

Burma's Activists Still In Prison

Voice of America - 28 August 2008

More than a year after pro-democracy demonstrations were violently crushed by the Burmese military junta, protest organizers remain in prison. Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, among others, are being detained under harsh conditions for what began as a peaceful protest against skyrocketing fuel prices.

The August arrests of the student leaders inspired tens of thousands of Buddhist monks and ordinary Burmese citizens to take to the streets in cities across Burma calling for freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights in Burma. Although the demonstrations remained peaceful, the regime reacted with brutality, killing many and arresting hundreds more.

According to the human rights group Amnesty International, there are still more than two-thousand political prisoners in Burma. And there seems to be no end to the arrests. Most recently, Burmese police took Myint Aye into custody after searching his home. He is a member and founder of the group Human Rights Defenders and Promoters. Myint Aye has been arrested and imprisoned at least five previous times since 1988. In April, he was attacked on the street by two unidentified men. The assault was one of several perpetrated against opponents of the new constitution backed by the Burmese regime.

Meanwhile, Burma's most famous political prisoner and pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. Her latest period of confinement dates from May 2003. Aung San Suu Kyi has spent more than thirteen years of the last nineteen years under house arrest.

The United States renews its call for the Burmese regime to release all political prisoners and end its attempts to intimidate and silence those who seek the promotion of democracy and human rights in Burma. The U.S. also continues to urge the military junta to engage in a meaningful dialogue with Burma's democratic and ethnic minority leaders on a credible transition to democracy. And finally, the government should lift restrictions on the operations of all humanitarian organizations in Burma.

Five, last year's protesters, arrested again

Mizzima - Friday, 29 August 2008 13:06

Than Htike Oo and Myint Maung

Chiang Mai – As news of democracy icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's refusal to accept food supplies spreads among people, Burmese junta authorities are taking no chances. It rearrested five supporters of her party yesterday from their homes in Hlaing Thar Yar Township. Their fault – they took part in a prayer meeting for her release last year.

The protesters were arrested in May 2007 on their way to a pagoda for a prayer meeting for Suu Kyi's release from detention. They were released after 40 days in detention and signed pledges not to do it again. Now local authorities and Hlaing Thar Yar Police Station House Officer have arrested them again.

"My father was taken away from home at about 1 a.m. They told my father that he would be prosecuted for marching to the prayer meeting," said Ma Thin Thin Yu, daughter of U Tin Yu, who was arrested.

"My father told them that he had already signed a pledge and was not into any activity now demanding to know why he was being arrested. The inspector said they were acting on orders of higher authorities," she added.

Also arrested were Ko San Naing, Ko Soe Min Min, Ma Hla Hla Maw and Ko Yan Naing Tun (Kemmdine). Their whereabouts are not known.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) party leaders said that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been refusing food supplies since August 22.

U Nyo Ohn Myint, Foreign Affairs In-charge of NLD (Liberated Area) had said that in his opinion she was refusing food supplies to protest the planned 2010 generals and demanding direct dialogue with the junta.

The junta has produced pro-democracy activists in courts. Eleven protesters from Hlaing Thar Yar -- Ko Thant Zin Myo, Ko Kyaw Soe Win, Ko Sann Win, Ko Win Myint, Ko Aung Min Naing a.k.a. Mee Thway (charcoal) among others were produced in the Hlaing Thar Yar court. They were arrested on August 28

while they were staging a demonstration at Hledan junction, Kamayut Township protesting rising commodity prices.

"The 11 accused including Thant Zin Myo from Hlaing Thar Yar were produced at Hlaing Thar Yar court about 11 a.m. They were charged under section 505(b) (inducing crime against public tranquility), section 143 (joining unlawful assembly), sections 145 and 152 of the Criminal Code (Indian Penal Code)," Ko Thant Zin Oo from Hlaing Thar Yar said.

They are now in Insein prison and Ko Pho Phyu and some other lawyers are defending them.

Similarly Ko Dee Nyein Linn (final year Geology student of West Rangoon University) arrested on October 23 after the saffron revolution was charged under section 13(1) of the Immigration Act and sentenced to three years in prison by Insein Township Court yesterday.

"We will appeal against this verdict though there is no hope for any significant change in the verdict from a higher court. There is tremendous pressure on the judge," a person close to Ko Dee Nyein Lin said.

It was learnt that Ko Ye Myat Hein (17) (first year Mathematics student of West Campus) arrested on October 10 for joining the protest march with monks on August 25 last year, was produced before Insein court yesterday.

U.N. ♥ Burma's Generals -- II
Wall Street Journal - August 28, 2008

The United Nations has long been an enabler of Burma's tyrannical leaders. Last week it reached a new low.

Ibrahim Gambari, the U.N.'s special envoy to Burma, spent six days in the country, meeting almost exclusively with government ministers and government-backed "political parties" to discuss the junta's "road map to democracy," under which "elections" will be held in 2010. As during prior trips, the junta rejected Mr. Gambari's offer of U.N. election monitors for 2010.

The fact that Mr. Gambari is focusing on the next sham election instead of the current lack of political freedoms is a diplomatic victory for the generals. The ruling junta has already ignored international criticism for its crackdown on peaceful demonstrators last year and its mishandling of Cyclone Nargis, which killed 85,000 in May.

Things have gotten so bad that Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition National League for Democracy, is reportedly on a hunger strike. She refused to meet Mr. Gambari last week, despite his efforts to see her. Several NLD members have been quoted as saying the snub was intended to send a message about what she thinks of the U.N. mission. Mr. Gambari met twice with other members of the NLD's central committee.

Since Mr. Gambari began his job two years ago, he has visited Burma six times. The last three times, top general Than Shwe has refused to meet him. Why bother? With no real resolve at the U.N. or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to bring about political change in Burma, Mr. Gambari's visits are meaningless. The generals recognize that. It's time the U.N. did, too.

- **Indonesia says Gambari mission has not failed in Myanmar**
- **Reports of Daw Suu Kyi's refusal of daily food supplies creating serious concern**

Indonesia says Gambari mission has not failed in Myanmar
Xinhua- 27 August 2008

Indonesia considered that the UN mission in Myanmar carried out by its special envoy Ibrahim Gambari has not failed yet, supporting the envoy to continue its mission with the support of the Focus Group, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said.

President Susilo made the statement at the State Palace during his meeting with the envoy, whom left Myanmar at week end. In his latest mission, Gambari failed to establish dialogue between the military Junta and detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The president (Susilo) said that this mission only fail if all of us quit," state spokesman Dino Patti Djalal told a press conference after the meeting.

During the meeting the president, who has experienced difficulty in addressing a rebellion in the country, said that the issue of Myanmar was difficult to solve but it was a great challenge.

"As our experience in handling Aceh rebellion, there was a setback. The key to handling this business is never give up," President Susilo quoted by state spokesman as saying.

Dino said that Indonesia kept supporting U.N. mission in Myanmar especially under a difficult situation.

"President Susilo said that Indonesia wanted Gambari to keep plying his constructive role under the support of the Focus Group," he said.

Among the member of the Focus Group are Indonesia, China and Myanmar.

"The president hopes for a resumption of dialogue between the Myanmar government and Aung San Suu Kyi," said Dino.

As a member of the Focus Group, Indonesia would continue to help settledispute in Myanmar, said the spokesman.

Moreover, President Susilo would keep communicating with Myanmar leader General Than Shwe to find the best solution of the dispute, said Dino.

Reports of Daw Suu Kyi's refusal of daily food supplies creating serious concern

Asiantribune - 27 August 2008

Kuala Lumpur - The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) has expressed its deep concern over reports claiming that Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been refusing her daily food supply since 16 August 2008.

AIPMC Steering Committee based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in a press release said, "If these reports are confirmed to be true, then this is a serious concern for all. We strongly call on ASEAN leaders to intervene in this matter and ensure that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is given the necessary attention, which is highly likely needed urgently.

Press release has urged that, regional and international intervention in this matter is exceedingly essential in order to ascertain the veracity of these reports, given that Aung San Suu Kyi is denied any access to her friends, family, colleagues, the media and effectively the world outside her home.

AIPMC has requested the ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan to immediately visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and to personally ascertain her health status.

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus has further urged for a comprehensive assessment of Daw Aung Suu Kyi's health must be carried out as soon as possible.

This assessment must include all aspects of her well-being. The Sec-Gen should also look into the reasons as to why she is refusing her food supply.

Further, the AIPMC has called on the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to travel to Burma and meet with Daw Aung Suu Kyi as soon as possible. Her obvious refusal to receive the UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari during his visit last week is an indication that his mandate is failing, AIPMC said

AIPMC is of the opinion that a visit by the Sec-Gen will ensure that the United Nations plays a pivotal role in not only solving this latest crisis but also succeed in re-opening tripartite talks in Burma.

The AIPMC has also has reminded to take this opportunity to remind the United Nations and ASEAN that the continued well-being of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is vital in achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Burma.

Myanmar: Cyclone survivors look to radio

ReliefWeb - Date: 27 Aug 2008

KUNCHANGONE, 27 August 2008 (IRIN) - Squatting on the floor of his hut in the cyclone-affected Ayeryarwady Delta, Kyaw Kyaw gingerly adjusts his radio to hear the latest news from Naypyidaw, Myanmar's newly established capital.

"Radio is now part of our life," the 30-year-old said. "We don't pass a single day without listening to the weather report."

In post-cyclone Myanmar, much of which is still reeling from the effects of Cyclone Nargis, such a response is not difficult to understand.

The category four storm left nearly 140,000 dead or missing when it pummelled coastal areas on 2 and 3 May, and most residents complain they had little or no warning.

Almost four months on, reports continue to suggest that the authorities failed to adequately inform the delta's 4.2 million inhabitants of the storm's true severity on Naypyidaw Myanmar Radio - the country's only state-owned AM radio station and the only radio accessible in the delta.

This prevented many from seeking adequate shelter sooner, adding to the loss of life and property, say residents.

Radio has long been an important source of news and information in Myanmar, and many listen in for news of relief and recovery efforts.

Kyaw Kyaw, with two other families, purchased a US\$5 radio - allowing them to listen to weather broadcasts - an activity they now recognise could well save their lives in future.

However, most residents do not have a radio of their own - a fact prompting a number of private donors to quietly distribute cheap Chinese-made radios to cyclone survivors, though the distribution is largely without government approval.

Why radio?

Tint Naing, a driver from Daedayal Township, told IRIN radio was cheap and convenient, and required no more than a few batteries.

Even if electricity is available, purchasing a TV is simply out of the question, he said, and transport costs to remote parts of the delta can drive up the price of a newspaper or magazine to as much as \$1 a copy - a high price given his income of just \$30 per month.

In any case, newspapers and periodicals not only arrive late but are inaccessible to the many people who are illiterate.

Some also sees radio as a more objective source of information: "I like to listen to both state-owned and foreign [Burmese programme] radios like BBC and VOA (Voice of America)," said Lwin Maung, a 32-year old fisherman in Kunchangone who often tunes into the latter's regular Burmese broadcasts.

"I want to compare," said another resident, who regularly listens to the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), which is broadcast from Norway and is largely critical of Myanmar's military-led government.

Currently, delta residents can only access Naypyidaw Myanmar Radio, which is available nationwide and broadcasts programmes on the relief and recovery effort, as well as weather forecasts three times a day.

The country's only two FM stations - in Yangon and Mandalay - have only limited coverage and cannot be heard in the delta.

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)

Suu Kyi 'on hunger strike'

Independent.co.uk - Tuesday, 26 August 2008

By Andrew Buncombe, Asia Correspondent

Supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi believe the imprisoned Burmese democracy leader may have launched a hunger strike over the military regime's refusal to hold talks about democratic reforms.

Members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) said the 63-year-old had last accepted a weekly delivery of food on 15 August and told the young party members who delivered it not to bring any more. An NLD spokesman in Burma said he could not confirm whether she had stopped eating but that bags of food delivered to a checkpoint outside her house in Rangoon had not been picked up.

"If Aung San Suu Kyi continues to refuse food from her comrades, her health will be of serious concern," the NLD's office in neighbouring Thailand, said in a statement. "Two people living with [her] are also refusing food. The international community's immediate action is necessary."

The Nobel Laureate has spent 13 of the last 19 years either in prison or under house arrest. Since May 2003 she has been detained at her lakeside home where she lives with her assistant and another female party member. She was last seen in public when she briefly appeared at the gate of her heavily guarded house as a crowd of Buddhist monks gathered outside during last September's democracy demonstrations.

Her party colleagues said Ms Suu Kyi recently told the regime she wished to renew negotiations in order to help bring about national reconciliation. She also said she wanted a satellite dish installed at her home and for her assistant, Khin Win, to be able to leave whenever she wants.

At the same time, she last week cancelled a series of meetings with the UN's special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, during his six day visit to Burma. The Nigerian diplomat was criticised by Burma's political opposition and accused of trying to appease the country's military regime rather than push it towards making democratic reforms

The junta that has ruled Burma for two decades is determined to ensure Ms Suu Kyi remains in detention. It knows that if she were set free she would be the only person around which the public might rally in sufficient numbers to challenge the military authorities.

To those ends, in May the regime extended her current detention term by another year. They have also severely restricted the number of people allowed to see her. While her doctor and lawyer were permitted to visit her last week, that was her first medical check-up since February and the first meeting with her legal representative since 2004.

The military junta yesterday claimed that the detained politician had not started a hunger strike. "It is just rumours, it is not true," a government official told the Agence France-Presse. "We have not got any political demands from her."

But campaigners in the West said it was possible that Ms Suu Kyi had decided to turn to such drastic measures. "There have been rumours like this before which have turned out not to be true, but given the way Gambari seems to favour the regime one could imagine that she is feeling very frustrated," said Mark Farmaner of the Burma Campaign UK. "Gambari does not have the respect of the [military regime] and is seen as biased by the democracy movement. It is hard to see how he can carry on as UN envoy."

In 1990 Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD won an overwhelming victory in national elections. But the military authorities ignored the result and began rounding up political opponents. Human rights groups believe that up to 200 people may have been killed by the authorities when they crushed last year's demonstrations. Hundreds of political prisoners and Buddhist monks remain in jail.

ASEAN & UN: Address reports of Daw Suu Kyi's refusal of daily food supplies

ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY MYANMAR CAUCUS

<http://www.aseanmp.org>

For Immediate Release: 27 August 2008

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) is deeply concerned about reports claiming that Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been refusing her daily food supply since 16 August 2008.

If these reports are confirmed to be true, then this is a serious concern for all. We strongly call on ASEAN leaders to intervene in this matter and ensure that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is given the necessary attention, which is highly likely needed urgently.

Regional and international intervention in this matter is exceedingly essential in order to ascertain the veracity of these reports, given that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is denied any access to her friends, family, colleagues, the media and effectively the world outside her home.

AIPMC requests that the ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan immediately visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and to personally ascertain her health status. A comprehensive assessment of Daw Aung Suu Kyi's health must be carried out as soon as possible. This assessment must include all aspects of her well-being. The Sec-Gen should also look into the reasons as to why she is refusing her food supply.

Further, the AIPMC calls on the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to travel to Burma and meet with Daw Aung Suu Kyi as soon as possible. Her obvious refusal to receive the UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari during his visit last week is an indication that his mandate is failing.

AIPMC is of the opinion that a visit by the Sec-Gen will ensure that the United Nations plays a pivotal role in not only solving this latest crisis but also succeed in re-opening tripartite talks in Burma.

The AIPMC takes this opportunity to remind the United Nations and ASEAN that the continued well-being of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is vital in achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Burma.

Released by the AIPMC Steering Committee

Burmese Foreign Minister to Attend Bimstec in New Delhi

Narinjara News - 8/27/2008

Dhaka: Burmese Foreign Minister U Nyan Win is expected to attend the foreign minister level Bimstec meeting to be held in New Delhi, India, on Friday, 29 August, said a report.

The meeting is intended to forge stronger ties and map out transportation and trade links. Foreign ministers from Bangladesh, Burma, India, Thailand, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand will attend the meeting.

According to the report, the ministers from the seven Bimstec countries will be discussing methods of cooperation in 13 sectors, including transportation, energy, tourism, terrorism, trade, and investment.

The meeting will also be used to highlight India's proposal to establish a joint weather and climate center, as well as an energy center.

The issues of global climate change and the food and energy crises will also be discussed.

Bimstec, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, was formed by five countries - Thailand, India, Burma, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka - in 1997. Nepal and Bhutan later joined the group as members. #

Myanmar junta denies Suu Kyi on hunger strike

AFP – 26 August 2008

YANGON () — Myanmar's ruling junta denied Tuesday that detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi had gone on hunger strike, but rumours persisted after she apparently refused to receive food deliveries.

Exiled Myanmar dissidents in India and Thailand reported that the Nobel Peace Prize winner last accepted fresh food supplies on August 15.

"It is just rumours, it is not true," said a Myanmar government official who refused to be named. "We have not got any (political) demands from her."

Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), said they were unable to confirm or deny the report as they were not allowed to keep in regular touch with their leader, who is under house arrest in Yangon.

"We haven't heard anything about it. So we cannot confirm these rumours as we have no contact with her at all," said NLD spokesman Win Naing.

The rumours were persistent enough to spread to Western diplomatic circles, with one diplomat who refused to be named telling AFP: "We are trying to know more. The only person who has seen her is the doctor."

Aung San Suu Kyi's doctor and lawyer were permitted to visit her on August 17 when she was given a medical checkup, her first since February.

One exiled opposition party based on the Thai-Myanmar border said it had heard Aung San Suu Kyi's weekly food supplies were last accepted on August 15, but were turned away on August 22.

Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of the past 19 years confined to her lakeside Yangon home.

Her latest detention began more than five years ago, and she has been allowed little contact with the outside world.

She met her lawyer, Kyi Win, twice in August but that was their first meeting since 2004.

Last week the junta said Aung San Suu Kyi refused to meet visiting UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari, and state television aired images of his two aides standing in vain outside her compound waiting for a response.

Gambari also failed to meet junta head Than Shwe, and left the country on Saturday with few results.

In a bid to soothe international outrage after a violent crackdown on anti-junta protests last September, the generals appointed a liaison, labour minister Aung Kyi, to negotiate with Aung San Suu Kyi.

But the pair have not met since January, when the opposition leader complained about the slow pace of their talks.

Aung San Suu Kyi is known as "The Lady" throughout Myanmar, where she remains a potent symbol of the struggle to end military rule despite being largely silenced by the ruling generals.

The NLD won national elections in 1990 but the junta, which has ruled Myanmar since 1962, never allowed it to assume power.

UN Denies Its Envoy's Visit to Myanmar Was Worthless

Bloomberg - August 26, 2008 02:33 EDT

By Paul Tighe and Daniel Ten Kate

The United Nations rejected criticism by Myanmar's opposition party that last week's visit by envoy Ibrahim Gambari was worthless, saying it was part of the UN's objective of holding regular talks with the junta.

The visits are a "process, not an event," Marie Okabe, deputy spokeswoman for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, said in New York yesterday. "One should not make a judgment on the process based on each individual visit."

Gambari didn't meet with Myanmar's military leader Senior General Than Shwe or Aung San Suu Kyi, the head of the opposition National League for Democracy. The envoy should be more effective and negotiate with the junta and the opposition, Nyan Win, the NLD's spokesman, said by phone from Myanmar yesterday.

Gambari was making his fourth visit since the junta deployed soldiers last September to end the most serious pro-democracy demonstrations in 20 years in the country formerly known as Burma. The U.S. says the military government has failed to meet pledges made after the unrest to pursue national reconciliation and open talks with Suu Kyi.

"Mr. Gambari has told us he has had extensive and open discussions with the government and other interlocutors, which in itself is necessary in order to broaden and deepen the process as expected by the secretary-general," Okabe said, according to a UN transcript. Ban intends to return to Myanmar for a visit "when conditions are right," she said.

Political Body

Gambari met with the Union Solidarity and Development Association, a political body set up by the junta that will probably represent the military's interests in elections scheduled for 2010.

"We told Mr. Gambari to do his work, his job and that meeting with other bodies is useless," Nyan Win said yesterday. Opposition parties may not support more visits by Gambari in the future, he said.

Suu Kyi, 63, who has been under house arrest for 12 of the 18 years since the NLD won elections that weren't recognized by the military, didn't show up for a meeting with Gambari on Aug. 20. Nyan Win said he didn't know why she didn't attend.

Other opposition members said Suu Kyi was either ill or sending a message she was unhappy with the UN's efforts to promote talks with the regime.

"Suu Kyi didn't show up because Mr. Gambari is going around with the military's agenda and he's being exploited by the military," said Zin Linn, a spokesman for the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, a government-in-exile formed by winners of the 1990 election, said yesterday.

State of Health

Myanmar's government made the arrangements for the meeting with Gambari, Okabe said at her briefing.

"To his regret, the meeting did not take place," she said. "We are not going to speculate as to why she was not able to attend."

The junta denied that Suu Kyi is on hunger strike, Agence France-Presse reported from the former capital, Yangon, today. The reports are rumors that aren't true, the news agency cited an unidentified government official as saying.

The NLD is "very concerned" about Suu Kyi's health "because we have no access to her," Nyan Win said last week by phone from Myanmar.

Suu Kyi, who underwent gynecological surgery in 2003 and needed treatment in the hospital in 2006, was suffering from low blood pressure and was unable to leave her bed, Japan's Nikkei news agency reported at the time, citing an unidentified person close to the military regime.

The military has ruled the nation of 47 million people since 1962.

Ghosts amid the wreckage in Myanmar

IHT - Monday, August 25, 2008

By Seth Mydans

BANGKOK: Nearly four months after the cyclone, the Irrawaddy Delta in Myanmar is a flat, dark expanse of ruin populated by dazed survivors, unburied bodies and visions of wandering, moaning ghosts.

The region seems to have avoided mass starvation and epidemic, and people are rebuilding their precarious lives in this vast and often flooded marshland where the margin between survival and death has always been thin.

Within that thin margin, recent visitors say, many of the survivors seem to have lost their spark of life, and some of the dead seem not yet to have disappeared as they haunt the minds of those they left behind.

"There is a weariness in people's eyes here," said a photographer who has been chronicling the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which struck on May 3. He spoke on condition of anonymity because access to the region is forbidden to foreign journalists.

"There's a lost feeling that you get," he said. "People are physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted. Some of them don't have the strength to start over."

After an international furor over the government's refusal to admit foreign relief workers, a tightly controlled system has been put in place, and aid is reaching much of the area, where the United Nations says 2.4 million people were affected.

The cyclone left 138,000 people dead or missing and 800,000 homeless, according to UN figures, after tremendous winds and a storm surge that resembled a tsunami.

It leveled most of the fragile thatch homes in its path, uprooted trees, swept away the livestock and fishing boats that provided a livelihood and polluted many rice fields with salt.

For those fields that survived, this year's planting season has now passed, and experts say it may be more than a year before many people see their next decent harvest.

Although some houses are being rebuilt and some fields are being worked, the delta remains a vista of ruin and debris, where human and animal bones and the last decomposing bodies still cluster at the edges of waterways.

Fantastical tales circulate among the survivors, the photographer said, weaving a tapestry of stories from this world and the next.

There is the tale of the boy who survived by clinging to the back of a crocodile, and the story of the boatload of people stranded at low tide who sat waiting on the silt for the water to rise, surrounded by stranded corpses.

There is the story of the mother who was reunited with her baby after it was swept away in a washtub, and the story of the woman who gave birth as the cyclone hit and pulled her baby from the water by its umbilical cord.

And there are the stories of wandering ghosts, whose cries for help can be heard at night in haunted places that no villager dares to enter.

Among these phantoms and traumas, international relief workers have become the survivors' lifeline, delivering aid to all but the most remote parts of the delta.

More than 1,800 visas have been issued to these workers, aid officials say, though access to the hard-hit delta is slowed by an ever-more-complicated process of permissions and paperwork.

By now, most survivors have received aid, said Andrew Kirkwood, country director for the aid group Save the Children. "But very few people have received enough assistance to get them through the next three months, and almost no one has received enough assistance to enable them to rebuild their lives."

He said the reconstruction of schools, clinics and other infrastructure, which should be well under way by now, still lagged because of delays in delivering basic emergency assistance.

