is definitely hiding something. A western diplomat who follows Burma closely believes the US senator may have been given some form of assurances or undertakings that the pro-democracy leader will be freed in the near future -- but has to keep mum for the time being.

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**US Senator: Burma Denies Nuclear Plans**

*VOA - 17 August 2009*

By Heda Bayron, Bangkok

U.S. Senator Jim Webb, who recently held talks with Burma's military leaders, says the government denies reports that it is trying to acquire nuclear technology. The senator also says Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has indicated a willingness to see some sanctions on Burma lifted.

Senator Jim Webb says he did not directly raise the issue of whether Burma has a covert nuclear program during talks with the country's leader, General Than Shwe. Webb met with the reclusive leader on Saturday, the first high-ranking U.S. official to do so.

However, he said Monday that the Burmese government denied having a nuclear program.

"But it was communicated to me earlier on that there was no truth to that, from a very high level in their government," Webb said.

Earlier this month, Australian researchers said interviews with defectors from Burma revealed that the government has a secret nuclear program, allegedly aided by North Korea. In June, a North Korean ship believed to be headed to Burma with a suspicious cargo turned back under international pressure. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned that any military ties between Burma and North Korea pose a security threat to the region.

In an unprecedented gesture toward the United States, Webb was allowed to meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon Saturday. He also was able to win the release of a U.S. citizen, John Yettaw, jailed for illegally visiting Aung San Suu Kyi at her home in May. That visit led to the government extending her house arrest by 18 months.

Webb says it appears Aung San Suu Kyi might not oppose easing sanctions on Burma. The U.S., the European Union and other Western governments have imposed economic sanctions over the years to punish the repressive military government. Webb favors the eventual lifting of sanctions on Burma, which he and others argue only increased the isolation of its people.

"I don't want to take the risk of misrepresenting her views," Webb said. "But I would say to you that it was my clear impression from her that she is not opposed to lifting some sanctions."

In the late 1990s, Aung San Suu Kyi expressed some support for economic sanctions as a way to pressure the government to recognize her party's election victory in 1990 and allow it to form a government. But in recent years, she has not publicly commented on sanctions. She has spent 14 of the last 20 years under house arrest.

On Sunday, Webb said Washington needs to develop new ways to end Burma's isolation and bring about political and economic change. Webb, a Democrat, spoke with Secretary Clinton Sunday and will brief her again upon his return to Washington.

The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs is on a five-nation tour of Southeast Asia. From Bangkok, he will fly to Cambodia Tuesday and from there, to Vietnam.

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***Sanctions***

**Suu Kyi Clarifies Her Sanctions Policy**

*Irrawaddy – 18 August 2009*

By Wai Moe

Burma's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi told US Senator Jim Webb on Saturday that "interaction" must first be established inside the country, according to her lawyer.

The comment was made in response to Webb's assertion that, with regard to sanctions, Burma "needs interaction with the international community," the lawyer said.

"Daw Suu told me that when she met with Senator Webb on Saturday she reiterated the need for the Burmese regime to first interact 'inside the country.' She said only when that happens 'will Burma benefit from relations with the international community,'" said Nyan Win, Suu Kyi's lawyer, who met her for about one hour on Monday afternoon.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday, Nyan Win said he asked Suu Kyi about the recent reports in several British newspapers that she had agreed to an overturn of the international tourism boycott on Burma. "She replied that she had not discussed the issue with anyone recently," Nyan Win said.

According to the lawyer, who is also a spokesperson for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party, Suu Kyi's stance on sanctions has not changed since she issued a statement in 2007.

"Suu Kyi said that as she was not the one who imposed sanctions against the Burmese regime, she is not in a position to lift those sanctions," he said.

The NLD leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate has in the past, however, offered an olive branch to the ruling generals. In November 2007, following the crackdown on monk-led demonstrations, she said, "In the interest of the nation, I stand ready to cooperate with the government in order to make this process of dialogue a success ..."

Suu Kyi said she explained to Webb that despite some early agreements with Maj-Gen Aung Kyi, the minister of relations, who was appointed by the government to liaise with her after the monk-led protests, nothing ultimately transpired from the meetings.

Nyan Win said that one of topics raised during Suu Kyi's conversation with Webb was China's influence within the Burmese regime. The US senator apparently referred to Beijing's involvement in Burma as a "fearful influence."

"However, Daw Suu told Webb that she rejects such terminology with regard to China, and she wants Burma to be on good terms with all its neighboring countries as well as the international community at large," Nyan Win said. "She said China is Burma's neighbor and wants to be a good friend of Burma. She said she did not see China as a fearful influence."

Another issue raised by Webb on Saturday was about the participation of her party, the NLD, in the coming elections in 2010. She told Webb that she needed to discuss the matter with members of her party thoroughly, her lawyer said.

Suu Kyi met with the Democratic senator in Rangoon on Saturday. On Monday, Webb told reporters at a press conference in Bangkok that Suu Kyi favors the removal of some of the international sanctions applied by the US and EU.

"I don't want to misrepresent her views, but my clear impression is that she is not opposed to the lifting of some sanctions," Webb said.

Webb is known for his strong criticism of the US administration's Burma sanctions, arguing that isolating Burma has strengthened China's grip, weakened US influence and done nothing to improve the junta's behavior.

According to Nyan Win, Suu Kyi made no comment on whether she considered the US senator's trip to Burma to have been beneficial.

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### [Journalists doubts effectiveness of sanctions on Burmese State-run media](#)

*Mizzima - 18 August 2009*

by Nem Davies

New Delhi - Journalists in Burma doubts the effectiveness of the European Union (EU)'s inclusion of four Burmese state-run media in their updated list of sanctions.

In the updated list of sanctions on August 14, the EU included the names of officials working at the New Light of Myanmar Newspaper (Burmese & English versions), the Mirror, the Myanmar TV (MRTV) including Myawaddy TV channels and the Myanmar Movies.

The EU list also included the names of the judges and officials responsible for sentencing pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on August 11. The restrictions imposed ban on the individuals to travel to European countries and freezing of their assets in foreign countries.

But journalists in Burma doubts the effectiveness of the sanctions as officials working at the state-run media are hardly making any profits and are rarely makes trips to any European countries.

"I don't believe in sanctions. The inclusion of Myanmar Periodicals Corporation is done out of ignorance," a Rangoon based journal editor told Mizzima.

"I think the sanction is missing the target. They should target business entities owned by family members of the military generals including their sons and daughters and their cronies," the editor added.

Besides, another editor of a Journal in Rangoon remarks that journalists in Burma are often forced used as part of the junta's propaganda as the journalists cannot resist the junta's orders.

"There are many journalists in the private media, who have a good rapport with government officials. But at the same time no private journals can resist their command. We have to follow their dictats though we resent it," he added.

A veteran journalist remarks that the media environment has been controlled by the junta and no journalists can resist the orders saying the blame is not on the journalists but on the junta's system.

"The state owned media will continue to be the machinery for state propaganda. They have been constituted only for being the state's propaganda machinery. It is part of the junta's tactic of 'Counter media with media'," he added.

Meanwhile, exiled based Burma Media Association welcome the EU's updated list of sanctions saying they should have included the Burmese Censorship Board in the list and ban travel to those working at the censorship board.

San Moe Wai, Secretary BMA, said, "The EU should include the Censor Board in their sanctions list. They violate press freedom and control freedom of speech. The EU should also ban their travels."

He said, by putting the state owned media in the list, it also serves as a warning to other private media. Moreover, the sanction will also impose restrictions on the junta's mouthpiece media.

The EU sanction was first imposed on the junta in 1996 and it is renewed every year. This new renewal will expire on 30 April next year.

Moreover EU has imposed economic sanctions on 40 businesses ventures owned by the military regime and its private partners.

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**Other**

**[Veteran opposition leader in hospital](#)**

*Mizzima - 17 August 2009*

by Phanida

Chiang Mai - Win Tin, a member of the Central Executive Committee of the National League for Democracy, who was hospitalised on Saturday and underwent a cardiac surgery, is recovering and will be discharged soon, a relative said.

The 80-year old opposition leader was admitted to 'Asia Taw Win' special clinic in Rangoon's San Chaung Township on Saturday and was operated upon on Sunday.

"We took him to the clinic on Saturday evening. The operation was performed on Sunday afternoon. Doctors inserted a pace maker as they found that his heart beats were slow," his relative, Thet Naing Oo, told Mizzima.

Thet Naing Oo said the veteran journalist's health is improving and he is likely to be discharged from the clinic on Tuesday. But doctors have forbidden use of electronic equipment including telephones near him.

Win Tin, after serving a 19-year prison sentence, was released on September 2008. But ever since his release, he has been complaining of various health problems including eye problems.

Win Tin earlier told Mizzima that he had problems with his eyesight, and an operation is needed. But doctors dare not carry out an operation as his pulse rate is below normal.

"When I had my eyes checked up, doctors said I need an operation but they dare not do it because when they checked my pulse rate it was much below normal. My pulse rate is only about 40-50 beats per minute, where as the normal rate is about 80-90," Win Tin told Mizzima in an earlier interview.

The former editor served as an advisor to the detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 1989.

In 1996, he received an additional seven-year sentence for writing a testimonial to the United Nations on torture and the lack of medical treatment in Insein Prison.

In 2001, he was awarded the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize of UNESCO and the World Association of Newspapers also named him winner of the Golden Pen of Freedom Award.

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**[Burma's Monks Carry On Democratic Fight](#)**

*Time* – 18 August 2009

By Hannah Beech / Sittwe, Burma

The abbot leaned in but didn't bother to lower his voice. Around us were sitting half a dozen local Buddhist worshippers, including one man whose aggressive curiosity about my presence made him a likely informant for the notoriously repressive Burmese junta. No matter — the abbot had no time for fear. "This is a very famous monastery," he said, as I, the first foreign visitor to the monastery in many months, nodded. "Important people have come here throughout history: Nehru, Indira Gandhi and, of course, the Lady."

It was, in fact, the connection to Aung San Suu Kyi — the democracy icon known simply as "the Lady" in Burma, who on Aug. 11 was sentenced to 18 months of house arrest on charges condemned by leaders worldwide — that had led me to the Shwe Zedi monastery in the first place. Located in the crumbling Indian Ocean port town of Sittwe, Shwe Zedi was the monastery of U Ottama, one of Burma's most famous monks, whose pacifist resistance against the colonial British inspired independence hero Aung San, father of Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi. The political activism of the Shwe Zedi monks has continued into modern times; in 2002, this was one of the few places Suu Kyi visited in between stints of house arrest, and she called for political change from its lawn. In September 2007, Shwe Zedi was among the first in Burma to organize peaceful prodemocracy rallies, a doomed effort that ended in the junta gunning down unarmed demonstrators on the street. "At first, I was scared to join the protests," recalls a teenage monk who participated in the mass rallies. "But I had faith that even if it failed, it was better than doing nothing." ([Read "Burma Court Finds Aung San Suu Kyi Guilty."](#))

The generals who have ruled Burma since 1962 may have a harder time keeping the faith. Most Burmese are devout Buddhists, and the junta tries to burnish its image by plastering state-controlled newspapers with articles about its cash contributions to religious causes. But no amount of merit-making can erase the specter of regime goons massacring monks, as they did in 2007 and, even more violently, in 1988. Although a frightened hush followed the most recent crackdown, Suu Kyi's trial has ignited speculation that this time, the generals have gone too far — and that religious harmony has been disturbed. "Signs that the government in Burma is losing its power are everywhere," opined a June editorial in *Mizzima*, a leading Burmese dissident news website. "Why [is] a military government armed to the teeth very afraid of the gentle lady who speaks softly from behind bars, as well as barefoot monks who pray peacefully?"

Certainly, the signs from the heavens haven't been auspicious of late. On May 30, the revered Danoke pagoda on the outskirts of Rangoon suddenly collapsed, killing three and injuring dozens of others. Burmese with an eye for otherworldly coincidences noted that a recent ceremony for the pagoda had been presided over by none other than the wife of Than Shwe, the junta's supremo leader. Many ruling generals are known to consult astrologers — a previous junta head once denominated the Burmese currency by nine because he considered the number lucky — and the collapse of a pagoda after being blessed by a junta family member surely dented their sense of divine right. Then, on June 4, an elevator inside a 32-story Buddha statue in Sagaing division rapidly lost altitude, injuring several passengers. "Burmese people take omens very seriously," says a newspaper editor in Rangoon. "I can assure you that the generals are very worried."

In the aftermath of the crushed 2007 protests, Shwe Zedi, like many monasteries across the country, was forced to shutter for a month. Cautiously the faithful returned, but dozens of Sittwe monks are still missing, believed either to be toiling in labor camps or to have slipped into foreign exile. Yet the monks I spoke to seemed curiously unafraid to talk. "It is our responsibility to try to change our country," said a monk who sat cross-legged on the burnished teak floor of the 19th century monastery. "If the monkhood doesn't do it, who else will?" Another monk padded over to a bookcase and pulled out a Burmese-English dictionary, flipped through it and pointed to a word: *democracy*. Perhaps their outspokenness is the legacy of their monastery's activism — or the knowledge that they carry far more legitimacy in the eyes of the Burmese people than does a clutch of army men.

In September 1988, in Burma's precursor to the Tiananmen Square massacre, hundreds — if not thousands — of people were slaughtered when troops opened fire on monks, students and other peaceful protesters in Rangoon, just days after predictions had abounded that the junta was on its last legs. Two years later, the ruling generals lost badly in elections to Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, a clear indication of the public's disenchantment with army rule. The junta ignored the poll results and tightened its grip on power. In 2010, the regime promises another nationwide poll, the final step to building what it calls a "discipline-flourishing democracy." Few doubt that the generals will ensure their victory this time through intimidation or ballot-box-stuffing. ([Read "Burma's Agony."](#))

So what can the monks of Shwe Zedi do, besides silently point at words in a dictionary? I posed the question to the abbot, who replied, "Pray." The snooping man sitting near us, who had whipped out a camera to take photos of our meeting, smirked. As I left Shwe Zedi, the abbot handed me a slip of newspaper on which rolled a tiny ivory-hued bead. It was, he said, a bone relic of the Buddha, or at least it symbolized as much. I thanked him for the gift of luck. But I couldn't help thinking that the monks of Burma — not to mention the impoverished citizens kneeling around me in their frayed sarongs — will need the relic far more than I.

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**[Government employees to lose incentives in Naypyitaw](#)**

*Mizzima - 17 August 2009*

by Ni Moe Myint

Naypyitaw – Authorities will begin collecting five different bills including house rent, electricity and water bills, from government employees they were earlier exempted from in Naypyitaw.

In July, the authorities collected Kyat 2,000 from each flat or houses as electricity bill up to July 2009. They, were however, told that they would be charged at the rate of Kyat 25 per unit next time.

Government employees have to pay rent at a flat rate of 10 per cent of their monthly salary regardless of the type of houses occupied, either with the family in flats or if they are staying together in dormitories, a staff from the Ministry of Forest told Mizzima.

"The monthly electricity bill may touch five digits as power is available here 24x7. Then we have to pay rent and Kyat 6,000 per month for cable TV. After deducting all these expenses from our monthly salary of just over Kyat 20,000, I wonder how much will be left for us to eat," a low ranking staff from the Ministry of Economics and Commerce told Mizzima.

In Burma, where there has been military rule since 1962, the monthly salaries of low ranking government employees range from 15,000 kyat (USD 12 approximately) to 30,000 kyat.

In late 2005 and in early 2006, employees in various government ministries were ordered to move to Naypyitaw, as the military junta announced shifting of its capital to the jungle city. There was a lot of resentment among employees, habituated to living in urban areas. Some even toyed with the idea of resigning.

To persuade the employees to accept the transfer to the new jungle capital, authorities thought up incentives including one-step promotion, free housing in modern flats, round the clock free electricity and free cable for state-run TV.

However, there was a nasty shock in store for employees after they began settling down in their new homes. The regime began withdrawing the concessions one by one.

To make matters worse, government employees are forced to plant saplings and plants in their housing complexes and are given points on it. Those who fail to get 25 points are asked to explain.

"The authorities come and check our kitchen garden every week. A sapling of gourd fetches one point. It receives five points when it begins to bear gourds. So we dare not pluck our own gourd from our plants for fear of losing points. Five mango trees get one point," a staff from the Ministry of Industry (1) living at the Bugwe Housing told Mizzima.

"And if we fail to collect 25 points, we have to explain to the minister. The minister is known to threaten employees with transfer to factories," the staff complained.

Under pressure government employees have to attend office on holidays in rotation. Worse their families have to tag along when they need to do tiring work like planting trees, cleaning offices among other chores.

The ministries including Central government offices moved to Naypyitaw near Pyinmana in central Burma, as of November 2005 from the former capital Rangoon.

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### [Rohingya Teenagers Die in Thai Detention Camp](#)

*Irrawaddy – 18 August 2009*

By Lawi Weng

Two young Rohingya migrants have died in the past three months in a detention camp in southern Thailand, the Bangkok English-language daily newspaper, *The Nation*, reported on Tuesday.

13 other inmates are in poor health, *The Nation* reported.

The Ranong camp, near Thailand's southern border with Burma, is holding 55 Rohingya illegal migrants who were arrested on the Thai coast in January after they fled in open boats from Burma. Thai authorities allowed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to visit the camp in January and February but have not granted access since then.

The two dead migrants were aged 19 and 15. An immigration officer, Pol Lt Col Nattarit Pinpak, told *The Nation* that they had refused food or drink for several days. They were depressed and homesick, the police officer said.

UNHCR regional spokeswoman Kitty McKinsey, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday that requests for access to the camp had not been granted.

"We have asked the Thai government many times for access there. We told the Thai government that we are ready to help them [the detained migrants]. We want to know what their protection needs are. But we are not getting access."

Twenty nine Rohingyas who were also arrested in January were deported to Bangladesh after their documents showed they were Bangladesh citizens.

Despite extensive discussions with Thai immigration officials, Burma has refused to take back the remaining Rohingyas, saying they are not Burmese citizens.

Hundreds of Rohingyas, Muslim victims of discrimination and human rights abuses in Burma's Arakan State, have been fleeing in open boats, hoping to reach Malaysia. Unknown numbers have drowned on the open sea, and international rights groups have accused the Thai navy of turning back boats that tried to land in Thailand. The Thai government has denied the charges.

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**[KNU to try and reunite breakaway DKBA](#)**

*Mizzima - 19 August 2009*

Chiang Mai (Mizzima) – Serious confabulations are on in some KNLA battalions under the command of the KNU's 6th Brigade, where ways are being explored to reunite with its breakaway faction the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA).

Should the exploratory moves bear fruit, it will be a blow to the Burmese military junta, which has been pitting the two Karen groups against each other.

Some commanders from the 16th and 17th Battalions of the KNLA in Duplaya District, Karen State, which is under the control of KNLA's 6th Brigade have started coordinating among themselves to reinstate members of the breakaway faction.

"It is not possible to demote them from platoon commanders to section commanders when they come back to the fold. We must see to their not losing their status. If someone comes back with a section, he will be made a section commander. Those that come back with a platoon will be given platoon commander status. This was our discussion in brief," an officer of the KNLA told Mizzima on condition of anonymity.

The plan afoot is yet to be forwarded to the 18th Battalion in the 6th Brigade for discussions but it has been sent to 6th Brigade Commander.

The armed conflict among Karen nationalities will not end through violence. At the grassroots level we have circulated our plan of reuniting with the breakaway faction to district officials and the Brigade. The high command is yet to reply to our proposal," he said.

The KNU Vice-Chairman said the plan would be implemented if found appropriate, when it reaches the KNU headquarters.

"We do not know about it yet. There is a committee to deal with DKBA affairs in each district. If they send the plan to the headquarters, we will discuss and consider it. If we deem it fit and proper we shall implement it. We shall advice and lead them in this regard," KNU Vice-Chairman Saw David Takapaw told Mizzima.

An officer of the DKBA said that he thought it would be difficult to implement this plan but they would abide and comply with the decision reached by the high commands from either side.

"I have no idea of how to reach this stage (reuniting with the mother unit). The situation on both sides -- the situation in Burma and the situation of exile based units, need to be considered. Anyway if our seniors agree we have no problem with the plan," he said.

The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) led by Tha Htoo Kyaw split from the mother unit the Karen National Union (KNU) in 1994. They are now based in Myaing Gyi Ngu village, Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State.

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**[Monks searched as they travel through Mon state](#)**

*IMNA - 18 August 2009*

Panorkkyar

Beginning this month, Burmese government authorities in Mon State have been increasing security measures and investigating Buddhist monks who are traveling – searching through their saffron robes and requiring them to open their bags.

According to one monk who was searched on his way from Moulmein to Mudon at the checkpoint in Ro Go, "At 5:00 PM I reached Ro Go checkpoint by bus. A soldier in uniform asked me to opened up my bag. As he found nothing he made me lifted up my robe and again found nothing. Then he allowed me to proceed on my way."

The security increase has come as tension has mounted after the recent re-incarceration of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who was found guilty of violating her house arrest and was sentenced to serve an additional 18 months. After her return to her home, every town gate and roadblock between Moulmein to Ye has been checked thoroughly, though some say these checks have been the standard military security practice even before the verdict.

The practice of so strictly checking Monks has only more recently developed, as, according to a monk from Moulmein, rumors have spread that monks in Rangoon are going to hold uprising soon.

The anniversary for the 2007 protests led by Monks is next month. Popularly known as the "Saffron Revolution" due to the color of the monks robes, the protest grew over frustration with the government as gas prices increased after price subsidies were removed. In a remarkable display, Monks joined the protests calling for a lowering of prices, and peaceful demonstration. The protests were ultimately put down by the Burmese military on September 26th, resulting in estimated 138 deaths though some sources cite higher numbers.

Though rumors have spread, the exact reason for the searches cannot be confirmed. According to a monk, "We don't know why they're carrying out these searches. They always do like this when some sort of news brakes out. Previously they just checked residents, but now they're also thoroughly checking monks."

According to residents in Moulmein, a few days ago a rumor spread that people are preparing for an uprising. This has been seen as one cause why authorities have tightened security in every corner of the city.

A resident stated, "I heard the news that people are going to demonstrate, but I don't know who will act as a leader to hold the uprising."

"In Moulmein the police are just taking role of travelers at different checkpoints," A civilian in Thanbyuzayat told IMNA. "But, in Thanbyuzayat, the police, members of the USDA [Union Solidarity and Development Association] and the fire-fighter brigade, were also taking part in searching people at checkpoints."

A Khitpyaing News article published on yesterday described a rumor that there will be a saffron revolution soon in Rangoon. As a result, people in Rangoon have been stocking food supplies, and have been worried about the increase in the price of goods.

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### [Ethnic Kachins banned from having cultural symbols in their state in Burma](#)

*Kachin News Group - 18 August 2009*

In a fresh repressive measure the Burmese military junta has banned Kachins, an ethnic nationality, from constructing its cultural symbols – the "Manau Pole and Manau House" in their State, said Kachin cultural leaders.

In Bhamo, the second largest city in Kachin State, the ban comes in the way of construction of the cultural Manau Pole and House on the 13-acre wide Bhamo (also called Manmaw in Kachin) Kachin Literature and Culture compound (BKLC) in Aung Ta village in Two Miles. It was bought from the Bhamo Zonal Kachin Baptist Church in 1996, BKLC committee members said.

Maj-Gen Soe Win, commander of Northern Regional Command (Ma Pa Kha) and the junta's most powerful man in Kachin State thrice rejected the official request for permission to construct the Manau Pole and House this year by the BKLC committee, a committee member told KNG today.

Last July, some committee members met commander Maj-Gen Soe Win in the Kachin State's capital Myitkyina in its latest effort. However the commander rejected their request saying "Looking at genuine peace in Kachin State, the construction of Bhamo Kachin Manau Pole and House was banned," said committee members.

Earlier, the military authorities of Kachin State had twice rejected BKLC's letters to the junta's Bhamo District Administrative Office, called Bhamo District Peace and Development Council (or Kha-Ya-Ka) on March 31 and Kachin State Administrative Office, called Kachin State Peace and Development Council (or Pa-Ya-Ka) on May 19, according to the BKLC committee.

Committee members said, both rejection letters came up with the same reasons ---- first, the Kachins already have the cultural venue with Manau Pole and House in Myitkyina indicating "Kachin Traditional Manau Park" in Shatapru quarter in the town, which was constructed in early 2002. Secondly, there are different ethnic nationalities in Bhamo and constructing Kachin traditional symbols may harm unity among them because the Kachin Manau Pole and House represent ethnic Kachins, alone.

BKLC committee members disagreed with Commander Soe Win's rejection notes. They believe that the construction of the Kachin cultural Manau Pole and House will not harm the ethnic unity in Bhamo and Kachins have to build their cultural symbols in every Kachin village, said committee members and Kachin cultural leaders.

On June 22, five BKLC committee members of a total of 40 members were made to forcibly sign in the Bhamo District Administrative Office (Kha-Ya-Ka) to abandon construction of Kachin cultural buildings by the Kha-Ya-Ka chairman Col. Khin Maung Myint, said committee members.

According to Article 22 and 27 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to show, develop and protect their culture and literature.

There are Kachins (also spelled Jinghpaw in Kachin language or Jingpho-su in China and Singpho in India) in three of Burma's neighboring countries like China, India and Thailand and they are authorized to build their cultural symbols - Manau Pole and House.

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**Opinion / Analysis**

*Engagement*

**[Let's Talk to Burma. China Sure Is. - By Thant Myint-U](#)**

*Washington Post – 16 August 2009*

Twenty years of sanctioning and lecturing Burma's military regime have failed. The West needs to engage with Burma's leaders, increase humanitarian aid and reopen commercial relations with the country. If it doesn't, not only will positive change remain as elusive as ever, but the country will turn quickly and irreparably into an economic vassal of China.

In a sign of just how impervious the regime is to Western pressure, last week, opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was [sentenced](#) to her fourth spell of house arrest. Two thousand political prisoners remain locked up. And a transition to democracy appears nowhere in sight.

I was born in the United States in 1966 to Burmese parents. My grandfather, U Thant, was then serving as the United Nations' third secretary general. I witnessed repression in Burma firsthand when I was 8, during the violent unrest surrounding my grandfather's funeral.

In 1989, just after college, I spent a year in Thailand and along the Thai-Burmese border, working with dissidents and trying help the first wave of Burmese refugees. Thousands had been killed during a failed anti-government uprising. Suu Kyi had just been placed under house arrest. And the ruling junta, after losing relatively free elections, was refusing to hand over power. Later in Washington I argued with members of Congress and others that maximum sanctions were the best way to topple the dictatorship. It was an easy argument to make.

By the early 1990s nearly all Western aid to Burma had been terminated, and development assistance through the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had been blocked. A

decade later, embargos and boycotts had cut off nearly all economic ties with the United States and Europe. None of the senior Burmese government officials or their children (these are the only international sanctions targeting children) are allowed to travel to the West.

But as the regime not only survived but began to seek trade, investment and tourism, I started having doubts. My feeling was that the West should use the opening and find a back door to change while the front door remained firmly shut.

In 2006 I published a book, "The River of Lost Footsteps," in which I argued for a shift in the West's approach. Even when, in 2007, new protests were violently crushed, I still believed greater engagement was the right way. I felt that many policymakers and journalists were missing the bigger picture.

Few seemed aware, for example, that Burma was just emerging from decades of civil war. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government and more than a dozen different ethnic insurgent armies hammered out cease-fires, a breakthrough that went virtually unnoticed in the West. (Today, though the cease-fires remain, there is no permanent peace.) And few seemed concerned by the country's grinding poverty, the result of decades of economic bungling as well as embargos, boycotts and aid cutoffs.

In 1991, UNICEF's country director warned of a humanitarian emergency among Burma's children, arguing that more aid couldn't wait for the right government. Eighteen years later, Burma still receives less than a tenth of the per-capita aid handed out to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Tens of thousands die needlessly from treatable diseases.

These challenges have been ignored in the hope that sanctions and tough talk would lead to political change. But that hasn't happened.

Part of the reason is that the people who fashioned the sanctions didn't consider how the rise of Asia's giants -- China and India -- would transform Burma. As American businesses pulled out in the mid-1990s, Chinese and other Asian companies poured in. Hundreds of billions of dollars worth of natural gas have been discovered offshore, and massive hydroelectric and mining projects are being signed. Within two years a 1,000-mile oil and gas pipeline will stretch across Burma, connecting China's inland provinces to the sea. The U.S. trade embargo led to the near-collapse of the garment industry in the late 1990s, throwing tens of thousands of people out of work, but for the regime this has meant little.

Burma today is in no danger of economic disintegration. Without Western engagement, however, Burma's 55 million people risk becoming a virtual colony of their 1.3 billion Chinese neighbors to the east. There is no nefarious Chinese takeover scheme, but the vacuum created by Western policy is being filled.

The old Burmese generals will soon retire, and a new generation will rise to the top. Gen. Than Shwe, Burma's powerful autocrat, is 77 and ailing. Any chance for change requires support from at least some military leaders. Yet we've done nothing to try to influence the worldview of Than Shwe's possible successors. The upcoming generation of officers will be the first never to have visited Europe or America.

Last winter the Obama administration announced a review of Burma policy. I hope it will reconsider the United States' long-standing reliance on sanctions. It's not just that they don't work, but that they've been hugely counterproductive, taking away the one big force -- American soft power -- that could have played a role in reshaping the landscape.

Asia has experienced many successful democratic transitions, and none came about because of the sanctions and lectures that Western powers and advocacy groups seem to think will work in Burma. Generals don't negotiate away their power in the face of threats. You have to change the ground beneath them.

Engagement is not just about talking -- it's about dealing with the powers that be enough to get a foot in the door and create new facts on the ground, especially through economic contacts with the Burmese people. Nor is it based on the notion that economic development will automatically produce democracy, but that we must tackle simultaneously Burma's political and economic ills.

Many in America and worldwide are again outraged by goings-on in Burma. But without new thinking, 20 more years will pass and the dream of a prosperous, democratic Burma will be more distant still.

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Thant Myint-U is the author of "The River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma."

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**[COMMENTARY: Suu Kyi Escapes Prison Sentence, but is Still Isolated - By Aung Zaw](#)**

*Irrawaddy* – 11 August 2009

The much awaited drama of the court ruling in the case against Aung San Suu Kyi has finally ended. As many anticipated, justice was not served—Suu Kyi was found guilty despite her protestations of innocence.

The court decision had its twists and turns. The Nobel Peace Laureate was sentenced to three years imprisonment but that was later commuted to 18 months house arrest, a Home Affairs minister said.

Burma's military ruler Snr Gen Than Shwe signed a special order suspending the sentence and ordering that Suu Kyi should spend a further 18 months under house arrest. Was it a conciliatory gesture from a paramount leader who is now preparing for a general election while facing sustained pressure from his allies and the West? Not really.

The general, a former psychological warfare officer, has played dirty tricks before now. Again he shied away from daring to make a courageous decision to free Suu Kyi, in spite of pleas from the international community and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The US, the regime's most vocal critic, even extended an olive branch to Than Shwe through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who has said that if the regime released Suu Kyi there would be an opportunity for investment.

Than Shwe has usually resorted to extreme actions to shock the international community before gradually reducing them to some level where he is able to manipulate to recuperate kudos and reduce mounting pressure. This time he cowardly (or cleverly) executed the decision to extend Suu Kyi's detention—manipulating public opinion once again. But, mindful of Than Shwe's tricks in the past, he won't be able to fool the people again and again.

Through all the court adjournments of the past weeks, political pundits have predicted that the verdict would be a compromise. *The Irrawaddy* reported that the generals were having second thoughts about how to handle the case. Initially, many believed that the regime would pass down a five-year prison sentence on Suu Kyi.

The question is: did international pressure play a part in the court decision? It did to some extent, although Than Shwe made his own mind up without outside influence.

It is believed that China and Russia, the regime's allies, have been giving advice to the generals on the Suu Kyi trial.

We also need to look at the dynamic within the ruling military leadership, which is divided over how to deal with the lady. I don't see anyone who is ready to ally with the lady—the generals are united in their intention to prevent her from entering into politics although they may adopt different strategies.

The manipulative general Than Shwe, who signed a letter freeing Suu Kyi from her first term of house arrest in 1995, again played a role in this court ruling, personally permitting Suu Kyi to return to her home. (See *online news report*.)

The special court in Insein Prison is known to be a "one-way street," traveled by many prominent politicians and activists on their way to long terms in prison. Suu Kyi, who has been detained in Insein prison since the start of the trial in May, is perhaps the only one sent back home to serve her prison sentence.

But that doesn't mean the regime has shown leniency toward Suu Kyi. The court decision will only invite more criticism and international condemnation, and will serve as a setback for the US and the West in their efforts to engage with the regime. This shows that expressing outrage alone is no longer enough.

Suu Kyi's arrest and arraignment before a court within the walls of Insein Prison are a political decision, barring her from participation in the 2010 election. The continuation of her imprisonment is yet another attempt to suppress democracy in Burma and a blatant bid to isolate "the Lady" from her people.

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**Burma's political turmoil runs ever deeper - Pascal Khoo-Thwe**

*DVB – 14 August 2009*

It is hard to imagine what kind of life Aung San Suu Kyi would now be leading had she not taken the decision to plunge headlong into the brutal world of Burmese politics in 1988.

More than twenty years ago, she was leading the quiet and stable life of an academic and loving mother to two young children, and would have been likely to follow that trajectory, with its own achievements and satisfactions, had circumstances not forced her to choose a very different path. Now that path is again barricaded, and beyond the walls her future is equally uncertain.