The xenophobic military junta that holds Myanmar in its grip prevented large-scale foreign aid deliveries for the first three crucial weeks after the cyclone, then loosened its controls only gradually and partially. It never did allow U.S. and French naval vessels to bring in tons of aid and equipment.

But despite the early demands from around the world that the government permit open deliveries of aid, the United Nations says that nearly half the assistance pledged by foreign donors has yet to appear. Recently it said it had received \$339 million in international donations, a shortfall of \$300 million.

But life has always been bitter for the people of the Irrawaddy Delta, with 8 out of 10 families living in poverty even before the cyclone, according to Save the Children.

For many people, the harshness of life today may not be so very different from the harshness of the life they have always known.

"They live on a thin line, every day of every year of every decade," the photographer said. "And that is what they are doing now. They just keep going, day by day by day."

Red Alert; People of Myanmar still struggle in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis

Reuters AlertNet - 25 Aug 2008 10:10:59 GMT

Source: [Irish Red Cross - Ireland \(Crois Dhearg na hÉireann\)](#)

Reuters and AlertNet are not responsible for the content of this article or for any external internet sites. The views expressed are the author's alone.

Imagine standing in your town while winds exceed 190kph? That day, the storm ripped through the delta city for more than 10 hours. 95% of homes were destroyed, in one village alone the death toll rose to 10,000. Homes were flattened, trees uprooted, power lines down, water and fuel supplies destroyed. In the early hours after the storm, a network of 25,000 Myanmar Red Cross members stood among the devastation, distributing emergency aid and bringing urgent medical attention to the wounded.

DUBLINER Joe Lowry reported live from the disaster zone, "We have already airlifted 14 tonnes of humanitarian aid, distributing tarpaulins, drinking water, clothing, food and hygiene kits to the worst affected areas. Children, the elderly, the sick and injured are the most vulnerable".

President of the Myanmar Red Cross Society, Prof Dr Tha Hla Shwe spoke how he was inspired by stories of dedicated Red Cross volunteers when he said, "Many of our own staff and volunteers have been affected with personal tragedy and hardship yet they continue to come to support the day to day operations of the Red Cross in our country."

Since the disaster, thanks to your support, over 327,500 people have received aid from the Red Cross Movement but with the disaster affecting 2.4 million, our work has only just begun. Please give what you can today and let us reach those people who need our help today.

[Any views expressed in this article are those of the writer and not of Reuters.]

Myanmar official media hail diplomatic establishment anniversary with Thailand

Xinhua - Aug. 26, 2008

by Feng Yinqiu

YANGON () -- Myanmar official media hailed on Tuesday the 60th anniversary of the country's establishment of diplomatic relations with Thailand, calling for further strengthening of the existing friendly ties between the two neighbors.

"It is our belief that through our joint efforts, we will be able to enhance the existing friendly relations and cooperation between our two countries for the common interest of our peoples as well as for promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region," the New Light of Myanmar said in its editorial.

Noting that the friendly relations established over 60 years ago are now becoming stronger and bringing common interest to peoples of the two nations, the editorial said bilateral cooperation in multilateral for a such as in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), ACMECS (Ayeyawaddy-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy) and GMS (Greater Mekong Subregion) reflect the common

resolve to improve the lives of the peoples of two countries and to ensure peaceful development and prosperity of the region as a whole.

Warning that global nations are now being beset by many unconventional challenges which no country alone can cope with, the editorial firmly believed that if Thailand and Myanmar work hand-in-hand they will be able to overcome any difficulties.

In April-May this year, in return to the March visit made by his Thai counterpart Samak Sundaravej, Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein toured Thailand, paving way for furthering bilateral economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.

During Thein Sein's trip, an agreement on promotion and protection of investments between the two countries was signed.

Discussions between the two governments during the visit covered bilateral cooperation in a number of sectors such as narcotic drug eradication, hydropower, energy, mining, agriculture and industry as well as construction of a deep-sea port in Myanmar's southern port city of Dawei, the road to Mawlamyine through Myawaddy-Thingan Nyinaung, the railroad and motor road linking Kanchanaburi and Dawei and the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway.

Myanmar-Thailand bilateral cooperative ties have maintained a good momentum in recent years with Thailand playing a key role in Myanmar's economic development as Thailand has become Myanmar's biggest foreign investor and trading partner.

With huge investment of 6.311 billion U.S. dollars pouring in Myanmar's electric power sector alone, Thailand's investment has accounted for 7.3 billion dollars, or over 53 percent, of Myanmar's total foreign investment received.

The Thai investment prompted Myanmar's contracted foreign investment to hit 14.736 billion U.S. dollars in 19 years as of the end of 2007 since the country opened to such investment in late 1988.

Thailand also stood as Myanmar's top trading partner as well as top exporting country during the fiscal year 2007-08, which ended in March, with a bilateral trade volume of 3.205 billion U.S. dollars, of which Myanmar's export to Thailand amounted to 2.823 billion dollars, while its import from Thailand 382 million dollars, according to Myanmar official statistics. Myanmar gained a trade surplus with Thailand for exporting natural gas during the year.

On the occasion of the Myanmar-Thai diplomatic establishment anniversary, Thai Foreign Minister Tej Bunnag visited Myanmar, while Myanmar Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint toured Thailand last weekend.

Harn Yawnghwe: UN efforts deserve support

Shan Herald Agency for News, 25 August 2008

Current UN operations in Burma, despite varied outcomes, are worth solid support from the people of Burma whose needs are such any assistance, big or small, is a blessing, according to Brussels-based Burma activist Harn Yawnghwe.

"The UN is the one of the few friends we have," he said yesterday.

Speaking to the meeting of border-based Tai Coordination Committee (TCC) that was formed last January as part of the joint struggle to set up a Shan State representative body, he spoke highly of Ibrahim Gambari, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and Tomas Ojea Quintana, the new UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, who had recently concluded their separate visits to the military-ruled country.

"Mr Gambari is considered an old hand in dealing with military dictators, his country also having been under military rule," said 60-year Harn, Director of Euro Burma Office (EBO). "Mr Quintana is also a veteran human rights activist. They deserve all the support and advice that we can give."

Both have been lambasted by activists and opposition politicians alike for their "soft approach" to Burma's ruling generals.

Harn urged the TCC members, led by Peunkham Payakwong and Ms Hseng NOUNG, to consider the consequences of the alternative. "As long as the UN has a role in the Burma affairs, there is hope," he pondered. "Once it runs out of role, the country will become practically out of sight and out of hearing to the rest of the world."

Harn Yawng Hwe is one of the surviving sons of the Sao Shwe Thaik, former Prince of Yawng Hwe and later the first President of Burma (1948-1952). He died under mysterious circumstances a few months after being detained at Insein following the 1962 military coup d'etat. His late mother Sao Hearn Hkam, the Mahadevi of Yawng Hwe, also served as a Member of Parliament and later President of the Shan State War Council (1964-68).

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No top-rank talks for Burma envoy

BBC News – 23 August 2008

The United Nations envoy on Burma has left the country without meeting either its top military ruler or detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ibrahim Gambari had extended his visit in the hope of securing higher-level meetings to press for political reform.

But he was not invited to meet Gen Than Shwe in the remote capital Nay Pyi Taw.

Ms Suu Kyi, meanwhile, failed to attend scheduled talks with the UN envoy on Wednesday, fuelling speculation she is unhappy with his lack of progress.

Ibrahim Gambari was on his fourth visit to the military-ruled nation since anti-government protests were brutally crushed in September 2007.

He has been pressing for talks between Burma's generals and the pro-democracy movement.

Aung San Suu Kyi and a military liaison officer, Aung Kyi, have held five meetings. But they have not met since January and their talks have yielded no progress.

'Not much'

During his six-day visit, Mr Gambari did meet Prime Minister Thein Sein, but he was not given an audience with top leader Than Shwe.

"He said he raised some points with the government and hoped to return. In terms of concrete outcomes, there was not much," Reuters news agency quoted a Western diplomat as saying.

Ms Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, proved equally elusive - despite the fact that she has met Mr Gambari on previous visits.

After she missed the Wednesday meeting he sent two aides to her house on Friday to try to secure last-minute talks, but they received no response, reports said.

It could be a sign that the Nobel Peace Prize winner is unhappy with the UN's failure to cajole the junta to reform, analysts say.

In recent months Burma's leaders have tightened control over the South East Asian nation.

Three months ago, amid the devastation of Cyclone Nargis, they forced through a new constitution that further cements their hold on power. They have also extended Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest for another year.

The pro-democracy leader led the National League for Democracy to a landslide victory in elections in 1990, but the party has never been allowed to take office.

Thai PM Says West Uses Myanmar's Suu Kyi As Political Tool

AFP -25 August 2008

BANGKOK --Thailand's prime minister on Monday criticized Western nations for pinning their efforts to bring democracy to Myanmar on the release of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Samak Sundaravej met Ibrahim Gambari, the UN's top envoy to Myanmar, on Monday and told the diplomat that efforts to engage the military regime would be more productive if the Nobel peace prize winner was left off the agenda.

"Europe uses Aung San Suu Kyi as a tool. If it's not related to Aung San Suu Kyi, you can have deeper discussions with Myanmar," he told reporters after the Bangkok meeting.

"Aung San Suu Kyi is one thing. The (international community) should talk about how to bring democracy in Myanmar and focus on the constitution and the elections," he added.

Samak said he would relay that message in a meeting with United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon in New York next month.

Samak said that as the current chair of regional bloc the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or Asean, Thailand would try to persuade the junta to allow observers at the promised election.

China to deepen defence ties with Myanmar

Press Trust Of India / Beijing August 25, 2008

China today expressed keen interest to deepen its military cooperation with Myanmar so as to "safeguard regional stability".

Stating this, Chinese Defence Minister General Liang Guanglie said China and Myanmar, as close and friendly neighbours, have increased cooperation in political, economic, cultural and military affairs in recent years.

The Chinese defence ministry is ready to work with Myanmar to further expand bilateral cooperation, so as to help the two nations' military building and to safeguard regional peace and stability, Liang told Tin Aye, chief of Defence Industries of Myanmar.

The Chinese Defence Minister also praised Myanmar's adherence to the one-China policy regarding on the Taiwan issue.

Liang also expressed his sympathy toward the Myanmar people in the cyclone-hit region, Xinhua news agency reported.

Tin Aye said Myanmar values its relations with China, hoping that the two nations would further enhance friendly cooperation.

Myanmar would continue to support the one-China policy, he reiterated.

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- **Myanmar opposition criticizes UN envoy**
 - **Myanmar stresses continued implementation of 7-step roadmap**
 - **Burma monk disrobed over street protests**
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Myanmar opposition criticizes UN envoy

Associated Press – 24 August 2008

YANGON, Myanmar: The party of the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi accused a UN special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, on Sunday of wasting his time during a visit to Myanmar, talking about controversial elections with military rulers while failing to end the political stalemate in the country.

The unusually harsh criticism came a day after Gambari ended a six-day mission to Myanmar without meeting Aung San Suu Kyi or the country's top general.

Gambari told diplomats Saturday that it was Aung San Suu Kyi and not the government who had refused the meeting. The news adds to speculation that the Nobel Peace Prize laureate may be dissatisfied with the so-far unsuccessful efforts by the United Nations to bring about change in the military-ruled nation.

On Sunday, the spokesman for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League For Democracy, Nyan Win, had little good to say about Gambari's mission. He criticized Gambari for failing to meet the country's leader, General Than Shwe, and being unable get any commitments from the junta to start talks with the opposition on national reconciliation.

He also criticized Gambari for offering to help the junta prepare for planned 2010 elections. Aung San Suu Kyi's party, known as the NLD, has criticized the planned election, which follows a constitutional referendum earlier this year that critics say was neither free nor fair.

"We have made very clear to the UN envoy that the mission should not discuss the upcoming 2010 elections, as the NLD does not recognize the military-backed constitution," Nyan Win said. "The UN envoy was wasting his time on matters that he was not supposed to deal with."

Diplomats who met with Gambari echoed the concerns of the NLD, saying that he had achieved very little.

Gambari's troubles are part of a larger struggle by the United Nations to persuade the junta to change its ways.

UN envoys have visited the country nearly 40 times since 1990, along with other senior officials, while the UN General Assembly has passed numerous resolutions calling for change.

Myanmar stresses continued implementation of 7-step roadmap

Xinhua - 24 August 2008

Myanmar Minister of Information Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan has stressed that the government will continue the implementation of its seven-step roadmap as a transitional government in accord with the mandate of the people, the official newspaper New Light of Myanmar reported Sunday.

According to an article of the new constitution ratified in late last May through the national referendum, "the existing government has become the transitional government mandated to implement the provisions of the constitution before the commencing date of the first session of the Union Parliament on which the constitution will come into force," Kyaw Hsan, who is also leader of the government's spokes authoritative team, told United Nations Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari during the latter's just-ended six-day Myanmar visit.

Kyaw Hsan said the government will not tolerate any attempt to jeopardize or harm the constitution and the process.

Noting that a multi-party general election, which is the fifth step of the roadmap, will be held in 2010, he said laws and rules concerning the establishment, organizing and entering elections of political parties will be enacted.

"Those in favor of or against the government and the constitution will have rights equally in accordance with law," he also said, adding that it is designed to ensure all inclusiveness.

He signaled that talks with Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest will be held in line with the previous procedures.

He emphasized three aspirations of the people-- peace and stability, development of the country and earning of livelihood in accordance with the law while marching on speedily towards the desired goal of democracy.

He hoped for full cooperation from the UN in the implementation of the government's roadmap.

As reported by the official newspaper, thanking the Myanmar government for its full cooperation, Gambari said he was pleased with the government's re-affirmation for regularizing relations with the UN Secretariat, calling for emergence of obvious results during every trip.

Burma monk disrobed over street protests

Independent, UK - 23 August 2008

The Burmese monk who helped organise the huge street demonstrations against the country's military rulers has been disrobed by the authorities in contravention of Buddhist traditions.

Ashin Gambira, who was arrested last year following the so-called Saffron Revolution, told his lawyer that after he was detained, the authorities stripped him of his status as a monk. His lawyer, Aung Thein, told the Irrawaddy Magazine that the disrobing was carried out without observance of Buddhist traditions and with no consultation with senior monks.

"Ashin Gambira said the authorities, under Buddhist rules, had no right to disrobe him or to charge him with criminal offenses," said the lawyer.

The 29-year-old monk, leader of the All Burma Monks' Alliance, appeared this week at a court inside Rangoon's notorious Insein jail where he was charged with a series of offences including contacting banned organisations and having illegal contacts with foreigners. His family have said they believe that if he is convicted of any treasonable offences he will either be executed or jailed for life.

- **Burmese junta prevents Christians and Buddhists from providing help, increasing censorship**
 - **Ethnic opposition leaders not allowed to meet UN Envoy**
 - **Oppressed Burmese deserve better from the world**
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Burmese junta prevents Christians and Buddhists from providing help, increasing censorship

AsiaNews- 20 August 2008

The military feels increasingly threatened by the growing solidarity and collaboration between believers of various religions. The generals are increasing controls, exploiting refugee labour and trafficking in international aid.

Yangon – "Burmese Christians and Buddhist monks work, pray, engage in joint efforts and promote joint initiatives on behalf of the population," especially for those who lost everything as a result of cyclone Nargis. This element of union and collaboration represents a "threat to the ruling military junta" which is trying "to prevent believers of various religions from coming together"; it is doing so by increasing controls across the country, including churches, temples, streets and even means of transportation, this according to a source that has remained anonymous for security reasons.

"The government has used refugees, sheltered in centres set up by the Church, to rebuild roads and structures damaged by the cyclone," he told AsiaNews.

Even today, four months after the event, around Yangon there are "families that survive as best they can without any certain access to food or water".

Help by Christians and Buddhists is "fundamental" in their life, but the government is "afraid of this joint commitment" because it could foster other "popular revolts that might overthrow the ruling dictatorship."

Burmese are going through "an increasingly bad economic crisis" because of rising prices, especially "basic items like food." For many of them the only meal of the day is "a bowl of rice", the nation's basic food staple, in many cases coming from aid provided by the international community.

According to the source the military junta is seizing supplies "without distributing directly to the population." People "must earn their daily meal by working for the dictatorship. A bowl of rice is the puny reward they get in exchange for it."

Cyclone Nargis disrupted the national economy, especially that of the Irrawaddy Delta region, where most farmers had to abandon water-covered fields and destroyed farm equipment, turning to fishing which at

least can provide a daily meal, at least on the short run. The country runs the risk however of finding itself without grain reserves.

According to government data, confirmed by the United Nations and ASEAN, the cyclone wiped out more 16,200 hectares of harvest. Damages to machinery and equipment are around US\$ 4 billion.

Despite the extremely urgent situation, the government “prefers to arrest volunteers and send out spies and policemen to every corner of the country. We have many cases in which aid was not handed out or was sent back to the sender only because it came from the international community,” said the source.

“Many monks have been prevented from helping out in reconstruction. Instead the government continues to argue obstinately that problems are just a Western pretext to undermine its power. This is the propaganda spun by the military junta to cover up Burma’s real situation.”

The bloody repression of the monks’ revolt in September 2007, the growing economic crisis and the possible observance of the 20th anniversary of the massacre of pro-democracy activists on 8 August 1988 worsened the “military’s obsession with security,” pushing them to snuff out any voice that opposed the regime.

“Since 1 August cities are under tight control; temples are patrolled around the clock. No commemoration of the slaughter of 3,000 people in August 1988 was possible.”

Ethnic opposition leaders not allowed to meet UN Envoy

Independent Mon News Agency – 21 August 2008

Ethnic opposition party leaders have not been allowed to meet United Nations special envoy, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari who is in Burma on a five-day visit, though ethnic leaders demanded a meeting.

Twelve ethnic opposition leaders from the UNLD sent a letter to the Burmese government authorities and the UN office in Rangoon for a meeting with the envoy.

“We are not allowed to meet him. The junta only invited the envoy to meet ethnic political parties who would support its election,” said Nai Ngwe Thein, Vice Chairman of Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF).

“However we sent a letter to UN about our stand on the elections,” he added.

Twelve ethnic opposition parties, who won some seats in the 1990 elections demanded that the UN recognize the 1990 elections and not to recognize the May 10 referendum. They would boycott the coming election like the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The Zomi National Congress, the Chin National League for Democracy, the Mon National Democratic Front, the Arakan League for Democracy, the Karen National Congress for Democracy, the Kachin State National Congress for Democracy, and the Kayah State all Nationalities League for Democracy and four other ethnic parties made the demand during UN Special Human Rights Rapporteur Tomás Ojea Quintana’s visit to Burma in the first week of August.

However they were not allowed a meeting and were interrogated by the special branch of the police.

The regime arranged for the UN envoy to meet representatives of Union Pa-O National Organization, National Unity Party and a Karen ceasefire group which support the government’s election plans.

Oppressed Burmese deserve better from the world

Thaung Htun

Bangkok Post – 22 August 2008

The Burmese people have had to maintain a sense of optimism after 46 years of military dictatorship. But, as the first anniversary of the Saffron Revolution approaches and in the midst of yet another visit by the United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari to Rangoon, optimism is waning. The international

community has expressed its commitment to promoting democracy in Burma, as this latest visit by Mr Gambari underlines. However, commitment in its expression is easily undermined by its failure in practice.

For instance, strong words in the wake of the devastating Cyclone Nargis in May against the inhuman intransigence of the military leaders, has not yet ensured that aid is getting to the most needy Burmese.

Millions of aid dollars have been creamed off and pocketed and still aid workers are blocked from gaining full access to many of those hardest hit in the Irrawaddy delta.

This inaction is the more disappointing when placed next to the non-movement from global bodies like the United Nations on the ridiculous referendum held in May. The vote, held in areas still recovering from Nargis and carried out amidst widespread vilification and oppression, resulted in a constitution which seeks to guarantee the rule of the junta and confirms the iron rule of the military as a legally validated political culture.

Yet, still the UN has issued no statements or commentary, let alone a heated condemnation and censure motion as might be expected.

Finally, some international actors have extended tacit support for the "full" election to be held in 2010, as the military's own self-created roadmap decrees. That this election is expected to take place in the current climate of intimidation and fear, as well as against a backdrop of a patently undemocratic and frankly absurd constitution, appears not to have motivated enough international actors to move to quash the process and to replace it with an internationally sanctioned and supported free and fair election.

This somewhat squeamish approach leads to a process which is actually aiding the consolidation of military rule, rather than seeking an all-inclusive democratic process. The ruling SPDC has proven that it is no longer relevant as a responsible national body, and holds the mandate of its governmental legitimacy, won by the direst acts of terrorism, in a tense grip of state violence on a massive scale.

Yet, it basks in the warmth of validity based on its position and power, as defined by realpolitik international agendas.

Meantime, Burma's democracy movement is being forced into a corner. Groups such as ours, which represents the Members of Parliament elected in the last full and free election, in 1990, cannot hope to operate in such circumstances. If democracy is a flower, then it would appear it is expected to grow in soil so poor that nothing of the kind has ever grown there before.

It is clear that a number of major points need to be addressed prior to any election in Burma.

First, an ongoing dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, the outright winners of the 1990 election, must be opened and maintained.

This is difficult, if not impossible to achieve, without her release from house detention. This leads to the second condition: the release of all political prisoners.

Third, there needs to be a convention established to construct a democratic election process. This must involve all relevant parties, such as the NLD, ethnic groups and the military.

Among the agenda items for this convention would be the building of an interim constitution and the construction of a national unity government to oversee the pre-election period.

Fourth, Burma needs an economic development forum to raise issues of poverty and to seek measures for alleviating it.

Finally, a regular channel of open communication must be opened between such bodies as the UN and appropriate actors inside Burma, to ensure that access to dialogue is never used as a weapon again. A permanent presence in Rangoon, say of a UN mediation centre, would aid this process.

It is imperative that Mr Gambari pushes for these goals as his efforts to return democracy to Burma will falter should they be ignored.

A year since the birth of the Saffron Revolution, the UN and other international interlocutors have a long way to go.

For Burmese, the distance seems ever longer. So far, the only conclusion is that the international community has failed Burma. As time goes on, failure becomes an option that is no longer tenable. The people of Burma deserve better. The world must do better.

Thaung Htun is Representative for UN Affairs of the Burma UN Service Office, National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, Burma's government-in-exile.

Two quakes hit China-Myanmar border in quick succession

AFP - 21 August 2008

BEIJING () — Two earthquakes shook the border between China and Myanmar on Thursday in quick succession, the US Geological Survey said, a day after a tremor hit the same area.

The quakes, measuring 5.0 and 5.9, struck less than four minutes apart more than 200 kilometres (125 miles) from the city of Dali, a popular tourist spot in southwest China.

They happened 61 and 36 kilometres respectively from Myitkyina in northern Myanmar early Thursday evening, according to a statement on the USGS website.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the region, which is mountainous and sparsely populated, China's official Xinhua news agency said.

The epicentre of the quakes, which both hit at a depth of 10 kilometres, were less than 30 kilometres away from a 5.3-magnitude tremor in the area on Wednesday morning.

A massive quake hit southwest China's Sichuan province bordering on Yunnan in May, leaving nearly 70,000 dead, with about 18,000 people still missing.

UN ends Bangkok "air bridge" to Burma

Bangkok Post – 22 August 2008

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) on Friday shut down its "relief air bridge" to Burma after delivering 4 million kilogrammes of cargo from Bangkok to the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

Thai authorities were quick to offer Don Mueang, Bangkok's old international airport, as a logistics hub for the massive relief effort for neighbouring Burma in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which hit the impoverished country in May, leaving about 140,000 dead or missing and another 2.4 million badly in need of food, medicine and shelter.

The international relief effort was initially stalled by Burma's ruling military junta, which was reluctant to allow an unhindered influx of cargo and foreign aid workers into the cloistered country.

By establishing a logistics hub in Bangkok, the United Nations was able to eventually speed up air deliveries to the cyclone victims in Burma once the regime eased their restrictions.

"For the WFP and the wider UN and NGO community, the air hub was critical for the provision of vital relief supplies to the people of Myanmar," said Tony Banbury, Asia regional director for the WFP.

In the three months since the opening of the Don Mueang humanitarian air bridge on May 24, 232 relief flights were dispatched to Burma, he said.

Nearly 4 million kilogrammes of cargo were delivered, including shelter materials, medical supplies, mosquito nets and water-purification equipment.

Ten chartered WFP helicopters were also sent through the Bangkok air bridge, arriving in Yangon in early June, where they flew relief supplies into the heart of the disaster zone in the Irrawaddy Delta.

Two helicopters remain in operation there.

The UN relief effort for the victims of Cyclone Nargis was expect to continue for months, but the delivery system has largely shifted to the affected areas in Burma and is being handled by ships and trucks, WFP officials said. dpa

UN envoy extends visit

IHT/AP - Friday, August 22, 2008

YANGON, Myanmar: U.N. special envoy Ibrahim Gambari, hoping to promote democratic reform in Myanmar, will extend his five-day visit until Saturday in an apparent effort to meet detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi failed to appear at a scheduled meeting Wednesday amid speculation that she may be dissatisfied with the United Nations' hitherto fruitless efforts to affect change in the military-ruled nation.

Gambari's five earlier visits beginning in mid-2006 failed to forge either a dialogue between Suu Kyi and the military or secure her release from more than 12 years under house arrest. He usually met Suu Kyi on the previous trips.

A government official, who demanded anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press, said that Gambari would depart Myanmar on Saturday rather than Friday as originally scheduled.

Two Gambari aides were seen by neighbors outside the gate of Suu Kyi's residence Friday morning, shouting Gambari's name. They left when nobody came out to meet them.

Gambari and Suu Kyi were to have met Wednesday at a guest house but the Nobel Peace Prize laureate did not come. Neither the U.N. nor the government have said anything about the aborted meeting.

"We don't really know the reason why she did not meet Mr. Gambari. But we knew that she was unhappy with the situation," said Nyan Win, spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

"She sets a time limit for everything and she may be unhappy with something," he said, without elaborating.

While allowing Gambari and other U.N. officials into the country, the junta says it will follow its own so-called "road map to democracy" which includes elections in 2010 under a recently promulgated Constitution which guarantees the military will maintain its grip on power.

Myanmar Opposition Concerned About Suu Kyi's Health

Bloomberg - Aug. 21 2008

By Daniel Ten Kate - -- The party of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is ``very concerned" about her health after she failed to show up yesterday for a meeting with a United Nations envoy, said National League for Democracy spokesman Nyan Win.

Suu Kyi, 63, was due to meet with Ibrahim Gambari, a UN representative on a five-day mission to push for reconciliation between opposition groups and the military, which has ruled the country formerly known as Burma since 1962.

``The government didn't give an explanation for why she didn't show up and neither did Mr. Gambari," Nyan Win said by phone from Myanmar. ``We are very concerned about her health because we have no access to her."

Suu Kyi, who has been detained for 12 of the past 18 years, was suffering from low blood pressure and was unable to leave her bed, Japan's Nikkei news agency reported yesterday, citing an unidentified person close to the military regime.

Suu Kyi underwent gynecological surgery in September 2003 and was hospitalized in 2006 for a stomach ailment. The junta stopped allowing her physician to visit her home for monthly medical checkups earlier this year, NLD member Soe Aung said by telephone today from Thailand.

``It's been quite a long time since her doctor visited her," said Soe Aung, who was elected as a lawmaker in 1990 elections that were rejected by the junta when the NLD won. ``She's not getting proper care."

Gambari's Visit

It is Gambari's fourth visit to Myanmar since the junta deployed soldiers last September to quash pro-democracy protests in the former capital, Yangon. The UN says at least 31 people were killed.

The UN is calling on Myanmar's generals to commit to democratic change and release political prisoners. The Bush administration, which leads international criticism of the regime's human rights record, says the junta has backtracked on a promise to pursue national reconciliation and hasn't met with Suu Kyi since January.

``So far we haven't seen the UN or Mr. Gambari come up with timeframes for the release of political prisoners like Aung San Suu Kyi and dialogue with opposition groups," Soe Aung said. ``Mr. Gambari must show the generals that the UN means business or his trip will be worthless."

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- **UN envoy meets Suu Kyi's party, but fails to see her**
 - **UN chief expected to visit Myanmar in December**
 - **Indonesian Foreign Min Says UN Under Pressure Over Myanmar**
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UN envoy meets Suu Kyi's party, but fails to see her

AFP - 20 August 2008

YANGON - UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari met briefly Wednesday with top leaders from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, but his planned meeting with her did not take place, a party spokesman said.

Gambari spoke for 20 minutes with five NLD leaders at a military facility in Yangon, party spokesman Nyan Win said.

The envoy told the party that he had not yet met Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been kept under house arrest for most of the last 19 years.

He said that he wanted to press the junta to free the Nobel Peace Prize winner as well as other political prisoners, while relaunching a dialogue between her and the regime, Nyan Win said.

Gambari said he would also ask the junta to allow the appointment of a special UN liaison officer in Yangon, who would coordinate contacts with the generals, according to the spokesman.

Since he arrived Monday, Gambari has not met with any of the military's top leadership, although he has held talks with the ministers of information and foreign affairs.

UN chief expected to visit Myanmar in December

Associated Press - 20 August 2008

YANGON, Myanmar - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is planning to visit Myanmar at the end of this year to hold talks on the country's political problems, the main opposition party said Wednesday.

National League for Democracy party spokesman Nyan Win said it was informed of the planned talks by visiting U.N. special envoy Ibrahim Gambari.

Gambari met Wednesday with five executive committee members of the party, which is led by detained Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ban last visited Myanmar in May to lobby for the country's rulers to open up to more foreign assistance and aid workers in the wake of the devastating Cyclone Nargis.

The U.N. chief avoided political issues during that trip, which Gambari described as "humanitarian," according to Nyan Win. He said the envoy told party officials that the visit planned for the last week of December would be solely political.

Gambari told the party executives that Ban's visit was one of five matters he was tackling during his current visit, according to Nyan Win. The others matters include seeking the release of political prisoners, including Suu Kyi.

Gambari had been expected to meet with Suu Kyi on Wednesday, but did not do so. However, he told the party officials he would try to see her.

The United Nations has a poor record in Myanmar. Its envoys have visited the country nearly 40 times since 1990, along with other senior officials, while the U.N. General Assembly has passed numerous resolutions calling for change.

To date, the ruling generals have virtually ignored such pressure.

Indonesian Foreign Min Says UN Under Pressure Over Myanmar

AFP – 20 August 2008

JAKARTA --The U.N. Security Council is under "growing pressure" to act against Myanmar's military regime unless it takes more credible steps toward democracy, Indonesia's foreign minister said Wednesday.

Hassan Wirajuda said Myanmar's partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) were consulting with Security Council member China and other countries to try to nudge the junta toward genuine democratic reform.

"There's growing pressure to bring the Myanmar case back to the UN Security Council. So we are not sitting quietly, we are doing what we can do to help...ensure a more credible process," he told reporters.

"This is a difficult issue...and I don't expect much that there will be a big change in Myanmar." Indonesia is a non-permanent member of the Security Council and a founding member of Asean. China has good relations with Myanmar's junta and has blocked previous U.S.-led calls for UN sanctions.

Washington warned Myanmar's military rulers last month that they must cooperate with U.N. mediator Ibrahim Gambari or face increased pressure from the council.

The generals plan to hold elections in 2010 under a new constitution which bars Aung San Suu Kyi from running for office and gives the military broad powers to intervene in government.

"Myanmar claims to have a new constitution and these elections will be multi-party elections, but what is important for us at Asean is to ensure that a more credible process is taking place," Wirajuda said.

He said the elections and the "follow-up transfer of power" in 2010 had to be "acceptable to the international community." Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for most of the past 18 years.

Earthquake hits China's border with Myanmar

AFP – 20 August 2008

BEIJING () — A 5.3-magnitude earthquake hit China's border with Myanmar early Wednesday, destroying homes and forcing more than a thousand people to evacuate, the US Geological Survey and Chinese state media said.

The tremor struck at 5:35 am (2135 GMT), 224 kilometres (139 miles) from the city of Dali in southwest China and 65 kilometres from Myitkyina in Myanmar, according to a statement on the USGS website.

The USGS said the quake was centred at a depth of about eight kilometres (five miles).

About 1,200 people were forced to evacuate their homes near the epicentre, an area populated with large numbers of ethnic minorities, China's state-run Xinhua news agency said.

Many homes collapsed in Sudian and several other towns also reported damage, Xinhua reported.

There were no immediate reports of casualties, according to the agency.

A massive quake hit southwest China in May, leaving nearly 70,000 dead, with about 18,000 people still missing.

Earthquake Raises Concern over Mega Dams Wednesday,

Irrawaddy - August 20, 2008

By VIOLET CHO - Frequent earthquakes in North Burma this year have raised more concern over the military government's plan to build a series of mega dams on the Irrawaddy River to generate electricity.

A 5.3 magnitude earthquake struck near the Burma-China border on Wednesday, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). No deaths were reported.

The quake was reported at 5:35 a.m. (2135 GMT) located 224 kilometers from Dali in southwest China and 65 kilometers from Myitkyina in Burma, according to a statement on the USGS Web site.

Aung Wa, the chairman of the Kachin Development Network Group (KDNG) who is based in Laiza on the Burma-China border, said four earthquakes have struck in Kachin State so far this year.

Naw Lar, the coordinator of the KDNG dam research project, said military authorities should reconsider plans to build dams on the Irrawaddy River, Burma's most important commercial waterway.

"Burma's military regime should learn from China," said Naw Lar. "It is not too late for the regime to re-think and halt its planned dam projects if they seriously think about the impact of earthquakes in Sichuan Province in southwest China."

The Sichuan earthquake in May killed more than 40,000 people and millions of people in the earthquake zone lived in fear of the potential failure of hydroelectric power dams there. One dam was seriously threatened, but none failed.

Meanwhile, a joint inspection team from China and Burma are engaged in surveying the seven dam projects, which will generate an estimated 13,360 MW in Kachin State in North Burma, a region that is on an earthquake fault line that runs through China's Yunnan Province.

Naw Lar said Burma and China should abandon the dam scheduled to be constructed near Myitsone on a confluence of the Irrawaddy River. The dam, the largest of the proposed structures, is considered to be the most vulnerable to earthquakes.

According to a KDRG report, "Damming the Irrawaddy," the Myitsone dam is located less than 100 kilometers from a fault line where the Eurasia and India tectonic plates meet.

Since 2006, the dam projects have been in a roll out phase by the Hydropower Project Implementation Department under the Ministry of Electric Power (1) and China Power Investment Corporation (CPI).

"If the Myitsone dam is built and breached by an earthquake, Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State with more than 140,000 people, will be at risk and hundreds of thousands of people in Waingmaw, Sinbo and Bhamo Townships along the Irrawaddy River will be under water," said Naw Lar.

China's state-run Xinhua News Agency said the tremor on Wednesday destroyed buildings and about 1,200 people were forced to evacuate their homes near the epicenter, an area populated by large numbers of ethnic minorities.

Many homes collapsed in Sudian, China, and other towns reported damage, Xinhua reported.

The Burmese community in Laiza said the quake was stronger than others in the recent past.

ASEAN considers observer status for Burma's elected government

ABC - Updated August 20, 2008 16:02:15

Burma's government in exile is waiting for Senior General Than Shwe and his military SPDC government to allow 1990 election results. [Reuters]

ASEAN members meeting in Singapore this week will consider the admission of members of Burma's civilian government in exile as observers of the group.

A delegation of Burmese politicians living in exile has travelled to Singapore to meet with members on the sidelines.

Radio Australia's Katie Hamann reports one of their strongest allies is Indonesia and last week they were invited to the capital Jakarta where they attended a session of parliament.

Last Friday Teddy Buri and four other exiled MP's stepped into the Indonesian House of Representatives for a plenary session marking the 63rd anniversary of the archipelago's independence.

Teddy Buri's 18 years as an elected member of Burma's civilian government has led him everywhere but the seat of power in his homeland.

Elected in 1990 but unable to form government he was driven from Burma by the military junta in 1994.

"I've been out of Burma for nearly 15 years," Mr Buri said.

"It's impossible for me to return unless, you know, I surrender but that's out of the question so in other words I'm unable to return to Burma at all."

Dividing his time between Thailand and Australia he now serves as President of the Burmese Members of Parliament Union or MPU.

Last Friday's invitation was the first time exiled Burmese MP's had attended the government session of an ASEAN member state, on this occasion as the official guests of the house speaker Agung Laksono.

"We got invited officially, which reflects, we believe, Indonesia's support for the Burmese democracy movement and that it also wants to see change in Burma.

"We see Indonesia as the third largest democracy in the world and the largest democracy in the region, so we really see it as very significant," Mr Buri said.

Symbolic, not official

Dr Jason Abbott, a Burma specialist at Briton's University of Surrey, says the delegations visit to Jakarta was mainly a symbolic gesture.

"We shouldn't forget that Indonesia is the largest democracy in ASEAN so there is some symbolic import from this visit.

"I think it's more significant to the MPU and perhaps to the junta than it is to the Indonesian government as a whole although it is symbolic from the point of view of Indonesian parliamentarians," Mr Abbott said.

"But the fact that it's not an official invitation from the Government itself or from the President means that we should caution against reading too much into this."

Perhaps deliberately, Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono didn't raise the issue of Burma in his address to the house.

As Indonesia's representative at this weeks ASEAN meeting in Singapore, Mr Laksono, however, is one of several South East Asian leaders lobbying for the MPU to be admitted to ASEAN as observers, a proposal first tabled by Indonesia in 2006.

Teddy Buri says he expects it will be rejected because the ASEAN executive committees requires consensus based decisions.

"We are pretty sure that Burma's going to oppose our participation, so it's a foregone conclusion that we are not going to be accorded observer status.

"But still the fact that we have some members that are speaking on our behalf sends a very strong message to the other members as well as the SPDC that there is a need for change in Burma," he said.

Report: Myanmar refugees waiting months for aid

AP - 3:51 PM CDT, August 19, 2008

FORT WAYNE, Ind - Myanmar refugees resettling in Fort Wayne are waiting months to receive Medicaid, food stamps and other welfare benefits that used to take an average of just two weeks, a newspaper report said.

Some advocates and agency officials blamed the delays on changes to the state's welfare eligibility system that arrived in the Fort Wayne area in mid-May, The News-Sentinel said.

The delays have prompted Mayor Tom Henry to question whether Fort Wayne can continue to resettle large numbers of refugees from overseas, spokeswoman Rebecca Karcher said.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend now is trying to line up emergency cash assistance for some of the hundreds of Myanmar refugees arriving in the city, said the agency's executive director, Debbie Schmidt.

Secretary Mitch Roob on the Family and Social Services Administration said the real reason for the delay in benefits was the sudden, large influx of refugees, many of whom do not speak English, rather than the welfare changes.

A coalition of companies led by IBM Corp. and Affiliated Computer Services Inc. has a 10-year, \$1.16 billion contract to take over eligibility services for Medicaid, food stamps and other benefits received by about one in six Indiana residents.

The refugees arrive in the U.S. under the sponsorship of the State Department, are resettled by local agencies including Catholic Charities, and receive up to eight months of government benefits including Medicaid coverage, food stamps and cash assistance.

Health Commissioner Dr. Deborah McMahan said the Fort Wayne-Allen County Department of Health has been seeing refugees without Medicaid cards for extended periods.

"They were having these appointments weeks in the future to even discuss (getting the cards)," McMahan said. "That's not acceptable. When we invite people here, it's not acceptable when people are hungry, when they need to see a doctor."

Austin Moe, a Burmese refugee who resettled in Fort Wayne last year, now volunteers as a translator for newly arriving refugees.

"I had my (Medicaid) card and food stamps in two weeks," Moe told The News-Sentinel. "Now they wait many weeks."

Fort Wayne is home to one of the largest communities of refugees from Myanmar, the Southeast Asian nation formerly known as Burma. It also is home to large communities of refugees from other countries and continents including Bosnia, Vietnam and Africa.

"In Fort Wayne, we have been pleased to help and resettle some of the most mistreated people in the world," Karcher said, reading a statement from Henry. The current situation "has given us reason to rethink our capacity to resettle large numbers of refugees."

Roob said Tuesday he expected to receive a report from Henry on the benefit delays by the end of this week.

"We're going to follow his lead," Roob said.

The FSSA secretary said his agency's network of county welfare offices was not designed to handle large numbers of non-English speaking refugees applying for benefits all at once.

"We're not prepared to deal with busloads filled with refugees," Roob said.

FSSA can better bring case workers to satellite locations where they can enroll large numbers of refugees at one time, Roob said. FSSA has used that model after disastrous June flooding in southern Indiana and when large numbers of workers lose their jobs all at once because of layoffs. Benefits can start arriving in 72 hours in such cases, he said.

Catholic Charities in Fort Wayne is expected to resettle about 800 Myanmar refugees during the federal fiscal year ending Sept. 30. A similar number of Myanmar refugees are expected by resettlement agencies in Indianapolis.

Roob said there have been no problems with refugees obtaining benefits in Indianapolis.

FSSA has rolled out the welfare privatization so far to 59 of the state's 92 counties, but the Indianapolis area isn't among them. The changes have come under close scrutiny and in some cases criticism by advocates, Indiana lawmakers and federal officials who oversee the benefits.

UN envoy tours Myanmar cyclone zone

AFP - 19.08.2008

YANGON — UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari toured Myanmar's cyclone-struck delta Tuesday while on a mission to push the junta to re-open talks with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi a year after mass anti-government protests.

A Myanmar official said Gambari traveled to Kungyangone township, south of the main city Yangon, to witness the recovery from Cyclone Nargis, which left 138,000 dead or missing in early May.

He had planned to travel by helicopter into more remote regions of the Irrawaddy Delta, the key rice-growing region that bore the brunt of the storm, the official said.

But the flight was cancelled due to heavy rains this week, which have compounded the struggles of 2.4 million cyclone survivors, many of whom remain without permanent shelters.

Gambari was later expected to meet Information Minister Kyaw Hsan in Yangon.

It is Gambari's first visit since the cyclone hit, and comes exactly a year after anti-government protests broke out, sparked by an overnight hike in fuel prices that left many people unable to afford even a bus fare to work.

The former student leaders who led the protest were arrested days later and remain in prison. Buddhist monks began leading the rallies in September but were brutally suppressed by the military.

Gambari's visit aims to restart a political dialogue with the opposition in the military-ruled country that was put on hold when the cyclone hit, and to allow for greater humanitarian access to the disaster victims.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962. The opposition National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the junta never allowed them to take office.

UN officials described Gambari's last visit to Myanmar in March as "disappointing," after the junta publicly rebuffed his calls for political reform and rejected his offer to send election monitors for a referendum that approved a new constitution in May.

Gambari met Monday with Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win, state media said, as well as foreign diplomats, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and a special panel overseeing the aid effort for victims of Cyclone Nargis.

Myanmar natural gas sales up 25 percent

AP/IHT - Tuesday, August 19, 2008

YANGON, Myanmar: Myanmar's natural gas sales soared nearly 25 percent to US\$2.5 billion in the financial year through March, official statistics seen Tuesday said.

That's up from US\$2.03 billion, the data from the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development showed.

The ministry said natural gas sales constituted 40 percent of Myanmar's total commodities export revenue of US\$6.4 billion in 2007-2008, with neighboring Thailand being the primary market.

Myanmar has exported natural gas since 1998 from its two major offshore gas fields in the Gulf of Martaban. Thailand uses the natural gas mainly to produce electricity.

Myanmar exported 515,689 million cubic feet (14,604 million cubic meters) of natural gas in 2007-2008 compared to 460,087 million cubic feet (13,029 cubic meters) the previous year.

Myanmar, ruled by the military government in 1988, faces economic sanctions by the United States and the European Union which hope to pressure the regime into improving its poor human rights record and hand over power to a democratically elected government.

UN, Myanmar resolve aid currency problem, in theory

Reuters - Mon Aug 18, 2008 5:54am EDT

By Ed Cropley

BANGKOK, Aug 18 - The United Nations and Myanmar have resolved a problem with distorted official exchange rates that led to U.N. losses of more than \$1.5 million in the delivery of aid to survivors of Cyclone Nargis. U.N. officials said on Monday the military government had agreed to let outside donors pay local companies directly and in U.S. dollars, rather than via the official, long-winded system involving foreign exchange certificates.

"This option was always open to both vendors and the U.N. However, there was a 10 percent government transaction fee on such operations that deterred us from using it," U.N. country representative Dan Baker said.

"The government has now agreed to waive the fee for all international humanitarian agencies -- U.N., bilateral and international NGOs," he said in an email to Reuters in Bangkok.

Most local firms used by aid agencies to buy supplies such as food, fuel or construction materials had dollar bank accounts, and those that did not should be able to open them up without too much difficulty, Baker said.

The U.N. has not yet had the chance to ensure the new system works in practice -- always a big if in a country under military rule for the last 46 years -- but Baker said the government had pledged to resolve any problems that arose.

The U.N. losses stemmed from Myanmar's insistence that donors convert aid dollars into foreign exchange certificates with a notional value of \$1 each. These certificates are then used to buy the local currency, the kyat.

However, the exchange rate for one certificate is around 880 kyat compared to a market rate of more than 1,100 kyat per dollar, leading to a currency conversion loss of at least 20 percent.

It came as a nasty surprise to many international and private donors, making them even more reluctant than normal to give to a country already regarded as a pariah.

The May 2 cyclone left 140,000 people dead or missing, making it one of the most devastating ever to hit Asia, although the amount of aid pledged has been only a fraction of that which followed the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Of the \$482 million it appealed for, the U.N. has managed so far to raise only \$200 million.

After discovering the currency problem last month, U.N. humanitarian chief John Holmes urged donors not to withhold their cash lest it increase the suffering of the 2.4 million people affected.

Holmes initially estimated U.N. losses at around \$10 million, but when accountants dug into the numbers they came up with \$1.56 million, officials said. (Editing by Alan Raybould)

Burma opposition lauds UN visit

BBC News - 2008/08/18 01:15:10 GMT

By Brenda Marshall

Burma's National League for Democracy has said it hopes a visit by the UN's special envoy will revive talks between its detained leader and the government.

Ibrahim Gambari will begin a five-day visit on Monday - his fourth since widespread pro-democracy protests were crushed by the military last September.

Talks between a senior junta official and NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi began in October 2007 but ended in January.

Ms Suu Kyi has spent 12 of the past 18 years under house arrest in Rangoon.

She led the NLD to a landslide victory in elections in 1990, but the party has never been allowed to take office by Burma's military rulers.

Lack of progress

Mr Gambari, who aims to promote democratic reform in Burma, is likely to be hoping for a more successful visit than his last one in March, which he described as disappointing.

He did not meet Burma's reclusive military leader, Gen Than Shwe, and his offer of international observers for a referendum on a new constitution was rebuffed.

The vote went ahead in May despite the humanitarian crisis caused by Cyclone Nargis, which is believed to have killed 130,000 people and left hundreds of thousands of others homeless.

The generals eventually allowed in foreign aid, but ignored international concern over the continued detention of Ms Suu Kyi. Instead, they extended her period of house arrest.

Since then, Burma has faced increasing criticism from the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) for its lack of progress towards democratic change.

But in the past week, Ms Suu Kyi has been allowed to have a medical check up, and has met her lawyer twice to discuss an appeal against her continued detention.

However, for each small step forward in Burma there is a step backwards.

Just days before Mr Gambari's visit, a court jailed five activists for taking part in a peaceful demonstration marking the 20th anniversary of a pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

Six Die and Thousands Flee Torrential Rain in Burma

Irrawaddy - Monday, August 18, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING A landslide in the village of Bawbada in Mogok Township killed six people on Saturday, while flooding forced thousands of residents of Pegu Division to flee their homes, as torrential downpours hit a wide swathe of Burma over the weekend.

Six people—three men, two women and a child—were killed in Bawbada, located about 5 miles from Mogok, on August 16, after their home was swept away by a landslide, according to Mogok resident Hla Oo.

Hla Oo said it has been raining almost continuously for three months in Mogok—known as the ruby capital of the world—and there is still no sign of it abating.