Whether she has taken the right or wrong decision for herself and her family, most of the time her life story is less to do with her but more about the mentality and desperation of her supporters and her opponents. Many people who support her cling on to her name with desperation in an effort to further their fight for freedom and democracy while ignoring the needs for discipline, tolerance and consistency that she advocates. On the other hand, her critics, mostly people who supported her when the going was good, cite her lack of flexibility on political matters.

It all comes about because both have been unable to persuade or shift the generals whose grip on power has been consolidated by the monetary and military support of opportunistic nations and conglomerates. Moreover, with bickering rife among opposition groups, not many people seem to consider the fact that infighting is part of the process before 'victory' is achieved, and this is made worse by the 'winner-takes-all' politics.

One thing for sure, her name is often used and misused by both political activists and the military, in the same way that previous rulers of Burma used her father, Aung San's memory, after his assassination. Choosing her cause is as easy as picking fallen fruits on the ground, but it is not easy to fight for it. At the same time, criticizing her is as easy as shooting a bird in a cage.

She was regarded by almost the whole of Burma as the saviour of the nation when she came into the Burmese political scene in August 1988. Now, however, she is seen as the victim of ruthless generals, and some former supporters even go so far as to blame her for the troubles she is facing, because she has been unable to deliver them the 'democracy' they expected.

Similarly, her role as the daughter of the national hero has been overtaken imperceptibly by her own acquired status as the lone freedom fighter, but neither her supporters nor opponents have been able to accept the subtle differences between the two roles. Many would still like to think that she is the only person who could save the country single-handedly, thus ignoring many opportunities to solve some of the real problems for our country in the process. We just hope and pray too much with too little prepared plans and actions. We just like other people to do it for us but criticize them if they make mistakes.

Even if she is allowed to take part in political activities in the future, there would still be problems for Suu Kyi when it comes to tackling the intricate and deep-rooted problems of the country, either in her capacity as a figurehead of the nation or leader of a political party. Burma has never matured to a stage where a head of state can act solely in the interests of the whole nation without implicating his or her political influence and affiliation. Many old political figures were in politics solely because they were involved in the struggle for the country's independence, not because of their ability to rule the nation or run a government. The situation is not much better at the moment.

The turmoil has been compounded and complicated by support for the junta from allied countries. Currently, the army attempts to possess nuclear weapons with the help of North Korea as a way frightening its neighbours into submission, but it could also attract more aggressive foreign intervention which could fracture the army and the nation further.

Despite the dangers, the junta is likely to use the strategy as the bargaining chip in its dealings with the international community in the same way that North Korea has been doing, having already jeopardised the option of using Suu Kyi's release as political currency.

Now that Aung San Suu Kyi will be imprisoned for the coming future, opposition groups, supporters and detractors have to think hard about the best way to push the junta into negotiations. But without coordinated international or at least regional efforts, it would be a long time before the country could enjoy real freedom. It would not be the end of the problems for the generals either, even if they could get rid of her and her supporters. Burmese politics can mutate into various 'unpleasant' forms as long as the people are regarded as the enemy by the government, be it military or civilian.

Burma's ruling generals, who believe in many kinds of prophecy, necromancy and numerology, would be wise to heed Suu Kyi's late husband, Michael Aris' warning, quoting the Burmese proverb, 'Touch my wife, watch my knife'. Domestic and international anger towards them is growing ever more palpable, and various minor concessions from the junta are an acknowledgement of this, but anger and infighting often blurs the potential for a clear-cut strategy to tackle them with. Superstition and threats alone will not shift the generals, but pragmatism from their opponents can be a lethal weapon

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*Webb & Yettaw*

[Editorial: Visit to Myanmar](#)  
*New York Times – 18 August 2009*

Myanmar's repressive government was uncharacteristically welcoming when Senator Jim Webb visited last weekend. The junta released an American prisoner. Its leader, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, held talks with Mr. Webb and allowed him to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who has been under house arrest for 14 of the last 20 years.

We hope this new attitude means that Myanmar's leaders are looking for ways to lessen their isolation and are finally ready to loosen their iron grip. We encourage the Obama administration to test that proposition. But it is far too early to lift sanctions on one of the world's most authoritarian regimes.

The seven-year sentence imposed on John Yettaw was cruel. The American, who suffers from post-traumatic stress, was convicted after swimming across a lake to visit Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi, uninvited, at her home. The junta used the incident to add another 18 months to her detention, which now extends past next year's general elections. She — and 2,000 other political prisoners — should be released immediately and allowed to engage in peaceful political activity.

Mr. Webb is right that American policy — Washington tries to isolate the junta, while Myanmar's neighbors pursue engagement — has failed to bring change. The Obama administration's policy review, on hold during Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi's trial, must be speeded up if Washington hopes to influence the elections.

Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi has been a strong supporter of economic pressure. But Mr. Webb said she told him she "is not opposed to lifting some sanctions." A statement issued by her lawyer on Tuesday suggests otherwise. We would like to hear her views directly.

Any change should begin with a dialogue to explore how relations might improve. The United States should press the junta to free Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi and allow the opposition to participate in fair elections. It should make clear that it is prepared to begin lifting sanctions if the junta demonstrates its willingness to stop persecuting its own people. Washington must also make clear that it is closely monitoring reports of suspected nuclear cooperation between Myanmar and North Korea.

The administration must also persuade China (Myanmar's major foreign investor), India and others to rethink their policies. If Washington is willing to open a dialogue with the generals, Myanmar's neighbors must be willing to use their diplomatic and economic influence to press the generals toward a peaceful transition.

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**CONTRIBUTOR: A Sunrise in the West? By Nga Zaw**

*Irrawaddy – 19 August 2009*

“Those from US and British embassies visited NLD (headquarters) 30 times in July,” claimed Burma’s state-run mouthpiece *The New Light of Myanmar* on August 4.

The thinly veiled accusation from headlines such as this is that the NLD leaders are stooges of the Western powers, which, in turn, are known in Burma’s state press as “neo-colonialists” and “internal destructionists.”

It is logical for a military regime that has endured a four decade-long civil war to look for enemies both externally, as well as internally. This keeps the army unified and under control. The ruling junta justifies its illegitimate rule this way—pointing at its history of armed struggle and warning the Burmese public about the dangers of the West’s involvement with the opposition.

Senator Webb’s meeting with Snr-Gen Than Shwe and the State Peace and Development Council team was indeed significant. The visit could have an impact on the anti-Western mindset of the military generals and those close to them. The visit took on added significance when the senator was allowed to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi so soon after a similar request from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was denied.

It would be naïve to expect any progress toward Suu Kyi being released to come from Webb’s visit. Whatever expectations the Virginia senator set himself, the mere willingness of the SPDC to engage with him, reflects a desire to engage with the US and the West in general.

The question is—will the Burmese state media now accuse the military generals of being “stooges of the West?”

The regime has tried various ways of fostering closer ties with the US government for years. However, the Americans have been reticent because of the regime’s inhumanity.

From 2001 until the Depayin massacre in 2003, the regime hired the DCI group, a Washington-based lobby firm, according to Aung Lin Htut, formerly the deputy chief of mission at the Burmese embassy in Washington. He said that the Burmese authorities paid the lobby firm hundred of thousands of dollars to approach the US government and make a case for them.

Many influential persons in Burma would love to have access to the US. It produces military hardware and arms favored by Burmese commanders and soldiers, according to a senior diplomat and military intelligence officer who defected to America.

Made-in-the-USA pilot jackets are famously sported by the generals. They frequently send shopping lists for suits, shirts and other goods to anyone who is visiting the US.

But will engagement work?

Perhaps if expectations are set low. It could work if all political parties are included. It could work if the agenda is less about politics, but more about programs aimed at rebuilding the dismal Burmese public health and education sectors.

Engagement should also focus on economy—training entrepreneurs, skills-transfer and out-sourcing models for the growth of a middle-class that would be the driving force of social change. Educating military cadets and sending them to gain experience in the West would help open up the eyes and ears of a new Burmese military generation.

Burmese activists and lobbyists have warned that the Webb visit could legitimize the junta's 2008 sham constitution and 2010 elections. One should not anticipate a U-turn in the US policy overnight.

However, gradual engagement with tangible results may lend a hand in bringing the generals to the dialogue table with Suu Kyi. But a sudden change in policy by the SPDC would create a backlash.

Engagement will, at least, prove that the NLD and the Lady are NOT “stooges” of the West, and could pave the way for the military to work with the opposition and the ethnic groups in rebuilding the nation.

*Nga Zaw is a Burma observer living in the United States.*

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**CONTRIBUTOR: Hostage Diplomacy: A Not-So-Cautious Tale - By Kelley Currie**

*Irrawaddy – 19 August 2009*

For a moment imagine that you are an American looking to get into trouble in an exotic, forbidding corner of the world. First you pick your destination: it should be someplace that enjoys difficult relations with the United States because of its appalling human rights record or pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Then you throw caution to the wind and illegally cross a border, or enter an area that is clearly marked as being off-limits. When—surprise, surprise—you are nabbed by the canny authorities of the police state you are monkeying around in, you and your family start demanding that the US government use the full range of diplomatic resources to get you out.

After a show-trial in which your foolishness is criminalized and you are sentenced to hard —and I mean really, really hard—time, the United States of America suspends efforts on behalf of the brave dissidents, imprisoned local journalists and just plain innocent victims of whatever regime holds you captive in order to focus on obtaining your release.

If you happen to work for Al Gore and the country holding you hostage has nuclear weapons, a former president of the United States will ride in on a white horse (or a gambling mogul's luxury jetliner) to secure your release. This former president may or may not also conduct nuclear proliferation negotiations along the way. If you are merely a run-of-the-mill American goofball but manage to get a Nobel Peace laureate arrested with you and get busted in a dictatorship undergoing an Obama Administration policy review. U.S. Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia is the guy who pulls your bacon out of the grease.

How did the gentleman from Virginia come to secure the release of American adventurer and psychic John Yettaw during his recent visit to Burma? Yettaw found himself in a Burmese hoosegow by virtue of his attempt to “save” Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Burma's democratic movement, after he had a vision she was going to be assassinated.

After swimming across a lake to illegally enter her home, Yettaw refused to leave and got himself, Suu Kyi and her two companions arrested. On Aug. 11, after several postponements, they were sentenced: Yettaw received seven years hard time, while Suu Kyi and her companions were sentenced to three years. Junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe immediately commuted Suu Kyi's sentence to 18 months of house arrest in a display of “compassion.” As luck (or regime manipulation) would have it, the senator had recently received a visa from Burma's paranoid regime and was on his way to meet with junta supremo Than Shwe. Next thing you know, Yettaw was on a plane to Thailand.

Unfortunately, Yettaw's luck did not extend to Suu Kyi. Rather, his delusional home invasion provided Burma's junta the pretext it needed to extend her house arrest and keep her sidelined during the regime's stage-managed elections scheduled for next year. On the bright side, Suu Kyi did get to take a break from imprisonment to meet with Webb for 40 minutes and hear his views on how engagement would be good for Burma.

And why was Webb in Burma in the first place? Webb has been an outspoken critic of US policy on Burma and has made his anti-sanctions views well known. As the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Asia subcommittee, he is a fairly significant figure in US policy-making on Burma. Since becoming chair of the Asia subcommittee in the past year, he has been itching to get to Rangoon and had applied for a visa back in May. At that time, he was told it was not convenient. It turns out that Webb has been to Burma before, in 2001, as the guest of an American businessman with ties to Burma, and who is also opposed to US sanctions on Burma. Despite denials from the White House and State Department that Webb was carrying an official message, he remains an influential player in Burma policy and that influence will have been greatly expanded by his “successful” trip to Burma.

Let's tally up the score on this: a misguided American gets himself and Burma's democracy leader arrested, but his freedom is secured by Webb, who opposes sanctions on Burma and is in a position to do something about it. Webb gets enormous positive publicity at home and abroad, and he enhances his stature in the Burma policy debate in Washington.

Suu Kyi goes back to house arrest for the next 18 months. More than 2,100 political prisoners remain in the junta's jails, subject to tortured and abused daily.

The Burmese junta, having gotten so much attention out of following in North Korea's footsteps on hostage diplomacy and general obstreperousness, seems intent on following the North Koreans down the nuclear path as well. If they succeed, maybe next time they arrest a hapless American, they will get a visit from Bill Clinton.

*Kelley Currie is a non-resident fellow with the Project 2049 Institute, a think tank in Washington, DC. She previously served as an official working on Asia policy at the US Department of State during the George W. Bush administration.*

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**CONTRIBUTOR: The Junta's New Balancing Act - By Htet Aung**

*Irrawaddy – 18 August 2009*

John William Yettaw has been released from Burma's notorious Insein Prison, where hundreds of the country's political prisoners are currently detained while dozens sacrificed their lives in the past two decades.

The Aung San Suu Kyi intruder is now able to return home, crossing thousands of miles of ocean, not by swimming, but in the comfort of a jet, leaving the innocent victim, Suu Kyi, to serve out her fourth house arrest for another 18 months.

The dismal end to the drama couldn't be more frustrating to the Burmese people who desperately want to see their beloved democracy leader free. She is their hope for freedom under the ruthless military dictatorship.

US Sen Jim Webb may be satisfied with his mission: he accomplished two of his three requests: the release of Yettaw and a meeting with Suu Kyi.

But Sen-Gen Than Shwe is smiling too, because he can now safely carry out the 2010 elections with Suu Kyi safely locked away under house arrest.

Now the junta chief can fully concentrate on a major issue that has the potential to unravel the smooth path to national elections—the unruly ethnic armed ceasefire groups.

Than Shwe has two goals: to transform the ethnic ceasefire groups into a Border Guard Force and to persuade the groups to form political parties in their respective areas and to field candidates in the upcoming election.

So far, Than Shwe has convinced only one group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, to transform into a Border Guard Force, under the command of government officers.

The task must be done in line with the new constitution and its Section 338, which states: "All the armed forces in the Union shall be under the command of the Defense Services."

However, the most powerful ethnic ceasefire groups have not signed on to the plan, especially the largest groups along Burma's frontier bordering with China. The United Wa State Army and the Kachin Independence Army, the strongest of the armed ethnic groups, have rejected the government's order.

They don't trust the junta. Their common position is they want to deal with this issue after a parliamentary government is formed following the 2010 election.

Although the junta enjoys China's political support in keeping international pressure at bay, it hasn't received its neighbor's support on the border guard issue. Instead, China has pressured the junta to tackle the issue carefully and not to destabilize the border area.

Having successfully drawn India, at one time a strong supporter of Burma's democracy movement, into its camp by playing a balancing act with China, the junta can now play the same diplomatic game between China and the United States.

If the US decides to practice a more flexible engagement policy, the threat of UN Security Council might be reduced, meaning that it may not need to rely so much on China's veto in opposing anti-Burmese junta resolutions. That could give the junta more bargaining power in tackling the issue of the armed ethnic groups along the border with China.

If the Obama administration sees Webb's achievement as a positive step and an opportunity for engagement with the junta, it means the junta has more leverage in playing the two superpowers off one another.

Furthermore, it means a significant diplomatic triumph for the junta to win the official recognition of the US, the generals' major foe that is often accused of neo-colonialist meddling in the country's internal affairs.

If not, the junta has nothing to lose. The more it delays the release of Suu Kyi, the more the US might feel responsible for Suu Kyi's fourth detention, which was triggered by the actions of an American.

But for the time being, the Democratic senator can bask in his accomplishment of snatching Yettaw from the hands of a ruthless junta.

*The author is an independent researcher and a graduate in International Development Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.*

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[Will 'Webb diplomacy' bring a thaw in US-Burma relation - by Mungpi](#)

*Mizzima - 15 August 2009*

New Delhi - US Senator Jim Webb, who is also the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Asia Pacific Subcommittee, during his visit to Burma this weekend, has triggered several surprising events, including a meeting with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

On Saturday afternoon, Webb after returning from a meeting with Burma's military supremo Snr Gen Than Shwe in the new jungle capital city of Naypyitaw, met opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a government guest house.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who was given 18 months of suspended sentence last week, was seen escorted from her lakeside home to the guest house.

In yet another surprising development, Webb's office states that the American Yettaw will be deported. He will be sent back along with the visiting senator Webb on Sunday evening.

The US State department and the White House on Friday declared that Webb is not representing the Obama administration but expressed its support to the region to explore US interest.

Webb said he is in the region as part of a five nation tour and will explore the possibilities of engaging the region.

But whatever the agenda behind the trip, the meeting with Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi and securing the release of Yettaw, have all come as a series of surprises, as even the United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari had not been able to make such things possible during his visits.

In his last trip, Gambari was unable to meet Than Shwe and the UN chief Ban Ki-moon, in his visit to Burma in June, was denied a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi.

While the details of the discussions between Webb and Than Shwe, and Aung San Suu Kyi, is still not clear, the meeting itself was viewed as a significant step in the possibility of re-establishing US-Burma relationship.

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese analyst based in Thailand, believes that though Webb is not officially representing the Obama administration, the visit could be part of the administration's policy review on Burma.

The US said it is currently undertaking a review of its policy on Burma after stating that the previous policy of isolating and imposing sanctions have not worked. But the US has so far not indicated what could be the direction of the new policy.

“Meeting Than Shwe is significant and this could indicate that there is a new opening between US-Burma relationship,” Aung Naing Oo said.

On the other hand, Aung Naing Oo said, Than Shwe’s agreeing to meet Webb could also be interpreted as a significant sign indicating the junta’s willingness to engage with the US.

The US has been the strongest critic of the Burmese regime; condemning its human rights violations and imposing economic sanctions for failure to implement political reforms. Reciprocally, the Burmese regime had never shown a favourable attitude towards the US and constantly blamed the US of trying to instigate unrest in the country by supporting opposition groups.

Every month, the junta, in its state-run newspapers, mentions the number of times that the US and UK embassy officials visit the office of the National League for Democracy stating that the officials have handed large and small envelopes, apparently implying that the officials are providing monetary support to the NLD leaders.

But this meeting between Webb and Than Shwe, Aung Naing Oo said, could be a new era of opening in the US-Burma relationship and could be a turning point for the US in its policy towards Burma.

“It shows that the Burmese regime is also interested in holding a dialogue with the US. It looks to me like a point of entry for dialogue,” he added.

However, a few opposition groups have voiced concern over Webb’s visit to the country. Three Burmese organizations, in an open letter to Webb, expressed concern that the Burmese junta might propagandize the visit to say Webb endorses the regime’s treatment on Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

The three groups – All Burma Monks’ Alliance, The 88 Generation Students, All Burma Federation of Student Unions – urged Webb to maintain a tough stand on the Burmese regime and to continue supporting the Burmese opposition’s position on the junta’s planned elections in 2010.

“We are surprised to learn that you have an intention to support the regime’s 2010 election; even its constitution is imperfect,” said the statement.

The groups also said that they have written this open letter to Webb, “As we are in hiding to avoid arrest, torture and imprisonment by the regime, we would not have a chance to meet you when you are in our country.”

But Aung Naing Oo said engagement with the US is important for Burma and that isolating and imposing sanctions alone gives the US a lesser chance of influencing the Burmese regime.

“We have seen that the US maintains a relationship with several other dictatorial countries and it has proved beneficial for both. I think it is important that the US engage the regime and maintain its presence in Burma,” he commented.

### **Chinese Worries**

While it would be too early to speculate on the US-Burma relationship, a few observers believe that if the US-Burmese relationship goes smoothly, China, a long-time ally of Burma, would find it worrisome.

Nyo Ohn Myint, in-charge of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NLD in exile, said “China would not be too happy if the US and Burma get too close, though at this point there is nothing to suggest that the US is getting close to the regime.”

He speculated that the Burmese regime had always wanted to lobby the US and would like to see a change of US policy towards them.

Professor Ian Holliday, Dean of Social Sciences at the University of Hong Kong, told Mizzima that Webb’s visit is significant given the long gap of almost no diplomatic relation between Burma and the US.

“After such a long time with so little contact that's an important step,” said Holliday but “At present, I don't think China needs to worry - there really isn't any US-Burmese relationship to speak of, and there's a long way to go before that happens.”

But he said, “I think China wants a stable and predictable Burma - first and foremost it's this, strategic and economic interests are also important, but stability is the key.”

Though the final results of Webb's visit to Nay Pyi Daw are yet to be seen over the next few days and weeks, the American Senator seems to have achieved his expected aim so far, including the release of the American Yettaw. It is also more than clear now that the regime and its strong man Than Shwe is willing to play along with the world's super power which has been so far the most voluble critic against the Burmese junta and has shown that it is willing to enter into a dialogue for better US-Burma relationship.

Critics may point out that the junta will now try to woo the Obama administration for a lenient attitude towards its Seven-Step Road Map and forthcoming 2010 elections. The Burmese regime which is facing another serious crisis with ceasefire groups such as Kachin, Kokant and Wa in the northern part of the country will want to make efforts to calm down the political boil over the issue of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's trial, at least for some time. Whatever the regime's motives may be and though it is more likely to use Webb's visit to Burma as another propaganda inside the country, the fact that the regime's whole leadership has met with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Asia Pacific Subcommittee and had allowed him a meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and released Yettaw should be welcome as positive signs for any future political settings before 2010 elections. The Burmese people and the international community, especially Burma's neighbouring countries would be watching these developments eagerly with the hope for possible political dialogue between Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

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#### **[NEWS ANALYSIS: Behind the Scenes of Webb's Visit - By Aung Zaw](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 16 August 2009*

US Sen Jim Webb's timely visit to Burma has secured the release of the American intruder John William Yettaw, but the overall mission has received mixed reactions from observers and campaign groups.

The visit must not lend any legitimacy to the repressive dictatorship and even more pressure must be applied on the generals, say opposition groups.

Debbie Stothard, the coordinator of the Southeast Asia-based Altsean Burma, said the junta's leaders granted Webb face-to-face meetings with Snr-Gen Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi *only* because of unprecedented international and regional pressure.

“It is ironic that Sen Jim Webb is allowed to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and [Snr Gen] Than Shwe because of pressure and sanctions,” Stothard said, while Webb himself opposes the US sanction policy. He is chairman of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Well-informed sources told *The Irrawaddy* that before Webb's non-official visit, Snr-Gen Than Shwe authorized secret discussions between Burmese and US representatives in a calculated diplomatic maneuver to deflect international pressure stemming from the sentencing of Suu Kyi.

The Burmese side gave the green light to the senator's visit shortly after her bizarre trial ended last week. Webb arrived days after the conviction, and Yettaw's release came a few days later.

In the past, the regime has played similar tactical maneuvers to dilute international pressure. Burma watchers recall that in February 1994, US Rep Bill Richardson was allowed to meet Suu Kyi for more than five hours at her house.

This newest gesture comes at a moment when the Obama administration is set to release its new Burma policy, following rising signals that US officials are open to new approaches on Burma, including, perhaps as a first step, the lifting of visa bans on Burmese officials and restoring the post of ambassador in Burma. Yettaw's release sends a conciliatory signal to the US and European Union and carries the potential to deflect stronger sanctions. The US expanded its sanctions only last month.

Than Shwe, who granted Webb a personal audience in the fortress capital of Naypyidaw, also allowed him to meet Suu Kyi, the detained Nobel Peace Prize winner who last week received an additional 18-month suspended sentence and is now under house arrest in her lakeside home.

Burma watchers warn that Yettaw's release is purely superficial because Suu Kyi and 2,100 other political prisoners remain in prison. Real substance is needed to justify US, or international, policy changes, and yet there's a danger that the regime could manipulated the event to its advantage.

The Democratic senator, who noted that he asked for the release of Suu Kyi, said in a press statement: "It is my hope that we can take advantage of these gestures as a way to begin laying a foundation of goodwill and confidence-building in the future."

A senior US security official said last week that Webb did not carry a message from the US administration, but the White House followed the visit closely and welcomed it.

"It is important for the Burmese leadership to hear the strong views of American political leaders about the path it should take toward democracy, good governance and genuine national reconciliation," said Mike Hammer, a spokesman for the National Security Council.

On Saturday, Fred C. Lash, a state department spokesman, reiterated that Yettaw's release was a welcome step but more is needed.

"We also call on Burmese authorities to release unconditionally Aung San Suu Kyi and all of Burma's more than 2,100 political prisoners in order to begin a process of national reconciliation and inclusive political dialogue," he said.

Chiang Mai-based Burma analyst, Bertil Lintner, a Swedish journalist and author of several books on Burma, said, "It is naïve to expect these generals to listen to America and change their course."

Regime watchers noted that a background drama involving Burma and China was also unfolding during Webb's visit. China's unchallenged economic influence in Burma is growing, and Asia's largest power clearly enjoys a regional strategic advantage in its unchallenged relationship.

Webb noted in an earlier statement: "As the United States continues its attempt to isolate Burma due to the human rights policies of its military regime, China's influence has grown exponentially."

However, Lintner said, "There's no way that Burma will give up China because of America."

Burma's main concern, he said, is to maintain its good relationship with China and India, its two powerful neighbors, followed by Asean and a good relationship with the rest of the world including the U.S and EU.

A veteran Burmese journalist told *The Irrawaddy* that the regime's relationship with China is deeply rooted, but even so Than Shwe and other top leaders are unhappy that China lends its political support to ethnic armed groups along the Sino-Burma border, in fear that clashes between the junta's troops and ethnic armies could unleash a wave of refugees seeking safety in China, much like what has happened on the Thai-Burmese border.

Only this month, about 10,000 people, including Kokang and Chinese migrants, sought shelter in China after tensions increased between government troops and the Myanmar [Burma] National Democratic Alliance Army, a Kokang ceasefire group.

"Than Shwe is a clever chess player, and he may want to send a signal to China that he could have better relations with America," said the Rangoon-based journalist.

However, considering the regime's heavy reliance on China in terms of military hardware, trade and investment, plus a planned gas pipeline into Yunnan Province, he said, "The 20-year-old girl [Burma] is now pregnant, and she is not going to leave her husband [China] anytime soon."

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*Sanctions*

## Sanctions - a stumbling block for Burma? - by Mungpi

*Mizzima - 18 August 2009*

New Delhi – On the now contentious issue of sanctions, Burma's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said she had not indicated to the visiting US Senator Jim Webb that she will not oppose lifting of some of the sanctions imposed by western countries on Burma.

Ohn Kyaing, a spokesperson for the National League for Democracy on Tuesday said, Aung San Suu Kyi has explicitly denied having commented to the visiting US Senator that she will not oppose the lifting of some of the economic sanctions.

The clarification came on Tuesday after the visiting Senator Webb on Monday told reporters at a press conference in Bangkok that during his talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, she had indicated that she will not oppose lifting of some of the economic sanctions.

"Senator Webb might have misinterpreted Aung San Suu Kyi, because she explicitly denies making any comments that could indicate that she will not oppose lifting sanctions," Ohn Kyaing said.

Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday evening told her party spokesperson Nyan Win, who visited her as her lawyer, to discuss her case, that she had been misinterpreted by Webb.

The detained Burmese Nobel Peace Laureate has never changed her position on the economic sanctions imposed on Burma but reiterated her call to the junta supremo Snr Gen Than Shwe to work together for the development of Burma including easing off of economic sanctions, Ohn Kyaing said.

"U Nyan Win had told us that Aung San Suu Kyi is not happy with the comments and feels that she had been misinterpreted wrongly. Sanctions were not called for by her and she has no power to remove it, but she is willing to work together with the ruling junta," Ohn Kyaing said.

Time and again, Burma's ruling generals have accused Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD party of advocating economic sanctions and opting for total devastation and confrontation with the junta and had asked Aung San Suu Kyi to call for lifting the sanctions.

But the NLD, Ohn Kyaing said, has never called for economic sanctions and has no power to withdraw it.

"We believe that the first step in trying to lift sanctions is to begin with a discussion between the opposition and the junta and to work together to develop the country," Ohn Kyaing said.

It is meaningless to accuse the NLD of choosing utter devastation of the country, when the Generals are unwilling to talk to anybody and unwilling to cooperate with others to work for the development of the country, he added.

Despite the clarifications by Aung San Suu Kyi through her spokesperson, several groups advocating anti-sanctions in Burma have welcomed the comment and the tourism industry viewed it as a green signal to explore travel business in the country.

Derek Tonkin, a former British ambassador to Thailand and now member of the Network Myanmar, and a long time campaigner advocating engagement with Burma said it is the first step of moving in the right direction and urged people around the world to visit Burma.

"Tourism does not serve the military generals but helps local Burmese people to get employed," Tonkin told Mizzima welcoming the comment of Webb on Aung San Suu Kyi's indication.

Tourism, according to Tonkin, is one safe sector where the Burmese people can directly benefit as the industry largely is in the hands of private businesses, who are not members or even related to the regime.

"Tourists can easily avoid going to hotels or places run by the military authorities and make their choice of living in private hotels, which will help the Burmese people," Tonkin said.

But Aung San Suu Kyi in an interview with the BBC in 2002, said the situation in Burma has not improved and is not in a good condition to encourage people to pay a visit.

But her comments did not carry any message of advocating the imposition of sanctions and isolating the country, her party members said.

"It is purely up to the countries that impose sanctions to lift or continue. But Aung San Suu Kyi has been calling on the junta to begin working together starting with a talk between the two," Ohn Kyaing said.

Nyo Ohn Myint, in-charge of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NLD in exile, said Webb must have, out of "excitement", misinterpreted Aung San Suu Kyi of not opposing the lifting of some of the sanctions imposed on the country.

"As far as I understand, Webb would not like to twist the information but it is more of a misinterpretation," said Nyo Ohn Myint.

Given Webb's background of being opposed to economic sanctions, Nyo Ohn Myint said, he might have a misconception of the ideas behind Aung San Suu Kyi's comments.

"Aung San Suu Kyi might have told him that she is willing to work with the junta in order to develop the country as a whole and not just lifting of sanctions," Nyo Ohn Myint said.

### **Stumbling block**

While Webb's comment on Aung San Suu Kyi might have come as a misinterpretation, it clearly shows that many Burma observers are beginning to doubt the effectiveness of sanctions and are seeing engagement as another possible way to bring a change in Burma.

Sanctions, in the strictest terms, have only been imposed by a few western countries on Burma. But it has largely been negatively viewed as a big obstacle for any economic progress in military-ruled Burma.

Regional countries, including those of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as China and India had consistently been engaging the regime and are directly supplying the much needed revenue through purchase of natural resources including oil and gas.

While these countries continue maintaining a so-called "constructive engagement", they have proved failed in persuading the regime to implement reforms.

While the military regime has time and again blamed sanctions for Burma's economic deterioration, Sean Turnell, a Professor of Economics at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia said that the regime's mismanagement is the root cause of Burma's deteriorating economy.

Turnell said, Burma's economy is largely dependent on the prevailing political situation. And with the ruling junta lacking the expertise and reluctant to allow experts to handle the economy, the country's fate is inevitable.

Sanctions do not play a role in bringing down the economy but are useful as a political tool that send messages of opposition to the regime's rule, he added.

According to Nyo Ohn Myint, lifting off sanctions without any considerable change in the behaviour of the regime would not help Burma move forward but will only be an incentive to the regime.

He said sanctions as a political tool that they are, should be used as a 'stick' while lifting them, as the generals make progress in political reforms, should be the 'carrot'.

"Economically, sanctions are not a stumbling block, but they are a stumbling block politically for the regime," he added.

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**13/08/2009**

**[EU Stiffens Myanmar Sanctions, Demands Freedom for Suu Kyi](#)** – Bloomberg – 13 August 2009

European Union governments stiffened sanctions against Myanmar after the country's military rulers extended the house arrest of pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi in an attempt to silence her during next year's elections.

At least 60 regime-backed companies were added to a list of firms subject to an EU investment ban and asset freeze, and at least four more officials were barred from traveling to Europe.

The 27-nation bloc condemned the "unjustified trial of and the verdict against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and urged her unconditional release," according to a statement in Brussels today.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi, 64, has spent more than

13 years in confinement since her National League for Democracy won Myanmar's last elections in 1990, a result overturned by the military.

Suu Kyi was sentenced on Aug. 11 to 18 more months of house arrest, after being found guilty of breaching the terms of her detention by sheltering for two days an American citizen who swam to her lakeside home in May.

Myanmar holds around 2,000 political prisoners, according to the United Nations. Elections are scheduled for next year under a constitution that the opposition says is designed to entrench military rule.

#### Next Steps

EU foreign ministers will discuss the next steps on Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, at a meeting Sept. 4-5 in Stockholm. In May, ministers from Sweden, Germany and Finland questioned a U.K. appeal for tighter sanctions, saying the EU has little leverage over the isolated country.

EU sanctions including an arms embargo were prolonged by 12 months in April. As of then, there were 535 Myanmar government officials, military officers and family members and 93 companies on the EU's banned list.

The penalties target officials who benefit from Myanmar's "misrule" and "who actively frustrate the process of national reconciliation, respect for human rights and progress toward democracy," the EU statement said.

Names of the people and companies added to the list will be released tomorrow.

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#### [Aung San Suu Kyi to appeal to higher court](#) - Mizzima - 12 August 2009

New Delhi (Mizzima) – Unhappy with the verdict of the special court in Insein prison on Tuesday, Burma's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday told her lawyers that she would appeal to a higher court.

Nyan Win, her lawyer and spokesperson of her party, told Mizzima that he was able to meet the Nobel Peace Laureate at her lakeside home for the first time since May 14, when she was whisked away to Insein prison. He had discussions with her on appealing against the Insein court's verdict to a higher court.