In June, at least eleven people in Mogok were killed following flooding and landslides.

Meanwhile, torrential rain which started in early August has flooded at least 25 wards and villages in Pegu Division, forcing about three thousands residents to flee the area, according to residents of Pegu, located about 105 miles from Rangoon.

Heavy rain also damaged thousands of acres of paddy fields and some fields are still flooded, said local residents. Flooded regions included Pyuntansa, Shwegyin and Madauk, all in Pegu Division.

Pe Pe, a resident of Pegu, the capital of Pegu Division, said local authorities had opened temporary rescue shelters for flood victims at schools and monasteries. Authorities and volunteer donors, including monks, are now providing food to the refugees, she said.

She added that the rain has now stopped in the area, and some residents were returning to their homes.

A police officer in Pegu who refused to be named said they established about 19 temporary rescue camps and have provided packages of rice to refugees. He said that the situation is now returning to normal and people are starting to return. He also claimed the flooding had no impact on paddy fields.

In Pyuntansa, Shwegyin and Madauk, however, the rain has not stopped and floodwaters have not subsided. Local residents said they haven't received any assistance from the authorities. Shwegyin and Madauk are totally flooded and people have to use boats to get around, said residents.

Chit Thar, a resident of Pyuntansa, said authorities had ignored requests for help.

"I told the Ward Peace and Development Council that we [farmers] couldn't find paddy seeds. I asked them to sell paddy seeds to us, but they said they couldn't," she said.

Meanwhile, rising water levels on the Irrawaddy River have alarmed residents of Nyaungdon Township in Irrawaddy Division, who say they are worried about the possible collapse of a dam located near the village of Kachaung.

If the dam collapses, the towns of Nyaungdon, Maubin, and Twante could be flooded, said residents. The authorities have not given any warning of this threat to people in the area.

Last Saturday, the state-run *Myanma Ahlin* newspaper reported that the floods hit areas of Rangoon and the Irrawaddy delta, where Cyclone Nargis left a swathe of devastation in early May, as well as other regions of the country. No casualties were reported.

Flooding has also hit parts of Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. In Laos, at least four people died after levels in the Mekong River reached record highs.

In Laos, Foreign Ministry spokesman Yong Chanthalsy said on Friday that four people had died outside the capital, Vientiane, after being injured in landslides triggered by the flooding.

Yong said that there were reports that the flooding was receding on Friday after water levels in the Mekong had reached 44.8 feet (13.68 meters), exceeding the previous recorded high of 40.61 feet (12.38 meters) in 1966.

Another report suggested that at least 130 people were killed, dozens were missing and thousands were driven from their homes in northern Vietnam, and hundreds of tourists were forced to flee the resort area of Sapa.

Junta commander: Thailand violating Burmese sovereignty

Shan Herald Agency for News - 19 August 2008

In a public speech given to the local officials and people yesterday at a location in Shan State's Mongton township, opposite Chiangmai, the Burma Army commander of the Triangle Region Command had charged Thailand of "violating the territorial integrity" of Burma, according to sources on the border.

Maj-Gen Kyaw Phyoe, who was appointed to his new post in June, succeeding the outgoing Min Aung Hlaing, added, "Just as they (Thailand) have unilaterally taken possession of the Cambodian territory, they are doing the same at Loilang (the 32 square kilometer disputed area between Burma's Monghsat and Thailand's Mae Ai). The time will come when we'll have to deal with the issue properly."

The general, a graduate of legal affairs from India and military affairs from UK, according to him, was referring to the ongoing border dispute over the Preah Vihear temple area between Thailand and Cambodia.

Kyaw Phyoe had been on an inspection trip on the Thai-Burma border since 16 August.

He also charged the kingdom of employing the anti-junta Shan State Army (SSA) South of Col Yawdserk as a buffer against the Burma Army.

As for Yawdserk, we are open to talks with him anytime he's ready," he said. "But there is only one condition for him: he has to exchange arms for peace (a euphemism for surrender)."

Kyaw Phyo left for Mongton, 53 miles from the border, at 18:00.

The SSA South has 5 main bases along the Thai-Burma border:

Loi Wa Her	opposite	Maehongson
Loi Taileng	opposite	Maehongson
Loi Lam	opposite	Chiangmai
Loi Hsarmsip	opposite	Chiangmai
Loi Gawwan	opposite	Chiangrai

Loilang, under the now defunct Mong Tai Army (MTA)'s control since 1982, was taken over by the Thai Army in 1987.

The issue, after reportedly debating at length at the Regional Border Committee (RBC) #25 meeting in Chiangrai, 6-8 August, has now been forwarded to the respective governments for resolution, according to Bangkok Post. The Burmese side, which included Kyaw Phyo, had demanded "full rights" over the disputed territory.

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- **UN envoy departs for five-day visit to Myanmar**
 - **Myanmar opposition hopes UN envoy's visit will spur talks**
 - **5 Myanmar activists sentenced to prison**
 - **Myanmar dissidents stay out of sight**
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UN envoy departs for five-day visit to Myanmar

UN News Centre - 15 August 2008

The United Nations Special Adviser on Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, is departing today for a five-day visit to the South-East Asian nation starting on 18 August, at the invitation of the Government.

Mr. Gambari said that he looked forward to returning to Myanmar and continuing his consultations with the Government and other relevant parties in the implementation of the good offices mandate entrusted to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon by the General Assembly.

It will be Mr. Gambari's fourth visit to the country over the past year.

On previous visits, the Special Adviser met with senior Government officials, as well as the detained pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar opposition hopes UN envoy's visit will spur talks

Associated Press - 17 August 2008

YANGON, Myanmar: The main Myanmar main opposition party said Sunday that it hoped a visit this week by a special envoy from the United Nations would help restart stalled talks between the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the ruling military junta.

"We hope that Mr. Gambari would be able to revive the stalled dialogue," said Nyan Win, spokesman for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

He said the UN-brokered talks between a junta-appointed minister, Aung Kyi, and Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest, began in October 2007 but stopped in January after five meetings.

On Sunday, Aung San Suu Kyi met her lawyer, Kyi Win, for the second time in two weeks. The meeting at her lakeside house lasted more than four hours, according to a neighbor who demanded anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the issue.

On Aug. 8, Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed the first meeting with her lawyer in five years.

5 Myanmar activists sentenced to prison

AP - Sunday, August 17

YANGON, Myanmar - Five Myanmar activists have been sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison each for commemorating the 20th anniversary of pro-democracy protests that were crushed by the country's military rulers, an opposition party official said Saturday.

The five were arrested in the northwestern state of Rakhine on Aug. 8 after a peaceful march marking the 1988 protests by more than 1 million people which were brutally crushed by the military.

They were convicted of unlawful assembly and creating public alarm, said Thein Naing, a senior official in Rakhine of the National League for Democracy.

All five were members of the league, which is led by detained Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Thein Naing said the verdict came "without giving enough time for the defendants to hire a defense lawyer."

The five were among a group of 48 young protesters who marched peacefully in the town of Taungkok on the day of the anniversary and were arrested.

Myanmar dissidents stay out of sight

UPI - 14 August 2008

YANGON, Myanmar -- A student opposition movement in Myanmar is leaving its trademark red cross in public places but is otherwise keeping a low profile, its members say. The crosses -- spray-painted on walls and traffic signals -- have been appearing more frequently, the German magazine Der Spiegel reports. Students who go out at night with cans of paint have adopted the name "Red Campaign" for their movement.

The campaign operates deep undercover, with members organized into groups of five. In one recent case, when posters that said "Remember 88" were pasted on a university wall, soldiers were sent to remove them.

"The government has seldom been so hated as it is now," a teacher who is a leader in another group, "88 New Generation," said.

The 88 refers to Aug. 8, 1988, when 1 million people participated in non-violent protests against the former dictator, Ne Win.

Myanmar: More Than \$1.5 Million In Cyclone Aid Lost, Says UN

Associated Press- 15 August 2008

YANGON, MYANMAR: The Myanmar government insisted Thursday (14 Aug) that it was committed to addressing concerns that more than US\$1.5 million in cyclone aid has been lost because of the country's antiquated currency controls.

In a meeting with the United Nations, U Soe Tha, the country's planning and economic minister, denied the government was exploiting the situation and suggested one solution would be for aid agencies to transfer dollars into the bank accounts of local vendors whom they purchase goods and services from.

"The Government is committed to addressing this concern of the international humanitarian community," U Soe Tha said a statement. "We do have alternative ways for the international humanitarian community, including international NGOs, to bring in dollars and to get the full dollar value of their assistance."

Until now, Myanmar has required that foreign aid money be converted first into Foreign Exchange Certificates at a set price and then into the country's national currency, the kyat. The certificates have been worth as much as 25% less than the market value of an equivalent number of U.S. dollars, causing US\$1.56 million in losses since the cyclone hit on 2-3 May, the U.N. said.

The certificates were introduced by the military junta in 1993 to counter a thriving black market and take advantage of a rise in tourism dollars coming into the country. But the black market has remained popular for most citizens because the official exchange rate remains artificially low at about 6 kyat to the dollar.

Myanmar's sad anniversary

Aug 13th 2008 From [Economist.com](http://www.economist.com)

The limits to people power

THE auspicious date of the eighth day of the eighth month may now forever be associated with the opening of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. But for a generation of Burmese it will always recall the mass uprising of 1988, and its brutal quashing.

The twentieth anniversary this month, like its predecessors, was marked by protests in capitals around the world, and heavy security in Myanmar itself. Some attempted demonstrations were reported from within the country. But most people seemed too scared, or simply too busy trying to make ends meet, to risk their freedom and perhaps their lives on the streets.

Myanmar's people-power revolution was well and truly put down, and, despite occasional flashes of resistance, such as last September's monk-led movement, the chances of a repeat seem slim. Yet elsewhere in the world, people power has proved irresistible.

Myanmar's rebellion followed successful popular campaigns in the Philippines in 1986 and South Korea in 1987. It was followed by the downfall of the Soviet Union and its clients in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and by the toppling of dictatorships in Thailand in 1992 and Indonesia in 1998.

So why did Myanmar's revolutionaries fail?

It was not for lack of courage or determination. Nobody knows how many died—3,000 is a widely cited estimate that may well be understated—but long after it was clear the army would use lethal force, protesters braved the danger.

It was not for lack of popular support. Millions took to the streets in 1988—more people than protested in Russia and its satellites. When Myanmar's regime held an election less than two years later, the beleaguered opposition still won more than 60% of the votes.

Nor was it for lack of a charismatic, popular leader. Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, emerged as just such a figurehead. In that role she was far more impressive than was, say, Corazon Aquino, the widow of a Philippine opposition leader, who emerged as the president who succeeded Ferdinand Marcos, the deposed dictator.

Nor was it for lack of international goodwill. For those few weeks in 1988, most of the world cheered the protesters on. The junta had friends, of course, as its successor does now, but none provided help that amounted to a lifeline.

No, the reason the revolution failed was simple: the army was prepared to kill as many people as it took to thwart it.

This seems obvious. But in fact it is often forgotten. China's Tiananmen protests in 1989—Asia's other great failed people-power rebellion—were similarly fruitless for the same reason: that in the end troops were willing to shoot their fellow citizens. Yet it is quite commonly argued that they failed because the Chinese Communist Party, unlike its Soviet and East European counterparts, had got the economy right. It may have done. But guns, not butter, saved it.

Similarly, the Burmese junta's survival is often ascribed to the weakness or bad policies of its opponents, or the lack of a concerted international approach, or even sometimes to the argument that poor Asian countries need dictatorship to thrive (a ludicrous claim in this case, given the junta's role in impoverishing one of the best-endowed countries in the region).

The sad truth is that the junta will survive as long as it and Myanmar's people are confident that the army will do whatever it takes to protect its rule. Change is therefore more likely to stem from a split in the ranks of the army and junta than from the futile heroism of the huddled masses yearning to be free.

[Get article background](#)

- UN envoy expresses hope for Myanmar
- Myanmar military junta sentenced nine monks to two years' imprisonment

UN envoy expresses hope for Myanmar

The National, United Arab Emirates – 13 August 2008

BANGKOK // The United Nations' new human rights envoy to Myanmar, Tomas Ojea Quintana, who made his first visit to the military-ruled country this month, is certain the regime is ready to co-operate with him.

Mr Quintana made his assumption based on his discussions about political prisoners with low-level figures in the junta.

"The prison conditions of the political prisoners I saw were reasonable," he said yesterday. While in Myanmar, he visited five renowned activists being held in Yangon's Insein prison, where most of Myanmar's political prisoners are held and, it is reported, abused and made to live in squalor.

Mr Quintana's assessment contrasted starkly with those of his predecessor, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, who constantly said that although the circumstances for political prisoners had improved during his seven-year tenure as special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, the conditions remained appalling and unacceptable.

But Mr Quintana did seem to understand that conditions were far from adequate. One of the political prisoners complained that he had been denied dental care and, after Mr Quintana raised it with the prison authorities, a dentist was allowed to treat him.

Although the UN envoy was relatively upbeat about his first visit, he did accept that it was largely "an introductory mission – a 'getting to know you' trip", he said.

"My visit comes at a very important time in Burma – as it moves under the new constitution to civilian rule after the elections planned for 2010," the envoy said. "What is important now is the interim period, and I told the Burmese government that I planned to draw up a detailed proposal on how human rights issues should be treated and that I expected them to implement it."

Mr Quintana did not try to see Ms Suu Kyi, on the grounds this was a sensitive issue best avoided on his first visit to Myanmar. But he did ask the military authorities to allow her to see her lawyer to discuss her detention.

Mr Quintana said he could not clarify the conditions of her detention, but planned to study her case and Myanmar law so he could discuss it fully with Myanmar authorities next time he visits.

That visit is planned for February, as Mr Quintana prepares for his submission to the UN Human Rights Council in March. The authorities seemed to be willing, he said, "but let's wait and see". Many of his

predecessors, particularly Mr Pinheiro, found making follow-up missions virtually impossible. In the meantime, he is working on his report to the UN General Assembly in November.

Myanmar military junta sentenced nine monks to two years' imprisonment

TransWorldNews – 12 August 2008

By Ashin Mettacara

In Myanmar recently nine Buddhist monks were sentenced to two years imprisonment. Reportedly Myanmar military junta accused them of defaming the Buddhism. They were arrested by the military authorities while they were waiting at Yangon railway station on July 15th. And the monks were sent to Insein prison and sentenced them on July 16th.

According to the witness the young monks came from different places to return home and arrested before the train departed.

In all probability the young monks were arrested for going to help Nargis cyclone survivors.

Rape wrecking communities in Darfur, Myanmar: Nobelists

AFP – 13 August 2008 - [Link](#)

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Rape is increasingly being used as a tool of war in ethnic conflicts in Darfur and Myanmar, wrecking families and communities, two women Nobel peace laureates warned Tuesday.

Jody Williams, who spearheaded a campaign banning antipersonnel landmines, and Wangari Maathai, an outspoken advocate for greater democracy in Africa, said women were paying "the highest price" in the violent conflicts.

The duo, accompanied by actress-activist Mia Farrow and other rights campaigners, visited clinics and refugee camps to hear first-hand the plight of women affected by the violence in the two areas.

"Unfortunately, in the ethnic cleansing being carried out by the Burmese military junta in eastern Burma, rape is being used as a tool of war, as it is in Darfur," Williams said, using Myanmar's former name Burma.

"The obvious purpose, in my view, is to destroy the fabric of the community. If the women are raped, they are obviously shamed in the eyes of their community. Often times the husbands divorce the women, who are left alone," she said.

Maathai said women were the first to be "victimised" in conflicts -- "victimised by the fighters and then be victimised by the men that you love.

"It is very, very painful and for the women, it is pain you live with all your life.

"As for the girls, you can imagine the trauma and sometimes, I would look at the eyes of the women in the camp and just wonder whether she is one of those who was raped and what is going on in her heart and mind," Maathai said.

Within a camp in Chad sheltering refugees who fled the Darfur conflict in neighboring Sudan, Williams said she met with a group of about 30 to 40 women and "within the space of the hour that I had with them, I've heard of seven tell the stories of their gang rape.

"One woman was 35 years old and she had been raped by several of the Janjaweed (Arab militia in Sudan) and by the time she saw her husband, he already knew she was raped and he divorced her on the spot, leaving her with eight children," she said.

"Obviously, if you do this to enough communities, you destroy the family, you destroy the fabric of a community and if you do it throughout enough villages, you can shred the fabric of an ethnic group, which is what they are doing in Darfur and which is what they have done in the eastern part of Burma," she said.

According to the United Nations, up to 300,000 people have died and more than 2.2 million have fled their homes since the conflict erupted in Sudan's western Darfur region in February 2003.

It began when African ethnic minority rebels took up arms against the Arab-led Khartoum regime and state-backed Arab militias, fighting for resources and power in one of the most remote and deprived places on earth.

In Myanmar, rights groups charge the soldiers from the country's ruling military junta raped women in ethnic minority areas in an apparent bid to punish populations suspected of supporting insurgency groups.

Williams said a sister of a rape victim from Myanmar she spoke to in Thailand along the border with the military-run country was eager to complete her education so that she could return to help her people.

"This young woman was going to stand up and struggle for her sister, for her community, showing again the resilience in the face of such brutality which amazes me," she said.

Myanmar gem merchants dismiss US embargo threat

AP – 13 August, 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Myanmar — Thousands of sapphires, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, jade and other gems glitter in long glass display cases as merchants haggle with professional buyers — most of them foreigners — and tourists.

Business is good here at the sales center of the Myanmar Gems Museum, despite legislation signed by President Bush last month to ban the import of rubies and jade into America. Yangon gem sellers dismissed the sanction against their government as a symbolic gesture unlikely to have much impact on their lucrative trade.

"Our buyers are almost all from China, Russia, the Gulf, Thailand, India and the European Union, and we can barely keep up with their demand," said Theta Mar of Mandalay Jewelry, a store in the museum gem shop, where prices range from a few hundred dollars to about \$18,000 for the best rubies.

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, produces up to 90 percent of the world's rubies and is a top international supplier of other gems and jade. The government-controlled sector, often criticized for harsh working conditions and poor environmental controls, is a major source of export revenue for the military.

No recent or reliable official statistics on the gemstone trade are publicly available, but analysts and human rights groups say it likely brings the military regime between \$300 million and \$400 million a year.

The embargo on gems is the latest U.S. move to apply financial pressure on the junta. Many Western nations have instituted economic and political sanctions against the military government, which seized power in 1988, violently suppressed pro-democracy demonstrations by monks last September and hindered foreign aid after a devastating cyclone in May.

The U.S. bill bans all import of gems from Myanmar. U.S. officials say Myanmar had been evading earlier gem-targeting sanctions by laundering the stones in third countries before they were shipped to the United States.

The United States also has been trying to persuade the U.N. Security Council to consider introducing international sanctions, and has demanded that the junta release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.

Exiled Myanmar pro-democracy activists hailed the new U.S. measure.

"This legislation sends a strong signal to Burma's military regime that the United States stands firmly on the side of my country's democracy movement," said Aung Din, co-founder of the Washington-based U.S. Campaign for Burma, which lobbies for political change.

However, the junta has not issued an official response. And local officials have privately told foreign diplomats the embargo will have no effect on the sector's foreign sales unless the wider international community joins in.

Such a move seems unlikely anytime soon. Although the European Union has edged closer to the punitive U.S. position toward Myanmar's military rulers, Yangon's regional trading partners — China, India and members of the Association of Southeast Asian States — have argued that engaging the junta will be more productive in the long run than isolating it through sanctions.

Foreign diplomats also have pointed out that sanctions would primarily impact disadvantaged minorities, who live in many of the gem mining areas of Myanmar.

So the gem trade continues to thrive. Myanmar's rubies, and particularly the rare "Pigeon Blood" stones, are highly prized on international markets because of their unique deep color. The country's precious jadeite deposits produce the dark green "Imperial Jade" that is sought-after in China and other countries in the region.

The junta holds regular gem auctions for foreign merchants during which it sells thousands of lots of valuable stones, which are said to generate upward of \$100 million in foreign currency per sale. The last such event, held in November, drew more than 3,600 foreign buyers.

"We are not concerned (by the U.S. embargo)," Myint Myint Cho of the Min Thiha Jewelry Shop in downtown Yangon told a reporter. "We are not thinking of it at all."

Myanmar arrests 385 drug traffickers in July: state media

AFP – 13 August 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON — Myanmar arrested 385 drug traffickers last month, state media said Wednesday, as the world's second-largest opium producer sought to show it was cracking down on the narcotics trade.

The United Nations anti-drugs body has said opium production in Myanmar shot up 46 percent from 2006 to 2007, but the military-ruled nation continues to insist that it is on track to be drugs-free by 2014.

"Action was taken against 385 persons -- 317 men and 68 women in 236 cases," the junta-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

Police, customs and the military also seized 105 kilograms (231 pounds) of opium, 1.6 kilograms of heroin, 138,550 stimulant tablets and smaller quantities of other narcotics and chemicals in July, it added.

Myanmar's mountainous and lawless border regions once hid swathes of poppy fields which fed most of the world's opium habit well into the 1990s.

Under pressure from governments including close ally China, Myanmar eventually began a campaign in the 1990s to eradicate the crop, and soon Afghanistan took its mantle as the world's top opium producer.

But after a few years of steep decline, opium production in Myanmar has risen once again.

A UN Office on Drugs and Crime report last year blamed high-level collusion and corruption for the rise, while activists across the border in Thailand say the crop substitution programmes for poor farmers have not been successful.

The military-ruled nation, meanwhile, has become a hub for methamphetamine production, with convoys of high-tech trucks ferrying chemicals and mobile laboratories under the cover of Myanmar's dense jungle, experts says.

UNICEF continues relief efforts for Myanmar cyclone victims

http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/myanmar_45170.html

YANGON, Myanmar, 12 August 2008 – UNICEF Myanmar has pledged to continue relief works until the lives of cyclone-affected families are fully restored.

It has been over three months since the deadly Cyclone Nargis struck south west parts of Myanmar in early May. Relief efforts are now focusing on repairing damage and giving children a sense of normalcy with child-friendly spaces and an emphasis on returning to school.

Cyclone Nargis destroyed or damaged over 4,000 schools and more than 600 health facilities, contaminated 4,000 drinking water wells and separated hundreds of young children from their parents and close relatives.

“It has been three months now since the cyclone hit, and there is still much work to do, such as distributing family kits, organizing child friendly spaces, providing safe water supplies and immunizing children,” said Ramesh Shrestha, UNICEF Representative in Myanmar. “This operation will last at least one year and depends on continued access to the affected areas.”

Many challenges remain

UNICEF's Director of Emergency Programs, Mr. Louis-Georges Arsenault visited Myanmar in July to report on UNICEF's emergency operations.

“The recovery operation is going well but there remain many challenges and we will continue our relief efforts as long as necessary,” said Mr. Arsenault.

As part of his visit, Mr. Arsenault travelled to Bogalay in the Ayeyarwaddy division, one of the worst-hit areas.

“It's a very difficult environment,” he said, “but the catastrophe has also opened several doors. Education is a very good example of where we can make a bigger difference.”

Build-back-better

UNICEF has an opportunity to build-back-better by making substantial improvements in the social services made available for children and their families. One of the ways UNICEF can do this is through the construction of child-friendly spaces, which can then become multi-purpose centres for the community.

Many children suffered in the wake of the cyclone, some of whom saw their parents killed, or their villages swept away. But remarkably, signs of recovery were evident, as communities in the hardest hit areas pulled together and were able to make use of temporary shelters, health centres and classrooms.

“There is nothing like coming to see for yourself,” Mr. Arsenault said. “I was amazed by the resilience of the affected populations and by the sense of community in Myanmar society. Communities have begun remarkable recovery efforts in the face of enormous difficulties.”

Amy Bennett contributed to this story from New York.

Remembering our heroes and rethinking the revolution

Wednesday, 13 August 2008 12:34 - [Link](#)

Commentary - by Saw Kapi

August 12th is a solemn day in the history of the Karen people. On this day we mourn the deaths of our national heroes, or martyrs if you will, and remember their sacrifices. It has been almost 60 years since the glorious Karen armed resistance commenced in 1949, and our dead heroes – San C. Poe, Saw Pay Thar, Synedy Loo Ne, Saw Ba U Gyi, Saw San Kay, Mahn Ba Zan, Skaw Ler Taw, Gen. Bo Mya and countless others – have indeed persisted in our collective memory. The persistence of our memories for them, however, may not be in exactly the way they anticipated.

Most of those who claim to admire Saw Ba U Gyi and are vehemently against reviewing his principles have only the sketchiest knowledge of his life and goals. Somewhat surprisingly, the apotheosis of Saw Ba U Gyi's four principles is accompanied by a parallel disappearance of the real understanding of his intellectual insights and the unmatched sacrifices he made. Gone is the educated, intellectual and selfless Saw Ba U Gyi, who sold thousands of acres of his inherited land to compensate the government for money stolen from a government bank by his unruly followers. Gone is the confident warrior who trusted his people, refusing to accept a platoon of personal bodyguards offered to him and as a result ambushed and killed by enemy troops. To date, the principles he laid down and the future he wanted for his people have not been realized. Confined mainly in the Thai-Burma border area, the movement has been gradually losing its strength and consequently, to some extent, its relevancy.

In fact, it is troubling to note that there is a huge gap between the magnitude of our challenges and the smallness of our politics - our chronic avoidance of answering tough questions, our remarkable inability to build a viable consensus to tackle the critical problems confronting our people and our singular lack of confidence and skills in engaging the international community in an increasingly interconnected world.

The first step to solving our people's predicament and advancing our cause is to confront the naked realities before us as they really are, not as we fancy them to be. Imperative is the need for us to recognize the gap between our professed ideals as a people – the imagined Karen community – and the reality we witness everyday. The Karen as we would like to imagine ourselves is a homogeneous assembly, concentrated in one geographic area, speaking the same language, and subscribing to one religion. But such is not the case. The reality, whether we like it or not, is that there are three major Karen sub-groups, each with its own distinctive spoken and written language. While almost 35 percent of Sqaw Karen subscribe to Christianity, a large percentage of Pwo Karen remain faithful to Buddhism. And a small percentage of both Pwo and Sqaw still practice animism.

Having settled in a wide range of geographic areas with notable concentrations in the Mergui/Tavoy region, Irrawaddy delta, Toungoo hill tracks and Pa-pun district, Karen people within and beyond Burma intermingle with other ethnic nationalities. Although there are some exclusively Karen enclaves in different parts of Burma, it is hard to point to a single geographic region inhabited only by Karen. This demographic reality demands that we seriously rethink the issue of how we define a Karen state. How can the recognition of a Karen state be completed, until and unless we establish a consensus on what a Karen state should constitute?

Equally important, and no less complex and sensitive, is the question of what should be the official Karen language. Of course we must have the right to speak, read, write and be educated in our own language. But in actuality, we have three distinctive Karen languages, belonging to three different Karen sub-groups. Which one do we want to use for official communication? These are fundamental questions that need to be addressed in the broader national context with utmost rationality and sensitivity.

Establishing a collective consent of Karen people in response to these questions will be a crucial step toward deciding our own political destiny. Only this critical process of questioning and reviewing our movement will allow us to see that there is an urgent need to restructure the increasingly fragmented Karen national identity and for a realistic and articulate Karen voice in national and international politics.

Undoubtedly, the Karen need a new generation of political leadership that can articulate a national strategy that goes beyond the same voices recycled from the old framework. The new and younger political leadership must be able to grasp the complex dynamics of ethnicity and yet be attuned to the regional political situation of an increasingly interconnected world. After more than half a century, there is no doubt about the Karen determination to fight militarily. But on this long and painful path that the Karen people were and still are compelled to tread, it takes more than a strong will to reach our goal. As part of our struggle, we will need to come up with a strategy that goes beyond regular press releases that simply expose atrocities committed by the Burmese military regime against the Karen.

If the Karen struggle is to gain national and international support, intellectuals, few though they may be among the Karen, will have to look beyond their narrowly specialized disciplines, and play their own role within the struggle. Many western-trained Karen intellectuals – such as Dr. San C. Poe, Saw Ba U Gyi, Saw Pay Thar and Saw Sydney Loo Ni – participated at the forefront of the struggle when the Karen began their movement. It is now time for the Karen to gather their strength from all walks of life, including the exiles and the urban intellectuals – whose voices must play a critical role in promoting awareness and raising the profile of the Karen in general – and the rural populace and internally displaced, whose steadfast resistance to forced relocation and cultural assimilation has always been crucial to the very existence of the Karen. In order to accomplish this task, the Karen need a leadership that is not only committed but also skillfully creative in policymaking and competently attuned to international political dynamics.

As much as the Karen quest for their collective right to self-determination is theoretically justified, the practicality of having such a right can be complicated at best, but not impossible. The salience of ethnicity in Burmese politics, after all, is a reality imposed by history that must be confronted with the consideration of appropriate political and cultural measures that are at least recognizable and responsive to the basic

human needs of identity, security and equal participation. Inasmuch as the Karen are resolved in armed resistance, they must also learn to compete, compromise and cooperate with their adversary at the political table. It is hoped that the Karen, if and when opportunity presents itself, will be ready to engage in a national political dialogue not only with the Burman but also with the other ethnic nationalities in mapping out the details of both a future Karen state and our country of Burma.

Aung San Suu Kyi detention extended

CNN -- August 11, 2008 -- Updated 0705 GMT - [Link](#)

Myanmar's military rulers have extended the house arrest of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi for another year, a source who spoke to a member of her political party told CNN on Monday.

The junta's decision will keep Aung San Suu Kyi under detention for more time than the county's law allows. She has already been under house arrest for four and a half years, and the maximum limit is five years without charges being filed.

The pro-democracy leader met with her attorney Sunday to discuss legal issues, the source told CNN.

Aung San Suu Kyi won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. She has become the face of the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar and the focus of a global campaign to free her.

The junta has confined Aung San Suu Kyi in her home for 12 of the last 18 years. Her latest house arrest began in 2003 and has been periodically renewed.

The country last held multiparty elections in 1990, but the regime ignored the results, which showed Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party posting a landslide victory.

Last year, the government came under intense international pressure after using force to suppress a pro-democracy movement. In late May, Myanmar state media said voters had overwhelmingly approved a draft constitution that strengthens the junta's rule.

At the time, New York-based Human Rights Watch said it had received indications that the referendum was conducted "in an atmosphere of official coercion and vote tampering."

The military government refused international or independent referendum monitors and UN assistance in conducting the voting, the group said.

And the balloting was conducted amid a humanitarian crisis in the Irrawaddy Delta and other regions devastated when Cyclone Nargis made landfall in Myanmar in early May.

About 130,000 people either died or are missing, according to the United Nations. And more than 2 million have been rendered homeless.

The draft constitution makes way for general elections in 2010, but it has been met with skepticism from pro-democracy opposition leaders. The changes grant 25 percent of parliamentary seats to the military. It also states that the president can cede power to the military during a state of emergency.

Danish Minister Slams Burma Boycott, Sanctions

Irrawaddy - Monday, August 11, 2008 - [Link](#)

By WAI MOE - Denmark's minister for development cooperation said in a recent interview with a Danish newspaper that economic sanctions on Burma and a tourism boycott of the country are counterproductive.

According to a report in *Politiken* on Saturday, one of Denmark's leading newspapers, minister Ulla Tørnæs of the ruling Liberal Party said Burma would benefit from more tourists and trade with the world.

Meanwhile, there have been unconfirmed reports among nongovernmental workers and diplomats that the European Union developmental agency might be in the process of undergoing a reevaluation of its views on economic sanctions on Burma.

Ulla Tørnæs said she planned to raise the issue with the EU and ask it to reconsider its position on Burma.

Some analysts said the Danish minister's views are a sign of a potential EU policy shift in the near future.

"I think it is fine to consider a new strategy and to re-think the sanctions," said Mikael Graver, a Burma expert at Aarhus University in Denmark in an e-mail to *The Irrawaddy*. "But a sudden change looks like a surrender and letting down the opposition. A new strategy must be formulated before the sanctions are lifted."

Tourism and trade are positive for the country's development, said minister Ulla Tørnæs. She said economic sanctions may have a place in some situations, if they can be shown to achieve their desired effect, but, "Burma is isolated and closed."

Change is more likely to come in Burma from internal pressure on the military government, she said.

She said Aung San Suu Kyi probably understands that nothing has changed in a positive way. She also disagreed with Suu Kyi over sanctions.

In 1996, Suu Kyi called for economic sanctions on the Burmese junta and a tourism boycott, saying they only put more money into the hands of the junta and funded human rights violations. The US and some EU countries are the strongest proponents of sanctions against the regime. They are not favored by Asian countries.

Christian Friis Bach, an international officer of the relief mission of the Danish Church, said the junta's strategy is to isolate the people and Western sanctions help to isolate the people as well.

"Therefore I agree that it is a good idea to encourage people to go to Burma," he was quoted as saying in *Politiken*.

The EU has passed annual sanctions against the Burmese junta for years. Recently, the EU adopted tighter sanctions, including an embargo on the import of gemstones, timber and metal, and a wider visa ban against members of the Burmese military government following the suppression of pro-democracy protests in September 2007.

Some Danish activists expressed surprise at the minister's comments in *Politiken* because Denmark is a supporter of EU policy on Burma and officially supports sanctions against the junta.

The Danish Burma Committee told *Politiken* the minister was out of touch with Danish interests.

"She is quite careless about people," said Anton Johannsen, the chairman of the Danish Burma Committee. He said economic sanctions are effective in weakening the junta.

Thomas Petersen, a Denmark trade union activist who has worked on the Burma issue for years, told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday that Ulla Tørnæs comments were a "big surprise."

"It's strange she says things like that when the official policy at the ministry of foreign affairs is different," he said.

"It is not important what I think about sanctions or no sanctions. I am working on Burma for the Burmese people and as long as the Burmese people are calling for sanctions, so will I," he said. "We are not here to tell the Burmese what to think."

Myanmar police arrest opposition party executive

AP - 12 August 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Myanmar () — Police in Myanmar's western Rakhine state arrested a member of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party Tuesday, a party official said.

"Nyi Pu was taken from his home early Tuesday morning," said Thein Naing, a senior official of the National League of Democracy in Rakhine.

"Police said they want to question him but it is not clear what they want to know," he said.

Police could not be contacted for more information on the arrest, because it was unclear exactly which officers detained Nyi Pu and where he was being held. Myanmar police also do not usually release statements.

Nyi Pu's arrest came four days after the anniversary of 1988 pro-democracy protests that were violently suppressed by the military. The only public demonstration known to have taken place in Myanmar to mark the occasion Friday took place in Rakhine.

Nyi Pu is the chairman of the Taunggok branch of the NLD party. Authorities detained 48 demonstrators who took part in Friday's peaceful march through the township, but released all but five the same day.

Taunggok and other parts of Rakhine state are hotbeds of anti-government sentiment. Buddhist monks in the area joined pro-democracy rallies that swelled into nationwide protests last September.

At least 31 people were killed in the country's largest city, Yangon, when the military crushed last year's protests, sparking global outrage. Rakhine has hosted some of the bigger pro-democracy protests held in Myanmar in the past year, while most of the country remains subdued.

Authorities also arrested prominent human rights activist Myint Aye, who has been arrested and imprisoned at least five times in the past 20 years.

No reason was given for the arrest on Friday.

The Aug. 8, 1988 protests brought down longtime dictator Ne Win, but a new group of generals replaced him and brutally crushed demonstrations in September, killing an estimated 3,000 people.

The protests propelled Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero Aung San, into the political limelight, and led to the founding of her National League for Democracy to challenge army rule.

Elections were held in 1990, but the military refused to recognize the NLD's landslide victory. Suu Kyi, who won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has spent more than 12 of the past 19 years in detention and is currently under house arrest in Yangon.

Beijing holds key to change in Burma

Financial Times - August 8 2008 03:00 - [Link](#)

By Amy Kazmin in Delhi - As the Chinese exult in the opening of an Olympic Games aimed at showing off their nation's ascent under Communist rule, the population of neighbouring Burma is marking a more sombre occasion: the 20th anniversary of a failed pro-democracy uprising.

On August 8 1988 angry Burmese fed up with severe economic hardships and national stagnation after 26 years of socialist-oriented military dictatorship took to the streets *en masse* to demand democracy. While the dramatic uprising shook the nation and raised hopes of a better life, the military brutally suppressed the protests, killing at least 3,000 people and sending a generation of young Burmese fleeing for the border to struggle in exile.

Twenty years on, Burma remains firmly under the military's boot, with most people struggling to get by in a crippled economy and fearful that any public expression of discontent will result in their imprisonment and the persecution of their family.

"So many people have sacrificed and so many of them are still in jail today, but I don't see any progress or hope of change," said Win Min, who was a medical student in 1988 and fled to Thailand, from where he monitors developments. "The new generation is suffering as we suffered in the past."

President George W. Bush and his wife Laura sought to put the spotlight on the plight of Burma's 52m people yesterday. The US president had lunch in Bangkok with prominent Burmese exiles and Mrs Bush travelled to the Thai-Burma border to meet refugees.

"The American people care deeply about the people of Burma and dream for the day the people will be free," Mr Bush told dissidents and former political prisoners at an hour-long lunch.

But for all Washington's high-profile support for the Burmese democracy movement, including financial aid to exiles seeking to foment another popular uprising, several exiles urged Mr Bush to bring China into the push for change and to co-ordinate policy towards Burma with it.

The ruling Burmese junta receives substantial financial support and political cover from China, which sees its impoverished and badly governed neighbour as a valuable source of natural resources, including wood, gemstones and natural gas, necessary for its own buoyant economy.

"China holds the key," said Aung Zaw, founding editor of a Chiang Mai-based magazine, The Irrawaddy, and one of the dissidents who met Mr Bush. "This is the country that continues to protect and defend this appalling military government."

Mr Bush told the dissidents he would raise the issue of Burma with Hu Jintao, the Chinese president, during his Olympic visit to Beijing, but said forging a common position was difficult given the two countries' widely differing interests in Burma, according to several of those who attended the lunch. While the US was interested in human rights, China was interested in commerce, he told the group.

Some pro-democracy campaign groups hoped to use the coincidence of the Olympics opening ceremony and the start of the 1988 uprising to highlight China's support of the military regime, just as campaigners have successfully drawn attention to Chinese policy in Tibet.

But Aung Zaw said some Burmese activists "think it would be a strategic blunder to provoke China when there is a possibility of opening communication" with Beijing. In the past few years Chinese authorities have opened low-level contacts with some exiled pro-democracy activists and broadened their contacts inside Burma, but such dialogue has remained at a low level and does not appear to have resulted in any shift in -policy.

Still, Mark Farmaner, the head of Burma Campaign UK, said democracy activists felt it better to try to "charm and woo" Chinese officials in order to convince them that the democracy movement represents a genuine positive alternative to the generals, rather than to simply embarrass China on the eve of the Olympics.

"We might have been able to make a splash and get headlines but would it make a policy impact in China? We think not," Mr Farmaner said. "China has been starting to move, very gently, in the right direction. If we piss them off, they will just retreat into their shell again."

Few expect the Burmese people to commemorate the uprising's anniversary with a fresh outpouring against their rulers.

Security is extremely tight in Rangoon and most prominent dissidents and many of the Buddhist monks who led protests last September remain in prison. Authorities yesterday charged Zarganar, the country's most popular comedian, with five political offences. He had given interviews to foreign media criticising the regime's slow response to cyclone Nargis, which left 133,000 people dead or missing in May this year.

But Win Min remains confident that eventually the military will be forced to relax its grip. "Even if change will not come at the moment, there must be some combination of people's power movement, international pressure and moderate officers coming to the top that will bring change."

Humanitarian Relief Funds for Myanmar and China receive donation of \$100,000

Source: Government of Brunei Darussalam - Date: 12 Aug 2008 - [Link](#)

The Humanitarian Relief Fund for cyclone victims in Myanmar and the earthquake in China has received a donation of one hundred thousand dollars from the Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Foundation. The donation brings the total amount collected to \$264,955.87. It was presented Monday by the Minister of Communications, Pehin Dato Seri Setia Haji Awang Abu Bakar who is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Foundation. The contributions were received by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Pehin Dato Seri Utama Dr. Ustaz Haji Awang Mohd. Zain, Co-Adviser to the Relief Fund. The presentation of donation took place at the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The Community Development Department which acts as the Fund's Secretariat is urging the public to make direct donations through the SMS or through banks, supermarkets, mosques and religious halls nationwide. Donations can be handed in until the 16th of this month. Meanwhile, 7 families whose houses were razed down by fire in Kampung Junjungan, Delima Satu, Burong Pingai Ayer, the Kurnia Rakyat Jati Kampung Telisai Land Scheme and the Kampung Pandan National Housing Scheme areas received donations from the Community Development Department, amounting to \$30,800. They also received donations of \$6,600 from the Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Foundation. 4 people received \$3,600 for house repairs.

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Retired Major General Pehin Dato Seri Pahlawan Haji Mohammad handed over the donations.

Staying Alive

Time - Friday, Aug. 08, 2008 - [Link](#)

By Andrew Marshall

Three years ago in Rangoon I met an extraordinary man with an ordinary name. Once a physics student at Rangoon University, Jimmy had just been released from jail after 16 years for his role in the democracy uprising that began on Aug. 8, 1988. He had been tortured in jail and robbed of his youth. I asked him how he planned to use his freedom. "I will take a rest," he replied in rusty English. "Then I will continue to do my activity for democracy."

And he did. Last August Jimmy — real name Kyaw Min Yu — was arrested along with other members of the so-called 88 Generation Students for staging street protests against government price hikes. These protests inspired the mass demonstrations led by Burma's monks, which captured the world's imagination a month later. Jimmy is still in jail. His wife Nilar Thein, another die-hard democrat, is in hiding. Their infant daughter has effectively been orphaned by the regime.

This month millions of Burmese are solemnly commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1988 protests. As Jimmy's story shows, the spirit of '88 has not been entirely extinguished. But Burma's dictators have proved far more resilient than its democrats. In the past year alone, the junta has survived two of its biggest challenges since 1988: last year's mass protests and the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which killed nearly 140,000 people when it slammed into the Irrawaddy delta region in May.

"There will be change," the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi once said, "because all the military have are guns." Perhaps that was true in 1988. Today, the generals have much more than guns. They have huge revenues from oil and gas, relations with powerful neighbors India and China, and the support — occasionally the censure — of fellow members of ASEAN. They have a large standing army that has struck cease-fires with most of the ethnic rebel armies ranged against it and set about annihilating the rest. In many ways — economically, militarily, politically, regionally — Burma's generals are better off than 20 years ago.

Not so the democrats. Suu Kyi has spent 13 of the past 19 years in detention. Her party, the National League for Democracy, is virtually extinct. Last September's protests radicalized a new generation of young Burmese democrats, but more than 100 people were killed and thousands arrested in the regime's crackdown. Many of the 88 Student Generation are behind bars. No wonder, then, that some Burmese democrats are now considering more violent forms of protest. Leading Burmese journalist Aung Zaw recently recalled conversations with a senior dissident and a monk. The dissident was seeking funds to plant bombs in the old capital of Rangoon, while the monk wanted to launch a missile at the new capital of Naypyidaw. It is a measure of their rage and desperation that many educated Burmese believe only force can dislodge the generals.

Today, Burma's plight receives immeasurably more international attention than it did 20 years ago. U.S. President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush met with Burmese activists and visited refugees during their stopover in Thailand en route to the Beijing Olympics, while the U.N. has dispatched two special envoys to Rangoon this month. Yet ordinary Burmese have less faith than ever that global diplomacy will improve their lives. Last September's protests taught them there are limits to what the world is willing or able to do.

If a mixture of censure and selective sanctions aren't working, then all that's left is engagement. The Nargis relief effort could provide an opportunity for "a more open relationship" with the generals, the former British diplomat Derek Tonkin has argued, while the U.N.'s humanitarian chief John Holmes, who toured the Irrawaddy delta last month, spoke of a "positive door" opening to the regime. Let's hope they're right. Even its most implacable opponents recognize that the Burmese military is not just the problem, but also part of any solution. Suu Kyi — a soldier's daughter — has always said as much.

Protests during this anniversary month seem unlikely. But then Burma is a big country and hard to predict: both the 1988 uprising and last year's protests took Burma watchers by surprise. It's even tougher to read the country's secretive military rulers. The chief general, Than Shwe, is 75 years old and by some accounts ailing, but it would be naive to assume that his demise will fracture or enfeeble the military. Over the years, senior Burmese generals have either died (Ne Win in 2002) or been purged (Khin Nyunt in 2004), and each time the military has closed ranks and stayed intact. Still, future protests seem inevitable, so long as the junta refuses to tackle Burma's woes — poverty, inflation, disease — and the opposition continues to survive against appalling odds. Jimmy is one of 2,050 political prisoners in Burma today, says Amnesty International. If he were released tomorrow, nobody need ask him what he would do next. We already know. He will take a rest. Then he will continue to do his activity for democracy.

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-

Myanmar's Suu Kyi met lawyer: party spokesman

AFP – 10 August 2008

YANGON - Myanmar's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed a rare meeting with her lawyer to discuss her ongoing house arrest, a spokesman for her party said Sunday.

"Last Friday (August 8), The Lady met with her lawyer U Kyi Win from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm regarding her detention," said Nyan Win, National League for Democracy (NLD) spokesman, referring to Aung San Suu Kyi.

"This is the first such meeting since 2004," he told AFP.

The surprise meeting at her lakeside Yangon home came a day after the new United Nations human rights envoy for Myanmar Tomas Ojea Quintana left the country after his first visit.

Nyan Win said he did not have any details of what was discussed at the meeting with her lawyer, although the NLD has lodged an appeal against the recent one-year extension of their leader's house arrest.

Aung San Suu Kyi was first arrested in July 1989, and has been allowed only a few brief years of freedom since. She remains isolated most of the time, with only occasional visits from her doctor.

Legal experts say that under Myanmar law a citizen can only be held for five consecutive years. The NLD has not yet received a reply to its appeal.

Prominent Myanmar human rights activist arrested

Associated Press - 10 August 2008

YANGON, Myanmar - Police in Myanmar arrested a prominent human rights activist on the 20th anniversary of massive pro-democracy protests, a colleague of the detained man said Saturday.

Myint Aye, 57, was arrested Friday evening after police searched his home in Kyimyindine township, a suburb of Yangon.

The reason for the arrest was not immediately known. Police released no information.

Myint Aye and Maung Maung Lay are both members of the group Human Rights Defenders and Promoters, which Myint Aye founded in 2002.

Myint Aye has been arrested and imprisoned at least five previous times since 1988, most recently in August 2007, Maung Maung Lay said. He also has served as an official in the opposition National League for Democracy party.

In March he was attacked on the street by two unidentified men, requiring hospitalization and four stitches on his head. The assault was one of several staged at the time against opponents of the new constitution backed by the military government.

Myint Aye's arrest came on the anniversary of nationwide pro-democracy protests in 1988 that were violently suppressed by the military. Only one serious public demonstration is known to have taken place Friday, in the western Rakhine State.

Asked if Myint Aye's arrest was connected to any anniversary protest, Maung Maung Lay said his colleague was more concerned with promoting human rights than engaging in political activities. He said Myint Aye was able to prepare for jail, bringing along clothes and medicine for his diabetes when he was taken away by police.

Authorities detained 48 demonstrators who marched peacefully Friday in Taunggok township of Rakhine State, but released all but five later that evening.

The marchers complied with a police request to surrender, said Thein Naing, an organizer for the National League of Democracy in Rakhine State.

"I hope those remaining five will also be released as they had not done anything to harm the peace," Thein Naing said. "They did it in memory of those who were killed in 1988 and I hope the authorities who have declared plans to establish democracy in the country will treat those youths leniently and release them quickly."

No significant protests were reported in Yangon, the country's biggest city, where security personnel were deployed in large numbers to stave off any trouble. Activists instead performed small gestures, such as laying flower baskets with slogans by a roadside.