On Tuesday, the special court in Insein prison sentenced her to three years in prison with hard labour. But Burmese junta supremo Snr Gen Than Shwe commuted the sentence to half by an executive order and allowed her to serve out her term at her home under restrictions.

"Aung San Suu Kyi said she is not happy with the court's decision. She feels that this is not justice and the decision was not logical," Nyan Win, who met the Burmese democracy icon for an hour on Wednesday, said.

Nyan Win said he is waiting for a copy of the judgement, which he had applied for to be submitted along with their appeal for reconsideration of the verdict at a higher court.

The meeting, which is the first since Aung San Suu Kyi was brought back to her lakeside home, lasted about an hour on Wednesday afternoon.

Aung San Suu Kyi also said she is confused with the restrictions imposed on her and requested her lawyers to find out its meaning and implications.

Her sentence has sparked international outrage and consequent criticism but the critics believe the junta is likely to revert the court's decision.

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[After Suu Kyi verdict, should the West engage Myanmar?](#) Reuters – 13 August 2009

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Myanmar's reduced sentence for opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi may be an indication the junta is becoming more sensitive to international pressure as it prepares a transition to civilian rule next year, analysts say.

A Myanmar court on Tuesday sentenced Suu Kyi, who has spent 14 of the past 20 years in detention, to three years in jail -- which the junta then immediately reduced to 18 months of house arrest at her lakeside home in Yangon.

The West reacted in outrage, with the European Union preparing a fresh round of sanctions, while China and Myanmar's other neighbors took a more measured response.

The trial came at a time when Western capitals were questioning their strategy toward the generals, given their ineffectiveness in trying to ostracize them or Asia's attempts at engagement.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on a visit to Jakarta in February, expressed frustration at the failure of both approaches. "Imposing sanctions has not influenced the junta... Reaching out and trying to engage has not influenced them either."

Myanmar is a resource-rich country that lies strategically between China and India. The 10-nation Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, worries that isolating Myanmar will merely shove it into China's orbit.

"Such sanctions don't seem to have much effect on Myanmar because it is a resource-rich country" where Asian neighbors compete for everything from timber to oil and gas, said Antonio Rappa, political analyst at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

Singapore is among the top three biggest trading partners and investors in Myanmar, whose ruling generals are believed to park their money and send their children to study in the island-state.

Analysts saw other signs of the junta beginning to become more engaged with the world, such as its acceptance of international aid -- and foreign aid workers -- to help rebuild after a cyclone hit the Irrawaddy Delta in May 2008, killing 140,000 people.

"What Myanmar needs is more international contact rather than less," said former ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino, adding the junta had shown a "degree of openness" to the international community in the wake of the cyclone that made 2.4 million people destitute.

#### KANGAROO TRIAL

Debbie Stothard of the anti-junta Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma said the repeated delays in handing down the Suu Kyi verdict, and then the commuted sentence, showed the regime could be swayed by international pressure.

"I think what's interesting is we could see that from a fast kangaroo trial, the regime had to delay the trial and impose a lighter sentence because of international pressure," Stothard told Reuters Television.

That would appear to argue for brandishing a stick at the regime, and analysts said it was unlikely the Obama administration would soften its stance following the verdict.

"If anything, the result will be to solidify the American policy toward Burma," said Walter Lohman of the Washington-based think-tank, the Heritage Foundation. The U.S. Campaign for Burma, which has called for a full U.N. arms embargo on the country as a way to press China to stop its support for the junta, and isolate the regime to get it to talk to the opposition, said it wanted both sanctions and engagement.

"ASEAN has been reaching out to the regime now for 10 years, the U.N. has sent envoys on some 40 trips -- but clearly engagement without sticks is not working," Campaign's Jeremy Woodrum said.

The junta's move to extend Suu Kyi's house arrest was clearly aimed at keeping her sidelined until the end of next year's planned election. Her ability to mobilize thousands of people for rallies helped her party win 392 of the 485 seats in the 1990 election that was annulled by the military.

The junta is on the final stage of its road map to democracy, culminating in next year's vote, and with a constitution that enshrines a powerful role for the military.

The junta might have become more responsive to international pressure because it may want its new cabinet -- an ostensibly elected civilian one but likely filled with retired generals -- to be acceptable to the outside world, analysts said.

Instead of calling for an election with Suu Kyi's participation, the international community should shift its focus to deal with a post-election Myanmar, they said.

"From now until the elections, Aung San Suu Kyi won't be in the picture," said Pavin Chatchavalpongpan of the Institute of South East Asian Studies in Singapore. "Why don't we sit down and try to think of policies of the next government?"

"Than Shwe may be thinking about leaving his legacy behind," Pavin said referring to the junta supremo. "Whether he already has a political successor in his mind, we don't know. But I am sure he has been thinking about that."

(Additional reporting by Prapan Chankaew in Bangkok and Paul Eckert in Washington; Editing by Bill Tarrant)

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**[US Senator Jim Webb to visit Myanmar](#)** – DPA - Asia-Pacific News – 13 August 2009

United States Senator Jim Webb is scheduled to visit Myanmar Friday to meet with the country's military leaders, as well as opposition representatives, both Myanmar government officials and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) confirmed.

'He will arrive here on Friday for a three-day visit,' said a government official who requested anonymity.

Webb, who is chairman of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Committee, is due to travel to the junta's headquarters in Naypyitaw to meet with military leaders, but it is uncertain whether he will meet with the regime's head, Senior General Than Shwe, the source said.

NLD spokesman Nyan Win said the party was invited to come to Naypyitaw on Friday. 'But we did not know what is the purpose of invitation,' he added.

A government representative, who asked not to be named, said all of Myanmar's registered parties were scheduled to meet with Webb.

'I cannot say definitely whether we will go there or who will go there,' Nyan Win cautioned.

Webb, a past proponent of change in US foreign policy towards Myanmar, would be the first US senator to visit Myanmar in more than 10 years.

He is expected to seek the release of US national John William Yettaw, 54, who was on Tuesday sentenced to seven years in prison with labour for swimming to the house-cum-prison of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on May 3 on a mission to warn her of an assassination attempt he had envisioned.

Suu Kyi was sentenced by the same court to three years in prison, which was swiftly commuted to 18 months under house arrest by Than Shwe.

Suu Kyi's NLD won the 1990 general elections by a landslide victory but has been barred from power by the junta since then.

Myanmar pro-democracy groups have questioned the timing of Webb's visit and cautioned him not to become a tool of the ruling regime.

'We are concerned that the military regime will manipulate and exploit your visit and propagandize that you endorse the trial of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the imprisonment of over 2,100 political prisoners, their human rights abuses on the people of Burma and their systematic, widespread and ongoing atrocities against the ethnic minorities,' said the joint statement sent to the US embassy in Yangon by the All Burma Monks Alliance, 88 Generation Students and All Burma Federation of Student Unions.

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**[Experts Question Reports of Secret Myanmar Nuclear Program](#)** – GSN – 12 August 2009

Several experts have questioned the claims of two defectors from Myanmar that their home nation is operating a secret nuclear program that might be aimed at weapons production, Reuters reported yesterday (see GSN, Aug. 10).

The two men, interviewed extensively by a strategic analyst and a journalist over the course of two years, said they were part of a clandestine effort aided by North Korea to construct an underground nuclear facility capable of producing weapon-grade plutonium. They also said Myanmar had supplied "yellowcake" uranium to North Korea and Iran, according to a report in the Sydney Morning Herald.

However, Trevor Wilson, Australia's former ambassador to Myanmar, argued that defectors in general should not be automatically believed.

"I wasn't entirely convinced the evidence they were citing was pointing to a nuclear weapons program. It could have been a nuclear power program," Wilson said. "There's plenty of evidence of a military relationship [between Myanmar and North Korea] and also a suggestion over a long period that the Burmese army is interested in acquiring missiles from a country like North Korea, but not necessarily a nuclear-armed missile."

Wilson added that while Myanmar possesses uranium, nothing suggests that it is in the business of processing the ore to produce "yellowcake, or anything else for that matter." Still, he said it was plausible that Myanmar's military government might trade the ore itself for missiles and conventional weapons.

He said Myanmar would have no strategic reason for developing nuclear arms, since it had no nuclear-armed enemies.

"Why would the Burmese army want to acquire nuclear weapons for national security?" Wilson said. "It would actually make them a target. It wouldn't help them with any threats they face, which are all of a conventional nature" (Bill Tarrant, Reuters I, Aug. 11).

While satellite photos do suggest a network of underground tunnels in Myanmar, some analysts say they are located in an unlikely spot for a nuclear reactor, Reuters reported.

The alleged site of the underground facility is too far from a water source to pipe in sufficient coolant for a nuclear reactor, analyst Sean O'Connor wrote last week on the Arms Control Wonk blog.

Another analyst, Mark Hibbs of the online publication Nuclear Fuel, said the structure shown in satellite images is probably "a non-nuclear industrial workshop or machinery center."

While some satellite photos "do indeed depict tunnel entrances and indoor or underground storage facilities," stated the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, those structures "are likely not nuclear industrial facilities" (Reuters II, Aug. 11).

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**[10,000 Villagers Forcibly Relocated in Shan State: Rights Groups](#)** – The Irrawaddy – 13 August 2009

The Burmese army has recently forced an estimated 10,000 people in central Shan State to leave their villages and torched more than 500 homes, Shan human rights groups claimed on Thursday.

The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) and the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) told reporters that the Burmese junta has been forcibly relocating villagers in Laika Township, in central Shan State, since July 27. About 40 villages were affected, the groups said.

"This campaign has been carried out cold-bloodedly and systematically," said Kham Harn Fah, the director of the SHRF, speaking at a press conference in northern Thailand. He added that in many cases, Burmese troops used the villagers' own petrol to burn down their houses.

At least three villagers were killed, including a young woman who was shot while she was trying to recover possessions from her burning house, and over 100 had been arrested and tortured, the Shan rights groups said.

Another woman had her throat cut and was thrown into a river after troops arrested her, and a 45-year-old man was shot to death during the forced relocation, the groups said.

The groups also said that a woman had been gang-raped in an incident that occurred on August 2. Witnesses said that the woman was raped in front of her husband by an officer and three of his subordinates from Light Infantry Battalion 514, based in Laika.

"It was very cruel. For many years, the junta's troops have used raping women as a weapon of war," said Charm Tong, one of the founders of SWAN, which published License to Rape, a report documenting the Burmese army's extensive use of sexual violence as part of its operations against ethnic insurgents.

She added that while the international community was expressing outrage over the trial of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese regime continued to commit crimes against humanity in ethnic areas.

"They are thumbing their noses at the international community," she said of Burma's ruling generals, adding that the recent creation of a regional human rights body would be "a joke" if it did nothing to end human rights violations in Burma.

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### [Tension Mounts at Three Pagodas Pass](#) – The Irrawaddy - 13 August 2009

More Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) troops are deploying near Three Pagodas Pass in preparation for an offensive against Brigade 6 of the Karen National Liberation Army, according to local sources.

A businessman at Three Pagodas Pass said that about 80 DKBA soldiers arrived last week to set up a new battalion at Three Pagodas Pass, which is 3 kilometers from the township.

More troops are to come, according to the businessman.

About 1,000 Burmese troops are on their way to the area, according to the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

The sources said that a joint DKBA and Burmese force plans to take Maekatha village, the main KNLA Brigade 6 base, which is about 15 kilometers from Three Pagodas Pass.

The offensive aims to gain control of lucrative concessions for logging, commercial trade and taxation.

A member of the KNU at Three Pagodas Pass said, "We know their plans and will not allow them to succeed. We will fight back."

The New Mon State Party (NMSP) is concerned that the Burmese troops will target them in turn.

"This is first time such a large Burmese force has come near us in 14 years of ceasefire with the junta," said Nai Chay Mon, a member of the NMSP.

The Mon refused the recent Burmese army request to transform their troops into a border guard force.

The NMSP said that the Burmese army plans to set up a new brigade at Three Pagodas Pass, which it thinks will be used against the NMSP if tensions escalate.

The NMSP said that the Burmese military will give more control over border trade to the DKBA at the Three Pagodas Pass, hoping that this will encourage fighting between the NMSP and DKBA.

"Even the Karen fight Karen, so the Mon are ready to fight anytime," NMSP member Nai Lawi Mon said.

The NMSP and DKBA have had frequent disputes at the Three Pagodas Pass. Last year, a member of the DKBA was killed by the NMSP after a crackdown on drugs in their area.

In 1988, the KNU and NMSP clashed at the Three Pagodas Pass, causing loss of life on both sides.

Meanwhile, the DKBA has expanded the area where it will serve as a border guard force and control border trade.

The DKBA seized KNLA Brigade 7 in June, and joint DKBA and Burmese army forces intend to seize all KNLA-controlled areas along the border before the Burmese regime holds its planned general election in 2010, according to border sources.

The DKBA is the only armed ethnic group that has agreed to transform its troops into a border force after the 2010 election.

Security analysts describe the DKBA as an armed group that earns income from drug trafficking and car smuggling with the tacit acceptance of the military junta.

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#### [Indonesia Bans Meeting of Exiled Burmese Activists](#) – AP – 13 August 2009

JAKARTA — Indonesia's government has stopped a group of exiled Burmese opposition activists from holding a conference in the country, officials said Thursday, a day after the president voiced support for "credible" elections in the military dictatorship.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah said police had prevented the conference from taking place Wednesday because it was inappropriate.

"We will not allow a group claiming to be a government-in-exile from whatever country to hold their activities in Indonesia," Faizasyah said, noting that Burma is a legal state recognized by Indonesia and other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

On Tuesday, a Burmese court found pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi guilty of breaching the terms of her house arrest. She was sentenced to 18 months of further confinement.

In response, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono issued a statement on Wednesday saying Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party should be allowed to take part in "inclusive and credible" elections in Burma.

Suu Kyi's detention will keep her from participating in the junta's planned elections next year, the first polls since 1990, when her party won overwhelmingly but was barred from taking power.

The Jakarta conference was organized by a group called The Movement for Democracy and Rights for Ethnic Nationalities, an alliance of ethnic and pro-democracy parties, both exiled and within Burma, who say on their Web site that they want to push for quicker democratic reform.

The conference delegates included exiled parliamentarians from Suu Kyi's party and six other organizations dedicated to the rights of woman, youth and ethnic minorities.

Bo Hla Tint, a member of Suu Kyi's party living in exile, accused Burma's military rulers of exerting behind-the-scenes pressure on Indonesia to scrap the conference.

"This shows the real interference of the military junta. They don't want interference from other Asean members," he said in a telephone interview Thursday, referring to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Bo Hla Tint accused Burma's neighbors of "double standards" by supporting the international community's calls for democratic elections while at the same time turning a blind eye to human rights abuses.

Suu Kyi's conviction drew sharp criticism from world leaders and human rights groups, as well as promises of new European Union sanctions against Burma.

"There is a clear and stark contrast between the public statements of the Indonesia government with its actions," said Roshan Jason, a conference organizer and executive director of the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar (Burma) Caucus.

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#### [UNSC Meeting on Burma Remains Inconclusive](#) – The Irrawaddy – 12 August 2009

WASHINGTON— An emergency meeting of the powerful United Nations Security Council convened on Tuesday afternoon at the request of France to discuss the situation in Burma in the aftermath of the fresh sentence against pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. However, the meeting ended without conclusion because of sharp differences among its members.

Emerging from the closed-door meeting, the Security Council president for the month of August, Ambassador John Sawers from Britain, said the 15-member UN body would meet again on Wednesday.

A draft statement was circulated by the United States among the member countries, which, among other things, condemns the conviction of Aung San Suu Kyi and calls for her immediate release and ability to participate in the political process.

When asked about Russia and China, the two members that have asked for more time to consider the draft statement, Deputy French Ambassador to the UN Jean-Pierre Lacroix said "I mean, everybody pretty much knows the dynamic within the Council, but we are in the midst of a discussion now and, as I said, we will do our best to try and achieve the kind of outcome that we are looking for.

"The draft statement has been circulated by the US delegation. We support that initiative, we support that draft. Some members of the Council have asked for some time to communicate this draft to their capital, and we respect that. But it is our firm position that there has to be a speedy and firm reaction of the Security Council," he said.

"It has been our longstanding position, but also one of the [UN] secretary-general, that if there is to be an inclusive and fair electoral process in Burma, it cannot be without the participation of all relevant political players, particularly Aung San Suu Kyi. That is why we think there has to be a reaction by the Security Council. The verdict is in clear violation and breach of the request made by the Security Council," he added.

Talking to reporters, the US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, said: "We recognize that other members of the Council may take different views on this, and we think it is important nonetheless to have a discussion and a debate and to seek as a matter of principle and policy a statement by the Council in accord with the principles of the Charter and the principles of democracy and respect for human rights that we are committed to."

Earlier in the day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his deep disappointment over the verdict and deplored the decision.

"The secretary-general urges the [Burmese] government to immediately and unconditionally release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and to engage with her without delay as an essential partner in the process of national dialogue and reconciliation," said a statement issued by his spokesperson.

"Unless she and all other political prisoners in Myanmar [Burma] are released and allowed to participate in free and fair elections, the credibility of the political process will remain in doubt," the statement said.

Ban also spoke to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown after Suu Kyi was sentenced to another 18 months of house arrest.

Meanwhile, however, China urged the international community to respect Burma's judicial sovereignty, reacting to the regime's decision to prolong the pro-democracy leader's house arrest, according to Agence France-Presse news agency.

"The international community should fully respect Myanmar's judicial sovereignty," foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said.

Meanwhile Malaysia's foreign minister called for an "urgent meeting" of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) after the verdict was announced.

"I think there is a need for Asean foreign ministers to have an urgent meeting to discuss this issue, which is of grave concern," Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said.

"With this sentence there is no possibility for Aung San Suu Kyi to participate in the general election next year which should be free, fair and inclusive," he added.

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[Rules set for Suu Kyi's house arrest](#) – Democratic Voice of Burma – 11 August 2009

Aug 11, 2009 (DVB)—A list of conditions under which Aung San Suu Kyi will live out her house arrest has been laid down by the courtroom, following an announcement that she could be released early if she abides by them.

The Rangoon prison courtroom today handed Burma's opposition leader an 18-month sentence, commuted from three years with hard labour after an interjection from junta leader Than Shwe, on charges of breaching conditions of her house arrest.

The regulations under which she will be kept in detention largely mirror those of her previous spell under house arrest, and include restrictions on contact with the outside world.

Suu Kyi will be kept in the compound on the shores of Rangoon's Inya lake which belonged to Suu Kyi's mother and which has been the subject of a legal battle over ownership, with claims from both her estranged brother and cousin that they hold part-ownership.

It was at this house, which she has been kept in detention for nearly 14 of the last 20 years, that the visit by US citizen John Yettaw in May triggered the charges she has been found guilty of.

With reports that security is now beefed up around the residence, Suu Kyi will have to contend with at least eight regulations which if adhered to, according to the government, could see her released early.

The only guests Suu Kyi is allowed are her doctor and the few visitors, likely only senior level diplomats, whom the junta authorises. She is only allowed to watch and read state-run media and is denied any leave of her compound.

According to a statement read out in the courtroom today by Burma's home affairs minister, General Maung Oo, "if she has concerns about the regulations, she can contact the authorities".

Her two caretakers, Khin Khin Win and Win Ma Ma, will again live with Suu Kyi at the house after they too had three-year prison sentences commuted to 18 months under house arrest.

According to reports, government troops charged with guarding the house have again taken position around the compound in preparation for her return. Since being brought to court in May, she has been kept in a unit inside Rangoon's Insein prison.

Following the verdict announcement, around 3000 people marched through Rangoon and were dispersed by police, who arrested around 70 of the protestors.

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[Myanmar sentences Suu Kyi to more house arrest](#) - Associated Press - 11 August 2009

YANGON, Myanmar – A Myanmar court convicted Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on Tuesday of violating her house arrest by allowing an uninvited American to stay at her home. The head of the military-ruled country ordered the democracy leader to serve an 18-month sentence under house arrest.

The 64-year-old opposition leader has already spent 14 of the last 20 years in detention, mostly under house arrest, and the extension will remove her from the political scene when the junta stages elections next year.

The court — which also convicted the American, John Yettaw, and sentenced him to seven years with hard labor — drew immediate criticism from world leaders, with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown calling it "monstrous."

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Suu Kyi should never have been put on trial. French President Nicolas Sarkozy urged the European Union to quickly adopt new sanctions, calling the verdict "brutal and unjust."

But Suu Kyi's term was less severe than the maximum sentence she faced — five years in prison — and shorter than the one the court initially ordered Tuesday — three years with hard labor.

Five minutes after that sentence was read out, Home Minister Maj. Gen. Maung Oo entered the courtroom and read aloud a special order from junta chief Senior Gen. Than Shwe, cutting the sentence in half and saying it could be served at home.

Than Shwe's order, signed Monday, likewise reduced the sentences of Suu Kyi's two female house companions, Khin Khin Win and Win Ma Ma, to 18 months. Both are members of her political party.

One of Suu Kyi's lawyers, Nyan Win, said the democracy leader told her defense team to proceed with an appeal and that they had applied for permission to meet with her Wednesday.

The junta leader said he commuted the sentences to "maintain community peace and stability" and because Suu Kyi was the daughter of Aung San, a revered hero who won Myanmar's independence from Britain.

It seemed likely it was in response to intense international pressure, including a call for Suu Kyi's release from the United Nations that was backed by China, Myanmar's key ally and benefactor.

South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu warned, however, that the reduced sentence was "not a concession — it is a manipulation of an illegal process. It must not be accepted by any government."

Clinton said Suu Kyi "should not have been tried, and she should not have been convicted."

Suu Kyi looked alert but tired during the 90-minute court session. She stood as the verdict was announced and then thanked foreign diplomats for attending her trial.

"I look forward to working with you in the future for the peace and prosperity of my country and the region," Suu Kyi said in a soft voice to diplomats seated nearby. She then was led out of the courtroom.

Officials said she was driven back to her lakeside villa in a six-car convoy. They spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the high-profile case.

One of her party members tied yellow ribbons at the gate and two nearby trees as a gesture of welcome. Suu Kyi had been in prison during the trial.

Yettaw — who swam across a lake the night of May 3, entered Suu Kyi's home uninvited and asked to spend two nights before trying to secretly swim back — was sentenced to seven years in prison with hard labor.

The timing of Yettaw's visit came just weeks before Suu Kyi's current six-year term of house arrest was to expire May 27. It sparked theories among Suu Kyi supporters that he was a pawn of the regime, while the junta insinuated he was being used by its exiled opponents.

Suu Kyi's trial has sparked international outrage and calls for her release and that of Myanmar's more than 2,000 other political prisoners. The sentence sparked angry reaction from across the globe.

"The facade of her prosecution is made more monstrous because its real objective is to sever her bond with the people for whom she is a beacon of hope and resistance," Brown said, calling the verdict a "purely political sentence" aimed at keeping her out of the 2010 elections.

Burma Campaign UK, an activist group, called for a global arms embargo against Myanmar and said the junta was "determined to silence all pro-democracy voices in the country in the run up to rigged elections."

Suu Kyi's international lawyer, New York-based Jared Genser, said her most recent period of detention violated Myanmar's own laws.

"The real question is how the international community will react — will it do more than simply condemn this latest injustice?" he asked.

London-based Amnesty International called the sentence "shameful ... nothing more than legal and political theater."

The 53-year-old Yettaw, of Falcon, Missouri, was returned to Insein prison, the site of the trial, on Monday night after hospitalization for epileptic seizures.

The court sentenced him to three years in prison for breaching Suu Kyi's house arrest. Yettaw was also sentenced to three years in prison for an immigration violation and to another year for swimming in a restricted zone.

Yettaw's lawyer Khin Maung Oo said his client would have to serve his sentence consecutively. He said he would appeal the decision within 60 days, asking the court for leniency.

"He was not surprised by the judgment. He's in good spirit, and he has moral courage," the lawyer said of Yettaw. He said Yettaw was "well" following his release from the hospital.

Yvonne Yettaw, a former wife and the mother of six of his children expressed surprise at the severity of the sentence.

"How is he going to do hard labor if he is so ill?" she told The Associated Press by phone from Palm Springs, California. "Maybe they'll realize he won't make it seven years and they'll send him home."

Yettaw, a devout Christian, earlier told his lawyer that he swam to Suu Kyi's residence to warn her of an assassination attempt that he had seen in a vision.

Yettaw was hospitalized last Monday after suffering seizures. He reportedly suffers from epilepsy, diabetes and other health problems, including post traumatic stress disorder from his service in the U.S. military.

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#### [Diplomats, journalists allowed to witness Suu Kyi trial](#) – Mizzima - 11 August 2009

New Delhi (Mizzima) – In an ostensible attempt at transparency the Burmese military junta on Tuesday allowed diplomats and journalists to be present at the court proceedings in Rangoon's Insein prison, where a verdict will be pronounced on the ongoing trial of Aung San Suu Kyi and her three other co-defendants.

A Rangoon-based diplomat told Mizzima that several foreign missions based in Rangoon as well as a few others, who have arrived recently, along with journalists were given permission to be inside the courtroom.

"I am not sure how many diplomats and journalists are there but I understand that several of them, even some diplomats who have recently come to Burma to witness the trial were allowed into the court today," the diplomat told Mizzima.

The court has fixed Tuesday for pronouncing the verdict of the nearly three-month long trial of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was charged for violating the security terms of her house arrest and 'harbouring' an American man who swam across a lake and entered her home in early May.

Aung San Suu Kyi, her two live-in party mates and the American man could face up to five years in prison, if found guilty.

Critics and opposition members have speculated that the court is likely to find Aung San Suu Kyi guilty, as the junta is determined to keep her away from the people as it prepares for a general election in 2010.

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#### [Four ethnic ceasefire groups to take on junta in event of war](#) – Kachin News Group - 11 August 2009

Four ethnic ceasefire groups in Burma's north have got together and decided to retaliate against the ruling junta, if it starts any offensive against any member of the alliance, said local sources.

The groups in the military alliance are the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) based in Kachin State and Northeast Shan State, Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS), Kokang ceasefire group and United Wa State Army (UWSA), said KIO sources.

KIO officials in Laiza headquarters on the Sino-Burma border said, the groups in the military alliance have decided to wage against the Burmese Army in their territories if the latter launches an offensive against any group in the alliance.

As tension builds up, an increasing number of Burmese troops are being deployed around the KIO headquarters in Laiza and the controlled areas of the other three groups--- UWSA, NDAA-ESS and Kokang ceasefire group, said Sino-Burma border sources.

Maj-Gen Soe Win, the junta's negotiator with the KIO and Commander of the junta's Northern Regional Command based in Kachin State's capital Myitkyina visited Laiza on July 31. He tried to ensure that the ceasefire continues and the problems between the two sides are resolved through discussions in the coming days, said KIO officials in Laiza.

Sources in the military-wing of KIO, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) said, KIA soldiers are patrolling the frontlines where the Burmese troops are active in Kachin State and northeast Shan State.

On the other hand, Thai authorities are checking their nationals in villages on the Thai-Burma, connecting the UWSA's territories because the UWSA is going ahead and preparing for war with the ruling junta, said residents on the Thai-Burma border.

The junta's No. 2 strongman, Vice-Senior-General Maung Aye had informed to the Chinese government during his China visit in June 15 to 20 that the junta is going to wage war on ethnic ceasefire groups along the two countries' border, said Sino-Burma border sources.

Till now, the Chinese government has not mounted pressure on the ethnic armed groups along the border to accept the Burmese Army-controlled Border Guard Force (BGF), said sources close to ethnic armed groups.

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[Suu Kyi sentenced to further 18 months](#) – Financial Times – 11 Aug 2009

A court in Burma has sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader and Nobel Laureate, to a further 18 months under house arrest for breaching the terms of her previous incarceration when an American tourist swam across the lake that backs on to her villa and stayed the night.

The court, sitting in Rangoon's notorious Insein Prison, sentenced Ms Suu Kyi, 64, to three years hard labour, but the junta that rules the country commuted the sentence to 18 months under house arrest.

Ms Suu Kyi was charged after John Yettaw, an American from Falcon, Missouri, swam across the lake that backs on to her house and spent the night there.

Mr Yettaw, a devout follower of the Mormon faith who relatives say suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder from his service during the Vietnam War, told the court he was acting on a vision in which he saw her being assassinated by terrorists.

Ms Suu Kyi said that she only allowed Mr Yettaw, a diabetic, to stay because he was exhausted.

"I acted without malice simply with intent to ensure that the one concerned should not suffer any adverse consequences," she told the court in her closing statement.

The court also found Mr Yettaw, 54, guilty and sentenced him to seven years: three years for breaching security laws, three years for immigration violations and one year on a municipal charge of illegal swimming. Four years of the sentence is to be served at hard labour.

Ms Suu Kyi's companions and housekeepers, Khin Khin Win and Win Ma Ma – mother and daughter – will share Ms Suu Kyi's incarceration.

Ms Suu Kyi's defence had argued that the constitutional measure under which she was charged had been superseded, and that the security forces should bear responsibility for allowing Mr Yettaw to breach the cordon that surrounded her home.

The sentence will effectively keep Ms Suu Kyi out of circulation until after the conclusion of elections that are due to be held next year.

Ms Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for 14 of the 19 years since her National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in general elections, a result that the generals annulled.

But she remains the regime's most dangerous opponent: the one figure with the ability to unite the fractious and demoralised opposition within the country.

The authorities mounted a huge security operation outside the prison, with an estimated 2,000 police and government militia manning checkpoints in an attempt to forestall any public demonstrations.

"The people who favour democracy do not want to see riots and protests that can harm their goal," said the government-run New Light of Myanmar in a commentary on Tuesday.

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[Myanmar court convicts Suu Kyi of violating terms of house arrest](#) – Los Angeles Times – 11 Aug 2009

The Nobel laureate's sentence is extended past the time of national elections. An uninvited American who visited her gets 7 years, 4 of them at hard labor.

BANGKOK -- A military court in Myanmar today declared pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi guilty of violating the terms of her house arrest and extended her sentence by a year and a half -- well past the date for national elections scheduled for 2010.

Thousands of supporters and security personnel gathered outside the courtroom at Yangon's Insein Prison for the culmination of the stop-start trial that has drawn harsh criticism from Western governments, rights groups and the United Nations. President Obama has described the proceeding as a "show trial," and Burmese activists were quick to blast today's verdict.

"The whole trial was politically motivated and began as a deliberate attempt to jail her. The regime wants to attach a criminal record to Aung San Suu Kyi's life, which they think will prevent her role in politics and in public life," said Bo Kyi, secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a humanitarian group based in the refugee camp of Mae Sot, Thailand.

"To jail Aung San Suu Kyi is to jail the future of Burma," said Bo Kyi, a pro-democracy organizer. Burma is another name for Myanmar.

The junta-backed court first sentenced Suu Kyi to a three-year prison term including hard labor. After a short recess, a high-ranking official read aloud a special order from the junta chief, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, to reduce the sentence 18 months and allow the ailing Nobel Peace Prize laureate to serve the time at her villa in Yangon. The defense has 60 days to appeal, but no plan to do so was mentioned.

Suu Kyi was arrested in May after an uninvited American, John Yettaw, swam across a lake to enter her home. Yettaw was sentenced to three years in prison for breaching Suu Kyi's house security and another three years with hard labor for immigration violations. The 53-year-old resident of Falcon, Mo., was also given a one-year term with hard labor for swimming in a restricted zone.

Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, has been in detention for 14 of the last 20 years, mostly under house arrest. Her party won the 1990 election, but the regime rejected the results and put her in custody.

According to witnesses, Than Shwe claimed to have reduced the sentence to "maintain peace and tranquility." Although a controversial constitution passed in 2008 bars Suu Kyi from standing in next year's national vote, because she had children with a British man, many analysts believe that her presence would greatly influence the election's outcome. Her party has said it will not participate unless the junta releases the more than 2,000 reported political prisoners it holds and reviews the 2008 charter.

"This is not only the regime's rejection of NLD's call for review of the controversial 2008 Constitution, but also ensures that Aung San Suu Kyi cannot play any role in the coming 2010 election. Then, to deflect any serious reaction to this complete injustice, the regime sends her back home for house arrest," said Naing Aung, general secretary of the Thailand-based Forum for Democracy in Burma.

An eyewitness in Yangon said some unrest broke out in front of Insein Prison and as many as 50 people were hauled away in security vans. According to Bo Kyi, the streets leading to Suu Kyi's house were closed this morning and he believes that she will be taken back to her house today.

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## [EU to Stiffen Myanmar Sanctions Over "unjustified" Suu Kyi](#) – DPA – 11 Aug 2009

The European Union said Tuesday it would stiffen its sanctions against the Myanmar regime following the "unjustified" sentencing of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The European Union condemns the verdict against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and the unjustified trial against her," the EU's Swedish presidency said in a statement issued on behalf of the bloc's 27 member states.

"The EU will respond with additional targeted measures against those responsible for the verdict. In addition, the EU will further reinforce its restrictive measures targeting the regime of Burma/Myanmar, including its economic interests," the statement said.

The EU's current sanctions, which were recently extended until April 2010, target some 500 regime figures and their families, as well as some 80 businesses linked to the regime.

While strongly condemning Suu Kyi's "show trial," EU foreign ministers in May stopped short of bringing more sanctions, instead calling for more cooperation with regional powers such as China and India.

Tuesday's statement from the Swedish government, however, suggested the bloc was now ready to stiffen its stance.

In London, Ivan Lewis, a Foreign Office minister for the region, said Britain would be urging further EU sanctions against Myanmar.

The issue would likely be discussed at an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers scheduled for the first week of September in Stockholm.

Suu Kyi, 64, was found guilty of breaking the terms of her detention by allowing a US national to swim into her lakeside compound-cum-prison on May 3.

The 18-month sentence means the opposition leader will still be under house arrest when Myanmar's general election is due to take place next spring.

In its statement, the Swedish presidency called for Suu Kyi's immediate and unconditional release, saying the judicial proceedings brought against her breached both national and international law.

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## [Europeans Demand Release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi](#) – New York Times – 11 Aug 2009

PARIS — Within moments of her sentencing to an effective 18 months house arrest on Tuesday, European governments demanded the immediate and unconditional release Tuesday of the pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain called for a global embargo on arms shipments to the military regime in Myanmar.

### Pro-Democracy Leader in Myanmar Is Convicted

The European Union demanded her freedom in a statement issued by Sweden, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the 27-nation body, news reports said. In a statement, the body said it was ready to impose "targeted measures against those responsible for the verdict" and to stiffen some earlier measures, including an arms export ban, visa restrictions and financial sanctions.

In many parts of Europe, her trial has been followed closely and her cause has been embraced by a broad range of politicians and human rights advocates.

"Citizens across the globe are asking world leaders to hold this brutal regime to account," said Ricken Patel, director of an online campaign network called Avaaz.org. "Aung San Suu Kyi's detention today on spurious charges removes any shred of legitimacy."

Irene Khan, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, said in a statement in London that, while the Myanmar authorities "will hope that a sentence that is shorter than the maximum will be seen by the international community as an act of leniency", it "must not be seen as such."

Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi "should never have been arrested in the first place. The only issue here is her immediate and unconditional release," Ms. Khan said.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France called the sentencing "brutal and unjust" and said European sanctions should target profitable industries including timber and ruby mining.

In Britain, Mr. Brown said he was "saddened and angry" at her sentencing and said it was designed by the ruling military leaders of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, to keep her out of elections next year.

In a statement, he said: "It is further proof that the military regime in Burma is determined to act with total disregard for accepted standards of the rule of law in defiance of international opinion."

Calling on the United Nations Security Council to impose a global prohibition on arms sales, he added: "The facade of her prosecution is made more monstrous because its real objective is to sever her bond with the people for whom she is a beacon of hope and resistance."

The American response was likely to express similar outrage, and it seemed unlikely that the military's decision to commute her sentence from an initial three years hard labor would soften western perceptions that the trial had been a political maneuver.

The Obama administration has been reviewing American policy toward Myanmar since February, when Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton declared that the existing sanctions against its military-run government had been ineffective.

At a meeting of the Association of South East Asian nations in Thailand last month, Mrs. Clinton spoke in unusually detailed terms in discussing the country's human rights record and its treatment of Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We are deeply concerned by the reports of continuing human rights abuses within Burma," she said at the time, "and particularly by actions that are attributed to the Burmese military, concerning the mistreatment and abuse of young girls."

She also dismissed the charges against Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi as "baseless and totally unacceptable" and said an improvement of ties with Washington depended on the Myanmar junta's handling of human rights issues.

"Our position is that we are willing to have a more productive partnership with Burma if they take steps that are self-evident," she said.

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#### **[Palpable tension between Burmese Army and Kokant rebels](#)** - Mizzima - 10 August 2009

Tension flared between the Burmese Army and the Kokant ethnic ceasefire group, following a stand-off for about five hours between the two sides near the Sino-Burma border on Saturday.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, an analyst based on the Sino-Burma border said, the two sides were locked in a stand-off when the Kokant soldiers met about 70 Burmese soldiers, who were on their way to a surprise raid on the residence of Peng Jiasheng, Chairman of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), in Laogai Township in Kokant Special Region in northern Shan state.

The Burmese troops, under the north-eastern regional command along with personnel of the Special Branch of the Police (Narcotic) were blocked by around 300 Kokant rebels on their way to the home of Peng Jiasheng also known as Phone Kyar Shin.

"The stand off lasted several hours but both sides held their fire. When Phone Kyar Shin threatened that his troops would open fire, the Burmese soldiers backed off," Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

Aung Kyaw Zaw said following the incident, Maj. Gen Aung Than Htut, the north-eastern regional commander on Sunday tried to meet Phone Kyar Shin, but the MNDAA Chairman refused to meet him.

The MNDAA is one of the groups that had refused to accept the Burmese junta's proposal of transforming their army into a Border Guard Force, which will be administered by the Burmese Army.

Reports suggest that several Kokang ethnic villagers have fled to the China border, as they feared fresh clashes between the Burmese Army and the MNDAA on Saturday.

“But now, some of them have returned home though some are still waiting for the condition to normalise,” Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

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**Kokang Thwart Burma Army Drug Raid** – The Irrawaddy – 10 Aug 2009

Tension is high between the Burmese military and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), a Kokang ceasefire group, following an attempted drug raid by some 70 Burmese troops on the house of the Kokang group’s chairman on Saturday, according to sources in the area.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese analyst based at the Sino-Burmese border, told The Irrawaddy that the Burmese army stood down after a standoff that lasted five and a half hours.

The MNDAA chairman, Peng Jiasheng [Burmese: Phon Kyar Shin], reportedly ordered 300 of his soldiers to block the route in anticipation of the Burmese army attempting a raid. The Burmese were encircled by Kokang insurgents while negotiations took place, said Aung Kyaw Zaw.

Kokang leader Peng Jiasheng poses for a photograph with Kokang children at a local festival on February 3.

Peng reportedly told the Burmese army that they could search his home if they entered unarmed. Otherwise, he reportedly said he would order his troops to open fire on them. With no solution in sight, the Burmese army retreated.

Meanwhile, about 10,000 Kokang residents in Laogai Township fled to the Chinese border on Saturday in fear of clashes between the two armies, according to the sources.

Tensions escalated further on Sunday when Peng Jiasheng refused to meet Maj-Gen Aung Than Htut, the northeastern regional commander, according to the border sources.

The Burmese regional commander allegedly wanted to meet his Kokang counterpart regarding the Kokang ceasefire group’s recent rejection of a Burmese military proposal to transform the MNDAA battalions into border guard forces.

Mai Aik Phone, who is close to several ceasefire groups in the area, told The Irrawaddy on Monday that more Burmese troops have been deployed in the region following the MNDAA’s rejection of the proposal.

“It is obvious they [the Burmese army] are threatening the Kokang people and their army by dispatching more troops into the area,” he said.

However, the two analysts estimated that the Burmese military will not take strong action against the Kokang group at the moment because of Aung San Suu Kyi’s ongoing trial and the fact that the country is due to hold general elections next year.

According to various sources at the Sino-Burmese border, the Burmese military has established a Regional Operations Command (ROC) with seven infantry battalions in Kokang territory in recent months.

The ethnic Kokang army was originally assigned status as an autonomous region of northern Shan State after the Kokang and the Wa army defected from the Communist Party of Burma in 1989.

Along with the Wa, the Kokang are believed to be involved in the drug trade, according to international anti-narcotic agencies. However, Kokang leaders have claimed their territory has been drug-free since 2003.

Meanwhile, the Burmese military has reportedly deployed more troops around ethnic armed ceasefire groups’ areas in the wake of the groups’ refusals to transform to border guard duties.

In recent months, the junta has pressured Burma’s ceasefire groups to participate in the forthcoming election in 2010. The junta has reportedly encouraged them to give up their arms in the post-election period.

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[US Focus on Pyongyang Risks Overlooking Burma](#) – The Irrawaddy - 10 Aug 2009

While there is no hard evidence to demonstrate that the Burmese regime in Naypyidaw has been seeking to acquire or develop nuclear weapons, the circumstantial evidence is worrying when North Korea's track record is taken into account.

Recently, the secretary-general of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Surin Pitsuwan, said that there is still no clear evidence that Burma has such a nuclear facility, but that if it does exist, Burma would be forced to leave the regional bloc because all member states, including Burma, have signed a treaty pledging to maintain Asean as a nuclear-weapon free zone.

However, Burma's alleged proliferation partner, Pyongyang, is providing its neighbors and the US with a much more immediate and pressing nuclear challenge, and one which could lessen the urgency of any international response to the Burma issue.

Speaking to The Irrawaddy recently, Prof Mely Caballero Anthony of the National University of Singapore said, "Between the two, DPRK and the Korean peninsula issues would be more pressing for the US than Burma."

So far the US has given conflicting signals.

At two US State Department press briefings last week, spokespersons refused to be drawn on the issue, despite claims published in the international media that the Burmese junta was trading uranium extracts for North Korean military hardware and technical expertise.

This reticence came despite US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's warning at an Asean meeting in Phuket in late July about a possible North Korea-Burma nuclear collaboration.

"We worry about the transfer of nuclear technology" from North Korea to Burma, Clinton said.

Her words were part of a highly publicized spat with both the junta in Burma and the Communist regime in Pyongyang, with the latter calling the US foreign secretary "a schoolgirl."

Her husband, former US President Bill Clinton, received somewhat better treatment when he arrived in Pyongyang last Wednesday, on what was described by the White House as a "private humanitarian mission."

During the visit, the former president secured the release of two American journalists, Euna Lee and Laura Ling, who worked for former Vice President Al Gore at his Current TV media company. The women were arrested by North Korean police after entering the country illegally from China.

Former President Clinton met Kim Jong-il and Kim Kye-gwan, Pyongyang's chief nuclear negotiator, hinting that there was more to the mission than just bringing the two women home safely.

In any case, Kim Jong-il was reportedly delighted to have such a high-profile emissary, perhaps vindicating his hardball strategy over the years.

As Con Coughlin noted in the Daily Telegraph: "The [Bill] Clinton administration handed over millions of dollars in aid, food, oil and even a nuclear reactor in the hope of persuading the North Koreans to ditch their military program. They simply took the aid and carried on with nuclear development regardless, so that by 2006 they were able to detonate a device."

Nevertheless, Pyongyang still finds itself under pressure to resume the stalled six-nation talks over the future of its nuclear program. It has declared the six-party talks dead, apparently wanting bilateral talks with the US and a priori acceptance of its status as a nuclear power as the next step in any nuclear diplomacy.

This might explain the cautious words used by the US State Department spokespersons last week. During a briefing, spokesman Philip Crowley said: "I think over time, we would like to clarify with Burma more precisely the nature of its military cooperation. The [US] secretary was encouraged that Burma said that it would abide by its responsibilities under the sanctions that were recently passed by the UN, and we will be looking to see them implement those sanctions."

When pressed on the specifics of the revelations by two Burmese defectors, who claimed to have inside knowledge of the military junta's nuclear sites, Crowley said, "I'm not commenting on any particular facility."

This exchange came just before former President Clinton's mission, which at that stage had not been publicized. No doubt the US administration did not want to jeopardize the trip by making further comments on the allegations against the two rogue states.

Pyongyang has rattled its sabers vigorously since Obama took the office. It conducted a long-range missile test in April, then pulled out of the six-party talks with the US, Russia, South Korea, Japan and China.

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### **No U.S. Confirmation of Myanmar Nuclear Report** – GSN - 10 Aug. 2009

U.S. officials have yet to address reports that Myanmar is building an underground nuclear facility with help from North Korea, the Washington Times reported yesterday (see GSN, Aug. 5).

The Sydney Morning Herald recently reported claims from two Burmese defectors regarding construction of a nuclear facility that includes a reactor, possibly as part of a nuclear-weapon program. The men said Myanmar's military government was building the facility with help from North Korea.

Rumors of a secret nuclear project in Myanmar have previously circulated in the Burmese expatriate community. Evidence suggesting a possible collaboration with Pyongyang came into focus in June as the U.S. Navy tracked a North Korean ship suspected of heading toward Myanmar with contraband weapons. The ship eventually reversed course.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said she was "very concerned" by potential nuclear collaboration between the two nations. So far, there has been no hard evidence of such a relationship.

"It's frightening to contemplate nuclear cooperation between two military dictatorships, especially when the intentions and capabilities of the recipient ... in this case are so murky," said Sharon Squassoni, a nonproliferation analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington.

If Myanmar "truly has peaceful nuclear intentions," she said, "it should invite observers in for a full tour, join the Proliferation Security Initiative and sign an Additional Protocol with the [International Atomic Energy Agency], which would enhance inspections."

"Myanmar is a signatory of the [Nuclear] Nonproliferation Treaty and thus has concluded a safeguards agreement with the IAEA with a small-quantities protocol, which is designed for states that have little or no nuclear material and no nuclear material in facilities," said the agency in a statement. "Based on this agreement, it would be expected to inform the IAEA no later than six months prior to operating a nuclear facility."

There is little chance that Myanmar would make the moves advocated by Squassoni, meaning the U.N. Security Council might ultimately have to deal with the matter, according to the Times. China, which has veto authority on the council, has a close economic relationship with Myanmar, meaning it could block any effort to crack down on Naypyidaw.

North Korea is a known proliferation that is already suspected of supporting construction of an alleged Syrian nuclear reactor destroyed in a 2007 Israeli airstrike.

In light of international efforts to cripple its own nuclear program, Pyongyang could be trying to "keep [its] expertise alive and ... people employed in projects abroad" by sharing its nuclear knowledge with Myanmar, said Avner Cohen, a nonproliferation expert at the University of Maryland.

It "would not be at all surprising if North Korea was in fact involved in a secret nuclear effort," agreed Daryl Kimball, head of the Arms Control Association.

However, Kimball said Myanmar's involvement would be a bit more perplexing. "No one is threatening Burma's security for them to need a deterrent," he said. "In fact, they would be inviting a threat if they were trying to acquire a nuclear weapons capability" (Simon Roughneen, Washington Times, Aug. 9).

The head of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Saturday said that Myanmar could be kicked out of the group if reports that it is building a secret nuclear reactor turn out to be true, the Thai News Agency reported.

ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan said the existence of such a facility would violate the group's agreement that member nations abstain from pursuing nuclear programs, and would qualify Myanmar for expulsion.

"ASEAN leaders will have to jointly consider on the issue," he said. "If (Myanmar) is found guilty then it will be forced to leave ASEAN" (Thai News Agency)

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#### [U.N. publishes Myanmar landmine map](#) – AlertNet – 10 Aug 2009

The United Nations has published a map showing the location of landmines in Myanmar, a country where unmarked mines kill or maim hundreds of civilians every year.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) said it was an important step to highlighting the problem of landmine use in Myanmar.

"It represents a first small step by illustrating the extent of the country's landmine problem in order to be able to address it more effectively," the ICBL said in a statement.

Click [here](#) for the map

The Canada-based Landmine Monitor, a group that analyses mine use around the world, described landmine contamination in Myanmar as extensive.

It said on its Web site that Myanmar was one of a handful of countries that had not signed a treaty banning the use of landmines and its army still uses them to fight guerrillas.

"Landmines in Myanmar are concentrated on its borders with Bangladesh, India and Thailand, and in eastern parts of the country marked by decades-old struggles for autonomy by ethnic minorities," Landmine Monitor said.

In 2007, the latest figures on Landmine Monitor's Web site, landmines killed or injured over 400 people in Myanmar.

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#### [Analysis: Myanmar waiting for development aid](#) – IRIN – 10 Aug 2009

The detention of Aung San Suu Kyi is just one of a number of obstacles to further assistance for Myanmar

YANGON, 10 August 2009 (IRIN) - Myanmar is one of the least-funded countries in the world but faces a number of hurdles if it wants to receive more overseas development assistance (ODA).

Donors cite the continued detention of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as a key obstacle, along with issues of access and other restrictions on the delivery of aid.

However, the relief effort that followed Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, which left some 140,000 people dead, proved that aid can be delivered directly to those in need, agencies say.

In 2007, the country received just US\$4 per person in ODA, less than any of the poorest 50 countries, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Cambodia and Laos – countries with similar poverty levels – received \$47 and \$68 respectively for the same time period.

"I can't speak for other donors – but I would imagine most donors do want to give more to Myanmar," Paul Whittingham, head of the UK's Department for International Development in Myanmar, told IRIN.

"But there are challenges to effective delivery," he said, citing issues of restricted access, lack of reliable data, and a poor policy environment.

However, it is the issue of Aung San Suu Kyi that appears to remain centre stage.

“Clearly it is not always possible to keep politics separate from the humanitarian priorities,” Whittingham conceded.

#### Top 10 Donors of Net ODA to Myanmar 2007

USD Million

JAPAN 30.5

EC 19.7

UK 18.0

USA 15.4

UNICEF 14.3

UNDP 13.0

AUSTRALIA 12.9

SWEDEN 11.4

NORWAY 11.0

DENMARK 7.9

TOTAL \$154.1m

Aung San Suu Kyi has been in detention for 14 of the past 20 years. In May she was charged with violating the terms of her house arrest and her trial has drawn international condemnation. In response, western nations, including the United States, have renewed sanctions against the country. The trial verdict is expected this month.

Aid workers in Myanmar argue that aid for the general public should not be withheld on political grounds, noting that other countries with repressive governments receive much more.

“It’s a mystery to me that Myanmar gets so little in aid, considering the needs are so great,” said an NGO worker who has worked in Myanmar for 15 years.

“[Donors] are so blinded by their opposition to the form of government that they forget the needs of the people.”

Medical workers estimate there are between five and 10 million malaria patients per year in Myanmar, but only a small proportion receive effective treatment.

The country also has the highest rate of HIV in Southeast Asia, but anti-retroviral drugs are only available to one-fifth of those who need them. The remainder, about 60,000 people, goes untreated.

And more than 30 percent of Myanmar’s children are chronically malnourished, according to the UN.

“We know we can reduce the number of people who die each year from preventable diseases,” said Dan Collison, director of emergency programmes for Save the Children in Myanmar. “But without donor support, we can’t do the work we need to do,” he said.

Primary school students learning on the floor of a cyclone-damaged monastery in Gwe Gon village, Dedaye Township Cyclone recovery under-funded

More than a year after Cyclone Nargis, a multi-million dollar recovery effort remains critically under-funded, Bishow Parajuli, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Yangon, told IRIN.

Of the \$691 million needed for the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan, only \$100 million has been raised to address health, shelter, water and sanitation, and agriculture needs.

"There is also a misconception among donors that aid cannot be delivered effectively, but this is not the case and that has been proven with Nargis. This is the message that needs to get out, to be communicated to donors," said Parajuli.

"The response to Cyclone Nargis in the delta has shown that it is possible for the international community, local organizations and the government to cooperate to save and rebuild lives," said Whittingham of DFID, which was one of the biggest donors to the Nargis response and has just pledged an extra \$32 million in assistance across Myanmar over the next two years.

"The needs are immense - so we urge others to follow us and commit more."

Donors and humanitarian workers agree that the government itself must do more to address the root causes of poverty. State investment in basic services is among the lowest in the world: for example, Myanmar spends just \$0.70 per person on healthcare each year.

"Only a joint effort of government, the UN, NGOs and donors can really address the massive needs of the people of this country," said Andrew Kirkwood, head of Save the Children in Myanmar.

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#### [Verdicts in Myanmar's Suu Kyi trial may be delayed](#) - Associated Press – 10 Aug 2009

YANGON, Myanmar — Verdicts in the trial of Myanmar's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi may be postponed again because of the continued hospitalization of the American defendant who swam to her home, a lawyer and hospital sources said Monday.

A court was scheduled to deliver the verdicts Tuesday, ending the 64-year-old Nobel laureate's nearly 3-month-long trial on charges that she violated the terms of her house arrest by allowing American John Yettaw to stay at her home for two nights.

But Suu Kyi's lawyer Nyan Win said he expected the verdicts to be delayed again if Yettaw remains in the hospital because Myanmar courts do not generally make rulings in the absence of the accused.

Yettaw was still in intensive care on Monday, said a hospital staff member, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals in the military-run country. He reportedly suffers from epilepsy, diabetes and other health problems, including post traumatic stress disorder from his service in the U.S. military.

National police chief Khin Yi told the media last week that Yettaw was looked after by a team of seven medical doctors but declined to comment on his condition.

A verdict had been scheduled for last Friday, but judges said they needed more time to sort through legal issues and it was rescheduled for Tuesday.

Suu Kyi, who is widely expected to be found guilty, faces up to five years in prison. Yettaw is charged as an abettor in violating her detention and could also be imprisoned for five years.

The trial of Suu Kyi, who has been detained for nearly 14 of the last 20 years, has refocused international outrage on Myanmar, which has been ruled by its military since 1962.

The regime in recent days has beefed up security in Yangon, claiming that domestic and foreign opposition groups were planning attacks to coincide with the Suu Kyi trial.

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#### [Myanmar opposition unites at UN](#) - Associated Press – 07 August 2009

UNITED NATIONS – Exiled opposition leaders from Myanmar came together at the U.N. on Friday to present a plan for a democratic future in their homeland and ask the U.N. to transmit it to the country's military rulers.

The opposition leaders called for the release of Nobel Prize-winning pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, a dialogue with the regime, credible elections in 2010 and a review of the constitution adopted last year.

The alliance of political parties and ethnic groups asked the U.N. Security Council and Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to send its reconciliation plan to the military regime in Myanmar.

Sein Win, a cousin of Suu Kyi and head of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, which describes itself as the country's government-in-exile, called her trial a "mockery of justice."

He said the regime "has made a lot of promises, but if you look at the facts, it's not getting any better" as human rights are violated, villages are destroyed and the country becomes more militarized. He condemned the regime's purported nuclear ambitions.

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[Myanmar may have to leave ASEAN if it has nuclear plant](#) - Thai News Agency – 08 August 2009

Myanmar may be forced to abandon its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) membership if it is found to have a nuclear reactor in the country, ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan said on Saturday. So far there is no clear evidence that the Southeast Asian country, Thailand's neighbour to the west, has such a facility but if it does, it will be forced to leave the organisation because operating a nuclear plant violates a regional pact which states that ASEAN will be a nuclear free zone, said Mr Surin.

Mr Surin was responding to Western media reports which said recently that impoverished Myanmar was building a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium facilities with the help of North Korea and aims to have a nuclear bomb in five years.

"ASEAN (government) leaders will have to jointly consider on the issue. If (Myanmar) is found guilty then it will be forced to leave ASEAN," said Mr. Surin, adding that so far there is no sign that the country has built such facilities.

Touching on the court delay in issuing a verdict against Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Mr Surin said he believed the postponement probably so the verdict to be issued would not impact the feelings of the international community.

The verdict must be transparent before general elections, otherwise Myanmar authorities would not have reason to back their claims to the international community, and it would also put pressure on ASEAN, he said.

Myanmar court has postponed the verdict until Tuesday.

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[Burma Isn't Broke: The junta, not a lack of resources, is to blame for the people's poverty](#) - The Wall Street Journal – 06 August 2009

By SEAN TURNELL

The drawn-out show trial of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has once again focused attention on Burma and sparked discussion on how to engage the regime. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently suggested development aid as a carrot to coax the generals to talk. But contrary to popular belief, the junta isn't as poor as it claims to be.

Burma has emerged as a major regional supplier of natural gas in Asia-Pacific. At present, most of this gas is sold to Thailand, but new fields will shortly provide for vast sales to China. Rising gas prices and increasing demand have caused the value of Burma's gas exports to soar, driving a projected balance-of-payments surplus for this fiscal year of around \$2.5 billion. Burma's international reserves will rise to over \$5 billion-worth by the end of the year.

These revenues make next to no impact on the country's official fiscal accounts, however. The reason is simple: Burma's U.S. dollar gas earnings are recorded in the government's published accounts at the local currency's "official" exchange rate of around six kyat to a dollar. This rate overvalues the currency by nearly 200 times its market value and undervalues the local-currency value of Burma's gas earnings by an equivalent amount. Recorded at the official rate, Burma's gas earnings translate into less than 1% of budget receipts. By contrast, if the same gas earnings are recorded at the market exchange rate, their contribution would more than double total state receipts, and largely eliminate Burma's fiscal deficit.

The motivation for this sleight of hand is probably to “quarantine” Burma’s foreign exchange earnings from the country’s public accounts, thereby making them available to the regime and its cronies. This accounting is facilitated by Burma’s state-owned Foreign Trade Bank and some willing offshore banks.

Flush with these funds, Burma’s military rulers have embarked upon a spending binge of epic proportions, including indulging themselves in the creation of a new administrative capital named Naypyidaw, or “abode of kings.” They are also buying nuclear technologies of uncertain use from Russia and possibly from North Korea.

This kind of behavior is par for the course in Burma. The military junta took power in a 1962 coup and has consistently expropriated the country’s output while dismantling its basic market institutions. There are no effective property rights in Burma, and the rule of law is weak. Macroeconomic policy making is capricious, unpredictable and ill-informed. The regime spends greatly in excess of its revenue and resorts to the printing presses to finance its spending, creating inflation. Most of Burma’s prominent corporations are owned by the military, and the country is judged by Transparency International as the second most corrupt in the world.

Burma’s fall from grace has been incredible to watch. The country was once one of the richest in Southeast Asia and the world’s largest rice exporter. Today, Burma can barely feed itself. In 1950, the per capita of GDP of Burma and its neighbor, Thailand, were virtually identical. Today, Thailand’s GDP is seven times that of its former peer, despite very similar religious, cultural and physical endowments.

The people of Burma are poor, but the regime that oppresses them is not. Changing this equation is the true key to economic development in Burma, and the outcome to which the efforts of the rest of the world should be directed.

*Mr. Turnell is the editor of Burma Economic Watch and an associate professor in economics at Macquarie University in Sydney.*

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[Is the Lady Wrong?](#) Irrawaddy - Friday, August 7, 2009

In a fresh attack on Burma’s pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, The Economist proclaimed that she was an obstacle to the country’s development. “Will the courageous Lady admit as much?” the international political journal challenged.

As a student of international development, I was keen to look into the argument through a comparative review of Suu Kyi’s own concept of development.

Before reading my analysis, readers should not lose sight of two fundamental factors: The system and the power.

Politically and economically, Burma has been in a transitional state to democracy, practicing a military authoritarianism and a market economy since 1988 with the military junta exercising legislative, executive and judiciary powers.

Meanwhile, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections. She, however, has been a prisoner of the junta for nearly 14 of the past 20 years.

The notion that democracy can be achieved through development, as Thant Myint-U said in the article, is in fact not new. It was a popular idea in the 1980s when the world witnessed the “economic miracle” in East Asia when countries such as South Korea and Taiwan took off, accompanied close behind by Southeast Asian neighbors Singapore and Malaysia.

Economists viewed these countries’ spectacular development as a consequence of rapid economic growth. They usually reached the conclusion that East Asia had succeeded on a policy of “development first, democracy second,” on the basis that democracy is fragile without a strong middle class.

Thant Myint-U seems to be a member of this camp. Some development theorists advocated that as the East Asian countries in question—the “Asian Tigers” as they became known—were ruled by one-party-dominated governments, the task of development in an authoritarian state was easier to implement than

in a democratic one. They pointed to the failure of several Latin American countries' economies as an example.

But later, a new finding proved that the growth of an economy that over-emphasized GDP (Gross Domestic Product) didn't reflect that country's development.

The late former president of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino, invited Suu Kyi to a meeting of the World Commission on Culture and Development in Manila in 1994. Under house arrest, Suu Kyi was only able to send to the meeting a letter which stated her concept on development.

Referring to Francois Perroux's "A New Concept of Development," issued by UNESCO (United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization) in 1983, Suu Kyi was aware of the need to redefine the meanings of "development" and "growth."

"The unsatisfactory record of development in many parts of the world and the ensuing need for a definition of development which means more than mere economic growth became a matter of vital concern to economists and international agencies more than a decade ago," she said.

Another finding on the recent economic miracles of East and Southeast Asia is that the success of those economies is due to the efficiency of strong government institutions. Ironically, these authoritarian states embraced the core principles of accountability, transparency, a minimum level of corruption, an independent banking system, an effective check and balance system through decentralization to the private sector, and the state's social investment in education and health.

So, is it logical that the absence of good governance in Burma is due to the economic sanctions of the American-led Western countries? Does it make sense that the junta's failed economic policies of the past 20 years were caused by the NLD leader's advocacy of economic sanctions?

No country wants to invest in a country without a rule-based economic environment; and the necessary rules are drawn and adopted by policymakers from the political arena.

The development of China and Vietnam today could not have been achieved without the ability to conduct a series of reforms.

Therefore, it is impossible and even wrong to consider the "development first, democracy second" principle.

The people of Burma have been living without a constitution for 20 years and badly need a functioning political system. They have showed the desire for this many times, most memorably the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and the 1990 elections.

Suu Kyi wrote a special report in the Human Development Report titled "Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World," [published by the UNDP in 2002]. In it she wrote: "Human development encompasses all aspects of human existence.

It is generally accepted that its scope includes political and social rights as well as economic ones, but the different rights are not always given the same weight.

"For example, some people still claim that humanitarian aid and economic assistance cannot wait for political and social progress. This insidious idea creates dissonance between complementary requirements."

After her release from a second period of house arrest in 2003, The Irrawaddy interviewed Suu Kyi, a month before she was attacked in Depayin. She answered questions covering a range of the issues, including humanitarian aid.

"We have never said 'no' to humanitarian aid as such," she said. "We have always said humanitarian aid must be given to the right people in the right way, which of course calls for accountability and transparency.

"And of course we always say that the minimum necessary requirement is independent monitoring."

In another interview, this time for an Altsean-Burma report—"A Peace of Pie? Burma's Humanitarian Aid Debate"—Suu Kyi said: What I would like to say is the most important aspect of humanitarian assistance

or any kind of assistance is good governance. Unless there is good governance, you cannot ensure that the assistance will really benefit the country.”

The past two decades are adequate testimony to the efficiency of a government with a total lack of “good governance,” which has caused what can only be called a “gross domestic failure.”

If the readers didn't lose sight of the two fundamental factors, as I mentioned above, they can conclude the correct answer to the question of this article's title.

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[China-ASEAN Free Trade Area to be Launched by the End of the Year](#) - 2point6billion.com - 7 Aug 2009

The China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) free trade area is expected to be launched by this year.

The free trade area will include China, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam with the new ASEAN members Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam to be given an additional transitional period of five years.

“The free trade zone will cover a population of 1.9 billion and involve about US\$6 trillion in gross domestic product,” Lu Kejian, director of the ministry's Department of Asian Affairs, was quoted by Xinhua during the opening of the fourth Pan Beibu Gulf Economic Cooperation Forum in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The ASEAN is China's fourth most biggest trade partner after the European Union, the United States and Japan. Last year, bilateral trade between China and ASEAN amounted to US\$231.1 billion.

A free trade area is an agreement between a group of nations on a series of economic conditions which include reducing tariff rates, developing intellectual property regulations and easing investment rules to name a few.

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[NMSP officially rejects future role in Burmese government 'Border Guard Force'](#) - Independent Mon News Agency - 4 Aug 2009

On August 4th, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) announced that it decided to turn down the offer made by the Burmese State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), to reform its armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) into either a Border Guard Force (BGF) or a government aligned people's militia. Despite increased pressure from the SPDC to bring the MNLA under nominal state control as a reduced force, the NMSP statement sites the importance of ethnic identity and the will of the people in making its decision.

The statement, already available on the NMSP website, is to be officially announced on August 5th, at the 62nd Mon Revolution Day, which celebrates the beginning of the Mon armed struggle in 1948.

According to the statement, the NMSP signed the 1995 ceasefire with the Burmese regime because, like other ethnic armed groups, it wanted to solve the political turmoil in Burma through tripartite talks including the Burmese government, the ethnic communities, and the national democracy movement. It adds that its status as a political party with an armed wing has brought the NMSP and the Mon people their own rights and freedoms, as well as provided protection for Mon people and culture.

The NMSP will maintain the cease-fire with the government and will continue to call for tripartite talks to solve, not only the political problems with the current Burmese regime, but also with the future government that will form after the 2010 election.

This decision came after an emergency Central Executive Committee (CEC) and Central Committee (CC) meeting was convened on July 25th, where senior NMSP party members vowed to discuss their options until they had reached a decision regarding the future of the MNLA.

On June 7th high-ranking NMSP officials met South East Command (SEC) General That Naing Win who officially requested that the MNLA reform as a BGF. Though the NMSP was originally given until the end of July to return with a decision, it appears the deadline was extended, as the statement will officially be given to Southeast Command on August 5th.

The issue of forming BGFs has been a contentious issue for the ceasefire groups. In an attempt to resolve the long standing armed stalemate with over 15 ethnic armed groups, the SPDC requested that each group reform its armed wing into a 'Border Guard Force'. The request comes as the SPDC purses its 7-step "roadmap" to a "disciplined democracy". Seen by many as an attempt to legitimize its ruling status through an attempt at a civilian election, the SPDC has placed significant pressure on armed groups to resolve their status before the 2010 election.

The decision to reject the BGF offer came, according to one NMSP officer, after party leaders appealed to the opinions of the Mon community, prompting an influx of feedback from monks, university students, Mon youth groups inside Mon State, and Mon State residents who sent in letters. NMSP party leaders also spoke with residents of the central quarters of Thaton, Moulmein, and Tavoy districts under their control. The majority opinion held that the party should not accept the Burmese government request to form a BGF or a pro government people's militia.

"The BGF and people's militia are not important because orders to them would come from them [SPDC] and would have to act according to their orders," said Nai Oukar Mon from Mon community at Mae Sot. "Such a result would in no way help the Mon people and NMSP. Because of the plans of the Burmese government, it [BGF] would not benefit our people."