RP drops anti-Myanmar stance for ASEAN charter

Philippine Daily Inquirer - 08 August 2008

JAKARTA—Malacañang is pressing the Senate to ratify the proposed charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations by November in an effort to dispel concerns that the country could become a stumbling block in providing the regional group a legal personality.

Full ratification of the ASEAN charter by all 10 member-nations will enable the ASEAN to evolve from what critics describe as "a mere talk shop" into an intergovernmental-organization that is based on rules and accountability.

Vidal E. Querol, Philippine Ambassador to Indonesia, said in an interview the Philippines had nothing against the ratification of the ASEAN charter.

Querol's disclosure appears to be a turnaround from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's statement to fellow ASEAN leaders in November 2007, when she said Congress would find "extreme difficulty in ratifying the charter" until military-ruled Myanmar (Burma) freed Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

So far, seven of the 10 ASEAN members have ratified the charter, the latest among them Myanmar. Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam had earlier ratified the document.

The two others who have yet to ratify the charter are Indonesia and Thailand, which like the Philippines, are original members of this group that marked its 41st anniversary yesterday.

"(Malacañang) forwarded the ASEAN charter to the Senate in June," Querol said. "The Philippines has nothing against ratification."

The ambassador added that all that was left now was to allow the Senate to go through its usual process of deliberation.

The ASEAN's target for full ratification is by end of 2008 but Querol said Malacañang hoped the Senate would have made a decision by November, in time for the 14th ASEAN Summit to be held in Bangkok.

Myanmar Faces More Food Shortages

Wall Street Journal- 09 August 2008; Page A5

YANGON, Myanmar -- Almost one million people who survived the deadly cyclone that ripped through this country in May remain vulnerable to food shortages until the October rice harvest, aid workers here said.

Three months after Cyclone Nargis caused an ocean swell, the waters are yet to fully recede in many villages across the hardest-hit Irrawaddy River delta, the nation's rice bowl.

Some 925,000 people affected by the flooding are still relying on food aid, the United Nations estimates. The U.N.'s World Food Programme, which is coordinating the flow of food from international donors, is scrambling to procure enough supplies in the run-up to the harvest, said Chris Kaye, the WFP's country director for Myanmar in Yangon, the nation's largest city.

Myanmar's military rulers initially agreed to let the U.N. procure 20,000 metric tons of rice domestically for distribution in the delta. But in the lean period before the harvest, they decided to halve the amount to ensure enough supplies for other parts of Myanmar, a nation of 52 million people.

That has forced the WFP to import rice at a time of tight global supplies because of export bans from big producers such as Vietnam. The agency is working to make up for the shortfall by importing rice from Thailand and elsewhere but may have to ration supplies during the coming two months anyway.

"We're experiencing a pipeline break," Mr. Kaye said.

Aid workers also are concerned about a government decision to stop all U.N. helicopter flights into the delta beginning next week as the recovery effort gathers pace. Private aid groups have been relying on those flights to get aid to the swampy area.

"It means now we have to truck all the food in," which is slower and costlier, said Judy-Leigh Moore, a senior relief associate with World Vision, a U.S.-based relief organization.

Aid workers say it remains uncertain whether farmers were able to plant enough rice in July to make the coming harvest a success. World Vision's Ms. Moore said one problem is that much agricultural land was too waterlogged to be sowed. Villages visible from high-rise towers in Yangon are still inundated.

8/8/88 Anniversary Statements

ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY MYANMAR CAUCUS

<http://www.aseanmp.org>

For immediate release on 8 August 2008

20th Anniversary of 8.8.88 – Two decades of ASEAN failing the people of Burma

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) in solidarity with the people of Myanmar / Burma reminds all ASEAN leaders that the bloody events of the 1988 uprising in Burma has yet to be addressed by ASEAN till this day.

ASEAN has further ignored the plight of the Burmese people who again in 2007, demonstrated against the injustices perpetrated against them. The 'Saffron Revolution' of 2007 was also brutally suppressed and ASEAN has yet to hold the Burmese junta accountable for its actions.

Conditions have since worsened in Burma as a result of the devastation left by Cyclone Nargis and the poor management of this crisis, by the present military junta, leaves the people of Burma living in deplorable conditions.

AIPMC disappointingly notes that to date the measures taken by ASEAN leaders to address the humanitarian and political crisis in Burma have been insufficient and unsatisfactory.

“Burma continues to face rampant inflation, poor healthcare, the unceasing use of child soldiers and the continued imprisonment of political prisoners. ASEAN leaders have failed to ensure that, with the inclusion of Burma into ASEAN, the junta are compelled to respect the rights of its people,” said AIPMC President Kraisak Choonhavan.

AIPMC strongly urges ASEAN to compel Burma’s junta to engage in genuine political, economic and social reforms. Failing which, ASEAN should no longer protect the junta from international action. Without these comprehensive reforms, especially politically, regional lawmakers fear that Burma will continue to plunge in a downward spiral that would be especially damaging to countries in Southeast Asia.

“We want ASEAN leaders to ensure that the military junta is held accountable for all the injustices perpetrated by establishing an ASEAN Human Rights mechanism to look into this matter. This must be done in accordance to international human rights standards and principles found in the ASEAN Charter,” added AIPMC senior adviser Loretta Rosales.

As stated in the preamble of the ASEAN Charter, AIPMC again reminds ASEAN leaders that they have agreed to adhere to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. There is no reason for ASEAN to delay the implementation of their promises.

Released by AIPMC Steering Committee:

For media contact or to facilitate an interview with AIPMC Parliamentarians, please call:

Roshan Jason (AIPMC Executive Director) at +6-012-3750974 or the numbers above.

Human Rights Watch

Burma: No rights reform 20 years after massacre

Olympics Open on Bloody Anniversary

(New York, August 7, 2008) – Twenty years after the uprising in Burma, the military government continues to sharply restrict fundamental rights and violently suppress dissent, Human Rights Watch said today. The anniversary falls as the Olympic Games open in Beijing, while the Chinese government gives crucial support to Burma’s repressive regime.

On August 8, 1988, millions of Burmese took to the streets around the country to demand democracy and an end to military rule. The day was a turning point for the nationwide popular movement that had started in March 1988, because the Burmese army came out to brutally suppress the demonstrations, gunning down hundreds of protesters. An estimated 3,000 people were killed nationwide during the seven months of protests. There has been no independent investigation or prosecution of the members of Burma’s security forces involved in the violence of 1988. Many of Burma’s current leaders, such as President Than Shwe and army chief General Maung Aye, held senior positions in the military at the time.

‘As the world celebrates the opening of the Beijing Olympics, people should pause to remember the atrocities in Burma 20 years ago,’ said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. ‘This anniversary is testament to the Burmese people’s enduring demand for freedom and to the world’s failure to end repressive military rule. And China, more than any other country, has enabled the survival of the brutal Burmese regime.’

In echoes of the 1988 uprising, security forces brutally suppressed peaceful demonstrations of activists, monks and ordinary people in August and September 2007. Security forces shot and killed at least 30 protesters, and arrested thousands, many of whom were tortured and mistreated. The army continues to

engage in brutal military offensives against ethnic minority populations in Burma, committing atrocities that violate international humanitarian law.

A third of Burma's population of 54 million lives in abject poverty. Education and health services have deteriorated to among the lowest in the world. Following the devastating Cyclone Nargis, which struck southern Burma in early May 2008, the military government showed it was more concerned with national security than with the plight of its people. It initially delayed and blocked international relief efforts, and then proceeded with a constitutional referendum. Human Rights Watch's report 'Vote to Nowhere: The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma,' showed that the referendum was carried out in an environment of severe restrictions on access to information, repressive media laws, an almost total ban on freedom of expression, assembly, and association, and the continuing widespread detention of political activists. Despite obvious flaws in the process and its implementation, China hailed the referendum as progress. The ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has announced parliamentary elections for 2010.

Human Rights Watch said that the Olympic spotlight should be turned on Burma because of China's role as a close ally of the SPDC. As a major source of foreign investment, trading partner, and diplomatic supporter of the SPDC, the Chinese government further entrenches military rule in Burma. China's actions, such as blocking UN Security Council action on Burma, have frustrated efforts by the Burmese people to enlist other countries and the United Nations to press for an end to decades of political oppression.

On August 8, many heads of state, including US President George W. Bush, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Chinese President Hu Jintao, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein will be in Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

'The Chinese government and the Olympic movement should be ashamed to have a leader from this ruthless regime as an Olympic guest,' said Pearson. 'At the very least, Beijing should tell the prime minister that it's time for political reform in Burma. As a responsible power, China should put the Burmese people's welfare first, ahead of profit from business deals and arms sales that only benefit the regime.'

This week, the new UN special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Tomás Ojea Quintana, visited Burma for the first time. The UN special advisor to the secretary-general on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, will also visit Burma in August to consult with the SPDC on political reforms.

Human Rights Watch calls on the international community, particularly China, India, and the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to pressure the Burmese government to cooperate fully with both envoys and to make basic reforms to improve the human rights situation, including to:

Cooperate fully with the United Nations and international relief agencies to respond to cyclone-affected areas, to provide aid with full transparency, accountability, and community participation;

Immediately and unconditionally release an estimated 2,000 political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, and permit them free and unfettered participation in political activities;

Cease restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association; and

Cease military attacks against ethnic minority populations, and hold accountable all members of the security forces responsible for war crimes.

'Burma's rulers have used China's support as a license to commit atrocities,' Pearson said. 'Concerned governments should focus sustained criticism and targeted sanctions on the military regime so that the people of Burma do not endure another 20 years of brutal oppression.'

Source : <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/ONIN-7HASPD?OpenDocument&cc=mmr>

News

New OCHA report released: Myanmar: Cyclone Nargis OCHA Situation Report No. 44

Burma quiet on rally anniversary

The military authorities in Burma have imposed tight security in the main city, Rangoon, on the 20th anniversary of a major uprising.

BBC NEWS: 2008/08/08 07:53:26 GMT - [Link](#)

Police and pro-government militias are stationed at strategic points in the city, including Buddhist monasteries.

Activists outside Burma are marking the anniversary with demonstrations.

The 1988 protests drew hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets, but ended with a violent clampdown and the deaths of at least 3,000 civilians.

The date 8 August 1988 was significant for the superstitious Burmese, and marked the start of six weeks of rallies against military rule.

Until the 8/8/88 protests, Aung San Suu Kyi was only known as the daughter of liberation hero Aung San, but her speech to the assembled protesters during the rallies propelled her to the centre of the pro-democracy movement.

Nyan Win, a spokesman for her National League for Democracy (NLD) party, told AFP news agency that the anniversary marked "an important historical turning point".

Anti-China protests

The only sign of the anniversary inside the country was the heavy military presence, with riot police posted at busy intersections, the former campus of Rangoon University and the famous Shwedagon Pagoda.

Additional barriers and a fire engine were also placed outside Aung San Suu Kyi's home.

Elsewhere in Asia, though, human rights groups and activists who fled in the aftermath of the 1988 protests held demonstrations outside Burmese embassies.

They also protested outside the Chinese embassy in Bangkok.

"We are here because China is the main supporter of the military regime," Kyaw Lin Oo, a Burmese activist, told reporters.

"We want the Chinese government to understand the actual cost of their support to the people inside of Burma," he added.

"As the world celebrates the opening of the Beijing Olympics, people should pause to remember the atrocities in Burma 20 years ago," added Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch.

In Rangoon, dissident Min Aung told the Associated Press: "I've totally lost hope that change will come through mass protests.

"It's difficult to organise protests now because most of the leaders are in jail or in hiding."

Fearful residents mark Myanmar's "8-8-88" uprising

Reuters, Friday August 8 2008 - [Link](#)

(Updates with Bangkok and Manila protests, teacher) By Aung Hla Tun - YANGON, Aug 8 (Reuters) - Cowed and afraid, people in Myanmar marked exactly 20 years on Friday since the army crushed an "8-8-88" democracy uprising with the loss of an estimated 3,000 lives, although the only protests were outside the country.

After last year's widespread fuel-price rallies, the generals in charge of the former Burma were taking no chances, posting armed police and pro-government thugs at strategic sites around Yangon, such as the gilded Shwedagon pagoda.

Most of the leaders of the 1988 uprising, the biggest challenge to army rule dating back to 1962, have been behind bars since the start of the fuel-price demonstrations last August. They are just a few of an estimated 1,100 political prisoners.

"We are not planning any official ceremony, although some people might choose to do something in private," Nyan Win, a spokesman for the opposition National League for Democracy, said.

Others concurred, citing the daily struggle to survive in one of Asia's poorest nations and a sense of the futility of protest that has lingered since 1988 and last year's crackdown, in which at least 31 people were killed.

"Nobody is happy with the present situation, but most people know from experience that protests will not change their lives," English teacher Hla Maung told Reuters.

Outside the pariah Southeast Asian nation, however, human rights groups and activists who fled the 1988 bloodshed staged demonstrations outside Myanmar and Chinese embassies.

In Bangkok, dozens of protesters chanted anti-junta slogans, burnt Myanmar flags and waved placards calling for the release of democracy icon and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest in Yangon.

In the Philippine capital Manila, activists from the Free Burma Coalition and Amnesty International criticised Chinese support for the junta.

About 40 activists marched with mock Olympic torches to the Chinese embassy, calling on China to use the Games to improve human rights.

"REMEMBER THE ATROCITIES"

China is being targeted on what is also the opening day of the Beijing Olympic Games because of its commercial and diplomatic ties to the generals, gate-keepers of Myanmar's plentiful reserves of natural gas and other resources.

"As the world celebrates the opening of the Beijing Olympics, people should pause to remember the atrocities in Burma 20 years ago," Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

"This anniversary is testament to the Burmese people's enduring demand for freedom and to the world's failure to end repressive military rule. And China, more than any other country, has enabled the survival of the brutal Burmese regime," she said.

Aug. 8, 1988 -- 8-8-88 -- was chosen as the focus of the uprising because of its numerologically auspicious connotations for most Burmese. It was also said to be a powerful foil to then military supremo Ne Win, whose lucky number was nine.

On Thursday, U.S. President George W. Bush used a visit to neighbouring Thailand, home to more than 100,000 Myanmar refugees and more than a million migrant workers, to highlight the 1988 bloodshed and call yet again for Suu Kyi's release.

"The American people care deeply about the people of Burma and dream for the day the people will be free," he told dissidents and former political prisoners at an hour-long lunch.

He also heard criticism of Washington's stance towards Myanmar -- labelled an "outpost of tyranny" by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice -- for forcing the generals into the international isolation that junta supremo Than Shwe craves.

"I asked him to engage with the Burmese military," activist Aung Naing Oo, who fled for his life 20 years ago, said. "It's only Than Shwe and a few other generals who want to isolate Burma, so I told him engagement was very important." (Additional reporting and writing by Ed Cropley; Editing by David Fogarty)

Security tight on anniversary of Myanmar uprising

AP - 8 August, 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Myanmar — Twenty years after it violently suppressed a bid by more than a million peaceful protesters to restore democracy, Myanmar's military junta was on high alert Friday with riot police guarding the country's main city and detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's home.

While no protests were reported in Myanmar itself, activists around Asia planned to mark the 20th anniversary with demonstrations at the embassies of both Myanmar and China, a key ally of the junta that critics say could pressure the leadership to bring about change. The protests also coincide with the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing.

"We are here because China is the main supporter of the military regime," said Kyaw Lin Oo, a Myanmar activist living in Thailand who was among 30 protesters at the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok.

"We want the Chinese government to understand the actual cost of their support to the people inside of Burma," he said, using the country's former name. "China can help our democratization process by putting pressure on the military regime."

He later joined about 100 others outside the Myanmar Embassy. They chanted "Free Burma, Free Aung San Suu Kyi" and threw red paper airplanes with the message "We will never forget. We will never give up. 1988." over the embassy wall.

No one was arrested.

A similar protest was held in the Philippine capital, Manila, where some 50 people demonstrated outside the Chinese Consulate.

The demonstrations mark the 1988 uprising in which more than a million people took to the streets following the government's sudden demonetization of the currency, which wiped out many people's savings. The protests brought down longtime dictator Ne Win, but a new group of generals replaced him and brutally crushed the protests in September, killing an estimated 3,000 people, including many students and Buddhist monks.

The protests propelled Suu Kyi, daughter of Myanmar independence hero Aung San, into the political limelight, and led to the founding of her National League for Democracy party to challenge army rule.

Elections were held in 1990, but the military refused to recognize the landslide victory of Suu Kyi's party. Suu Kyi, who won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has spent more than 12 of the past 19 years under house arrest.

The mood inside the country is weary. Suu Kyi remains under house arrest for a sixth year and many other pro-democracy leaders are in prison or in hiding following last year's failed demonstrations in which at least 31 people were killed.

"I've totally lost hope that change will come through mass protests," said Min Aung, a dissident in Yangon who marched in 1988 and again in demonstrations last year. "It's difficult to organize protests now because most of the leaders are in jail or in hiding."

In Yangon, the country's largest city, the only sign of the anniversary was beefed-up security.

Hundreds of riot police were posted at busy intersections and truckloads of security personnel guarded landmarks and flash points for earlier protests, including famed Shwedagon pagoda and the former campus of Rangoon University, which has been moved out of the city.

Additional barriers and a fire truck were placed at Suu Kyi's house, already surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by scores of riot police. Activists said they had no plans to challenge the junta in the streets.

Nyunt Hlaing, a 57-year old grocery shop owner in Yangon, recalled with fondness how he marched for a month in 1988, threw stones at soldiers and put up barricades to stop their armored vehicles.

"I cannot participate the way I did in 1988. I am older now and have a family to take care of," Nyunt Hlaing said. "Those were the days, and I don't expect demonstrations of that scale to ever take place again in the country."

Exiled Burmese dissidents in Thailand acknowledge they are at a loss as to how to bring down the regime, at least in the short-term.

"A lot of people are saying, 'What has gone wrong? Where are we now?'" said Aung Naing Oo, who took part in the 1988 uprising and was among nine dissidents who met Thursday with President Bush. "Why are we still in this situation?"

But that doesn't mean Burmese activists have given up hope or forgotten the dark days of 1988.

"As the world celebrates the opening of the Beijing Olympics, people should pause to remember the atrocities in Burma 20 years ago," said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "This anniversary is testament to the Burmese people's enduring demand for freedom and to the world's failure to end repressive military rule."

Suu Kyi's party hails 1988 uprising as 'turning point' in Myanmar

AFP - 8 August 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON () — Aung San Suu Kyi's party Friday hailed a 1988 pro-democracy uprising as a "turning point" in Myanmar's history, as activists silently mourned the movement that was violently crushed by the military.

"This anniversary marks an important historical turning point in Myanmar's politics. People will never forget it," Nyan Win, spokesman for her National League for Democracy (NLD), told AFP.

August 8, 1988 -- a numerologically important date known as 8.8.88 -- marked the beginning of a student-led uprising that drew hundreds of thousands of people into the streets of cities and villages across the country.

The movement capped a year of student protests that resulted in the former dictator Ne Win stepping down in July 1988. With the government in turmoil, the August 8 uprising quickly spread around the country.

Soldiers opened fire to break up the crowds, but the unrest rumbled on for six weeks, until a group of generals staged a coup and reasserted total military control. An estimated 3,000 people were killed in the uprising.

Until then, Aung San Suu Kyi had been the little known daughter of slain liberation hero General Aung San. She had spent most of her life as an expatriate, settling into a comfortable life in British academia.

She happened to be in Myanmar -- then known as Burma -- to care for her ailing mother when the uprising erupted.

On August 26, 1988, she spoke to the crowds outside Myanmar's holiest shrine, the golden Shwedagon Pagoda, and instantly became the public face of the movement.

After the coup she helped form the NLD, but was thrown under house arrest in 1989. Despite her detention, the party won 1990 elections in a landslide, but was never allowed to govern. Since her initial arrest, she has been allowed only a few brief years of freedom.

No remembrances were planned to mark the anniversary in Myanmar, and heavy police security was seen around Yangon -- especially around Shwedagon Pagoda -- to ward off any protests.

Laura Bush urges China to act on Burma

Financial Times - August 7 2008 18:55 - [Link](#)

By Chawadee Nualkhair in Bangkok - Laura Bush, the US first lady, urged China to join other countries in putting pressure on Burma's military junta to loosen its vice-like grip on its people on Thursday.

Her call added to criticisms of human rights offences in Asia by her husband, President George W. Bush, on his last trip to the region.

Mrs Bush toured a resettlement camp and health clinic on the Thai-Burmese border to highlight the plight of refugees from the military dictatorship that has been in place for more than 40 years in Burma.

"We have talked to the Chinese quite often about this," said Mrs Bush. "We urge the Chinese to do what other countries have done, to sanction, to put a financial squeeze on the Burmese generals so that they will reach out to the people in the country of Burma."

Mr Bush on Thursday also had strong words about Burma, and reiterated a call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Prize laureate, who has been under house arrest since 1989.

"Together, we seek an end to tyranny in Burma," he said in Bangkok, adding later: "We will continue working until the people of Burma have the freedom they deserve."

Hours before leaving for Beijing for the start of the Olympic Games – a move criticised by members of the US Congress because of China's record on human rights – he condemned Beijing's treatment of political dissent and pushed for an unfettered press.

Mr Bush said the US harboured "deep concerns" about human rights in China, and said increased freedom in the communist country would ultimately benefit the country.

"America stands in firm opposition to China's detention of political dissidents, human rights advocates and religious activists.

"We speak out for a free press, freedom of assembly, and labour rights not to antagonise China's leaders, but because trusting its people with greater freedom is the only way for China to develop its full potential," he added.

China hit back on Thursday at Mr Bush, calling his remarks an interference in its domestic affairs.

"We firmly oppose any words and deeds that use human rights and religion to interfere in other countries' internal affairs," said Qin Gang, a spokesman at the Chinese foreign ministry.

"The Chinese people enjoy religious freedom according to law. That's a basic fact evident to all," he said.

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- **Burmese university students challenge junta, remember slaughter of 8 August 1988**
 - **Bush spotlights Myanmar repression**
 - **Philippines urged to take lead role in ASEAN against Myanmar**
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Burmese university students challenge junta, remember slaughter of 8 August 1988 *AsiaNews/Agencies – 06 August 2008*

Yangon – University students in Yangon have prepared an anti-government pamphlet and poster campaign to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 8 August 1988 protests and the military dictatorship's bloody crackdown.

During the protests in 1988 more than 3,000 people were killed; for this reason the government is at present tightening security measures to prevent any form of dissent.

Students at Yangon's Dagon University sent a letter to its rector and vice-rector, asking them to participate in protest actions in commemoration of the uprising set for Friday.

Security appears tighter around all universities which confirms that the junta fears demonstrations like those led by Buddhist monks last September.

Former student movement leaders said they plan to wear black on 8 August in memory of the victims of 1988.

Prayers will be held at temples and offerings of food made to monks.

Twenty years later former students remember 1988 as a time when everyone was involved, when the "whole country was marching in the streets"

Bush spotlights Myanmar repression

Associated Press - 07 August 2008

BANGKOK, Thailand - President Bush praised the spread of freedom in Asia while training a harsh spotlight Thursday on the region's democratic laggards, sharply criticizing oppression and human rights abuses in China, Myanmar and North Korea.

And the speech was followed by a string of events Thursday, by both the president and his wife, Laura, that were clearly aimed at shifting the focus to the repressive military regime in Myanmar.

The president was briefed at the U.S. ambassador's residence on recovery from the cyclone that devastated Myanmar's heartland and killed more than 80,000 people, had lunch with nine Burmese activists.

Bush called the activists "courageous people," saying he wanted to hear their stories and their advice.

One of the activists, Lway Aye Nang of the Women's League of Burma, said rape has long been used "as a weapon of war" in Myanmar and thanked Washington for imposing sanctions against her country.

"This is really hitting ... the regime and their associates, who have been defiling the country's natural resources for their own benefit and leaving ordinary citizens in extreme poverty," she said.

Bush's speech had been expected to prominently feature Myanmar. But it contained only a brief — though blunt — mention of the reclusive nation.

"We will continue working until the people of Burma have the freedom they deserve," Bush said, calling for the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners.