Three youth groups located inside of Mon State in Burma, released a joint statement comprising the opinions of the Mon Youth Organization, Young Monk's Organization, and the Mon University Students Organization, which declared, "We don't want to be a BGF or people's militia, and don't want to be damaged from the cease-fire. We want the party leaders make a decision themselves from their intelligence."

"We have to think hard about the cease-fire. Before cease-fire with the SPDC, Mon people could do regular business not mixing with other ethnicities. But now we mix with other ethnicities after the cease-fire," explained a Mon nationalist from TPP stating why he thought the Mon army should not become a BGF or people' militia. "Before it was just the Mon and Karen ethnicities who lived at TPP. Mon depended on the Mon and Karen depend on Karen. If the cease-fire breaks apart and fighting begins again, other ethnics will administrate the area."

A business man, also from TPP, expressed his distaste for the BGF proposition, explaining that in acquiescing to the SPDC's demands, and submitting a reformed MNLA under nominal government control, the NMSP and Mon people would suffer a loss of dignity.

Additionally he stated that he supports the ceasefire, saying if it were to break, the Mon people would have no chance to fight for their culture. However, even the loss of that would not be significant as in his eyes the NMSP and the Mon people never received much support from the Burmese government, as had been agreed upon in the 1995 ceasefire agreement.

"The Mon army will become the Burmese army and it will be difficult for us to have any political control," said one resident of Three Pagodas Pass [TPP] who was asked by IMNA his opinion on the political outcome if the NMSP had accepted the BGF offer. "It would be more difficult to conduct business and protect against human rights abuses because the army [including BGF and people' militia] is led by the Burmese government. Its will be fine if Mon have to guard Mon border areas."

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[U.S. Senate's Webb to visit Myanmar this month](#) – Reuters – 6 Aug 2009

U.S. Senator Jim Webb will visit Myanmar this month, the first member of Congress to travel to the southeast Asian country in more than a decade, his office said on Thursday.

Webb, who chairs a Senate subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific affairs, leaves on Sunday for a five-nation, two-week trip "to explore opportunities to advance U.S. interests in Burma (Myanmar) and the region," a statement from his office said.

A Vietnam war veteran and former U.S. Navy Secretary who speaks Vietnamese, Webb will also meet government representatives and industry leaders in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, his office said.

U.S. lawmakers are pushing for the release of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, but Webb, a Virginia Democrat, is not expected to see her during his visit, an aide to the senator said.

U.S. relations with Myanmar's military junta have been strained for years. In May, President Barack Obama extended for one year a ban on U.S. investment first imposed in 1997 because of the authorities' repression of the opposition. Last week, Obama renewed sanctions targeting imports from Myanmar.

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**[Security Beefed Up on University Ave](#)** - The Irrawaddy - 6 Aug 2009

The Burmese military authorities on Thursday began beefing up security around the lakeside home of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, sources in Rangoon said.

"This morning, security personnel surrounded Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house," said a journalist in Rangoon who spoke on condition of anonymity.

University Avenue—where the Nobel Peace Prize laureate's house stands—was open to traffic on Thursday morning, the sources said, but riot police blocked the road in the afternoon.

"At about 2 pm, the police stopped all motorists from driving down University Avenue. We had to divert to other roads," a taxi driver in the city said.

Security forces were withdrawn from University Avenue in May after Suu Kyi was taken to Insein Prison to face trial for allegedly harboring American intruder John W Yettaw.

Thursday's activity around University Avenue has fueled speculation that preparations are under way to bring the pro-democracy leader back safely to her home after the trial, the verdict on which is due on August 11.

Commenting on the security surrounding Suu Kyi's house, her lawyer Kyi Win said, "In Burma, everything happens in unexpected ways."

Meanwhile, reporters in the former capital have been notified of a press conference at the Narcotics Museum in Rangoon at 2 p.m. On Friday. The subject of the press conference is expected to be related to Suu Kyi, journalists said.

Suu Kyi's lawyers, Kyi Win and Nyan Win, were allowed to meet with their client at Insein Prison on Thursday afternoon.

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**[Kachin News Group: Russia taking raw Uranium from Burma since 2007](#)** – Kachin News Group – 6 Aug 2009

A Russian firm has been taking raw Uranium from Hpakant areas in Burma's northern Kachin State since 2007, said reliable local sources.

Victorious Glory International Private Ltd. of Russia is taking the raw Uranium from the company's Uranium mines in Tarmakhan, Hongpa near Katai Taung, under tight security provided by the ruling junta, said eyewitnesses.

A local eyewitness told KNG today, the company's mining areas are fenced off with opaque covers and the Uranium is mined inside the mountain with sophisticated digging machines.

The raw Uranium is specially packed in sacks, which look like cement sacks. It is then transported to Hopin railway station in large trucks. Then the Uranium is transported to Rangoon sea port by trains for delivery to Russia, said sources close to the company and eyewitnesses.

According to eyewitnesses in Hpakant, the company has been excavating the raw Uranium from these areas since 2007.

The company signed an agreement with the ruling junta in Naypyitaw on February 15, 2007 for exploration of gold and associated minerals along Uru Hka River (or Uru Hka in Kachin) between Hpakant in Kachin State and Homalin in Sagaing Division.

One year before the two sides reached an agreement, Russian Uranium explorers arrived in the area, said residents of Hpakant. The movements of Russian miners are specially secured in the mines and outside by security forces of the junta, said residents of Hpakant.

The junta is constructing a nuclear plant in caves after tunneling into a mountain in Naung Laing in northern Burma, some 600 kilometres north of Rangoon. Five North Koreans worked there, according to South Korean media reports. A nuclear reactor from which plutonium can be extracted is also allegedly being built.

Two defectors from the Burmese Army testified recently that the junta has a secret nuclear weapons programme, which is being supported by North Korea and Russia.

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[More Karen refugees flee to Thailand](#) – Democratic Voice of Burma - 6 Aug 2009

Around 200 Karen refugees have fled across the border to Thailand's refugee camps in recent weeks with many reporting continued forced recruitment into the Burmese army and militias.

According to a refugee who recently arrived in Thailand's Nu Poh camp, villagers were given the choice of either paying 150,000 kyat (\$US150) or joining the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) militia, who have been fighting alongside Burmese troops.

"We have been already struggling for food and we can't afford to pay them," said the refugee. "And we couldn't go out to work for food as there are landmines surrounding our villages."

A spokesperson from the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) said that 200 more refugees have recently arrived at three camps located in Thailand's Tha Song Yang district, in Tak province.

"Some said there was forced recruitment and labouring as well as extortion of money [from the villagers]," he said.

Some of the newly arrived refugees said the DKBA's Battalion 999 has been recruiting villagers in Karen state's Nabu township, citing security for the villages as the reason.

An official from Battalion 999 said that new recruits are essential, although it is done on a voluntary basis.

"During the 15-year-long standing of our group, we have had our people injured or dying, and in order to replace those soldiers, we have to find new recruits," he said. "We are not forcing them to join; we are only asking for their help, for their own people."

"Since we are short on troop numbers, they can help us fight for at least three years...and then they can resign if they are not happy with us.

"Those who have money can pay us to hire mercenaries but we are not collecting money from anyone as we have our orders not to."

Many of the refugees who have entered Thailand had fled from the Ler Per Har camp for internally displaced people in eastern Karen state, which became a focal point of the fighting and has now been overrun by the DKBA.

Last month the Bangkok-based Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) said that while fighting had eased, reports of the forced labour, portering and extortion of money, food and livestock from villagers by the DKBA continued.

Reports have surfaced today that the DKBA is preparing to attack the KNU Brigade 6 base, following their loss of the strategically important Brigade 7 base in June.

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[Myanmar cooperating with int'l community in combating human trafficking](#) – Xinhua -6 Aug 2009

The Myanmar government is cooperating with the international community in carrying out rescue and rehabilitation programs for trafficked victims to combat human trafficking.

Under government to government system, a total of 686 victims smuggled out of Myanmar have been rescued and brought back to the country as of 2008 and they were being kept at the rehabilitation centers, according to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

International organizations that Myanmar cooperates in cracking down human trafficking include United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO).

In July, the country hosted the 9th meeting of senior officials of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations in the new capital city of Nay Pyi Taw on combating transnational crime.

The meeting was attended by representatives of dialogue partner countries from China, Japan, South Korea Australia, Russia, the European Union as well as organizations including the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and other international NGOs.

Earlier in April, Myanmar and Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) as part of the country's cooperation with its neighbors in the fight.

The areas of cooperation under the MoU cover combating all aspects of human trafficking including prevention, protection, rehabilitation, reintegration, law enforcement, justice and developing and implementing joint action between the two countries.

Neighboring countries with which Myanmar is cooperating include China, India and Bangladesh in addition to Thailand as well as the Russian Federation and Vietnam.

Myanmar has so far set up border liaison offices in Muse with immediate neighbor of China and in Tachilek, Myawaddy and Kawthoung with Thailand to promote cooperation in cracking down on human trafficking at the basic level.

Coordination is also being made for the move involving the UNODC and UN Inter Agency Project (UNIPA) on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

In the latest development, Myanmar is also planning to set up temporary care center at the Muse for the victims with the help of GGA organization of Japan in November this year.

After the promulgation of Myanmar's Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Law in 2005, the taking of punitive action against traffickers has stopped many cases of human trafficking, the authorities said, adding that measures are also being taken across the country to save those who fall prey to human traffickers and to enable the victims to integrate back with their society and to rehabilitate them.

Myanmar is in the process of drafting a national-level five-year plan of eliminating human trade to step up combating the crime. The plan covers five sectors -- cooperation through the policy, prevention, taking action, protection of the victims and capacity building, according to the Central Committee for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons.

Myanmar joined in March 2004 the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women.

The country also signed a memorandum of understanding of six-member Greater Mekong Subregion against trafficking in persons in October 2004.

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[FOCUS: Bangladesh Looks To The Sea For Energy Security](#) - Dow Jones Newswires - 6 Aug 2009

Bangladesh is among a group of the world's poorest countries that may be sitting on top of untold oil and gas wealth, but can't exploit it due to ownership arguments.

But with severe economic problems driving it forward, Dhaka is soon to go ahead and award a string of offshore exploration blocks, including to major international companies like Conocophillips (COP).

Overseas oil firms, including the U.S. company, placed the highest bids for some of the blocks, some of which overlap or are near areas claimed by poor neighbor Myanmar and far more wealthy India.

"That issue is being discussed as we consider the approval of awards. But I don't think it will hold us up; we're in the final stages of discussion," Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, energy advisor to the Prime Minister, told Dow Jones Newswires on Thursday.

The licensing round was held before current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina came to power, so the new government has to study and approve the process, Energy Secretary Mohammad Mohsin told DJN. "A decision could come by the end of this month," he said.

While its first licensing round of offshore blocks may go through without a big fuss, top government officials say they want to pave the way for future auctions of acreage that'll be farther away from its coastline and that could potentially provoke the wrath of neighbors.

Bangladesh is getting ready to offer more offshore acreage, probably by early next year, said state-run Petrobangla's Chairman Muqtadir Ali.

Ownership rows over vast areas of Asia's offshore waters has prevented prospecting and production in many areas that are known to harbor, or may contain large reserves of hydrocarbons, and the Bay of Bengal is no exception.

These include a three-way Malaysia-Indonesia-Brunei dispute, another between Vietnam and Cambodia, one in the East China Sea which continues to sour relations between Beijing and Tokyo, and yet another over the Spratly Islands in the southern waters of the South China Sea between China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei.

Elsewhere, Chevron Corp. (CVX) says it would like to explore more in the Gulf of Thailand, but a Thailand-Cambodia dispute has put offshore prospecting in the area on hold for more than 30 years.

Discoveries of huge amounts of gas in the Bay of Bengal in recent years have brought India, Bangladesh and Myanmar to the negotiating table sporadically, and have also prompted occasional jousting at sea by naval units.

Myanmar has long exploited gas in its waters, piping it ashore and on to Thailand. It is now preparing to extract gas from another field in its waters and send it to south China via pipeline.

#### Recent Talks

Recently there has been a heightened pace of engagement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, where the maritime boundary issue is more critical as a larger area is in dispute than is the case with India. Officials from the two countries met last week.

"We (Bangladesh and Myanmar) now agree that we must delimit the boundary as soon as possible so that we can both explore the region for oil and gas," said a senior Bangladeshi negotiator, who didn't wish to be named.

After years of status quo, "there's now an urgency on both sides...there's convergence of views. We may come to an agreement on at least some kind of technical framework, so that we can both go ahead with exploration. After that, the political process will take its own time."

A possible resolution could also include the neighbors jointly exploring some of the regions, Chowdhury said.

Some blocks that Bangladesh has offered are in waters where India has also auctioned acreage.

To the east, military-ruled Myanmar is a more tricky gateway to riches chased by local and regional energy companies and Western majors.

"We have steered clear of Myanmar; in fact, not many companies want to be seen involved with that country," said Kevin Quinn, who manages Tullow Oil PLC's (TQW.DB) Tullow Asia business unit. "It's a question of reputation." Tullow is the likely winner in at least one offshore block in Bangladesh's auction.

Chevron has long been under fire from Western human rights activists over its stake in the Yadana gas field offshore Myanmar, from where gas is piped to Thailand.

Bangladesh plans to resolve sovereignty issues bilaterally, but any international arbitration will likely favor Dhaka, Bangladeshi officials claim, citing precedence elsewhere in the world.

Some of the companies involved seem to agree.

"We talked to our experts on international laws of the sea and we see any disputes being favored and settled in favor of Bangladesh in the future," Conoco's Exploration Vice President Larry Archibald told analysts in March, according to a transcript on the company's Web site.

Conoco is a frontrunner for eight deepwater blocks in the latest auctions.

For international oil firms, Bangladesh offers a cheap and convenient entry into some of the least-explored areas in the Bay of Bengal.

"For a fairly modest bid," Conoco was the high bidder on virtually all of the deepwater blocks, Archibald said.

Bangladesh, which is heavily dependent on rapidly-depleting onshore gas reserves, urgently needs to exploit offshore gas to plug a growing energy deficit.

Its rising gas demand and the shortfall has been made worse by more than six years of virtually no exploration in new regions, said Chowdhury.

It now gets nearly all its gas from onshore fields, but awarding new onshore acreage has been blocked for years because of a long-running court injunction.

"We're very short of gas. We will now appeal and seriously try to get the injunction lifted so that we can offer onshore blocks as well," Chowdhury said.

Dhaka plans to gradually reform its gas market to attract more foreign investment, he said. For example, the government is now open to private companies building terminals to import liquefied natural gas.

Bangladesh gets nearly 85% of its electricity from burning domestically produced gas, but has to rely more on imported coal and liquid fuels to meet bridge the gap.

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#### [UN to hold high-level meeting on Myanmar](#) – Xinhua - 6 Aug 2009

The United Nations will hold a high-level meeting in September to discuss international policy towards Myanmar, said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon here on Wednesday.

"The international community has high expectations that the government of Myanmar will act in Myanmar's interest by taking timely and positive steps in follow up, after the specific proposals which I made to the senior levels during my visit," Ban told reporters.

After returning from Myanmar in early July, Ban met with Myanmar's UN Ambassador Than Swe on July 31 to reiterate his calls for the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi as well as all political prisoners, he said.

Ban said the second high-level meeting would take place at the margins of the UN General Assembly in September, as a follow up the first meeting last year.

The secretary-general made the comments after meeting with the Group of Friends of Myanmar: Australia, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Britain, the U.S. and Vietnam, as well as the country holding the presidency of the European Union, which is currently Sweden.

This was the first time the UN special envoy to Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, chaired the Group of Friends meeting, said Ban.

The international community hopes Myanmar responds to UN requests, expectations, and encouragements in a timely fashion, he said.

On Tuesday, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, said she will be sending a team to Myanmar to press the military junta and rebel groups to end the practice of using child soldiers.

"Coomaraswamy is taking all efforts to address the child soldier issues all around the world, including Myanmar," Ban said. "This is a very important step."

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#### **UN Chief Repeats Call to Release All Political Prisoners**, Irrawaddy, August 6, 2009

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Wednesday said he hoped that the Burmese military junta would listen to the international community at this moment and release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, the popular pro-democracy leader.

The secretary-general made his remark at UN headquarters in New York following a meeting of the "Group of Friends" on Burma. Ban said he had the support of all key international players on his approach to Burma.

"I expect that the authorities of Myanmar [Burma] will respond positively and in a timely manner to the expectations and concerns and repeated calls of the international community to release all political prisoners and particularly Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," Ban told reporters.

He said he briefed the 14-member group about the two messages he delivered to the military regime during his visit to Burma last month and to the Permanent Representative of Burma at the United Nations last week.

"First, my clear expectation and that of the international community is that the government of Myanmar will give careful consideration to the implications of any verdict in the trial of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and use this opportunity to exercise its responsibility to ensure her immediate release," he said.

"Second, the international community's high expectations that the government of Myanmar will act in Myanmar's interest by taking timely and positive steps in follow-up to the specific proposals which I made to the senior leadership during my visit, starting with the release of all political prisoners so that they could participate in a credible and inclusive political process," Ban said.

"I am pleased that, in our discussion today, the members of the Group of Friends welcomed these messages," the secretary-general said.

This—together with the statements of support issued over the past few weeks from the G8 Leaders' meeting to the Asean Regional Forum—confirms the continued interest of the international community as a whole to see Burma respond positively at this critical juncture of the country's transition, Ban said.

When asked if he has any indication when political prisoners would be released, Ban said: "I do not have any clear indication, except what the Permanent Representative of Myanmar has reported to the Security Council in an official meeting on July 13, if I remember correctly, that upon request of the secretary-general of the United Nations, the Myanmar government was taking necessary procedures to grant amnesty to political prisoners.

"I hope they will take necessary measures to implement their commitment," he said.

This was the second meeting of the Group of Friends on Burma after Ban's trip to the country last month. The first meeting was chaired by Ibrahim Gambari, the special US representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"This was an opportunity for me to personally thank the members of the group for their continued strong support to my good offices' effort. It was also an opportunity for me to hear their views on developments in Myanmar at this point," Ban said.

The Group of Friends, founded in December 2007, represents a wide range of views on Burma and was established to hold informal discussions and develop shared approaches to support UN efforts. Its members are Australia, China, the European Union, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Russia, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Vietnam.

The secretary-general said another meeting of the Group of Friends will be held in September on the sidelines of the opening of the General Assembly at UN Headquarters.

Meanwhile, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, said she will send a team to Burma to press the military junta and rebel groups to end the practice of using child soldiers.

"Coomaraswamy is taking all efforts to address the child soldier issues all around the world, including Myanmar," Ban said. "This is a very important step."

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#### [UN Chief to hold 'Friends of Burma' meeting](#) – *Irrawaddy* - 5 Aug 2009

Washington — United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will convene a meeting of the Group of Friends on Burma on Wednesday to review the world body's policy on the military-ruled country.

Formed in December 2007, the Group of Friends consists of Australia, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Britain, the US and Vietnam, as well as the country holding the presidency of the European Union.

Ban is expected to brief UN ambassadors from these countries on his recent trip to Burma and the latest developments in the country, including the ongoing trial of Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent nearly 14 of the last 20 years under house arrest.

Ibrahim Gambari, the UN special envoy to Burma, is also expected to brief the group.

During the meeting, Ban will seek advice from members of the group on how the world body can move forward in its efforts to help resolve Burma's longstanding political stalemate and other issues.

Meanwhile, in yet another effort to show the world that they are united against the military regime, pro-democracy organizations from both inside and outside of Burma have decided to form a common platform and launch a transition plan.

The plan, known as the "Proposal for National Reconciliation," will be formalized at a two-day meeting in Jakarta on August 12-13.

"This is history being made," said Dr Sein Win, prime minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the Burmese government in exile, speaking on behalf of all the groups involved.

"The last time all major ethnic and pro-democracy organizations have forged a common position was in 1947 when all forces agreed to seek independence from the British," he said. "As such, this is the first time an indigenous coalition has agreed to work together against a homegrown power."

Sein Win said the alliance, known as the Movement for Democracy and Rights for Ethnic Nationalities, believes the proposal provides a means by which Burma can move through a phase of democratic reform without upheaval and recrimination.

The proposal envisages opening a process of dialogue with the junta, effectively offering a sustainable exit strategy for the military rulers. While it acknowledges a place for a functioning military, it presents a democratic future rooted in civilian, not military, rule, said Sein Win.

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#### [Activists say dam in Myanmar will force people from their homes, lead to human rights abuses](#) -

Canadian Press -5 Aug 2009

BANGKOK, Thailand — The construction of two dams in Myanmar could displace thousands of ethnic minorities, put them at greater risk of human rights abuses and send them fleeing into neighbouring Thailand, activists warned Wednesday.

The dams - proposed for the 1,500-mile (2,400-kilometre) Salween River, the last major free-flowing river in Southeast Asia - would generate electricity that would mostly be bought by Thailand. Thai and Chinese companies are involved in the construction.

Human rights and environmental activists have long been critical of such deals with Myanmar's junta, noting that the military often commits human rights abuses as it tries to clear areas for construction. The proposed Hatgyi and Tasang dams would be in an area of Myanmar where the military has brutally suppressed the Karen minority's bid for independence.

Damming the Salween has also raised environmental concerns, both in Myanmar and in China, where the river is known as the Nu. Activists say the projects would threaten one-third of the 75 fish species in the river. In 2004 Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao announced the suspension of all projects on the Nu River pending further scientific study.

"Construction of the dams at this time will cause extensive environmental damage, and the Karen people will be displaced," said Vice-President David Tharckabaw of the Karen National Union on Wednesday. "Thousands could cross into Thailand as refugees."

The group, which is fighting for autonomy in eastern Myanmar, has petitioned Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to abandon the proposed dam projects, but has had no immediate response.

Somma Kamolyabuttra, a representative of the Thai agency in charge of the project, Electrical Generating Authority of Thailand, or EGAT, said Tuesday that construction will not begin at either site until a final power purchase agreement with Myanmar has been reached and the Thai government approves the deal. Sommai was involved in recent discussions on the dam.

The Thai Prime Minister's office is expected to release a bipartisan report on the two dam sites later this month.

EGAT says the dams would generate electrical power necessary for Thailand's growing economy and neighbouring countries, while curbing reliance on natural gas as a power source. Environmental groups say the Tasang would be one of the largest in Southeast Asia, with a 7,110 megawatt capacity. Sommai said the Hatgyi would produce 1,360 megawatts. Thailand is expected to purchase about 85 per cent of the power generated.

But activists say such benefits come with high costs.

The Shan Women's Action Network says the number of Myanmar troops has increased fivefold near the proposed site of Tasang dam in Shan State over the last few years. An official opening ceremony for the Tasang project was held in 2007, but construction has not begun.

The Thai Burma Border Consortium, a key aid provider for refugees along the Thai-Myanmar frontier consortium says nearly 500,000 people have been displaced from their homes in eastern Myanmar - a figure that includes those forced from at dam sites but also civilians uprooted in military operations aimed at eradicating insurgents in the area.

Such military buildups are often accompanied by human rights abuses, according to the network and the border consortium. The groups have documented sexual violence committed by army troops against hundreds of women around the Tasang dam site. The government has consistently denied any violations.

Although the Karen insurgents have also come in for some criticism of using boy soldiers and other human rights abuses, the United Nations and international human rights groups have documented atrocities by Myanmar troops in great detail.

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[\*\*Sri Lanka - Myanmar Joint Commission: Condemns terrorism and pledges support\*\*](#) – Sri Lanka Daily News - 5 Aug 2009

The Second Meeting of the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation between Sri Lanka and Myanmar was held in Colombo on August 4 presided by Foreign Ministers Rohitha Bogollagama and U Nyan Win.

The Joint Commission between Sri Lanka and the Union of Myanmar was established pursuant to the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of a Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation which was signed on February 1, 1996. The first Meeting of the Joint Commission was held in July 2007 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. Both delegations acknowledged that the recently concluded visit by President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Myanmar had paved the way to take the bilateral relationship to a new dimension.

The Myanmar side acknowledged with thanks the stand taken by the Government of Sri Lanka on Myanmar during the ASEAN Regional Cooperation Meeting (ARF) in Phuket, Thailand and recalled with satisfaction the substantive bilateral discussions held on the sidelines of the ARF.

The Sri Lanka side informed the Myanmar side that despite the military defeat of LTTE in Sri Lanka, the activities of the LTTE network overseas, including its front organizations and pro-LTTE groups, continue to be active and emphasized the need to neutralize the LTTE's terrorist network overseas.

Both sides condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and expressed their views on continuing joint and separate actions to curb this menace which is a threat to regional peace and security and an obstacle to regional cooperation. The two sides agreed to cooperate both bilaterally and at regional and multilateral fora in this regard in particular at the UN, Shangri-la Dialogue, BIMSTEC and ARF.

The Myanmar side also reaffirmed its Government policy of not allowing any group or individual to use its territory for hostile acts against Sri Lanka. Both sides expressed that taking measures against such activity on its territory would be coordinated through relevant agencies.

The next Joint Commission between Sri Lanka and Myanmar will be held in 2011 in Myanmar.

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### [Nuclear watchdog urged to seek answers from Burma](#)

Brisbane Times - 04 August 2009

AMERICAN non-proliferation experts have called on the international nuclear watchdog to seek clarification from the Burmese Government over its nuclear program after a Herald report that quoted defectors claiming there was a secret military nuclear program.

The report, based on interviews by Professor Desmond Ball of the Australian National University and a journalist, Phil Thornton, said the country had been developing a secret nuclear program. It revealed Burma was building a secret reactor, with North Korea's assistance, at Nuang Laing, close to Mandalay.

Daryl Kimball, of the Arms Control Association, told the Nelson Report, an influential online security report, that although there had been no evidence of a Burmese nuclear-weapons quest, whatever the North Koreans were doing must be made a priority by the International Atomic Energy Agency, of which Burma is a member.

"The report is probably enough cause for the IAEA director-general [and Russia] to seek clarification from Myanmar [Burma] and request a special inspection," Mr Kimball said.

Russia is said to have agreed in 2007 to provide the Burmese with a small, civilian light-water reactor, which would be subject to agency inspections, although the project's exact status is disputed.

David Albright, the head of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, which monitors nuclear proliferation said: "There's no hard evidence, just suspicions right now. We are watching it."

He pointed out visits to Burma by executives from the North Korean firm, Namchongang Trading Corporation, which is under sanctions for its role in trading nuclear technology. Western officials say it

channelled equipment and material for the nuclear reactor in Syria, which was destroyed in an Israeli air strike in September 2007.

Mr Albright also pointed to sales of technology used in ballistic missile manufacture from North Korea to Burma.

On Monday the Institute for Science and International Security posted links to photos on the Yale Global site, which show extensive tunnel construction in Burma overseen by North Korean engineers. They are understood to be separate to tunnelling related to the nuclear program referred to by the defectors.

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### [U.N. team to visit Myanmar over child soldiers](#)

Reuters - -04 August 2009

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations said on Tuesday it was sending a team to Myanmar to press for action by the government and rebel groups to end the practice of using child soldiers.

Reports by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon have accused the army of Myanmar's military government and ethnic rebel militias, such as Karen groups in the east of the country, of recruiting children to serve as fighters.

The latest report, issued in June, said there had been "grave violations" against children in Myanmar. It accused the junta of failing to provide proof of measures it said it was taking to end use of child soldiers, and of blocking U.N. access to rebel groups.

But Radhika Coomaraswamy, U.N. special representative for children and armed conflict, said on Tuesday there had been some positive developments and that the government of the Asian country had been releasing some children.

"We still are not sure how comprehensive that is and the extent of it," she told a news conference. "And so I am dispatching a team (to Myanmar) at the end of this month."

The team would be talking to rebel groups that had started peace negotiations with the government of Myanmar -- also known as Burma -- and to the junta, Coomaraswamy said.

She said the aim would be to push for plans that the United Nations seeks to draw up with armies that use child soldiers in order to halt the practice. So far it has none with the Myanmar government or rebels.

Coomaraswamy was speaking shortly before the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution aimed at stepping up pressure on the issue of children by expanding a blacklist of government armies and rebel groups contained in periodic reports by Ban.

The resolution asked Ban to include not just those that recruit child soldiers but also those that engage "in patterns of killing and maiming of children and/or rape and other sexual violence against children, in situations of armed conflict."

The Mexican-drafted resolution mentioned no names, but there have been allegations of such abuses in Democratic Republic of Congo, the western Sudan region of Darfur, and elsewhere.

The blacklist aims at "naming and shaming" but does not provide for sanctions.

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### [UN development partnership with Myanmar to assist rural economy](#)

TNA/UNESCAP - 04 August 2009

BANGKOK – Bangkok-based United Nations experts will help Myanmar's government assign more resources to the country's agricultural sector, and UN statistical experts will visit the country later this month to conduct a training workshop to better enable the process.

A United Nations statement said the training resulted from last week's official visit by Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, the highest

ranking UN official in the Asia-Pacific region at the invitation of Myanmar Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Htay Oo.

During the six-day visit, July 26 to August 1, Dr Heyzer met Prime Minister Thein Sein and met nine cabinet ministers and deputy ministers, as well as mayors and local officials.

ESCAP, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, was asked by Minister Htay Oo and the minister of planning and economic development to jointly organise national seminars on development partnerships.

Prime Minister Thein Sein asked Dr Heyzer for ESCAP's assistance in building the country's statistical capacity for building a system of accurate national accounts and MDG reporting. The Executive Secretary accepted the requests for ESCAP's assistance and assured the Myanmar authorities that ESCAP would extend the country all possible help in revitalising its rural economy.

As an immediate response to the request by the Prime Minister to undertake statistical capacity building, the Executive Secretary informed him that ESCAP was sending a team of experts this month to organise a training workshop on national accounts, MDG reporting and computing human development indicators.

Agriculture Minister Htay Oo said ESCAP can "pave the way in diverting the resources back to agriculture, ensuring that food and agricultural producers, particularly small farmers, have the support they need to grow the food the world needs today."

In accepting the request to jointly hold national seminars on development partnership, Dr Heyzer called for rural debt relief and an agricultural stimulus package as options for revitalising Myanmar's rural economy.

She also said that developing a supportive and enabling policy environment for the agricultural economy, including rice production, needed urgent attention by policy makers.

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### **[Myanmar-Thailand bilateral trade hits over 3 bln USD in 2008-09](#)**

Xinhua - 04 August 2009

Thailand bilateral trade hit 3.05 billion U.S. dollars in the fiscal year 2008-09 which ended in March, according to the latest figures of the government's Central Statistical Organization.

Of the total, Myanmar's export amounted to 2.655 billion dollars, while its import stood at 398.28 million dollars, enjoying a trade surplus of 2.25 billion dollars.

Thailand stood first in Myanmar's foreign trade partner line-up during the year, followed by Singapore, China, India, China's Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia.

In 2007-08, Thailand also led as Myanmar's top trading partner as well as top exporting country.

Of the year's Myanmar-Thailand bilateral trade volume of 3.205 billion dollars, Myanmar's export to Thailand amounted to 2.823 billion dollars, while its import from Thailand 382 million dollars, gaining a trade surplus for exporting natural gas.

Thailand exports to Myanmar textile, shoes, marine products, rice, rubber, jewelry, motor cars, computer and electronic accessories and vice versa, while importing from Myanmar forestry products, marine products, agricultural produces and natural gas.

**04/08/2009**

***Aung San Suu Kyi Trial***

**[Yettaw suffers seizure, hospitalized: US Embassy](#)**

*Mizzima - 4 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - The American, John William Yettaw, on trial in Burma for swimming across to Aung San Suu Kyi's home in early May, was hospitalized on Monday night, after having convulsions in Rangoon's Insein prison.

Yettaw (54) reportedly suffering from diabetes and other health problems, was taken to Rangoon General Hospital from the notorious Insein prison, where he is being detained, by the police after having a fit on Monday, a spokesperson of the US embassy in Rangoon said.

Richard Mei, the embassy spokesman, said, "It is true that he was taken to Rangoon hospital late last night [Monday night] for an ongoing disease that he is suffering."

Yettaw is said to be kept in a separate room, away from other patients, in the hospital and is heavily guarded.

Earlier in a rare press conference in June, the Burmese junta's police chief Khin Yee told reporters that Yettaw is in fine health.

Yettaw, from Falcon, Missouri in United States is on trial along with Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and two of her party mates living with her after he swam across the Inya lake and entered her home in May.

The devout Mormon said he was on a mission sent by God to warn the Burmese Nobel Peace Laureate that she could be assassinated.

He is currently facing trial on charges of abetting Aung San Suu Kyi to flout security laws, immigration violations and a municipal charge of illegal swimming.

Along with Yettaw, Aung San Suu Kyi and her two party mates face up to five years in prison, if found guilty.

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**[Yettaw Hospitalized During Fast](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 4 August 2009*

By Arkar Moe

John William Yettaw, the American on trial with Aung San Suu Kyi, on Monday was hospitalized for a second time, apparently the result of fasting in prison, a hospital staff member told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday.

Yettaw, 54, was taken from Insein Prison to Rangoon General Hospital at 2 am. His condition was not serious, and he is recovering after treatment, sources said.

Khin Maung Oo, his lawyer, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday, "According to his religious belief, he has been fasting, taking only water. I wish him well and pray for him. The most important thing for a fair trial is getting enough defense witnesses."

"The authorities said he suffered from feeling dizzy," said a source close to the hospital who asked to remain anonymous.

Yettaw was taken to the hospital by police after he had what was described as "a fit." He has been kept under guard and away from other patients. More than 50 persons are assigned to his security, said the hospital source.

The United State Information Resource Center in Rangoon said on Tuesday that it had no information about Yettaw's condition.

Yettaw was charged with violating security and immigration laws after he allegedly swam across Inya Lake and entered the home of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in May. She was charged with violating the terms of her house arrest.

During July, Yettaw was treated in the Insein Prison hospital after he reportedly had declined food for 49 days.

If convicted, he could be sentenced from six months to five years in prison. He faces charges of abetting Suu Kyi's breach of security laws, immigration violations and a municipal charge of illegal swimming.

Yettaw, a former military veteran from Falcon, Missouri, is on trial along with two female aides of Suu Kyi's.

A devout Mormon, Yettaw told authorities that he embarked on a mission to warn Suu Kyi of a vision he had that said she would be assassinated.

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**Court verdict will test constitution, judiciary: Suu Kyi**

*Mizzima - 3 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Detained Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said the verdict on her trial and three other defendants will test the "Rule of Law" and the judicial system of Burma, a country ruled by military dictators since 1962.

The National League for Democracy, in a statement released on Monday, published comments on the trial made by party leader Aung San Suu Kyi on the last day of the hearing of final arguments on Friday.

The Burmese pro-democracy leader said the verdict on her trial and her two live-in party mates and the uninvited American visitor, will test Burma's constitution and the judiciary.

"Without first investigating whether the law, that allows detaining me for over five years under house arrest, is legal or illegal, I do not believe that the verdict of the current trial can be given rightly," she said.

"Equally critical is the principle that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done, clearly and unequivocally," she said.

The Burmese democracy icon's comments came as the judge on Friday postponed the verdict on her trial to August 11. It is widely believed that the postponement of the verdict is to deflect pressure – international and domestic.

But Aung San Suu Kyi told her lawyer and party spokesperson Nyan Win that she is ready to face the verdict.

While the judge did not give any other reason for postponing the verdict, he merely said, there were legal problems in interpreting the constitution and that he needed more time to decide.

Commenting on the legal problem, Aung San Suu Kyi said there were irregularities in interpreting the constitution in the trial and that has caused legal complications.

She said that these complications are "also connected with the elements of the government", adding that the trial should be legally sanctioned and must be conducted under the protection of the rule of law.

Meanwhile, Burma's military rulers, in its mouthpiece newspapers last week, said the trial is being conducted as per the principle of the rule of law and cautioned anyone from predicting or commenting on the trial saying it amounts to "contempt of court".

Aung San Suu Kyi has been charged with violating the law of her house arrest by 'harbouring' an American, who swam across a lake and entered her house in early May.

While the prosecution argued that the incident is a violation of the law under the 1974 constitution, the defence said she cannot be charged with a law under a constitution that has been defunct for two decades.

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**Suu Kyi Says Trial Tests Legal System**

*AP/ Irrawaddy - 4 August 2009*

RANGOON — Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has told the court trying her that her trial on charges she violated her house arrest is a test of the military-run country's legal system.

Suu Kyi's full testimony in the closed-door trial was released for the first time by her opposition political party, the National League for Democracy. The court is due to reach a verdict next week.

The 64-year old Nobel Peace laureate—who is facing five years in prison for giving temporary shelter to an American man who swam to her house uninvited in early May—declared that the court's decision is already "painfully obvious."

Critics say the ruling military has seized upon the bizarre intrusion as an excuse to keep Suu Kyi jailed through next year's scheduled elections—the country's first in nearly two decades.

The charges against Suu Kyi, who has been detained for 14 of the last 20 years and was under house arrest at the time of the incident, have refocused international outrage on Burma.

The district court was scheduled to deliver the verdict last Friday but postponed its decision to August 11, saying it needed more time to consider relevant legal issues.

"The Court will pronounce on the innocence or guilt of a few individuals. The verdict will constitute a judgment on the whole of legal, justice and constitutional system in our country," Suu Kyi said in her statement during final court arguments on July 24. Her party released the full statement Monday.

Suu Kyi said that she had allowed the American to stay in her home "without malice, simply with intent to ensure that no one concerned should suffer any adverse consequences."

She also said that charges against her cannot be adequately assessed without determining the legality of her latest, five-year house arrest and how Burma's constitution applies in the case.

Her lawyers have argued that the repeated extensions of her house arrest were illegal and that she is being tried under a provision of a constitution that has been superseded.

"Throughout, my lawyers have been scrupulous in their efforts to procure due process, which is critical to the rule of law. Equally critical is the principle that justice must be done and seen to be done, clearly and unequivocally," Suu Kyi's statement said.

Verdicts were also postponed in the cases against the 53-year-old American, John Yettaw, and two women who lived with Suu Kyi—Khin Khin Win and her daughter Win Ma Ma. The women face similar charges to Suu Kyi, and Yettaw is accused of abetting the violation of Suu Kyi's house arrest. He faces up to five years in prison.

### **Pleading for the Cause of the Rule of Law**

By THE IRRAWADDY

*The following paragraphs are the excerpt from the 30 pages final argument declared by Aung San Suu Kyi to the court on July 24.*

The Court will pronounce on the innocence or guilt of a few individuals. The verdict itself will constitute a judgment on the whole of the law, justice and constitutionalism in our country.

On both occasion of trespass into the grounds of my house, the one on which this present case is constructed as well as the one which took place on 30 November 2008, I acted without malice simply with intent to ensure that one concern should suffer any adverse consequences. An approach that placed a premium on discernment and a sense of responsibility, rather than on imputation, would have accorded with a concept of law as the guardian of security and harmony in civilized societies.

The charges move against me can not be accessed correctly or adequately without enquiry into the legality of the process by which I was confined to house arrest for more than five years. Throughout my lawyers have been scrupulous in their efforts to procure due-process which is critical to the rule of law. Equally critical is the principle that justice must not only be done but seen to be done, clearly and unequivocally.

This lawsuit brought to light anomalies in the interpretation and application of constitutional provisions and further, raised questions about the constitution itself. Thus it is germane to the very conception and character of government and the right of citizen.

As I plead "not guilty" to the charges before this court, I would also plead the cause of the rule of law, flawless in its impartiality, of justice, irreproachable in wisdom and benevolence, and of constitutionalism as a bulwark of lawsuit and just governance.

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## **News - Other**

### **Activists Skeptical on Asean Human Rights Body**

*Irrawaddy – 3 August 2009*

By ARKAR MOE

Burmese human rights activists have expressed skepticism over the role of the Asean Human Rights Body, claiming for now at least that it is a paper tiger.

Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) are set to approve the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the human rights body in July.

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said at the 42nd Asean Ministerial Meeting in Phuket last month that the body failed meet everyone's expectations, and that it should work to become a credible, realistic and evolutionary body.

Aung Myo Min, the director of Human Rights Education Institute of Burma in Thailand, told *The Irrawaddy* that the body is only a "paper tiger" and was not an organization that could protect people effectively.

He urged Asean to commit to the protection of human rights, form a commission with authority to investigate and report on rights violations and establish a court empowered to take action against violators.

Asean has proposed to name the human rights body the Asean Inter-Governmental Commission of Human Rights, which is expected to be endorsed by the group's leaders at a summit in Thailand in October.

Debbie Stothard, the coordinator of the Alternative Asean Network on Burma (Altsean), said, "Actually, the Asean Human Rights Body can not protect its people effectively."

"They say their Asean Human Rights Charter has an international standard. But, they do not accept international norms about human rights."

Some observers say that Asean's initiative to establish a human rights mechanism is itself a positive sign.

Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya said in July that the TOR is a beginning of an evolving process. It is a living document that will provide an evolutionary framework, he said, and a platform to further Asean's efforts in the promotion and protection of human rights.

The draft terms of reference state the body's purpose is "to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedom" of Asean citizens.

As it now exists, the body continues the tradition of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and, as such, is not expected to present immediate problems to countries such as Burma, Laos, Vietnam or Cambodia, which are generally ranked low on human rights rankings.

Aung Myo Min said all Asean member states and civil society groups must work together to make the body more effective and have real impact.

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### **Exiled opposition group to push for new approach**

*Mizzima - 3 August 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi – For a way out of the political imbroglio that has left the country totally devastated and pushed its people into an abyss of poverty, the fractious Burmese opposition groups said they have a new proposal for the ruling junta to mitigate the suffering of the people.

With a meeting fixed for August 12 and 13, at the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, the Seven Alliance, a broad-based alliance of political parties, women and students groups said they will finalize a proposal titled “Proposal for National Reconciliation”, that will be forwarded to the junta.

Dr. Thaug Tun, the Burmese government in exile’s permanent representative to the United Nations, on Monday said the convention will for the first time draw together members of diverse groups of the opposition including ethnic nationalities, students, and women.

“Given the current situation of political deadlock, national reconciliation is urgently needed and for this, we have come up with a plan,” said Dr. Thaug Tun, adding that the convention in Jakarta will approve a final “proposal for national reconciliation”.

The landmark conference will be attended by members of Seven Alliance, which includes umbrella groups the National Coalition Government of Union of Burma (NCGUB), National Council of Union of Burma (NCUB), Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), Women’s League of Burma (WLB), Students and Youth Congress of Burma (SYCB), Nationalities Youth Forum (NYF) and Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB).

Civil sector support, electoral and constitutional reforms, military demobilisation, ethnic relations and social infrastructure are among the central areas addressed in the proposal.

Dr. Thaug Tun said, besides members of the Burmese opposition, Members of Parliaments from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) will join the meeting.

“The proposal will be put forward to both the ruling regime as well as the international community, including the United Nations. The conference is not a one-time meeting but it is a process and we will continue having such meetings in US and Europe,” Dr. Thaug Tun said.

Dr. Sein Win, Prime Minister of the Burmese government (NCGUB) in exile, in a statement has called the meeting, which will gather all sectors of the opposition, as ‘history in the making’.

“The last time all major ethnic and pro-democracy organizations forged a common position was in 1947, when all forces agreed to seek independence from the British,” Dr Sein Win said.

“As such, this is the first time an indigenous coalition has agreed to work together against a home-grown power,” he added.

However, no matter what the size of the meeting or the coalition of opposition forces and how inclusive and pragmatic the proposal may be, the question remains – will the junta accept any proposals at all?

With Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition group, on trial and due to be handed down a verdict on August 11, the junta has proven its stubbornness in the past 20 years and had never made any gestures that might suggest their slightest interest in holding talks with the opposition.

But Dr. Thaug Tun said, “We have thought of how the junta is likely to respond and are keeping a close watch for the verdict on August 11. Anyway, we have to start moving and have to find a way to bring the junta on the road to reconciliation.”

The military junta has announced that it will hold general elections in 2010 as part of its seven-step roadmap to usher in democracy in the country. But critics say unless the junta amends its 2008 constitution, the election and the whole process will be illegitimate as it lacks inclusiveness and transparency.

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[\*\*Burma declares 13 H1N1 victims, numbers increase\*\*](#)

*IMNA - 3 August 2009*

Three more cases of H1N1 have been diagnosed in Burma, bringing the total number of victims of the virus to 13, according to an article published in the Burmese government controlled newspaper The New Light of Myanmar.

A program of the Health Ministry Department has been underway at the Rangoon International Airport to check travelers who are visiting Burma, and those Burmese who are returning from other countries.

The latest victims were 3 men who had just returned from a trip to Malaysia, according to sources, where they became infected with H1N1. The patients have been hospitalized and are being monitored closely.

In the recent wave of Health Ministry testing, designed to detect travelers infected with H1N1 at the airport, 172 travelers from flight TG -303 and 151 travelers from flight MH – 740 were checked. Due to the risk of possible exposure the department also tested 138 airport employees who had been working at Rangoon International, according to the New Light of Myanmar. In addition 17 family members of the 3 patients have also been watched closely by the Rangoon Health Ministry Department.

Of the 13 victims of H1N1 now officially diagnosed in Burma, 4 patients have recovered and been allowed to return home. The remaining patients are still receiving treatment at Way Bar Gi Hospital, Insein General Hospital, Rangoon General Hospital, Rangoon Eastern Hospital and Children's Hospital.

According to a local source, the Burmese authorities have been conducting health checks at the border crossing points, checking every person who enters or exits Burma. However, many locals along the border area are still concerned that there are no Health Ministry checkpoints at the illegal crossing points, where people still come in and out in of the country, such as at crossings around the Three Pagoda Pass area.

"I think there are much more then 13 patients [of H1N1]," said a doctor in Rangoon. "[I think this] because the government took specially responsibility to only check at the gates of the airport. What about the day-to-day travelers who come in and out in the borders? It is easy for people to infect each other."

According to The New Light of Myanmar, thus far over 120 people were seriously thought to have H1N1 in Burma, however after the patients were examined in the hospital, only the 13 people tested positive. The paper also reports that so far, there have been no fatalities caused by the H1N1 virus in Burma.

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**[Su Su Nway Put in Solitary](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 4 August 2009*

By Lawi Weng

A prominent Burmese labor rights activist, Su Su Nway, was placed in solitary confinement for three days after participating in a ceremony to mark the 62nd anniversary of Martyrs' Day on June 19 in Kalay Prison, in Sagaing Division, according to her sister.

Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Tuesday, her sister, Htay Htay Kyi, said, "She was put in solitary confinement because she stood up and sang an independence anthem composed by Min Ko Naing to mark Martyrs' Day."

Htay Htay Kyi said she visited her sister on July 21 when she delivered medicine to Su Su Nway who said she had been denied medical care by the prison authorities.

Su Su Nway, 37, suffers from hypertension and heart disease.

In 2006, she won the John Humphrey Freedom Award for promoting human rights.

She was arrested together with two colleagues after they pasted anti-government posters on a billboard in downtown Rangoon during the monk-led uprising of 2007. She was sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison.

Su Su Nway is among other 2,100 political prisoners who are currently being detained by the Burmese military authorities.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in July called on the Burmese junta to release all political prisoners before the national elections in 2010.

Burmese permanent representative at the UN, Than Swe reportedly told Ban that Burma will release prisoners before the election; however, he did not specify if political dissidents would be among the prisoners released.

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### **Singapore Foreign Minister Challenged Over Burma Remarks**

*Irrawaddy – 3 August 2009*

By Wai Moe

Remarks about Burma by Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo have raised eyebrows in Burmese exile circles.

In an interview with Singapore's *Online Citizen*, Yeo made several incorrect statements about Burma, leading to questions about the depth of his knowledge of the country.

In the most blatant of the errors, Yeo said Burma had been ruled by the military since independence. In fact, post-independence Burma enjoyed democratic government until 1962, when Gen Ne Win's coup introduced military rule.

Yeo was also incorrect in telling the *Online Citizen* that independence hero Aung San had created the law that a Burmese citizen who married a foreigner could not take political office.

The law could be used to bar his daughter Aung San Suu Kyi from ever becoming Burma's president.

In fact, Aung San did not introduce the law. According to Burma's first constitution of 1947, the president of Burma has to be at least second generation Burmese.

"No person shall be eligible for election to the office of President unless he is a citizen of the Union who was, or both of whose parents were, born in any of the territories included within the Union," according to the 1947 constitution.

And to be a qualified member of parliament, the constitution noted that, "Any person who is under any acknowledgment of allegiance or adherence to a foreign power, or is a subject or citizen or entitled to the rights and privileges of a subject or a citizen of a foreign power shall be disqualified for being chosen as and for being member of either Chamber."

An application by Suu Kyi to be accepted as a candidate in the 1990 election was rejected on the grounds she had married a British scholar, Michael Aris.

"Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was accused three things, one of them being that she was not qualified because she married a foreigner," said Moe Zaw Oo, a leader of the National League for Democracy (Youth) in the 1990s who closely worked with Suu Kyi before she was put under house arrest in 1989.

In the *Online Citizen* interview, Yeo also said that the problems of Burma must not be oversimplified. They were very complex because of ethnic diversity, he said.

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### **KNU Asks Thai Government to Pull out of Salween Dam Project**

*Irrawaddy – 4 August 2009*

By Saw Yan Naing

Burma's Karen National Union (KNU) appealed on Tuesday to the Thai government to halt its involvement in the construction of the Hat Gyi Dam on the Salween River, warning that the project would cause "huge" environmental damage and human rights abuses.

The KNU made the appeal in a letter to Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.

David Takapaw, KNU vice chairman, said: "The dam will result in huge environmental impacts and human rights abuses. It will force local villagers to flee to Thailand and become refugees. So we asked him: please, don't continue the dam construction."

In recent months, Thai engineers have conducted a field survey at the construction site on Salween River. Many villagers in the area are reportedly opposed to the dam project.

According to the Karen River Watch, a memorandum of understanding was signed in June 2006 between Burma's Department of Electric Power, the Thai energy authority EGAT and China's Sinohydro Corporation to build the Hat Gyi dam.

The dam is one of a series scheduled to be built on the Salween River in a joint Thai-Burmese government program. They are expected to generate 10,000 megawatts of electricity, much of which would be delivered to Thailand.

Some reports have claimed that the dams will affect more than 10 million people from 13 ethnic groups in Burma.

Copies of the KNU's letter to Abhisit were also to be presented by Karen environmental advocates at a meeting in Bangkok on Tuesday attended by Thai environmental rights groups and Burmese environmental advocates.

The meeting was to focus on human rights abuses and environment issue related to the project, according to an ethnic Shan environmental advocate, Sai Sai, who attended the meeting.

Thailand plans an energy program known as the National Power Development Plan which includes the dams on the Salween River. The plan is expected to be completed by the year 2014, according to Sai Sai.

Meanwhile, his environmental group, the Shan Sapawa Environment Organization (SSEO), released on Tuesday a new report titled "Roots and Resilience" and charging that the construction of dams on the Salween River will result in human rights abuses and environmental damage and will benefit only the Burmese regime and Thai authorities.

SSEO Spokesman Sai Sai said: "Human rights abuses will widely happen if the dam is constructed. Villagers will come to Thailand en masse as refugees."

Local villagers would receive no benefit from the dams, which would serve only the interests of the Burmese regime and neighboring Thailand, he said.

The environmental damage would include flooding, deforestation and the disappearance of traditional and cultural heritages, Sai Sai maintained.

The SSEO report said the biggest Salween River dam, the Tasang dam, would flood more than 100 villages, forcing thousands of villagers to relocate. One community of 15,000 in Keng Kham, Shan State, had been forced to move 10 years ago because of work on the dam, and most had fled to Thailand, the report said.

Most of the electricity generated by the 7,110 MW Tasang dam will be sold to Thailand. Project investors include the Thai MDX Company and China's Gezhouba Group Company.

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### **[Junta Troops Prepare for Battle against UWSA](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 3 August 2009*

By Lawi Weng

Junta troops and members of a private militia have joined forces in preparation for an attack against the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Shan State in northern Burma, according to UWSA sources.

The militia, called the Wanpang group, number about 500 soldiers in Tang Yan Township in eastern Shan State. Led by Bo Mon, it is a remnant of group formed by late drug lord Khun Sa.

"The militia has been ordered to obey the command of the government troops," said Mai Aik Phone, who is close to the UWSA.

Saengjuen, a news editor of the *Shan Herald Agency for News* based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, said the military government plans to use the militia as a proxy army, in a way similar to its relationship with the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which wages war against the Karen National Union (KNU).

The UWSA is the most powerful ethnic armed ceasefire group, and it has rejected the government's offer to serve as a border guard force.

The government troops have been reinforced in UWSA-controlled areas in Shan State in recent months. Most UWSA troops are now on 24-hour alert.

According to Burma's new constitution, all ceasefire groups must operate under the command of the military government.

Most ceasefire groups have reject the offer to serve under the command of the government army, and say they will maintain their current role as an army to protect their own people.

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) has proposed to transform its troops into the Kachin Regional Guard Force, but it has rejected the offer to serve as a border guard force. The junta has not responded to their proposal yet.

In July, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) also rejected the offer to serve as a border guard force.

Hongzar Bang Kyine, a NMSP spokesperson, said that the party will officially announce its rejection of the offer on Mon Revolution Day on Aug. 5.

The party's leaders have been told by the junta's regional commander to consider serving as a local militia, if they reject the border guard proposal.

Meanwhile, in recent operations along the Thai-Burmese border, combined forces of the government army and the DKBA attacked military units of the KNU. The DKBA has agreed to serve as a border guard force and has waged fierce battles with their fellow Karen in the past several months, claiming many lives and injured on both sides.

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[Shan army has say on cross-border road](#)

*SHAN - 3 August 2009*

Hseng Khio Fah

The Shan State Army (SSA) 'South' has warned a Thai firm to seek its cooperation with regards to a cross-border road project to be constructed between Thailand's Chiangrai and Burma's Shan State.

"We have nothing to say about the road construction plan inside Thailand," said Col Yawd Serk, Chairman of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), the political arm of the SSA. "But nothing should be carried out inside Shan State without our prior consent."

Saraburi Coal Mining, a subsidiary of Ital-Thai had been granted concession by Burmese authorities to extract coal from Shan State East's Mongkok sub-township, Monghsat township, 70km north of Chiangrai border towards the end of 2008.

But the company was insisted by the Burma Army to construct the Mongkok-Maejok route in exchange for the coal concession. The road is proposed to be built across Maejok on the Burmese side of the border to Thailand's Hmong Kaolang, will be roughly 60 km inside Burma and at least 90 km inside Thailand.

Last month, the firm reportedly conducted an opinion survey in Ban Hintaek village (Ban Therd Thai) in Chiangrai's Mae Fa Luang district, where the proposed road will be passing through. Survey found that all villagers opposed the project because they feared it would destroy the environment and livelihood of people.

"There will be a mass protest if the company insists on building the road," a villager quoted a village headman as saying in a public meeting held on 13 July.

On 10 July, the villagers staged a protest against this project, argued that the road project could affect local village life, endanger the environment, promote drug trafficking and place local people's lives at risk as the proposed area is operated by the anti-Naypyitaw Shan State Army (SSA) 'South' and the United Wa State Army (UWSA).

Critics say the fact that the Burma Army is insisting on building a new road near rebel bases, when there is already a road to Tachilek that joins the Asian highway in Maesai to Tachilek, shows the planned road will be used for its military purpose.

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### **Kalemyo people taxed heavily for Bible School**

*Khonumthung News - 3 August 2009*

The Kalemyo Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) has started to tax people heavily for opening a Bible School in Kalemyo, Sagaing division western Burma.

Last year the TPDC had collected Kyat one lakh. This year it has raised its target to Kyat two lakhs.

"The Burmese military junta authorities are collecting taxes in the entire country. They are also increasing the rate of taxation to more than last year in other places as well. But we have no idea of the exact amount of money collected from other locations," said a teacher of Kalemyo Christian Bible School.

In Kalemyo, there are 47 Bible Schools with 30 to 50 pupils in each school.

"We have taken Kyat 7,000 to 10,000 as school fees per student. Last year we could manage to run our school with the same amount but now it has become very difficult to manage, because school taxes have doubled since last year," a teacher in Lairawn Baptist School said.

"Some students cannot pay the fees, so we cannot pay the rent for the school building on a regular basis. Neither can we purchase small amounts of dry food. While it is all right to collect some tax, the authorities are collecting far too much!" he added.

There are about 20,000 bible students in Kalemyo area each year. Most are Chin youths from different areas. In Chin state, there is a Bible School in each township.

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### **Football clubs can import cars worth USD 70,000**

*Mizzima - 3 August 2009*

by May Kyaw

Chiang Mai – Private football clubs will be allowed to import cars worth USD 70,000 by the Burma Football Federation.

"The Chairman of the Football Federation has told all football clubs to apply for car import license collectively. We shall implement this programme later," Acting Secretary of Football Federation Ye Htut Tin told Mizzima.

It is learnt that the Federation Chairman Zaw Zaw told the football clubs not to apply separately for car import licenses but to do it collectively.

Under this programme, all eight private football clubs can apply for car import license for two cars, which should not be worth more than USD 70,000 in accordance with import procedures. The Football Federation will arrange for car import license at the market rate in foreign countries.

"The cars are essential for the football clubs. Frankly speaking, it will be more convenient for them traveling in their own cars rather than in rented cars with the club logo painted on them," the Acting Secretary of Football Federation Ye Htut Tin said.

It is not yet clear what type of car will be permitted for import. But Football Federation circles said that one would be a bus and another a car of their choice.

Currently there are eight private football clubs in Burma, all of which are owned by famous business tycoons. Each one of them represents eight States and Divisions.

They are Magwe FC owned by Asia World Co. Ltd. of Tun Myint Naing, Kanbawza FC owned by KBZ Bank of Aung Ko Win, Yadanabon FC owned by Loi Hein Co. Ltd. of Dr. Sai Sam Tun, Rangoon United owned by Htoo Group of Co. of Tay Za, Othha United owned by IBTC Co. Ltd. of Aung Moe Kyaw, Southern Myanmar FC owned by Shwe Naga Minn Group of Co. of Win Myint, Zeya Shwe Myay FC and Delta United FC owned by Soe Han Lin (Pathein Association Chairman) and funded by Football Federation Chairman Zaw Zaw's Max Co.

The first 'Myanmar National League' (MNL) soccer tournament was played from 16 May to 5 July.

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### **Friend of Burma - India's Marxist leader dies**

*Mizzima - 4 August 2009*

by Salai Pi Pi

Kolkata – Subhas Chakraborty, a prominent leader of India's Communist Party of India (Marxists), who had come out in strong support of the Burmese cause in the struggle against the military junta, died on Monday from cancer in West Bengal's capital Kolkata.

Chakraborty, (67) who was also the Minister for Transport, Sport and Youth Services of West Bengal State, was admitted in a city hospital in Kolkata for lung infection.

An official of the Department of West Bengal's Transport Ministry said the minister died on Monday morning at 11.35 a.m.

Chakraborty, during his tenure as the head of the Sports Department in 2008 April had organized Indo-Burmese friendship football matches, in a bid to highlight the Burmese struggle for democracy.

The football matches were played between India's premier club Kingfisher's East Bengal junior team and the football team of the New Delhi-based Burmese Independent media, Mizzima. The Burmese football team also played against Kolkata's Jadavpur University students.

While the soccer matches were aimed to promote Indo-Burmese people to people relationship, it also highlighted the case of 34 Burmese rebels, who were arrested in 1998 from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and are now lodged in Kolkata's Presidency jail and facing court trial.

The late minister, during the opening ceremony of the football match last year called on the Indian government to release the rebels as they were not gun runners, as accused by the prosecution, but freedom fighters fighting against rogue military rulers of Burma.

"They [the rebels] were helping RAW, [India's external security agency]. But six of them were shot dead while coming to the Andaman Islands," said the late minister, expressing concern that they rebels might not get fair trial and called on the Indian government to release them.

The 34 Burmese rebels, who are Arakan and Karen ethnic groups from Burma, were arrested in early 1998 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands by Indian security forces, who accused them of gun-running.

But the rebels said, they were freedom fighters waging war against the Burmese military regime and had been betrayed by Indian intelligence, who had promised to allow them a base at one of the Islands of the Andaman and Nicobar in exchange for monitoring Chinese naval activities in the Bay of Bengal.

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### ***Opinion / Analysis***

### **COMMENTARY: Burma Must Make Clear its Nuclear Ambitions - By Aung Zaw**

*Irrawaddy – 3 August 2009*

Reports of Burma's shady nuclear ambitions have resurfaced to take their place alongside warnings by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of secret military ties and possible technology transfers between Burma and North Korea.

One report which aroused special interest was based on research by Desmond Ball, an Australian security analyst and author of several books on nuclear strategy and security issues in the Asia-Pacific.

However, to understand the present situation and Burma's nuclear ambitions we need to look at the past. Burma's interest in nuclear science and technology is, in fact, nothing new.

Three years ago, *The Irrawaddy* published a special cover story on Burma's nuclear ambitions. A Burmese scholar, Maung Thuta, wrote: "More than five decades ago, Kyaw Nyein, the pragmatic modernist among the ruling triumvirate, with U Nu and Ba Swe, and the driving force behind Burma's nascent industrialization, oversaw the setting up in 1953, under the Ministry of Industry, of the Union of Burma Applied Research Institute (UBAEC), in collaboration with the American Armour Research Foundation."

In 1955, the Atomic Energy Centre and the Atomic Minerals Department were established and dozens of young scholars and technicians were sent abroad, mainly to the US, to study medical physics, nuclear physics, nuclear, metallurgical and mining engineering and technical training in nuclear applications in instrumentation, agriculture and industry. The same year Burma attended the first international conference on peaceful uses of atomic energy, which was held in Geneva. Two years later, Burma joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Maung Thuta, in an article entitled "Transparency Needed," wrote "at the dawn of the 'Atomic Age,' Burma's nuclear elites centered around the UBAEC apparently had no doubts about propelling Burma into a modern industrial state through extensive research and development in the fields of power production, agriculture, medicine, industry and education."

Indeed, Burma was well advanced in those days to develop a nuclear project, compared to neighboring countries. In the early 1960s, a site for a nuclear research reactor was designated near the Hlaing Campus in Rangoon.

"However, the first phase of nuclear ambitions faltered and stagnated within a few years when the much-vaunted 'Pyidawthar' industrial plan failed and UBAEC patron Kyaw Nyein fell from grace amid disputes among the ruling political elite," Maung Thuta wrote.

Burma's early nuclear ambitions ended there. Gen Ne Win, who staged a military coup in 1962, had little interest in nuclear projects, nor did he trust scholars. So Burma's nuclear program fell by the wayside, although in 1984 the general admitted to university professors at a private dinner party that he had made a blunder by ending it.

One of the experts from those times, Thein Oo Po Saw, who earned a master's degree in nuclear engineering from the University of Illinois in 1950s, remains active in Burma today.

Thein Oo Po Saw played a crucial role in reviving Burma's Atomic Energy Committee and renewing links with the IAEA. He also urged Burma's military regime in 1995 to join the Regional Cooperative Agreement for Research, Development and Training in Nuclear Science and Technology in Asia and the Pacific (RCA).

The professor has taught at the Defense Services Academy in Maymyo and is currently an adviser to the Ministry of Science and Technology and adjunct professor at the Yangon [Rangoon] Technological University.

Whatever the motives involved, the regime revitalized the nuclear project. An Arakanese professor, Thein Oo Po Saw, renewed links with the IAEA. Since then, Burma has been demonstrating its intention to develop nuclear energy for "peaceful purposes."

The regime has outwardly supported the concept of nuclear-free zones and signed the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, or Bangkok Treaty, in 1995. A year later, Burma signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Burma's renewed interest in nuclear technology was evident, however. The Ministry of Science and Technology was created in 1997 and headed by an extreme nationalist, U Thaug, a graduate of Defense Services Academy Intake 1.

Two years later, Burma began negotiations with Russia on a nuclear reactor project, and in January 2002 the military regime confirmed plans to build a nuclear research reactor for “peaceful purposes.” The Deputy Foreign Minister at that time, Khin Maung Win, declared that Burma’s “interest in nuclear energy for peaceful purpose is longstanding.”

Thein Oo Po Saw also played a key role in the military-sponsored National Convention. During discussions of a chapter of the draft constitution relating to the defense of the Union of Burma, he and several professional colleagues made an interesting suggestion.

The chapter under discussion on March 3, 2005, covered seven key points on national defense, including chemical and biological weapons.

The professor suggested an addition to the chapter to cover the “prevention of terrorist acts and pressures” in enacting laws regarding “the defense of the Union of Myanmar and of its every part, and to prepare a defense program.”

That program would potentially include “conventional arms, ammunition and explosives, and non-conventional sophisticated strategic arms” as well as “nuclear energy, nuclear fuel and radiation, and mineral resources that produce them, highly classified materials, objects, areas, technologies, researches and information and special security issues, accidents concerning the persons whose work involves highly classified materials, objects, areas, technologies, researches and information, and compensation and insurance coverage for them in case of accidents,” according to a report in state-run *The New Light of Myanmar*.

Aung Toe, the chairman of the National Convention Convening Work Committee, replied by saying that such a program—particularly a nuclear one—would incur international criticism if it was included in the chapter on defense and security.

Aung Toe’s prediction was not wrong. Now some international press reports suggest that Burma is on the way to possessing a nuclear bomb.

The lack of transparency in Burma’s nuclear program and the regime’s repressive nature only increased the suspicions of international critics and dissident groups.

Aside from Thein Oo Po Saw, Burma’s nuclear project has been developed by Minister U Thaug, who signed the reactor agreement in Moscow with Russian counterpart Sergei Kiriyenko, the head of Russia’s atomic agency. U Thaug is known to be close to junta chief Snr Gen Than Shwe and his deputy, Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye.

U Thaug has in-depth knowledge of Burma’s mining and uranium sectors and resigned his army post to become director general of the country’s Department of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration in the 1980s.

U Thaug visited Moscow several times in the past in pursuit of the nuclear deal. He also organized students and army officers to participate in nuclear orientation and training in Moscow. In 2006, nuclear physics departments were established in the universities of Rangoon and Mandalay, with enrolment controlled by the regime.

In 2006, Russia’s ambassador to Burma, Dr Mikhail M Mgeladze, confirmed that about 2,000 Burmese students had been admitted to 11 academic institutions in Russia, under a bilateral agreement, and about 500 had returned to Burma with bachelor, master’s or doctorate degrees.