Philippines urged to take lead role in ASEAN against Myanmar

AFP - 07 August 2008

MANILA - A prominent exiled Myanmar opposition lawmaker Thursday called on the Philippines to take a more prominent role in pushing for genuine democratic changes in the isolated state.

Khun Myint Tun, who is a member of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), said atrocities continued in his homeland and urged the United Nations to withdraw its recognition of the ruling military junta.

He said it was time for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) "and the United Nations to be more serious in crafting tangible ways to bring democracy back" to Myanmar, including pressuring the generals to open up dialogue with the opposition.

"ASEAN should talk about dialogue. ASEAN should discuss the Burma issue during dialogues with China," Khun Myint Tun said.

Khun Myint Tun said he was in Manila to "urge the Philippine government as a member state of ASEAN to reject the Burmese junta's so-called roadmap to democracy and to take a lead in forwarding a genuine tripartite dialogue in Burma."

The Philippines has warned it will not ratify ASEAN's charter if the junta continues to detain democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

Khun Myint Tun was elected an MP in 1990, when Aung San Suu Kyi led the NLD to a landslide win which was never recognised by the junta.

He was imprisoned for seven years until 2003, but continues to work in exile for reforms in Myanmar.

US First Lady visits Myanmar refugees

AFP - 7 August 2008 - [Link](#)

MAE LA REFUGEE CAMP, Thailand — US First Lady Laura Bush, a vocal critic of Myanmar's junta, toured a refugee camp on Thursday and called on the military regime to open dialogue with the opposition.

Highlighting abuses in military-run Myanmar has been the chief cause of the first lady, and with her daughter Barbara she made her way through a muddy settlement which is home to tens of thousands who have fled the junta's repression.

She thanked the Thai government for allowing the nine camps housing more than 120,000 refugees that string the border with Myanmar.

"If we could see a change in the Burmese government ... so people could move home in safety, that would be the best result," the first lady told camp leaders, referring to Myanmar by its previous name.

"The best solution would be if General Than Shwe's regime would start real dialogue," she said after being greeted by refugees performing song and dance in traditional dress.

About 35,000 refugees huddle in Mae La camp at the foot of forested mountains, which many risked their lives to cross in their desperation to flee military crackdowns on ethnic rebel armies in their homeland.

Mae La is on the site of the first refugee camp, which was set up in 1984 as Myanmar's army advanced into Karen state and forced thousands over the border.

Most are from Myanmar's ethnic groups, including many Christians from the Karen minority.

The United States has pledged to resettle 26,811 refugees, and Bush and her daughter -- who were swaddled in shawls woven by the refugees -- also visited a class teaching the people about life in America.

But, Bush said: "Most people do not want to have to move to third countries. They would rather move to their home villages in safety and security."

President George W. Bush, who arrived in Thailand on Wednesday, hailed his wife's efforts to highlight abuses in Myanmar, which has been ruled by the military since 1962 and keeps democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi locked up.

"We seek an end to tyranny in Burma," he said in a speech in Bangkok on US policy in Asia.

"This noble cause has many devoted champions, and I happen to be married to one of them ... America reiterates our call on Burma's military junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners."

The president will later meet with exiled Myanmar dissidents and politicians, a day before the 20-year anniversary of a pro-democracy uprising there which was crushed by the army, leaving 3,000 dead.

Aung San Suu Kyi led her National League for Democracy (NLD) party to election victory in 1990, but instead of recognising the result the junta kept her under house arrest, where she has now spent most of the last 19 years.

The generals have suppressed any sign of dissent, and more than 2,000 political prisoners are believed to be behind bars in the isolated nation.

On Friday, activists in Myanmar will silently mark two decades since the August 8, 1988 uprising, when students led activists, Buddhist monks, and even young military cadets into the streets, only to face a massacre by the army.

Last year, protesters again poured onto the streets to rally against economic hardship and junta rule. This time, 31 people were killed in the resulting crackdown, the United Nations has said.

Bush's Thailand trip turns heat on Myanmar

Reuters - Wed Aug 6, 2008 9:54am EDT - [Link](#)

By Matt Spetalnick - BANGKOK, Aug 6 - U.S. President George W. Bush flew into Bangkok on Wednesday on the latest leg of a pre-Olympics Asian tour, although his focus in Thailand is mainly on the "outpost of tyranny" junta in neighbouring Myanmar.

In a broad speech on U.S. involvement in Asia to be delivered on Thursday, Bush will repeat his mantra for the former Burma's military rulers "to release Aung San Suu Kyi", the opposition leader and Nobel laureate detained for the last five years.

In all, Suu Kyi, 63, has been in prison or under house arrest for nearly 13 of the last 19 years. After a meeting with Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, Bush praised Bangkok for its role in helping funnel emergency relief to the victims of Cyclone Nargis, which killed 134,000 when it slammed into Myanmar's Irrawaddy delta on May 2.

"We want to see prosperity and freedom restored to Burma," he told reporters.

On Thursday, he will cover the whole gamut of U.S. policy in Asia, from North Korea's nuclear programme to regional security and trans-Pacific trade to his strongest criticism yet of China's attitude to human rights.

"The United States believes the people of China deserve the fundamental liberty that is the natural right of all human beings," Bush will say, according to excerpts of Thursday's speech released in advance.

"So America stands in firm opposition to China's detention of political dissidents, human rights advocates and religious activists," he will say.

However, the timing of his visit and the schedule in place for him and his wife in Thailand leaves little doubt about his other main message.

"8-8-88 DEMOCRACY"

As well as the start of the Olympics in Beijing, Friday is the 20th anniversary of Myanmar's "8-8-88" democracy uprising, when an estimated 3,000 people were killed when troops were sent in to crush nationwide protests.

On the eve of this numerically auspicious day, Bush will have lunch with activists who took part in the uprising before fleeing for their lives to Thailand, where they have campaigned for an end to military rule that stretches back to 1962.

Laura Bush, who has adopted Myanmar human rights as a personal cause, will travel to the Thai border to visit a refugee camp and health clinic for those fleeing the ethnic guerrilla wars that have roiled Myanmar's hinterlands for decades.

"Together, we seek an end to tyranny in Burma," Bush will say, echoing his Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who has referred to Myanmar as an "outpost of tyranny".

Under Bush, Washington has been at the forefront of the West tightening up sanctions against Myanmar, a policy criticised for merely increasing the international isolation in which junta supremo Than Shwe appears to revel.

The depth of distrust of the outside world was highlighted in May when the junta refused U.S. and French offers of military helicopters and ships to assist the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

"Nargis has shown that if the U.S. wants to help the Burmese people, they need to have some kind of relationship with the Burmese military government," Aung Naing Oo, one of the exiled dissidents set to meet Bush on Thursday, told Reuters.

"Than Shwe wants to isolate Burma. If the U.S. tries to isolate Burma, they are simply doing Than Shwe's work for him," he said. (Additional reporting and writing by Ed Cropley; Editing by David Fox)

Bush, Beijing and Burma

Irrawaddy - Thursday, August 7, 2008 – [Link](#)

By AUNG DIN - One day before the Beijing Olympics begin, President George W Bush and first lady Laura Bush meet with Burmese democracy activists in Thailand. The trip rightly draws attention to a matter China prefers the world would ignore—it's propping up of one of the world's most brutal military dictatorships.

The trip also calls into question those in the United States, European Union and many countries in Asia who have for some years placed great hope in the idea that China will assume the role of a "responsible stakeholder" as it is increasingly integrated in the international community.

In the case of Burma, these hopes couldn't be more divorced from reality. China serves as Burma's financial, political, military and diplomatic backbone, working actively to derail international efforts at change. Without China's help, the regime would have been forced into peaceful negotiations many years ago.

The stakes couldn't be higher for the Burmese people. While not as well-known as Idi Amin, Omar Al-Bashir, Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin, Burma's dictator Than Shwe rightly belongs in a rogue's gallery of the worst dictators in history. Among other abuses, Than Shwe has locked up nearly 2,000 political prisoners, along with the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Aung San Suu Kyi.

He has ordered and carried out the destruction of a staggering 3,200 ethnic minority villages in Burma, forcing millions to flee as refugees and internally displaced people. To put this in a comparative perspective, this is twice as many villages as have been destroyed by Bashir's Janjaweed in Darfur. To make matters worse, when Buddhist monks marched on the streets in Burma last September calling for peace in the country, Than Shwe ordered his troops to shoot directly at the monks. Many monks were killed; many more were arrested, disrobed and tortured, along with leading dissidents and human rights activists.

I can personally testify to the horrors of Than Shwe's prison gulags. I was arrested and then imprisoned in Burma for more than four years, during which time I experienced firsthand many of the Burmese military regime's torture tactics. Severe beatings, starvation and electrocution are the order of the day. I still have nightmares about what happens behind Burma's bamboo curtain.

Many modern dictators who carry out atrocities on this scale are immediately faced with action from the United Nations. Peacekeepers may be dispatched, the UN Security Council might demand changes or a global arms embargo could be put in place. Yet, China has prevented any meaningful action at the UN via its veto power at the Security Council.

When France, the UK and the United States proposed a non-binding resolution in early 2007 that called on Than Shwe's regime to end its attacks against the Burmese people and engage in peaceful negotiations with the democracy movement, China vetoed the move.

When the military regime opened fire on the Buddhist monks, China permitted a truncated UN Security Council statement calling for change in Burma, only to backpedal the very same day.

Beyond stifling UN efforts at jump-starting peaceful negotiations in Burma, China has served as Than Shwe's key supplier of weapons for more than two decades, including tanks and armored personnel carriers, fighter jets, attack aircraft, coastal patrol ships, small arms and light weapons. With Chinese arms and military equipment, Burma's regime has quadrupled the size of its forces to 450,000 soldiers.

In return, Burma has granted China sweetheart deals on natural gas extraction. By some estimates, the Burmese regime ignored a superior Indian offer by \$8.4 billion for Burmese natural gas; the cheaper deal went instead to China. Unlike China, India can offer no respite to the regime from the UN Security Council.

Meanwhile, the regime continues to plead for international humanitarian aid, shockingly siphoning off 10 to 15 percent for itself. Even after Cyclone Nargis recently devastated much of Southwestern Burma, the regime continued to line its own pockets, stealing millions of dollars in foreign assistance intended to help the most needed.

The President and first lady should raise these issues with President Hu Jintao when they arrive in China on August 8th, the 20-year anniversary of a massive popular uprising in Burma and the opening day of the Beijing Olympics.

Specifically, the President should ask President Hu to inform the Burmese military regime that unless Than Shwe enters into serious three-way negotiations with Aung San Suu Kyi and the country's ethnic minorities, China will end its support for the Burmese dictator at the UN Security Council.

We hope the Bush meeting with Burmese dissidents—many of whom have been through hell in their peaceful struggle for democracy—will inspire him to press China to play the "responsible" role that the modern world expects.

Aung Din is the executive director of the US Campaign for Burma. A former political prisoner in Burma, he served more than four years imprisonment.

White House Press Release - August 7, 2008

Fact Sheet: the United States Supports the People of Burma

 [In Focus: Trip to Asia 2008](#)

President Bush And Mrs. Bush Are Committed To Helping The People Of Burma Achieve The Freedom They Deserve

Today, President Bush and Mrs. Bush are continuing their efforts to keep international attention on the ongoing humanitarian and human rights situation in Burma. In Bangkok, Mae La, and Mae Sot, they are meeting with activists and other leaders who are working to assist the people of Burma. President Bush is receiving a briefing on the United States' response to Cyclone Nargis, having lunch with Burmese freedom activists, and conducting a roundtable with media outlets to discuss Burma. Mrs. Bush is traveling to the Thai-Burma border to visit with refugees at the Mae La refugee camp and the Mae Tao Clinic.

- The United States has provided significant humanitarian assistance to the people of Burma to assist the victims of Cyclone Nargis. From May 12 to June 22, the United States conducted 185 airlift flights of U.S., Thai, U.N., and non-governmental organizational emergency relief supplies from Thailand to Burma. U.S. goods benefitted approximately 450,000 people, and were part of the \$50 million in U.S. Government assistance for the cyclone relief effort.
- In Fiscal Year 2008, the United States is providing over \$65.5 million to help the people of Burma in the areas of democracy-building, humanitarian assistance, health, and education.
- The United States is providing \$12.7 million in Fiscal Year 2008 to support Burmese refugees in Thailand.
- From 1998-2008, the United States provided more than \$2.4 million for the Mae Tao Clinic, and we plan to provide another \$450,000 in the coming fiscal year as part of the ongoing humanitarian and health program for the Burmese people.

President and Mrs. Bush continue to actively express the American people's support for the people of Burma as they struggle for democracy, human rights, and freedom. Since the Saffron Revolution of September 2007, President Bush has issued two new executive orders that authorize the Department of the Treasury to impose financial sanctions on persons determined to be responsible for supporting, empowering, and enriching the Burmese regime as well as state-owned enterprises.

- Under these Executive Orders, the Administration has already targeted 84 entities and individuals for sanctions.
- The President also signed into law the Tom Lantos JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act, which prohibits importation of jadeite or rubies from Burma, and jewelry containing such jadeite and rubies, thereby targeting a significant source of revenue for the Burmese regime.

Additionally, in 2006, Mrs. Bush hosted a United Nations roundtable on the plight of the Burmese people, and has continually urged the international community to condemn the violence in Burma and work to prevent future violence. In this effort, Mrs. Bush has consulted with the UN Secretary General and met several times with Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Secretary General's special adviser on

Burma. Most recently, Mrs. Bush held a press conference in May 2008 in the White House Press Briefing Room calling on the junta to allow unhindered access for international disaster experts and aid providers so that the Burmese people could receive the assistance they need in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/08/20080807-1.html>

Kuwait strengthens economic ties with Myanmar

DPA - Aug 7, 2008, 5:37 GMT - [Link](#)

Yangon - Oil-rich Kuwait has signed two economic agreements with gas-rich Myanmar as part of Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah's tour of the region, state media reports said Thursday.

Nasser visited Myanmar's military capital of Naypyitaw on Wednesday and held talks with Prime Minister General Thein Sein to discuss bilateral relations, said The New Light of Myanmar, a government mouthpiece.

The two premiers witnessed the signing of an 'Agreement for the Encouragement and Reciprocal Protection of investment between the Union of Myanmar and the State of Kuwait' and an 'Agreement for Economic and Technical Cooperation between the Union of Myanmar and the State of Kuwait.'

Myanmar, a pariah state among Western democracies for its atrocious human rights record, is one of Asia's most backward economies. It is, however, rich in offshore natural gas reserves which last year earned the country about 2.6 billion dollars in export revenues.

The Kuwaiti premier has been on a tour of Asia that has already taken him to Brunei, Japan, South Korea, Cambodia and Laos. He will also visit Thailand August 13 to 14.

In Laos and Cambodia, Nasser expressed Kuwait's interest in investing in the two countries' agricultural sectors.

Kuwait is oil-rich but largely covered in desert, making it difficult to grow enough food for its 2-million-plus residents.

'This is a new policy of Kuwait and the Persian Gulf as a whole,' said Lao Foreign Ministry spokesman Yong Chanthalangsy. 'Now they have extra money from oil, so they are looking further afield for investments. This is good for us because we have economic potential but lack capital.'

- **UN envoy meets top Myanmar political prisoners: spokesman**
- **UN envoy meets Myanmar monks: official**
- **UN envoy tours Myanmar cyclone zone: official**
- **Amnesty calls on Myanmar to free 2,000 political prisoners**
- **Burma Military Regime Said Requiring Cyclone Survivors To Pay Back Aid**

UN envoy meets top Myanmar political prisoners: spokesman

Agence France Presse- 05 August 2008

YANGON - The new United Nations human rights envoy for Myanmar met on Tuesday with some of the nation's most prominent political prisoners inside the feared Insein Prison, a spokesman said.

UN special rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana met with five inmates, including Win Tin, a 78-year-old journalist who is the country's longest-serving political prisoner, detained since 1989, UN spokesman Aye Win said.

The envoy also met with leading labour activist Su Su Nway and with Buddhist monk Gambira, who helped lead mass anti-government protests violently suppressed by the military last September, the spokesman said.

The two other activists allowed to speak with Quintana were Thurein Aung and Kyaw Kyaw, labour activists sentenced to 28 years in prison last year for organising a May Day seminar at a US embassy seminar, Mr Aye Win added.

The prison visit came shortly after Quintana toured parts of the Irrawaddy Delta devastated by Cyclone Nargis three months ago, when more than 138,000 people were left dead or missing.

UN envoy meets Myanmar monks: official

AFP 04 August 2008

YANGON - The UN's new human rights envoy for Myanmar met with senior Buddhist monks on Monday, as his first visit to the military-ruled nation got under way, a senior official said.

United Nations special rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana, who took up his post in May, met with the monks as well as other religious leaders in Yangon, a Myanmar official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The official did not say whether Quintana met monks who were personally involved in the protests.

Before his trip ends on Thursday, he also aims to meet state officials, ethnic groups and political parties, and try to open talks with the generals on improving their human rights record.

UN envoy tours Myanmar cyclone zone: official

Agence France Presse – 05 August 2008

YANGON - The new UN human rights envoy for Myanmar on Tuesday toured remote parts of the Irrawaddy Delta still reeling from a killer cyclone that struck the country three months ago, a senior official said.

UN special rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana, who took up his post in May, travelled to the town of Labutta, which was among the areas hardest hit by Cyclone Nargis, a senior Myanmar official told AFP.

Quintana visited Labutta, where many aid agencies have set up their relief operations, and toured surrounding villages, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

During his five-day mission, he plans to meet with senior officials, ethnic groups and political parties, and will try to open talks with the generals on improving their human rights record.

Quintana is expected to push the regime to address international concerns that the junta employs forced labour, suppresses the democracy movement, persecutes ethnic minorities and imprisons dissidents.

Amnesty calls on Myanmar to free 2,000 political prisoners

Agence France Presse – 05 August 2008

BANGKOK - Twenty years after Myanmar's military crushed a national pro-democracy uprising, Amnesty International on Tuesday urged the junta to release more than 2,000 political prisoners it says remain jailed.

The London-based rights group urged the United Nations to take bolder measures to secure the release of the "8/8/88" protesters who commemorate the anniversary of their movement on Friday.

"Nothing speaks louder of the government's poor faith than the fact that there are more long-standing political prisoners in Myanmar now than at any other time since those protests," said Benjamin Zawacki, Amnesty's Myanmar researcher, in a statement.

"The UN should no longer accept the government's hollow assurances but hold Myanmar firmly to its word."

Despite visits from UN human rights advocates and resolutions passed by the United Nations, about 2,050 political prisoners remain in detention, said Amnesty.

It called for immediate freedom for 20 prominent activists in particular, including Win Tin, a 78-year-old journalist and member of the opposition National League of Democracy party led by detainee Aung San Suu Kyi.

Win Tin is the country's longest-serving prisoner, detained since 1989.

Burma Military Regime Said Requiring Cyclone Survivors To Pay Back Aid

AFP - 03 August 2008

BOGALAY - Myanmar's military regime is giving desperately needed aid to cyclone survivors on credit, requiring them to pay back to the government any assistance offered, officials said.

The officials insisted that government aid had allowed for farmers to plant their fields and for fishermen to return to their boats -- but insisted that the cyclone victims would have to reimburse the regime for the aid received.

"If everything is free of charge, its value is very low. If something must be paid back, then they try their best to do it. This is the system," one senior official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The government will distribute everything for them through a payback system. Otherwise, controlling the aid will be very difficult," he said.

About 2.4 million people are struggling to piece together their lives after the storm, according to UN estimates.

Farmers have no choice but to accept the loans, but say they don't know how they will ever repay them.

"We have received power tillers and diesel on credit from the government. Even then, we still need more help to get bank loans so that we will have cash to hire field hands," said Kyi Win, 57, a farm owner in Sat San village outside Bogalay.

"If the UN cannot deliver rice and stops their assistance to us, we will be in trouble. We have no income now as our employers are finding it difficult to start their farming," said Moe Wah, a 24-year-old farm worker.

"I have no job now and am relying on rice aid from the WFP. All of us need jobs urgently to resume our lives. We lost everything in the cyclone," she said.

UN envoy tours Myanmar cyclone zone: official

AFP - 5 August 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON (AFP) — The new UN human rights envoy for Myanmar on Tuesday toured remote parts of the Irrawaddy Delta still reeling from a killer cyclone that struck the country three months ago, a senior official said.

UN special rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana, who took up his post in May, travelled to the town of Labutta, which was among the areas hardest hit by Cyclone Nargis, a senior Myanmar official told AFP.

The United Nations says 2.4 million people are struggling to rebuild their lives and are in need of aid after the storm, which left more than 138,000 dead or missing.

Quintana visited Labutta, where many aid agencies have set up their relief operations, and toured surrounding villages, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

After returning to Yangon, Quintana went to the notorious Insein Prison north of the city, where many of Myanmar's estimated 2,000 political prisoners are believed to be held.

Witnesses reported seeing Quintana inside the prison, where he was expected to meet with some of the detainees.

The envoy, who arrived Sunday in Yangon, held talks on Monday with government officials, disaster relief experts and senior Buddhist monks, UN spokesman Aye Win said.

During his five-day mission, he plans to meet with senior officials, ethnic groups and political parties, and will try to open talks with the generals on improving their human rights record.

Quintana's predecessor, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, was harshly critical of the ruling junta's deadly crackdown on anti-government protests led by monks last September.

Pinheiro said in a report to the UN Human Rights Council in November that at least 31 people were killed and 74 remained missing after the crackdown.

He also said about 1,850 political prisoners were behind bars, and the government had "accelerated" unlawful arrests.

Quintana is expected to push the regime to address international concerns that the junta employs forced labour, suppresses the democracy movement, persecutes ethnic

Burmese still struggling after cyclone

Story from BBC NEWS - 2008/08/05 21:46:11 GMT: [Link](#)

By Nga Pham

It has been three months since Cyclone Nargis struck Burma, leaving 130,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless.

On a covert trip to the Irrawaddy Delta region, I found many of the survivors still in need, and the regime still suspicious of foreigners.

Recently, the government started letting aid workers in, but foreign tourists and journalists are still not allowed to visit the affected areas.

I had been warned by my Burmese colleagues that it would be very difficult to move around Burma, and I had to be aware of the many layers of security designed to keep a close eye on visiting foreign nationals.

My plan was to fly to Rangoon, then to hire someone who would be willing to accompany me to the Irrawaddy region.

I would be posing as a Burmese woman to avoid unnecessary attention. It turned out to be more difficult than I thought.

I got a traditional Burmese dress, the longyi. I was also prepared to smear myself with the sunscreen powder you see most Burmese women wearing on their faces.

But finding someone who would go with me was tricky, partly because I had to be careful not to put anyone in danger.

Many people were punished by the regime after the cyclone for helping foreign journalists, or simply because they were spotted travelling with journalists.

Via some contacts, I found a guide who agreed to go with me, on the condition that if he saw any sign of danger at all, we would immediately make our way back.

Temporary huts

We left Rangoon early in the morning. We took the ferry cross the Yangon river, swollen, dark and muddy with monsoon rains.

Along the road down into the Irrawaddy region, houses had been repaired, trees had been cut and replanted, pagodas repainted. Paddy fields were covered in the green of the new crop.

However, it was still possible to tell where the cyclone hit, from the pockets of temporary huts scattered across the region.

Most of the huts I saw did not have proper roofs but were covered with plastic sheets provided by international agencies.

Some of the victims were sitting in the mud. As it is the rainy season, it rains almost daily and vast areas are still flooded.

My guide told me that local people have been warned by the authorities not to speak to foreigners and it took us a while to find someone who agreed to have a chat.

Mr Naing Win is a farmer whose family lost almost everything in the cyclone. I found him living with his wife and two children in a small hut.

"The cyclone struck at night, when we were sleeping," he said.

"I saw houses collapsing around my house. Then the rain started pouring down through the roof, which by that time was heavily damaged."

He had nowhere to go, he said, so he simply held a child in each of his arms and stood inside what was left of the house until dawn broke.

"Now we stay in this hut with nothing inside," said Mr Naing. "The children cough all the time because it is so damp.