Russian companies are also actively involved in the search for uranium in upper Burma. In the early 2000s, the regime confirmed publicly that uranium deposits had been found in several areas: Magwe, Taungdwingyi, Kyaukphygon and Paongpyin in Mogok, and Kyauksin and in southern Tenasserim Division.

The Russian companies Zarubezneft, Itera, Kalmykia and the state-owned enterprise Tyazhpromexport have been involved in oil and gas exploration and the establishment of a plant to produce cast iron in Shan State. Tyazhpromexport’s investment alone is worth about US \$150 million.

Aside from Russia, Burma's renewed diplomatic relations and secret military ties with North Korea no doubt heightened suspicions. Washington has repeatedly warned of technology transfer between the two nations.

In April 2007, a North Korean freighter, the Kang Nam I, docked at Thilawa port, 30km south of Rangoon. Interestingly, Burmese officials said the ship, the first to visit Burma since the restoration of diplomatic relations, sought shelter from a storm. Two local reporters working for a Japanese news agency were briefly detained and turned back when they went to the port to investigate.

The Kang Nam I headed for Burma again recently, but turned back after being shadowed by a US destroyer in the harsh light of international attention.

The April 2007 incident wasn't the first time a North Korean ship reported running into trouble in Burmese waters—by a strange coincidence, the North Korean cargo vessel M V Bong Hoafan sought shelter from a storm and anchored at a Burmese port in November 2006. The regime reported that an on-board inspection had “found no suspicious material or military equipment.”

Indeed, to skeptics, the go-ahead for the nuclear reactor project, the arrival of North Korean ships and shady military ties (*The Irrawaddy* exposed one particular trip made to Pyongyang by Gen Shwe Mann in November in 2008 with exclusive photos) are new developments.

It is premature, however, to conclude that Burma intends to undertake the complicated and perilous process of reprocessing uranium to get weapons-grade plutonium, although strong suspicions will continue to grow.

Although there are unofficial reports that Burma has set a goal of becoming a nuclear nation by 2025, it is still unclear whether the regime intends to develop a nuclear weapon. More solid evidence needs to emerge—and, no doubt, Thein Oo Po Saw, U Thaug and Gen Maung Aye could provide it.

It is legitimate, however, to raise the issue and to inquire into the regime's intentions, in the interests of keeping nuclear technology out of the hands of the irresponsible regime.

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### **[NEWS ANALYSIS: Nuclear Fallout - By Simon Roughneen](#)**

*Irrawaddy* – 3 August 2009

Although Burma signed an energy agreement with its Southeast Asian neighbors last week—and despite a stern warning from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—there are clear danger signs that the Burmese military government has embarked on a policy of close nuclear and military cooperation with North Korea.

The issue of military cooperation between the two rogue states has been documented for months by *The Irrawaddy*, including a cover story in the August issue titled “*An Open Secret*,” which examines the clandestine deals and negotiations between the two regimes.

It was echoed loudly in an article this weekend that quoted two Burmese defectors as claiming that the junta was preparing underground tunnels and trading uranium extracts—known as “yellowcake”—for North Korean military hardware and/ or technical expertise.

The article, based on research conducted by Professor Desmond Ball and journalist Phil Thornton, was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Bangkok Post* on Saturday. Reporting on interviews with the defectors, the article claims that there are more than five North Koreans working at the Thabeik Kyin uranium processing plant in Burma, and that locally refined uranium from Burma was being traded to North Korea.

The junta has been browsing the nuclear bazaar since at least 2000, when science and technology minister U Thaug visited Moscow. A resulting agreement to build a low-grade research reactor, under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), initially fell through when questions arose about how the Burmese would pay for Russian assistance.

In recent years, several Burmese officials (both civilian and military) have claimed to have direct knowledge, or even first-hand experience, of a secret nuclear weapons program.

According to the defectors in this recent report, Burma's military government began building a reactor near Maymyo in 2002 with the aim of developing a nuclear device by 2020. The reactor and some related nuclear fuel processing plants were said to be hidden underground. The expertise for this project reportedly came from North Korea, with help from Iran and possibly Pakistan.

The report adds to common fears that Burma is "going nuclear."

In an article titled "*A New Start for Non-Proliferation*" published in July, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El-Baradei, said:

"A number of countries with nuclear energy programs have the capability, if they choose, to manufacture nuclear weapons within a matter of months if their security perceptions change, because they have mastered the critical technology—uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing. If more countries take this path, it could prove to be the Achilles' heel of non-proliferation."

In other words, even civilian nuclear technology cooperation between well-intentioned states, who are signatories to the non-proliferation treaties (which includes Burma), has the potential to be misused, if countries can access the technology.

"We worry about the transfer of nuclear technology and other dangerous weapons," Hillary Clinton told the Asean representatives in Phuket last month in reference to North Korea and Burma.

Notwithstanding Burma's alleged role in nuclear trafficking, the junta followed on the heels of Phuket by chairing the Asean Energy Ministers meeting in Mandalay.

According to the statement released after the meeting on July 29: "Ministers adopted the Asean Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) 2010-2015, which will serve as a guideline for the Asean energy cooperation to support the realization of the Asean Economic Community toward 2010 and beyond."

The statement went on to outline a seven-point energy plan of action for 2010-15, which consists of "seven program areas," namely: (i) Asean Power Grid; (ii) Trans-Asean Gas Pipeline; (iii) Coal and Clean Coal Technology; (iv) Renewable Energy; (v) Energy Efficiency and Conservation; (vi) Regional Energy Policy and Planning; and (viii) Civilian Nuclear Energy."

It would appear Asean does not share the rest of the world's fears that Burma is a danger to the region. Indeed, Burma's neighbors—in particular Thailand, China and India—seem prepared to condone the junta's military expansion while they can still plunder the resource-rich country at bargain-basement prices.

Wong Aung, a representative of an environmental organization, the Shwe Gas Movement, said that electricity consumption rates per capita in Burma are less than 5 percent that of Thailand. Nonetheless, the military junta still aims to export more energy resources to its neighbors.

"These include plans for over 20 large hydroelectric dams to power Thailand, China and Asean power grids, and trans-Burma oil and gas pipelines to China set to begin in September this year," he said. "The revenue from the energy sector is the main source of income for the Burmese generals."

Despite ample natural resources, ordinary Burmese do not benefit in any way, with some of the lowest health and education spending in the world.

"In a few years time, if you look down on Asia at night, there will be a dark spot where Burma is. The people of Burma sit in the dark while their natural resources are sold off to provide energy for their neighbors, and money for the generals who oppress them," said Mark Farmaner, executive director of the Burma Campaign UK.

Like his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong-il, Burmese junta head Snr-Gen Than Shwe is probably not losing sleep over whether his citizens are going without basic commodities and electricity while he pursues his self-interests in the military hardware store.

However, the US and the EU may not be prepared to turn a blind eye to the regime's recent moves.

"If it was just the Russian reactor, under full International Energy supervision, then the likelihood of them being able to do something with it in terms of a bomb would be zero," Professor Ball said. "It's the North Korean element which adds danger to it."

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**03/08/2009**

***Aung San Suu Kyi Trial***

**[Lawyers still hope Suu Kyi will be freed](#)**

*AFP – 2 August 2009*

YANGON — Lawyers for Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi said Sunday they still hoped she would be "freed unconditionally", despite widespread fears of a guilty verdict in her prolonged prison trial.

The Nobel peace laureate faces up to five years in jail if convicted on charges of breaching the terms of her house arrest following an incident in which an American man swam across a lake to her heavily-secured villa in May.

The two-and-a-half month trial has provoked international outrage and critics have accused Myanmar's junta of using the intrusion as an excuse to keep her locked up during elections scheduled for 2010.

A verdict had been expected on Friday but judges postponed their pronouncement until August 11, saying they needed time to review the case.

"We hope that she will be freed unconditionally," said Nyan Win, one of Suu Kyi's lawyers and a spokesman for her National League for Democracy (NLD).

"We have nothing much to do. We are just waiting for the next trial date. Tomorrow we will submit an application to the authorities to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and we hope to meet her on Wednesday or Thursday," he told AFP.

He said Suu Kyi, currently detained at Yangon's notorious Insein prison, had instructed her defence team to visit her before August 11.

The delayed verdict, which adds to uncertainty over the junta's plans for the democracy icon, was hailed Friday by her lawyers as a sign that the judges have "serious legal problems".

Ahead of Friday's expected decision, UN chief Ban Ki-moon had pressed for the immediate release of Suu Kyi during a meeting with Myanmar's UN ambassador, a UN spokesman said.

Washington, which like the European Union has imposed sanctions against the Myanmar regime, also demanded Thursday that Suu Kyi and another 2,100 political prisoners in Myanmar should be "immediately and unconditionally released".

Analysts say Myanmar's rulers have showed rare concern for foreign opinion by delaying the verdict, but only because they want to minimise the fallout while pursuing a hard line against her.

The junta has kept Suu Kyi in detention for a total of nearly 14 years since refusing to recognise the NLD's landslide victory in elections in 1990.

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**[Scores of supporters arrested, as court postpones verdict on Suu Kyi](#)**

*Mizzima - 31 July 2009*

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Scores of supporters of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her party members across the country were rounded up on Thursday, on the eve of the special court in Rangoon's Insein prison postponing the verdict of Aung San Suu Kyi to August 11.

An official of the National League for Democracy told Mizzima on Friday that several members of the party both in Rangoon including Naw Ohn Hla from Hmawbe Township and in various parts of the country were arrested on Thursday night.

"I think these people are being apprehended because of their show of solidarity towards Aung San Suu Kyi on her trial and for gathering outside the Insein prison during the trial," Nyan Win said.

But sources said some of the arrested activists were released on Friday afternoon after the court announced postponement of the verdict on Aung San Suu Kyi to August 11.

“Naw Ohn Hla and the other two people from Rangoon have been released today afternoon, but we are not sure of those arrested in other parts of the country,” Ohn Kyaing, a spokesperson for the NLD told Mizzima.

On Friday, the special court in Rangoon’s notorious Insein prison postponed the verdict on the trial of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to August 11 saying it has difficulties in interpreting the law, a defense lawyer said.

“The court announced postponement of the verdict to August 11. The court said it needs more time in deciding on a verdict as there are some difficulties in interpreting the law on the charges on Daw Suu,” Nyan Win, lawyer of Aung San Suu Kyi, told Mizzima.

Nyan Win said he agreed with the court’s decision as the law used for charging pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has a problem of its own.

“We agreed with the court. Though the court did not mention what the problem is, we believe the problem of the law is that it has been taken from parts of the constitution which has not been in use,” Nyan Win said.

Despite tight security, hundreds of supporters and members of the NLD on Friday gathered outside of the Insein prison. Authorities have blocked the Insein road and other smaller lanes in and around Insein prison.

Sources said the government had deployed several soldiers in various parts of Rangoon since Thursday in a bid to stop any kind of anti-government protests that might be held on Friday.

Activists, meanwhile, have distributed leaflets in parts of Rangoon on Thursday night exhorting the people to wage war against the military rulers saying the verdict is obviously going to find pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi guilty and sentence her to a prison term.

But Win Tin, a senior NLD member, had earlier predicted that the government would change its strategy in trying to sentence the Burmese Nobel Peace Laureate to a prison term and that the court on Friday is likely to come up with a softer verdict or even postpone it in order to divert the attention of both the international and internal community.

“But in any circumstances, the government will find a way to sentence her [Aung San Suu Kyi] and imprison her, because that is what they wanted to do,” Win Tin told Mizzima.

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**[26 Dissidents Detained in Rangoon: AAPP](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 31 July 2009*

By Wai Moe

The Burmese military authorities arrested 26 pro-democracy activists on Thursday night in a move to preempt any public outrage concerning the postponement of a verdict against Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, said a Burmese human rights group.

Tate Naing, secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a Burmese human rights group based on the Thai-Burmese border, told The Irrawaddy on Friday that Burmese authorities had arrested 26 dissidents since Thursday evening.

“We have learned that 28 people were arrested and that two activists among them were later released,” he said. “But the other 26 remain under arrest. Most of them are former political prisoners.”

The following morning (Friday), the Burmese judiciary postponed the verdict on Suu Kyi to August 11.

Later that day, Suu Kyi’s lawyer, Nyan Win, said at a press conference at the headquarters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) that the Rangoon Northern District Court had said that it decided to postpone the verdict because it is “reviewing the law.”

Among the 28 who were allegedly arrested during the overnight operation are elected representatives from the 1990 elections, including Tha Aung from Myothit Township and Nyunt Hlaing from Aunglan Township, as well as a well-known woman activist, Naw Ohn Hla.

Tate Naing said Naw Ohn Hla and Nyunt Hlaing were later released. However, he added that the number of arrests could rise as tensions increase among Suu Kyi's supporters and security forces around Insein Prison, where the opposition leader has been detained since May 14.

"These arbitrary arrests show that the junta is scared of public outrage over the unjust trial of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," Tate Naing said.

The detention of the 26 dissidents adds to the more than 2,100 political prisoners already being held in Burma's prisons. According to AAPP and other human rights groups, the number of political prisoners in Burma has doubled in the last two years.

The arrests came following calls from the international community for the junta to release Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners in Burma.

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**[Poverty saps local interest in Suu Kyi trial](#)**

*AFP – 3 August 2009*

YANGON — While the international community condemns the prison trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, many people in military-ruled Myanmar have more pressing concerns as they struggle to make ends meet.

"I saw some barricades near the jail when I passed by on the bus but I have no interest in the verdict," father-of-two Maung Zaw told AFP.

The 40-year-old said he earns a meagre 1.50 dollars a day through his two jobs in construction and as a shop worker.

"I am only interested in my daily wages for my family which is a more important thing for me," he said.

Speculation is rife among diplomats and foreign observers as to the sentence the Nobel laureate could face if she is convicted of breaching her house arrest rules, after an American man swam to her lakeside home in May.

But while the international community awaits the verdict in the court case at Yangon's Insein prison, now expected on August 11, many in the poverty-stricken country are more preoccupied with daily financial worries.

Cho Mar, the 30-year-old manager of a tourism company who earns 250 dollars a month, was also concerned about the economy in what is one of the world's least developed countries.

"Although we are interested in her we have to see to our own situation first as we struggle in our daily life because our economic situation has been declining in recent years," he said.

As Suu Kyi's trial reconvened in the commercial hub of Yangon Friday, there were a noticeable lack of tourists in the area, which has been shunned by many because of Myanmar's 47 years of military rule.

Visitors were further deterred by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, which swept through the country's southwest, leaving 138,000 people dead.

At the Shwedagon pagoda, the city's leading attraction, tour guides and photographers milled about with nobody to employ them, while the few Asian visitors who did walk through the compound tried not to slip on loose tiles.

In a middle-class neighbourhood south of the city, two men in a cafe, who declined to be named, joked about "one very famous tourist" -- a reference to John Yettaw, the uninvited US man who swam to Suu Kyi's house, sparking her trial.

Foreign critics say the court case is a ploy to keep Suu Kyi, widely known as "The Lady" in Myanmar, locked up for elections scheduled for 2010.

The junta has detained her for a total of nearly 14 years since refusing to recognise her party's landslide victory in elections in 1990.

The United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions against the Myanmar regime, demanding the release of Suu Kyi and more than 2,000 political prisoners.

But the impact of those sanctions has been weakened as neighbours, notably China, spend heavily on resource-rich Myanmar's natural gas, timber and precious stones.

However, a report in May said that while the country's foreign exchange reserves were at a record 3.6 billion dollars, the junta had not used them to help the people and the country's economic prospects were "bleak".

The report from the International Monetary Fund, quoted by the Financial Times newspaper, said social spending was the lowest in Asia.

This was even as the regime, officially known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), continued to splash out on showcase projects including the building of the new administrative capital Naypyidaw.

There are also serious concerns about the regime's military spending.

A report on Saturday, citing the evidence of defectors, said North Korea is helping Myanmar build a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction plant to build an atomic bomb within five years.

"The poverty endured by the people in Burma is because of the SPDC's policy," said activist Debbie Stothard of the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, referring to Myanmar by its former name.

Despite many citizens living a "hand-to-mouth existence", Stothard said she did not believe they were uninterested in Suu Kyi's fate.

"I think many are concerned about the trial and those who have access to information realise that their suffering is linked to the crisis in the political situation".

Htwe Htwe, a 50-year-old housewife in Yangon, agreed that there was a lot of interest in the trial, although it was often discreet.

"People in the market and at the teashops are secretly discussing the verdict," she said. "People want to know what will happen to her."

But some, it seems, have lost hope of a positive future.

One taxi driver, who did not wish to be named, had a dog-eared stash of copies of the state-run newspaper on his passenger seat and laughed when asked if he read them.

"No, I use these for cleaning the windshield when it fogs up. It's a waste of time to read that newspaper," he said.

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### [Suu Kyi's Trial Gives Rare Glimpse into Burma's Judicial System](#)

*Irrawaddy – 3 August 2009*

By Marwaan Macan-Markar / IPS Writer

BANGKOK — A political trial in Burma that could prolong its pro-democracy icon's isolation by five more years has opened a rare window for the international community to judge the quality of justice in the military-ruled country.

Many foreign envoys based in Rangoon, the former capital, have eagerly grabbed this chance. They have shown up in numbers when given access to the largely secret trial of Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, being held in a decrepit courtroom inside the notorious Insein Prison in northern Rangoon.

Last Friday marked the latest in this diplomatic show of force, when foreign envoys packed the rear of the court to mirror the unprecedented international attention this bizarre trial has drawn since it began in early May.

"There were about 20 to 25 diplomats in the court. They were Europe, the US, China, South Korea and other Asian countries," a European diplomat who attended the trial on July 31 said in a telephone interview from Rangoon. "They were mostly of the ambassadorial rank."

It was a number as large as that present on the third day of the trial in late May. At the time, some 30 diplomats were given the nod by the junta, otherwise known to be secretive and paranoid, to get a rare glimpse of Suu Kyi's battle with Burma's justice system.

And this time, too, the 64-year-old Suu Kyi used the occasion to openly engage with the diplomatic corps, a practice that has been denied to her during the 14 years she has been kept under house arrest in her lakeside home in Rangoon.

"She appeared relaxed, confident and dignified when she thanked the diplomats for coming and showing interest in the trial," the diplomat revealed. "There was also a surreal moment when she was laughing and joking with her legal team as they waited for the judges to enter."

When they did, the two judges presiding over this case had a brief announcement: the verdict, due that day, will not be given. Judgment day was postponed until August 11, since the judges "needed more time to explore the details of the case."

Suu Kyi appeared relaxed in court that day, wearing a pale pink blouse and a dark purple traditional Burmese *longyi*. "Sorry for the inconvenience," she reportedly told some diplomats after the judges delayed their verdict. "You may want to come back on August 11."

Yet, Suu Kyi's lawyers do not expect this delay in the verdict to change the outcome in the trial, where the widely popular opposition leader has been charged for violating the terms of her house arrest when a U.S. citizen showed up as an uninvited guest in her house and spent two nights in early May.

"She was not optimistic from the beginning. She is ready to face the worst," Nyan Win, one of Suu Kyi's lawyers, told IPS from Rangoon.

Such pessimism stems from the manner in which the trial was conducted. "This trial was not a free and fair one; not a public hearing," Nyan Win noted. "That was our main worry, this lack of openness, which is practiced in our country for all political cases."

Closed trials have been common under the current military regime, indicative of its oppressive rule. The victims have been pro-democracy activists, who make up the majority of the over 2,100 political prisoners presently languishing in Burmese jails. And verdicts have been severely harsh, with some sentenced to over 100 years in prison.

These trials follow a familiar pattern aimed at trampling any hint of "fairness" and "justice" in the courtroom. "In all politically motivated cases, military intelligence people usually sit in the trial and monitor the court process, actions of judges, lawyers and other judicial staff openly," says Aung Htoo, general secretary of the Burma Lawyers' Council, a network of Burmese lawyers operating from the Thai-Burmese border.

"By holding trials in the compound of the prisons, the authorities (implicitly) threaten all relevant persons in a proceeding," Aung Htoo wrote in an e-mail interview. "They (military intelligence) even intercept private meetings held between the defence lawyers and the accused."

"Many times, they (military intelligence) send judgments, already written prematurely, to the judges only to read," he revealed. "The judiciary has been used as an instrument to crush down the political opponents and human rights activists."

This court culture is now under scrutiny after the junta slapped Suu Kyi with a legal case—the first political trial she has been subjected to since being placed under house arrest for the first time in July 1989.

"There has never been a [more] high-profile case than this one. It has drawn so much international attention and international pressure," says Soe Aung, the spokesman for the Forum for Democracy in Burma, a network of Burmese political activists living in exile. "It is not usual for diplomats to attend such cases."

"The Burmese regime is feeling the heat both inside and outside the country due to all the attention on this trial," Soe Aung added. "Prolonging the trial process by postponing the verdict till mid-August is one of the signs that they (the regime) are worried about growing international pressure."

As the world wait for the judgment, the speculation among the diplomatic community about Suu Kyi's fate, indicates that she may be declared guilty by court.

"Western diplomats say she will get a three year sentence out of the maximum five years," an informed source in Rangoon told IPS. "They say she will be first kept in Insein Prison and then moved back to her house."

Asian diplomats, particularly from Southeast Asia, have another view, the diplomatic source added.

"They say her sentence will be commuted to house arrest without much delay because the (Burmese government) wants to look good ahead of the UN General Assembly coming up in late September."

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*Opinion/Analysis*

### **EDITORIAL: Lay Off the Lady**

*Irrawaddy – 1 August 2009*

Some ideas never seem to die. Recently, the argument that Aung San Suu Kyi, the woman seen by many as the guiding light of Burma's quest for democracy, is actually the country's greatest impediment to progress has made its way back into print. This notion, which is propagated by a faction of self-styled Burma experts known as the "third force," has repeatedly reared its head over the years. *The Irrawaddy* believes it is time to put this myth to rest.

The latest instance of this malicious meme appeared in the July 23 edition of *The Economist*, in an item titled "*The Lady should be for turning.*" The piece begins by noting the 20th anniversary of the day Suu Kyi was first placed under house arrest, and proceeds with a de rigeur acknowledgment of her two decades of courage and personal sacrifice (no doubt to avoid the sort of excoriation provoked by an article published in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper in November 2008, originally titled "*Not such such a hero after all,*" which was later subject to numerous corrections and a public apology).

Once the formalities are out of the way, however, the writer, citing "a growing body of opinion," poses the question of whether Suu Kyi is an "icon or obstacle." More specifically, Suu Kyi's position on sanctions is obliquely attacked as the cause of Burma's economic misery, and by extension, its failure to achieve any meaningful progress towards democracy.

There are numerous objections that one could make to this assertion, which the writer does not attempt to support in any way, perhaps assuming the logic to be self-evident. However, we can identify a few fundamental flaws in the underlying argument that should suffice to set the record straight.

The first point that needs to be made is that Suu Kyi does not dictate the Burma policy of Western countries. Although the issue of sanctions is often linked to her fate, that does not mean she is the main impetus behind the policy. When US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently said that the US might be ready to invest in Burma if Suu Kyi was released, she did so at her own discretion, not in consultation with the detained democracy leader. Conversely, if Suu Kyi suddenly reversed her position on sanctions, there is no reason to believe that Western governments would automatically follow suit. To imply that she is somehow responsible for decisions made in foreign capitals is, therefore, grossly unfair.

It is also a distortion of the facts to suggest that sanctions are the cause of Burma's endemic poverty. A total absence of accountable governance—not a lack of international aid or investment—is the real reason this resource-rich nation can barely support its own population. The junta has never had any difficulty in finding foreign partners willing to help it exploit Burma's natural wealth. But most of the plunder from this wholesale theft of the country's riches is deposited in overseas bank accounts or in bunkers in Naypyidaw; virtually none of it is plowed back into the local economy for the benefit of the country's long-term development.

It is true, as *The Economist* notes, that official aid to Burma falls far short of what the country needs. Again, this is because most international donors don't trust the regime to use aid appropriately or

cooperate fully with the agencies that dispense it, not because they feel obliged to support the country's pro-democracy leader. Even if Suu Kyi were completely removed from the equation—as some junta apologists and exasperated pseudo-pragmatists have long argued she should be—it would not alter the fact that, even post-Nargis, the regime does more to obstruct aid than facilitate it.

The fact that the regime has tightened the screws on the opposition at the very moment that the world wants to increase its aid to Burma shows that the generals are only interested in using the suffering of ordinary Burmese to their own advantage. In effect, they are telling the international community to make a choice: save Suu Kyi, or save the rest of the country. Suu Kyi herself would not hesitate to recommend the latter, if it were a meaningful choice. But it is not, because eliminating her as a political force would bring no tangible benefit to anyone but the generals.

*The Economist* is probably not, like some, hell bent on discrediting Suu Kyi. But it does subscribe to certain views that make it susceptible to the arguments of those who are. One of its most cherished ideas is that economic development is a force for political good. And so it asks if “the courageous Lady” will admit that “[d]evelopment ... could be the fastest path to democracy.”

Never mind that the experiences of China and Vietnam, two countries mentioned as possible models for Burma, do not support this claim at all. And forget the fact that the Burmese regime seems to take greater inspiration from Pyongyang than Beijing or Hanoi. If you want proof that the development-to-democracy narrative makes sense, just look at Indonesia.

The Economist states that “development could bring about swift changes to the political landscape, as eventually happened in Indonesia”—a view it attributes to noted Burmese historian Thant Myint-U. But the Indonesian example, even if it could be said to apply to Burma, is hardly an encouraging one. More than 30 years of brutal and corrupt rule under Suharto ended only after the collapse of the Indonesian economy and a period of deadly unrest in the late 1990s. Is this the scenario that Thant Myint-U and other opponents of sanctions envision for Burma? If so, it is hard to see how it is preferable to calls for a 1988-style popular uprising.

If there is anything to be learned from Indonesia, it is that repression breeds violence, and that only a viable alternative to iron-fisted rule can halt the downward spiral that accompanies the inevitable downfall of a despised dictatorship. In Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of slain independence leader Sukarno, played a major role in guiding the country back from the brink. Although not particularly effective as president, she succeeded in paving the way for more capable politicians and a more stable political system—as Suu Kyi would do if given the chance.

Sadly, however, Burma's current rulers lack the foresight to let this happen. Unlike Megawati, who was active in Indonesia's legislature long before Suharto's fall from power, Suu Kyi has spent most of the past two decades as a prisoner. Isolated and silenced, she has been given neither an opportunity nor a reason to reconsider her stance on sanctions.

It is unfortunate, too, that some foreign journalists seem to feel a need to dismiss Suu Kyi's views because of her status as “democracy's poster girl,” as *The Economist* describes her. They do her, and Burma, an enormous disservice. If some in the Western media err on the side of uncritical admiration, others go too far in trying to deflate her iconic image. Suu Kyi is not above criticism, but blaming her for Burma's woes, even indirectly, is completely out of line. This question is: Will *The Economist* admit as much?

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### **[With all deliberate delay – by Francis Wade](#)**

*DVB – 31 July 2009*

A collective, but all-too familiar, sigh accompanied the announcement this morning that the verdict in Burma's trial of Aung San Suu Kyi has been postponed until mid-August.

It is a trial that has twisted and turned over the course of nearly three months, besieged by delays and digressions from the courtroom and flecked with the odd concession from the judges. It has successfully shouldered a visit by the UN Secretary General, brushed off fierce condemnation from world leaders and trampled over Burma's own domestic laws.

Given the likelihood of the outcome, the trial could have been wrapped up in a matter of days. The verdict was likely drawn up the moment John Yettaw arrived back on the shores of Lake Inya in early May, but instead the old tactic of delay has reared its head again. Seasoned observers of the Burmese legal system are used to this sort of behaviour from the junta – some may see it as a tactical manoeuvre, while others point to a sadistic means of further punishing Suu Kyi, with the agony of the unknown still stretching out before her.

One hopes, however, that the lady who recently passed 5,000 days in detention is inured to such practices - indeed her lawyer Nyan Win said this morning that she was “not surprised” by the decision, and reports have said she is already choosing her reading list for the likely prison sentence.

But there is another reason for delaying the decision. The junta, in its desperate attempt to justify why Suu Kyi should be kept out of sight, has scoured the Burmese political and legal landscape for any pretext that would add weight to their case. They have spent the last three months looking for loopholes in their own laws that they can exploit to maintain the status quo, even if that means doctoring the constitution they carelessly rushed through last year. That the trial was a sham in the first place is not disputed; the junta knows that Yettaw’s visit was beyond Suu Kyi’s control. Indeed the sight of guards merely throwing stones at Yettaw as he approached the compound shows how far they were willing to go to deter someone heading towards incriminating Suu Kyi.

But the Burmese regime is fully aware that the eyes of the world are fixed firmly upon it, and this international attention is far from welcome. Outcry has reached fever pitch, and the junta now has to look towards dampening the impact of the final verdict. The US-based legal counsel for Suu Kyi, Jared Genser, believes that the delay could be “a smart move” by the government to cushion the blow, and extend the decision until the middle of August “when a lot of government and UN officials are going to be on vacation.” In this case, he said, it will remain to be seen whether, given that August is a slow news month, they’ll actually heighten expectations by the lack of other news, “or whether in fact they will succeed in driving this to some extent from the headlines”.

Another factor for the regime to contend with is the tricky question of what to do with Suu Kyi once the verdict is given. It is perhaps no coincidence that the house in which she has been kept in detention for 14 of the last 20 years, which she shared with her two caretakers and in which she was allowed room for meditation and a semblance of normality, is suddenly the subject of a legal battle over ownership. Suu Kyi’s adopted cousin, a retired military officer, claims ownership of a portion of the land, and has put it up for sale.

This follows an attempt by her estranged brother, who has been described by various Burmese opposition groups as a surrogate of the junta, to claim half-ownership of the home, with speculation that he would then sell this to the government. Thus it could be that the decision of Suu Kyi’s verdict is extended until the dispute is settled, leaving the court ostensibly no choice but to place her behind bars. In this outcome, the site that has become almost revered throughout Burma could fall to another vindictive court decision.

It’s all speculation, but that’s the best we can do at this moment. Who knows what the reclusive regime is hatching? Only last month there were rumours that she could be held in a military base outside of Rangoon, while other people have floated the prospect of a lengthy sentence behind bars. According to senior National League for Democracy member Win Tin, the junta’s posturing over the past three months means that the only conclusion will be a “prison outcome”.

Either way, Suu Kyi is said to be prepared for the worst, and so must we be. The junta are not concerned with alleviating her agony, which is excruciatingly protracted and intensified by the delay, but placating their demons, which leaves her at the mercy of whichever tactic comes next.

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**[End of the old man](#)**

*Mizzima - 31 July 2009*

The kangaroo court pretends there’s no problem in tackling the case of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi but it had to postpone hearing dates without coming up with a sound reason. This reveals, though they have the upper hand, they are in a crisis as well.

The court fixed July 31 for pronouncing its judgment on the 'National League for Democracy' (NLD) party General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi's case in which she has been charged with violating her house arrest term by the police as the prosecutor. However, they had to postpone the hearing again on the orders of Naypyitaw, fixing the date for August 11.

The special court inside the Insein prison made similar postponements without prior notice four times since the trial started on May 18. The judges themselves might not know the reason behind these postponements.

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had to intervene in this case, compelling him to visit Burma. Moreover, there has been a chorus of calls for the release of the Nobel Laureate globally. Though there is a debate on the effectiveness of international pressure these days, as for the isolated, self-conceited and aggressive junta leaders, such intervention is unbearable and intolerable.

It is not a coincidence that the junta requested Thailand's Prime Minister to postpone his planned visit to Burma on July 31, on the pretext of dealing with internal politics, to two or three weeks later, through its ambassador in Bangkok.

The State Peace and Development Council is all too aware that supporters of Suu Kyi and hardcore activists will not stay passive with folded hands. They are not averse to arresting all of them, if necessary, over and above the 2100 political prisoners already languishing across jails in Burma, since it contrasts with the junta's so-called seven-step roadmap to democracy.

In the meantime, the deterioration of the current situation for the paranoid and skeptical junta, ensconced behind the iron curtain, the classified report with the word 'Secret' on top of the paper, is being circulated wildly on the internet, which reveals there are loopholes in their inner security circle. These reports range from the visit of the third strongman of the junta's military hierarchy Gen. Shwe Mann to communist North Korea, which is defying the international community with its nuclear arms race, to the meeting minutes between leaders of the junta and foreign countries.

In a quick response to these leaks, the junta retaliated with a combing operation in the Defence and Foreign Ministries besides resorting to cyber tracking and counter espionage.

On the other hand, the junta's plan to transform ceasefire ethnic armed groups into the Border Guard Force (BGF) under the total control of their Armed Forces and disarming them is facing serious resistance and has been unsuccessful so far, as this plan lacks political guarantee and lack of mutual confidence.

The country's economy is on the collapse mode in the face of the global economic crisis and the devastating Cyclone Nargis which left over 130,000 people dead. The economists estimate the country's growth rate at zero percent.

Most of the generals in the top echelons of the junta whisper that dear leader Senior Gen. Than Shwe's days are numbered and his fate is at its lowest ebb. To the superstitious and black magic believers among the generals, the collapse of 'Danoke' pagoda in Dala Township, which was repaired by first lady Kyaing Kyaing and her family, is a bad omen for this family.

The 'Grand Strategy' of transition to a puppet mixed administration of civilian and the military from the current military regime is uncertain and insecure.

It will be interesting to see how the psychological warfare savvy old man Than Shwe copes with the challenges faced on all fronts.

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#### **[NEWS ANALYSIS: Verdict on Hold - By Aung Zaw](#)**

*Irrawaddy – 31 July 2009*

Did astrologers advise Snr-Gen Than Shwe to postpone the verdict in the trial of opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi? Or was it a ploy by Than Shwe, a former psychological warfare officer, to buy more time? Or did Chinese leaders tell the Burmese to postpone the ruling?

Whatever the reason, the delay is part of the twists and turns of politics in military-ruled Burma and more drama is likely to follow.

The delay should not be taken as a sign of weakness on the part of the stubborn military regime, however. It is likely that the regime is just buying time to deflect both domestic and international pressure.

The postponement of the verdict shows that the regime leaders who are prepared to impose a prison sentence on Suu Kyi wish to avoid unpleasant consequences: the outrage from the international community and more pressure from the West and neighboring countries.

The regime has no control over the sustained international pressure—UN chief Ban Ki-moon and international leaders appealed for the release of Suu Kyi and more than 2,100 political prisoners. The US, EU and Asean nations are keeping to a unified stance: free Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners.

The domestic factor may also have played a part.

Security has been beefed up in Rangoon and the countryside where small protests may occur. More riot police are deployed and more military trucks and police have moved into Rangoon.

The generals don't want to take risks at this time, and it is perhaps a smart move to postpone the court decision.

The fact is the case is political: the regime wants to exclude Suu Kyi from politics and especially from the coming 2010 election.

However, as her supporters say, Suu Kyi is no coward, and she is ready to face reality in the military-ruled country. Suu Kyi is prepared for the worst—her lawyers said that she was stockpiling books and medicines.

Though behind bars, Suu Kyi recently commented on the regime's planned election. Knowing that Ban had made a high level visit to Burma to discuss political issues and her release, Suu Kyi's lawyer said she had one important message for Ban.

The message is that the UN should be prepared to denounce the upcoming elections in Burma as illegitimate if the regime does not implement national reconciliation beforehand.

Her stance on the election alone sends a strong message to the UN and the international community. She wants the generals to embrace national reconciliation.

But the generals like to talk tough, as the state-run newspapers testify. The editorials reflecting the opinion of ruling general Than Shwe and his hardliners clearly demonstrate their uncompromising stance.

"Myanmar [Burma] is an independent, sovereign county with the rights to formulate and prescribe appropriate law, and to form a government with suitable administrative machinery," *The New Light of Myanmar* thundered on Wednesday.

The same newspaper said that Burma has no political prisoners, and it asked the international community not to interfere in the court ruling, saying that Burma has its own judicial system.

The paper stated there are "external interferences" in the case, and that while the Suu Kyi trial is going on in "accord with the law," no one should call for the release of political prisoners, including Suu Kyi.

The more they talk tough in *The New Light of Myanmar* the more it shows the generals' level of paranoia.

"Threatening and unnecessarily attempting to influence the trial should be avoided. Anyone should not be involved [sic] in such acts as favoring the defendant, favoring the plaintiff and using influence," it said.

But why did they postpone the verdict?

It shouldn't come as a surprise if the regime continues to postpone the verdict in the coming months. The generals are good at buying time and manipulating domestic and international opinion.

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**News - Other**

[N.Korea 'helping Myanmar build nuclear plant': report](#)

AFP – 2 August 2009

SYDNEY — North Korea is helping Myanmar build a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction plant to build an atomic bomb within five years, a report said on Saturday, citing the evidence of defectors.

The nuclear complex is hidden inside a mountain at Naung Laing, in Myanmar's north, and runs parallel to a civil reactor being built at another site by Russia, according to the Sydney Morning Herald.

The revelations come just weeks after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton voiced concerns that Pyongyang was transferring weapons and nuclear technology to fellow pariah state Myanmar.

Defectors codenamed Moe Jo and Tin Min reportedly told Australian investigator Desmond Ball the military junta has nuclear ambitions that far exceed its official line.

"They say it's to produce medical isotopes for health purposes in hospitals," Ball said, quoting Tin Min about the prospect of a Myanmar nuclear programme.

"How many hospitals in Burma have nuclear science?" Tin Min allegedly said, using Myanmar's former name. "Burma can barely get electricity up and running. It's a nonsense."

Giving an account of the men's testimony in the Herald, Ball said they "claim to know the regime's plans" and that a nuclear-armed Myanmar was a "genuine possibility".

"In the event that the testimony of the defectors is proved, the alleged secret reactor could be capable of being operational and producing one bomb a year, every year, after 2014," Ball wrote in the newspaper.

Moe Jo, a former army officer, allegedly told Ball he was trained for a 1,000-man "nuclear battalion" and that Myanmar had provided yellowcake uranium to North Korea and Iran.

"He said that the army planned a plutonium reprocessing system and that Russian experts were on site to show how it was done," wrote Ball, who is a strategic studies professor from the Australian National University.

Moe Jo said part of the army's nuclear battalion was stationed in a local village to work on a weapon, and a secret operations centre was hidden in the Setkhaya Mountains, according to Ball.

"(It was) a set up including engineers, artillery and communications to act as a command and control centre for the nuclear weapons program," wrote Ball.

Tin Min was said to have been a book keeper for Tay Za, a close associate of the junta's head General Than Shwe, and told Ball in 2004 he had paid a construction company to build a tunnel in the Naung Laing mountain "wide enough for two trucks to pass each other".

According to the report, Tin Min said Za negotiated nuclear contracts with Russia and North Korea and arranged the collection and transport, at night and by river, of containers of equipment from North Korean boats in Yangon's port.

Tin Min reportedly said Za told him the junta knew it couldn't compete with neighbouring Thailand on conventional weapons, but wanted to "play power like North Korea".

"They hope to combine nuclear and air defence missiles," Za said, according to Tin Min.

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### [Defectors outline Burma's nuclear ambitions](#)

*DVB – 3 August 2009*

Burma and North Korea may be collaborating on the development of a nuclear reactor in northern Burma, according to experts who carried out extensive interviews with two Burmese defectors.

One of the two defectors, who are both now based in Thailand, is a former army officer, while the other was an executive at Htoo Trading, a company with close ties to the military junta.

During interviews carried out over the course of two years with Phil Thornton, a Thailand-based journalist, and Desmond Ball of the Australian National University, the two men detailed North Korea's assistance in helping Burma acquire a nuclear weapon.

The report, published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 1 August, said that the junta was building a nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction plant in northern Burma, much of it hidden in a network of tunnels dug into a mountain at Nuang Laing.

The report will add weight to a body of evidence that has emerged over the past two months that points to North Korea's assistance in helping Burma develop a nuclear weapon.

In June *DVB* published a report on Burma's secret network of tunnels, dug with North Korea's assistance, with leaked intelligence documents saying the tunnels could accommodate heavy weaponry.

And in June a North Korean ship, the *Kang Nam 1*, that was being tracked by the US navy on suspicion that it was carrying arms in violation of a UN resolution on North Korea, appeared to be headed towards Burma before turning around.

At the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum last month, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke of concern over Burma's nuclear ambitions.

Htay Aung, a Burmese military analyst at the Network for Democracy and Development, said that Burma's acquisition of nuclear technology would add a new dynamic to Asia's regional security threat.

"If the junta has nuclear arms then there will be problem for everyone, including countries like China and India who have always been saying Burma is not a regional threat," he said.

"We still can't tell if countries like North Korea and Iran, those who already are in a hold of nuclear arms, are not going to sell their weapons to Burma.

"There is a chance that they will consider Burma, who is also facing against the US just like them, as a friend and sell nuclear weapons to the junta," he said.

*Reporting by Ahunt Phone Myat*

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### [Six NLD members freed](#)

*Mizzima - 31 July 2009*

by Phanida

Chiang Mai – Six members of the opposition National League for Democracy, arrested on Thursday evening, were freed by authorities on Friday.

Thet Thet Aung of Rangoon's Dagon Myothit Township, Htein Win and Khin Win Kyi of South Dagon Township, Nyunt Hlaing of San Chuang Township, who is an elected member of Parliament in the 1990 elections, Naw Ohn Hla and Khin Myat Thu were released after being detained for several hours since Thursday evening, according to NLD spokesperson, Ohn Kyaing.

On Thursday the authorities rounded up at least 30 people, mostly young supporters and members of the NLD, across the country, in a move to pre-empt anti-government protests on Friday, the day the court had earlier fixed to pronounce the verdict on the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The court, however, postponed delivering the verdict on Aung San Suu Kyi to August 11, saying it is facing legal problems and needs time to decide.

Htein Win, youth in-charge of the NLD from South Dagon Township told *Mizzima*, "I arrived home at noon after being released. I was interrogated and asked what we will be doing on July 31. They asked whether we had plans to hold demonstrations and also wanted to know our plans for the 8.8.88 anniversary. They also asked what we will do if Aung San Suu Kyi is sentenced to a prison term."

He said, the chairman of the ward, police from the special branch and several other officials came to his house at about midnight and asked him to come to the police station saying they needed to ask a few questions.

He was later taken to the office of the Ministry of Home and interrogated for two hours.

Htein Win said Khin Win Kyi was also brought to the same office for interrogation.

He was also reportedly made to sign a pledge not to say anything about the interrogations to the media.

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### **Burmese Regime Deliberately Depresses Economy**

*Irrawaddy - 31 July 2009*

By Saw Yan Naing

Burma is ranked as one of the world's most undeveloped countries because of intentional mismanagement by its own leaders, says a leading regional activist, Debbie Stothard, the coordinator of the Alternative Asean Network on Burma (Altsean).

Many developing countries in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand lack the abundant natural resources of Burma, Stothard noted. However, Burma is poorer than each of these neighboring countries.

Many Burma observers say the country has become the poorest country in region because the military regime lacks any interest in a plan to develop the economy and to integrate with the international community. One result is that almost all of Burma's natural resources are sold to neighboring countries, say observers.

Stothard and economic specialist Sean Turnell of McQuarie University in Australia said Burma's generals have completely lost touch with economic reality, making the country a "very, very high-risk environment" for potential foreign investors.

In the past, Burma was at the top of Southeast Asian countries in terms of economic development and natural resources and had one of the region's best education systems, Stothard noted.

"People wanted to go to Burma to study because of its universities," she said. "Think about that. But, in a few decades the Burmese regime has turned the situation completely around."

Stothard said Burmese people are among the poorest in the world due to the military government's policy of preventing the development of a functioning economy and a professional education system.

"The regime intentionally twists the education system and squeezes the ordinary people," she said.

Due to the broken education system, many of the brightest young Burmese leave the country and many never return.

Stothard noted that many regional businesspeople would not dare to set up a business in Burma.

"The only companies that dare go into Burma are the ones who are going to export the natural resources. They just go in, grab the natural resources and run," said Stothard.

Turnell said that the regime's economic policies have done far more damage to the country's economic prospects than global economic sanctions, put in place because of the regime's anti-democratic policies and human rights abuses.

"The biggest sanction on Burma is the Burmese regime itself," said Turnell, who added that the regime's "determined mismanagement" of the country's economy, including its refusal to respect property rights, is the main obstacle to Burma's economic development.

Stothard said, "Singaporean businessmen have told me, those generals don't know anything.

They don't want to know anything. It is not about the generals being stupid. It is about generals who refuse to listen to the advice of their own technocrats."

Burma has been designated one of the world's least developed countries by the United Nations for more than 20 years. On a UN Web site, Burma is described as "a resource-rich country that suffers from government controls and abject rural poverty."

A former Burmese intelligence official in exile, Maj Aung Lynn Htut, wrote in a recent assessment of the country that the junta's chief, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, is adept at using dirty tricks as a result of his background in psychological warfare.

Aung Lynn Htut wrote, "He [Than Shwe] understands very well that if the public is allowed to have a better life it will gain a progressive outlook and become interested in politics."

In the Human Development Index 2008 Update, Burma's per capita GDP (US \$881 in 2006) was ranked 163rd out of 178 countries in the world.

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**Dhaka Delegation in Naypyidaw for Border Talks**

*Irrawaddy – 31 July 2009*

By Lawi Weng

A delegation of Bangladeshi experts on border issues met with Burma's foreign minister in Naypyidaw on Friday to discuss an territorial dispute between the two countries, according to Burma's state-run media.

The Burmese-language *Myanma Alin* newspaper reported that talks with the Dhaka delegation focused on efforts to reach an agreement on disputed maritime boundaries. The delegation, led by retired commodore Khurshed Alam, an expert on maritime affairs, arrived in Naypyidaw on July 29.

The meeting comes as rival claims to offshore deposits of natural gas have raised tensions between the neighboring countries. Earlier this month, Bangladesh raised the stakes of the conflict when it granted nine offshore gas blocks in the Bay of Bengal to two foreign oil firms, ConocoPhillips and Tullow Oil.

Tin Soe, an editor with the Bangladesh-based *Kaladan News Network*, said that the Burmese military regime told Dhaka that three of the offshore gas blocks belong to Burma.

"The delegation has to go Burma because they are worried about a disagreement with the Burmese government over the offshore exploration contracts," he said.

Dhaka has said that it wants to discuss multiple issues with Burma, including the border dispute and the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. It has recently sent four delegations to Burma, but has made little progress on either issue.

In October 2008, the junta's No 2, Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, also visited Bangladesh to discuss maritime boundaries, trade and economic ties between the two nations.

After the trip, however, tensions between the two nations grew over the issue of maritime boundaries, prompting both countries to step up their military defenses in the Bay of Bengal.

In March of this year, Burma set up a 200-km fence along the border, claiming that it was to prevent human trafficking of Rohingya people.

There are nearly 30,000 Rohingya refugees from Burma's Arakan State living in two makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar District in Bangladesh, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Many more are believed to live outside the camps.

In early July, about 400 crude dwellings belonging to Rohingyas living near the Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar were destroyed or relocated, and an estimated 1,000 people were forcibly evicted by Bangladeshi police and camp management, said the UNHCR.

The Rohingya are a stateless Muslim minority who face severe discrimination in Burma. Many have fled the country to escape human rights abuses, including forced labor by the Burmese army. They also face abuses in Bangladesh. Right groups say that many Rohingya have died while traveling by boat to Thailand or Malaysia in search of work.

In June, the Burmese regime agreed to allow the Bangladesh government to repatriate Rohingya refugees. However, Dhaka said it fears the Rohingya will return if there is no improvement in the human rights situation in Burma.

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**Thai government keen to develop border logistics**

*Mizzima - 3 August 2009*

by Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai – In a bid to give a leg up to border trade, Thailand’s Ministry of Commerce will be developing a logistics system at main border checkpoints, particularly in the Mae Sot border with Myawaddy in Burma.

Alongkorn Polbut, Thailand’s Deputy Minister of Commerce visited Mae Sot and Myawaddy on July 31 and August 1 in support of Thai border business ventures.

Alongkorn said in a conference in Mae Sot that the Ministry will develop a “Logistics Hubs Project”. It will help in ASEAN economic cooperation and may include a free trade area agreement in the future. “Last year, border trade between Thailand and Burma was high at about 156,000 million baht [4,727 million US\$]. It is expected to be 10 per cent higher this year,” he added.

“The government will develop a route from Vietnam, Lao, and Thailand to Burma’s Myawaddy and Moulmein. In addition, the ministry will propose to the Thai cabinet to approve Tak Province as a special border economic zone. This will include Mae Sot, Mae Ramad and Pob Phra districts (border with Karen State),” the minister said, according to a report by the Thai National News Bureau website.

The economic zone in Tak Province project was started three years ago with the objective of boosting trade and checking the problem of illegal migrant workers by providing more job opportunities near the border. This was expected to stop workers migrating to big cities such as Bangkok or nearby provinces.

The project will have the support of the law that will allow business ventures to hire workers from Burma on special conditions such as lower registration fees or lower tax rate.

Komsan Ekkachai, Tak Governor said trading in Mae Sot this year is about 17,000 million baht [515 million US\$] and it is expected to touch 20,000 million baht [606 million US\$] in 2010.

On Wednesday, a businessman in northern Thailand urged the government in a conference in Ranong, border with Kawthoung in Burma to spell out the budget for linking routes between South Asia and Southeast Asia and China.

Bunika Jamsai, Director of South Asia Sector, Department of Trade Negotiation, Ministry of Commerce said given the prevalent economic crisis, Thai business should change its target from the US and Japan to India and China, which has registered rapid economic growth. The location is also closer which will help transportation.

“Currently, Thailand and India has a free trade agreement for 82 products and tax tariff has decreased from 40 per cent to 0 per cent. In addition, transportation from Ranong to India takes only four days,” she said.

However, the political situation in Burma has affected border trade. Recently, Burmese authorities imposed restrictions in major border checkpoints both in Kawthoung and Myawaddy apprehending trouble from anti-government groups following the postponement of the verdict in Daw Ang San Suu Kyi’s trial to August 11.

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**[Floods force hundreds from homes](#)**

*DVB – 3 August 2009*

Torrential rain in western Burma has forced the evacuation of over 300 homes, with some areas experiencing five feet of rain, state-run media reported on Saturday.

Heavy rains hit Arakan state’s Thandwe and An townships on 29 July and continued over the weekend, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported.

“Over 300 households in the flood-hit wards and village were evacuated to safe places,” it said, adding that relief measures were being taken by local authorities.

“As some sections of An-Sittway and An-Tutaung motorways were submerged, the vehicles faced delays of some hours on the motorways.”

A flood warning in today's New Light of Myanmar said that Shwegyin river was currently one foot above its danger, while the Sittoung river was 2.5 feet above danger level.

"It may remain above its danger level (1070) cm during the next (48) hours commencing noon today," it said.

*Reporting by Francis Wade*

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### **Ministry orders checks on "black listed" tourists**

*Mizzima - 31 July 2009*

by Nem Davies

New Delhi – Tour agencies have been directed by Burma's Ministry of Hotel and Tourism to check tourists applying for 'Arrival Visa' with the list of people banned from entering the country.

"The people banned are among those 'black listed' and the list is with the Immigration Department," Ohn Myint, Deputy Director at Ministry of Hotel and Tourism in Naypyitaw, told Mizzima.

The notice states that persons included in the 'black list' will not be issued 'Arrival Visa'. Tour agencies as such are required to submit one of three forms to the Immigration Department in Rangoon six days in advance, in order to provide time for checking the list.

A director of a popular tour agency in Rangoon said the screening of 'Arrival Visa' is being done mainly to check people involved in politics.

"We have to submit the bio-data of tourists, who apply for 'Arrival Visa' to the Immigration Department. They [immigration] mainly check tourist's into politics. The "black list" is with them and it is confidential," the director told Mizzima.

Though tourists can apply for normal visas at respective Burmese embassies abroad, it is mandatory for tourists, who face time limits in applying for normal visas, to connect with tour agencies in Burma to apply for the 'Arrival Visa'.

"For people, who do not have time to obtain a normal visa, authorities issue 'Arrival Visa' but they need to get in touch with tour companies before they come. Every tour agent takes care of his guests," a director at another tour agency in Rangoon told Mizzima.

The ministry's order on Thursday states that tour agents can enquire whether the list of their guests has been cleared by the Immigration Department. They have no right to question the decision of the Immigration rejecting a guest.

The order also said that the 'Arrival Visa' system has been introduced in order to make travelling to Burma easier and to provide maximum service to tourists. It is also to check that tour companies do not charge tourists extra for their services and prevent the companies from evading tax payment to the government, which is seven per cent.

"Tour agencies must understand that a country has the right to reject or welcome particular tourists, without giving any reason," the order adds.

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### **Myanmar activist awarded Asia's Nobel prize**

*Reuters - 3 August 2009*

MANILA - An activist from Myanmar who was tortured by the military as a student and now runs an NGO probing infrastructure projects is among this year's winners of the Ramon Magsaysay Award, its committee said Monday.

Also cited for the award, Asia's equivalent of the Nobel, were two Chinese men, an Indian, a Filipino and a Thai woman.

Ka Hsaw Wa of Myanmar, co-founder of EarthRights International, was recognized for "dauntlessly pursuing non-violent yet effective channels of redress, exposure, and education for the defense of human rights, the environment and democracy," the committee said.

Yu Xiaogang of China was given the award for raising concerns about dams in his country and advocating social impact assessments in all such mega-infrastructure projects.

Ma Jun, also of China and a former journalist, was awarded for publicizing environmental issues in China, including naming over 10,000 companies violating emission standards.

Indian Deep Joshi, who has management and engineering degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was cited for decades of development work in rural India, and founding a non-profit organization that recruits university graduates and grooms them to do grassroots projects in poor communities.

Antonio Oposa Jr., a Filipino environmental activist and lawyer, was awarded for helping protest abuse of marine eco-systems, including organizing sea patrols to raid boat operators engaged in illegal dynamite fishing.

Krisana Kraisintu of Thailand was recognized for her work in producing generic drugs for HIV/AIDS victims, many times cheaper than the multiple pills from pharmaceutical companies. She has worked both in Thailand and in sub-Saharan Africa.

(Reporting by Raju Gopalakrishnan; Editing by Rosemarie Francisco and Bill Tarrant)

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### **Opinion / Analysis**

#### **[Profile: Burma's ruler: brutal, reclusive – and a skilled manipulator - By Benedict Rogers](#)**

*Independent - 3 August 2009*

The man behind Burma's secret nuclear plans, Senior General Than Shwe, is one of the world's most brutal and reclusive dictators. Hidden in his bunker in the newly built capital, Naypyidaw (which means "seat of kings"), his appearances in public are rare and his interactions with the international community unusual.

Aged 76, the former postal clerk became Burma's ruler in 1992, 30 years after the military under Ne Win first seized power. Colourless, uncharismatic and relatively uneducated Than Shwe rose through the ranks by simply obeying orders and showing loyalty. Indeed, his apparent lack of flair, initiative and intellect were precisely the qualities the army rewarded. He was not perceived by his superiors as a threat – and was rewarded accordingly. Far from showing courage or prowess on the battlefield, he led his troops into numerous defeats at the hands of the Communists – but that did not appear to have been a barrier to promotion.

A skilled manipulator, Than Shwe consolidated his power using classic divide-and-rule tactics against his rivals within the regime and his opponents among the democratic and ethnic groups. Trained in psychological warfare in the 1960s, he lectured for a time at Ne Win's Central Party School, so he is steeped in the use of propaganda. Billboards across the country display the regime's message in Orwellian tones.

His regime has relentlessly suppressed pro-democracy activists, while in its long war against the ethnic minorities it has used forced labour, rape, extra-judicial killings and torture as weapons of war and has overseen the destruction of 3,000 villages. The Burmese junta ranks alongside its new partners North Korea as among the worst abusers of human rights in the world.

Than Shwe is heavily influenced by astrology. In 2005, he announced that he was moving the capital from bustling Rangoon to the middle of the jungle 600 kilometres away. It is believed that he made this decision on the advice of astrologers, although it was also a result of his fear of a US invasion and to protect him against another uprising. He reportedly has at least seven personal astrologers, including several dedicated solely to monitoring the fortunes of imprisoned democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

A new constitution will enshrine military rule, and elections scheduled for next year are expected to be a sham.

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**[Leading article: Human rights and nuclear arms](#)**

*Independent - 3 August 2009*

Reports by two defectors from Burma that the secretive military regime is collaborating with North Korea to build nuclear weapons should send a shudder down everyone's spines. These are, admittedly, only reports. Moreover, even if the defectors' claims prove accurate, Burma is still a long way behind North Korea, Libya or even Iran when it comes to acquiring this technology. The target date appears to be 2014.

Nevertheless it is depressing, as well as worrying from a strategic point of view, to conceive of these generals getting their hands on such an important prize in the not-too-distant future.

It is, firstly, a grotesque joke to think of a regime that cannot properly feed, or provide electricity for, its citizens spending millions of pounds on obtaining nuclear technology. The point made by many foreign-based Burmese rights groups is equally important: past experience shows that the acquisition of nuclear arms gives even the most anti-democratic regimes a new aura of legitimacy in the international arena.

North Korea has been an example of this. If ever a country was a candidate for externally imposed "regime change", this brutal prison camp was it. But, as the Burma Campaign UK group points out, since Pyongyang acquired nuclear weapons, the emphasis has been on "effectively bribing the regime to give up nuclear weapons, while ignoring human rights".

They also point out that pandering to these paranoid regimes rarely gets the West far. If North Korea's response to such wooing is anything to go by, the tendency is only to up the ante and demand more concessions.

It would be a pity if the West went down this road with Burma too. The regime may well shrug off Western pressure about the lack of democracy there. But the moral sympathy that the outside world has lent Burma's imprisoned pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has at least kept the issue of Burmese human rights alive.

Another question is whether the Burmese generals can be trusted to use nuclear technology safely or whether, as some experts fear, the likely result is another Chernobyl. The world needs to watch Burma closely, and not make the same errors it has made with North Korea.

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**[Can Indonesia Break the Asean Deadlock on Burma? - By Simon Roughneen](#)**

*Irrawaddy - 1 August 2009*

The military junta ruling Burma is more or less impervious to foreign pressure, or so it seems. It might well respond to some harsh words from Beijing or New Delhi, should these ever materialize. For now, however, neither tough rhetoric nor sanctions have made much of a dent.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has been particularly acquiescent, holding fast to its cherished principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. It came as something of a surprise, then, when Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Hassan Wirajuda, speaking in advance of the Asean Regional Forum in Phuket, Thailand, last week, said that the junta must release Aung San Suu Kyi for the 2010 elections to be deemed free and fair.

Despite this unexpected departure from the Asean party line, however, some observers say it is too early to judge whether Indonesia—a country that has undergone a remarkable political transformation over the past decade—is about to take the grouping in a new direction in its approach to Burma.

"It is better to look into the future [to see] if Indonesia's policy toward Myanmar [Burma] will be similar to the Asean approach or it might be different," said Pavin Chachavalpongpun, a visiting research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

Noting that Indonesia has been too preoccupied in recent years with its own process of democratization to formulate a clear policy on Burma, Pavin said that Jakarta may now be turning to this issue to bolster its own democratic credentials.

“Personally, I think Jakarta would choose to adopt a harsher stance vis-à-vis the junta to prove that it really adheres to democratic principle,” he said. “Indonesia does not have ample economic interests in Myanmar, so it is easier for Jakarta to push harder for political change in this country.”

Part of this may be a response to pressure from Indonesia's parliament and civil society, which still has vivid memories of the anti-Suharto struggles. But if Dr Wirajuda's remarks mark a concerted policy change, Jakarta might be on its own, in Asean at least. Now and then Manila chips in with some harsh words, and would-be Asean member Timor-Leste has irked the junta with President Jose Ramos Horta's sporadic exhortations (most recently telling Australian media that Canberra could do more to pressure the generals). But for the most part, the grouping has gone out of its way to avoid rocking the boat on Burma.

This could change, however, if China's growing clout in the region provokes Asean to act more assertively to put its own house in order. If Asean members, led by Jakarta and in concert with the US, sought to intervene more forcefully in Burma, it might show Beijing that it cannot expect to have things all its own way with the 600 million-strong bloc to its south, and would remind Beijing that some Asean countries have powerful outside allies to turn to for support.

Pulling Burma more firmly into Asean's orbit would have major consequences for China. Burma is a vital part of China's regional strategy, with energy and economic ties intertwined with Beijing's geo-strategic concerns—the latter exemplified by the new energy corridor linking Burma's Kyaukpyu port with China's Yunnan Province. This will transfer 20 million tonnes of crude oil to China from the Middle East and Africa annually, and help Beijing reduce reliance on the Straits of Malacca, which the US Navy, could, if push came to shove, close off at any time.

Whether Indonesia sees itself taking on such a role is, of course, entirely a matter of speculation. However, it may well be that Jakarta would like to carve out a niche for itself that is commensurate with its status as Asean's largest and most populous member. President Yudhoyono sought to raise Jakarta's geopolitical profile during his first term in office, but many of his foreign policy initiatives were written off as ineffective and symbolic. Indonesia's stint on the UN Security Council achieved little of note, including on Burma.

However, Indonesian progress over the last decade has been one of the more surprising success stories in democratization, in an era when scholars such as Larry Diamond and organizations such as Freedom House are noting regression across the globe. In Southeast Asia, only Indonesia is ranked as free by Freedom House. Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are ranked as not free, while Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore are ranked as partly free.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's tentative moves toward a more active role in promoting democracy in the region have been duly noted by Burma's government-in-exile.

“We have been seeing some positive developments within the regional context from some founding members of Asean, including Indonesia in recent years [being] more outspoken concerning the human rights situation, national reconciliation and democratization process in Burma,” said Bo Hal Tint, foreign minister for the Washington-based National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma. “However, we do not see any specific and official policy towards Burma yet by any member of Asean at this point.”

Another development that held some hope was the recent establishment of an Asean human rights commission, as called for under the Asean Charter. This week, however, Asean foreign ministers endorsed terms of reference that empower the commission to promote the concept of human rights, but not to monitor or investigate abuses, let alone punish them.

This means that informal diplomacy will continue to take the place of formal legal measures under Asean. And in this regard, Indonesia is uniquely well placed to have an influence on developments in Burma.

“Indonesia is a leading member of Asean, a close friend of Burma and has access to the generals in Naypyidaw. Indonesia is also a reliable partner of the US and EU in many areas. Therefore Indonesia can

help to build a bridge between the Western powers and the generals in Burma,” said Aung Din, the executive director of the US Campaign for Burma.

Indonesia will also be instrumental in effectively applying a combination of Western sanctions and Asean’s principle of constructive engagement, according to Aung Din.

“Now, the United States is ready to offer incentives to the regime if they do positive things, such as releasing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners. Indonesia should convince the generals to take this opportunity.”

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### [Junta fails to respond to global financial crisis](#)

*Mizzima - 3 August 2009*

by Moe Thu

Myanmar’s military leadership is yet to become fully aware of the consequences of the current global financial meltdown, and thus has been unable to position the country to respond properly to the crisis, which has hit the poorest of the developing world like Burma.

Unlike regional neighbours such as Thailand and Malaysia, which have been making significant economic progress over a few decades, Burma is falling behind and probably falling apart as well, as it has not moved.

And the military leadership continues to pursue a concept that the over-50-million-populated country is immune to the global crisis.

The ruling generals think the country is in an isolation ward, which does not deal much with the outside world – especially the United States, the origin of the financial disease.

With their reasoning, the country’s economy is underdeveloped, referring to such things as no stock market, no multinational companies working, the fact that its banking sector is in a kindergarten stage, and another that the country need not worry about reserve currency as it does not have much. Official statistics show that Burma has reserve currencies valued at US\$ 4.7 billion as of 2008.

The military leadership’s reasoning is good. A low level economy like Burma is staying on the ground floor unit of a multi-storied building, so it does not get hurt when falling out of a window. It can be much more painful, when staying on the 10th floor and falling out. It could be better if and when staying in the basement where there is no window to fall out. Indeed, the junta has put the country into the basement -- below the bottom of a community structure.

What has the junta done to keep out of the financial disease? The generals apply “administrative measures” such as closure of border trade, cancel licenses for imports and exports, and rounding up foreign exchange dealers.

To prove its immunity, the military government refers to official statistics. Due to the financial crisis, many of its neighbours suffer negative GDP growth rates, while the ruling elite continue to claim that the country is growing at a high rate. That’s the leadership’s own no-problem assumption.

No problem? There is a lot of it. The isolated, underdeveloped economy could not set up an isolation ward in this increasingly globalised world. That’s because of its underground or informal or non-official economy, being linked to the outside world.

For instance, the country imports Japanese made vehicles across the border.

Meanwhile, the illustrated basement is the last place upon and around which other buildings are tumbling down, when the world is in a crisis like a catastrophic earthquake.

Suppose trying to seal the border. In the mountainous land with forests and rough terrain, it requires resources, including thousands of special forces and hundreds of guard outposts. They must be provided with sufficient funds and equipment to close the border. However, no one guarantees they are honest in performing their duties.

Also look at the sea border, to patrol the coast costs ten times more than the value of goods kept out or in.

For official statistics, it deals with the formal or official economy. It is possible to have a high growth in this economy, while the global disease brings disaster to the country's already-impoverished population. That's because the majority of Burmese people live in a non-official economy, which is – in design or not – linked to the outside world, a primary reason why Burma gets devastated by the global crisis.

A significant result is that large human costs that the country's young people and poor families have to bear in neighbouring countries and border areas – such as human trafficking and unprotected migrations. Whenever a crunch comes, the burden falls fatally on the poor and the masses at the lowest rung of society in a country like Burma. How can it be quantified? No monetary value could be placed on them and it can never be reflected in the official statistics.

So the idea that Burma need not worry about external economic shocks is alarmingly wrong. Other reasons to worry include undiversified economic structure, poor infrastructure, insufficient foreign reserves and limited administrative capacity that do not have effective shock-absorbers, resilient measures and safety nets to counter or cope with any kind of economic disturbance.

In fact, the vulnerability of Burma to get hurt by economic disturbances, especially those outside the border is the primary reason why the international community has recommended that it be given special treatment in aid, trade, debt relief and technology flows.

Given the fact that financial crises keep coming again and again in history in different parts of the world, the best thing a poor country like Burma can do is to join its neighbours and the international community in order to set up a better international financial system and its institutions.

It is not true Burma is not affected by the global crisis. Actually, it is helpless and does not have the capacity and means to protect itself, and it would be more devastating for Burma, which is, in turn, expected to take keen interest in the global financial crisis – its causes, consequences and remedies by undertaking economic reforms to become a modern, developed nation.