"I would like to have somewhere better, more solid for my family to stay. But in order to build a proper house, we'd need at least 300,000 kyat (\$46,580) and I don't think we'll ever have the money."

Temporary shelters

The government has closed refugee camps in an attempt to prove that everything has returned to normal.

The Paritta Monastery in Kyauktan, near Rangoon, used to host some 250 families. Now, according to head monk U Pyinya Wanttha, they are all gone.

"About a month ago, the government came here and demanded that all the refugees go back to where they were from and they are now living in the temporary shelters that they've built from bamboos and pieces of wood," he told me.

He said the biggest problem now was to provide the victims with proper shelters, as nobody has any money left. And of course they need food, he added, because it will be some time before the new harvest.

"Kind people have been donating instant noodles and dry foodstuffs which we transfer to the refugees," said U Pyinya Wanttha. "But it is clearly not enough."

Survivors have complained that aid from the government has been scarce.

International charities warn that lack of food could affect millions. Limited access to clean water and unhygienic living conditions are other concerns.

Thu Ya, a local businessman who runs a private relief campaign in the Irrawaddy Delta, said the victims urgently needed help - particularly those in remote areas.

It is monsoon season and they are at risk contracting dangerous illnesses such as malaria, diarrhoea and lung diseases.

Military checkpoints

The United Nations has urged the Burmese government to assure continued access to remote communities, particularly for international non-governmental organisation partners.

On the way into Irrawaddy region, I saw a number of premises emblazoned with agencies' names, such as Save the Children and Care, but did not see any foreign staff inside.

What I did see, in the space of three hours, were six or seven military checkpoints.

We had to beat a hasty retreat when my guide spotted a large military checkpoint ahead of us, where he said we would be stopped and searched.

A recent joint assessment by Asean, the UN and the Burmese government estimates that a further \$1bn is needed for relief and reconstruction work in the country after Cyclone Nargis.

But international agencies like Save the Children are worried that since the spotlight seems to have turned away from Burma, it will be impossible to get sufficient funding.

At least 20 killed in Myanmar jade mine landslide

Reuters - Tue Aug 5, 2008 6:27am EDT - [Link](#)

YANGON, Aug 5 - At least 20 people were killed when the slag heap from a jade mine in military-ruled Myanmar collapsed late last month after torrential rain, industry sources said on Tuesday.

"A number of people panning for gold in the earth were buried alive," a person involved in the jade industry in Yangon told Reuters, saying they had heard about the July 30 incident through traders in the northern state of Kachin, where it happened.

Official media in the former Burma have made no mention of the tragedy, which the source said occurred at the Hmawzizar Jade Mine in Phakant, a major jade mining area about 1,500 km (930 miles) north of Yangon.

"At least 20 bodies had been found as of August 3," said the source, who did not want to be named.

Although one of Asia's poorest countries, Myanmar is a major gemstone producer and such incidents are not uncommon. At least 16 people were killed in a landslide caused by torrential rains in Mogok, the centre of Myanmar's ruby mining, in June.

Locals frequently blame the mining companies, especially those owned by cronies of the ruling military junta, saying they operate mines in Dickensian conditions with scant regard for the safety or welfare of the workers.

Myanmar, an international pariah after 46 years of unbroken military rule, produced more than 20 million kilograms of jade last year, contributing to nearly \$650 million of foreign exchange from sales of precious and semi-precious stones. (Reporting by Aung Hla Tun; Editing by Ed Cropley)

New U.N. rights envoy starts mission in Myanmar

Reuters - Mon Aug 4, 2008 2:48am EDT - [Link](#)

YANGON - The U.N.'s new human rights envoy to Myanmar started his first mission to the military-ruled Southeast Asian nation on Monday, four days before the 20th anniversary of brutally crushed democracy protests.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, whose own parents were political prisoners under a military regime in Argentina, arrived in the former Burma late on Sunday and is due to stay until Thursday, eve of the "8-8-88" uprising anniversary.

He is expected to meet a number of government officials as well as opposition politicians and leaders of some of Myanmar's many ethnic minority groups.

It is not clear whether he see detained opposition leader and Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been in prison or under house arrest continuously for the past five years, and on-and-off for nearly 13 of the past 19 years.

"The Special Rapporteur wishes to engage in a constructive dialogue with the authorities with a view to improving the human rights situation of people of Myanmar," the Geneva-based U.N. Human Rights Council said in a statement.

It remains to be seen whether he will make any headway in a country that has been ruled by a succession of uncompromising military dictators for the past 46 years.

Last week, the junta charged popular comedian and leading dissident Zarganar with public order offences that could see him jailed for up to two years, a lawyer said.

Shortly after his appointment, Ojea Quintana described the arrest of Zarganar for helping coordinate relief supplies to victims of Cyclone Nargis as part of continuing, serious human rights violations.

The junta is keeping a particularly tight grip on public life at the moment as the 20th anniversary of the nationwide democracy protests approaches -- also the start of the Olympic Games in China, Myanmar's main commercial and diplomatic backer.

The uprising was crushed by the army with the loss of an estimated 3,000 lives. Dissidents who fled the crackdown are hoping the milestone will trigger another uprising, although analysts and diplomats say that is very unlikely.

According to the United Nations, more than 1,100 people are behind bars in Myanmar because of their political or religious beliefs.

(Reporting by Aung Hla Tun; Writing by Ed Cropley; Editing by David Fogarty)

Myanmar PM to attend Beijing Olympic Games

Xinhua - 2008-08-04 09:57:27 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Aug. 4 -- Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein will attend the opening ceremony of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games scheduled to be held in China's capital Beijing on Friday, according to an official announcement from Nay Pyi Taw Monday.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar Sports Ministry also said the country is sending a 20-member sports delegation including six athletes to compete in track and field, swimming, archery, rowing and canoeing/kayak in the Beijing Olympic Games which will run from Aug. 8 to 24.

The Myanmar athletes have pledged to try their utmost to attain their personal best in their respective sports events.

Troops on standby in Burma for massacre anniversary

Thousands of heavily-armed Burmese security forces have been moved to the outskirts of Rangoon days before the twentieth anniversary of an uprising which came close to bringing down the military regime.

Telegraph.co.uk - [Link](#)

By Nick Meo

Last Updated: 2:05AM BST 03 Aug 2008

Monks demonstrate against the government prior to the 1988 massacre Photo: GETTY

The regime appears determined to stop any attempt to mark the date, which with four eights - 8.8.88 - is of magical importance in Burma's calendar and of huge significance to protesters who two decades on are still trying to bring down a military government in power under a different dictator.

On 8th August 1988 Burmese soldiers are believed to have shot, suffocated and drowned more than 3,000 protesters after weeks of anti-government demonstrations.

In recent weeks protest leaders who were still on the run have been arrested and additional military units have been moved into the city, Burma's largest.

A Western diplomat in Rangoon said: "Truckloads of heavily armed police and soldiers are on the city outskirts. They are keeping large numbers of security personnel inside the city, out of sight. If they see a single protester in the street he will be picked up in minutes."

Rangoon is seething with frustration after last year's failed protests, which were led by monks. The government's callous handling of the cyclone in May which killed at least 140,000 people has increased popular anger.

Some now talk about taking up arms against the government after the failure of last year's non-violent protests.

A group of young men in a Rangoon bar spoke openly about wanting to attack the army. "If we could find guns, we would do it," said one English-speaking teenager. "I marched last year, we were shot at and we had nothing to shoot back with."

Western embassies have warned their citizens about the risk of bombs in Rangoon after a series of attacks in the city in recent weeks including one last month which killed a government militiaman. Many Burmese believe bombs are set off by the government to justify repression, but there also ethnic-based rebels who continue to fight a low-key guerrilla war which has dragged on for decades in Burma's jungle borderlands. After the 1988 uprising student protesters and guerrillas joined forces.

Sources in Rangoon described growing levels of anger with the military regime.

The diplomat said: "I wouldn't be surprised if people turned to violence. Levels of frustration are such that people feel they don't have any alternative.

"Security may be too high for mass protests this week, but the situation is increasingly bad and Burma is becoming more unstable. This country is crumbling economically."

The return of popular protest is not the only worry for the government. Ethnic rebel groups are attempting to bring charges against Burma's leaders for crimes against humanity, encouraged by the International Criminal Court's recent indictment of Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, for genocide.

The notoriously superstitious generals also fear a prophecy which has been enthusiastically recounted by the ordinary Burmese who must suffer their misrule. Since last year astrologers have been warning that the new capital, Naypidaw, would fill with piles of bones after a fire in Mandalay and the disappearance of Rangoon's trees.

A shopping centre in Mandalay burned down earlier this year, and many of the city's trees were felled by the cyclone in May. Burmese gossips claim that since then the Army has bought thousands of animal bones from butchers and piled them in the streets of Naypidaw - a city closed to most outsiders - in an attempt to fool the spirits believed by Burmese to enact prophecies.

Olympics Notwithstanding, Trip Won't Be All Fun and Games

Washington Post - Monday, August 4, 2008; A09 - [Link](#)

By Michael Abramowitz - Continuing the global barnstorming that has marked his final year in office, President Bush leaves today for a seven-day trip to Asia that has the potential for fireworks at every stop.

The prospect for controversy at the Olympics in Beijing, where Bush is to arrive Thursday, has already been well documented. But stops in Seoul and Bangkok -- aimed at celebrating ties with two of the United States' closest allies in Asia -- could also make Bush's ninth, and probably final, trip to the region something less than the triumphal tour the White House has been hoping for.

Korean protesters angry about the resumption of U.S. beef imports are girding to hit the streets when Bush arrives in Seoul on Tuesday night.

Before the trip, Bush did try to defuse one issue that could have had the effect of pouring gasoline on fire: He effectively undid a move by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, a little-known bureaucratic entity, to disturb the status quo involving a small group of islands in the Sea of Japan, to which both South Korea and Japan lay claim.

According to the Nelson Report, which closely monitors U.S. policy in Asia, the agency decided to change its designation of the islands -- known as Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan -- from "Korean control" to "control is disputed," without input from the White House or the State Department. After furious South Koreans complained, the White House reversed the decision.

"I'm pleased to tell you that . . . whole issue has been restored [to] the way it was seven days ago," Bush told a South Korean journalist Wednesday.

After South Korea, Bush will go to Bangkok to celebrate the 175th anniversary of U.S. diplomatic relations with Thailand. Prime Minister *Samak Sundaravej*, a close ally of the ousted populist premier *Thaksin Shinawatra*, has barely survived street protests and a move to censure him in Parliament.

Political repression in neighboring Burma will be high on Bush's agenda in Bangkok. He will meet with dissidents at the U.S. Embassy while *Laura Bush* tours refugee facilities on the Thailand-Burma border. Yet the Thai government is seen by many in the region as a major enabler of Burmese military strongman *Than Shwe*.

Burma will be "a tricky one" for Bush in Thailand, said *Mike Green*, a former Asia adviser to Bush who briefed reporters last week at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Green and senior Bush administration officials see Asia as a relative bright spot for Bush's foreign policy legacy, with relations improved with each of the major regional powers: China, India, Japan and South Korea. "The U.S. standing in Asia is actually quite good," Green said.

It just may not be apparent for the next few days.

Off the Record, Yes, but Here's What I Said

In another case of pre-trip outreach to those concerned about repression in China, national security adviser *Stephen J. Hadley* met privately Wednesday with the heads of a number of the major human rights organizations. While Hadley asked participants to treat his comments as off the record, to encourage candor, some of those present volunteered their own ideas of what Bush should do in Beijing.

"My main message was that, much as the president would like the Olympics to be an apolitical sporting event, it won't be," *Kenneth Roth*, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said in an e-mail message. "Chinese people will seize the opportunity through peaceful protest to advance their own freedom agenda, the Chinese government will crack down, and President Bush will look awful if he ignores the repression around him and simply applauds the athletes."

One More Maine Event

"Welcome Back, Mr. President!" read the sign strung in front of Bartley's Dockside Restaurant, near the Bush family compound in Kennebunkport, Maine. "And thank you for your service!" the chalkboard added below.

President Bush arrived in coastal Maine on Thursday for what may be his last stay as commander in chief. Bush spends most vacations at his ranch in Crawford, Tex. Yet the Walker's Point family retreat -- a regular refuge for *George H.W. Bush* when he was president -- has also been a frequent destination for his son.

During his weekend stay, my colleague Dan Eggen reports, President Bush took some early-morning bike rides and attended a Saturday wedding for two White House staffers: *Chris Ellis*, son of the president's cousin, and *Rachel Williams*, assistant to presidential counselor *Ed Gillespie*.

Bush's visit also prompted a small protest Saturday, as several dozen demonstrators opposed to U.S. policy toward Iraq and Iran marched along Ocean Avenue near the presidential retreat. They carried, among other things, a U.N. flag, peace signs and a placard reading "No More Bush Wars."

Myanmar detains comedian who delivered cyclone aid

AP – 3 August 2008 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — A famous Myanmar comedian and three other activists who helped deliver relief supplies to cyclone victims could be imprisoned for two years on charges of causing public unrest, his lawyer said Saturday.

Comedian Zarganar and the others appeared in court inside Insein prison on Wednesday, according to Aung Thein, their attorney. They included a sports writer identified as Zaw Thet Htwe and Thant Zin Aung.

Aung Thein said he has not met his clients and was unable to confirm the charges. But he believes they will be accused of breaking a law that makes it illegal for "anyone to circulate a statement or rumor with intent to cause alarm to the public."

Zarganar, the country's most popular comedian, was arrested in June after he gave interviews to foreign media in which he criticized the military regime's slow response to the May 2-3 cyclone that killed more than 84,000 people.

Zarganar said he and more than 400 entertainers in Myanmar volunteered to aid victims of the cyclone, making several trips to hard-hit areas to help some of the more than 2 million survivors.

The day after he was arrested, the junta began publishing daily warnings in state-controlled media against people who send "video footage of relief work to foreign news agencies." Many believe the government suspects Zarganar and his co-workers of providing videos from their relief missions to anti-junta groups.

Zarganar has been imprisoned several times. Most recently, he was held for three weeks for providing food and other necessities to Buddhist monks who spearheaded anti-government protests in Yangon last September.

Zaw Thet Htway, formerly an editor of a popular sports newspaper, was arrested in 2003 for allegedly plotting to "overthrow the government through bombings and assassinations."

He was convicted of high treason and sentenced to death but was later given a reduced sentence and released in 2005 after serving 18 months.

Bush: Burma's Neighbors Not Interested in Sanctions

Irrawaddy - Friday, August 1, 2008 - [Link](#)

By LALIT K JHA - WASHINGTON — US President George W Bush said on Thursday that neighboring countries do not favor economic sanctions against Burma, and this is one of the reasons US sanctions have not been as successful as he would have liked.

"There are some countries in the neighborhood that are not interested in joining," Bush told Suthichai Yoon of the National Media Group of Thailand in an interview, the transcript of which was released by the White House.

Bush said sanctions are not working more effectively because many neighboring countries do not apply them. Observing that unilateral sanctions are effective only to a certain extent, he urged other countries to join the US which has slapped the Burmese junta with a series of sanctions, the last round early this week.

Praising the Burmese democracy advocate, Aung San Suu Kyi, for her courage, Bush said: "Here is a very heroic woman that was elected overwhelmingly by her people and has now been under house arrest by a group of military guys that just simply won't allow the will of the people to flourish."

The US president, who will meet with several Burmese dissidents while in Bangkok, in another roundtable interview with foreign print media, acknowledged there is a difference of opinion within the Association of Southeast Asia Nations about how hard to push Burma to move toward democracy. "I'm at one end of the ledger," he said. "And we'll continue to press hard."

On meeting with Burmese dissidents in Bangkok, Bush said: "My message is going to be one directed to the people in Burma when I meet with some of the activists, and Laura is going to be meeting with some of the people that she got to know."

Bush thanked the people of Thailand and its government for their humanitarian help to the people of Burma in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.

"I think it's very constructive and very helpful," he said. "And I will be speaking to activists to let them know that the United States of America hears their voices. You know, it's a tough issue for some countries.

"I do want to thank the Thai government for its understanding of the refugee issue, particularly as relates to the border policy," he said. "I think it's been very wise and very humane."

Meanwhile, three leading Burmese dissident groups—the All Burma Monk's Alliance, the 88 Generation Students and the All Burma Federation of Student Union—urged UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to review the mission of the United Nations in Burma.

The statement said: "The United Nations is stepping back from its benchmarks, which is the realization of an all party-inclusive, democratic, participatory and transparent process of national reconciliation."

Instead of working toward these benchmarks, the UN has allowed the Burmese military regime to embark on a unilateral and brutal path, forcing democracy groups to live in a repressive, untenable position, it said.

"If the secretary-general openly and strongly asks the Security Council take action on Burma, we believe that China and Russia might change their position," the statement said.

The statement expressed disappointment with the role played by UN Special Envoy to Burma Ibrahim Gambari, who will visit Burma in August: "Instead of convincing the regime with a forceful voice and the strength of moral authority, it seems that he was convinced by the regime that there was no other way [but] to accept their unilateral actions."

Bush vows to 'press hard' for democracy - US leader makes clear his stance on Burma
Bangkok Post – 1 August 2008 - [Link](#)

Pichai Chuensuksawadi - WASHINGTON : US President George W. Bush admits that differences continue to exist between the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) on Burma but disagrees with the notion that this issue will hinder more advanced Asean-US cooperation.

"Burma is a concern for the US," he said in an interview with the Bangkok Post and senior editors from South Korea and China held at the White House on Wednesday.

"I think [Asean-US] relations are very strong on counter-terrorism and on the economy.

"[But] there's a difference [between us] about how hard people should push for democracy in Burma. I'm at one end of the ledger. And we'll continue to press hard," he said.

Mr Bush will arrive in Thailand on Wednesday and will meet Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej for dinner at Government House. They will issue a joint statement which is expected to highlight the 175th anniversary of Thai-US bilateral ties.

The situation in Burma will also feature prominently when Mr Bush issues a statement prior to a press conference on Thursday at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre.

The president said he wants to thank the Thai government for its understanding of the refugee issue and its border policy. "I think it's been very wise and very humane," he said.

"My message is going to be one directed to the people in Burma when I meet with some of the activists [in Bangkok]."

Mr Bush's wife Laura will also meet Burmese dissidents while in the capital.

While in Bangkok, Mr Bush will also visit the Mercy Centre of the Human Development Foundation and get a briefing on disaster relief efforts in Burma. He will meet Burmese dissidents at the residence of US ambassador to Thailand Eric John, and will speak to radio journalists about Burma.

"I want to tell you an interesting story," he said on Wednesday in Washington. "I included Burma in my last United Nations address, and it was a pretty strong statement.

"And she [Laura Bush] was in the audience there at the United Nations. And just as soon as the speech ended, she got an email from one of the activists she had met, a person that was trying to help deal with human suffering.

"And I just thought it was an interesting world we're in, in which the speech finishes, the word gets out, they email back to Mrs Bush to thank me as I walked off the podium.

"Now, it's very important for us to _ I understand pressures on countries, and I understand different interests. And I always try to put myself in the other person's shoes.

"But as I do so, I never forget certain basic fundamental values. And so we will be _ I will be, and Laura will be _ expressing our opinion in a way that is, I hope, very clear and hopeful to people."

Myanmar charges comedian with public order offence

Reuters - Fri Aug 1, 2008 12:44am EDT - [Link](#)

YANGON, Aug 1 (Reuters) - Myanmar's military junta has charged popular comedian and leading dissident Zarganar with public order offences, which could see him jailed for up to two years, a lawyer said on Friday.

Zarganar was arrested on June 3 after publicly criticising the ruling generals for their sluggish response to Cyclone Nargis, which left 134,000 people dead or missing when it slammed into the Irrawaddy delta a month earlier.

Opposition lawyer Aung Thein said Zarganar was charged with "inducing public offence" at a secret hearing inside Yangon's notorious Insein prison on Wednesday. Three other anti-government activists also appeared at the hearing.

"It was the first time they appeared at the court and it's said that their trial will start on Aug. 7. We don't know yet whether defence lawyers have been arranged for them or not," he told Reuters.

As one of the former Burma's most recognised public faces, Zarganar had been a focal point of the informal relief effort by private citizens into the delta. Unsanctioned donors were frequently harassed and intimidated by police and the military.

Secret police also seized Zarganar's computer and several banned films, including the latest Rambo movie and the leaked video of the lavish "champagne and diamonds" wedding in 2006 of junta supremo Than Shwe's daughter.

Relatives of Zarganar and the other three dissidents said they had not been informed of any court appearance or trial date, as is often the case with detained activists.

"Family members are normally contacted but we have not been contacted by anyone so far. We are really worried about them," one relative, who asked not to be named, said.

Myanmar's junta, the latest face of 46 years of military rule, is keeping a tighter-than-usual grip on public life as the 20th anniversary of nationwide democracy protests approaches on Aug. 8.

The so-called 8-8-88 uprising was crushed by the army with the loss of an estimated 3,000 lives. Dissidents who fled the crackdown are hoping the 20th anniversary will trigger a repeat, although analysts and diplomats say that is very unlikely. (Reporting by Aung Hla Tun; Writing by Ed Cropley; Editing by Darren Schuettler and Alex Richardson)

Myanmar cooperates with UN organization in avian influenza prevention

Xinhua - 2008-08-01 13:20:07 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Aug. 1 (Xinhua) -- Myanmar is cooperating with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in prevention against highly pathogenic avian influenza under a three-year project, the state newspaper New Light of Myanmar reported Friday.

The three-year project (2008-2011) involves a financial aid of 1.315 million U.S. dollars pledged by the World Bank, the daily said.

With the FAO's cooperation, the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD) of Myanmar will implement the project.

In April this year, the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) declared Myanmar as a bird-flu-free country three months after the country was proved that there was no residual bird flu virus remained over the period since January.

According to then OIE statement, the latest spread of the H5N1 virus from Kengtung to Mongphyat in Shan state in November last year, which infected a seven-year-old girl later in December, had been under control since late January this year, attributing the infection to carrying from abroad.

There were numerous outbreaks of the avian influenza in Myanmar covering 25 townships of six states and divisions over the past two years since February 2006 until December 2007.

All of the occurrences were blamed for infecting from abroad especially that the virus was carried into the country by migratory birds from the cold regions in the world infecting local birds, according to the LBVD.

Myanmar reported outbreak of the avian influenza in the country for the first time in some poultry farms in Mandalay and Sagaing divisions in early 2006, followed by those in Yangon division in early 2007, in Mon state's Thanbyuzayat and western Bago division's Letpadan in July and in eastern Bago division's Thanatpin and in Yangon division's Hmawby in October the same year.

In fight against the disease, Myanmar has been cooperating with experts from the FAO and USAID.

Despite the declaration as a bird-flu-free country, the Myanmar livestock authorities continue to call on the country's people to exercise a long-term precaution against the deadly H5N1 bird flu.

Myanmar warns against more bomb attacks

Xinhua - 2008-08-01 10:48:29 - [Link](#)

YANGON, Aug. 1 (Xinhua) -- The Myanmar authorities warned on Friday against more bomb attacks following Wednesday's mine explosion in northeastern Kayin state and urging people in the country to remain vigilant against more such probability, official media reported.

The mine explosion in the state's Leiktho, Hpa-an at night caused collapse of and damage to a pylon located between the areas of Lawpyita and Toungoo, said the New Light of Myanmar.

The authorities blamed the country's largest anti-government ethnic armed group, the Kayin National Union (KNU), responsible for the incident.

According to the report, Myanmar's state-run Electric Power Enterprise is regularly supplying power through Lawpita-Kalaw-Thazi power line in order not to disrupt the power supply.

The authorities also appealed to the public to come forward timely with information about the terrorists.

On Dec. 18 last year, about seven members of the KNU detonated a mine and fired small arms at a passenger bus which was on its way to Myawaddy from Kawkareik in the border area with Thailand in the same state, killing eight people and wounding six others, according to earlier official report.

The authorities charged the KNU with constantly committing all destructive acts such as undermining stability of the state, community peace and tranquility and prevalence of law and order.

Since the government adopted a policy of national reconciliation in 1989, 17 main anti-government armed groups have made peace with the government under respective cease-fire agreements and leaving the largest of them, the KNU, out of the legal fold.